

CHAPTER 3: ORBIT

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

OVERVIEW

"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.

THE FORM

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 → Eb → Db → 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.

VOICING REFERENCE

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)

THE 3/4 FEEL

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.

PRACTICE ROUTINE

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

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

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

- [] 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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← **Blue Cycle** | Next: **Rust & Chrome** →
