Chapter III

The Mastery of Voice Leading - Fundamentals

Mark explains the fundamental principles behind his approach to voice-leading and how he incorporates these voice-leading concepts in his playing and improvisation.
The Mastery of Voice Leading - Fundamentals

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Mark emphasizes the importance of understanding the fundamentals of voice leading in this chapter, especially for horn players. Because the saxophone is not a polyphonic instrument, it is helpful to practice alongside a piano when studying voice leading. For Mark, he will start by playing a basic progression on the piano with the root, 3rd, and 7th while making sure that the 3rds and 7ths are either resolving by whole-step, half-step, or carrying over to the next chord as a common tone wherever possible. He then translates this exercise onto his saxophone and plays it verbatim.

Mark also insists on being able to sing the voices in the chord. He suggests alternating between playing bass on the piano and singing the 3rds, then playing bass and singing the 7ths, then playing the 7ths and singing the 3rds, and so on. Learning a new tune this way can also be incredibly useful because it will help ingrain the structure of the piece in your ear and under your fingers.

In order to incorporate strong voice leading in your solo, Mark instructs his students to practice these voice leading exercises for all chord qualities. Furthermore, he suggests voice leading through different progressions, not just a cycle of 4ths or 5ths.

Mark’s closing thought is that while you try to maintain a focus on the exercise and on your performances in general, you also want to increasingly widen your awareness to the other musical information that is being communicated around you, such as between your band members.
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THE FUNDAMENTALS OF VOICE LEADING
(0:50)

- Cycle through the circle of 5ths using dominant chords
- Play the root in the left hand and the 3rd and 7th in the right
- Use closed voicings only
- Mimic the exercise on your horn
- Practice singing the voices while playing the one of the other two notes on the piano. Switch between which voice you are singing - the root, 3rd or 7th

Refer to the next section for transcriptions.
Connecting the Scales - Transcriptions

[01:46] G7  C7  F7  Bb7  Eb7  Ab7  Db7  Gb7  B7  E7  A7

[02:19] B7  E7  A7  D7  G7  C7  F7  Bb7  Eb7

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THE MASTER OF VOICE LEADING - FUNDAMENTALS

Homework

- Start by applying the exercise demonstrated by Mark to other chord qualities - minor chords, diminished, major, altered chords, etc. Mix and match them as well.

- Create your own progressions to voice lead through or choose a tune from your repertoire or one which you’ve wanted to learn.

- Using the next page, write down some voice leading ideas for progressions and compositions.

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The Fundamentals of Voice Leading

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WIDEN YOUR AWARENESS
(4:31)

- As you focus on one aspect of the exercise, work on increasing your awareness of the other aspects.

- Depending on the instrumentation in your performances, you will have to widen your awareness to multiple sounds outside of your own.

- By widening your awareness in this exercise you are not only working on voice leading but on ear training as well.

No transcriptions for this section.
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Widen Your Awareness: Homework

• As you work through this exercise, change the element which you are focusing on in any given time.

• When you’re playing at a gig or jam session, be mindful of how much you’re listening to the band versus how much you are focused on yourself. It should be a balanced combination of both.

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