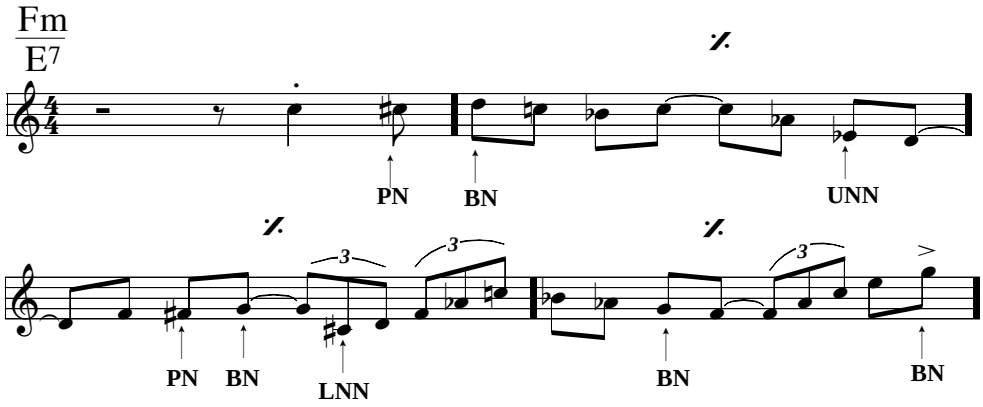
FOREIGN NOTES

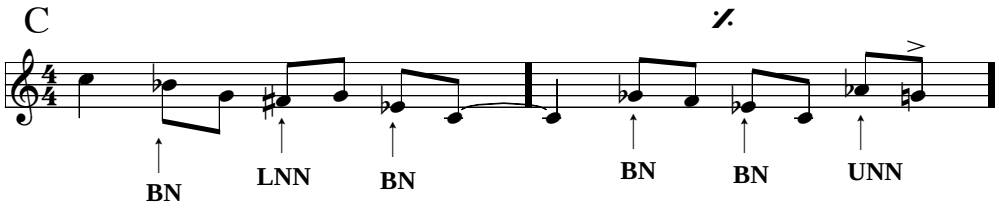
You may think that foreign notes are what you end up with after a holiday abroad. But in music, it means something quite different. Read on.

FOREIGN NOTES

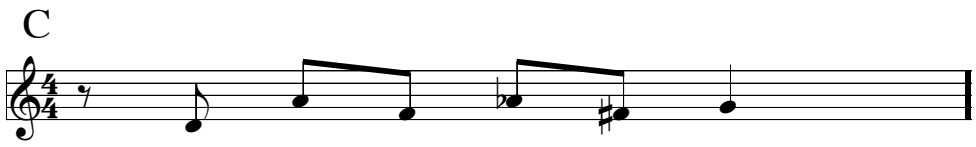
Using the scales as a basis for playing over chords does not rule out the inclusion of notes from outside the scale. Chromatic passing-notes (**PN**), upper and lower neighbouring notes (**UNN** and **LNN**) and blues notes (**BN**) can increase the choice of notes which can be used, as shown below:



Chromatic passing notes here are labelled in relation to the scale, not the chord. Note that the blues notes in this example do fall within this scale. An example of them being used as foreign notes outside of the scale would be this:

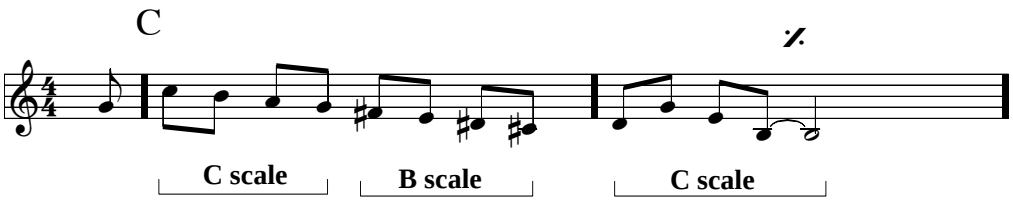


Lower neighbouring notes are usually a semitone below a note within the scale which occurs after a leap. In certain contexts, they can also be a tone below the note which gives it a more modal and less chromatic sound. Upper neighbouring notes are often a tone above the note, as this note falls within the same scale in most instances. They can also occur a semitone above as in the first example given above. To encircle a note and to put off playing it as long as possible, some players like to state the neighbouring notes a tone away and then a semitone away before playing the note in question. For example:



When you go beyond two consecutive foreign notes in the scale you are really delving into what is called *going outside* (ie. the key). I believe that the inclusion of scales in the symbols can offer a more reliable guide to the tonality than conventional complex chord symbols.

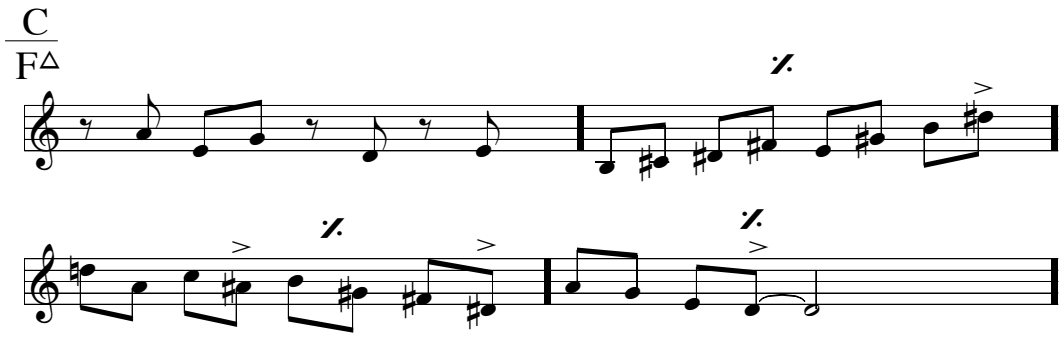
Where the chord changes are regular and spaced at, say, one every two bars at a medium to fast tempo, a few extraneous notes from a key that is a semitone above or below the actual key can again serve to delay the onset of particular notes, but approached from a different angle than that shown in the previous example. A touch of exotic colour can thus be introduced into a line, like so:



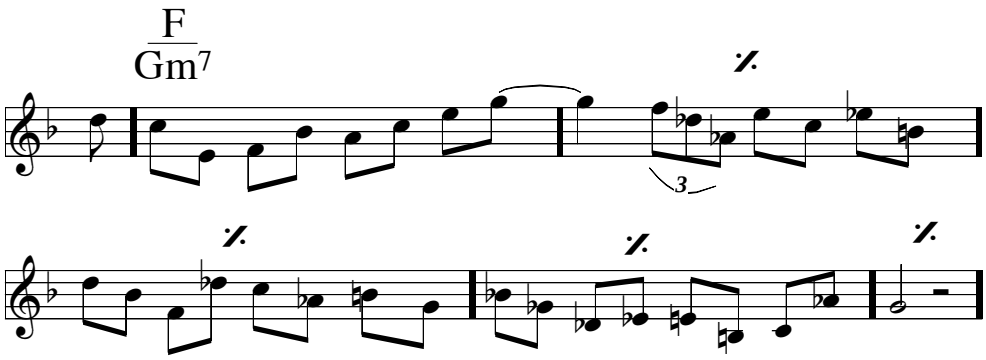
The normal scale must be established first however and it should really be returned to before the chord changes, otherwise the foray into other keys could merely sound like wrong notes. *Sideslipping*, which is what this is often called, does not work so well with scales which are themselves only a semitone away from the root of the chord, eg.

Dbm	Dbo	DbmH
C7	C7	C7

Chords with scales that are far removed from the chord's related scale are best suited to sideslipping. The more distant the temporary key, the more effective it will be, hence the frequent use of scales that are a semitone or tritone away from the original scale. Above all, this is a very useful device for livening up long passages on a single chord. Under these circumstances, the out-of-key experiences can be much lengthier than where the chord changes every few beats, eg:



Once out of the key you can follow an (improvised) mini-sequence of your own choosing. Chromatic progressions are common:



Another way to get an atonal sound is to use mainly set intervals, such as perfect fourths or fifths or major or minor seconds.

The logical extension of all this is playing free, in which case you can forget about being cautious about the guidelines stated here. However, going down this route requires you to develop your ear to a tremendous degree or you'll just end up playing by and with yourself in public. And there are laws which prohibit that sort of thing!