

“Mop Mop”

“Mop Mop” is one of the best and most celebrated group recordings of Tatum. It was recorded on January 18, 1944 during a famous concert held at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, gathering great jazzmen like Louis Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, Coleman Hawkins, Barney Bigard, Jack Teagarden, Al Casey, Oscar Pettiford, Sidney Catlett and others (all these musicians played together for this piece).

A typical vehicle for jam sessions, “Mop Mop” is also important because the improvisations on it are built on practically the same chord changes as “I Got Rhythm”—that is, the so-called “rhythm changes” which along with the 12-bar blues form is the most widely used in jazz.¹ During his solos on “Mop Mop,” Tatum made very sparse and bebop-like use of the left hand, mostly playing just a few isolated rootless chords from time to time, thus leaving a lot of bars unaccompanied by his left hand. The accompaniment played by guitar and double bass here seems mostly improvised and not planned in advance—in various passages, it seems that the guitar and the string bass do not play the same chord together. However, as a general harmonic reference for the improvisation on “Mop Mop” we can take the chord changes reported in our transcription.²

Tatum’s first two solo choruses³ on “Mop Mop,” transcribed here, are very interesting. In some passages he took many liberties with the chord changes, almost as if he had decided to disregard them and to impose his own phrases over them. See, for instance, bars 9-16 where he plays a very long run in triplets, almost exclusively made of arpeggios on diminished seventh chords,⁴ resulting in the harmonic clashes found in bars 10-15. Consider also the astounding and rather odd idea of bars 25-30, where we find him playing one of his favorite “tricks,” that is a very fast series of hammered (tremolo-like) octaves and single notes, structured on the following pattern in ascending minor 3rd skips and descending half-note skips:



The other important Tatum devices found in this transcription are:

- the beautiful long phrase in triplets in bars 17-19. As previously noted in this book, this phrase is a reshaping of a recurrent basic idea;
- the “three-over-four” phrase in bars 34-35;
- bar 39: the distinctive right hand “broken” arpeggio;
- bars 42-44: the interesting episode built on dissonant slash-like licks with a very strong displacement of the beat;
- in bars 49-55 the left hand claims a role, playing a long series of melodic tenths which were often used by Tatum on secondary dominant seventh chords;
- the delicious bluesy riff in bars 57-60;
- bars 61-64: the astounding long phrase started by a repeated six-note cell, then resolved with the customary fragments of pentatonic and the descending chromatic passages—on this account also see the introductory repeated notes to “I Got Rhythm.”

¹For an exhaustive discussion on this matter, see “I Got Rhythm” in Dick Hyman’s *Professional Chord Changes And Substitutions For 100 Tunes . . .* (Ekay Music); Stefano Zenni: “I Got Rhythm” e il suo lungo “giro” in “Musica Jazz” (Italy), Novembre 1995, pp. 50-52; and Stefano Zenni: Attraverso Gershwin anticiparono il bebop in “Musica Jazz” (Italy), Gennaio 1996, pp. 52-55.

²In the statement of the theme (i.e. the first chorus, played by the full ensemble), the chord changes for the A section are:

||: Bb Bb7 / Eb Edim / Bb F7 / Bb :||
 D E

³In this recording of “Mop Mop,” following the guitar solo chorus Tatum played a third piano solo chorus which has not been transcribed here.

⁴This recurrent Tatum figure has been seen in the “Breaks” chapter of this book.

Mop Mop

as recorded by Art Tatum on January 18, 1944

Coleman Hawkins

Transcribed by Riccardo Scivales

Very fast (♩ = c. 270)

B \flat Gm 7 Cm 7 F 7 B \flat Gm 7 Cm 7 F 7 B \flat 7 B \flat 7 /D

swing 8ths

6 E \flat Edim B \flat /F F 7 B \flat F 7 B \flat Gm 7

10 Cm 7 F 7 (b9) B \flat Gm 7 Cm 7 F 7 (b9)

13 (8va) B \flat B \flat 7 /D E \flat Edim B \flat /F F 7

16 B \flat E \flat 7 D 7

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19 **G7** **C7**

23 **F7** **Bb** **Gm7** **Cm7** **F7**

l.h. *f* *l.h.*

27 **Bb** **Gm7** **Cm7** **F7** **Bb** **Bb7/D**

8va

30 **Eb** **Edim** **Bb/F** **F7** **Bb** **F7(b9)** **Bb** **Gm7**

swing 8ths *mp cresc.*

2nd Chorus

34 **Cm7** **F7** **Bb** **Gm7** **Cm7** **F7** **Bb** **B7/D**

f

E- **Edim** **Bb/F** **F7** **Bb** **F7** **Bb** **Gm7**

8va *sfz*



42 *ff* *8va* C7 F7 B^b Gm7 C7 F7 C7 F7 B^b B^b/D *sfz*

46 E^b Edim (F7) B^b/F F7 B^b D7

50 *8va* G7

53 C7 F7 *8va* *r.h.* *l.h.*

57 *8va* B^b Gm7 Cm7 F7(b9) B^b Gmaj7

60 Cm7 F7 B^b7 E^b Edim

63 B^b/F F7 B^b (B^b)