

Introduction

The Concept

The inspiration for this book began with my interest in five-note melodic patterns, sometimes referred to as melodic “shapes”. Initially this interest had to do with explorations with polymeter, as applied to improvising over “familiar” chord changes in 4/4. Using five-note (odd number) shapes as continuous eighth notes over even meters was both challenging and enlightening, and opened up lots of new melodic possibilities for me over this familiar harmonic material. There are many ways to form a five-note melodic shape (scales fragments, modes, intervals, etc.), but one of the most interesting types of five-note shapes I enjoyed working with was simply organizing chord tones into compelling, often beautifully unusual sounding melodic patterns. This became particularly true when I used altered notes over dominant chords (b9, #11, etc.)

So I decided to write an etude to “catalogue” these five-note shapes as they applied to dominant chords. (The first chapter in this book contains that original etude.) My aim was to present what seemed to me as a “natural expansion” of the chord tones, starting with the root ascending to the 9th; then the 3rd ascending to the 11th; then the 5th ascending to the 13th; and finally, the 3rd ascending to the 11th, but with an augmented 5th. Here is a reference chart demonstrating this sequence of expansion, with each note labeled with respect to its function over a C7 chord:

C⁷

1 3 5 7 9 1 3 5 7 b9 1 3 5 7 #9
Shape One Shape Two Shape Three

3 5 7 9 #11 3 5 7 b9 #11 3 5 7 #9 #11
Shape Four Shape Five Shape Six

5 7 9 #11 13 5 7 b9 #11 13 5 7 #9 #11 13
Shape Seven Shape Eight Shape Nine

3 #5 7 9 #11 3 #5 7 b9 #11 3 #5 7 #9 #11
Shape Ten Shape Eleven Shape Twelve

As you can see, there are twelve different five-note chord shapes. **All of the exercises in this book are based upon these twelve shapes**, including many inversions and variations. This book is by no means an “exhaustive” exposition of all the possible chord shapes that can be formed from natural and altered dominant chords tones. You’ll note, I didn’t use, for example $b13^{ths}$, choosing instead to use the $\#5^{th}$ instead. I did this to both think of the altered 5^{th} as something occurring in the “lower” part of the chord (root through 7^{th}), as well as to make my original etude (Chapter One) flow much more melodically. (It is also for that reason that I chose the “#” symbol for labeling the 5^{th} , as opposed to the “+” symbol, as there is no chord root to form an actual augmented 5^{th} .)

I also didn’t include the natural 11^{th} either, mostly because that note tends to be (to me) an awkwardly dissonant note over most dominant chord voicings, clashing with the 3^{rd} (unless it is used in passing). Again, my aim is not to present *all* possibilities, but to simply present a way to work with the more common dominant chord alterations, getting them in them in the ear and “under the fingers”, so to speak.

What I discovered as I started going deeply into working with these twelve shapes was that I was really hearing very clearly (aurally imagining) the “upper partials” (or “upper structures”) of the dominant chords as melodic material in ways like never before. Not only imagining each note of the chord (altered or not), but also how these altered notes sounded in combinations as cohesive melodic material in relation to the dominant chord from which they are formed.

I also discovered that the more I explored each of the twelve shapes in detail (inversions and alterations of sequence), the more I discovered lots of beautifully “angular” sounding melodic material, as these shapes invite explorations into “wider” intervals, like 5^{ths} , 6^{ths} and 7^{ths} . All of this led to the possibility of an ever-expanding melodic vocabulary, a possibility that I would like to share with you.

The aims of this book

I’ve developed and practiced the material in this book with specific aims in mind. I offer this work:

- To help you develop a clearer aural imagination in using the altered notes of dominant chords, not just as singular sounds, but also as tonal color combinations (e.g., $\#5^{th}$ combined with $\#9^{th}$ and $\#11^{th}$, etc.)
- To help you become more fluent and imaginative in using altered notes over dominant chords in all twelve keys

- To help you discover new melodic possibilities when improvising over ii-V type chord progressions
- To inspire you to think and explore more with other kinds of five-note melodic shapes
- To help you improve your skill and flexibility on your instrument with wide intervals
- To challenge your ears
- To help you further cultivate your own personal language as an improviser
- To help you understand and more readily recognize how various scale qualities (melodic minor, diminished, augmented, etc.) relate to dominant chords as alterations.

Format

I've organized this book into four chapters:

Chapter One contains the original etude I composed that presents the flow of each of the twelve of the five-note shapes as a melodic sequence.

Chapter Two offers a more “expanded” version (inversions and alteration of sequence) of each of the shapes to help you place each one more deeply into your aural imagination (your ears) and under your fingers.

Chapter Three demonstrates how each of the twelve shapes can be applied over dominant chords resolving to tonic.

Chapter Four demonstrates how you can apply and combine multiple five-note shapes over the movement of ii-V “turnback” cycles.

How to practice this material

I strongly suggest that you start with Chapter One and spend lots of time there.

The idea is to develop a vivid impression as to how each of the twelve shapes flow together in the “expanding” way I've organized them. This is largely to help you hear the gradual (and not so gradual) changes in each shape as you alter notes, as well as when you omit others.

Of course, I've organized the book in the sequence I think it is best to study, so if you want to “cut to the chase” and apply these shapes over dominant chords, you're welcome to do so. (But *please* start with Chapter One; you'll be happy you did!)

Having said this, **I also recommend** that you spend lots of time with Chapter Two. This will really help you get each shape deeply into your ear, as well as helping you use each shape as “stand alone” mode that you can improvise over. (Plus, it’s great for building your technical skills on your instrument!)

I also highly recommend that you sing each of the twelve shapes in at least one key before spending time working on it with your instrument. The clearer it is in your ear, the more readily it will show up in your playing.

All of the exercises are written in treble clef, and without articulations. Most of the rhythms for each exercise are continuous eighth notes, with the occasional quarter note. The range for any of the exercises, no matter the transposition, is Bb below the staff (at the lowest end), and three octaves up to the double Bb above the staff (at the highest). You can of course transpose octaves where it serves you best.

I’ve aimed at using accidentals as how they represent the notes relative to the chord (e.g., using Db in combination with an F# over a C7 chord). This doesn’t always make it as easy as possible to sight-read the exercises, but it will keep the “function” (#9th, #11th, etc.) always clear in your mind. I think that is crucial. The exception here is with double flats and double sharps. I don’t use either in this book, as that adds just a bit too much of a reading challenge for some. (So you’ll often see, for example, “A” natural in place of “B” double flat over the Ab7 chord when using a lowered 9th.)

Finally, as always, I encourage you to use this book to help you explore and develop your own new melodic possibilities. Feel free to alter the written material I’ve presented to do so. Try different types of rhythms and articulations. Discover something new and have fun with it! Best wishes!