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## INTRO

### *Preface*

#### *Two Tales*

Playing jazz is fun.  
Or is it?

Jim, a young musician, is sitting in an improv class, where he's staring at a page of music that has 47 chord changes above the melody. Picking up his horn to solo, he sounds *AWFUL!* He can't swing, can't keep his train of thought, gets lost, and is frustrated beyond words. "Phrygian scale over the minor-iii chord," his mentor reminds him. "Quickly, now the Locrian scale... now Dorian...don't forget to shift to *MIXOLYDIAN OVER THE V-CHORD HERE...!!!*" "Man," Jim exclaims, "soloing is like trying to improvise a speech while dodging tomatoes from the audience every two seconds. I don't like it. *I quit!*"

Sound familiar?

Another young musician, Susan, sits in at a jazz club when the combo calls *Moten Swing*. "But I've never played *Moten Swing*," she says, panic setting in. "Relax," a veteran band member tells her. "The tune's in A $\flat$ , with a bridge in C. You'll hear it." And sure enough, when she improvises her solo using the A $\flat$  major scale, switching to the C major scale for the bridge, it sounds all right! Smiling, she plays a few choruses before turning the stage back over to her hosts with the applause of the audience.

A week later, Susan's on a lead-sheet gig looking at a page of melody and lyrics to another tune she's never played: Gershwin's *They Can't Take That Away From Me*. She notices that the melody to this legendary tune doesn't have a single accidental until one occurs in the bridge. So when her solo rolls around, she decides to ignore the intimidating chord symbols and instead just improvise using *no accidentals*, staying in the home key. And she sounds OK! She closes her eyes, relaxes, and focuses on creating lyrical, swinging lines—and it works! "Wow," she says to herself, "if the home key is good enough for George Gershwin's melody, then it's good enough for my first solo chorus!"

Susan's already had a couple of great experiences and is going to continue studying jazz. Eventually she'll learn a lot more about chords and symbols and what options they afford her when she solos; but she's already hooked on the joyous feeling of creating new melodies over a tune's harmony. Meantime, nobody in

her audiences can figure out how she picked up on this "jazz thing" so darned fast.

Jim, on the other hand, has found the whole "calculus of jazz" to be too overwhelming and hasn't yet had the pleasure of creating a lyrical solo. In fact, he's been told that he probably won't play a good solo until some four or five years down the road, after he's learned all his scales, modes, chords, arpeggios, and transposed 100 licks into all 12 keys. But that seems an awfully long time to wait for some satisfaction; and Jim is not at all interested in treading on that long, long road: he has *quit*.

In whose shoes would you rather be?

#### *The Problem: Frustration!*

Many musicians begin exploring jazz through one-chord (modal) tunes or few-chord blues tunes—fine. The problem occurs in making the leap to the many-chord standard tunes: tunes by Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Rodgers and Hart, Duke Ellington—tunes such as *All of Me*, *I Could Write a Book*, *Over the Rainbow*, *Take the "A" Train*...and Latin tunes by Antonio Carlos Jobim such as *Meditation* and *Wave*.

All of a sudden, you're faced with 40-60 chord symbols on a 32-bar tune; and somehow you're supposed to create thoughtful, lyrical, swinging new melodies? Very few musicians can quickly master keeping their creative right-brains happily improvising while their mathematical left-brains are overcompensating for all the symbols on the page. The 5% who can don't need this book—unless they're teaching one of the 95% of the rest of us. Musicians newer to jazz want to get it "right" but often get frustrated and scared; and many of their ensemble instructors are frustrated and scared because they, too, may not have gotten a chance to study jazz in depth.

So what happens? The instructors tend to program few-chord tunes on their concerts so that the students sound better. Or they encourage their students to play the suggested, written-out solos rather than improvising. But as soon as even an eight-bar ad-lib solo pops up in a big band chart of a standard tune like *Misty*, the improvising student's solo falls apart; and the band also sounds the worse for it.

As a result, many of our students—and their teachers—are not learning the "Great American Songbook": the great tunes from Broadway and film,

the works of the Tin Pan Alley composers and others. Nor are they learning the wonderful bossa nova, samba, and Afro-Cuban tunes also based on *ii-V-I* progressions. An important heritage is being discarded en masse because of fear of chord symbols.

### *The Jazz Highway*

Imagine for a moment that you're driving on the interstate from one city to another, whizzing past exits every other minute. Do you decide to take each exit, leaving the highway, and then find the nearest on-ramp to hasten back to the highway—then exit the next exit and repeat the process...and then again, and again? Of course not. While such an approach might generate the ultimate scenic route, you might also get repeatedly lost if you're unfamiliar with the locations of the necessary on-ramps. At the very least, you'll quickly become frustrated at the constant interruption to what would have been steady pacing during your journey.

While exits are indeed opportunities to leave the main highway, they also serve a function as guideposts or landmarks: no one says you are required to follow each exit off the road. By simply passing by most of them, you get straight to where you're going, *especially if you're trying to arrive at a destination for the very first time*. Staying on the main road offers you confidence, good focus on your goal, and good timing in your arrival.

Now imagine for a moment that you're in a jazz group reading a new tune, a tune with 52 chord changes in 32 bars—including 14 different chord changes. Your destination is to create lyrical improvisations throughout the tune's form, yet every measure brings you one or two invitations to divert your attention to the chord symbols within it. You're a relatively new "driver" on this path and find it challenging to keep your melodic focus when confronted with so much different chordal signage: should you decide to take each chordal "exit," react to that chord; jump back into your melodic focus—then exit into the next chord; then try to regain that lyrical focus, divert to the next chord symbol...and again and again? *No wonder you're frustrated!*

Yet many budding improvisers—students and teachers alike—know of no alternative to taking each "exit." Every time they focus on creating a good melody, some chord change interrupts, screaming: "Pay attention to me!" As a result, a student's improvised melodies become fragmented, the phrasing often

"boxed" within a single measure or two so as to react to the new sound. Typically the student often responds to the cue of a chord symbol by issuing a scale that "matches" that new chord, often from the root up—how unexciting to begin so many phrases on the root!

### *The Solution: Cutting the Changes!*

*Don't take every exit!* While diverting to each chord symbol may be the ultimate scenic route for an improviser, it won't be enjoyable if all you do is get lost. Chord symbols should inform you as to what *key center* you're in at that moment: they indicate a progression of tension and release in that key. Think about hearing the sound of a major scale slowly over its corresponding major chord: aren't there moments of relative consonance and dissonance as the scale is played? Does that keep us from playing that particular scale with that specific chord? Of course not: we enjoy hearing the relative tensions and releases of playing a scale within the given key.

Look: there's value in getting lost on a trip and having to find your way back to your intended highway. But I encourage you to save the "scenic route" for a time when you're a bit more experienced and a little less stressed about getting to your destination.

There's no need to panic. Standard tunes are actually as easy to play over as blues and modal tunes. Some standards are even easier than a blues! But there's too much information on the page: the lead sheet for a standard tune needs "weeding out." By providing beginning soloists with the perspective a pro has already learned, beginners can thrive in their initial solo outings, enjoy the experience of improvising, and thus stay active and interested long enough to benefit from *later* learning more about the endless intricacies of chord symbols.

We'll *cut chord symbols completely out* of the initial picture and approach these tunes entirely from their major-scale key centers. If you later want to explore why this approach works and discover how you can learn how to apply these concepts yourself on more tunes, the enclosed CD-ROM will show you how, along with references to some great resources so that you will continue to grow.

The major-scale approach is also particularly valuable for jazz vocalists, who lack other instruments' valves or keypads for assistance in technical accuracy. If you've ever tried as a singer or teacher of singers to leap to the  $\text{Zb}$  Dorian mode and then two beats later

the Q $\sharp$  Lydian, you know how impractical it can be—indeed, how many instrumentalists can sing them so quickly? But aspiring jazz singers can often relate to the major scales over a given progression.

### *Prerequisite Skills*

To experience the benefits of this book, you only need to be able to play your major scales: your concert C, D, F, G, A, E $\flat$ , D $\flat$ , and A $\flat$  major scales cover eight of the tunes. Knowing a few blues scales would help, and you'll find the major and blues scales in your key on page 7 of this book.

If you want to play the melodies to these tunes, you'll have to be able to read music; otherwise, you could solo strictly by ear using the major scales you might already know. Beyond that, you'll need only your willingness to learn—and to listen to jazz!

### *What This Book is Not*

This book is not a substitution for listening to jazz live and via recording, singing along with great recorded jazz solos (no matter what your instrument or theirs), and learning such solos on your instrument. Learning jazz vocabulary is like learning a spoken language: you must hear it and imitate it before you can accurately express thoughts of your own.

This book is not a substitute for later, in-depth study of chord symbols and progressions; in fact, I intend that this book lead to such study. However, I have found that most musicians new to jazz enter the improvisation tradition *much* better without having to deal with all those chord symbols.

You won't learn how to arpeggiate your seventh chords from this book, nor will you receive pages of "licks" to learn and transpose. (But you will find 13 great melodies and their chords to transpose, if you're ready!)

Similarly, you won't find much in here about the Diminished, Altered-Dominant, Lydian-Mixolydian, Whole-Tone, or Melodic Minor scales or the like. They're all great, but they are for another day. This book is about making things *simpler*, not more complex, so that you can get maximum reward for your initial efforts in soloing.

This book focuses on standard tunes and other compositions that rely heavily on *ii-V*, cycle-of-fifth progressions. It is of far less use towards honing your skills over Coltrane's *Giant Steps*.

While the conceptual approach of this book is

ideal for vocalists as well as instrumentalists, the melodies of the provided tunes are presented in their "standard" keys. These keys, often carried over from the tunes' Broadway or movie days, pitch the melodic register in a higher "belting" range for most vocalists performing on the stage of American musicals. Jazz vocalists frequently lower the keys a fifth or more so as to provide the opportunity of singing the melodies in a more relaxed, conversational tone. Should you be a vocalist using this book, I encourage you to enjoy singing and humming the melodies softly, as an instrumentalist might, without necessarily attempting to perfect performing the melody in a key that might be awkward for you. But when it comes time to solo, you can and should explore the very same issues and approaches as anyone else: for vocalists, the key you are in should not challenge your improvisation as it does most instrumentalists!

Finally, this book is about single-line soloing, not about how to voice chords on piano, guitar, or vibraphone or how to walk a bass line or how to play a groove on the drums. All these instruments can use this book and its Play-Along CD and CD-ROM so as to develop solo-improvisation experience—and of course to listen to and learn from the exceptionally fine rhythm-section performances. Should you decide to obtain the optional rhythm scores and parts for the live accompaniment of these tunes, you'll find the suggested voicings, bass-lines, and grooves are compatible with the form and style of the provided Play-Along CD!

### *A Word About Counting Changes...*

- What chord changes appear with a tune varies with who's the leader on the bandstand: the changes shown in this book represent merely one arbitrary choice.
- The count of how many chord symbols appear on the lead sheet is loosely equivalent to how many symbols on such a lead sheet would interrupt a soloist's train of thought.
- Counting symbols as "different" from one another generally means that chords such as B $\flat$  and B $\flat$ /A $\flat$  are viewed as the same, as are B $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>, B $\flat$ <sup>9</sup>, and B $\flat$ <sup>13</sup>.
- The minimum number of keys equates to how few keys a soloist could employ to be virtually completely "inside" the chord changes of the moment (and in cases where alternate changes



are used on different choruses, the version with the fewest changes).

### *...and Play-Along CD Timings*

I believe it's always best to learn by listening; so I will frequently refer you to the Play-Along's timing of specific tracks—such as [► Track 13, 0:28-0:38]—and note where the melody, chords, keys, or rhythm players present an interesting opportunity to observe how jazz improvisation and accompanying can develop.

Because no two CD players necessarily generate the exact same timing display, please allow for a second or so of leeway on either side of a provided timing in order to identify a given event.

### *Enjoy the Music!*

Standard tunes are incredibly rich material: melodies that have stood the test of time, chord changes that add such color and movement to each moment, lyrics that express timeless thoughts. We should all enjoy playing their melodies and improvising over their harmonies.

### ***With Appreciation***

By the time this book was published, it had completed a 15-year journey spanning workshop presentations on several continents and to all ages: its concepts have been well field-tested in many cultures!

It would have been a far quicker process if I had written the book based on my own, new compositions written over the chord progressions of existing standard tunes—and a more lucrative publishing deal. It's not easy to obtain the rights to such tunes, nor is it easy to find a publisher willing to face the inherent challenges. But a book of my own tunes would hardly make as clear a point about how to address standard tunes; so I waited until I could find the right publisher willing to make the leap with me.

I am grateful to everyone at the Neil A. Kjos Music Company for bringing this project to life; to Bob Dingley, Dave Olson, and Jennifer Dagdag at Warner Brothers, Inc. for facilitating the rights for my use of these superb tunes; and to Rick Hirsch for his superb skills as copyist for all the music in the book, CD-ROM, and rhythm-section scores and parts.

Virginia Commonwealth University's support of this project has been exceptional, and I appreciate the opportunity to be teaching at so fine an institution. I am

especially grateful to Joseph Seipel (Associate Dean, VCU School of the Arts); John Guthmiller (Chair, Department of Music); Richard Toscan (Dean, School of the Arts); and Eugene Trani (VCU President); plus to exceptional musicians such as my VCU faculty colleague Victor Dvoskin (bass) and alumni Daniel Clarke (piano) and Robby Sinclair (drums); my superb VCU recording engineer, Curt Blankenship; my faculty guitar colleague Mike Ess (for his sketching of appropriate guitar fretboards for the rhythm parts); faculty trombone/technology colleague Ross Walter plus Joseph DiMiceli (VCU Arts Computer Center Director) for their advice regarding the CD-ROM preparation; and alumnus Ryan Corbitt (for his initial work as copyist at the earliest stages of the process). The VCU Jazz Studies Program is a remarkable family of faculty and students within the team that is the Department of Music. It is an honor to serve with them.

I do not believe for a moment that the information in this book is largely new to the world of jazz. However, I do believe I have presented it in a way that *is* new, accessible, and practical for the jazz beginner of any age (including instructors). For the overall perspective, I thank every musician with whom I've performed, studied, or otherwise learned (including the recorded jazz masters), as they have all influenced me.

Finally, I thank my ex-wife, María, for her longtime support and inspiration. Look, María: it's finally *done!*

*Antonio J. García*