

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF EVERY PRACTICE SESSION!



Introducing Approach Notes

By Gunnar Mossblad

At some point every jazz student hears the phrase "you can play any note on any chord as long as you approach and resolve it the right way." This somewhat oversimplified statement alludes to a very important aspect of melodic development, the use of approach notes to construct credible improvised melodies that retain the integrity of the fundamental harmony. I make a point to emphasize the last part of the statement to young students, because they often misinterpret it to mean any note can be played without regard to the harmonic and melodic structures of the composition.

APPROACH NOTES

Approach notes are simply any note that is not a part of the fundamental harmony (diatonic or non-harmonic) that lead in an accepted formulaic way to a fundamental chord tone. There is nothing new about developing melody based on dissonant notes (ap-

proach notes) resolving to consonant notes (fundamental chord tones) in relationship to the harmony. Nicolas Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*, and Yusef Lateef's *Repository of Scales and Melodic Patterns* both examine intervallic relationships as a way to develop melody. Further, entire improvisational methods have been developed based on this consonant-dissonant relationship of notes in a melodic. George Russell's *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization for Improvisation*, David Liebman's *A Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody*, and Shelton Berg's *Jazz Improvisation: The Goal Note Method* are just a few of the published titles that address the art of improvisation in this way.

The development of an improvised melody that has more color (or dissonance) while retaining a strong theoretical credibility is a challenge for a young student of jazz. The student must first understand basic harmonic analysis, chord scale relationships

the other 6 keys. Minor 3rds cycle through 4 keys at a time, requiring 3 exercises to work through all 12 keys, and tritones cycle through 2 keys at the time requiring 6 exercises.

The first approach notes I present are the resolution of diatonic upper partials (7, 9, 11, 13th) of a chord. It is simply approaching the fundamental notes of a chord from the diatonic upper partial located a major or minor second about the appropriate note. The 9 resolves to the 1 (tonic), the 4 (11th) to the 3, the 6 (13th) to the 5, and so forth. After the student can hear the basic approach to the tonality, the exercises can be expanded to include the 9, 11, and 13 as fundamental tonalities. Notice that the fundamental harmony is on the stronger beats of the measure, and the descending form is simply the scale.

At this point the student should understand the concept of approach notes, and is ready to develop their own exercises using two or more of the above combination as well as applying the approach notes to phrases. Example 7 shows how interesting a traditional jazz quote can become by applying some of the above approach notes.

At some point, the student will be ready for exercises that utilize larger intervallic formulas in complex combinations, but that is a other topic, so I'll save that for next time.

I hope these few beginning exercises demonstrate the importance of studying this concept of melodic development. Approaching the fundamental harmony through both diatonic and non-harmonic notes in a logical but creative manner is a vital skill of the modern improviser that can lead to a very unique, individual improvisational style. §

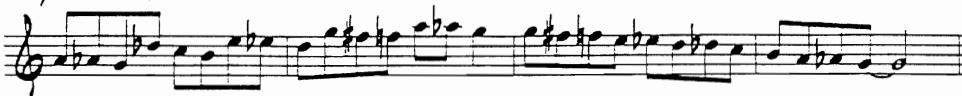
Exercises 4, 5, and 6

These exercises are double chromatic notes from above and below each note of a chord. Then a combination of these two exercises.

4A) G7



4B) G7



4C)



5A) G7



5B) G7



5C)



6A) G7



Exercise 7

7A) - ORIGINAL G



7B) - VARIATION G

