

General stuff

There are two main types of harmony found in modern Western music:

- 1) Modal
- 2) Functional

Modal harmony generally involves a static drone, riff or chord over which you have melodies with notes chosen from various scales. It's common in rock, modern jazz and electronic dance music. It predates functional harmony, too.

In some types of modal music – for example in jazz - you get different modes/chord scale sounds over the course of a piece. Chords and melodies can be drawn from these scales.

This kind of harmony is suited to the guitar due to its open strings and retuning possibilities. We see the guitar take over as a songwriting instrument at about the same time as the modes become popular in pop music. Loop based music also encourages this kind of harmony.

It has become very common in all areas of music since the late 20th century under the influence of rock and folk music, composers like Steve Reich, modal jazz pioneered by Miles Davis and John Coltrane, and influences from India, the Middle East and pre-classical Western music.

Functional harmony is a development of the kind of harmony used by Bach and Mozart. Jazz up to around 1960 was primarily based on this kind of harmony, and jazz improvisation was concerned with the improvising over songs written by the classically trained songwriters and film composers of the era. These composers all played the piano, so in a sense functional harmony is piano harmony. It's not really guitar shaped.

When I talk about functional harmony I'll mostly be talking about ways we can improvise and compose on pre-existing jazz standards rather than making up new progressions. This is what jazz musicians refer to as **playing changes**.

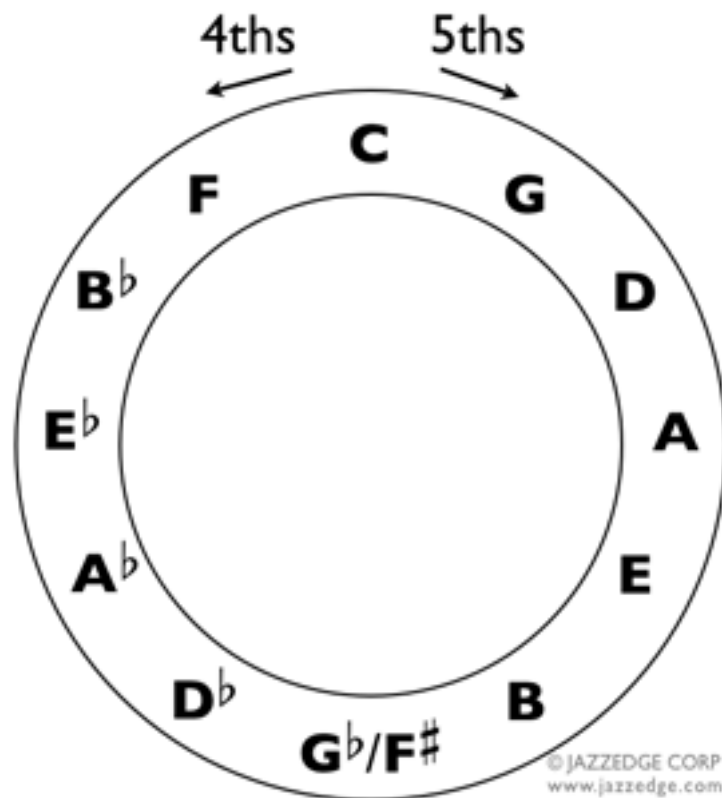
While you can find a modal tinge in a lot of older jazz AFAIK jazz musicians were not consciously improvising with modes until the 60s.

Functional progressions have a lot of stock cliches the most famous of which is probably the ii-V-I. An experienced improviser in the jazz tradition will learn to recognise these structures by ear and on the page at a glance.

Since the '60s there's been a strong move in jazz to combine the two things and play functional chord progressions modally. I would suggest learning to play changes first. Many jazz players learn bop language (Charlie Parker etc) for this reason. In order to play jazz you have to learn to deal with functional chord progressions, which means that people often make the mistake jazz = chords. In fact, jazz = rhythm.

Stuff You Have to Know

Most important thing to know is the **cycle of fifths**. Memorise it. Father Christmas Gave Dad an Electric Blanket. Sketch it on the tube. Tattoo it backwards on your forehead. Whatever works.



This makes things a lot easier. We will primarily be concerned with the order things come in going anticlockwise, - backcycling as it is called. It then becomes the cycle of fourths! Or – **round the houses!** (Raaaannnd the aaaahses.)

Chord types

I don't really care about all the smug numbers and slashes and stuff, but there are basically four types of chord in jazz

- **Major** – including things like Maj9s, 6/9's Whatever floats your boat. Must have a normal 3rd and **not** have a b7 in it.
- **Minor** – min, madd9, m6, some with a major seventh like min(maj7), min9(maj7) and some with a flat seventh like m7, m9 and so on. I don't care so long as the 3 is flat.
- **Dominant** – 7s, 7#11s, 9s, 13s, 7b9b13, 7#11b9, 13b9 and so on. Must have a 3 and a b7. Diminished 7th chords, are, BTW, dominant chords in disguise. Don't be fooled.
- **Half Diminished** or m7b5 chords. These are dirty fifth columnist traitors that are actually minor chords in disguise. So actually there's only three kinds of chords. Also the Royal family are all lizards.

Making sense of chord progressions

Let's take a standard progression that looks all kinds of horrible at first:

Bbmaj7	G7b9	Cm7	F7	Dm7	G7b9	Cm7	F7
Fm7	Bb7	Ebmaj7	Ab7#11	Dm7	G7b9	Cm7	F7

The striking thing about this progression – which is a very standard one in jazz – is that if you look at it from the point of view of modes and scales it's a total nightmare. You are playing a different scale every two beats. Now you could simplify things and play the same scale for Cm7 and F7 – C mixolydian, say – and for Fm7 Bb7 – F mixolydian maybe – but we run into problems with the Eb and Ab7 chords which don't belong to the same scale at all. The G7b9 is a bit of a pain as well.

In fact, an experienced jazz musician would tend to strip down complicated, busy looking progressions of this type. On the highest level what we basically have is this:

Bbmaj7	F7	Bbmaj7	F7
Bb7	Eb	Bbmaj7	F7

(Although different musicians might break it down differently, this is the way I was taught.)

So we have a progression not much more complicated than a simple 12-bar blues. We can add in more colour and movement to this simple template as we want. So how do we work this dark sorcery?

Well, TBH, a lot of it is experience, acquired bandstand knowledge, rules of thumb and so on. I also know that this works because I was told that it does by a recognised master of the music – Barry Harris. Most of the stuff here is based on what I learned from him.

For the moment, I would suggest not worrying too much about why, and just focus on how. After a while you will start to intuit what works, and perhaps also draw your own conclusions as to why.

That said, it may help you to see why if I point out that Dm7 is a common substitute for Bbmaj7.

Bbmaj7	G7b9	Cm7	F7	Dm7	G7b9	Cm7	F7
Fm7	Bb7	Ebmaj7	Ab7#11	Dm7	G7b9	Cm7	F7

Another important rule – if you see a ii-V (that a min or m7b5 chord and a 7 with second chord a click anticlockwise from the first) – just think of the V. You can hopefully see this is what I have done with **Cm7 F7** and **Fm Bb7**.

The dominant scale

The dominant scale is perhaps the most important area of harmonic study for an aspiring jazz musician. Pretty much all the progressions in standards can be reduced to a dominant moving to another chord (see the next few sheets.)

The dominant scale, is often called the mixolydian, although I've always thought that a rather pretentious term for something so simple. It's just the major scale with a flat 7th – very common in Irish folk music, Rock, Pop and of course, jazz:

1 2 3 4 5 6 b7

Or, starting on C

C D E F G A Bb

(It's good to be able to sing this scale BTW, play it in all fingerings in all keys.)

The scale has some interesting properties. If instead of going up on steps, we construct it in a stack of thirds (miss out a note, play a note), we get this thing:

1 3 5 b7 9 11 13

or

C E G Bb D F A

I think of this as the Wes Montgomery shape. It's basically a C13 arpeggio, but I like to call it the ladder of thirds. This is a great thing to have under your fingers all over the neck, in all keys, along with the normal scales.

Now, we can break this up into groups of three notes, and we get chords. If we do four notes, we get the **Family of Four** (Sheryl Bailey.)

C E G Bb – C7 – booring

E G Bb D – Em7b5 or Gm6 - that's what Gypsy Jazz is made of

G Bb D F – Gm7 - Cool

Bb D F A – Bbmaj7 - Wes Montgomery-tastic

Notice that we have all the basic flavours of chord in one scale and they all work over dominant. You can also do this with triads, five note chords, whatever you want. *This does not work on major, BTW, some chords sound foul.*

When you work out (jazz) stuff from records you are going to see these patterns come up again and again, often with little chromatic neighbour tones and stuff.

Furthermore, these sounds also work great over minor chords. In this case we use the 'ii-V' rule and play them over a minor chord a fourth lower. So, if we have a D7 scale, we play it over Am. OTOH if we have a Cm chord, say, we play F7.

The four types of dominant move

- Dominant chords move to major, minor or other dominant chords using one of these pathways, most of the time.
- Aim to resolve to the final chord in a nice, simple way. You can resolve to a 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 or 9 on the target chord, although the 1 will sound the most straightforward and the 9th will sound the most floating. Experiment. But no-one is terribly interested in the resolution chord. It's all about the anticipation, as with so many things in life.
- Examples given in C major with the final chord given as a C. Remember, it can be any flavour of C chord IRL.
- **True fact – any of these cadences can be swapped in for the V7 I.**

V7-I (G7-C) - the *Vanilla*

So this is one click anticlockwise on the cycle of fourths. *If you see a II-V-I – e.g. Dm7 G7 C, simplify to this.* It's easier, and if you use the family of four you'll get all the sounds. Doesn't usually resolve to a minor chord, but *Invitation* has a whole bunch of exceptions to that rule

bVII7-I – the *Backdoor*

Also do this when you see:

- **minor II-V-I – e.g. Dm7b7 G7b9 C**
- **IVm-I – Fm6 or Fm7 C**

You can also raise the 1 degree of the scale to a #1 near the end of the phrase (or any other point TBH) to create more push.

IV7-I (F7-C) – the *Blues*

Also do this when you see any of the following:

- **IV #IVo7 I - F F#o7 C**
- **II bIIlo7 III - Dm7 Ebo7 Em**
- **Io7 I - Co7 C**
- **VII7 I - B7 C**
- **V7+5 I - G7+5 C**

This is actually a really common type of cadence – it's in the Blues, for example – but rarely gets talked about. The #1 trick works great, as for minor.

bII7 – I (Db7 C) - the *Tritone*

This is a common resolution, named for the fact that the root of the bII7 chord is a tritone away from the V7-I. This gives you the famous altered dominant sound – **V7alt**. Look out for 'split subs' like **Abm7 Db7 C**, too. Not super common, but they do pop up. (The nicest thing about this is the way you can go Bmaj7 Cmaj7. Sweet.)

Finally chains of Dominants going anti-clockwise around the cycle are very common, especially in older tunes. Check out – *Rhythm Changes* B section, *Sweet Georgia Brown*, *No Greater Love*, *Yesterdays*, *Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone*, and millions more. For example:

C E7 A7 D7 G7 C

Blues Changes

Basic 12 Bar in F

F7	Bb7	F7	F7
Bb7	%	F7	%
C7	%	F7	C7

- Your basic 12 bar progression will never let you down as a basis for soloing on the most common variants.
- Notice that in this version of the blues, there is no IV (Bb7) chord in bar 9. This chord appeared on the scene around the 1950s in Chicago Blues, so is not generally a feature of jazz blues progressions unless the composer wants that sound (Watermelon man, for example.)

Analysis of the chord moves:

F7-Bb7 **frontdoor Bb7**

Bb7-F7 **blues F7**

F7-C7 **blues C7**

C7-F7 **frondoor F7**

- This'll do for Route 66.
- We'll keep those important chords in bold. Everything else is just a way of moving between them. Sometimes they get moved a little bit, but they are still there.
- Bars 11-12 are designated a *turnaround*. We can do whatever the f*** we want here provided it sets us up on a 'hanging chord' like C7 to push us into the next chorus.

Jazz Blues

F7	Bb7	F7	F7
Bb7	Bo7	F7	D7b9
G7	C7	A7 D7	G7 C7

Very important that you get to grips with this one.

- This chord progression is the one most associated with jazz. Notice that we can get the Bo7 in bar 5, and the D7b9 (F#o7) in bar 7, by raising the Bb in a Bb7 to a B, and the F in an F7 to an F# respectively.
- The Bo7 has the Ab (b3) and B (#4) in it. Blue notes.
- You can do this with the scales too to get a bebop sound.
- We have a G7 in bar 9, which adds a bit of movement 'round the houses' or around the cycle of fourths – D G C F. Old school.
- The G7 also has the B (#4), which is one of our blue notes.
- We also add in a turnaround at the end. I like this one as it starts with a tangy A7 instead of . Round the houses as the jazz guys say – 4ths – A D G C. A classic **turnback**, cos it doesn't start on F7.

Jazz Harmony Primer

Bebop Blues

F6	Bb7	F6	Cm7	F7
Bb7	Bo7	F7	Am7b5	D7b9
Gm7	C7	Am7 D7	Gm7	C7

- I've made some of the chords in F6.
- In many sources there are a few added ii-V's to decorate the dominant chords. You can safely ignore these for blowing, but they can sound nice for some styles of jazz (bebop and later.)
- Notice we make the G7 chord in bar 9 a Gm7 in keeping with this sound. The turnaround is a little slicker as well. We've changed the chord qualities a bit

A blues with a bassline

F6	F7/A	Bb6	Bo7	F6/C	Cm7	F7
Bb6		Bo7		F7	E7	Eb7 D7
Gm7		C7		Am7 D7	Gm7	C7

- A development of the jazz blues with lots of bass movement. The idea is to keep everything moving. Lots of scalar bass motion
- Notice the traddy walkdown in bars 7-8.
- But – nonetheless basically the same as our bebop blues.

Backdoor Blues

F6	Bb6	F6	Cm7	F7
Bb6	Bbm6 (Eb7)	F7	Am7b5	D7b9
Gm7	C7	Am7 D7	Gm7	C7

- Notice instead of using a Bo7 to get back to F7 from Bb, we use a backdoor – a Bbm6/Eb7 or IVm/bVII7.
- This chord was considered a functional equivalent of Bo7. It's very common to hear the backdoor played over the diminished. Even though they aren't a match scalically, it works well and is a part of jazz history. You'll see the same thing again and again.
- Soloing wise, we add in a Eb7 scale in bar 6.
- Basically, if the melody isn't a D (VI), you can use this. If it is, choose the Bo7 instead ☺

Parker Blues

F6	Em7b5 A7b9	Dm7 (G7)	Cm7	F7
Bb7	Bbm7 Eb7	Am7	Abm7	Db7
Gm7	C7	F D7	Gm7	C7

- *Blues for Alice*
- Biggest departure yet – but not as mental as it looks.
- Biggest change is the move into relative minor, Dm (VI) in bar 3. If we add in a G7 too, we have a smooth 'round the houses' progression E A D G C F Bb and eventually Eb, right?

Jazz Harmony Primer

- Now, to get to the Gm7 C7 we use chromatically descending ii-V's – or sideslips as I call them. Notice that to do this, we replace F (I) with Am7 (iii) – a very common substitution.
- Improvising - while a straight blues would work, we need to introduce a few of extra scales to express this progression fully:

F	C dom → c# →	D min	F dom
Bb dom	Eb dom	D dom	Db dom
C dom	%	F dom → f# →	C dom

Bud Powell Blues

F6	Fm7 Bb7	Am7 G7	F#m7 B7
Fm7	Bb7	Am7 D7	Abm7 Db7
Gm7	C7	F Ab7	Dbmaj7 Gb7

- *Dance of the Infidels*
- A lot of ii-V's! Bb7 becomes Fm7 Bb7.
- We have a tritone sub for chord I (F7) in bar 4. We use B7 – a #4 higher/lower for more bebop wierdness.
- Similar ii-V's sidestepping down half-steps to the Parker example. Am7 subs in for Fmaj7.
- I put a Tadd Dameron turnaround in the end cos that's what Barry Harris and Roni Ben Hurr do (obviously the tune wasn't hard enough.) It also introduces you to this sheeexxy turnaround. We end on Gb7, tritone sub for C7.
- That turnaround aside, it works fine with standard scales, apart from bars 7 & 8 which take a D7 and a Db7 respectively.
- For the turnaround, play F for 2 beats, Db for the rest. It's what Wes does.

Wave (A section) – a Bossa Nova blues!

Fmaj9	Db7	Cm11	F7
Bbmaj7	Bbm6	A7	D7
G7	Db7 C7	Dm7 Dm6	Dm7 Dm6

- **(Transposed to F from D)**
- OK – Dbo7 is adding a bit of movement into Cm11. It's really just a C7 going to F7 into Bb - round the houses!.
- Cm11 F7 – II-V into Bb
- Bbm6 = backdoor. Same fing as Eb7.
- A7 (III7) instead of F (I) – turnback! Remember?
- Round the houses! A7 D7
- Db7 C7 – Db7 is a bluesy decoration for C7. Fits the b5 in the melody.
- The turnaround is a F minor latin vamp. F major to F minor? Told you we can do what we want there!

Finally

- Everything you can do to the blues, you can do to everything else.
- But above all – chords should fit the melody – unless you are soloing, and then you are free.