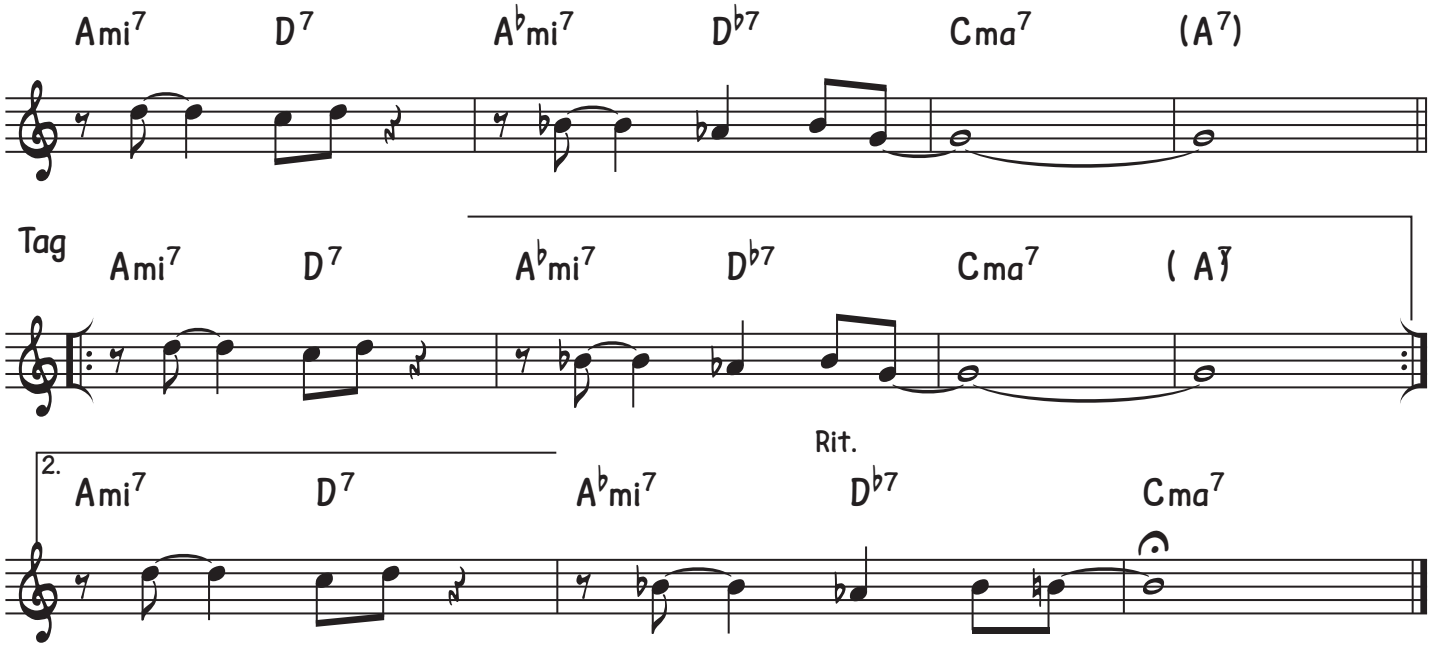
Ending Songs

Sean Parsons

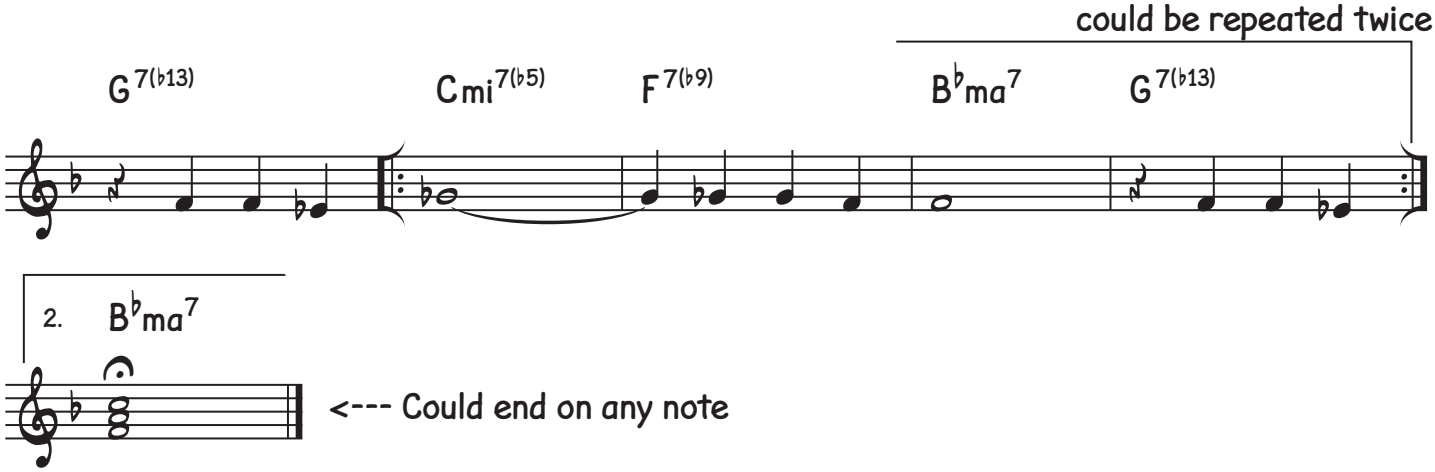
1. Melodic Tag

Usually this will tag the last 4 measures but not always. The melody/rhythm often will dictate what works well. The tag might be repeated twice.

"Satin Doll", written ending

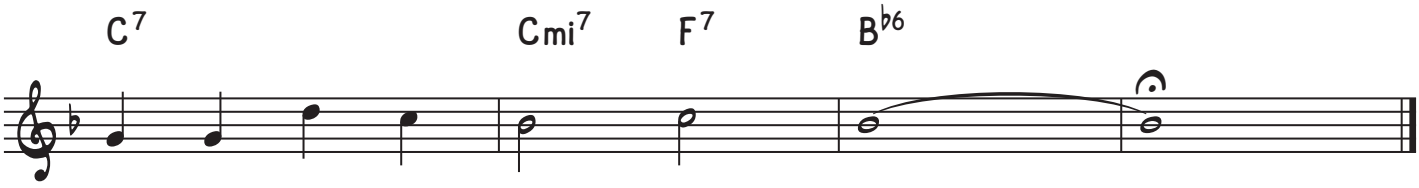


"Stella By Starlight", last 4 measures (with a pickup)

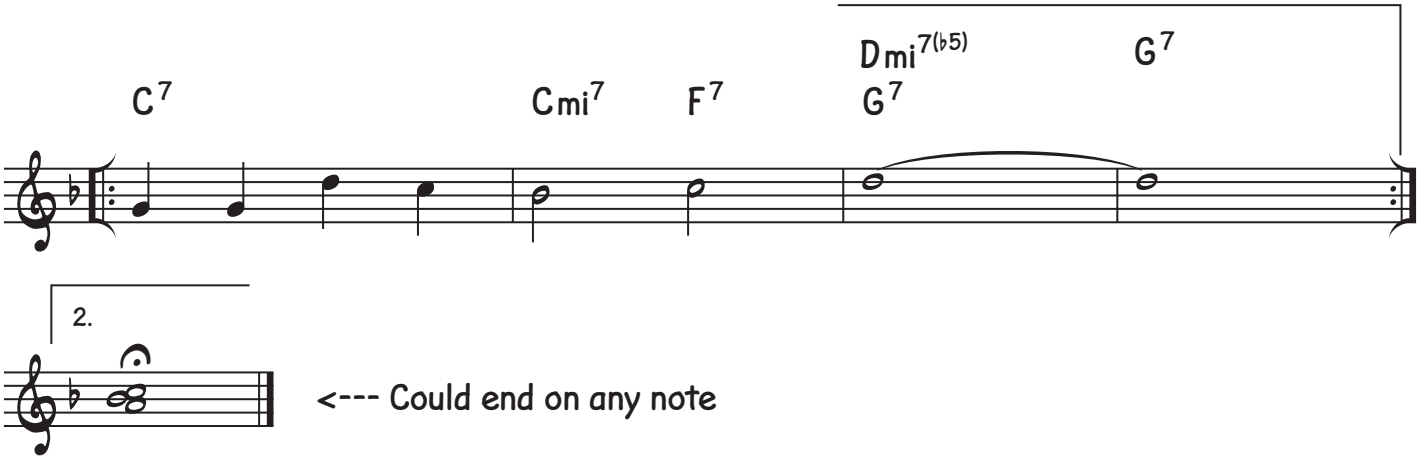


Sometimes the melody ends on the tonic (1) and signaling to the ensemble you wish to tag will require changing the last note to trigger the turnaround. For example, "There Is No Greater Love" ends on the tonic:

"There Is No Greater Love", written ending

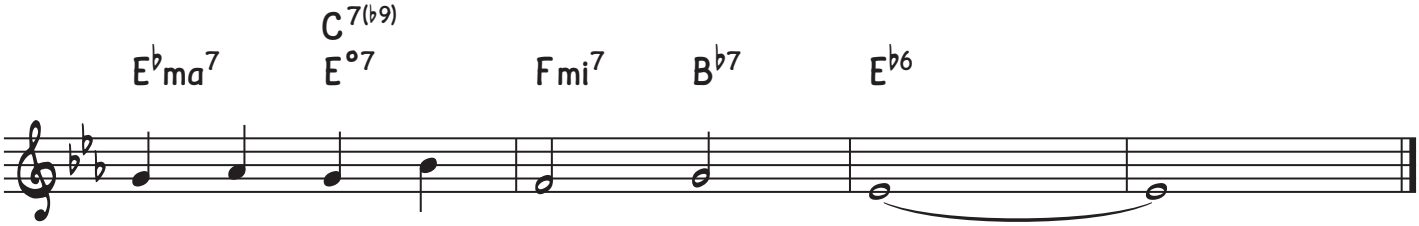


so instead of resolving to 1, the resolution is to a note in the VI chord (V/ii). (You could also fill or play a short line to further indicate the turnaround)

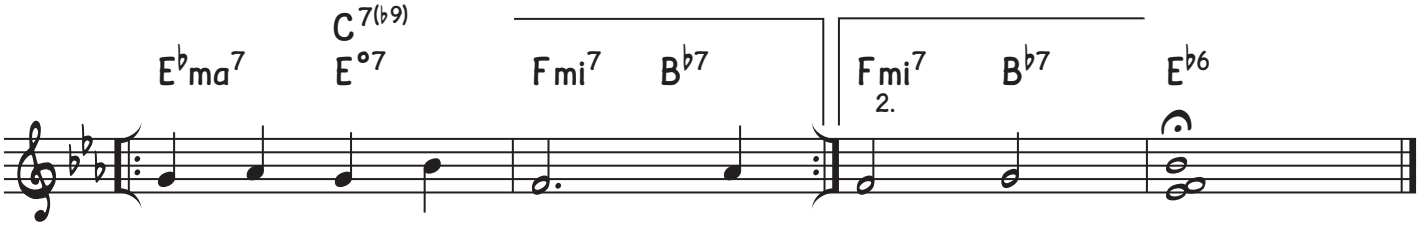


The turnaround might happen before phrase ending. This example delays the resolution.

"They Can't Take That Away From Me", written ending



Likely repeated 2X due to length



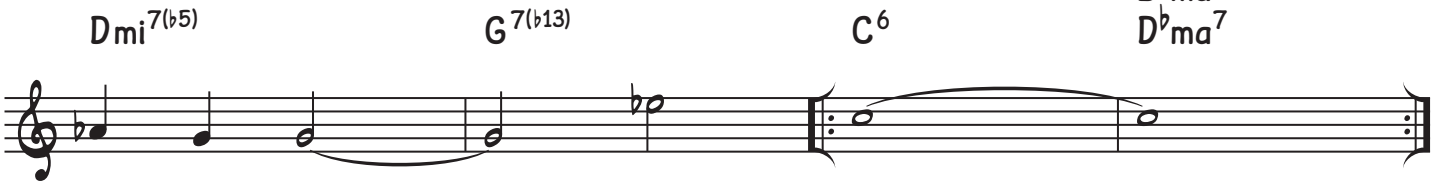
Could end on any note

2. Vamp Ending

Some tunes lend themselves well to a vamp at the end. This open-ended repeat could be a turnaround as before, but could also alternate between less harmonies. The song tempo and style help to dictate this. Sometimes the style is changed from swing to Latin as well.

For instance, this is the traditional ending to "What Is This Thing Called Love?"

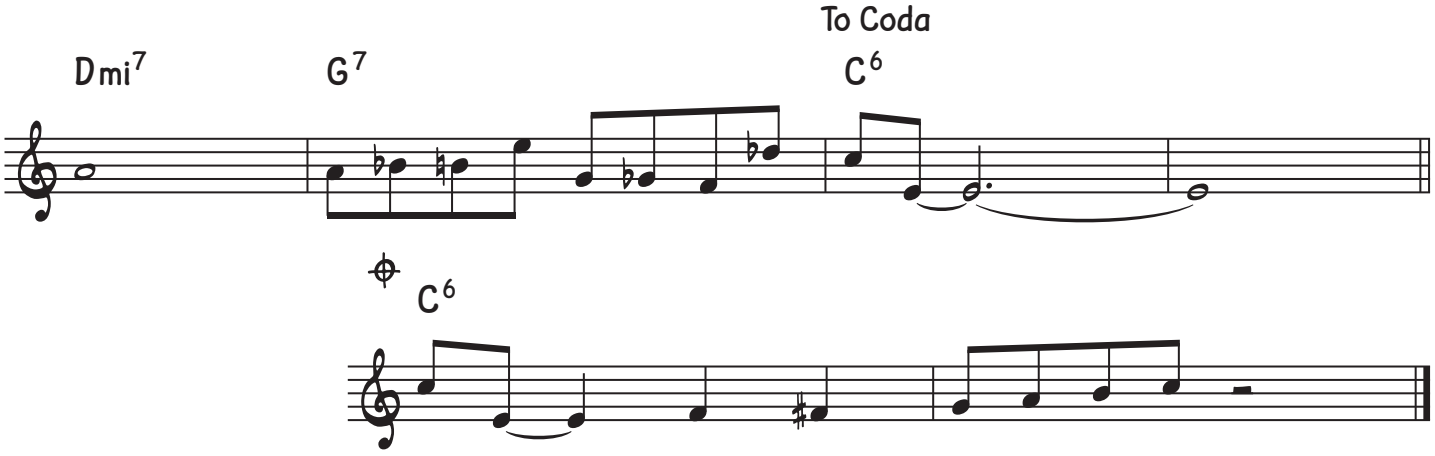
Repeat at will, improvise, trade with other instruments, etc.



This song ending is likely initiated by a held note from the person playing melody, and/or by the rhythm section. A change from swing to Latin almost certainly signals it.

3. "Take The A Train Ending"

Often played on this tune, it works well on others too. Words of caution: use sparingly. Overuse can seem cliche'.

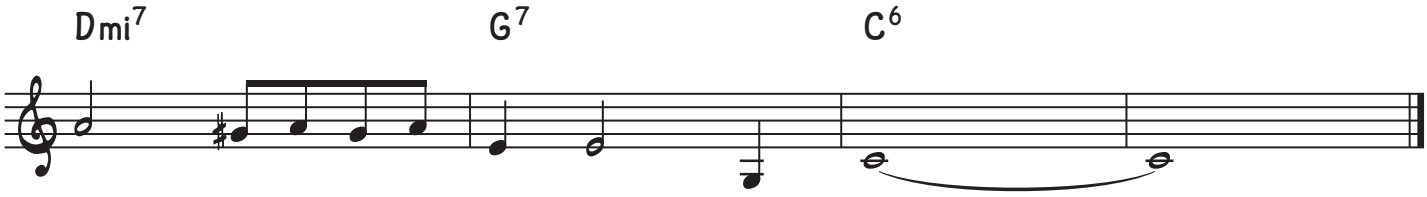


3. Cadenza

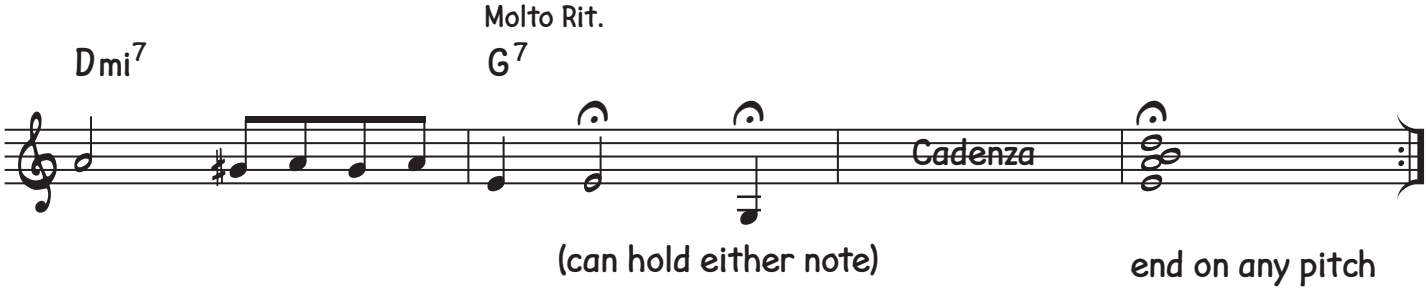
An open improvisation by the person playing the melody. Common in the occasional ballad or a song that slows down heavily at the end, this has a number of ways it may be indicated. A strong ritard concluding by an intentionally long, held note before the resolution of the melody "puts the brakes" on, usually indicating a V7alt harmony.

It is important for the person playing the cadenza to have a clear harmonic and rhythmic conclusion, often times physically cueing the last hit for the rhythm section.

"Stars Fell On Alabama" written ending



"Stars Fell On Alabama" cadenza

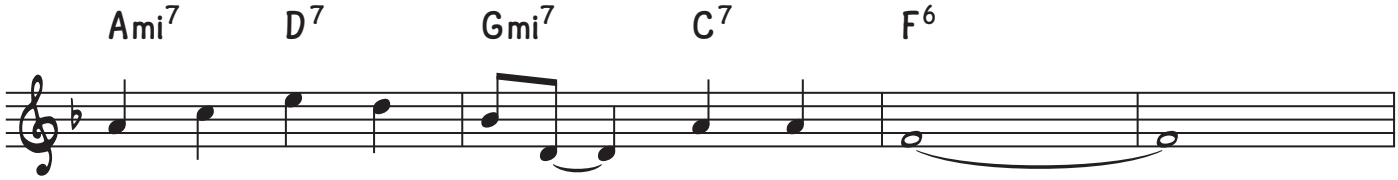


Note: Cadenza length is often determined by the language available to the soloist. Sometimes a few moments are better than a lengthy extended solo.

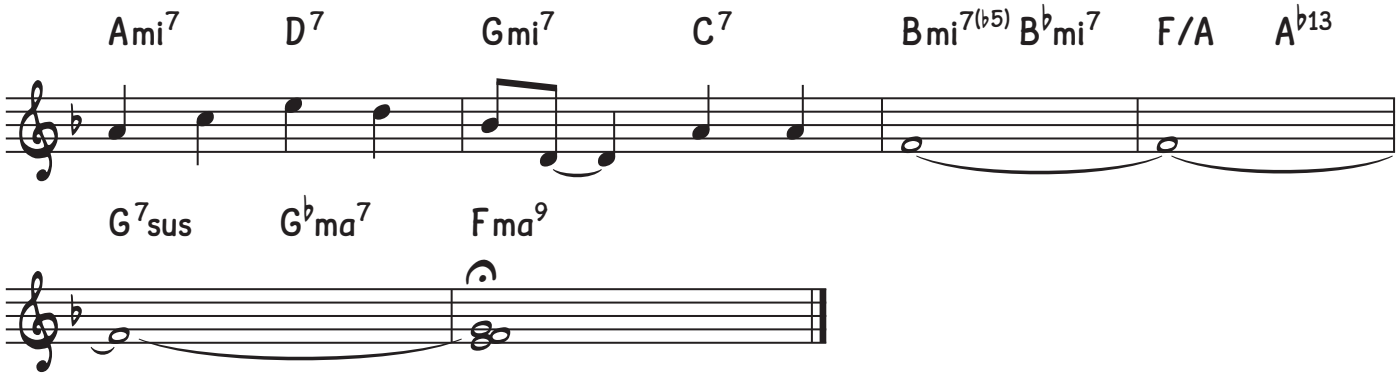
4. Tritone Walkdown

This is a type of ending often dictated by a member of the rhythm section, often a chording instrument. It is a good ending when the person playing the melody decides to end on the tonic and hold out the note. This works well as the tonic wiil sound consonant with all of the harmonies. It is part of the last 8 measures of songs like "Night and Day".

"Georgia On My Mind" written ending



"Georgia On My Mind" walkdown from the tritone

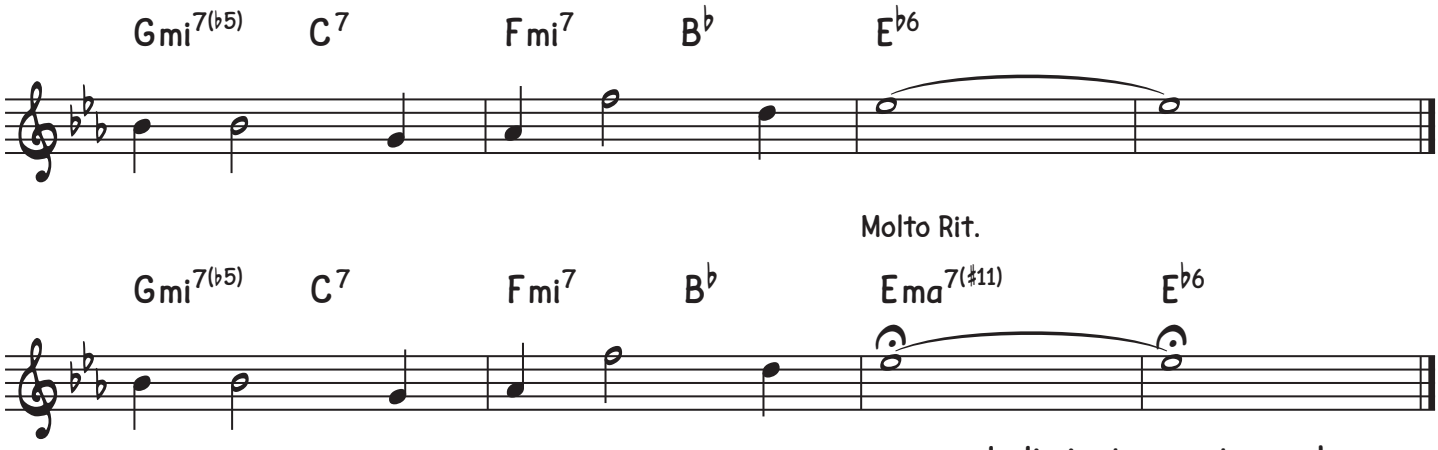


Note: The harmonic choices by the chording instrument can have may variations. This tends to work well when only one chording instrument plays the harmonies. The bass walking down chromatically wiil always work out well, and unless decided before hand, the chord qualities could often clash if too many people are playing them. Rhythm players should keep their ears open and adjust rhythmically as appropriate.

5. bIIma7

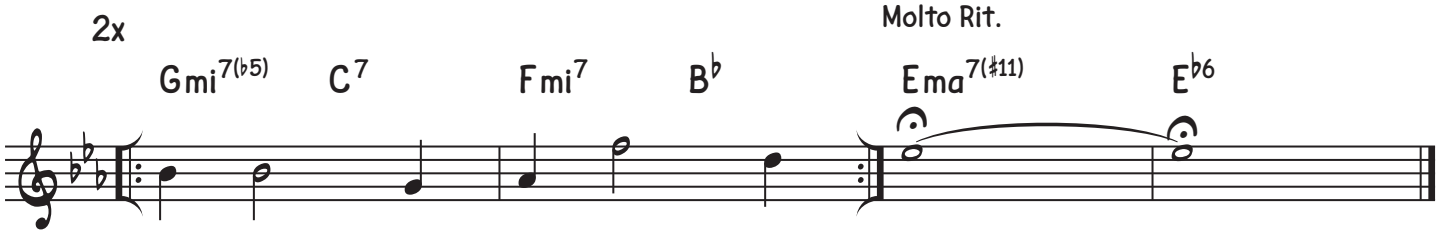
This ending is another possibility when the person playing the melody ends on the tonic. A harmonic instrument will play a bIIMa7, likely with some sort of light fill before indicating a resolution to I or i. The tonic becomes the Ma7 of the bIIMa7 and can be resolved if desired when I or i follows.

"Like Someone In Love" written ending



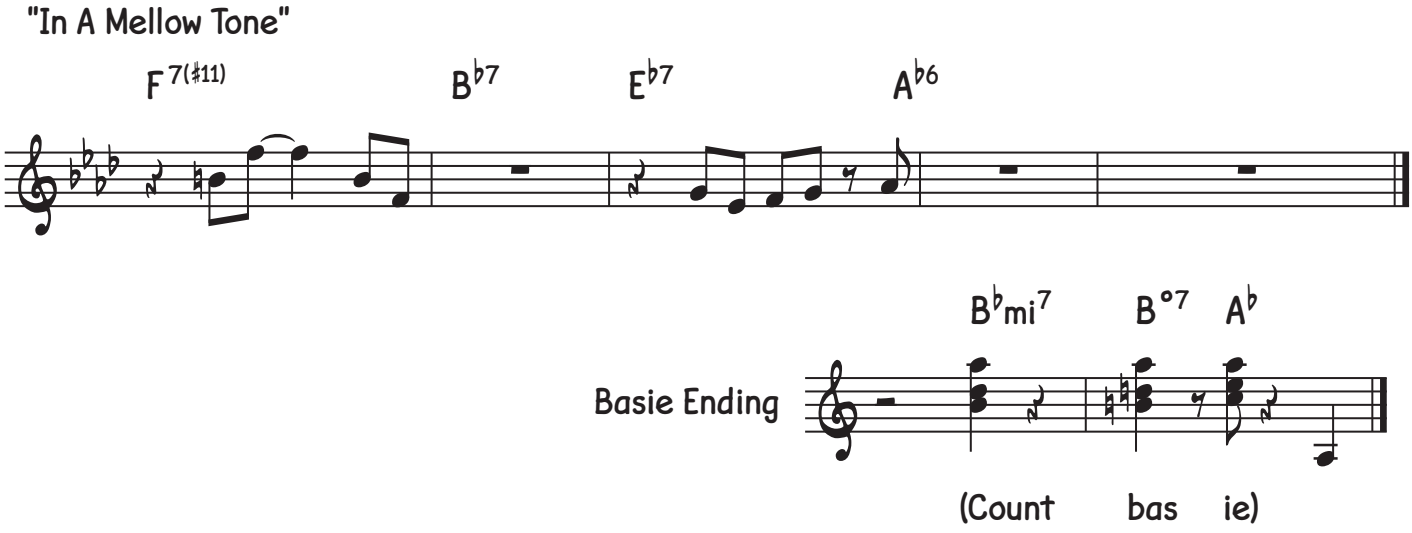
melodic instrument can change to another note at resolution

This can be combined with different endings as well. This is an example of a tagged ending before a bIIMa7.



6. Count Basie Ending

This iconic ending is rhythmic and harmonic. It is played in a break at the conclusion of a song, often by a melody or melodic interpretation that ends short. It can be played by anybody in the group but is usually left to a comping instrument.



7. Traditional Endings

Many songs have endings that are traditional, intentionally composed, or often played. "Moment's Notice" (composed), "A Night in Tunesia" (cadenza), "Take the A Train" (composed), etc. Some are combinations of others, some are unique to the song.