

Unlocking Standard Tunes for Improv: *Use Your Keys!*

presented by

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The Midwest Clinic: An International Band & Orchestra Conference

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Williford Room, Chicago Hilton, Chicago, Illinois

Thank you for coming today!



STOP!

Ideally, I wouldn't distribute this handout (or any accompanying materials) to you at the beginning of this session: the best way for you to experience this workshop is for you to do so with your *ears*, in the same manner as the volunteers demonstrating for you today. But rather than interrupt our workshop later in order to pass these out, I am doing so now. I encourage you *NOT* to open and review the contents until I cue you to do so during the session. That way you can experience these concepts first *aurally*, just as your peers and students would in an ensemble or improv class.

In the meantime, if you wish, take a look at the first eight bars of the lead-sheet excerpt below. Consider how *you* would explain to someone else how to solo over these chord changes if asked to do so right now—particularly if you were explaining to a fairly *new* improviser!

And Then Love Calls by ANTONIO GARCÍA

(SWING) ♩ = 140

A

Chord changes: $G_{mi}7(b9)$, $C7(b9)$, $F_{mi}7$, $D_{mi}7(b9)$, $G7(b9)$, $C_{ma}9$

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If you're still sitting around after this exercise, waiting for the session to begin, feel free to read my bio on the last page. I wrote a *really* long one so that you'd have something to do right now. Or meet the person next to you!

Thanks again for coming—we're going to have a good time experimenting today!

(Don't turn the page yet: stick to the front or back pages for now!)

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Their Experiment

We'll start by having one of our volunteers solo over *The Shadow of Your Smile*, perhaps first looking at the 36 or so chord changes on a typical lead sheet, but then certainly with a little suggestion I'll offer along the way.

We may then do a similar experiment with *I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face*.

Your Experiment

Going back to *Shadow*, let's sing a concert G major scale in legato eighth notes along with the chord progressions for a chorus. (A person owning *Cutting the Changes* would find the following example within the book's CD-ROM supplemental text. Clicking on the triangular "play" icon prompts playback of the musical example on your computer.)

Example 1 (Track 15 [▶ 0:05-1:19]):

G Major Scale in Eighths
(breathe as needed)

G MAJOR SCALE (REPEAT FOR A CHORUS OF THE TUNE.)

How did it feel? Did all the notes work for you? It sounded quite consonant, didn't it?

Tonic Scale over Non-Diatonic Chords

Let's look at what happens when in measure two of *Shadow* you play the tonic G major scale over the not-so-G-looking B⁷ chord—a chord that jazz theory tells us is in the key of E major, three additional sharps away from the tonic key of G. If that's not extreme enough a difference for you, then check out the G scale over an F^{#7} chord—a chord in B major. (The recordings offered of this example are first very literal, stark, and stiff, followed by the context of a soloist and rhythm section playing rubato with good style. You can hear how much more musical, more jazz-like, this scale's tones sound with appropriate phrasing.)

Example 2 [▶]:

Chord Tones Created by Tonic Scale over Non-Diatonic Chord

Look at all the great chord alterations you can hit by using the tonic scale over other chords! Musicians practice for years to find the altered fifths and ninths of chords, but they'll fall right into

your reach with the tonic scale. If the combination of these tones sounds weird to you, keep playing and singing them: by the tenth playing, you'll accept them more in soloing.

Popular songs are so diatonic (in tonic key) because the composers wanted them to be *popular!* The more chromatic accidentals that appear in a melody, the harder it is for the mass audiences to hum or sing along, capture the tune, and be interested in buying recordings or sheet music that make money for the composer. So these Broadway and movie-musical composers kept their melodies as diatonic as possible; and in order to create interest, *they shifted the chords under those melodies* so that the end result offered tension and release in the music. Smart composers!

So if the tonic scale was good enough for the *composer* of the tune over so many different chords, why shouldn't you explore it as one of your first avenues for improvisation? I'm not suggesting that you should forever express yourself entirely via the tonic scale, but isn't it great to know how useful and how dependable it can be for you? Relax and improvise a good melody!

Tonic Scale over Diatonic Chords

Take your basic C major scale, two octaves; and run a scale from C to C, D to D, etc. Each of these new scales is called a "mode," and each has a very formal-sounding name:

Example 3 [▶]:

Modes of the Major Scale (in C)

D DORIAN (MINOR) F LYDIAN (MAJOR) A AEOLIAN (MINOR)

C IONIAN (MAJOR) E PHEYGIAN (MINOR) G MIXOLYDIAN (DOMINANT) B LOCRIAN (DIMINISHED)

I hope you'll agree that I could call the Dorian mode "Fred" and the Locrian mode "Pass the Salad"; they'd still just be the *same notes of the C major scale* but starting on different scale steps, right? And if you stacked a series of chords in thirds above each note of the C major scale, all notes staying in the key of C, then all the chord tones would also be the *same notes of the C major scale* but starting on different scale steps.

Example 4 [▶]:

Chords Derived from the Modes of the Major Scale (in C)

IONIAN (MAJOR) DORIAN (MINOR) PHEYGIAN (MINOR) LYDIAN (MAJOR) MIXOLYDIAN (DOMINANT) AEOLIAN (MINOR) LOCRIAN (HALF-DIMINISHED)

(BOTTOM NOTES ARE C MAJOR SCALE.)

Therefore you can play the C major scale over each of these chords and sound just fine!

So one new improviser is staring at a page of music with over 30 chord symbols and is so intimidated by them that he can't keep his train of thought. He gets lost and is frustrated beyond words. Another young musician sits in at a jazz club when the combo calls *Moten Swing*. "But I've never played *Moten Swing*," she says, panic setting in. "Relax," a veteran band member tells her. "The tune's in $A\flat$, with a bridge in C. You'll hear it." And sure enough, when she improvises her solo using the $A\flat$ major scale, switching to the C major scale for the bridge, it sounds all right!

In whose shoes would you rather be? Which student will enjoy jazz and thus remain interested enough to eventually learn more about chord symbols, scales, and lyrical improvisation?

THE SOLUTION: *Cutting the Changes!*

Chord symbols should inform you as to what *key center* you're in at that moment: they indicate a progression of tension and release in that key. It's possible to begin improvising over large groupings of major key centers rather than over 40 chord symbols.

From the early days of swing music into bebop, "cutting sessions" were jam sessions in which players tried to outdo one another in tempo, range, and whether or not they could handle the rapid chord progressions—"cut the changes"—of the tunes. In this workshop we're going to have our own cutting session: we're going to *cut chord symbols completely out* of the initial picture!

Why start improvisers off with all those intimidating chord symbols? For example, the first 16 measures on a typical lead sheet of *Shadow* include a different chord change above every bar: *16 chord changes!* But in *Cutting the Changes* the soloist sees *NO* chord symbols, instead seeing only major-scale key centers:

viewed as fewest key centers (4) & also as pitch-exceptions to key of concert G

TONY'S TIP TRY SOLOING OVER THIS TUNE ENTIRELY IN G CONCERT. IT WORKS!

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Now *that's* a great way to start soloing over 16 chord changes!

The major-scale key-center approach is also particularly valuable for jazz vocalists, who lack other instruments' valves or keypads for assistance in technical accuracy. Aspiring jazz singers can often relate to the major scales over a given progression.

The table below represents a quick look at a few tunes and the resulting statistics (which of course vary depending on whose version of the tune you're examining). The *Minimum Number of Key Centers* equates to how few keys a soloist could employ to be virtually completely "inside" the chord changes of the moment:

TITLE	# of Chords	# of Different Chords	Minimum # of Key Centers
All the Things You Are	37	25	7
Blue Moon	62	10	3
But Not for Me	45	11	1
Bye Bye Blackbird	34	9	2

Do Nothin' 'Till You Hear From Me	50	14	5
Girl From Ipanema	27	11	8
I Got Rhythm	51	9	4
Love is Here to Stay	51	13	3
(The) More I See You	50	16	5
My Funny Valentine	58	14	3
Over the Rainbow	61	14	4
Summertime (<i>16 measures</i>)	30	11	1
They Can't Take That Away From Me	63	14	4
What's New?	61	18	5
With a Song in my Heart	51	13	2
You Make Me Feel So Young	73	16	2
AVERAGE	50	14	4

The practicality of this approach is self-evident: these tunes average *more than 10 times* as many chord-symbol interruptions as key centers. I ask you: would you rather initially learn to solo over a new tune approaching these concepts with the numbers from *left to right* or from *right to left*?

Using My Book as a Tool

I helped write The Midwest Clinic's guidelines for the non-commercial presentation of its clinics; so I am keenly aware that our goal here is to teach concepts that are universal. And I hope you've found the live, recorded, and visual examples so far today to be just that. Midwest does allow me to introduce you to the book I've authored as a means to accelerate learning of these key-center improv concepts. So I'm delighted to share some information with you about *Cutting the Changes: Jazz Improvisation via Key Centers*.

As I've stated in workshops around the world, I do not believe for a moment that the information in *Cutting the Changes* is largely new to the world of jazz. However, I do believe I have presented it in a way that *is* new, accessible, and practical for the jazz beginner of any age (including instructors). For example:

Prerequisite Skills

To experience the benefits of this book, you only need to be able to play your major scales: in fact, your concert C, D, F, G, A, E \flat , D \flat , and A \flat major scales cover eight of the tunes. The book is available in C Treble, C Bass, B \flat , E \flat , and F keys/clefs. You'll find the major scales in your key in the front of the book. Beyond that, you'll need only your willingness to experiment: no further jazz theory is needed!

Key Sheets, Lead Sheets, and Play-Along CD

The book presents 13 great standard tunes *without* chord symbols, instead showing major-scale key-centers. Lyrics are included for all but one of the tunes. Most are very accessible for a less-experienced musician, but I've included a couple that will offer anyone something to work on. The book then offers the same 13 tunes *showing* the chord symbols so that you can compare the two versions of each tune, if you like.

The Play-Along CD provides you with an inspirational accompaniment of bass (left channel), piano (right), and drums (both) for each tune, plus six demonstration tracks in which you can hear me soloing with the rhythm section on tunes using the *Cutting the Changes* concepts. The book also includes a brief, recommended discography for each tune, as recorded by major artists. There is no substitution for listening to jazz live and via recording, singing along with great recorded jazz solos (no matter what your instrument or theirs), and learning such solos on your instrument.

The CD-ROM: A Supplemental Text, Linked to Audio Examples, plus Sheet Music!

Once you find the key-center sheets on these tunes so practical, you'll probably want to know how to analyze similar tunes yourself so that you can create your own key-sheets for other repertoire. So if you *want* to learn more jazz theory, the CD-ROM includes an *additional* text of more than 70 pages in PDF format. In a reader-friendly manner, this interactive supplement shows you how to analyze chord progressions and reduce them to basic key centers for you and your students. Not only can you print out the material, you can interact with it on your computer: it includes almost 70 musical examples, linked to visuals in the supplemental text, prompted by a click of your mouse. (All the examples in the beginning of this handout come from this PDF text.) Also included as a self-test are several tunes in typical chord-symbol style that you can analyze yourself and then compare with the answers shown in the nearby key-center answer sheet.

Since the print book is available in five key/clef versions, the CD-ROM for each also includes an appendix of concert-key PDF lead sheets with chord symbols so that non-C instrumentalists can easily compare them with the theory analyses of the PDF text. Among the other appendices included are a *Chord Symbol Primer* and an annotated list of more than 10 pages of recommended recordings for the 13 tunes examined.

A tremendous bonus also awaits you on the CD-ROM. The good folks at Kjos Music had suggested that I make it possible for musicians to perform their own accompaniment, such as in an improv or ensemble classroom, rather than rely only on the excellent Play-Along CD. So the CD-ROM also includes *printable PDF scores and parts for rhythm section* (optional guitar, plus piano, bass, and drums). These charts match the form and style of the Play-Along CD and provide the level of notation you'd want for musicians newer to the jazz tradition: voiced chords plus chord symbols for piano, fretboard-guides for guitar, bass lines, and drum grooves.

In Summary

So often aspiring improvisers are told that they must know all scales and keys before they can improvise lyrically, and as a result most students of the music give up before ever improvising successfully. I believe we should reverse the typical order of focus in jazz education—away from the “micro” of the chord symbols and back to the “macro” of the larger key centers they represent—to pass on to our students the perspective that every experienced improviser already has: the “big picture” of the tune’s key centers. After all, how many significant accidentals are in the melodies of these standard tunes? If the home key worked a long time for the composer, why not for your first solos or your students’? Allow them to improvise lyrically *now* using the vocabulary they already have!

After the experience of *using keys to unlock standard tunes*, students are far more ready to embrace the later learning of the complexities of chord symbols. This workshop session simply places the material in the order that “street” musicians have experienced for as long as jazz has existed.

More Experiments

If time allows, we may have one of our volunteers solo over *Tea for Two* and/or *The Days of Wine and Roses*, perhaps first looking at the many chord changes on a typical lead sheet, but then certainly using today’s concepts.

Answer to the Question on Page 1

If you have not yet thought of your answer to the musical question on page one, skip this section until you do. But if you are ready to compare your answer with mine regarding the first eight measures of *And Then Love Calls*, then check this out:

You could solo over the first four bars using only the A^b major scale, then two bars of E^b major scale, and finally two using the C major scale. That’s three familiar major scales instead of six chord changes. Aspiring jazz improvisers might otherwise feel they’d have to learn at least three *other* types of scales in order to play musically over these eight measures. *Cut* the changes!

How is this possible? As the CD-ROM of the book demonstrates, the first three chords are a $ii^{7(b5)}-V^{7(b9)}-i$ progression entirely in the key of the minor i , F minor—or its relative major, A^b major. The next two chords are the same $ii^{7(b5)}-V^{7(b9)}$ progression, but in C minor (E^b major). And the final two measures are of course in C major.

So a key-sheet for this tune would display no chord symbols: only the names of these three major scales. And how many middle school music students, much less high school and college, know those three major scales? *Plenty!*

I hope that this workshop has provided you with practical information you can consider applying *today!* If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me (see last page).

My thanks to the musicians who have demonstrated these techniques today!

My presentation today would not have been possible without support from Virginia Commonwealth University, Kjos Music, and Conn-Selmer. I hope that you will find the following information of interest.

Music at Virginia Commonwealth University

VCU is an urban, state-aided, Carnegie Research I (Doctoral Extensive) Institution serving some 30,000 students (approximately 15,000 of them undergraduate) via some 1,600 faculty. Located in the heart of Richmond's historic Fan District, the Monroe Park Campus provides a vibrant setting for the study of music; and there are extensive, nationally ranked health and science programs at the nearby Medical College of Virginia Campus. The most popular undergraduate majors are engineering, arts, business, humanities, and sciences. The VCU Music faculty numbers more than 20 full-time members, more than half of whom hold doctorates, plus more than 30 part-time instructors. Over 300 undergraduate students are enrolled as music majors; well over 400 others take music courses each semester.

Jazz Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University

Established in 1980, the VCU Jazz Studies Program offers its students outstanding opportunities to pursue jazz performance and writing, as evidenced in part by such successful former students as Steve Wilson (sax, Chick Corea's Origin); James Genus (bass, Saturday Night Live Band; recordings with Dave Douglas, Michael Brecker, Mike Stern, and John Abercrombie); Victor Goines (sax/clarinet, Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra; Director, Juilliard Jazz Studies); Alvester Garnett (drums, recordings with Abbey Lincoln, Cyrus Chestnut, James Carter, Regina Carter); Mark Shim (sax, Blue Note recording artist, member of Terence Blanchard sextet); Al Waters (sax, featured with Ray Charles); and Alvin Walker (trombone, Count Basie Orchestra). The Bachelor of Music in Jazz Studies degree annually affords some 60 students avenues for pursuing jazz and classical studies, including with ten jazz faculty covering all the traditional jazz instruments; and VCU's urban campus offers opportunities for students to play in area club settings.

VCU students have benefited from visits by numerous guest artist and clinicians including violinist Joe Kennedy, Jr.; vocalists René Marie and Phillip Manuel; saxophonists Frank Foster, Steve Lacy, Benny Carter, Branford Marsalis, George Coleman, Jimmy Heath, Fred Haas, and alumni Victor Goines and Steve Wilson; trumpeters Clark Terry, Woody Shaw, Thad Jones, Wynton Marsalis, and Brian Lynch; trombonist Art Baron; guitarists Gene Bertoncini, Uwe Kropinski, and Jimmy Bruno; pianists Jaki Byard, Mulgrew Miller, Barry Harris, and Billy Taylor; bassists Dave Holland, Chris Lightcap, David Friesen, and alumnus James Genus; percussionist Mayra Casales; drummers Louie Bellson, Max Roach, Harvey Sorgen, and alumnus Alvester Garnett; composer Gunther Schuller; and the Woody Herman and Count Basie Orchestras. The program has received *Down Beat* "Outstanding Performance" awards in the big band, combo, soloist, and vocalist categories and has appeared at the Smithsonian Institution, the IAJE Conference, and the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

The VCU Jazz Program's latest CD, "It Could Happen To You," features the Jazz Orchestra I, one of the Small Jazz Ensembles, and the Faculty Jazz Septet. It also includes two performances with guest New York trumpet soloist Brian Lynch, whose credits include the Horace Silver Quintet, Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, Eddie Palmieri, and The Artist formerly known and once again known as Prince. The CD was chosen by the IAJE *Jazz Education Journal* as one of the "Top 10 Campus CDs of 2002" and has received praise from *Down Beat*, *All About Jazz*, and other periodicals. You'll find it at CDBaby.com's site page at <www.cdbaby.com/vcu jazz>, or call 1-800-BUY-MY-CD with any major credit or debit card. In Greater Richmond, find the CD at the VCU Bookstore (804-828-1678) and at Plan 9 Music stores (804-353-9996). All proceeds go to the VCU Jazz Students Fund.

This is the fifth recording by the VCU Jazz Studies Program, previous releases being "The Tattooed Bride" (1982), "Things to Come" (1983), "Mood Indigo" (1992), and "The World on a String" (1997).

Neil A. Kjos Music Company

I am honored that Kjos Music has partnered with me in bringing this presentation and my book to you. The Neil A. Kjos Music Company, founded in 1936, is an outstanding publisher of educational materials in band, piano, jazz, strings, choral, and general music. Visit <www.kjos.com> for more information! And visit the Kjos exhibit booth in the remaining hours this afternoon, where you can find copies to browse of *Cutting the Changes: Jazz Improvisation via Key Centers*.

Conn-Selmer, Inc.

I have played Bach trombones exclusively for decades and am pleased that Conn-Selmer has co-sponsored me as a clinician for so many wonderful educational events at schools and festivals over the years. My instruments are simply exceptional horns. They assist me in creating my best possible sound, and they respond to me as no others do. I have performed on them around the world and recommend them without reservation!

For those of you seeking technical detail, my tenor trombone is a Model LT16M, purchased in 1980: .509" medium bore, 7-1/2" one-piece yellow brass bell, open gooseneck, chrome-plated nickel silver seamless inner slide, lightweight nickel silver outer slide, nickel silver handgrip, tubular nickel silver body braces, disc balancer, Vincent Bach 6-1/2 AL mouthpiece.

My bass trombone is a Model LT50B3LG, purchased in 1982: keys of Bb/F/Gb, .562" bore, 10-1/2" one-piece hand-hammered gold bell, traditional double in-line independent rotor system, traditional wrap, chrome-plated nickel silver seamless inner slide, lightweight nickel silver outer slide, nickel silver handgrip, tubular brass braces, Vincent Bach 3G mouthpiece.

For an application form for Conn-Selmer support towards bringing me to your school or event as a clinician, please visit <www.conn-selmer.com/clinic>.

Antonio J. García is an Associate Professor of Music and Director of Jazz Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. An alumnus of the Eastman School and of Loyola of the South, he has received commissions for jazz, symphonic, chamber, and solo works—instrumental and vocal—including grants from Meet The Composer, The Commission Project, The Thelonious Monk Institute, The Wolf Trap Foundation For The Arts, and regional arts councils. His music has aired internationally and has been performed by such artists as Sheila Jordan, Arturo Sandoval, Bobby Shew, Denis DiBlasio, James Moody, and Nick Brignola. Composition/arrangement honors include IAJE (jazz band), ASCAP (orchestral), and Billboard Magazine (pop songwriting). His works have been published by Kjos Music, Kendor Music, Doug Beach Music, Walrus, UNC Jazz Press, Three-Two Music Publications, and his own garciamusic.com and recorded on various CDs.

A Conn-Selmer trombone clinician, Mr. García has freelanced as trombonist, bass trombonist, or pianist with over 70 nationally renowned artists, including Ella Fitzgerald, Dave Brubeck, George Shearing, Mel Tormé, Doc Severinsen, Louie Bellson, and Phil Collins—and has performed at the Montreux, Nice, North Sea, Pori (Finland), New Orleans, and Chicago Jazz Festivals. He has produced recordings or broadcasts of such artists as Wynton Marsalis, Jim Pugh, Dave Taylor, Susannah McCorkle, Sir Roland Hanna, and the JazzTech Big Band. An avid scat-singer, he has performed vocally with jazz bands, jazz choirs, and computer-generated sounds. He is also a member of the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences (NARAS). A New Orleans native, he also performed there with such local artists as Pete Fountain, Ronnie Kole, Irma Thomas, and Al Hirt.

Mr. García is Associate Jazz Editor of the *International Trombone Association Journal*. Within the International Association for Jazz Education he serves as Past Editor of the *Jazz Education Journal*, Past President of IAJE-IL, past International Co-Chair for Curriculum and for Vocal/Instrumental Integration, and served as Chicago Host Coordinator for the 1997 Conference. He is Co-Editor and Contributing Author of *Teaching Jazz: A Course of Study* (published by MENC). He served on the Illinois Coalition for Music Education coordinating committee, worked with the Illinois and Chicago Public Schools to develop standards for multi-cultural music education, and received a curricular grant from the Council for Basic Education. He has also served as Director of IMEA's All-State Jazz Choir and Combo and of similar ensembles outside of Illinois. He is the recipient of the Illinois Music Educators Association's 2001 Distinguished Service Award.

The *Chicago Tribune* has highlighted García's "splendid solos...virtuosity and musicianship...ingenious scoring...shrewd arrangements" and cited him as "a nationally noted jazz artist/educator...one of the most prominent young music educators in the country." *Down Beat* has recognized his "knowing solo work on trombone" and "first-class writing of special interest. Phil Collins has said simply, "He can be in my band whenever he wants."

A member of the board of The Midwest Clinic (an international band and orchestra conference), Mr. García has adjudicated festivals and presented clinics in Canada, Europe, Australia, and South Africa, including creativity workshops for Motorola, Inc.'s international management executives. He has served as adjudicator for the International Trombone Association's Frank Rosolino Jazz Trombone Scholarship competition and Kai Winding Jazz Trombone Ensemble competition and has been asked to serve on Arts Midwest's "Midwest Jazz Masters" panel and the Virginia Commission for the Arts panel. He has been repeatedly published in *Down Beat*; *Music, Inc.*; *The International Musician*; *The Instrumentalist*; and the journals of MENC, IAJE, ITA, American Orff-Schulwerk Association, Percussive Arts Society, Arts Midwest, Illinois Music Educators Association, and Illinois Association of School Boards. Previous to VCU, he served as Associate Professor and Coordinator of Combos at Northwestern University, where he taught jazz and integrated arts, was Jazz Coordinator for the National High School Music Institute, and for four years directed the Vocal Jazz Ensemble. Formerly the Coordinator of Jazz Studies at Northern Illinois University, he was selected by students and faculty there as the recipient of a 1992 "Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching" award and nominated as its candidate for 1992 CASE "U.S. Professor of the Year" (one of 434 nationwide). Visit his web site at www.garciamusic.com.

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