

MELODY

When writing tunes or improvising there are certain things to be aware of to maintain the listener's interest and to prevent them from getting bored. Here are a few guidelines.

CHORDS

A lot of tunes are based solely upon the notes of the underlying chords. This produces a very strong sound, in fact, *too* strong if taken to excess. It is used a lot in patriotic songs, and marches. There is nothing wrong with hugging the chordal notes, but it does lack subtlety and suspense. It is sometimes termed "male" melody.

On the other hand, there are tunes which are more scalar in nature, producing a more fluid sound, greater emotional content and much more suspense. This is sometimes called "female" melody. This is great but too much of this however can be too airy-fairy.

As in most things, a mixture of the two is often the most effective form.

SCALES

Beginners, in particular, tend to play a lot of arpeggios over the chord sequence. When they realise that scales can be used as well, (through listening to Coltrane) they then play up and down the scales without cease, except to gasp for air every now and again. This can be extremely boring to listen to - both the music and the gasps! The worst case is when such people master circular breathing and construct solos based entirely on scales! We have all come across this...and tried to erase it from our minds.

Part of the problem may be that the players concerned fear that they will get lost if they miss out a note of the scale, so they run up and down them fast and furiously. Much as I like *So what*, I dread listening to it in a jam session! Playing like this may be excellent for building technique but from the point of view of musicianship, it is somewhat lacking. This is where the Scored Changes system comes in handy because you don't have to try and remember what scales to use - it's all written down and you can pick and choose the notes more thoughtfully.

COMBINED

To turn a scale or chord into a melody there must be an element of surprise. A run of a few notes may be followed by a leap (musically-speaking) or a rest; the melodic line may change directions; or the rhythm of the notes may suddenly change. Uninterrupted runs of more than an octave at a time are comparatively rare (except with beginners). In fact three- or four-note runs are much more common. Consider the following line which is made up of mainly scalar runs:

A musical staff in treble clef with a 7/8 time signature. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The notes are: F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Annotations above the staff: 'leap' above G4-A4, 'leap' above A4-Bb4, 'leap' above Bb4-C5, 'change direction' above C5-Bb4, 'leap' above Bb4-A4, 'rhythmic change' above the first two notes of the second measure (E4, D4). Annotations below the staff: 'change direction' below A4-Bb4, 'rhythmic change' below the first two notes of the second measure, 'change direction' below Bb4-A4, 'rhythmic change' below the first two notes of the third measure, 'change direction' below the last two notes of the third measure (D4, C4).

Now compare this with a line which omits the leaps and rhythmic changes:

A musical staff in treble clef with a 7/8 time signature. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The notes are: F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. This version omits the leaps and rhythmic changes from the first example.

The second example clearly sounds more like a technical exercise than a melodic line.

END-NOTES OF PHRASES

An analysis of well-known standards reveals another interesting feature. The notes on which phrases end are a key element in their attraction. These notes often form a pattern in themselves, such as a part of a diatonic or chromatic scale:

A musical staff in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The notes are: F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Arched lines group the notes into phrases. Arrows point to the end notes of these phrases. Labels below the staff: 'end of phrase scale' under the first four phrases, 'inter-phrase scale' under the last two phrases.

Examples of tunes that have this characteristic are *Autumn leaves* and *All the things you are*, while the first few bars of *Stardust* (the chorus) displays how a note that is part of a run can be displaced by an octave. *How high the moon* is a good example of a tune that follows a descending chromatic line which *Strike up the band* emphasizes a very striking ascending chromatic scale.

Sometimes the end-notes of phrases highlight a harmonic element in the song, as in the middle 8 of *I'm in the mood for love* or the first 8 bars of *Old devil moon*.

Repetition may be the distinguishing feature, as in the first 6 bars of *Mood indigo*. *Tangerine* (in the key of F) is of special interest as there are 2 notes which form the pattern A-D-A that is repeated three times over the course of 24 bars.

Scalar runs can also be formed from within a phrase as in the last 4 bars of the example shown above. The first four bars of *Green Dolphin Street* illustrate this point well in a descending chromatic line, whereas an ascending chromatic scale can be easily detected in the first few bars of *Darn that dream*.

Of course, not all tunes fall into these regular patterns, but it is still worthwhile analysing them to see how the suspense is maintained until the end is reached.

Adopting these techniques to solos can be of tremendous benefit. Phrasing overall should be improved by this as it gives a focus to aim for when completing a phrase and gives the whole solo a feeling of cohesion. It is easiest to do in short phrases, but even when longer phrases are played they can often be broken down into smaller components with accented notes sometimes taking the place of end-notes.

Unless you are doing it for a special effect, guard against finishing each note on the root-note of the chord, otherwise it sounds as if you have come to a stop. Vary the end-notes and leave a short rest before the next phrase. After a while it becomes second-nature, but it will improve your phrasing in no time at all.