



# BASS

## Those Chords to Know

By Tom Pieper

Different styles of music require bassists to have an understanding of chords in unique ways. In an orchestra you are required to play what you see, what the conductor asks from you, and need to respond and tune to both the players in your section and other instrumental sections in the ensemble who are playing the same pitch or relying on your pitch to tune to. In a rock band you are required to double the root of the chord that the guitar player is playing, which makes these players experts at using visual cues to line up their part with the other musicians. In a jazz big band you are required to play the a walking line that best supports the ensemble, or unison tutti parts that must be interpreted and reproduced just as written. In a jazz trio, quartet, sextet or duo you have many of the same requirements with the addition of needing knowledge of chords, harmony and form that enable you to support the other players, composition and soloist.

In past articles I have written about the basic modes of the major key. A mode is created when you take a scale and start it from any of the seven different scale degrees. Even though each scale creates these seven different modes and they all share the same key signature, each mode has a unique color and sound. This is due to the harmonic weight given to notes of the mode when supported by a chord structure. They sound different even though they originate from a common source so it is important to think of each mode as a separate entity instead of just the major scale starting on a particular pitch. Some modes are used more than others; the most common modes used from the major scale in jazz are the Dorian, Mixolydian, and Ionian:

**G DORIAN**      **G-7**      **PIANO VOICING**

**C MIXOLYDIAN**      **C7**      **PIANO VOICING**

**F IONIAN**      **F MAJ7**      **PIANO VOICING**

Other unique chords come up in the jazz repertoire however that are not derived from the major scale. Most of the other modes in common usage come from the melodic minor scale ascending.

**F MELODIC MINOR -- SAME WAY UP AND DOWN**

This scale, unlike its original counterpart, keeps the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> degree raised whether you are ascending or descending. The modes are used in this way because you are using the sound of the mode to improvise and when soloing the direction of the scale does not determine the pitches. In context it becomes a pool of notes for you to choose from which will give you a musical color. One of the most important elements in jazz is to remember you are always in the key of the chord, not of the tune. Jazz musicians spend less time debating what the harmonic analysis of this chord or that chord is and spend more time presenting the sound in the moment. I had a theory teacher who would say, "When you practice you can think of all the names and reasons that this scale works with this chord but when the tempo is going at ♩=248 you better be playing and not thinking."

In many tunes the key switches frequently so playing one scale is not an option that will help you create a line that adheres to the harmonic movement of the tune. In this way jazz is much more concerned about the moment. Often when playing classical music if I think, "Wow, that's a #11 on the dominant chord!" I must remember to return to where I am and not get lost in the sound but make my next entrance with the orchestra. (It's the curse of jazz and composing music.)

The most common modes used from melodic minor ascending are the IV mode (Lydian Dominant), the VII mode (Altered Scale), and the I (Minor with Major 7<sup>th</sup>).

**B<sup>b</sup> LYDIAN DOMINANT**      **B<sup>b</sup>7#11**      **PIANO VOICING**

**E ALTERED SCALE**      **E-7b5**      **E7 ALT**      **PIANO VOICING**

**F MELODIC MINOR**      **F-MAJ7**      **PIANO VOICING**

All these modes can be found in standard songs from the jazz repertoire and knowing them will help you when soloing or walking over these chords is required. As with everything else in jazz, the more you know the better off you are. Knowing these other modes helps you to improvise more effectively and with more clarity.

In *Blue in Green* the first chord is G-6/9, or the I chord in G melodic minor ascending. The melody also emphasizes this scale by starting on the E natural, or the 6<sup>th</sup> of the scale, which is a major

6<sup>th</sup> above the root.

**BLUE IN GREEN**

Musical notation for "Blue in Green" showing two measures. The first measure has a G-6/9 chord and the second measure has an A7ALT chord. The melody is written in the treble clef.

The second chord is A7 alt, which is the VII of B<sup>b</sup> melodic minor; the sharp nine or the C<sup>♯</sup> is in the melody.

*Nica's Dream* uses B<sup>b</sup> minor with the major 7<sup>th</sup>, and alternates that chord with A<sup>b</sup> minor with the major 7<sup>th</sup>. The melody is the ninth but the major 7<sup>th</sup> is featured in the chord, once again from melodic minor ascending.

**NICA'S DREAM**

Musical notation for "Nica's Dream" showing two measures. The first measure has a B<sup>b</sup>-MAJ7 chord and the second measure has an A<sup>b</sup>-MAJ7 chord. The melody is written in the treble clef.

*Funkallero* cadences on the C-6/9 with B<sup>♯</sup> in melody in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> measure and uses the major 7<sup>th</sup> in the melody and the 6/9 chord for the harmony. Since both the A and B are in the melodic minor scale the two chords, C-6/9 or C-maj7, are interchangeable. The first has less tension than the second but both function as tonic chords.

**FUNKALLERO**

Musical notation for "Funkallero" showing three measures. The first measure has a D7 chord, the second measure has a G7<sup>#5</sup> chord, and the third measure has a C-MAJ7 chord. The melody is written in the treble clef.

In *Bouncing with Bud* we get an example of the Lydian Dominant mode from the IV mode of melodic minor. The chord occurs in the 5<sup>th</sup> measure of the bridge and has the melody notes E, C<sup>♯</sup>, A, and F<sup>♯</sup> over the G13<sup>#11</sup> chord (D Melodic Minor).

**BOUNCIN' WITH BUD**

Musical notation for "Bouncin' with Bud" showing two measures. The first measure has a G13<sup>#11</sup> chord and the second measure has an F<sup>#</sup>13 chord. The melody is written in the treble clef.

*We'll Be Together Again* 4<sup>th</sup> measure D9<sup>#11</sup> and *Take the "A" Train* 3<sup>rd</sup> measure D9<sup>#11</sup> both use the Lydian Dominant scale on the D9<sup>#11</sup> chord (A Melodic Minor). The two songs are good examples of these chords being used in older standards. Billy Strayhorn and Carl Fischer were also aware of this mode and used the sound in

their compositions, which continue to be played by countless jazz musicians.

**WE'LL BE TOGETHER AGAIN**

Musical notation for "We'll Be Together Again" showing three measures. The first measure has an A- chord, the second measure has an A-7 chord, and the third measure has a D9<sup>#11</sup> chord. The melody is written in the treble clef.

**TAKE THE "A" TRAIN**

Musical notation for "Take the 'A' Train" showing four measures. The first measure has a C<sup>b</sup> chord, and the second measure has a D9<sup>#11</sup> chord. The melody is written in the treble clef.

*E.S.P.* starts out with an E7 Altered chord. We call a dominant chord altered when it originates from the VII degree of melodic minor and has the root, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, b9, #9, b5 and #5 in its chord construction. On this tune you have the advantage of the chord lasting for two measures, so you have some time to improvise on the scale. The disadvantage is the tempo they perform the tune at. Play it slowly while you are learning the mode.

**E.S.P.**

Musical notation for "E.S.P." showing two measures. The first measure has an E7ALT chord and the second measure has an FMAJ7 chord. The melody is written in the treble clef.

Can you use any of these chords in other tunes? Often jazz musicians change the extensions, or colors of the chord to give more variety and interest for improvisation. Major chords can often use the Lydian scale (IV of Major key), minor 7<sup>th</sup> chords can use the minor major 7<sup>th</sup>b<sub>5</sub> (VII of major/ II or VI of melodic minor), and dominant chords can use the Lydian Dominant (IV of melodic minor) or Altered scales (VII of melodic minor). The best substitutions must take into account the melody. If the melody of a minor chord is 1-2-3-4-5, you can use either the minor or major 7<sup>th</sup>. The most important thing when you are substituting a chord is that it sounds good with the melody. Remember you can do this while practicing, arranging, and even while playing on the spot; have fun while trying!

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