

PLAYING GIANT STEPS WITH ONE SCALE

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Before we begin, I'll admit that the approach we're going to look at here is actually a real cop-out. Truly effective soloing over *Giant Steps* is about clearly outlining the individual changes as you flow through the unorthodox harmonic motion.

Nevertheless, this article will introduce you to a scale structure that, as long as we admit a bit of a fudge, does actually fit all the changes in this unorthodox progression. It can work well as just one approach to soloing over these changes and also makes an interesting case study in how to apply the scale structure more generally.

GIANT STEPS CHANGES

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||: BM D7 | GM Bb7 | EbM | Am7 D7 |
| GM Bb7 | EbM F#7 | BM | Fm7 Bb7 |
| EbM | Am7 D7 | GM | C#m7 F#7 |
| BM | Fm7 Bb7 | EbM | C#m7 F#7 :||
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This tune gives most learning players an attack of the vapours. The chordal motion is weird, the tempo is fast and it involves playing over progressions in the key of B, which most players haven't spent very much time with.

There are different ways of analysing this tune, but the most important thing to notice is that it moves up and down by key centres a major 3rd apart, which divides the octave into three parts – B, Eb and G.

The tune contains only nine chords, II-V-I's in the keys of B, Eb and G.

As Mark Levine has pointed out (in *The Jazz Piano Book* and *The Jazz Theory Book*), this means that it's possible to play the tune using just three pentatonic scales – F#, Bb and D major pentatonics, which fit all the chords from the II-V-I's in B, Eb and G respectively. To use this approach, all you have to do is keep an eye on which key you're in at any given point – note that during bars 1-2 and 5-6, the keys change *in the middle of the bar*.

THE AUGMENTED HEXATONIC SCALE

But we can be much lazier than that. The fact that the keys move by major 3rds gives us an interesting opportunity to use a synthetic, symmetrical scale over the whole tune. The scale in question is the augmented hexatonic scale.

Hexatonic (six-note) scales are structures derived by combining the tones from two mutually exclusive triads. There are lots of possibilities, all of which work over more than one chord.

The augmented hexatonic is derived by combining two augmented triads a semitone apart:

B augmented triad: B D# G
Bb augmented triad: Bb D F#

as a scale: B D D# F# G Bb

This scale is symmetrical – note the structure of a repeating minor 3rd and semitone that repeats every major 3rd. This means that B/Bb aug contains exactly the same notes as Eb/D aug and G/Gb aug (D# and F# are the same as Eb and Gb).

AUGMENTED HEXATONIC OVER Eb, G AND B MAJOR CHORDS

What does this mean over the chords from *Giant Steps*? Let's look at the major chords first. Here's what the scale means over a Eb major chord:

Eb Gb G Bb B D
1 3 5 7
 b3 #5

The structure contains a major seventh chord, plus b3 and #5. Both these additional tones can be used over a major chord – The b3 is a “blue” 3rd, the #5 is an optional alteration and often used as a passing tone in the bebop major scale.

Since the augmented hexatonic scale repeats every major 3rd, chord-tone analysis will produce exactly the same results over G and B major scales. Actually, even though it fits each chord individually, this structure suggests a polytonal approach, allowing you to effectively suggest three chords all at once.

AUGMENTED HEXATONIC OVER Bb7, D7 AND F#7 CHORDS

Here's what the scale means over a Bb7 chord (again, because of the symmetry of the scale, the same chord-tone analysis will apply over D7 and F#7 chords):

Bb B D Eb F# G
1 3 13
 b9 sus4 #5

Not so straightforward, at least at first sight.

First of all, although the scale contains 1, 3 and 13, all tones that appear on a straight dominant chord, the defining dominant 7th (Ab) isn't in the scale. However, the b9, sus4 and #5 are all chord extensions that strongly imply different species of dominant in combinations:

1 3 sus4 13	suggests	Bb7sus
1 b9 3 13	suggests	Bb7b9
1 b9 3 #5	suggests	Bb7+9
1 b9 sus4 13	suggests	Bb7susb9

You don't really need to focus on hitting these tones for any specific dominant sound – using the complete scale will just imply flipping between more than one dominant type within the same line, which is fine.

A 7susb9 alteration is, in one interpretation, the minor equivalent of a Vsus reharmonisation of a major II-V – so playing Bb7susb9 is a bit like collapsing Fm7b5-Bb7alt into one chord.

AUGMENTED HEXATONIC OVER Fm7b5, Am7b5 and C#m7b5 CHORDS

You don't have to play the II when you see a II-V at all. But how would the augmented scale look over the related minor II, Fm7b5?:

F# G Bb B D Eb
 9 4 b5 b7
b9 13

Four out of six notes apply nicely to the Locrian #2 scale that accompanies a half-diminished chord. The b9 would imply a straight Locrian scale (the b9 would usually be best treated as a passing note). The 13 doesn't belong to a half-diminished chord (13 is flatted on this chord type), but again as a passing tone, it's okay.

(Actually, if we play 9 4 13 and b7 together, we're implying, very ambiguously, a straight Dorian Fm7 – strictly speaking, Fm13 no 3. Oh, and various different permutations of the tones also suggest different species of F *dominant*. This would suggest a reharmonisation of Fm7 Bb7 to F7 Bb7.)

Should we worry that the root and minor 3 are absent? Well, the bass will usually take care of the root for you. As to the minor 3, we can actually get by without it as the simultaneous presence of the 4, b5 (and b7) unambiguously defines the chord as half-diminished.

THE FUDGE

So this is the nature of the fudge. By using this scale over the dominant chords from *Giant Steps* you're either ignoring the II chords altogether or implying an ambiguous reharmonisation of the II-Vs.

THE SCALE AS AN INTERVALLIC RESOURCE

It may feel a little limiting to just play these tones. To open up the possibilities, you need to practise seeing the scale simultaneously in all three keys. And it's not as limited a resource as you may think. The scale contains:

semitones, minor 3rds, major 3rds, perfect 4ths, perfect 5ths, 6ths and major 7ths.

The best results from this scale are obtained by being aware of where these different intervals are located so you can combine them fluently.

So there we have it. Using the B/Bb augmented hexatonic scale allows you to treat *Giant Steps* almost as a modal tune. This scale has a defining sound of its own (just like the other symmetrical scales – diminished and whole-tone), which is a sort of polytonal modality.

You could opt to use it in any context over a II-V-I. For instance, over Dm7 G7 CM, you'd use the augmented hexatonic scale built from C and B augmented triads.

Best of luck, and feel free to e-mail me with any queries or comments at jlyon@opus28.co.uk.

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