Progressive Music and Beyond

A discussion with Ivan Bertolla

Going "Outside The Zone"

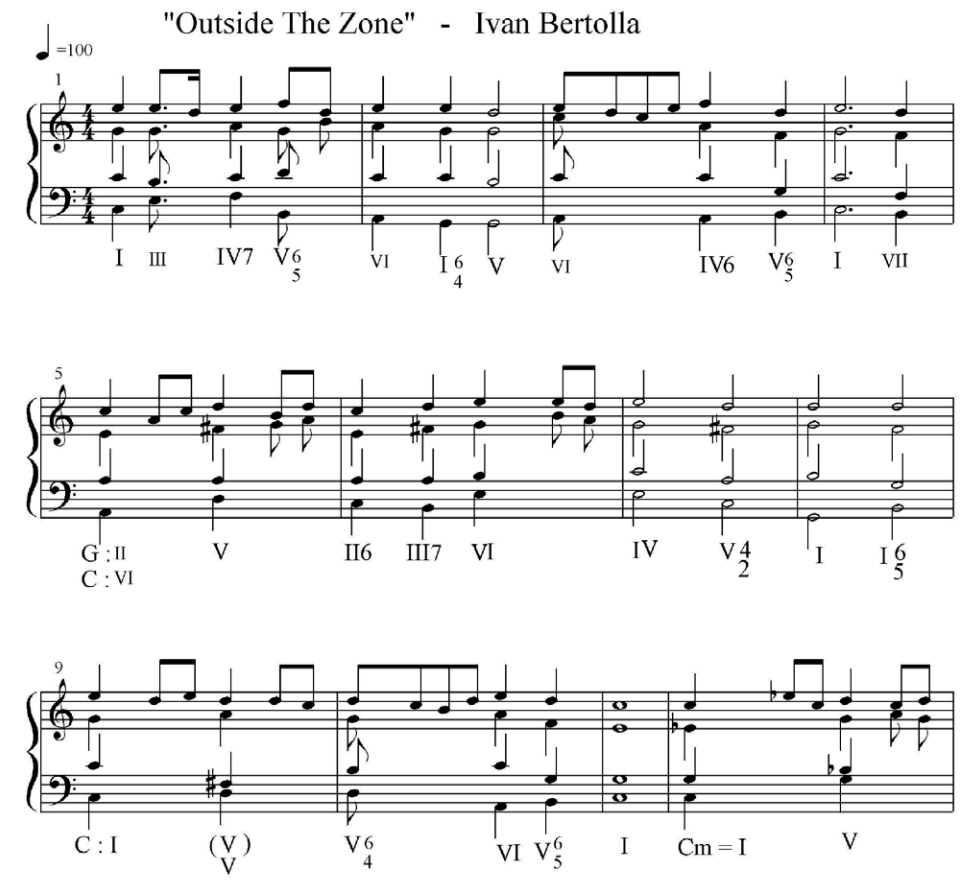
In past columns I have given examples of how to move music composition outside the normal - I IV V - zone . In addition I have given examples of how to use a basic pivot chord idea as a device to move into different keys. For example moving from an A major key to its parallel minor key (A minor). This month I want to expand this further by showcasing an entire composition of only 16 bars and how I structured it .
For those of you who have not studied music in a classical way I need to explain the numberings under the chords. These numbers refer to the distance between the intervals when the chord is inverted

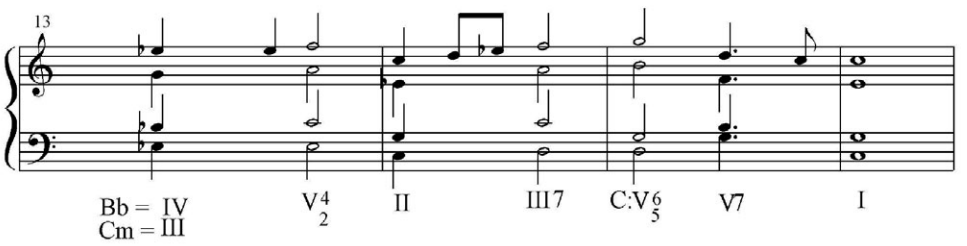
7th Chords

6 5	4 3	4 2
1st Inversion	2nd Inversion	3rd Inversion

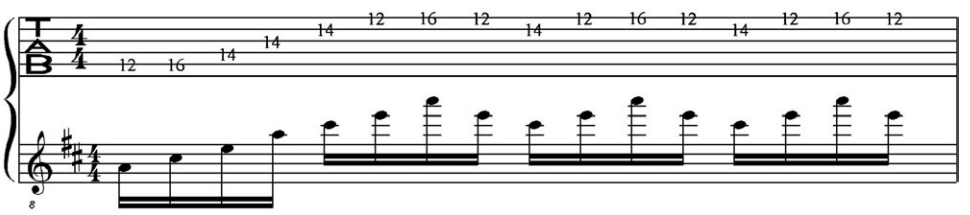
Triads

6	6 4	
1st Inversion	2nd Inversion	





This is a quick example of how you can cut up 16 bars of music and take the sections into different worlds of harmony. I have ignored using key signatures because I didn't want to make the score messy and confusing . I have divided the chords into 4 groups of notes (stems up and down.. In other words (vocal style) because aside the inversions there is voice leading occurring here. I will talk more about voice leading in future.
The 1st thing to notice is bar 5. I have pivoted into the key of G major but not in a cliched way (parallel major/minor) . The A minor chord = VI in the key of C Major and = II in the key of G Major. So it was ideal in this melody to use as a "pivot chord" and smooth transition from the key of C to G. The most cliched way of moving into another key happens at Bar 12. I use the parallel minor pivot from C major to C minor. In bar 13 I briefly went to E flat . The E Flat major chord = IV in the key of Bb Major and = III in the key of C Minor. I used the obvious dominant 7th in C to get back to the start of my piece which started in C major. Try and play this on a piano and you will hear how the piece gets "out of the zone" . This technique will only improve how you write music. If you know your music theory you can pen 10 of these out without hearing the melody and know that it will work every time. I advise you to learn the 4 diatonic harmonies in major and minor for both 7th chords and triads.



Circular Sweep Picking Guitar

Sweep picking as explained in previous columns is an efficient and enjoyable way of playing arpeggios very quickly. I have included a variation of an A major arpeggio this month using sweep picking. No tempo is included because I want you to play it as FAST as possible. Remember sweep picking is virtually strumming. So pick the 1st note of "A" up then the rest down . Make sure with your right hand palm you eliminate overlapping notes and tidy up noise. Your left hand should be articulate. The reason for this exercise this month is at the end of this arpeggio. From that high "E" onwards I want you to strum as fast as possible (up and down) the last part of the arpeggio. If you circular strumming is precise you will sound amazing. Good luck with it!!

Ivan Bertolla is a Melbourne Based composer/producer/guitar instructor who has released his debut CD worldwide of Cinematic music ***"Beyond The Skies Eternity".***
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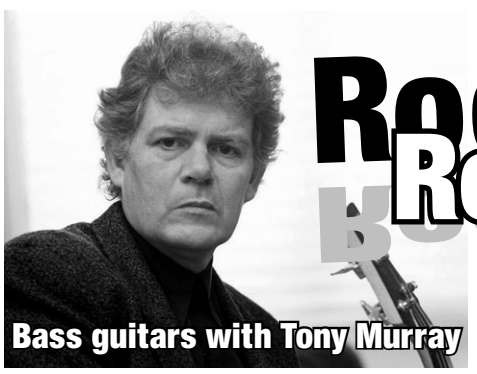
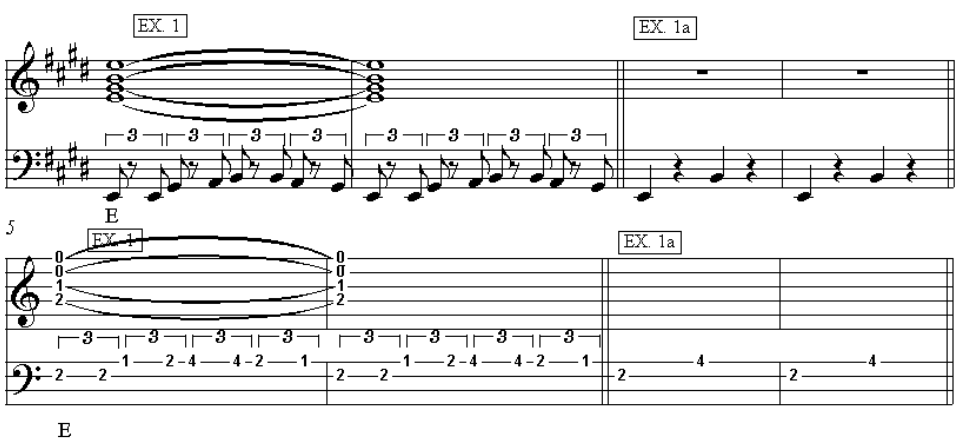


Rocking the Foundation

Chapter 2: MIXING THE INGREDIENTS

The appeal of musical performance to an audience often depends on whether the listener is engaged at the most basic, almost subliminal level – are the people going to dance, or tap their feet, or nod their heads – or walk away disappointed? If the music rocks, or swings, or smokes, the listeners will be hooked. Not so long ago a lazy reviewer would assess a promising new pop song as follows: 'Well, it's got a beat, and you can dance to it'. This 'beat' consists of at least three elements - rhythm, harmony and melody. Let's go, bass players, this is where we come in!
Ex 1 shows a single unit of harmony – *one* chord, with a bass line as it might be played in any number of popular music styles. Ex 1A shows it stripped down to its essentials, a two-beat pattern which has been used in just that form through centuries of popular and classical music, particularly the kind intended for dancing (in the west, not necessarily in other cultures). Within the four beats of the bar there is a hierarchy of emphasis – the first is the most important, followed by the third, then the 'off' beats, the second and fourth. Each is essential to the whole, as indeed are the subdivisions of the beats, triplets in this case.



With this hierarchy in mind, it seems logical that the first beat will be underlined by the root or tonic harmony, which in the example key is E. The third beat uses the next most important note of the chord, the fifth, B. The offbeats enable us to fill in the harmony with the G# (third of the scale) and A (fourth of the scale) as a melodic passing note. The latter note is not part of the harmony but it contributes substantially to the melody of the bass line, and hence to the overall feel of the piece.
Getting back to those triplets: in this particular rhythm, the 'swing' depends entirely on the execution of these little notes, even though they are subdivisions of the main beats of the bar. (Note: Trumpeter Louis Armstrong swings, like no other musician alive or dead, on the first four straight crotchets of his famous opening solo to *West End Blues,* playing each note *on the beat* – but he's an exceptional performer, to put it mildly!) In performance the triplets easily drift from ♩♩♩ in each beat to ♫.
However mathematical exactness is also to be avoided, being as deadly to the feel of the piece as sloppy execution. This is why sequencers have a 'humanise' function, to add and subtract randomly from each rhythmic duration and avoid exact equality. Music seems to be found somewhere in the mystical area between mathematics and incompetence!
In music generally, notes of a melody can be given a certain emphasis by a preceding upbeat. Think of the opening of Beethoven's Fifth symphony – as we musicians would say, 'Da-da-da- daaaahhhh!' The three short notes act as an upbeat, giving monumental impact to the long note on the *minor third* of the harmony – the definitive tragic statement. In our more modest example, each note of the harmony has its own little triplet upbeat, driving the bass line forward from note to note of the harmony. The cumulative effect, we hope, is a full dance floor and the crowd screaming for more.
By concentrating on a fundamental unit of harmony I have tried to show the internal logic of this kind of musical construction, with its multiple interlocking components – because next time we're going to put a rocket up the whole system!

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