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**Jazz Composition
Theory and Practice**
Ted Pease

Chapter 1
Melodic Considerations
Interval Patterns

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Interval Patterns

A thorough study of melody writing produces certain observations about how composers connect notes together to form melodies. The scales listed above contain an almost unlimited number of potential interval patterns, any of which can be used to create a musical idea at any given moment. Nevertheless, the patterns that most composers use most of the time can be described in general terms in order to help you get started.

First, some definitions:

Step: Melodic movement up or down by a major or minor second (i.e. a whole step or a half step).



Skip: Melodic movement up or down by a major or minor third (i.e. “skipping” over a scale note).



Leap: Melodic movement up or down by a perfect fourth or more.



(Note: Some theory texts define a leap as any interval larger than a major second.)

Most scales are made up of combinations of whole and half steps (see above). Notice, however, that the pentatonic scale contains two minor-third skips. Notice also that the harmonic minor scale contains an augmented second interval between the sixth and seventh step.

Chord arpeggios are made up of a combination of skips, with occasional steps or leaps depending on the chord type and whether an arpeggio happens for more than one octave.



JAZZ COMPOSITION THEORY AND PRACTICE

The following interval patterns are common in tonal and modal melody writing, not only in jazz but in most other forms of popular music.

1. **Stepwise motion** is very common. It may be up or down. Stepwise motion usually conforms to the scale of the moment. In some cases, two notes from the scale of the moment may be connected by a chromatic approach.

G major scale

2. **Skips** are common. They may be up or down. They are useful any time you wish to spell a chord melodically. Arpeggiated chords form the basis of many bebop melodies (“up the II, and down the V”).

3. **Leaps** are used for dramatic purposes. The wider the leap the more dramatic it is, and the greater the likelihood that it will be followed by a move in the opposite direction.

4. **Consecutive leaps** in the same direction should not exceed an octave. The same goes for a leap and a skip in the same direction.

a.

Weak: combined leap is a major ninth Better: combined leap is only a minor seventh OR Also better: combined leap is a major seventh

b.

Weak: combined leap is a major ninth Better: combined leap is only a perfect fifth OR Also better: combined leap is a major sixth

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