

BEYOND FOURTHS AND PENTATONICS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED
RECORDINGS OF McCOY TYNER FROM 1962 TO 1963

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Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2020

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Satterthwaite, Gregory. *Beyond Fourths and Pentatonics: A Critical Analysis of Selected Recordings of McCoy Tyner from 1962 to 1963*. Doctor of Musical Arts (Performance), May 2020, 37 pp., 1 table, 11 musical examples, 3 appendices, bibliography, 48 titles.

In this paper, I explore the early musical language of McCoy Tyner. Today, Tyner is recognized mostly for his use of quartal harmony and pentatonic scales despite having made recordings in his early career that reflect a more mainstream approach. In an effort to expand how Tyner is represented, I argue that Tyner's early style was characterized by a graceful balance of tradition and innovation, a masterful blend of bebop syntax with pentatonic melodies and quartal harmonies. The recordings that I analyze and discuss are: "Effendi," "Cousin Mary," and "Newport Romp." I transcribed and analyzed selected portions of these recordings in order to better understand his early musical language as a soloist from 1962 to 1963. A portion of this paper is focused on the early reception of Tyner, which acknowledged him as an accomplished mainstream player with a firm grasp of the jazz tradition. Ultimately, my analysis shows that Tyner's early style was a balance of tradition and innovation, incorporating bebop syntax, pentatonic melodies, and quartal harmonies.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of the faculty at the University of North Texas. I am very grateful to my committee members Dave Meder, Brad Leali, and Dr. Fabiana Claire for their support throughout this project and my time at UNT. I am thankful for the mentorship of Dr. John Murphy and Stephen Scott. Thank you Dr. John Murphy for your patience, encouragement, and passion. Thank you Stephen for your friendship and for sharing so much beautiful music with me. My journey at UNT would have not been possible without the love and support of my Father and Mother. Thank you to my incredible wife Samika for your love and support throughout this process and over the years. I love you Christian and Ellison; keep striving.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND THESIS

McCoy Tyner is one of the most celebrated jazz musicians of his generation. He collaborated with many notable jazz artists including John Coltrane, Freddie Hubbard, and Wayne Shorter. Tyner influenced several generations of pianists, including Chick Corea, John Hicks, Harold Mabern, Jan Hammer, Richie Beirach, Mulgrew Miller, Kenny Kirkland, Dave Kikoski, George Cables, Jim McNeeley, and John Medeski.¹ Tyner came of age in the 1950s and was influenced by the great bebop pianists Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk. Tyner made his first recording in 1959 at the age of 21, and, in the six decades since, recorded dozens more.

Jazz artists are often known and celebrated for the features that make them unique. Dizzy Gillespie is known for his virtuosity, Thelonious Monk for his minimalism, and Miles Davis for his lyricism and melodicism. But jazz is also an art form that celebrates the tradition as much as it does innovation. The great jazz artists of every era sought a balance of these competing aesthetic values.

Today, Tyner is recognized mostly for his use of quartal harmony and pentatonic scales. This is not entirely unfair. Indeed, Tyner was one of the first pianists to explore these features extensively and make them an integral part of his sound. However, prior to being known for these innovations, Tyner was recognized as a proficient mainstream player. As Dick Katz notes in his Oxford Music Online article, Tyner “was an accomplished bebop player who was at home playing standards.”² Jazz scholar Paul Rinzler distinguishes between Tyner’s mainstream, bebop,

¹ Keith Waters, "Tyner, (Alfred) McCoy," *Grove Music Online* (January 13, 2015), <https://libproxy.library.unt.edu:5982/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002276732>, (accessed September 25, 2019).

² Dick Katz, “Pianist of the 1940s and 1950s,” *The Oxford Companion to Jazz* (2000): 371.

and his quartal and pentatonic approach, characterizing the former as “not such an important part of his unique special sound.”³ Although Rinzler does not criticize Tyner’s mainstream playing, he does not identify it as part of what made Tyner’s playing special. Rinzler’s statement seems to capture the widespread sentiment that only innovation makes a contribution to jazz special.

That general sentiment is reflected in the fact that most extant literature about Tyner has focused on his use of pentatonics and fourths to the exclusion of other interesting features of Tyner’s playing. This can mislead students and educators into a limited understanding of the breadth of Tyner’s musical legacy. I want to expand how McCoy Tyner is represented. To that end, I argue that Tyner’s early style was characterized by a graceful balance of tradition and innovation, a masterful blend of bebop syntax with pentatonic melodies and quartal harmonies. In this paper, I examine Tyner’s musical language as a soloist from 1962 to 1963 in order to better understand his early musical style.

The recordings that are analyzed and discussed are: “Effendi,”⁴ “Cousin Mary,”⁵ and “Newport Romp.”⁶ “Effendi”⁷ is from Tyner’s first album as a leader. Analyzing a recording in which Tyner takes the role as a leader is important because it highlights his voice in a more unfettered, personal, and prominent way that is not under the influence of another soloist. “Effendi”⁸ is a modal composition and a vehicle for Tyner to employ some of his characteristic musical techniques. He improvises with bebop-oriented syntax mixed with non-traditional

³ Paul Rinzler, “The Quartal and Pentatonic Harmony of McCoy Tyner,” *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 10 (January 1, 1999) 37.

⁴ McCoy Tyner, *Inception*, recorded on January 10, 1962, master number A-18, Impulse!.

⁵ John Coltrane, *Afro Blue Impressions*, recorded on November 2, 1963, master number PL 2620-101, Pablo Records.

⁶ McCoy Tyner, *Live At Newport*, recorded on July 5, 1963, master number, A-48, Impulse!.

⁷ McCoy Tyner, *Inception*, recorded on January 10, 1962, master number A-18, Impulse!.

⁸ *Ibid.*

melodic patterns consisting of fourths and chromatic harmony.

Both “Cousin Mary”⁹ and “Newport Romp”¹⁰ are based on a blues form. They provide an interesting study because they each demonstrate Tyner’s ability to outline chord changes using bebop dialect while still incorporating many elements that are unique to him. Both tunes are fairly up-tempo pieces that illustrate just how adept Tyner was at mixing the musical language of bebop with his own unique approach.

Literature Review

Paul Rinzler has written two extensive articles on McCoy Tyner’s style, syntax, and harmony. “McCoy Tyner: Style and Syntax,” comprises single-note transcriptions and analyses of five recordings, including “Blue Monk,”¹¹ “May Street,”¹² “The Night Has a Thousand Eyes,”¹³ “Impressions,”¹⁴ and “Moment’s Notice.”¹⁵ Rinzler states that the pieces were chosen because each one has stylistic demands which make the application of a modal or blues-based approach to improvisation challenging. The main analytical tool used by Rinzler is structural hierarchy, where the lowest level would be individual notes and higher levels are groups of notes which form syntactic relationships.¹⁶ Rinzler asserts that the combination of chromaticism and pentatonicism is an essential part of Tyner’s sound.¹⁷ Rinzler characterizes Tyner’s melodic

⁹ John Coltrane, *Afro Blue Impressions*, recorded on November 2, 1963, master number PL 2620-101, Pablo Records.

¹⁰ McCoy Tyner, *Live At Newport*, recorded on July 5, 1963, A-48, Impulse!.

¹¹ McCoy Tyner, *Nights of Ballads and Blues*, recorded on March 4, 1963, master number A-39, Impulse!.

¹² McCoy Tyner, *Time for Tyner*, recorded on May 17, 1968, master number BST 84370, Blue Note.

¹³ McCoy Tyner, *Song for My Lady*, recorded on November 2, 1972, master number MSP9044, Milestone.

¹⁴ McCoy Tyner, *Trident*, recorded on February 18th and 19th, 1975, master number M -9063, Milestone.

¹⁵ McCoy Tyner, *Supertrios*, recorded on April 9th and 10th, 1977, master number M -55003, Milestone.

¹⁶ Paul Rinzler, “McCoy Tyner: Style and Syntax,” *The Annual Review of Jazz Studies 2* (1983): 110.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

approach on all the songs as modal and pentatonic. “Blue Monk”¹⁸ is the only piece in Rinzier’s study where Tyner’s performance is more rooted in the bebop tradition. Rinzier analysis of “Blue Monk”¹⁹ highlights Tyner’s use of mixolydian modes and chromatic scales. Rinzier’s book *The Quartal and Pentatonic Harmony of McCoy Tyner*²⁰ provides a thorough study of Tyner’s harmonic approach. Rinzier explains the way Tyner constructs bass lines and uses dyads. He provides theoretical explanations for many musical examples.

There have been numerous method books written about McCoy Tyner’s style. Many of them focus exclusively on his use of quartal voicings in modal music and his use of pentatonic melodies in his improvisation. In *Post-Bop Jazz Piano*,²¹ John Valerio states that John Coltrane evolved the concept of modal jazz first introduced by Miles Davis and Bill Evans. Valerio describes Tyner’s left-handed and two-handed quartal chords, modal patterns, and right-hand modalization concepts.²² In *The Jazz Theory Book*,²³ Mark Levine references Tyner’s recording “Peresina”²⁴ when describing the “So What”²⁵ voicings that he employs. He also references other Tyner recordings on his chapter on fourth voicings and cites Tyner as the first pianist in the early 1960s to play them extensively.²⁶

¹⁸ McCoy Tyner, *Nights of Ballads and Blues*, recorded on March 4, 1963, master number A-39, Impulse!.

¹⁹ McCoy Tyner, *Nights of Ballads and Blues*, recorded on March 4, 1963, master number A-39, Impulse!.

²⁰ Paul Rinzier, “The Quartal and Pentatonic Harmony of McCoy Tyner,” *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 10 (January 1, 1999).

²¹ Valerio, John. *Post-Bop Jazz Piano* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2005).

²² *Ibid*, 65.

²³ Mark Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book* (Petaluma, CA: Sher Music Co., 1989), 105.

²⁴ McCoy Tyner, *Expansions*, recorded on August 23, 1968, master number BST 84338, Blue Note.

²⁵ Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*, recorded on March 2nd and April 22nd, 1959, master number 88697-33552-2, Columbia.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 105.

In his article “Apart Playing: McCoy Tyner and Bessie’s Blues,”²⁷ Benjamin Givan states that Tyner’s playing on the recording “Bessie’s Blues”²⁸ exemplifies the traditional Afrodiasporic performance practice of “apart playing.” Givan credits this term to art historian Robert Farris Thompson, and defines it as “whenever individual performers enact different, complementary roles in an ensemble setting.”²⁹ Givan writes that apartness is applicable to other familiar features of jazz improvisation including harmonic substitutions and playing “outside” a given harmony and scale. I do not analyze “Bessie’s Blues”³⁰ in this study; however the concept of “apart playing” is used to think about Tyner’s stylistic approach in the recordings of this study.

In a 1960 interview with Al McFarlane for *Black Scholar*, Tyner opined on the connection between the blues, the pentatonic scale, and Africa, suggesting that several emerging jazz styles of the 1960s and 1970s represent a direct expression of African-American culture.³¹ As Tyner explained:

The blues originally came from Africa. The blues is really based on a five-note scale which is African, or Eastern and Middle Eastern...It was just black people’s concept of music before they came here...There’s some talk about the American or European influence on our music, but again, the five-note scale is African.³²

Tyner’s view suggests one reason he seems to have increasingly favored the use of pentatonic scales in his own music: it was a way of celebrating African-American culture.

²⁷ Benjamin Givan, “Apart Playing: McCoy Tyner and Bessie’s Blues,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 1 (2007).

²⁸ John Coltrane, *Crescent*, recorded on April 27th and June 1st, 1964, master number A-66, Impulse!.

²⁹ Benjamin Givan, “Apart Playing: McCoy Tyner and Bessie’s Blues,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 1 (2007): 257.

³⁰ John Coltrane, *Crescent*, recorded on April 27th and June 1st, 1964, master number A-66, Impulse!.

³¹ Al McFarlane, “The Black Scholar Interviews: McCoy Tyner,” *The Black Scholar* 2/2 (1970): 40.

³² Benjamin Givan, “Apart Playing: McCoy Tyner and Bessie’s Blues,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 1 (2007): 185.

According to jazz historian Mark Gridley, Tyner borrowed from Bill Evans's chord voicings but was not as influential as Evans was.³³ Gridley describes various elements of Tyner's approach, which include his use of fourths and pentatonics and his percussive style of comping. In *Jazz from Its Origins to the Present*,³⁴ authors Lewis Porter and Michael Ullman also claim that Tyner was not as influential as Evans and describe Tyner's approach as "steel driving."³⁵

Another source that helped to provide historical and social context in understanding the development of Tyner's style is Alton Merrell's dissertation "The Life and Music of McCoy Tyner: an Examination of the Sociocultural Influences on McCoy Tyner and His Music."³⁶ Lewis Porter's biography of John Coltrane was also used to gain insight into the life of Tyner during the early 1960s.

Method

For this project, I used an analytical method modeled on Benjamin Givan's approach to studying the improvisational style of Sonny Rollins in terms of intraopus style (the style as expressed in a single work), idiom (a performer's individual improvisational vocabulary), and dialect (the improvisational vocabulary shared by a group of musical collaborators).³⁷ This method of analysis allowed me to clearly delineate between Tyner's idiom and the bebop dialect. Tables and music transcriptions are used to illustrate his idiom versus mainstream jazz dialect.

³³ Mark C. Gridley, *Jazz Styles History and Analysis* (Newark: Prentice-Hall, 2000), 270.

³⁴ Lewis Porter and Michael Ullman. *Jazz from Its Origins to the Present* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1993).

³⁵ *Ibid*, 336.

³⁶ Alton Merrell Louis, II. "The Life and Music of McCoy Tyner an Examination of the Sociocultural Influences on McCoy Tyner and His Music" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2013), 27.

³⁷ Benjamin Givan, "Gunther Schuller and the Challenge of Sonny Rollins: Stylistic Context, Intentionality, and Jazz Analysis," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Spring 2014): 211.

My musical analysis is based on common practice and jazz theoretical concepts as presented by David Baker,³⁸ Jerry Coker,³⁹ Mark Levine.⁴⁰

³⁸ David Baker, *How to Play Bebop 1* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1988).

³⁹ Jerry Coker, *Elements of the Jazz Language for the Developing Improvisor* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1991).

⁴⁰ Mark Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book* (Petaluma, CA: Sher Music Co., 1989).

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

Tyner acknowledges his mother as a great musical influence on him, as noted in Alton Louis's work in 2013, "I owe my training to my mother who was once a church pianist. Our parents play such an important part in our shaping."⁴¹ The Great Migration of the early 1900s created cities with close knit communities of young African American musicians who would often gather to exchange musical ideas. Bud Powell lived in the same neighborhood as Tyner and gave him a lesson or two while Tyner was still a teenager.⁴²

Tyner was raised in a thriving, musical, African-American community in Philadelphia. His mother Beatrice Tyner worked as a domestic worker upon arrival to Philadelphia, but her entrepreneurial spirit led her to eventually start her own beauty salon. She was supportive of McCoy Tyner's musical talent and bought a spinet piano for him on credit. She allowed him to put the piano in the salon and permitted him to have jam sessions there while she serviced her clients.⁴³

Like many artists, Tyner was influenced by teachers in grade school. His elementary music teacher Violet Addison was a pianist whose playing left quite an impression on Tyner. In middle school, Tyner studied for a year with Mr. Habershaw, who taught Tyner the fundamentals of the piano and music notation.⁴⁴ At the age of fourteen, Tyner studied with Ted Baroni, who exposed him to the music of the European classical tradition and cultivated his reading and

⁴¹ Alton Merrell Louis, II. "The Life and Music of McCoy Tyner an Examination of the Sociocultural Influences on McCoy Tyner and His Music" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2013), 27.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 46.

technical piano skills.⁴⁵ Tyner furthered his formal music education at the Granoff School of Music, in Philadelphia. At the time he attended, it was one of the largest music institutions of the east coast, rivaling schools such as Juilliard and the Curtis Institute. Tyner studied seventeenth-century theory at the Granoff school. Tyner counts the works of Debussy and Bach as some of his favorites during his formal years of study.⁴⁶

Jazz saxophonist John Coltrane also influenced Tyner and incorporated world music, Eastern music, classical music, and many other genres into his performances with Tyner. Tyner continued to evolve as an artist after joining Coltrane and all their past musical influences came together in a fresh and creative way. Tyner opined on creative expression and the formal study of music:

What written music does is it can show you the possibilities of what you can do with the instrument [piano]...It can't teach you to be creative. It's not meant to do that. It just can take you places that you may not have gone in terms of music... It's all notated... I liked studying, but I put the books away and I took my theoretical knowledge and information that I had gathered harmonically, and I went that way.⁴⁷

Tyner's open mindedness helped him to create a diverse body of work that explored new directions in music. His mastery of the piano certainly points to a grounding in music as a result of serious study of many styles.

⁴⁵ Alton Merrell Louis, II. "The Life and Music of McCoy Tyner an Examination of the Sociocultural Influences on McCoy Tyner and His Music" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2013), 47.

⁴⁶ Alton Merrell Louis, II. "The Life and Music of McCoy Tyner an Examination of the Sociocultural Influences on McCoy Tyner and His Music" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2013), 47.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 49.

CHAPTER 3

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Early Reception before Coltrane

Tyner's first professional recording was with the Curtis Fuller sextet on December 17, 1959. He then recorded with the Art Farmer and Benny Golson Jazztet in February of 1960. Tyner was making quite a wave in the jazz scene in the early 1960s even though he was only in his early twenties. An article by George Hoefer in January of 1960 details the reaction of a record executive upon hearing Tyner perform with the Jazztet at the Jazz Gallery club on opening night: the executive was begging the Jazztet's manager to record Tyner's group and apparently there was a bidding war between several labels to be the first to record the Jazztet.⁴⁸ Hoefer goes on to state that, "part of the group's success is due to Benny Golson's discovery in Philadelphia of a 20-year-old pianist named McCoy Tyner, whose playing is impressing everyone."⁴⁹ Benny Golson, co-leader of the Jazztet, remarked that Tyner, "proved to be a most important person of the Jazztet."⁵⁰ Tyner's playing with the Jazztet could be aptly characterized as in the tradition of mainstream jazz. This shows Tyner's respect and understanding of the music of his predecessors and his early style is certainly rooted in this tradition.

Tyner appeared on Freddie Hubbard's 1960 debut album *Open Sesame*.⁵¹ This album features compositions in the hard-bop and post-bop traditions. John A. Tynan gave *Open Sesame*⁵² three and half stars and described the album as "exciting"⁵³ and Tyner as "one of the

⁴⁸ George Hoefer, "The Hot Box," *Down Beat* 27, no. 2 (January 1960): 42.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ David B. Bittan, "Meet The Jazztet," *Down Beat* 27, no. 11 (May 1960): 19.

⁵¹ Freddie Hubbard, *Open Sesame*, recorded on June 19, 1960, master number BLP 4040, Blue Note.

⁵² Freddie Hubbard, *Open Sesame*, recorded on June 19, 1960, master number BLP 4040, Blue Note.

⁵³ John A. Tynan, "Open Sesame," *Down Beat* 28, no.2 (January 1961): 31.

most stimulating young piano men to emerge in a long time.”⁵⁴ The title track, “Open Sesame,”⁵⁵ is a composition that is rooted in the hard bop tradition and features a solo by Tyner that exhibits his mastery of the bebop dialect. His playing is reminiscent of the great hard bop pianists of the 1950s including the likes of Richie Powell, Sonny Clark, and Kenny Drew. This review and the article by Hoefer show that both the critics and Tyner’s peers deemed his playing to be excellent and even special enough to be the main attraction of an all-star group.

*Inception*⁵⁶ was Tyner’s first album as a leader. This trio recording on the Impulse! label was recorded on January 10th and 11th in 1962. The rhythm section included Steve Davis on bass and Elvin Jones on drums, the same members that had earlier performed on Coltrane’s recording *My Favorite Things*.⁵⁷ This album captures Tyner in the midst of a musical transition. On this album, Tyner uses original compositions as a vehicle for more modal explorations while his interpretation of jazz standards features a more mainstream approach. The *Downbeat* review of this album is positive overall and highlights the album’s blending of modal and mainstream jazz. Barbara Gardner describes Tyner as a pianist of substance who articulates long flowing statements. The review goes on to describe the album as a good showing for a 23-year-old pianist who is receiving a lot of attention because of his association with high profile groups.⁵⁸

Tyner’s second album as a leader, *Reaching Fourth*,⁵⁹ was recorded on November of 1962. He is joined by Roy Hanes on drums and Henry Grimes on bass. Like *Inception*,⁶⁰ this trio

⁵⁴ John A. Tynan, “Open Sesame,” *Down Beat* 28, no.2 (January 1961): 31.

⁵⁵ Freddie Hubbard, *Open Sesame*, recorded on June 19, 1960, master number BLP 4040, Blue Note.

⁵⁶ McCoy Tyner, *Inception*, recorded on January 10, 1962, master number A-18, Impulse!.

⁵⁷ John Coltrane, *My Favorite Things*, recorded October 21st, 24th, and 26th, 1960, master number SD-1361, Atlantic.

⁵⁸ Barbara Gardner, “Inception,” 29, no. 28 *Down Beat* (November 1962): 35.

⁵⁹ McCoy Tyner, *Reaching Fourth*, recorded on November 14, 1962, master number A-33, Impulse!.

⁶⁰ McCoy Tyner, *Inception*, recorded on January 10, 1962, master number A-18, Impulse!.

album is a mix of jazz standards and original compositions. Tyner's arrangement of the standard "Old Devil Moon"⁶¹ uses modal vamps, pentatonic-based improvisation, and bebop-oriented linear material. As he did in "Effendi,"⁶² Tyner here employs ostinato bass figures throughout this arrangement. His voicings are more quartal-based and his improvisation more pentatonic-based during these ostinato figures. He also uses chromaticism over the ostinato figures. His improvisation is also very bebop-oriented, particularly over the part of the song where there are a lot of minor to dominant chord progressions. The title track "Reaching Fourth"⁶³ features what can be described as intervallic playing, where Tyner is arranging intervals in interesting ways to create new melodies. Don Nelsen gave the album four and a half stars in a *Downbeat* article on July 18, 1963. He describes the album as well planned, well executed, and successful in evoking several moods.⁶⁴

Harvey Pekar's April 29, 1963 *Downbeat* review of Tyner's third album, *Nights of Ballads & Blues*,⁶⁵ is worth noting because he compares it to Tyner's recordings with Coltrane, writing that, "while his playing on some of these tracks is not as adventuresome as it has been with Coltrane, this set is still above average in quality." He goes on to add that, though some better examples of Tyner's playing can be found on Coltrane albums, most jazz piano fans will enjoy the album.⁶⁶ Pekar, like many critics both past and present, was more interested in Tyner's work with Coltrane than Tyner's work as a trio leader.

⁶¹ McCoy Tyner, *Reaching Fourth*, recorded on November 14, 1962, master number A-33, Impulse!.

⁶² McCoy Tyner, *Inception*, recorded on January 10, 1962, master number A-18, Impulse!.

⁶³ McCoy Tyner, *Reaching Fourth*, recorded on November 14, 1962, master number A-33, Impulse!.

⁶⁴ Don Nelsen, "Reaching Fourth," *Down Beat* 30, no. 16 (July 1963): 27.

⁶⁵ McCoy Tyner, *Nights of Ballads and Blues*, recorded on March 4, 1963, master number A-39, Impulse!.

⁶⁶ Harvey Pekar, "Nights of Ballads & Blues," *Down Beat* 30, no. 24 (August 1963): 27.

The reviews from *Downbeat* testify to Tyner's prowess as an accomplished mainstream player and show that his early style was very well received. The caliber of the musicians with whom he worked and the opinions of his reviewers are a testament to the importance of his pre-Coltrane and pre-modal contributions. The early reception of Tyner by the critics and his peers was very positive. He was described by Benny Golson as integral to the Jazztet ensemble and most critics regarded him as a promising up and coming musician. His style on many of these early recordings is very much inside the mainstream; fourths and pentatonics are not yet a defining part of his sound, but he nevertheless already had a unique voice that can be heard since his debut album. The reviews describe him as someone with great potential.

Reception with Coltrane

Tyner left the Jazztet to join the Coltrane quartet in 1960. Tyner's first album with Coltrane was titled *Live at the Jazz Gallery*.⁶⁷ He would go on to record several prominent albums with Coltrane throughout the rest of 1960, including *My Favorite Things*,⁶⁸ *Coltrane's Sound*⁶⁹ and *Coltrane Plays the Blues*.⁷⁰ Tyner's albums with Coltrane *Afro Blue Impressions*⁷¹ and *A Love Supreme*⁷² differ from his earlier work because they are highly pentatonic and chromatic. Reviews from the time show that the music of the Coltrane quartet was very well received. The reaction to their music only served to point others to focus more on the classic Coltrane quartet's work and less on other earlier Tyner recordings.

⁶⁷ John Coltrane, *Live At The Jazz Gallery 1960*, recorded June 10, 1960, master number 88662. RLR Records.

⁶⁸ John Coltrane, *My Favorite Things*, recorded October 21st, 24th, and 26th, 1960, master number SD-1361, Atlantic.

⁶⁹ John Coltrane, *Coltrane's Sound*, recorded on October 24th and 26th, 1960, master number SD-1419, Atlantic.

⁷⁰ John Coltrane, *Coltrane Plays the Blues*, recorded on October 24th, 1960, master number SD-1382, Atlantic.

⁷¹ John Coltrane, *Afro Blue Impressions*, recorded on November 2, 1963, master number PL 2620-101, Pablo Records.

⁷² John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, recorded on December 9, 1964, master number AS-77, Impulse!.

*My Favorite Things*⁷³ received five stars in a review from Pete Welding. Welding's review is quite long and glowing, which is not typical for a *Downbeat* review. Coltrane is depicted as no less than a brilliant artist. Tyner, however, is hardly mentioned. Welding writes that Tyner didn't provide many linear melodies because competing with Coltrane would have been futile. On "My Favorite Things"⁷⁴ and "Summertime,"⁷⁵ Welding says Tyner played well enough to sustain the mood while Coltrane was not playing.⁷⁶ This is certainly not the most glowing review of Tyner and the writer's comments were mostly about Coltrane's performance.

*A Love Supreme*⁷⁷ was recorded on December 9, 1964. This album received a five-star review from Don DeMicheal in *Downbeat* in the April 8, 1965 issue. DeMicheal describes this album as a "work of art." He writes that it marks a change in Coltrane's music. According to DeMicheal, "the melodicism that is such a striking characteristic of [Tyner's] playing on this album is more often chromatic than diatonic and, consequently, sometimes creates a bitonality that sets up a wonderful tension with Tyner's chords and Garrison's basslines."⁷⁸ Tyner's approach is highly chromatic, quartal, pentatonic, and intense. DeMicheal describes the work of Tyner and Elvin Jones as "excellent."⁷⁹ So influential was the group that recorded on *A Love Supreme*⁸⁰ (John Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison, and Elvin Jones), that it came to be known as Coltrane's classic quartet. They recorded together from 1961-65 and helped to define

⁷³ John Coltrane, *My Favorite Things*, recorded October 21st, 24th, and 26th, 1960, master number SD-1361, Atlantic.

⁷⁴ John Coltrane, *My Favorite Things*, recorded October 21st, 24th, and 26th, 1960, master number SD-1361, Atlantic.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Pete Welding, "My Favorite Things," *Down Beat* 28, no 13 (July 1961): 30.

⁷⁷ John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, recorded on December 9, 1964, master number AS-77, Impulse!.

⁷⁸ Don DeMicheal, "A Love Supreme," *Down Beat* (April 1965): 27.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, recorded on December 9, 1964, master number AS-77, Impulse!.

the sound that is heard on the seminal recordings of this period. Some of these recordings include *Coltrane Live At Birdland*,⁸¹ *Crescent*,⁸² and *A Love Supreme*.⁸³

On October 24, 1963 *Downbeat* devoted two pages to an interview with McCoy Tyner conducted by Stanley Dance. This interview reports on Tyner's background, early career, influences, and overall musical philosophy. When discussing his transition to the Coltrane group Tyner said that he was not concerned with making money because he knew that working with Coltrane was something he needed to do.⁸⁴

⁸¹ John Coltrane, *Live at Birdland*, recorded on October 8, 1963, master number A-50, Impulse!.

⁸² John Coltrane, *Crescent*, recorded on April 27th and June 1st, 1964, master number A-66, Impulse!.

⁸³ John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, recorded on December 9, 1964, master number AS-77, Impulse!.

⁸⁴ Stanley Dance, "Tyner Talk. John Coltrane's pianist discusses his musical background, beliefs and goals," *Down Beat* 30, no 28 (October 1963): 18.

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF RECORDINGS

“Effendi”

“Effendi”⁸⁵ is a modally based composition on the album *Inception*.⁸⁶ The composition features a distinctive bassline which functions as a counter melody and creates a call-and-response feature that is similar to what occurs on “So What”⁸⁷ by Miles Davis. The composition has an ABA structure and each section is eight measures long. The harmonic structure is D dorian for the A section and F-sharp dorian for the B section. Tyner mostly plays three-note quartal voicings in the left hand throughout the recording. These voicings are moved around diatonically and chromatically. It’s the type of left-hand comping that he would later employ on albums like *A Love Supreme*⁸⁸ and *Afro Blue Impressions*⁸⁹ with Coltrane.

Tyner’s improvised solo on “Effendi”⁹⁰ uses enclosures, sequencing, melodies emphasizing chord tones on downbeats, chromaticism, triplet rhythms, apart playing, and pentatonics. Ex. 1 demonstrates Tyner’s use of enclosures, chord tones placed on downbeats, and a melodic phrase in measures one and two, which emphasize scale degrees one, minor two, minor three, and five.

The melodic phrase in measures one and two embellishes a tonic minor triad and provides chord tone resolutions on the downbeats. All chords tones in Ex. 1 are labeled CT.

⁸⁵ McCoy Tyner, *Inception*, recorded on January 10, 1962, master number A-18, Impulse!.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*, recorded on March 2nd and April 22nd, 1959, master number 88697-33552-2, Columbia.

⁸⁸ John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, recorded on December 9, 1964, master number AS-77, Impulse!.

⁸⁹ John Coltrane, *Afro Blue Impressions*, recorded on November 2, 1963, master number PL 2620-101, Pablo Records.

⁹⁰ McCoy Tyner, *Inception*, recorded on January 10, 1962, master number A-18, Impulse!.

Beats two, three, and four of measure two resolve on the minor third and the fifth scale degrees of D minor respectively. Measure four begins with a scalar phrase which resolves on the minor third, followed by a series of three enclosures. These enclosures are labeled as [ENC] in Ex. 1. Each enclosure in measures four through six resolves to scale degrees five, minor three, and one, respectively. The emphasis of scale degrees one, two, three, and five is a common melodic shape in bebop dialect, especially when played in descending order over a minor seven chord.

Example 1: “Effendi,” Tyner solo mm. 1-9 (0:30-0:38)

In *How to Play Bebop*,⁹¹ David Baker describes how the early pioneers of bebop used chromaticism in scales so that chord tones would be placed on downbeats.⁹² Though Ex. 1 is not very scalar, Tyner phrases most of the chord tones on downbeats. This is achieved by using enclosures, another technique common to bebop. An enclosure is when resolution is achieved by approaching a target note from above and below. Chord tone resolutions on downbeats is an important feature in bebop.

Ex. 2 shows Tyner’s use of apart playing, sequencing, chromaticism, triplet rhythms, and pentatonics. Apartness here as defined by Givan occurs on at least one level. Tyner is playing

⁹¹ David Baker, *How to Play Bebop 1* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1988).

⁹² *Ibid*, 1.

“outside” of the harmony of F-sharp minor. This is achieved by the use of the chromatic substitutions that is played in his left hand in measures nine through twelve. The underlying harmony for this section is F-sharp minor, but Tyner alternates between an F-sharp minor and a G minor voicing. Apartness occurs at another level in how Tyner implies one harmony with his right hand and plays another with his left. Everything played with his right hand in measures nine through twelve of Ex. 2 stays within F-sharp minor while his left hand plays apart from that going to G minor at times. Playing outside of the harmony became a strong identifying feature of Tyner’s later sound. *Inception*⁹³ is Tyner’s first recording as a leader and outside playing was already very prevalent in his style.

Example 2: “Effendi,” Tyner solo mm. 5-16 (0:34-0:49)

The phrase in measures six and seven ends with a descending chromatic figure voiced in minor thirds. The phrase in measure six incorporates triplet rhythms and outlines a D minor triad,

⁹³ McCoy Tyner, *Inception*, recorded on January 10, 1962, master number A-18, Impulse!.

placing the chord tones of each note of the chord on downbeats. The short motive in measure seven occurs numerous times throughout this recording. In measures eight and nine Tyner sequences a phrase which basically outlines a minor triad in second inversion. He transposes the phrase played in measure eight up a minor third in measure nine. Tyner frequently sequenced phrases as a way to play outside. He would play a motive in one key and then transpose it several times to various other keys, and eventually return to the home key. Measure fourteen includes a pentatonic-based riff, though his performance here is less pentatonic and pattern-oriented than later recordings.

Example 3: “Effendi,” Tyner solo (1:49-1:50)



The two-bar phrase shown in Ex. 3 includes elements that make it part of the bebop dialect. The sixteenth note triplet to eighth-note in the first measure of Ex. 3 is a rhythm frequently used by Charlie Parker and subsequent musicians after. Often times the triplet figure is an enclosure that resolves to a chord tone on the subsequent downbeat. This is usually then preceded by a stream of eighth notes, many of which have chord tones occurring on downbeats. Tyner used variations of this phrase throughout numerous recordings in his early career, particularly when he was taking a more bebop-oriented approach. This is part of Tyner’s idiom which is rooted in bebop dialect.

“Cousin Mary”

“Cousin Mary”⁹⁴ was recorded with the Coltrane quartet in 1963. It is a twelve-bar blues

⁹⁴ John Coltrane, *Afro Blue Impressions*, recorded on November 2, 1963, master number PL 2620-101, Pablo Records.

that incorporates a flat-five substitution for the five-chord. Tyner plays an exciting and extended solo. There are blues and bebop phrases throughout the solo which are contrasted by phrases that are intervallic and pattern-based.

Example 4: “Cousin Mary”, Tyner solo mm. 53-57 (1:16- 1:20)



The beginning of both Ex. 4 and 3 are very similar. This type of phrase can have variation at the end, but the beginning usually has an enclosure that resolves to the tonic or fifth (depending on the chord quality). The close musical relationship of ii minor and V dominant chords allow this phrase to be played over either one. Ex. 3 in “Effendi”⁹⁵ would work over a B seven chord and Ex. 4 in “Cousin Mary”⁹⁶ would work over a A-flat minor seven chord. Variations of this phrase occur frequently throughout both “Effendi” and “Cousin Mary.” In accordance with bebop common practice, Tyner places most of the chord tones on downbeats in measures fifty-three and fifty-four.

Ex. 5 shows a phrase from Tyner’s solo on “Cousin Mary”⁹⁷ that constitutes both a part of Tyner’s personal idiomatic style and a motive common to the bebop dialect. The musical phrase is taken from the third chorus of the piano solo on the recording “Cousin Mary.”⁹⁸ Measure twenty-five and twenty-seven feature a common bebop phrase which outlines a minor triad with an added second. In measure twenty-six Tyner plays a motive that is comprised of four

⁹⁵ McCoy Tyner, *Inception*, recorded on January 10, 1962, master number A-18, Impulse!.

⁹⁶ John Coltrane, *Afro Blue Impressions*, recorded on November 2, 1963, master number PL 2620-101, Pablo Records.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

out of five notes of the major pentatonic scale. This motive is played over an A seven chord which is functioning as a chromatic substitution of the tonic chord Ab seven. The pattern-oriented way in which he plays the pentatonic scale and the use of a chromatic substitution are two features that are idiomatic to Tyner. Tyner frequently alternates between the tonic and the chord a half-step up on many recordings of varying styles. Measure twenty-eight uses a D seven chord which is based on the tri-tone substitution of the tonic chord. Tyner plays a fragment of a whole-tone scale over this harmony (which is more of a shared dialect). This four-bar example is an illustration of how Tyner seamlessly fuses bebop dialect with the use of pentatonics.

Example 5: “Cousin Mary,” mm. 24–32 (0:47– 0:53)



Table 1: Cell A-Tyner’s idiom, Cell B- bebop dialect

Track	Elapsed Time	Cell A (Tyner’s idiom)	Cell B (Bebop dialect)	Album	Artist
“Cousin Mary” ⁹⁹	(0:47– 0:49)		Cell B1 (m.25)	Afro Blue Impressions	Tyner
“Cousin Mary” ¹⁰⁰	(0:49– 0:50)	Cell A (m.26)		Afro Blue Impressions	Tyner
“Daahoud” ¹⁰¹	(0:47– 0:49)		Cell B (no music ex.)	Clifford Brown & Max Roach Quintet	Brown

⁹⁹ John Coltrane, *Afro Blue Impressions*, recorded on November 2, 1963, master number PL 2620-101, Pablo Records.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Clifford Brown and Max Roach, *Clifford Brown & Max Roach Quintet*, recorded on August 6, 1954, master number MG 26043, EmAcry Records.

Ex. 6 is another iteration of Ex. 3 and 4, but it is presented here with more variation. It is scalar and very chromatic. Other ways of adding chromaticism to the major scale as detailed in Baker’s *How to Play Bebop*¹⁰² include placing half steps between the first and second, and second and third scale degrees of a major scale. An example of this approach is provided in the first measure of Ex. 5 of Baker’s book.¹⁰³ Ex. 6 of Tyner’s solo is essentially the inverse of the Baker example. This musical example from Tyner is further evidence of his mastery of the bebop tradition.

Example 6: “Cousin Mary,” Tyner solo mm. 29-33 (0:52- 0:56)



Measure forty-nine of Ex. 7 is another example of apart playing. Here again Tyner is playing apart from himself. In the second half of measure forty-nine he plays an A-flat 13 voicing with his left hand while the right hand superimposes notes taken from the A major scale. In the same measure Tyner again uses sequential patterns in various keys to play outside of the harmony. The pattern that is sequenced is an arpeggiated G-flat major triad in second inversion which he transposes up to an A major triad.

Example 7: “Cousin Mary,” Tyner solo mm. 46 -50 (1:09- 1:12)



¹⁰² David Baker, *How to Play Bebop 1* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1988).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

“Newport Romp”

“Newport Romp”¹⁰⁴ is a Tyner composition that was recorded live at the Newport Jazz Festival. Tyner plays the first solo and also takes a short solo at the very end. The following example features pentatonics, 4-3 resolutions, repeated patterns, altered dominant approaches, and bebop clichés. On many of the V chords (F seven) Tyner plays notes derived from the Gb major pentatonic scale. This scale provides altered notes on the F seven chord including the flat nine, sharp nine, and flat thirteen. This scale also provides a B-flat, the fourth of the F seven chord. Two examples of this can be given in measures ten (the first two beats) and eighteen (last two beats) of Ex. 8.

Example 8: “Newport Romp,” Tyner solo mm. 10-24 (0:31-0:43)

10 F7 [0:31] [Gb Pentatonic] 11 Bb7 Major 7th [4-3 Resolution] 12 13 Bb7 [Repeated pattern with a tri-tone interval] 14

15 [Bb Altered Dominant] 16 [Pentatonic] 17 [Bebop] 18 [Bebop Dialect] [Gb Pentatonic] F7

19 Bb7 [4-3 Resolution] 20 Cm7 21 Cm7 22 F7 ["Cry Me A River" lick] 23 Bb7

Measure 11 highlights a phrase that uses a major seventh chord tone against a dominant seventh chord. This can seem like a mistake, but it was common practice in bebop. Measure thirteen and fourteen include repeated melodic patterns. Tyner is able to generate a lot of rhythmic energy with this pattern and uses quartal left hand chords to accentuate the highest notes in the phrase. The phrase is angular and creates tension because of the tri-tone intervals that are used. In measure fifteen and sixteen Tyner outlines part of a Bb altered-dominant scale

¹⁰⁴ McCoy Tyner, Live at Newport, recorded on July 5, 1963, master number A-48, Impulse!.

and doesn't fully resolve the phrase until the third beat of measure seventeen. Measure seventeen is chromatic and blends fragments of pentatonic notes with a bebop scale. In measure eighteen Tyner mixes a standard bebop shape with a minor pentatonic run. This is a great illustration of how Tyner seamlessly mixes bebop dialect with pentatonic based melodies. The 4-3 resolution of the Bb seven chords can be heard throughout this recording. Measures eleven, nineteen, and twenty-three provide examples of this. Often Tyner would resolve to the third on beat one or three and then resolve to the tonic note of Bb. Measure twenty-two features the "Cry Me A River" lick. According to Jerry Coker, this lick is so versatile and has been used by so many jazz musicians that he devoted a chapter to it in *Elements of the Jazz Language for the Developing Improvisor*.¹⁰⁵

Tyner uses repeated melodic patterns usually based on larger intervals. In measures thirty-five through forty-five, shown in Ex. 9, Tyner generates a repeated eighth note pattern based on a pentatonic scale that utilizes fourth and fifth intervals. Measures thirty-five through forty-three demonstrate this. Tyner uses a Bb minor pentatonic scale for most of Ex. 9. In addition to the Bb minor pentatonic, Tyner will also often use the F minor pentatonic scale when playing over a Bb seven chord. Measures forty-three and forty-four illustrate an ascending two octave minor pentatonic run from F to F.

Example 9: "Newport Romp," Tyner solo mm. 35-45 (0:53-1:01)

¹⁰⁵ Jerry Coker, *Elements of the Jazz Language for the Developing Improvisor* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1991), 74.

Coker writes that the bebop lick, “is a specific melodic phrase, generally taking place on dominant seventh and minor seventh chords, and closely related to the bebop scale, using a portion of that scale in its structure.”¹⁰⁶ Ex. 10 demonstrates the bebop lick over an F7 chord.

Example 10: Bebop Lick



Measures forty-five through forty-nine of Ex. 11 utilizes bebop-based melodies with melodic material that approximates F seven and Bb major harmonies. The bebop scale, except for an occasional flat five and flat nine, form the basis of the four-bar phrase in Ex. 11. The last two beats of measure forty-seven in Ex. 11 incorporate the first four notes of the “bebop lick.”

Example 11: “Newport Romp” Tyner solo mm. 45-49 (1:02-1:06)



In Ex. 11, I have labeled the measures that Tyner uses either augmented, major, or bebop scale melodic material. Tyner again is creating melodies that approximate F seven for four bars and in so doing ignores the standard progression found in the last four bars of a blues.

¹⁰⁶ Jerry Coker, *Elements of the Jazz Language for the Developing Improvisor* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1991), 40.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Tyner's early career was one marked by a meteoric rise to the top echelon of the jazz world. While still in his early twenties, Tyner found himself in the company of experienced musicians, creating innovative music that had a profound impact on the music community. Tyner, like Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock and countless other great jazz innovators, created groundbreaking music at a very early age. Tyner seemed to somehow know that Coltrane was the musician he needed to be working with if he was going to be a part of something special. Less than one year after joining a well-established group, the Jazztet, Tyner decided to join Coltrane's group. Tyner indeed made the right decision and went on to create new and exciting music with the Coltrane quartet.

But even before his time with Coltrane, Tyner was already discovering his sound and incorporating it into his original compositions and the jazz standards repertoire. His signature sound of pentatonic melodies and quartal harmonies had already begun to emerge from his first album in 1962. Blended with that emerging style were echoes of the jazz tradition. Great bebop era musicians like Bud Powell had made a powerful impression on Tyner, and their music was an important part of Tyner's early style. The innovations for which Tyner is most well-known were certainly a remarkable and powerful contribution to jazz, but his earlier musical contributions were also significant. The recordings as discussed in this study exemplify a musician who was an innovator from early in his career. His early style demonstrated a delicate balance of the bebop tradition, quartal harmony, and pentatonic melodies.

APPENDIX A

“EFFENDI” (TYNER SOLO 0:30-0:53)

0:30

Dm⁹

2 CT CT CT 3

4 CT CT [ENC]

5 CT [ENC] CT [ENC] 6 CT CT 3 CT CT 3 7 Chromatic Thirds 8 Dm⁹

9 F#m⁹ Minor Arpeggiated Triad 10 CT CT Scalar Phrase CT CT 11

LH Chromatic Substitution

12 3 Scalar Phrase 13 14 Pentatonic Phrase 15

16 CT CT CT 17 Dm⁹ 18 19

APPENDIX B

“COUSIN MARY” (TYNER SOLO 0:25-1:36)

Musical score in 4/4 time, featuring a melodic line with various chords and techniques. The score is divided into eight systems of five staves each. Chords are indicated by letters above the staff, and techniques like triplets and cross-tuning (CT) are marked. A time signature of 0:52 is shown at the start of the eighth system.

Chords and techniques marked in the score:

- 1: $A\flat 7$
- 2: $A\flat 7$
- 3: $A\flat 7$
- 4: $A\flat 7$
- 5: $D\flat 7$
- 6: $A\flat 7$
- 7: $A\flat 7$
- 8: $D 7$
- 9: $D 7$
- 10: $D\flat 7$
- 11: $A\flat 7$
- 12: $A\flat 7$
- 13: $A\flat 7$
- 14: $A\flat 7$
- 15: $D\flat 7$
- 16: $D\flat 7$
- 17: $D\flat 7$
- 18: $D\flat 7$
- 19: $A\flat 7$
- 20: $A\flat 7$
- 21: $D 7$
- 22: $D\flat 7$
- 23: $A\flat 7$
- 24: $A\flat 7$
- 25: $A\flat 7$
- 26: $A\flat 7$
- 27: $D\flat 7$
- 28: $D 7$
- 29: $D\flat 7$
- 30: $D\flat 7$
- 31: $A\flat 7$
- 32: $A\flat 7$
- 33: $A\flat 7$
- 34: $A\flat 7$
- 35: $A\flat 7$
- 36: $A\flat 7$
- 37: $A\flat 7$

Techniques marked: [ENC], 3, CT, CT, CT, CT, 3.

2

Musical score for guitar, measures 38-73. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The tempo is marked as 1:16. The score includes various chords and techniques:

- Measures 38-42: Chords Db7, Ab7, D7, D7, Ab7.
- Measures 43-47: Chords Ab7, D7, D7, Ab7.
- Measures 48-50: Chords Ab7, Ab7.
- Measures 51-52: No chords.
- Measures 53-56: Chords Db7, Ab7. Techniques: [ENC], 3, CT, CT, CT, CT, CT, CT.
- Measures 57-61: Chords D7, Db7, Ab7, Ab7.
- Measures 62-66: Chords Db7, Db7.
- Measures 67-69: Chords Ab7, D7.
- Measures 70-73: Chords Db7, Ab7.

APPENDIX C

“NEWPORT ROMP” (TYNER SOLO 0:22-1:05)

Musical score for guitar, 4/4 time signature, E-flat major key signature. The score consists of 36 measures, numbered 1 through 36, across eight staves. The chords indicated above the notes are:

- Measure 1: B \flat 7
- Measure 5: E \flat 7
- Measure 7: B \flat 7
- Measure 9: C \flat m7
- Measure 10: F7
- Measure 11: B \flat 7
- Measure 13: B \flat 7
- Measure 17: E \flat 7
- Measure 19: B \flat 7
- Measure 21: C \flat m7
- Measure 22: F7
- Measure 23: B \flat 7
- Measure 25: B \flat 7
- Measure 30: E \flat 7
- Measure 31: B \flat 7
- Measure 34: F7
- Measure 35: B \flat 7

2

Musical score for measures 37-50, featuring a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is divided into three systems of five measures each. Measure numbers 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, and 50 are indicated above the notes. Chord symbols are placed above the corresponding measures: Bb7 (measures 37, 43), Eb7 (measure 41), Cm7 (measure 45), and F7 (measure 46). The notation includes quarter notes, eighth notes, and rests. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 50.

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