

CHAPTER 5: FIRST LIGHT

Style: Metheny Lyrical | **Key:** G Major | **Tempo:** 96 BPM | **Time:** 4/4

OVERVIEW

"Open, luminous voicings that shimmer like morning light."

First Light captures Pat Metheny's signature sound: clear melodic lines over lush diatonic harmony, arpeggiated figures that breathe, and a sense of wide-open space. The title evokes that moment when dawn breaks—soft colors gradually becoming vivid. This tune teaches lyrical phrasing, tasteful chord extensions, and the art of making simple harmony sound profound.

Playing Tip: Use a clean, slightly chorused tone. Let each note ring clearly.

THE FORM

32-bar form with four 8-bar sections:

Section 1 - Intro (Bars 1-8):

Gmaj9	Gmaj9	Cmaj9	Dmaj7	
Em9	Am9	Dmaj7	Gmaj7	

Section 2 - Triad Solo (Bars 9-16):

Gmaj7	Bm7	D	Gmaj7	
Cmaj7	Em7	Am7	Gmaj7	

Section 3 - Chord Melody (Bars 17-24):

Gmaj9	Em9	Cmaj9	Dmaj7	
Am9	Bm7	Am7	Gmaj9	

Section 4 - Outro (Bars 25-32):

Gmaj9	G6	Cmaj9	Dmaj7	
Em9	Am9	Dmaj7	Gmaj9	

Key Harmonic Features

1. **Diatonic purity:** All chords from G major scale
 2. **9th extensions:** Gmaj9, Em9, Am9 create Metheny's floating quality
 3. **IV chord color:** Cmaj9 provides the "open sky" feeling
 4. **Pedal point potential:** D pedal under changing harmonies
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SCALE PALETTE

Chord	Primary Scale	Color Notes
Gmaj9	G Ionian / G Lydian	A (9), F# (maj7)
Cmaj9	C Lydian (in G)	D (9), F# (#4)
Dmaj7	D Lydian (in G)	G# (#4), E (9)
Em9	E Dorian	F# (9), C# (raised 6)
Am9	A Dorian	B (9), F# (6)
Bm7	B Aeolian / B Dorian	C# (9), A (7)

The Metheny Lydian Sound

Metheny frequently uses Lydian mode for major chords: - #4 creates the "floating" quality - **Avoid the natural 4th** on major chords - **Cmaj7** in G becomes Lydian (F# instead of F) - **Whole-tone fragments** over maj7 chords

TRIAD PAIR VOCABULARY

Chord	Stable Triad	Color Triad	Resulting Color
Gmaj9	G Major	A Minor	9th and 6th
Gmaj9	G Major	D Major	Bright 5-7-9
Cmaj9	C Major	D Major	Lydian #4
Em9	E Minor	G Major	Relative major glow
Am9	A Minor	C Major	Dorian brightness

Arpeggiated Cells

Practice these Metheny-style arpeggiated figures over Gmaj9:

Cell 1: G - B - D - G (octave) - B - D - E - D
 Cell 2: D - E - G - A - B - D (stepwise with skips)
 Cell 3: A - C - E - G - B - D (stacked thirds ascending)

THE THREE CHORUSES

Chorus 1: Lyrical Melody (Version A)

Concept: Singing melodic lines with natural breathing

- **Bars 1-4:** Ascending scalar figures (D-E-G-A-B) with stepwise motion
- **Bars 5-8:** Arpeggiated descent through chord tones
- **Phrasing:** Breathe between phrases like a vocalist would
- **Dynamics:** Crescendo to bar 8, then release

Dynamic Curve:

mp ————— mf ————— f ————— mp
 Bar 1 Bar 4 Bar 8 Bar 16

Chorus 2: Triad Arpeggios (Version B)

Concept: Flowing triad shapes across the neck

- **Bars 9-12:** G major triad → Am → D → G sequence
- **Bars 13-16:** Connecting triads with scalar runs
- **String crossing:** Sweep-like motion between triads

Triad Sequence:

Bar	Triad 1	Triad 2	Connection
9	G Major	Am	B passing tone
10	Bm	C Major	D passing tone
11	D Major	Em	E pedal point
12	G Major	—	Resolution

Chorus 3: Chord Melody (Version C)

Concept: Harmonized melody with voicings underneath

- **Bars 17-20:** Melody on top, voicings move in contrary motion
- **Bars 21-24:** Voicings thicken as melody rises
- **Four-note voicings:** 9th chords in close position

Voice Leading:

Gmaj9 → Em9: D stays, B descends to G, A stays, F# descends to E
 Em9 → Cmaj9: E stays, G stays, B rises to C, D stays

VOICING REFERENCE

Open Position Voicings

Gmaj9: 3-x-4-4-3-2 (open D string rings)
 Cmaj9: x-3-2-4-3-x (classic Metheny shape)
 Dmaj7: x-5-4-6-5-x (drop 2)
 Em9: 0-2-2-0-3-0 (open strings for shimmer)
 Am9: x-0-2-4-1-0 (open A string)

Chord Melody Voicings

Gmaj9 (melody A): 3-x-4-4-5-3
Em9 (melody F#): 0-2-2-0-5-0
Cmaj9 (melody D): x-3-2-4-5-x

High Register Voicings

Gmaj9 high: x-x-12-11-12-10
Cmaj9 high: x-x-10-9-10-8

TECHNIQUE: ARPEGGIATED PHRASING

The Metheny Arpeggio Style

1. Let open strings ring when possible
2. Use hybrid picking (pick + fingers) for clarity
3. Slight delay/chorus for shimmer
4. Connect arpeggios with scalar passages

Picking Approach

- **Downstrokes:** Bass notes
- **Upstrokes:** Higher strings in arpeggios
- **Fingers (m, a):** For simultaneous notes

Practice Exercise

| Gmaj9 arpeggio pattern |
G (down) - B (up) - D (m) - G (a) - A (up) - B (down)
Let notes overlap for harp-like effect

PRACTICE ROUTINE

Week 1: Lyrical Phrasing

- [] Practice singing your lines before playing them
- [] Work on breathing with phrases
- [] Learn Version A at 80 BPM

Week 2: Triad Connections

- [] Master all diatonic triads in G major
- [] Practice smooth connections between adjacent triads
- [] Work on Version B with flowing motion

Week 3: Chord Melody

- [] Learn the chord melody voicings
- [] Practice voice leading between chords
- [] Work on Version C with clear melody projection

Week 4: Expression

- [] Play through all three choruses
- [] Add dynamics and rubato
- [] Record with appropriate effects and evaluate

LISTENING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Pat Metheny** – *Bright Size Life* (the source)
 2. **Pat Metheny** – *First Circle* (lyrical phrasing mastery)
 3. **Pat Metheny** – *One Quiet Night* (solo acoustic beauty)
 4. **Lyle Mays** – *Street Dreams* (the harmonic language)
 5. **John McLaughlin** – *My Goal's Beyond* (acoustic lyricism)
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TONE TIPS

For First Light: - **Clean or very light chorus:** Shimmer, not wash - **Slight compression:** Even dynamics, sustained notes - **Reverb:** Medium plate or hall - **Delay:** Dotted eighth for classic Metheny sound (optional)

COMMON PITFALLS

1. **Too many notes:** This is about space and breath
 2. **Cluttered voicings:** Let open strings ring
 3. **Ignoring dynamics:** Shape every phrase
 4. **Rushing:** 96 BPM should feel relaxed, not driven
 5. **Too much effects:** Clarity first, effects second
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THE FIRST LIGHT CONCEPT

The title evokes: 1. **Emergence:** Ideas developing from simple to complex 2. **Clarity:** Pure diatonic harmony, uncluttered 3. **Hope:** The optimistic quality of major 9th chords 4. **Space:** Wide open voicings, room to breathe

When playing this piece, imagine the first rays of sun hitting a still landscape—gentle, warm, gradually revealing beauty.

SELF-EVALUATION

- [] Does every phrase breathe naturally?
 - [] Are my arpeggios flowing smoothly?
 - [] Can I hear all notes in my voicings clearly?
 - [] Does the tune have a sense of gentle forward motion?
 - [] Am I playing with warmth and lyricism?
 - [] Does it sound like Metheny, not just major 9th exercises?
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← **Parallax** | **Next: Angular Motion** →
