

What might you play to kick off an improv jam with Flea and Chad?

Well, it could be anything. A lot of times it's a chord progression [Fig. 1], or just some groove. Around the time we were writing *By the Way*, I'd always be coming in with chord progressions like that—ones that have a real open, "human" sound to them. Something like that might end up being a section to a song. But sometimes those things don't go anywhere; they just go into the air. And I never remember anything, unless it's a thing I've just been doing. So I use a tape recorder a lot to record ideas.

What kinds of foundation do players need to get under their belts in order to improvise rhythm parts well?

To me, I think it's important, if you're in any given mode, to see the whole neck as one thing. The important thing is not the scale pattern; it's that those are the notes you *could* be playing at any given time. It's also important to remember the notes that *aren't* proper also have a place—whether it's passing notes, grace notes, or just this dissonant 12-tone thing. Once you see it that way, playing chords makes a lot more sense.

It definitely starts with understanding things like 7th, 9th, and 11th chords—chords with a lot of numbers behind them. And it's important to recognize that, much of the time, a chord with five or six (different) notes in it won't make sense when you hear it by itself. That was my mistake growing up, because the only chord book I had was Ted Green's *Chord Chemistry*. I would hear all these freaky chords and understand, "this chord is called 'this' because it's got these intervals in it," but I didn't know how to use them in context. So I spent a lot of time looking at sheet music, studying music by people who use those interesting chords—like Burt Bacharach, Elton John, and the Beatles. When you open up their songbooks and see they're using something besides minor and major chords, you start to see the way you can use those chords.

For instance, I saw an E7 \sharp 9 chord in a *Fiddler on the Roof* songbook and a Beatles song. If you play E7 \sharp 9 by itself, it's kinda dissonant. But when you go from E7 \sharp 9 to Am [Fig. 2], it makes a lot more sense. By seeing the similarity of the way it was used in both situations, I ended up using it that way in something myself. There are also chords that sound kinda messy when you play them by themselves [Fig. 3A]. That's like an E and D chord combined. It's good to go to a Cmaj7 [Fig. 3B] from that. I like using chords that have so many intervals in them that they become kind of a washy texture, not really something somebody would hear and know exactly what it was.

You've mentioned in interviews that you wanted to create guitar parts for *By the*

Fig. 1 • HEAR IT ONLINE
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J = 92

Chord progression: Cm9♭9, Cmaj7, G/B, A13♭9♯5

play 3 times

Fig. 2 • HEAR IT ONLINE
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E7 \sharp 9 Am

Figs. 3A-B • HEAR IT ONLINE
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E9sus4 Cmaj7

Fig. 4 • HEAR IT ONLINE
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Dmaj7/A C♯7 Aadd9 Bm(add4)/E C♯add11 Amaj7/E

Fig. 5 • HEAR IT ONLINE
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J = 84

Chord progression: Aadd9/E Am7/E

Figs. 6A-B • HEAR IT ONLINE
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A Mixolydian A Major

Figs. 7A-B • HEAR IT ONLINE
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A Dorian A Minor

Fig. 8 • HEAR IT ONLINE
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Moderately

Am7

Fig. 9A • HEAR IT ONLINE
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Cm7

Scale tones: 1 2 b3 4 5 b7 b9

Fig. 9B • HEAR IT ONLINE
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Cm7

Scale tones: 5 6 b7 1 2 b3 4 5