

Chords or Melody? Which came first?

It would be interesting to have the composers of these tunes at a seminar of some kind to ask them a few questions: "When you wrote these songs, were you sitting at the piano or doodling on a guitar? Did you first come up with the chord progression and then weave the melody to suit? Did you have a melody in mind and then come up with the chord structure?" (More at the bottom of the second page.)

"Twinkle Twinkle"

Chord progression: C, C7, F, C, G7, C, G7, C

Techniques: R, 5th, 3rd, 5th, b7th, 3rd, 5th, R

"All of Me"

Chord progression: C, E7

Techniques: R, 5th 3rd, R aux R, 5th, 3rd, R

"Ain't Misbehavin' "

Chord progression: C, Em7, Dm7, G7, C, C7, F, Fm

Techniques: R aux/app, R 3rd, R aux/app, 9th

"Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"

Chord progression: C, Am7, Dm7, G7, C, Am7, Dm7, G7

Techniques: app, pt, app

"Lullaby of Birdland"

Chord progression: Am, F#m7b5, B7, E7, Am, F, Dm7, G7

"Here, There and Everywhere"

Chord progression: C, Dm7, Em7, F, C, Dm7, Em7, Dm7

"Girl From Ipanema"

Chord progression: Cmaj7, D7

"Sunny"

Chord progression: Am, C7, F, E7

"Bluesette"

Chord progression: C, Bm7b5, E7

Lesson 15a. (cont'd)

"All the Things You Are"

Am7 Dm7 G9 G7b9 Cmaj7

"Body and Soul"

Dm7 A7b9 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7 F7 Em7 Ebdim7

"Flamingo"

C Am7 Dm7 G7 Cm7 F7 G7

"Heart of Gold"

Am F G C Am F G C

"How High The Moon"

Cmaj7 C6 C Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 Bb6

"Ave Maria"

C Am6 C/G G7 Am Dm/F G7

Even without having an answer from any of these famous song writers, I would guess that the chords came first and the melody was woven into that structure. There of course is the chance that the chords and melody took shape more or less simultaneously.

However, the point is that the melodies contain more basic chordal tones than anything else but there probably is more scale wise motion from one melody note to the next as compared to arpeggiated leaps. Extremely long melodic leaps tend to be in places where one phrase ends and the next one begins. None of these observations are written rules for composition but are useful when creating a solo. I would recommend studying full versions of dozens of tunes (or more) to observe what good song writers have done in the past. Any good fake book will be an excellent source of material. Pay attention to things such as melody note to suggested chord relationship. Also note, that good songs generally have a fair amount of thematic repetition. Repetition might come in the form of rhythm but with new melody notes and harmony. Repetition of an idea is needed to give the listener something to hang on to. Make note of how songwriters have used melodic inharmonics such as passing tones, auxiliaries, appoggiaturas and such.

The previous lessons in this book have suggested all of these ideas and the last few lessons had extended arpeggiated elements. The next lesson has some arpeggiated elements which are smoothed out and maybe disguised by passing melodic elements. There is always the danger that what will emerge from this process might simply sound like connected scales.

The first few song excerpts have the beginnings of some basic melodic analysis. Continue this process with songs of your own choosing.