

INTRODUCTION

The original title of this book was: “Harmonic Possibilities of the Improvised Line”. An intriguing concept. Does an improvised line, i.e. a jazz solo, actually *have* harmonic possibilities? And if so, what are they? Isn’t it enough to know the correct scales to go with the chords in whatever song you are playing, and then just let your creativity take over? Or can a melody being spontaneously improvised over chord changes actually go one step further than that? Can the modern jazz soloist create melodies that really reflect and embody the harmonies of the chords in the tune he is improvising over? Can he develop his melodies based on extended *harmonic* creativity, chord substitutions, etc? Is it possible for the player to really *get inside* the harmony of a tune and achieve real harmonic *and* melodic control of *every note he is playing*?

Well, yes. It can be done. And this book is being written to light the way.

In my last book, *The Serious Jazz Practice Book*, I tried to put forth a guide to getting just about every possible combination of *melodic* materials under the fingers of the modern jazz soloist. To give the player a vast and varied musical vocabulary to be used for the creation of *melody*.

But *harmony* is different from melody. The harmony of a tune is part of its structure and foundation. Harmony happens, chords change, over time, at specific points in time, and the modern jazz soloist must be aware of those points and be sure to adjust his spontaneity, his creativity, his improvisation accordingly. There are so many ways to do this, and variations upon variations, but with dedication and study I believe that it can be mastered. (To get started with this book, you should have at least a basic knowledge of scales, modes, and chord formation.)

A very important thing to remember, in my opinion, is that playing and improvising over chord changes is first of all an exercise in *correctness*. The *craft* of it comes first; the *art* comes later. If the soloist is not fully conscious of the prevailing harmony and (at least) the correct notes that can (and should!) be played against it, the music will definitely suffer. I think musicians should have to take kind of a jazz version of the Hippocratic Oath like doctors are required to do before they are allowed to practice: “First, do no harm.” Well, as long as you are not playing any seriously *wrong* notes, you will be doing no musical harm! Once you have the *correct* thing down, *then* you can be more adventurous, creative and inspired! As John Coltrane once said, “The more you know, the more you can create.” And I would venture to say that he knew what he was talking about!

Some might say that there is no such thing as a *wrong* note, there are only wrong ways to *play* them – wrong places to *put* them – wrong ways to insert them melodically into the harmonic structure one happens to be improvising on at the moment. And there is a lot of truth in that.

But in any case, a rock-solid knowledge of the *exact notes* that make up *every chord you are likely to see* as a jazz player is a great foundation on which to build solos of real and lasting musical value.

Another – and probably the *most* important thing to remember – is that, harmonically speaking, *everything is interrelated*. Every (major) scale has 7 notes, and 7 modes, which means that every note of every scale is part of 6 other scales, and (if you multiply 6 times 7) 42 other modes! And that is not even counting the non-diatonic scales, of which there are plenty!

And of course, every note can be part of a great number of chords. And the degree of the chord that that note is functioning as (along with the type of chord itself) will determine what I like to call its *harmonic color*. I tend to think of the basic tones of a chord...root, third, fifth, seventh... as the primary colors, and the ninth, eleventh, thirteenth, and various alterations (b5, #5, b9, #9) as the more exotic harmonic shades! But the interesting thing is that *every note has the same number of possible uses, harmonically speaking, as every other!* The relationships, relative to each possible chord and bass note, will stay the same!

We are going to go over a LOT of harmonic possibilities in this book, and I hope that it will greatly increase your knowledge and understanding not only of your particular instrument but of music and jazz playing in general. Have fun!

NOTE: For those of you who have *The Serious Jazz Practice Book* (or those who haven't got it... yet!) I would recommend a thorough review of the Diatonic 7th Chords and Arpeggio sections—in all keys—as a prelude to, or accompaniment for, this book.

ANOTHER NOTE: For those readers who would like to get right into practicing and playing, you are permitted to skip the painstaking analysis and music theory contained in Section One and proceed directly to Sections Two, Three and Four. But I would definitely recommend that you come back and peruse this first section at some later date. I think you will find it quite interesting and informative. Fascinating, even. If I do say so myself! - B.F.

Let's get started by taking a look at the various harmonic possibilities of one note. Let's see how many different things a "C" can be!