

THE JAZZ THEORY BOOK

by Mark Levine



Author of "The Jazz Piano Book"



SHER MUSIC CO.

ENDORSEMENTS

"This could be the single finest music book of any type I've ever seen. It's certainly the best explanation of the mechanics of jazz, and the amazing depth of the content is matched by the care and accuracy of the presentation. An invaluable resource for all improvising musicians regardless of instrument."

Bass Player Magazine

"Mark has done it again. *The Jazz Theory Book* has the clarity that most pedagogical books strive for. This book seems to have left no stone unturned in what one should know about the inner sanctum of jazz theory. The most fruitful information is generally derived from the source and that is the essence of this book. This book is connected to the music of our Jazz Masters. You can't get any better than that. Even the mature musician will find information here. Truly a magnificent accomplishment."

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"Mark has done it again and the music world is grateful. This book will help move the understanding of jazz theory and harmony into the 21st century."

Jamey Aebersold

"Mark Levine has done it again, but this time he has created the most comprehensive and complete book I've ever seen. It is really user-friendly and is written in a clear and comfortable style. It has excellent musical examples pertinent to the text and is also very inspiring and gives a lot of practical advice you don't find in most theory books. Again, a great job! Highly recommended."

Richie Beirach

"As is the case with *The Jazz Piano Book*, Mark has done a completely thorough job, organizing the material in a very logical and readable manner – highly recommended."

Dave Liebman

"Just what the doctor ordered. Insightful and very well thought out."

Donald Brown

"*Finally*, a book on jazz theory and harmony that is very easy to understand yet still covers in great depth just about all of the basics anyone would need to know in order to get started or, in the case of the more advanced player, wonderful information on areas such as playing "outside", reharmonization, keyboard fundamentals, etc. I wish I'd had this book 40 years ago. I think this is the book every musician should own."

Bobby Shew

"*The Jazz Theory Book* should be in every musician's library regardless of the level of their ability."

James Moody

"Once again Mark Levine has made an invaluable contribution to the field of jazz textbooks. *The Jazz Theory Book* covers a wide range of very useful material. It is quite thorough and complete. Even better, Mark never loses sight of the fact that you use theory in order to play and compose music. Simply a great book."

Jim McNeely

"This is the best book on jazz theory I have seen to date. The conversational tone of all the text gives the student the feeling of learning from a friend rather than an authoritarian figure. Great stuff!"

Ernie Watts

"A great book!"

Keyboard Magazine

THE JAZZ THEORY BOOK BY MARK LEVINE



SHER MUSIC COMPANY

for Deborra and Si

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Metronome All Stars—1949, Billy Bauer (guitar), Eddie Safranski (bass),
Charlie Parker (alto), Lennie Tristano (piano)

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Author's Note

I was fortunate to have some great teachers. A New York jazz pianist, Joe Pace, introduced me to the beauty of the II-V-I progression. I spent two years studying with the great Jaki Byard, followed by a year with Hall Overton, who knew more about Thelonious Monk's music¹ than anyone else at that time, and was a profound and caring teacher. I spent a year or so studying with Herb Pomeroy, one of the all-time great jazz educators. I learned more in a single afternoon with Barry Harris than is found in most jazz harmony books. Most of what I've learned, however, is from the masters themselves, by transcribing directly from recordings. Every great jazz musician has gotten the best part of his or her education by transcribing. Learn how to do it early and skillfully.

I've been lucky enough to work with, and learn from, Woody Shaw, Joe Henderson, Bobby Hutcherson, Dave Liebman, Sonny Stitt, Milt Jackson, Art Farmer, Blue Mitchell, Harold Land, Cal Tjader, Carmen McRae, Art Pepper, Charlie Rouse, Johnny Griffin, Chet Baker, Mongo Santamaria, and Luis Gasca.

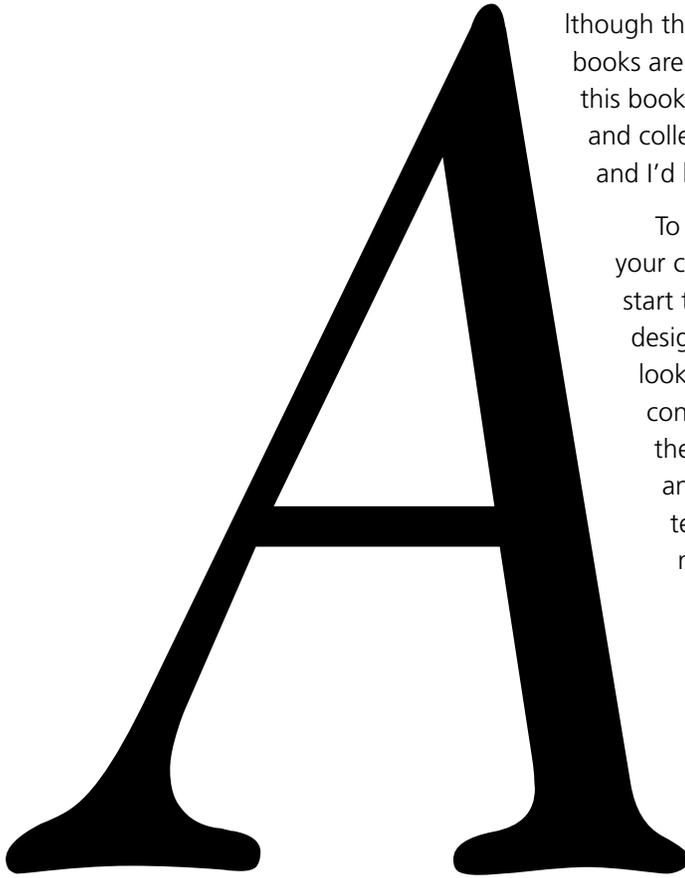
I value any comments you may have about this book. Please don't hesitate to write me, care of my publisher, Chuck Sher:

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Mark Levine records for Concord Jazz and is active on the San Francisco jazz scene, both with his own trio and as a sideman with many bands. He is currently on the faculty of both The San Francisco Conservatory Of Music and Mills College, and teaches at the following summer jazz camps: Jamey Aebersold, The Stanford Jazz Workshop, Jazz Camp West, and the Jazz Studio Camp in Brugge, Belgium.

¹ Hall helped Monk with the big band arrangements for Monk's 1959 album *At Town Hall*, Fantasy Records.

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Introduction

A great jazz solo consists of:

- 1% magic
- 99% stuff that is
 - Explainable
 - Analyzable
 - Categorizeable
 - Doable

This book is mostly about the 99% stuff.

There is no one single, all inclusive “jazz theory.” In fact, that’s why the subject is called jazz *theory* rather than jazz *truth*. The only truth is in the music itself. “Theory” is the little intellectual dance we do around the music, attempting to come up with rules so we can understand why Charlie Parker and John Coltrane sounded the way they did. There are almost as many “jazz theories” as there are jazz musicians.

Having said this, it’s OK to come back to reality and state that there *is* a common thread of development in jazz theory, a thread that has evolved logically from the earliest days of jazz through Louis Armstrong, James P. Johnson, Duke Ellington, Art Tatum, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, Bobby Hutcherson, Wayne Shorter, McCoy Tyner, Joe Henderson, to Mulgrew Miller and beyond. All these musicians could have played with each other and understood one another, even though their terminology may have differed. Louis Armstrong recorded with Duke Ellington,¹ Duke Ellington recorded with John Coltrane,² and all three sounded as though they enjoyed the encounters.

Charlie Parker once said “learn the changes and then forget them.” As you study jazz theory, be aware of what your ultimate goal is in terms of what he said: *to get beyond theory*.

When you’re listening to a great solo, the player is *not* thinking “II-V-I,” “blues lick,” “AABA,” “altered scale,” and so forth. He or she has done that already, many years ago. Experienced musicians have internalized this information to the point that they no longer have to think about it very much, if at all. The great players have also learned what the chords and the scales *look and feel like* on their instrument. Be aware of what your eyes see and what your hands *feel* when you play. Do this just as much as you focus your mind on the mental stuff, and you’ll get *beyond theory*—where you just flow with the music. Aim for that state of grace, when you no longer have to think about theory, and you’ll find it much easier to tap into the magical 1%.

In order to reach this point of mastery, you’ll have to think about—and practice—theory a great deal. That’s the 99% part.

¹ Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, *The Great Reunion*, Vogue, 1961.

² *Duke Ellington and John Coltrane*, MCA/Impulse, 1962.

The Piano

Many of the examples in the book are written for piano. You don't need any "piano technique" to use this book. You just need to be able to read the notes. Because many people reading this book won't be pianists, many of the piano transcriptions have been simplified, and are marked as such. If a piano example looks too difficult for you to decipher, have your teacher or a piano-playing friend play it for you.

Unlike other instruments, the piano lets you "see" what you play, and that makes it easier to put all the pieces together. *Almost all the great jazz players, regardless of instrument, play some piano.* This includes Max Roach, Woody Shaw, Clifford Brown, Kenny Dorham, Joe Henderson, Art Blakey, Sonny Rollins, Hank Mobley, Benny Carter, Coleman Hawkins, Freddie Hubbard, Kenny Clarke, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Philly Joe Jones, Carmen McRae, and Fats Navarro, just to name a few. Some of them played well enough to record on piano, including bassist Charles Mingus,³ and drummers Jack DeJohnette⁴ and Joe Chambers.⁵

How Good Do You Want To Be?

There are certain prerequisites for a becoming a good jazz musician. You must have:

Talent (ears, time, a sense of form)

Direction (exposure to the right music for you)

Education (teachers, mentors)

Ambition

Number 4—ambition—is perhaps the most important of all. I don't mean ambition in the sense of wanting to be a star, but in the sense of *having the will, desire, and stamina to practice*. If you don't have this quality, all the talent in the world means nothing.

As you go through this book, lots of questions will come to mind, and perhaps you'll have the good fortune to have a teacher or mentor that can answer them. A good thing to remember, however, is that *the answer to all your questions is in your living room*. Your CD or record collection contains the history, theory, and practice of jazz. Almost all the great jazz musicians of the modern era learned most of their "licks," and gained most of their theoretical knowledge, from listening, transcribing, and analyzing tunes and solos from records. Start learning how to transcribe now. It may seem difficult at first, but the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Good luck, and don't forget to practice today.

³ Charles Mingus, *Mingus Plays Piano*, Mobile Fidelity, 1964.

⁴ Jack DeJohnette, *The Piano Album*, Landmark, 1985.

⁵ Joe Chambers and Larry Young, *Double Exposure*, Muse, 1977.

A Note on Terminology and Chord Symbols

Most working jazz musicians prefer easy-to-read shorthand symbols. Both G7alt and (b13) (#11) (#9) G7(b9) mean the same thing. Which would you rather read?

For the beginner, jazz presents a bewildering array of chord symbols. You will soon find out that they are just different ways of writing the same few chords. There is no one single set of standard chord symbols. The lack of a universally agreed-upon set of symbols is not a bad thing at all. Jazz is a living, breathing, growing, constantly evolving art, and its changing terminology reflects this.

A C major 7th chord can be notated as Cmaj7, CM7, C6, C $\frac{9}{6}$, or C Δ , and they all mean pretty much the same thing. Many jazz musicians just write C. In this book I'll write C major 7th as C Δ .

A D minor 7th chord can be notated as D-7, Dm7, or Dmi7. I like to use the minus sign, as in D-7.

The plus (+) symbol (C7+11) and the sharp (#) symbol (C7#11) both mean the same thing: Raise a note (the 11th, in this case) a half-step. I'll use the # symbol in this book.

The flat (b) symbol (C7^b9) and the minus (-) sign (C7-9) both mean the same thing: Lower a note (the 9th, in this case) a half-step. I prefer the flat symbol.

The 4th and 11th are the same note in a chord. I like to use 4 on major and sus chords (C Δ [#]4, Csus4), and 11 on dominant and minor chords (C7[#]11, C-11).

The 6th and 13th are the same note within a chord. Standard practice is to use 6 on major and minor chords (C6, C-6), and 13 on dominant chords (C7^b13).

Many piano and guitar voicings for major 7th chords don't include the major 7th. You'll see an occasional "C Δ " chord in this book with no major 7th in the voicing shown.

I use abbreviated numbers—such as "3rd," "5th," "7th," and so on—when referring to *intervals and notes in a specific chord*, such as "the 5th of the G7 chord." I spell out the number as a word—such as "third," "fifth," "seventh"—when referring to anything else, such as "the fourth mode of C major," "the cycle of fifths," "the seventh note of the scale," and so on.

Jazz musicians use the terms “scale” and “mode” interchangeably, and I will do the same. I make a distinction when the mode is in direct reference to its parent scale, as in “the D Dorian mode of the C major scale.”

All the examples in this book are written in concert key. B \flat and E \flat instruments, if you are playing along with the original recording, don't forget to transpose accordingly. Examples originally played by bass clef instruments (trombone and bass) are shown in the bass clef. A few piano examples have been transposed down an octave so you don't have to read too many ledger lines.



TERMS, LINGO, MUSICIANS' NICKNAMES

Glossary

Aeolian The sixth mode of the major scale, also known as the natural minor scale.

alteration (AKA altered note) The $\flat 9$, $\sharp 9$, $\sharp 11$, $\flat 5$, $\sharp 5$, $\flat 13$ of a chord.

altered mode The seventh mode of the melodic minor scale.

"avoid" note A note from the scale of a chord that sounds dissonant when held against the chord. The term usually refers to the 4th of a major chord and the 11th of a dominant chord.

bag (AKA bag of tricks) A jazz musician's repertoire of licks, patterns, and so on, often used in proprietary form, as in "Jackie's bag."

ballad Slow tune.

bebop The revolutionary style of jazz that evolved in the early 1940s.

Bird Charlie Parker.

blowing choruses The choruses of a tune that are improvised.

break Breaks typically occur at the beginning of a solo. The soloist plays alone as the rest of the band lays out, usually for 2, 4, or 8 bars. One of the greatest is Lee Morgan's break at the beginning of his solo on John Coltrane's "Locomotion" on Coltrane's album *Blue Train*.

bridge The "B" section of a tune, usually on an AABA or ABA tune. Sometimes called the "channel."

cadenza An improvised rubato ending of indeterminate length, played by the soloist while the rhythm sections lays out.

changes The chords to a tune.

channel See bridge.

chart Arrangement, lead sheet.

chops Technique.

chorus Once through a tune.

circle of fourths (AKA cycle of fourths) A circular arrangement of all 12 notes of the chromatic scale. When viewed counterclockwise, each note is a 4th higher than the preceding note. When viewed clockwise, each note is a 4th lower than the preceding note. See also cycle of fifths.

clave (pronounced "clah-vay") A two-bar rhythmic pattern that almost all Afro-Cuban music is based upon.

common tones Notes that are found in the chords and/or scales of two or more consecutive chords.

cycle of fifths (AKA circle of fifths) A circular arrangement of all 12 notes of the chromatic scale. When viewed counterclockwise, each note is a 5th lower than the preceding note. When viewed clockwise, each note is a 5th higher than the preceding note. See also cycle of fourths.

deceptive cadence A V chord resolving someplace other than down a 5th.

diatonic Chords within a particular key. C Δ , D-7, Esus $\flat 9$, F Δ $\sharp 4$, G7, and Gsus are diatonic to the key of C.

diminished scale A scale alternating half steps and whole steps (or vice versa).

Diz Dizzy Gillespie.

Dorian mode The second mode of the major scale; also the chord derived from that mode.

double diminished chord Two diminished 7th chords played at the same time by a pianist, an eight-note chord including all the notes of a diminished scale.

double time Change the tempo to one that's twice as fast, the changes also moving twice as fast.

double time feeling Change the tempo to one that is twice as fast, but with the changes still moving at the speed of the original tempo.

eights (or "trade eights") Two or more players, each in turn trading eight-bar improvisations, usually for one or more choruses after the regular solos.

ending The last part of a tune, often specially arranged.

enharmonic Two differently spelled notes that are the same, such as C \flat and B, D \sharp and E \flat , or F \sharp and G \flat .

extensions The 9th, 11th, and 13th (also known as the 6th) of a chord.

fake book A book of standards and jazz originals, usually consisting of just the melody and chord symbols, so-called because improvising used to be called "faking."

finger memory The internalized muscular memory of what a chord, lick, phrase, pattern, and so on, feels like (a term used mainly by pianists, but applicable to all instruments).

form See song form.

fours (or "trade fours") Two or more players, each in turn trading four-bar improvisations, usually for one or more choruses after the regular solos.

free (or "play free") Improvise, usually without chord changes or a pre-set form.

from the top Take the tune from the beginning.

funky Earthy, soulful, visceral, unintellectual.

gig A musical job, be it at a club, party, festival, or record date.

Great American Song Book, The The compositions of George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, Jimmy Van Heusen, Jimmy McHugh, Hoagy Carmichael, and so on.

groove The "lock" between members of a rhythm section playing well together.

half-diminished (1) A minor 7th chord with a flat 5th; (2) the chord built off of the sixth mode of the melodic minor scale; (3) the chord built off of the seventh mode of the major scale.

head (1) The composed melody and changes of a tune; (2) a tune composed by a jazz musician based on the changes to a standard; (3) the first time through the melody of a tune, before the solos begin.

interlude A section of a tune, usually played between the head and the solos, or between soloists.

interval The space between two notes.

in the pocket When the music is rhythmically in a groove.

intro An introductory section before a tune is played, often improvised.

Ionian mode The first mode of the major scale.

jam session (also "to jam") Informal gathering of jazz musicians playing together.

kicks Specific rhythmic hits played by the rhythm section.

Latin jazz A fusion of jazz and Afro-Cuban music.

lay back Relax; play on the back side of the beat.

lay out Don't play.

lead sheet A sheet of music usually containing just the melody and the chord symbols of a tune.

left-hand voicings Rootless voicings for the left hand, originally developed by pianists Red Garland, Bill Evans, and Wynton Kelly.

lick An improvised phrase that has entered the everyday language of jazz, often used descriptively, as in "a Joe Henderson lick."

Locrian mode The seventh mode of the major scale.

Lydian augmented mode The third mode of the melodic minor scale; also the chord derived from that mode.

Lydian dominant mode The fourth mode of the melodic minor scale; also the chord derived from that mode.

Lydian mode The fourth mode of the major scale; also the chord derived from that mode.

minor major mode The first mode of the melodic minor scale; also the chord derived from that mode.

minor II-V-I A II-V-I progression in a minor key, as in D \flat , G7alt, C- Δ .

Mixolydian mode The fifth mode of the major scale.

mode A seven-note scale created by starting on any of the seven notes of a major or melodic minor scale.

natural minor scale See Aeolian.

original A tune written by a member of the band, often part of a bandstand announcement, as in “we’d like to play an original tune by...”

out chorus (or) “out head” The last time through the melody of a tune.

outside Playing notes not in the changes (and assuming that they sound good, unlike “wrong notes”).

parallelism Chords or chord voicings moving in parallel motion.

parent scale The scale from which a mode is derived.

pedal (or) pedal point A note, usually in the bass, which remains the same, over which a chord, or series of chords, is played.

Phrygian mode The third mode of the major scale; also the chord derived from that mode.

polychord Two or more chords played at the same time.

polytonality Playing in more than one key at the same time.

refrain Don’t play (just kidding).

“Rhythm” changes Chord changes based on George Gershwin’s tune “I’ve Got Rhythm.”

riff Repeated horn figure, often played behind a solo.

“right on it” No intro; start playing right on the head.

rubato Playing out of tempo.

sequence A phrase, or motif, repeated at a different pitch. The repeated phrase doesn’t necessarily have to have the exact same interval structure, but generally has the same shape as the original motif.

‘shed See woodshed.

shout chorus A specially arranged chorus, usually played between the last solo and the out chorus.

sit in, sitting in When a musician who is not a member of the regular band joins the band to play.

slash chord (1) A triad played over a note in the bass other than the root; (2) a 7th chord played over a note in the bass not in the chord; (3) a triad played on top of another triad. See *also* polychord.

solo, soloing Improvise on the tune.

solos Improvised section of a tune.

song form The organization of letter names given to different sections of a tune (usually in eight-bar segments), as in “AABA,” “ABC,” and so forth.

standard A tune popular with jazz musicians, usually, but not always, composed by a non-jazz songwriter (George Gershwin, Cole Porter, and so on). Many of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn’s songs are also considered standards.

stop-time Usually occurring during a solo, the rhythm section plays only on the first beat of every two, or four, bars. Occasionally a stop-time figure will have two or more kicks. One of the greatest stop-time solos is by Sonny Rollins on Vincent Youmans’ “I Know That You Know” on the Dizzy Gillespie-Sonny Stitt-Sonny Rollins album *Sonny Side Up*.

straight ahead Play with a swing feeling.

straight 8ths Play with a rhythmically even feeling, without swinging in the traditional sense. Most Latin music is played this way.

stroll A solo section, where on the soloist’s cue, the pianist, or the entire rhythm section, lays out for awhile. See lay out.

substitute chord A chord that substitutes for the original chord.

sus chord A dominant 7th chord in which the 4th does not act like an “avoid” note.

sus^{b9} chord A sus chord derived from either the Phrygian mode of the major scale or the second mode of the melodic minor scale.

swing era Jazz of the 1930s.

tag An improvised section at the end of the out chorus, often repeated indefinitely.

take it out A signal from the band leader to play the out head.

tonic minor chord A minor chord not functioning as a II chord, but as a “minor I.”

top The beginning of a tune.

train wreck When everything goes off track; someone forgets to take a repeat, or skips the bridge, or turns the time around, and so on.

'Trane John Coltrane.

tritone The interval composed of three whole steps, most significantly occurring between the 3rd and 7th of a dominant 7th chord.

tritone substitution A V chord substituting for another V chord a tritone away. Both chords share the same 3rd and 7th, which are also a tritone apart.

tritone substitution II-V A II-V progression substituting for a V chord a tritone away, or for the II-V progression a tritone away.

turnaround A chord progression occurring (1) at the end of a repeated section of a tune, leading back to the repeat; (2) at the end of the tune, leading back to the top.

up Fast tempo.

vamp (1) A rhythm section ostinato figure; (2) a short, repeated chord sequence.

"vamp 'til cue" Keep repeating a vamp until the cue to go on.

verse A specially composed introduction to a ballad, often played or sung rubato. The verse to Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life" is a prime example.

voicing An arrangement of the notes of a chord, usually for piano or guitar, often in other than root position.

whole-tone scale A scale made up entirely of whole steps.

woodshed (also 'shed) To shut oneself up, away from the world, and practice long and hard, as in "going into the woodshed."

"you'll hear it" What the musician who called the tune sometimes says to another musician who's not sure of the changes.

PART I

THEORY: CHORDS AND SCALES

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CHAPTER ONE

Basic Theory

- *Intervals*
- *Inverting Intervals*
- *Triads*

Intervals

As atoms are the building blocks of matter, intervals are the building blocks of melody and harmony. A good definition of an *interval* is “the space between two notes.” **Figure 1-1** shows all the intervals from the smallest, the half step/minor 2nd, up to the octave, all based on middle C. The most commonly used term is shown above each interval; alternate terms are shown just below.

Figure 1-1

minor 2nd half step	major 2nd whole step	minor 3rd	major 3rd
perfect 4th	tritone augmented 4th diminished 5th	perfect 5th	minor 6th augmented 5th
major 6th	minor 7th augmented 6th	major 7th	octave