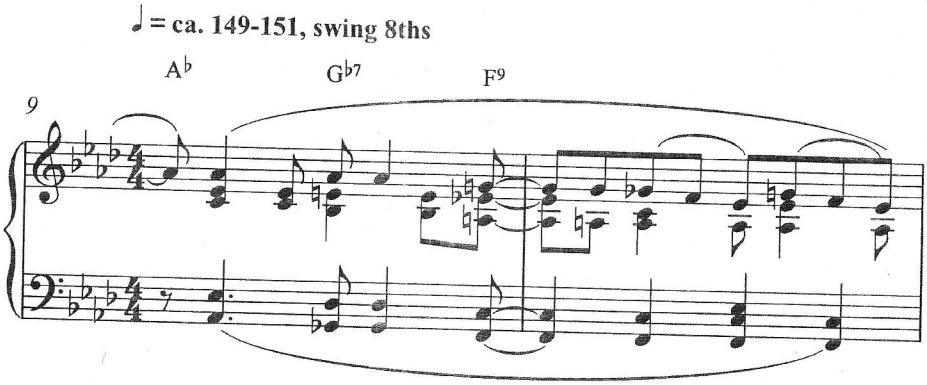
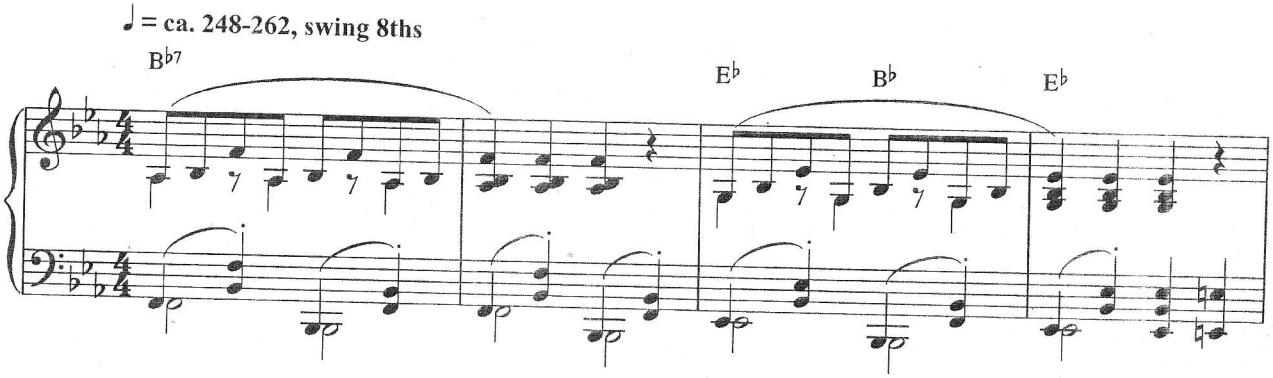
24. Jelly Roll's Bass with Sixths and Octaves

The great New Orleans pianist and so-called "originator of jazz," Jelly Roll Morton leaned toward an "oom-pah" ragtime bass made up of octaves on downbeats and mid-range afterbeat chords that are voiced one inversion lower than that commonly used by stride pianists. But this was just the starting point. From his first solo recordings of the early 1920s, he often personalized performances with a very syncopated and varied approach.[13] On paper, ample evidence of this is found in the books, *Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton—The Collected Piano Music* transcribed by James Dapogny (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982) and *Jelly Roll Morton—The Piano Rolls* realized by Artis Wodehouse (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1999). As a matter of fact, Morton's bass work not only included "tangana"[14] figures and stride bass patterns with tenths, broken tenths, and "walking" tenths or tenth triads, but also other left hand techniques such as chords played in the mid-low range of the keyboard, open 5ths, and passages of parallel open 5ths (bars 9-10 of the A1 strain of "King Porter Stomp" as transcribed by James Dapogny):



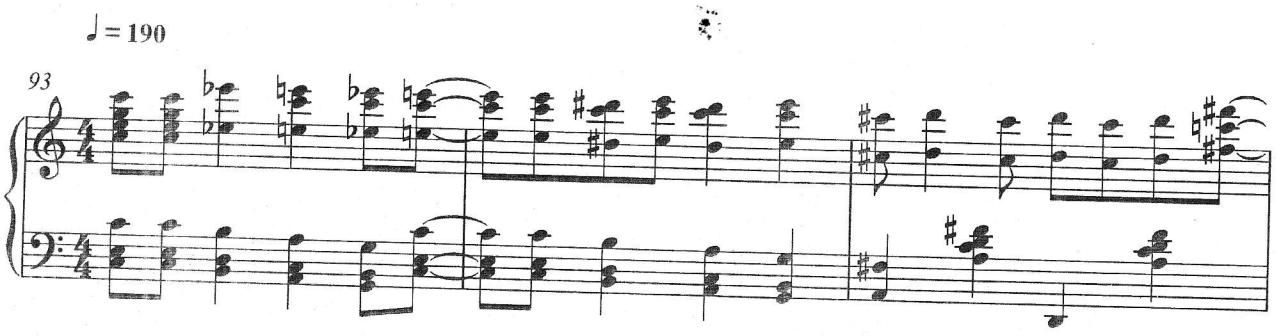
Here he uses broken octaves with the root or the 5th of the chord as an added inner voice (bars 1-4 of the Bb strain of "Black Bottom Stomp" as transcribed by James Dapogny):



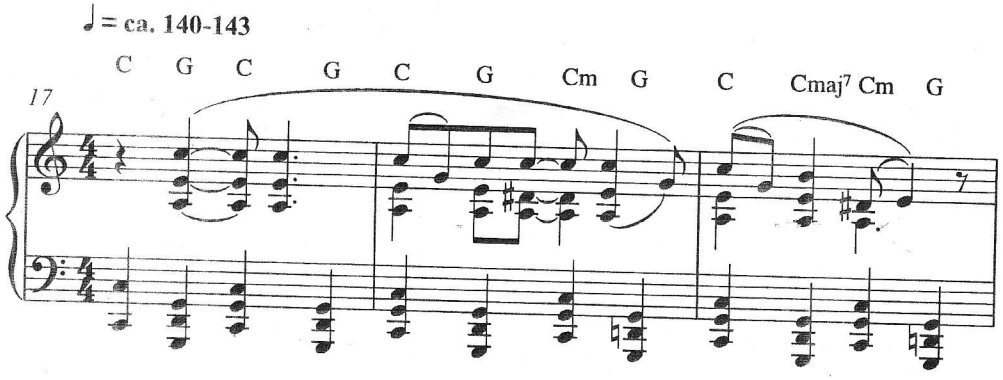
[13]The left hand rhythmic vitality of many of Morton's recordings was one of the most modern and innovative facets of his piano art, as well as an influence on the young Earl Hines.

[14]See Part Two of this book.

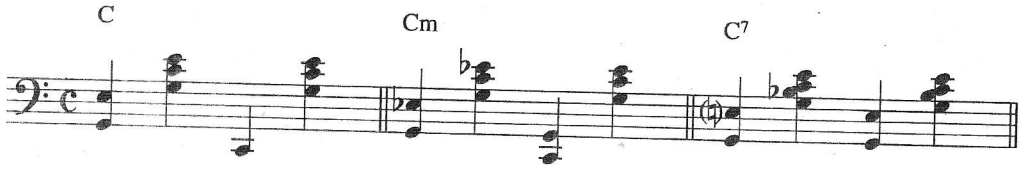
"Rough" barrelhouse-like passages of octaves (or broken octaves) with added 4ths, 5ths, or 3rds appear (bars 93-95 of "Grandpa's Spells" as transcribed by Artis Wodehouse):



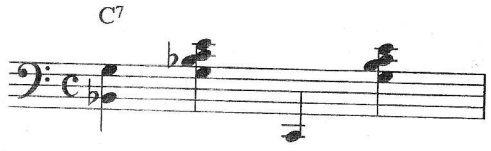
Or he might use a tonic-dominant alternation of octaves with added 5ths (bars 17-21 of the C2 strain of "The Pearls" as transcribed by James Dapogny):



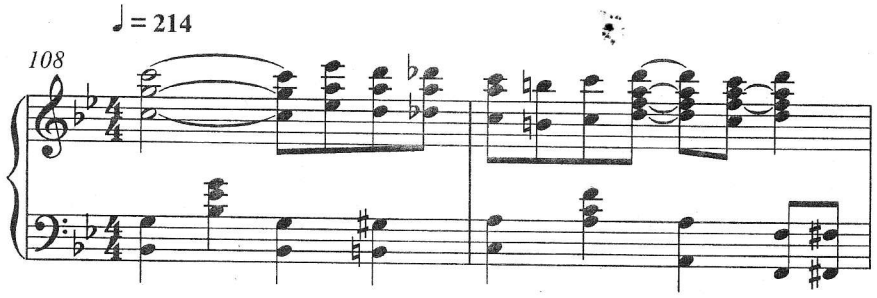
In addition, unlike most other pianists, Morton especially favored left hand sixths. On the downbeats of his ragtime bass, he often played a sixth interval made up of the 5th and the 10th of major, minor, or dominant seventh chords:



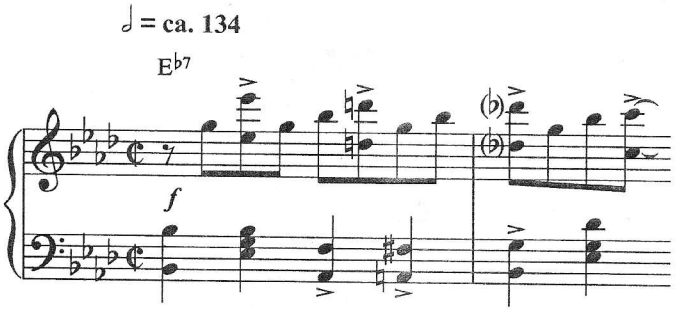
Or, as an alternative, a sixth interval made of the minor seventh and the 5th of dominant seventh chords:



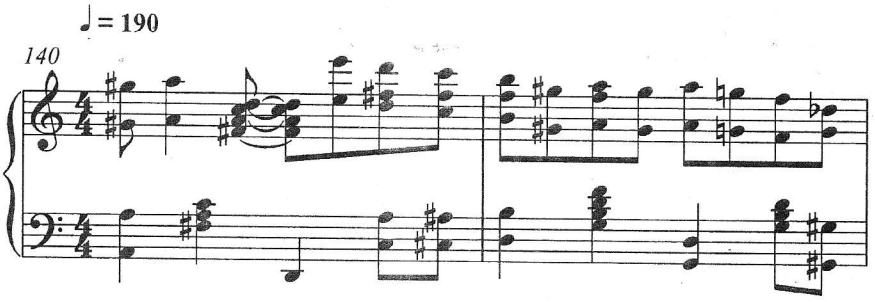
Morton used these sixths in a variety of ways. He could play chromatic (or diatonic) sixths connecting beats 3, 4, and 1 of his "oom-pah" bass, as in the following examples. Bars 108-109 of "Shreveport Stomp" as transcribed by Artis Wodehouse:



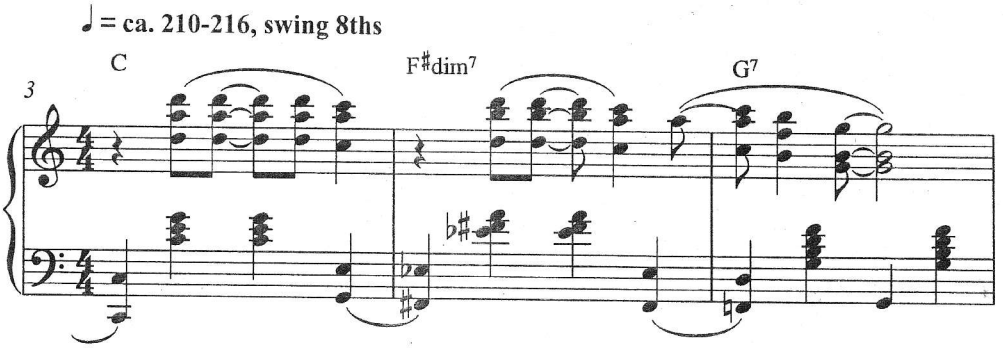
Bars 9-10 of the B1 strain of "Maple Leaf Rag—St. Louis Style," Herwin 401:



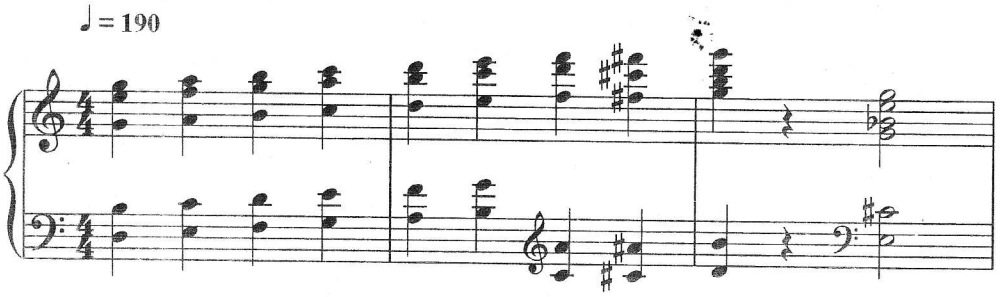
Bars 140-141 of "Grandpa's Spells" as transcribed by Artis Wodehouse:



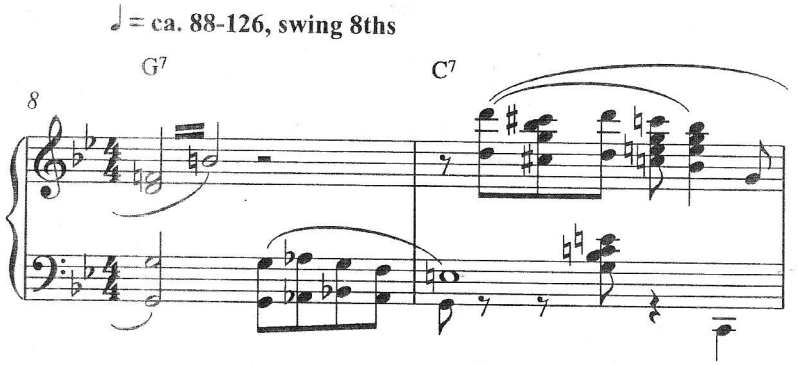
Here are examples of sixths resolving to diminished sevenths (and vice versa) (bars 3-5 of the B2 strain of "Grandpa's Spells" as transcribed by James Dapogny):



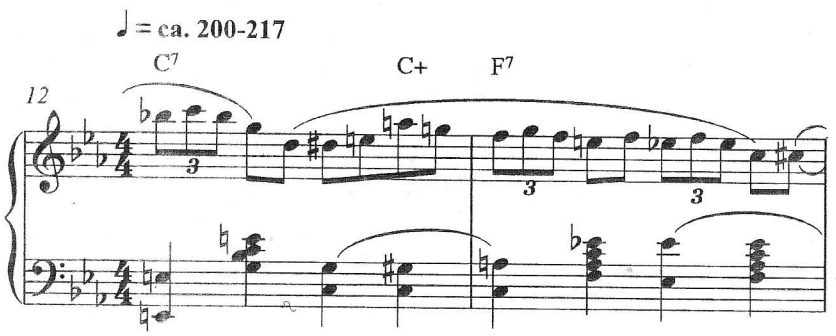
He also used diatonic or chromatic scales of sixths (from the intro of "Grandpa's Spells" as transcribed by Artis Wodehouse):



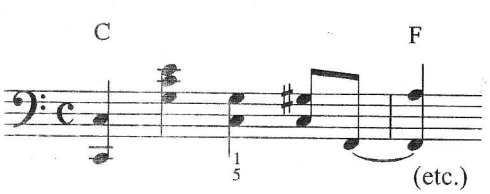
Short scales of octaves can be resolved by sixths (bars 8-9 of the first chorus of "Dead Man Blues" as transcribed by James Dapogny):

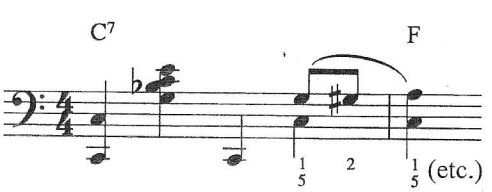


Here, a "fifth-augmented fifth-sixth (or tenth)" pattern connects chords a fourth apart (bars 12-13 of the B2 strain of "Kansas City Stomp" as transcribed by James Dapogny):

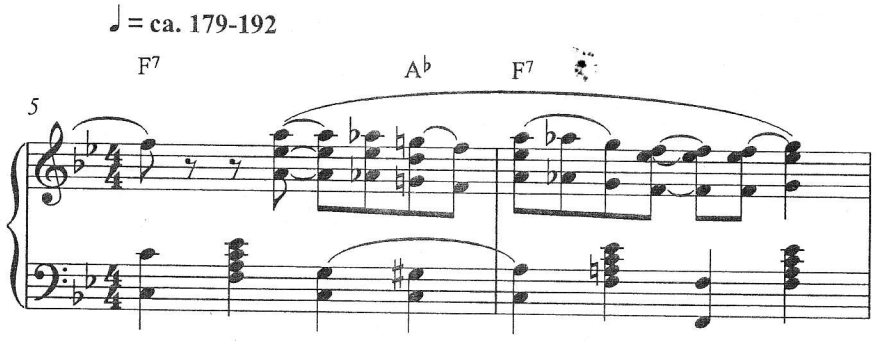


Some of Morton's variations include:

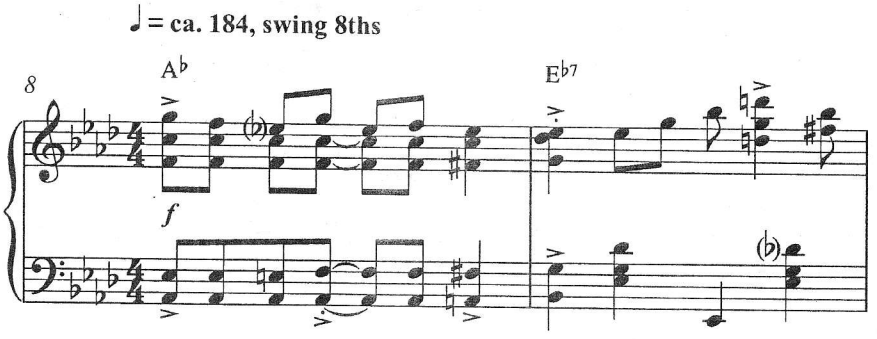




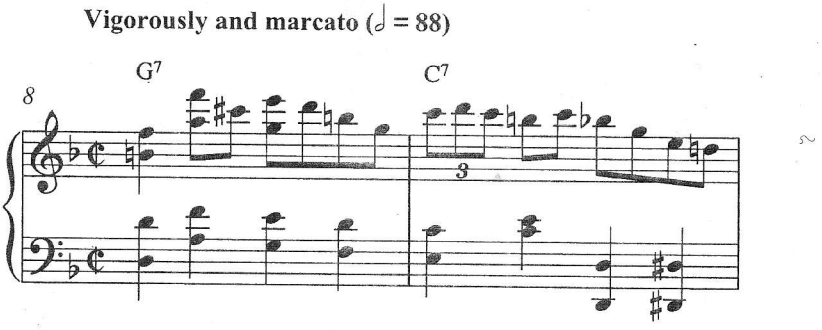
In this case he is "moving" a long static chord (bars 5-6 of the B strain of "Wolverine Blues" as transcribed by James Dapogny):



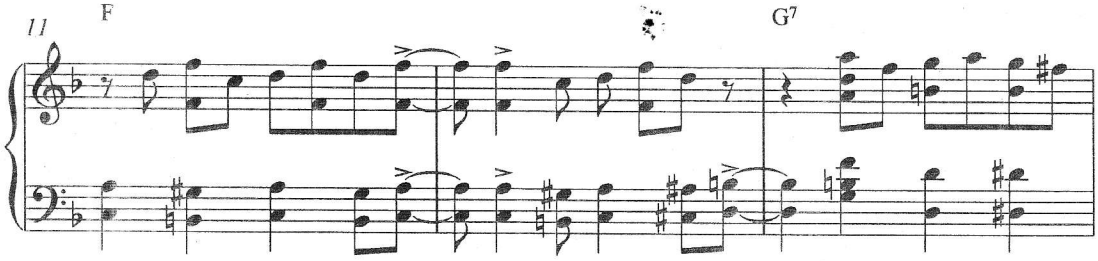
On I-V7 changes, a syncopated figure made up of passing sixths preceded by a fifth and an augmented fifth is also used (bars 8-9 of the B strain of "Maple Leaf Rag–New Orleans Style," Herwin 401):



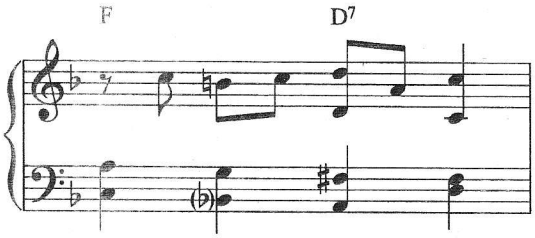
Morton's use of sixths has been beautifully summarized by Dick Hyman in his etude "Decatur Stomp," included in his Ekay Music book, *In The Styles Of The Great Jazz Pianists*. As shown by this piece, passages of diatonic sixths can be inserted in a common ragtime/stride bass to give melodic emphasis to a II7-V7 harmonic change in "Decatur Stomp," bars 8-9:



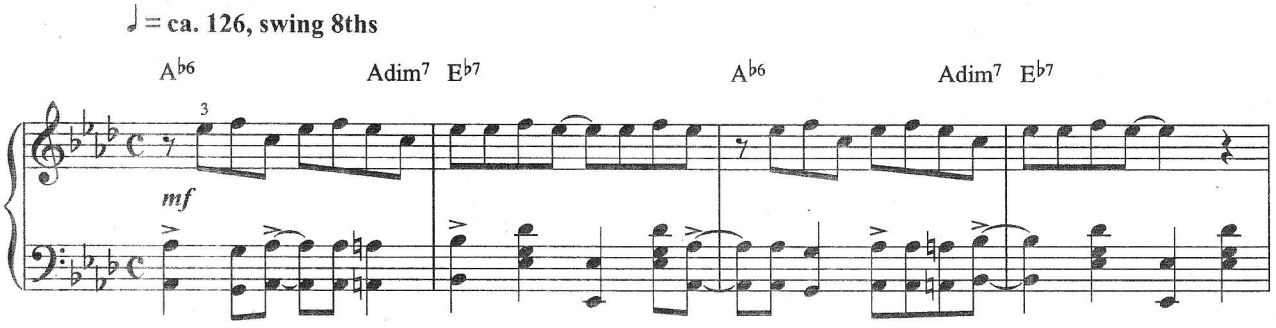
Passages of chromatic and syncopated sixths can "move" a long static chord as in "Decatur Stomp," bars 11-13:



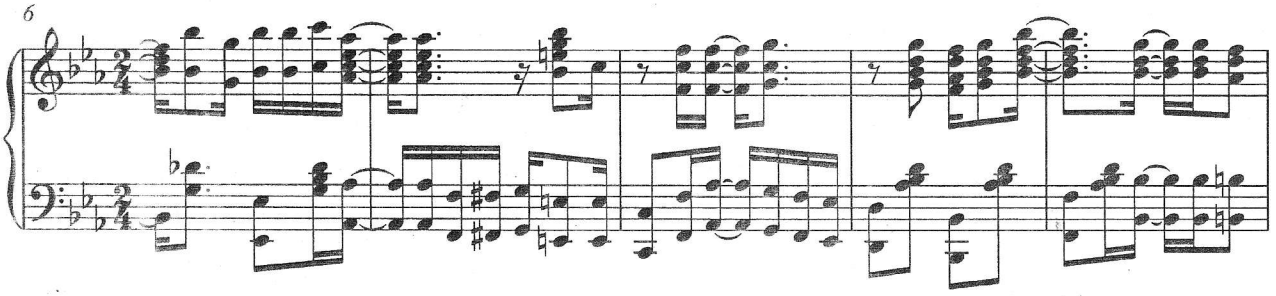
And sixths can also connect I-VI7 changes ("Decatur Stomp," bar 21):



One of Morton's most famous devices was to include lively trombone-like passages of octaves within his "oom-pahs." This was a regular feature of old ragtime pieces, but he used it in a much more developed and challenging way, with lots of syncopation. See the following example of the left hand part found in the opening of the A2 strain of his 1938 recording of "Maple Leaf Rag—New Orleans Style" (Herwin 401), with a simplified right hand part:

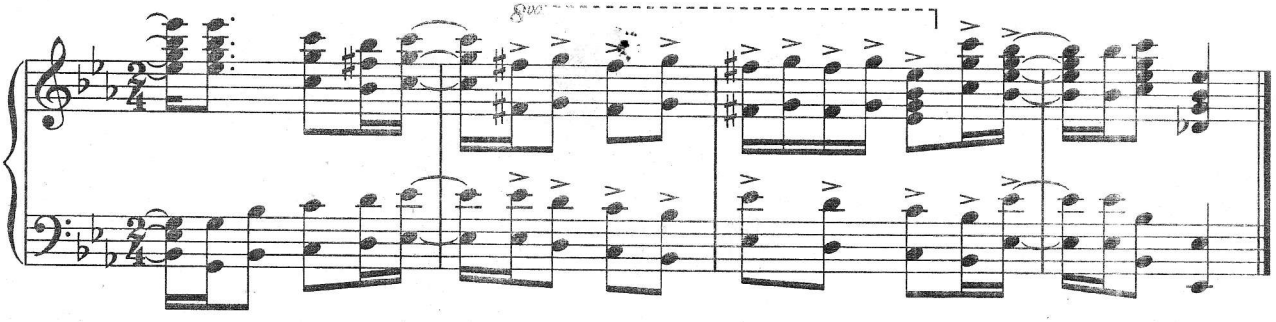
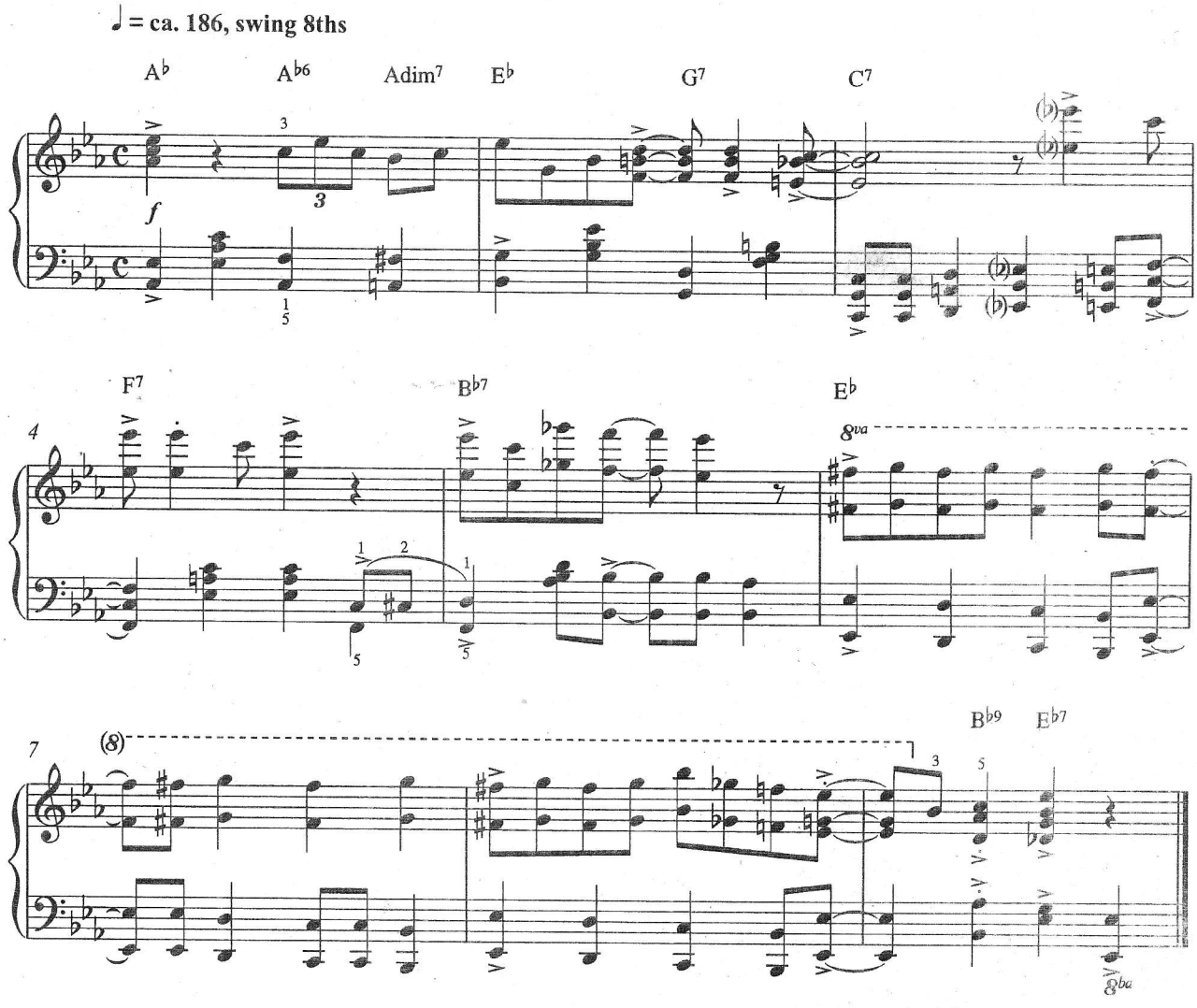


And the following excerpt is from J. Lawrence Cook's transcription[15] of Morton's 1923 piano solo recording of "Frog-I-More Rag" (bars 6-10 of the "Variation on trio"):



[15]Reprinted in the book, *The Art Of Jazz*, edited by Martin Williams (New York: Da Capo Press, 1960).

From the last four measures of the above-quoted transcription, here is one of Morton's famous endings, based on trombone-like octaves:



Here is an application summarizing some of Morton's concepts (ending of a piece in Eb):