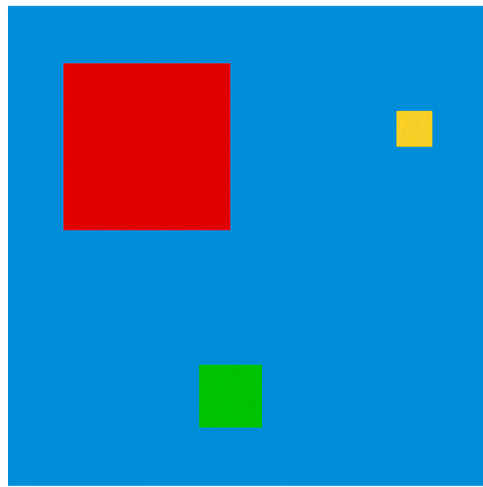


Asymmetrical Patterns for Saxophone



by
Ted Nash

©2021 TNASH MUSIC

• • • • •

Cannot be reproduced or redistributed in any way.
Not for resale - intended for use of purchaser only.

Asymmetrical Patterns for Saxophone

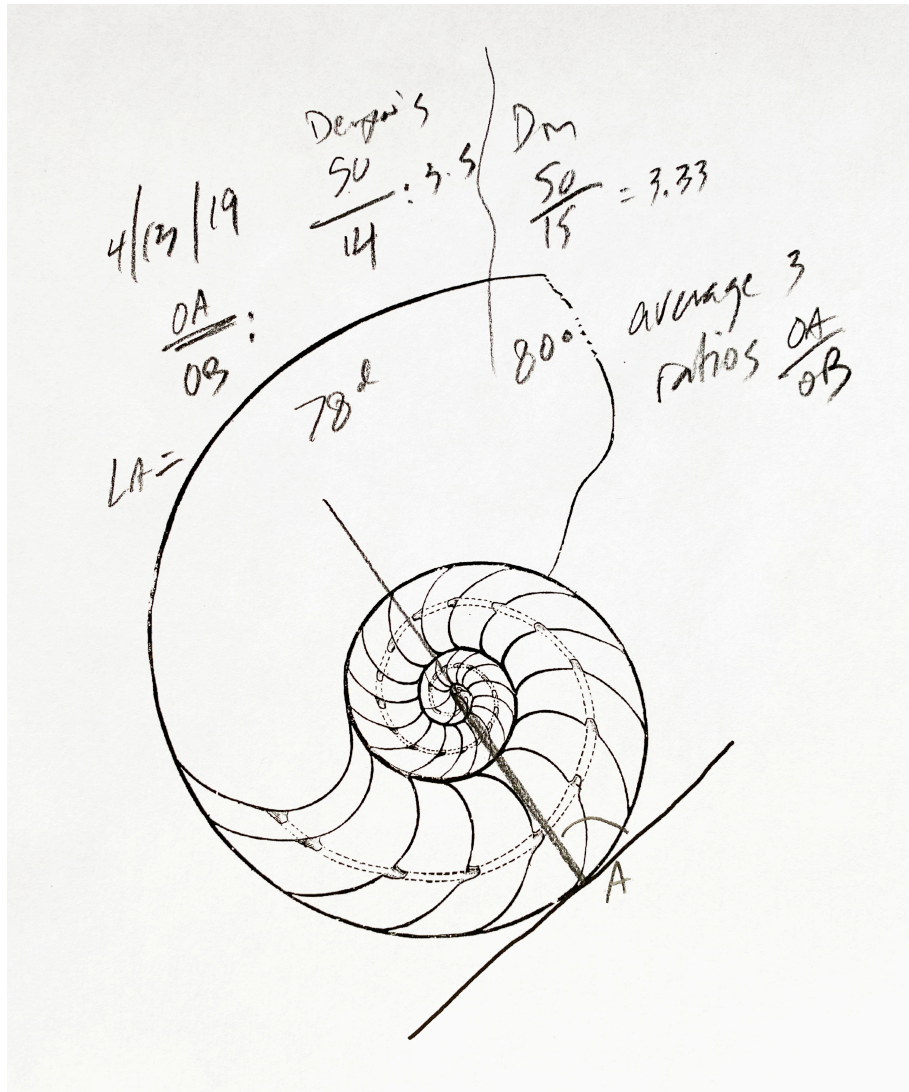
by
Ted Nash

Jazz is the perfection of imperfection. It acknowledges the cracks in the sidewalk of humanity, the flaws in the diamonds of our souls, the tectonic faults in our personal relationships—and forges all those discordant notes into something greater and stronger than the sum of those parts. In the end, jazz not only makes us feel better—it can also make us be better.

— Kareem Abdul Jabbar

a·sym·met·ri·cal
adjective

- Characterized by symmetry in the spatial arrangement of placement of parts or components
- Having parts or aspects that are not equal or equivalent; unequal
- Uneven in distribution



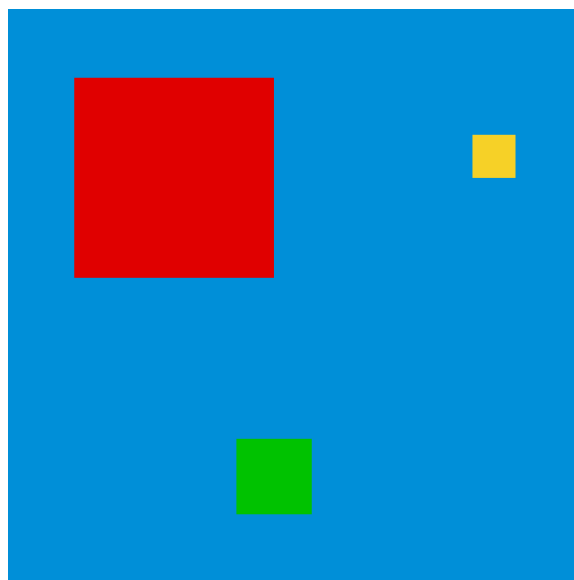
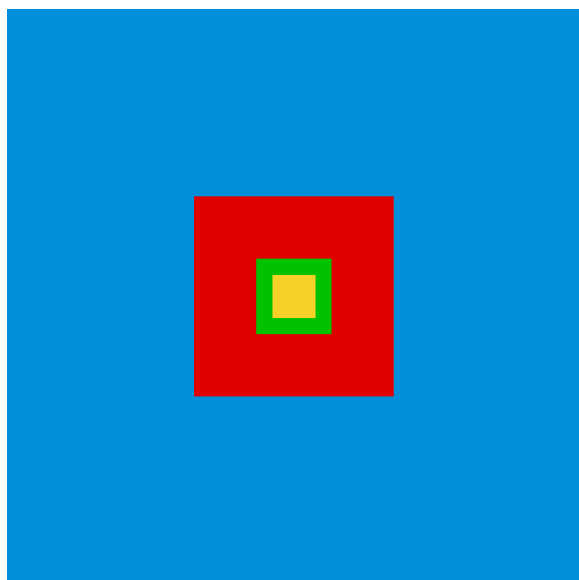
Natural Balance

Nature is an incredibly beautiful and diverse thing, and that is largely due to the wonderful variety it expresses. Our world is certainly not perfect in the sense that everything is symmetrical and even. In fact, it's just the opposite: it is beautiful because it is *not* perfect. The balance that comes from asymmetricality is what creates the natural beauty that we find in so many examples around us: a tree with branches of different sizes and shapes; rivers that wind in different directions; cloud formations which never repeat; the incredibly diverse characteristics of the people around us. The list goes on and on.

Imagine if everything was perfectly symmetrical. It would be artless and boring. In traditional Japanese aesthetics there is a term, *wabi-sabi*, which is the view or thought of finding beauty in every aspect of imperfection in nature. It is about the aesthetic of things in existence, that are imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete.

Take for example the following illustrations. The first one places four squares of different sizes in a manner that is symmetrical. Yet, despite the “perfection” there is a lack of natural balance.

The second example shows how placing the squares to offset each other actually creates a stronger sense of balance, despite being asymmetrical.



(In the back of the book you can find a page with printed squares you can cut out and use for this exercise. There is no right or wrong in doing this. Just find a placement that feels balanced to *you*. One that feels right. There are so many possibilities.)

Patterns

Most of us are familiar with the diminished pattern John Coltrane used over a dominant chord. It's a perfect pattern. It also hits all the notes in the diminished scale that are used on a V chord: the root, third, fifth, sixth, seventh as well as the b5, b9 and #9. This creates wonderful harmonic tension. You can start this at any point and it will still maintain the integrity of the pattern.



(To hear Coltrane playing this pattern, listen to three recordings made in 1957: Moment's Notice on *Blue Train*; Bass Blues on *Traneing In*; Sonny's Crib on *Living Space*.)

At some point in our early development most of us discover this diminished pattern and work on it in all three keys. This can be very useful in developing some aspect of our technique. It also helps us explore the beautiful and perfect qualities of the diminished scale, a scale that is extremely important in improvising, in many contexts. But if we just toss the pattern into a solo it isn't particularly creative, as it is a worked out phrase; a lick. And it doesn't really tell people much about who we are or how we think or feel. It shows we practiced and can play the diminished pattern that Coltrane played (and a thousand other people since). To play this in an improvised solo might be marginally impressive, as it requires some technical ability. But trying to impress people with our playing should never be a goal. We should be developing the tools - our technical ability, our understanding of harmony and rhythm - not to impress people but to move them emotionally in some way. To do this we should play what we are hearing and feeling, not something we memorized.

Just like balancing the squares, we can "balance" a phrase using asymmetricality that feels natural, varied and personal. Using the same diminished scale, we can make an asymmetrical version that allows us to express our own creativity.



chord as it changes. A good song to use is *Stella by Starlight*, as the chords change mostly once per bar. (You can find other great songs for this exercise, like Benny Golson's *Stablemates* or George Gershwin's *Love Walked In*.) This exercise can be trickier than it seems, and can also expose a lack of understanding of the harmonic implications of the chords. You can start anywhere in the scale. This exercise asks you to keep the integrity of this very simple pattern (ascending by a step) while embracing the harmony.

Musical notation for a 4/4 exercise. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The exercise consists of six bars, each containing a single whole note. The notes are: Bb (first bar), C (second bar), D (third bar), Eb (fourth bar), F (fifth bar), and G (sixth bar). Above the staff, the following chords are indicated: Emin7b5, A 7b9, Cmin7, F 7, Fmin7, and Bb7.

Once you've had fun with this for a while, you can try it with half-notes.

Musical notation for a 4/4 exercise. The key signature has two flats. The exercise consists of six bars, each containing two half notes. The notes are: Bb (first bar), C (second bar), D (third bar), Eb (fourth bar), F (fifth bar), and G (sixth bar). Above the staff, the following chords are indicated: Em7b5, A 7alt, Cm7, F 7, Fm7, and Bb7b9.

Change the starting note.

Musical notation for a 4/4 exercise. The key signature has two flats. The exercise consists of six bars, each containing two half notes. The notes are: C (first bar), D (second bar), Eb (third bar), F (fourth bar), G (fifth bar), and Ab (sixth bar). Above the staff, the following chords are indicated: Em7b5, A 7alt, Cm7, F 7, Fm7, and Bb7b9.

Now create a four-note repeating pattern over these same chord changes, using two half notes per bar.

Musical notation for a 4/4 exercise. The key signature has two flats. The exercise consists of eight bars, each containing two half notes. The notes are: Bb (first bar), C (second bar), D (third bar), Eb (fourth bar), F (fifth bar), G (sixth bar), Ab (seventh bar), and Bb (eighth bar). Above the staff, the following chords are indicated: Em7b5, A 7alt, Cm7, F 7, Fm7, and Bb7b9. Below the staff, the following chords are indicated: EbΔ7 and Ab7b5.

Change the starting notes on different degrees of the scale. Change other parameters, like the length of the notes (half, quarter, etc.). Be creative.

With any pattern exercise it is always more beneficial to use your brain to complete the pattern, rather than just reading it. Of course, there is much to be gained by working on written-out exercises: it develops our sight-reading, our technique, and even our sound and range. Keep in mind that when we use our eyes to work on material, we often shut down other parts of our senses, in particular our hearing. I have always noticed that it takes much longer to absorb and memorize material when we are reading it, as opposed to listening and learning by ear.

One outcome of reading these patterns will be to improve your dexterity; to get your fingers to move in new combinations, break old habits. In the beginning stages of our development as improvisers we often play familiar lines, because our fingers go to them easily. But this can be limiting.

In this book, I have created over one hundred pages of asymmetrical patterns that will develop your sight-reading and technique, but it will also allow your mind to hear unusual combinations of notes and fresh approaches to uses of scales. Although much of this material is written out, I strongly urge you to continue by making up your own, and certainly to do these in your head, as Mr. Nedzela and I did back stage. This will help develop another important part of improvising and that is idea development - taking an idea and developing it over a period of time and over series of chords. Improvising is more than just a bunch of notes. It is how you choose notes to fulfill ideas. If there are no clear ideas then, ultimately, it just sounds like a bunch of random notes.

In the last section of the book I take the concept of creating patterns and show how we can apply it in different ways over a series of chord changes. In the beginning of each exercise the material is written out. I then ask you to continue using your brain to complete the exercise. This is an extremely valuable step and I implore you to not skip this part of the work.

Tips and Explanations

To benefit from the sight-reading and technique-developing aspects of the material in this book, it doesn't necessarily matter if you comprehend (harmonically or conceptually) exactly what you are playing; it's more important you just play it. And always play an exercise at a consistent tempo throughout, rather than speeding up and slowing down to accommodate different levels of difficulty. It's better to play larger passages slower at first and return later to play them a bit faster.

As a rule, I don't give many courtesy accidentals. Personally, I find them a little confusing, as it can be redundant. It also trains you not to recognize the inherent value of the note without the crutch of being reminded.

In traditional notation, particularly in classical music, accidentals stay loyal to the key of the phrase, and will often use double-flats and double-sharps. In general, I don't see the necessity to be so "correct" all the time. Mixing flats and sharps in a bar or phrase is often completely acceptable and can be easier to read.

In a few situations found in the exercises in this book, the pattern begins to move out of the natural range of the instrument. In this case, it switches to a new inversion to accommodate the situation. In some exercises, where only one note goes out of range (too low), that note is transposed up an octave. This changes the pattern slightly.

When completing patterns in your head, try to use that opportunity to also expand your range by moving up the altissimo register.

This book does not attempt to cover every variation or possibility - that would amount to thousands of pages. But you are welcome to try on your own...

I hope you enjoy this book.
Thank you,
Ted

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ted', written in a cursive style.

Asymmetrical Patterns

This is a basic pattern, using a descending C scale. This is a *symmetrical* pattern.

C B A G F E D C

In this next example we reverse the scale to an **ascending** C scale, always starting on **next available note**. This is an *asymmetrical* pattern.

C D E F G A B C

The following exercises are based on the example above, but reversing direction.

This is a **major scale** pattern based on a **descending chromatic scale**. Remember - we are always going to the next **available note**.

B \flat A A \flat G F \sharp F E E \flat

D D \flat C B B \flat B B \flat

(etc.)