ALTERNATIVE CHORD PROGRESSIONS

Before I get underway, I'd like to point out that in my own journey into jazz, I have derived a lot of pleasure and satisfaction from listening to the Standards played by the top players, just as much as many other people have and still do. I have also played many Standards as a professional musician and written quite a few arrangements of them for various bands.

It should be remembered that the early repertoire of jazz consisted of the blues and ragtime tunes. Somewhere along the line, jazz got into bed with the American Songbook. Maybe it was pressure from vocalists who wanted well-known songs to sing, or perhaps it was through commercial pressure - a demand that bands play the popular music of the day. While this was understandable, it became too much of a strangle-hold.

There have always been tunes written by jazz musicians themselves, but the majority of the repertoire still played by most musicians is taken from the American Songbook. Go along to any jam session, and you will encounter a selection of these songs. Unfortunately, jam sessions seem to attract the least-able musicians, while the better musicians find it gives them a chance to show off their own technical skills. In this sort of environment, musicality goes out of the window. Both good and bad musicians tend to go in for long drawn-out solos, while the members of the rhythm section have to accompany them without falling asleep or passing out from sheer exhaustion.

OK, I'll be blunt. What is it about Standards which increasingly leaves me cold? You cannot fault the ability of the song-writers to come up with a catchy initial musical phrase, along with catchy lyrics to go with it. Certainly, the composers of these songs had a thorough grounding in traditional European music theory, by which I mean the following. The majority of the chords are taken from the notes found in the major or minor key of the piece itself. There is often a modulation in the first 8 or 16 bars to a closely related key before returning to the home key again. Then in the bridge section (also known as the middle 8) there is usually a number of modulations to other keys, ending up with a transition back to the home key of the song. This often adheres to the cycle of fifths.

Regarding format, most Standards, follow this pattern: 8 bars; 8 bars in which at least half of which is the same as in the first 8 bars; a middle 8; and finally 8 bars or 10 bars, if a tag is included, in which again a good deal of it is the same as in the first 8 bars. The point is that all of this became a formula and did not change until the arrival of pop music.

Some composers were more adventurous - Jerome Kern, and Hoagy Carmichael, for instance, but still that leaves a lot of stuff that is, to be honest, quite mundane. Believe me, I played solo piano in a prestigious restaurant in a five-star hotel for 27 years and had to play hundreds of Standards every night. Some of the tunes retained my interest, but I wish that quite a few of them had never been written.

The other thing that used to get to me was the unimaginitive chord progressions of so many of these songs, often a succession of 1-6-2-5s and 2-5-1s with the occasional cycle of fifths thrown in.

The end result is that many people now think of jazz as music which must contain these elements. They are the easily-spotted identifying facts and just a few bars is enough to convince a great many people that what they are hearing must be jazz. The element of improvisation seems to matter much less to them.

To my mind, the most ridiculous thing occured in bebop times when bebop-style tunes, or "heads", were written over the chord changes of several of these songs with a few additional 2-5s and 2-5-1 s being added in places where the original chord sequence had few chords.

Fortunately, there were jazz musicians around who produced more interesting, thought-provoking pieces, people like Thelonius Monk, Charlie Mingus, Dave Brubeck, Oliver Nelson, Freddie Hubbard, Herbie Hancock, Bill Evans, Wayne Shorter and so on, but a lot were "handicapped" by not having any lyrics, which took away some of the potential audience for these pieces. Audiences in general do like vocalists and vocalists who sing songs that people are familiar with.

Then, in the 1970s a group of students from the Berkley School of Music compiled the Real Book - a collection of Standards, plus some jazz tunes. This became the bible for a lot of musicians and, it must be said, it proved very useful

for them when doing gigs or playing in jam sessions. But the chord sequences in the Real Book very soon became the holy grail of 2-5-1s. No dominant sevenths without preceding minor sevenths, or half-diminished (min7 b5) chords in the case of minor cadences (2-5-1ms).

But there are other forces at play here. Scour the internet and you will come across ways to play on these sequences. So this immediately removes any creative response by the players to these albeit-clichéd progressions. To make matters worse are the collections of licks that are published that can be utilised to get round the chords. This is anathema to the whole spirit of jazz in my opinion.

I'll get to point and say straight out that I am totally fed up with 1-6-2-5s and 2-5-1s. There are alternative chord progressions and they bring a freshness to the music.

What I would like to do, now, is to list some alternatives to the chord sequences that can be used, at least in original music. (Some people take exception to changing the chords in Standards.) Some of these alternatives may already be familiar to people; others not.

A note of caution though - whereas it is easy enough to write using conventional chord changes, using alternative changes can be much trickier and should be checked over on a piano to make sure they sound acceptable. You need not totally banish 2-5-1 s, but you can make your music much more interesting by reducing the number of them. Examples of these alternative progressions can be found below.

ALTERNATE CHORD PROGRESSIONS

1. A CHORD OF ONE TYPE CAN GO TO ANOTHER CHORD OF THE SAME TYPE

There are <u>six basic types of chord</u>: major, minor, minor seventh, dominant seventh, diminished and half-diminished, all of which have a specific function. However, at times, dominant sevenths and minor sevenths can be used as tonic chords, in place of major chords and minor chords.

The augmented triad could be viewed as another type, but in jazz it usually becomes a dominant seventh augmented chord, eg. C7 (#5). More of a rarity occurs when a minor seventh note is added to the augmented triad, eg. C maj7(#5). The augmented chord is therefore subsumed into the other categories of dominant sevenths and major chords, respectively.

You can follow a chord of one type by another similar chord. For example, Cm7 to F#m7 or Ebm7 or Abm7, etc. This is also possible if the chords have higher extensions, becoming minor 9ths, minor 11ths and minor 13ths. Sometimes it is also possible or even desirable for a minor seventh to go to another minor chord - a minor 6 or 69 or a minor major 7th - but it must still be a minor chord. This must not be overdone or it will lose its allure.

Care must be taken with <u>consecutive major chords with altered fifths</u>, and dominant sevenths with altered fifths and <u>ninths</u>. Chords with different alterations, including natural ninths and fifths will usually follow each other with no problem, but best to check them out. The best quide is to use your ears. Don't worry if it goes against conventional music theory. If it sounds right, it IS right.

2. SUS CHORDS.

Instead of, say, Dm7 G7 C (a 2-5-1) you can usually use a G7sus4 chord for the second chord and omit the preceeding Dm7 chord. There is no need to always resolve the sus chord, as it may depend upon the melody note at that point. You may even get away with a 4th and the 3rd an octave above. If the 1-chord is a minor, you can flatten the 9th of the G7sus4, which is best written like this: Dm7(b5)/G giving you Dm7(b5)/G Cm69 or other minor chord.

3. MODAL SOLUTION.

This can take two forms.

a) Give the player a chord or scale to play over for several bars and specify you want it played <u>modally</u>. (If you are not fussed about this, you can just leave out this instruction but any chromatic notes the player may use will not result in adherence to the mode.)

This works best with the (major) Lydian and Mixo-Lydian, and the (minor) Dorian, Phrygian and Aolian Modes but doesn't come off with the Ionian (normal major diatonic scale). The players may insist upon knowing the chords, in which case tell them that it was good enough for Miles when Gil Evans just gave him a scale to play on.

b) Give the player a series of chords taken from a specific mode and ask the player to solo over a given mode which fits all the chords.

4. OTHER SCALES BESIDES MODES

You may prefer using <u>pentatonic or diminished scales</u> - the same applies.

For those who would like to spice things up you could use some composite or Arabic scales (Maqam):

- 1. CDbEFGAbBC
- 2. CDEbF#GAbBC
- 3. C D Eb F G Ab Bb B C (C D Eb F G Ab Bb C is Eb major scale)
- 4. C Db E F G Ab Bb B C
- 5. C Db E F F# G Ab Bb (B) C

etc. etc.

5. TRITONE DOMINANT SEVENTH SUBSTITUTES

This is a well-known trick, using a Db7 (b5) for a G7 (b5) chord, or vice versa. Remember also point 1 above. Thus, you may have Dm7 followed by Db7 (b5) going to any other dominant seventh with a flattened fifth. The addition of another chord means that it too can be substituted for yet another such chord, and so on.

6. USING CHORDS TAKEN FROM THE RELATIVE MINOR KEY (OR MAJOR KEY IF IN A MINOR KEY)

This is an old favourite with classical composers in the 19th century.

These are the basic chords in a major key and below are chords taken from the melodic minor and below this from the harmonic minor.

 Cmaj7
 Dm7
 Em7
 Fmaj7
 G7(9)
 Am7
 Bm7(b5)

 Cmmaj7
 Dm7
 Ebmaj7(#5)
 F7
 G7(9)
 Am7(b5)
 Bm7(b5)

 Cmmaj7
 Dm7(b5)
 Ebmaj7(#5)
 Fm7
 G7(b9)
 Abmaj7
 Bdim

It may be possible, say in the key of C major, to use the equivalent chords taken from C melodic or harmonic minor.

7. RESOLVING ONTO AN UNEXPECTED CHORD AT END OF PHRASE

This was common in Medieval music, so try it out with simple chords first as it is the movement of inner parts which are important.

Let's suppose a phrase ends Dm7 G7 C. Now change the last chord, say to an A, or Ab, or F or E - a lot depends upon the voicing to be effective. You can, with a bit of tinkering about, substitute any major chord for the last one. But if you go to more distant keys you will often need some notes common to both the dominant seventh and following chord. This will involve various extensions or alterations. Eg. Dm7 G7 Ebmaj7 - the B is found in both the

G7 and the Ebmaj7 (#5).

To generalise, adjacent chords, whatever they are, that are from distant keys will often need at least one note in common. Eg. Cmaj9 to Ebmmaj9 - the D. It is often most effective if the note in common has a prominent part, such as the lead/melody.

8. SUBSTITUTE DOMINANT SEVENTHS FOR MINOR SEVENTHS

Minor sevenths in progressions such as Bb Gm7 Cm7 F7 (a 1-6-2-5 sequence) are often replaced by dominant sevenths with various altered 5ths and 9ths. Here, the Gm7 can be replaced by a G7. In this particular sequence, the third chord can be either a Cm7 or a C7.

9. INSTEAD OF REPEATING THE TONIC CHORD, SUBSTITUTE A MINOR SEVENTH A MAJOR THIRD ABOVE THE TONIC CHORD

This is very common - Cmaj7 Am7 Dm7 G7 **Em7** (in place of the Cmaj7) Am7 Dm7 G7 This minor seventh chord is sometimes turned into a dominant seventh.

10. AMBIGUOUS CHORDS

Certain chords, containing no more than 4 notes, can be viewed as belonging to a number of different keys. C augmented (C E G#) can resolve onto an F major chord, or the G# may merely be a passing note against the C major chord, going from G to G# to A. Change the bass note to an E and it becomes an E aug which can resolve onto an A major chord. Starting on G# we have a G# aug chord, resolving onto a C# major chord. Thus a C augmented triad can be followed by an F major chord, an A major chord, or a C# major chord.

Far more common is the diminished (seventh) chord. Classical composers could not get enough of this chord. So, a B diminished seventh chord - B D F Ab, could be regarded as a Bb7 (b9) (the B being the b9); a G7 (b9) with the Ab being the b9; an E7 with the F being the (b9); or a Db7(b9) with the D being the (b9). This ambiguity easily enables modulations into four different keys.

It is often used in jazz. Take the tune I Got Rhythm, where the original sequence is:

Bb Gm7 Cm7 F7. This is a 1-6-2-5 sequence. As stated earlier, the second chord could be replaced by a G7 (b9).

A common substitute for this is: Bb Bdim Cm7 C#dim. The F in the Bdim chord is replaced by a G without altering the chord type. Instead of going to the Cm7, it could go to a Gb7, or an Eb7, or to an A7 - although this one is not so easy to do.

Similarly, a basic Cm7 chord could be regarded as an Abmaj9 or an F7sus4 or an Eb6. Likewise, a basic C major7 could be thought of as an Am9, or a D7 sus4, etc. And a Dm7(b5) could be viewed as an Fm6, which in itself could be part of a Bb9, or it may be regarded as an Abmaj7(b5). All of these have repercussions for what chord you can choose to follow them.

11. TONICIZATION

This merely means changing one chord (other than the tonic) into a new tonic chord by means of adding a (secondary) dominant seventh immediately before it.

Take this sequence: Cmaj7 Em7 Fmaj7 Dm7 Em7 Am7 Fm6 G7

Now replace the Dm7 with a Dmaj7 which thus becomes a new tonic chord. To make a smoother transition add an A7 before it, straight after the Fmaj7, or you could omit the Fmaj7 altogether. It you wanted to make the Fm6 (the penultimate chord) into a new tonic, you merely change the Am7 into a C7 with the option of omitting the Em7 which comes before that. (In writing chord sequences, you sometimes have to work backwards.)

12. CYCLE OF FOURTHS, etc

Everyone knows about the cycle of fifths, but there are other cycles. Here is the cycle of fourths: C G D A E B F# C# Ab Eb Bb F Extracts from this cycle can be a refreshing change. Keep the chords uniform: major or minor chords work well.

The cycle of major 3rds - C E Ab C follows the augmented chord.

The cycle of minor 3rds - C Eb Gb A C follows the diminished chord.

13. ASCENDING OR DESCENDING BY HALF OR WHOLE STEP

This is always a useful device and the descending pattern is used a lot. The chords themselves maybe dominant sevenths or a mixture of these with other chords, such as major sevenths. The same applies to the ascending pattern. It is sometimes possible to use a mixture of half and whole steps.

14. USING INVERSIONS

The first inversion of major/minor chords in jazz is not common as it can sound too "classical". All you need to do it to add the major seventh and/or the second to the chord to give it a different flavour. You can then treat it as a hybrid chord, whereas in root position the chord progression would not work as well.

Eg. D to E to Cmaj7/E to Bbmaj7/D to E

The second inversion does not possess the same mystical sound but remains very rooted as to what it is.

The third inversion, whether the bass note is the minor or major seventh note of the chord, can be used too. The minor seventh note, Bb in a C7, is quite common place and usually resolves down a half or whole step, eg. C7 to C7/Bb to Am7. However the chord after the C7/Bb could be a different chord. See what works.

The <u>major seventh note</u> - B in a C major7 is more discordant but can lead to an interesting sequence.

Eg. Cmaj7 to Cmaj7/B to F#m11 or perhaps Cmaj7 to Cmaj7/B to Fmaj7(#11) etc.

Think of these inversions as being in a parallel universe providing portals to different sounds.

15. PEDALS

Pedals are extremely useful devices. I'll discuss just pedals in the bass here as those are what really dictate the chord progression. In a sequence using a pedal, the first chord tends to be concordant with the pedal, after which the notes of the chords can change diatonically or chromatically to create some interesting tensions and dissonances. Be aware of which resulting chord is the most dissonant so you can build up to this chord.

16. SUCCESSIVE TRIADS CONTAINING ONE OR MORE "FOREIGN" NOTES

See the table at the end of this file for a full run-down of triads with a single foreign note in the bass. They can also be found with a perfect 5th in the bass, progressing to similar configurations in parallel or contrary motion.

A more advanced stage of this is where there is a three-note chord, combined with another three-note chord some distance away which moves towards or away from the other chord. Where they move in opposite directions to one another, it is labelled mirror imaging. One or other, or both of the sections can be a triad or a chord built of fourths (usually perfect fourths). This device can also be applied using the notes of a mode which results in some fascinating chords along the way.

17. DISPENSING WITH TURN-AROUNDS

In many Standards the final tonic chord may be arrived at in the penultimate bar or even two bars from the end, so a turn-around is necessary before the sequence is repeated. This is always a bit of an anticlimax. I think it is more sensible to end the chord progression on another chord, which then leads on to the tonic chord in the first bar of the

repeat. This dispenses with having to tread water at the end of each chorus.

18. CHANGING THE CHORD PROGRESSION.

To some people the chord progression of an existent song is sacrosant. But it makes more sense to change it for soloing purposes if it makes the task of soloing easier or more meaningful. The Standards were not originally written to be used as vehicles for jazz. Where there are different chords for each beat or for each note of the tune it would be impossible to stick to this for soloing, so you can devise a simplified progression which hints at the overall direction of the sequence without being too dogmatic.

19. INCLUDING LONG STRETCHES ON ONE CHORD

This device can be useful for building up tension. It could be used for a different rhythm from the preceeding section (Latin, for instance within a swing feel for the rest of the tune.) It's an old trick but can be highly effective.

20. WANDERING HARMONY - changing 1 or 2 notes to get a new chord. See Chopin's Prelude 4 at the very end of this tutorial.

21. MUSICIANS' CHOICE

I have done this in various arrangements and it works. You give each horn player the same scale and ask them to play any note on a given signal. The responsibility of the leader is to dictate things, such as what rhythm to play, or on which beat, or whether to play the note short or long. I have done this by giving the members of the band a sheet of paper on which the various options are listed and numbered, eg. staccato note, long note, a note with a fall on it, etc. It is then just a question of indicating by holding up the right number of fingers and then directing the musicians when to play.

FOOTNOTE

There is no substitute for doing as all the great composers and arrangers have done, which is to sit down at the piano and by trial and error find what works and what doesn't in coming up with a new chord progression.

SOME MELODIC AND RHYTHMIC POINTS

1. INCORPORATION OF DIFFERENT TIME SIGNATURES

Jazz seems to be scared of doing this. Jazz musicians are notably good at feeling groups of 4 bars in 4/4 time, so they have no difficulty in feeling the 12 bars of a blues or the 16 and even 32 bars of a standard tune. What worries most of them is when there is the odd bar or more of 2/4 or 3/4 within these structures. They can cope with a whole piece in 5/4 but not usually when there is an odd 5/4 bar inserted in a chorus.

I put this down to the fact that this does not occur in any American songbook tunes. Those composers with European roots (often Russian or English) had no experience of this, whereas, had they come from Bulgaria, Arab countries or India, the American songbook would have been very different.

2. INCORPORATION OF RUBATO PLAYING (COLLA VOCE)

This does exist in some ballad playing, but usually takes the form of just prolonging a certain chord, which is always directed by the soloist. This is not the same as following a chord sequence that is played rubato or colla voce.

3. INCORPORATION OF THINGS LIKE RITS, AND ACCELS.

Rits do occur, usually at the very end of pieces, but rarely within. Accels, for some reason, are very rare. Instances of rits, accels and rubato playing did see the light of day in some free jazz, but it is nowadays still quite rare.

4. INCORPORATION OF 2 DIFFERENT TEMPOS AT THE SAME TIME

I'm referring to totally different tempos, not 2 against 3. It can be done - I have written one piece to prove it and it worked (Fisher Folk). Usually on recordings where this is done, it is something which is done post-production rather than live. But it would be interesting to do in a live situation.

5. NOT SOLOING OVER THE CHORD SEQUENCE BUT DEVELOPING MOTIFS FROM THE TUNE ITSELF.

The actual chord progression can be dispensed with or altered to enable soloists to play around with elements from the tune itself. There is no reason why this cannot be done.









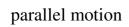
1st inversions

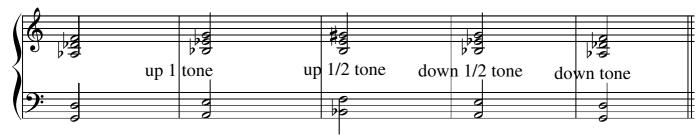


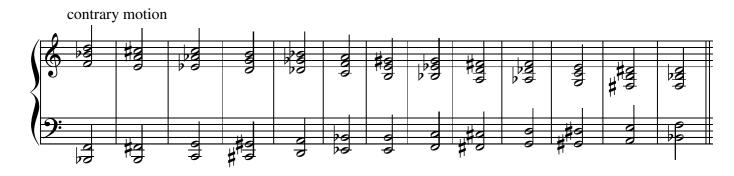
2nd inversions (of Eb)

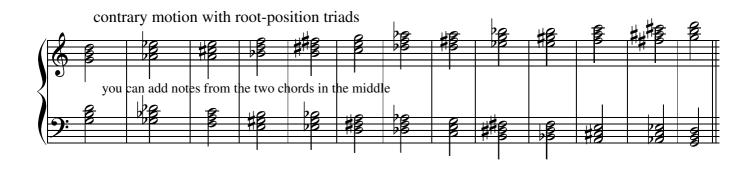












SOME EXAMPLES

Bandora's pox - using just one scale throughout (similar to modal playing)

Bridges - unexpected chord changes, particularly at end of phrases

Pravda - bass pedals and sequence of parallel 4ths with additional notes added

Rachael's Peace - inversions

When all's been said and done - pedals and descending bass lines

Anima - pedals and unexpected sequences

Intuition - progressions of same type of chord

Revelations - sequences of same type of chord and sus chords

Under the sun - descending lines in bass

Child's play - sequence of same type of chord

No such thing as never - sequences of descending major 2nds and perfect 4ths

Whoops - unexpected chord progression

The best of friends - chords on each note of the tune condensed into simple sequence for soloing

See final page for links to recording/soundbites of these tunes

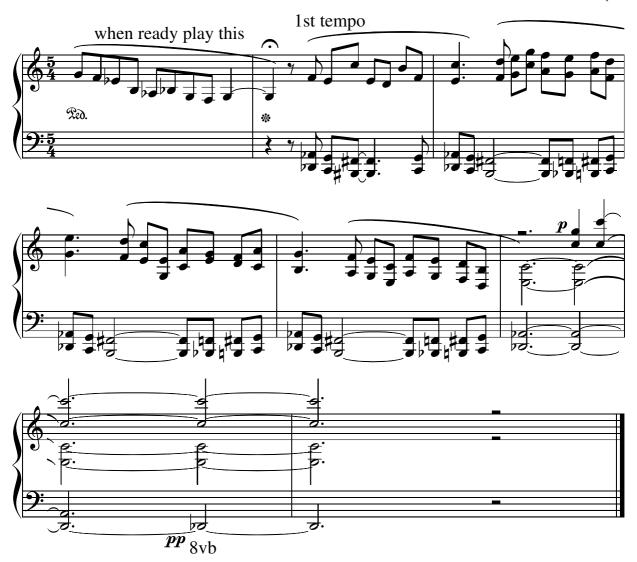




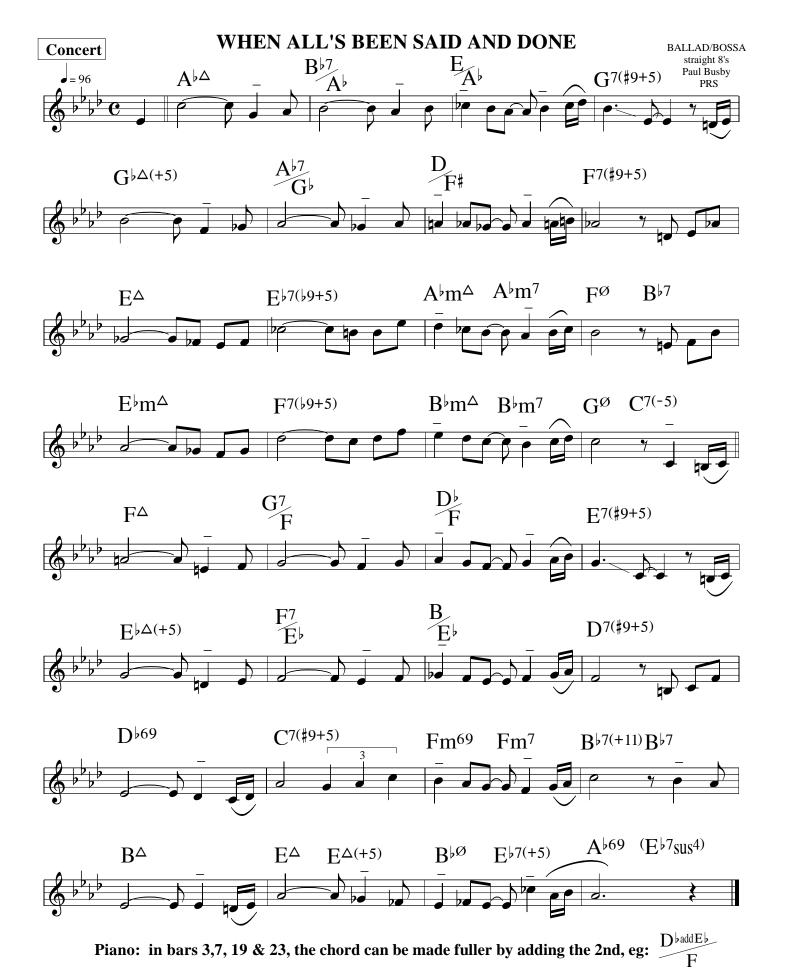
Piano, Bass & Drums also play the syncopated beats



















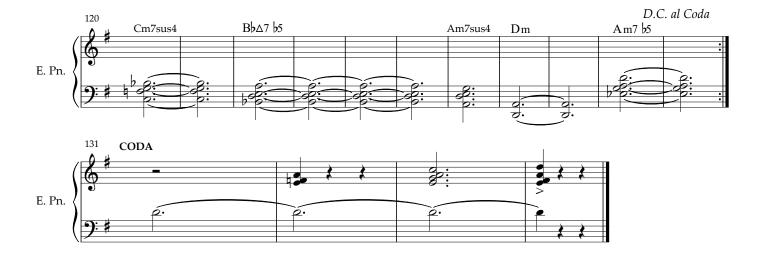


CHILD'S PLAY

Paul Busby







On the recording this is played by electronic piano (software). If playing it on accoustic piano, use the pedal to play it legato.



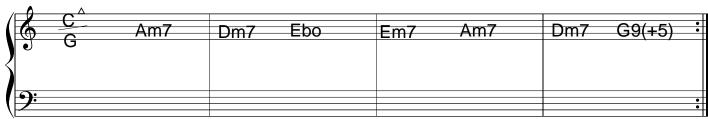


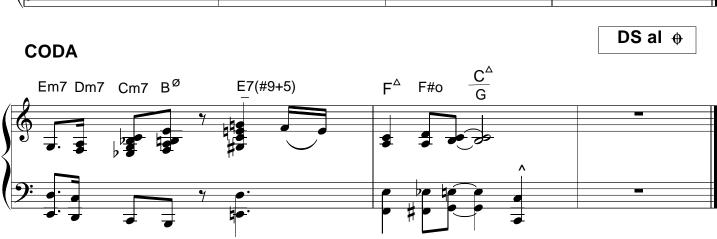




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SOME EXAMPLES

Bandora's Pox - using just one scale throughout (similar to modal playing) www.scoredchanges.com/soundbites/collections/bandoras%20pox.mp3

Bridges - unexpected chord changes, particularly at end of phrases www.scoredchanges.com/soundbites/collections/bridges.mp3

Pravda - bass pedals and sequence of parallel 4ths with additional notes added www.scoredchanges.com/soundbites/solopiano/pravda.mp3

Rachael's Peace - inversions

www.scoredchanges.com/soundbites/trombones/rachaelspeace.mp3

When all's been said and done - pedals and descending bass lines https://youtu.be/qtTRLvrXg70

Anima - pedals and unexpected sequences www.scoredchanges.com/soundbites/collections/anima.mp3

Intuition - progressions of same type of chord www.scoredchanges.com/soundbites/collections/intuition.mp3

Revelations - sequences of same type of chord and sus chords https://youtu.be/W22ORRso6uc

Under the sun - descending lines in bass https://youtu.be/1stylaVnHDI

Child's play - sequence of same type of chord <u>www.scoredchanges.com/soundbites/solopiano/childs-play.mp3</u>

No such thing as never - sequences of descending major 2nds and perfect 4ths https://youtu.be/7cQYTAYLBRM

Whoops - unexpected chord progression www.scoredchanges.com/soundbites/collections/whoops.mp3

The best of friends - chords on each note of the tune condensed into simple sequence for soloing https://youtu.be/J13fn6gyzog

Chopin - Prelude 4

