

Stretching The Changes—Polyrhythmically

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Here's a simple way to approach stretching the changes by using a 4 over 3 polyrhythm. I can't take credit for this idea since it was Bret Willmott who turned me on to it in his *Polyrhythms for Guitar* class. Working with this technique will definitely lead you to alternative ways of improvising over chord changes.

When the chord changes, we alter the new scale to fit on the beat. It's the most basic improvisation technique. Let's take a look at how we can alter the chords by using dotted half notes with a II V I progression. If we gave every chord 3 beats instead of 4, we would come up with the rhythm in Example 2. A7 would have to be struck twice to fill bar 2, but it also runs into bars 1 and 3 by 1 beat. We've displaced the harmonic rhythm or in other words, stretched the changes.

Example 1

Example 2

“...you'll have a new perspective on nailing changes.”

Let's go a step further and apply it in a linear improvisation context. The effect that it has over a “straight form” (i.e. example 1) creates an interesting feeling.

Example 3

If you use this idea as an exercise over an entire form of a tune (Bret highly recommends “All the Things You Are”) you will definitely feel the effect of superimposing your own rhythm over the chords, and you will now develop a new perspective on “nailing” the changes. You can also start the dotted half note on beat 2, (example 4) which would also displace the chords.

Example 4

By displacing the chords 1 beat, you create a new feeling for the polyrhythm. Also try other displacements. For example, displace the dotted half by 2 beats. A good friend of mine, Charles Lee, suggested displacing the dotted half by eighth notes. Bret also suggested displacing the dotted half notes by eighth note triplets. You can really get crazy with this idea. After you can feel the chord changes in the polyrhythm over a “straight” rhythm section, you can stretch your linear ideas to fit the polyrhythm in your head.