

the Jazz
HARMONY
· B O O K ·

A COURSE IN ADDING CHORDS TO MELODIES

by

David Berkman

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INTRODUCTION

Today, the jazz world is in a particularly rhythm-focused period. Of course, interest in rhythm is nothing new—jazz has always been about rhythm. Swinging, grooving, ‘over-the-bar playing’ or cross rhythms, African influences, Afro-Cuban clave and samba—all these rhythmic elements have been shaping jazz since its birth around the beginning of the 20th century. Harmony and melody have always been, and continue to be, a significant part of that story as well, but recently, the focus of many younger musicians has been rhythmic above all else and innovations in rhythm, particularly improvising over odd meter and mixed meter forms have been driving most of the innovations in contemporary jazz of the last 15 years.

This was not always the case. Many jazz players who came of age in the 60s and 70s played mostly, if not entirely in 4/4, 3/4 and 6/8. It’s important for younger players to take note of the fact that the musicians that shaped and developed jazz, players from Lester Young and Charlie Parker to John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Thelonious Monk and countless others played entirely in these meters. (That is not to say that there weren’t experiments in different meters, from Don Ellis to Dave Brubeck and many jazz fusion players in the 70s and beyond, but this was, by and large, an exception to the general trend among mainstream jazz musicians.)

From the 40s through the 60s, rhythms in jazz evolved and changed but it’s probably fair to say that harmony was leading the way. The harmonic innovations of bebop musicians (the use of chromaticism in scales, the superimposition of chords, secondary dominants and tritone substitutions, the use of more exotic scales and emphasis on unusual sounding altered tensions on chords) were followed by the harmonic innovations of modal music, Coltrane and “Giant Steps” chord progressions, free jazz players and the open-ended and mysterious playing of the late 60s Miles Davis Quintet. Players like Herbie Hancock and McCoy Tyner re-defined the harmonic palette of jazz piano with influences drawn from 20th Century classical music and African pentatonic scales.

Well, so be it. Time marches on and tastes change. Personally, as a jazz pianist and composer, I continue to be fascinated by harmonic color: from the whole tone flourishes and chains of secondary dominants of Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell and Art Tatum; the passing chords, parallel voicings and moving inner voices that resolve through altered tensions to chord tones in great players such as Hank Jones, Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett; the diminished and near-diminished sounds you hear in Herbie Hancock’s playing, as well as the world of classically-influenced harmony drawing on Ravel, Bartok, Hindemith and others. I am, of course, also fascinated by rhythm, but for a while now I’ve been noticing that my students are out of touch with the subtle manipulation of harmony that has been the stock and trade of most great jazz pianists, guitarists and arrangers of the past.

One reason for this is that most students first encounter standards in fake books nowadays. They often play with (other young) players who have also learned standards from books. Learning standards from fake books leads toward more agreement about the changes of the tune—young players play the changes they’ve learned and they play them more or less the same way every time they play the tune, chorus after chorus.

CHAPTER 1 – THE FIRST CIRCLE: I, IV AND V7 CHORDS



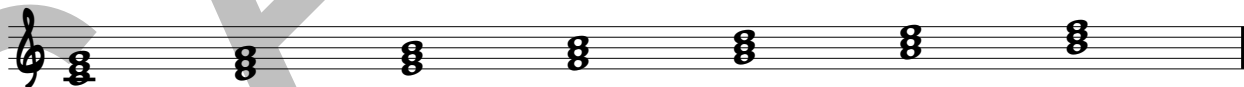
I like to think of harmonizing as a process that can be studied through an ever widening set of concentric circles, each circle expressing some key part of harmony, or a process of harmonization. The first circle is the most basic, central harmony—the simplest most elemental way a melody can be harmonized using western musical tonal principles. As we move outward from the center circle, we add harmonic possibilities, and have a larger and larger palette of chords available to use in our harmonizations of melodies.

Creating Chords in a Key

Before we can talk about basic harmonization, we have to create the chords that we use to harmonize. We start with a major scale.



We can create chords built on each one of the degrees of a major scale. To make a triad (a 3-note chord) play the first note of a major scale, then skip the second note, play the third note, skip the fourth and play the fifth. (This chord is called the I chord because it is built on the first degree of the scale.) In a similar way, you can build a triad on the second degree of the scale by playing the second, fourth and sixth notes of the major scale (called the ii chord). To make a chord built on the third note of the major scale you'd play the third, fifth and seventh note of the scale. In this way, working upward, playing alternating notes of the scale, you can build triads starting on each note of the scale.



Because the major scale is not symmetrical, meaning it is composed of both half steps and whole steps that don't occur in an even pattern, these chords are not all the same type of chord. The I, IV and V chords are major triads (three note chords comprised of the interval of a major third between the bottom two notes and the interval of a minor third between the top two notes), the ii, iii and vi chords are minor triads (three note chords comprised of the interval of a minor third between the bottom two notes and the interval of a major third between the top two notes) and the vii chord is a diminished triad (a three note chord comprised of two minor thirds). Following common practice, I use upper case roman numerals for major chords (and augmented) and lower

(CD TRACK 7)

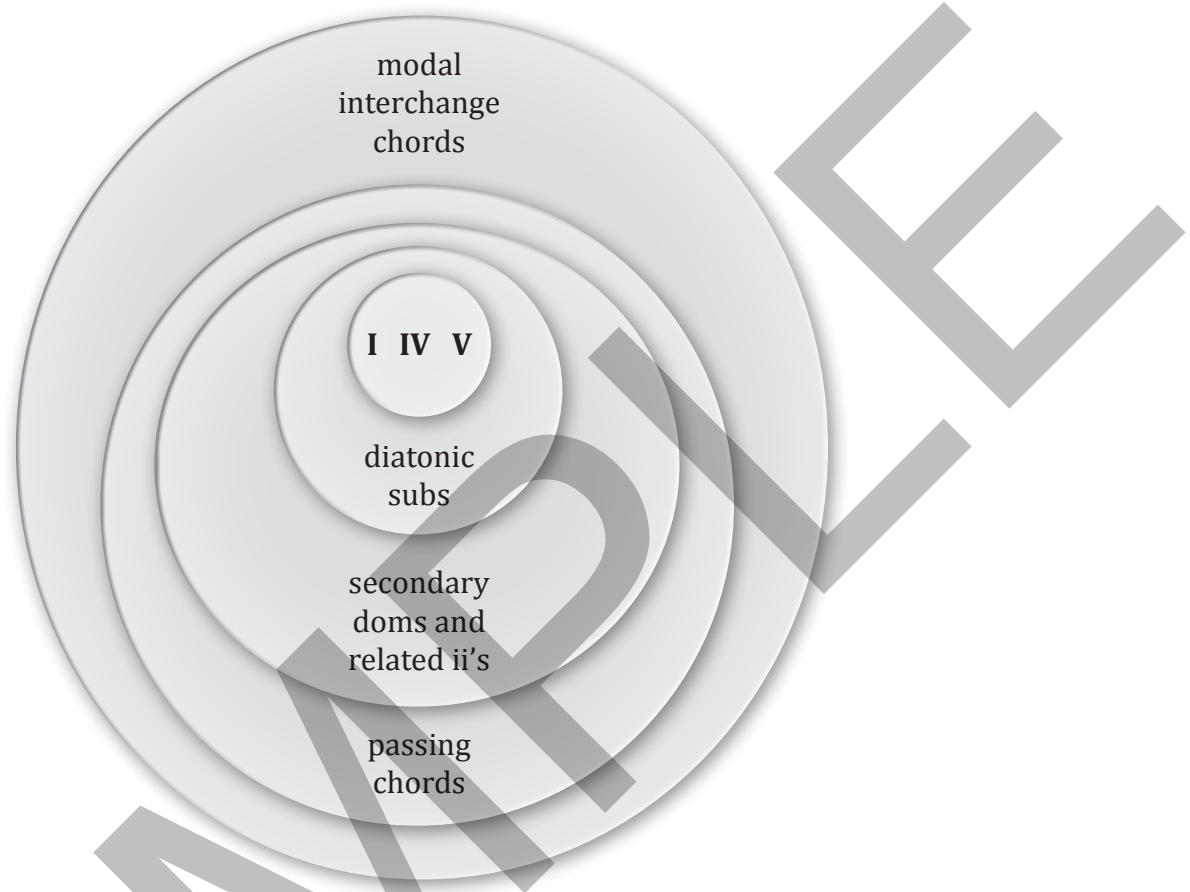
8bΔ9 D7#9 G-9 D-9 F-13(9) Bb7(9) EbΔ13(9) C7(9#11) C-13(9 11) F7(9b13)

7 BbΔ9/D G-9 C7(9#11) F-7 Bb7(9) EbΔ9 E-7b5 A7b9 D-9 F-9 Bb9 Bb7(9)

13 EbΔ7 E-7b5 A7b9 D-9 D7#9 G-9 G7b9 C-9 F7b9 D7b9/F#

19 G-11 C13(9) C9(13) C-9 F13 F7b9 BbΔ6

CHAPTER 6 – THE FIFTH CIRCLE: MODAL INTERCHANGE CHORDS



A quick review: we started with the first circle that contained I, IV and V chords, the basic elemental chords that give us the concept of tonic, subdominant and dominant function. The second circle of harmony added the rest of the chords built from the major scale, chords that had different harmonic colors, but still behaved in tonic, subdominant and dominant ways. We added a little more nuance here by adding seventh chord harmony, inversions and even more harmonic color by adding the available tensions to the chord tones of these chords. The third circle gave us secondary dominants and their related ii-7 chords, chords that function as dominants and sub-dominants leading to different diatonic chords and create cadences that resolve to chords other than the I chord.

Still, these chords have a clear harmonic function, targeting (or “tonicizing” as it is sometimes called) various diatonic 7ths. The fourth circle, passing chords, gave us a larger palette of leading chords, chords that resolve to target chords (which now can include any chords of the tune, not just diatonic 7ths) by half step or whole step. Some of these passing chords are diatonic, but they needn’t be, and we also saw some new harmony in the form of passing diminished 7ths, but all of these chords have clear functions: either leading to a target chord (somewhat in the manner of a secondary dominant although by half step instead of by fourth) or acting as a delaying chord that resolves to the I chord (in the case of the color chord use of the I diminished chord.) The

(CD TRACK 98)

IN PASSING

D7#9/F#
 5
 9 **B^b DIM⁷**
 14 **D⁷/A** **E⁷ALT/G#**
 18 **G⁷**
 23 **G⁻⁷**
 27 **D7#9/F#** 16 **B^b DIM⁷** 4 **D⁷/A** 2
 30 **E⁷ALT/G#** 4 **G⁷** 3 **G⁻⁷** 4

PARALLEL DIMINISHED CHORDS (MAJOR TRIADS + FLAT 2)

This technique continues into the Last A section, using a few different parallel diminished voicings, and then mixing these diminished sounds.

PARALLEL DIMINISHED CHORDS (DOM 7 + #9) DIMINISHED SOUNDS CONTINUE (MIXED STRUCTURES)

These instances of exact transposition give an open feeling to the arrangement, a feeling of unpredictability. They allow Hank to leave the normal chord progression for several bars at a time, harmonizing the melody in a particularly rich and colorful way, but without sacrificing the sense of logical connection between chords. We don't even feel that we've entirely left the key, since the parallel sounds are following a melody that is very much in the key of F. We hear the "out" harmony, but it resolves, a colorful moment that we hear as a logical extension of what he played earlier. (It's worth noting that Hank Jones uses exact transposition most extensively in the last A section of the piece, after he has played two earlier A sections that use more functional harmonic language.)

Now would be a good time to go back to one of the functional arrangements that you did in the first half of the book to see if you can use exact transposition in a few places in the same way that we saw above, increasing the harmonic color and creating a momentary chromatic section of your arrangement, without losing the overall sense of working within a compatible harmonic vocabulary for the piece. Try this repeatedly in your arrangements and re-harmonizations of standards or original compositions. (Again, for more ideas of compositional strategies, refer to "Appendix A: Tips for Composers.")