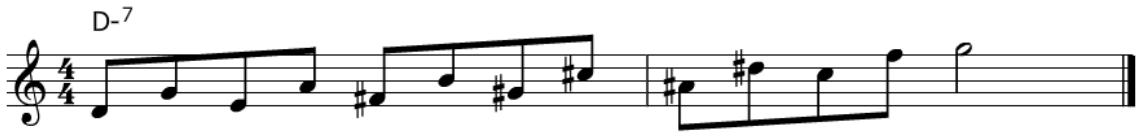
Approach #1: Playing Strict Symetrical Patterns

This approach refers to the practice of playing a pattern 100% symmetrically, regardless of the chord playing beneath it.

So, for example, let's say you have a D-7 chord and you want the sound of perfect fourths moving up in whole steps. If you play the exact pattern, at a certain point, you'll find that the notes in the pattern are no longer a part of the group of notes that fit diatonically within the a D-7 chord.

In the notated music below, notice how playing the pattern exactly symmetrically causes us to stray from the notes diatonic to D-7:

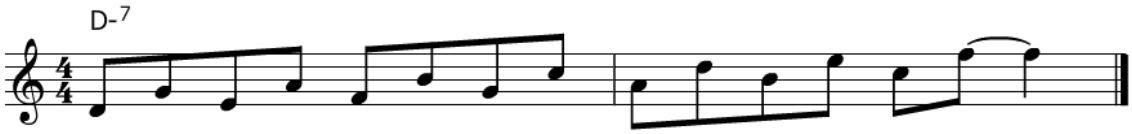


Although we're straying from the tune's key center, the lick works because perfect fourths in succession sound very hip. The key is to resolve the pattern into a note that works over the chord you're landing on. In this case, since we're staying with the D-7, the ending note of G resolves nicely.

This approach works nicely if you're looking to stretch the listener's ear a bit by playing "outside." However, since you're outlining a very clear pattern, you're still creating a very clear and coherent melodic statement, taking the listener "along for the ride" until you land on an "inside" note. Of course, there are no rules here, and you could choose to keep the tension going by not resolving at all. It's really up to you – this is where the "art" part of improvisation comes in.

Approach #2: Playing Diatonic Patterns

If you're going for the general sound of a particular intervallic pattern, but don't want to go outside of the chord changes, you could modify a pattern so that it's not 100% symmetrical, and instead lives clearly within the changes.



You'll notice that these fourth groupings are not all perfect fourths, as the F-B interval is a tritone. You'll also notice that not all of the fourth groupings move up by a whole step, as the E-A pair moves up a half-step to F-B instead of moving up a whole step.

This approach works well if you're going through a chord progression and want to clearly outline the harmony while also implying an intervallic pattern.

TAKE ACTION

On page 52 of the included workbook is an example of thirds moving through the chord changes to the jazz standard, *Blue Bossa*. Because we're restricted to notes that fit strictly within the chord changes, sometimes these intervals are major thirds, sometimes minor thirds. In addition, these third groupings are moving up through the range of the instrument sometimes in whole steps, sometimes in half steps. So in order to hit the changes, a perfectly symmetrical pattern will not work.

You'll also notice that once we hit the top of our given instrument's practical range, we're dropping down as far as we can go on the instrument while keeping the pattern intact. Of course, where the pattern will drop down to a lower octave depends completely on the range of the instrument as well as the ability of the musician. But the trick here is to stick to the chord changes even if we're not playing the root of the chord on beat one of that chord's first measure.

The three patterns you see on page 52 are just examples of what can be done with the melodic shapes based on the patterns we've explored earlier in this chapter.

Taking things to the next level, try playing through the changes to *Blue Bossa* (or any other tune, for that matter) in any of the patterns you'd be playing as part of the other "Take Action" modules in this chapter.

Making Patterns Sound Like Music, Not Mathematics

At first, we need to simply get used to incorporating these new shapes and patterns into our solos, even if we don't yet have a crystal clear concept of how to best fit them into the music. Bob Sheppard shares, "At first you're just adding these intervals at random, no rhyme or reason. You're just forcing them in. At first it's very uncomfortable, so just make sure that you don't lose the time. If it's an 8 bar phrase just try and keep the time together.

"Let's say I'm playing the blues. I've got my blues licks going, but I'm just starting a minor 3rd interval, on maybe chord tone and just going chromatically, not sure where it's going to end up. You could end up on a funky note, but it doesn't matter, don't worry about it. You're just taking this exercise and superimposing it onto this tune that you know really well and won't get lost on. I know its non-specific, and I'm not saying there's any one way to do it, but you already know the interval, so simply play it and see where it takes you.

"This minor third, for example, interval is strong and you're just going to try it out, maybe with a Jamey Aebersold record or something like that. Your ears will tell you how to get in and out of it, and your musical sensibility will eventually be able to take this minor 3rd and figure out a way to use it. You will gain confidence that you can play something that you would never, ever play and stick it in a tune."

But eventually, we need to be able to use these devices tastefully. When asked about the prospect of an entire solo comprised of the types of intervallic shapes we're discussing here, Bob Sheppard says,

"It would be totally boring. That's why you have to have a lot of these things down and you can't play them as straight patterns. At first you have to, don't get me wrong. You have a pattern and you just stick it in; you have to learn how to use it. It's sort of like, if, for a year you're in class trying to learn French, and you simply start repeating words – you never actually speak to anyone in French. Then you take a trip to France, and all of a sudden you're going to actually try to use this thing and it's scary as hell; you don't know what's going to happen with it. You're scared to use it. But you do, and it's ok - you survived and it happens again; and you use it again. Four or five times later it's ok. I'm alright with that one. It's not so scary."

In other words, you're basically opening up your ears and your mind to new ways of generating material. Especially when we're talking about making modal patterns. Using patterns based on a variety of melodic shapes moving in a variety of directions by a variety of intervals, you end up with an endless supply of things to play over any given chord.

But as far as using these shapes and patterns to craft powerful melodies, that's where we really need to apply the lessons learned by listening to and transcribing the greats as well as learning as many tunes as possible.

If there was another formula I knew of that you could follow and automatically end up with beautifully crafted and powerful melodic material, then I'd be rich - and we'd all be much better improvisers!

Here are a few things we can do to use patterns to create organic-sounding lines:

- Experiment by varying the rhythm of the pattern.
- Play the pattern leaving out certain individual notes, or even certain groups of notes.
- Use only small snippets of patterns as a means of tying together non-pattern-based phrases.
- Within the span of a musical phrase, mix and match different patterns to the point where the listener is no longer hearing what sounds like a pattern, but instead sounds like an interesting melody.

TAKE ACTION

Taking it to the next level…

1. Find a simple tune such as a blues or a standard without too many chord changes to it. **(**Some simple standards would be tunes such as *Blue Bossa*, *Bye Bye Blackbird,* or *Summertime,* to name just a very few.)

2. Write out a solo over that tune where you use your normal improvisational vocabulary, but also work in some intervallic patterns, either symmetrical or diatonic.

3. The goal here is to work in these patterns in a way that sounds tasteful and organic, so do not overuse the patterns. When you do use them, make sure to vary the rhythm and try to mostly use snippets of patterns, mixing and matching patterns as much as possible. There are no hard-and-fast rules here, and you may very well choose to run through a pattern over a wide range of the instrument. The point is to practice using patterns as a means to enhance your improvisational vocabulary without pushing you toward robotic and uncreative playing.

BONUS:
Re-harmonize the tune you're using for this exercise utilizing the techniques and principles you learned in Chapter 3 and write your solo over those changes.

Hearing Patterns in Action

Lucky for us, during his audio master class interview, Bob Sheppard was kind enough to demonstrate the application of patterns in the context of an actual solo. Check out the following two tracks from the accompanying example mp3 files to hear him bringing to life the techniques we've been discussing:

- **11_Patterns-Blues.mp3:** A standard blues - first chorus is regular blues vocabulary, second chorus brings in patterns)

- **12_Patterns-Softly.mp3:** Chord changes to *Softly as in a Morning Sunrise*

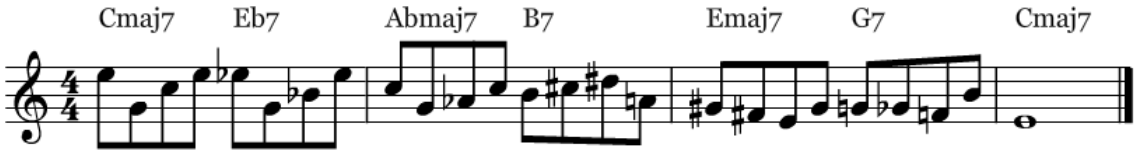
Giant Steps = The Golden Key to the Modern Jazz Vocabulary

Now that we've thoroughly explored how we can use patterns and melodic shapes to increase our vocabulary, I thought we'd take a look at an approach to playing over complex changes – whether those changes are being superimposed on a simple standard, or whether those changes are part of an original composition, such as *Giant Steps,* that monster of a tune we discussed in the last chapter. Because the changes to *Giant Steps* outline many different tonal centers within a very brief span of time, it becomes quite important to outline the chord changes very explicitly.

Oftentimes, musicians improvising through these changes will stick to very basic scalar or arpeggio-based melodies over each chord. And it's this simplified approach that had a major impact on the modern jazz vocabulary.

Of course, there are no 100% hard-and-fast rules when it comes to improvisation, and there are tons of players who play very complex melodies over these changes. But a huge influence on the sound of modern players ranging such as Joe Henderson, Woody Shaw and Michael Brecker (not to mention all three of our esteemed Jazz Lessons with Giants teachers!) was Coltrane's melodic approach of outlining complex chord progressions in an extremely explicit manner.

To illustrate, here is a simple micro-etude that works over the Coltrane turnaround we just went over:



Check out the note choices – what do you see? That's right, nothing out of the ordinary at all. Mostly chord tones with a few passing tones thrown in.

Of course, what I've written here is quite simplistic compared to the melodic flurries you might hear from someone like Joe Lovano or Brad Mehldau playing over these changes. But the more you get these simply structured lines into your brains and ultimately, into your ears, the more complex you'll be able to get with your melodic content.

As you can see, you can certainly kick some serious booty on Giant Steps by just playing very basic chord and scale tones over each chord (Coltrane certainly did!). And if you're kicking serious booty over Giant Steps, that means that you've become pretty darn good at spelling out seemingly disparate tonalities. And once you can clearly spell out seemingly disparate tonalities, then you're equipped to play just about *anything* you want – as long as you can clearly take the listener's ear back home - or purposely steer them away from "home" in a compelling manner.

The point is, you want to be able to *consciously* take the listener's ear on a journey, and not to just play a bunch of random nonsense and call it "modern jazz." So when approaching a difficult set of changes – start simple! You'll be surprised at just how hip simple can sound.