

Puns and Pivots

People often give me a hard time – and perhaps rightly so – because I am a punny guy. I keep puns down to a minimum these days in conversations, but not in music. The pun depends on double meanings – words that can be understood in two different ways. In jazz, there are plenty of multiple meanings - in harmony notes, in rhythms, even in ambiguous pitches such as bends or slides. All of these give richness to the jazz language that can be very satisfying. Even if you can't stand puns, look for double meanings in music.

Opportune-ities

(Sorry about the pun.)

There are several basic ways to use ambiguity in jazz: through harmony, expression, and rhythm. In harmony, each pitch of the chromatic scale can be used in multiple ways, as explained below. That's particularly helpful in outside playing. This chart focuses only on 3, 5 and 7 – you can also extend it to use other chord tones (and the 1 is omitted as it's self-evident). Use enharmonic spellings whenever helpful in the chart.

Pitch Harmonic possibilities

C	3 rd of Ab, Ab7, or Am;	5 th of F, F7, or Fm;	7 th of Db or D7
C#,Db	3 rd of A, A7, or Bbm;	5 th of F#, F#7, or F#m;	7 th of D or Eb7
D	3 rd of Bb, Bb7, or Bm;	5 th of G, G7, or Gm;	7 th of Eb or E7
D#,Eb	3 rd of B, B7, or Cm;	5 th of Ab, Ab7, or Abm;	7 th of E or F7
E	3 rd of C, C7, or C#m;	5 th of A, A7, or Am;	7 th of F or F#7
F	3 rd of Db, Db7, or Dm;	5 th of Bb, Bb7, or Bbm;	7 th of Gb or G7
F#,Gb	3 rd of D, D7, or Ebm;	5 th of B, B7, or Bm;	7 th of G or Ab7
G	3 rd of Eb, Eb7, or Em;	5 th of C, C7, or Cm;	7 th of Ab or A7
G#,Ab	3 rd of E, E7, or Fm;	5 th of C#, C#7, or C#m;	7 th of Db or D7
A	3 rd of F, F7, or F#m;	5 th of D, D7, or Dm;	7 th of Bb or B7
A#,Bb	3 rd of F#, F#7, or Gm;	5 th of Eb, Eb7, or Ebm;	7 th of B or C7
B	3 rd of G, G7, or Abm;	5 th of E, E7, or Em;	7 th of C or C#7

Even though it may seem like a lot of work at first, you should study these possibilities until they become second nature to you. You'll be amazed at the harmonic doorways that open up to you as you do. To practice, see how many possibilities you can quickly name or finger for each pitch, without looking at the chart above.

With expressions, you can use bends, slides, half sounds, growls, clusters, etc. See Chapter 4D: *Special Effects* for more details.

With rhythms, you can use off-rhythms, slower-to-faster, rubato, shifting rhythmic pulses, etc. See Chapters 5B to 5D for more details.

The Pivot Point

Once you discover a “multiple meaning” note, you can use it as a pivot point. Then three basic choices open up to you:

- Playing the pivot note but not going in a new direction.
- Hinting at a new direction but not staying there.
- Switching to a new direction.

Try all three choices in your playing. You can vary between them to add a sense of mystery, development, or both. The possibilities are endless – pivot points are truly one of the magical aspects of jazz improvisation. **Note:** For more on (moron?) puns, see "Deft-initions" in the More folder.