

Reharmonization + back-cycling for Chord Melody Playing

Reharmonization is the process of enriching an existing chord progression or song by applying chord substitutions, and re-interpreting the chords given.

Before starting the following exercise, it is assumed that you already understand extension substitution, ^b5th substitution, + relative minors + majors; if not, do not undertake this page.

The first song we will use as a model is "Swanee River".

Here is the simple chord progression (given in the key of C):

C | F | C | G || C | F | C | G | C || G | C | F | C || C | F | C | G | C ||

this symbol will mean end of phrase.

There are 2 basic ways to reharmonize anything: 1) to start with the basic chords as a guideline and work them over; and 2) to chuck them aside and start from scratch. We will use the first method for now. First, you should try extensions; you might get something like the following:

C7 C6 | F7 | C19 | G7 || C7 | F7 | C7 G9 | C6 || G7 G9 | C7 | F6 | C6 || C7 | F9 | C9 G7 | C6 ||

This would still sound pretty ordinary but a little better than before. By the way, you may have noticed that major extensions were used on the I + IV chords while dominant 7th extensions were used on V. This is common procedure but for a more bluesy or gospel effect dominant extensions can be used on I and especially on IV

IF YOU DESIRE THIS CHANGE OF TONE COLOR (there are no rules other than personal taste so experiment).

Before you try any ^b5th substitutions, it is wise to try back-cycling. Using back cycling you might end up with something like this:

C7 Gm7 C7 | F7 G7 || E7#9 Am7 | D7 G7 || C7 Gm7 C9 | F9 G7 || Em7 Am7 D7 G7 | C6 || G7 Dm7 G7 | C7 Gm7 C7 | F7 G9 | C7 G7/b || C7 Gm7 C7 | F7 G7 || Em7 Am7 D7 G7 | C6 ||

Now you could go back and try ^b5th substitutions - like A67 for D7 etc. You will find that some songs do not lend themselves well to the ^b5th subst.

Experiment. The only real missing ingredients left in this progression are passing chords. The most common place to put in passing chords that are not covered by back-cycling is when leading to I, especially from II or IV. Some of the most common ways found to be pleasing of going IV to I are:

F C° | C ; F D7 | C ; F A67 | C ; F Dm7b5 | C ; F D9 Dm7b5 | C ; F Em | C ;

In conclusion, every chord substitution that theoretically may be tried is tempered by the melody of the song which still takes precedence over the harmony.