WHERE HAVE I KNOWN THIS BEFORE? AN EXPLORATION OF HARMONY AND
VOICE LEADING IN THE COMPOSITIONS OF CHICK COREA

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Committee:

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ABSTRACT

Chick Corea has been and remains one of the most influential jazz pianists of the last 50 years. Throughout his career, he has had a distinct voice in the jazz community and is recognized for his incorporation of many different types of keyboard instruments into his compositions. Beyond timbral innovations, he has composed hundreds of pieces that represent a variety of styles, notably hard bop, post-bop, fusion, and classical. He also took part in the avant-garde jazz movement, through extensive, free group improvisations. Despite his large oeuvre, a surprisingly small amount of scholarly analysis and writing has been devoted to his music. A few theses and articles have examined his improvisations, but even less attention has been paid to his harmonic language. Steven Strunk has presented on Corea’s compositions of the 1960s, but these represent only a small portion of his musical output, and Ramon Satyendra’s article on “Starlight” focuses on a single composition.

This thesis first discusses the styles in which Corea has composed and some of the musical attributes of these styles. The bulk of this paper is then devoted to the analysis of several pieces and excerpts of pieces containing specific harmonic features: functional harmony, chromatic-third relationships, harmonic planing, line-based progressions, pedal points, ostinati, and vamps. Within each chapter, general conclusions are made concerning the styles in which specific harmonic structures are evident.
I would first like to thank Dr. Gene Trantham, under whom I served as a teaching assistant during my first semester as a master’s student at BGSU. Both his demeanor and the rapport he holds with his students have been positive influences in my life and my teaching. Under his tutelage, I was able to overcome the apprehensions I originally held concerning the instruction of a group of students not so much younger than myself. Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. Nora Engebretsen, who helped inspire my new found interest in twentieth-century music and scholarship. Her upbeat personality and passion for music helped create a stimulating learning environment in which I constantly felt challenged and inspired. Next, I extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. William Lake, with whom I learned lessons both in music and in life. While teaching me the meaning of hard work, he also showed me the great reward inherent in it. His scrupulous attention to detail and emphasis on consistent and concise presentation of knowledge have been very influential in my academic career. Without his help, this thesis would not have been completed. I would like to thank my family and my girlfriend for being so supportive of me and my endeavors through thick and thin. Their belief in my abilities has been a great encouragement. Lastly, I’d like to thank my heavenly Father, in whom all things are possible.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Chick Corea has long been admired as a jazz pianist. According to Len Lyons, he is recognized as one of a small handful of keyboardists to help “expand the role of alternative keyboards in jazz.” He is particularly lauded for his artistry on electric keyboards, synthesizers, and Fender Rhodes, in addition to acoustic piano, and has been occasionally been called a “multikeyboardist” (Lyons 1983, 258). Actively involved in the ever-evolving jazz scene for more than 50 years, he continues to tour and record with as much fervor at he did at the inception of his musical career, despite being 71 years old. To date, he has won eighteen Grammy Awards and two Latin Grammy Awards for everything from arranging to instrumental solos to performances with groups. He has been the recipient of several coveted awards from Down Beat Magazine, including Best Electric Pianist, Composer of the Year, and Artist of the Year to name a few, and he was inducted into their Hall of Fame in 2010.¹

Corea began playing piano at the age of four and learned the basics of reading and writing music from his father, a bandleader in the Boston area. His parents “provided [him] with a very safe environment,” in which he was able to grow and develop his own musical thoughts. A few years later, he began lessons with Salvatore Suolo, a classical piano teacher in Boston, with whom he studied music of classical composers such as Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin. Around this time, he also began to develop more technical ability (Lyons 1983, 259).

Throughout high school, he organized and participated in bands that played for social events, like dances, weddings, and bar mitzvahs. He also assembled jazz groups to play sets in small clubs. After brief stints at Columbia University and the Julliard School of Music, he moved

¹ A full list of awards is available on www.chickcorea.com.
into a New York apartment on 71st Street and began “working with as many bands as possible” (Lyons 1983, 260).

During the next several years, Corea had his first taste of commercial success on Blue Mitchell’s albums and subsequently with the release of his own material. A crucial aspect of his development during this period was his interaction with many famous musicians including Stan Getz, Roy Haynes, Sarah Vaughn, and most importantly, Miles Davis. Filling in for Herbie Hancock, who was on his honeymoon, Corea played with Davis at a performance in Baltimore with no preparation. Before the performance, in response to Corea’s question about a rehearsal, Davis told him to “just play what [he] hear[d]” (Lyons 1983, 261). This philosophy epitomizes much of Corea’s music and his polystylistic tendencies, as he seems to have an insatiable desire for creativity and distaste for compartmentalization.

Take for example the 1978 album The Mad Hatter, a concept album based on Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. It begins with the synthesizer-heavy, through-composed piece, “The Woods,” which leads directly into “Tweedle Dee,” a short composition featuring a string quartet and Corea striking piano keys while dampening the corresponding strings inside the piano with his hand. “Humpty Dumpty” is essentially a straight-ahead jazz tune that utilizes a quartet setting. Corea’s wife, Gayle Moran, sings on “Falling Alice,” which also includes strings and a brass section. Although these pieces represent less than half of the songs on the album, one can see the variety of instrumentations and timbres employed by Corea, which were not normally all present on the same jazz album.

Other examples of atypical instrumentation are heard in “Lenore” and “Passage” (from The Leprechaun and Eye of the Beholder, respectively), which feature Corea playing the melodies of the pieces on acoustic piano. This alone in not unusual; rather, it is the fact that he is

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2 Note that he also plays the piano traditionally on this piece.
being supported by a rhythm section and overdubbed synthesizers, which represent a distinctly jazz-fusion sound (a style of jazz that almost always features electric instruments and a heavy backbeat). Such unconventional combinations of timbres abound in Corea’s music.

Timbre and instrumentation are not the only parameters with which Corea experiments. Because he is versed in “classical” repertoire composed by Scriabin, Bach, Mozart, and Bartók (among others) as well as in the musical genius of jazz pianists such as Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, and McCoy Tyner, his compositions include a great variety of harmonic structures. This is where the idea for this thesis began.

In listening to several different Chick Corea Elektric Band albums, I noticed some harmonic structures, namely chromatic-third relationships and planing that seemed to appear several times. As I began listening more diligently to a broader range of his music and began keeping track of a few additional recurring structures, I concluded that this aspect of his music warranted examination. Realizing that his discography exceeded one hundred albums, I also concluded that I would need to be selective in my study. I decided to examine passages from more well-known works (“What Game Shall We Play Today?,” “Litha,” “Humpty Dumpty,” “500 Miles High,” “No Mystery,” etc) but also examine some lesser-known pieces.

My original intent was to survey several harmonic structures to see if there was any consistency concerning the styles of jazz in which they occurred. I soon recognized that while Corea’s albums are placed into particular style categories (hard bop, avant-garde, fusion, post-bop, etc) by album reviewers, several of his albums could be placed in more than one category. Additionally, the style “post-bop,” in which a large amount of Corea’s oeuvre is placed, is exceptionally vague. The term serves mainly as a chronological indicator, unattached to any

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3 Score availability was also something I had to consider. As transcribing is a time-consuming process, I was fortunate enough to not have to do very much of it.
specific musical characteristics. Thus, while style is still discussed, it appears as a secondary concern in this thesis.

This paper begins with a chapter devoted to jazz styles that examines some of the musical distinctions inherent in them. Specific categorizations of Corea’s albums by reviewers are also discussed. The majority of the paper is then devoted to the study of harmony. Specifically, the main goal of this thesis is to discuss several recurrent harmonic structures and to highlight ways in which these structures are combined and used independently. At the highest level, one can think of a division between functional and nonfunctional harmony. Chapter three deals with functional harmonic structures, while chapters four through seven are devoted to nonfunctional structures, including chromatic-third relationships, harmonic planing, line-based progressions, and pedal points, ostinati, and vamps. Each chapter will begin with a brief, preliminary discussion of the topic and proceed into the analysis of specific passages.

A few notes on terminology and methodology are in order. The classification of a passage as “functional” relies on the presence of functional chords, particularly dominant and tonic chords. Functional progressions require dominant-to-tonic motion and dominant-functioning chords are defined here as the V or vii7 (and all of their extensions and/or alterations) of the key or of one of the secondary regions of the key. Passages lacking this dominant-to-tonic motion necessarily fall into the nonfunctional category, although Corea frequently mixes functionality and non-functionality as the reader will soon see. Because nonfunctional progressions lack a functionally-defined tonic, they can not be called tonal and instead are most

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4 Part of the reason for this vagueness is that after the bebop era, jazz music (that wasn’t distinctly fusion, hard-bop, avant-garde, etc) lost its near-universality in musical parameters such as instrumentation and melodic/harmonic practice. Rather than proliferating labels, it was easier to simply group all of this music together. An analogously fuzzy term in the realm of popular music is “alternative.”
often centric. Here, a pitch center is established through nonfunctional means, such as metric emphasis, formal placement, repetition, or duration, among other things.

The improvisational nature of jazz music raises issues in analysis, as a score can not always be trusted. Several of the scores examined for this study are transcriptions of recordings whereas others are original scores from which the musicians departed. In general, the recordings are given precedence.

Many of the musical examples in this thesis feature reductive analytic techniques similar to those discussed in David Neumeyer’s and Susan Tepping’s book, *A Guide to Schenkerian Analysis* (1992). Stemmed pitches are more important than those without stems and the length of a stem is directly proportional to the structural weight of the pitch (and chord) to which it is attached. As harmony is most pertinent to this paper, the bass is usually the focus of the examples, though the melody plays a role at times. The other voices that are included in the examples are usually there to make playing through the reductions an easier task. If an example includes voicings taken from transcriptions, the associated caption will state that this is the case. Due to the volatility of jazz music and the fact that multiple performances of the same piece can and often do produce different harmonic voicings, the reader should remain aware that he or she may sometimes be required to think about voice leadings more abstractly.

Given Corea’s large oeuvre and his status in the jazz world, one might assume a substantial scholarly discourse would exist around his music. Unfortunately, there is little research specifically dedicated to harmonic structures in Corea’s music. Of the theses that have been written, Carol Yampolsky’s thesis (1986) deals with several different parameters of Corea’s solo piano pieces, Daniel Duke’s thesis (1996) focuses solely on Corea’s improvisations, and Andrew Sturges’ thesis (2008) mainly explores Corea’s family background and pre-NYC life. As
far as journal articles are concerned, Steven Strunk, in his *Journal of Music Theory* article (1999), uses set-theory analysis and also implements a hermeneutic approach in assessing Corea’s improvisations on “Night and Day.” Ramon Satyendra’s article in *Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis* (2004) contains little actual analysis and instead proposes a method by which one might analyze a piece. (He occasionally frames his method with reference to Corea’s composition, “Starlight.”) Remarks Corea has made during interviews are somewhat helpful, although they rarely deal with harmony.⁵ Perhaps the most useful item is the transcript of a presentation given by the late Steven Strunk at the West Coast Conference of Music Theory and Analysis on Corea’s music of the 1960’s, which was sent to me during private correspondence.⁶ My hope is that this study will help pave the way for more exploration of Corea’s compositions.

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⁵ Corea has been interviewed multiple times in a variety of different magazines, among them *The Jazz Report*, *Jazz Educator’s Journal*, *Down Beat*, *Jazziz*, *Jazz Forum*, *Melody Maker*, *Jazz Times*, and even *Modern Drummer*. (Corea is also a competent percussionist, an ability that is especially noticeable in many of the rhythmic complexities of his compositions.)

⁶ Strunk 2000.
CHAPTER II. OVERVIEW OF STYLES

When asked what qualifies as jazz during an interview with Len Lyons, Chick Corea replied, “The user is the one who creates the style. I don’t ask myself, ‘Does this work as jazz?’ I’ll create the music I need without thinking about style” (Lyons 1983, 265). Vague as it may be, this quotation explains a great deal about how Corea thinks about music, in that he seems to be focused strictly on creation rather than conformation. It also helps to explain why there are so few sources that thoroughly explore his styles and compositional periods. Much of his music (both individual compositions and albums) incorporates aspects of several different styles, making it very difficult to compartmentalize and classify any particular album. Corea’s own website (chickcorea.com) organizes his biography into fairly broad, chronologically-defined categories: The Early Years (1941-71), Return to Forever (1971-78), Playing With Friends (1978-86), Going Electric (1986-2006), New Directions (2006-08), and Fusion Evolves (2008-09). Unfortunately, these periods do not correspond directly to style categories.

This chapter will explore each of the broad style categories in which Corea’s albums are usually placed, as shown in Table 2.1. The main source of information for this table was allmusic.com, as it is currently one of the most reputable online music review sites (though other sources such as allaboutjazz.com were also examined). Several of the albums are double listed here due to their double listing on allmusic.com. Of course, these over-arching style categories do little to explain the subtleties of the compositions appearing on each album.
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Hard Bop

In his brief article in *Grove Music Online*, Barry Kernfeld describes hard bop as “a substyle of bop dating from the mid-1950s,” which “stands in opposition to cool jazz and particularly to West Coast jazz in its re-emphasis on the African-American roots of bop and its reaffirmation of forthright musical and emotional qualities” (Kernfeld [n.d.]). However, he also remarks that it is “largely indistinguishable from the parent style, bop.” David Rosenthal attempts to capture more of the musical aspects of this music in his book, *Hard Bop: Jazz and Black Music 1955-1965*. He writes: “The early fifties saw an extremely dynamic rhythm-and-blues scene take shape.... And it is in this vigorously creative black pop music, at a time when bebop seemed to have lost both its direction and its audience, that some of hard bop's roots may be found” (Rosenthal 1992, 24). According to Rosenthal, Miles Davis was one of the crucial figures in the transitional period from bebop to hard bop. In commenting on two of Davis’s early '50s records that “point[ed] ahead to hard bop,” Rosenthal states that “There is a marked
preference for the minor mode. Up-tempo tunes are the exception. Melodies are simpler and rarely based on bebop’s standard chord changes…. Above all, the mood of the music is far darker than in bebop” (29). Scott Deveaux and Gary Giddins comment specifically on timbre, characterizing the sound as “heavy, dark, [and] impassioned”, perhaps to “reflect the intensity and hustling tempo of city life” (Deveaux and Giddins 2009, 324).

Corea’s participation in Blue Mitchell’s group during the middle 1960s constitutes the majority of his interaction with this style. He served as the pianist on Mitchell’s albums The Thing to Do, Down With It!, and Boss Horn. The last two compositions on Boss Horn were written by Corea and would appear again on his first album as a bandleader, Tones For Joan’s Bones (1967).

Avant-Garde Jazz

Often considered synonymous with free jazz, avant-garde jazz is generally characterized by one or more of the following musical features: “the absence of tonality and predetermined chord sequences[,] the abandonment of the jazz chorus structure and its replacement by loose designs in which collective improvisation takes place around predefined signals[,] an avoidance of ‘cool’ instrumental timbres in favor of more ‘voice-like’ sounds[,] and the suspension of standard timekeeping patterns for a free rubato” (Robinson [n.d.]). One of the main differences between the two seems to be that avant-garde jazz includes some sort of a priori structure, a musical fragment or general formal outline agreed upon by the musicians before the performance. Free jazz, as its name suggests applies to music in which everything is improvised.

Hints of this style are evident on albums such as Is (1969), Sundance (1969), and The Song of Singing (1970). However, the full manifestation of free jazz in Corea’s music did not
come until he and bassist Dave Holland left Miles Davis’s band and formed the band Circle in 1970. Corea talks briefly about this time period in an interview with Alyn Shipton. “We wanted to experiment, and try our best to delve completely into a world of improvised music…Every performance would have no preparation to it at all. No composition, no discussion, nothing…. It was totally open, although the one thing we did work on was the mechanics of sound. But as far as the forms go, it was very open and left to anything that would happen” (Shipton 2004, 36).

Together with Holland, Barry Altschul (drums), and Anthony Braxton (saxophone), Corea participated in extended harmonic, melodic, and timbral explorations, often lasting thirty or forty minutes. Several studio and live albums document the group’s interactions, and the reader may find it rewarding to compare different versions of the same piece. Unfortunately, this paper does not address improvisation and thus, Circle’s music will not be analyzed.

**Fusion**

This is another broad term, to which the prefix “jazz-rock” is often added. Mark Gilbert discusses jazz-rock in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*: “A style of music, initiated in the 1960s, which combined the harmonic resources and improvising techniques of modern jazz with the instrumentation, rhythms, and idioms of rock music and funk… By the late 1970s ‘jazz-rock’ had largely been replaced by the term ‘fusion.’” (Gilbert [n.d.]). He then outlines “three key elements defin[ing] a jazz-rock performance”: the use of amplified and electronic instruments, the “presence of a rock or funk rhythm, which emphasizes a heavy backbeat,” and “the presence of jazz harmony, either in improvisation or accompaniment.” The musicians contributing to this movement were more than willing to employ new instruments and timbres and to include musical aspects of other cultures. Gilbert notes that “Corea made a distinctive adaptation of
Hispanic music,” which manifested itself in the first two albums of Return to Forever (hereafter abbreviated RTF). For the purposes of this paper, the term fusion will be limited to the melding of jazz and rock and/or jazz and Hispanic music.

Corea discusses the disbanding of Circle and the beginnings of RTF during his interview with Shipton: “There had come a point in Circle where I had begun to want to have a predictable effect, which means a rhythm, a song, a melody, a composition. I wanted to go back into composing again, so it was time for me to move on and do that, the result of which was forming my first Return to Forever band” (Shipton 2004, 36).

RTF is perhaps Corea’s best known group, with the past four decades seeing four different incarnations. The first lineup released two albums together, Return to Forever (1972) and Light as a Feather (1973). Many of the songs on these albums are backed by samba or Latin patterns in the rhythm section and compositions such as “La Fiesta” and “Spain” further suggest the Hispanic influence.

The subsequent RTF albums were noticeably more rock-oriented. The second incarnation would be maintained for the next four studio releases. Even after a single listening, one can tell a distinct difference in the feel of the music when compared to that of the original lineup. Many of the songs are groove oriented and include the heavy backbeat described by Gilbert. This music more closely resembles the music of the other prolific fusion groups that were active around the same time, namely Weather Report, Headhunters, and the Mahavishnu Orchestra.

In 1977, Corea changed the membership of RTF yet again adding horn players to the lineup while still maintaining a fusion sound. The horns added a new sonic dimension, which was reminiscent of bands like Tower of Power and Earth, Wind & Fire.
In June 2011, Corea took part in a worldwide tour with a fourth incarnation of RTF, (appropriately named Return to Forever IV) adding jazz violinist Jean-Luc Ponty to the quartet setting (keyboards, guitar, bass, and drums) employed during RTF’s second incarnation.

Corea was seldom content with just one project at a time. He also released several solo albums (though they include backing bands) during his stint with RTF. The first of these, entitled *The Leprechaun*, is heavily influenced by rock and funk. Likewise, his album, *My Spanish Heart*, is influenced by his Hispanic heritage, while still remaining fundamentally a fusion album.

After the breakup of RTF, Corea collaborated with several musicians on a variety of projects. Although he did not formally return to fusion until he formed his Elektric Band, many of the albums released between 1978 and 1986 seem best placed into the fusion category. Most of the tracks on *Secret Agent* (1978) include electronic instruments and several include a heavy backbeat. Likewise, *Tap Step* (1980) and *Touchstone* (1982) all prominently feature synthesizers and include many backbeat-oriented pieces. The absence of electric guitar on these albums is most likely the reason why they are not considered fusion albums by reviewers.

Corea formally returned to fusion in the mid ’80s with the Chick Corea Elektric Band (hereafter abbreviated CCEB). Like RTF, the music being created here was a powerful fusion of jazz and rock that often touched on other styles as well. During the Shipton interview, Corea stated that he “came back to [a very high-powered sound] somewhat with the Elektric Band, although it was done in a more controlled way” (Shipton 2004, 37). This fusion music is heavily produced and much less raw than that of RTF, as Corea was hoping that it would garner commercial success (McPartland 1989).
The band began as a trio comprised of Corea, Dave Weckl (drums), and John Patitucci (bass), although Scott Henderson was soon added as a guitarist. The self-titled debut album (1986) combines heavy drum-and-bass grooves with virtuosic keyboard and guitar lines. A year later, Henderson was replaced with Frank Gambale, and saxophonist Eric Marienthal was added to provide another timbral dimension. This would be the definitive Elektric Band lineup, which was altered only on the 1993 release, *Elektric Band II: Paint the World*. The definitive lineup would later regroup in 2004 to release *To the Stars*, a tone poem based on L. Ron Hubbard’s science fiction novel of the same name.

After the CCEB released *To The Stars* in 2004, Corea gathered several musicians with whom he had previously played and recorded another tone poem, *The Ultimate Adventure* (2006), again based on L. Ron Hubbard’s work. Corea notes many influences that contributed to this album during an interview with Todd Whitesel: “My love for any kind of Latin music—Spanish music, Cuban music, South American music—has been prevalent for my whole life. All these things came together on this record” (Whitesel 2006). These influences, coupled with Corea’s jazz background, create a Latin-jazz fusion that is reminiscent of the early RTF albums, though only slightly.

**Post-Bop**

It is difficult to succinctly express the characteristics of post-bop. Kernfeld’s brief definition in *Grove Music Online* only emphasizes its ambiguity: “A vague term, used either stylistically or chronologically…to describe any continuation or amalgamation of bop, modal jazz, and free jazz; its meaning sometimes extends into swing and earlier styles or into fusion and third-world styles.” In short, as the term implies, much of the jazz music released after the
bebop era could be placed in this category, including many of Corea’s albums. Harmonic practice was much less universal than during the bebop era, which contributes to the difficulty of compartmentalization. Discussing the unique aspects of all of Corea’s post-bop albums is beyond the scope of this thesis (though excerpts of several compositions will be analyzed for their harmonic content). Many of the albums that are not distinctly fusion or classical are placed under this style, making post-bop something of an “other” category (in addition to the albums’ chronological placement). To give brief insight into these albums, several subcategories will be created and explained. Bear in mind that due to the equivocal nature of the style, these categories deal mainly with instrumentation.

The first and most prominent subcategory is straight-ahead jazz. For the purpose of this thesis, straight-ahead jazz will be defined as jazz music in which the instrumentation is normative—that is, it follows any of the instrumentations used during the bebop era—the music is generally swung, and the harmony is not bebop-influenced. Corea’s first two albums fall into this category. As mentioned previously, *Tones For Joan’s Bones* (1967) contains two pieces that appeared on Blue Mitchell’s album, *Boss Horn*. The instrumentation includes piano, trumpet, saxophone, bass, and drums. *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs* (1968), which is often considered by jazz historians to be Corea’s magnum opus, features a more compact trio setting. The group played Corea originals, jazz standards, and even dabbled in free improvisation.

Several later albums also fit into this subcategory. The *Now He Sings* trio, which included Roy Haynes (drums) and Miroslav Vitouš (bass), recorded *Trio Music* and *Trio Music, Live in Europe* in 1982 and 1987 respectively. He also collaborated with Circle members Holland and Altschul, and released *The Song of Singing* and *A.R.C.* (both 1970), which contains several composed pieces, despite the presence of some free improvisation. During his stint with CCEB,
he performed and recorded with Patitucci and Weckl on a side project, the Akoustic Band (releases in 1989 and 1991). While this trio did perform some of Corea’s original compositions, they also paid homage to some of the great jazz composers of the previous decades by covering standards. Years later, he formed the New Trio, which recorded *Past, Present & Futures* in 2001. This album is comprised mainly of Corea’s original compositions.

Corea also led many ensembles that were similar to that of *Tones For Joan’s Bones*. The albums *Is* and *Sundance* (both 1969) employ fairly traditional instrumentation but heavily favor improvisation. They are not strictly avant-garde albums, but several of the compositions appearing on them are free-form. *Inner Space* (1972) was a re-release of the pieces on *Tones*, but also included a few new compositions as well. Albums such as *Friends* (1978), and *Remembering Bud Powell* (1997) maintain the straight-ahead jazz setting. In the late ’90s, Corea formed the group Origin, which was a six-piece acoustic ensemble. Together, they released several albums that contain a variety of different-sounding jazz musics. From covering jazz standards to engaging in larger, improvisationally driven pieces, the group excelled in several mediums.

The next subsection is piano jazz, which, for the purpose of this thesis, will be defined as any recordings that include Corea on solo piano or in an ensemble comprised only of pianists. His first solo efforts on piano, *Piano Improvisations Vol. 1 & 2*, were released in 1971. Corea also released two more albums of solo improvisations: *Delphi I* (1979) and *Delphi II & III* (1980). In the late 1970s, he toured with Herbie Hancock and put out two live albums, which captured some of their best interactions. The duo performed originals by each member, jazz standards, and improvisations based on the music of Bartók. During the early 1980s, he also collaborated separately with Friederich Gulda (*The Meeting*, 1983) and Nicolas Economou (*On...*).
Two Pianos, 1983). These duos played unique versions of jazz standards but also indulged themselves in extended improvisations. In 1994, he released Expressions, which contains mostly jazz standards. Six years later, he released two albums, Solo Piano: Standards and Originals. Most recently, he has worked with the Japanese virtuoso, Hiromi Uehara. They released one album together simply titled Duet (2009), on which they play jazz standards, originals composed by each member, and their own version of The Beatles’ “Fool on the Hill.”

The remaining post-bop albums are hard to categorize. The subsection “chamber jazz” will be used to identify any music that features Corea collaborating with at least one other non piano player. Note that these instrumentations differ from standard bebop instrumentations. In 1972, Corea began working with vibraphonist, Gary Burton. Together they released several albums, the most famous of which is Crystal Silence. On their 1983 album, Lyric Suite For Sextet, they also worked with a string quartet. Over the years, Corea has also collaborated in duet settings with Steve Kujala (flutist), Bobby McFerrin (vocalist) and Béla Fleck (banjoist).

Corea’s forays into the ambiguous post-bop style are multifaceted. Because of the breadth of the style, the biggest help for the reader may be to note the differences in instrumentation, which has been done above.

Classical

For the purpose of this thesis, the term “classical” extends to any music that specifically combines elements of Western art music with jazz. In 1984, Corea released an album comprised of twenty short songs entitled Children’s Songs. Most of the songs are based on short motives and are reminiscent of Bartók’s Mikrokosmos. The following year, he collaborated with Friedrich Gulda in a performance of Mozart’s Double Piano Concerto Fantasy for Two Pianos. The same
year, he also composed a large five-movement piece and a single movement piece for a septet consisting of a string quartet, piano, flute, and French horn, which appeared on the appropriately titled *Septet* (1985). This music represents a Corean take on modern chamber music. In 1996, he performed Mozart’s *Piano Concerto* Nos. 20 and 23 with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Bobby McFerrin. Four years later, he premiered his “First Piano Concerto” with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. While predominantly a composed piece, there are sections in which Corea improvises. In general, the percentage of Corea’s compositions that are not jazz-influenced is quite small.

While Corea was and is constantly evolving as a composer/performer and shifting his focus from project to project, several trends are evident throughout his career. The first major recordings he took part in were hard bop albums, though he soon left that style in favor of other styles. This music was timbrally dark and did not utilize standard bebop harmony. Corea’s stint with avant-garde jazz was also quite short. This was due in part to his (and his bandmates) desire for something musically predictable and concrete, as all aspects of avant-garde jazz relied solely on improvisation. Corea delved heavily into fusion with Return to Forever during the early to mid ’70s (after his time with Miles Davis) and later with the Chick Corea Elektric Band in the mid ’80s to early ’90s. Heavily influenced by Davis’ groups of the late ’60s, jazz fusion music utilized electronic instruments and funk/rock rhythms, often supported by a heavy backbeat. When he was not working with specific groups, he was heading several other fusion and post-bop ensembles. Unfortunately, the post-bop style is so broad, it refers mainly to the albums’ chronological placement in Corea’s œuvre.
CHAPTER III. FUNCTIONAL HARMONY

Functional harmony’s well-established routines rely heavily on the tonic-predominant-dominant paradigm, which is present on more than one structural level in music of the common-practice period. Bebop harmony likewise relies on this paradigm both for chord-to-chord relationships and middleground structures. Even after the bebop era, jazz composers employed functional harmony, often combining it with nonfunctional harmony. While all of the excerpts in this chapter include functional harmony, more than half include it at the middleground. Within these examples, Corea prolongs the motion between functional chords in several different ways.

The passages in this chapter are taken primarily from fusion pieces, save “Señor Mouse” and “Hand Me Down,” which are post-bop compositions. The general organization of the chapter pertains to structural levels. That is, the first two examples exhibit functional progressions on the foreground and as the chapter progresses, the functional structures move further into the middleground. This chapter also introduces the concept of ellipsis of the dominant: occasionally, Corea includes pairs of chords that fit into a diatonic referential collection as a ii-I progression, thus leaving out the functional dominant that would more heavily tonicize the I chord. This concept could be compared to the truncated use of the ii-V-I progression in bebop, in which the tonic chord is frequently absent. In both cases, the diatonic referential collection is still implied and used for improvisation even when the tonicizing dominant or the expected tonic chord is not present.

An example of Corea’s use of a fairly unembellished version of the functional paradigm appears in the first section (0:00 to 1:00, mm. 5-35) of “Night Streets,” from My Spanish Heart. This passage relies mainly on the progression V7/iv-iv-V7-i in C minor, a complete

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7 Chick Corea, My Spanish Heart, 2006 (1976), Universal Distribution 9270.
predominant-dominant tonic progression. Throughout the piece, Corea uses this progression as a vehicle for improvisation.

A similar improvisationally-driven passage occurs at the end of “Love Castle” (also from *My Spanish Heart*). The music (2:56 to 4:08) repeatedly moves through the progression ii7-V7-I-V7/ii in C Major, during which Corea improvises. Occasionally, additional color tones are added to some of the chords, which do not obstruct the local functionality.

Example 3.1 illustrates a slightly different use of functional elements on the foreground. In the B section (1:02 to 1:33, mm. 24-51) of “Señor Mouse,” from *Crystal Silence*, Corea employs V-I progressions in several keys. While they are functional locally, they do not contribute to a functional middleground, but instead help to emphasize C as the pitch center of the passage, which is ultimately centric. Part of the difficulty in arguing for middleground prolongation of C is due to the surface relationships the various C triads share with their surrounding chords. The first C-minor triad is tonicized but immediately left in order to tonicize a minor triad built on the leading tone to C. Later, the music arrives at a C-major chord that sounds like a VI in the key of E minor, which has been tonicized prior to the appearance of the C-major triad. In general though, the locations of the C triads at both the beginning of the section and as the penultimate chord in the section help support the idea of C as a pitch center. From this example, one can gather that Corea may use functional progressions on the local level that do not contribute to a functional middleground.

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Example 3.1. Opening of B Section (1:02 to 1:33, mm. 24-51) of “Señor Mouse”

The first three examples illustrate the use of functional harmony in the foreground; however, functional harmony may also be present at the middleground. One example of functional harmony at the middleground occurs in “Hand Me Down,” a live track recorded with the post-bop group, Origin, which never appeared on a studio release. It begins in E minor and alternates between the tonic (occasionally V7/iv) and the subdominant, and then the bass ascends toward a structural dominant (0:33 to 0:40, mm. 21-26) through a series of passing chords (example 3.2). With the exception of the penultimate chord, this progression is diatonic in E minor: i-iiø7-i6-V42-Eb/Bb-V. While all of the chords between the tonic and the dominant serve as passing chords, the second to last is fairly unusual. The Eb/Bb chord functions as a chromatic passing chord, with the common tone Eb/D# providing aural connectivity between it and the following B dominant. It is also unusual for a iiø7 to function as a passing chord, but as it is only one half step away from being a viiø65, the change is not very noticeable. Finally, it is atypical for a third-inversion dominant to “resolve” upward. Undoubtedly, Corea was not trying to compose stylistically. More pertinent than these interesting quirks is his prolongation of the middleground motion from tonic to dominant through nearly-functional passing motion.

10 These timestamps refer to the version that appears on Disc 2 of A Week at the Blue Note.
11 The common tone is not played by the same instrument, but it does occur in the same octave.
Some of Corea’s music displays functional middleground structures that are decorated with nonfunctional harmonic motion in the foreground. “El Bozo,” one of the longer pieces from My Spanish Heart, is divided into three sections, and there is an additional track entitled “Prelude to El Bozo.” The harmony in the A section (0:00 to 0:19 mm. 1-8) of the “Prelude” is defined by the arpeggiated parallel fifths in the left hand; they move downward by step diatonically in the key of C minor (example 3.3). From there, standard ii-V-I root motion occurs in the left hand. The fact that Corea only plays the root in the left hand during this portion of the progression allows him to easily adjust the quality of the predominant through the use of specific pitches in the melody. In addition to the middleground functional harmony, Corea has prolonged the motion from the tonic triad to the major mediant through a nonfunctional linear-intervallic progression (LIP) comprised of perfect fifths.

Example 3.2. Ascent toward structural dominant in “Hand Me Down” (0:33 to 0:40, mm. 21-26)

Example 3.3. A Section (0:00 to 0:19, mm. 1-8) of “Prelude to El Bozo”

12 Chick Corea, My Spanish Heart.
Like the “Prelude”, the introduction (0:00 to 0:24) of the track entitled “North Africa” (from *The Ultimate Adventure*) begins with a stepwise bass line descent leading toward the predominant (in this case a root-position Neapolitan), which is followed by a standard V7-i cadence (example 3.4). This example prominently features the concept of ellipses of the dominant, a term discussed in the introduction. The Fm7 and the Bbm7 chords are not diatonic in G minor, but they do fit into the extremely brief tonal centers implied by the major seventh chords that they precede. Thus, they serve as subdominant prefixes that weakly tonicize the following major seventh chords (as shown in the roman numerals in the example). This passage contains functionality (in varying degrees) on both the foreground and middleground levels.

Example 3.4. Introduction (0:00 to 0:24) of “North Africa.” *The Db7(b5) is a tritone-substitute dominant

A setting of Neville Potter’s poetry, “Looking at the World,” is a track from the 1976 release, *The Leprechaun*. The chord progression of the verse (0:56 to 1:11, mm. 33-42) is a good example of Corea’s integration of several types of harmony into a single progression (example 3.5). Corea uses nonfunctional passing motion (including unusual passing chords

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14 This concept of ellipsis of chords is invaluable when analyzing Corea’s music and will come into play in subsequent chapters.
bVII7 and bIII7#4) between the tonic and the submediant (which one might consider tonic expansion) and later between the supertonic and the subdominant (the predominant of the passage). He also employs strong fourth/fifth root-motion between the submediant and the supertonic. The triad versions of the two unusual passing chords, borrowed from the parallel minor mode, are encountered in Western art music, but their usage here as passing chords is nonnormative.

Example 3.5. Verse (0:56 to 1:11, mm. 33-42) of “Looking at the World”

“What Game Shall We Play Today?” (from Return to Forever) is a Latin song (another setting of Neville Potter’s poetry) with an introductory chord progression that seems almost cliché in comparison to Corea’s other harmonic explorations from the same time period (example 3.6). The harmonic language in this passage (0:00 to 0:21, mm. 1-15) is quite similar to that of the common-practice period. It employs several of the prolongation techniques and voice-leading principles used during that time. It is also noticeably different from the harmonic language of the verse, which contains mainly diatonic chords in parallel motion and weak plagal cadences. Here, Corea prolongs the motion between the tonic and predominant through the harmonization of a mostly-chromatic bass line with several functional secondary dominant and leading-tone chords, thus utilizing functionality on the foreground and middleground.

16 The chords shown in the score differ slightly from the chords played on the recording, particularly in the bass part. For example, the bass remains on G during the ii65 creating a Dm7/G, which is heard as a V7sus4.
Several conclusions can be drawn from the analyses presented in this chapter. Corea’s use of common-practice harmony (based on functional paradigms) varies depending on the composition. Pieces like “Night Streets,” “Love Castle,” and “What Game Shall We Play Today?” employ familiar, functional harmony on the foreground and middleground levels. More frequent in the excerpts analyzed is Corea’s use of functional harmony in combination with more modern harmonic language. Many of his compositions include dominant-tonic motion, though not necessarily as a cadence in the home key. It may instead emphasize an auxiliary key (ex. the B section of “Señor Mouse”), which, due to its transience, may need a strong affirmation. In other words, Corea sometimes employs surface-level functional progressions (cadential progressions) that may not support a single middleground tonality. He also composes music containing functional harmonies at a middleground level, which are elaborated and/or connected through nonfunctional foreground harmonic motion (“Looking at the World,” “Prelude to El Bozo,” and “Hand Me Down”). Within these examples, there are various degrees of chromaticism. “Prelude to El Bozo” is almost completely diatonic, but the parallel harmonies result in nonfunctional prolongation. “Looking at the World” contains chromatic passing chords that are inserted between mostly parallel, diatonic chords. “North Africa’s” chromatic chords occur as tritone-subsitute dominants and subdominant prefixes, both of which can be considered
functional. Occasionally, Corea seems to omit certain functional chords (primarily dominants) in order to avoid disrupting the descending or ascending nature of a passage (“North Africa”). It is evident in a survey of only a small number of pieces that he does not favor one particular method of incorporating functional harmony into his compositions.
CHAPTER IV. CHROMATIC-THIRD RELATIONSHIPS

Chromatic mediants played a very important role in much of the music composed during the latter half of the nineteenth century; their use is “widely recognized and well documented” (Kopp 2002, 3). Though a great deal of research has been devoted to the late-Classical and Romantic repertoire, very little has been written concerning their appearances in jazz harmony. In his *Journal of Music Theory* article, “Chick Corea’s 1984 Performance of ‘Night and Day’,” Steven Strunk notes Corea’s “preference for chromatic-third relationships involving major seventh chords” (Strunk 1999, 259). Though he does not discuss much of Corea’s music beyond citing a few pieces and briefly describing their use of chromatic mediants, he does raise an issue that merits further study. Corea often uses chromatic mediants and their presence can serve many different functions. The excerpts to be analyzed in this chapter will show that he tends to use chromatic mediants in three main ways: as part of a partially or fully realized “chord series of limited transposition” (defined below), as embellishing chords, and as large-scale key relationships.

Chromatic-third relationships were present in jazz music before Corea was part of the scene. David Demsey remarks that “the composer who is often most closely associated with the use of chromatic third-relation techniques is saxophonist John Coltrane” (Demsey 1991, 145). One of the prime examples is his composition, “Giant Steps,” as it “demonstrates the most highly organized use of the third-relation principle in any Coltrane composition” (168). Throughout the piece, the keys of Eb major, G major, and B major are all tonicized. Measures 8-15 in particular contain a chord progression that has been generated in a very systematic way. Each

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18 These measures numbers refer to the version of “Giant Steps” that appears in the 5th edition of *The Real Book*. 
key is tonicized (in the order listed above) with an appropriate ii-V-I progression, displaying a high level of transpositional symmetry (example 4.1). The entire chord series can be generated by successively transposing the first three chords by $T_4$, in effect creating a chord series of limited transposition (hereafter abbreviated CSLT). For the purpose of this thesis, a CSLT will be defined as: any series of chords that maps onto itself after two, three, four, or six chromatic transpositions. The transposition value is particularly what limits the transposition, since all of the values are divisors of twelve. As a result of the limited transpositions, there is often at least one voice (usually the bass) in a CSLT that is a mode of limited transposition or subset thereof.\(^{19}\) CSLTs are essentially chromatic sequences, though they contain less predictable and clearly defined content than one who is familiar with functional, sequential progressions might expect.

![Example 4.1. Measures 8-15 of John Coltrane’s “Giant Steps”](image)

This chapter examines several excerpts from hard bop, post-bop, and fusion compositions. It begins with an excerpt containing a fully realized CSLT and progresses through other pieces containing increasingly smaller portions of a CSLT. The discussion then moves to consider compositions utilizing chromatic mediants as embellishing chords. Finally, the last few pieces depict Corea’s use of chromatic-third relationships as key relationships. These three uses are not mutually exclusive and there is some overlap, particularly between the first two uses.

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\(^{19}\) For more information on modes of limited transposition, see Messiaen 1956, 58-63.
A level of symmetry similar to that of “Giant Steps” is evident in the introduction (0:00 to 0:36, mm. 25-32) of Corea’s fusion piece, “King Cockroach,” which appeared on the Elektric Band’s eponymous release.20 The progression (example 4.2) is composed entirely of major seventh chords, with every other chord relating at T₉.21 The EbM7 chords residing at both ends of the progression indicate a middleground prolongation of Eb. Considering the T₉-related major seventh chords as temporary tonal centers, the intermediary chords do not fit into the tonality implied by either the preceding or following major seventh chords, unlike “Giant Steps.” In the present context, all of the chords between the EbM7s are nonfunctional passing chords.

![Example 4.2. Introduction (0:00 to 0:36, mm. 25-32) of “King Cockroach”](image)

One of the larger principles evident in Corea’s progression is the notion of a transpositionally symmetrical chord series containing pairs of chords in which one chord is auxiliary to its partner. The more structural chord implies a temporary tonal center, though the weaker chord does little in the way of emphasizing the already brief tonality. Example 4.3 contains a progression that also supports this principle.

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21 Note that the third descent (0:22 to 0:36) is the only one that features a prominent bass. It is also the only time that all the chords appear as major seventh chords. In the first two descents, one or two of chords are missing sevenths (though they are implied by the voices that are included).
Corea uses an almost identical method of transitioning between key centers in another piece. The B section of “Love Castle” ends (at 0:39) on a CM7, which is the final chord in a ii-iii-IV7-V7-I7 progression in the key of C major. To move back into the A section, which began on an AM7, Corea inserts a passing Bb Major chord (0:39 to 0:44, mm. 25-28) that slides smoothly into the AM7.\footnote{The score (which is not an exact transcription) lists the passing chord as a BbM7, though an A natural is not audible.} Though the key centers in “King Cockroach” are more transient than in “Love Castle,” the principle of using nonfunctional, parallel voice-leading chords between key centers is the same.

A similar progression featuring major seventh chords related at T9 occurs in the hard bop tune, “Litha,” a track from Corea’s debut album as a bandleader, *Tones for Joan’s Bones* (1967).\footnote{Chick Corea, *Tones for Joan’s Bones*, 2004 (1967), WEA International 8122753522.} The first fourteen measures (0:00 to 0:12) contain a progression in which every other chord is a major seventh chord sharing a T9 relationship with the preceding major seventh chord (example 4.3). (Note that the pattern is broken with the last two chords.)\footnote{The inclusion of an Em7 chord between the last two chords would have produced a CSLT. However, the FM7 is the goal of the opening descent. At the middleground level then, the FM7 chord serves as an embellishing chord prefix to the final DM7 (Strunk 2000, 13).} This progression differs from “King Cockroach” in that the intermediary chords do fit into the tonalities implied by the following major seventh chords as “subdominant prefixes [(ii7s)]…[which] mildly toniciz[e] each of the major seventh chords (Strunk 2000, 13).” The idea of ellipsis of chords presented in chapter three also applies to this situation. Corea has left out the dominant chords that would more strongly tonicize each major seventh chord, perhaps because including them would disrupt the systematic, parallel voice leading.
The first two examples illustrate full and nearly-full realizations respectively of CSLTs based on chromatic mediants. However, there are other instances in which Corea uses transpositionally equivalent pairs of chords containing chromatic-third relationships that do not interact with a CSLT in the same manner (in other words, one chord in each pair is not more structurally important). The title track from the 1973 album, *Inner Space*, begins with T₃-related pairs of major seventh chords (example 4.4).²⁵ ²⁶ This progression is different from the previous two because a chromatic-third relationship occurs both within each pair of chords and between corresponding members of two pairs of chords.²⁷ Also, the transposition value between the pairs is four instead of three (or nine). Note that the example does not include two chords that slide chromatically from the EM7 into the Dbm centricity that begins the A section. In terms of relationships to the rest of the piece, none of these chords carries any structural value. Each one sounds like a point of arrival, but each is abandoned before a tonal center can be confirmed. The overlapping chromatic-third relationships and the lack of motion towards a tonic create a sense

²⁵ In the score, the chord symbols are written as major seventh chords with flatted fifths, due to pitches in the horn part. However, all of the chords besides the AM7 also contain the regular fifth. Thus, it is more appropriate to consider the flatted fifths as sharp elevenths. (The symbol ‘b5’ next to a chord usually indicates that the pitch a diminished fifth above the root is being substituted for the pitch a perfect fifth above the root.)


²⁷ These four constitute the first two thirds of a CSLT.
of a suspension of tonality and leave the analyst with one decent option, which is to consider the opening passage atonal.

Example 4.4. Opening (0:00 to 0:08, mm. 1-8) of “Inner Space”

The first four chords (1:02 to 1:08, mm. 37-42) in the last eight bars of “Song of the Wind” (from Sundance) are part of a progression that leads back to the A section (example 4.5).\textsuperscript{28} Despite the T\textsubscript{9} transpositional relationship shared between the first two pairs of chords (the four chords together are the first third of a CSLT), the final Dm7 is actually the goal of the descent, not the DbM7. It serves as the iv\textsubscript{7} in a iv\textsubscript{7}-V7 progression in A, which resolves deceptively to F\# minor, beginning at the top of the head. Thus, the Fm7-DbM7 motion prolongs the Fm7, which serves as an embellishing-chord prefix to the Dm7. As in “Litha,” Corea employs a chromatic-third relationship to embellish a single chord.

\textsuperscript{28} Chick Corea, Sundance, 2003 (1969), Charly Records SNAP-104CD.
Thus far, most of the compositions discussed have included chromatic-third relationships between major seventh chords. However, Corea also exploits this relationship between minor seventh chords. The head of “Humpty Dumpty,” a track from the 1978 release, *The Mad Hatter*, relies heavily on these relationships (example 4.6).\(^{29}\) As a whole, the chord progression suggests a tonal center of Eb, supported by its beginning on an EbM7 chord and the formal emphasis on Bb-rooted chords (one of which occurs at the end of the head). However, the first four chords constitute two of the four subsets of a CSLT, in which the first chord in each pair is more structural.\(^{30}\) The metric emphasis on both the EbM7 and the GbM7 allow parts of the head to be heard as residing in Gb Major.\(^{31}\)


\(^{30}\) As such, the DM7 and FM7 are incomplete suffix neighbors to the chords they follow.

\(^{31}\) One might call the Gb Major area an “embellishing transient key center.”
Overall, one can notice a preference for chromatic-third relationships, the richest passage being the string of minor seventh chords related at T₃/₉ (Dm7-Bm7-Abm7-Fm7-Abm7). Due to the tonicization of the flat major mediant in the opening four bars, this passage mainly embellishes the predominant region of the temporary Gb major tonality. The Bm7 is ultimately an embellishing chord prefix to the Abm7, which is itself embellished by the Dm7. The Abm7 is then embellished by the Fm7. Before returning to the home key, Corea includes a weak ii7-I7 motion in GbM7, which, in a sense closes out the temporary key center. The music finally arrives on a root position V7 in the original key—the goal of the head—and proceeds back to the top. This piece illustrates the use of chromatic mediants as surface-level embellishing chords. As a whole, the piece also illustrates Corea’s use of chromatic-third relationships as large-scale key relationships.

“500 Miles High,” a Latin piece that appeared on Return to Forever’s 1973 release, Light as a Feather, features similar uses of chromatic-third relationships as embellishing chords and as key centers (example 4.7). The piece begins on an Em7 chord but quickly moves to a Gm7, which serves as an embellishing-chord suffix to the Em7. A related chord, BbM7, then follows the Gm7, which facilitates smoother voice leading into the following B⁰⁷. The subdominant (Am7) is eventually tonicized with a ii⁰⁷-V7-i progression and is followed shortly by an embellishing chord suffix (Fm7). This suffix then serves as a iv7 to the following Cm7, creating a weak plagal cadence. Other factors besides the cadence—including agogic stress, formal placement and melodic cadence—allow for the Cm7 to be heard as the arrival point of the head.

32 Notice that Corea once again leaves out the dominant that would have closed the key center in a more strongly functional manner.
33 The Bbm7 at the half way point, though modally borrowed, can also be heard as a point of a arrival, which emphasizes the Eb pitch center.
34 Chick Corea, Light as a Feather, 1998 (1973), Universal Classics & Jazz 5571152.
A B7 is then used to move the music back to the beginning. These two key centers (C minor and E minor) share a T4/8 relationship, which is less normative for Corea.

Several of Corea’s other compositions exhibit much stronger chromatic-third key relationships in which a main theme is stated in both keys. In “Again and Again,” a slow samba from the album of the same name, the second main theme occurs in Eb major (0:24 to 0:35, mm. 17-24). The harmony alternates between I7 and iv64. The theme then repeats in G major (0:35 to 0:46 mm. 25-32), supported by a similar harmonic progression, alternating between I7 and ii42. Following this second key area the music moves on to E major. While remaining unsupported by cadences, the sheer length of these key centers emphasized through neighboring motion is enough to distinguish them from some of the previous examples, in which the tonal centers were much briefer.

The fusion tune, “Lifescape” (from Beneath the Mask) also contains statements of the main theme in two keys sharing a chromatic-third relationship, although there is music that

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36 In the score, there is an FM7 separating the last GM7 and the return to the EM7. However, this does not come across in the recording. The would-be motion between these three chords is identical to the chords in the introduction of “King Cockroach.”. A similar motion (GbM7-EM7-EbM7) precedes the start of the second theme (0:20 to 0:23).
separates the two keys.\textsuperscript{37} After an intro, the head theme begins in D major (0:29 to 0:50, mm. 19-30). Here, Corea uses a borrowed chromatic mediant (bVI\textsuperscript{7}) as an embellishing chord. Later on, this theme returns in F major (1:33 to 1:52, mm. 56-67), supported by harmony that is virtually identical to that of the D major section.\textsuperscript{38} Unlike “Again and Again,” each of these key centers is confirmed multiple times through standard cadential motion.

In summary, much of Corea’s music conveys his penchant for chromatic-third relationships occurring between either major or minor seventh chords. They are often encountered between respective members of transpositionally related pairs of chords (ex. “King Cockroach,” “Litha,” “Inner Space,” and “Humpty Dumpty”). In these situations, Corea seems to favor major seventh chords and shows a preference for T\textsubscript{3/9} relationships. The chords sharing these relationships often sound as temporary key centers, whether they are supported by the less structural chords in the pairs or not. In other situations, he uses chromatic-third relationships to embellish a major or minor seventh chord (ex. “Litha,” “Song of the Wind,” “Humpty Dumpty,” and “500 Miles High”). Lastly and least frequently, he employs chromatic-third relationships in large-scale key relationships (ex. “Humpty Dumpty,” “500 Miles High,” “Again and Again,” and “Lifescape”). While these relationships are sometimes separated by several phrases of music (as in “Lifescape”), they are still present and very much audible.

\textsuperscript{38} The score includes b5s on some of the FM7s and DbM7s to account for pitches in the melody. These alterations should be considered #11ths due to the presence of natural 5ths.
CHAPTER V. PLANING

Common-practice functional tonality favors voice leading that is in contrary motion. Apart from the use of parallel, first-inversion triads (Fauxbourdon style), thoroughgoing parallel voice leading is virtually nonexistent in music of the common-practice period. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, composers (notably Debussy) began to use root position triads and seventh chords in parallel motion, a compositional technique whose effect was often heard as the thickening of a melodic line. Jazz harmony progressed in much the same way. At its inception, bebop relied heavily on counterpoint and functional paradigms. By the 1960s (after the bebop era had ended), “parallel harmony…became more and more common,” as “deliberate tonal identity became less important” (Pease 2003, 52). Like many of Corea’s harmonic idioms, parallel chords are evident in a variety of situations. First, they may serve as the middleground harmonic structures for all or a portion of a piece.39 Corea also uses parallel harmonies between two structural points in a piece or as part of a motion leading up to a single structural point. In all of the excerpts, the planing is nonfunctional, but in the second group of examples, the structural point (or points) is often a functional chord.

This chapter examines mostly fusion pieces almost exclusively, though one post-bop composition (“Chelsea Shuffle”) is also included. The chapter begins with the examination of excerpts in which parallel harmonies are the only chords used. As the chapter progresses, the planing passages become more closely tied (beginning and/or ending of the passage) to one or more structural (and usually functional) chords. To restrict the scope, the chosen excerpts contain

39 In “Cool Weasel Boogie” (analyzed in chapter seven), the harmony repeatedly cycles through Cm7-Fm7-Abm7-Bbm7 in a twenty-four-bar vamp. Specifically, one would call this “real planing,” because the sonority is exactly transposed.
mainly real planing. There are many instances of both diatonic and mixed planing as well, but
their use is not as systematic in comparison to real planing.40

The composition, “View from the Outside,” which appeared on the Elektric Band album,
Light Years, employs a real-planing vamp, similar to that of “Cool Weasel Boogie.”41 After an
introduction, the vamp begins and occurs sporadically throughout the piece (example 5.1). The
Am7 harmony first serves as a nonfunctional neighbor chord to the Bm7. It then becomes a
chromatic passing chord between Bm7 and G#m7. The G#m7 serves as an embellishing chord to
the Bm7.42 Throughout the piece, the melody occurs mainly over the Bm7 and generally resides
in B dorian. On the few occasions when it does briefly leave B dorian, it moves to G# dorian.
This only occurs during the parts of the vamp when the embellishing G#m7 is active. Even then,
Corea most often emphasizes pitches that are shared between the two collections (F# and C# in
particular). In short, Corea utilizes a vamp containing parallel harmonies to emphasize B as a
pitch center.

Example 5.1. Vamp from “View from the Outside.” These are transcriptions of the recording.

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40 Real planing occurs when a sonority is exactly transposed. Diatonic planing occurs when each chord member
moves in the same direction by the same number of scale steps within a specific key. Mixed planing occurs when the
two aforementioned types of planing are combined in any way (Kostka 2006, 86).
42 This usage of a chromatic-third related chord as an embellishing chord is one of the primary ways in which Corea
uses chromatic-third relationships (See chapter four).
The episodic “El Bozo Part 2” features a passage (0:49 to 1:11) based solely on major seventh chords (example 5.2). Unlike the previous example, the chords Corea uses do not emphasize a single pitch center. Rather, each pair of chords emphasizes a different pitch center. The progression starts as a CSLT, beginning with a T<sub>10</sub> transposition of the first two chords. After the fourth chord, the pattern is broken. The chords within a single pair share a T<sub>5</sub> relationship. Thus, the BM<sub>7</sub>, AM<sub>7</sub> and penultimate F#M<sub>7</sub> serve as incomplete subdominant suffixes to the chords that precede them. Oddly enough, the BbM<sub>7</sub>, which when reached sounds like a point of arrival, serves as a subdominant prefix to the C<sub>7</sub>sus<sub>4</sub> (BbM<sub>7</sub>/C) that begins the next episode (which resides in F major). In this example, Corea capitalizes on chords of the same quality that imply specific pitch centers (in this case, the I<sub>7</sub>s and IV<sub>7</sub>s from several major keys). He then uses these chords as a harmonic motive.

“Alan Corday” (from the Elektric Band’s *To the Stars* album), contains a portion of music (1:11 to 1:17) in which the structural dominant is left and returned to through chords in mostly parallel motion (example 5.3). The initial transition to the F#M<sub>7</sub> does not sound out of place, mainly because the motion is akin to that from a tritone-substitute dominant chord to a tonic.

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43 Notice that this portion of the progression is also an unusual take on a traditional 10-6 LIP.
chord.\textsuperscript{45} What follows is essentially embellishment of the F#M7, which is a neighboring harmony to the G7 at the middleground. Instead of using an F#M7 as the penultimate chord, Corea chooses to use a C#m7/F#. This may have been to keep F# from sounding too strongly as an auxiliary pitch center.\textsuperscript{46} Overall, this passage is of little structural importance; it serves only as a brief digression from the dominant chord.

\begin{example}
\begin{music}
\begin{musicstaff}
\begin{musicnote}
G7
\end{musicnote}
\begin{musicnote}
F\#M7
\end{musicnote}
\begin{musicnote}
EM7
\end{musicnote}
\begin{musicnote}
FM7
\end{musicnote}
\begin{musicnote}
C#m7/F#
\end{musicnote}
\begin{musicnote}
G7
\end{musicnote}
\begin{musicnote}
V7
\end{musicnote}
\end{musicstaff}
\end{music}

Example 5.3. 1:11 to 1:17 of “Alan Corday”
\end{example}

In the A section of the straight-ahead post-bop tune, “Chelsea Shuffle” (\textit{Past, Present & Futures}), parallel harmonies are used to connect the tonic Ebm7 with the related CbM7 (V17).\textsuperscript{47} Throughout, the left hand plays perfect 5ths, which help to define the harmony. Once the V17 is reached a second time (:16), the chords move in parallel motion downward towards the tonic i7 (example 5.4). The EM7 could have easily moved directly to the tonic chord; instead, the addition of the DM7 creates a double neighbor effect in the bass line. While the goal tonic is certainly the most structurally important chord in the excerpt, the V17 is also fairly significant. Thus, this excerpt differs from previous examples because the progression of parallel chords connects two structural points.

\textsuperscript{45} In other words, it sounds as if the G7 is a substitute dominant for a C#7 in the key of F# major.
\textsuperscript{46} Due to the tritone-substitute dominant-tonic motion mentioned above, F# has the propensity to sound like a pitch center, which would have been amplified further, had the penultimate chord been an F#M7.
\textsuperscript{47} Chick Corea, \textit{Past Present & Futures}. Stretch Records SCD-9035.
Example 5.4. 0:16 to 0:19 (mm. 6-8) of “Chelsea Shuffle.” Aside from the first and last chords, the remaining chords are all decorated with #11s. These are transcriptions of the recording.

The first part (0:09 to 0:15, mm. 6-9) of the A section of “No Mystery,” which appeared on the Return to Forever album of the same name, is an excellent example of Corea’s combination of real planing with functional tonality.\(^{48,49}\) He uses mode mixture to harmonize the melody with mostly major seventh chords (example 5.5). The planing passage is related to CSLTs in that it contains transpositionally related sets of three major seventh chords.\(^{50}\) This nonfunctional passage stops at the N7, which serves as a predominant (a role it frequently serves in tonal music). From there, the phrase ends with a functional cadence. Thus, the N7 is actually both the end of the nonfunctional planing passage and the predominant of the functional cadential progression.

\(^{48}\) This portion of the piece is also analyzed in chapter seven.
\(^{50}\) However, continuing the established pattern would not yield a return of the same chords. Therefore, it is not a CSLT.
“Prism,” from *Light Years*, begins with a passage (0:00 to 0:17, mm. 1-6) of parallel chords that leads up to a structural dominant (example 5.6). It begins with a pair of “sus” chords that is successively transposed by T₃. Before sounding the second chord in the third pair of chords, Corea inserts an Abm7, which has one main consequence. In combination with the following chord, a ii₇-V₇sus₄ progression is created, opening up the possibility of a cadence in Gb major. Instead, Corea treats the Abm7/Db as an altered tritone-substitute dominant and proceeds onward to a less ambiguous dominant-functioning chord (B⁰₇), cadencing in C minor. While the Abm7 does hint at the possibility of a cadence in a different key, its functional implications are diminished once the B⁰₇ is sounded. Ultimately, the parallel chords leading up to the structural dominant are more significant.

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51 The progression also constitutes three quarters of a CSLT.
52 Chick Corea, *Light Years*. 
Example 5.6. Introduction (0:00 to 0:17, mm. 1-6) to “Prism.” *The Abm7/Db is an altered tritone-substitute dominant

A strikingly similar passage occurs in “Lifescape,” which appeared on Beneath the Mask, an Elektric Band album released four years later. This music (0:56 to 1:09, mm. 31-39) precedes the return of the post-introduction harmonic material, which is based in D major (example 5.7). It is important to note that the chords are extremely similar but not strictly identical. While the Bb/C, D/E, and F/G chords in the piano part do not contain thirds above the root, the bass guitar part momentarily touches on the minor thirds above the roots of the chords, leading the listener to hear them as minor 11th chords. Consequently, the rest of the chords (other than the last two) also sound like minor 11th chords. It is particularly the strong, descending-fifth root motion that convinces one to hear the Em7/A as a V7sus4 rather than a minor 11th chord. Like the previous example, the Em7/A here serves as both the endpoint of a passage of nonfunctional planing and as a functional chord.
Corea’s use of harmonic planing is quite varied throughout his oeuvre. In some instances, he uses parallel harmonies as the harmonic backbone for some or all of a piece (ex. “Cool Weasel Boogie,” “View from the Outside,” and “El Bozo Part 2”). In other pieces, parallel chords may serve as passing chords between more structural (and often functional) chords or to move to a single structural chord. The excerpt from “Alan Corday” depicts Corea’s use of planing to prolong a neighboring chord to the dominant. He also uses planing to connect the submediant to the tonic in “Chelsea Shuffle” and the tonic to the Neapolitan in “No Mystery.” Finally, both “Prism” and “Lifescape” contain passages of planing that lead up to the dominant. While planing generally seems to be more common in Corea’s fusion compositions, the brief examination of “Chelsea Shuffle” indicates that it is also sometimes used outside of this style.
CHAPTER VI. LINE-BASED PROGRESSIONS

One particularly interesting aspect of Corea’s harmonic language is the inclusion of passages that lack either functional progressions (on or close to the foreground) or transpositionally-related (real or diatonic) chords or sets of chords. In many of these instances, there is often one (or more) stepwise voice-leading strand that helps provide continuity to the passage. Stepwise lines are extremely common in much of the music composed during the last millennium and they can, of course, be harmonized functionally, but Corea’s music exhibits his own idiomatic approach. For instance, a few of the CSLTs in chapter four featured descending, stepwise bass lines that supported transpositionally related sets of chords (“King Cockroach” and “Litha”). However, some of Corea’s compositions contain passages featuring a stepwise line or lines in the bass and/or soprano independent of functional progressions or transpositional relationship. Other than occasional internal patterning, these ascending or descending line or lines tend to be the most aurally recognizable element(s) of the music in these passages. These progressions are generally nonfunctional and typically serve to connect two structural chords.

The majority of the passages in this chapter are taken from fusion pieces, where nonfunctional harmonic motion is quite common. This chapter begins with examinations of bass-led linear progressions and moves on to an excerpt featuring a soprano-led progression. Following this example, passages with more than one active line are considered. The fourth example features both the bass and soprano moving linearly in the same direction. The remaining progressions feature two or more lines moving in opposite directions with each subsequent progression incorporating an increasingly larger number of chords.
In “The Slide,” a piece from *Tap Step*, the harmony is governed by a descending line in the bass (example 6.1). The five-chord vamp repeats throughout the entire track. Notice that the progression begins with a G minor triad and ends with a D dominant seventh chord, which serve as the functional bookends of the progression. Additionally, one can hear the Db/Eb as a tritone-substitute dominant sus4 chord. One might compare this progression to a more classically inspired progression with the same bass: i-v6-IV6-iv6-V. This vamp is one of the simpler progressions that include a nonfunctional, line-based series of chords separating two functional chords.

![Example 6.1. Vamp from “The Slide.” These are the voicings written in the score.](image)

“Morning Sprite,” a composition from *Akoustic Band*, utilizes a similar descent in the bass. The introductory samba section resides firmly in E major. The following section (0:15 to 0:30, mm. 9-17) begins on the ii7 of Db major and the bass moves downward by semitones until it reaches the V7 (example 6.2). The bass then resolves to Db, though the Db does not support tonic harmony. While all of the chords between the ii7 and the V7 are essentially nonfunctional passing chords, the A7 does serve as an applied dominant (tritone-substitute dominant) to the Ab7. The preceding Bbm7 also fits into the very brief Ab tonicization as a ii7. Notice that the

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progression includes a brief passage of planing. Like “The Slide,” this piece includes a line-based progression between functional chords.

Example 6.2. Line-based progression (0:15 to 0:30, mm. 9-17) between ii7 and V7 in “Morning Sprite”

“Twang,” a piece from *Again and Again*, includes a passage that is controlled by an ascending stepwise line (at the middleground) in the melody (example 6.3).\(^{55}\) Unlike the previous examples, the endpoints are structural but not functional.\(^{56}\) The line-based progression (4:35 to 4:44, mm. 17-22) begins on DbM7 and ends on a CM7, suggesting parallel voice leading at the deep middleground. In the foreground, the progression starts as a CSLT and, as such, indicates a pairing of chords. A brief chromatically descending passage also occurs from the BM#11 to the AbM7. However, this brief, internal patterning is far less important than the middleground voice leading and the ascending stepwise line, and the latter has the most structural weight. Notice that the voice directly below the melody also moves upward in a stepwise fashion until the last chord, though it changes direction between the EbM(#11) and the F#m7. After the final CM7, the music returns to A minor, where it had resided briefly (4:21 to 4:27) before moving into F minor. The passage as a whole serves as a middleground elaboration of a neighboring motion from DbM7 to CM7.

\(^{55}\) Chick Corea, *Again and Again*.
\(^{56}\) The outer chords do not function as tonics, predominants, or dominants.
Example 6.3. (4:35 to 4:44, mm. 17-22) of “Twang.” This is a reduction of transcriptions of the recording.

“Ezinda,” composed for the *Eye of the Beholder* Elektric Band album, contains a similar instance of a line-based progression connecting two nonfunctional chords (example 6.4). Like those in “Twang,” there is voice leading between the outer chords of this progression, though it is more abstract, since the chords are in different octaves. The progression (2:30 to 2:45, mm. 27-34) exhibits a stepwise ascent in the bass and supports a stepwise, ascending compound melody. One might assume that the soprano is more structural than the alto, since it is an outer voice. However, the melodic motive both starts in the alto voice and returns to it. Also, the soprano voice is not always present. Thus, the alto voice is more structural. It starts on B₃ and ends on B₄, which begs the question: which line is controlling the progression, the bass or the alto? In general, the melody relies heavily on the ascending-descending-perfect fourth motive. The melody voices do not change consistently with the bass, though this may be due to the inconsistencies within the harmony. The passage begins with a phrase of real planing (the first four chords), but there is no patterning throughout the remainder of the passage. This suggests that both the bass and alto voices might share equal structural weight. Assuming octave equivalence, one can see middleground incomplete-neighbor motion between the harmonies and the octave transfer of B natural within the alto voice.

All of the excerpts above contain a line or lines moving in one direction. However, there are other instances of progressions that feature soprano and bass lines moving in opposite directions at the middleground. Strunk notes two such progressions in his article on Corea, one from “Crystal Silence” and the other from “Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy” (Strunk 1999, 261). These “wedge progressions” (as they are called) often rely on the contrapuntal relationship between the outer voices to provide aural continuity. In “Lenore” (from *The Leprechaun*), a wedge progression (0:37 to 0:47, mm. 37-49) begins with an AM7 that may lead the listener to expect a return to the opening of the piece, which began on the same chord. Instead, the outer voices expand until a Bb64 is reached (example 6.5).58 This quasi-cadential 64 does not move to an F7 but rather returns to the AM7. One might think of the Bb64 chord as an upper-neighbor chord to the AM7 with an altered bass, although the term neighbor may be inappropriate, as the respective bass notes are not separated by a step. At the very least, it is a chord that is auxiliary to the AM7, and it facilitates smooth semitonal voice leading between the respective thirds and fifths of the chords. Overall, the chords separating the initial AM7 and Bb64 are less important.

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58 Chick Corea, *The Leprechaun.*
than the expanding outer voices, despite the mild functionality of the F#7 contained within the progression.  

![Example 6.5 Expanding wedge progression (0:37 to 0:47, mm. 37-49) in "Lenore"](image)

“Stretch It,” from the Elektric Band’s *Inside Out* album, contains several passages of lines moving in contrary motion.  

It is quite clear that Corea’s focus is on linear voice leading rather than vertical sonorities, as many of the “chords” that are formed are incomplete triads and seventh chords. As with other line-based progressions, identifying the beginning and end of the progression is the key to understanding it. The endpoint of the first six chords of the first excerpt (0:29 to 0:33, mm. 12-14) appears to be quasi-cadential (example 6.6).  

The ascending fourths in the upper voices move by whole steps from A₃-D⁴ to G⁴-C⁵ and the bass descends from G² to C². Clearly, the last chord suggests some sort of C triad, despite the lack of a third above the bass. Likewise, the “fifthness” of the first sonority implies a G triad even though this harmony also lacks a third. At the middleground level, Corea seems to be connecting these two chords with linear passing motion. This weak C centricity (if one can even call it that) is short lived, as the rest of the passage changes directions and appears to prolong the transformation of a Bm7

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59 This chord could be considered a tritone-substitute dominant. However, once the music moves to the C#m⁷/F# (heard as a dominant sus₄ chord), one has to stretch the definition of tritone-substitution, as this chord lacks the tritone about which the substitution would take place.


61 Even though the seventh chord continues the expanding wedge, the length of the rest between the sixth and seventh chords separates the phrases.
into a BM7. Here, the upper voices descend in fourths, maintaining a half-step, whole-step pattern until the last two chords. Conversely, there seems to be no pattern in the bass voice.

Again, while vertical sonorities are created, Corea appears to be focusing on contrary voice leading and the endpoints of these progressions.

Example 6.6. Expanding and contracting wedge progressions (0:29 to 0:33) in “Stretch It.” These are transcriptions of the recording.

Shortly after the excerpt above, there is a brief keyboard passage (0:39 to 0:44, mm. 17-19) that also features expanding and contracting wedges (example 6.7). Aside from the last two sonorities, there are two upper voices traveling in similar motion that move in the opposite direction from the two lower voices. During the initial contraction, each pair of voices forms mostly major thirds. Likewise, as the pairs of voices expand, they continue to be separated by major thirds and move consistently by semitone for the majority of the remainder of the passage. It is unwise to consider vertical sonorities beyond those occurring between each pair of voices, especially considering Corea’s systematic voice leading during much of the excerpt. Rather, the harmonies are byproducts of the voice leading. On the other hand, a closer inspection reveals that the first and last chords are permutations of one another, with the small difference of the Ab

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62 Neither of these chords contains a fifth above the bass and thus, one could question their qualities. However, in the absence of a background tonality, perfect fifths above the bass seem like the most logical intervals one’s ear would fill in.

63 Note that the bass line does contain a minor third.

64 In doing so, one would also have to argue for implied tones over and over again.
in the first sonority and the A in the last. More specifically, it seems that within each pair of voices, something analogous to a voice exchange has taken place. The brisk pace at which this piece is performed does not allow the listener much time to register the similarities, but the quasi voice exchange does help provide continuity to a passage that is ultimately atonal and governed by lines. In general, the title of the piece seems appropriate; Corea is stretching voices in opposite directions while simultaneously stretching the boundaries of tonality.

Example 6.7. Contracting and expanding wedge progressions (0:39 to 0:44, mm. 17-19) in “Stretch It”

Of all the nonfunctional harmonic structures used by Corea, line-based progressions are some of the most obscure. In these progressions, stepwise voice leading reigns supreme and controls the harmony and the general direction of motion. In the first four examples, line-based progressions separated two structural chords. Sometimes these chords served very strong functions (“The Slide” and “Morning Sprite”) and other times not (“Twang” and “Ezinda”). Corea does not seem to show any preference when choosing the voice to guide these progressions, as there are passages in which the bass leads (“The Slide” and “Morning Sprite”) and in which the soprano leads (“Twang”), as well as passages in which multiple voices seem to share the duty. The wedge progressions are unified by the fact that their outer voices are expanding or contracting by step (not necessarily systematically). Here, the vertical harmonies that are created are products of the voice leading. The passages examined indicate that they are generally nonfunctional, though a functional chord may happen to be included along the way.
(“Lenore”). The number of voices involved varies from piece to piece. It also appears that the higher the number of voices, the more difficult it becomes to apply labels to the harmonies (“Lenore” vs. “Stretch It”). Besides “Morning Sprite,” the remaining pieces analyzed in this chapter are fusion pieces, suggesting that line-based progressions are more common in this style. They are not completely absent from other styles, but are generally less common than other harmonic structures.
CHAPTER VII. PEDAL POINTS, OSTINATI, AND VAMPS

Pedal Points

In their book, *Jazzology: The Encyclopedia of Jazz Theory For All Musicians*, Robert Rawlins and Nor Eddine Bahha write that “pedal point is one of the earliest devices for creating dissonance to be found in Western music” (Rawlins and Bahha 2005, 132). Its use in the jazz repertoire is usually “to create tension and increase harmonic interest.” In the absence of functional harmony, pedal points also create a “tonic by assertion” (Kostka 2006, 102). The listener is encouraged to hear the retained pitch as a pitch center and will consequently hear the rest of the music in relation to it. Corea uses pedal points in this way.

A pedal point on G opens the title track from Return to Forever’s eponymous release. This pedal (0:00 to 1:02, mm. 5-12) is part of an ostinato in the left hand that oscillates between G and D. Above this open fifth is a haunting melody that emphasizes several scale degrees, most of which reside in G minor (example 7.1). The use of mode mixture allows for interesting tensions, particularly because of the inclusion of some unusual dissonant intervals. Despite the lack of functional harmony, Corea has clearly established G as a pitch center through the use of this pedal point.

Example 7.1. 0:00 to 1:02 (mm. 5-12) of “Return to Forever”

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“Love Castle,” from *The Leprechaun*, begins over a pedal point on A. The opening section (0:16 to 0:29, mm. 1-14) begins on an AM7 chord but quickly moves through several harmonies that suggest other modes (example 7.2). When the melody enters, several of the pitches also reflect the modal ambiguity. However, the listener can be certain that A is the pitch center because the pedal point occurs through the duration of the phrase. While solidifying the pitch center, the pedal point weakens the functionality present in the progression, particularly the final dominant (which does not resolve) superimposed over scale degree 1. Like the previous example, this pedal point occurs at the beginning of the piece.

![Example 7.2. 0:16 to 0:29 (mm. 1-14) of “Love Castle”](image)

In 1979, Corea composed a piece for his wife, Gayle Moran, entitled “Song to Gayle.” This composition appeared on two albums, *Duet* and *In Concert, Zurich, October 28, 1979*, both of which feature him performing with Gary Burton. The opening section (0:37 to 1:24, mm. 1-8) begins with several chords over a pedal on F (example 7.3). While the middleground harmonic structure is based in F, these chords lead one to hear the F as a dominant pedal, due to the abundance of dominant functioning chords (Cm7/F and F7b9). Once the pedal point ends, the music progresses toward the structural dominant (C7), providing the listener with more

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66 Chick Corea, *The Leprechaun*.
67 Referential timestamps will apply to the version on the studio release, *Duet*.
assurance that the opening portion of the composition does reside in F. As such, the chords occurring over the F pedal should be viewed as asserting the tonic for the piece. The pedal point still conveys the essence of the tonic.

Example 7.3. 0:37 to 1:24 (mm. 1-8) of “Song to Gayle”

The title track from *Tap Step* (released in 1980) relies heavily on pedal points, which dictate the overall tonal structure. It begins with a pedal on Bb (0:00 to 0:39) over which static melodies in Bb major are played. Like other examples, the pedal point is not sounding constantly; instead, it is part of a rhythmic ostinato. The bass then moves to a B pedal, supporting B-minor harmony. Throughout much of the piece, the musicians improvise over these two pedal points. Sometimes these improvisations may imply a different mode, but the tonalities remain as those mentioned above.

“Brasilia,” from the Corea and Burton album, *Lyric Suite for Sextet*, begins with an arpeggiating figure in the left hand, the lowest pitch of which imitates a pedal point on E. Notice that there are two lines a third apart in the left hand, which ascend/descend stepwise in E lydian (example 7.4). While each arpeggiated figure implies a different chord, it is better to think of the vertical sonorities as voice-leading chords. The two that stand out the most are the fourth

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69 Chick Corea, *Tap Step*.
and the eighth chords, due mainly to their positions at the end of phrases and the rhythmic cadences created by the melody at those points. Consequently, both sonorities are E major chords, the first a major seventh chord and the second a major triad. Thus, the repeated $E_3$ emphasizes a pitch center and the stepwise lines help define and elaborate the static, background E lydian scale through passing motion. This idea becomes clearer when the right hand enters with three melody pitches that descend in a stepwise manner within E lydian.

Example 7.4. 0:00 to 0:18 of “Brasilia.” These are transcription of the recording.

In the previous examples, a pedal point has never been present without at least one other pitch. However, in “The Golden Dawn” (from Secret Agent), the music begins with Corea playing a single pitch (C) inside the piano, which establishes a pitch center from the first moment it is struck. Gradually, other pitches are added—first a G, and then a D—in various registers above the bass. Eventually, a melody enters, doubled on synthesizer and piano; this melody includes E natural, solidifying C major as the tonality by assertion. Throughout, the tonality remains in major, and the music generally does not venture very far harmonically. Corea’s use of a pedal point at the start of this piece ties in quite well with its title. As the sun gradually rises, so the tonality of this piece is slowly asserted as other pitches are added above the pedal point.

The title track from *No Mystery* contains a pedal point not written in the score.\(^{72}\) Once the A section begins, the bass remains on the tonic D, providing a strong foundation for the melody, which shifts between D major and D minor (example 7.5). Corea harmonizes this fundamentally diatonic melody (despite the change of mode) mostly with parallel major seventh chords.\(^{73}\) Note that the bass does shift to C# to support the A7, which is the structural dominant of the passage. In this case, the use of a pedal point provides tension, but also connects the tonic chord with the predominant (Neapolitan) of the phrase.

![Example 7.5. 0:09 to 0:15 (mm. 6-9) of “No Mystery”](image)

This portion of the chapter examined pieces from the fusion and classical styles. Of the excerpts analyzed, pedal points are most common in fusion pieces, though it is unlikely that they are completely absent from other styles. In each of the passages, a pedal point emphasizes a pitch center, though the degree to which a tonality is only asserted or is confirmed through functional harmony differs. Generally, it seems that Corea likes to employ pedal points at the beginning of his compositions, perhaps because they strongly assert a tonal center from which to depart.

\(^{72}\) Chick Corea, *No Mystery*.

\(^{73}\) This passage was analyzed in chapter five.
Ostinati

Rawlins and Bahha defines an ostinato as “any clearly defined melodic or rhythmic pattern that is repeated persistently” (Rawlins and Bahha 2005, 132). Frequently, melodic ostinati are also rhythmic ostinati. They relate to a pedal point, as one of the pitches within an ostinato structure usually serves as the pitch center for the passage in which it occurs. This happens regardless of whether that pitch is constantly sounding or not.

A composition entitled “Flamenco,” from Tap Step begins with a triplet ostinato pattern in the piano part (example 7.6). It is difficult to deny G as the pitch center, particularly because of its presence in both hands and because the fifth scale degree of G (D) is also present. The third degree of the scale is never actually sounded, making it impossible for the listener to decipher the mode.

![Example 7.6](image)

Example 7.6. Opening ostinati in contrary motion from “Flamenco.” These are transcriptions of the recording.

A related instance of ostinati in contrary motion occurs in “Kaleidoscope,” a track from the Elektric Band album, Light Years. Generally, much of the composition relies on the use of layered ostinati. The opening ostinati (example 7.7) include the same intervallic relationships as were used in “Flamenco” (C, D, F, and G). The ostinati are then transposed down one whole step, adding the pitches Bb and Eb to the collection. The metric placement of C and G at the

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74 Chick Corea, Tap Step.
75 Chick Corea, Light Years.
beginning of the vamp urges one to hear C as a pitch center throughout. Considering all of the pitches together—C, D, Eb, F, G, Bb, C—one finds that they constitute the majority of the C blues scale. Corea continues to add layers of ostinati that appear on larger hypermetric levels as the piece moves on. An ostinato in the bass part is eventually added (at :43), which helps solidify C minor. A sparse synthesizer ostinato enters at 1:04 and includes A natural, which more precisely defines the minor mode as dorian. The melody proper does not actually enter until 2:08. While the ostinati strongly indicate the C-minor tonality, it is interesting to note how Corea organizes the melody over these structures. Among other things, he utilizes transpositionally related motives (2:25 to 2:29) that locally embellish related keys (Eb and Bb major), which keep the music from becoming stale.

![Example 7.7. Ostinati in contrary motion from “Kaleidoscope” (0:21 to 2:51, 3:34 to 4:16, and 6:24 to 7:07). These are transcriptions from the recording.](image)

Another of Corea’s compositions for the Elektric Band, “Cool Weasel Boogie,” also features layers of ostinato. The piece begins with a four-measure bass ostinato that is repeated once. The ostinato is primarily rhythmic, as the pitches change when the chords change. Harmonically, there are eight bars of Cm7, eight bars of Fm7, and eight bars of Abm7, totaling twenty-four bars. In the last bar of Abm7, there is a slight rhythmic alteration to account for a

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76 Chick Corea, *The Elektric Band.*
Bbm7, which serves as a chromatic passing chord between the Abm7 and Cm7.\textsuperscript{77} Once the Cm7 chord is reached again, the twenty-four bar ostinato repeats, and it continues to repeat throughout the piece.\textsuperscript{78} The large-scale harmonic rhythm affords Corea the ability to develop ideas at length over each chord.

Several of the twenty pieces from Corea’s \textit{Children’s Songs} rely on simple ostinati in the left hand.\textsuperscript{79} In the preface of the score, Corea writes that he composed the first piece to “convey simplicity as beauty, as represented in the spirit of a child.” While being notably less complex than his other compositions, several of the pieces are actually quite ambiguous harmonically. The first of these pieces features a two-measure ostinato that immediately implies cadential motion in the key of C (example 7.8). Listening forward, it becomes clear that the functional implication is being overridden by the prominence of G in both the ostinato and the melody. The right hand enters with an angular melody that touches on scale degrees from both G major and G minor. Additionally, the piece ends with G being played in both hands. Thus, despite its functional implications, the ostinato ultimately emphasizes G as a pitch center in the piece, which is centric and not tonal. In most of the \textit{Songs}, the ostinati serve a similar function, that is, to emphasize a pitch center.

\textsuperscript{77} The Abm7 serves as an embellishing chord prefix to the Cm7. This juxtaposition of two chords sharing a chromatic-third relationship is one of the primary ways in which Corea uses these harmonic structures (see chapter four).

\textsuperscript{78} Note the exclusive use of minor seventh chords here. For discussion of similar use of chords in parallel motion, see chapter five.

Example 7.8. Ostinato from “Children’s Song No. 1.” This is a transcription of the recording.

For Corea, an ostinato is a compositional building block used to emphasize a pitch center. While it is possible to have several pitches involved, a single pitch class is often stressed due to metric placement and/or sheer repetition. Considering the passages that were examined, fusion pieces were the most common (though not the only) contexts in which Corea used ostinati. Their often static nature (unless they are larger in scale, as in “Cool Weasel Boogie”) is more compatible with this style.

Vamps

The authors of the *Grove Music Online* article on vamps indicate that in jazz, a vamp is “an introductory or transitional progression of simple chords repeated until a soloist’s entrance” (Kidson and Root [n.d.]). They go on to write that, “in some forms of jazz (modal, jazz-rock, Latin jazz) and popular music (especially funk), an entire piece may be based on a succession of open-ended vamps.” This latter portion addresses the situations in which one will, more often than not, find vamps in Corea’s music.

“Lenore,” a piece from *The Leprechaun* (discussed in chapter six), employs a vamp between AM7 and GM7 in the introduction.\(^8^0\) While pitch centers are only weakly established throughout this piece, it is clear that in this instance, the GM7 is a neighbor to the AM7, thus

\(^{80}\) Chick Corea, *The Leprechaun*. 
making A the pitch center. Besides serving in the introduction, the vamp also extends somewhat into the first part of the body of the piece, providing harmonic support for the opening of the theme.

The track entitled “Fickle Funk,” which appeared on Secret Agent, is based almost entirely on vamps consisting of minor 7th chords. The piece begins abruptly with a vamp between Fm7 and Ebm7, over which the melodies are played. It is best to consider the Ebm7 a chromatic, nonfunctional neighbor chord to the Fm7. After two repetitions of these chords, the music moves to a vamp between Gm7 and Abm7. Here, the Abm7 is a chromatic, nonfunctional neighbor chord to the Gm7. Ultimately, the piece is centric, with particular emphasis on the Fm7 chord (due mainly to its formal placement). On a larger scale, the Gm7 functions as a neighboring chord to the Fm7.

Composed several years later for the Elektric Band, “Elektric City” displays several of the same characteristics as “Fickle Funk.” After a short introduction, a vamp begins between chords built from C and Bb (example 7.9). Above the bass note C, the right hand plays an EbM triad, which slides down to a Dm triad. Combining these pitches results in the collection \{C, D, Eb, F, G, A, Bb\}, which constitute a dorian mode. The triads played over the Bb share the same T10 transposition that is shared by the bass pitches and consequently comprises the Bb dorian scale. These harmonies are present throughout and are only altered during the chorus (:48 to 1:05). Here, the new harmonies created—Cm7-FM-Bbm7-EbM—reflect the respective C and Bb dorian modes in that the major chords serve as incomplete subdominant suffix chords to their tonic minor chords.

81 Chick Corea, Secret Agent.
Example 7.9. Simplified vamp from “Elektric City.” These are transcriptions of the recording.

In general, Corea tends to use vamps when composing fusion-oriented pieces; all of the pieces analyzed above are from fusion recordings. Each of the vamps examined in this chapter include chords of the same quality and one of the chords in the vamp is usually a nonfunctional neighbor to the other. Even though they may seem structurally equivalent (as in “Elektric City”), the chord that leads the vamp is typically more structural. Though vamps are chordally based, a pitch center is usually asserted; in all of the excerpts, the bass of the first chord serves this role. It is also worthy of mention that the melodic material occurring over one of the chords will sometimes occur over the other at a transposed level (albeit sometimes varied).

There are many similarities between pedal points, ostinati, and vamps. All three of these harmonic techniques serve to emphasize a tonic by assertion. The pitch center is often emphasized by repetition and by metric and formal placement, or, in the case of pedal points, by simply never leaving the pitch. In the chordally based vamps, the bass of the first chord is normally the pitch center. Ostinati by definition are not harmonically based, though the way in which Corea uses them sometimes implies harmony (perhaps not triadic structures). Vamps are, in a sense, also rhythmic ostinati, as the featured chords normally appear in the same metric position upon repeat. Occasionally, Corea combines these techniques within a single composition. In “Cool Weasel Boogie,” he layers ostinati but also includes a harmonic vamp that
repeats every twenty four bars. In “Return to Forever,” the pedal point on G is part of an ostinato in the left hand. Because of the repetitive nature of these techniques, none of them allows for a great deal of harmonic directionality. The intrigue of a particular piece often surrounds what goes on above these structures.
CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSION

By now, the reader should be aware of several different harmonic structures contained in Corea’s compositions. While much has been discussed, the passages examined represent only a small portion of his oeuvre. In the absence of an exhaustive survey, conclusions will be drawn based only on the music that was studied. This chapter will cite interactions and similarities between techniques and also discuss general observations concerning frequency.

The passage from “North Africa” (example 3.4) was one of the first excerpts discussed to include a rich variety of harmonic structures. In examining the foreground, one finds local functionality in the form of cadences (both traditional and tritone-substitute versions) and predominant-to-dominant motion. The subdominant prefixes also mildly tonicize the major seventh chords they precede. They illustrate very well the concept of ellipsis of the dominant, which Corea seems to employ for contrapuntal reasons. At the middleground, he connects the tonic chord to the predominant Neapolitan through passing motion. This portion of the progression could be considered line-based in the most general sense, since it is essentially the harmonization of a descending bass line.

Although “Humpty Dumpty” (example 4.6) was cited primarily for its inclusion of chromatic-third-related chords both as embellishing chords and as key relationships, other structures are also evident. The first four chords constitute a portion of a CSLT. This essentially means that an initial set of chords shares a transpositional relationship of $T_2$, $T_3$, $T_4$, $T_6$, $T_8$, $T_9$, or $T_{10}$ with at least one subsequent set of chords. As in “North Africa,” ellipsis of the dominant is exploited through the use of a mildly-functional subdominant prefix to close out the subordinate Gb key center. Functional cadential motion is also evident at the middleground between the tonic
and dominant of the main key. In the latter half of the progression, Corea does employ parallel harmonies (minor seventh chords) similar to planing, though performances may not reveal exactly-transpositionally-related voicings.82

The “No Mystery” excerpt (example 5.5) first covered in the planing chapter exhibits several other harmonic structures. Functional harmony is evident on the foreground in the cadential motion at the end of the passage. A nearly linear planing passage spans the gap between the tonic and the predominant Neapolitan, which form a middleground functional progression. The first three of these modally mixed major seventh chords share a T₅ relationship with the subsequent three, meaning that they are not part of a CSLT. However, one can still hear the transpositional relationship. To top (or bottom) the passage off, a pedal point played by the bassist creates interesting tensions with the chords above it until the structural dominant is reached and bass changes.

In “Morning Sprite” (example 6.2), a line-based progression passes between a functional middleground ii7-V7 progression. Local functionality occurs at the end of the passage, where an applied ii7-V7 (tritone-substitute dominant) progression weakly tonicizes Ab. A four-chord portion of the descending progression also features planing. Though not included in the corresponding example, the root of the Ab7 (V7) at the end does resolve to a Db, which is held as a pedal point by the bass player for several bars, over which Corea plays several different chords.

The excerpts mentioned above are not the only ones that combine different harmonic structures, but they are some of the richer passages in this regard.

82 This is an issue with jazz harmony in general. While chord symbols in a score may indicate one idea, a musician’s realization of these chords may change from performance to performance. The possibility of omitted tones and the abundance of potential substitute tones and/or chord alterations creates many problems when one is not talking about exact transcriptions of a particular performance. Thus, one is sometimes forced to talk about harmonic motion and voice leading abstractly to make a point.
Several of the techniques discussed in this paper share similarities with one another. Planing and line-based progressions both tend to serve as passing progressions that link structural chords ("Chelsea Shuffle," "No Mystery," "The Slide," "Morning Sprite," "Ezinda," "Lenore," and "Stretch It") and both rely heavily on lines. Planing by its definition suggests transpositionally-related chords and thus when the transpositional unit is a half or whole step, several moving lines are usually present (albeit, sometimes more abstractly, depending on the performance).

Transposition is a unifying feature for a few of the structures. First, as mentioned above, the transposition operation is what creates planing. Secondly, several of the vamps featured in chapter seven and elsewhere ("View From the Outside," examined in chapter five) also include chords of the same quality and can be thought of as being unified by transposition in addition to repetition. Third, when chromatic-third relationships occur locally between chords of the same quality and the chords share the same T₃₉ or T₄₈ relationships, the transposition operation becomes an important feature of the passage constituted by these chords. Finally, a topic that has some overlap with both planing and chromatic-third relationships, CSLTs, by their definition are brought together by transposition. Somewhat different than the rest of these structures, a chord in a CSLT (full or partial) does not always share a local transpositional relationship with an adjacent chord but instead can be part of a set of chords that shares a transpositional relationship with a subsequent set of chords.

Prolongation is also an interesting concept in reference to Corea’s work. From the passages analyzed here, it seems rare that Corea actually prolongs a harmony. Prolonging the motion from one structural chord to another is much more common. This type of prolongation is often (but
not always) achieved through passing motion, which is typically non-functional. In some passages, the structural chords are functional, as in “Hand Me Down,” “Prelude to El Bozo,” “North Africa,” “Looking at the World,” “What Game Shall We Play Today?,” “No Mystery,” “The Slide,” and “Morning Sprite.” In others, the structural chords lack function, as in “King Cockroach,” “Litha,” “Chelsea Shuffle,” and “Ezinda.”

Speaking more generally about the excerpts analyzed in this paper, non-functional harmony is much more common than is functional harmony. Within the pieces containing functional harmony, it is quite common that other nonfunctional structures exist as well. (The two passages that include only functional harmony—“Night Streets” and “Love Castle”—are essentially vehicles for improvisation.) In fact, at least two examples from each of chapters four through six incorporate functional harmony in some way. On the other hand, the structures in chapter seven, particularly pedal points and ostinati, are somewhat static in nature and leave little room for functional harmony. One can argue that the E/A at the end of the passage from “Love Castle” (example 7.2) serves as a dominant, but the pedal point on A appears to diminish any latent functionality. The vamp from “The Slide” (which was analyzed mainly because it is a line-based progression) is the only excerpt in chapter seven that includes functional harmony.

It is equally rare for specific nonfunctional harmonic structures to exist by themselves. Chromatic-third relationships can be present on the local level, where they serve as embellishing chords. At various levels of the middleground, they can sound as temporary key centers (as in some CSLTs) or as large-scale key relationships. The chromatic mediants in the opening of “Inner Space” (example 4.4) are quite possibly the only ones that are not functional (in the

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83 An argument could be made that this passage prolongs a harmony (EbM7).
hierarchical, structural sense), despite their participation in a partial CSLT. No pitch in particular seems to be emphasized in the passage, thus requiring the atonal categorization.

The same is generally true for planing and line-based progressions. Their purpose is usually to connect to a structural chord or to serve as a link between two structural chords. The planing in “View From the Outside” and “El Bozo Part 2” (examples 5.1 and 5.2, respectively) are two examples of planing serving independently. In “View,” the parallel chords are part of a vamp and serve as the harmony for the majority of the piece. Likewise, the planing in “El Bozo Part 2” is comprised of I7-IV7 progressions in several keys that are not subordinate to other harmonic structures. The key centers are fairly transient, and it seems plausible that Corea could have continued using this harmonic motive to great effect. In terms of line-based progressions, the only one that gives the impression of being somewhat aimless is the second progression from “Stretch It.” Neither endpoint of this contracting/expanding wedge holds any structural value apart from the quasi-voice exchange.

Pedal points, ostinati, and vamps by their very nature require other musical material to be present. They are bases (and sometimes “basses”) upon which one can add virtually anything. Needless to say, they never occur as stand-alone structures in the excerpts analyzed in this paper.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, style was a secondary concern in this study. Only one hard bop piece (“Litha”) and two “classical” pieces (“Brasilia” and “Children’s Song No. 1”) were examined. As a result, very little can be generalized about these two styles. One similarity shared by the latter two pieces is that they both employ structures which assert a tonic. The remaining passages were taken from fusion and post-bop pieces, with the majority of the
examples representing the former style. Passages representing both styles appear in all of the chapters with one exception: none of the ostinai examples are post-bop pieces.

This thesis explored a single musical parameter (harmony) and surveyed only a small portion of Corea’s musical offerings. To gain a fuller understanding of Chick Corea as a composer necessitates a more exhaustive study. One hindrance here is the lack of transcriptions for much of his work. Other perennial, relevant issues are the question of composition versus improvisation (of great importance when embarking on an analysis of the avant-garde music of Circle) and the lack of a methodology for modeling voice-leading in non-bebop jazz music, which does not lend itself as well to Schenkerian thinking.

While this paper looked at harmonic material and provided insight into several of the more prominent, recurring idioms Corea favors, much can be written about various other musical parameters. Some scholars have already written about melodic principles in his music and others have examined his improvisatory material. In his younger years, Corea was a percussionist and still plays drums on occasion. His propensity for complicated rhythmic patterns and hemiolas is evident in many pieces and is a trademark of his style. A thorough investigation of rhythmic, metric, and formal principles in his music would most likely prove very rewarding and illuminating.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


DISCOGRAPHY


