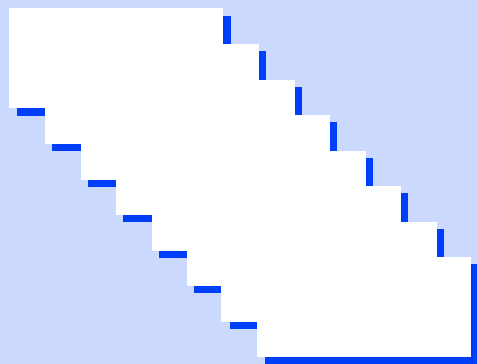


the New Guide to
Harmony
with **LEGO®**bricks



the best way to
remember jazz changes

Conrad Cork

Plaudits for this edition

One of the very few seminal contributions to jazz theory to emerge from the U.K, this book, with its clear, modular approach has opened musical doors and enhanced the understanding and development of thousands of musicians since the first edition was published in 1985.

Charles Alexander, Musician and Director of JAZZWISE publications.

It is terrific -- the best book I've ever seen on helping people to learn to improvise!

Philip Johnson-Laird, Stuart Professor of Psychology, Princeton University, USA

A remarkable achievement. Cork has not only given us a reliable way in to understanding the inner mechanisms of the jazz harmonic and formal language, but he has also provided us with a series of insights that have relevance to a wide range of disciplines. His concepts are being applied in such diverse fields as linguistics, cognitive psychology, computing and aesthetics. As with the potential applications of any great idea, the only limiting factor remains our imagination. *The New Guide to Harmony with LEGO Bricks* remains top of my recommended reading list for students at every level. He is to be congratulated.

It is recommended reading for anyone who wants to know more about musical creativity. *The New Guide to Harmony with LEGO Bricks* goes straight to the heart of the matter. It is so refreshing to find a work that avoids the tired old myths about jazz, and seeks instead to establish a whole new view of the art form. Don't lend this one out - you're unlikely to get it back!

At last, we have the Plain English, no-nonsense version of 'How It Works', applied to Jazz. Whether you're an established musicologist or simply an enthusiastic listener, you should have this on your bookshelf. *The New Guide to Harmony with LEGO Bricks* has a great deal to offer.

Robin Dewhurst, Head of Popular Music, Faculty of Media, Music & Performance, University of Salford, UK

Full of wisdom. He looks with fresh eyes at much of the traditions and concepts of jazz and music in general. Cork's approach is thorough and, where appropriate, he is not afraid to be light-hearted or controversial. Amen.

Graham Collier, Director of Jazz, Royal Academy of Music. London

It is excellent, and I shall certainly recommend it to my jazz tutors and students. The conversational tone makes it sound as if the author is there in the room with the student. I like very much the way he backs up principles with practical advice (for both learning and playing) that obviously comes from years of first hand experience. It all very much fits within my schema of jazz understanding and so its methods make complete sense to me.

Louise Gibbs, Lecturer in Charge for Music, Goldsmiths College, University of London.

I like the first premise of this book - that the music comes first. The chapters on how to listen and what to listen for are very valuable to a beginner. I would recommend this book to students who have started to learn, and know something of the history of the music and love it; they will have a good time.

Eddie Harvey, leading Jazz Educator, musician and arranger.

It is excellent.

John Robert Brown, Director of Jazz Studies, City of Leeds College of Music, UK

This wonderful book.

Henry Lowther, master trumpeter.

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Foreword and Acknowledgements

I really owe so much to so many people that I can only begin to acknowledge my indebtedness. My profoundest apologies to anyone I miss out.

Perhaps at the deepest level, the most gratitude is due to the LEGO group, the manufacturers of LEGO bricks, whose inspirational holistic product has for, as long as I can remember, shown me that reality can be modelled to advantage as a series of modular components. This has helped me to think through a variety of problems to good effect, not just in music, but in my other career in computing too. The tolerance of the LEGO group in permitting me to use LEGO bricks both actually and as concepts (in what must have seemed to them a singularly eccentric venture) has my sincere and enduring gratitude.

Of my fellow musicians, it was the late Lionel Grigson who provided the occasion for the first real breakthrough in my thinking about harmony. Oliver Bennett gave me the benefit of his broad humanistic vision and his passion for jazz throughout the years preceding the first edition, during which the contents of these pages struggled to be born. Simon Holland, of the Open University, and Dr Laurie Kay of the University of Kent at Canterbury, both helped me more than they ever knew by responding to the ideas and precepts in the first edition. But Richard Yorke gave the most detailed attention of anyone to the text of that edition, while Rob MacTavish helped so much with the computerised production, that he read the book and went out and bought a saxophone. Without either of them, at that stage, no improvement would have been possible. Evan Parker's acute and perceptive reading of various drafts, combined with his untiring willingness to engage in debate, is responsible for the honing and improvement of many sections. The late Stan Barker took a day of his time out to interrogate the book (and, I think, me) and pronounced himself satisfied.

In the final stages of the preparation of this edition, Dr Andy Hamilton argued every point with me, and ran up some huge phone bills in the process. And John Runcie (like Andy, another rigorous academic who just happens to be a great player) proofread the final version and made innumerable valuable suggestions. After that, any mistakes are of course, mine alone.

But, with Arnold Schoenberg, I can truly say, 'This book I learned from my pupils'. Some of these have come to me in formal circumstances, and have been of normal student age, notably during the years I directed Jazz Studies at De Montfort University Leicester. Some situations have been less formal, generally involving grizzled, seasoned semi-professional players attending extra mural classes, and warily looking to improve their playing (or maybe just avoid the Sunday afternoon washing up). Some others, like Jamie Thompson, have seemed alarmingly young at the start, but been searingly intelligent and acute throughout.

Maybe the most unlikely, but at the same time most valuable help in the preparation of this edition has come from two dedicated non-musicians, Alan Ross, who sells me my books as well as my records, and my wife Alison. Watching them both unerringly recognise everything the book describes gave me the courage to insist to budding musicians and self-proclaimed jazz lovers that if they couldn't hear it they couldn't play it.

I wrote the original version of this book in Picardy in the summer of 1985. Prior to that I had spent a long time trying to work out why I could remember clearly every chord sequence I had played in my student days, but had increasingly to use books like Lionel Grigson's *A Jazz Chord Book* as a crutch when playing subsequent additions to my repertoire. Gradually the idea of **Harmony with LEGO Bricks** emerged - in effect simply a rationalisation of the way I had done it before, and I took myself off to the French countryside to write it all down.

I was then able to use it as the prime teaching document for jazz at the then Leicester Polytechnic, (now De Montfort University Leicester), as well as in private tuition, with primary school children, and on courses for practising players in Birmingham, Leicester and elsewhere. All of this showed me that while the ideas in the book certainly held up, the whole presentation of it was only effective if you were starting from my starting point. Using it 'in the trenches' (in Phil Woods's phrase) enabled me to see what the definitive shape should be. So the first re-write happened.

In the summer of 1986, the Arts Council of Great Britain awarded me a bursary, which enabled me to prepare and distribute, from 1988 onwards, the new edition. This is something for which I continue to be grateful. In the years which have passed since then, the same processes which produced that revised version have continued unabated.

In those (too many) years between deciding to re-write the book in this way, and ultimate publication, I have stumped the country, giving one-off lectures and master classes on the new methodology, to anyone who would listen. Despite occasionally feeling that I had been set up as an Aunt Sally from the lunatic fringe, and that it was hoped the audience would come away more prepared to go along with orthodox practice, these sessions were invaluable in marshalling my arguments to deal with standard objections. In particular, the students at the Royal Academy of Music, London, and those at University College Salford were alert and perceptive, and helped considerably in the formulation of the fine print of the exegesis of this book. My thanks are due to the members of staff at those institutions who got me the gigs, Robin Dewhurst at Salford and Graham Collier at the Royal Academy.

With regard to users' experience of what became the 1988/1990 edition, two factors in particular emerged.

First, that many (though by no means all) of them never acquired a sufficient overview of the subject matter. They stopped using the book as soon as their playing improved. And because there was a step by step approach, they knew nothing of what came after.

The other, more significant one, was my distress at the number of times I was told by students that they couldn't tell *How High the Moon* from *I Got Rhythm*, and that it was cruel and unreasonable of me to expect them to! I now see that there was some significance in the fact that the students with the most problems were the ones who were or had been stars in various prestigious 'Youth Jazz Orchestras'. The ones in other words who appeared to be most like 'jazz' students at auditions, and who could reasonably be expected to have had the least difficulty. The trouble was, they had spent all their time in a tightly disciplined purely playing environment, and had never actually **listened** to anything.

On the other hand, and at the other end of the expectation spectrum, I frequently met non-musicians who had no trouble in identifying, not just chord sequences in their entirety, but also borrowed bits, like an *I Got Rhythm* bridge turning up in another song. I already knew that the whole ground could be covered by **ear alone**. But these (quite numerous) non-musicians gave me the courage to insist on that approach for everybody. Around the same time I came across Anton Webern, in his short but very exciting book of lectures *The Path to the New Music*. Here he triumphantly managed to spell out the *What to Listen for* of his allegedly difficult art to non-musicians in Vienna in 1932 and 1933. His insistence on always trusting the ears to lead one endorsed my determination to try to do something similar for jazz.

The 'learn by listening' approach thus answered both problems. The musician would be encouraged to play only after learning the **whole** system of presentation. And the non-musician would be able to understand **everything** except actually how to produce and control the sounds.

So, I re-wrote it again, and it became twice as big, but, I hope, ten times as useful, and that is the edition you now have.

A Note on the 2008 Printing

This printing is still the same book as the revised and extended 1996 edition. But it is not **exactly** the same. So if you are working with another LEGO bricklayer, you will be better advised to go by section headings rather than page numbers to compare notes.

All that has happened, basically, is that a number of errata have been corrected, along with the emendation of some typographical errors. I took the opportunity at the same time, to eliminate some verbal infelicities, and to add the occasional extra bit of clarification. A few of the recommended listening tracks have been changed, and the Playalong documentation now gives CD track information, rather than detailing what is on what side of the cassette. And I developed the charts of the system at the end of Part V from work originally done by tireless bricklayer Phil Clark.

This printing was originally scheduled for 2000 and later for 2004. Both times, my health meant that I was unable to complete the job satisfactorily. But during 2007, the world wide community of LEGO bricklayers has rallied round and done the job for me. Ludo Beckers of Antwerp did a remarkable and thorough job of finding all the typos – including ones I had not noticed. Then John Elliott of Edinburgh arrived like a tornado and went through it again, making countless valuable suggestions, as well as enhancing the book's power by providing the summaries you will now find at the end of the didactic chapters, reinstating the LEGO brick 'walls' in the repertoire chapter, which readers of the previous edition may recall, and using better software to reset the music examples in Part IX. This book would not have happened without Ludo and John. Thanks guys.

A Note on the 2021 PDF e-Book Edition

In memory of Conrad Cork 1940–2021

Conrad died on 25th April 2021

Before Conrad retired, he brought out a final edition in 2008 of the *New Guide to Harmony with LEGO Bricks*. It is now 2021 and quite a lot has changed. We are delighted to be able to ensure that the book is still available, and the reader is asked to note the following updates.

Play-along backing tracks:

- The Play-along CD intended to allow students to learn to play and improvise over the various bricks and joins is no longer available. Instead, MP3s of the CD tracks are available for free download from the dropback.co.uk website where the e-book form of Harmony with LEGO Bricks can be purchased. Please don't request the free play-along CD mentioned in the front of the 2008 print edition.
- The iRealPro app (emerging, by coincidence in 2008) is a very popular alternative for providing play-alongs which can be adapted to the student's needs such as groove, key and tempo. The Forum contains several LEGO harmony practice charts which have been donated by other students of LEGO, including the equivalent of all the tracks on the original book CD.

Companion recordings:

- The companion recordings mentioned on p13 that the reader was urged to acquire can now be accessed for free using streaming services such as Spotify (emerging, by coincidence in 2008). On Spotify, one of the users has very helpfully made public playlists of all the tracks mentioned in Harmony with LEGO Bricks Part I.

Related publications and materials:

- If you want a complete repertoire of over 230 songs presented in LEGO bricks form, take a look at the PDF e-book *Insights in Jazz* by John Elliott, which you can find at dropback.co.uk – the book also contains a comprehensive pictorial presentation of how the LEGO bricks approach works. If you are already a musician, this is an excellent place to start. The website contains details about the book, table of contents and free sample pages. The MP3 audio tracks of the bricks of chords defined in the *Insights in Jazz* book are freely available for download.
- You can buy *Insights in Jazz* from the Dropback site in electronic form as a PDF file. The book has over 300 pages and there are significant benefits to being able to electronically search the book for patterns as well as print out the pages you want for yourself.
- Also at Dropback, you will find free podcasts containing LEGO lessons and demonstrations, sometimes a 'family' of related bricks, sometimes a whole song, or anything else the world-wide community has asked for. These should help enormously. They bring the book and the approach to life.
- Lionel Grigson's *A Jazz Chord Book* to which Harmony with LEGO Bricks refers for the best chord changes is no longer available. However, you cannot copyright a chord progression and many of the changes used in *A Jazz Chord Book* were used in the roadmaps available in *Insights in Jazz*.

The 'brick-layers' community:

- Meantime however, you may want to consider joining the Google Groups "LEGO Bricks" group. This was originally set up by inveterate LEGO Bricklayer Ludo Beckers of Antwerpen and has been managed for the past ten years or so by John Elliott of Edinburgh. It is for people of any degree of experience who are interested in using the Harmony with LEGO Bricks system. There are lots of useful resources there and all the help you will ever need, from some of the nicest people on the net.
- So, if you have any questions, remarks or something to share concerning Harmony with LEGO Bricks, here's the place for it. To subscribe and for more options, visit <http://groups.google.com/group/LEGO-bricks>

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Conrad Cork read English at Nottingham University but has been a jazz musician and writer all his professional life.

As a musician he has, over the years, led a series of his own groups, playing a variety of instruments, as well as from time to time appearing with jazz 'names', ranging from Adelaide Hall to Derek Bailey, taking in Joe Harriot and Lee Konitz along the way.

As a jazz writer he has published many critical and educational articles in periodicals such as *Jazz Monthly*, *Jazz Journal International*, the *British Journal of Music Education*, and *Music Teacher*. *Harmony with LEGO Bricks*, first published in 1985, is now established in jazz curricula, as well as being regularly cited in the psychological literature.

As a student of the cognitive psychology of improvisation he has co-written papers which have been translated into several languages and been presented in Japan, Sweden and Peru.

As an academic, for more than 12 years he directed the jazz component of the influential Performing Arts Degree course at the then Leicester Polytechnic, now De Montfort University, Leicester. These days, he is frequently to be found propounding his system at collages and conferences across the country. And he continues to teach privately, including a rising number of correspondence students from around the world. As a campaigner for jazz he served on the Music Advisory Panel of the Arts Council of Great Britain for a number of years, during which time he regularly chaired committees charged with allocation of grants and bursaries. These included jazz, improvised music, electro-acoustic music, and several one-off investigations. The 1995 Arts Council consultative green paper *Review of Jazz in England* took his definition of the music as its starting point, saying to go beyond it 'would not be productive or possible'.

For health reasons, he plays very little now, and finds his time increasingly taken up with running a computer software consultancy. Not surprisingly perhaps, he feels that the principles of Object Orientation seem remarkably similar to those expounded in *Harmony with LEGO Bricks*!

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