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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2008

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## Review of George Garzone's Chromatic Triadic Approach DVD

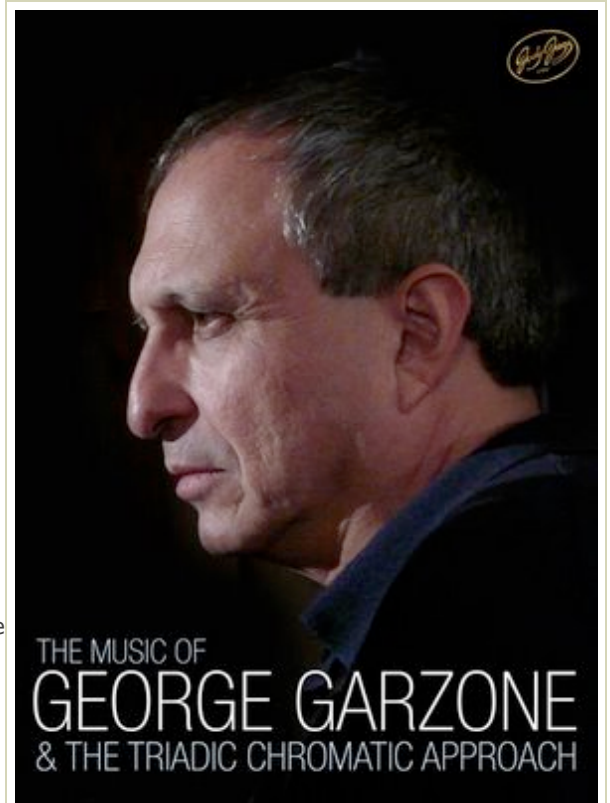
In the world of Jazz education there are few teachers who have been as influential as George Garzone over the past few decades. He is the quintessential musician's musician. Most serious players are aware of his playing; yet few laymen know his music. The list of his students reads like a who's who of major modern Jazz saxophonists. Just a few of the students he taught when I was studying with him in the 80's were Donny McCaslin, Josh Redman, Douglas Yates, Kenny Brooks, Chris Speed, Seamus Blake, Mark Turner, Matt Otto, Chris Cheek, and Teadross Avery. Rest assured there will be more major artists emerging from the Garzone School in years to come.

George has been promising an educational book for as long as I can remember and some of his signature lines have been circulated by his students, but up 'till now there has been no way to learn his method without attending an East Coast Jazz conservatory and shelling out \$100 an hour to study with him privately.

Last year I posted a few pages of George's lines along with an explanation of his triadic concept by one of his former students. George asked me to withdraw the post. He told me that his book was in the works and when it was finished I would be one of the first to get a copy. I was skeptical because he had been working on this fabled book



for over a decade. I was surprised and excited to learn that Jody Espina (also a former student of Garzone) of JodyJazz Mouthpieces (which Garzone endorses), had produced a Jazz improvisation instructional two DVD set called *The Music of George Garzone & the Triadic Chromatic Approach*.



When I studied with Garzone twenty years ago his teaching concept seemed fairly abstract and esoteric. He was known for turning all the lights out during his Avant-Garde ensemble and telling his students to play a tree or play a sweep. It was hard to define his concept and it seemed there was a certain amount of osmosis involved in his teaching style. George didn't teach the nuts and bolts of Jazz improvisation. He was more like a Zen master you went to after you had all your fundamentals together and were ready to have your concept expanded. Back then it seemed to me that the way he skated on the jagged edge of the chord changes was something so abstract that it couldn't be talked about directly. Twenty years of teaching has crystallized Garzone's concepts to the point that he is able to convey them simply and clearly- in a way that can be widely understood.

George's deceptively simple yet devastatingly profound triadic chromatic concept can be explained in a just few minutes - although he stresses that the concept takes many years to truly master. He also emphasizes that a player first needs a strong foundation of Jazz harmony and the language of bebop in order to apply this triadic concept effectively- otherwise

when you take it out using the concept you'll have nothing to come back inside with.

Without going into full detail, the idea of Garzone's triadic chromatic concept is to take either major, minor, diminished or augmented triads and move them around chromatically and in random inversions. If you don't repeat the same inversion twice in a row and move chromatically on each successive triad you will be borrowing from the twelve-tone row. Triadic lines created in this way have a strong forward motion and resolve themselves often. Garzone argues that lines created using this concept are even more likely to resolve than lines created using chord-scales. He notes that scales cover and obscure the underlying chords, but that triads played in this particular way allow you to explore all of the different available tonalities.

I was surprised at how melodic the lines sounded, frequently resolving, when I watched Garzone demonstrate his concept over a root/fifth drone on the piano. Using the TCA, the improviser can easily create structures that are harmonically ambiguous, yet support the underlying harmony. This concept is much more than, as one of my students recently remarked, just a fancy way of skating over changes. The significant innovation here is the application of the 12-tone system in a way that allows the player to create these lines in a spontaneous and flexible way while improvising over changes. Many players have experimented with incorporating 12-tone lines in jazz improvisation, but all too often the 12-tone lines are taken note for note from sources like Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*. Probably because 12-tone lines are almost impossible to improvise on the fly.

It's clear that, as Garzone says in the DVD, to learn to fully apply this concept takes many years of practice. Although it's a simple concept to understand, it's clear that the average player will need to attune their mind to rapidly conceiving these lines through extensive time spent wood shedding this material. The thing I wonder about is: did Garzone develop this concept as a rationalization/explanation for the way he naturally hears things, or does he have this concept in mind clearly when he plays his crazy lines? It's most likely a little of both.

I must say that this DVD did give me a totally new understanding of why Garzone's lines sound so unique, and for that alone it is worth the price of the admission ticket.



The other piece the Garzone's formula is his Random Chromatic Approach which consists of two basic principles:

1. *The constructed melodic lines MUST stay within an interval of a Major 3rd.*
2. *The same intervals CANNOT be repeated consecutively in the same direction within the chosen Major 3rd.*

The idea here is avoid repeated patterns, which seems to one of George's major guiding principles in music and in life. George once told me that the most succinct example of his concept is his line on *Have You Met Miss Jones*. When I first heard this line on his *Four's and Two's* CD I was floored. This line moves so unpredictably in the direction it takes as it weaves in and out of the changes that you almost lose track of which way is up and which way is down. While this line would seem pretty dissonant with a standard analysis, it still sounds consonant when played along with the standard head.

I think that if you really want to get inside Garzone's concept then some time spent with this line would be a good place to start. With George's permission I have included a link to a PDF chart of this line.

The two DVDs in the set are packed with over three hours of footage, plus 32 pages of supplemental material in PDF format. The first DVD has six performances by the Fringe + saxophonist Frank Tiberi (a major inspiration and influence for Garzone), vibraphonist Mike Manieri, and guitarist Chris Crocco. One of these tracks is of George doing a solo version of "I Want to Talk About You" with a nod to Trane. George's sound is amazing on these DVDs. As a television and DVD producer myself I really appreciated the production quality of every aspect of this project.



The Jody Jazz mouthpiece George plays is, to my ears at least, more focused, centered and maybe even cleaner sounding than the Otto Links that he used to favor. It's hard to imagine how a tenor sound could be any better; it's rich, warm, sweet, fat, and complex. I must say that this recording made me want to try a hard rubber Jody Jazz piece. There's also a duo version of Soul Eyes with Mike Manieri that is stunningly beautiful. George's sound here is something like a perfect marriage of Getz and Trane.

There are examples on the first DVD of the CTC played on piano, soprano, tenor and guitar, all over a root/fifth pedal. The last two are play along tracks, one in 3/4 and the other in 3 over 4, so the student can practice the concept over a drone. After watching the first DVD the student should have a clear understanding of how to apply the concept and be able to start the process of learning to apply it.

The second DVD in the set starts off with a great exposition by George on sound. After all, George is like the Louis Armstrong of the saxophone and a Garzone DVD wouldn't be complete without this lesson. George stresses the importance of a loose lower lip and gives an airstream development exercise that Joe Viola (who also taught George) used to have me do. He also talks about focusing the airstream down into the instrument. George plays a 10\* tip opening, but I wouldn't recommend such an extreme tip opening to just anyone. He guarantees a hernia within two weeks to anyone who isn't prepared for such a monster piece.

I hear that George runs ten miles each morning, which has to be a big factor in his ability to get such a massive sound. Garzone goes on to talk about how his sound concept was influenced by his uncles and cousins, who all had the spectacular Garzone family sound. George learned the saxophone in the back of his uncle Rocco's pizza shop and would come home from his lessons with flour all over his clothes from the flying spinning pizza dough. This chapter is as entertaining as it is educational.

There are twelve play along tracks on the second DVD, some are the usual Aebersold style play-along and some have George trading choruses with you. These tracks are like sitting in with the Fringe (but without the intense stress that comes from the real experience.) Aebersolds will never seem satisfying again after a few hours with this multi-media Fringe play along DVD. Here again the production quality shines. The second DVD is rounded out by extended interviews with all the musicians on the project.

The price tag of close to a hundred dollars may seem high compared to other instructional videos, DVDs or books, but when you see just how much great content is here you'll realize that it really is a bargain. You'd have to spend many hundreds of dollars to obtain this material in private lessons with Garzone (if you could even get accepted to the colleges where he teaches).

George, Jody Espina, and everyone else involved obviously have put a lot of love of hard work into the production of this project. I must say that it was well worth the long wait. This DVD is a must have for any serious student looking to expand their harmonic horizons and I have no doubt that it will be an important and influential piece of work in the years to come.



The Chromatic Triad Approach has been *unveiled!*

