Keys To The Highway
Session 2
“Subtle Tonalities”

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Subtle Tonalities

I've been returning to "Key To The Highway" as a song to study over a fairly long period of time. First in maybe 87 or 88. I wanted to learn how to have my playing reflect the chord changes and have better melodic direction. I don't think I was articulating that thought in my mind clearly. It was more of an intuitive feeling. I was sure that something I felt was important was missing in my improvisation. I'm not sure why this tune caught my interest. I had not really listened to it and I was not studying any particular version.

Maybe its because bluesy tonalities where a bit familiar and the chord progression is a bit different than a standard 12 Bar so it offered a unique opportunity to express the changes.

Now we are looking at it together. In 12 different Keys if we can. The fact that this song is still teaching me after all this time shows the depth that seemingly simple relationships can have when explored deeply over a long period of time.

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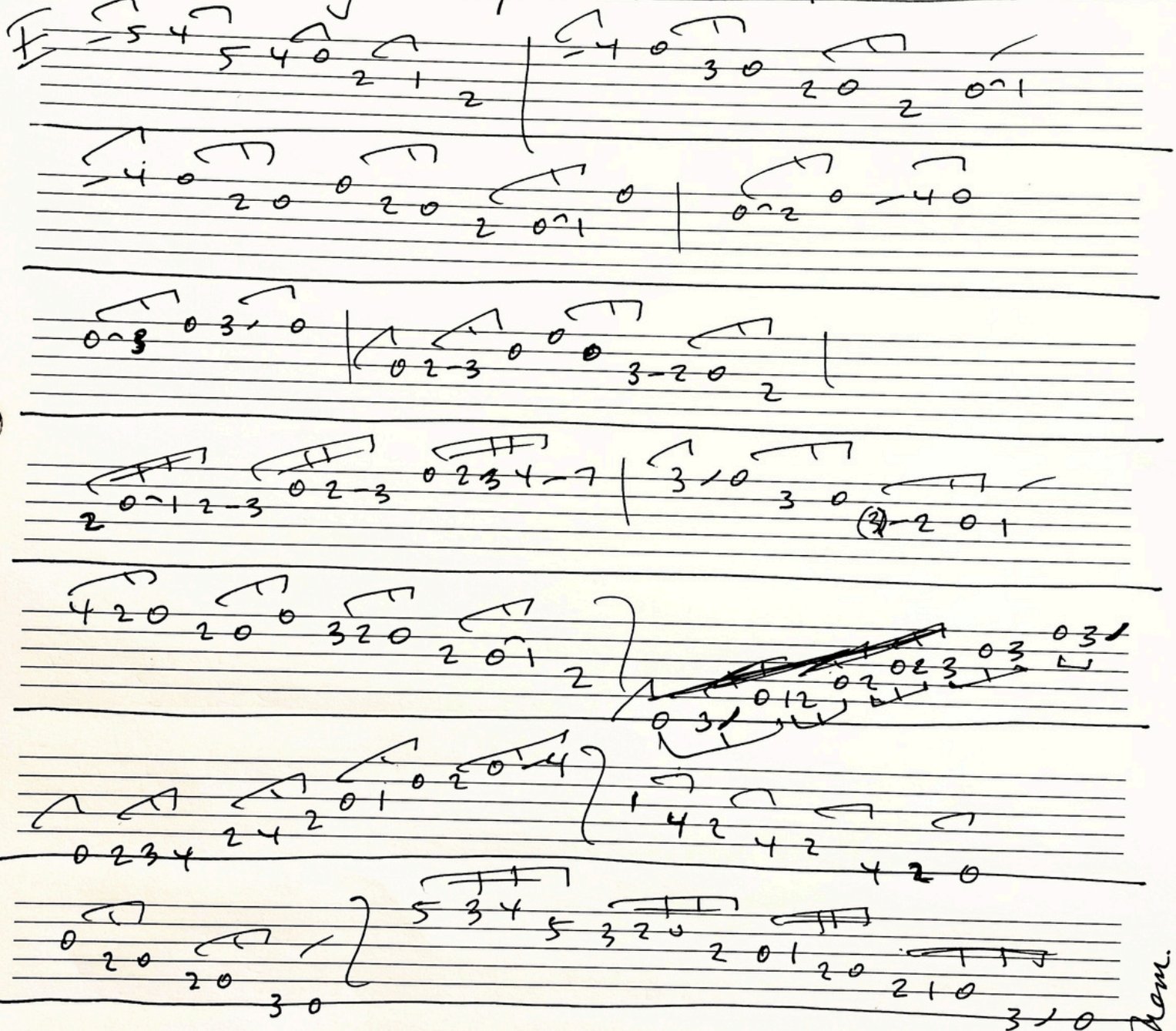
Subtle Tonalities

The Big Bill Broozy version is in "E" (Kind of ☺)
we can say that E is our tonic or home base.

Let's freely explore a few sounds against an E chord. Play each phrase several times and listen.



Hear the subtle shades between Major and Minor tonalities? Learn to flow through Major and minor blues scales and pentatonics. E mixolydian (A major) Try and discover how intervals can be transferred from scale between them.

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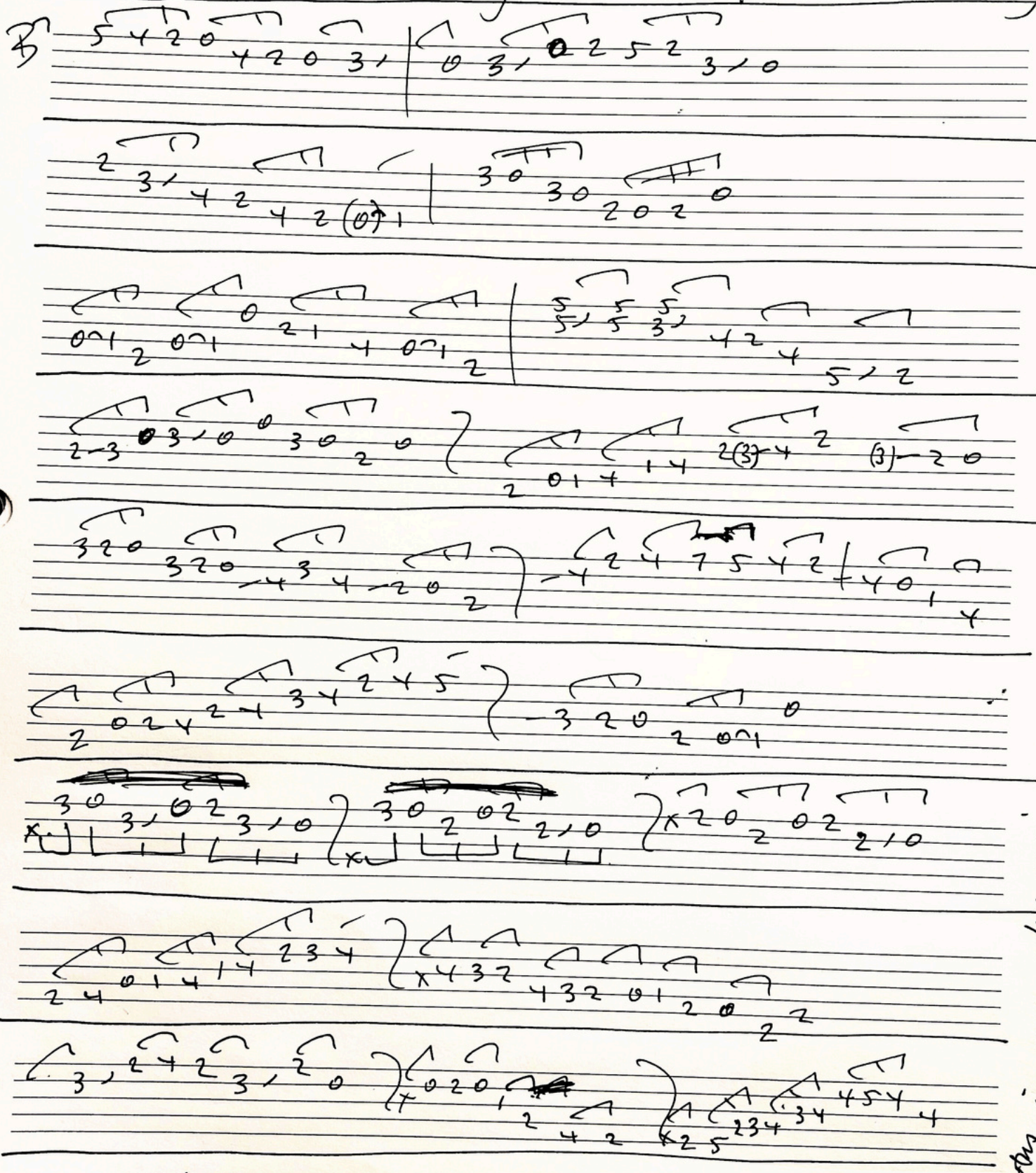
Subtle Tonalities

The next chord in our progression is B7. Lets try some more sounds. Play the chord before each melody



B7

5 4 2 0 4 2 0 3 1 | 0 3 1 0 2 5 2 3 1 0

2 3 1 4 2 4 2 (0) 1 | 3 0 3 0 2 0 2 0

0 1 2 0 1 0 2 1 4 0 1 2 | 5 5 5 5 5 3 1 4 2 4 5 1 2

2 3 0 3 1 0 0 3 0 2 0 | 2 0 1 4 1 4 2 (3) 4 2 (3) 2 0

3 2 0 3 2 0 4 3 4 2 0 2 | 4 2 4 7 5 4 2 | 4 0 1 4

2 0 2 4 2 4 3 4 2 4 5 | 3 2 0 2 0 1 0

x 3 0 3 1 0 2 3 1 0 | x 3 0 2 0 2 2 1 0 | x 2 0 2 0 2 2 1 0

2 4 0 1 4 1 4 2 3 4 | x 4 3 2 4 3 2 0 1 2 0 2 2

3 1 2 4 2 3 1 2 0 | x 0 2 0 1 2 4 2 | x 2 5 2 3 4 3 4 4 5 4 4

8ths in your phrasing.

A 12/8 feel is good for this tune. So try triplets and swing

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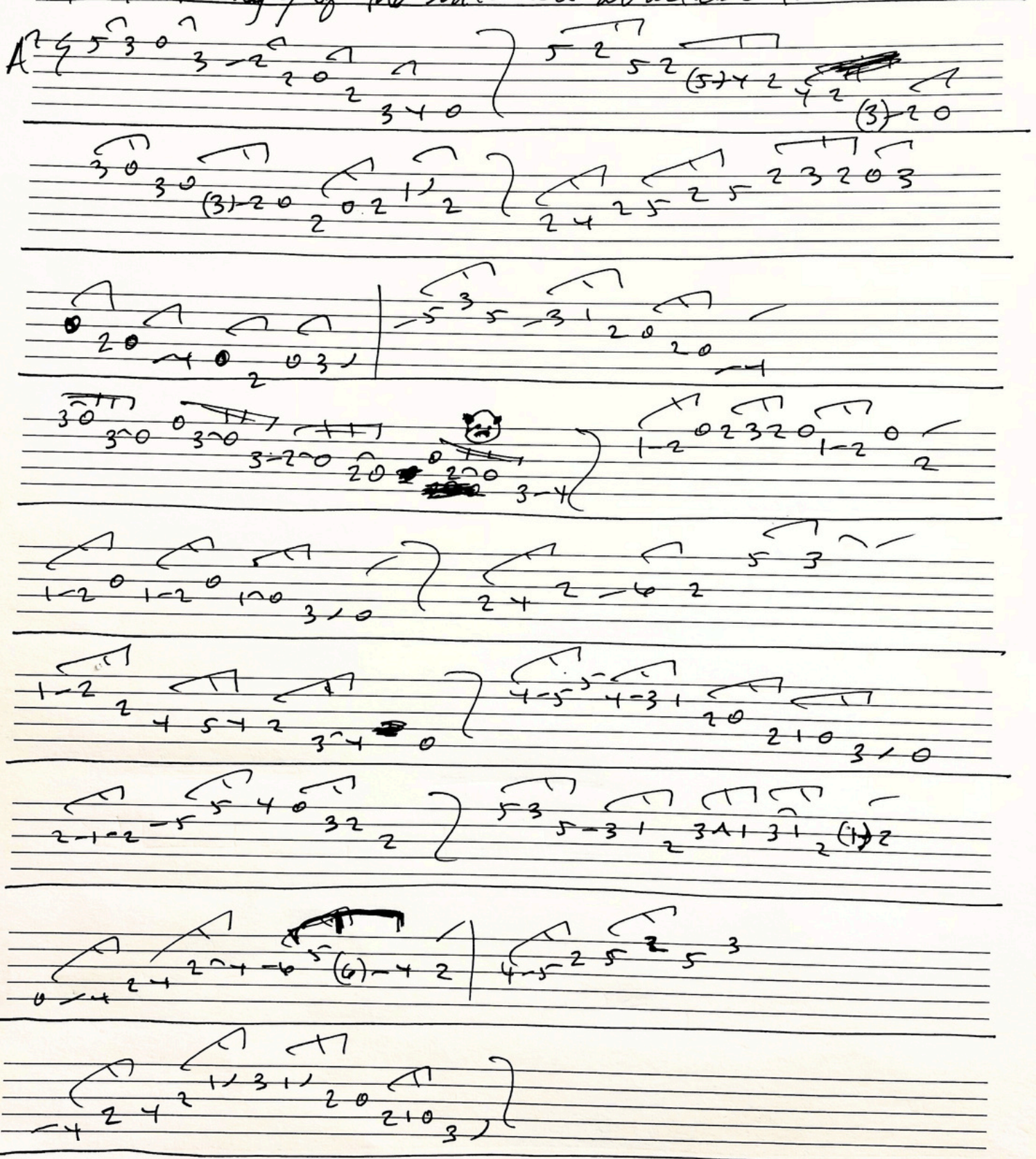
Subtle Tonalities

Finally the A for our version in "E". Are you hearing the flexibility of the intervals available to us?



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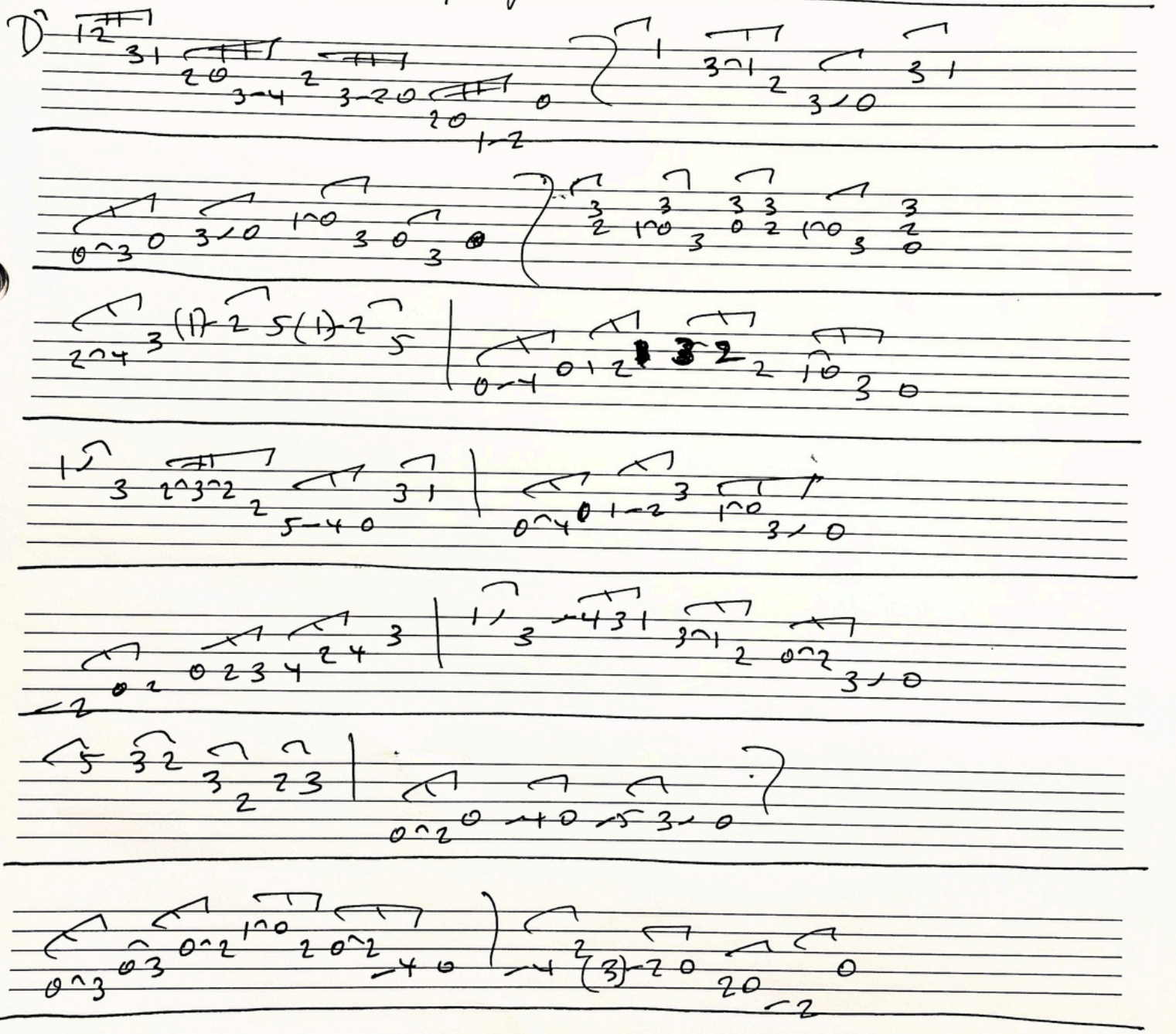
Subtle Tonalities

Let's start modulating in 4ths. Next we will have the "key" of A. We will need to add a D chord. Each time we modulate we will add one chord. Keep in mind the functions of the chords change with each "key" The A is not the same in "E" as it is in "A". The D is not the same in "A" as it is in "D". This will be true for all the chords in our progressions.



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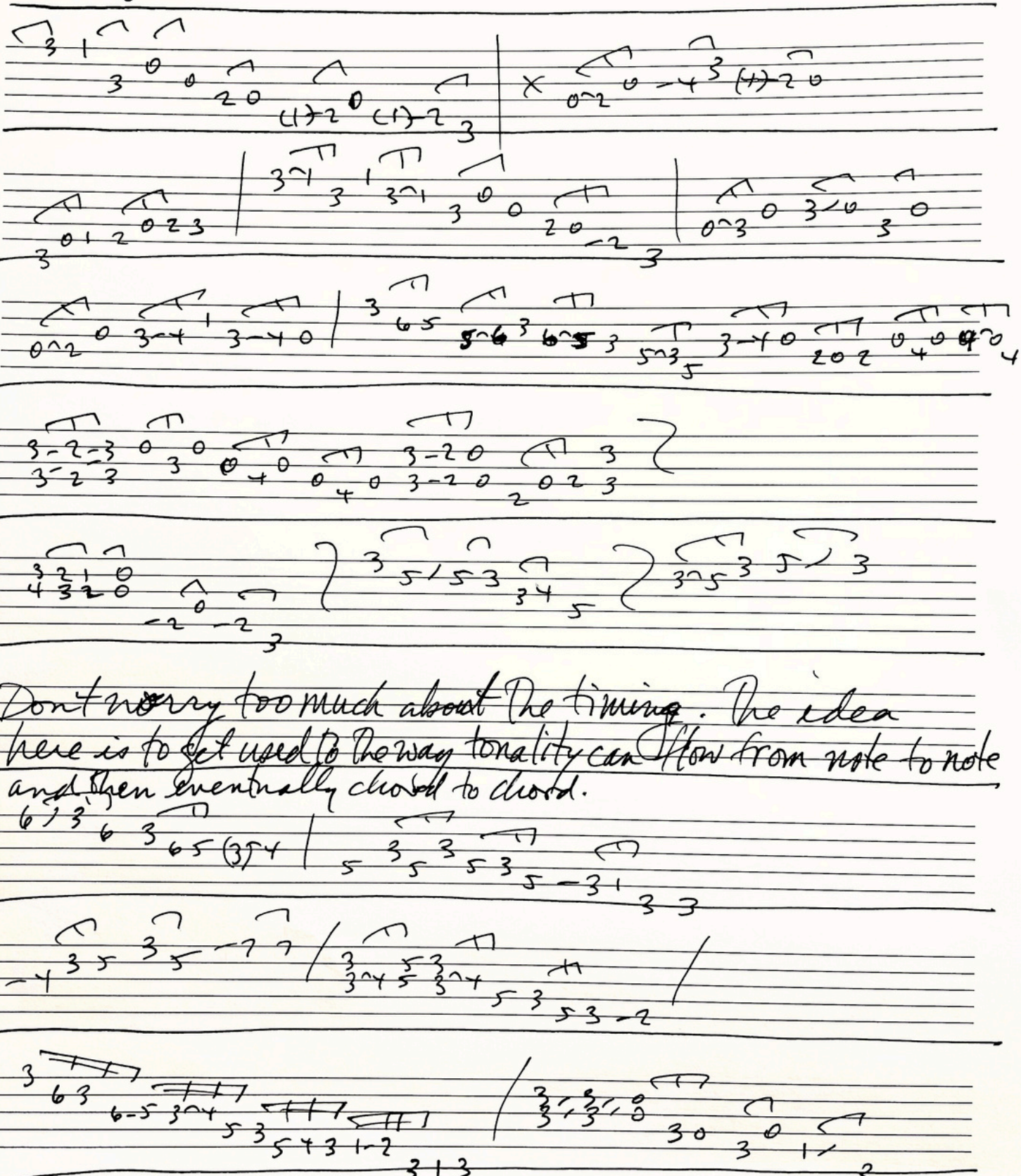
Subtle Tonalities

Moving into "D" we will add the 6:



Don't worry too much about the timing. The idea here is to get used to the way tonality can flow from note to note and then eventually chord to chord.

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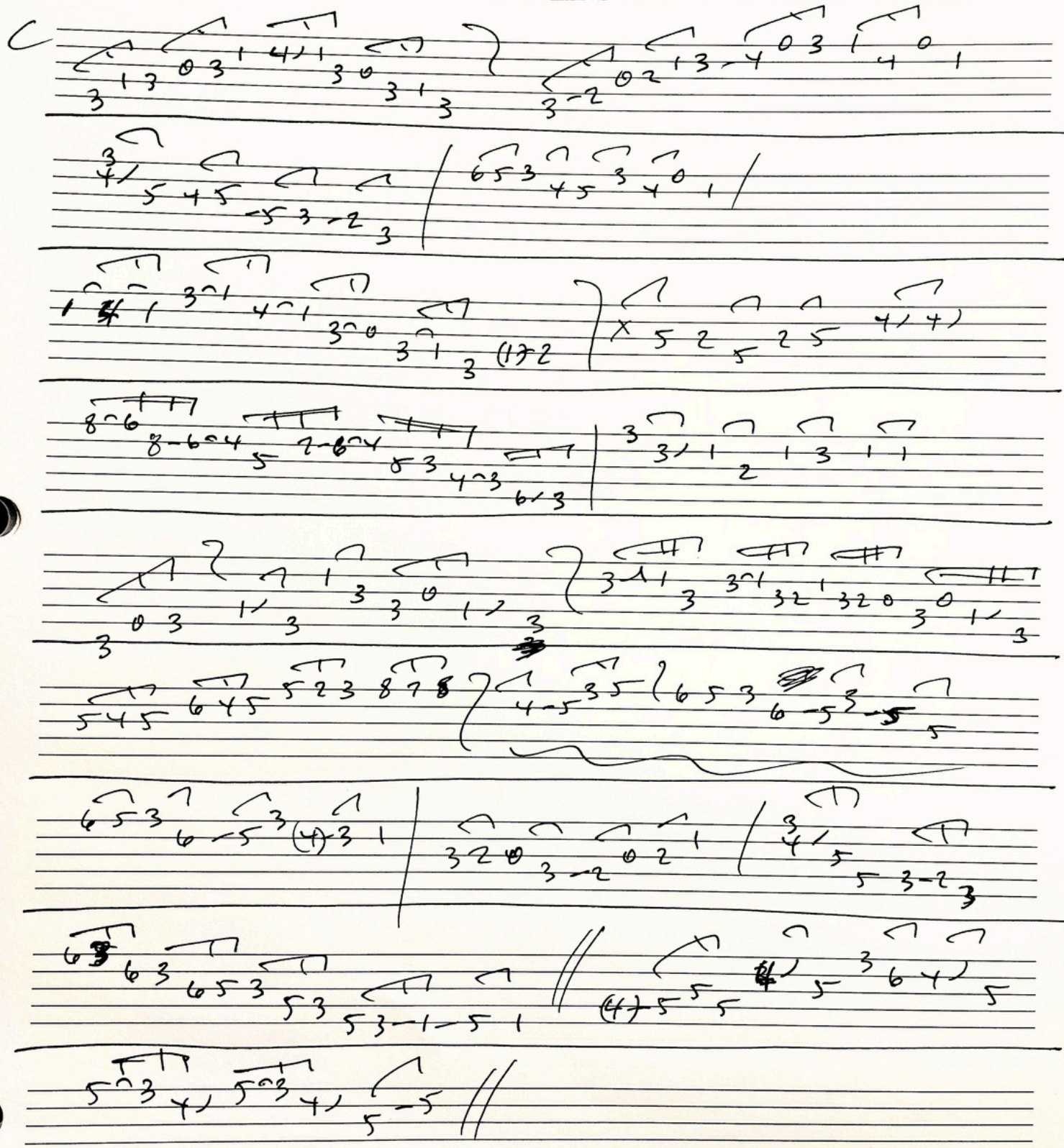
Subtle Tonalities

Moving into "6" we will add C.



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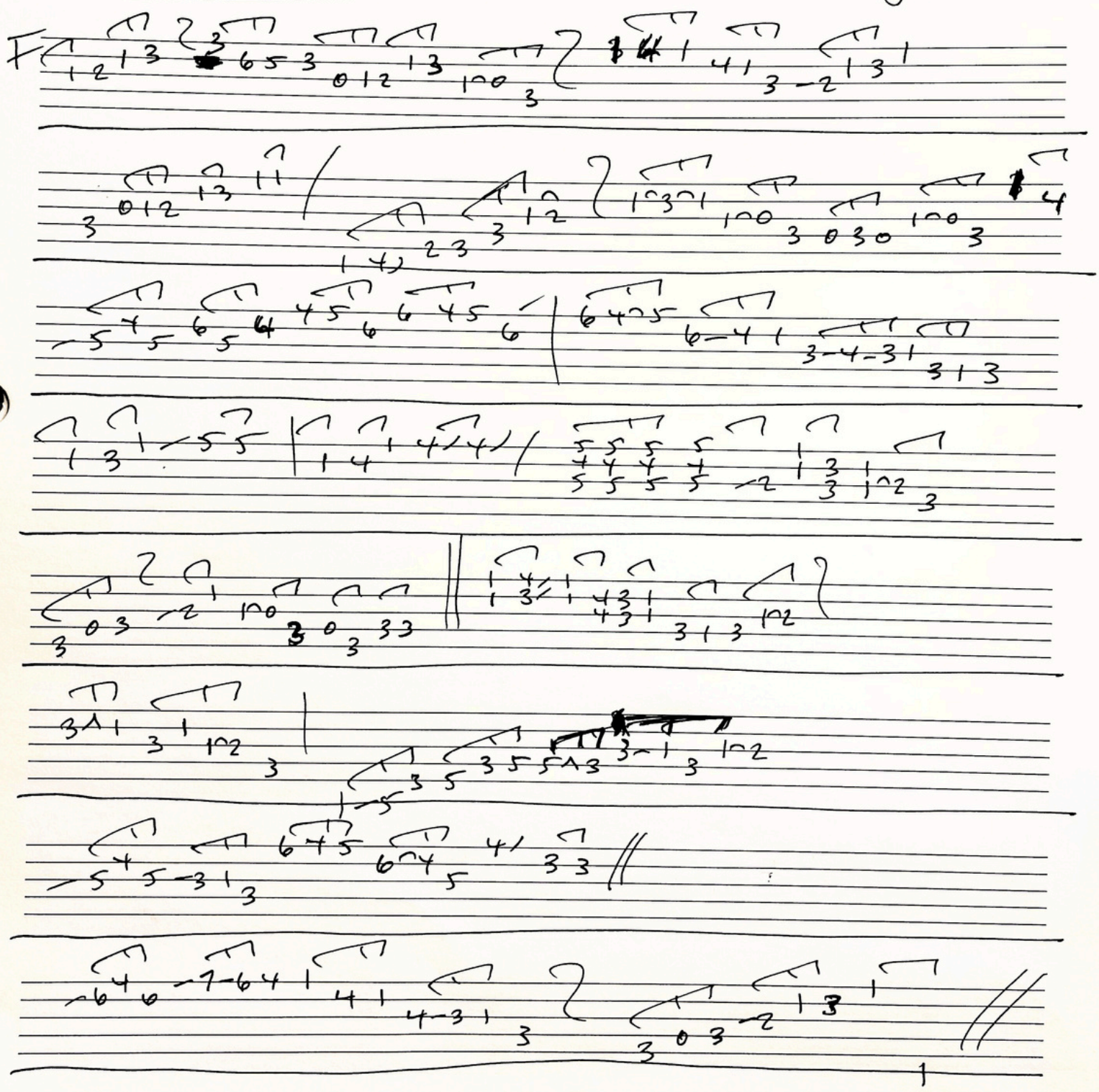
Subtle Tonalities

Moving into C we will add F. Notice we are staying on the low end of the neck. You are going to want to explore the entire instrument and find flows for these tonalities across the entire fingerboard.



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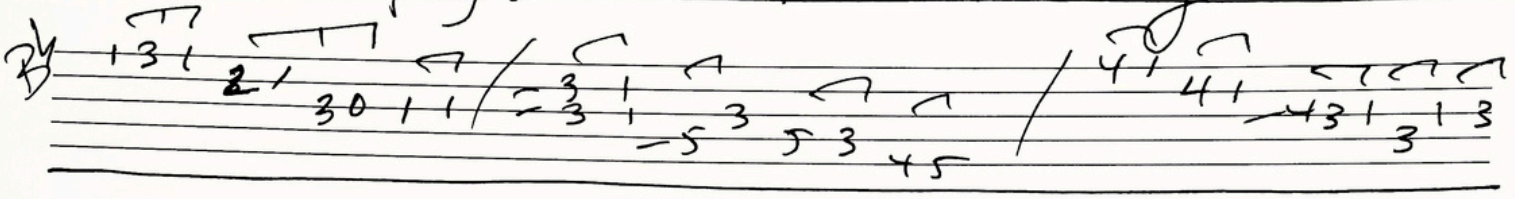
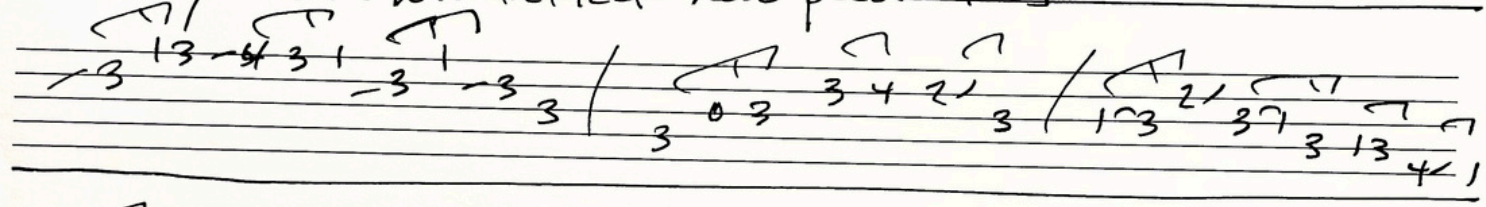
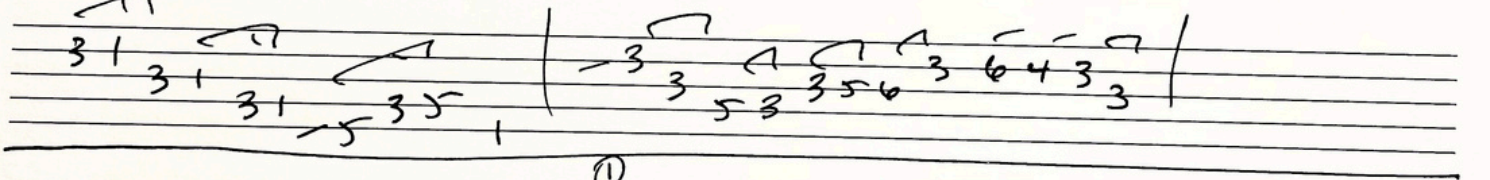
Subtle Tonalities

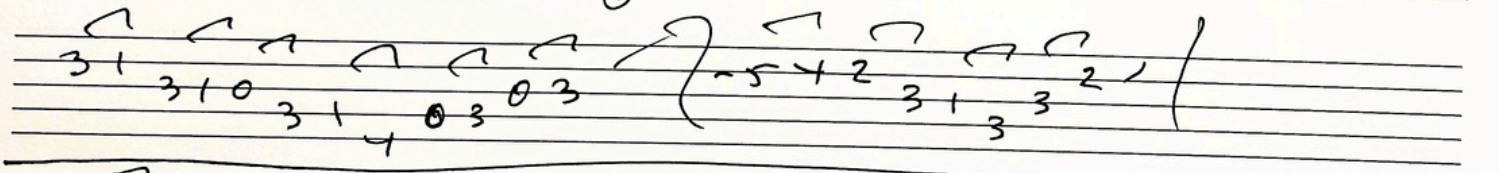
Moving to the key of "F" we will add B♭
Remember play the chord then a melody

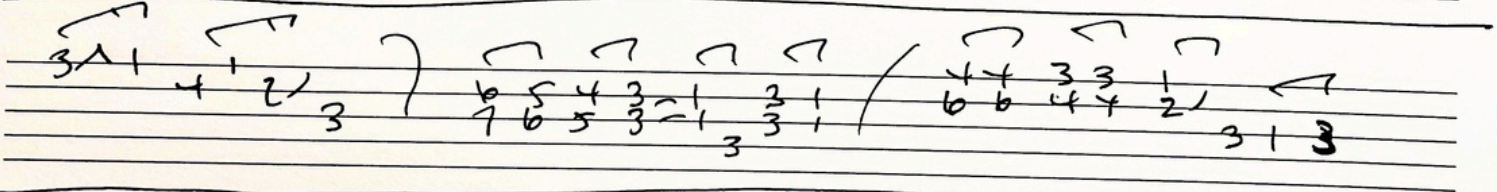


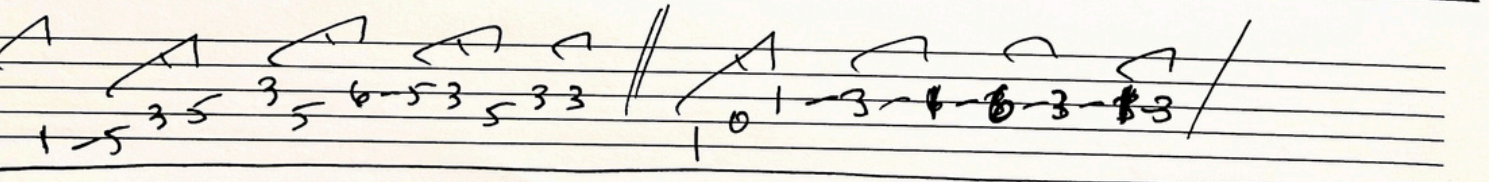
Remember to ~~some~~ put these in context with the key they are in. The tonality will flow in a different way in each context: in "F" B♭ would be the IV in B♭ the I in E♭ the V. As you progress through each key every chord will reflect new possibilities

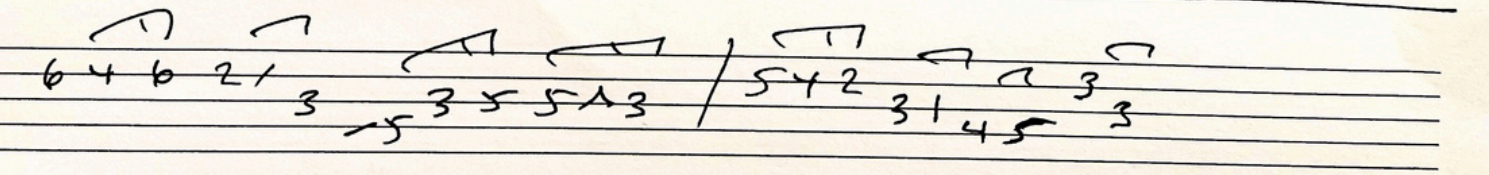






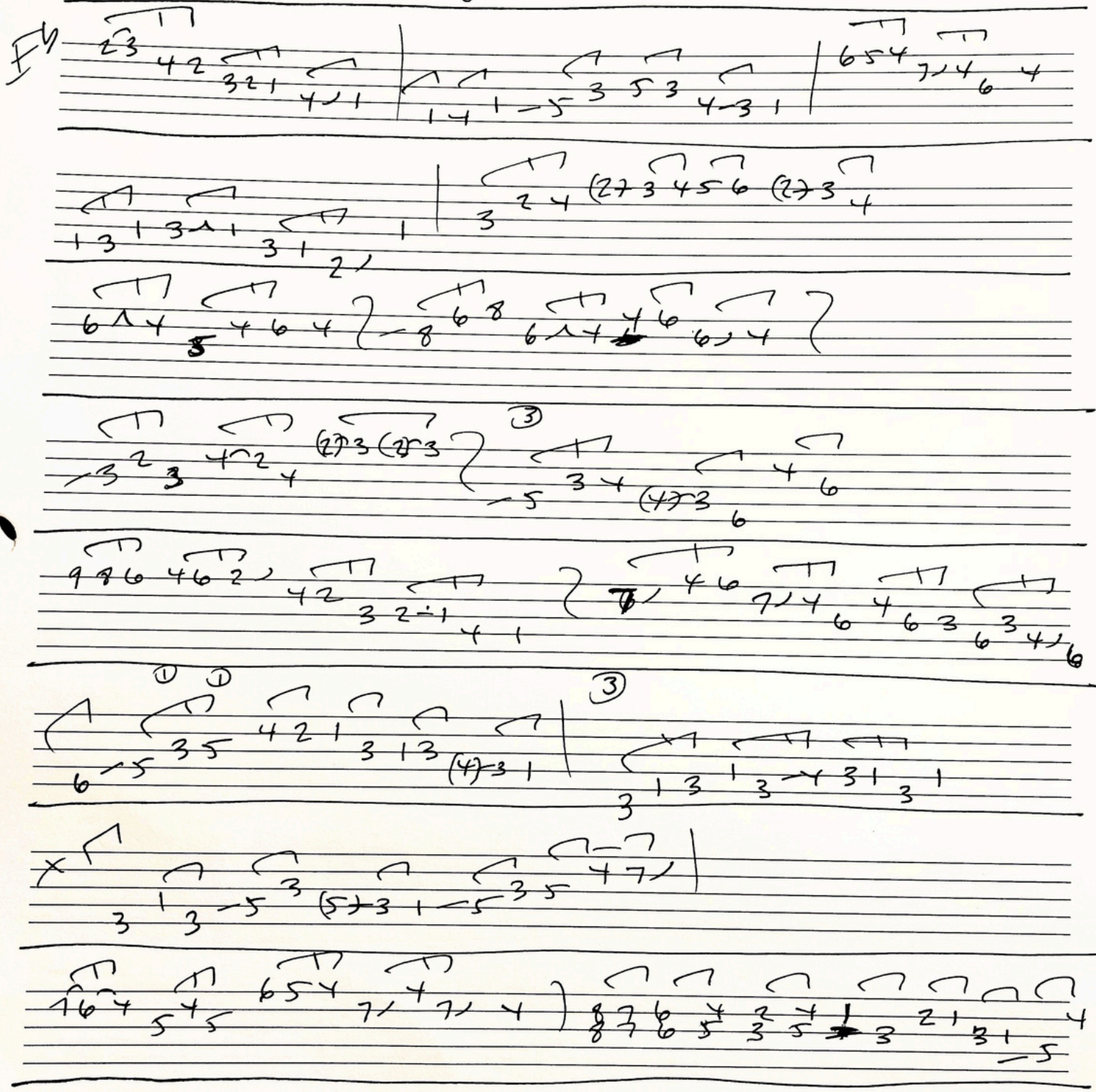






Subtle Tonalities

Moving into the key of B♭ we will E♭



Play and explore the tune in context.

Are we playing scales???

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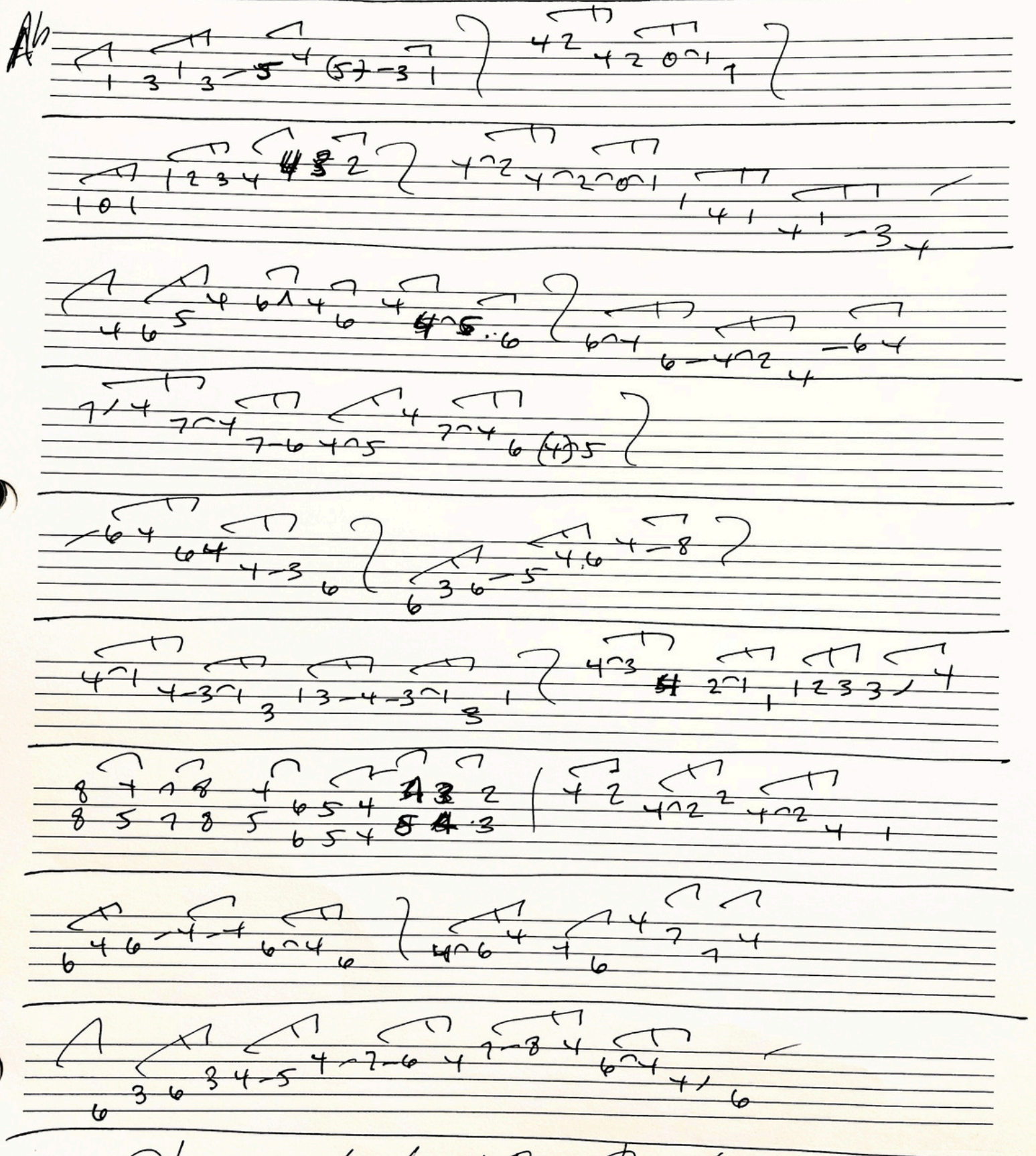
Subtle Tonalities

Moving into Eb we will add Ab



Play each chord then the phrase

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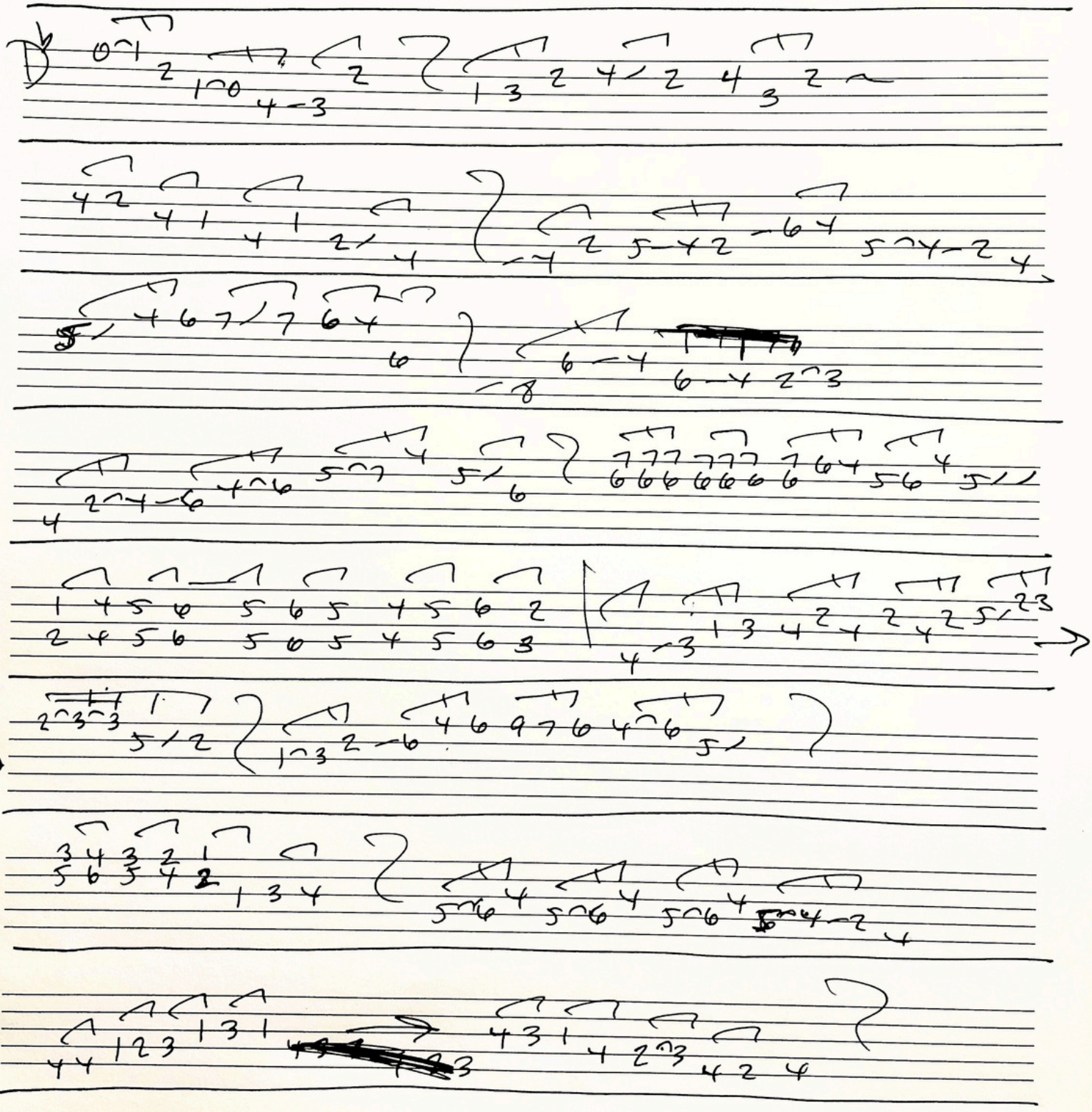
Moving into A♭ we will add D♭
Remember these are just short phrases that explore flows of tonality.



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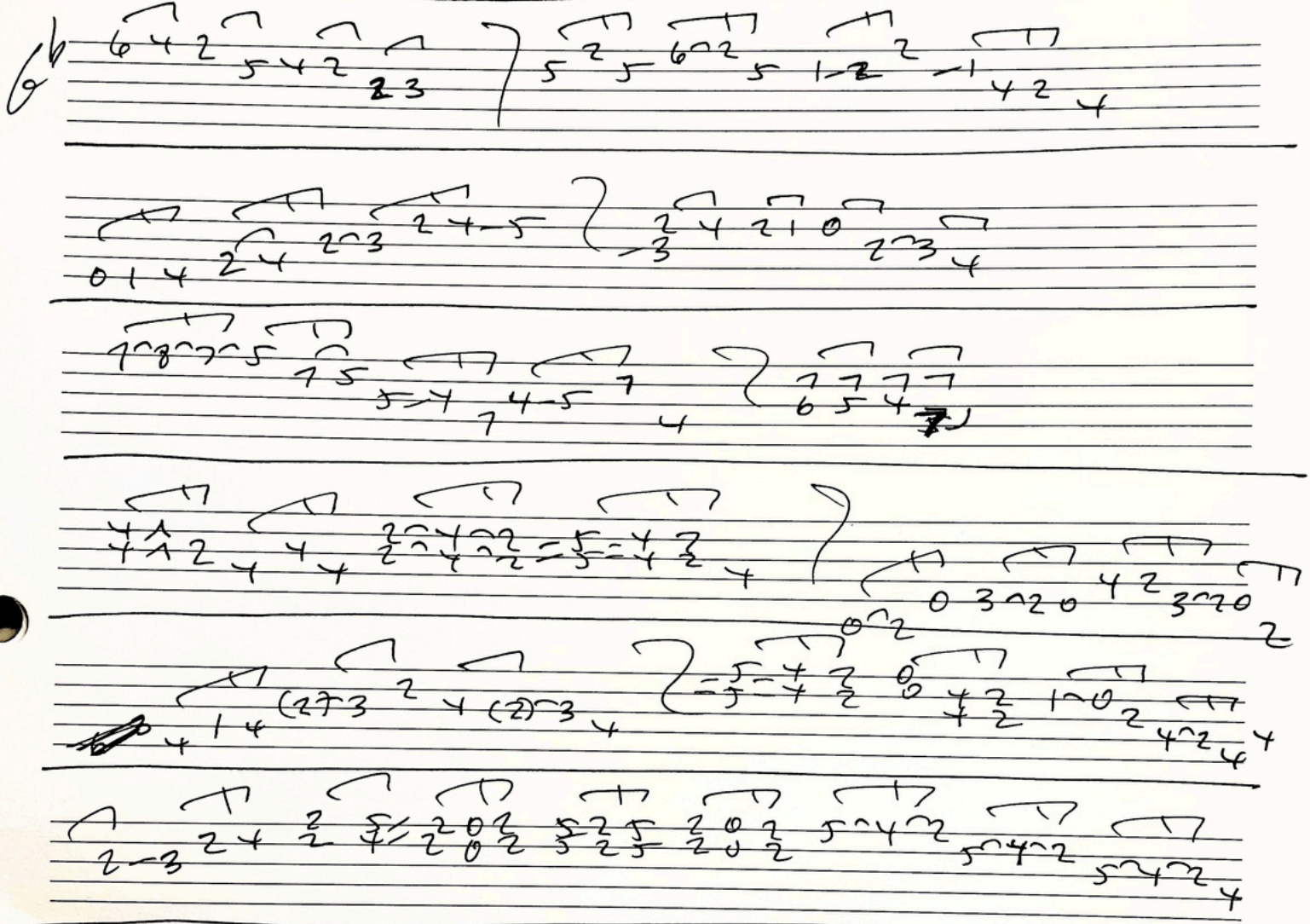
Moving into the key of D♭ we will add 6♭



Remember to work in every area on the neck. No reason to be in a hurry. Notice we haven't talked much about scales? Focus on flows of tonality. Try different grooves as you explore the keys. Have fun ☺

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