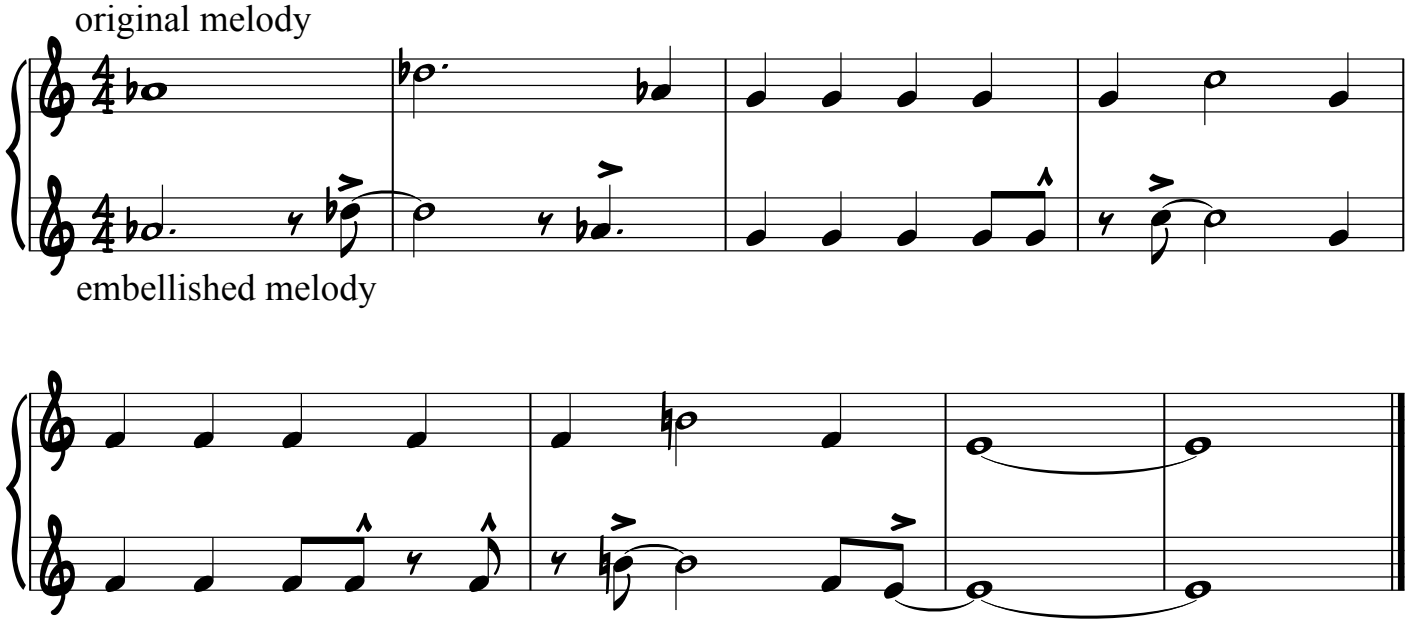
Embellishing Melodies

From Digging Deeper Video #134

When you think about it, around half of the songs in the Real Book (and most collections of jazz songs) are not actually jazz tunes. All the great music written by Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, Cole Porter or Rodgers & Hart . . . are not jazz songs. They are songs that jazz musicians like to *play,* but they aren't jazz songs. They need to be jazz-ified.

Many novice and intermediate jazz players mistakenly think that embellishing a song means to add more notes to it, to change the melody. To often, however, this just messes up a perfectly good melody, and does nothing to make the song any more jazz-like. Oops. Instead, we should be thinking about the RHYTHMIC side of things. Jazz is about syncopation. By inserting some syncopation to the music, we are inserting some jazz feel. Leave the poor melody notes alone, and work with the rhythm. Jazz glory awaits those who syncopate.

Below, the top stave is the song "All The Things You Are," the way you would see it written in the Real Book. The lower stave is the same melody, but with syncopations added. You can see visually (vertically) where the rhythmic differences are. Notice that ALL the syncopations involve a note being played EARLIER than origianlly written.



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