

# Atonal Jazz

**A Systematic  
Approach To Atonal  
Jazz Improvisation**

***By Meyer Kupferman***

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*By Meyer Kupferman*

**A Systematic Approach To  
Atonal Jazz Improvisation**

The complete set of  
**Atonal Jazz**  
includes the following materials!

155 page text

Play-Along CD

3 Play-along books  
(one each for the keys of C, Bb, and Eb)

pull-out chart of INFINITIES TONE-ROW

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# Preface

A contemporary blending of atonal classical music, with jazz elements, has been a major preoccupation of my creative work since the late 1950s. It all began with my *Sonata on Jazz Elements* for piano, in 1958, which was followed by many jazz works, all based on 12-tone procedures. Some of these were for classical performers, like my *Jazz String Quartet* and chamber symphony called *Infinites Twelve*. Others were for jazz players (including myself), like *Tunnels of Love* for clarinet, bass and drums, which I premiered at Carnegie Hall with Richard Davis on bass, and Ronnie Zito on drums. *Jazz Infinites Three* was also composed strictly for jazz artists, while such compositions as *Concerto for Cello and Jazz Band*, *Moon Child and the Doomsday Trombone*, and my recent *Jazz Symphony*, were conceived as atonal classical/jazz vehicles for symphonic musicians and jazz soloists.

In four decades the world of jazz has undergone tremendous upheavals. The impact of brilliant jazz artists, each reflecting an extremely personal message, has left its mark on the evolution of a great new art form. The genius of Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus, Cecil Taylor, and Sonny Rollins, all presented to us a powerful gift of new musical thought, much of which has been preserved, fortunately, on recordings. It is clear that among the varied styles of today's jazz music many embrace the volatile chromaticism of a unique atonality.

It has been evident to many experienced performers and teachers that a need exists for solid direction, or at least a point of view, about atonal jazz. This, in some published or recorded form, that can be carefully studied and practiced. Also, such a work should be directly related to those aesthetic developments in today's jazz experience, which may be ultimately most significant to any serious musician.

No aspiring young artist can really grow without understanding the dynamics of the music world around him. There is, for example, an enormous jazz literature now available on recordings. There are also excellent method books for the study of jazz improvisation, based on tonal principles. Musicians like Jamey Aebersold, Jerry Coker, David Baker, Eddie Harris, David Liebman, and Oliver Nelson, only to site a few, have made wonderful contributions in this area. The use of play-along recordings, as an educational vehicle, has become enormously successful,



and for good reason. There is so much a young performer can learn by trying out their own improvisations in the privacy of one's own room, against the firm rhythmic and harmonic backing of a first rate professional rhythm section.

The area that has not been explored, however, is that of atonal jazz. Writers have often alluded to it in articles and reviews, but no real method book seems to be available for this form of jazz study. Since I have been teaching ensemble improvisation for more than twenty-five

years at Sarah Lawrence College, I have encountered this vacuum over and over again. My solution was to steer advanced students to those contemporary classical sources in books and recordings, and encourage them to work out the connections to new jazz forms entirely on their own. I would, of course, offer suggestions and guidance whenever it seemed appropriate.

At this point, however, I have gained enough experience in this field through my compositional activities, jazz performances, and years of teaching, to test my ideas in a method book centered on atonal jazz. I do feel that it is necessary for students to be comfortable with traditional or tonal improvisation, before they plunge into the complex material of this book. The musical tools and practices of tonal improvisation represent the roots of our evolving new jazz gestalt. To an impressive extent this gestalt has, by now, a strong commitment to atonality.

The compact disc to be used for the play-along studies is documented to a large extent with chord symbols. To some this may be viewed as a contradiction. For me, it is merely another indication of my reluctance to give up tonality in the midst of atonality.

## SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Do not jump right into the play-along studies without going through the material sequentially, beginning with Chapter One. One has to absorb this atonal language and get the feel for its grammar, vocabulary, and idioms. Practice is needed to understand row technique and other types of chromatic principles. A new feeling for rhythm is also essential to these new harmonic directions. Clearly, a little patience will go a long way, for you are about to begin a challenging and exciting musical journey. ♪

# Introduction

**C**hords and scales were our first musical friends. Next came simple repetitive rhythms: swarming sequences of eighth notes, triplets, dotted rhythms, and sixteenth notes. It is more than likely that we all began our earliest studies practicing such standard exercises and simple scale sequences. As a result, our first jazz improvisations generally reflected this kind of basic finger activity. Standard chord patterns, in even repetitive rhythms, were ingrained into our "finger thinking," like half memorized diatonic "licks." These emerged more easily by their own volition, rather than by our own direct control.

The same is probably true in most forms of jazz improvisation. The real singularity of artistic styling is often determined first by what happens with little or no conscious effort in the fingers, and only later those conscious choices of rhythmic design and note patterns, made under pressure during the heat of performance.

Similarly, highly chromatic jazz improvisation often combines the familiar with the unfamiliar, or the conscious with the unconscious.

Atonal improvisation is a difficult challenge to today's jazz instrumentalist. Although there are many interesting ways of approaching the art of atonal jazz improvisation, my own particular preference for a beginning point is that of an amalgamation of standard chords, tunes, and scales, together with a contemporary musical equivalent, like highly chromatic interludes and embellishments. This unorthodox blending should be an easy going "free mix," using a few cogent guide lines rather than a set of hard boiled rules to govern the way such divergent musical elements interact.

Throughout this book the reader will discover that the idea of a "free mix" involves a large variety of tonal and atonal elements. Study pieces, for example, offer

twelve-tone melodies with quasi traditional tonal chord changes (in the usual written chord notation) marked above the music. To some musicians this type of score may represent the "lead sheet" format of the future! There are also twelve-tone materials linked with the whole-tone scale, with patterns of fourths or with fragments of the eight-tone symmetrical scale. These may be hooked up to new jazz forms, sometimes structural, and sometimes instrumentally subjective (the latter is possible only through the most searching kind of improvisation, like the music of say Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk, or Charles Mingus).

Clearly, the attraction of free chromaticism, as well as the challenge of systematic atonality, now exist side by side with the tonal tradition. It is important to remember that sounds which seemed unnatural or discordant to yesterday's generation may eventually prove to be quite normal or even in the forefront of a later period.

The "free mix" tends to bind together unlike materials which permit a totally new jazz compositional approach. All this, however, should be governed by "feel" rather than by rule. Contemporary jazz pieces which are twelve-tone throughout are also gradually making their way into the literature, but these types of compositions tend to be linked more with the contemporary classical world (like *All Set* by Milton Babbitt) rather than the performing jazz world. What should be clear is that the richness of our musical sources today make it dramatically evident that contemporary composers, arrangers, and improvising artists, are now in a position to strike out into truly uncharted territory. ♪

# PART ONE

## CHROMATIC JAZZ TECHNIQUES

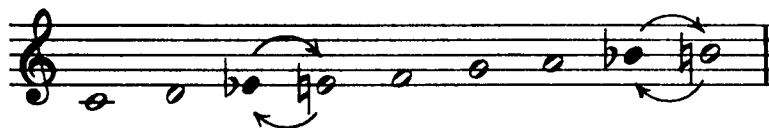
### Chapter One

## Overview Of Chromatic Techniques

For more than four centuries chromaticism has been a major force in Western music. The gradual intrusion of accidentals (#, b, & k); a curious term in itself, or new sharps or flats in our scale formations, has exerted a powerful influence on our chordal structures. Toward the end of the 19th century these influences were strong enough to undermine the stability of our tonal system. Chordal chromaticism, and linear (or melodic) chromaticism, function in similar ways. They intensify the intervallic relationships around them. They also make possible new dissonances in the harmony and new magnetic attractions in any melodic figurations they encounter.

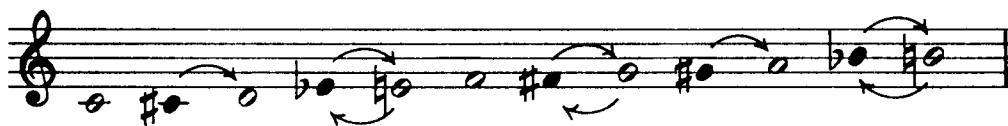
In jazz, the use of "blue notes" provided us with our earliest samples of chromaticism. A blue note is a complete bend in pitch, bringing the original note down an entire half step. The lowered third and seventh eventually became accepted working elements of our basic jazz scale. Later, new blue notes appeared as jazz took on a more universal appeal. If we examine our normal blue note scale we will find a nine tone setting, rather than our usual seven tone diatonic order.

### *Blues Scale*



Increased blue note activity, particularly among singers and horn players, grew out of a kind of "melodic passion" - a strong need to bring expression and emphasis to sustained melodic phrases. In some ways it is quite unnatural for us to sing a tone exactly on pitch and to hold that pitch for even a bar. An expressive jazz singer will want to bend the tone chromatically to add greater depth, color or sensuality. The same is often true for most horn players, who will experiment in half-valve fingerings, manipulate vibrato speeds, or inject short slides or glissandi. The busy fingers of a virtuoso will shoot out rapid chromatic tones like a machine gun.

### *Expanded Blues Scale*



The most frequent blue notes are half-step tones leading away from the II the III the V the VI and the VII. Now, if you count the number of notes in this new blue note scale you will find that they add up to twelve! Indeed a coincidence!

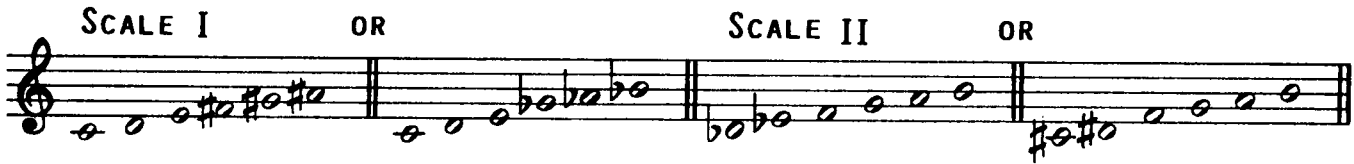
## Chapter Two

# Whole-Tone Scales

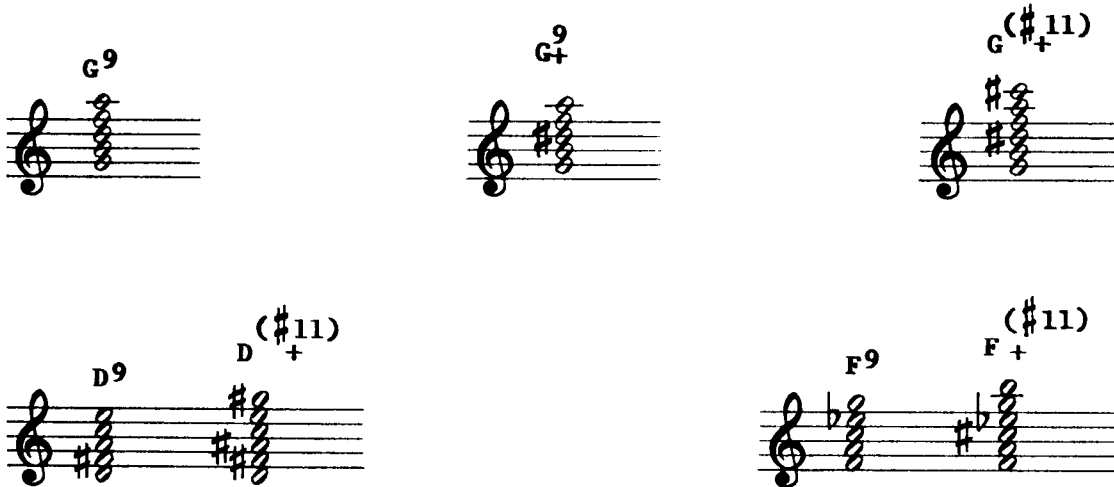
Many famous jazz improvisors of the late 1950s, like Ornette Coleman, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, and Eric Dolphy, enjoyed teasing the ear with short whole-tone, or wildly chromatic licks as a means of enriching their more traditional melodic patterns. The neutrality of whole-tone harmony makes this scale eminently suitable as a mixing agent. Also, since whole-tone passage work is generally easier on the fingers than twelve-tone row forms, it is usually a good idea to precede the study of twelve-tone improvisation with a short study of techniques based on our two whole-tone scales:

*Whole-Tone Scale 1*

*Whole-Tone Scale 2*



It is possible to tip these scales on end and create a variety of chords centered around the augmented fourth or the augmented fifth. Many improvisors have used the whole-tone scale as an extended dominant ninth chord (with the augmented fifth, of course). This is easily accomplished by converting an ordinary  $G^9$  chord into its whole-tone equivalent  $G^+ \#^9$  and still further into a six-note chord,  $G^+ \#^{11}$ . Notice that the  $G^+ \#^{11}$  chord contains all six tones of the whole-tone scale. In like manner, a  $D^9$  chord could easily be converted into a  $D^+ \#^{11}$ , just as an  $F^9$  could be transformed into an  $F^+ \#^{11}$ .



# Eyes For Love

## Exotic Blues

F $\Delta$  C $\sharp$ m6 Dm7 3 Am7 Dm7 3 B $^{\circ}$  3  
 C4 C7 Gm7 C $\sharp^{\circ}$  Dm7 3 G7 F $\sharp$ 7 B $\flat$ 7 (-9) 3  
 Cm7 F-9 B $\flat$  $\Delta$  Gm7  
 G(-5) C4 C7 Am7 D4 D7 Gm7 C7 F $\Delta$  3  
 Dm7 3 D $\flat$ 7 F $\Delta$  3

# Eyes For Love

(the chords, CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

## Exotic Blues

F C $\sharp$ m6 Dm7 Am7 Dm7 B $^{\circ}$  C $\sharp$ 11 C4 C7



# Eyes For Love

(variation one)

## Exotic Blues

The musical score for "Exotic Blues" is written in 4/4 time and consists of eight staves of music. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score includes various chords and ornaments:

- Staff 1:** Chords: F $\Delta$ , C $\sharp$ m6, Dm7, Am7, Dm7, B $^{\circ}$ . Includes a piano (*p*) dynamic marking.
- Staff 2:** Chords: Gm7, C $\sharp^{\circ}$ , Dm, G7, F $\sharp$ 7. Includes a box with "C11+" and two triplet markings (3).
- Staff 3:** Chords: Cm7, F-9. Includes a box with "Bb11+" and a triplet marking (3).
- Staff 4:** Chords: Bb $\Delta$ , Gm7. Includes a box with "G11+".
- Staff 5:** Chords: Gm7. Includes a box with "C11+" and two triplet markings (3).
- Staff 6:** Chords: Am7, Gm7, F $\Delta$ . Includes boxes with "D11+" and "C11+" and a triplet marking (3).
- Staff 7:** Chords: Dm7, D $\flat$ 7+, F $\Delta$ . Includes a box with "D $\flat$ 7+" and a triplet marking (3).
- Staff 8:** Chords: F $\Delta$ . Includes a box with "C11+" and a triplet marking (3).

# Eyes For Love

(variation two)

Exotic Blues style

*mp espr.*

Chord symbols:  $F\Delta$ ,  $C\#m$ ,  $Dm7$ ,  $Am7$ ,  $Dm7$ ,  $B^\circ$ ,  $Gm7$ ,  $C\#^\circ$ ,  $Dm$ ,  $G7$ ,  $F\#7$ ,  $Bb^{11}$ ,  $Cm7$ ,  $F-9$ ,  $Bb\Delta$ ,  $Gm7$ ,  $G^{11}$ ,  $C^{11}$ ,  $Am7$ ,  $D^{11}$ ,  $Gm7$ ,  $C^{11}$ ,  $F\Delta$ ,  $Dm7$ ,  $Db^7$ ,  $F\Delta$ .

# Mystery Kiss

Meyer Kupferman

Adagio blues

The musical score consists of ten staves of music in a 4/4 time signature. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes various dynamics and articulations:

- Staff 1: *p espr.* (piano, expressive), includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Staff 2: *f* (forte), *p* (piano), includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Staff 3: *cresc.* (crescendo), includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Staff 4: *f* (forte), includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Staff 5: *p* (piano), includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Staff 6: *cresc.* (crescendo), *f* (forte), includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Staff 7: *mf* (mezzo-forte), *p* (piano), includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Staff 8: *pp* (pianissimo), includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Staff 9: *f* (forte), includes a triplet of eighth notes.

# Mystery Kiss Analysis

Adagio blues

The musical score consists of ten staves of music in treble clef, 7/8 time. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. Key features include:

- Staff 1:** Labeled "Adagio blues". Features a "passing" note and a triplet. Dynamic: *p espr.*
- Staff 2:** Labeled "Row 1 inversion". Features a triplet. Dynamic: *f*.
- Staff 3:** Labeled "Row 2" and "Row 2 inversion retrograde". Features triplets. Dynamic: *p*. Marking: *cresc.*
- Staff 4:** Labeled "Row 8" and "Row 2 with aberrations". Features a triplet. Dynamic: *f*.
- Staff 5:** Labeled "Row 10 inversion with aberrations" and "non 12-tone interlude". Features a triplet. Dynamic: *f*. Marking: *cresc.*
- Staff 6:** Features a triplet. Dynamic: *mf*.
- Staff 7:** Features a triplet. Dynamic: *p*.
- Staff 8:** Labeled "Row 8". Dynamic: *pp*.
- Staff 9:** Labeled "Row 8". Dynamic: *f*.

# Atonal Jazz

ATONAL JAZZ  
ATONAL JAZZ

## *Meyer Kupferman* *Play-Along Book* FOR C INSTRUMENTS

This section of **Atonal Jazz** is devoted to improvisational studies to be played against a prerecorded jazz backing of piano, bass, drums, and one wind instrument. You will hear some tuning notes at the beginning of the CD. Each musical number will be preceded by a two bar time count to set the tempo. The published material here is divided into three transpositions: "C" instruments, "B flat" instruments, and "E flat" instruments.

The chordal signs over the written material is mostly for the back-up instruments, but it is also designed to give an unusual quasi-tonal implication to the atonal material. The chordal signs in the ad lib areas, however, are indeed tonal but should be approached unconventionally at all times. Steer clear of passages that suggest ordinary melodic tonal formations that stick very close to the indicated triads.

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# Bridge

Brightly (♩ = 176)

Meyer Kupferman

Musical score for the Bridge section of 'First Tune On CD' by Meyer Kupferman. The score is written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It consists of ten staves of music. The first staff begins with a Gm7 chord and a 4-measure phrase. The second staff continues with Eb/Ab and a triplet. The third staff features Bm7 and Bb(-5) chords. The fourth staff has DΔ and F#Δ chords. The fifth staff includes E° and C9 chords. The sixth staff shows Eb(-5) and Am6 chords. The seventh staff has C#(-5) and a triplet. The eighth staff is marked with a box 'A' and contains Gm7 and F(-5) chords. The ninth staff concludes with Eb/Ab and triplets. The music is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs, and a variety of jazz-influenced chords.

Musical notation for the first system, featuring various chords and triplets:

- Bm<sup>7</sup>**
- B<sup>9</sup>(-5)**
- D $\Delta$**
- F $\sharp$**
- E $^{\circ}$**
- C<sup>9</sup>**
- E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>(-5)**
- Am<sup>6</sup>**
- C $\sharp$ <sup>7</sup>(-5)**

**B [AD LIB]**

Musical notation for the second system, featuring chords and a rhythmic pattern:

- Gm<sup>7</sup>**
- F<sup>9</sup>(-5)**
- E $\flat$ /A $\flat$**

(Play 5 times)

Musical notation for the third system, featuring chords and a rhythmic pattern:

- Bm<sup>7</sup>**
- B $\flat$ <sup>9</sup>(-5)**
- D $\Delta$**

Musical notation for the fourth system, featuring chords and a rhythmic pattern:

- F $\sharp$  $\Delta$**
- E $^{\circ}$**
- C<sup>9</sup>**

Musical notation for the fifth system, featuring chords and a rhythmic pattern:

- E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>(-5)**
- Am<sup>6</sup>**
- C $\sharp$ <sup>7</sup>(-5)**