

# Three Elements of Bebop

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In my view, there are three main ingredients in the bebop\* melodic line (harmonically speaking):

- 1.) Arpeggios
- 2.) Scales
- 3.) Chromatic Ornaments

I like to think of these as the 1.) meat, 2.) potatoes, and 3.) spice of bebop harmony (sorry to all of my vegetarian musician friends). The arpeggios provide the main substance that allows us to really hear the harmony. Scales are likewise important, as they provide a palette of “correct” pitches in a step-wise fashion. Just as a meal that lacks spice, a jazz improvisation that doesn’t employ any chromaticism can tend to be a bit bland. Whether an improvisation focuses primarily on the meat or the potatoes, and how much spice one adds, depends on the personal taste of the musical chef. Herein lays the individual artistry. There are a number of effective ways to practice these materials. This article provides a brief synopsis of how to practice these essential materials.

## 1.) Meat – Arpeggiation Concepts

It is important to practice all chord and scale types first as separate entities, and then they should be applied to standard tunes. A basic first step is to practice all chord qualities from the root, at least up to the 9<sup>th</sup>; but they may also be practiced up to the thirteenth (the highest extension). This is a good warm up exercise for jazz band directors to use with their bands, and this type of arpeggiation is idiomatic for just about any instrument. You may wish to focus on one key a week and learn all of the basic chord qualities in that key. Try practicing the arpeggios in eighth-notes first, then in triplets and sixteenths. These rhythms are important, as they will serve as the rhythmic palette in the improvisation.

Basic 1,3,5,7,9 Arpeggios

The image shows four musical staves, each with a treble clef and a common time signature. The first staff is labeled CMA9 and shows an arpeggio of the notes C, E, G, B, D, F, A, G, F, E, D, C. Below the staff are the numbers 1 3 5 7 9 7 5 3 1. The second staff is labeled C9 and shows an arpeggio of the notes C, E, G, Bb, D, F, A, G, F, E, D, C. The third staff is labeled CMi9 and shows an arpeggio of the notes C, Eb, G, Bb, D, F, A, G, F, Eb, D, C. The fourth staff is labeled C67 and shows an arpeggio of the notes C, Eb, G, Bb, D, F, A, G, F, Eb, D, C. Below the first two staves is a note: "(ROOT MAY BE SUBSTITUTED ON HALF-DIMINISHED. THE 9TH IS A BEAUTIFUL TONE, BUT OPEN CONFLICTS WITH MELODIES THAT ARE BASED ON THE LOOBYN WOOD.)"

Below is another type of arpeggiation that is not based on the root. There are two main ways to arpeggiate the notes:

1.) A SINGLE ARPEGGIATION IN EACH OCTAVE



2.) ARPEGGIATING FROM EACH POINT OF THE CHORD



THESE CAN BE IMPLEMENTED OVER OTHER CHORD TYPES.



The single arpeggiation in each octave is nice because it produces a gesture that quickly sweeps the range. On the other hand, arpeggiating from each inversion point is also helpful because it provides an opportunity to manipulate arpeggiated material in a more condensed range. Below are some practice tips:

Practice Tips

- Isolate each chord type and practice these arpeggios in all twelve keys in eighths, triplets, and sixteenths. Always use a metronome.
- For each song learned, practice the arpeggios over the top of all the chord changes, trying to connect the arpeggios of each chord without having to start the pattern over. Start the metronome very slowly and gradually increase the speed once mastery is achieved at each tempo.
- The arpeggios need not be played as patterns. They may simply be used as guide tones or reference points for motives. Try letting go of the patterns, and simply use the arpeggios as starting points for motivic play.
- Sometimes the arpeggios can facilitate faster lines when needed. These can be overdone, however.

2.) Potatoes – Scale Concepts

I have insufficient space here to adequately discuss chord-scale application. For the purpose of this article, it will be assumed that a fundamental knowledge is intact.

One of the first principals of applying scales to chord changes is that they need not be (and usually should not be) performed as a traditional scale; root-to-root, in one single direction. Avoid starting on the root and try to add some contour to the lines. A few twists and turns at appropriate points can turn a simple scale into a nice line.

-NOTES FROM THE SCALE, BUT NOT PLAYED AS A SCALE

A MORE ADVANCED CONCEPT IS TO SIMPLY PLAY MOTIVES UTILIZING THE NOTES IN THE SCALE SIMPLY AS A BANK OF AVAILABLE PITCHES TO CHOOSE FROM.

Another way to utilize the scales is to group three- and four-note shapes and to plane them over a mode or scales.

### Shapes over Modes/Scales

HERE ARE TWO OF 16 POSSIBLE PERMUTATIONS

COMBINING PERMUTATIONS MAKES THE LINE MORE INTERESTING.

OTHER SHAPES ARE POSSIBLE, THESE OR ANY OTHERS THAT MAY BE DISCOVERED.

## Practice Tips

- Each time a new tune is learned, the scales and shapes should be practiced over the top of the chord changes so that once improvisation begins, there will not be any "fishing for notes," as they will be well ingrained in the motor memory.
- The scales should be practiced (starting at a slow tempo, with the metronome) in quarters, eighths, triplets, and sixteenths. Once mastery is achieved at a slow tempo, bump the metronome up a few notches and repeat the exercise. Continue until the tune is perfected at a wide range of tempos.
- Finally, let go of the drills and try to improvise, leaving space etc.

### 3.) Spice – Chromatic Ornaments

There are a number of chromatic ornaments that are commonly incorporated in bebop lines. These can be mixed with the scales and arpeggios in a variety of ways. The example below illustrates:

1.) THE PRINCIPAL OF THE LEADING TONE. PRACTICE TARGETING THE 9, 9<sup>b</sup>, 5, 6, AND 7.

(A.P.)-----  
3 5 7 9  
TARGETING THE 9TH  
5 7 9 5  
TARGETING THE 5TH

2.) ENCLOSURES - CHROMATICALLY ENCIRCLING A NOTE

C<sup>9</sup>  
9 5 6 ETC.  
(ENCLOSURE + ARP.)  
ENCLOSURE + 4-NOTE SHAPE  
ENCLOSURE + SCALE  
9TH 5TH

3.) EXPANDED ENCLOSURE - AGAIN, TARGET THE 9, 9<sup>b</sup>, 5, AND 7 IN ALL 12 KEYS

C<sup>9</sup>  
9 5 7

### Practice Tips for Mixing the Ingredients

- As before, practice mixing the ingredients very slowly; –an enclosure, an upward arpeggio that is succeeded by a downward scale etc. Sometimes I like to start mixing the elements by playing rubato to allow time to really concentrate on the materials. Once the lines begin to feel comfortable over a particular tune, the metronome should then be set at a slow tempo and gradually sped up until intricate lines may be performed at a fast tempo.

\*As an aside, I use the term, "bebop," not in the strict sense (i.e., not limiting my discussion to the improvisatory style of the beboppers of the 1940s; such as Parker and Gillespie). Rather, I use the term in a broader context, referring to the general improvisatory style that stems from that tradition.



## Stephen R. Anderson

Stephen Anderson is both a composer and a pianist. As a composer, his works have been commissioned and/or performed by a variety of artists and ensembles: The West Point Military Band, Christopher Deane, Brian Bowman, Lynn Seaton and the Dallas Chamber Symphony, the Crested Butte Chamber Orchestra, the One O' Clock Lab Band, Two O'clock Lab band, the Lynn Seaton Trio, Rone Sparrow, and a film score broadcast nationally on PBS.

As a pianist, Anderson has performed and recorded with the Lynn Seaton Trio ("Puttin' On the Ritz" – Nagel Heyer Records, 2005), and played and recorded with the One O'clock Lab Band (Lab 2001). He served as house pianist in the International Trombone Festival (2002) and was keyboardist for a short time with (country-western) gold-recording artist, Kevin Sharp (1996-1997). From 2003 to 2005, Anderson served as Assistant Professor of Jazz Piano at Western Illinois University and performed in the faculty jazz sextet. Currently, he teaches composition and jazz studies at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Awards and recognitions include: Reviews of Lynn Seaton Trio recording in *All About Jazz* and *Jazz Times* (2006), Barlow Foundation commission to compose a percussion concerto for Rone Sparrow, soloist, and the West Point Military Band (premiered April 2005). UNT outstanding composition student of the year (2003), *Enclosures*, for solo bass reviewed in the annual journal of the International Society of Basses (2003), *Enclosures* – Honorable Mention in the International Society of Basses composition competition (2002), winner of Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival piano competition, and first runner up of all instrumentalists (1997), recognized in *Downbeat* magazine (September, 1997), outstanding music student (of graduating class) BYU College of Music (1997), member of Phi Kappa Phi (2003; 2005).

Recent publications or premiers include:

"Stella By Starlight" – arrangement premier, Lynn Seaton and Dallas Chamber Orchestra (February 2006).

*Three Elements of Bebop* – article, published in IAJE NC Winter 2006 Newsletter.

"Puttin' On the Ritz" – recording, Lynn Seaton Trio, Nagel Heyer Records (2005).

*Rhyth Migot* – recording, *On the Horizon*, Western Illinois University Jazz Studio Orchestra (2005).

*Concerto for Solo Percussion and Concert Band* – premier, West Point Military Band (April 2005).

Forthcoming publications:

*Rhyth Migot* and *Time of the End* – big band scores, UNC Jazz Press (2006).

Anderson earned a Doctorate of Musical Arts (2005), and a Master's of Music (2000) in composition at the University of North Texas, and a Bachelor of Music degree in composition at Brigham University in 1997. He studied composition with Cindy McTee, Joseph Klein, Tom Clark, Joseph Butch Rovon, Phil Winsor, and Paris Rutherford at UNT, and Stephen Jones, David Sargent, Michael Hicks, and Murray Boren at BYU. He studied jazz piano with Dan Haerle and Stephan Karlson at UNT, Dan Waldis at BYU, Gary Freeman at Eastfield College, and Wilson Brown at Ricks College.

Teaching experience includes: Assistant Professor, Composition and Jazz Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill (Fall 2005), Assistant Professor of Jazz Piano at Western Illinois University (2003-2005), Composition Teaching Fellow UNT (2002-2003), Jazz Arranging Teaching Assistant UNT (1999-2002), Piano Instructor UNT Community Music Program (1997-2003), Director of Jazz Combos BYU (1995-1997).