Ethan Helm

In What Key is “Bye-Ya”?

I consider three possible keys for “Bye-Ya” based on voice leading and bass movement. Eb, Ab, and a lydian-dominant alteration of Db are all convincing conclusions, but each necessitates a very different harmonic structure throughout the 32-bar form. The three harmonic structures are represented below as Schenkerian “graphs” showing important voice leading and bass movement. Schenkerian analysis can help us visualize the flexibility of jazz harmonies and their relationships with one another. The improviser can use these readings to organize solos, by transferring the voice-leading structures from the middleground (a less abstracted graph) or the background (a more abstracted graph) to the musical surface (the notes and rhythms of an improvisation) using specific rhythmic and melodic “events.” The end result is a larger pool of material to build musically coherent solos.

Possible Key Centers of Bye-Ya

	Eb Features	**Ab** Features	**Db (lydian dominant)** Features
Primary Lead Line	^3 descends to ^1	^b3 descends to ^2	^3 descends to ^2 (sub. for ^1)
Cadence	auxiliary ($bVII^7$)*	half	$IV\text{-}V\text{-}I^{7(\#11)}$**
Function of Bridge	IV ($V/bVII^7$)	I prolongation	V
Interesting moments	IV at bridge	Ab^{69} strongest tonic sounds	2nd half of A goes to IV, like Blues or Rhythm Changes
	mm. 7-8 strongly confirms bass line sounds like I-VI-II-V	$IV^{7\#11}\text{-}I^{69}$ is harmonically coherent	Bass goes V-I, repeatedly
			Schenkerian motive: incomplete neighbor at cadence and on surface at bridge
Problems with this key (but also interesting!)	No V-I motion, bass obscures harmonic center until very end	Goes to I at bridge??, -Half-cadence every A??	No ^1 in melody
		Harder to hear I as tonic in opening IV-I gesture	

*See Jimi Hendrix's "The Wind Cries Mary" (0:38) or Ellington's "The Single Petal of a Rose" (0:34)

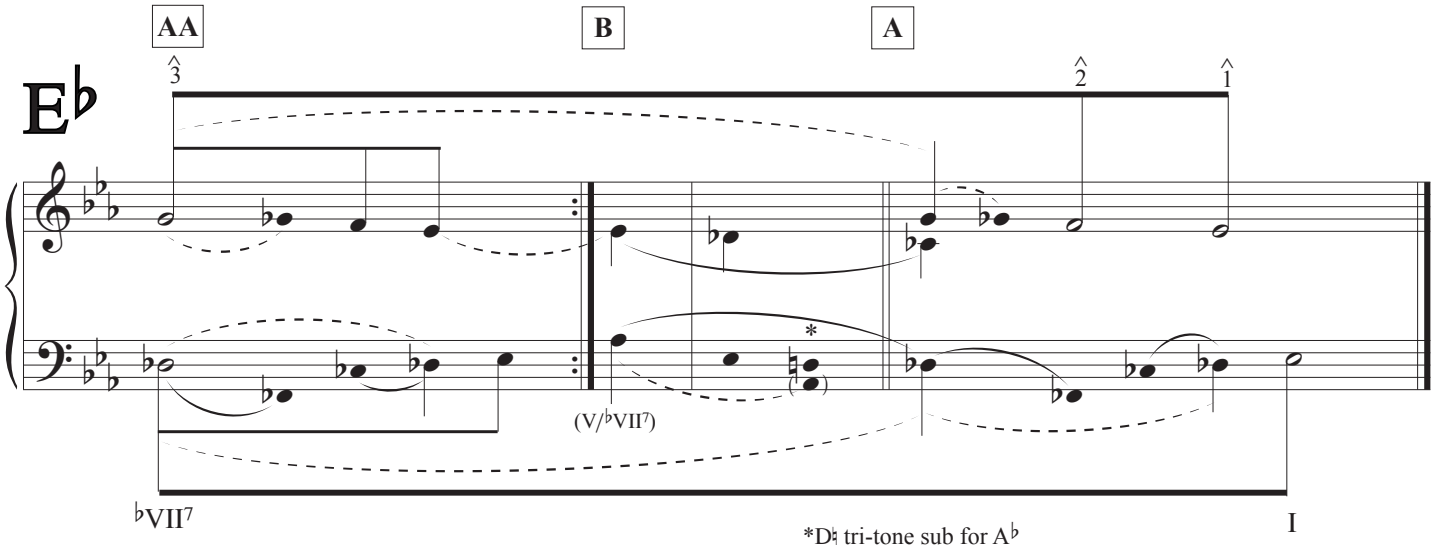
**See Sonny Rollins "Blue Seven" (0:43), or the 1952 “Bye-Ya” Coda. On the 1957 recording, Coltrane outlines I-VI-II-V in Db at 3:45

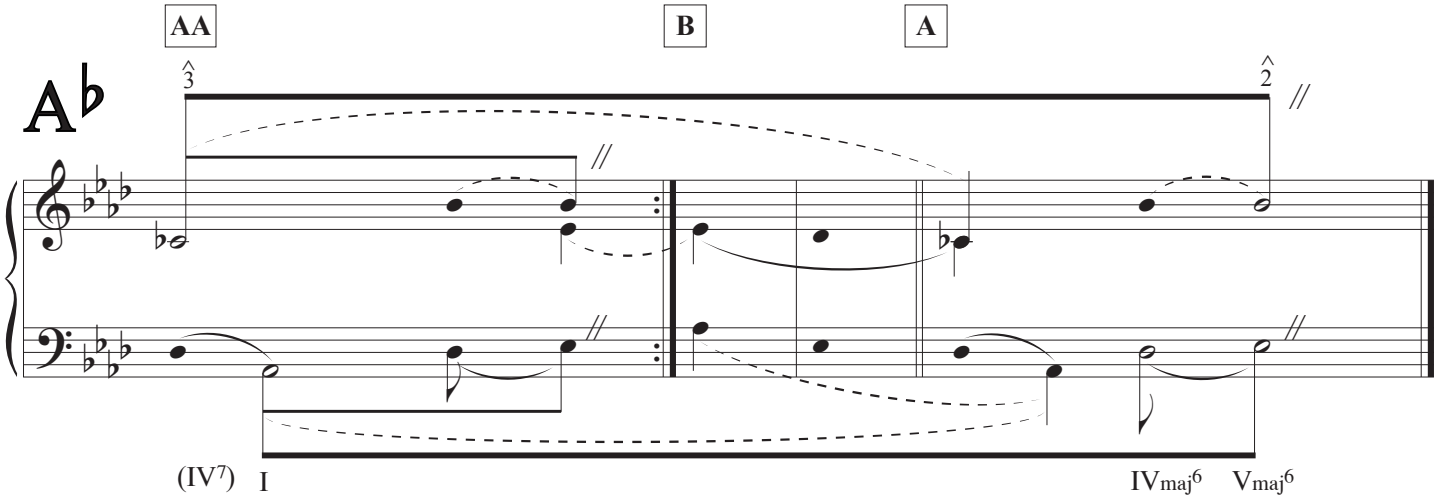
Other thoughts:	On the 1958 recording (from *Misterioso*) I hear Db as the key in the end of the first ‘A’ sections, and Eb as the key at the end of the second ‘A’ section. Is the Db in the first ‘A’ a sort of half cadence in Eb? Or is the Eb of the second ‘A’ an incomplete neighbor “tag" in the *true* home key of Db? To complicate things, at 10:26, piano plays Db as the last chord, but then bass plays Eb, but then piano play one more Db!

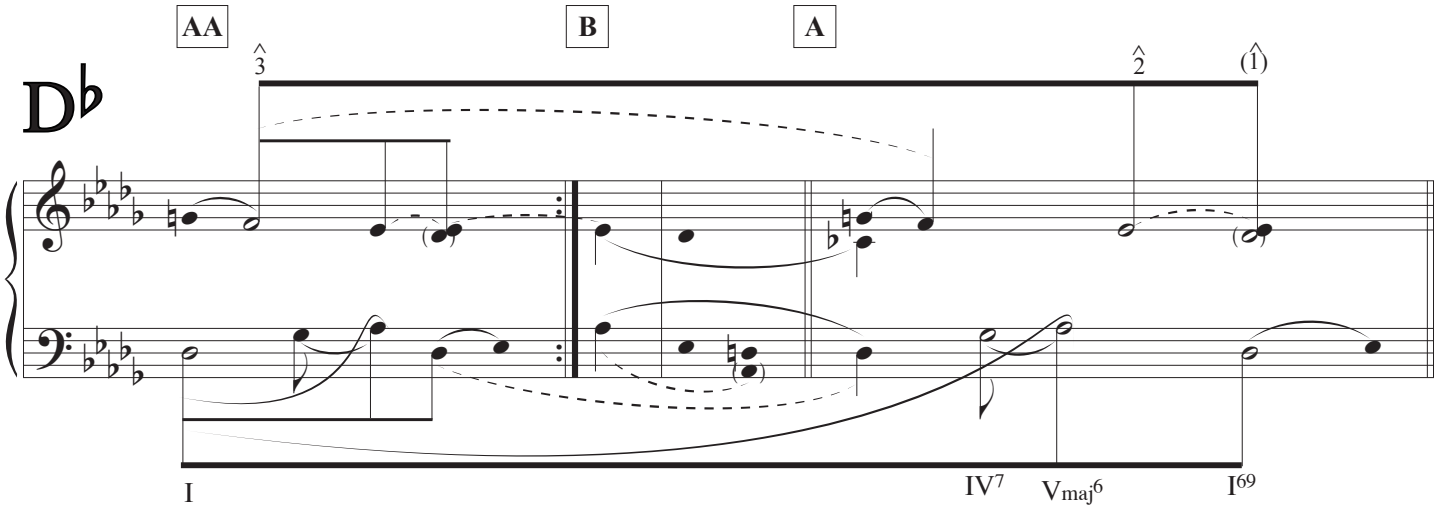
Bye-Ya

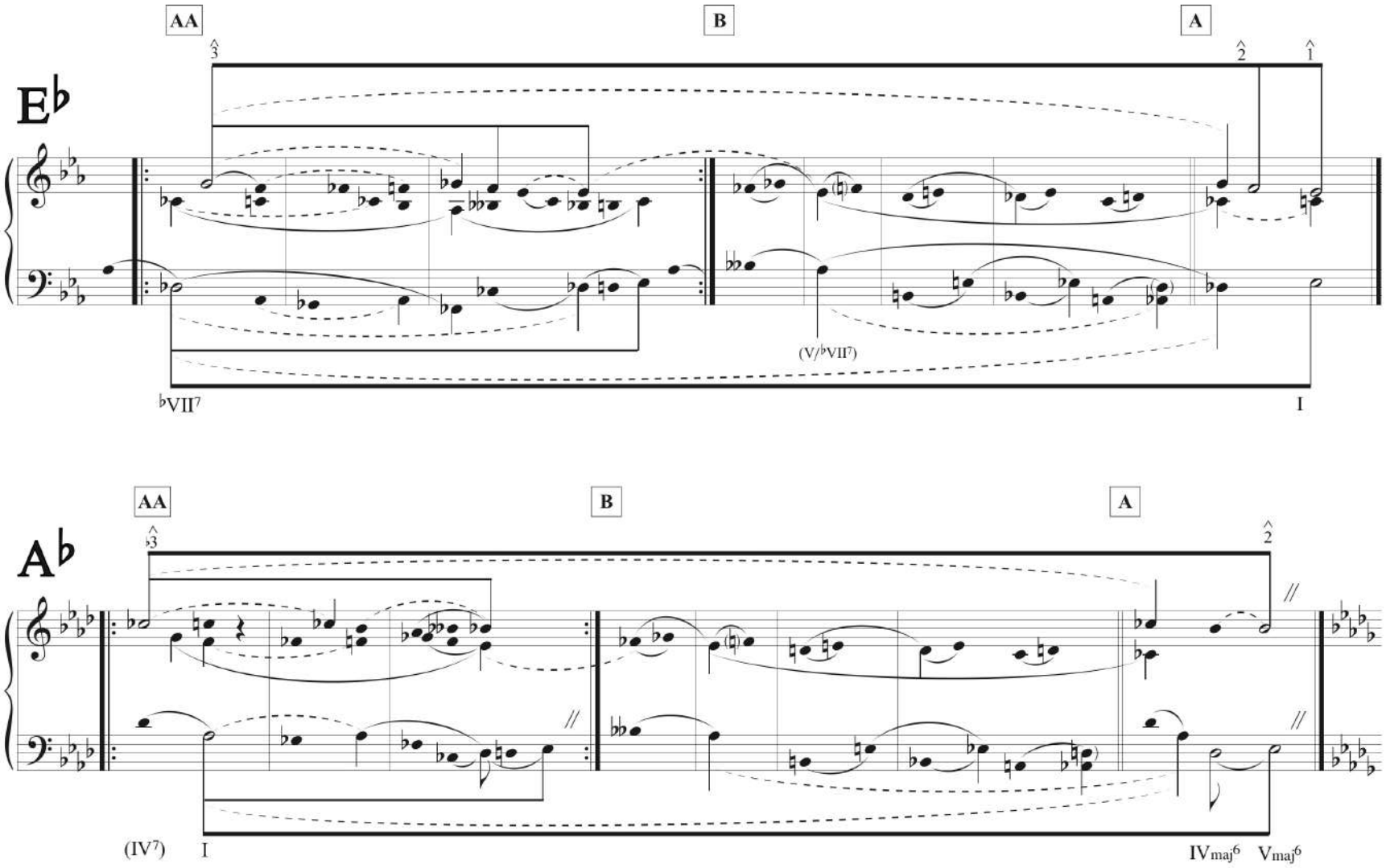
backgrounds in Eb, Ab, and Db

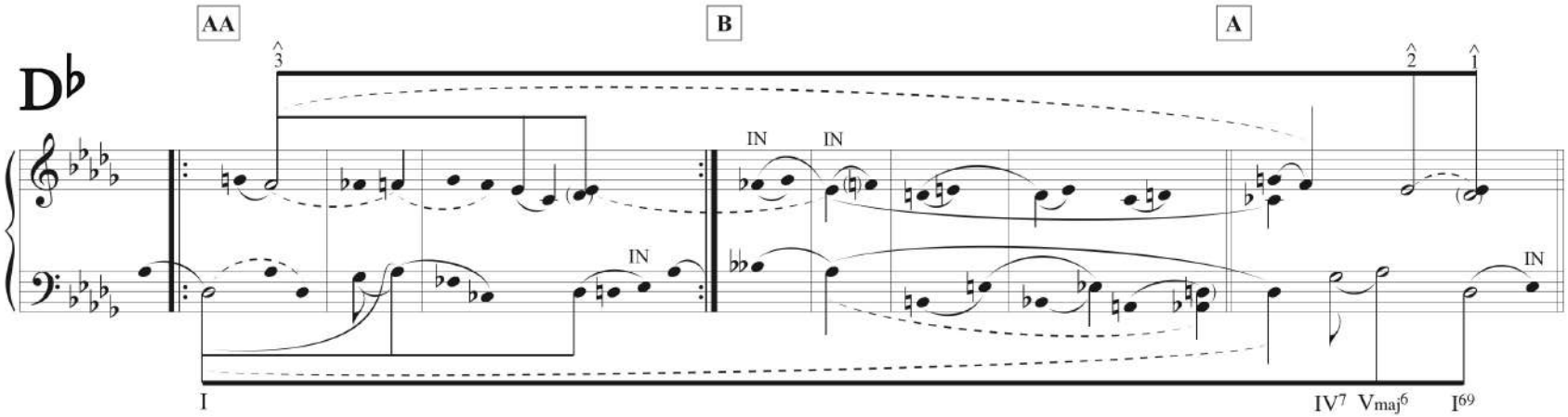
Thelonious Monk

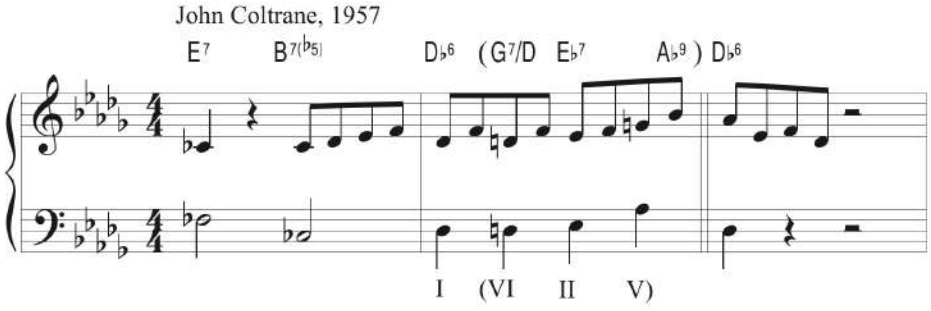


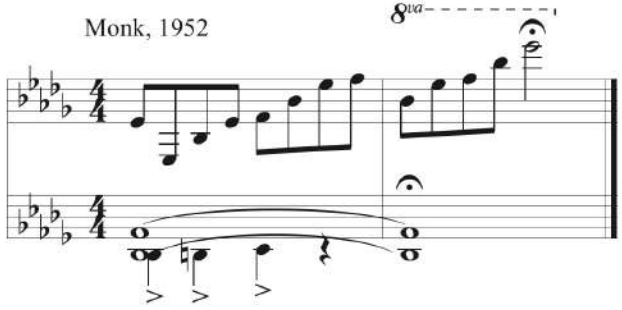





AA
B
A
E♭
3̂
2̂
1̂
(V/♭VII7)
♭VII7
I
AA
B
A
A♭
♭3̂
2̂
(IV7)
I
IVmaj6
Vmaj6


AA
B
A
D♭
3
2
1
IN
IN
IN
IN
I
IV7 Vmaj6 I69


John Coltrane, 1957
E7 B7(♭5) D♭6 (G7/D E♭7 A♭9) D♭6
I (VI II V)


Monk, 1952
8va