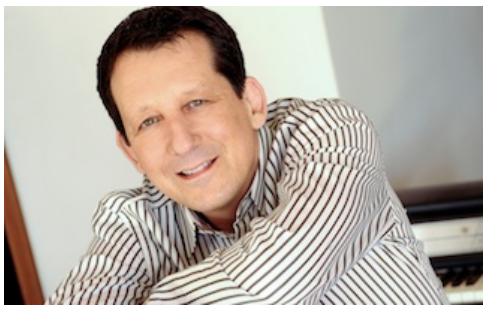
Keyboard

# Jeff Lorber on Funk Comping

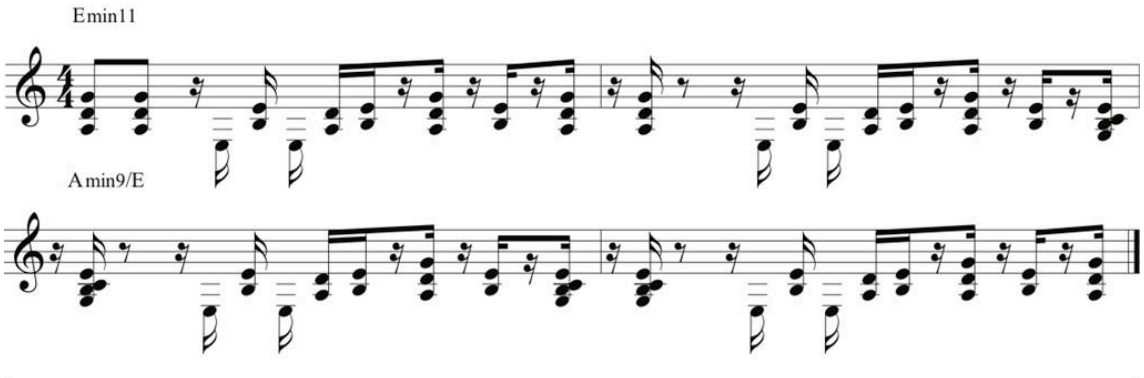
BY JEFF LORBER December 13, 2013



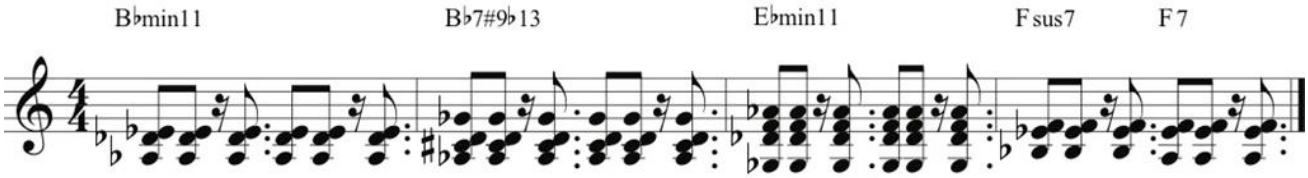
As a member of the rhythm section, one of the keyboard player's roles main roles is to playing supporting harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment that propels the music forward. This is especially true of funk music. While the rhythmic drive for many funk artists often comes primarily from guitar parts, keyboards can be an essential or even primary element that creates the funk. The goal of syncopated funk is a synergy of all the instruments in the mix, including syncopation of the *melody*. One of the key things that creates a great funk groove is each member of the band playing repeating patterns that lock into each other. Latin music, where each of the players has a set pattern is a parallel for the kind of precision and interlocking rhythms that comprise a good funk feel. (In fact, there are keyboard parts from Latin music that work beautifully in a funk context). Let's look at some examples of funk grooves and comping.

### 1. Funky Support

**Ex. 1** is based on a repeating rhythm of two eighth-notes followed by an accent on the second sixteenth-note of the second beat. The tempo is around 108 bpm. The contrast between the "straight eighths" and the syncopated sixteenth-notes help make this a funky groove. The range of the part traverses around a fifth above and below middle *C*—an excellent range for comping. This area will most likely stay out of the way of the bass and whatever is ultimately added on top.

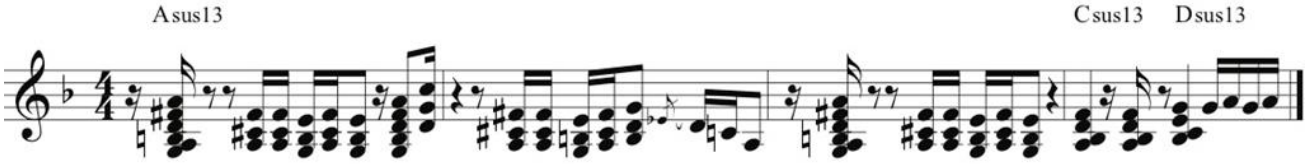


### 2. Slower Syncopations



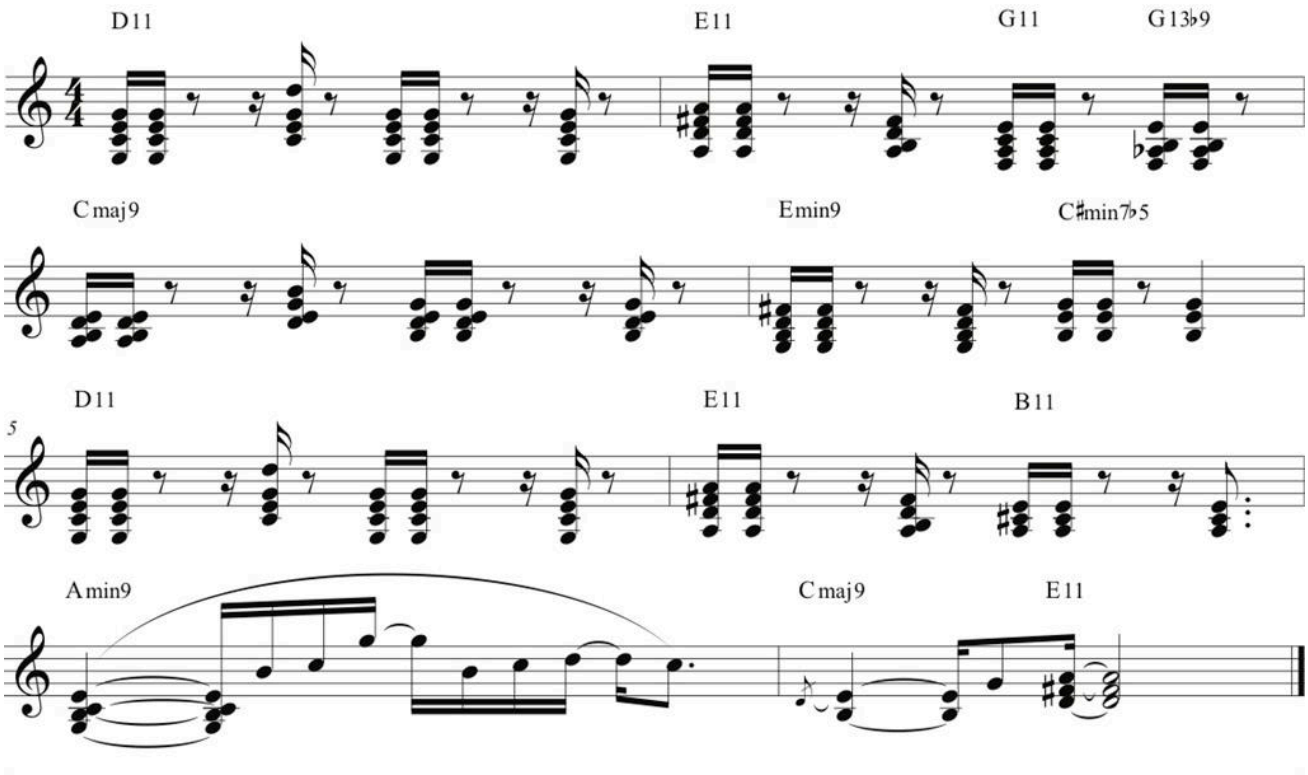

**Ex. 2** is at the much slower tempo of 84 bpm. There's a lot of syncopation—the snare drum plays on the "and" of beat 2 and then on the "four" of each bar. At a slower tempo such as this, there's more space to enjoy the syncopations that you can create. The first syncopation is the "delayed" hit on the second sixteenth-note of beat one. The patternson beats 2 and 3 are less syncopated, but the chords on the second sixteenth-note of the fourth beat and then the 16th note *anticipations* of the second bar provide contrast. For me, that's what makes something funky: the combination of "on the beat" rhythms and the syncopated ones.

### 3. Simmering Sixteenths




**Ex. 3** is based on a recurring double sixteenth-note chordal pattern heard on beats 1 and 3 of each bar, and syncopations on the *second* sixteenth-note of beat 2. It's similar to what's used in my song "Rain Dance," which has been sampled by a number of rap artists and has a funky R&B feel. The fact that this progression doesn't really resolve anywhere except perhaps on the last bar gives it additional energy and tension.

**4. Drum-Like Funk**




**Ex. 4** is a comping pattern for a "house groove." These type of grooves are very popular today in pop music and are even starting to be heard in some contemporary jazz pieces as well. This example is similar to my song "Haciencda." It illustrates an effective device in creating funky keyboard parts, which is *counterpoint* between the left and right hands. Some of the parts are similar to drumming. You can actually use drum rudiment patterns like "paradiddles" to come up with effective parts that use both hands.

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**Contrast Ratio**

"What makes these kinds of off-beat hits effective is the contrast between the syncopation and the straighter rhythm that supports it. If everybody in the band is playing syncopation, it's not as effective as when that contrast exists," says acclaimed fusion keyboardist Jeff Lorber. His latest release is entitled *Hacienda*. Find out more at lorber.com.

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