

HARMONISING A TUNE OR SOLO LINE (CONVENTIONAL WAY)

The simplest way of harmonising a tune or solo line is by using 2-parts, voiced in:

3rds or 6ths - this is the most common way of doing it, especially for tunes made from mainly basic intervals of the underlying chord.

4ths or 5ths - a more angular sound suitable for certain tunes and often used where there are a lot of higher chordal intervals in the tune.

2nds or 7ths - not used a lot, but don't ignore it. The odd 2nd or 7th may be used in the context of other intervals, but harmonisation using just these intervals is rare.

For some tunes, the one interval can be maintained throughout, others will require changing the interval at certain points. Try and ensure that the harmony part is as melodic in its own right as possible.

The choice of harmony note will depend upon the sound you want to produce (3rds have a lighter sound than 6ths for example), technicalities (eg. the range of different instruments) and the demands of the underlying harmony.

With just 2 horns, the piano/guitar part will be quite strong in the overall mix so you can get away with omitting certain basic notes in the horn parts. When you are writing for a bigger band divided into 2 part harmony you will have to be more aware of basic notes you may have omitted. Remember that the bass part is also a harmony note so to be sure of getting the harmony you want you may have to write the exact notes you want on the bass part.

Bass players are often confused by slash chords, eg. Dm7/G and play the first part of the symbol whereas you want the other bit. If you get this problem, rewrite this symbol as a G7sus4 or G11. Writing slash chords is easy on music software but can be hard to read if you cram too many bars on a staff. Dm7/G can be interpreted as Dm7 for 2 beats followed by G for 1 beat.

Usually, the melody or solo line will lie on top. Where it comes below another part be sure to add more weight to the tune part or give it to a louder instrument. Vocal groups often make use of a reiterated note above the melody - this is not done much in instrumental music. An exception is to be found in bluesy piano:



Remember that unison lines will always sound strongest, but the line itself has to sound good in itself. A mixture of harmony and unison lines may be the answer.

With 3 horns, you have the possibility of a strong unison or octave line, 3-note harmony, or an independent line with the other 2 horns playing a harmony part in a different rhythm. You can also mix and match these approaches.

Using 3-part harmony gives you scope to play fuller harmony. Think of the bass player as providing the lowest note of the harmony and you can in effect write for 4-parts. Thus, the root note of the chords will not be needed to be played by the horns, except where it falls in the melody itself or is part of a moving harmonic line. To produce a flowing line in which the lead note is the most important, keep the distances between the harmony parts as uniform as possible. If you are more concerned with emphasising the harmony (as when using the horns as background to a horn or

vocal solo) you can vary them.

The biggest conundrum is deciding on which notes in a chord to leave out. Generally speaking, the 3rd (or 4th) is usually included, as is the 7th but there are times when it can be omitted.

Dm7 (G13) G13 C69 B \flat 9+11 A7-9+5 A7-9

no 7th no 7th no 7th no 3rd no 7th

The best guideline is that if the chord sounds complete in itself even though basic notes are missing, you can use it.

With 4 horns, the right harmonisation of passing chords is crucial. Conventionally, major chords are made into major 6ths or sometimes major 7ths and minor chords into minor 6ths. These tend to harmonise the basic notes of the chord, including the 6th itself. Sometimes, the 2nd is treated as the 9th - Em7 with D lead used for a C major 9th and Em7-5 instead of C9. Chromatic notes either side of a basic note can often be harmonised using the same chord as that used for the basic note but a semitone below or above.

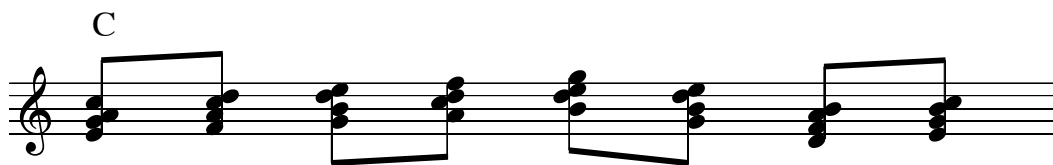
Various other notes can be harmonised using a diminished chord.

There are times when certain notes have to be harmonised differently - often a minor seventh or a minor 6th will work. Play it over until you find one that works. After a time you will develop an instinct for getting the right harmony.

This is the way in which sections in a big band used to be written. With a 5-person sax section, the lowest part doubles the melody an octave lower. The second voice down can be dropped an octave to produce this:

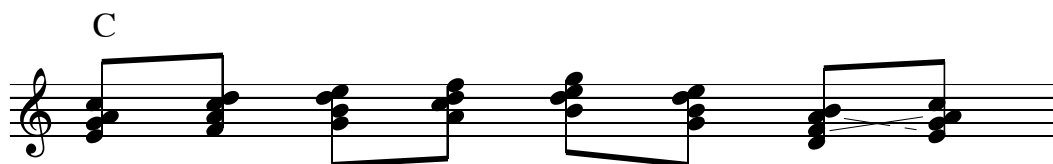
You could also drop the 4th voice (from the original close voicing) an octave to get this:

Instead of using diminished chords, you might choose instead to use just notes found in the scale:

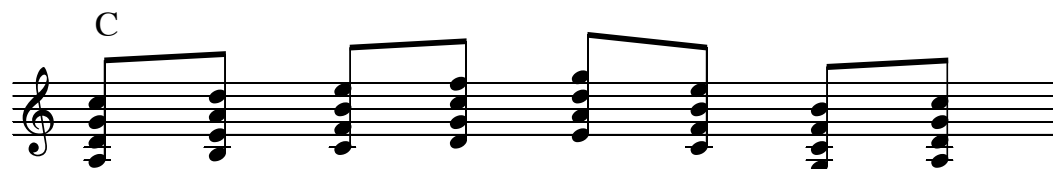


Some of these chords have been changed from 6ths to major 7ths. The last chord - C major 7th with a semitone between the top voice and the next one - might be better if you substituted a C6 for it. See how it sounds to you.

If you change it for a C6, you will see that the 2nd voice down in the last two chords is the same note - A. To get a smoother sound you can swap parts around so that the 2nd horn plays the 3rd part for this chord and the 3rd horn plays the 2nd part. This works best when it concerns 4 horns from the same section.



You could also harmonise the phrase in other ways, such as in 4ths:



The intriguing thing about harmonising tunes diatonically in fourths is that you sometimes get a 4th and a 3rd in the same chord (see third chord). The momentum and the parallel movement of parts makes this quite acceptable.

There are yet more ways to harmonise lines. Try working them out at a piano, bearing in mind that each part should be melodic in itself. The time spent doing this will be well worth it.