

## “Rock Me Mama”

On July 13, 1941 Tatum recorded some pieces with a sextet including the blues singer Joe Turner, trumpeter Joe Thomas, guitarist Oscar Moore, bassist Billy Taylor and drummer Yank Porter. Among these pieces, we have transcribed the Tatum solo on “Rock Me Mama,” which is a good example of his right hand phrasing on the blues changes. Since in this recording the left hand work is quite sparse and barely audible, the left hand part in this transcription is a simplified adaptation of what is mostly played by guitarist Oscar Moore. Also, the original key of this recording is very probably Gb (we have transcribed it in F for ease in reading and analysis).

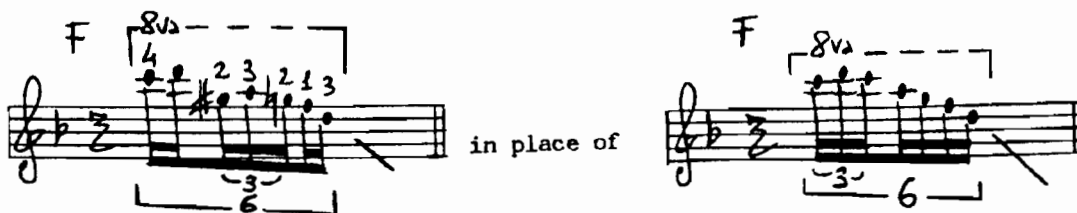
In this solo, some of Tatum’s distinctive devices are featured, i.e.:

- bar 4: the descending run outlining a decidedly modern (for jazz in 1941) F+7b9. This run seems easier to be played in the original key of Gb:



- bars 5-6: the Fdim7 “broken” arpeggio played on a Bb bass, thus resulting in a Bb7b9 chord (practice transposing this device in all keys);

- bar 8: the little yet delicious variation in the descending F pentatonic run, that is:



(Notice that the variation shown above can be applied to all the Tatum descending pentatonic runs);

- bars 10-11: the spectacular run played in irregular seven-note groupings and split between the hands. Also notice that this run is made of descending chromatics and fragments of descending arpeggios; it has a descending-then-ascending contour. These kinds of runs were often used by Tatum and by other major jazz pianists like Earl Hines, and were an integral part of their improvisational language.

As in “Knockin’ Myself Out,” in “Rock Me Mama” Tatum mixed traditional blues phrasing (see bars 1-4 and 11-12) with his own imaginative and advanced devices, thus creating a new whole that from the harmonic and double-time-phrasing standpoint might likely have been of some inspiration to younger jazzmen of the Forties (on this account, also see the introductory note to “Sweet Georgia Brown”).

