Keyboard Voicings Study

by Russell Schmidt

"ii - V^7 - I's" in "Drop 2" format

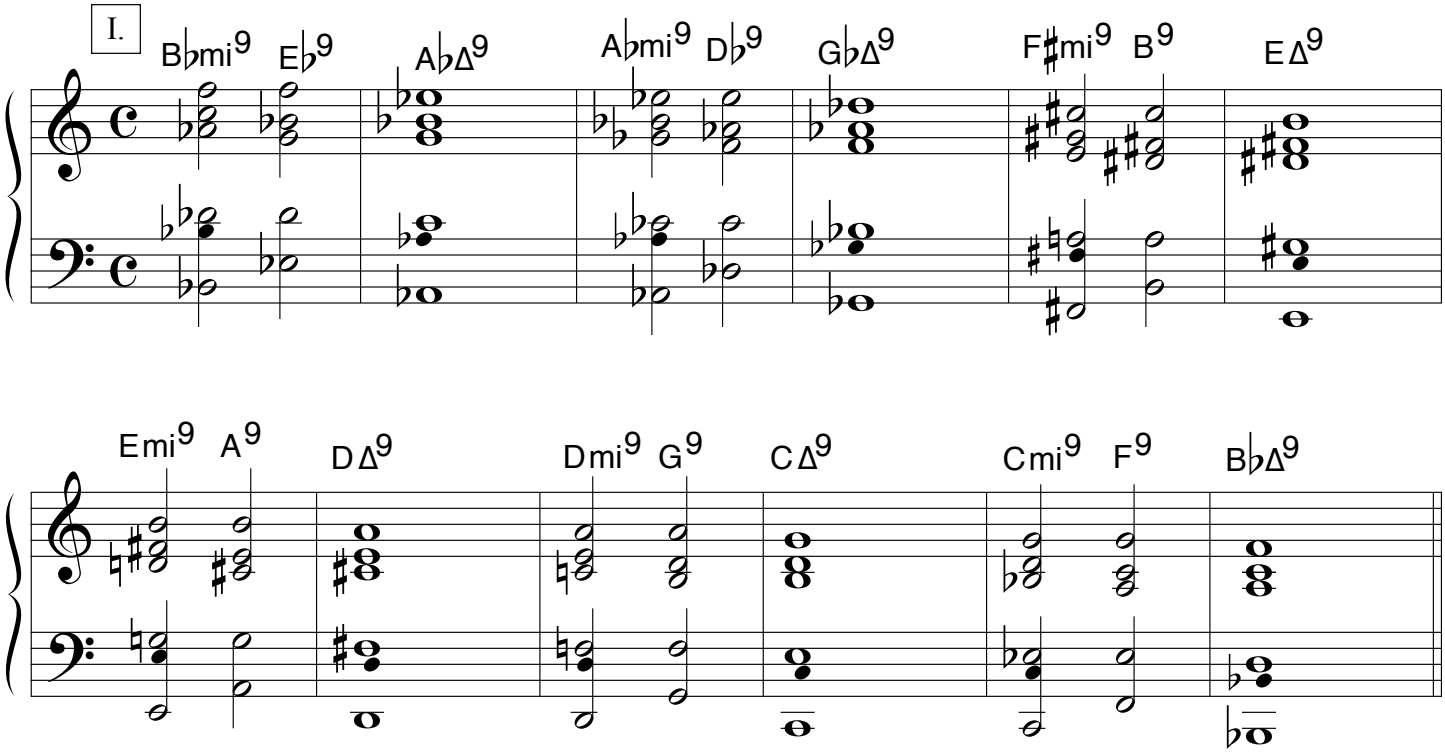
*(plus added bass pitch---**practice** **with** ***and*** **without** ***the bass pitch**)*

These materials provide pianists with many examples of strong voicings for a common harmonic progression in a major key: the "ii - V^7 - I" progression. The voicings to examine are the four uppermost notes for each harmony displayed. These are voicings in "Drop 2" format, an open position type of voicing (spanning more than one octave). In addition, bass pitches have also been included for two reasons:
1) To provide harmonic context as one practices these voicings, and
2) To expand the usefulness of these voicings as one moves from combo performance to solo piano settings.
By the latter point, the implication is that the bass pitches are not necessary when one is working with a bassist, as in a combo. But in solo piano settings, being able to play the bass pitch *in addition to* the four-note, "Drop 2" voicings can be a great advantage.

To gain the full benefit from these materials, practice the voicings in two separate ways:
1) When practicing as four-voice, "Drop 2" chords, play only the four uppermost notes, with two notes in each hand. To be clear, this means your left hand will be playing the lowest note found in treble clef and the highest note found in bass clef.
2) When practicing with the added bass pitch (playing five note harmonies), perform as shown, with three notes in the right hand and two notes in the left. [Also, pianists with smaller hands should play the upper bass pitch *(wherever one is cued)*, to avoid having to span a 10th.]

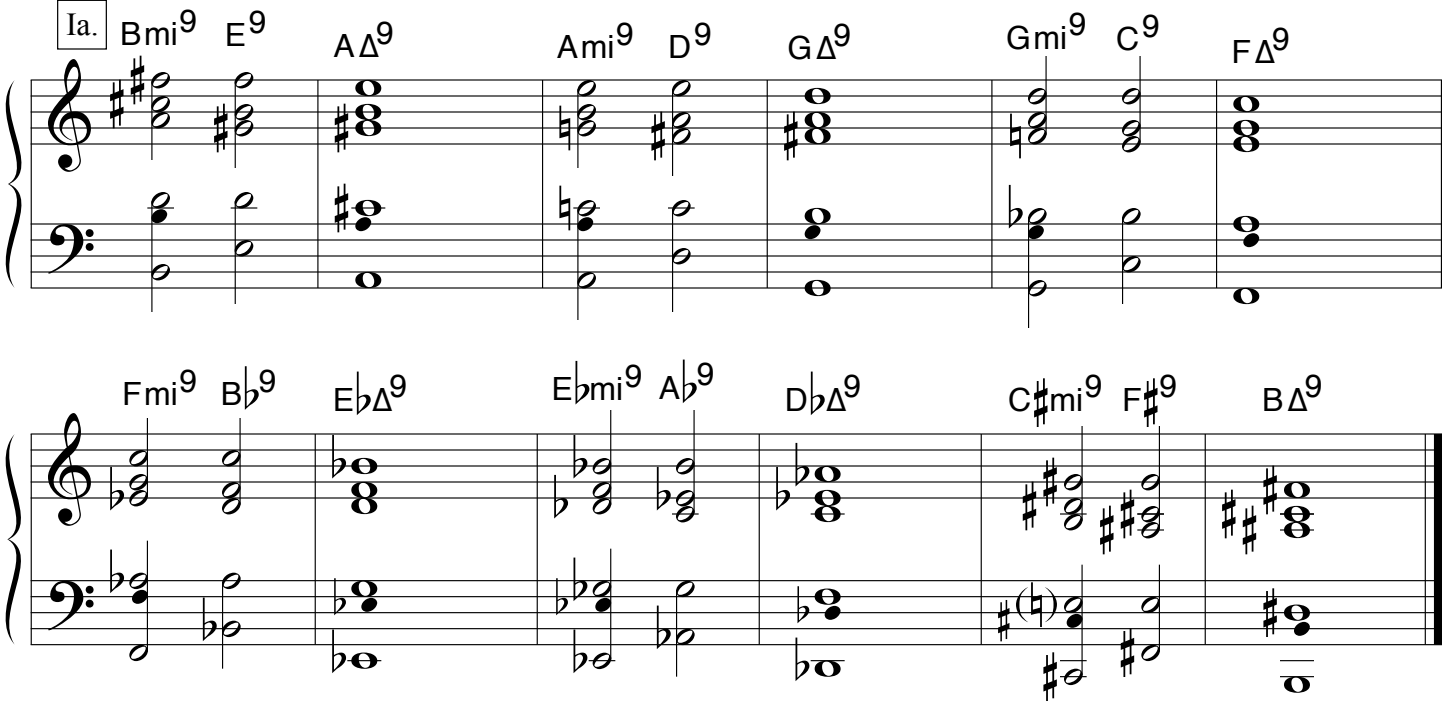
Another item worth mentioning: Note that in these progressions, three basic *seventh chord* types are used as *ninth chords*. Major seventh chord voicings are being used as to sound as the upper structure for minor ninth chords. Half-diminished seventh chords are serving as the upper structure for dominant ninth chords. And minor seventh chords are being used as the upper structure for Major ninth chords.

If this information is neither helpful nor useful, then please see the separate "*Harmonic Equivalence*" hand-out to better understand the relevance of these particular cross-relationships.



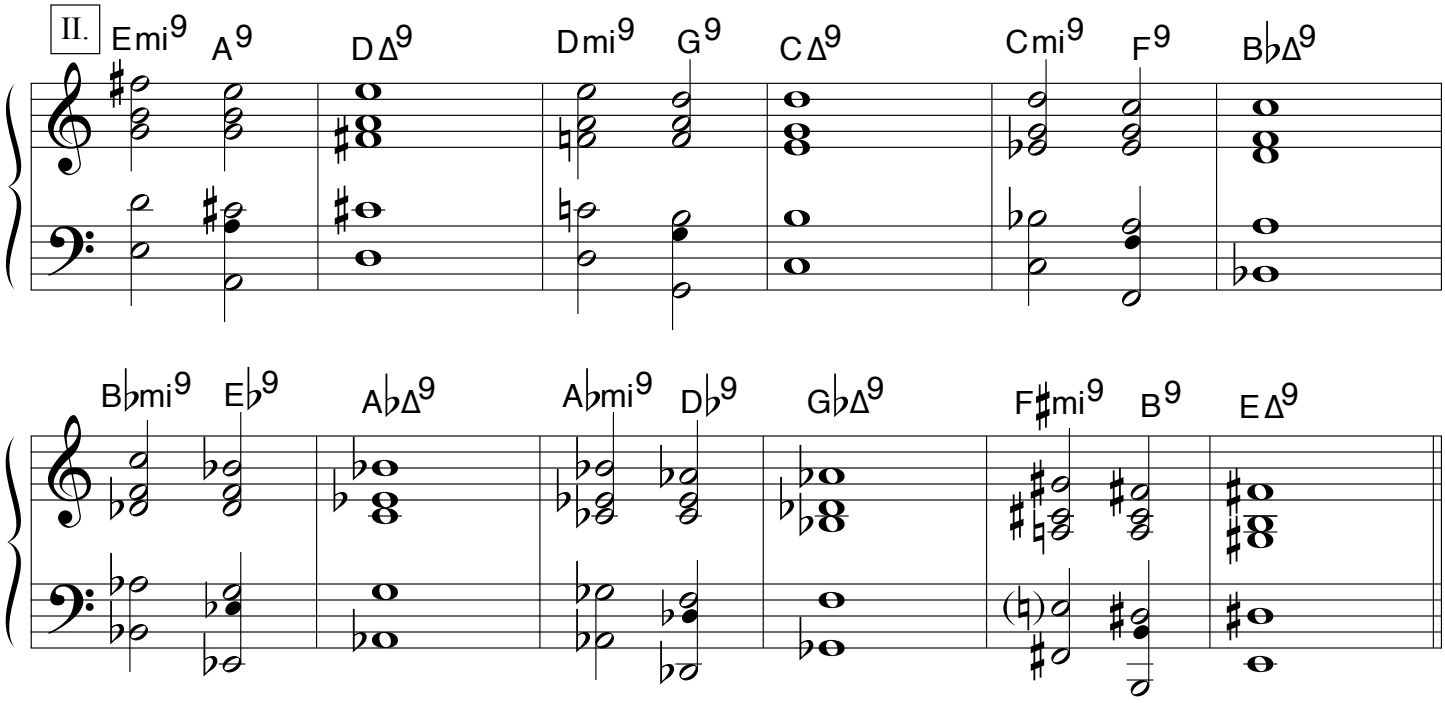
(...and again in the six remaining keys)

Ia.



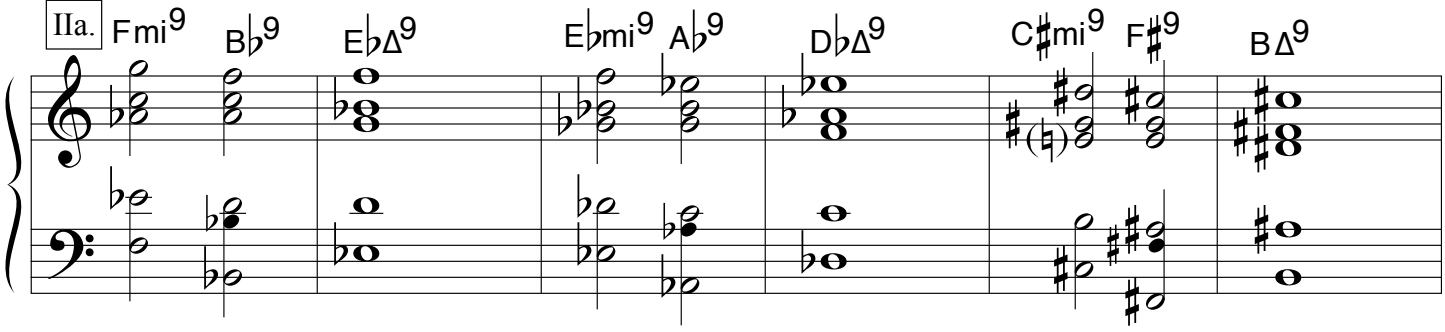
Here is a different inversion...

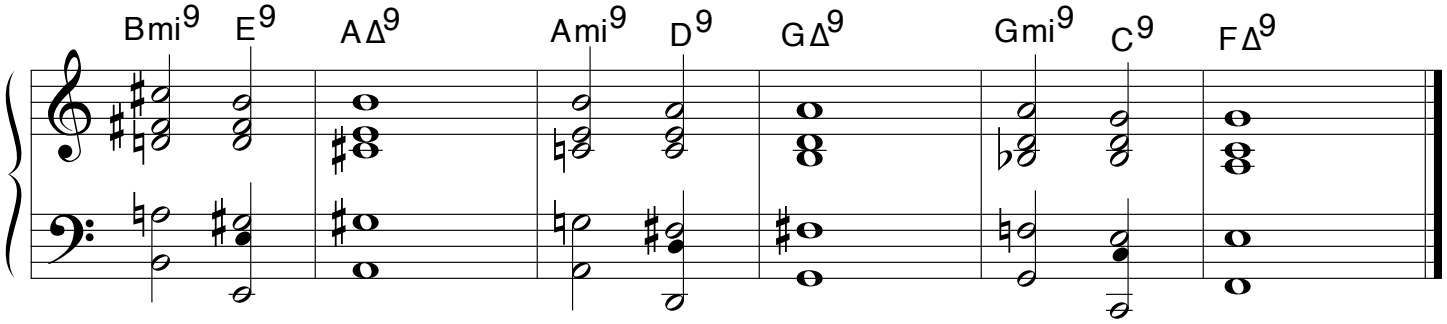
II.



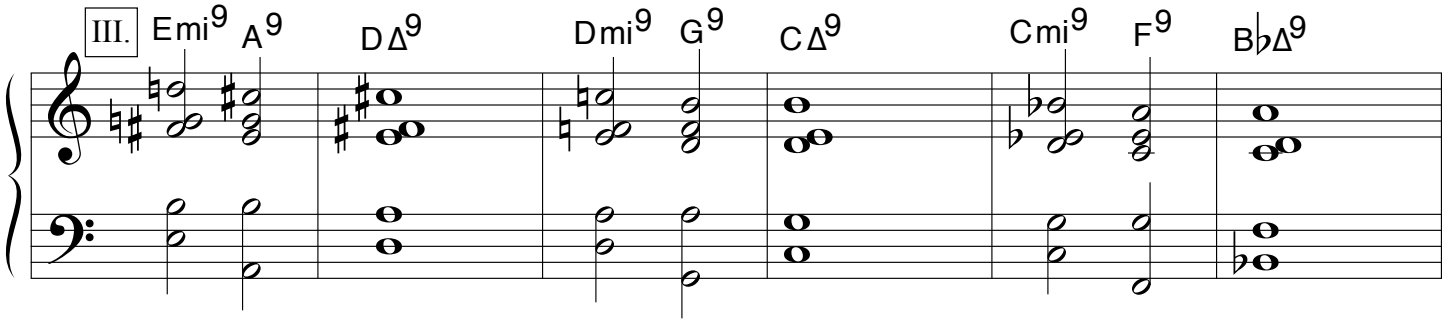
(...and again in the six remaining keys)

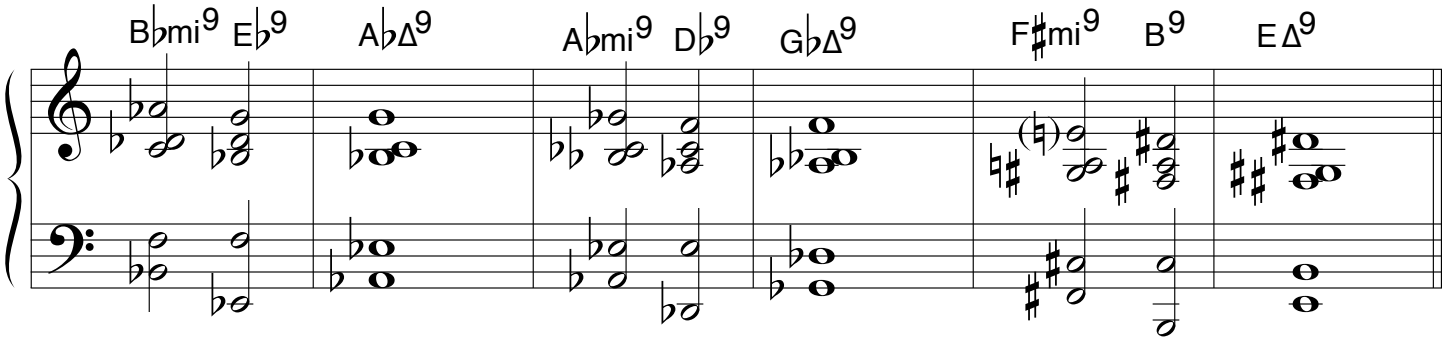
IIa.



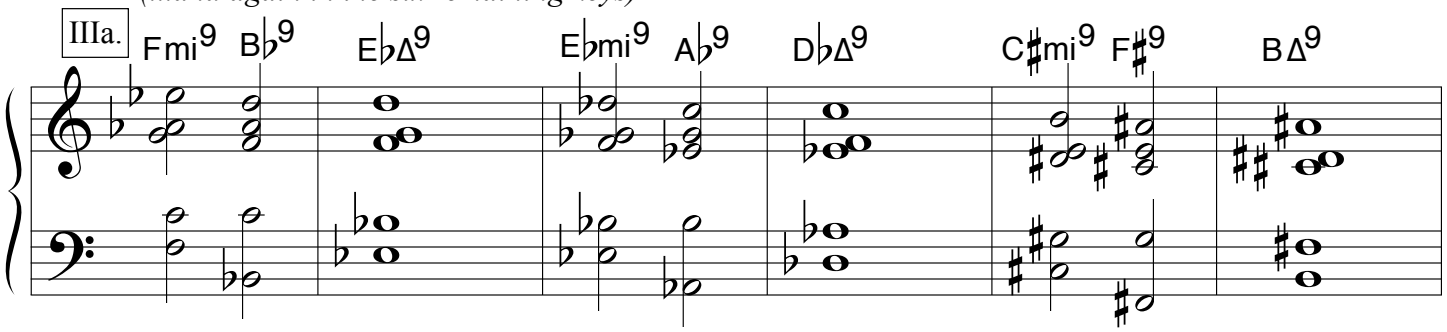


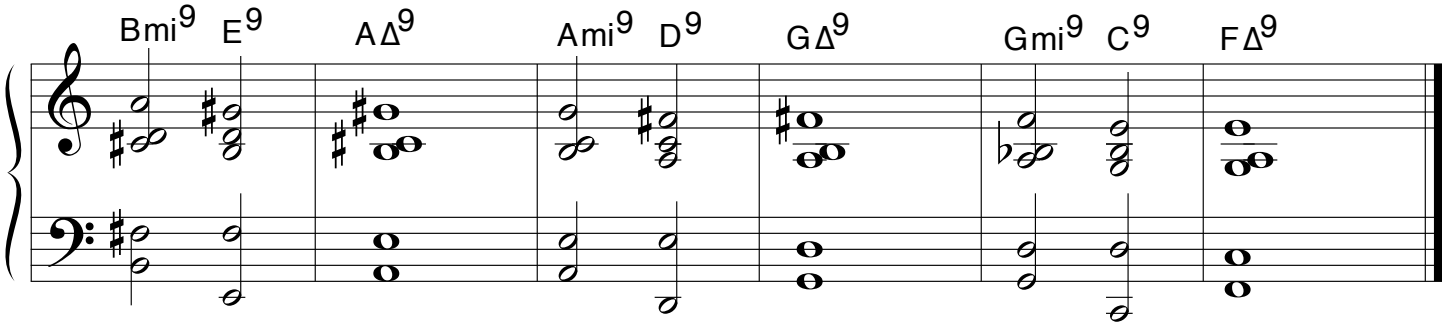
Here is yet another inversion...



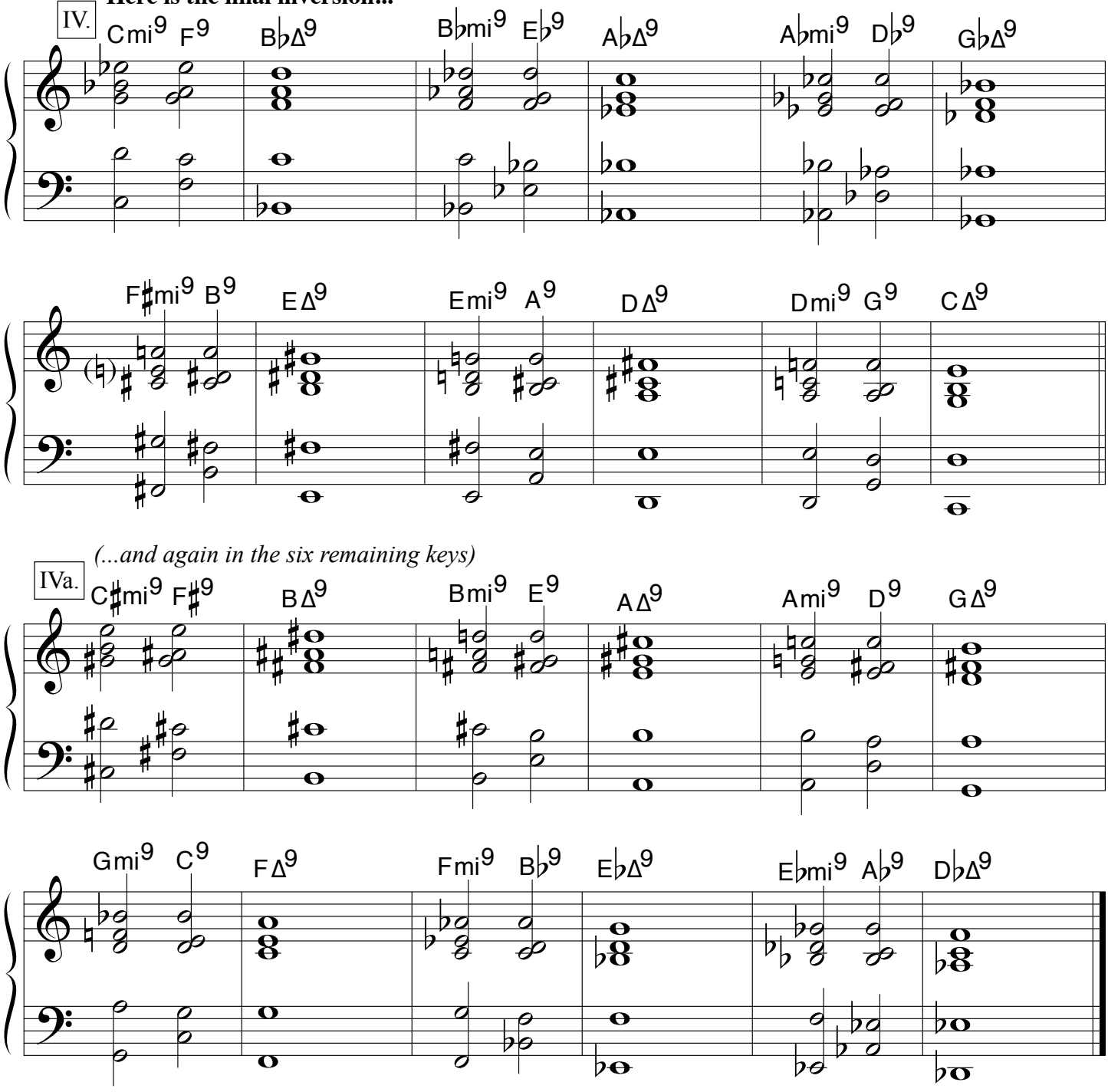


(...and again in the six remaining keys)



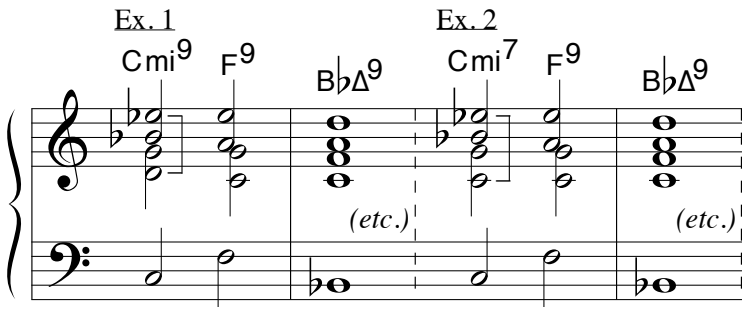


Here is the final inversion...



(...and again in the six remaining keys)

A final comment...With this last inversion (found only on page four), less experienced pianists sometimes object to the outer interval that sounds on each "ii" chord. Ignoring the bass pitch for a moment, that means we are talking about the minor 9th interval existing between the 3rd of the chord (atop the voicing) and the 9th of the chord (at the bottom). To *this* listener, that's actually one of the most beautiful harmonies found in the hand-out. But if a pianist really wants less of a *rub* on that "ii" chord (Ex. 1), then the root may be substituted, replacing the 9th (Ex. 2) for this particular inversion, smoothing off the *edge*.



Also, this particular voicing suffers more than any of the others shown when played on a slightly out-of-tune piano. So despite the author's appreciation for this harmony, there may be times when even he abandons it for the simpler voicing (Ex. 2) that, while less interesting, is irrefutably more stable.