

“Indiana”

The great Art Tatum was famous for his amazing technical command. His unique, legendary skill in playing is reflected in performances of the most lightning-fast tempos (♩ = 320 and even greater speeds were easy for him). Yet many of his masterwork recordings were taken at a more relaxed pace, which allows us to have a closer look at his style.

An example is his piano solo interpretation of “Indiana,” recorded on July 26, 1940, and played in a very relaxed mood at medium tempo. This piano solo consists of an eight-bar intro and two choruses. We have transcribed the first chorus.

Dressed up with a lush reharmonization, including plenty of altered, passing and substitute chords, the first chorus of Tatum’s “Indiana” is a beautiful paraphrase of the original theme. Luckily, it also features quite a number of Tatum’s characteristic devices and right-hand runs. What follows is a catalog of some of them:

In bar 4, Tatum plays one of his descending four-note runs, built on the tones of an A9 chord (the tonic is played in the bass only). This is one of the most recurrent Tatum devices. A similar run is used to close the phrase in bar 8 (also, notice how Tatum resolves both these runs to reach the third of the next chord).

Musical notation for bars 4 and 8 of the first chorus of "Indiana". The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Bar 4 features a descending four-note run in the right hand, starting on G5 and ending on E4, with a dotted line above it labeled A⁹. The left hand plays a single note, A2, in the bass. Bar 8 features a similar descending four-note run in the right hand, starting on G5 and ending on E4, with a dotted line above it labeled D. The left hand plays a single note, D2, in the bass.

In Bars 5-6 feature an enterprisingly “modern” yet melodically delicious paraphrase in triplets, based on some passing chords from D7 to G. This articulated kind of phrasing, with unusual skips and displaced accents, is also a typical Tatum device.

Musical notation for bars 5 and 6 of the first chorus of "Indiana". The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Bar 5 features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand, starting on G5 and ending on E4, with a dotted line above it labeled D7. The left hand plays a single note, D2, in the bass. Bar 6 features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand, starting on G5 and ending on E4, with a dotted line above it labeled Am7. The left hand plays a single note, A2, in the bass.

In bar 7, Tatum plays a very fast “climbing” run built around the tones of a G Major chord. Often used by him, this is a well-known device from the classical piano literature, which Tatum studied and knew well. (Also, notice that bars 7-8 as a whole can be considered a “break” phrase to fill the “rest” space of the original melody.)

The musical notation consists of two systems. The first system shows a piano introduction with a G Major chord (G) and a fast 'climbing' run of sixteenth notes. The second system shows a continuation of the run with a D9 chord (D⁹) and a final triplet of notes.

In bars 15-16, we find another “climbing” figure made of four-note groups taken from the Db Major scale and played upon a D9 chord. So, this phrase goes temporarily “outside”—i.e. a half-step lower—the harmony, finally reaching the G Major tonic chord by means of plenty of chromaticism:

The musical notation consists of two systems. The first system shows a piano introduction with a D9 chord and a 'climbing' figure of four-note groups taken from the Db major scale. The second system shows a continuation of the run with chromatic notes and skips, and an arpeggio on D7(b9) and chromatic notes G.

Bars 19-23 feature an adventurous double-time phrase played in “Swing 16ths,” with an interesting use of altered and chromatic tones:



Note the fourth beat of bar 23–bar 24: a lightning-like and “climbing” broken arpeggio made of the tones of a diminished seventh chord. Tatum was very fond of this device, often found in the classical literature, too.

In bar 25 Tatum plays one of his distinctive pentatonic runs using the pentatonic major scale of G. Notice the “approaching” chromatic tones—most of the Tatum pentatonic runs are approached in a similar way, and they are often resolved with some chromatic notes leading to the next chord or phrase. By means of alternating skips, chromatic passages, and descending runs, Tatum was able to create very agile and interesting phrases. Bar 8 is a brief yet clear example of that (a more extended application of this concept eventually led to the innovative long phrases often found in Tatum’s later recordings).

Beyond their self-evident technical mastery, the astounding thing about the Tatum runs illustrated above is that they are played with a very precise rhythmic subdivision—they are not mere ornamentation, but the substance of part of his musical language—which also holds the key to how to start practicing them. One important aspect of the accompaniment: in bars 1 and 12 we find the so-called “clipped-bass note” technique; that is, left-hand tenths whose lower notes are played like grace notes.

Medium (♩ = c. 108)
Swing 8ths (♩♩ = ♩♩)

G F#7(b⁹)

F7 E7

In the second chorus of “Indiana”—not transcribed here—Tatum plays two adventurous break-like phrases. The first one, found in bars 39-40, is based on a I/IV situation with many passing chords:

G⁶ A[♭]7 D[♭]7 G D7 G7(b⁵) D[♭]7(b⁵) C

The second break-like phrase comes from bars 47-48, in a V7 / bII7 / I cadence starting on a whole-tone scale:

D7 A[♭]7 G

Despite the deep admiration of most musicians, Tatum’s achievements and influence on the evolution of jazz were overlooked by some critics and historians, who disliked his virtuosity and accused him of lacking real inventiveness. Judging by this 1940 recording of “Indiana,” it is indeed evident that at that time, Tatum was already in complete command of a remarkably advanced musical language, rich in innovative devices commonly associated with later jazz styles.

Indiana

as recorded by Art Tatum on July 26, 1940

Ballard MacDonard and James F. Hanley

Transcribed by Riccardo Scivales

Medium (♩ = c.108)

Swing 8ths (♩ = ♩)

Swings 16ths

Chords: G, F#7(b9), F7, E7, A7, Em7, A7, D7, Am7, Ab7, G, Eb7(b5), D7(b5), Db7, C, Cm, G6, F#7(b9), F7, E7, A7, Bb7(#5), Em9, A7, D9 (Db)

16 (D7(#5)) G F#7 Bm7 E7 A#7

19 A7 Swing 16ths E7(b9) A7

21 D13 F#7 B7 Em Edim7

24 G

26 F#m7(b5) B7 Em Dm6 D#dim7

29 G/D Bbm7 Am7 D7 G N.C. 8va Am7(b5) D13 G