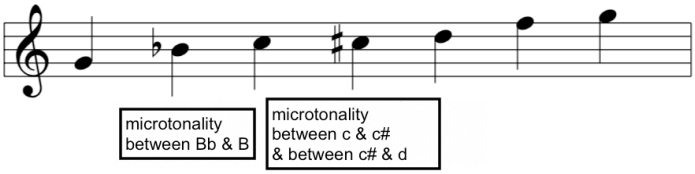
Improvising the Blues

The Blues Scale

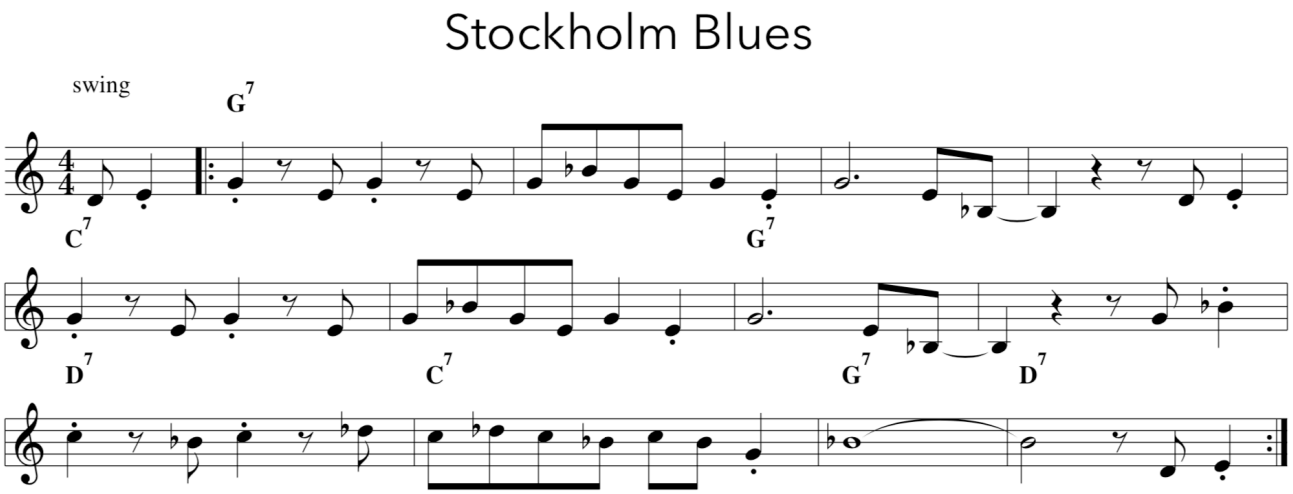
The blues scale comprises the notes that are most commonly used for melodies and improvisation in traditional and contemporary blues. It is also a summary of the notes that sound good over all 3 chords of the 12 bar blues form. (Of course, there are more notes that will *also* sound good in a blues context, so the blues scale does *not* mean other notes are banned!). You can also use the blues scale to play over other forms, chord patterns or chordsmand also in different styles.
Usually, the notes of the blues scale are not played in well-tempered intonation. Rather, blues uses a lot of microtonal colors („too low", „too high", „sliding" etc). These colors are what makes blues sound „bluesy"! To get a feeling for typical colors, listen to blues and imitate what you hear. Using a heavy bowing arm to make „dirty", scratchy and earthy sounds will give your instrument a bluesy sound. Don't use classical vibrato – try playing with no vibrato, or with a slow & wide vibrato instead.

The Blues Scale in G:



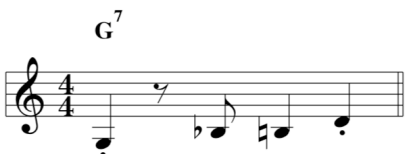
The blues scale is very similar to the minor pentatonic scale – it has only one note more: the augmented 4 (in G, that is c-sharp).
You can memorize and play scales like this with **fingering patterns**: On cello, if you play the lower root note with your 4th finger, you can play all notes of the scale in one position. On violin & viola, try playing the lower root note with your 3rd finger. This fingering pattern works for all keys!

Here is an example for a 12-bar Blues form in G:

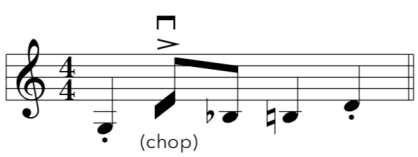


You can improvise over the entire form with the Blues Scale in G, using it over all 3 different chords!

For accompaniment, you can play any kind of bass line or bass pattern; or rhythmic chords.
Try playing this bass pattern over the form, adjusting it to the changing chords:

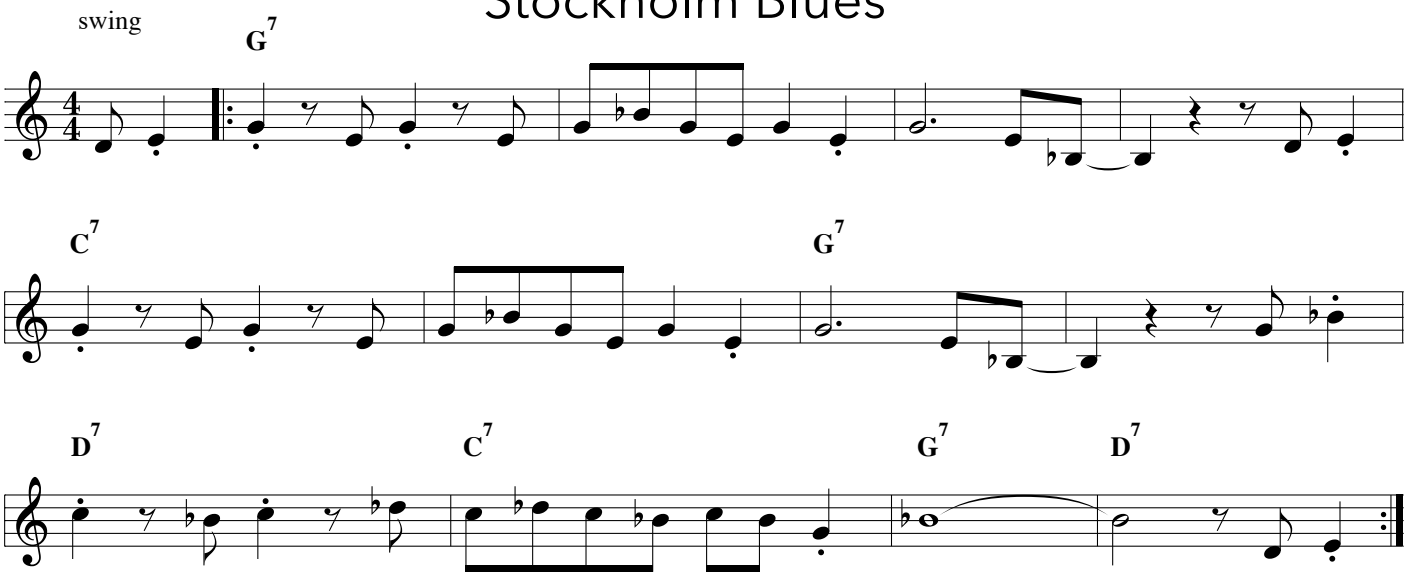


Try adding a chop on the 2:



Invent accompaniments of your own!

Stockholm Blues



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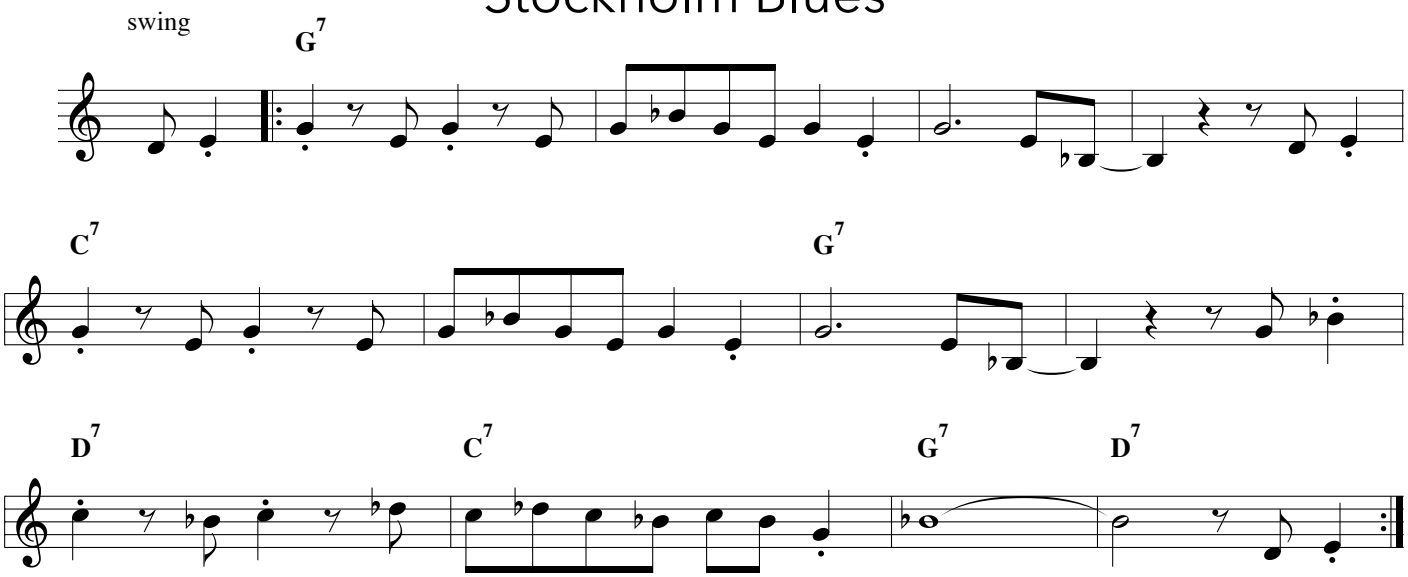

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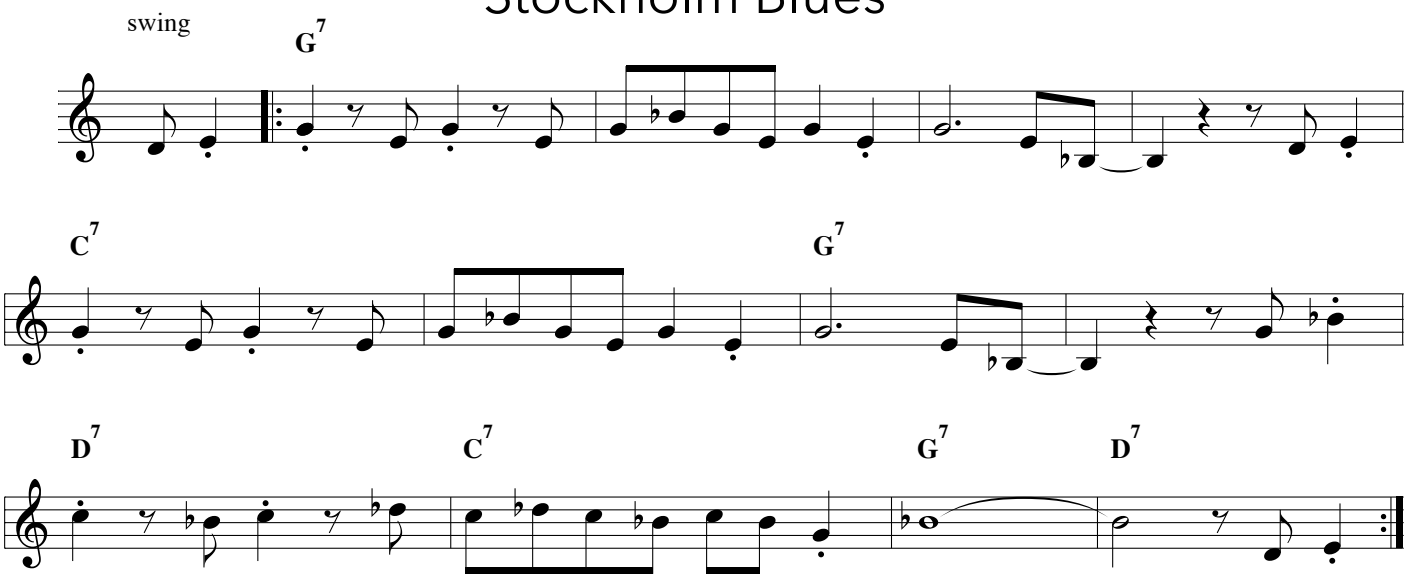

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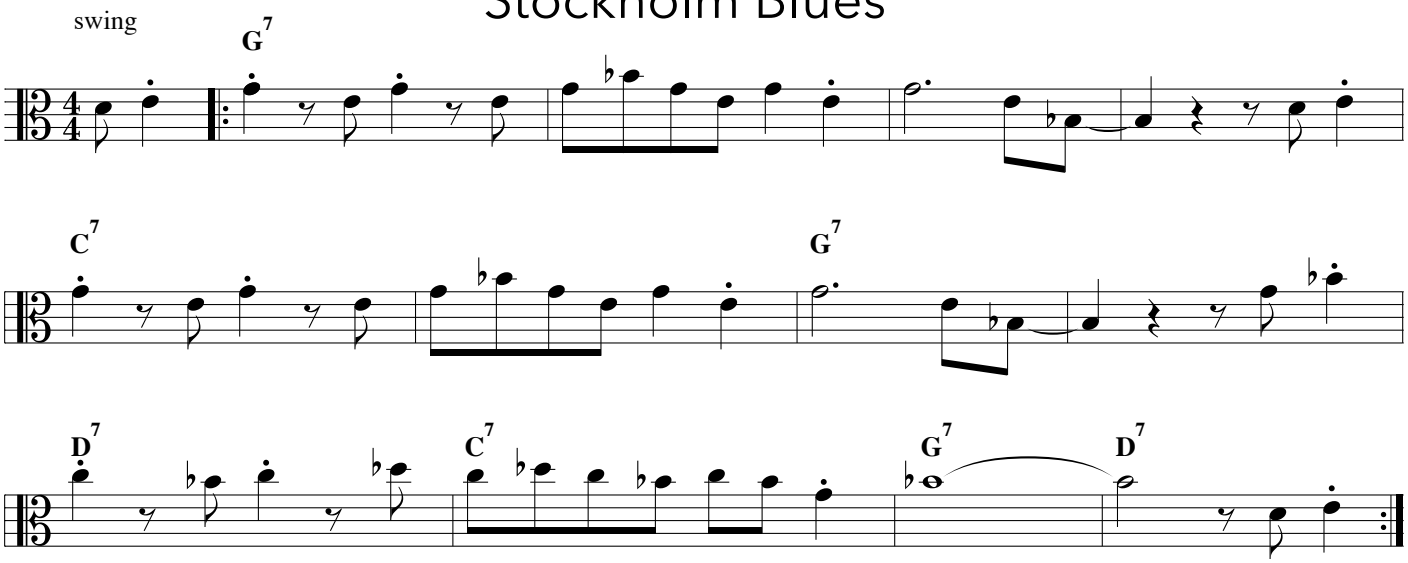

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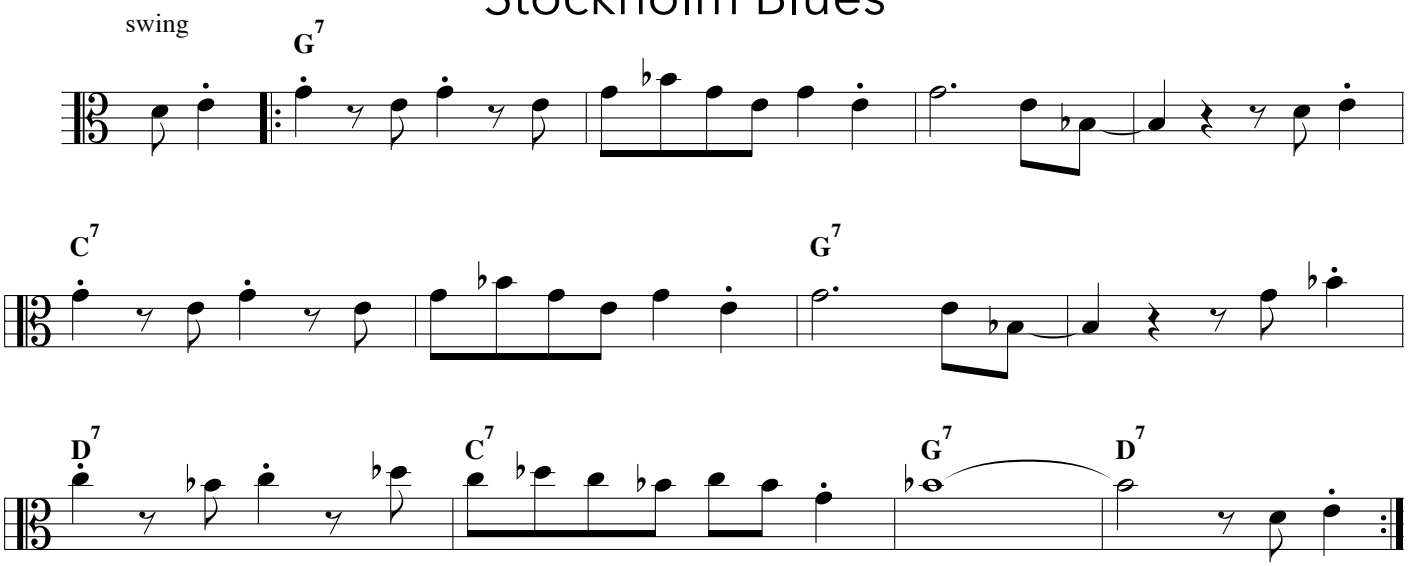

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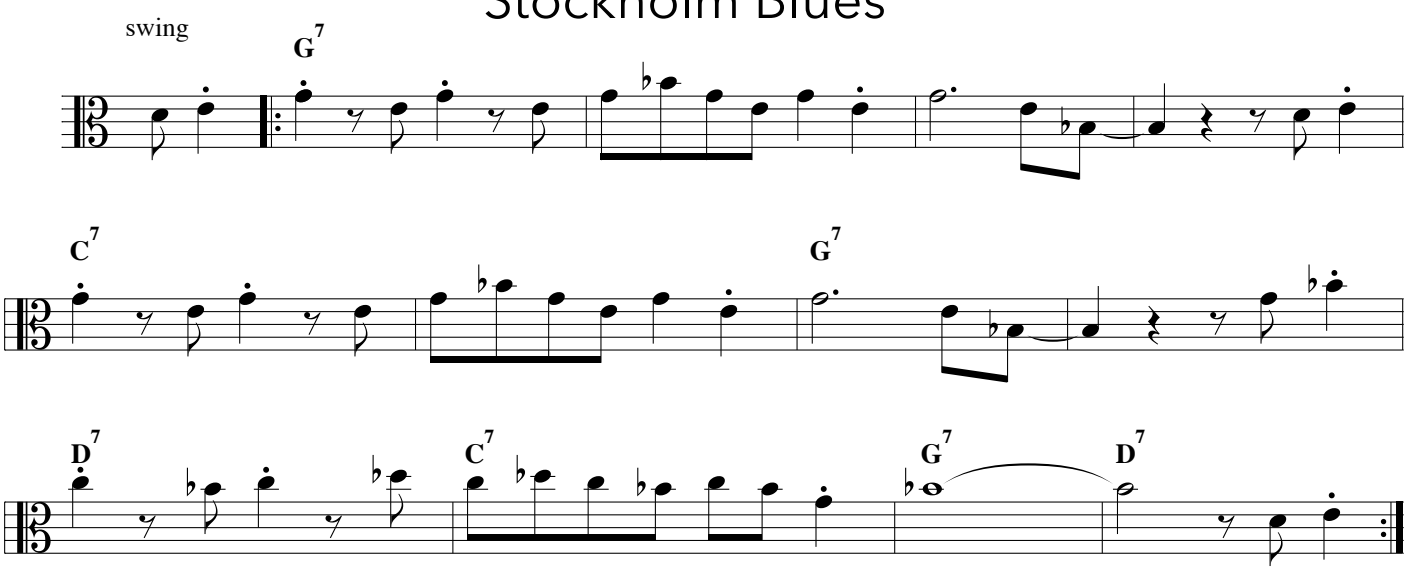

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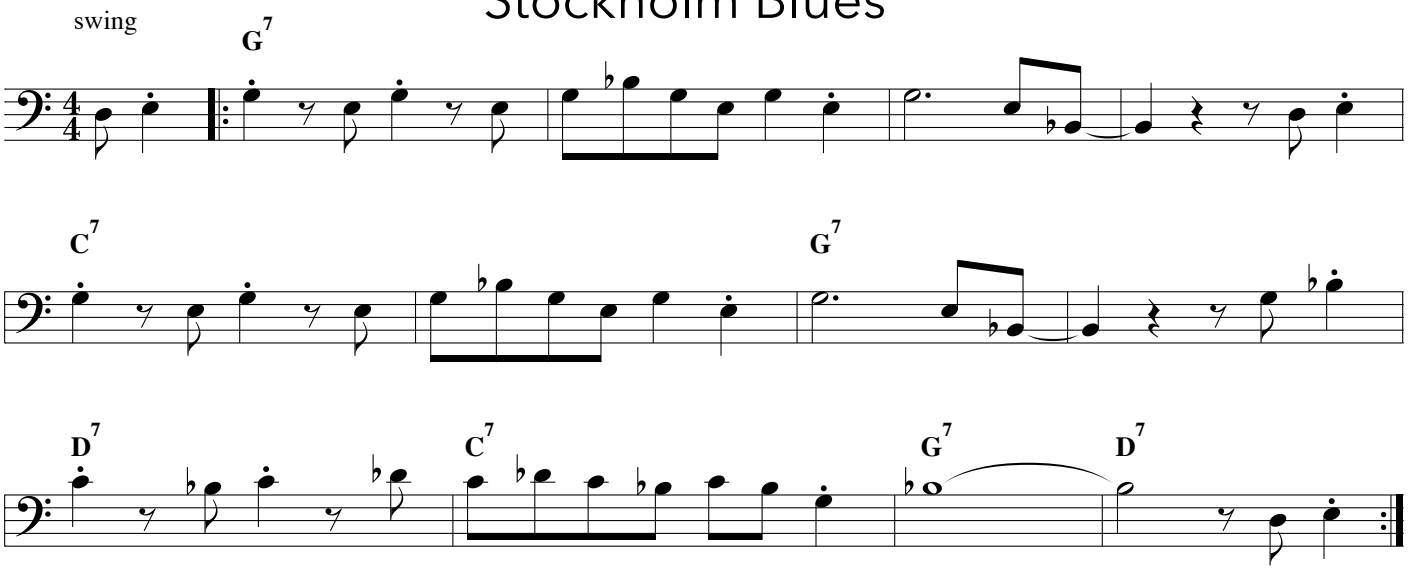

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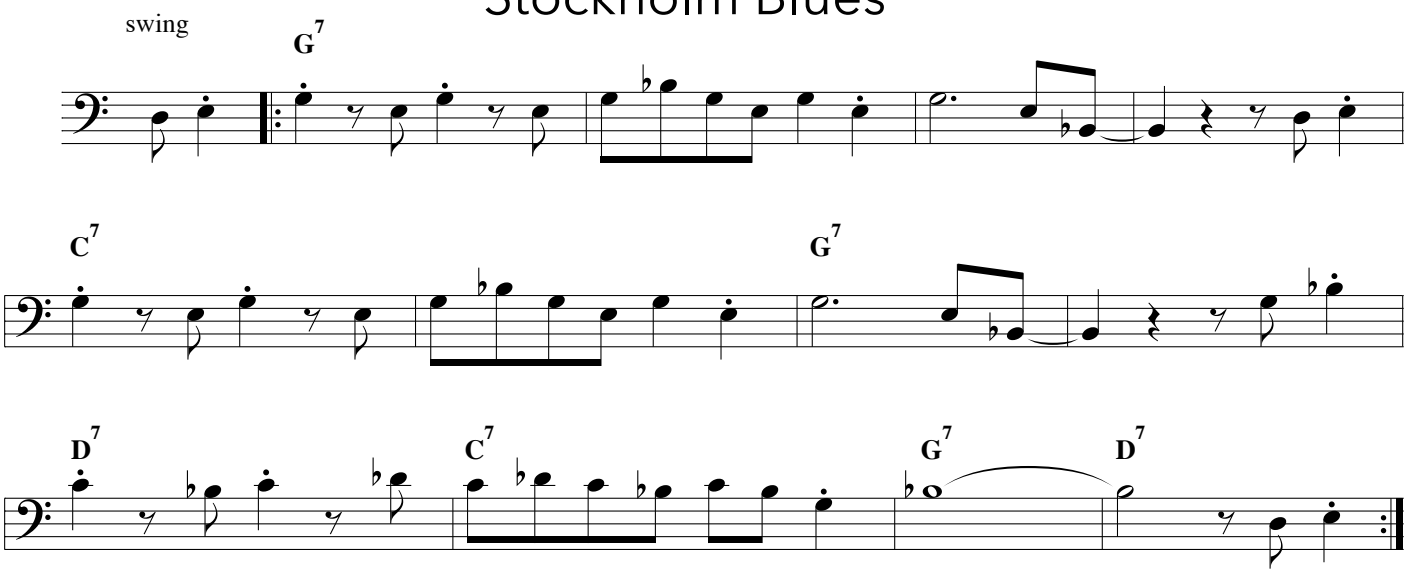
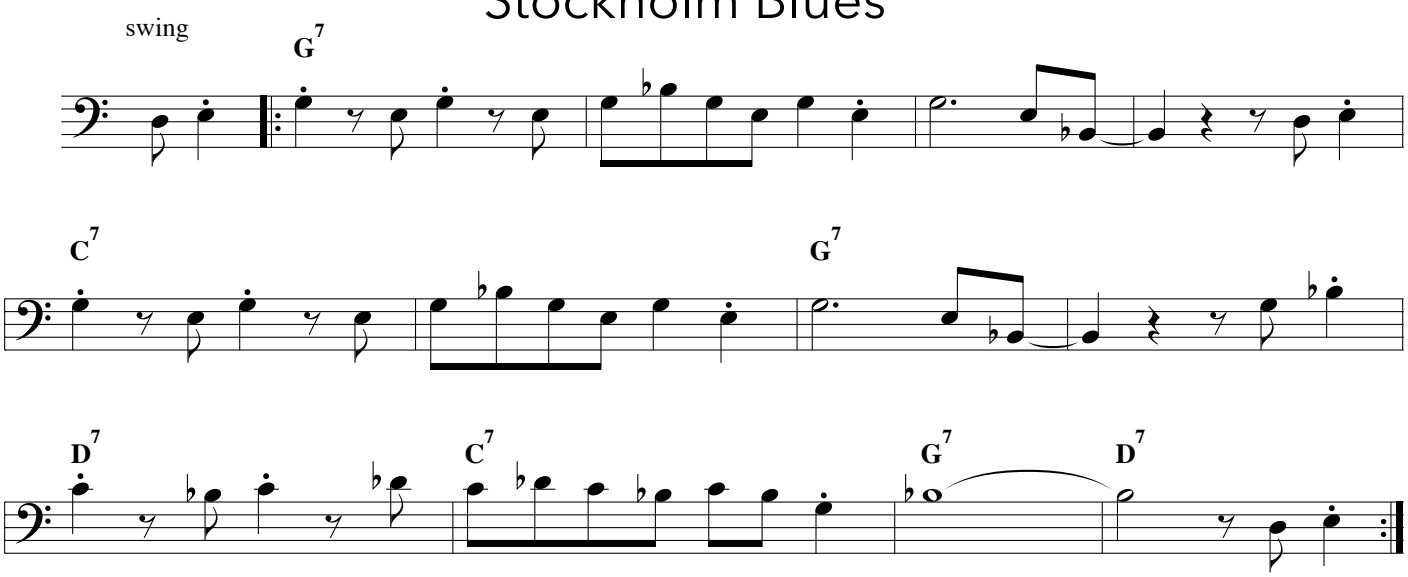
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