

Messing Up Ideas

(A Lesson On Developing A Creative Process)

By David Oakes and James Seaberry

A note from David Oakes: James Seaberry and I have been online friends for several years now. He has been instrumental in getting many people to visit my site and has always been there to cheer me on and keep me cranking out these lessons. Even though James and I have never met in person, I'm sure that when we do we will play tunes for many hours the way old jazz friends do. The evening will probably end in a argument to see who is going to pick up the dinner check. James is also a big fan of Jimmy Wyble and has studied the art of two-line improvisation extensively. He recently sent me some ideas that he had composed and I took them and messed around with them and sent them back. This lesson shows how these ideas developed and ultimately ended up as part of a great guitar arrangement. I hope that you enjoy this post,

David Oakes
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Last week, James sent me example #1 (below). He had been working on the Mini Lesson from Jimmy Wyble that I had just posted. His idea moved in a similar way but started with a different chord voicing. This example has excellent voice leading with two voices moving up while two voices move downward in each measure. Jimmy would have loved this idea and the creativity that James showed messing up his original idea. Many times when I played an arrangement for Jimmy, he would remark on how he never thought of doing whatever I had done with any of his ideas. That is the basis for this lesson on messing up ideas. Jimmy would never say that he had improved on an idea, but he would tell you that he had messed up your idea.

Example #1 is a musical notation in 3/4 time, starting with a boxed '1' in the first measure. The notation is as follows:

- Measure 1:** Chord C^(aug). Notes: G4 (finger 2), A4 (finger 4), C5 (finger 3). Bass note: G3 (finger 1). Fingering: ⑥.
- Measure 2:** Chord F7^(#11). Notes: A4 (finger 4), B4 (finger 1), D5 (finger 3). Bass note: F3 (finger 2). Fingering: ⑤.
- Measure 3:** Chord B^b(aug). Notes: B3 (finger 2), C4 (finger 4), D4 (finger 3). Bass note: B2 (finger 1). Fingering: ⑥.
- Measure 4:** Chord E^b7^(#11). Notes: D4 (finger 4), E4 (finger 1), G4 (finger 3). Bass note: E3 (finger 2). Fingering: ⑤.
- Measure 5:** Chord E^b7^(#11). Notes: D4 (finger 4), E4 (finger 1), G4 (finger 3). Bass note: E3 (finger 1). Fingering: ⑥.

Example #2 (below) shows how I messed James idea up. I used the same chords but broke them down into two voices from the block chord shapes that James had originally sent me. I also changed the time signature but still kept the III – VI – II – V progression in tact.

Example #2 musical notation showing a sequence of chords: F#9(b5), B7(alt), E9(b5), A7(alt), and Dmaj7. The notation is in 4/4 time and features two voices per chord, with fingerings indicated by circled numbers 1-4.

Example #3 is a second idea that James composed and sent me. It was a great sequence of mi7(b5) to the V chord going around the cycle.

Example #3 musical notation showing a sequence of chords: Em7, A7(alt), Dm7, G7(alt), Cm7, B13, and Bb. The notation is in 4/4 time and features two voices per chord, with fingerings indicated by circled numbers 1-4.

I really didn't do much with this idea to begin with. The only thing that I did was add a passing tone on the "and of one" in each measure. (Example #4) That note helped to connect the lower line and also strengthened the bar harmony. James and I both felt that this was a nice improvement over the original line.

Example #4 musical notation showing a sequence of chords: Em7, A7(alt), Dm7, G7(alt), Cm7, B13, and Bb. The notation is in 4/4 time and features two voices per chord, with fingerings indicated by circled numbers 1-4.

Now, the question that is always asked: What do I do with this information? How can I use it? The first thing that you have to be willing to do is change the idea. This is the beginning of the creative process that everyone needs to develop. I took James idea in example 4 and applied it to the last 8 bars of “*Stella by Starlight*”. First, I changed the idea rhythmically to begin on beat 3 of the measure instead of beat 1. That made the bar harmony change on beat one of the following measure. I incorporated the melody to “*Stella*” and worked the sequence down with the tune. It proved to be a creative way to use the line that James sent me.

LAST 8 BAR SECTION OF "STELLA"

Well that was nice, but what else can be done with this material? I had started working out an arrangement of “*Georgia On My Mind*” and I had been working on this arrangement separate of these ideas that James had sent me. James idea’s had worked their way into my playing and then right into the arrangement and pretty soon James and I were emailing this arrangement back and forth and it became a collaboration between us. One of my favorite sayings is “Use it or loose it!” I will go through this arrangement measure by measure and break down what we did.

I had several goals for this arrangement:

1. To imply the melody and not literally state it all the way through.
2. To try and keep a bluesy and jazzy four to the bar feel all the way through.
3. To make an arrangement that was very pianistic in quality.
4. To write something that feels more like a 2nd or 3rd chorus and not the head of the tune.

Measure 1: I stated the opening motif of the melody so everyone would know what the song was that I am playing. The accompaniment is also moving four to the bar.

Measure 2: Here is James idea that he sent me last week note for note. (Example 4) Like I said earlier, his idea's naturally worked their way into the arrangement.

Measure 3 and 4: I wanted to come back into the melody out of James idea and keep the bluesy effect by using an Ab in the phrase. The Ab is a note that I will come back to all through this arrangement to add the bluesy element.

Measure 4 and 5: Wyblizing the melody with two line ideas. Even though I am not stating the melody in these bars, it is strongly implied. Thanks Jimmy! (Jimmy would probably say "Oh no, Thank You!"))

Measure 6: I went back to the original melody with some motion from the four to the bar chords below the melody.

Measure 7 and 8: I need a III – VI – II – V turnaround here. The way I messed up James idea in example #2, worked perfectly.

Since I was using James ideas, I sent these first 8 bars to him and asked him to add to it.

Measure 9: This was James idea for the second time through the A section. Again stating the melody and then a great lick to get us into the next bar. The downward triplet figure really impressed me so I continued to use the triplet figure all the way through bars 9 – 16. Implying the melody and trying to give it a soulful feel was very important here.

Measure 17 - 25: (The Bridge) I went to a simple contrapuntal feel here by using a counter line against the melody. The chords above the bridge reflect the bar harmony but they don't reflect the harmony that is going on in measures 19 and 20. I then sent the arrangement back to James and he added the turnaround at the end of the bridge. (Measures 23 and 24). James and I both agreed that the bridge should contrast the heaviness of the A section.

Measures 25 – 32: I wanted to bring the arrangement home. The melody is very strong in these bars and I used only one chord substitution. In bar 26, I substituted a Bbma7(6/9) chord for Emi7(b5). It made for a very nice splash of color at that point in the arrangement.

James and I really enjoyed tossing this arrangement back and forth and the end result was worth it. Each time I received an idea from James, it sparked some creativity on my part.

I hope that this lesson helps to spark your creativity in your own arrangements.

David Oakes and James Seaberry

Chord Melody Solo based on

GEORGIA ON MY MIND

Hoagy Carmichael

Arr by David Oakes and James Seaberry

A Fmaj7 F6 Em7(b5) A7(alt) Dm7 D/C G/B Bbm6

1 2 3 4

Fmaj7 A^bdim7 Gm7 C13 A7(alt) D7(alt) G7(alt) C7(alt)

5 6 7 8

BV-----
Fmaj9 Em7(b5) A7(b5) Dm7 Dm7/C G/B Bbm6

9 10 11 12

Am7 D7 Gm7 (Db7) C7 F6 Bb6 Bdim7 F6/C Bb7 A7

13 14 15 16

Chord Melody Solo Based On : Georgia On My Mind - page 2

B Dm A7/C# Dm7/C Bm7(b5) Dm7 A7/C# Dm7/C Bm7(b5)

17

Dm A7/C# Dm7/C Bm7(b5) E7(b9) Am7 D7(b9) Gm7 C7(b9)

21

C Fmaj7 Bbmaj7(6/9) A7(b5) Dm7 Dm7/C G/B Bbm6

25

Am7 Abdim7 Gm7 (Db7) C7 F6 Bb6 Cdim7 F6/C F6/9

29