

“Spud” Murphy and the EIS System

(From Wikipedia and Dan Sawyer)

Miko Stefanovic (August 19, 1908 – August 5, 2005), better known as **Lyle ‘Spud’ Murphy**, was an American jazz multi-instrumentalist, bandleader, and arranger.

In addition to being a talented composer, arranger, and musician, Murphy became a renowned educator, writing over 26 books on various topics in music, such as instrumental techniques and music theory.

Murphy started his own swing band after leaving Benny Goodman’s organization where he arranged many of Benny’s early classics including Jingle Bells. After that period, he worked for the movie studios. As a staff writer he worked on countless movies doing dance numbers for the likes of Fred Astaire and Marilyn Monroe. He even arranged “Three Blind Mice” for the Three Stooges theme song. In the 1950s Murphy recorded jazz albums for Gene Norman, GNP and Contemporary labels. Dan Sawyer and Scott Page produced “The Ultimate Odyssey,” an album of Murphy’s music in 1981 which was later reissued on compact disc.

Murphy’s crowning achievement was his 12-volume course in composing, arranging, and orchestration for the professional musician titled The Equal Interval System. He taught mostly in Los Angeles but also a special course at the Mount Royal Conservatory in Calgary, Canada. He was an instructor who was voted Educator of the Year in 1990 by the Los Angeles Jazz Society.

Murphy died in Los Angeles two weeks short of his 97th birthday. In 2003, orchestra leader Dean Mora, a friend of Murphy, recorded some two dozen of his early swing arrangements in a tribute CD, *Goblin Market*.

Equal Interval System (EIS)

The Equal Interval System (EIS) (also known as the System of Horizontal Composition based on Equal Intervals) is a modern system of music composition developed by Murphy over a lifetime of research. Several courses based upon the EIS system were taught at Pasadena City College.

Many notable composers and arrangers have been students of the Equal Interval System, such as Tom Chase, Gerald Wiggins, Jimmie Haskell, Richard Firth, Mary Ekler, David Blumberg, Steve Marston, Clair Marlo, Dan Sawyer, Don Novello, Don Peake, Danny Pelfrey, Craig Sharmat, Scott Page, James L. Venable, Marcos Valle, and Oscar Peterson.

Notes Regarding Ted Greene's Pages on Application of Spud Murphy's EIS System

by Dan Sawyer, June 23, 2020

A number of Ted Greene's friends and students studied music with Lyle "Spud" Murphy. There was a lot of interest in the course especially among guitar players because EIS doesn't favor the traditional diatonic system of music. I encouraged Ted to study EIS as I had gotten so much out of it myself. Ted was interested and asked me if I could play something. I sat down at the family's piano and plunked out one of Spud's piano pieces. Ted got excited towards the end of the piece and asked me to repeat a section. "Those are guitar chords!" he exclaimed. I was surprised and impressed. These weren't just average guitar chords; easily identified, but lush and dense 5-note structures. Ted's "big ears" served him well that day. Anyway, that was Ted's motivation to dive in deeper and study Spud's method.

The EIS system is mainly a system (12 books) of harmony and music theory. Even though Spud was known mainly in the swing era as one of Benny Goodman's arrangers and later as an experimental jazz composer, the course he taught was not based in any musical style. It is based on the overtone series, and can be used for any style, including so-called classical or serious music.

The pages that Ted wrote out seem to be notes to himself after reading Spud Murphy's writings. They are probably reminders of those concepts and things that he wanted to practice on the guitar. The part of the EIS course that Ted studied was the elementary part, which was designed for rank beginners who knew little about music.

Ted did not get very far into the EIS music course, but he got a lot out of it. I wish Ted had gone deeper. I encouraged Ted to continue studying the EIS material. He said, "I'd love to get into this but I've still got so much to learn on the guitar. Maybe in 10 years."

Below is a brief rundown on Ted's EIS pages:

EIS – Bass in Motion thru Harmonized Melodic Patterns

There's not much interest here. There is a lot of repetition and it is very basic harmonically. The example Ted called "Modern" is the most interesting musically. The dotted notes confuse me. I don't know why they are there (measures 1, 3, and 4 for example). Dotted notes are also used later as in page 1, bar 21. That bar and others has 4 and ½ beats in it! Perhaps Ted meant to make the last note an 8th note as he does three bars later.

EIS teacher Tim Torrance has confirmed that "Bass in Motion" is from Spud's book number 2.

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Important Notes, Facts, Resources, and Devices of EIS Murphy System

Everything on these pages seem to be direct quotes from Spud Murphy explaining and introducing his course.

For 13), **4th octave contains**: 1, 2, 3, 4+, 5, 6, -7, called Scale Tones. **The 5th octave contains** would be the same, I believe, or possibly chromatic tones.

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Interesting Progressions Using Dominant 11th Chords

Progressions that Ted found interesting.

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“Spud” for Guitar

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Variations on Basic EIS Murphy Triad Progressions

This page shows Ted working out some of the EIS ideas.

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EIS Concepts for Harmonizing a Melody

“Shearing chords” refers to the George Shearing Quintet’s style of harmony, which was very popular in the 1950s and 60s.

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EIS Lesson #4

Ted saying “Good E3” means these are E3 root movements (ascending) that he liked. We would say a chord progression moving up in minor thirds.

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EIS Murphy System – Guides or Rules

More quotes or summaries by Ted. It’s important to note that these were the rules for the beginning of Murphy’s course where the primary objective is to teach smooth voice leading and how to write tonal music. Later in the course these rules don’t necessarily apply and Murphy teaches the student how to be much more free in their writing.

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EIS Murphy System - Resources and Devices

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EIS Practice – Various Concepts

“Everything in the course is reversible.” This is a statement from Spud. It means any of the music can be played backwards and still make musical sense.

C.O.P. means “Change of Position,” or what we would call chord inversions.

The boxes with E numbers are shorthand for Spud’s terminology, “Equal Intervals.” Of course, there are 12 tones in Western music, but Spud simplified it (in terms of intervals) to 6 tones. “E5 descending” means the chord progression is descending in what we call fourths. Thus; in the second example, C minor descends to G minor, and then G minor goes to D minor. (There is a mistake in the first example where it should say Ascending E5.)

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EIS Resources for Writing

This show Ted working out some more EIS ideas. These are mostly about chord progressions and voice-leading.

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