

# CHAPTER 3: ORBIT

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**Style:** Wayne Shorter (Avant) | **Key:** F Major | **Tempo:** 160 BPM | **Time:** 3/4

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## OVERVIEW

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*"Non-functional harmony over a floating pulse."*

Orbit channels the mysterious, spacious quality of Wayne Shorter's compositions. The waltz time signature (3/4) creates a lilting, orbital motion while the harmony deliberately avoids traditional V-I resolutions.

**Playing Tip:** Let the intervals ring; prioritize sustain over speed.

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## THE FORM

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16-bar form with through-composed feel:

Fmaj7#11	Ebmaj7#5	Dbmaj7	Bmaj7	
Bbm9	Abmaj7	Gbmaj7	Emaj7	
Fmaj7#11	Dbmaj7	Amaj7	Gmaj7	
Fmaj7#11	Ebm9	Dbmaj7	Fmaj7	

## Key Harmonic Features

1. **Non-functional movement:** Chords relate by interval, not by resolution
2. **Major 7th dominance:** Almost every chord is a major 7th variant

3. **Chromatic root motion:**  $F \rightarrow E_b \rightarrow D_b \rightarrow B$  (descending chromatic)
4. **Symmetry:** Bar 1 material returns in bars 9 and 13

## SCALE PALETTE

Chord	Primary Scale	Color Note
Fmaj7#11	F Lydian	B natural (#11)
Ebmaj7#5	Eb Lydian Augmented	B natural + G#
Dbmaj7	Db Lydian	G natural (#11)
Bmaj7	B Lydian	E# (#11)
Bbm9	Bb Dorian	G natural (6th)
Emaj7	E Lydian	A# (#11)

## Shorter's Approach

Wayne Shorter often uses **Lydian as default** for major 7th chords. The #11 creates a floating, unresolved quality that defines this style.

## TRIAD PAIR VOCABULARY

Chord	Stable	Color	Creates
Fmaj7#11	F Major	G Major	Lydian color (9, #11, 6)
Ebmaj7#5	Eb Augmented	Bb Major	Augmented + Lydian
Dbmaj7	Db Major	Eb Major	9, #11
Bbm9	Db Major	Ab Major	Minor 9 sound

### Pattern: Lydian Triad Pair

Over Fmaj7#11:

F-A-C (Imaj) → G-B-D (IIImaj) → F-A-C...

The G Major triad provides B natural (the #11) and D (the 6th).

## THE THREE CHORUSES

### Chorus 1: Lyrical (Version A)

**Concept:** Floating, long-tone melody

- Emphasize the 3/4 pulse gently—avoid heavy downbeats
- Use half notes and dotted half notes
- Let phrases span across bar lines
- Target chord tones on beats 1 and 3

**Motif:** Ascending perfect 4th (like planets in orbit)

## Chorus 2: Modern Interval Lines (Version B)

**Concept:** Wide intervals, Shorter-style angularity

- Major 7ths and minor 9ths between successive notes
- Avoid stepwise motion
- Create tension through silence—use rests strategically

**Example over Fmaj7#11:**

E (maj7) → F (8va up) → B (#11) → C (5th, 8vb)

## Chorus 3: Parallel Motion Counterpoint (Version C)

**Concept:** Two voices moving in parallel motion (unusual!)

Unlike Blue Cycle's contrary motion, Orbit uses **parallel 4ths and 5ths**: - Top voice: Melody - Bottom voice: Perfect 4th or 5th below

This creates a medieval, modal quality appropriate to Shorter's cosmic aesthetic.

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## VOICING REFERENCE

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### Quartal Voicings (Shorter-style)

Fmaj7#11: x-x-3-4-5-5 (stacked 4ths: C-F-B-E)  
 Ebmaj7#5: x-6-5-4-4-x (Eb with G# tension)  
 Dbmaj7: x-4-5-5-6-x (with Lydian #11)

### Wide Drop-2 Voicings

Fmaj7: 1-x-2-2-1-x (root position)  
 Bmaj7: 7-x-8-8-7-x (root position)

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## THE 3/4 FEEL

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### Counting the Waltz

Internalize the pulse as: - **ONE**-two-three, **ONE**-two-three - Not: one-TWO-three (avoid polka feel)

### Phrase Lengths

In 3/4, natural phrase lengths are: - 2 bars = 6 beats (short phrase) - 4 bars = 12 beats (standard phrase) - 8 bars = 24 beats (extended phrase)

Let your lines follow these natural groupings.

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## PRACTICE ROUTINE

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### Week 1: The Float

- [ ] Learn Version A melody with extreme sustain
- [ ] Practice letting notes ring into each other
- [ ] Use volume swells for dynamics

### Week 2: Intervals

- [ ] Drill major 7th intervals in all positions
- [ ] Practice minor 9th jumps
- [ ] Work on Version B slowly (80 BPM)

### Week 3: Parallel Motion

- [ ] Practice parallel 4ths ascending and descending

- ☐ Add the melody as top voice
- ☐ Work on Version C

## Week 4: Synthesis

- ☐ Connect all three choruses
- ☐ Develop your own phrasing within the form
- ☐ Record with a 3/4 drum loop

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## LISTENING RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. **Wayne Shorter** — *Speak No Evil* (the blueprint)
2. **Wayne Shorter** — *JuJu* (more floating harmony)
3. **Herbie Hancock** — *Maiden Voyage* (related aesthetic)
4. **Kenny Wheeler** — *Gnu High* (ECM-style space)

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## COMMON PITFALLS

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1. **Forcing resolution:** Don't try to make the chords "go somewhere"
2. **Heavy accents:** Keep the 3/4 light and floating
3. **Too many notes:** Space is essential in this style
4. **Ignoring sustain:** Shorter's melodies sing—don't chop notes short

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## SELF-EVALUATION

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- ☐ Does my playing have a floating quality?

- [ ] Can I hear the major 7th chords as "home" (not needing resolution)?
  - [ ] Are my phrases breathing naturally in 3/4?
  - [ ] Is there enough space between ideas?
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