

Chris Trinidad's Common Themes Songbook



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keyboard improvisations ...

Obligatory piano lessons as a child were difficult endeavors. When the Canucks were on television, or if I had acquired a new video game for my Commodore 64, practicing the piano fell way down the list. No amount of coaxing, pleading, or prodding from my parents would inspire me sufficiently to work through the black dots in those Leila Fletcher piano books. I had taken up the bass guitar in the ninth grade, and that instrument was immediately more satisfying than playing the piano. The piano lessons stopped and I devoted myself more and more to the bass guitar. The piano sat idle in the living room for a year until I decided to lift the lid and play again.

I acquired from my local library a Pink Floyd song book. I set about trying to learn how to voice chords. I enjoyed playing freely without parental persuasion and what developed was a love for improvising on the keyboard. I could work out ideas without being hounded by anyone. I started playing the music that I wanted to play with no coercion. Little did I know that I was training my ears to hear certain things and that the ability to improvise would serve me during my years studying jazz in college.

limited understandings ...

My way of composing in the jazz idiom is informed mostly by my limitations. Rather than see this as a negative, I have learned to use these constraints as fresh compost for jazz composition. I have never felt like I had a detailed or complete understanding of traditional Western European art music theory or jazz harmony in spite of my academic credentials (shhh! Don't tell anyone!). Indeed, a cursory examination of the grades granted to me by various theory and composition teachers would reveal that I had shortcomings in understanding certain concepts. Part of the problem was that I wanted to break the rules before I even properly understood them. I also attempted to rationalize what I was hearing melodically and harmonically in my head and, in turn, tried to apply these ideas to conventional analysis. It didn't always work properly. I would often get my assignments back with red ink plastered all over the page and when red ink wouldn't suffice, the word "redo" would be adequate in conveying their frustrations.

Two years after completing my theory and composition classes, I was not able to write a single tune. Everything that was written on the manuscript looked and sounded like an exercise for theory class. However, those classes did manage to plant a seed within me. I picked and chose certain interesting ideas and I learned to use, albeit in a very jagged way, the concepts of *musica ficta* and certain chromatic melodic ideas, deceptive harmonic movement usually making use of mixed modes, the use of bass ostinati, and melodic and rhythmic motivic development.

visits to cloud nine ...

In between my semesters in college (and well after those dreaded theory classes), I signed on as an entertainer and bandleader aboard several cruise ships of the Royal Caribbean fleet. I formed a number of trios that specialized in Afro-Caribbean music and our task was to entertain the guests with our version of their music. Ironical that Royal Caribbean would hire Canadian bands to play the music native to the region and the people onboard. I certainly didn't argue as I realized what a great opportunity it was to see a part of the world. It was also a chance to work on practicing, and, maybe a little composing.

Each ship I played on had a room called Cloud Nine and it was a little nook nestled on the top deck where private functions would sometimes take place. Found within that room was a grand piano that sat idle, where the view, even at night, was breath taking. Those fortunate enough to find this lonely room or those who were seeking refuge from the hustle and bustle of the activities on decks below were welcomed with peace and silence upon entering this sacred space. Luckily for me, this room was rarely visited and it became the sanctuary where I could retreat. In some ways, writing these tunes were an antidote to the routine of entertaining passengers week in and week out. It was not entirely unusual for me, after a three hour set of fast-paced and frenetic dance music ending at 1:30 in the morning, to go into Cloud Nine and write music until the sun arose on the horizon.

on inspiration ...

Another songbook accompanied me on these trips to Cloud Nine: the Pat Metheny songbook. I carried that book with me each time I entered that space. Exploring the work of one of my favourite musicians was welcome inspiration. The earlier mentioned concepts, the songbook, coupled with inspired listening of Pink Floyd, King Crimson, Genesis, Pat Metheny, Bill Evans, Charlie Haden, Ralph Towner, Brad Turner, Chris Gestrin, Keith Jarrett, Jan Garbarek, Gary Burton, Steve Swallow, Chris Tarry, as well as a panoramic view of the Caribbean ocean, helped me to set about writing the tunes that would be included in the Common Themes trilogy.

revelations ...

As the compositions revealed themselves, I learned to “allow” a tune to go where it wanted to go. I would attempt to manipulate or deceive it but none of these tactics would deter the tune of its preconceived path. Sometimes, certain melodies would appear seemingly out of thin air. I knew that a memorable melody would be worth crafting and developing if it milled around in my head for longer than a few days.

The piano in Cloud Nine and the piano in my parents’s living room served as loyal companions and these instruments helped to realize the musical thoughts presented here. Isn’t it ironic that an instrument I once loathed practicing and later loved playing would consent to give voice to my compositions? My limited music theory knowledge, unique and unhindered opportunities to explore, inspired listening to my musical heroes, and a couple of songbooks have helped to motivate my desire to write in the jazz idiom.

on song titles and language ...

Really, I’m just tired of song titles like “home” or “here” or “untitled.” When my eye or ear catches something fancy, I write it down. Alliteration and assonance are two of my favorite literary devices. Sometimes, places or points of interest will make their way onto my song title list. When I need a title for a tune, I pick from the list. Simple, isn’t it?

Music is often referred to as a language. Musicians often use terms associated with language as metaphors or analogies for describing musical concepts. Vocabulary, syntax, grammar, dialect, and jargon are some used to explain these ideas.

Instrumental music requires us to attach meaning by way of connecting the song with our own sentiments, experiences, memories, emotions, and thoughts. An instrumental music composition, in reality, can be given any title. Composers writing vocal or choral music can use word painting and other compositional devices to marry music with text to create particular evocative effects. So, please try not to read into my song titles too much. To my ears, the titles just sound cool.

Here, then, is my own songbook presented in lead sheet-style format. I present these compositions with humility and the hope that they, along with these notes, will help you to find your own way along your journey with music composition. Enjoy!

Chris Trinidad
July 2008

If Eternity Had The Time. This is the only composition not recorded on a Common Themes album. It is included here because it was my very first attempt at writing in this genre. The melody highlights certain "colour notes" in the harmonies. This composition was inspired by the work and artistry of Pink Floyd, Bill Evans, and local Vancouver pianist and composer Chris Gestrin. **Recorded on Brave Waves: Havens of the Light.**

Principles of Causality. The seed for this tune came about while holed up in a Capilano College practice room frantically preparing for a class piano exam in the fall of 1997. Conceived as a "straight-three" rather than a "waltz-three" my good friend multi-instrumentalist Neelamjit Singh Dhillon convinced me to write this out as a "double-time six." I modified the B section melody and chords slightly a few days before recording this tune. **Recorded on Common Themes III.**

Until Then, My Friend. I wrote this tune in 1998 but completed it the next year after listening to Ralph Towner, Pat Metheny, and Roy Haynes. In fact, Morgan Childs, the drummer on the Common Themes II session, introduced me to Roy Haynes both on record and in person. Hearing Roy on record play his flat ride cymbal for the first time was electrifying and seeing him in action was equally incredible. Morgan used his flat ride on this cut at my request. **Recorded on Common Themes II.**

New Moon in Mind. The original melody came to me in 1998, but the intro and the chord changes were conceived during my stint aboard the Explorer of the Seas during the Summer of 2001. The bridge was developed shortly thereafter and was highly influenced by the Pat Metheny Group's album *We Live Here*. **Recorded on Common Themes I.**

White Tigers and Grey Elephants. I wrote this tune early one summer morning in 1999, after a conversation with a friend who had a love for huge stuffed animals. I formally asked her out about a week later. We dated for a while, and she moved away. The tune makes use of close chromatic root movements, and motivic development, two compositional tools I loved experimenting with at the time. **Recorded on Common Themes II.**

Eyes Open. The rhythm for this tune is inspired loosely by the Afro-Cuban montuno, the syncopated rhythm played by the tres or the piano. I came up with the melody shortly after my stint with the Marlin Ramazzini Orquesta and during my first cruise ship contract aboard the *Grandeur of the Seas* during the winter of 2000. The bridge section came together after taking the very last motif and developing it. Brad Turner's use of bass melodies in his compositions was a huge influence on me. I asked Larry to play a drum part similar to the one he had asked me to play some eight years earlier when I was playing drum set for one of the school stage bands. The name of the tune was Boomerang by Jay Chattaway. Nick's use of marimba and his choice of voicing chords in thirds and sixths pays homage to the steel pan bands of the Caribbean. Feel the ocean spray when Nick's cymbal swells come around! The title came from a *Star Trek: Voyager* episode. Can you guess which? **Recorded on Common Themes I.**

Lamig ng Umaga (Cold Fall Morning). This composition came from the same batch that was written onboard the Explorer of the Seas in 2001. I was born and raised in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, but Tagalog was the primary language spoken at home. My good friend violinist Kimwell Del Rosario, whom I met while aboard the Voyager of the Seas in 2002, helped me with suggestions and made sure that the words both flowed and had a sense of line. I also arranged an a cappella version for my chamber choir at St Thomas More Collegiate. **Recorded on Common Themes I.**

Essence of the Intention. This track was written in 2001 onboard the Explorer of the Seas while listening intensely to the Brad Turner Quartet's album *There and Back*. I fit some chords around a rhythmic motif for the introduction. I fit a melody unto those chords for the main theme and expanded those chords over two measures for the improvising section. At some point, a bridge section was yearning to be written and it came to be. **Recorded on Common Themes III.**

Dark Green Neon. Inspired once again by the writing of Brad Turner for his quartet, Pat Metheny for his group, and Tony Banks for Genesis, I wrote this tune as an exercise to synthesize these influences. The tune was written aboard the Voyager of the Seas in 2002. The title refers to a particular type of car. **Recorded on Common Themes II.**

Arrive to Reason. The chords and melody for this ballad came together fairly quickly one afternoon onboard the Voyager of the Seas in 2002. I'm all about the melodic motivic development in this piece. **Recorded on Common Themes III.**

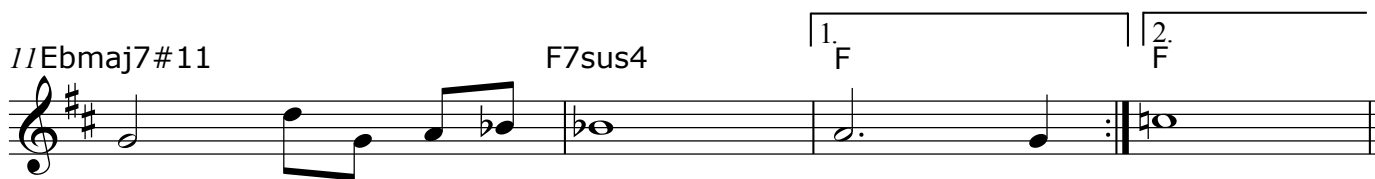
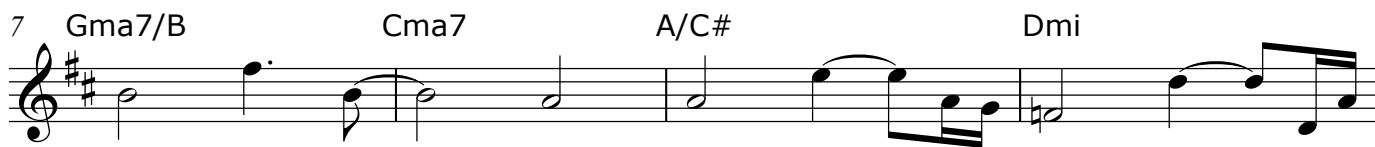
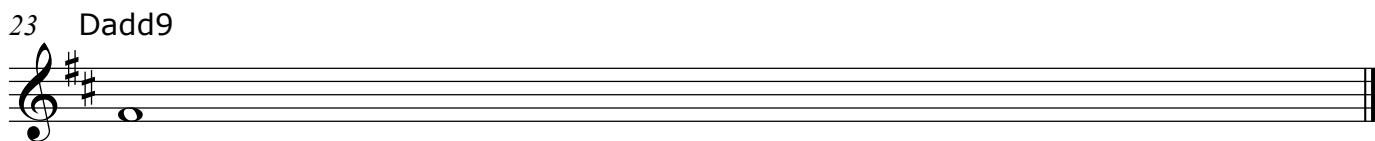
Essentially Considered Settled. The second to last of a batch of compositions written on the Voyager of the Seas during my stint aboard ship in 2002. The composition is in 7/4 with a melody that struck between a typical bebop trip followed by a pentatonic riff. Following the head, the improvising section was written as "open." This was my first attempt at including open improvisation within a tune. **Recorded on Common Themes III.**

Old Sun in Spirit. The last tune written for the Common Themes project. A loosely connected "partner song" to New Moon in Mind, this composition was inspired by listening to Richard Bona's music. The melody is meant to be singable, repetitive, and folk-like with shifting harmonies underneath. **Recorded on Common Themes III.**



Cloud Nine Lounge aboard the Explorer of the Seas - 2001

If Eternity Had The Time

A**B***DC al coda on head out only*

Principles of Causality

Double Time Straight Six Feel

by Chris Trinidad

[vamp until cue]

[if cluster is not possible, omit notes except melody note]

3

5 **A** [vamp continued]

9

14 **B**

Bbmi7 Cmi7 Dbma7#11 Eb7 Ama7#11 G#mi7

20

F#mi7 B7 Bbmi7 Cmi7

24

Dbma7#11 Eb7b5 F7sus4 F7

DC for solos until B is cued

Until Then, My Friend

A

Gadd9

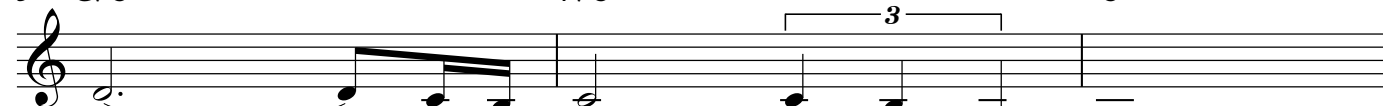
Bmi9



5 G/C

F/C

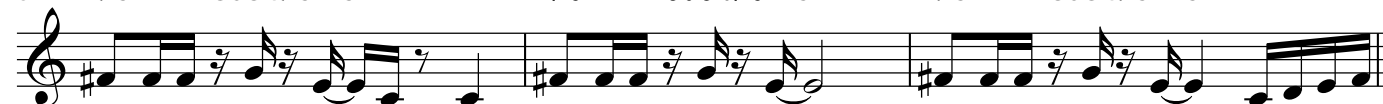
C



8 D/C Dsus4/C C

D/C Dsus4/C C

D/C Dsus4/C C

**B**

11 Gadd9

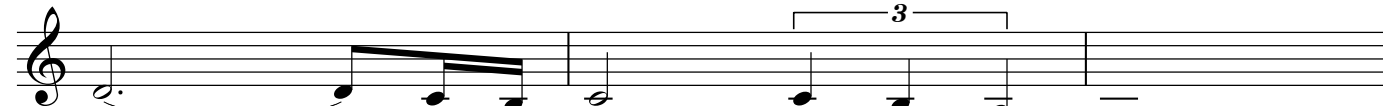
Bmi9



15 G/C

F/C

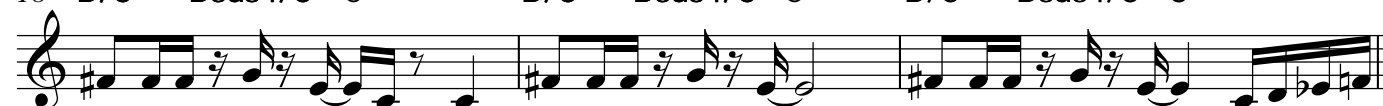
C



18 D/C Dsus4/C C

D/C Dsus4/C C

D/C Dsus4/C C

**C**

21 Ebma7

Fmi7

Eb/G

Dbma7/Ab

F7/A

Bb7



25 Ebma7 Fmi7

Eb/G

Dbma7/Ab

F7/A

Bb7

Eb/Bb



29 Ab/Bb

Bb

Ab/Bb

Bb7

Eb/Bb

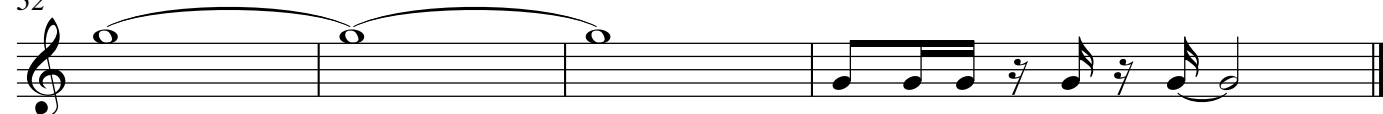
Bb7



[take coda on head out]



32 Gadd9



New Moon In Mind

New Jack Swing

by Chris Trinidad

A

B

Dmi C#dim Bbma7 G/B

Gmi9 A7alt Dma7

Ami11 Ebma7 Cmi11 Abma7#11

A7alt *fine*

C

Dsus Fsus Bbsus Ebsus

Dsus Fsus Bbsus Ebsus

D [blowing]

Dmi C#dim Bbma7 G/B Gmi9 A7alt Dma7

Ami11 Ebma7 Cmi11 Abma7 A7alt Dmi7 A7b9

F

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White Tigers and Grey Elephants

Jazz Waltz

by Chris Trinidad

A

Dbma7#11 F7b9 Bbmi7 A7

5 Dma7#11 F#mi7 Bmi7 Bb7

9 Ebma7 Emi7b5 F F#dim7

1. 13 Gmi7 C13 Ebmi7 Ab7

2. 17 Gmi7 C7 Cmi7 F7

B

21 Bbmi F#7#5 Bmi7 E7

25 Ami F7#5 Bbmi7 Eb7

29 Abmi7 Gma7#11

33 Gmi7 C7 Fadd2 DC al Coda

37 Gma7#11 [open repeat until cue]

Eyes Open

Straight Eighths

by Chris Trinidad

A

Bbadd9 Bb/D Eb F/Eb Gmi Bb7/D Cmi7 F7

5 Bb/D Ebma7 F7sus4 F7

B

9 Gadd9 G/B C D/C Emi G7/B Ami7 D7

13 G/B Cma7 D7

C

17 D/E D/C

21 D/G D/A

D

25 E E/G# A B/A C#mi E7/G# F#mi7 B7

29 E/G# F#mi7 B9 E [Cmi7 F7]

Cold Fall Morning

Waltz - Ballade

by Chris Trinidad

A

4/4

Gmi Bbma7/F Ebma6 Abma7

5 Cmi F7sus4 F Bbma7 Gmi

9 Bmi7/F# Emi7 Ami7 Fma7#11

13 C/Bb F/A D7sus4 D *fine*

Detailed description: This block contains the first 13 measures of section A. Measure 1 starts with a Gmi chord. Measures 2-4 contain Bbma7/F, Ebma6, and Abma7 chords respectively. Measure 5 starts with a Cmi chord. Measures 6-8 contain F7sus4, F, and Bbma7 chords. Measure 9 starts with a Bmi7/F# chord. Measures 10-12 contain Emi7, Ami7, and Fma7#11 chords. Measure 13 contains C/Bb, F/A, D7sus4, and D chords, ending with a double bar line and the word 'fine'.

B

[tag 3x from bar 14 to end and rit last time]

18 Bb/Eb F/Eb Eb/Bb Bb/D F7sus4

1. 21 Abadd2 Ami7 Dmi7 Cmi7 F7

2. 27 Cmi Abma7 C/G F7 D7alt *DC al fine*

Detailed description: This block contains the remaining 14 measures of section B. Measure 14 starts with a Bb/Eb chord. Measures 15-17 contain F/Eb, Eb/Bb, and Bb/D chords. Measure 18 contains a F7sus4 chord. Measure 19 starts with a 1. (first ending) bracket. Measures 20-22 contain Abadd2, Ami7, Dmi7, Cmi7, and F7 chords. Measure 23 starts with a 2. (second ending) bracket. Measures 24-27 contain Cmi, Abma7, C/G, F7, D7alt, and DC al fine chords, ending with a double bar line.

Essence of the Intention

Straight Eighths

by Chris Trinidad

[vamp until cue]

Ami11 G/F Abma7#11 Emi11 Ebma7#11 Fsus Gsus

5 **A** [chord vamp continued]

9

11 1 2

B [double time ride cymbal]

14 C7/E F/Eb Gmi7 Abma7

18 Fmi9 Ebma6 Gmi7/D Cmi7

22 Bdim G7 [drum fill or silence ...]

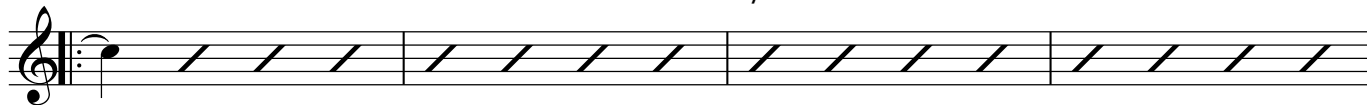
25 **C** [vamp continued]

29 *fine*

D [blowing - double time ride cymbal]

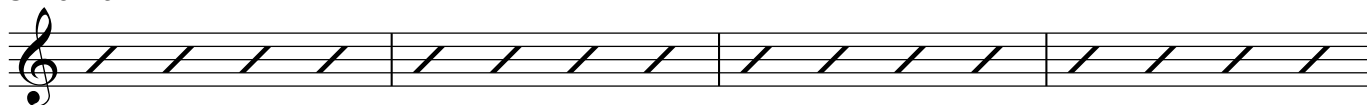
33 Ami11

G/F



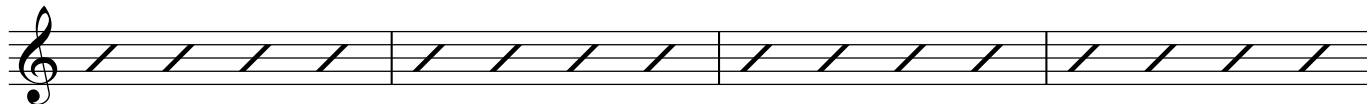
37 Abma7#11

Emi11



41 Ebma7#11

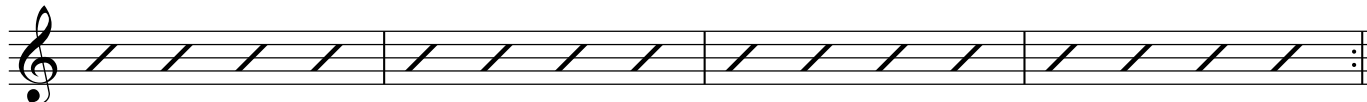
F7sus4



45 G7sus4

G7alt

DC al fine after solos



Dark Green Neon

Straight Eighths

by Chris Trinidad

A

Dmi11 Bbma9 Asus4 F#mi7b5 Ami11 Gmi11 C7sus4 C#dim
 7 Dmi Dmi/C Dmi/B Dmi/Bb Dbma7/Ab Gmi7 A7b9
 11 Dmi11 Bbma9 Asus4 F#mi7b5 Ami11 Gmi11 C7sus4 C#dim Bbma7 F/A Abma7(#11) Gsus4
 17 F#ma7 F#ma7/G# F#ma7 F#ma7/G# F#ma7 F#ma7/G# [unison]
 23 [half time feel] Fadd9 Bb/F Ab/F Eb/F
 27 Fadd9 Bb/F Ab/F Dbma7 *fine*

D

32 *Dmi11 Bbma9 Asus4 F#mi7b5 Ami11 Gmi11 C7sus4 C#dim Bbma7 F/A Abma7(#11) Gsus4*

38 *F#ma7 F#ma7/G# F#ma7 F#ma7/G# F#ma7 F#ma7/G#*

F

[blowing]

44 *Fmi11*

48

52 *Abmi11*

56 *C7alt* *DS al fine*

Arrive To Reason

Ballad

by Chris Trinidad

Musical score for "Arrive To Reason" in 4/4 time. The score consists of five staves of music. The first staff contains measures 1-4 with chords A^{ma}7, E^{mi}11, A^{ma}7, and E^{mi}11. The second staff contains measures 5-8 with chords A^{ma}7, E^{mi}11, D^{ma}7(13), and C^{ma}7(#11). The third staff contains measures 9-12 with chords B^{mi}7, F^{ma}7, A^{mi}7, and E/G#. The fourth staff contains measures 13-16 with chords F/G, C/G, B^bma7, A^{mi}7, and F. A double bar line with repeat dots is at the end of measure 16, with the instruction "[take coda on head out]". The fifth staff, preceded by a C-clef, contains measures 17-24 with chords D^{mi}7, C, B^bma7, F/A, C/G, Fadd9, E^{mi}7, and D^{mi}11. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end of measure 24.

Essentially Considered Settled

Seven Four Then Freak Out

by Chris Trinidad

[vamp]

The musical score is written for a single melodic line. It begins with a bass clef and a 7/4 time signature. The first staff contains a vamp section with a repeat sign and a double bar line. The second staff starts at measure 3 and features a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff starts at measure 7 and also features a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth staff starts at measure 11 and includes chord symbols: Gmi11, Fmi11, Abmi11, Bbmi11, and Asus. The fifth staff starts at measure 15 and includes chord symbols: F#mi, G/F, C/E, Bb/D, and C#mi. The piece concludes with a double bar line and the word 'fine'.

3

7

11

15

fine

[back to vamp and band goes free with bass and drums holding seven groove]

Old Sun In Spirit

Swampy Swung Fonk

by Chris Trinidad

Chords and measures for each staff:

- Staff 1: Ebma7, Fmi7, Eb/G, Abma7
- Staff 2: Eb/Bb, Cmi7, Bb7#9, Ebma6
- Staff 3: Cmi7, F7, Abma7, Dbma7#11
- Staff 4: Gbma7, B7, Bb7#9, Ebma6
- Staff 5: Cmi7, F7, Bbma7, Bbmi7, Eb7, Abma7
- Staff 6: Abmi7, Db7, Gbma7, F7, Bb7
- Staff 7: Bb/D, Dbma9, Cmi7, G/B
- Staff 8: Abma7, Gbma7, F7#5, Bb7, Ebma6