Holdsworth: "City Nights"

Creating mayhem with a common-tone approach

THIS WAS TO BE a retrospective on Allan Holdsworth's stylistic growth, with an analysis of his music via excerpts from various songs and solos. Then, at the last minute, Allan kindly supplied a rough mix of several of the songs he just completed for his new lp, Secrets. Allan selected this cut because, unlike his music previously appearing in print which contained solos with static harmonic motion, this piece sees him playing through a lot of changes.

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Let's first analyze the head and see how it relates harmonically to the accompanying progression. Note that Holdsworth has ingeniously taken a simple one-measure. three-note motif and used it as a basis for creating a majestic series of harmonic structures. For example, in measure 1, D represents the seventh of Ebmaj7, A is the suspended second of G/sus2 and G is the seventh of Am7add4 (a chord often mistakenly referred to as Am11; the ninth is not present). The chords themselves seem to be unrelated to one another, but closer examination reveals common tones. Ebmaj7 and Gsus2/B have two, G and D. In the final two chords in measure 4, Bbm7 and Email 3, you'll note that the progression becomes extremely angular, as the intervallic movement of their roots is an augmented fourth. Still, this poses no harmonic problem to our common-tone scenario, since the third and seventh of Bbm7 are the enharmonic equivalents of the thirteenth and third of Email3.

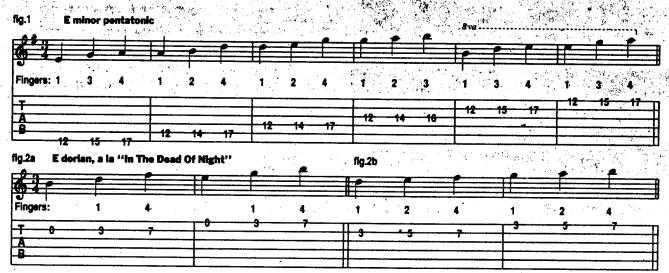
Measures 5-6 consist primarily of arpeggios, flawlessly executed with sweep-picking in conjunction with slurs. The first arpeggio (A E B F#), composed entirely of perfect fifths, exemplifies Allan's penchant for wide intervallic skips. He follows on beat 3 of measure 5 with an arpeggio pattern based on Am13 (A C E G B D F#) and commences to play various permutations of the chord. Then, in measures 8-11, there is a recapitulation of the theme, only this time the chord progression is reversed in each of the two-measure segments, and Em7add4 is substituted for Bb69/D.

Measures 12-23 introduce the progression that makes up the bulk of this piece. Throughout his first "chorus," Holdsworth plays through the changes with an uninterrupted, syncopated flow of primarily tied dotted eighth and sixteenth notes. The fluidity can be attributed partially to his smooth legato technique (using slurred slides, pull-offs and hammer-ons), but even expertise in this area would be of little consequence if not for Allan's gift for melodic development. Some of the same characteristics of the introductory chord progression also apply to melody. For example, the commontone idea is used in measure 17 by virtue of the tied-C note (the third of Alland the seventh of Dl) and with the tied Dl note (the third of Bmaj7 and the enharmonic equivalent of the seventh of Fm7add4) between measures 22 and 23.

The most important aspect of a good melody is that it doesn't break abruptly as the tonal centers shift below it. One device Allan uses is to begin a descending chromatic line on a harmonic or chord tone of one chord and ultimately resolve it on a harmonic tone of the next. This is the case in measures 20-22, as he plays through A7sus4 to Bibmaj9 by going chromatically from G, the seventh of A7sus4, to F, the fifth of Bibmaj9, then going from Bib6/F to Bmaj7 with a slightly longer chromatic line from D, the third of Bib6, to Ai, the seventh of Bmaj7.

The next chorus opens with a flurry of notes played within an extended scale pattern continuing unison notes he shifts along with the various tonal centers. In fig. 1-4 are examples of other extended scale patterns Allan uses. The first is the familiar E minor pentatonic, but with extended fingerings that result in groups of unison notes, as in measures 24-25. Figures 2a and 2b are patterns he used in the solo for "In The Dead Of Night" with U.K. Figure 3 is an ingenious symmetrical pattern based on the E 1+2, or half/whole tone diminished, scale appearing as part of a recurring theme in "Checking Out" [I.O.U.]. It will work against an E7 (especially if the voicing contains a \$5, \$9, \$9 or \$11 in conjunction with an unaltered thirteenth). Figure 4 is based on the same scale, but consists of a three-intervallic pattern moving in augmented fourths.

In measures 32-33 there are some extended fingerings, this time with a melodic pedal point on a high D, a common tone to Bm7add4, A7sus4, F69 and Bb69. In measure 35 Holdsworth approaches Amaj7 and Dmaj9 polytonally by playing the E major pentatonic (E F# G# B C#) against them. This is not really an "outside" move because it contains various harmonic extensions of each chord. In fact, as you analyze this piece in greater depth, you'll see that most of Allan's playing is within the confines of the proper chord/scale relationships. That is, until measures 41-42, when he decides to take an adventurous extended "outing" that sounds like a manic twelve-tone row.



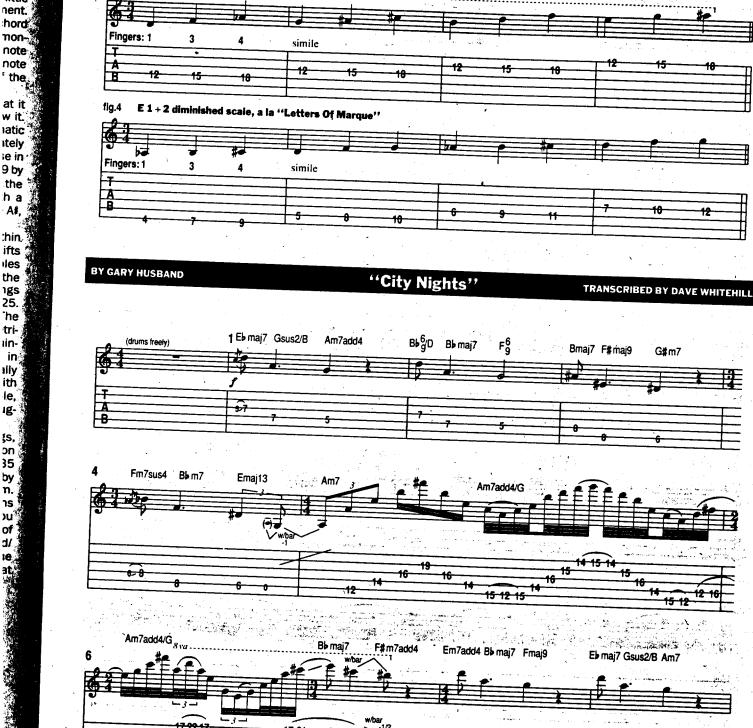


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E 1+2 diminished scale, a la "Checking Out"

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