keyboard

reading | technique | performance

PERFORMANCE 3

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KEYBOARD PERFORMANCE 3

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Chapter 1: Notation, Structure and Concepts

Keyboard Splits

In Keyboard Performance 2, we learned the basics of keyboard memory, patch selection, and we utilized patch switching to change sounds for different sections of a chart. Although patch switching is useful, it is not always ideal, as it can take your hands off the keys when you need them the most. Split patches can be an excellent solution, as they enable the keyboardist to play two or more different sounds on the same preset. This is particularly helpful in performance scenarios that require multiple keyboard sounds. Most electronic keyboards have features that allow you to split or layer (combine) multiple sounds. Keyboard manufacturers often call these split or layered patches "performances" (Yamaha/Roland) or "combis" (Korg).

In this unit, we will create a split patch for the chart "State of Mind," which features a sustained string part against changing piano chords—a very common device in pop/rock production. We will also discuss typical split configuration challenges and how to overcome them.

Keyboard Memory and Storage

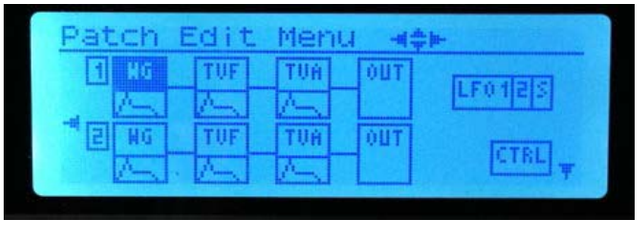
Before diving into the creation of split patches, let's first discuss keyboard memory and storage.

Today's electronic keyboards typically store patches on memory chips called *flash ROM*, a small battery with a very long life span. Because it is reliable for accessing information quickly, flash ROM is ideal for performers. Patches are typically stored in arrays called banks, which usually contain 127 sounds each.

Ex. 1.1: A typical sound bank.

Typically, pressing a button which places the keyboard in the combination-patch mode accesses such patches. When you select a patch, the keyboard's microprocessor retrieves the data from its memory address and places it in a temporary working area called the *edit buffer*. This generally makes it available for playing as well as adjusting parameters. The edit buffer doesn't preserve anything, because you wouldn't want to call up a sound, customize it and decide you'd like to change it, only to realize you couldn't get back the original sound. If you wish to preserve your changes in the edit buffer, you need to save it in the original or a new location. Please refer to the keyboard manual to learn how to save patches on your individual keyboard.

Ex 1.2: A typical patch edit menu with graphical display.



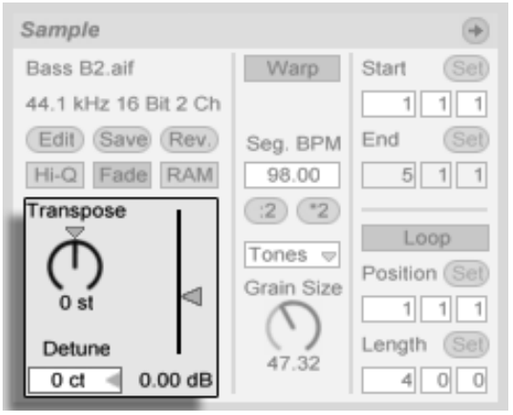
On your own instrument, try accessing some multi patches. You'll probably note the layered patches sound richer and fuller than single sounds. Chances are, your factory bank of multi patches contains at least a few *splits*—patches with different sounds spread across the keyboard. Try playing some of these and see how they sound!

Split Patch Creation

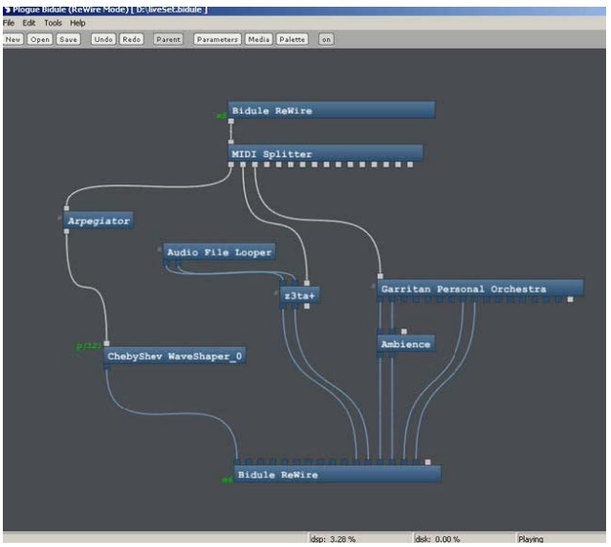
When creating a split patch, often several parameters must be adjusted for playability. Some of the most important are:

- **Zones**
  On a split patch, the area occupied by each sound is usually called a *zone*. Zone note ranges are usually programmable. Some keyboards offer two zones, where others can have four or more.
  Ex 1.3: Split patches can be set by the user.

- **Transposition Range**
  This needs to be adjusted so all parts play in the register you want them to.
  Ex 1.4: Setting the transposition range in a sequencer.

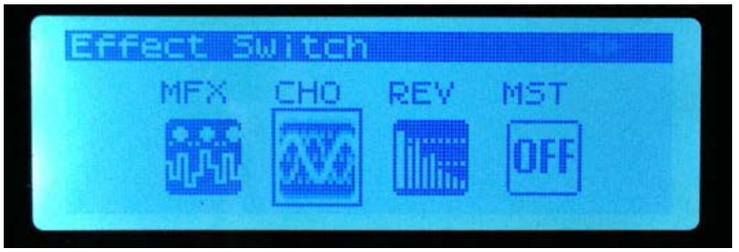


- **Controller Assignments**
  Ex 1.5: Controlling assignments in a sequencer.



Typically, you may want to remove the sustain pedal from some or all parts. Also, if using the mod wheel on one patch (to control Leslie speed, for example) you will probably want to remove it from the others. The expression pedal can be assigned to fade one patch up and down relative to another, or to the entire mix.

- **Effects**
  Ex 1.6: A programmable effect switch.



It is probable that the individual patches used will require different effects settings. Unfortunately, the process for adjusting this may be very complicated—but no keyboard player wants to hear the piano sound being processed through the simulated rotary speaker used on the organ. Best to consult the keyboard manual to learn this.

- **Volume**
  Ex 1.7: A physical volume fader.

If the keyboard provides a way to assign the volume levels of the individual parts to sliders on the keyboard, this is well worth doing!

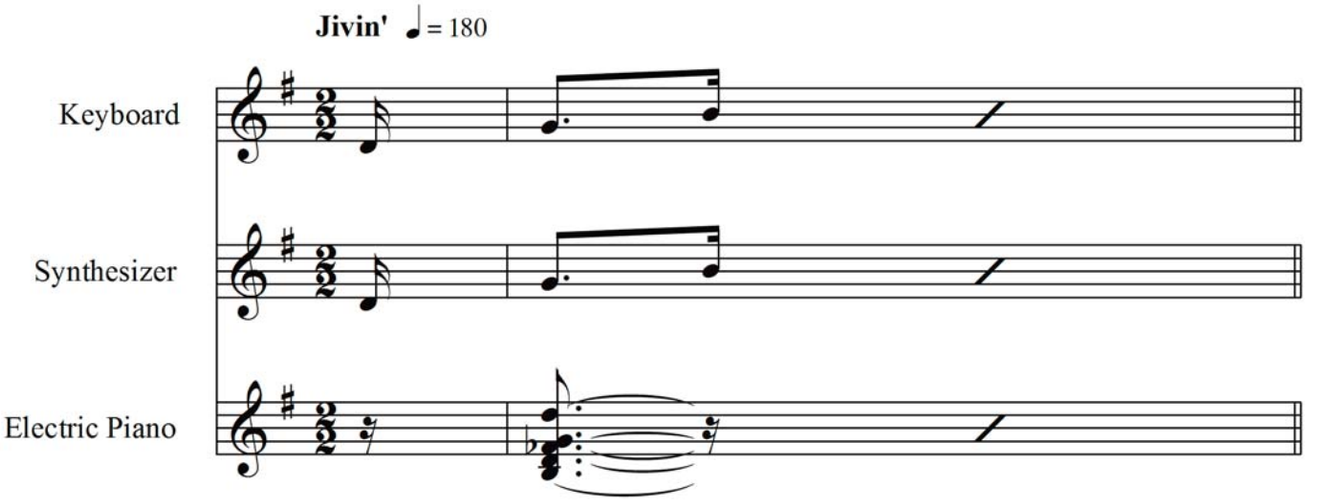
Keyboards often have an existing bank of pre-programmed split patches to choose from. If you cannot find a suitable patch, a split with any two sounds in separate key zones is a good starting place. Then, you can customize the patch to your liking. Please refer to your keyboard owner's manual to learn the following:

- How to select the patches and assign them to the appropriate zones.
- How to select the zone/range of each sound.
- How to transpose each part (you may need to transpose the bass up and the piano down to get the note ranges you want).
- How to route desired effects to each part (optional).
- How to name and save your results in a desired memory location.

Split Patch Notation

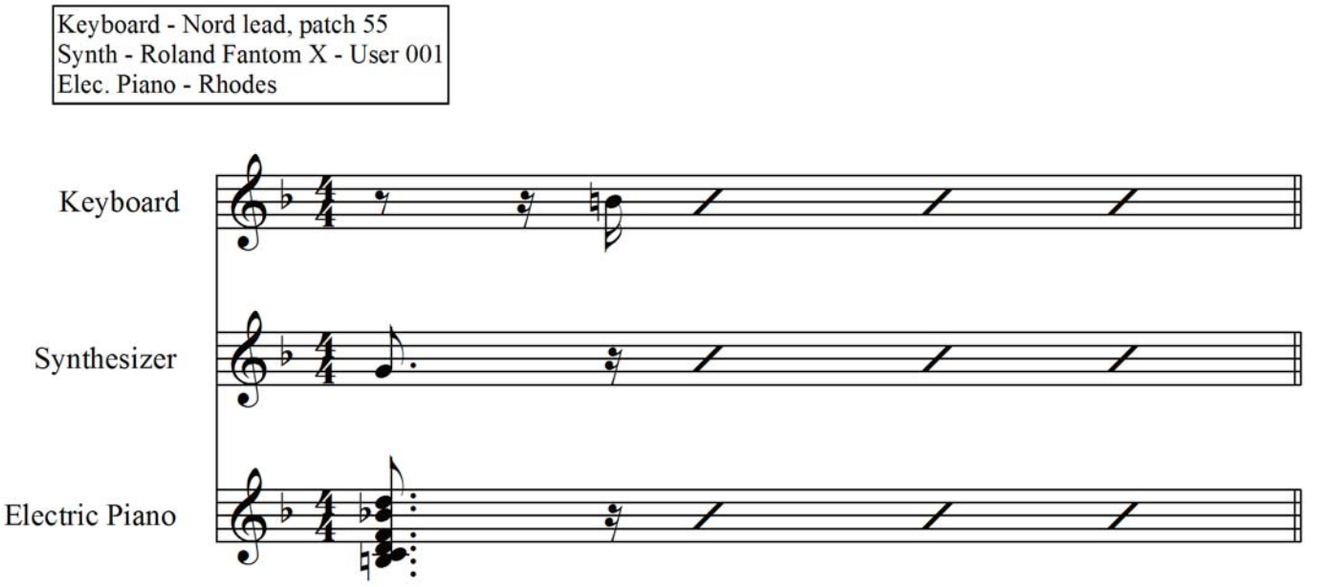
Parts for multi-key rigs are generally written on dual or triple staves. The general convention is that higher parts go on higher staves. It is common to see a variety of clefs, however, and musicians should get used to reading dual treble, bass or changes in clef.

Ex 1.8: A multi-keyboard rig chart with three treble-clef staves.



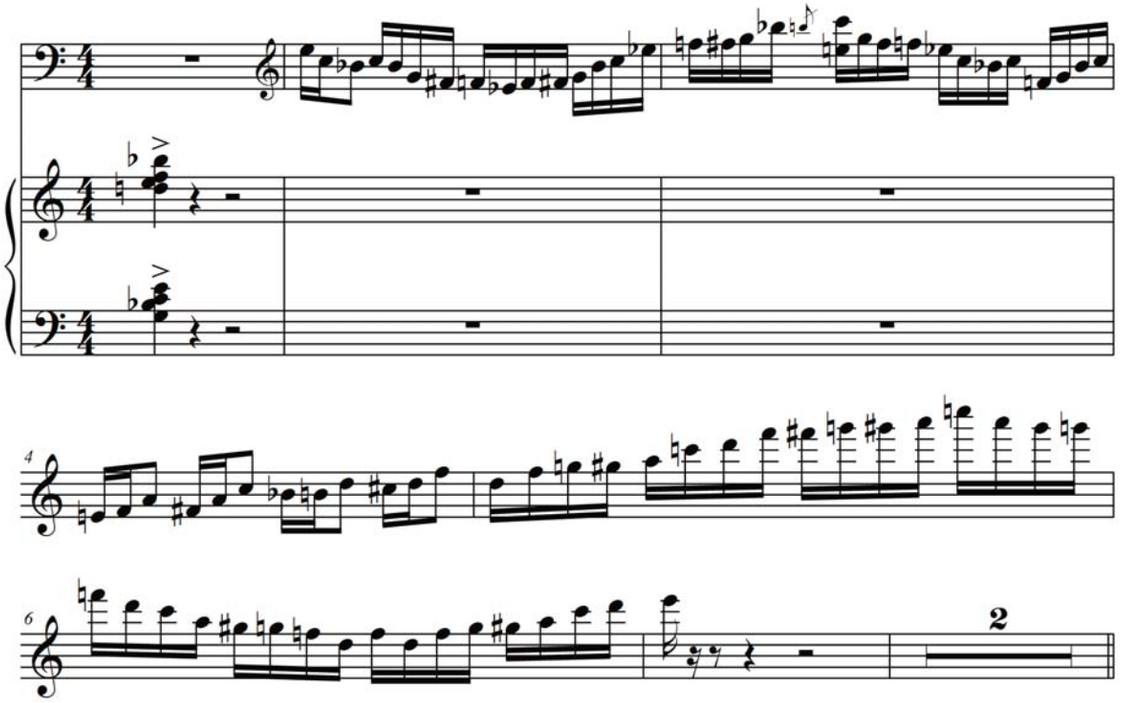
Placing the instrument name at the start of each system is a good practice, although not universally followed. A list of required patches at the top of the page somewhere is helpful. If not provided, it may be useful for the performer to add.

Ex 1.9: patch notes at the start of a chart.



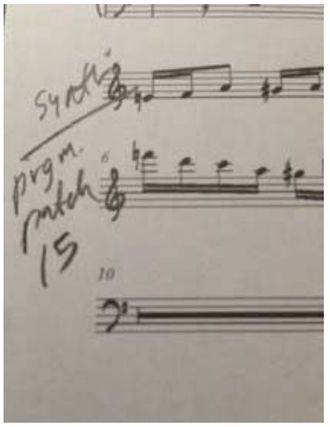
For long passages with only one instrument, the systems can be reduced to single staves for the duration. This saves paper and makes for fewer page turns.

Ex 1.10: Three initial staves, reduced to one in lines two and three.



Instrument names should be again provided for clarity wherever there is a change in the number of staves; it is astonishing how many arrangers/copyists fail to provide this vital information, as it is very disconcerting to turn a page, see a different number of staves and not know what sound(s) they pertain to. Again, this information can be penciled in by the player if need be.

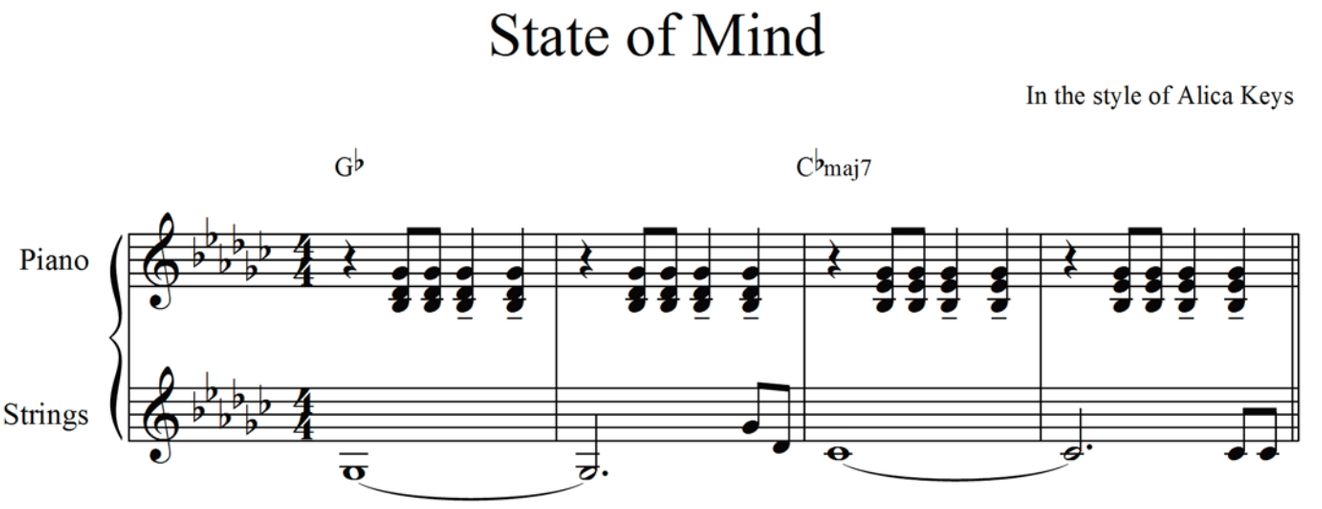
Ex 1.11: patch notes penciled in by the performer.



Chapter 2: Chart Talk-Down

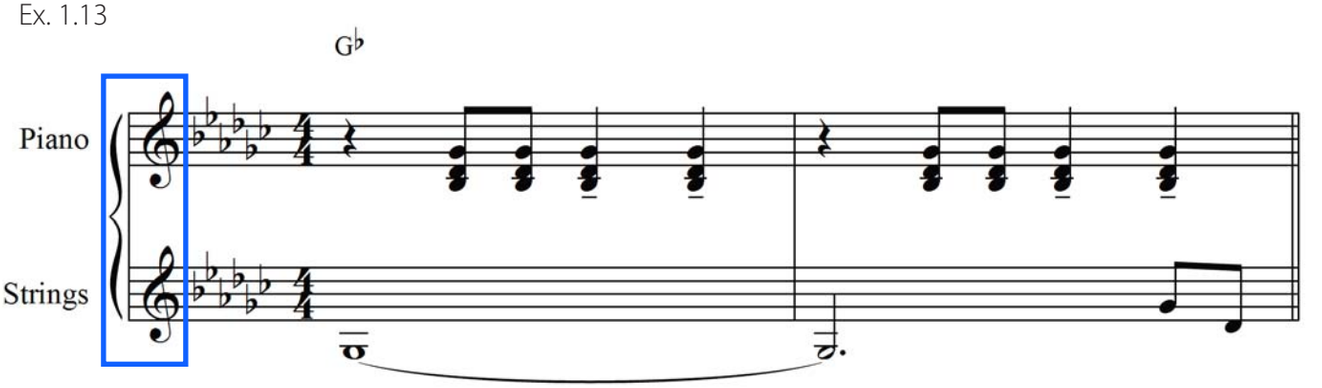
This unit's chart, "State of Mind," consists of a two-stave system with a single-note left-hand melody and right-hand piano chords.

Ex 1.12: A keyboard part with two treble clef staves



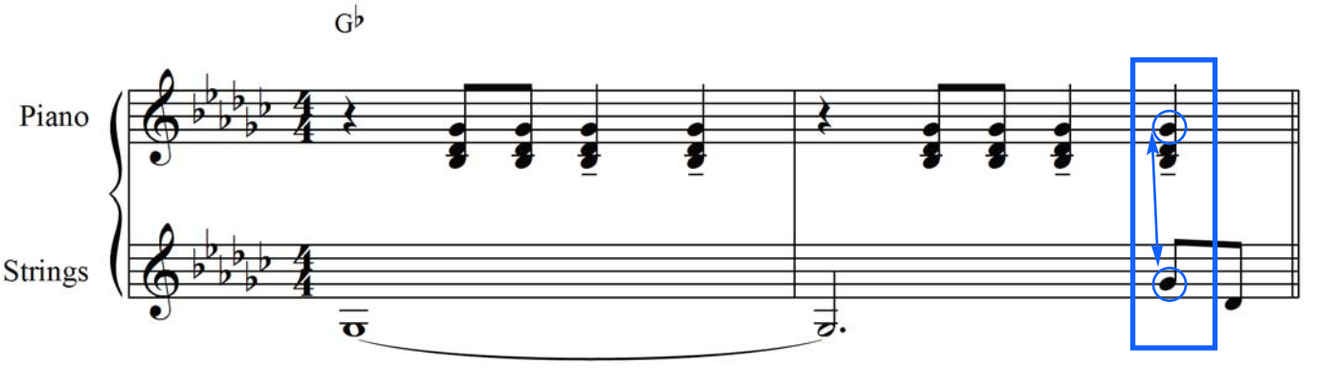
Please note that both hands are reading the treble clef for this piece.

Ex. 1.13



In fact, there is even some overlap between the right and left hand. To avoid tripping over your hands, change the octave of the string patch. This will enable you to play the part as written while giving your right and left hand room to accurately execute the passage.

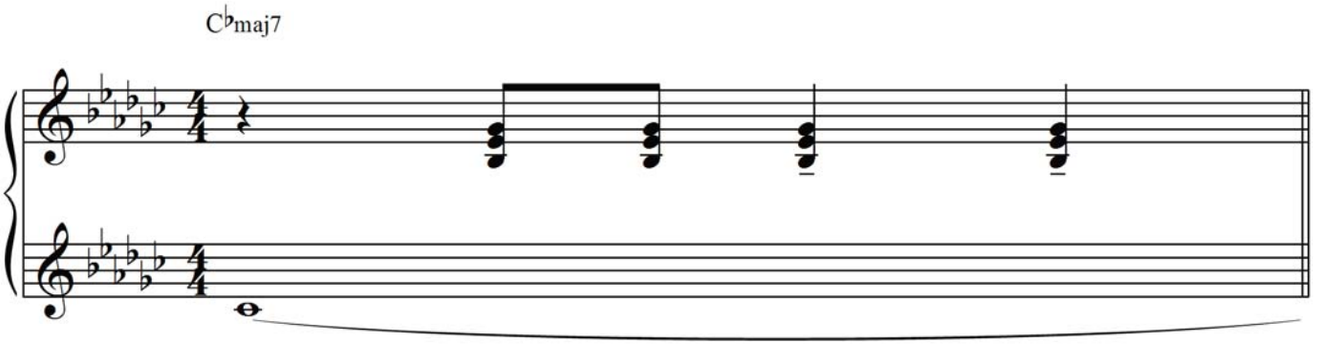
Ex 1.14: A tricky overlap situation in the notation.



Chord Progression Analysis

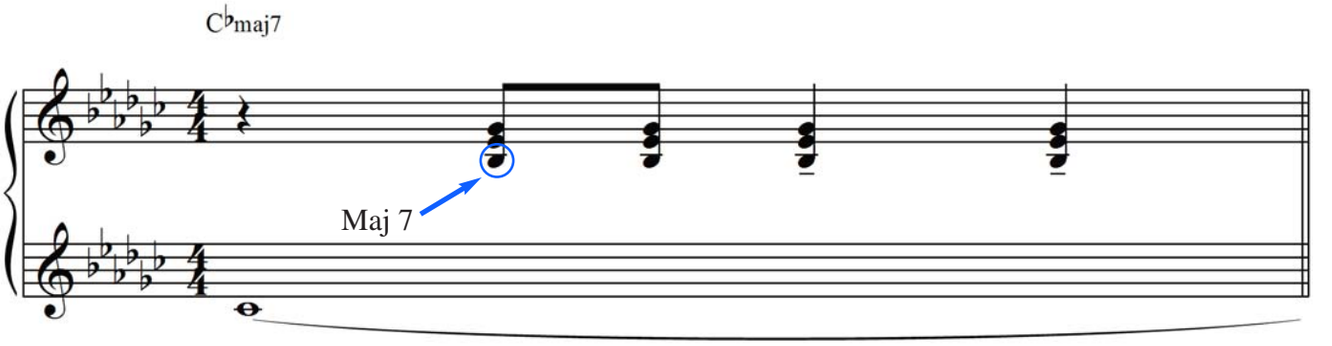
"State of Mind" is in the key of Gb major, and the verse consists of the following progression: I (Gb) to IVMaj7 (Cb Maj7). At first glance, all the right-hand chords look like simple triads. From a theory standpoint, though, there's actually more going on. Consider the Cb Maj7 found in the third measure:

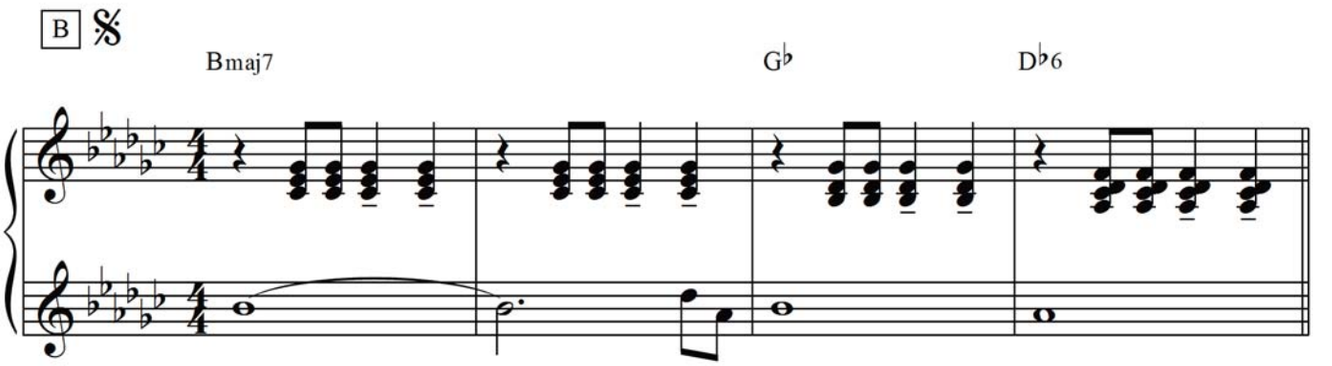
Ex 1.15: Voicings take into consideration the notes in both hands.



The right hand chord contains the notes Bb-Eb-Gb—a simple Ebm triad in second inversion. However, with the bass and low strings playing a Cb (B), the chord becomes something else entirely: a Cb Maj 7 chord. The major seventh is located on lowest not of the right hand chord.

Ex 1.16: The Cb major seventh chord in focus.



At letter B (the chorus), the progression changes to the following: BMaj7-Gb-Db6.

Ex 1.17: Watch for patterns in progressions.