

Ted Greene on “Expanded Diatonic Key”

Three excerpts from audio recorded lessons with Mark Levy

Mark Levy’s Ted Greene Lesson #25 on “Expanded Diatonic Roots”

1992, October 1 (part 2)

http://www.tedgreene.com/audio/MarkLevy/25_TedGreeneGuitarLesson_MarkLevy_1992-10-01_part2.mp3

Time starts around 17:00

[We enter this recording in the middle of a discussion about reharmonizing “God Bless the Child.” Ted is explaining a method of trying all the possibilities.]

Ted: ...The “Main line” level of the song, what we call the “mid-line changes” to hear the basic chords that are good enough

Mark: This is an area I want to really attack. Yeah, basic chords and being able to take changes.... I get lock-in to, “It has to be this way,” just mentally, you know?

Ted: We have to find... Here’s what it is, and I think Bill Evans would agree with this because I heard that interview with Marian McPartland: you find a decent mid-line level of changes that are the bedrock. We’re not talking about every exquisite detail yet, just what the basic, main, good fundamental jazz changes should be in the middle, mid-range level of activity. Not too basic (that’s terrible), not even this basic [he plays....] because this is just not cool enough. You can call it that, though. You can still say I – VI7 – ii – V7.

Mark: I feel comfortable doing that.

Ted: Yes. But a level up from there, that you’re happy to play the basic changes, that they’re voiced just well enough to where you’re not saying, “I’m bored.” You know? Like, this is well enough to me. [He plays...] Nothing there bothers me. But if I voiced it...[he plays]...it’s too basic for my ears. And certainly the “campfire” level of [he plays...] This not even close.

Mark: You’re doing that as a starting level to develop a piece.

Ted: Yes, that’s fair. And then you say, “How can I re-voice it without going to the ultimate and exquisite fanciness yet?” You say, “Well, do I know any other Eb extensions?” “Well, sure I do. I know all these major 9’s, and 6/9’s, and whatever.” [He plays...]

Mark: And the ability to harmonize it, and use....and deviate from the straight changes. You’re not using what you were talking about: a dominant II...

Ted: No, no. You try to hear what the normal changes are. Because these charts are not usually very perfect for that: to get a nice great set of blowing changes, or improvising changes. This isn’t bad stuff, but... For instance, for my money, one thing in musical art is: you don’t give away something so soon, that when it arrives in a larger context its value has been diminished. I really object to that in music. Anything, any tune I hear, or anything where I... Like, here this tune, this chord in a song, and then later, about 4 beats later they come back with it again. “Wait a minute! No. One or the other, but not so back-to-back.”

Mark: Right. It loses value.

Ted: It does. [Back to “God Bless the Child”] So for them to come out of the gate and go [he plays]...they mean well. Those are the original changes, probably. The only problem for me is when Ab6 is used...[he plays...] we’re right back with it. I mean, it doesn’t sound exciting. But if my ears were made hungry for Ab major, because I haven’t heard it yet...[he plays...] these are what I was doing before...I might save that, since that’s so flavorful, because that’s a IV dominant. I love IV dominant. I think I’ll save it for the second go around. So I’m going to try for another flavor. [He plays...] I’m going to go for Five-minor [v]. No, I can’t because we’re about to get to Five-minor. That’s our next chord! I’m looking for chords I can go to from Eb that will fit the melody, and that will not be disruptive to get from there to Five-minor next. So, I’m going to try the Five of the Five-minor [V of v]. It probably won’t sound good, but I’m going to just try it. [He

plays...]. Actually, I kind of dug it when I heard it. It was different. Not sure that’s the mid-line. I’m going to try a half-step into it. [He plays...] Wow, that’s wild. That’s not what I want to hear, but... Now I’m going to try a Five-altered [V7 alt.]. Because altered dominants lead very well into the minor on the same root. Like Bb’s altered dominants to lead into the minor sound. [He plays...]. That’s wild. It’s clashy, but I dig it. Yeah, I like the sexiness of it. [He plays...]

So, what I’m saying is: you can find out, Mark. Sometimes if you say, “Well, I don’t know, Ted. Please help me more” then I will. But sometimes you.... What we got into is that IV major character. We can feel now. Can I play it in another key, because the value is not fresh anymore, because we’ve heard it too many....

Mark: Of course.

Ted: For both of us. You’ll feel it. If I establish this key where we’re happy to be in it. Let me give you a Gershwin-esque intro. [He plays...]

Mark: Way cool.

Ted: Thanks. Now we’re ready for this key, right? I want to hear Billy [Holiday] come in...[He plays...]

Mark: Now, there you went to Two-minor [ii].

Ted: Two-minor. That’s what I did here too. But I said how it’s also a V. Curtis Mayfield would call it a V.

Mark: Well, if that sounds so much better, how come it’s not on the paper? [He laughs]

Ted: Let’s see now. The Real Book, that means these are the “real...”?

Mark: How come those guys didn’t know that!

Ted: A lot of people that write these books don’t mean to not know. They just don’t know that they don’t know. A lot of people in many areas in life, you’ve noticed that they don’t know that they don’t know, so they assume that they do know. So they go out on a limb and call their book “The Real Book.”

Mark: Yeah, it’s not their fault.

Ted: The “Real Book” – I mean it makes it sound like it’s going to be the real cool stuff, right?

Mark: It’s not.

Ted: It’s okay, though. It’s better than not having it. But gee whiz, man. I wish someone would clarify for...

Mark: It gives you the marble, the block marble.

Ted: It’s true. There are two other things in the market that’s...one guy says, “The *real* changes to the tunes.” I got the other one, the Dick Hyman one: A hundred songs you should know...

Mark: ...that are beautiful, the book with the hottest voicings, or the hottest changes.

Ted: His changes are improvements, and some of them are especially cool. Yet sometimes he’s a little old-fashioned for what I want to hear in certain spots. That’s all; just a touch.

Mark: So how do I develop this? I keep coming back.

Ted: Experience. Yeah, you’ll... There are only 12 roots at any one moment. When stumped, be a scientist. That’s what I had to do, Mark. I still have to do it. Say, “Well, here I am. I can either stay there or go to 11 other letter names. “It’s all that she wrote.”

Mark: Right.

Ted: It ain’t 11 hundred, just 11. So I’ll say...[he plays...] Whoa! Flat-two dominant? Not today. Unless I alter it. Let’s try it. So I say, “Let’s alter it before we junk it.” [He plays...] Wow, that was different.

Mark: I understand. But you see, what I got to do is: I got to get over the hump of “You’re shit, Levy”

Ted: No, no. None of us are shit. We’re ignorant. It sounds coarse, so we don’t want to say it too many times a day to each other or to ourselves. Human beings are ignorant. We’re slow, we’re

new to the planet, relatively speaking, in this band of history. We’re new to the planet; we’re babies; we’re the diapers creatures. So we’re going, “Hmm, we had somebody named Lady Day [Billy Holiday] who wrote a tune, or some friends wrote it with her – we got a chord, where can it go?” You say, “Where does One (I) go?” So you try to remember tertian studies out in Immaculate Heart college in Griffith Park. So say, “I went to Griffith Park, saw a squirrel, said hi. Came to class, sharpened a pencil, learned a few things. What is One (I) supposed to do?” You say, “Well, you can go to the basic chords in the key.” And somebody says, “Mr. Levy” (you’re the professor), “Can it go to any chord in the key felicitously?” And you go, “It’s a good question. Class, anybody want to answer it?” And another kid, “I tried it last night, and it *does* go to every chord.” And you go, “You’re right. How many chords is that, class?” One kid says “Six?” You go, “Correct, because if the One (I) is one of the seven chords itself, so there’s six other prime places to move it to.” “Teacher?” “Yes?” “How will I know which quality?” Answer: “You won’t until you learn to love the sounds by playing them a lot so that you can hear them in your head and choose the one you want. Don’t worry about the paper [the sheet music], use the one that you like, if you’re running the show. If it’s someone else’s show, use their paper unless you can convince them not to.”

So here you are: you’re going One (I) – Two (ii). Now you sing the tune [he demonstrates]. Now I’m going to try I to iii [he demonstrates]. That sounds like a Stevie Wonder version if he had never heard Lady Day’s version. [He plays...] Maybe not Stevie, but somebody like that, El DeBarge. [He plays...]

Mark: Now, you’re just staying diatonically?

Ted: Yeah. First the diatonic ones are the pullers of the key. Luckily, we have a few things to hang on to. So, then I would try I to IV. [He plays...] I say, “Wow, that really is sweet. It’s sweet.” Only thing is: I know it’s going to make the Four-major (IV), so that’s when I’d make a IV dominant there maybe instead. [He plays...] They really are different. The dominant is really different in feeling. Now I’m going to try Five (V). [He plays...] Then I remember, “Wait now Ted. Don’t junk it yet if you’re not happy. Try the sus ones. Those are cool.” [He plays...] I say, “Wow, I do like the sus dominant thing.” Then I try the altered [V]: [he plays...] “Whoa! Maybe I’ll save it, it’s so spicey. I want to save it for the ‘push in’ to some other spot. You know, I don’t want to use my spiciest color on the very first chord that One (I) goes to.”
Do you feel that’s okay to think that way? You hear where I’m coming from, right?

Mark: Oh yeah....

Ted: So then I start trying the extra Expanded Diatonic Roots: bII, bIII, bVI, bVII, #IV. Those are the five other non-[diatonic group]... That’s all 12 tones.

Mark: Why “expanded root diatonic”?

Ted: [I] love ‘em.

Mark: I love them. But why---how did that name come about?

Ted: I had to call it something. Didn’t want to go on TV with no ammunition. [They laugh] It’s the truth, man.

Mark: I love them too – bIII, bVI, bII, I am in love with.

Ted: Yeah. If you take diatonic as the framework of a key, and that it sounds attractive, and it’s very American, and it does work in this country, it’s part of our heritage. Whereas this is not American. [He plays harmonic minor scale lines.] We can’t say this is in the middle of our kinds of keys. But we can say....[he plays...] all that stuff, and certainly with the major chords and all that. People playing....[he plays...] Diatonic major is easily seen (George Russell notwithstanding) to be the center of everything.

Mark: Very American.

Ted: Yeah. Lydian is still---Lydian is a new visitor when she shows up. We’re glad to have her, but she ain’t the center, like George wants. Anyway, so if that’s true, then we say, “Well, what

about the other fellas who love to be in the key with brother and sisters? They’re in there, they love it, they want to be accepted. We invite them in; we like them. But they’re not strict diatonic, so they’re on the periphery of diatonic. We’re expanding the framework of what we mean by “diatonic.” So for short “expanded,” I just write “EXP. DIAT” – Expanded Diatonic Root, or “non-diatonic root.” “Non” tends to have a stigma of like “not-so-great” or something. “Non” is fair: “non-diatonic group” – but part of the key. But not part of *diatonic* key.

So, I tried going to a flat-two (bII). [He plays...]. I say, “Well, try a dominant [bII], see how you like that.” [He plays...] Try the Lydian [bII]. [He plays...]. Wow! Maybe I’ll save that one for later. That’s quite a flavor there. Now I’m going to try the flat-three (bIII). [He plays...] I may use that toward the end of the song as a surprise chord on the last out. Because it works with the melody and everything. That was A major 9 in the key of Gb or F#.

Mark: Okay.

Ted: Now I’m going to try flat-six (bVI) which is D (enharmonic). [He plays...]

Mark: That’s cool too!

Ted: Yeah, that’s a great sound. I’m not sure where to put the melody tone, but I love it.

Mark: It’s on the outer planet; on the outer planets.

Ted: Well, you’d be surprised how it’s not *so* out. It’s on...it’s---oh, yeah, it’s “out” compared to the center, yes. But not way far out. Okay. We’re still in the key, because this is still friends with all these fellas. [He plays...]

Mark: Great stuff.

Ted: So we have flat-seven (bVII). [He plays...] I kind of dig that. That’s like the lazy afternoon vibe of going to... Just majors down a whole step.

Mark: It’s got, “My Baby” in there.

Ted: Yeah, it’s got that vibe, doesn’t it? The melodies are very similar. You can get so many shadings in there. Then you try it as a dominant. [He plays...] That’s just a 9th. Now I’m going to try a 13th, because there’s a difference.

Mark: Now, you’re doing the flat-seven there?

Ted: Flat-seven 13 [bVII13]. Now I’m going to add the #11. [He plays...] I’m going to try it as a sus dominant. [He plays...]

Mark: I need to do---exercise this. I need to get this really tuned in. What do you think, Ted?

Ted: I think if every guitar player did this – withstand the heat of how much time it takes – they’d love harmony even more than they loved it before they do it. The frustration would be outweighed by the results of finding their own character. I had to find out that I love.... It helps me as a human being to know myself better. And I found out: “Man, do I love these atmospheric colors!” That’s just what I love.

Mark: And when you get it...because, I tell ya, I love playing [but] I don’t necessarily love all the stuff I play. I love playing. When I do find something that I love to play, man, it’s there.

Ted: Or you try to use it in some context. And even if you don’t use it right away somewhere, you play it for its own sake.

Mark: Man, when something new hits, I just, boom, I’m dialed! And this seems like a way to get there.

Ted: Yeah, I’ve done many, many hours of this work. And I’m glad; I still do it, Mark. I still try sometimes, but most of it’s behind me on the basic level now, thank God. Because I kept saying, “Ted, you can get it because there’s only 12 roots, and there’s only so many shadings. Just do all the moves that you can possibly stand to do at various times.”

Mark: I get myself in an artificial roadblock.

Ted: I didn’t say I must do every voice-leading and every soprano move. I have said that at times, but I know that’s a lifetime study. But I would say, “Choose a voicing of something and feel the color vibe. Like, what does it feel like to go to a bVII dominant?” If it was already good then I

might say, “Is it significantly different if I change something?” As soon as that would get different, I’d say, “What was it that made it...when did it finally get different?” ...I try to be a detective there, an observer, a science guy on that.

Mark: With the tools that I have, I may not have that full command of...

Ted: Oh, sure you do. Watch. This is just science. You just say, “Even if I didn’t know it” — Mark talking to himself — “Even if I didn’t or don’t at this moment know it, I know that it’s there. So, all I have to do is talk to it, and it’ll talk to me.” Kind of like anything.

So this is One [the I chord], and you decide that day to try your bVII dominant. And you’ve already done this, and you say, “That’s kind of groovy.” And you force yourself to sing [he demonstrates]. And you say, “I want to try it with lower, richer voicings, roughly in the same spot on the neck. So you got to E7 over here, where the b7 is in the bass, and then you say [he plays...] and you try different melodies on the E, and you go, “Wow, they’re all about the same effect, generally speaking. They all vibrate like a bVII dominant.” When does it change? When you get a sus4 or 11. Now, that’s a different shading on bVII. Is it good? Of course it’s still good, unless it clashes with the melody. We have to find out. [he plays and finds a melody clash]

Mark: I’d go for it.

Ted: I still dig it, but it is rubbing. Some folks might do the “Check, please” routine....

Mark: If I was playing for moms and stuff and PTA I might not do it.

Ted: I might do it to make sure that they need to adjust their lower garments. The bonnets and lower garments. They don’t enjoy life enough; get them moving around a little bit. [they laugh]

Mark: It’s like, you play it and you go, “You know deep down you really do like this.”

Ted: That’s right. “You’re not supposed to. You know you’re just...you tell yourself you’re just dunking doughnuts, but you know what you’re really doing!”

Mark: And they have a little devilish smile.

Ted: Yeah. You know what, man? I think the whole American psyche is tuned into the blues. It was a gift from God to our country, or something. Because, man, anything bluesy is just so hard to resist. Just everybody digs it in some form....

Mark Levy’s Ted Greene Lesson #38 on “Modes vs Expanded Diatonicism”

1993, July 19

http://www.tedgreene.com/audio/MarkLevy/38_TedGreeneGuitarLesson_MarkLevy_1993-07-19.mp3

Starts about 40:47

Ted: I don’t think modes. I think “tonal types;” “tonality types.” Because modes mean limiting in two ways. (I just want to remind you why I’m not doing these.)

1): It implies that there’s a parent scale that originally generates them. I don’t even want my thought complicated with that sound. When we were hearing C Lydian, you weren’t even hearing the G major at all. Neither one of us heard it. That’s the first reason.

Number 2): There are so many other things besides those 7 so-called modes. I mean, blues is its own tonality. Expanded Diatonicism, about 4 levels, working backwards...

Mark: What’s that?

Ted: Well, you know what it is already: that expanded sense of key that has the flat-three [bIII], the flat-seven [bVII], and the flat-six [bVI] for instance.

Mark: Oh yeah. Okay.

Ted: [They’re] what they called “borrowed chords” in the old days. But I’m not thinking minor, so I don’t call it “borrowed.” I don’t feel like I’m taking it from minor. It’s just part of the key; the

larger view; the modern 12-tone tonal key; the “pop” key. Twelve-tone pop. It’s not 12-tone serial music – not even close. Like this kind of sound here. [He plays...]

Mark: That’s tonal.

Ted: It’s contemporary Americana.

Mark: Well, I call it tonal. Is that...? It’s not atonal.

Ted: That’s right. It’s 12 tone “tonal” music. It’s pop too, I mean, it’s a sound that’s actually easily absorbed by the....

Mark: Can you give me an example of a good pop tune...

Ted: That has this in it?

Mark: Yeah. I mean, I don’t have....

Ted: Do you mean just anything that’s on the radio right now?

Mark: No, I mean, like as a model.

Ted: Yeah. “Lucy in the Sky” has expanded key. “Day in the Life...”

Let’s go with after the bridge of “Day in the Life.” It’s in G. You know how “Day in the Life” sounds? After this there’s a new section. McCartney wrote the bridge, so he wrote it in E. It sounds like Paul [he demonstrates....]

Mark: Okay, I got that.

Ted: Okay. Now, if he did it updated. [He plays...] Add 9.

Mark: uh-huh.

Ted: Major 9

Mark: I like that.

Ted: Add 9. Add 9...add 9. This is the key. If you’re in this key and you don’t go [he plays...] which is soul music. Late ‘60s or mid ‘60s. That’s diatonic. Or at least the ‘70’s – the Spinners, the Stylistics.

Now, here’s that expanded fusion voicings. [He plays...] It’s the voicings. Sixties version of the same thing: [he plays...] it’s a little sweeter.

[*The expanded key*]: It’s a youth.... It’s the major key in its youthful manifestation. It’s really a young sound. But I mean it in a good way. It’s very, very...God, is it youthful. I don’t know how....I got to find more/better terms for this concept.

Mark: “Virgin” ?

Ted: It’s a new sound, an awakening on the planet for the past 30, 40 years. It wasn’t here before in this way. Yeah, “virgin” — I’m afraid of only the connotations, speaking to people’s parents: “What’s he studying?” “Well, we went over “virgin major” today. Tomorrow we’re going to do “blaspheme minor.” [They laugh] Man!

It’s real different than the old diatonic which we adore. You and I both love that.

Mark: Sure.

Ted: I’m in A now. [He plays...] Here’s the old sound. [He plays...] Here’s Brian Wilson meets---(the Beach Boys) meets the Beatles. [He plays....] Something as simple as that. That was C – G – D – A, but 5ths in the bass on two of the chords. Voice-leading in reverse, by “natural process,” normal, meaning “closest notes.”

If we did sequence it’d be: [He plays C-G, D-A] and you could even go [he plays E-B] It’s the Olympics, you know: [He plays F#-C#] You can just write those things....whole step upward modulations. It’s exciting. Doesn’t sound bad, right?

Mark: No. Well, I mean...

Ted: It sounds predictable after a while.

Mark: Yeah, after a while.

Ted: Well, it’s certainly not but beautiful. It’s not an elegant thing, but it’s powerful.

Mark: Yep, very.

Ted: So, the expanded sense of key has these various aspects.

Mark: So that’s why the mode doesn’t cut it.

Ted: I mean, because this is a whole “tonal type.” I just have it in my notes as EXP. DIAT. – Expanded Diatonic sense of key, instead of this smaller diatonic, the average. When I just write DIAT. I’m just thinking the regular, beautiful “seven [?] world” with visits....

[He probably means chords harmonized with 7ths.]. The next level around that (we may have discussed this before) it’s just the first level of add-ons, which are generally fifth approach chords.

Mark Levy’s Ted Greene Lesson #42 on “Expanded Diatonic Key”

1993, November 18

http://www.tedgreene.com/audio/MarkLevy/42_TedGreeneGuitarLesson_MarkLevy_1993-11-18.mp3

Starts about 16:17

Ted: I guess for me, the art is mixing the colors up enough or stressing dwelling on the ones that we want more of right away. You know, like, “Bring that stuff back sooner. You come back here!” When I found major 9ths all over the board at one time, and found that they could be functional.

[He plays....]

Mark: That’s nice.

Ted: Yeah, I need “hits” of that – a lot. I mean, I don’t want to say, “Okay, that’s it. Now I’ve done major 9s.” I want more of that stuff. I want to hear other voicings, other registers, and not give up on the language.

Mark: When you say “functional” – meaning what? You can...? [Ted plays...] That’s....

Ted: Sure. All these degrees to play it on. That it wasn’t just like the “One” [I] chord, or maybe “four” [IV].

Mark: Okay.

Ted: It’s like massively functional. Like, maybe half of the degrees of the key can be major 9 without leaving the key.

Mark: Can I try and say what they are?

Ted: I know that you know. We’re going to go descending: root, and what else?

Mark: The IV?

Ted: Descending.

Mark: Oh. Flat-seven [bVII]?

Ted: [Ted plays this, thereby confirming that bVII is correct]

Mark: Flat-six [bVI]?

Ted: [Ted plays this, thereby confirming that bVI is correct]

Mark: Was I right?

Ted: I’ll stop if you’re not.

Mark: Okay.

Ted: If you say V, it’s modulation

Mark: Oh really, it is!

Ted: [Ted plays and sings a melody...] Isn’t it in this key now?

Mark: What is that tune?

Ted: No tune, just getting lucky singing the melody. I’m probably stealing, or no.

Mark: Sound like something I forgot.

Ted: Many, many things...I’m not just speaking dramatically when I say “many, many,” Mark, in this case. We have both heard scale-wise harmony in TV films, and regular films, and commercials, and sit-coms, you know, we’re the “media generation”.... That’s where we’ve heard this stuff.

Mark: Five [V] would be a modulation, and they you got IV?

Ted: Five [V] is a modulation. Before you get to IV...?

Mark: You mean #IV?

Ted: Yeah. Because if you.... Let's go back. [He plays...] It's a half-step above, right?

Mark: That's right. Okay, I can dig that.

Ted: [He plays....] I wouldn't dwell on this, if that sets up that.... But it's in there. It's borderline. It's not one of the biggies, but it sure sounds great at times. 6/9#11 is more smooth than major 9 is, usually. That's just real smooth in the key of A. [He plays and whistles....]

Mark: Flat-two [bII]?

Ted: [Yes.] Flat-two. And after IV and in between bII and IV is...?

Mark: Flat-three.

Ted: [Yes.] Flat-three.

Mark: Well, those seem to have really cool.... I find that...some of the coolest sounds, period, are all those non-diatonic roots in the key. Is that how it is?

Ted: Yeah. Expansion. Yeah. Expanded diatonic key is great, man.

Mark: How do I learn more about that?

Ted: Do it every day.

Mark: Okay. [They laugh]

Ted: I'm serious.

Mark: Hey, that's a great answer.

Ted: I just sit....Every time I touch the guitar for any protracted length, I find I do those sounds, keep them alive. [He plays...] All that was cycle-4-ing: I – IV – bVII – bIII – bVI – bII – I. Except instead of bII, I went to V. [He plays.....] That was....just doing a 4th thing now. The 5ths are great. Mark comes home and says, "It's been a 5th kind of day." So he goes [Ted plays bass notes: C, G, D, A] We'll try some of that. [Ted plays key of A: Amaj7 – Dmaj7, then adds C6 – Gmaj7 – Dmaj7 – A/9]....

Mark: I like that a lot.

Ted: It's so cheerful. Isn't it? So optimistic.

Mark: I like it.

Ted: Expansion roots are great, man. Puts the hair on my chest.

—END of excerpts—