TUNE-SCALES

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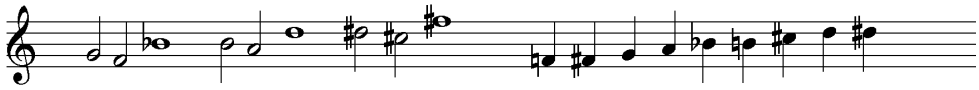
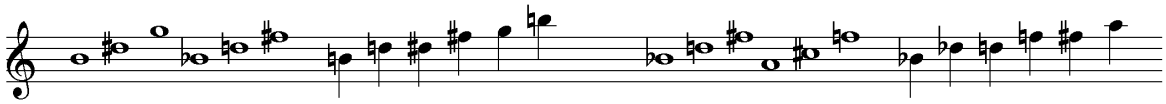
Here's a little synthetic scale resource derived from Coltrane's *Giant Steps*. Take the ascending melody line from the second eight of the tune (a repeating three-note motif ascending by major 3rds, played over the chords Fm7-Bb7-EbM, Am7-D7-GM, C#m7-F#7-BM) and overlay the figures to form a nine-note scale structure:



This kind of approach is borrowed from modern classical music. The goal is to improvise within the general sound or *sense* of a melody. The result is a synthetic structure rather than a scale proper – since it contains a lot of consecutive semitones and doesn't really have a leading-tone function. Having said that, this "scale" is bristling with structure and this makes it a highly flexible resource for improvisation.

As you'd expect from a structure formed from a motif ascending by major 3rds, there is a definite augmented character to this scale. In fact, the scale can be seen as an overlay of two augmented hexatonic scales:



Put another way, the scale is formed from three semitonally consecutive augmented triads: A, Bb and B. By extension, the scale is also the full chromatic scale minus the augmented triad on C…

Because of the shape of the motif, there is also repetition at the step of a tone, a minor third and a perfect fourth.

Some the structures in the scale:

Major triads on F#, G, Bb, B, D and Eb
Minor triads on F#, G, Bb, B, D and Eb

Major 7th chords on F#, G, Bb, B, D and Eb
Minor-major 7th chords on F#, G, Bb, B, D and Eb
Dominant 7th chords on G, B and Eb

Augmented triads on every tone: F, F#, G, A, Bb, B, C#, D and Eb

Stacks of three fourths on F, A and C#

Whole-tone scale(s) on F, G, A, B, C# and D#

There are two distinct ways of employing this scale.

1. USING THE SCALE OVER ITS OWN TUNE

The concept here is one of *overlaying* a distinctive melodic resource, rather than playing the changes. It is possible to use this kind of melody-derived scale to convincingly convey the overall *sense* of the tune, regardless of harmonic clashes. You'd be surprised how readily an audience will pick up on this *sense* of the tune.

In certain cases, particularly where, as here, a tune is highly structured and not overly chromatic, choosing a section of the melody and converting it to a scale can make an interesting resource for improvisation.

This tends to work best when you adapt a valuable guideline from outside playing. Consider that outside lines sound most convincing when we start inside the harmony, move outside and then bring the line back inside.

So the approach would be to begin by quoting the melody, then working around it motifically, increasingly treating the tones that comprise the melody as a scale.

2. USING THE SCALE IN OTHER CONTEXTS

To my way of thinking this scale best fits the following chords:

GM+4, BM+4, EbM+4
G7+11, B7+11, Eb7+11

Since the dominant and major 7ths coexist in the scale, you might want to take care to emphasise one or the other to strengthen the identity of the desired chord. The scale also contains minor 3rd and b13th in each case.

We found a whole-tone scale family in the scale, so it can also work over:

F7+5, G7+5, A7+5, B7+5, C#7+5, D#7+5

Various other dominant alterations are present as well.

Try experimenting with this approach over other tunes – as a rule, it will work better if you pick more modern tunes, rather than standards or bebop heads. But don't let that deter you…

Best of luck with this approach. Free to e-mail me with any (preferably constructive) comments at jlyon@opus28.co.uk.

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