

## **Masterclass: Jazz Piano Mastery - January 28, 2026**

**Title:** Circle of Fifths Mastery & Block Chord Swing – Exploring "Fly Me to the Moon"

**Focus:** Deep dive into the diatonic circle of fifths progression using Bart Howard's classic "Fly Me to the Moon" as the vehicle. Master a complete medium-swing two-hand arrangement featuring right-hand block chords derived from the sixth diminished scale (Barry Harris-inspired) and a supportive left-hand playing roots, voicings/chords, and steady time-keeping. Develop understanding of why the circle of fifths works harmonically, along with swing rhythm nuances for authentic feel.

### **Overview**

This masterclass uses the standard "Fly Me to the Moon" a perfect example of a diatonic circle of fifths progression in C major. The tune's harmony moves smoothly through descending fifths (roots cycling counterclockwise on the circle), creating natural forward motion and resolution.

We'll explore a complete medium-swing arrangement: right hand plays block chords harmonized via the sixth diminished scale (alternating major 6th and diminished 7th-derived voicings for chromatic color and flow), while the left hand anchors with roots, chord shells, and rhythmic pulse.

Building on prior lessons (walking bass/block chords in "Satin Doll," transposition/bebop in "Mack the Knife," upper-structure/voicings in "Sophisticated Lady"), this deepens circle-of-fifths thinking, block-chord technique, and swing feel for confident piano performance.

### **Lesson Plan Breakdown**

#### **1. Warm-Up and Review**

- Play the II-7 – V7 – IΔ7 progression in C major (Dm7 – G7 – Cmaj7) using bebop scales in the right hand (e.g., C major bebop scale: C D E F G G# A B C for the I; apply dominant and minor bebop variants accordingly) with swinging eighth notes.
- Add left-hand voicings or simple comping on the & of 2 and the & of 4.

**Purpose:** Activates bebop vocabulary, swing rhythm, and ear for the circle-of-fifths motion ahead. **Suggested daily practice:** 10 minutes

#### **2. Circle of Fifths Deep Dive: Concept and Harmonic Why**

- Explain the circle of fifths: chord roots move down by perfect fifths, creating strong root motion and natural tension/resolution (each chord's seventh pulls to the next

chord's third, dominant function resolves smoothly).

- Why it works: Diatonic in major keys, it maximizes common tones and smooth voice leading while providing forward propulsion — every chord feels like it "wants" to go to the next (e.g., vi → ii → V → I feels inevitable).
- Analyze "Fly Me to the Moon" progression (in C major): Am7 – Dm7 – G7 – Cmaj7 – Fmaj7 – Bm7b5 – E7 – Am7 (diatonic circle descent with the E7 secondary dominant flavor at the end of the phrase).
- Play root-position roots slowly to hear the cycle, then add simple shells and voicings.

**Purpose:** Builds intellectual and auditory understanding of the progression's logic, enabling transposition and variation in any standard. **Suggested daily practice:** 15 minutes (analyze + play chord voicings)

### 3. Sixth Diminished Block Chords in the Right Hand

- Introduce the sixth diminished scale (Cmaj6 and Bdim7 voicings).
- Harmonize melody/block chords using this: right hand plays close-position or drop-2 voicings alternating major 6th and diminished-derived chords for chromatic inner movement and color.
- Focus on swing: syncopated eighth-note rhythms, accents on &s, and locking with the left hand.

**Purpose:** Develops sophisticated, flowing block-chord technique (inspired by Barry Harris/George Shearing style) for melodic statement with harmonic richness. **Suggested daily practice:** 20–25 minutes

### 4. Analyzing and Performing the "Fly Me to the Moon" Arrangement

- Review the complete medium-swing two-hand arrangement (AABA form).
- Key techniques:
  - Right-hand block chords via sixth diminished scale (focus on smooth connections and inner-voice chromaticism).

- Left-hand: roots typically on beat 1, chord shells or walking elements on 2/4 or &s, maintaining steady swing time.
- Swing rhythms: eighth-note swing feel, ghost notes, anticipations, and subtle syncopation for groove.
- Learn section by section: start with left-hand time/root foundation, add right-hand blocks, then combine.

**Purpose:** Integrates circle-of-fifths understanding, block-chord voicings, and swing rhythm into a complete, expressive solo piano performance. **Suggested daily practice:** 25–30 minutes

#### 5. Homework:

- Daily warm-up: II-V-I bebop scales in C major (and transpose to 2–3 other keys).
- Master the circle-of-fifths concept: play "Fly Me to the Moon" roots/shells in from memory.
- Learn the full arrangement, focusing on sixth diminished block chords in RH, supportive LH time-keeping, and authentic swing rhythms.
- Record a complete performance (head + optional short improv) for self-review or submission.

#### Why "Fly Me to the Moon"?

- Its clear diatonic circle-of-fifths progression (especially the opening descent) is an ideal vehicle for understanding harmonic motion and root cycles.
- The medium-swing feel allows deep work on swing rhythms, block chords, and time-keeping.
- It builds directly on recent lessons (bebop lines, voicings, walking bass/block integration) while introducing sixth diminished concepts for modern color.

#### Tips for Success

- Refer to the provided "Fly Me to the Moon" arrangement sheet, sixth diminished scale examples, and masterclass recording.
- Listen to classic versions (e.g., Frank Sinatra/Count Basie) for swing inspiration.
- Experiment — add your own block-chord variations or rhythmic twists; jazz is about personal expression!