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Chapter 1

THE CONTRAFACT

NOTE: I am indebted to an excellent article in *Journal of Jazz Studies* (June 1975) entitled "Charlie Parker and Harmonic Sources of Bebop Composition: Thoughts on the Repertory of New Jazz in the 1940s" by James Patrick for the present use of the term "melodic contrafact" and some of the following ideas regarding its importance.

A contrafact is a tune which is based on an extant set of chord changes (harmonic progression), and it was this type of tune which comprised a large portion of the bebop repertoire. To be sure, throughout the history of Western music (jazz included) composers have used extant harmonic schemes as the basis for new original compositions; the chorale prelude is but one example. Jazz compositions such as Sidney Bechet's "Shag" (1932), based on "I Got Rhythm"; "Moten Swing," based on "You're Driving Me Crazy"; "Trumpet No End," based on "Blue Skies"; "Rainbow Mist," based on "Body and Soul"; "Up On Teddy's Hill," based on "Honeysuckle Rose"; "Dickie's Dream," based on "I Found a New Baby"; and "Daybreak Express," "Hot and Bothered," "Slippery Horn," and "Braggin' in Brass," all of which are based on "Tiger Rag," are all examples that predate the beboppers' use of contrafacts.

After the blues, the changes to "I Got Rhythm" serve as the basis for more bebop tunes than any other single composition. Other favorite bases for tunes include "What Is This Thing Called Love," "How High the Moon," and "Honeysuckle Rose."

The contrafact was valuable for a wide variety of reasons. During the bebop era the working performer was expected to function without music most of the time and to be familiar with a common body of tunes and changes which were virtually public domain. (This is perhaps even more crucial in today's bebop.) Many of the tunes which served as bases were tunes which were a part of the basic repertoire of the bands in which the beboppers served their respective apprenticeships and were consequently very familiar to them. It seems perfectly logical, then, that in choosing tunes for the ubiquitous jam sessions, the often hastily prepared record dates, and the gigs that used X amount of memorized heads in X hours, that musicians would rely on already memorized chord structures, which meant simply learning new melodies instead of learning both new melodies and new chords.

In contrast to the compositions of previous eras, the newly written compositions were inextricably linked to and interwoven with the ensuing improvisations. Many of the tunes probably began very loosely and then crystallized, possibly accounting, in a minor way, for the large number of bebop compositions with the **A** sections varied and those which were actually throughcomposed, such as "Confirmation," "Hot House," "Half Nelson," "Moose the Mooch," "Klaunstance," and "Cardboard." Further evidence of this can be seen in the number of melodic phrases shared by different tunes, among them the following: "Ornithology" **A** 1-2 equals "Anthropology" **B** 1-2; "Ornithology" **A** 7-8 equals "Anthropology" **B** 7-8; and "Cool Blues" 1-2 equals "Perhaps" 1-2.

The new approaches to improvisation during the bebop era demanded new compositional vehicles consistent with those approaches. The contrafact was an inexpensive way of putting together new material with minimum rehearsals, retakes, and composer's fees. It was also a way to avoid paying royalties on recordings of compositions which were chosen simply because the changes provided good improvisational vehicles.

Any good improviser in the bebop tradition is expected not only to know and recognize a large body of tunes strictly from the changes, but is also obligated to know the most frequently played heads on those changes. (Make it a practice to learn as many heads as possible on a given set of changes.) The remaining pages in this chapter will list some of the most frequently played tunes along with a number of their contrafacts.

I.   "I Got Rhythm"

   1.   "Anthropology"
   2.   "Boppin' a Riff"
   3.   "Calling Dr. Jazz"

Chapter 8

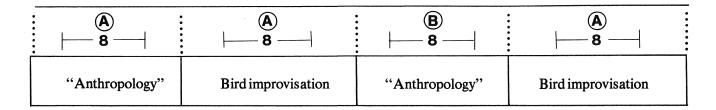## AN APPROACH TO IMPROVISING ON "RHYTHM" TUNES

After the blues, the changes to "I Got Rhythm" serve as the basis for more bebop tunes than any other single composition. Bird alone has in excess of 150 recordings of tunes based on these changes. Since the 1950s many more tunes have been written on the changes to "I Got Rhythm."

Because this vehicle comprises such a large portion of the modern jazz player's repertory, it is absolutely necessary that any good player be perfectly comfortable with these changes. The following technique is one way of gaining facility with "Rhythm" tunes.

1. Learn as many "Rhythm" heads as possible, as well as selected improvisations. The heads should be learned in all keys and at all tempos.

2. Play the melodies along with the records until they feel comfortable; imitate the feel, articulation, inflection, etc., of the player on the record (Bird, Diz, J.J., Dexter, etc.).

3. Play through some improvisations by your favorite players; learn them by ear or go to sources such as the *Omnibook* and other books of transcriptions.

4. Now choose three rhythm heads (I've arbitrarily chosen "Anthropology," "Dexterity," and "Moose the Mooch" for this example) and practice them in the following manner:

A. Interchange the "eights" as in the following charts:

	Ⓐ ⊢— 8 —⊣	Ⓐ ⊢— 8 —⊣	Ⓑ ⊢— 8 —⊣	Ⓐ ⊢— 8 —⊣
CHORUS #1	"Anthropology"	"Dexterity"	"Moose the Mooch"	"Anthropology"
CHORUS #2	"Dexterity"	"Moose the Mooch"	"Anthropology"	"Dexterity"
CHORUS #3	"Moose the Mooch"	"Anthropology"	"Dexterity"	"Moose the Mooch"

OR

Ⓐ ⊢— 8 —⊣	Ⓐ ⊢— 8 —⊣	Ⓑ ⊢— 8 —⊣	Ⓐ ⊢— 8 —⊣
"Anthropology"	Bird improvisation	"Anthropology"	Bird improvisation

OR