

CHROMATICISM/ NON-DIATONIC SCALES

How to play OUTSIDE the stated tonality

By DAVID LIEBMAN



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INTRODUCTION

The most common question asked of me by students concerns how to use pitches outside the stated tonality. Is there a system of thought which gives order to these choices, or is it just chance? Also, is there a method for developing one's ear and technique to facilitate these types of melodic lines? Over the years and after much trial and error, I have devised a system to be used in order that an interested student can begin these explorations on his own. In general, we refer to this type of harmonic thinking as a "chromatic approach."

Underlying chromaticism is the concept of superimposition: playing in one key over or against another; this is similar to the idea that an altered G7 (b9 for example) has more tension than just a plain G7, or that a C $\overset{\flat}{6}_9$ carries more tension than a C triad. Likewise, in chromaticism, varying degrees of tension can be predicted and therefore used artistically in a spontaneous, improved fashion.

Obviously, there are many complex variables that make a chromatic approach viable which can only be alluded to in this text: suitable phrasing and articulative nuances, the proper linking stylistically of melody and harmony, the use of a clear tonal center at critical junctures to insure that the tension/release principles are observed and more. These topics will be included in a full scale book on the subject which I am co-authoring with pianist Richard Beirach. Suffice to say, the point of this text and recording is to introduce the student to the use of chromatic principles in the area of choosing pitches.

CONTEXT

Although a chromatic approach can be used to some extent on a series of moving chord changes as in most standard tunes, this style is most suitable when playing in two related harmonic idioms: modalism and pedal point.

Modalism implies the extended use of a scale (mode) as the harmonic underpinning for creating melodic lines. The assumption is that the improviser uses the stated scale as the primary material to base his lines upon. Of course, passing tones between scale pitches are expected also. Pedal point playing is yet one step further away from tonal anchors. In this case, only the root is given without necessarily a scale or chord. Instead of D dorian, the improvising is based on D pedal, meaning that the harmonies and lines which spontaneously occur will be loosely centered around that tonal center. The D pedal could sound harmonically many ways at any point of the improvisation: minor, major, diminished, etc. In actuality, when an experienced pedal point musician improvises along these lines, he traverses many keys and scale qualities. But always in the back of his mind, you can discern at times a clear statement of the agreed upon root. This is necessary for obtaining a balance between tension and release, which is the goal of any artistic statement.

PURPOSE OF THIS EXOTIC SCALE RECORDING

This recording is not meant to be directly useful in the sense of adding a new scale or pattern to one's playing in the immediate sense. It offers a suggested methodology for practicing the idea of superimposition and pedal point harmonies. In a sense, it can be seen as an ear and mind training tool enabling the curious student to begin hearing and thinking more freely than in purely diatonic playing. It is not meant for everyone, because the sounds realized are definitely more dissonant than normal and take time getting used to. It is important that the student realizes that dissonance/consonance have no value judgement outside one's own aesthetic system - there is no good, bad, right or wrong - only how and when to use all the available choices. What is meant when referring to someone as a "complete" artist is that he (or she) is not ignorant of the possibilities inherent in his art; and his judgements on when and how to use something are based on clear intellectual and aesthetic decisions.

The examples on this recording are not exhaustive or complete. The idea is to stimulate the student into discovering his or her own. This recording can be seen as an intermediary step between orthodox modal playing and chromatic superimposition. Every example is related to the key of F, so a clear tonal center can still be realized. The next stage would be to shift the tonal centers around. The result is then polytonality, or several keys juxtaposed against, with or alongside each other. The ultimate goal is to hear all 12 notes equally and intervallically at any given moment against the original pedal point.

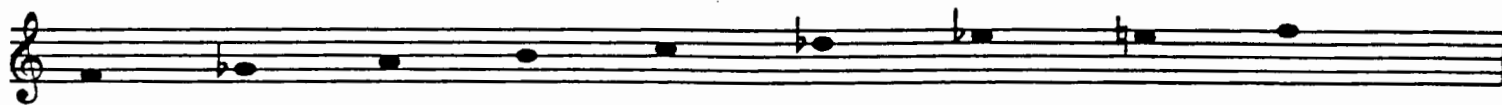
OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS

- Diatonicism and the varieties of pedal point chromaticism are similar to the extent that in the end, the tension and release balance needed work the same way. The difference is the language used.
- Harmony becomes less specific, more general and is thought of in terms of color, shapes and densities.
- Melodic lines must have a strong character and flow (shape); this is especially true in chromaticism because these lines are often in keys other than stated in the accompanying harmony.
- One must develop the ability to hear two or more different tonalities at the same time, which necessitates extensive grounding in the normal uses of tonality; this is basically the bebop language. In other words, one must be able to walk before running.

Section A Scale Formations & Derived Chords

Example 1

Terminology: 1) 1/2 1 1/2 1 1/2 1 1/2 1 1/2
 2) 1 b2 3 #4 5 b6 b7 b7 8
 3)



Common Chords: 1) $F\Delta 7$ 2) $F\Delta 7_{b5}^{\#5}$ 3) $F7_{b5}^{\#5}$ 4) $F7_{b13}^{b9}$ 5) $\frac{F\# - 7}{F}$
 6) $\frac{F\# \bar{\Delta} 7_{b5}^{\#5}}{F}$ 7) $\frac{A -}{F}$ 8) $\frac{A}{F}$ 9) $\frac{A+}{F}$ 10) $\frac{B}{F}$ 11) $\frac{B7_{b9}^{b5}}{F}$
 * $F\# \bar{\Delta} 7_{b5}^{\#5}$ = $F\#$ Major, minor/Major 7th, $b5$ ($b5$ is the same as $\#4$ and $\#11$)
 12) $\frac{C \bar{\Delta} 7_{b5}}{F}$ 13) $\frac{C\bar{O}7}{F}$ 14) $\frac{Db7_{b5}^{\#5}}{F}$ 15) $\frac{Db \bar{\Delta} 7}{F}$ 16) $\frac{Db\Delta 7_{b5}^{\#5}}{F}$
 17) $\frac{Eb - 7_{b5}^{\#5}}{F}$ 18) $\frac{Eb\bar{O}7}{F}$

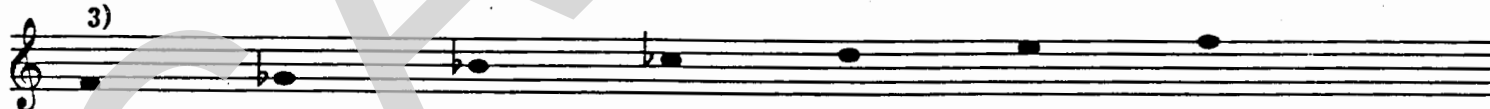
Other Voicings:

A) B) C) D) E) F) G)



Example 2

Terminology: 1) 1/2 2 1/2 1 1/2 1 1/2
 2) 1 b2 4 b5 6 7 8
 3)



Common Chords: 1) $\frac{Gb\Delta 7_{b5}^{\#5}}{F}$ 2) $\frac{Gb7_{b5}^{\#5}}{F}$ 3) $\frac{Bb}{F}$ 4) $\frac{B \bar{\Delta} 7_{b5}}{F}$ 5) $\frac{B -}{F}$ 6) $\frac{D+}{F}$

Other Voicings:

A) B) C) D) E) F) G)

