



CHAPTER EIGHT

Playing “Outside”

- *Sequences*
- *Playing a Half Step Away*
- *Playing a Tritone Away*
- *Playing Scales to Get Outside*
- *Some Piano Stuff*
- *The Chromatic Scale*
- *Be Brave, Go Ahead and Play Outside*

One reason that musicians such as Joe Henderson, Woody Shaw, McCoy Tyner, Bobby Hutcherson, David Liebman, and Mulgrew Miller are greatly admired is that they not only have mastered the art of playing changes, but also know how to play “outside” the changes.

Playing “outside” on chord changes can mean several different things, including playing notes that aren’t in the chord, stretching the length of one chord into another, or playing something recognizable but in a different key. It can also mean playing “free,” or atonal, with no chord structure at all. Musicians such as Anthony Braxton and Cecil Taylor fall into this category, and their music is “outside” the scope of this book.

Bear in mind that what’s considered outside is subjective and changeable. What you hear as “outside” someone else will hear as “inside,” and vice versa. Bird was considered “out” by many musicians in the 1940s, as was Coltrane in the 1960s. Quite a few musicians still hear Coltrane’s last few recordings as being “out.” Cecil Taylor has been recording for about 40 years, and is still considered “out” by many musicians.

Many of the best examples of “outside” playing are really *bitonality*, or two tonalities at the same time.¹ The pianist or guitarist may be ‘comping in one key, while the soloist goes outside and plays in another. To make this sound good, and not like a bunch of wrong notes, you must outline the second tonality clearly and play *with authority*. If you’re the least bit wimpy about it, it’s going to sound wrong. Someone once described playing outside as making the “wrong” notes sound “right.” As for a definition of the difference between “right” and “wrong” notes, remember this: *You can play any note on any chord. If it sounds “right” to you, then it is. If it sounds “wrong” to you, then it is.*

Figure 8-1



Figure 8-2

G-7

Play **figure 8-1**. Sounds like A major, right? Now play **figure 8-2**, the same phrase but played over a piano voicing for G-7. An A major phrase played over a G-7 chord is bitonality. This is from Woody Shaw’s solo on his tune “Rosewood.”² As shown here, this example doesn’t do justice to the music at all; the dissonance is much too harsh. You have to listen to Woody’s recording to really hear how it sounds.

Let’s examine several ways to get “outside.”

¹ “Tonality” and “tonal center” are alternative terms for “key,” although they are somewhat broader in meaning.

² Woody Shaw, *Rosewood*, Columbia, 1977.

Sequences

As I mentioned in Chapter 6, sequences are a good way to get outside the changes, because the ear picks up on their internal structure and has something to hang onto while the harmony becomes unclear. **Figure 8-3** shows a fragment of one of Mulgrew Miller’s best solos, on “Wingspan,”³ which is printed in its entirety at the end of Chapter 6. Mulgrew plays a four-note figure on an FΔ chord, transposes it to A♭, and then sequences it, following the cycle of fifths, to D♭ and G♭. He then goes up a half step and descends a G triad—D, B, and G—the 11th, 9th, and 7th of the written A-7 chord. Mulgrew starts inside, goes outside, and then comes back inside—a common approach when playing outside. Playing a sequence to go outside, and then coming back inside gives structure to your solo and makes it sound as though you know what you’re doing. Think *inside-outside-inside*.

Figure 8-3

The musical notation shows a sequence of notes in 4/4 time. The first measure is over an FΔ chord and contains the notes F, A, C, and E. The second measure is over an A♭ chord and contains the notes A♭, C, E♭, and G. The third measure is over a D♭ chord and contains the notes D♭, F, A♭, and C. The fourth measure is over a G♭ chord and contains the notes G♭, B♭, D♭, and F. The fifth measure is over an A-7 chord and contains the notes D, B, and G. Dashed lines below the staff indicate the sequence is 'inside' for the first two measures, 'outside' for the next two measures, and 'inside' for the final measure.

Why don’t notes that are outside the harmony sound “wrong”? A familiar set of chord changes establishes a dynamic structure, and your ear expects certain things to happen. Let’s call this *predictability*. After you’ve heard “Autumn Leaves” a few dozen times, you expect that C-7 will be followed by F7. Playing a sequence does the same thing. It establishes structure, and sets up your ear to expect the sequence to continue, just as it expects C-7 to be followed by F7 in “Autumn Leaves.” As long as the notes of the sequence remain part of the harmony, the music is “inside.” When the sequence diverges from the chords, the result is “outside” harmony. Let’s call this *surprise*. The written harmony and the sequence sound “right” by themselves, even though the sequence may go outside the written harmony. They don’t sound “wrong” played together, they sound bitonal. *Inside-outside-inside. Predictability-surprise.*

³ Mulgrew Miller, *Wingspan*, Landmark, 1987.

Later in the same solo, Mulgrew plays a descending sequence to achieve the same effect, as shown in **figure 8-4**. In the first bar, Mulgrew plays a four-note motif, descending a G triad—D, B, G, D—the 11th, 9th, 7th and 11th again, of A-7. He then outlines a B-7 chord—A, F#, D, B—the 7th, 5th, 3rd, and root of B-7—all the notes still from the key of G implied by the A-7 chord symbol. Mulgrew has started a four-note sequence, and is still inside the changes. In the second bar, Mulgrew continues the sequence down a 4th, outlining an F#-7 chord, with a C# that is outside the written D7 chord. He then outlines an E major triad. The G# is not really outside of D7, but is the #11 of the chord. In the

Figure 8-4

The musical notation shows a descending sequence of notes in 4/4 time. The first bar contains the notes D4, B3, G3, and D4. The second bar contains the notes A3, F#3, D3, and B2. The third bar contains the notes G#2, E2, C#2, and G#2. The fourth bar contains the notes F#2, D2, B1, and F#2. The fifth bar contains the notes E2, C#2, G#2, and E2. The sixth bar contains the notes D2, B1, G#2, and D2. The chord changes indicated below the staff are: G major, B-7, F#-7, E major, Cb major, and Gb major.



Joe Henderson

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Figure 8-5

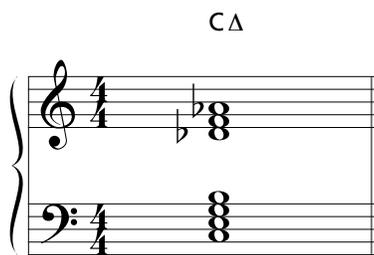


Figure 8-6

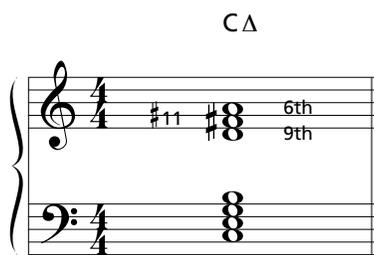
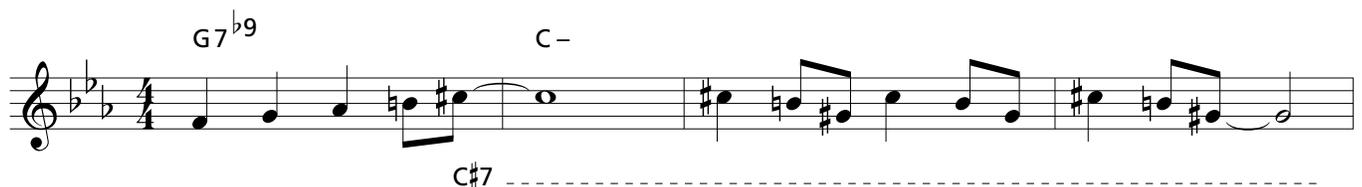


Figure 8-7



third bar, Mulgrew outlines $C\flat$ and $G\flat$ major triads, all the notes belonging to the written $A\flat-7$ chord. The first note of each four-note motif starts a 4th lower than the last one—D, A, E, B, $G\flat$, $D\flat$ —clockwise around the cycle of fifths. That $C\sharp$ in the second bar, the only outside note in the phrase, catches your ear. It sticks out, but not like a sore thumb. Remember, *inside-outside-inside*.

Playing a Half Step Away

It's very common to play a half step away from a chord to get outside. Playing up or down a half-step is popular because it creates the most dissonance, and dissonance is mostly what playing outside is all about. This technique is relatively easy. Because the notes are only a half step away, the ear can easily relate the line to its actual harmonic base and can conceive the logic in the dissonance. If you try playing a half step away, don't be tentative! Play it with authority or it will sound wrong. Many of the best players weave outside material into tonal ("inside") material by playing a half step or whole step away, achieving very graceful "side stepping," another term used for outside playing.

Figure 8-5 shows a $D\flat$ triad played over $C\Delta$. Even though C and $D\flat$ are right next to each other, this is about as outside as you can get. All three notes of the $D\flat$ triad sound extremely dissonant. Try playing each one over the $C\Delta$ chord—first $D\flat$, then F, then $A\flat$ —and you'll hear some serious dissonance. Now play figure 8-6, a D major triad over the $C\Delta$ chord. D is a half step further away from C than $D\flat$, but sounds very inside. All three notes in a D triad sound cool—D is the 9th of C, $F\sharp$ is the #11, and A is the 6th.

Figure 8-7 shows a fragment of Joe Henderson's solo on Horace Silver's "Nutville."⁴ Joe plays four notes on the $G7\flat 9$ chord, and then instead of playing C- he moves the tonality up a half step, playing on $C\sharp 7$.

⁴ Horace Silver, *The Cape Verdean Blues*, Blue Note, 1965.

Figure 8-8 is from Freddie Hubbard's solo on "Hub Tones."⁵ Instead of playing on the written four bars of B \flat 7, Freddie plays B \flat 7 for only two bars, then dips a half step below to A7 for most of the next two bars before returning to B \flat 7 just before the chord changes to E \flat 7. *Inside-outside-inside.*

Figure 8-8

The musical notation for Figure 8-8 is in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff shows a melodic line starting with a whole rest in the first bar, followed by eighth and quarter notes. Above the first two bars is the chord label B \flat 7. Above the next two bars is the chord label A7, with a dashed line underneath. The second staff continues the melodic line, ending with a whole note. Above the final bar is the chord label E \flat 7.

Playing a Tritone Away

Playing tritone substitution is another way to get outside.⁶ Like the last example, **figure 8-9** is also from Freddie Hubbard's solo on "Hub Tones." Freddie plays a phrase that looks and sounds like A7.⁷ A7 is the tritone substitution of E \flat 7, the written chord. Freddie also stretches A7 two beats into B \flat 7, the next chord.

Figure 8-9

The musical notation for Figure 8-9 is in 4/4 time. It consists of one staff showing a melodic line. Above the first two bars is the chord label E \flat 7. Above the next two bars is the chord label B \flat 7, with a dashed line underneath. Above the final bar is the chord label A7.

If you asked Freddie what he was thinking at the time, he'd probably say "I don't remember." Your goal is to practice and internalize everything until you don't have to think while improvising. Instead, you just hear it and play it. To get to this point requires hundreds, maybe thousands, of hours in the woodshed. Remember Bird's words: "*Learn the changes, then forget them.*"

⁵ Freddie Hubbard, *Hub Tones*, Blue Note, 1962.

⁶ Tritone substitution will be covered thoroughly in Chapter 13. Very briefly, it means replacing a V chord with another V chord a tritone away.

⁷ The A \flat is the passing note in the A bebop dominant scale.

Some Piano Stuff

Pianists: When going outside, you have a built-in advantage that other instrumentalists don't have. You have two hands, one to play the written tonality, and the other to go outside. **Figure 8-13** shows one of many ways you can do this. The right-hand phrase outlines the written C-6 chord. The left hand starts with diatonic 4ths in C minor, and then continues the 4ths chromatically, outside of C minor. Your ear hears this as bitonality:

- One hand is playing in the key of C minor.
- The other hand is playing in the "key of 4ths."

The "key of 4ths" may sound weird, but think about this: Playing in a key sets up a certain dynamic, and certain expectations. After you've played C, D, E, and F, your ear expects G, A, B, and C (the rest of the C major scale) to follow. Playing in 4ths sets up a similar kind of expectation. After you've played two or three 4th chords in a row, your ear expects more 4th chords, whether they are from the written chord changes or not.

Figure 8-13

The musical score for Figure 8-13 is written in 4/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) begins with a C-6 chord (C4, E♭4, G4, B♭4) and then plays a melodic line: C4 (quarter), E♭4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), B♭4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F5 (quarter), G5 (quarter), A5 (quarter), B5 (quarter), C6 (quarter). A triplet of eighth notes (C5, D5, E5) is marked above the first three notes of the second measure. The left hand (bass clef) plays a sequence of 4th chords: C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F5 (quarter), G5 (quarter), A5 (quarter), B5 (quarter), C6 (quarter). The chords are played in a way that creates a bitonality between the two hands.

The Chromatic Scale

In terms of playing on chords, the chromatic scale "belongs to every chord, belongs to no chord." If you play a chromatic run on any chord, it won't sound "wrong." But if you do this a lot, you'll end up sounding very boring, and will gain a reputation as not being able to play the changes. Nevertheless, chromatic runs, because they are harmonically ambiguous, are a way to get outside the changes.

Figure 8-14 contains a portion of Freddie Hubbard's solo on "Hub Tones."¹¹ Freddie plays eight notes of the chromatic scale in the first and second bars, ending on A, a "wrong" note on a B \flat 7 chord. Having fudged the tonality, he then sequences a three-note pattern, suggesting the keys of A, F, and B \flat . All this over the first five bars of a blues in B \flat .

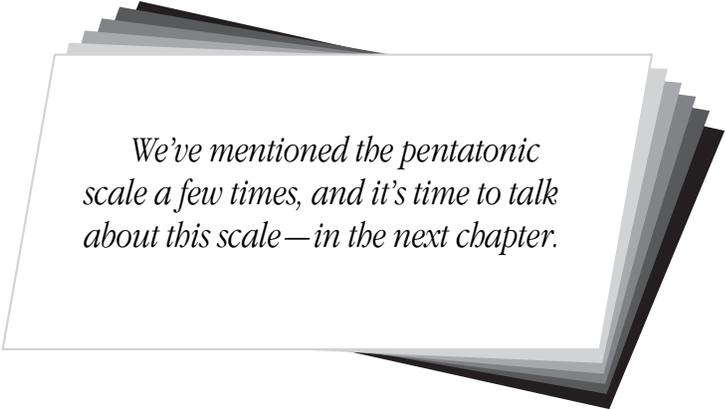
Figure 8-14

The figure shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a B \flat 7 chord. The first two bars feature an eight-note chromatic scale run: B \flat 4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, and B \flat 3. A dashed line labeled "chromatic" spans these notes. The third bar contains a three-note sequence: A4, G4, and F4, with a dashed line labeled "A Δ " underneath. The second staff starts with an F Δ chord. The first two bars of this staff feature a three-note sequence: F4, E4, and D4, with a dashed line labeled "F Δ " underneath. The third bar of the second staff features a three-note sequence: E \flat 4, D4, and C4, with a dashed line labeled "E \flat 7" above and "B \flat Δ " below.

¹¹ Freddie Hubbard, *Hub Tones*, Blue Note, 1962.

Be Brave, Go Ahead and Play Outside

An easy way to start playing outside is to do so on modal tunes. These types of tunes provide lots of space on a given chord to establish the tonality, take it outside, and then bring it back to the changes. Also since modal tunes have only one or two chords, the inherent boredom of static harmony creates a need for dissonance. Tunes such as “Passion Dance,”¹² “So What,”¹³ “Little Sunflower,”¹⁴ and “Impressions”¹⁵ are ideal for playing outside.



We've mentioned the pentatonic scale a few times, and it's time to talk about this scale—in the next chapter.

¹² McCoy Tyner, *The Real McCoy*, Blue Note, 1968.

¹³ Miles Davis, *Kind Of Blue*, Columbia, 1959.

¹⁴ Freddie Hubbard, *Backlash*, Atlantic, 1966.

¹⁵ John Coltrane, *Impressions*, MCA/Impulse, 1962.