Signature Characteristics in the Improvised Melodic Lines of Herbie Hancock

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Music (Jazz Performance) (Honours),
Sydney Conservatorium of Music,
University of Sydney.

2011

Contents

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank Phil Slater, Helen Mitchell and my honours supervisor Michael Halliwell for their guidance and openness in the planning of this project.

Introduction

> See, Herbie was the step after Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk, and I haven't heard anybody yet who has come after him.[1]
>
> -Miles Davis

Jazz pianist Herbie Hancock is one of the most successful and respected artists of the last century. From the beginning of his career as a sideman with the trumpeter Miles Davis through to his modern collaborations with pop artists such as Christina Aguilera, Santana and John Mayer, Hancock's music has always pushed musical boundaries and redefined stylistic norms. Primarily regarded as a 'jazz' pianist, his approach is one of the most instantly recognisable in the sphere of improvised music – a style which "remains a basic touchstone of contemporary jazz piano."[2]

Hancock has won twelve Grammy Awards (including 2008 album of the year), five MTV awards, an "Oscar" for "Best Original Score," and countless other awards and honorary degrees, and has been repeatedly crowned "Best Jazz Artist/Pianist/Group/Album" by various magazines' reader polls, including Downbeat, Playboy and Keyboard.

Aims

This study is an investigation into Hancock's improvisational style in the formative years of his career between 1961 and 1969. It examines key musical elements - or 'signature characteristics' – that distinguish his approach to melodic line from that of other pianists of the era and contribute to his success as an improviser.

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[1] Davis, M., & Troupe, Q. (1989). *Miles - The Autobiography*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Page 266.

[2] Gelfand, A. (2005). Almost Anything Goes: For Herbie Hancock, Jazz is All About Freedom and Personal Expression. *JAZZIZ, 22,* 36-38.

Project Significance

As the Miles Davis quote at the beginning of this introduction attests to, Herbie Hancock reflects two sides of jazz's musical coin. Appearing on the scene at somewhat of a pivotal point in the music's history, he demonstrates both a strong command of "traditional" jazz language, as well as a powerfully explorative individual voice.

Between 1961 and 1969, Hancock recorded seven albums as a leader for the Blue Note record label, while also being involved as a sideman with a number of other groups (most notably Davis' quintet) and simultaneously rising to the forefront of contemporary jazz piano.

Hancock's Blue Note records are significant as they enabled him to first establish his own voice as a bandleader and composer. Although the seven albums encompass a chronological span of seven years, a varied instrumentation with a variety of accomplished sidemen, and an ever-increasing improvisational and compositional range, they nonetheless exhibit a line of continuity in stylistic development unique to Hancock's career. Each album demonstrates a high level of artistic maturity, often juxtaposing conceptual complexity with disarmingly simple melody, harmony, and feel.

While Hancock exerted less artistic leadership as a sideman, his performances in this context nonetheless demonstrate some of his most creative and sophisticated playing. Miles Davis in particular strongly encouraged his men to experiment, and as an emerging artist this played a large part in fostering Hancock's development as an improviser.

On the pedagogical side, the nature of jazz music as an aural tradition has historically meant that one of the primary ways of developing as an improviser is by copying one's idols or mentors (see, e.g., (Berliner, 1994; Johnson-Laird, 2002). This has fed through into the universal ideology of jazz education systems and institutions, where it is taught that in order to improve musically one must transcribe and memorise the improvised solos of the acknowledged 'masters' of the music. In this regard, Herbie Hancock's musical sophistication and artistic sensibility often make him one of the most influential artists to an aspiring jazz musician.

From my personal experience with jazz education at a tertiary level, this conventional method of learning musical material from jazz recordings is generally in a purely aural as opposed to analytical sense – the student will listen to and transcribe a whole or selected part of an improvised solo and then memorise it, note for note.

The major downside to this approach is the student simply learns to regurgitate the same tired melodic content time and time again (what is known among jazz musicians as playing 'licks'), without tapping into their potential for melodic creativity or spontaneity. Recent academic literature has argued that in order to create a successful solo, improvisational algorithms (and in this study's case, musical concepts) must be ingrained, so that the soloist is able to use their knowledge to generate a range of musical possibilities, which fit within the constraints of both a tune's harmony and the stylistic criteria upon which it is based (see, e.g., Johnson-Laird, 2002; Sawyer, 2000; Thompson & Lehmann, 2004).

With this in mind, this study does not examine specific note choices within a solo, it instead looks at the core theoretical and structural elements that attribute to each improvisation's success. It aims to provide students with an overview of Hancock's style and empower them with the deeper knowledge of the theory behind his improvisations, as well as the ability to apply this analytical technique to future transcriptive research. While not the ultimate objective of this study, it is hoped the student will adopt this process in their study of jazz as opposed to the somewhat superficial understanding generated by directly copying, memorising and then reciting the notes of a transcribed melody. It is the author's belief that through this process a student may begin to develop their own personal improvising voice, instead of simply borrowing the voices of others.[3]

Much of the academic literature consulted in the research of this study involves fairly extensive historical, contextual or aesthetic analyses in conjunction with analyses of fundamental musical elements (again, see e.g., Wallmann, 2010; Waters, 2011). While extra-musical elements are massively outside the scope of this study, literature of this type does open up potential for future, specific analysis of Hancock's style – especially within the context of the Miles Davis Quintet.

In summary, there are two significant aspects to this study. First and foremost it will provide an overview of Hancock's style during a significant part of his career, while also paving the way for future, further in-depth research into his exhaustive recorded output. Secondly, it will add to the body of improvisational transcriptions and analysis already available, which will give the jazz musician or educator a new source of study material, or a different view of the familiar.

[3] This metaphor of jazz improvisation as a language is discussed in Chapter 1.

Background

In order to truly appreciate the artistic developments made by Herbie Hancock, it is necessary to be aware of the historical context in which these developments were made.

The improvisational language of jazz musicians in the 1950s was heavily influenced by revolutionary be-bop era artists such as Charlie Parker and Bud Powell - who had brought a vast increase in both harmonic sophistication and technical virtuosity to the conventional methods of playing standard repertoire (which was largely based on the "12-bar" blues and popular songs, typically those of 32 bars in an AABA or ABAB form by composers such as Cole Porter and George Gershwin).[4] By the late 1950s, artists such as Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman had begun to move away from this bank of common language - Davis released his now seminal *Kind of Blue* in 1959 which explored the concepts of modal playing; Coleman burst onto the scene in the same year with his quartet[5] album *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, a pioneering leap away from conventional song structures and towards freer forms and collective improvisation.[6]

The turn of the decade also saw huge developments in the art of jazz piano. The mid-50s gospel-influenced, hard-bop vein of artists such as Horace Silver and Bobby Timmons was a thing of the past[7], and Bill Evans had arrived on the scene, bringing an "intimate touch and lucid lyricism"[8], coupled with an somewhat introspective, yet explorative and highly sophisticated command of harmony. McCoy Tyner was demonstrating the possibilities of left-hand fourth voicings and pentatonic scales in getting 'outside' chord changes, and at the other end of the spectrum Cecil Taylor was using the huge versatility and range of the piano to his advantage in pushing the development of free jazz.

Also part of this revolution was Herbie Hancock. Absorbing and then building on the developments made by his predecessors, Hancock brought a fresh approach to melodic line construction, harmonic accompaniment and compositional song structure, emerging as a new breed of modern artist and setting the benchmark for the contemporary pianist[9].

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[4] Johnson-Laird, P. N. (2002). How Jazz Musicians Improvise. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 19*(3). 416.

[5] Coleman's quartet was composed of Coleman on alto saxophone, Don Cherry on cornet, Charlie Haden on double bass and Billy Higgins on drums – a revolutionary line-up as it omitted the historically omnipresent chordal/accompanying instrument of piano or guitar. This allowed Coleman to delve deeper into the potential of free-form and free-harmonic improvising, without conforming to set harmonic progressions.

[6] Kart, L. (2000). The Avant-Garde, 1949-1967. *The Oxford Companion to Jazz*, 446-458.

[7] Seymour, G. Ibid.Hard Bop. 373-388.

[8] Blumenthal, B. Ibid.Pianists of the 1960s and 1970s. 466-467.

[9] Ibid.

Born April 12, 1940, Hancock began classical piano lessons at the age of 7. A mere four years later he performed the first movement of a Mozart piano concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra after winning a school contest. He continued studying classical music at Chicago's Hyde Park High School, but turned to jazz after becoming interested in the improvisational performances of a classmate named Don Goldberg.

> People laugh when they find out Herbie Hancock learned to play the blues from a nice Jewish boy.[10]

Hancock enrolled at Iowa's Grinnell College initially with a parentally-mandated engineering major, but eventually switched his major to music and began to seek out performing opportunities. In the winter of 1960 a blizzard provided the chance for him to sit in with the band of trumpeter Donald Byrd, whose regular piano player was stuck in the storm.

Hancock subsequently spent the next two years in Byrd's band as well as working a sideman with numerous other groups, before releasing his debut album *Takin' Off* in 1962.

> Donald was like my big brother. He was the one who told me I was ready to cut my own record, because I didn't think so.[11]

The album provides and interesting overview of Hancock's career to come – it is a blend of bluesy/hard-bop tunes ("Driftin'", "Watermelon Man") and modern compositions with often complex harmony ("Three Bags Full", "Alone & I").

In 1963, Hancock joined trumpeter Miles Davis' new band. This group - which would eventually become known as the "Second Great Quintet" - was among the most musically adventurous, critically acclaimed and commercially successful bands of its time. Hancock speculates on Davis' choice for the piano chair:

> Maybe he liked my attitude. Maybe he liked the fact that I was always exploring. He liked my touch. I think he felt I could be moulded into something better than what I was. I guess he maybe thought I was "right". I wasn't too set in my ways musically about anything. I had a really good grasp of harmony and...you know...chordal textures and that kind of thing. And I was adventurous.[12]

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[10] Levin, E. (1987, January 19). Herbie Hancock. *People, 27,* 64.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Coolman, T. F. (1997). *The Miles Davis Quintet of the mid-1960's: Synthesis of Improvisational and Compositional Elements.* New York University. Interview conducted by the author. Page 14.

With saxophonist Wayne Shorter, bassist Ron Carter, and 17-year-old drummer Tony Williams, the group became a pivotal point in the history of jazz music – a vital link between the earlier bebop/hard-bop eras and the contemporary period from the late 1960s to the present[13]. With this band, Davis set about deconstructing the conventional approaches to song form, harmony and standard and original repertoire which had held sway in the previous decade. Hancock later recalled that the group was attempting to:

> …take all those influences that were happening to all of us at that time and amalgamate them, personalise them in such as way that when people were hearing us, they were hearing the avant-garde on the one hand, and they were hearing the history of jazz that led up to it on the other hand – because Miles was that history. He was that link. We were sort of walking a tightrope with the kind of experimenting we were doing in music, not total experimentation, but we used to call it "controlled freedom." [14]

Through his tenure with Davis, Hancock also recorded a string of albums for Blue Note Records under his own name. Chronologically, each album shows an increasing fine-tuning of his musical concepts, with a steady growth in sophistication in both his improvising and composing. It is this period of Hancock's development which is the focus of the study.

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[13] Ibid. Page 1-2.

[14] Quoted from the film *Miles Ahead*. Mark Obenhaus, dir., Obenhaus Films, 1986. Cited in Szwed, J. (2002). *So What: The Life of Miles Davis*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Page 255

Related Literature

It is interesting to note that while Hancock has been the subject of numerous articles and interviews (see, e.g., DiMartino, 1999; Gelfand, 2005; Levin, 1987; Woodard, 1997), and despite his fairly ubiquitous presence in the jazz and mainstream media, little scholarly inquiry (particularly with a pedagogical nature) has focussed on Hancock's improvisational style in his formative years. However, there are a few major resources which have been indispensible in the research of this project.

The Music of Herbie Hancock: Composition and Improvisation in the Blue Note years (Wallmann, 2010) is one of these and focuses on Hancock's seven albums recorded as a bandleader for Blue Note Records between 1962 and 1969. Wallmann selects seven pieces for in-depth analysis that are proportionally representative of Hancock's style during this period.

Each analysis begins by outlining the historical context of the performance and examining contributing aesthetic or expressive properties. The subsequent musical analyses examine elements of harmony, rhythm, and melody characteristic of Hancock's compositional and improvisational style such as scales, melodic patterns, motivic development, chord voicings, harmonic substitution, and rhythmic patterns and variation. The aim of this approach, Wallmann states, is to "identify and explain the formal construction, musical meanings, and the cultural significance of Hancock's Blue Note recordings." (p. 3).

Waters (2011) examines *The Studio Recordings of the Miles Davis Quintet, 1965-1968*. Waters gives an academic analysis of the fundamental musical elements present on each track, providing a variety of selected transcriptions taken from performances by each of the members of the ensemble. Waters also gives a breakdown of the studio processes and musical approaches taken by the group, focussing on the group's uncanny collective improvisational rapport and interpretations of melody, harmony and rhythm and the implications of this in the music; of particular interest is the variety of musical discrepancies in form discovered by the author.

Similarly, Coolman (1997) examines *The Miles Davis Quintet of the mid-1960s: Synthesis of Improvisational and Compositional Elements*. Unlike Wallmann (2010) and Waters (2011), it contains entire transcriptions of all instrumental parts present on each given recording – again a massive undertaking far outside the scope of this particular study. Coolman (2006) gives a very brief overview of Hancock's role in the group but contains no musical analysis of any kind.

Several other dissertations focus on Hancock's style in relationship to other pianists of the decade (Perry, 2006), while others look at later eras of Hancock's style – Pond (2005) and Opstad (2009) both examine Hancock's work with electric keyboards in the 1970s. While all of these are of a similar transcriptive nature to the aforementioned studies, they do not focus solely on the signature musical elements present in Hancock's improvisational style during the 1960s.

Widenhofer (1988) uses this sort of transcriptive and analytical method in his examination of pianist Bill Evans' improvisational style. The study provides full transcriptions and in-depth analysis of five Bill Evans solos, which the author explains were taken from different points in Evans' career (the years 1961-1979) in order to gain some insight into his development over time. Similar to all three aforementioned studies, Widenhofer analyses each example individually and also discusses the overall effect of the improvisation, with reference to the original melody and the interaction between the members of Evans' ensemble.

Also useful were a few of my colleagues' past dissertations from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (Heinrich, 2006; Rose, 2006). Again, while these are both thematically unrelated to the topic, the structure of their analysis is similar to the both aforementioned resources and the structure taken by this study.

As far as the theory behind the musical analysis goes, another indispensible resource has been Jerry Coker's *Elements of the Jazz Language for the Developing Improvisor* (1991) - a method book aimed at beginner to intermediate level musicians. It examines a range of different elements associated with the wider jazz language and draws examples from a range of historic improvisers and contexts. It also provided a lot of the basic technical improvisatory terms discussed in this study.

Similarly, the *Jazz Theory Book* (Levine, 1995) is a thorough guidebook to jazz harmony, theory and practice, and addresses a range of topics from simple chord/scale relationships to complex reharmonisation. Levine groups each topic into sections[15] and similar to Coker (1991), gives a range of musical examples which demonstrate the subject in question. Part Two of the book – especially chapters six ("From Scales to Music") and eight ("Playing "Outside""") – focuses more specifically on the improvisational process and techniques for creating a successful solo. *The Jazz Piano Book* (Levine, 1989), is the book's predecessor and takes a similar approach – only this time focussing on piano-specific techniques and comparing these across a range of pianists from different generations.

[15] This form of analysis could be described as 'taxonomical' – a term which is discussed in the Method section of this study.

There are a few books consisting solely of transcribed Hancock solos – *Herbie Hancock - Classic Jazz Compositions and Piano Solos* (Dobbins, 1992) is one of these but contains no musical analysis of any kind. *The Real Book* series published by Sher Music are also indispensible tools as they provide 'lead sheets' (a given tune's melody with the associated chord symbols written above), which cut down some of transcription work required and also give a reference point for comparison with an improvised solo.

While not the crux of this study, I also investigated the pedagogical side of jazz – specifically the transcription process and its relationship to both teaching and learning and the notion of developing a personal improvising voice. Studies which examine this include Johnson-Laird (2002), Sawyer (2000) and Thompson & Lehmann (2004), however in order to maintain a manageable scope this study does not delve too far into potential pedagogical applications of the material – this will remain an area for potential future research.

Method

An analysis of Herbie Hancock's style during the 1960s draws attention to several signature characteristics which present themselves consistently throughout his improvisations and compositions. Rather than focus solely on a few entire improvisations individually, this study will initially look at specific extracts from a variety of different solos, which clearly demonstrate a musical device that contributes to Hancock's style. This method of analysis could also be described as "taxonomical".[16]

The specific focus points in this study are outlined in the chapter by chapter breakdown below.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 focuses on fundamental melodic elements in Hancock's style drawn from and common to the wider jazz 'language'. These elements are largely based on the ones examined by Coker (1991) and Levine (1995) and are discussed in depth.

- Change running
- Digital/scalar patterns
- 7-3 resolution
- 3-b9
- Bebop scales/licks
- Harmonic generalisation/superimposition
- Enclosures
- CESH
- Tri-tone substitution
- Bar-line shifts
- Side-slipping
- Chromaticism/Outside playing
- Phrasing

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[16]This refers to the primarily biological concept of taxonomy, which is a system for naming and organizing things (plants and animals, but in this case musical devices) into groups which share similar qualities. Definition from Cambridge Dictionaries Online. Taxonomy. Retrieved 31 May, 2011

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 focuses on the characteristics unique to Hancock's style. The fundamental elements discussed in Chapter 1 will also be referenced throughout, insofar as they contribute to the following characteristics:

- Use of sequence in developing a melodic line
- Use of triplets
- Use of motivic development
- Rhythmic element/technical virtuosity
- Other miscellaneous signature characteristics[17]

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provides a case study of one entire Hancock performance which gives a contextual reference for the elements discussed in previous two chapters, and reinforces this study's concept of 'signature characteristics'.

Data Collection

The data collection (transcription) process involved five steps:

1. Listening through each Hancock solo on the selected albums recorded between 1961 and 1969. Each listen through focussed on 1 specific musical element for utmost accuracy,
2. Ascertaining a solo's relevance to the study (whether or not it contained enough valid signature characteristics),
3. Constructing a list of phrases (based on the time at which they occur) which could be classified as signature characteristics,
4. Transcribing these phrases and constructing a bank of potential analytical material,
5. Carefully selecting which examples to use in the body of the thesis – the examples seen here had the strongest relevance to the topic being discussed.

This method and the album selection process enabled the examination of Hancock's use of the above elements across the widest possible variety of settings – from free-time/form pieces to ballads,

[17] A note on footnote referencing: footnotes will be used throughout both Chapters 1 and 2 to reference the album from which the example in question was taken. Each track will only be referenced the first time it appears in each chapter; i.e. multiple appearances of a track does not warrant multiple referencing.

medium tempo and up tempo tunes, and also in settings where he functions as either a leader or a sideman.

As previously mentioned, this study will not delve too deeply into the specific note choices or chord/scale relationships involved in a solo, it aims instead to provide a breakdown of fundamental improvisational elements found within Hancock's style. These are of far more value in explaining the success of Hancock's solos, as they support and explain each solo's attributing core structures. It is the author's belief this approach will also be of far more benefit to students of jazz and improvisation in any future pedagogical application of this study.

All transcriptions will be done by the author. I own most of Hancock's discography from the 1960s, and any other albums required will be attained through colleagues.

Albums of particular note include Hancock's entire Blue Note discography as a leader during the 1960s: *Takin' Off* (1962), *My Point of View* (1963), *Inventions and Dimensions* (1963), *Empyrean Isles* (1964), *Maiden Voyage* (1965), *Speak like a Child* (1968), and *The Prisoner* (1969). Albums where Hancock appears as a sideman are also of vital importance, as they document Hancock's performance in a range of different contexts. Albums of note include those with Miles Davis from the middle of the decade: *E.S.P.* (1965), *Live at the Plugged Nickel* (1965), *Four & More* (1965), *My Funny Valentine* (1965), *Miles Smiles* (1967), *Sorcerer* (1967), and *Nefertiti* (1967). Other albums which feature Hancock as a sideman during this period are *Free Form, Royal Flush* (both Donald Byrd, 1961), *Hub-Tones* (Freddie Hubbard, 1962), and *Speak No Evil* (Wayne Shorter, 1965), to name but a few.

A full selected discography is given at the end of this study.

Chapter 1: Examination of Fundamental Melodic Elements which Reflect the Wider Jazz Language

Jazz music is often described as a language; in the same sense improvisation between members of a small ensemble is referred to as a conversation. Just as children learn to speak their native language by imitating older competent speakers, young musicians learn to speak jazz by imitating seasoned improvisers[18]. Like any language, there is a bank of common vocabulary of phrases and phrase components which are shared among all jazz musicians, and which reflect the historical development of the music.

Appearing on the scene at somewhat of a pivotal point in jazz's history, Herbie Hancock reflects two sides of the coin – he demonstrates both a strong command of "traditional" jazz language, as well as a powerfully explorative, individual voice. This chapter investigates the first side of this coin; the fundamental melodic elements of Hancock's style which reflect the wider jazz language.

In his book *Elements of the Jazz Langauge* (1991), Jerry Coker describes constructing a list of 18 devices he found through his research to be common among the solos of a wide range of jazz artists. Chapter 1 of this study discusses a few of these devices – the ones that metaphorically "provide us with the less-important, but needed aspects of the language - words like "the", "is", "by", "for", "a", "an", etc."[19] In other words, it examines the essential building blocks of creating an improvisation in a jazz context.

Given Hancock's uniquely individual style, these devices are often hard to find in their purest forms – they have a tendency to sound dated and cliché.

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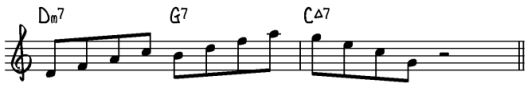
[18] Berliner, P. F. (1994). *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd. Page 95.

[19] Coker, J. (1991). *Elements of the Jazz Language for the Developing Improvisor*. Miami: Belwin, Inc. Page ii.

Change-running

Change-running is a jazz colloquialism for chord-arpeggiating. It is a technique frequently used among jazz musicians, as it strongly outlines the harmonic functionality of the chord or chord progression in question.

Figure 1.1 – Example of change-running over ii-V-I progression in C major.



Herbie Hancock uses this device in a range of situations.

Figure 1.2 "Jorgie's"[20]

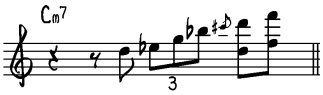


Figure 1.3 "Autumn Leaves"[21]

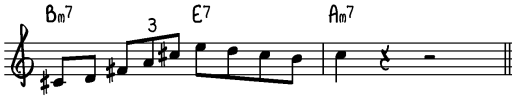
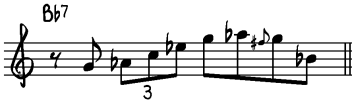
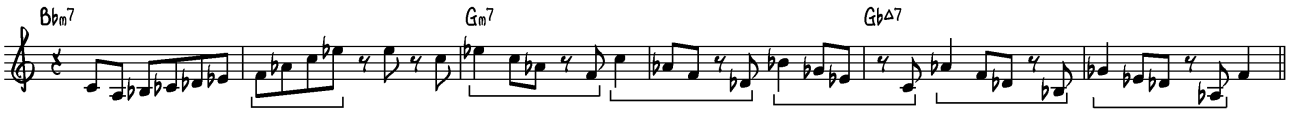


Figure 1.4 "All of You"[22]



All three of the previous figures demonstrate Hancock's use of change running, with similar phrases being found over similar progressions. In Figure 1.5, Hancock uses numerous examples of change running.

Figure 1.5 "Prince of Darkness"



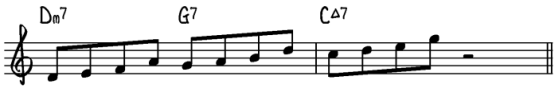
[20] Byrd, D. (1961). *Royal Flush*. New York: Blue Note.
[21] Davis, M. (1964). *Miles Davis in Europe*. New York: Sony BMG.
[22] Ibid.

In this example, Hancock also performs a bar-line shift - a device which will be discussed shortly. This figure is also a classic example of a ***melodic sequence*** – a fundamental aspect of Hancock's style examined in depth in Chapter 2.

Digital/Scalar Patterns

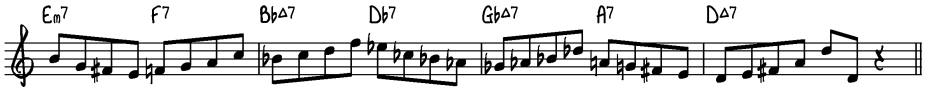
Digital patterns are cells of notes, usually numbering 4-8 notes per cell, that are named according to the numerical relationship of each note to the root of a chord/scale. Accordingly, a digital pattern of 1-2-3-5 in C major would be the notes C-D-E-G. Used in an improvisation, digital patterns strongly outline the harmony of a chord and add solidity of structure to a solo.

Figure 1.6 – Example of 1-2-3-5 digital patterns over ii-V-I progression in C major.



John Coltrane used digital patterns extensively to solo through the challenging, fast moving chords in his composition "Giant Steps":

Figure 1.7 – Digital patterns from John Coltrane's solo on "Giant Steps"[23]



Hancock also uses digital patterns, albeit sparingly. In Figure 1.8, Hancock plays a digital pattern of 1-2-3-5 (in A major) over the first two beats of the bar.

Figure 1.8 "Autumn Leaves"

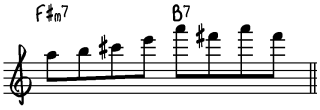
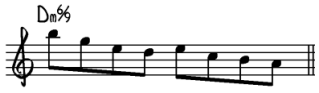


Figure 1.9 "The Sorcerer"[24]



Similarly in Figure 1.9 above, Hancock plays a descending digital pattern of 6-4-2-1, then 2-7-6-5.

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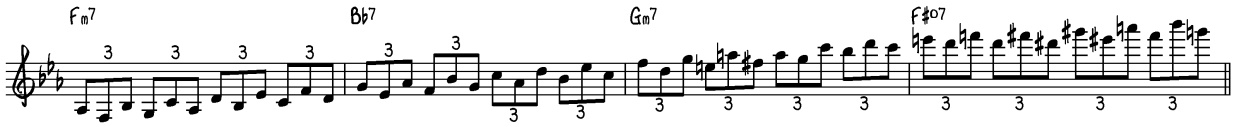
[23] Coltrane, J. (1959). *Giant Steps*. New York: Atlantic Records. Coltrane was one of the world's premier saxophonists at this point in jazz history, and he uses digital patterns extensively on this album to navigate the complicated changes to "Giant Steps" and "Countdown".

[24] Hancock, H. (1968). *Speak Like A Child*. New York: Blue Note.

In a similar sense to digital patterns, scalar patterns are simply patterns derived from a single scale. They are usually longer than digital patterns and use a primary intervallic shape such as consecutive 3rds or 4ths. Hancock uses these extensively.

Figure 1.10 "All of You"



In Figure 1.10, Hancock takes an initial two-note motif of a third and ascends it through the Eb major scale. Scalar patterns of this nature have a tendency to sound formulaic; to avoid this Hancock alters the harmonic content of the scale from the middle of bar 3 onwards – a technique known as ***outside playing*** which is examined shortly. Hancock's use of triplets within his melodic lines is also extensively examined in Chapter 2.

Hancock uses a similar pattern of descending thirds and fourths in Figure 1.11.

Figure 1.11 "Oliloqui Valley"[25]

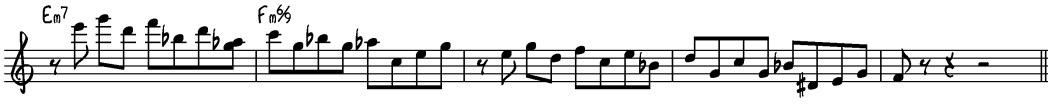
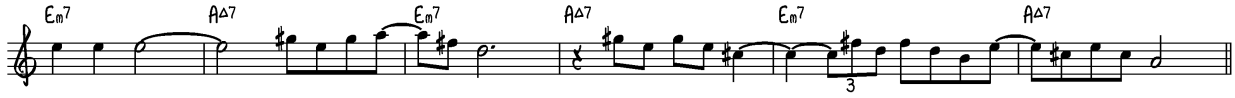


Figure 1.12 below also demonstrates a scalar pattern; Hancock descends the scale of B dorian using a motif of 3rds from bar 2 onwards.

Figure 1.12 "Oliloqui Valley"



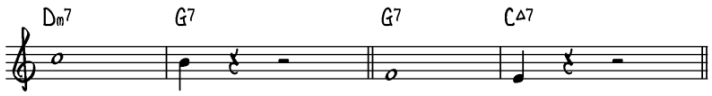
This figure is also another classic example of a ***melodic sequence***.

[25] Hancock, H. (1964). *Empryean Isles*. New York: Blue Note.

7-3 Resolution

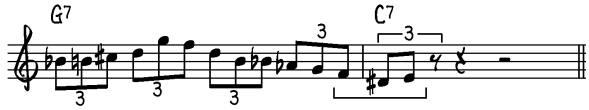
The term 7-3 resolution refers to the musical resolution accompanying the melodic movement from the 7th of one chord to the 3rd of another. In jazz, this occurs at typical cadence points such as ii-V or V-I.

Figure 1.13 – 7-3 resolutions during ii-V, then V-I progressions in C major.



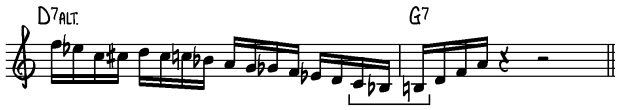
This type of movement is present through all eras of jazz improvisation, and can be found frequently in Hancock's melodic lines.

Figure 1.14 "There is Not Greater Love"[26]



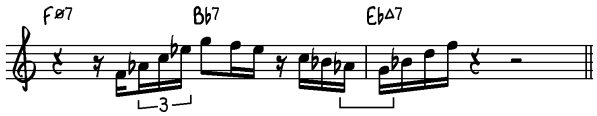
In Figure 1.14, the 7th at the end of bar 1 resolves (via a grace note) into the 3rd of the C7 in bar 2. The exact same movement occurs in Figure 1.15 below;

Figure 1.15 "I Thought About You"[27]



And again in Figure 1.16:

Figure 1.16 "All of You"



A 7-3 resolution often appears in conjunction with a device known as an ***enclosure***, which will be discussed shortly.

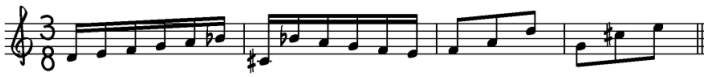
---

[26] Davis, M. (1964). *The Complete Concert*. New York: Columbia.
[27] Ibid.

3-b9

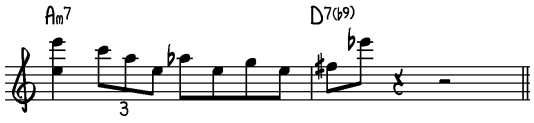
3-b9 refers to the melodic motion between the 3rd of a dominant seventh chord and the flattened 9th of the same chord. This is a typical occurrence in jazz improvisation, although its use dates back into classical antiquity:

Figure 1.17 – 3-b9 movement in Bach's Two Part Invention #3 in Dm (circa 1723)



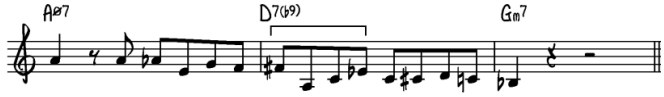
The first beat of bar 2 of Figure 1.17 is a clear example of movement between the 3rd of the V7 of Dm and the b9, which resolves to the tonic triad in bar 3.

Figure 1.18 "Autumn Leaves"



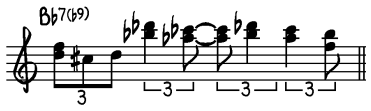
Herbie Hancock also uses this phrase in his solos, as seen in bar 2 of Figure 1.18. Figure 1.19 from the same solo demonstrates 3-b9 movement via two intermediate notes. He precedes both of these examples with a device known as ***CESH***, which will be discussed shortly.

Figure 1.19 "Autumn Leaves"



Hancock plays another simple 3-b9 in Figure 1.20, this time also voicing a third below the top melody note.

Figure 1.20 "All of You"



Bebop Scales

Bebop scales are common scales (mostly major, dorian or mixolydian) that have one specific chromatic (non-harmonic) tone added.

Figure 1.21 Bebop major scale in C

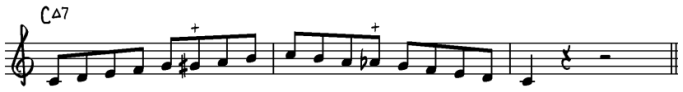


Figure 1.22 Bebop minor (dorian) scale in C

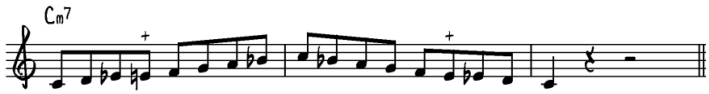
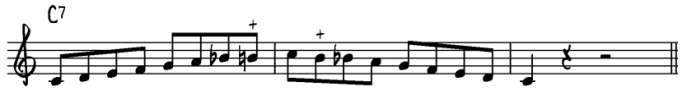
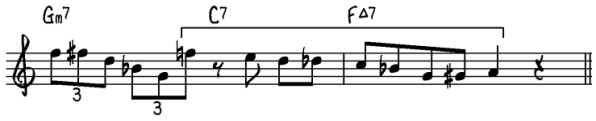


Figure 1.23 Bebop dominant (mixolydian) scale in C



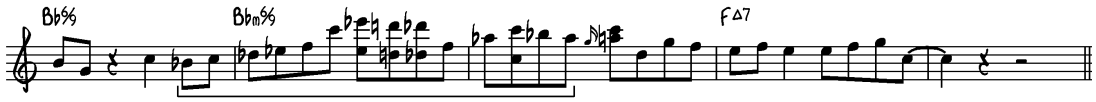
Hancock uses all permutations of the scale in a variety of different situations.

Figure 1.24 Use of bebop major scale on "Nai Nai"[28]



Hancock finishes the phrase in Figure 1.24 with an ***enclosure***, a device which will be discussed shortly.

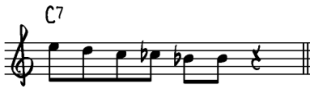
Figure 1.25 Use of bebop minor scale on "I Thought About You"



In Figure 1.25, Hancock plays a simple bebop minor scale phrase in bar 2. He uses a similar phrase in Figure 1.26, this time using the bebop dominant.

[28] Byrd, D. (1961). *Free Form*. New York: Blue Note.

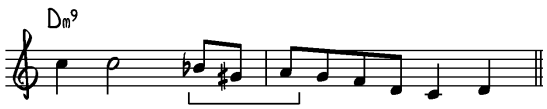
Figure 1.26 Use of bebop dominant scale on "There Is No Greater Love"



Enclosures

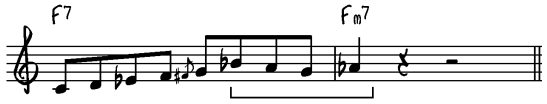
An enclosure is a melodic device in which a target note is approached chromatically by both an upper and lower tone.

Figure 1.27 "The Sorcerer"



In this example, Hancock encloses the A on beat 1 of bar 2 by preceding it with a semitone above then below.

Figure 1.28 "Stella by Starlight"[29]



Similarly in Figure 1.28, Hancock plays a scalar line before enclosing the Ab in bar 2.

Figure 1.29 "Autumn Leaves"

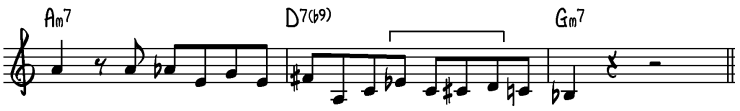
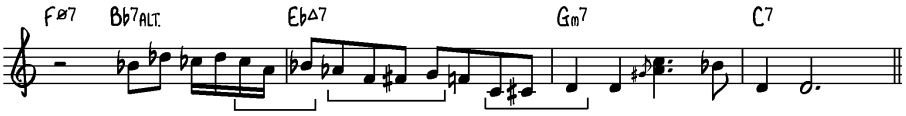


Figure 1.29 sees Hancock enclose the D in bar 2 by a semitone above, then two consecutive semitones below.

Figure 1.30 "All of You"



Hancock uses three quick-fire enclosures in Figure 1.30 above, the first landing on the 5th of the Ebmaj7 in bar 2, the second landing on the third of the Ebmaj7, and the last landing on the 5th of the Gm7 in bar 3.

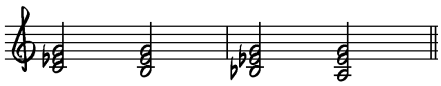
---

[29] Davis, M. (1964). *The Complete Concert*. New York: Columbia.

CESH

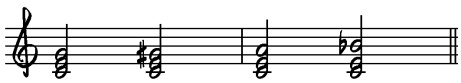
Pronounced "Kesh", this terminology comes from the initials of a device called Contrapuntal Elaboration of Static Harmony. It comes in two primary forms, demonstrated below – note the principal of each example applies to both major and minor tonalities.

Figure 1.31 - CESH from the tonic (on example C minor)



In Figure 1.31, the tonic note descends chromatically while the other chord tones remain static.

Figure 1.32 – CESH from the fifth (on example C major)



Similarly in Figure 1.32, the fifth of the chord ascends chromatically while the other chord tones remain static.

Hancock makes extensive use of the first form of CESH in his melodic lines, as seen in both Figure 1.33 and Figure 1.34 below.

Figure 1.33 CESH from the tonic on "Nai Nai"

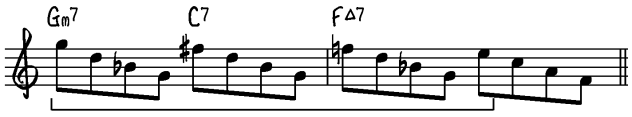
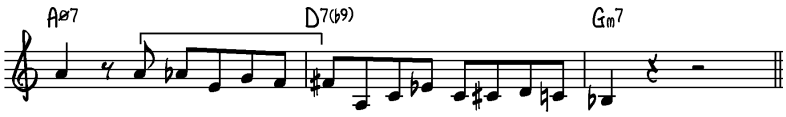


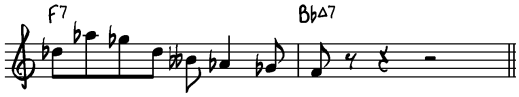
Figure 1.34 CESH from the tonic on "Autumn Leaves"



Tri-tone Substitution

Tri-tone substitution is the common practice among jazz musicians of substituting a chord (especially a dominant seventh) for a chord of the same type whose root is a tri-tone (augmented fourth) away from the given chord. The process works because the guide tones (3rd and 7th of the chord) stay the same (only in reverse), with the equivalent harmony giving an altered sound. Hancock uses this device frequently, as seen is Figure 1.35 below.

Figure 1.35 "Autumn Leaves"



In this example, Hancock uses tri-tone substitution to reharmonise the F7 to B7, before resolving the line in bar 2. A few bars later, Hancock plays Figure 1.36 and uses the device again to change the Gm7 to a Db7 – pre-empting the Cm7 in the third bar by preceeding it with its V7altered (Db7 shares the same scale as G7alt).

Figure 1.36 "Autumn Leaves"

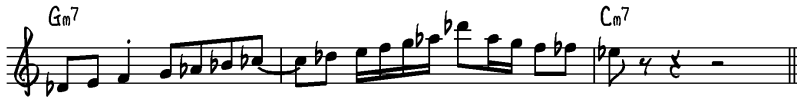
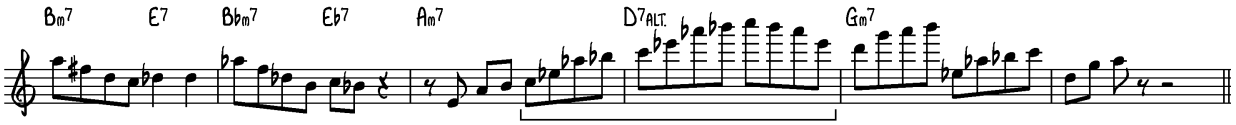
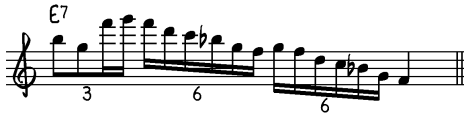


Figure 1.37 "Autumn Leaves"



Later in the same solo, Hancock plays Figure 1.37, clearly spelling out an Ab major tonality over the D7altered.

Figure 1.38 "I Thought About You"

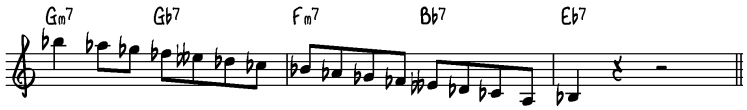


Similarly in Figure 1.38, Hancock clearly plays Bb7 (Bb mixolydian), instead of the given E7.

Harmonic Generalisation/Superimposition

Harmonic generalisation occurs when an improviser chooses one scale to accommodate two or more chords of a progression. Hancock does this frequently, as seen in Figure 1.39 below.

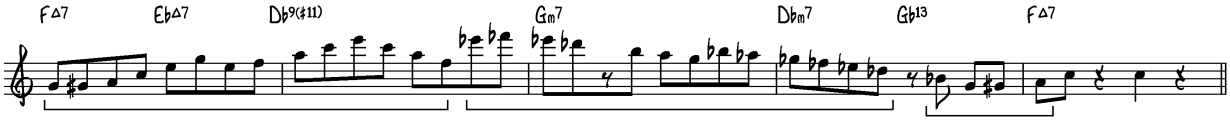
Figure 1.39 "Autumn Leaves"



Here, Hancock superimposes a Bb altered scale over the Gm7 chord, treating the whole iii-bIII-ii-V-I progression as the V7altered of the Eb7.

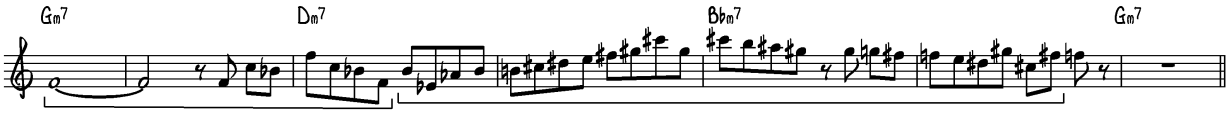
Similarly in Figure 1.40 below, Hancock generalises the complicated harmony to two basic scales, the first being Fmajor (or D dorian), and the second essentially Dbm. He then resolves the line in the final bar by playing an enclosure into the third of the Fmajor7 chord.

Figure 1.40 "E.S.P"[30]



The opposite of generalisation, harmonic superimposition occurs when the soloist imposes their own alterations over the harmony. This mostly occurs over longer chord changes, as seen in Figure 1.41 below.

Figure 1.41 "Prince of Darkness"[31]



Here, Hancock continues the Gm7 chord into the 3rd bar, and then implies G# aeolian (G#m7 or Abm7) over the Dm7 and Bbm7, which lasts from the middle of bar 3 until the end of the phrase, when he implies a resolution back to G dorian (Gm7).

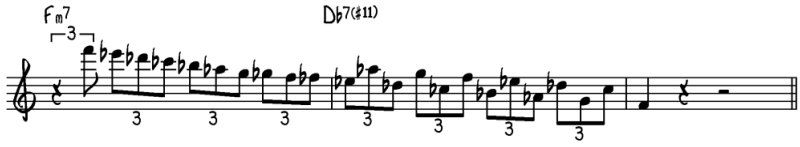
---

[30] Davis, M. (1965). *E.S.P.* New York: Columbia.
[31] Davis, M. (1967). *Sorcerer*. New York: Columbia.

Bar-line Shifts

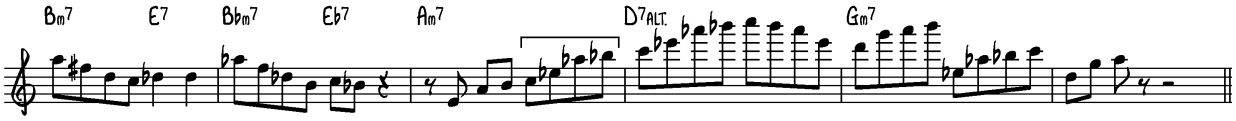
Bar-line shifts occur when the improviser intentionally arrives at a given chord earlier or later than its specified placement.

Figure 1.42 "Oliloqui Valley"



In Figure 1.42, Hancock anticipates the change of chord to Db7(#11) by nearly and entire bar.

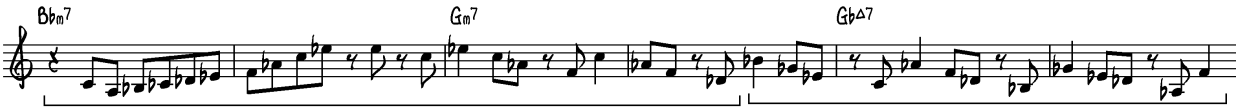
Figure 1.43 "Autumn Leaves"



Similarly in Figure 1.43, Hancock anticipates the change to D7alt by 2 beats.

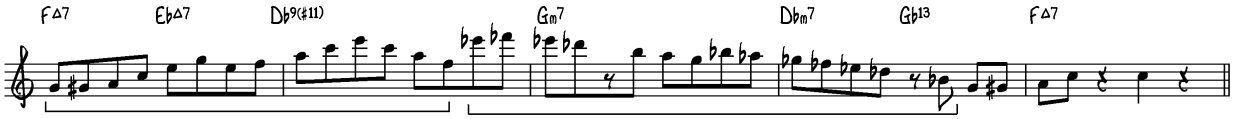
Bar-line shifting is also often be strongly related to harmonic generalisation, as is Figure 1.44.

Figure 1.44 "Prince of Darkness"



In Figure 1.44, Hancock stretches the Bbm7 out for another bar and half, before switching to Gbmaj7 – he ignores the Gm7 in bar 3 completely.

Figure 1.45 "E.S.P"



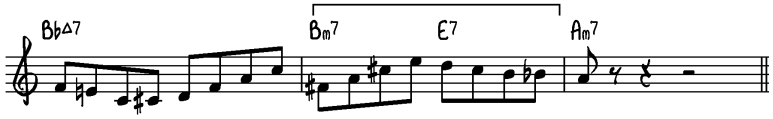
Similarly here, Hancock stretches the initial Fmaj7 chord out for nearly 2 bars, and then anticipates the Dbm7 in bar 4 by 5 beats, before resolving the line in bar 5.

Side-slipping

Side-slipping is similar to harmonic superimposition, in that it involves superimposing an alternate chord or chord progression over the fundamental harmony of a song; however, side-slipping generally refers to cases where the superimposed chord or progression is a semi-tone away from the original.

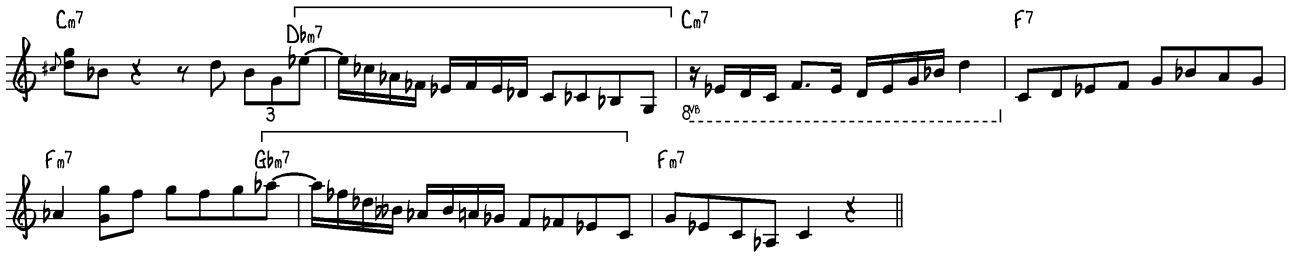
In Figure 1.46, Hancock superimposes a Bm7-E7 over the usual two bars of Bbmaj7, setting up a ii-V progression into the subsequent Am7.

Figure 1.46 "Autumn Leaves"



Similarly in Figure 1.47, Hancock plays two side-slips in a short space of time; the first in bar 2 replaces the pre-existing Cm7 with a Dbm7, and the second in bar 6 replaces Fm7 with Gbm7. Each time the side-slip resolves back to the original chord.

Figure 1.47 "Stella by Starlight"



Chromaticism/Outside playing

As the title implies, chromaticism involves simply playing highly chromatic lines through chord changes – which results in not all of the notes in a phrase specifically fitting any appropriate chord scale; the soloist is instead playing in the key of "chromatic"[32].

Figure 1.48 "The Sorcerer"

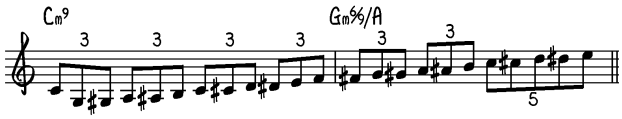


Figure 1.49 "The Sorcerer"

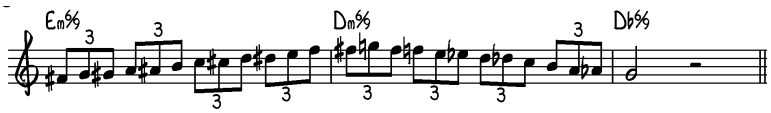
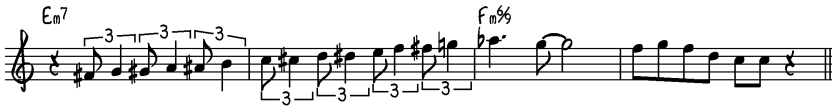
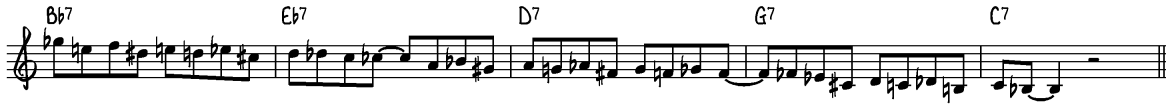


Figure 1.50 "Oliloqui Valley"



All three of the above figures demonstrate Hancock's use of chromaticism which temporarily disregards the fundamental harmonic progression.

Figure 1.51 "There Is No Greater Love"



Similarly in Figure 1.51, Hancock plays a long, chromatically descending line over the underlying shifts in harmony.

Chromaticism is closely related to ***outside playing*** - which refers to when a soloist intentionally plays notes that are "wrong" – that is, they play melodic lines which do not conform strictly to the set harmonic progression or associated chord scales. In these situations it is the structural integrity of the melodic line which makes it sound "right". Hancock uses this device frequently.

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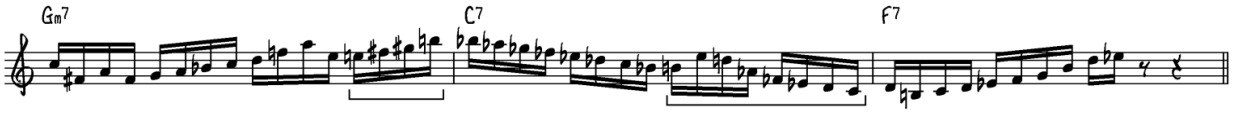
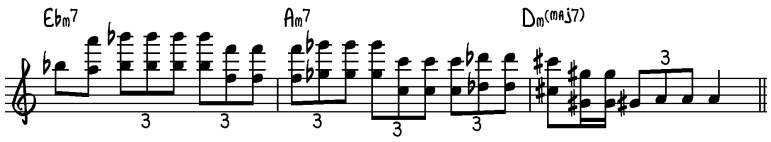
[32] Levine, M. (1995). *The Jazz Theory Book*. Petaluma, CA.: Sher Music Co. Page 190.

Figure 1.52 "There is No Greater Love"



In Figure 1.52, Hancock briefly ventures outside twice within a short period of time. At the end of bar 1, Hancock plays a digital pattern of 1-2-3-5 in E major, which takes him briefly outside the Gm7 chord. Hancock resolves the line in the second bar, then uses a tri-tone substitution over the C7 before hinting briefly at another outside phrase and then once again resolving the line in bar 3.

Figure 1.53 "Goodbye to Childhood"[33]



Similarly in Figure 1.53, Hancock uses a chromatically moving triplet figure to briefly venture outside. Hancock's solo on his composition "Goodbye to Childhood" demonstrates extensive use of all the devices discusses in Chapters 1 and 2, and is analysed in Chapter 3.

[33] Hancock, H. (1968). *Speak Like A Child*. New York: Blue Note.

Phrasing

Phrasing is the manner in which a soloist groups their melodic lines; it is a way of describing a line's shape and nature, whereas all of the elements discussed previously examine the line's content. Hancock's phrasing is strongly reminiscent of that of his instrumental predecessors, in particular that of Bobby Timmons and Oscar Peterson.

Figure 1.54 Bobby Timmons on "Moanin'"[34]

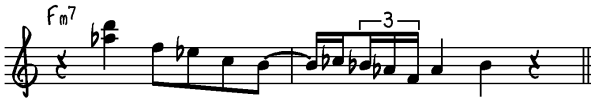
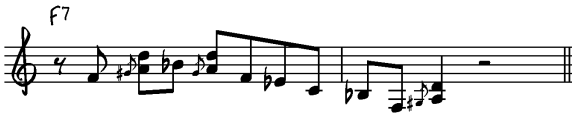


Figure 1.55 Hancock on "Watermelon Man"[35]



Both Figure 1.54 and Figure 1.55 involve blues-orientated material typical of the hard-bop era, and each phrase is of a similar length and nature.

Figure 1.56 Oscar Peterson on "A Foggy Day"[36]

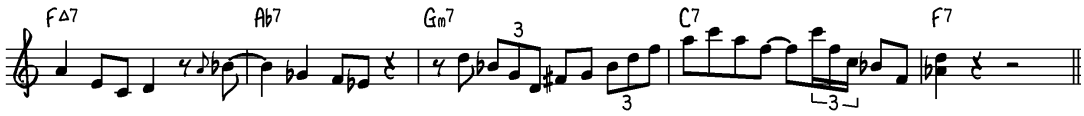
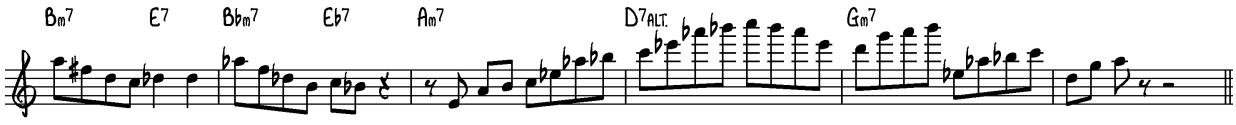


Figure 1.57 Hancock on "Autumn Leaves"



Both Figure 1.56 and 1.57 start with two short phrases of similar length before concluding with a longer line.

In summary, Hancock draws extensively from the bank of language and musical devices shared among jazz musicians across generations. However, Hancock also imparts his own unique style onto

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[34] Blakey, A. (1959). *Moanin'*. New York: Blue Note.
[35] Hancock, H. (1962). *Takin' Off*. New York: Blue Note.
[36] Peterson, O. (1962-1968) Recorded, (1992) Released. *Exclusively For My Friends*. New York: Island.

this language, through his adoption and use of a range personal melodic concepts and musical devices, or ***signature characteristics***.

Chapter 2: Analysis of Signature Characteristics in Melodic Line

> Herbie has a great linear harmonic sense, in that his phrases are elongated in a very beautiful way – they not only come out of something, they automatically lead back into something else.[37]
>
> - Oscar Peterson

Following on from the material discussed in the previous chapter, Chapter 2 of this study examines the other side of Hancock's musical coin – it focuses on the characteristics unique to Hancock's style.

One of the most notable ways Hancock achieves the manner of phrase described by Oscar Peterson above is through his use of musical sequence, and as such a large proportion of this chapter is dedicated to examining the variety of methods in which Hancock employs this device.

While the previous chapter discussed the fundamental technical elements of the jazz language, the following analysis does not delve into the core melodic or harmonic construction of each sequence; it instead provides a contextual overview of the device. To continue the jazz language metaphor, Coker states "items such as digital patterns, 7-3 resolutions, 3-b9, enclosures, etc., are like the letters and words of the language, whereas sequences are more like complete thoughts, sentences and chains of thought".[38]

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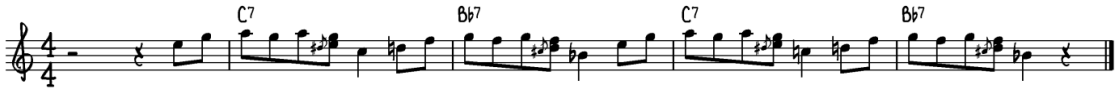
[37] Silvert, C. (September 8, 1977). Herbie Hancock: Revamping the Past, Creating the Future. *Down Beat,* 16.
[38] Coker, J. (1991). *Elements of the Jazz Language for the Developing Improvisor*. Miami: Belwin, Inc. Page 55.

Sequences

A sequence occurs when a melodic fragment is immediately followed by one or more variations on that same fragment[39]. It is a device used extensively across most genres of music, as the repetition of musical idea gives a strong sense of structure to a piece - thus providing much needed communication with the listener, who perceives, even anticipates, such occurrences. Jazz music is no different – improvising musicians will frequently utilise sequences to give their solos structure, and to reinforce a musical idea. One of the most prominent signature characteristics of Hancock's style is his mastery of the sequence, and he uses the device through a variety of contexts in a variety of different ways.

The first of these involves straight melodic repetition – Hancock will often develop his ideas through direct transposition or thematic development as seen in Figure 2.1 below.

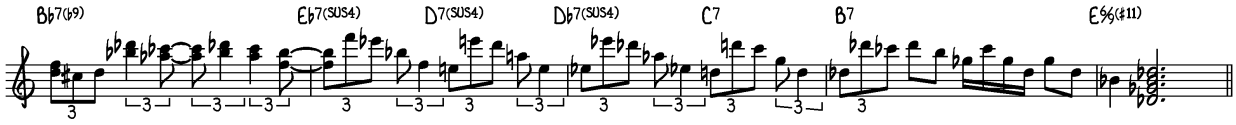
Figure 2.1 "Watermelon Man"[40]



Cliché blues phrases like core the motif in this example are used extensively in Hancock's vocabulary in the early 1960s – a reflection of the influence of hard-bop pianists such as Horace Silver, Bobby Timmons and Wynton Kelly. In this example, the phrase in bar 2 is then sequenced down a tone, following the shift in harmony.

Similarly in Figure 2.2, Hancock transposes the initial two-beat motif in bar 2 down four consecutive semitones before resolving the phrase.

Figure 2.2 "All of You"[41]



Hancock has an impeccable taste for melody, and will often build his melodic ideas from very simple initial motifs. Figure 2.3 is an example of a basic melodic sequence – the following extract shows him playing a down-a-fourth-up-a-third pattern which is repeated three times.

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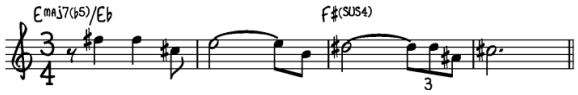
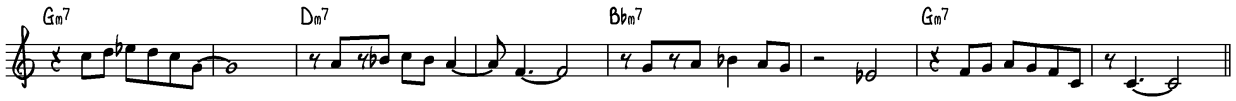
[39] Ibid. Page 55
[40] Hancock, H. (1962). *Takin' Off*. New York: Blue Note.
[41] Davis, M. (1964). *Miles Davis in Europe*. New York: Sony BMG.

Figure 2.3 "Little One"[42]



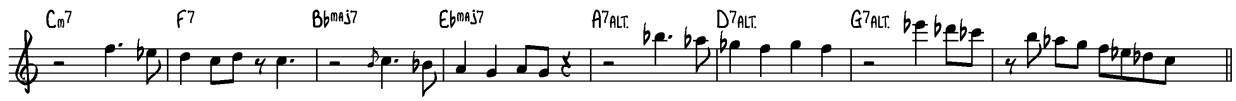
This use of simple motifs is a major part of Hancock's style and can be found frequently in a variety of settings throughout the 1960s – in Figure 2.4 below, Hancock sequences the original motif in bar 1 through the following 7 bars, slightly altering the line's rhythmic shape each time.

Figure 2.4 "Prince of Darkness"[43]



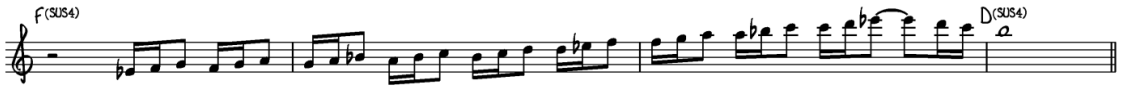
Similarly, Figure 2.5 below shows another simple melodic sequence played by Hancock – the initial phrase is transposed roughly three times over the shifting harmony.

Figure 2.5 "Autumn Leaves"[44]



Hancock frequently draws out his short initial melodic ideas into long sequenced patterns. In Figure 2.6, Hancock begins with a three-note scalar pattern which ascends the chord scale of F7sus (F mixolydian) before falling off to a B natural to compensate for the change of chord to D7sus (D mixolydian) in bar 4.

Figure 2.6 "Maiden Voyage"[45]



Similarly, Figure 2.7 shows Hancock developing another three-note scalar pattern. Here, Hancock plays a continuous ascending scale through the underlying shifts in harmony.

Figure 2.7 "The Sorcerer"[46]

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[42] Hancock, H. (1965). *Maiden Voyage*. New York: Blue Note.
[43] Davis, M. (1967). *Sorcerer*. New York: Columbia.
[44] Davis, M. (1964). *Miles Davis in Europe*. New York: Sony BMG.
[45] Hancock, H. (1965). *Maiden Voyage*. New York: Blue Note.
[46] Hancock, H. (1968). *Speak Like A Child*. New York: Blue Note.

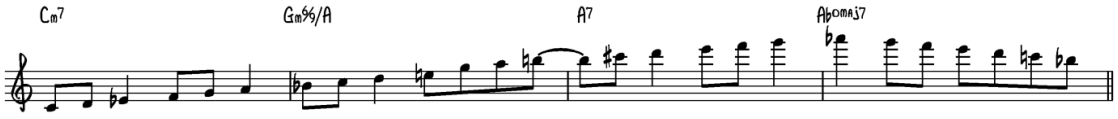
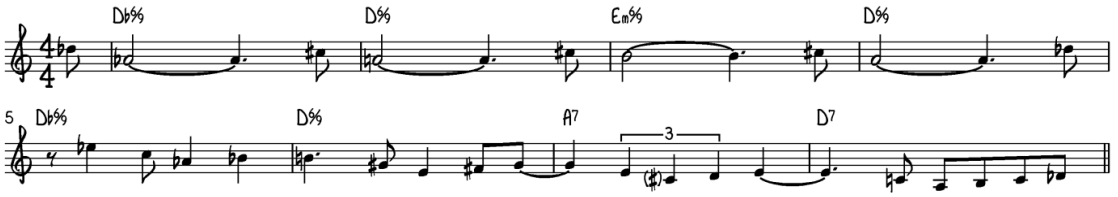


Figure 2.8 shows two consecutive motifs from Hancock's solo on "The Sorcerer". The first involves simple melodic development, the top note of each 1 bar phrase remaining the same while the second note changes underneath. The second (beginning in bar 5) shows Hancock sequencing a four note shape down in 3rds – first a direct transposition at a major 3rd, then an slightly altered major 3rd (a C# in bar 3 instead of a Cnatural) and a further sequence down a minor third to finish the line.

Figure 2.8 "The Sorcerer"



Later in the same solo, Hancock plays the line in Figure 2.9 below. In this extract, he develops another initial four-note melodic idea over the course of 5 bars, nearly exactly transposing it to accommodate for the underlying shifts in harmony.

Figure 2.9 "The Sorcerer"

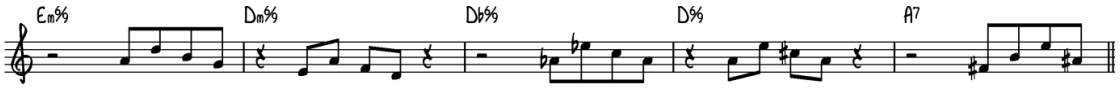
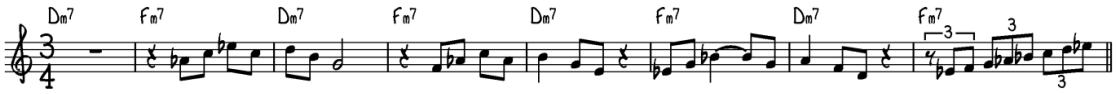


Figure 2.10 "Three Bags Full"[47]



Similarly in Figure 2.10, Hancock takes an initial up/down triadic pattern and then sequences it through the subsequent four bars. The phrase starts on an Ab triad and passes through G, Fm, Em, and Eb, before finishing on the conclusive tonic triad of Dm.

Hancock uses this concept of triads in a variety of situations; Figure 2.11 shows a simple triadic pattern played by Hancock to beautifully navigate the changes to Donald Byrd's "Night Flower".[48]

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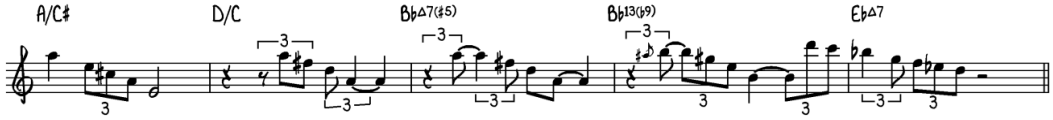
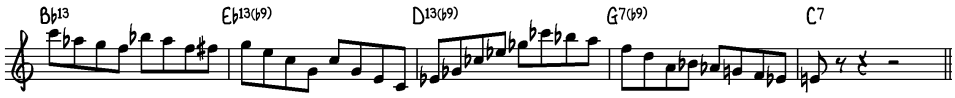
[47] Hancock, H. (1962). *Takin' Off*. New York: Blue Note.
[48] The note values in this example are twice that of the recording for ease of notation and reading.

Figure 2.11 "Night Flower"[49]



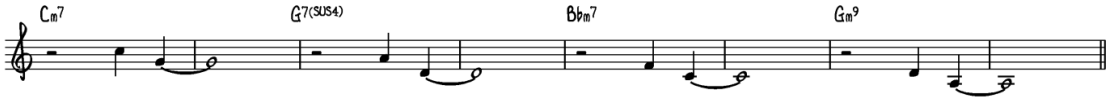
Similarly, Hancock uses triads to reharmonise to an altered sound in bars 2 and 3 of Figure 2.12 below. Note Hancock's use of a 9-7-6-5 (or 5-3-2-1 in Fm) digital pattern in bar 1 and the enclosure leading into beat 1 of bar 2.

Figure 2.12 "There is No Greater Love"[50]



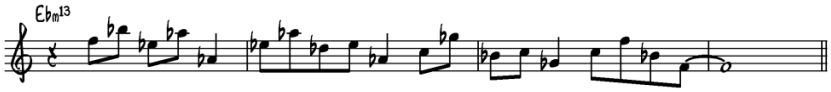
Many of Hancock's sequences are also constructed through the use of rising or falling fourths, which can be either diatonic or chromatic. Figure 2.13 is another example of a simple melodic sequence – this time Hancock uses the intervals of a perfect fourth and fifth to develop the original motif.

Figure 2.13 "Prince of Darkness"



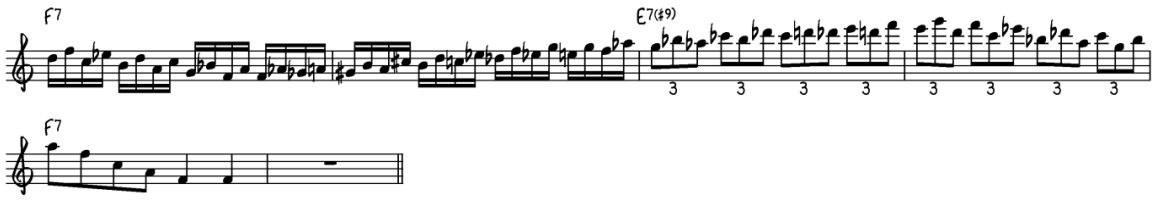
Hancock uses a similar device with shorter note values in 2.14 below.

Figure 2.14 Diatonic falling fourths on "One Finger Snap"[51]



[49] Byrd, D. (1961). *Free Form*. New York: Blue Note.
[50] Davis, M. (1964). *The Complete Concert*. New York: Columbia.
[51] Hancock, H. (1964). *Empryean Isles*. New York: Blue Note.

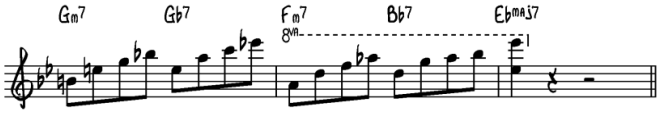
Figure 2.15 "Toys"[52]



Again, Hancock uses an up-a-third, down-a-fourth pattern to start the long sequence in Figure 2.15 above.

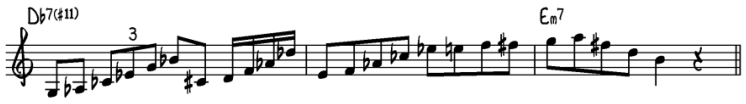
Hancock will also often execute complex sequences in the middle of a melodic line with no prior development. In Figure 2.16, Hancock sequences the arpeggio shape on beats 1&2 of bar 1 through the subsequent iii-bIII- ii-V-I progression. In doing so, he reharmonises each chord symbol to an altered sound (where every non-harmonically-essential degree of the conventional scale is raised or flattened by a semitone).

Figure 2.16 "Autumn Leaves"



Similarly, in Figure 2.17, the motif on beats 1&2 of the first bar is sequenced on beats 3&4, and then beats 1&2 of the following bar, before the line is resolved.

Figure 2.17 "Oliloqui Valley"[53]



All of the above examples identify Hancock's use of sequence using simple rhythmic denominations of the beat, such as crotchets, quavers and semiquavers (1/4, 1/8 and 1/16 notes). The following examples examine Hancock's extensive use of triplets in his melodic lines.

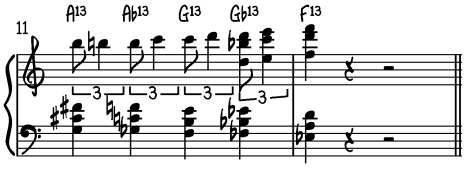
[52] Hancock, H. (1968). *Speak Like A Child*. New York: Blue Note.
[53] Hancock, H. (1965). *Maiden Voyage*. New York: Blue Note.

Triplet Sequences

Hancock makes extensive use of triplets in his improvisations – often in long, flowing, sequenced passages - and his recorded output from the 1960s contains countless examples of this.

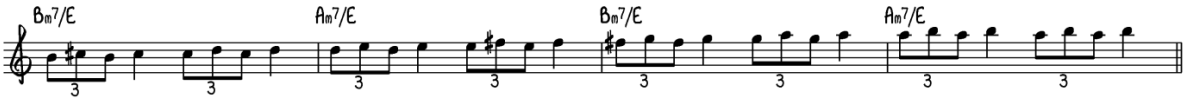
Similarly to the examples discussed previously, Hancock will also use triplets to play simple melodic sequences, as seen in Figure 2.18. Of particular note in this example is Hancock's use of contrary motion – he plays an ascending phrase in the treble stave while chromatically descending the chords in the bass stave.

Figure 2.18 "My Funny Valentine"[54]



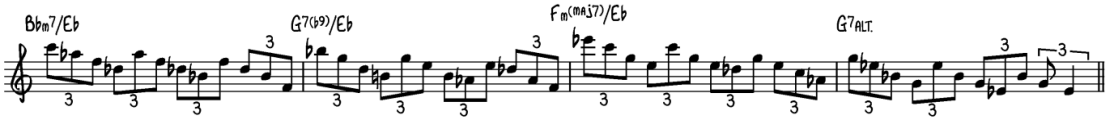
Hancock plays another simple melodic sequence in Figure 2.19 below.

Figure 2.19 "Dolphin Dance"[55]



However immediately after this, Hancock plays the complicated melody in Figure 2.20:

Figure 2.20 "Dolphin Dance"



Here, Hancock starts with a fairly generic four-note shape and sequences it down in thirds through the associated chord scale of each chord. The combination of the triplets, the four-note pattern (which crosses the natural fall of the beat in each bar) and the strength of the melodic line in its harmonic relationship makes this a very effective passage[56].

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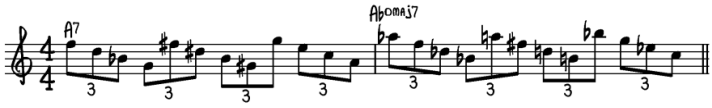
[54] Davis, M. (1964). *The Complete Concert*. New York: Columbia.

[55] Hancock, H. (1965). *Maiden Voyage*. New York: Blue Note.

[56] This concept of a melodic line's effectiveness in relationship to its position within the bar is discussed in depth by pianist Hal Galper in his book *Forward Motion* (2005, Sher Music).

Figure 2.21 below shows another example of this type of pattern – this time a similar four-note shape is sequenced up in semitones and ventures outside the chord changes. Hancock starts with a Gm7 arpeggio played in reverse which then ascends through G#m7, Am7, Bbm7, Bm7 and Cm7 – it is the constant structure of this line that makes it acceptable to the ear even though it is largely outside the changes.

Figure 2.21 "The Sorcerer"



Hancock uses a different kind of four-note pattern in Figure 2.22.

Figure 2.22 "Little One"

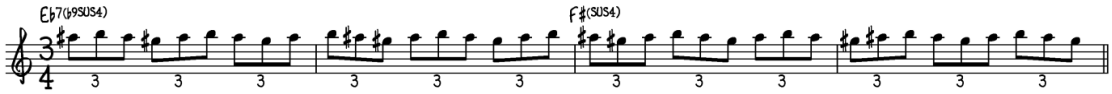


Figure 2.23 "Oliloqui Valley"

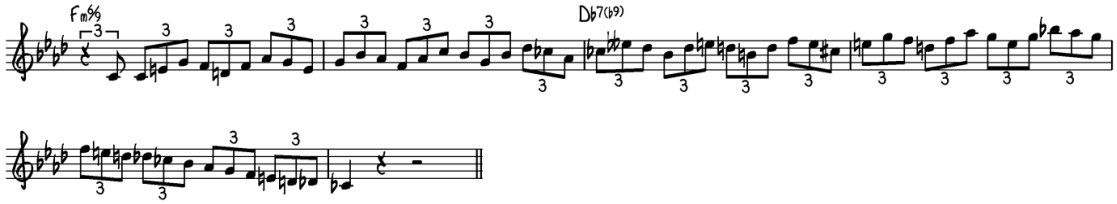
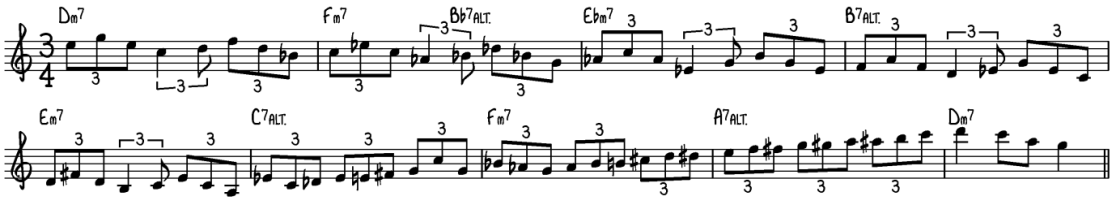


Figure 2.23 shows Hancock playing another four-note triplet pattern. This time he starts with basic triadic motif and ascends the chord scales of each chord (F melodic minor and Db half/whole diminished respectively), before releasing tension by descending the line.

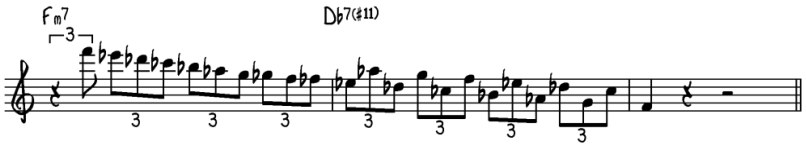
In Figure 2.24, Hancock again starts with a four note triadic pattern which he sequences down through five bars.

Figure 2.24 "Three Bags Full"



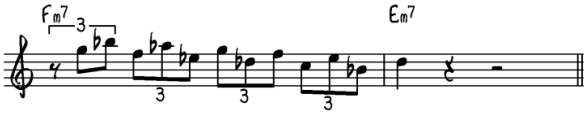
In Figure 2.25, Hancock plays another rapid sequence based on falling diatonic fourths. He also uses a bar-line shift, anticipating the chord change to Db7(#11) by playing the chord scale for this chord (Db lydian dominant) a bar early.

Figure 2.25 "Oliloqui Valley"



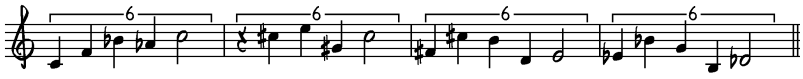
Hancock uses this idea often, and in a variety of manifestations, such as in Figure 2.26;

Figure 2.26 "You're My Everything"[57]



And also Figure 2.27:

Figure 2.27 "Madness"[58],[59]



Hancock will also often use triplets to get "outside" the written changes of a tune – a jazz musician is said to be playing "outside" when their melodic line strays from the conventional chord scale associated with a given chord.

Figure 2.28 is a perfect example of this. Hancock picks up where Freddie Hubbard finishes his solo and introduces the same type of simple melodic sequence discussed previously – this time a three note pattern seen in bar 3. He sequences this three times before returning to the original motif and repeating it up five consecutive minor 3rds – a line which weaves outside then back inside the changes - before releasing the tension in the final few bars.

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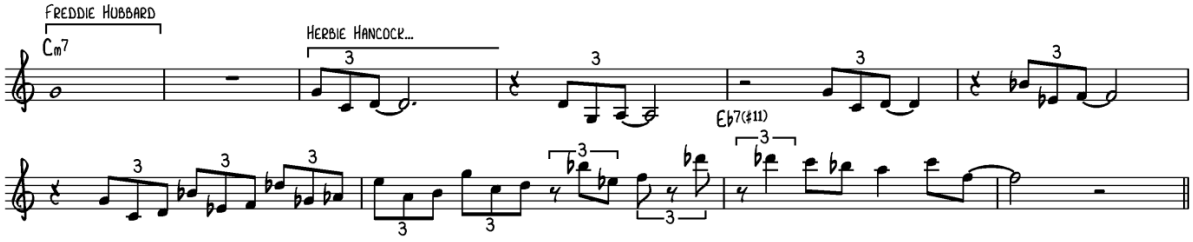
[57] Hubbard, F. (1962). *Hub-Tones*. New York: Blue Note.

[58] Davis, M. (1967). *Nefertiti*. New York: Columbia.

[59] At the start of Hancock's solo on this track, the rhythm section abandons their traditional timekeeping roles and the group enters a freer, interaction section. In reaction to this, Hancock abandons the set harmonic rhythm of the head and the previous two solos and imposes his own – he still plays over the set, 6-chord harmonic progression but instead moves to the next chord at will.

Figure 2.28 "Witch Hunt"[60]

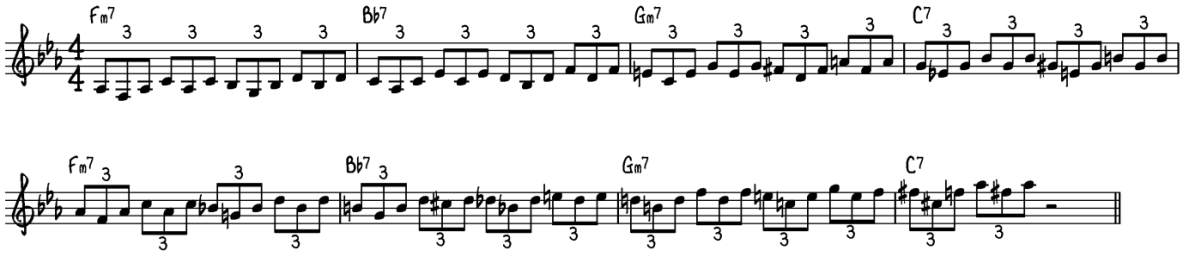


[60] Shorter, W. (1965). *Speak No Evil*. New York: Blue Note.

Outside Triplet Sequences on "All of You"

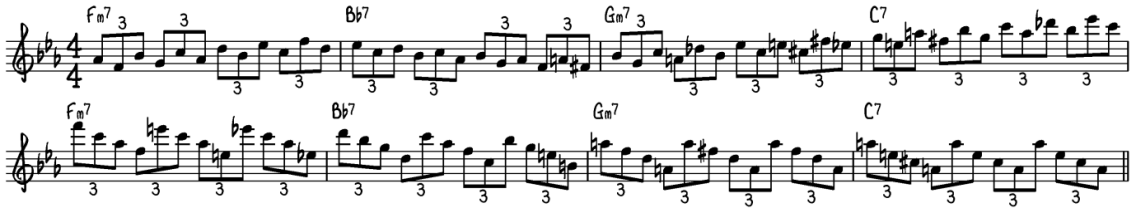
The following examples are from one of Hancock's greatest recorded solos[61] on Cole Porter's "All of You". On this particular recording, Hancock plays two complete choruses and then solos over a long "tag" section of iii-VI-ii-V changes in Eb (Gm7, C7, Fm7, Bb7). A few bars into this tag section Hancock starts to spin triplet sequence after triplet sequence, creating long flowing lines of increasing and decreasing tension. Most of these sequences are based on simple two to four note scalar patterns which weave craftily through (and occasionally outside) the changes.

Figure 2.29 "All of You"[62]



In Figure 2.29, Hancock starts with a simple three note motif and sequences it upwards. He strays "outside" in beat 3 of bar 4 of this extract, playing an E major triad over the C7 (E major contains a Bnatural – the major seventh of C instead of the flattened or dominant seventh implied by the chord symbol). The clash is not overly offensive or dissonant to the ear due to the strength of the sequenced line in the previous bars.

Figure 2.30 "All of You"



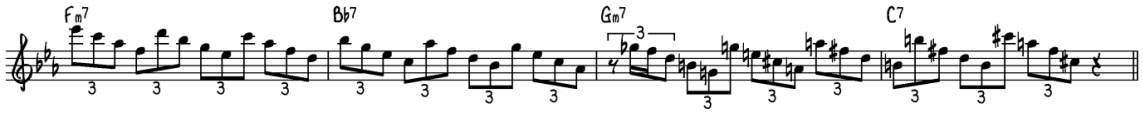
Later in the same solo Hancock plays Figure 2.30 above. This extract contains multiple examples of sequences – this time Hancock starts with a simple two-note triplet pattern which he develops and uses to get outside the changes from beat 4 of bar 2. This ascends into the same type of

[61] Levine, M. (1995). *The Jazz Theory Book*. Petaluma, CA.: Sher Music Co. Page 135.
[62] Davis, M. (1964). *The Complete Concert*. New York: Columbia.

four-note triplet pattern seen in previous examples, which gradually sequences its way down again. Once again Hancock strays outside in the final bar of the extract.

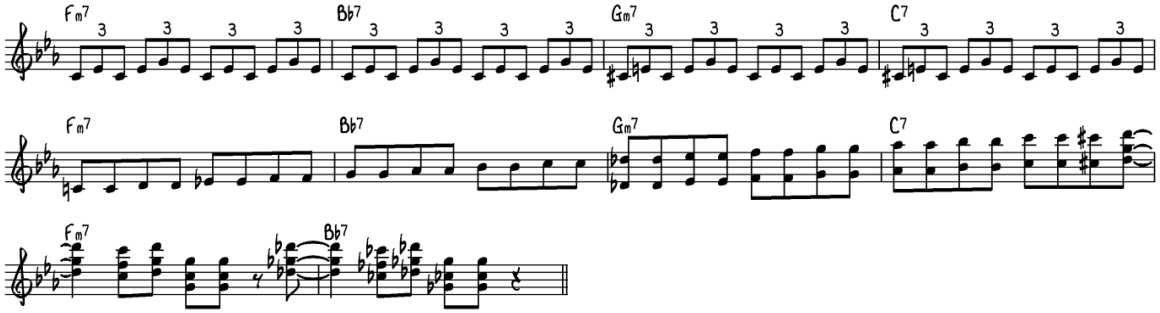
Shortly afterwards, Hancock plays Figure 2.31, again making use of a four-note pattern and again using it to get outside the changes in bar 3.

Figure 2.31 "All of You"



Hancock then plays:

Figure 2.32 "All of You"[63]



Here, he starts with a three-note triplet pattern and again uses this concept to get outside the changes in bar 3. The example ends with simple melodic sequence of the type discussed in the previous section – the initial phrase is exactly transposed down a semitone. The type of block chords seen at the end of this example is strongly reminiscent of the technique popularised by pianist Red Garland - Miles Davis' pianist from the previous decade.

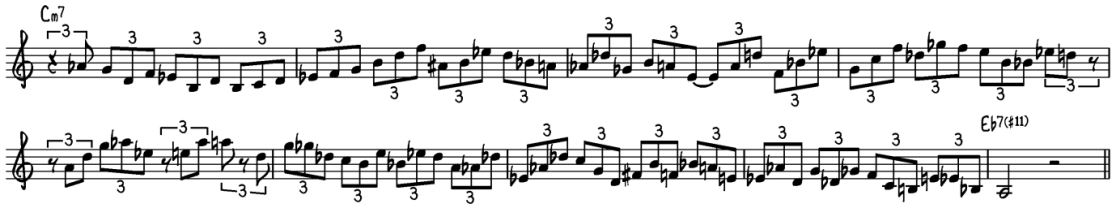
[63] This figure is written down an octave from the original recording for ease of reading.

Extended Outside Triplet Sequences

Most of the previous examples demonstrate Hancock playing "outside" for only short periods of time, before bringing a melody back in line with the chord changes. However, Hancock will also often spin long, often highly chromatic triplet sequences in which he seemingly disregards the underlying chord changes for an extended length of time.

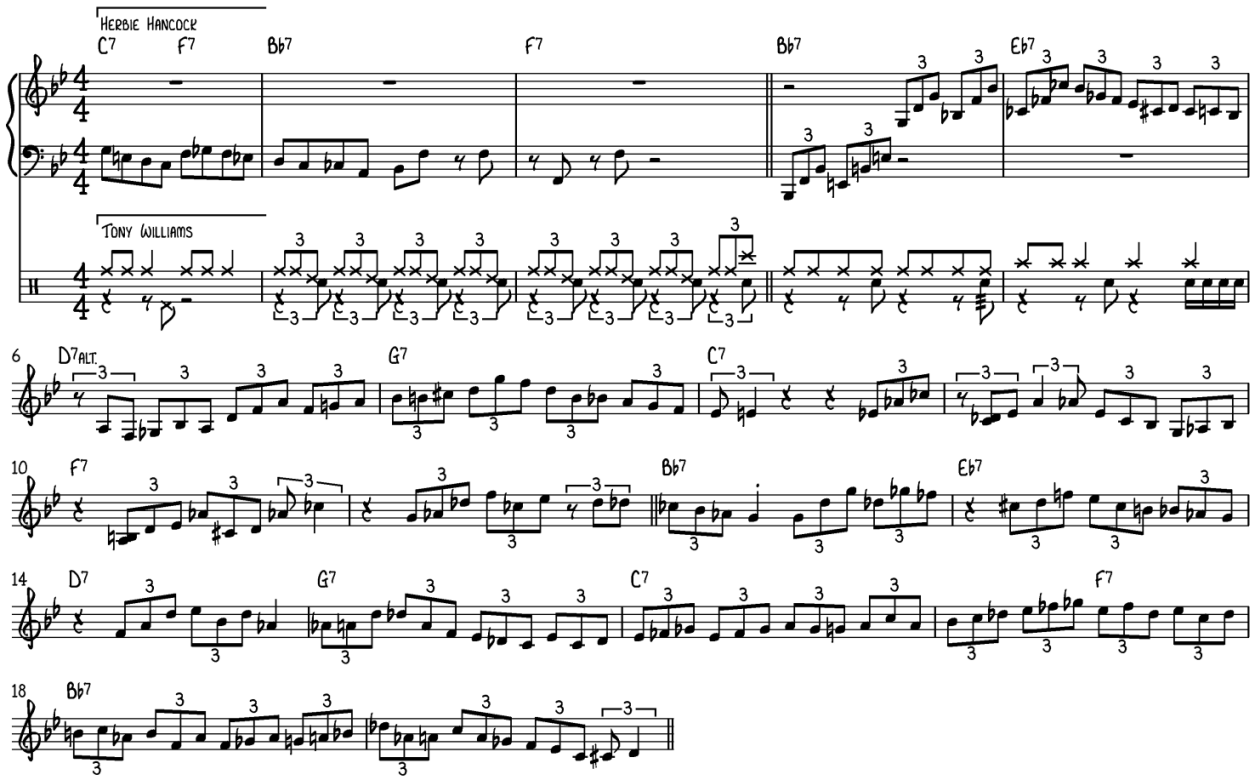
At the start of his second chorus on Wayne Shorter's "Witch Hunt", Hancock begins to spin a lengthy triplet sequence, using the intervals of a minor second and a fourth to dance in and out of the stagnant harmony of Cm7. This is particularly obvious in the final three bars of the figure, which contains one consistently descending line based on falling and rising fourths and semitones.

Figure 2.33 "Witch Hunt"



Hancock uses this same technique again as a sideman in Miles Davis' quintet – this time he picks up on a triplet figure played by Tony Williams in the last few bars of Hancock's first chorus, and uses this as a spring board into another long and highly chromatic phrase (see Figure 2.33 on the following page).

Figure 2.34 "There Is No Greater Love"



While not strictly exact melodic sequences, both of the previous examples are long rhythmic sequences and contain several distinct examples of sequenced melodic material – for example bars 3&4 and 7&8 of Figure 2.33 and bars 4 and 8&9 of Figure 2.34.

Motif Development

One of the qualities of a great improviser is the ability to develop and extend their melodic ideas. Similar to sequences, motivic development often involves repetition of an initial phrase which is subsequently built on in the following bars - a technique which adds a sense of logical structure to the solo. Hancock is a master at developing his motifs, which often stem from fairly simple starting phrases.

Figure 2.35 "Cantaloupe Island"[64]

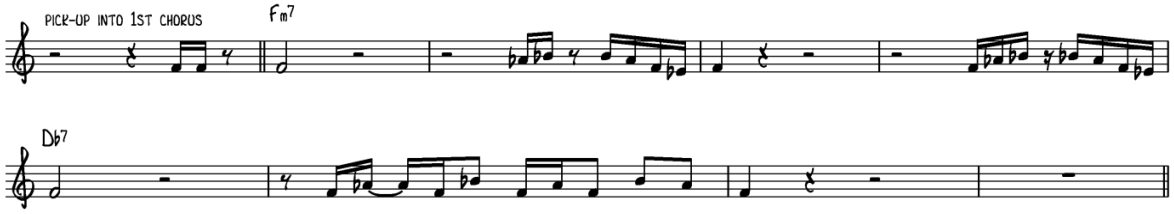
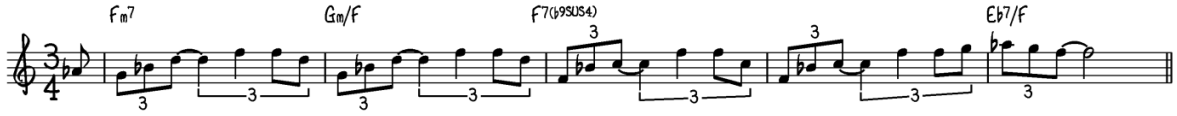


Figure 2.35 is an example of this. Hancock starts out with a simple one note rhythmic idea and gradually adds further notes to develop the phrase, while still maintaining the original F as a tonal centre.

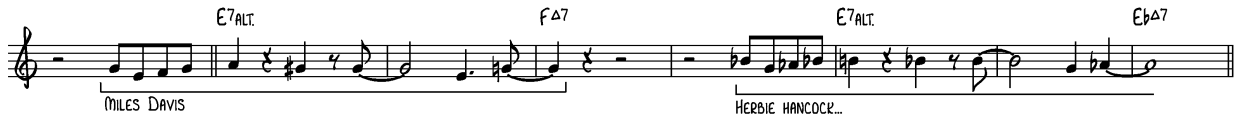
Figure 2.36 "Little One"



In the above example, Hancock takes a simple Gm7 arpeggio and repeats it over the course of 4 bars, creating beautiful melodic continuity through the harmony.

Figure 2.37 on the following page is another example of motivic development – Hancock picks up on a melodic idea played by Miles Davis at the end of his solo and repeats it, maintaining the rhythm and contour but initially sequencing it up minor third.

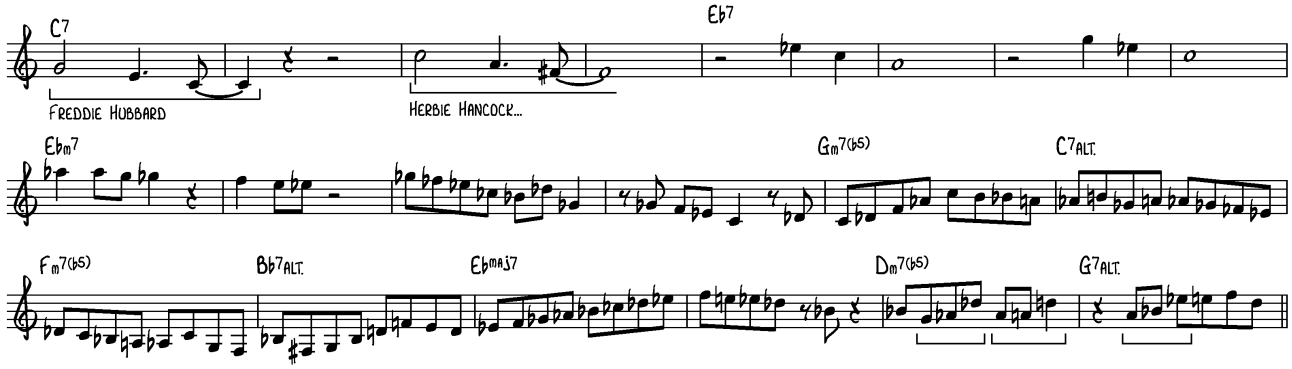
Figure 2.37 "E.S.P"[65]



[64] Hancock, H. (1964). *Empryean Isles*. New York: Blue Note.
[65] Davis, M. (1965). *E.S.P.* New York: Columbia.

Similarly in Figure 2.38, Hancock picks up on a three note phrase played by trumpeter Freddie Hubbard, sequences it upwards for 6 bars before using it to spring board into the start of his second solo on the an alternate take of "One Finger Snap". An interesting point of focus in the first line is that the semibreves at the end of each phrase in bar 4, 6 and 8 are an exact retrograde of the initial phrase Hancock plays in bar 3. The final two bars of this extract also demonstrate another sequence, a pattern of an ascending semitone and a fourth which climbs up chromatically.

Figure 2.38 "One Finger Snap"



In Figure 2.39, Hancock begins with a simple melodic motif which he develops through the subsequent 11 bars.

Figure 2.39 "Autumn Leaves"

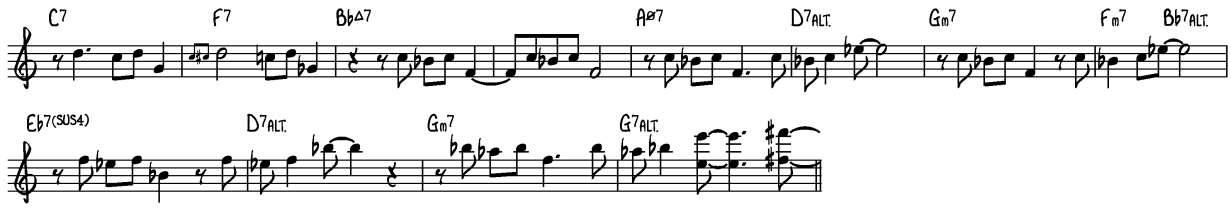
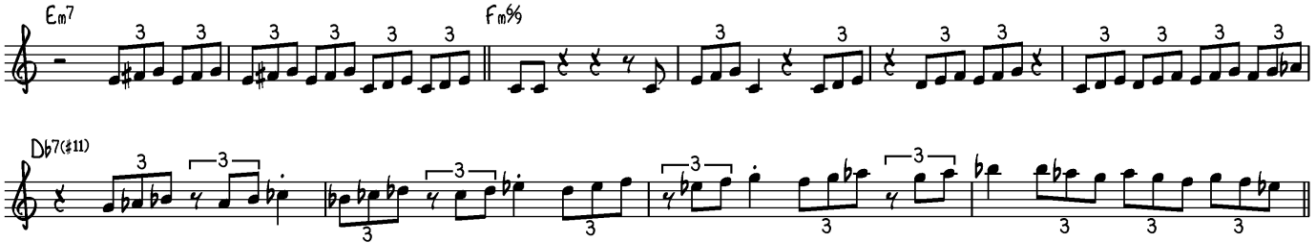


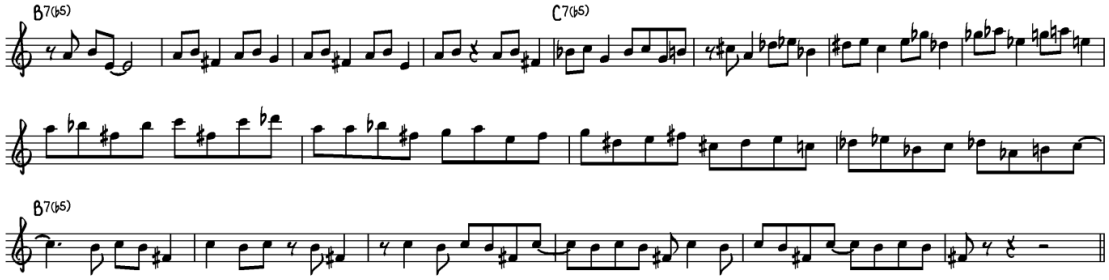
Figure 2.40 "Oliloqui Valley"



In Figure 2.40, Hancock starts with a triplet motif of notes grouped in threes which is then sequenced down a third. He then continues to develop this idea in the subsequent measures by continuing the same three note-triplet theme while ascending through the associated scales of each

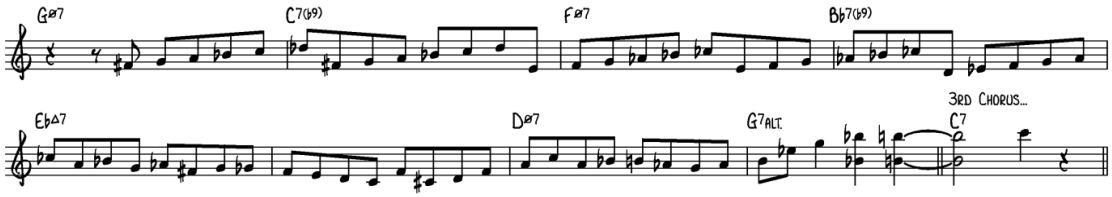
chord (F melodic minor and Db lydian dominant). This sort of development is an extremely effective way of building tension in a melodic line.

Figure 2.41 "Riot"[66]



Again in Figure 2.41, Hancock starts with a simple three note motif which gradually sequences upwards, before descending, again through the use of sequence. He then continues the motif into the third line of the example, and begins to imply a 3 over 4 cross rhythm in the last four bars – the final phrase starting in bar 3 of the third line repeats every 3 beats.

Figure 2.42 "One Finger Snap"



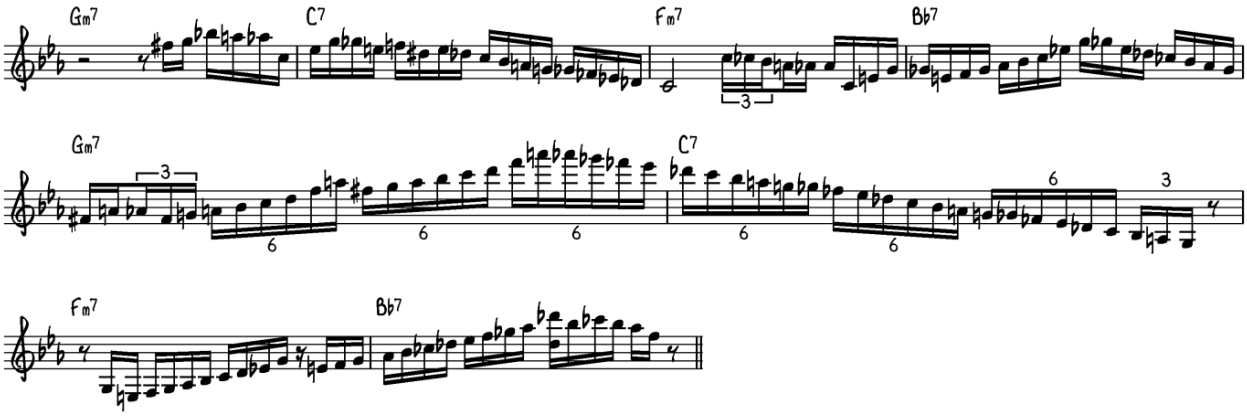
Here, Hancock starts with a six note motif which he sequences down twice in the subsequent bars, before using the idea as a springboard into the next chorus of his solo. Of particular note here is Hancock's extended use of chromaticism over the Ebmaj7 chord – he avoids landing on guide tones on the strong beats of the bar, which helps to propel the melodic line forward to its resolution at the start of the next chorus.

[66] Hancock, H. (1968). *Speak Like A Child*. New York: Blue Note.

Rhythmic Elements/Technical Virtuosity

The title of this section refers more specifically to rhythmic devices used by Hancock – with a focus on phrases that display his remarkable technical facility.

Figure 2.43 "All of You"[67]



This extract from Hancock's solo on "All of You" demonstrates his facility with double time[68]. Here Hancock dances around the changes in scalar patterns, making extensive use of diminished and altered scales to modify the standard harmony while utilizing both semiquavers and semiquaver-triplets.

Figure 2.44 is an extract from Hancock's solo on "Circle", a tune from Miles Davis' album *Miles Smiles* (1966). In this example, Hancock executes another long passage of triplets and uses a triadic motif to quickly extend the phrase through 4 octaves. There a few areas of particular interest here: the first is Hancock begins the D major triadic motif in bar 5 of the figure and continues it through the Bbmaj7 in bar 7, reharmonising the chord to Bbmaj7(#5). The second is the beat that is dropped at the start of the third line of the figure – the rhythm section adjusts immediately to the 2/4 bar, showing the group's uncanny rapport and adaptation in support of the soloist[69]. Hancock also finishes the long passage of triplets with another simple, scalar melodic sequence.

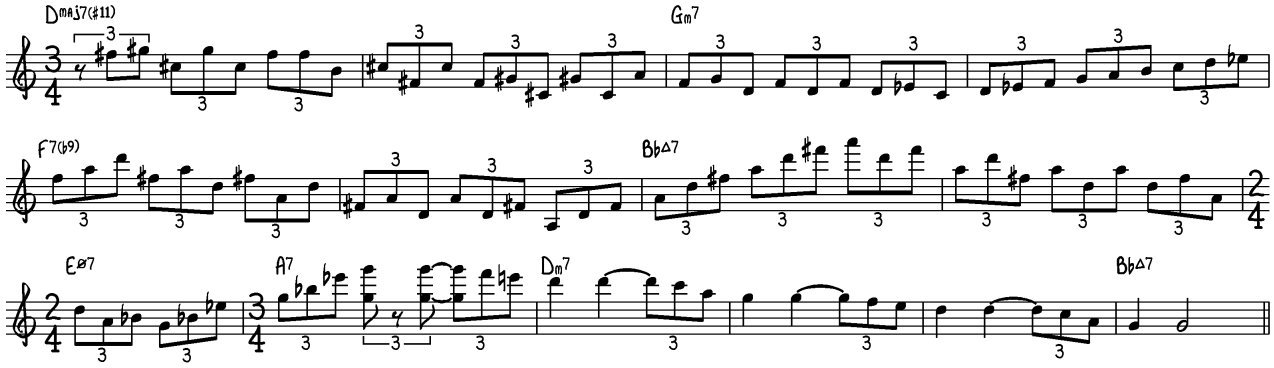
---

[67] Davis, M. (1964). *Miles Davis in Europe*. New York: Sony BMG.

[68] "Double time" is a jazz term which refers to a soloist utilising rhythmic denominations half the length of those used previously (i.e. a shift from quavers to semiquavers), without any change in the harmonic rhythm.

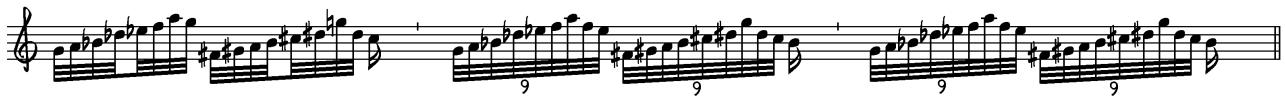
[69] Waters, K. (2011). *The Studio Recordings of the Miles Davis Quintet, 1965-1968*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Figure 2.44 "Circle"[70]



Hancock also makes use of complicated rhythmic denominations, as seen in Figure 2.45 below[71]. This example is taken from Hancock's solo on "The Egg", a compositional sketch in which the only stipulations are an initial piano ostinato and a melodic line played by the trumpet, before the piece descends into open, free improvisation.

Figure 2.45 "The Egg"[72]



[70] Davis, M. (1966). *Miles Smiles*. New York: Columbia.

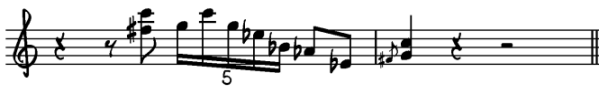
[71] Given the inspecifity of and frequent shifts in pulse and meter on this track, and the relative inadequacy of musical notation in accurately representing the music, the rhythmic denominations notated are the author's best estimate. The figure is scored without bar lines, as these lose their relevance with a piece of this nature.

[72] Hancock, H. (1964). *Empryean Isles*. New York: Blue Note.

Miscellaneous Signature Characteristics

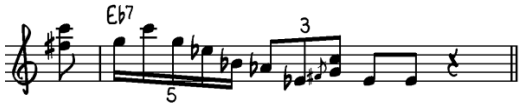
Hancock also has several idiosyncratic phrases which he uses in a variety of different settings. The first of these is Hancock's signature blues lick:

Figure 2.46 "Driftin'"[73]



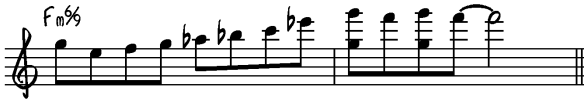
This phrase, somewhat unique to Hancock, makes an appearance early his recorded output and continues to show up in various manifestations and situations into the late 60s - despite the juxtaposition between the phrase's fairly blues orientated nature and the more contemporary vein of the music during that period (see Figure 2.47).

Figure 2.47 "Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum"[74]



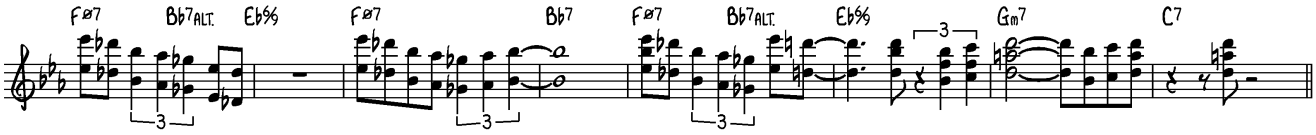
Another signature characteristic of Hancock's is his tendency to play his melodic lines in octaves. This either occurs in the middle of a phrase:

Figure 2.48 "Oliloqui Valley"



Or at the start of a phrase and continuing for an extended period:

Figure 2.49 "All of You"[75]



[73] Hancock, H. (1962). *Takin' Off*. New York: Blue Note.
[74] Shorter, W. (1965). *Speak No Evil*. New York: Blue Note.
[75] Davis, M. (1964). *Miles Davis in Europe*. New York: Sony BMG.

In summary, Hancock's melodic lines contain a range of signature characteristics, which contain devices that reflect both the wider jazz language and also Hancock's unique approach to melodic line construction. While all of the previous examples were examined taxonomically, Chapter 3 examines them within the context of a single solo.

Chapter 3: Case Study: "Goodbye to Childhood"

In order to reinforce this study's concept of "signature characteristics" in Hancock's music, the final chapter presents a thorough analysis of one specific Hancock performance which strongly demonstrates all of the previous discussed elements.

"Goodbye to Childhood" is from Hancock's 1968 album *Speak like a Child*, in which he began to move away from the conventional "small group" of rhythm section and saxophone/trumpet and began to realise the potential sound palate generated by orchestrating for multiple horns. The album is scored for the obscure combination of flugelhorn, alto flute and bass trombone – although Hancock's skill as an arranger makes this group sound a lot larger than its reality. The ensemble is rounded out by Hancock's traditional bassist Ron Carter and drummer Mickey Roker.

The melody itself is a perfect example of Hancock's high level of harmonic sophistication which, coupled with exceedingly skilled orchestration, makes it an extremely effective theme. The theme is played only once at both the beginning and the end of the recording, with the middle solo section based on a cyclic derivative of the theme's harmonic content. This solo section occurs in what almost feels almost like "free time", with Carter and Roker playing very sparsely; however a constant pulse can be felt throughout.

The Theme

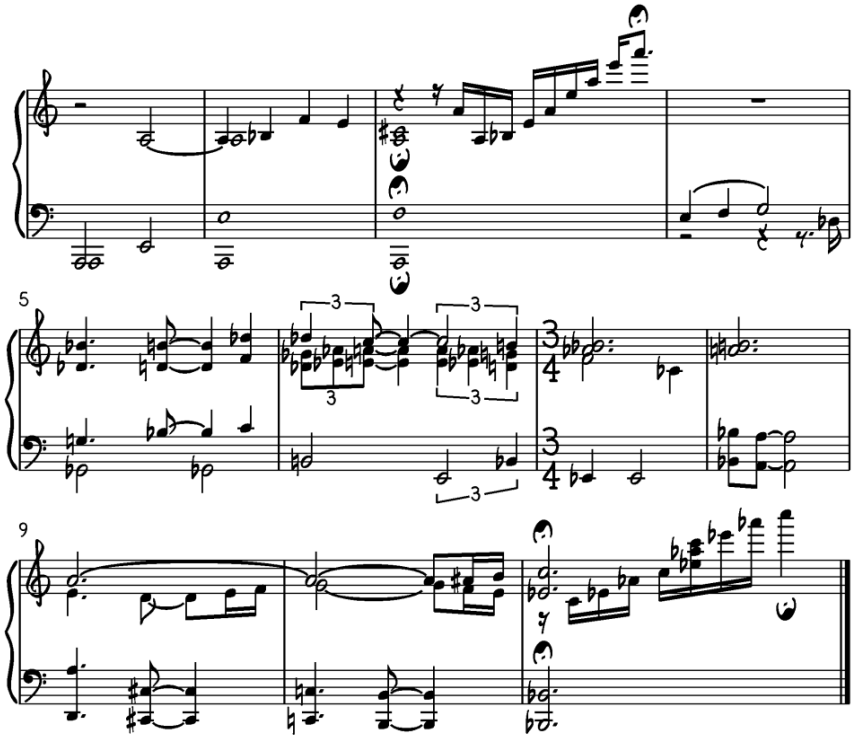
"Goodbye to Childhood" begins with an 11-bar section which sees the melody line primarily played by the flugelhorn, with the alto flute and bass trombone acting as accompaniment. Surprisingly, the piano is absent for the majority of this opening movement apart from a few embellishments at the end of phrases (as seen in bars 3 and 11).

The harmonic content of the theme strongly demonstrates the influence of 20th century classical music on Hancock's style – it is often extremely dissonant (e.g. the minor 9th interval in the bass clef on the first beat of bar 5; the spaced consecutive semitones on the first beat of bar 8). The dissonance of the harmony, however, is held together by the strong sense of voice-leading within each part, with each aiming towards an ultimate resolution point (e.g. bars 3, 8 and 11). Given the speed at which the individual lines move, the conventional jazz approach of assigning a chord symbol to each measure becomes somewhat superfluous. Hancock discusses his approach to orchestrating the album:

> For the most part, the harmonies in these numbers are freer in the sense that they're not so easily identifiable chordally in the conventional way. I'm more concerned with sounds than chords,

> and so I voice the harmonies to provide a wider spectrum of colours that can be contained within the traditional chord progression. In much of the album, there are places where you could call the harmonies by any one of the four designations, but no one designation would really include everything involved. That's how write; that's how it comes out.[76]

Figure 3.1 Opening theme to "Goodbye to Childhood"[77]



The Solo

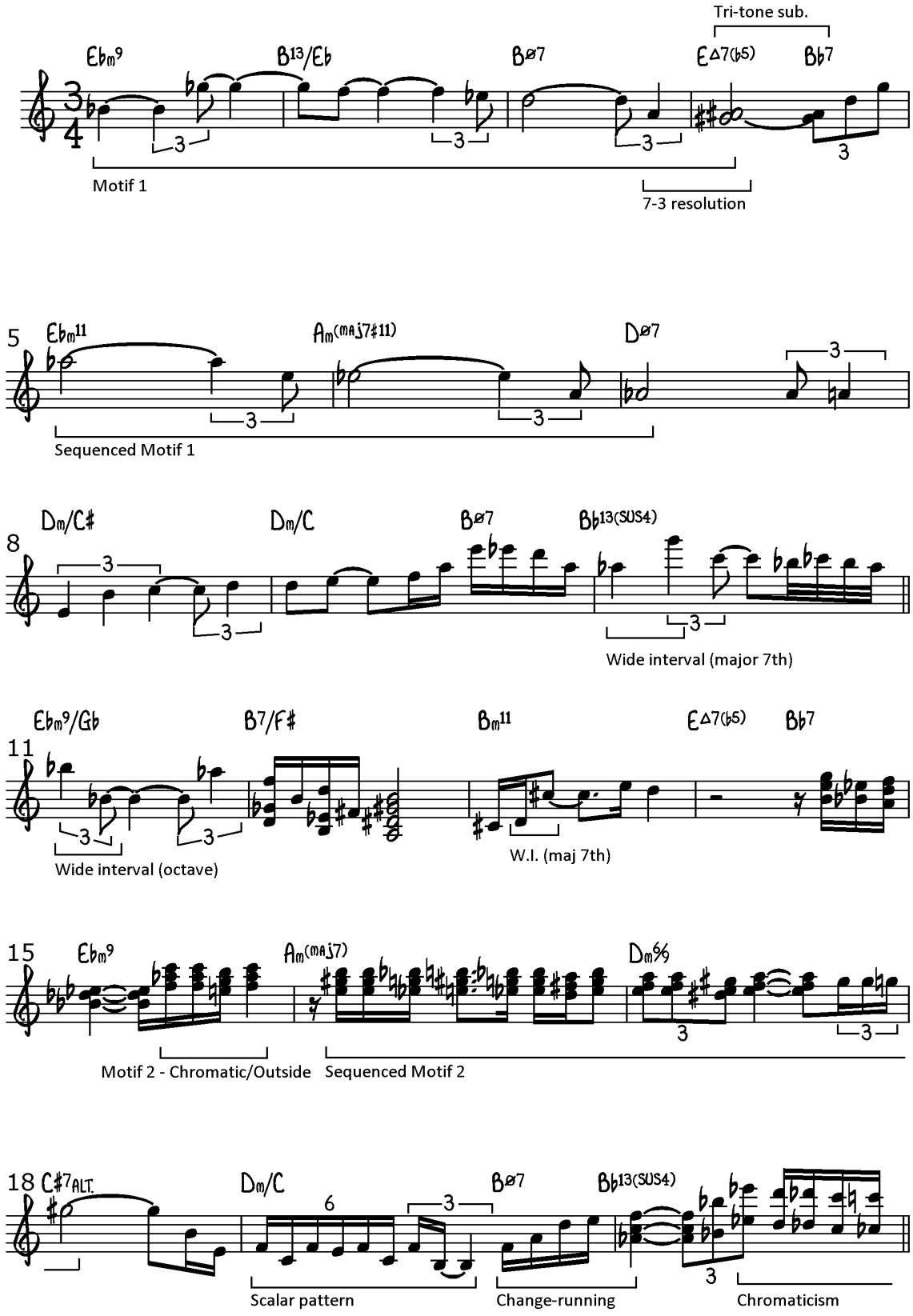
The solo section is a loose 10-bar derivative of the theme, throughout the course of which Hancock and Carter extensively reharmonise the chord changes. Similar to the theme, the harmony of this 10-bar repeated section is largely non-functional – it does not fit into the conventional jazz cadential paradigms of V-I or ii-V-I.[78]

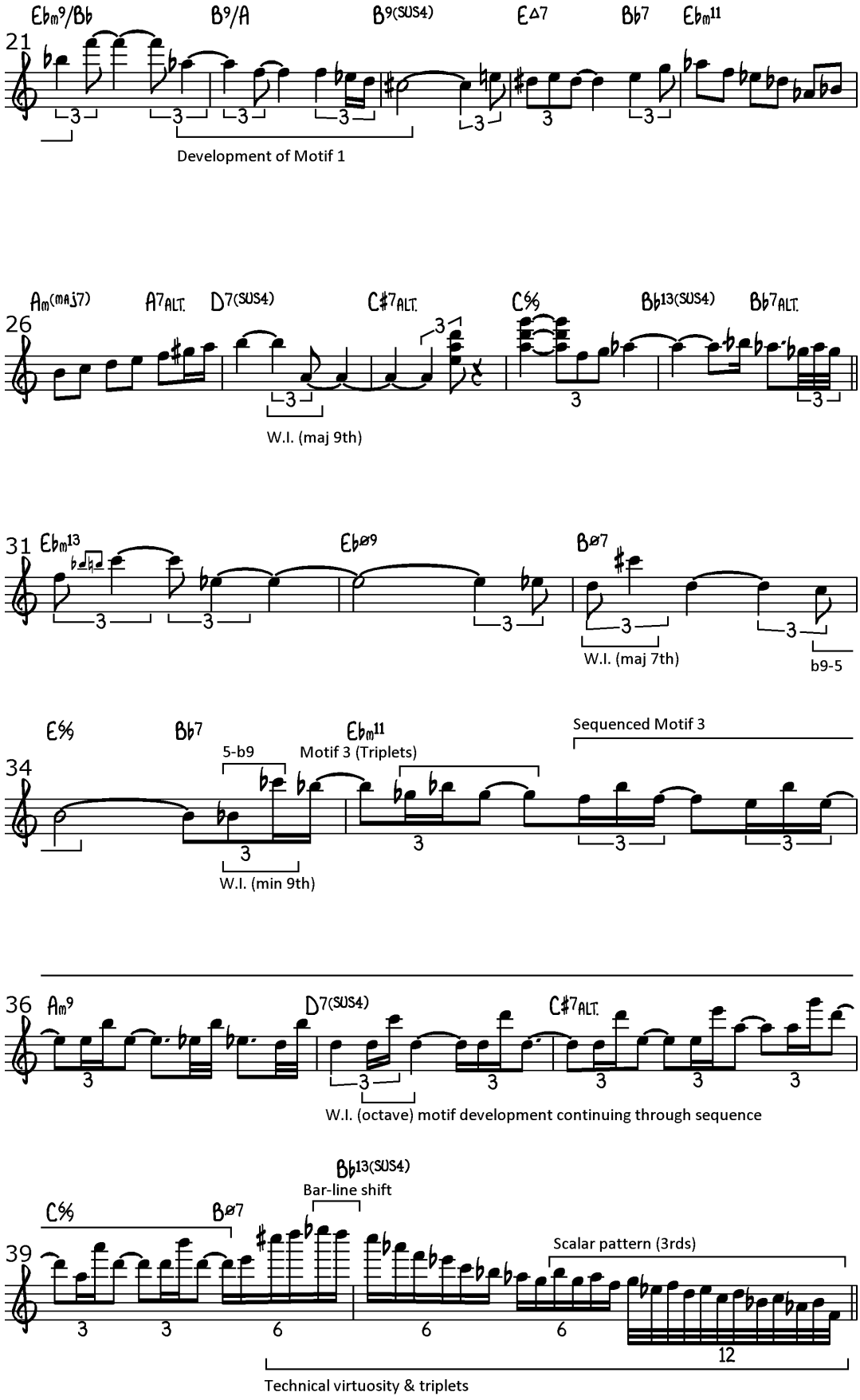
Hancock's solo itself is fascinating in that right from the very start it covers all of the previously discussed devices in great depth – these are detailed on the following 5 pages of Figure 3.2.

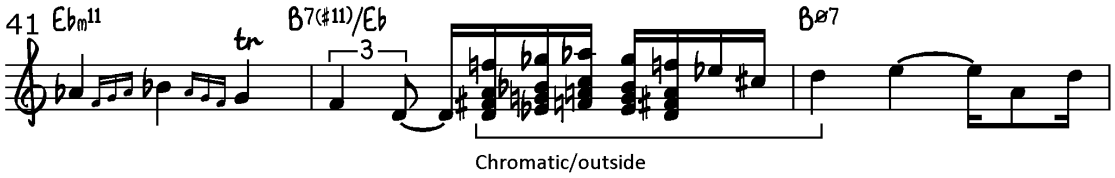
---

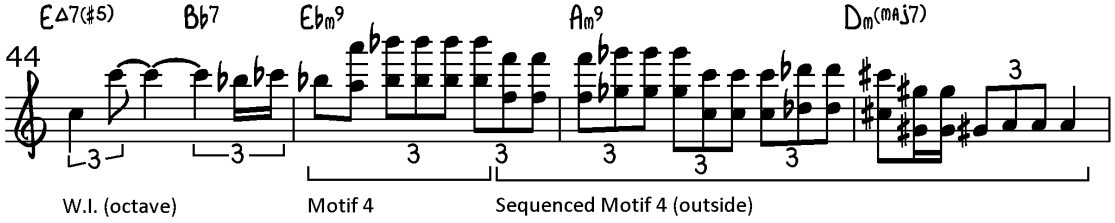
[76] Hancock, H. (1968). *Speak Like A Child*. New York: Blue Note. Hancock quote from original liner notes.
[77] Hancock, H. (1968). *Speak Like A Child*. New York: Blue Note.
[78] Waters, K. (2005). Modes, Scales, Functional Harmony, and Nonfunctional Harmony in the Compositions of Herbie Hancock. *Journal of Music Theory, 49*(No. 2), 333-357.

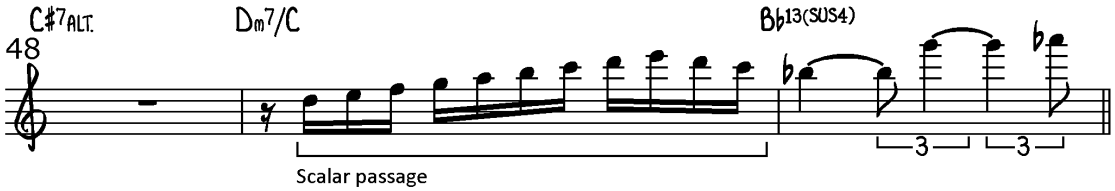
Figure 3.2 "Goodbye to Childhood"

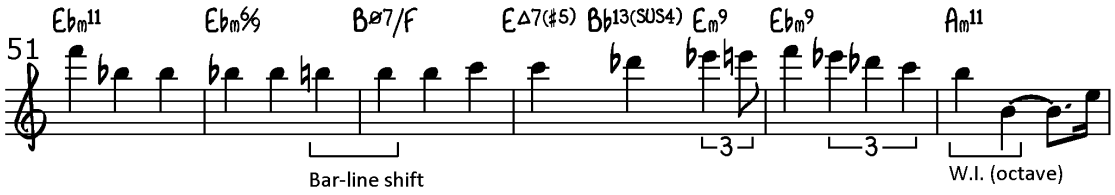


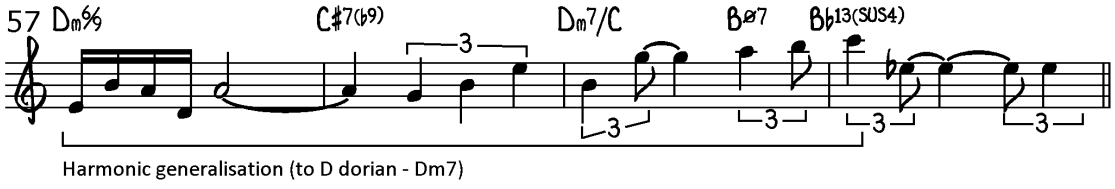

Ebm9/Bb
B9/A
B9(SUS4)
EΔ7
Bb7
Ebm11
21
Development of Motif 1
Am(maj7)
A7ALT.
D7(SUS4)
C♯7ALT.
C%
Bb13(SUS4)
Bb7ALT.
26
W.I. (maj 9th)
31
Ebm13
Eb∅9
B∅7
W.I. (maj 7th)
b9-5
E%
Bb7
Ebm11
5-b9
Motif 3 (Triplets)
Sequenced Motif 3
34
W.I. (min 9th)
36
Am9
D7(SUS4)
C♯7ALT.
W.I. (octave) motif development continuing through sequence
Bb13(SUS4)
Bar-line shift
C%
B∅7
39
Scalar pattern (3rds)
Technical virtuosity & triplets

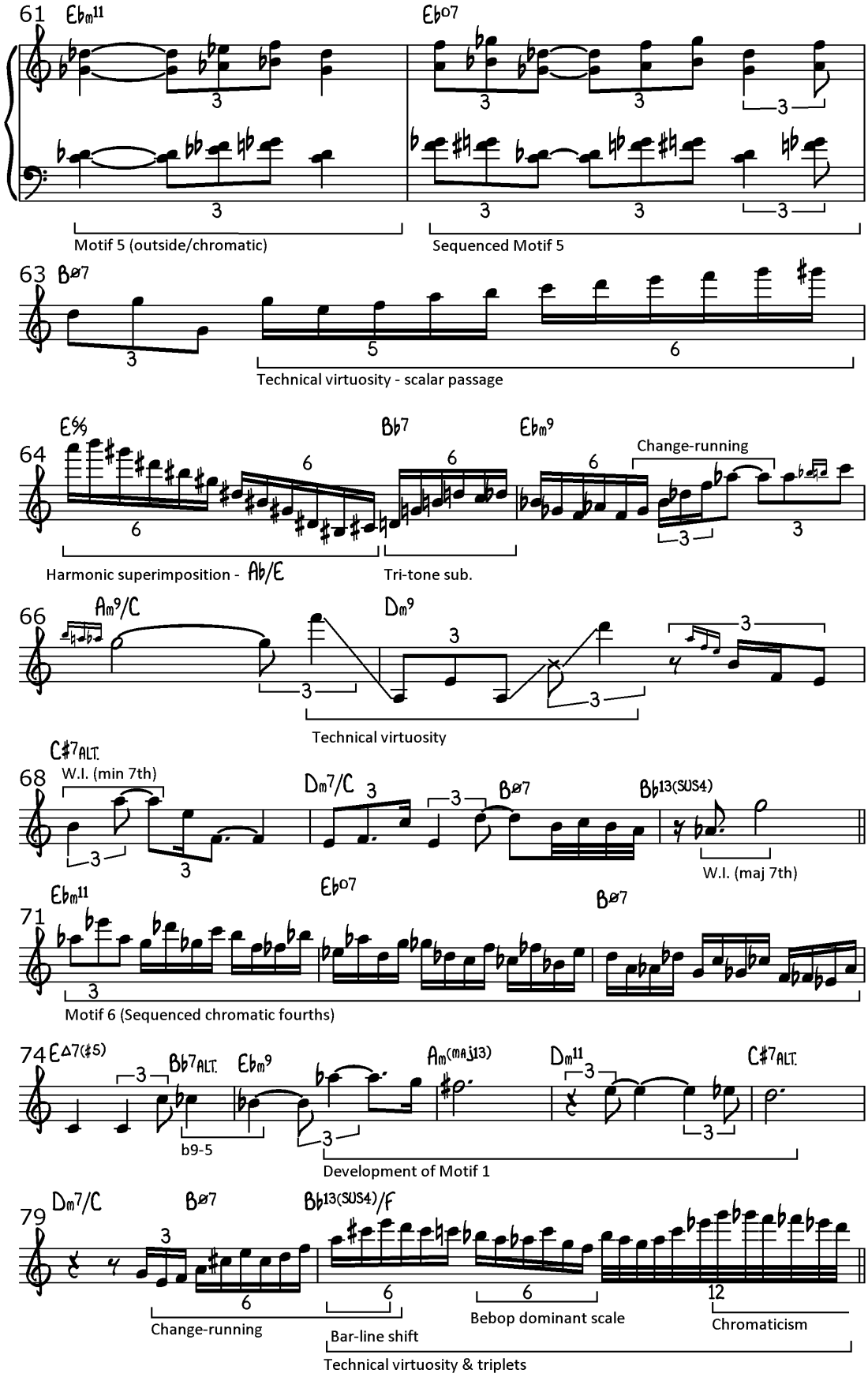

41
Ebm11
tr
B7(♯11)/Eb
3
Bø7
Chromatic/outside

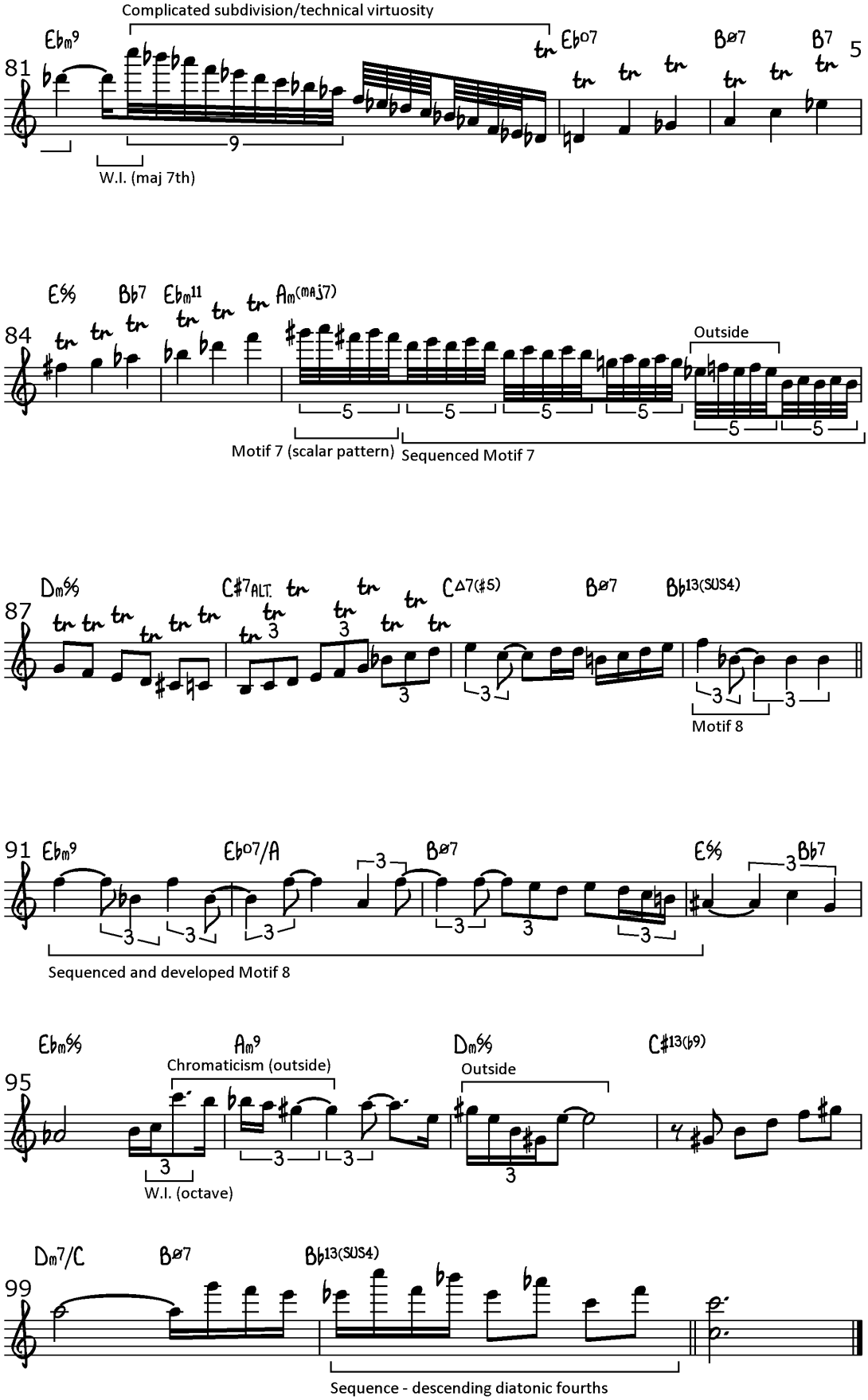

44
E△7(♯5)
Bb7
Ebm9
Am9
Dm(maj7)
3
W.I. (octave)
Motif 4
Sequenced Motif 4 (outside)


48
C♯7ALT.
Dm7/C
Bb13(SUS4)
3
Scalar passage


51
Ebm11
Ebm%
Bø7/F
E△7(♯5)
Bb13(SUS4)
Em9
Ebm9
Am11
3
Bar-line shift
W.I. (octave)


57
Dm%
C♯7(♭9)
3
Dm7/C
Bø7
Bb13(SUS4)
Harmonic generalisation (to D dorian - Dm7)


61
Ebm11
Eb°7
Motif 5 (outside/chromatic)
Sequenced Motif 5
63
Bø7
Technical virtuosity - scalar passage
64
E%
Bb7
Ebm9
Change-running
Harmonic superimposition - Ab/E
Tri-tone sub.
66
Am9/C
Dm9
Technical virtuosity
68
C#7ALT.
W.I. (min 7th)
Dm7/C
Bø7
Bb13(SUS4)
W.I. (maj 7th)
71
Ebm11
Eb°7
Bø7
Motif 6 (Sequenced chromatic fourths)
74
E△7(#5)
Bb7ALT.
Ebm9
Am(maj13)
Dm11
C#7ALT.
b9-5
Development of Motif 1
79
Dm7/C
Bø7
Bb13(SUS4)/F
Change-running
Bar-line shift
Bebop dominant scale
Chromaticism
Technical virtuosity & triplets


Complicated subdivision/technical virtuosity
Ebm9
Eb07
Bø7
B7
81
5
9
W.I. (maj 7th)
E%
Bb7
Ebm11
Am(maj7)
84
Outside
5
Motif 7 (scalar pattern)
Sequenced Motif 7
Dm%
C#7ALT.
C△7(♯5)
Bø7
Bb13(SUS4)
87
3
Motif 8
91
Ebm9
Eb07/A
Bø7
E%
Bb7
Sequenced and developed Motif 8
Ebm%
Am9
Dm%
C#13(♭9)
95
Chromaticism (outside)
Outside
W.I. (octave)
Dm7/C
Bø7
Bb13(SUS4)
99
Sequence - descending diatonic fourths

Conclusion

This thesis grew out of a fundamental desire to deepen my understanding of Hancock's music, and of the musical elements that attribute to his success as an improviser. In the initial planning process I was faced with the decision of whether to analyse the musical qualities of a few entire solos in depth, or to examine the contributing structural elements that underpinned them. In the end, my personal experiences with learning to improvise and my philosophy towards jazz education won out, and I decided upon the macro, taxonomical approach seen here. Initially, I had planned to analyse both melodic line and Hancock's approach to harmonic improvisation and accompaniment, although in the end I decided in order to do either justice within the size restrictions of the project I would have to focus on one or the other.

Thus the primary objective of this study was to give a breakdown of Hancock's approach to melodic line, analysing a range of his personal signature characteristics as well as a number of fundamental musical elements which reflected the wider bank of language shared amongst jazz musicians. A sub-objective of this was to encourage students of improvisation not to approach the process and analysis of transcription simply at face value, but rather to get deep inside the core structure of the solo and focus on applying its ***concepts***, not just the basic melodic content, to their own practice and performing. It is my belief that this process is ***integral*** to every jazz musician's challenge of developing an original voice.

This thesis argues is that through the use of a range of signature characteristics, Herbie Hancock emerged in the early 1960s as a truly original artist. Drawing upon and the building on the developments made by his predecessors, Hancock was ones of small group of artists who brought jazz into the modern era, by demonstrating both strong command of traditional jazz language as well as a powerfully explorative, individual voice.

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