Melodic and Rhythmic Color Combinations

Two of the most powerful improvisation tools we have are melodic color and rhythmic color. Combining these tools can be very useful, and it's not really that hard to do.

It's Closer than You Think

Let's start with the obvious: the least colorful pitches to emphasize are the 1 and 5, so the most colorful pitches must be nearby – and they are. The 7 and 2 color tones are close to the 1, and the #4 and the 6 are close to the 5. The fact that these color tones are so close to the resting tones is interesting; many improvisers settle for bland when color is literally a step away.

And it doesn't stop there – rhythmic color works in much the same way. The interesting rhythmic notes are right next to the more boring ones. Move just an eighth-note or a triplet to the left or right of beat 1 or beat 3 and you'll find great rhythmic color.

Twice as Nice

When you start a solo or a phrase inside a solo, consider combining melodic *and* rhythmic color. You can use the table below as a guide – just choose one possibility from each column, combine them and use them to locate your starting note in a solo or phrase. For example, you could play the 7 on beat 2 1/2, or the 2 on beat 4 1/2, etc. And don't worry about pre-planning; choosing just one note at the beginning won't stifle your creativity.

Color Pitch Degree	Color Rhythmic Beat
2	1 1/2
4 (Minor)	2 1/2
#4 (Major, Dominant)	3 1/2
6	4 1/2
7	

Or Even More

If you add non-harmonic tones to the available color tones, and triplet subdivisions to the available rhythmic beats, you get even more possibilities for melodic and rhythmic color. For example, choose an item in the first column and an item in the second column to generate a good starting point for your idea. Remember to resolve non-harmonic tones appropriately (see Chapter 3A: *More Melodic Color* for details).

Color Pitch Degrees	Color Rhythmic Beats
b2, 2, b3, 4, #4, b6, 6, b7, 7	1+1/3, 1+1/2, 1+2/3
	2+1/3, 2+1/2, 2+2/3
	3+1/3, 3+1/2, 3+2/3
	4+1/3, 4+1/2, 4+2/3