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### **Introduction:**

What is it that makes a musician sound like no-one else? Is it a conscious choice and a desire to do something unique? A deliberate process of tearing down the familiar and putting the pieces together again in a new way? Or can it sometimes simply be a natural result of a musician striving for excellence without the knowledge of how to go about doing that? Ladies and gentlemen; I give you Allan Holdsworth.

Many who dedicate themselves to the study of a musician have a long lasted relationship to the particular music. In this case the circumstances are very different, and my own relation to jazz and jazz-fusion music is relatively new. In the period 2004-2008 I studied classical guitar at the Grieg Academy in Bergen, Norway, with exception of 2006-2007 when I studied at the Lizst Academy of Music in Budapest, Hungary. Although I enjoyed the classical music, by the end of my bachelor I was in dire need of a change. My interest of performing great difficult pieces had shifted towards a desire to truly master the art of music, as opposed to only playing and interpretation it. My goal was improvisation. After growing up focusing on music from the rhythmical tradition, it felt natural to turn to jazz in order to enhance my competence on music structures. But with my love for rock and metal music I had a hard time finding an expression within the jazz tradition that appealed to me emotionally. After listening through a lot of jazz-rock fusion, I was still not able to find an artist or ensemble that offered a harmonic complexity, an improvisational approach as well as a rough, dark character. Then I remembered; in the first year of my classical guitar studies a jazz pianist showed me some music by a guitarist named Allan Holdsworth. Holdsworth was presumably someone who played with a sound similar to guitar virtuosos like Joe Satriani and Steve Vai, but with a harmonic language resembling jazz. At that time I dismissed it after a minute or so with the simple conclusion; "Not my thing." I was wrong. Three years later, after getting my hands on a few of his albums, I had found what I was looking for. I decided to continue my education at the Institute for Musicology at the University in Oslo, Norway, where I turned my focus to the analysis of jazz rock music. My objective was always unshakable; to gain understanding of complex musical structures so that I could adopt these very structures to my own playing.

I eventually decided to dedicate the entire focus of my master thesis to the music of Allan Holdsworth. As opposed to much of the music I spent time listening to and examining, his

music left me with both chills and a feeling of total confusion. I had no idea what he was doing. Both his chord progressions and his phrases defied my sense of tonality and sounded like nothing I had ever heard. At the same time, it all sounded so perfectly unstrained and logical; like a beautiful language I had yet to understand. His choice of notes may have resembled jazz, but the character of the music had a much darker melancholy, as well as an absence of the swing rhythm that to me makes traditional jazz always a little too cheerful. His chords sounded like something from the piano music of Debussy, and his rhythm section as progressive rock.

Although his name is not very well known, Allan Holdsworth has a whispered status of being one of the greatest guitarists in world. In an introduction to his book *Melody Chord*, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.5, we find the following description of his place in history: "As influential as John Coltrane, Django Reinhardt, Jimi Hendrix and Chuck Barry. Allan, a composer and band leader has influenced musicians and guitarists such as Frank Zappa, Scott Henderson, Eddie Van Halen, Joe Satriani, Carlos Santana, Niel Schon and many more." Despite his high regards among great musicians very little has been written about Holdsworth, except from a few brief publications giving some slight insight into his way of thinking about music. But to this day no comprehensive literature has been dedicated to this extraordinary musician.

After researching Allan Holdsworth and his music for some time now, my objective for the thesis is clear. I wish to shed light on the secret behind his characteristic music and identify the musical structures and compositional techniques that hold everything together. Imbedded in this task there is also the aspect of Holdsworths own thoughts and process regarding both the composition as well as the improvisation of his music. This will in other words not be the comprehensive biography he deserves. Instead I wish to formulate a research that will function as an introduction to a new way of thinking about music, especially in jazz-rock fusion. In other words, a text that can function as a both a detailed analysis of Holdsworth's work, as well as an alternative method book for guitarists who are looking for new input.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Source: *Melody Chords*, 1997 Allan Holdsworth

My approach to the problem is thereby as following:

What characterizes the elements and structures within the music of Alan Holdworth, and how do these distinguish themselves from more traditional jazz or jazz-rock compositions?

In order to answer these questions I will structure the material into four chapters. In chapter one, "The Musician", we will take a closer look at who Allan Holdsworth really is and his place in the musical scene the last 40 years. In the chapter two "The principles" I will show the difference between his theoretical understanding of music and the traditional music theory, in addition to other appropriate details. In the following chapter, "The music", I will present an extensive analysis of three Holdsworth tracks including a cover of John Coltrane's "Countdown". The music will be presented in standard notation and among the elements that will be examined are harmony, rhythm, chords, chord voicings, scales, phrasing and form, among other. You can find the complete transcriptions of these songs as appendix one, two and three at the very end. In the final chapter, "Thoughts of review" we will take a look at what I consider to be the most important aspects of what makes up the characteristics in Holdsworth's music. It should be noted that although some basic explanation of music theory will be presented in part two, this paper will require a certain level of theoretical understanding from the reader.

But before we dig into the depth of his principles and his music; let's get more acquainted with perhaps the only guitar legend who doesn't like the guitar; Allan Holdsworth.

# **Chapter 1: The musician**

# 1.1 The Allan Holdsworth story

It can be argued that *jazz-rock* in the original sense of the word never recovered after the economic climate of the seventies forced many musicians to choose between making accessible music or find work elsewhere. The word *fusion* that long had been associated with jazz-rock had now gained a new meaning: *funk-jazz*. Since it had been greeted satisfactorily by the general audience, jazz-rock soon disappeared from the main music scene. Today, few fusion-artists actually play something that can be described as a true mix between jazz and rock. Still, this might be the genre closest to defining the music of Allan Holdsworth. With a career stretching almost forty years, Holdsworth was one of the pioneers of jazz-rock-music in the early seventies and has since developed a style that is truly unique.

Allan Holdsworth was born in Yorkshire, England on August 6th 1948.<sup>2</sup> He grew up in the nearby town of Bradford in the north of England. His father, Sam Holdsworth, was a passionate jazz pianist with a great love for music. After trying his luck as a jazz musician in London, he had returned to his hometown of Bradford after concluding that the economic trials of musicianship and the absence of friends and family was not worth the effort. He took a job as a warehouseman, and settled down with his wife, Elsie, who worked as a cleaner at the local police station. His interest for music and musicianship however, remained very active, and he was to become one of the most important musical inspirations for his son.

From he was only a few years old Allan Holdsworth was observed having a great fascination for the record player, but despite his love for music he grew up with no serious interest for playing any instrument himself. Instead he developed a passion for cycling and left secondary school as soon as permitted at the age of fifteen to peruse his interest. When not attending his job at the factory floor, he entered several amateur bicycle races. At one point he actually worked repairing bicycles at the local bicycle shop.

As time went by he also became an increasingly devoted listener. Since he was quite tall for his age, at around the age of fifteen his father and brother-in-law was able to sneak him into

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> This chapter and all quotes (if not anything else is implied) is based on the biography from *Reaching from the uncommon chord*, 1985 Allan Holdsworth.

concerts at the local pub. Eventually at the age of seventeen he got his first musical instrument. "I had wanted a saxophone, I didn't really want the guitar, but saxophones were pretty expensive in those days, relative to a cheap acoustic guitar. My uncle played guitar and when he had bought himself a new one he sold his old one to my father, who gave it to me. That's basically how it started."<sup>3</sup>

Although this was to be the very start of a truly unique and highly respected musical career, Holdsworth still looks back at this moment as somewhat of a mishap. In an instructional VHS released in 1992 he explained in details:

"I never really wanted to play the guitar. I don't really like the guitar; for me. I love to hear other people play the guitar of course, but it's just that; it wasn't the instrument that I think I would have chosen. If I had been given a saxophone earlier for example, I would have much preferred that. But my dad bought me a guitar instead so, and saxophones where pretty expensive at the time so I ended up noodling on the guitar. I started out literately just noodling because I had no interest in the instrument, and it just developed over a period of time. So then I started to think; Well, you know an instrument, by nature of its name, just means it's a tool like a speller, or a wrench, or a screwdriver. It's something that you can use to get a job done. So, because I love music I ended up trying to do it with this [the guitar]."<sup>4</sup>

Choosing to focus more on the music and less on the narrow tradition and expression of any one particular instrument, Holdsworth gathered influences from many different sources.

One man, especially, played an important role in his musical development; "My first influence was my father. With him being a great pianist, I was constantly hearing him play.

Also, he had all these records- everything from Bix Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman, and Artie Shaw to Charlie Parker. Later I started going out buying albums on my own. I remember buying a lot of albums that Oliver Nelson had done. I was really intrigued by his arrangements and some albums he did with Jimmy Smith."

Holdsworth became increasingly devoted to his new craft and the next four or five years he would listened to music and practice the guitar whenever time would allow him to do so. In this period he discovered the electric guitar and the possibilities it offered. This eventually

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> http://jazztimes.com/articles/20372-allan-holdsworth-one-man-of-trane

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Clip from the instructional video *Allan Holdsdworth* by Allan Holdsworth, 1992. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iQnZ-gMd-E (0:20)

triggered the spark that set the curse for his guitar playing. "If somebody had ever told me that if I wanted to play an instrument that it had to be an acoustic guitar, I would never have started to play guitar at all . . . The only reason I like acoustic guitar now is through the electric. I started on acoustic, but that was accidental. . . . I wanted something I could blow on. I wanted to be able to make a note loud or long or soft or shorter, to play things legato or staccato. . . "

But Holdsworth didn't neglect the guitar scene completely, and he was especially fascinated by the legendary Charlie Christian. "I guess there was a period when I tried to learn what someone else did off a record. I learned some Charlie Christian solos off a record, and it was really a marvelous experience. I really loved that hollow sound he got out of his guitar and that was an awful long time ago. I don't know if playing his lines did me any good other than the fact that I became good at trying to play like Charlie Christian. After I heard all the other players, I realized I had to analyze music for myself in my own way. I started to listen to a lot of horn players at that point."

Although Holdsworth was fascinated by many different horn players, one prominent saxophone player caught his attention more than any other; John Coltrane. In an interview by Mike Morrison in February 2006, he describes his encounter with Coltrane on response to a question on what saxophone players that have influenced him the most:

Charlie Parker because of records my father had...also Cannonball Adderly, but really Coltrane was the main one. He was spiritually connected to some pipeline where he could bypass all the stuff you had to go thru a thousand times to get to what you really wanted to say. I think that was the biggest thing that I learned from that---that "oh my God!" it's possible to play over this thing without doing things that you've heard before. It was very inspiring for me and I went out and bought everything he played on. (..)Well it gave me a lot of ideas; it gave me a lot of...there were other ways of doing and playing things. It gave me freedom to do things that you hadn't really heard before...you know it didn't have to be diatonically correct or whatever if it's working. So it was that freedom to not have to make it sound like something you've heard already. Different lines, different chords, some specific formula to get away from..."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> http://www.therealallanholdsworth.com/allansinterviewmorrison.htm

Holdsworth's professional career might be said to have started when he finally decided to do as his father once did; move to London. After playing for London-based alto saxophonist Ray Warleigh at a jazz clinic in Bradford he was asked if he had considered moving to London. After explaining that he didn't have the financial means to do so, he was offered to come live with Warleight in London for free. After first saying no, Holdsworth changed his mind six months later and accepted the offer. "I just took a suitcase and a guitar, and I stayed there at his house. He was just incredible; he kind of fed me and gave me money and just generally looked after me. He took me around to a lot of the gigs and tried to get me to sit in."

At this time, the early seventies, the British music scene had firmly stated itself through the major international success of band like The Beatles, Rolling stones, Led Zepplin and Cream. Several different musical directions where also taking root, and among these was the English progressive rock with strong roots in blues-rock and it's American sister-genre; jazz/rock. The American jazz/rock had taken shape much as a result of two rebellious musical direction, rock and free-jazz, often sharing both the same stage and audience. Miles Davis is often credited for creating the jazz/rock genre with his release "Bitches Brew", and although this might be a harsh oversimplification he was undoubtedly a pioneer always staying one step ahead of everyone else. Many of the musicians who participated on his early experiments with rock also went on to create some of the biggest and most important jazz-rock bands of all times. Among these we find keyboardist Chick Corea's band; Return to Forever, keyboardist Joe Zawinul and saxophonist Wayne Shorter's Whether Report, guitarist John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra and drummer Tony Williams's Lifetime. The British progressive scene had also produced bands which today is regarded as nothing less than legendary; bands like YES, Pink Floyd, King Crimson, Genesis, Jethro Tull just to mention a few.

Although Allan Holdsworth refers mostly to jazz music as his main inspiration growing up, he was not ignoring the contemporary music scene and he himself felt rooted in rock music; "Rock was basically the music I was playing – it was the only thing I could play. I remember going through a blues period. I used to listen to a lot of Eric Clapton. Later I came to realize it had all come from American musicians like B.B.King. When Eric Clapton played, it was changed just enough for me to get into it. Another reason I liked the blues sound was again, because I really like the saxophone."

Before moving to London Allan Holdsworth had already played in many local bands as an electric guitarist, many of which he formed himself. Performing around Yorkshire, the music they played was mostly based on rock and popular dance music. He also formed a band called Igginbottom which was his first serious attempt at playing original material, but ambitions where still not high. "I never had any plans to make a career of guitar playing at all." When he arrived in London, though, he soon found himself in a much more serious project; the rock quartet *Tempest*. He soon earned a favorable reputation, and toured both Brittan and the US with the band after the release of their self-titled debut album in 1973. But Holdswoth was not happy with the musical direction the band was following and left the band shortly after.

"I thought of Tempest as being very much a rock band, and John Hiseman [drummer and co band leader] thought of it as not being commercial enough. He wanted me to play more like somebody else, and I didn't want to do that. So eventually I left the band. We did pretty well — we did an American tour. I feel I was lucky that I was in a band that was able to do that, but at the same time I was unlucky doing that in that it probably came too early for me.

Sometimes its better that you don't record anything until you learn to play better — but for me I guess it's always the same. There are a lot of records that I am pretty much ashamed of — but that's life."

After returning to London and playing at pubs for a while, he was invited to play with the progressive band *Soft Machine*. After playing some live shows with them he became a member of the band and was featured on their following album *Bundles* (1975). Holdsworth fondly recalls his time with Soft machine; "Soft machine played a funny kind of music — it was very interesting to me, playing in all these different time signatures. They were all great musicians, and I learned a lot from it." Still, he was to leave the band shortly after in favor of playing with one of the great legends of the jazz/rock era; "I left Soft Machine for a very important reason — to play with Tony Williams. (...) Tony just called me one day and said let's attack. I loved playing in that band. I had a lot of freedom, and got to write a couple of the tunes. Of all the great musicians I've had the opportunity to work with, Tony probably influenced me the most. I'd love to play with Tony again (if he ever wants to). He's magic. Unfortunately, things came to an end for that band, due in part to management problems, etc."

Holdsworth participated on two albums with *The New Tony Williams Lifetime* before the break up; *Believe it* (1975) and *Million Dollar Legs* (1976). Though the first album was a success, the second *Million Dollar Legs* aimed for a new sound and some might suggest that it was maybe not quite Holdsworth's turf. Robert Taylor writes for Allmusic.com; "The follow-up to *Believe It* should have been titled "I Can't Believe It." Fans who were so impressed with the first recording must have checked the personnel listing here several times for accuracy. Like many of the fusion stars of the '70s, the eventual sellout to disco/funk became inevitable for drummer Tony Williams. While he may have been able to pull this off due to his impressive talents, doing so with Allan Holdsworth was not a good idea."<sup>6</sup>

It didn't take long before Allan Holdworth was recruited to a new band, this time the progressive band *Gong*. Although the band was originally formed back in the late sixties, the line-up had changed since then. After Holdsworth joined the band they released the album *Gazeuse!* (1976), that had a much stronger jazz-rock character than previous albums. Although the band broke up, *Gong* continued shortly after with yet another line-up. Holdsworth however moved on to different projects, participating in the solo albums of two former Gong-members; violinist Jean-Luc Ponty's *Enigmatic Ocean* (1977) and drummer Bill Bruford's *Feels good to me* (1978).

Shortly after, Bruford brought Holdsworth into his new band; U.K. Bruford was a former *King Crimson-member* and the original plan was to re-form the band with some of his old band members. However, *King Crimson*-frontman and guitarist Robert Fripp changed his mind and Holdsworth was offered to take his place. The line-up therefore consisted of Eddie Jobson on violin and keyboards, former *King Crimson*-member John Wetton on bass, and of course Bruford and Holdsworth on drums and guitar. As with many of Holdsworth's other bands U.K. managed to release one record, debut-album "U.K." (1978), before the line-up proved unsustainable. "*Bill and I was actually fired from U.K. Silly, isn't it? It was a terrible mismatch from the start. I was the most miserable in that band than any I've been with – it took so much out of my physically and emotionally because I was unhappy with the music, and I'm sure they were unhappy with me." Although Holdsworth only managed to release one album with the band, it left a lasting impression on the progressive scene of the seventies. Stephen* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> http://allmusic.com/album/million-dollar-legs-r150300

Thomas Erlewine writes for allmusic.com; "Featuring members of Yes, King Crimson, Roxy Music, and Soft Machine, U.K. was one of the most prominent progressive rock supergroups of the late '70s. (...) Although the lineup was unstable -- Holdsworth and Bruford left after one album, with former Frank Zappa drummer Terry Bozzio replacing Bruford -- and the group was short-lived, the band maintained a dedicated cult following years after their early-'80s breakup. (...) U.K. released their eponymous debut in 1978 and the album captured the attention of progressive rock and jazz fusion fans, as did the record's supporting tour."

Shortly after the breakup Bill Bruford and Allan Holdsworth re-grouped in the new band Bruford together with bassist Jeff Berlin and keyboardist Dave Stewart. The chemistry within the band proved much more comfortable than in U.K., but as so many times before Holdsworth chose to leave the band, after one album, One of a Kind (1979), to start his own trio. "Bill's music was so close to UK in essence. I called it "jigsaw" music. As much as I loved working on his albums, it just didn't work for me live. I wanted to get back to the type of feeling that was happening when I worked with Tony Williams. The reason I moved to a trio was because I wanted to experiment with certain other aspects of my playing that I'd not had the chance to develop before and also clear my head of keyboards. I enjoy the trio thing, but it's hard sometimes — there's a lot of responsibility for me — sometimes too much."

Allan Holdsworth had experimented with the idea of going solo ever since playing with Tony Williams, but had encountered a nightmare with the recording and release of his debutalbum, *Velvet Darkness* (1977)." In an interview with Anil Prasad for the website "Interviews.org" he tells the story;

"It was no good. It was never any good. The way it was recorded, what happened to the musicians, the whole thing. It was a complete disaster. It was terrible at that time and that makes it terrible today. That album was never any good. (..) That album was never fit to be released. Nobody got to hear anything they did. I never got a tape of anything that was recorded. And we were actually rehearsing in the studio and they were rolling the tape while we were rehearsing on the premise that we'd be able to keep recording and also check things out, but that never happened. At the end of that day, the guy said "Thanks, see ya!" That's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> http://allmusic.com/artist/uk-p133450/biography

why a lot of those tunes don't have any endings—they were rehearsals! That was a complete rip-off."8

Holdsworth has several times tried to get the album of the market, but although the legal aspect is to his advantage it has time and again reappeared with different labels. John W. Patterson has tracked down the list of releases for allmusic.com; "This recording has been bootlegged by label after label, none of the musicians involved ever saw any royalties, and no legal paperwork exists. (The recording's known labels and release/re-release dates include CTI Records [1976], King Records [1976], Epic Associated Records [CD, 1990], King Records [Japanese-only CD, 1994], and CTI Records [Japanese-only CD, 1997].)" Despite Holdsworth's plea to not buy or listen to his "Velvet Darkness", the incredible circumstances of the album has made it no less than a collector's item.

After hearing great things about a young drummer from Leeds named Gary Husband, Holdsworth was finally about to make the first significant step forward in his solo career. After playing together the foundation for his new band, later named IOU, was set; "Basically, it was Gary and myself who started IOU." he recalls. Eventually they found their bass player, Paul Carmichael, and things seemed optimistic for Holdsworths new trio. But making a new album with the band would prove anything but easy. "Basically, I did nothing for two years. I wasn't playing, except with IOU (which wasn't playing) – I was just trying to get the band off the ground and couldn't. We couldn't get anybody interested in England. Finally I borrowed the money for the album – that's why I called it the IOU thing. The name was so perfect for it. No one got paid to make the album. "In a 1984 interview with Jock Baird for the magazine Musician he tells of this trying process and the light that was to appear at the end of a two year tunnel. "I was broke, couldn't make any living at all in music. I would've had to retire; in fact, I was just about to take a job in a music store. I had accumulated a lot of equipment over the years, and I basically paid the rent by selling a few things each month. Eventually, when we came to mix the I.O.U. album, I sold the last guitar I had. Then I came over to America on vacation and met someone who said she could get us gigs, so we all came over."9

The woman in question was Sharon Sudall and was able to offer Holdsworth and his band some concert dates on the west-cost, and the first concert was held at Roxy Theater in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> http://therealallanholdsworth.com/allansinterviewinner.htm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> http://ofeuillerat.free.fr/documents/articles/Musician%20Article%2084.html

Hollywood. Thought the I.O.U. album had not been released by any label, the show was completely sold-out. When speaking to the fans he was suddenly made aware that he had a highly devoted fan-base in America. Holdsworth had not seen this coming; "It's overwhelming! I was really shocked – I had no idea, and I'm really terrified." Their album however was still not catching on with the labels, so they pressed their own copies and did the best they could to sell it. Today "IOU" is a highly praised album, and John W. Patterson concurs in his review for allmusic.com; "The real Allan Holdsworth unleashed is at last revealed on I.O.U. in his original compositions and well-crafted soloing, versus being merely part of a group and forced to stay within certain boundaries of other bandmates' design. I.O.U., as a solo release, is high-quality jazz fusion interplay, offering emotive compositions, ethereal guitar atmospherics, complex chordal progressions, and intense legato explosions of guitar that set the standard for many guitarists to come." The album also feature tracks with vocals, as would be the case with many of his following releases. Despite their success, the rest of the IOU band suffered from the long distance to family and friends at home. Holdsworth therefore decided to find a new LA-based line-up and recruited bassist Jeff Berlin and drummer Chad Wackerman to the band. Finally things were looking up for him and the band played for sold out venues on both coasts. In addition record companies were expressing interest in IOU and with the help of his new friend, Eddie Van Halen, Holdsworth was signed to Warner Brothers for a mini-album. The plan was for Eddie Van Halen to coproduce the six track album, Road Games, but his tour-schedule did not allow him the time. After a lot of back and forward with delays and unexpected expenses, the album was finally released in 1984. Also this album is highly praised and was nominated for the 1984 Grammy Award in the category of "best rock instrumental performance". 11

One year later his third album *Metal Fatigue* was released on the Enigma Label. Because of yet another case of delays within the production and administration of the album, the tracks featured a varying lineup. In May 1985, around the time of the release, Holdsworth did an interview with Neville Marten for the magazine *Guitarist* and spoke about the circumstances surrounding the recording of the album.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> http://allmusic.com/album/iou-r9405

http://www.metrolyrics.com/1984-grammy-awards.html

"Warner Brothers took an awful long time to decide whether they wanted us to do another album or not, which is why this one's taken such a long time to come out. The majority of the recording was actually done quite a while ago, and there are two different sets of personnel. On side one it was Chad Wackerman on drums, Jimmy Johnson on bass, Paul Williams on vocals and myself on guitar. On side two Gary Husband, (an original member of the IOU band) played drums, Gary Willis was on bass and Alan Pasqua played some keyboards. The first line up is the one we're touring with at the moment, and we're just off to Japan. Hopefully, we're going back to the States to record the next album, which I'm really hoping will feature the SynthAxe."

And as he had hoped, the next album did feature the SythAxe; a brand new midi-controller built as a guitar synthesizer. Holdsworth was particular interested in using this instrument in his music since it allowed him to produce notes, timbers and textures in a way that was impossible on the guitar. (Read more about the SythAxe on in chapter 2.) The 1986 release, *Atavachron*, had only one track with vocals and this time by a female singer; Rowanne Mark. At allmusic.com John W. Patterson gives the following description of the album; "This release offered a semi-progressive symphonic element and served to ever stretch the boundaries of jazz fusion. Beautiful female vocals in one song framed by surrealistic visual musicks of the SynthAxe and keyboardy leads by Holdsworth may have turned guitar fans off, but this effort is clear evidence of the genius Holdsworth was demonstrating release after release. And as expected, Holdsworth continued to strive for that reed voicing and phrasing on his guitar solos, which merely pushed him to his best."<sup>13</sup>

Though his use of the SynthAxe was received modestly by some, he was not about to make the instrument a one-album feature. On his next release, *Sand* (1987), he dedicated almost the whole album to his new favorite instrument. Since he had just recently received his first SynthAxe when recording Atavachron, Holdsworth was eager to show a greater competence with the instrument on this next release. *Sand* was also his first album without any vocals. As he explains in a 1987 interview with Bill Milkowski for the magazine Guitar World, this was a conscious and strategic decision.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> http://ofeuillerat.free.fr/documents/itw/Marten%20itw%2085.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> http://allmusic.com/album/atavachron-r9406/review

"One of the problems that we've had over the last few years (. . .) is that nobody can tell me what this music is. For example, a jazz radio station will be reluctant to play any tracks from any of my albums, which is a drag, because they're playing music that is, in my opinion, far less jazz than what we do. They play this funky processed stuff and these kind of easy-listening things, which to me have nothing to do with jazz. And adversely, the rock stations won't play my music because they think it's too jazzy. So we don't get either, which kind of leaves me in this noman's land in the middle. So I'm now trying to get away from that and see if we can get over more with the jazz audience by doing all-instrumental music." 14

In chapter three I will go more into detail regarding the album and present an analysis of one of the tracks; "Pud Wud".

Many would argue that Holdsworths discography reached its peak with the release of his next album, *Secrets* (1989). Although he plays the guitar much more on this album than he did on Sand, the music remains largely based on the SynthAxe. A continuing dislike for the guitar reaffirmed his commitment to the midi-controller as he explains in a 1989 interview with Matt Resnicoff from *Guitar World*;

"I think I've made a lot of progress with the SynthAxe on this record. The longer I play the thing, the more comfortable it becomes and the more it becomes a part of my playing. Now; I enjoy playing it even more than guitar, because guitar poses a different set of problems that I've been battling with one way or another for years. On the one hand, I had to use distortion - quite unnatural to a percussive instrument like a guitar - to get the kind of sustain and vocal quality I wanted from my instrument. At the same time, I'm left with the schzzhhhh of it all. I find that I leave a lot more holes and pauses in my playing with the SynthAxe, whereas with the guitar's sustain, there's always some kind of note hanging on. (. . . ) That I don't like, because I realize I'm actually being pushed into something that I don't want to do, by the instrument." <sup>15</sup>

His confidence with the SynthAxe, however, allowed him to produce an album that did not go unnoticed. Vincent Jeffries writes for allmusic.com; "In addition to *Secrets*' technical accomplishments, Holdsworth contributes some of the most inspired songwriting of his career. The instrumental choruses are subtle and fluid, and the vocal lines on "Secrets"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> http://www.fingerprintsweb.net/ah/press/gw0687.html

http://ofeuillerat.free.fr/documents/itw/Guitar%20World%20itw%2089.html

(performed by Rowanne Mark) and "Endomorph" (Craig Copeland) surpass earlier Holdsworth-penned efforts with their touching lyrics and melodies. Simply put, this 1989 Enigma release is a triumph, the final contribution to the artist's seminal '80s collection that includes Metal Fatigue and Atavachron."

Although his solo career had produced many critically acclaimed albums, the nineties did not bring him the same recognition as the eighties had. In 1992 *Wardenclyffe Tower* hit the shelves, but neither Holdsworth nor the public was completely satisfied with the result. Being a relentless perfectionist, Holdsworth was mainly unsatisfied with the mixing of the album, but chose to release it anyway. "Well, I like some of the music on it. I thought all the guys played really great on it. As I said, the only thing that let it down for me is the mix." In his review of the album for allmusic.com, Daniel Gioffre shares his take on the compositions; "Despite the all-star cast of characters, there are certain peculiarities to Wardenclyffe Tower that prevent it from being numbered among Holdsworth's best work. (...) There is something formless about this album, something that blurs the tracks together in a meaningless way. Holdsworth has always been more of a distinctive than a strong composer, and the batch of tunes that he contributes here is not very compelling." One interesting aspect of *Wardenclyffe Tower* is that he plays a lot less SynthAxe on this album. In an interview by Anil Prasad published on the website innerviews.org, he explains why.

"There's a number of reasons, but the most important reason is that I was getting to a point where I was going to abandon playing the guitar altogether and only play the Synthaxe. (..) What I got afraid of is that I tried to keep in contact with them [Synthaxe Inc.] about any future things that they wanted to implement and Ideas that I had about modifications and improvements. The barrier broke down and in the end and right as it is—this moment—they don't exist at all. There's maybe two or three guys on the whole planet that could probably fix one. (..) So you can see, that's a scary situation to be in if that was the only instrument I played!" 19

Still, he was not about to abandon the SynthAxe all together and the instrument is also heavily featured on his following album, *Hard Hat Area* (1994). This album continues in the

http://therealallanholdsworth.com/allansinterviewinner.htm

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> http://allmusic.com/album/secrets-r9408/review

http://allmusic.com/album/wardenclyffe-tower-r181162/review

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> http://therealallanholdsworth.com/allansinterviewinner.htm

style of the previous release and Holdsworth, reluctant to choose a favorite, refers to this as one of his best albums. "I couldn't choose between say Hard Hat Area, Secrets, or The 16 Men." Hard Hat Area was also going to be the final album containing original composition in a steady stream of albums since the first IOU record. In 1996 None too soon became his first, and till now only, cover album. In chapter three I will present the story of the circumstances regarding the release, as well as an analysis of his version of Coltrane's "Countdown" from his legendary album *Giant Steps* (1959).

In 2000 Holdsworth released what is still today his most recent solo album; *The Sixteen Men of Tain*. With the bass guitar being replaced by double bass, and drummer Gary Novak playing in a more traditional jazzy character, this album represents a decisive shift with respect to overall sound. Many of his fans regard this as his absolute best musical effort and once again he enjoyed the praise of critics. *The Sixteen Men of Tain* will also be subject to a more detailed review in chapter three, as well as an analysis of the title track.

Since 2000 Holdsworth has contributed on several recordings and albums, but has not released any new solo album. It is unsure when we can expect anything new from Holdsworth, but in a January 2010 interview with *Jazz Times* we learn that he is finally working on his next solo album. It also seems that he has no intentions of doing another *The Sixteen Men of Tain*. "It's got considerably more energy than the last couple of records I did. (..) It's actually pretty aggressive ... for an old geezer."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> http://www.therealallanholdsworth.com/allansinterviewlogix.htm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> http://jazztimes.com/articles/25455-allan-holdsworth-once-upon-a-lifetime

# **Chapter 2: The principles**

# 2.1 Jazz in theory

Most musicians regard music theory as a mean to understand the structure of the music they play in order to be able to recreate and articulate new ideas that work in the context of their respected musical tradition. However, speaking of a theoretical approach can easily give an unfortunate implication that we are dealing with a clear, established system that has no room for personal alteration or adjustment. This is not the case. Author Mark Levin writes about the relativity of a theoretical system for jazz music in the introduction to his book *The Jazz Theory Book*: "There is no one single, all inclusive "jazz theory". In fact, that's why the subject is called jazz theory rather than jazz truth. The only truth is the music itself. "Theory" is the little intellectual dance we do around the music, attempting to come up with rules so we can understand why Charlie Parker and John Coltrane sounded the way they did. There are almost as many "jazz theories" as there are jazz musicians" (Levine 1995:187).

Since music theory is created as guiding lines for musicians, the nature of any musical genres or tradition will naturally set the premise for the formulation of its own theory. Examples of this include established musical schools of thought and theoretical disciplines both within and outside the academic music education system. Many musicians have benefitted from studying the extremely challenging rhythms of African music, where polyrhythm is represented more than in any other musical tradition. In India we find another unique tradition for classical music where small ensembles with native Indian instruments, and not to mention improvisation, represent a vital aspect. This music is underpinned by a very sophisticated musical theory, with clear "rules" for the creation and development of both melodic and rhythmic structures.<sup>22</sup>

The most well-known and recognized theoretical system within any musical tradition is that based on the western classical music. The educational form of which this system has been taught the past hundred years is in large degree based on the music of pioneers within composition of early classical music like Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594) and Johan Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). Although this discipline has been mainly reserved for the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Inspired and based on "Creative rhythmic concepts for jazz improvisation" by Ronan Guilfoyle, 1999.

classical tradition; it has had a profound impact on jazz music. Paul F. Berliner writes about this in his book celebrated book "Thinking in jazz":

Besides the jazz community's own institutions for learning, improvisers have benefited in varying degrees from colleges, universities, and conservatories. From the earliest days of jazz, influential artists have studied classical music at private conservatories or acquired technical performance skills from teachers with conservatory or academic backgrounds. (..) Ultimately, associations between jazz artists trained by ear in African American music and those with additional academic training blend differing worlds of musical knowledge, thus contributing to a mutual artistic exchange that continually enriches jazz tradition (Berliner 1994:55).

As the tradition developed through the years and new sub-genres of jazz was introduced, new ways of articulating the theory behind the music also played an important role. The most important contribution came in relation with the emerging modal jazz in the fifties. The book *The Lydian Chromatic Concept* (often shortened to *LCC*) by jazz musician, composer and theorist George Russell was first published in 1953, offering a new and different perspective to the *functional harmony* that still today sets the premise for most educations of music theory. Much of the basic idea of LCC is to regard the Lydian *mode* (this term will be explained later in the chapter) as the center of the tonal system, in the same way that the traditional major scale, also known as the Ionian mode, is generally perceived, and to redefine the way we think of chord-progressions. On the website *allmusic.com* Richard S. Ginell offers the following description of George Russel and the LCC:

While George Russell was very active as a free-thinking composer, arranger, and bandleader, his biggest effect upon jazz was in the quieter role of theorist. His great contribution, apparently the first by a jazz musician to general music theory, was a book with the intimidating title *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*, where he concocted a concept of playing jazz based on scales rather than chord changes. Published in 1953, Russell's theories directly paved the way for the modal revolutions of Miles Davis and John Coltrane."

Although Holdsworth has not credited *The Lydian Chromatic Concept*, or modal jazz at all, as playing any major part in the development of his personal style, there are many reasons to suspect the impact the modal concept has had on his music and theoretical principles. If we

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> http://allmusic.com/artist/george-russell-p79540/biography

disregard the fact that one of modal jazz biggest representatives, John Coltrane, has been Holdsworths biggest inspiration and strictly look at the structure of his harmonic system, it is still clear that he has a modal approach to playing music.

In this chapter we will take a close look at the theoretical principles behinds Holdsworths music, and how these ideas came to be. To get an understanding of how his unique system gives the music the characteristic sound, we will also examine some aspects of the more traditional music theory. This includes the basic structure and intent of functional harmony, with respect to chords and the individual notes role in each chord. Furthermore we will examine how the concept of modality differs from the functional harmony and how the modal jazz benefited from this new ways of approaching the use of chords and scales.

Most importantly we will examine Holdsworths own harmonic system and see how it relates to the previous mentioned schools of thought within the subject of music theory and relevant musical elements that are common between them.

### 2.2 The traditional concept of scales and chords

#### 2.2.1 Basic structures in music

In order to understand harmonic structure in western music it is essential to know exactly what a scale really is. We will therefore take a look at the basic structure of music presented through traditional theory. Countless books have been written on the issue, and it should be emphasized that it is neither my intention nor the purpose of this paper to give reference to all aspects of traditional music theory. Nor is it an alternative to reading an instructional book on the subject. It is, however, my goal to provide the reader with a simple summary of how scales and chords relate to each other, and give a functional context to the further subject of Allan Holdsworths own thought on the matter.

In western music we have divided the octave into 12 notes with equal distance between them. This is called a *chromatic scale*, a scale that includes all notes. In example 2.1 we see the names given to each of these notes, though these names sometimes change depending on the musical context.

Example 2.1

С	C#	D	D#	Е	F	F#	G	G#	Α	A#	Н

It is hard to give all these notes a significant role in a single piece of music, and still provide the tonal sensation that characterizes our musical tradition. And so, composers and musicians have throughout history chosen certain notes which together creates the building blocks for their music. The collection of these notes is known as a *scale*. Although there are as many scales as there are possibilities to subtract certain notes, one scale in particular has been used far more than any other. In example 2.2 we see how the chromatic scale has been structured to what we today know as the *major/minor-scale*. It must be noted that the nature of a scale is not defined by the notes that are present, but by the distance between these notes. In this way each scale can be constructed in 12 different ways, by moving the distance between all notes in a parallel manner. Each scale has traditionally one *root note* and the name of a scale is based on the name of this note. For example the scale in example

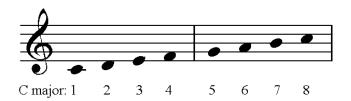
2.2 is known as a C major scale. The distance between notes are detectible through the space created by the absent notes.

Example 2.2

С	D	E	F	G	Α	Н

In musical notation, one octave of the C major scale is presented as following:

Example 2.3



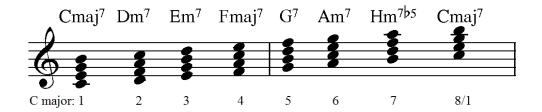
Traditionally we give a certain number to each note of a scale, to make each "building block" easier to identify and thereby help to see the musical structure as a whole. Be aware that number one and number eight is the same note. Each note has a unique role to play, and so it is important to be aware of the identity of each note. By switching the role of "root note" to another of the scales notes we see that a different structure of intervals occur between some of the notes. In other words, we can create seven different scales within the major/minor scale. But these new "scales" are not referred to as scales; but as modes within the scale. The different modes as named (1) Ionian, (2) Dorian, (3) Phrygian, (4) Lydian, (5) Mixolydian, (6) Aeolian and (7) Lokrian. These are also referred to as "second mode", "third mode" ECT. If the rote note in the music is for example the number 6, we know that the music is based on the Aeolian mode. The Aeolian mode is better known as the minor scale, and the Ionian mode (1) is known as the major scale. These two modes make up the duality of the western music, that most often base itself on either minor or major tonality. Since these to modes are used significantly more than any other, the scale in question is often referred to as the major/minor-scale. Although major and minor are modes within the same scale, they are generally referred to as minor scale and major scale, and creates the foundation for music in minor or major tonality.

Let's take a look at the chords vital role as part of the overall musical expression and how they are generally structured. Since chords will prove to play a key role in what makes Holdsworth's sound so characteristic, it is important to get some insight into the general school of thought regarding this and how his principles differ. Chords are generally used to create a certain harmonic landscape that either set the premise for the melody, or help to give a melody an appropriate harmonic context that enriches the musical expression.

Although chords are often basically a number of notes from a certain scale played simultaneously; there are a number of "rules" that speaks to how they should be structured. First of all; there should be one main note, commonly known as a root-note. This note will set the premise from the rest of the chord and can therefore be perceived as the absolute most important note in a chord. This note is most often the lowest note in the entire musical structure, and is mostly played by the bass instrument in the ensemble. If there is only one instrumentalist playing he will be sure to include the bass note in the music, as long as it is an instrument that allows for multiple harmonic layers. The next important note in a chord is referred to as "the 3rd". Since we tend to give each note of a scale a certain number, starting with "1" at the root and giving each note a higher number as we follow the scale ascendingly, we refer to each note by their number. You will notice that throughout the text these numbers will be written as 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and so on. This is to give a clear distinction between references to notes and other occasions where the words "third", "forth" and "fifth" appears in any context. The importance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> is grounded in its role to be the most important indication of whether it is a major or minor chord. If it is four half steps above the root the note is a major 3<sup>rd</sup> and therefore makes the chord a major chord. If the 3<sup>rd</sup> is three half steps above the root, it is a *minor* 3<sup>rd</sup>, making it a "minor chord". The last of the basic notes in a chord is the 5<sup>th</sup>. This note is almost always found seven half steps above the root and serves the purpose of giving the chord a fuller sound, as well as helps identify the root note of the chord. In classical music these three notes makes up the general chord structure. In jazz however there is a fourth note included in the perception of "basic chord structure"; the 7<sup>th</sup>. This note is also important in both giving body to the sound as well as contribute to a sensation of minor or major tonality. As with the 3<sup>rd,</sup> it bears the distinction of being one of the two. A major 7<sup>th</sup> is found 11 half steps over the root, or easier; one half step below. The minor 7<sup>th</sup> as found 10 half steps above the root, or two half steps below.

There is a synchronicity within the major/minor scale in the fact that if the chord is minor both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> will also be minor. Same with most major chords; if the 3<sup>rd</sup> is major, so is the 7<sup>th</sup>. The exception however is if the chord is a "dominant chord", in other words if it has a strong sensation to lead towards the chord found 5 half steps above, or 7 half steps under; than it has a major 3<sup>rd</sup> and a minor 7<sup>th</sup>. All in all there are generally seven different chords in the major/minor-scale, one for each note. In example 4.4 we see an eight chord displayed; this one is identical to the one found on the first step, only an octave higher.

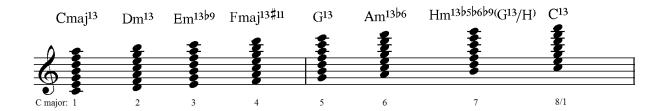
Example 4.4



As we can see in example 4.4 the four notes we have talked about, the root, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5th and 7<sup>th</sup>, is actually every other note in the scale when counting ascendingly from each root note. Although these are the most common notes to be found in chords there is also possibilities of expanding the harmony. And even thou there are thousands of different ways of doing this, the main principle is actually quite simple. In the same fashion that we have included every other note from the scale when creating the chord, we can now continue to regard further notes into the chord as shown in example 4.5. Although there are certain notes that sometimes are altered by choice of the musician, the principle remains sound. It is common to refer to these higher notes in the chord not by 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup>, but rather 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. When this many notes are included in the chords, it is often necessary, especially for guitarists, to exclude a few notes in order to be able to play it on the instrument. Another motivation for leaving out notes may also be that too many notes at the same time do not always serve the music in the best way. It is therefore important to have an idea of how to go about making this reduction. This depends very much on what other musical element are included in the overall musical structure. If there is another instrument in the ensemble playing chords, you may generally exclude or include whatever you feel like, since the harmony is already accounted for. If you're playing solo, though, there are a few things one

should be aware of; the root and the 3<sup>rd</sup> are always very important. In popular or classical music the third note to not be left out is the fifth, but in jazz the seventh may be regarded as more important.

Ex: 4.5



When a number of chords are played after one another, as in most song, we refer to this as a *chord progression*. Giving the chord from the first step of a scale, also known as the *tonic chord*, a central role in the progression is the key to giving the listener a clear feeling of the tonality of the music. To help establish this feeling chord progressions are often build around *cadenzas*. This is most basic framework of the harmonic structure of functional harmonic music. In the classical tradition the most regular cadenza consists of the progression; 1-4-5-1 (see example 4.5 for numbered chordal oversight), while in jazz the most common cadenza is 1-2-5-1, often referred to as a 2-5-1 progression since the phrases often starts on the  $2^{nd}$  chord. Of course, this only represents the very basic of structures, and so all other chords are frequently included in order to build longer and more interesting progressions.

When improvising melodies over music one can basically use any note from the scale which the music is based on, with preferably a little extra attention paid to the notes that are featured in the specific chord that is played at any given time. If an entire song is based on just one scale, with no alterations of any notes, you may in other word stick to that one scale in your improvisation. This is however rarely the case in jazz music, and so it is necessary to address the aspect of *modulation*.

Modulation is a change of tonality within a piece of music. In other words; the music changes the scale which the melody and harmony base itself on. This creates a whole new set of challenges with respect to improvisation. Not only is it necessary for the improviser to know what the new tonality is, it is also important to determine if a chord is fourth or fifth

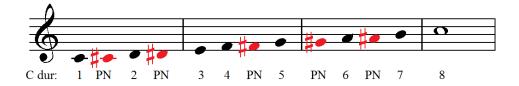
etc. in the scale. This will help him or her to find the appropriate *mode* of a scale to use for improvisation, give information on what notes to emphasize and what notes that can or should be altered.

A quick summary before we go any further; The major/minor scale provides seven notes that sets the basic premise for what chords and melody notes that can be used in a musical structure. An improviser can use any of these notes, but should keep some focus on the notes that are featured in, or sound best with, the chord played at that specific time. Any alteration in chords should be matched by a similar alteration in the scale used for improvising. A complete change of scale is called a *modulation* and any harmonic elements in the music must thereby be adjusted to the new tonality.

## 2.2.2 Playing chromatic

Playing chromatic means to include notes that are not originally in the scale. This is most often executed through a stepwise movement between two scale notes as shown in example 2.6. For the effect of chromatism to work in the traditional sense it is vital these notes resolves themselves upward or downward to scale notes within a short moment, if the listener is not to perceive the notes as "too strange" or "wrong". The use of this effect has been around for hundreds of years in the classical music, but was heavily introduced in the bebop period in the early 1940s with Charlie Parker leading the way. By preceding any scale or chordal note with one of the two neighboring chromatic notes the soloist suddenly have all twelve notes in the western musical system available for improvising over any harmony.

Example 2.6



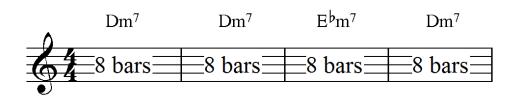
### 2.2.3 Playing modal

In the beginning of the 1960's the *modal jazz* changed the way musicians approached music both in terms of composition and improvisation. In the previous eras of jazz the musicians have played over the harmony of each chord as they pass by. In example 2.7 we see an excerpt from a pre-modal John Coltrane's composition called "Countdown". This song will be subject for further analysis later in the text, but we can already see that it modulates no less than three times the first four bars. In other words the improviser must use four different scales within this first phrase. With chords flying by this fast it is only just enough time to play a few notes per chord, and so the improviser will often end up prioritizing just a few of the chords most vital notes.

Example 2.7: "Countdown"24



Example 2.8: "So what"



In example 2.8 we see the first four bars of the song "So what". This song is the first track from the album that has been credited for setting the stage for modal jazz; Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*. It should be noted that in addition to the repeating chords the tempo is very slow. In Mark Levin's' *the jazz theory book* we find a very simple description of what modal jazz really is; "Few chords, lot's of space."<sup>25</sup> In essence this absolves the tradition role of functional harmony and opens for new voicings and more abstract use of tonal material. Instead of using the major-minor scale as an overall source for long strings of chords, the composition is often based on just one chord from the scale without contextualizing it in reference to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Source: Real Book.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Mark Levine, The jazz Theory Book 1995:29

other chords. The different *modes* we spoke about earlier have now become different potential *tonic chords* of their own, with the music spinning around all the harmonic possibilities without the musician being preoccupied with the function off either any specific note of chord. To make this possible the bass provides a strong harmonic foundation with the root note, or sometimes the 5<sup>th</sup>, playing the undisputed central role. In other words a modal tune can be in a *Dorian* tonality or a Lydian tonality and so on.

We have now looked at different important subjects within the established musical theory. It must be noted that that it takes a lot more than a few pages to master both the understanding as well as the usage of these principles. As earlier mentioned it is only my intention to create a common frame of reference between the author and the reader so that further musical discussions can be measured up to these basic principles of each musical element. In the following pages of this chapter we will take a close look at what Holdsworth describes as his own system and contextualize it with regards to the tradition approach to composing and improvising.

### 2.3 Holdsworths theoretical approach

#### 2.3.1 His view on musical structures

To get insight into the thought process of Allan Holdsworth we need to examine some of the literature published regarding his playing, as well as taking a closer look at the different elements that is being discussed in these texts. Not much have been written about him and even less focus have been given to the theoretical and technical aspect of his unique way of playing music. Holdsworth himself has shown to be very reluctant to share his concepts in any form, and speaks only in very general terms, constantly emphasizing his opinion that people should do their own thing and figure out their own way of approaching music. Although this might be true we do continue our quest to uncover the secrets behind his playing.

In an article by Gianluca Corona posted in the monthly magazine *Guitar Techniques* we find the following description of Holdsworth: "Regarded as unique and uncompromising, Allan's style relies on a complete knowledge of the fret board and a deep understanding of advanced music concepts allied to a mind-blowing technique. Unlike the vast majority of fusion players, his music doesn't pay huge tribute to the jazz tradition, nor does there seem to be any blues involved." <sup>26</sup>

With jazz and blues not being vital components in his playing it might be hard to imagine where the influence to his fusion-style music may have originated. In an interview by Darrin Fox done for the magazine *Guitar Player* he clarifies this on response to a question regarding what his compositional influences are: "Most of them are classical composers such as Ravel, Debussy, Stravinsky, Copland, and Bartok—particularly his string quartets. I still can't listen to Debussy's "Clair de Lune" because, if I do, I'll cry [laughs]. I can't get past the first two bars. It's really weird, man. It tears me up. What I took from those guys was how their tunes make me feel in my heart. It's about the emotion, rather than what the piece actually is. I think that's because I want to be influenced, which is a whole lot different than trying to work out precisely what someone is doing."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Guitar Techniques spring 2010 page 62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> http://www.th<u>erealallanholdsworth.com/allansinterviewgp.htm</u>

When listening to the Debussy's "Clair de Lune" it is not far-fetched to experience this as closer to much of Holdsworths own music than a lot of jazz-rock. But if his skills in composing and improvising did not develop through any analysis of this music, it still does not answer any question to where his theoretical and practical abilities originated. In one of his few publications on the issue, *Just for the curious* (1993), he talks about his approach to learning how to improvise over chord changes, and describes a process that is significantly different from any traditional way of learning music:

"I guess I started out trying to figure everything out by using math. So I started out using a fixed number like, say, number one. Because of the transposing nature of stringed instruments you can transpose real easy, something you can't do on other instruments. So I figures if I just started out with, say, five note scales than I could just permutate them all. Like one through five, then one two three four six, one two three four seven etc. through to twelve. And then I'd do the same with six notes, seven notes, eight notes, nine notes. And then I catalogue them and filed them away, and threw away all the ones that had more than four semitones in a row, in a straight row. And I just analyzed them and looked at them till I could see chords within them. And then I realized that the way I think about chord is they're just parts of the scale that are played simultaneously, and as the chord changes go by I don't so much think about the static chord-voicing staying or changing. I just see, like, the whole of the notes on the neck change. And I guess, for me, the only thing that makes one scale different from another is not the starting note; it's the separation of the intervals. For example if it's a D minor/major seventh scale, the name that I give to a scale is only a means of identification. It's for no other purpose. So when I think of that scale, I don't think of it as starting on D. I think of it as; it starts on the lowest available note on my instrument, which would be an E and the highest available note, which would be another E, the high E. So that's basically how I think of scales."28

Not even the aspect of learning chords happened in an ordinary fashion. Although Holdsworth was determent to do things his own way his father who was a piano player taught him much about both chords and scales. Holdsworth speaks of this in an interview with Bill Milkowski for the magazine *Jazztimes*: "But since he wasn't a guitar player, he couldn't tell me how it was supposed to be done on the guitar," says Allan. "And I guess that's how I developed such an unorthodox technique. I learned things from the piano and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Just for the curious CD: track 2.

figured out on my own how to transpose those ideas onto the guitar. And I just acquired this dexterity through constant repetition and practice. I didn't know it wasn't supposed to be done that way, it just seemed perfectly logical to me."29

As product of an unorthodox way of learning chords and scales, in addition to finding his main influence in music that is not related to the jazz or blues, his music was always bound to end up sounding a different from everything else. Let's now take a closer look at the main musical elements; scales, chords and rhythm. In addition to this we will learn more about one of the main characteristics in his music; his legato sound, as well as the equipment used to create the sound.

#### **2.3.2 Scales**

In few cases is there so much and so little to say regarding one and the same subject, as when we're talking about Holdsworths own musical theory. It is actually possible to compress the essence into this one short statement;

Any collection of five notes or more can be seen as a scale, and when playing any of the notes simultaneously, this creates appropriate chords to go with this scale. No scale or chord has any particular function in relation with any other, but all are tonic in their own tonality until a new scale is introduced.

We have already learned that he gained oversight into different scales using mathematical permutation. On the website thefreedictionary.com we find this definition of the word:

per·mu·ta·tion

- 1. A complete change; a transformation.
- **2.** The act of altering a given set of objects in a group.
- 3. Mathematics A rearrangement of the elements of a set. 30

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> http://jazztimes.com/articles/20372-allan-holdsworth-one-man-of-trane http://www.thefreedictionary.com/permutation

In the context of scales, permutation will in other words mean to rearrange which of the twelve notes in the chromatic scale that is to be used in a hypothetical scale. In example 2.9

we see how Holdsworth goes about doing this. In construction of a pentatonic scale, meaning a scale with five notes, the potential for different variations are anything but small. Using a factorial formula to calculate how many pentatonic scales that can extracted from 12 notes the answer ends at 792. After that one has to identify all the ones where the interval pattern is identical, in addition to Holdsworths own dismissal of any scale that includes four or more notes in a straight row. When this whole process is done for, the most important thing remains; to identify the scales that are most usable and sound best. Holdsworth has then done this with 6-, 7-, 8, and 9-note scales, some of which need two or three octaves to complete themselves. According

to a video posted on YouTube by guitarist and online teacher Pebber Brown, claiming to be a friend of Holdsworth, he has them all written down in something he calls "The phonebook from hell."<sup>31</sup>

When being presented with this method of figuring out scales, it is easy to get carried away and to assume that he constantly uses some strange scales that bear no resemblance to the music we are used to hearing. This is not the case. Although his music distinguishes itself a great deal from any other, he is also a product of our society and been subjected to the same western culture as any of us. This becomes clear in the instructional book, *Just for the curious*, where he presents what he considers to be the 10 most usable scales. An additional five more scales have been added in the book, probably after the recording of the video/DVD-version which is called simply *Allan Holdsworth*. All these scales will create the basis for the harmonic analysis later in this thesis. But first; let's take a look at them as they are presented in the book:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RycO2YoQWHM

#### Example 2.10

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Seven Note Scales:
Scale #1) C Major/D Minor/G7
Scale #2) D Minor (maj7) - (D Melodic Minor)
Scale #3) A Minor (maj7, 6) - (A Harmonic Minor)
Scale #4) A Minor (maj7, #4) - (E Harmonic Major)
Scale #14) C Dominant (#9)
Added Tone "Jazz" Scales (Eight notes):
Scale #6) Bb Jazz Major (add #5)
Scale #7) C Jazz Dominant (add 47)
Scale #8) B Jazz Minor (add 57)
Scale #9) A Jazz Minor (add 6)
Scale #11) D Jazz Minor (add #11)
Added Tone "Jazz" Scales (Nine notes):
Scale #12) C Jazz Dominant (add 3 and 47)
Scale #13) C Jazz Major (add 3 and 6)
Symmetrical Scales:
Scale #5) G# Diminished - 1/2,1,1/2,1,1/2,1, etc.
Scale #10) Symmetrical - 1/2,1/2,1 1/2,1/2,1, etc.
Scale #15) Whole Tone - 1,1,1,1,1, etc.
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It should be noted that the articulation of these scales through traditional terminology is done by the editor to make the information accessible for the general public. Holdsworth himself explains in the video that he uses special symbols to identify each scale; symbols that has no meaning to anyone but him. Still, we can clearly recognize the main structure of the scales from those found in traditional music theory. What is actually not articulated thoroughly in the list is that every minor scale is actually melodic minor (major 6<sup>th</sup> and major 7<sup>th</sup>), if nothing else is noted. This is of course with exception of the first scale, which is a traditional major/minor-scale.

Some of the scales in question are particularly known for giving Holdsworths music some of its characteristic sound. Gianluca Corona writes mentions this in the article from *Guitar Techniques*: "His note choice is often dependent on unusual scales and modes such as a melodic minor with a sharpened fourth (formula – R 2 b3 #4 5 6 7) used over minor chords. Alan also uses chromatic ideas that when mixed with altered scales imply an almost atonal sound." The scale described in this quote is actually "scale #4" in the list from example 2.10, and he confirms his fascination with it in the included CD containing sound extracted from the video/DVD-version; "I like this scale. A lot."

Although Holdsworth claim to dismiss any scale with more than four semitones in a row, he sometimes adds chromatic notes to the lines that do not appear in any scale he uses at the time. This is not stated in any interview or texts, but can be concluded from the simple fact that he at times plays long chromatic lines over one chord. This can often make the identification of the scale through analysis somewhat difficult, but only emphasizes the fact that he is prepared to do whatever he likes as long as it *sounds great*.

Some of the scale mentioned in the example is referred to as a major scale or a dominant scale, but this is not how Holdsworth himself think of them; "I always relate them to the closest minor in my head." This might be some of the reason why his music is known for its dark melancholy, and why even many guitarists from the metal-scene enjoy his music.

Another major contribution to his the characteristic of his music is the way he forms his phrases. Not choosing the traditional way of organizing his lines, he tries to "juggle the notes around" in new ways. In an April 1987 article from the magazine *Guitar*, Wolf Marshall writes: "Holdsworth is a master of line form permutation. In his style, myriad concepts of melodic invention and variation co-exist to color and define his unique improvisational approach. He has a penchant unusual and often angular melody lines with unexpected and unpredictable ranges and resolutions."<sup>33</sup>

As a concrete tip for improvisation, presented in his instructional book (1993), Holdsworth encourages guitarist to play more than three notes in on one string as a way of breaking away from any pattern. A direct result of playing scales in this fashion is that you will have to change your position of the neck constantly to avoid repeating notes. In general, many guitarists choose to play two or three notes per string when playing scales in order to stay in one "position". This requires less movement and easily gives the player access to two octaves of notes. However, many encounter the problem of not being able to break away from these patterns and end up repeating the same musical motives over and over. In this sense Holdsworths method is a step towards what he encourage to be the main goal; to be able to see all the scale-notes on the neck as they were all lit up, and to identify and extract chords and melodies from them.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Just for the curious CD; track 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Guitar, April 1987 <a href="http://ofeuillerat.free.fr/documents.html">http://ofeuillerat.free.fr/documents.html</a>

#### **2.3.3 Chords**

As opposed to many other guitarists, Allan Holdsworth rarely plays traditional "riffs". When he's not soloing, he seems to prefer playing chords and letting the top note be perceived as the melody. In many cases the melody might be less important than the feeling of each voicing and the sensation of the changing tonalities. In the last few pages we learned that he relates everything to the closest minor, and that he almost consistently uses the melodic minor, often sharpens the forth. In Corona's article from *Guitar Techniques* he tells of the effect this has on the music; "Chords built upon this scale [the melodic minor with sharpened fourth] really do sound very dark and dissonant, even more so when we look for closed voicings as Allan usually does."<sup>34</sup>

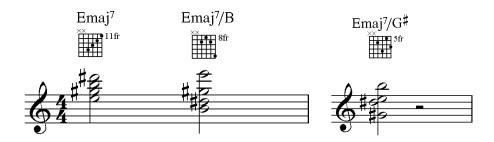
He is also famous for his unorthodox chords, where those close voicings sometimes creates a sound many do characterize as dissonant. There is however good reasons to assume that Holdsworth himself does not hear them as being dissonant. In the instructional book he gives us to examples of an E major seventh chord, comparing a fairly traditional voicing to one of his own; "Well, one of the things that might happen to you is if somebody says "Ok, play me an E major seventh chord", which is a pretty primitive chord. And if you haven't been playing very long you might just play... (see Emaj7 in ex. 2.11). But that's a really ugly, disgusting, dissonant sounding chord to me, so you could play another inversion of that; say... (see Emaj7/B in example 2.11), which sounds a whole lot nicer."<sup>35</sup> In the illustration below we see that the first chord is based entirely on thirds with the root note in the bass and the 7<sup>th</sup> as the top note. The second chord which Holdsworth suggests as a better alternative has the fifth in the bottom followed by the seventh, the third and finally the root note on the top. This creates two disadvantages though; one being that because of the fifth in the bass the chord is somewhat unstable without a bassist to play the root in the bottom. However that might not be a problem if the chord is not a tonic in piece of music based on functional harmony. The second disadvantage is the long stretch where the fourth finger (the little finger) will have to skip to frets. If the chords change rapidly this might create some problem for many guitarist. Finally we see a Emaj7/G# which is extracted from the transcription of "Countdown" in chapter three. In this chord we see an example of a typical Holdsworth chord with a close voicing.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Guitar Techniques spring 2010 page 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Just for the curious CD; track 14.

Example 2.11



Holdsworth continues the discussion of the chord by underlining one of his principles; you could also just pick out any other four notes from the E major scale and play that. He explains in greater detail in his book;

"People ask me a lot about chords and the way I think about chords, and the way I do think about chords is; I just think of them as being, say, members of a family. And I think of a four note chord for example, which most guitar chords are, as just being four members of a family. Say you have a, imagine a seat with eight family members on it and you say "Four stand up; Steven, George, Sarah, Winston", or whatever, "Stand up!" And then you take a picture of those and that's that particular chord, but their all members of that one family. So when I hear chords moving from one chord to another, I don't just hear the static voicing of that particular chord, although that may be important, in a head say for example. I see it more as being the families that changes; you change from one chord to the next. So, I just think of chords as being based on scales, so I try to hear the scale-shapes move, you know, from one family to the next as the chords go by."<sup>36</sup>

As a result of Holdsworths way of reformulating the structure of both melodies and chords, he is able to make even the most traditional scales sound strange and exotic. In example 2.12 we see an illustration of chords all originating from the C major scale. This musical example is presented in his book, *Just for the Curious*. When hearing this short piece of music it is hard to imagine that everything happens diatonically within the scale, and that all these chords should be able to function perfectly as C major chords.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Just for the curious CD; track 13.

Example 2.12



In 1985 a book with transcriptions of some of Holdsworths music was released under the fitting title; *Reaching for the uncommon chord*. The title bears witness to what everyone who has tried to play his music has experienced; the chords rarely feel comfortable to play. Still he emphasizes the importance of not taking the easy route to playing music; "Don't let your hands dictate what you think you can do. Take a look at those fingerboard charts and imagine your eyes, like, dancing on the notes that you wanna play. And then forget about whether your hands can do it or not; just try it!<sup>37</sup>"

### **2.3.4 Rhythm**

With a fresh new approach to both melody and harmony, Holdsworth clearly see no reason to be traditional when it comes to rhythm. Much of his music features changing time signatures, solos with challenging subdivisions, themes and melodies with unpredictable articulation and accents, and always a drummer with a refusal to give away too much of clear beat. Corona writes in his article; "Allan's lyrical solos are well supported by his astonishing knowledge and techniques. His instinct to play freely, with no recognizable pulse, or following odd numbers like seven, nine, five or eleven, makes his solos totally unpredictable, giving you a weird feeling that even a 4/4 groove would sound like there's no backbeat at all. On the top of that he can be very melodic, lying over long sustained notes and creating pure melodies that make his phrasing open up and breath."

The rhythmical aspect of his music is very rarely discussed, except in transcriptions and analysis. This might be because the style of fusion and progressive music often relay on odd

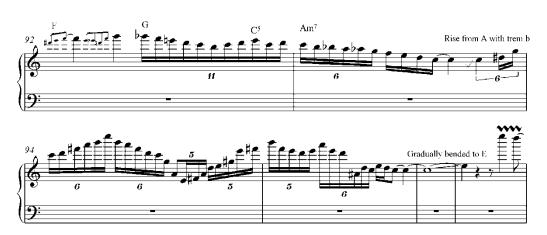
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Just for the curious CD; track 13.

rhythmical structures in their music. One can also speculate if not the progressive scene had a significant influence on his relation to rhythm in his own music. In an interview with Anil Prasad for the website *innerviews.org* he speaks of his time with the prog-rock band *Soft Machine*: "There was a lot of freedom in the group. Most of their pieces were quite simple harmonically, but they were in odd time signatures which was something going on at the time. I can't count anyway, so everything is in one to me, but I really dug it." <sup>38</sup>

In example 2.13 we see a few bars of the guitar solo from "Pud Wud", as an example of typical Holdsworth-subdivision. A complete transcription and analysis of the song can be found in the next chapter.

Example 2.13



http://www.ipportious.org

<sup>38</sup> http://www.innerviews.org/inner/holdsworth2.html

# 2.4 Making a different sound:

#### **2.4.1 Legato**

Allan Holdsworth is renowned for his legato style of playing the guitar. Although this applies to much of his musical expression in general, most attention regarding this has been given to the specific guitar-technical aspect of his execution of the legato. So let's examine how this technique distinguishes itself from the traditional way of playing notes on the instrument.

When playing guitar it is customary to synchronize the left hand and the right hand in order to produce the desired note or chord. For each new note the left hand pushes down the string on the appropriate fret, and the right hand pluck the string with a pick or a finger. This pluck always creates a certain articulation of the note, and the time it takes for the finger or the pick to create the note may also result in a slight pause that adds to the articulation. When playing legato all the work is done by the left hand. An ascending note is produced by what is called as an "ascending slur" or a "hammer on", where a finger is hammered on to the string in the appropriate fret and either produces enough vibration in the string to create the sound or simply changes the pitch without obstructing the vibration in the string. A descending note is done by the use of a "pull off", or again "descending slur", and is slightly more complicated to perform. The traditional way off doing it is to remove a finger while creating some tension in the string by pulling it slightly to the side before letting go. It is then vital that the player prepare for the next note in advance. A much less traditional way of doing it is to remove the finger without creating any tension in the string and instead hammering on a finger on the desired fret. This is referred to as a "hammer-on for nowhere" and is extremely difficult to perform in a convincing way. Guitarist and teacher Pebber Brown describes the difference of this two techniques in an e-mail sent to me regarding the subject; "Pull offs are a crude way of doing it. Its [hammer-on from nowhere] a similar thing but with much more finesse and grace. It's like fine Ballet instead of Drunken Stomping."<sup>39</sup> Some people, like Pebber Brown, claim that this is how Holdsworth himself performs his legato, though this has to the best of my knowledge never been formally stated in any interview or literature by Holdsworth himself. In musical articles showing musical examples of how he execute legato in his playing the trend is simply to play four notes per string instead of three and with as few plucked notes as possible, preferably only when changing to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Email from Pebber Brown 09.11.2009

a new string. In example 2.14 we see a typical Holdsworth-like way of playing a C major scale on the guitar. The lines show the use of legato on the instrument.

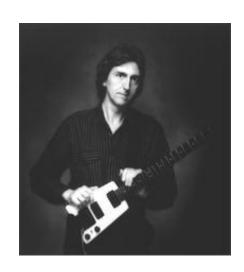
Example 2.14



The reason for his extensive use of the legato has however been stated in many occasions, and relates to his fascination with the horn. Allan speaks of this in his instructional video: "Well, I guess I started with the legato thing by accident, cause I didn't really know what was happening, and... I always wanted to play a horn, so I guess subconsciously I tried to make the guitar sound more like a horn. (..) And that's where the legato-thing came in because I just wanted it to be a lot more fluid than was natural for this percussive instrument to be."<sup>40</sup>

# 2.4.2 Equipment

Legendary guitarists are often remembered as much for the guitar they play as the music they play. In Allan Holdsworth's case the use of his once signature Steinberger guitar, now out of production, has made it part of the Holdsworth-icon. On this guitar we find passive Seymour Duncan SH-AH1 Humbucker pickups and a white colored finish. With its headless neck and small body this guitar has made its appearance known in the musical scene.



Allan Holdsworth with his Steinberg signature guitar.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Clip from the instructional video: *Allan Holdsworth*, 1992. <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iQnZ-gMd-E">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iQnZ-gMd-E</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Equipment info based on <a href="http://www.jazzguitar.be/allan holdsworth guitar gear.html">http://www.jazzguitar.be/allan holdsworth guitar gear.html</a>

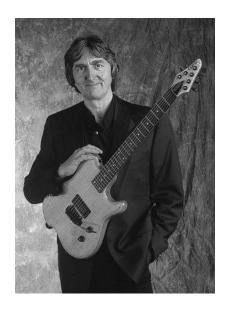
Another guitar he has taken to good use is one built by luthier Bill DeLap, again for Steinberger. As with all their instruments also this one is headless, though with a more traditional body with a natural wood finish.

Later Holdsworth signed up with Carvin and there are today three signature guitars in production. The Allan Holdsworth Signature Series H2, HF2 Fatboy and HF2S Synth Access Fatboy have all some characteristic features in common. They are all "hollow body" guitars, meaning that there is enough space within the body to provide the sound with a hollow and almost acoustic timbre. With Holdsworths wish of making the guitar sound as un-percussive and fluid as possible it is easy to see how this quality is appreciated. Other common features are the installed H22N and H22T humbuckers, as well as "jumbo frets" on the neck. Large frets ease the task of the legato technique and can provide a significant vibrato without too much movement in the left hand.

As amplification he uses among other two 80 W
Yamaha DG80 112 Digital Modeling Amps with the
speakers of the brand Celestion Vintage 30 installed. He



The slightly more traditional Steinberger Bill DeLap.



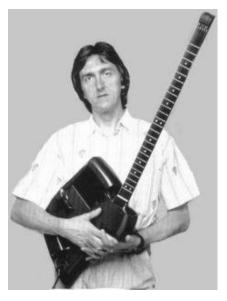
Holdsworth with his Carvin signature

uses one for the clean sound where he takes a crunch preset with very little gain and high master volume. The other one is used for his lead tone, where he use the lead one preset with various degrees of gain. He is also using the TriAmp MKII and the ZenTera amplifiers from Hughes and Kettner.

Allan Holdsworth is one of the few to fully embrace the SynthAxe when it was introduced. This is basically a midi controller that bases itself on the idiomatic of the guitar, and can also be operated with a breath control. He has uttered great respect for the instrument as it offered him the chance to escape from the guitars percussive nature and allowing him to

phrase and form the music as a horn player would do. Although Holdsworth decided to abandon the instrument a few years back due to the difficulties of getting it serviced since it

has gone out of production, he describes in an interview by Anil Prasad for the website *Innerviews* his fascination with the instrument; "With the Synthaxe, I could use it as a wind instrument. I used to use it with a breath controller—I could use it as the wind instrument I had always wanted to play since I was a kid. I didn't have to deal with distortion and shaping a distorted guitar sound into something musical, which is a real challenge. It's been one of the problems I have all of the time with the guitar—I want to make it sound more like a horn. But at the same time, the fact that you have to use any sort of distortion to get sustain is a kind of a catch-22. You have



In 1986 a complete Synthaxe system costed nearly £10,000.

to use something you don't want to use to get something that you want to use. I didn't have any of those problems with the Synthaxe. It was really clear and really easy."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> http://www.innerviews.org/inner/holdswor.html

#### 2.5 Videos and litterature

There has not been published much literature on Allan Holdsworth, and much of the information about him is mostly to be found in interviews and articles on the web and in magazines focusing on guitar playing. There has been written a master thesis in music titled "Allan Holdsworth: transcriptions and analysis with emphasis on harmonic, linear and rhythmical features" by Trond Keilen at the University in Trondheim in 1992<sup>43</sup>. Unfortunatly, I have not been successful in gaining access to this text. There have however been four significant publications and most of them are frequently being referred to in this thesis:

#### *Reaching for the uncommon chord* (1985, book):

With transcriptions of 11 original Allan Holdsworth compositions, this book is much more a traditional music sheet book, than anything else. However, some 20 – 30 pages has been dedicated to the biography and some additional information related to Holdsworths as a guitarist, as well as some brief analytical notes for each song. Written by Christopher Hoard in collaboration with Allan Holdsworth, this is the first and only book to give a somewhat thorough biography of him and analysis of his music.

#### Allan Holdsworth (1992, VHS and 2007, DVD):

This is the only instructional video where he shares his view on the different aspects of his playing. The main focus has been given to scales, chords as well as a live studio recording of five songs. This release, as well as the following *Just for the curious*, makes up much of the foundation for this thesis.

#### *Just for the curious* (1993, book):

This is basically a book version of the instructional video, with some added scales and examples that is not featured in the video. In his homepage this book can be found on the list of "Stuff I recorded, but wish I had not". The reason, and whether this applies to the video as well, is unclear.

## Melody chords (1997, book):

Written by his father, Sam Holdsworth, this book was intended to present the issue of chords and melodies on guitar the way Allan Holdsworth himself was taught. The book

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Original title in Norwegian: *Allan Holdsworth : transkripsjoner og analyse med hovedvekt på harmoniske, liniære og rytmiske trekk.* 

focuses on the ability to view the whole fingerboard and to see the different chord shapes that can be used in when playing in a specific key. Allan Holdsworth edited the book, but it was still completely credited to him instead of his father. In an interview by Richard Hallebeek for his website www.richardhallebeek.com Holdsworth explains: "It was supposed to be Melody Chords For Guitar by Sam Holdsworth edited by Allan Holdsworth. But he [the publisher] was a real, forgive the word, asshole about it and he wouldn't do it. He just said no and I got into a war with him, like a legal battle with him, but...because of the way that the contract was, he kind of won. So it was really sad."44

<sup>44</sup> http://www.richardhallebeek.com/interviews/holdsworth03.php

# **Chapter 3: The music**

# 3.1 The objects of analysis:

When analysing any piece of music it is always beneficial to know the theoretical and practical framework of which the artist usually operates within. In the previous chapter we examined Holdsworth's musical techniques, thoughts and equipment. In order to give context to all these different elements I will present an in-depth analysis of three different songs. Excerpts and examples from these songs will be presented in musical notation accompanied by audio tracks on the included CD. The analysis will focus on the following musical aspects, elements and parameters.

- Form
- Harmonic landscape
- Chord structures
- Choice of scale
- Texture
- Timbre
- Melodic structure

In order to illuminate the overall distinction of the music I have chosen three songs for subject of analysis. Though these songs differ in both character and sound, it is my intention to show a common musical approach that can give us an idea of what the secret behind Holdsworth's music is. Every song has been chosen to make up a certain piece of the puzzle:

- I. <u>Pud Wud:</u> This first song of my analysis represents a childish and naive character that is somewhat unique in the music of Allan Holdsworth. Both the chord progressions and form comes across as remarkably simple, and this is also my reason for choosing it to open the chapter of analysis. We will see how he balances his complex approach to music with a harmonic foundation resembling any pop song.
- II. <u>The Sixteen Men of Tain</u>: On his 2000-release *The Sixteen Men of Tain* he struck a balance between his trademark sound and a much jazzier feel and character. The title track shows us a complex composition with a wide harmonic landscape and a

rhythmic feel that can at times seem somewhat confusing. Still the strong melodic material both in the head and in the solo keeps it all within range of the average listener.

III. <u>Countdown</u>: When we examine Holdsworth's music it might be easy to lose some perspective on how his ideas are different from those of other musicians, and how they could be adapted to different situations. It might be illuminating to take a look at his version of John Coltrane's countdown. By analyzing his playing in the context of relatively well-known standard we will hopefully be able to get a clearer look at what makes his playing so unmistakably his own.

#### 3.2 Pud Wud

#### 3.2.1 Sand

In 1987 Allan Holdsworth released his fourth studio album entitled *Sand*, this time under the label *Cream Records*. Here the guitar is in large scale replaced by the Sythaxe as the voice and sound of the album. On his previous 1986 release, *Atavachron*, he introduced this instrument as a new significant factor in the overall sound of his music. In an interview with Neville Marten for the magazine *Guitarist* shortly after the release of "Sand", he speaks favourably to his Sythaxe–performance on this album in comparison with "Aatavachron".

"Basically it's a big leap forward for me with the SynthAxe. For the previous album 'Atavachron' I'd only had the SynthAxe a short time before we started recording. In fact, we actually came back off the road and I was waiting at home for it to arrive so that I could start working on the album and I didn't write anything until I got it. So I was thrown in at the deep end in a lot of ways, because I was dealing with the Axe, dealing with the synthesisers and trying to write at the same time. I'm not saying it turned out to be a bad album because there are things about it that I like, but generally speaking I made a lot more progress on the new album, because I've had the Axe for so much longer."<sup>45</sup>

The impact this instrument had on the album can hardly be overstated. When reading interviews with Holdsworth from the time following his release of *Sand* there is a striking thematic pattern revolving around the SynthAxe and his frustration with lack of exposure. The discussion of the music often fall victim to what seems to be his need to defend his use of the SynthAxe to a conservative guitar-playing audience; an audience he doesn't wish to play for. In the process of trying to get the jazz audience to open up to him, and at the same time replacing the guitar with SynthAxe, wanting a bigger audience while risking to alienate the guitar players, reach his musical goals and at the same time struggling to make ends meet; Holdsworth does not avoid the issue of his frustration. He explains in an interview with Willebrord Elsing from *Sym Info* in October of 1987:

"I'm not interested in guitar-players, I don't want to play for guitar-players, I don't like it to play for guitar-players. I want to make music, become a better musician. The

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> http://ofeuillerat.free.fr/documents/itw/Marten%20itw%2087.html

instrument isn't important. (...) And when I don't play guitar anymore in the future, maybe I get a bigger audience, or not any at all, but that doesn't interest me. (..) Everything is beginning to frustrate me bit by bit. It seems as if it isn't going to work. The last year I've been thinking to go and do something else, another way of earning my bread."<sup>46</sup>

With the commercial situation and his musical integrity on a full collision-course he sets his aim for the jazz-audience by making Sand an all-instrumental album. From his first soloalbum, IUO, the number of tracks where vocals where featured had declined steadily. On IOU (1982) half of the track-list had vocals, the following album, Metal Fatigue (1985), had two and the on his third album, Atavachron (1986) there was only one. The musical direction on Sand takes a decisive step towards a more improvisational character where the songs often have a very dynamically developing form. This is to a large degree a consequence of Holdsworth's choice of sound on the SynthAxe's midi-system. Although he uses different sounds throughout the album he often favors a sort of string-imitating character in the timbre. The breath-control which he obtained before making the album also plays a huge role in the way the notes and chords are produced. With his dream of playing a windinstrument coming somewhat to fulfillment with this devise, he gets an opportunity to give a glimpse into what he would sound like had he really played a horn. A good example of this is the second track on the album titled "Distance vs. Desire" where time and groove are completely absent and replaced by the feeling of scenery, as if looking at a painting. The only two elements in the song are different chords fading inn and out, while a obo-like sound dances lightly on each chord. All is played on SynthAxe, and so it is natural to assume it is produced in two takes. Still, that is not to say that this is a true description of the album as a whole, as we will see in the analysis of the song "Pud Wud".

It is interesting to note that although the overall sound of the album comes across as very synth-based, there is actually no keyboard on the album except from the keyboard-solo on "Pud Wud". So apart from the drums and bass which presents itself in very much the same way as on the previous albums, all music is produced with the sythaxe. This makes it sound very "80's", but is might be argued that it is somewhat inaccurate to assume that this is a result of the trend in the esthetics of the popular music of that time. Though the sound of

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<sup>46</sup> http://ofeuillerat.free.fr/documents/itw/Elsing%20itw%2087.htm

the contemporary music inevitably influences other musical productions, this opportunity for a guitarist to play with a different sound was something Holdsworth had been receptive for since the very beginning. So his sound might be more a result of the available midi technology that could help him phrase his music in the preferred way, than a wish to embrace the contemporary pop-music.

The name and album cover of *Sand*, which illustrates a small tent in the middle of a desert, can be associated with another earlier jazz album. Matt Resnicoff from the magazine *Guitar World* made this note when presenting an interview with Allan Holdsworth in 1989: "On a likewise reservedly titled album, Sahara, piano legend McCoy Tyner places marvelous strokes along the keyboard and a Japanese stringed instrument called a koto, with soprano saxist Sonny Fortune sailing over the top, all to blistering results." Though Holdsworth makes no reference on this personally it is interesting to register the striking similarity in the general feel of the music. Whether this is intentionally or not might never be clear, but there is absolutely some shared undertones in the music.

Despite the fact that Holdsworth expressed wishes to dedicate himself exclusively to the Sythaxe, *Sand* was to be the peak of his exploration with the instrument and further album would again present guitar as a central voice of the music.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> http://ofeuillerat.free.fr/documents/itw/Guitar%20World%20itw%2089.html

#### 3.2.2 "Pud Wud"



# TRACK 1

In the following analysis we will take a look at the third track on the album, "Pud Wud". Named after his daughter Emily "Pud Wud" Holdsworth, this song is based around a childlike, playful theme which both opens the song as well as creates the harmonic premise for the solos. This song stands out in that, as earlier mentioned, it is the only song containing any keyboard, and this is limited to the third solo of the song. Another element

#### Form:

00:00 – 00:39: Children's voices

00:39 - 01:25: Main theme

01:25 - 02:52: Bass solo

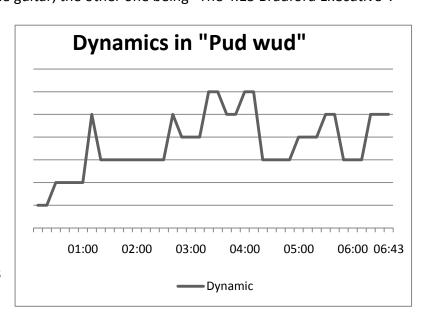
02:52 - 04:24: Guitar solo

04:24 – 05:50: Keyboard solo

05:50 - 06:45: Main theme

which makes this song different is that it is one of two tracks on the albums six tracks where Holdsworth actually picks up the guitar, the other one being "The 4.15 Bradford Executive".

Starting with 39 seconds of children laughing and playing, "Pud Wud" is built up using a very simple form. After presenting the theme ones, where as the band enters towards the end, Jimmi Johnson on bass guitar solos for two rounds over the chords from the head. Meanwhile



Holdsworth accompanies on the SynthAxe, playing the on the head in a very reduced and withheld way. Following the bass solo the guitar solo also lasts for two rounds. Though the SynthAxe accompany this time is mostly based on long chords, the second half of the solo presents the dynamic highpoints of the song. In addition to this intense and energized character of the solo, the SynthAxe and not to mention Gary Husband on drums, creates an almost chaotic rhythmic landscape. In the third and final solo we hear the mentioned keyboard-feature on the album; a solo by one of Holdsworths most used keyboardists Allan

Pasqua. With a crossover sound between piano, flute and string, the solo stays mostly calm over long chords on the SynthAxe in the background, although it ends on a dynamic upswing. "Pud Wud" clocks in at six minutes and forty-five seconds after a representation of the head where an additional layer of sythaxe accentuates notes from the melody in an improvisational and impulsive way. The form is in other words quite similar to how a traditional jazz tune would be played. In a recent interview from a concert he did in France in October 2010 he explains how this is true for all of his music; "All of the tunes are written as compositions; vehicles for improvisation. (...) It's just basically like any other, even in a normal form like jazz, actually. It's just like, there's a tune and there's a chord sequence and then we play it and we solo over them. So it's actually quite normal even though it might not sound that way, it is."<sup>48</sup>

The tempo of the song is mostly close to 135 beat per minutes, though this varies slightly through the song. As we have seen it is based around an Ax8 form, but there is a kind of "B" part within the "A" as we will see when examining the theme. Let's take a look.

<sup>48</sup> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZA6YkwWxWTs

#### 3.2.3 Head





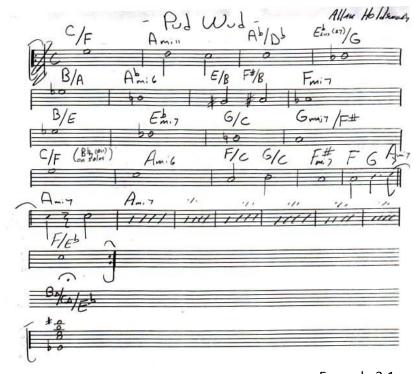
It could be argued that the beginning of the theme of "Pud Wud" is one of the most cheerful and light-hearted of all his released music. With a chord progression that sounds easily accessible for the average listener, a slight swing feel, and an accentuation pattern resembling a children song, it is not difficult to understand why this track has been named after his then young daughter. The timbre of the SynthAxe resembles a soft, round electric organ sound with a much used ability to change gradually to a much sharper synthetic sound. This is most likely done using a foot pedal.

Although I refer to the theme as only "A", it consists of two different parts where the first part stretches to the middle of the 18th bar, and the second part continuing up till the end of

the theme in bar 25. In the first part we see slash chords being used quite frequently (a chord consisting of a triad over a bass note that is not the root note in relation with the triad.) with the bass note often being well beneath the reach of a normal guitar. The second part has a very contrasting character as Holdsworth plays the melody using only fourths within the A minor scale, and with a very sharp timbre. If not aggressive, this part has a much tougher character that creates a distinct counterpart to the first 17 bars. It ends on a more harmless F major chord which ends the 25 bar theme of "Pud Wud".

In the biography we learned that Holdsworth never instructs his fellow musicians on what they should play. Therefore they also need to transcribe the songs themselves. In example 3.1 you can see the transcription of "Pud Wud" done by one of his keyboard players Steven Hunt. 49 In a personal email from Mr. Hunt responding to a request I sent him to confirm the authenticity of the document, he speaks of the transcription process: "Those are the changes as I saw them. Allan may have described them differently, I'm not sure. He had no charts to any of his music so all I could do is have him play me the tune and I would mark the

chord the way I saw or heard it."50 The transcription presented in this analysis is based somewhat on Mr. Hunt's interpretation, but with some small differences where I came to different conclusions regarding the harmonies. These differences relate to bass note or notation and do not affect the condition of possible scales available in improvisation.



Example 3.1

<sup>49</sup> http://www.lucaspickford.com/transpud.htm

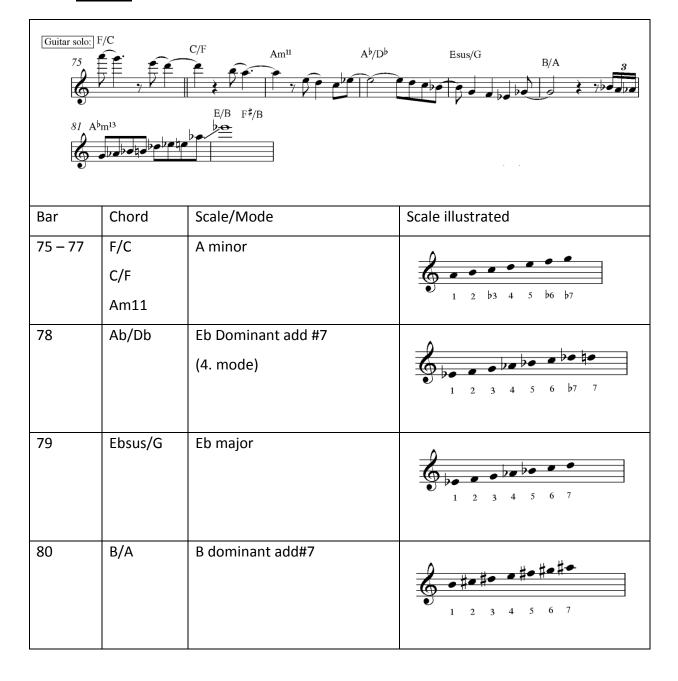
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Email from Steven Hunt 06.06.2010.

# **3.2.4 The solo**

The guitar solo on "Pud Wud" truly shows Holdsworths commitment to making the guitar sound fluid and non-percussive. As we will see continuingly throughout the solo he makes use of both volume control and whammy bar to express himself and to make the phrases both fragile and soft as well as rough and intense.



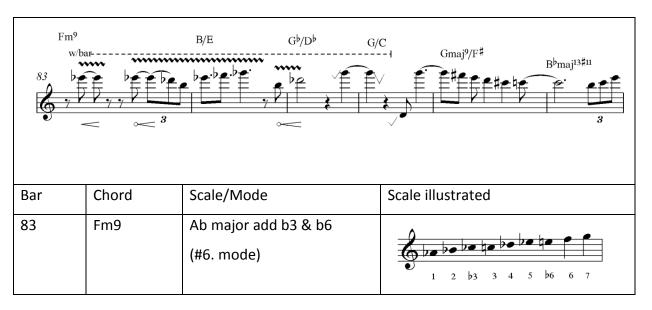
# TRACK 3



81	Abm13	Ab major add b3 & b6	1 2 b3 3 4 5 b6 6 7
82	E/B	E major	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	F#/B	F# major	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Starting off the in the final bar of the third round, following the bass solo, he introduces a motif of a descending major 2nd, which he pre-bends on the guitar before fading in the note using the volume control. After introducing it in beginning of bar 75 he repeats it one 4<sup>th</sup> below, then again another 4<sup>th</sup> below the finally a 5<sup>th</sup> below, before continuing the phrase. As we see in the chart he sticks to the A minor scale all the way to the very end of bar 77 before anticipating the changing harmony by playing an Eb as an sixteen-note upbeat to bar 78.





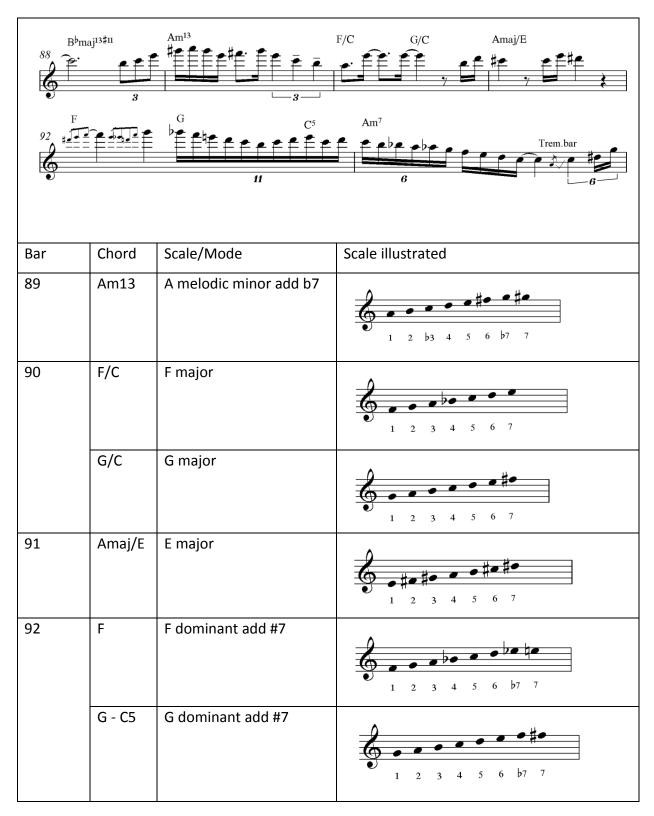
84	B/E	B major	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
85	Gb/Db	Ab melodic minor add b7 (b7. mode)	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 7
86	G/C	G major	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
87	Gmaj9/F#	D dominant add b3 & #7	1 2 b3 3 4 5 6 b7 7
88	Bbmaj13#11	Ab dominant #2 (#2. mode)	1 #2 3 4 5 6 b7

In bar 83 and following up to the Db in bar 85 we see Holdsworth use the whammy bar to create an extreme vibrato, while at the same time using volume control to fade the notes in. Continuing with the possibilities of the whammy bar, he approach the G in the end of bar 85 by gliding up to the note, and diving it down shortly after, making the guitar resembles a high pitch cry. The intensity evoked by this way of using the instrument is further enforced by the short pauses that occur in the phrase.

Harmonically we see Holdsworth frequently use his eight and nine note scales, often playing notes that normally would be considered "outside" with regard to traditional harmony and scales. But with his constructed scales where the chord in question is present, even though this is a result of the added notes, technically this makes it "inside" the scale of his choice. In any case "outside" and "inside" basically comes down to the listener and what notes he is used to hearing over a chord. We know that Holdsworth himself has some "boundaries" to

what scales he is willing to implement in his playing, and as we will see later in the solo, he is also willing to break these boundaries to create an "outside" feeling in the music.

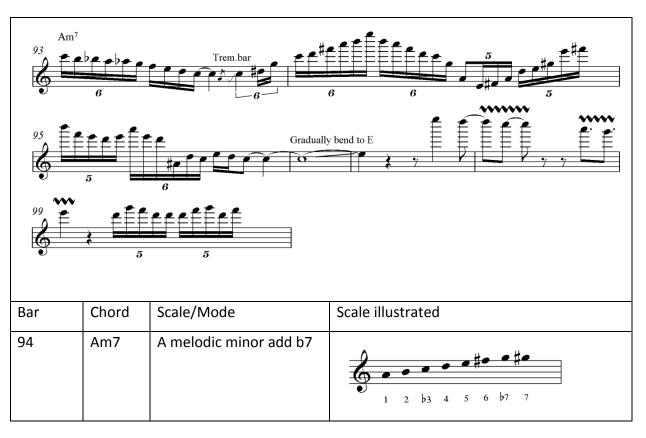




93	Am7	A melodic minor add #4									
		(with added chromatic)	2	•	•	•	•	#•	•	#•	#•
			•	1	2	<b>b</b> 3	4	#4	5	6	7

In the middle of this next phrase we again see him using small pauses in the music to build up intensity in the playing. Introducing it as an upbeat to bar 91 Holdsworth plays a three-note motif that he then repeats one step higher. He continues by imposing an ascending movement towards the first melody note in bar 92 before descending and repeating the movement aimed for the next melody note. This gradually built tension in the phrase peaks in a blistering descending scale that continues till the second beat of the next bar. The motivation for this dramatic phrase is a preparation for the second half of the head that start in bar 92 where as we saw earlier the music shifts to a rougher and bolder character.

# TRACK 6

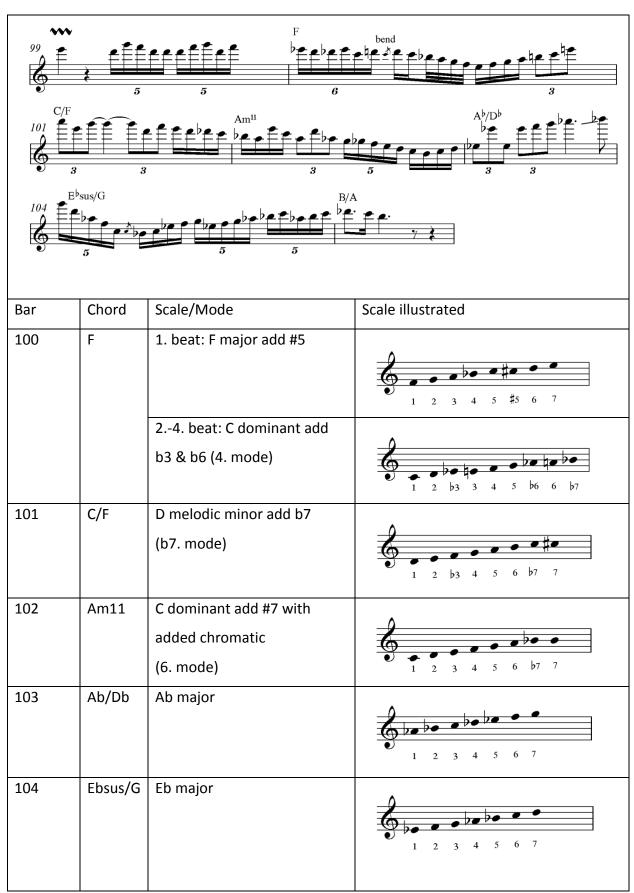


95	Am7	G major add b3 & b6	
		(2. mode)	1 2 b3 3 4 5 b6 6 7
96 – 99	Am7	A minor	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7

Though interviews with Holdsworth seldom lend any focus to the rhythmical aspect of his music, the fluidness of his playing does not restrict itself to the timbre and attach of the notes. As we see going further into the solo, the rhythmical subdivisions he uses often glides between for example groups of fifth and groups of sixths. This produces fluidness in the sense of rhythm that gives the feeling that he actually speeds up and slows down as an object in motion.

It is also interesting to observe the extreme movement within the bars illustrated in the phrase in question. To add to the dramatic character of the music we see the notes in steep ascending and descending movements. The whammy bar also plays a significant role. In bar 96 he gradually raises the pitch of the C note a major 3<sup>rd</sup> up to an E, before repeating the effect of extreme vibrato on high pitch notes and small pauses to add to the effect. Holdsworth continues by entering some blistering scales as the first of his two rounds of soloing is completed.

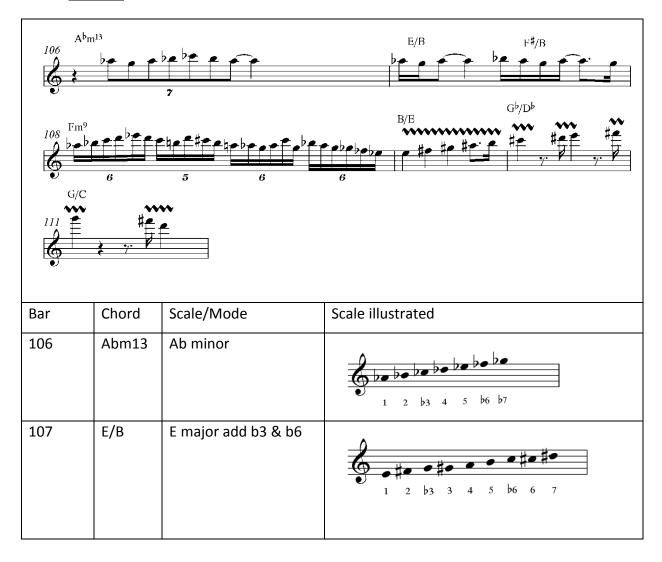


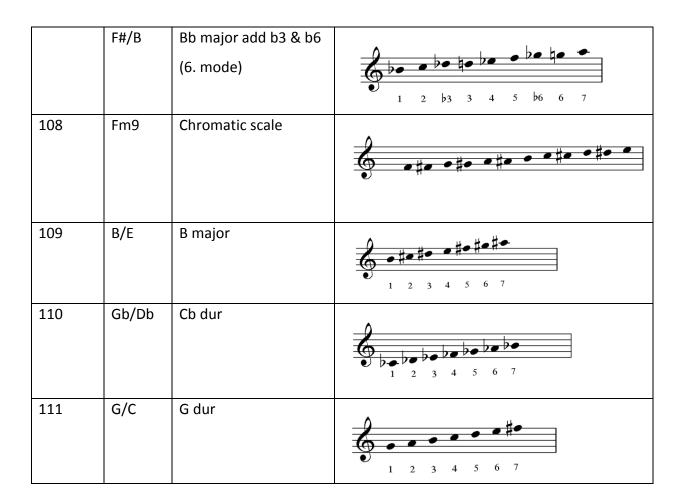


105	B/A	B major with added	_0 +- t- t-
		chromatic	6 - # - # - # - # - # - # - # - # - # -
			1 2 3 4 5 6 7

As we learned in the previous chapter Holdsworth disregards any scales with more than four semitones in a row, and so as we observe in bar 102 and bar 105 that he does use traditional chromatic neighboring notes and chromatic passing notes. Although he does not speak of the use of these, it is reasonable to conclude this on the bases of his mentioned principle.

# TRACK 8

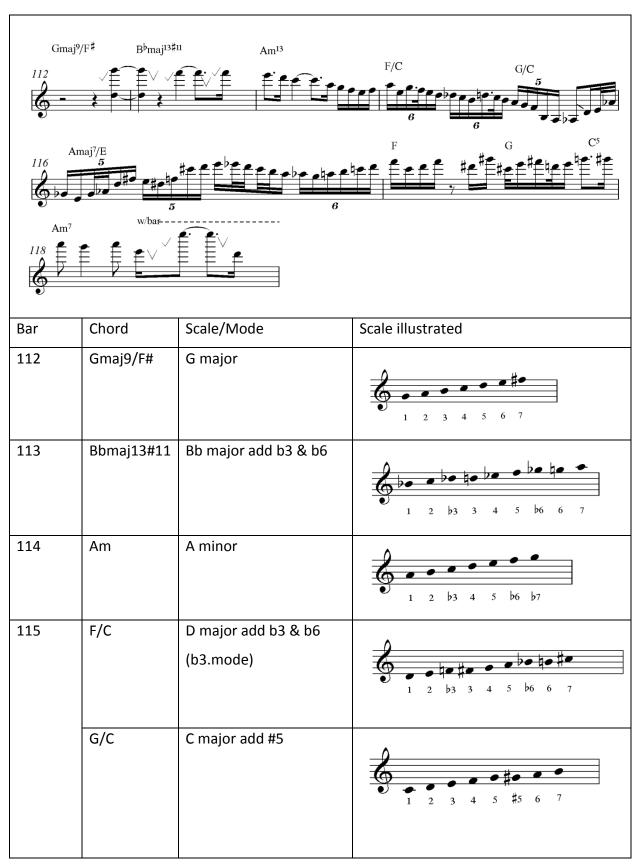




In bar 108 we see Holdsworth take the chromatic possibility even further as he base a complete bar on the chromatic scale. In that sense he steps "outside" the harmony and makes use of all twelve available notes.

One of the characteristics of this solo is the use of the whammy bar as we have observed earlier in this analysis. In bar 109 we again see the combination of extreme vibrato and small pauses in between notes. It is now clear this dramatic effect is one of the key signatures to making the solo as unguitaristic as it is, on an album where this is one of only two guitar solos.

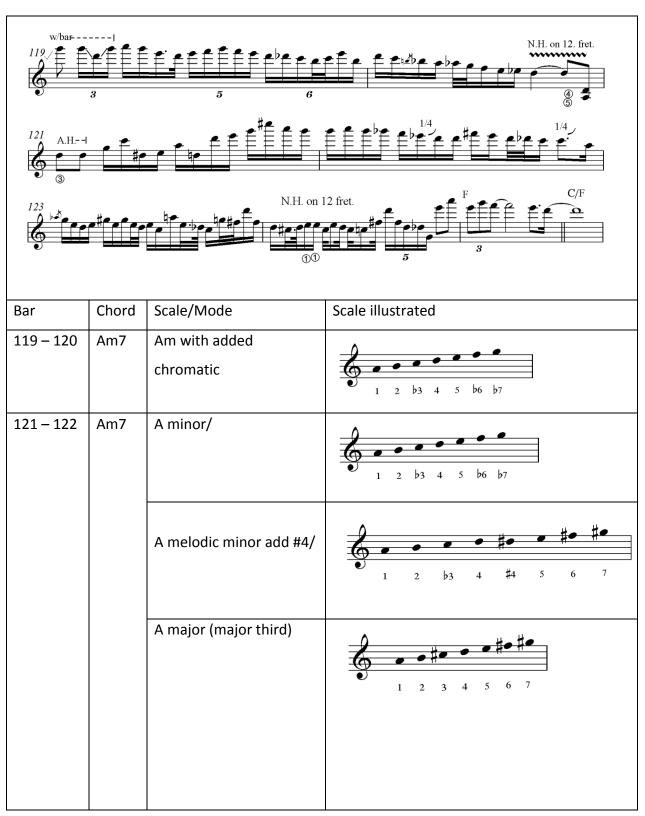




116	Amaj7/E	1. beat: A major	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
		2. & 3. beat: F# melodic minor add b7 (b3. mode)	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 7
		4. beat: F# melodic minor add #4 (b3. mode)	1 2 b3 4 #4 5 6 7
117	F	F dominant add b3 & #7	1 2 b3 3 4 5 6 b7 7
	G - C5	D major with added chromatic	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
118	Am	A minor	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7

Also in the following bars the whammy bar plays an important role as he continues to manipulate the pitch and character of notes. Another interesting observation is the way the notes are placed within the rhythmical groupings. Often musicians tend to divide groups of six notes into 3 + 3, 2 + 4 or 2 + 2 + 2. On groups of five notes 2 + 3 or 3 + 2 is also common and this grouping within the groups themselves is noticeable mostly in the direction of the notes and the intervals between them. The purpose of this is to create structure within the phrase for the ease of both the listener as well as the player. However this seems to be somewhat absent in the bars shown above, and there seem to be no predictability of the continuing direction of the solo as it goes along. This adds to the chaotic, intense feeling that most definitely is the purpose at this point in the solo.





123 – 124	Am7	1 2.beat: A melodic minor add b7	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 7
		3. beat and throughout bar 124: A dominant add b3 & #7	1 2 b3 3 4 5 6 b7 7
125	F	F – dur	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
126	C/F	C –dur	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

As we reach the end of the solo we have continuingly seen Holdsworth form his phrases in a very linier way. His modal-oriented approach to improvisation easily results in a more stepwise melodic construction then what would have been natural in the playing of a chord-oriented musician. This creates a further distance between the actual soloing and the harmonic landscape that lies beneath, since he does not accentuate or embellish the chord notes more than any other note available within an appropriate scale of his choice.

# **3.2.5 Summary**

Although Allan Holdsworth is known and loved for his melancholy that appears as a constant in all his music, "Pud Wud" presents a theme that is much more careless and naive than almost anything he has written. The development of the music and his soloing, however, remains true to the Holdsworth-expression. It should be noted that this expression is not dependent on the guitar as an instrument, since this album, *Sand*, is not a guitar album at all. As mentioned there are only two guitar solos on the entire record and so the SynthAxe is defiantly the main instrument here. But the guitar does offers some advantages as we hear

when examining the solo. The whammy bar is actually the key to the character of the solo and functions as a great imitator of some horn-like effects, as we saw in bar 83 through 88. Holdsworth has also used the whammy bar a lot as a method to approach notes in a way that suggest an emulation of the start or end of breathing into a horn. Devoted Holdsworthfan and guitarist in the Swedish metal band Meshuggah, Fredrik Thordendal refers to this in a 1997 interview with Per Boysen for the Swedish guitar magazine Fuzz; "He uses the whammy bar a lot to get tones from below and from above and I like that, it sounds sad. But the thing I like the most about his playing is that it doesn't sound so guitar-like." <sup>51</sup> In other words, he uses it as a method to add to the melancholy as well as making the guitar sound like a horn. The other guitar solo on Sand, featured on the track "The 4.15 Bradford Executive", sounds even more horn-like than the one on "Pud Wud". It is therefore obvious that on an album where the guitar is almost totally absent, the very few guitar moment are in no way a tribute to the traditional sound of the instrument. Instead it becomes a natural part of the highly unorthodox music, sound and texture of this album. However, because he is so unique it can sometimes be a little too tempting to regard Holdsworth isolated from his contemporary music scene. In many cases this can be justifiable, but we also need to remember that this album was released in the late eighties when every rock guitarist relied on the extreme effects of the guitars vibrato-system to make the most virtuoso expression possible. If this common factor between him and the popular rock music is a result of trends in guitar playing or simply a result of new guitar equipment being developed, is unsure. In a 1987 interview with Neville Marten from the magazine Guitarist, the same year that Sand was released, he gives us his own perspective on the issue; "I see a whammy bar as like the phase pedal - everybody's got one now but when I was looking for whammy bars on guitars in 1972, they all thought you were insane. Now you can't even sell a guitar if it doesn't have one on. So to me it's a superficial thing, bound to have a fleeting use. It's the notes that are the important thing. They're the thing that's not transitory. It's embarrassing when I listen back to how I used to play three or four years ago - it's horrible. It's absolutely horrendous and I can't figure out what I was doing because it sounds so lame. So over the last few years

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> http://www.boysen.se/artikelarkivet/artiklar/fredrik.html (Translated by the author.)

I've decided to place more emphasis on the sound and the notes rather than the 'toy' aspect of it - like a whammy bar or anything else."52

<sup>52</sup> http://www.fingerprintsweb.net/ah/press/gui1187.html

#### 3.3 The Sixteen Men of Tain

# 3.3.1 A jazz album

After a relatively long wait since his last studio album containing original music, *The Sixteen Men of Tain* was released in 2000, six years after his 1994 album; *Hard Hat Area*. Though the overall sound of his music had been slightly changing for each album, Holdsworth now took the music in significantly different direction. With its acoustic and jazzy sound, *The Sixteen Men of Tain* is often referred to as his finest album, proving wrong all those who assumed his best work was behind him. David R. Adler writes the following for *Allmusic.com*:

"Coming on the heels of some rather mediocre efforts, *The Sixteen Men of Tain* is startlingly superb. Holdsworth has stripped away the distracting banks of keyboards and allowed his soaring, gliding guitar to shine through in a way it hasn't since the 1980s. Even the Synthaxe, Holdsworth's signature guitar synthesizer, sounds organic and immediate, not to mention far less prevalent than on previous albums." <sup>53</sup>

One of the keys to this new sound is the change of instrumentation and line-up within the group. The SynthAxe has replaced the keyboard and contributes in a much more subtle way that often in the past. As this instrument is a midi-controller its sound bears the witness of the technological advancement that had been made since his 1994 release. The bass guitar has also been replaced with an acoustic bass, undoubtedly playing a huge role in the overall expression of the music. In an interview with Mike Flynn from the website munkio.com Holdsworth speaks of how this change came to be:

"The fact that Dave Carpenter played acoustic bass was nice because I was like "maybe it would be nice if you played acoustic bass on this record. (..)That's the beauty of it as well because he, like a lot of the other bass guitar players I've played with, he plays a lot. If you put Dave on bass guitar he's playing all the time and he plays chords I keep telling him I'm going to buy him a one string bass guitar! So giving him the acoustic bass was great. It was a good element to have and I think it also

<sup>53</sup> http://allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=10:dbfqxqwkldfe~T1

added something to the sound, which also important to loads of people's perception of it."<sup>54</sup>

Another key-contribution to the album was made by drummer Gary Novak. While earlier drummers within the band, Husband and Chad Wackerman among other, had a hard, energetic style of playing, Novak stays closer to the jazz tradition, allowing for softer dynamic and even swing-feel. In an August 2000 article by Jazztimes.com Bill Murkowski praise the drummers playing on the title track, presented in the upcoming analysis: "Novak's crisp but understated approach along with his hip time displacement sets a more intimate vibe for the surging title track. More favoring the Roy Haynes school of elastic time feel and creative overplaying than a more blatant backbeat sensibility, Novak's playing here brilliantly underscores yet another stellar example of Holdsworth's signature chordal voicings and uncanny legato flow over complex moving harmonies. Holdsworth has never swung this hard."55

Throughout his career his sound has often been heavily influenced by other contemporary music, if not in form and structure, than in timbre, character and groove. However, on *The Sixteen Men of Tain* he has created a record that seems as timeless as any legendary jazz album. The complete absence of any resistance between his musical expression, and the production and entirety of the album, makes it a monument in his discography. In the *jazz times* article he tells of his perception of how the album came to be:

"The interpretation of my original music can be played in so many different ways, almost like different kinds of styles. (..) And as I began playing with Gary Novak and Dave Carpenter a couple of years ago, I could hear that the interpretation of it was pushing into a different direction. And it sounded really kind of natural. So I basically wrote the material that was on this record with that in mind, because I knew that Gary Novak's interpretation is a different kind of thing from the way that Gary Husband's interpretation of it would be."

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> http://www.munkio.com/words/allan\_holdsworth.html

<sup>55</sup> http://jazztimes.com/articles/20372-allan-holdsworth-one-man-of-trane

In an interview by *Guitar Magazine* in march 2008 he presents us with that which was his overall aim for the recording *Sixteen Men of Tain*. It would be fair to imply that he met the standard of his goal in a remarkable way.

"I struggled to find a way to put more of a rock sound into a traditional jazz trio setting, where a lot of the music is kind of soft, while at the same time making the electric guitar sound less gnarly." <sup>56</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> http://ofeuillerat.free.fr/documents/itw/Cleveland%20itw%2008.htm

# 3.3.2 The Sixteen Men of Tain



Comparred to "Pud Wud" where the form and chord-progressions are relatively simple and accessible, "The Sixteen Men of Tain" presents a different level of complexity with regards to form and harmony. From the character of the music it is easy to get an impression that the number of different parts is relatively few, but some of these very similar segments may not share a common chord-progression. Instead they share

Form:

00:00 - 00:55: Head (ABAC)

00:55 - 01:36: Bass solo (over head)

01:36 - 01:54: C-part from head

01:54 - 04:42: Guitar solo

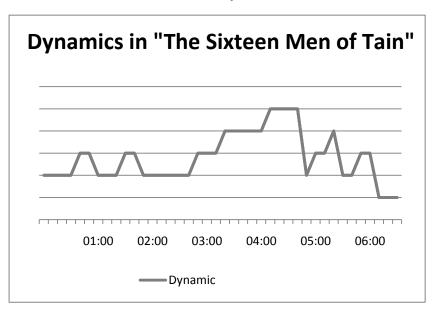
04:42 – 04:52: B-Part from head

04:54 - 05:34: Drumsolo (A & B-part)

05:34 - 06:26: Part A & C

the same melodic or rhythmical ideas. The sound is mostly soft and with very discreet accentuations that sets the music apart from Holdsworth's earlier rock-inspired dynamic. All in all this song, as with many of the other tracks on the album, express a calm and patient mood with very strong references to music found in more traditional jazz trios.

The form of which the song is structured can be said to be ABACA'B'A'CDBA'B'A'C', but in this case it may not be the best way to communicate this information. The list of different parts and the timeline showing the dynamic development in the song, both of them illustrated to the right, gives us a better understanding of this.



In addition to guitar, acoustic bass and drums, a SynthAxe contributes with somewhat sustained and constant chords discreetly setting a harmonic foundation in the music. The role of the SynthAxe remains modest throughout the song and avoids obstructing the experience of the music as a trio performance.

Though the character of the music gives a sensation of a quite moderate tempo, the underlying pulse in the music holds around 225 beats per minute. The chord-sheet for this song was generously provided by jazz-guitarist, Jeremey Poparad, and the transcription has further more been done by the author. Since the guitar and SynthAxe plays in a very similar pitch there might be some chords in the transcription that represents a mixture of the two instruments. I have chosen to allow this in cases where it contributes to a more accurate description of the harmonic material and sensation of the song.

# 3.3.3 Head





As with almost all his music "The Sixteen Men of Tain" bares similarities to any jazz tune by the immediate introduction of the "head" in the beginning of the song. The head has an ABAC-form that accounts for the first 55 seconds. The musical element with the absolute most significance to the A-part is the three-note motif presented first in bar 1 through 4. The rhythm of the motif can be said to be at least as important as its melodic structure, since the melody is flipped "up-side-down" in bar 5 through 8. Still, there is no doubt that this is the same motif and expresses the same musical effect, even if the intervals and their direction vary slightly. Harmonically the first part (A) is based on the F major scale, with the exception of the concluding D major chord in bar 16. It would be natural, based on traditional music theory, to claim Bb Lydian to be the tonality, but as earlier mentioned Allan Holdsworth does not give any name to a particular mode of a scale. It can be useful to take notice of his continuing use of scales with high 4<sup>th</sup>, but also keep in mind that he has probably not regarded any chord to have a function except the sound and mood it creates. It is therefore more true to his composition technique to disregard the aspect of different modes.

His love for chord-voicing featuring close intervals that sounds unusual and somewhat dissonant has become one of his absolute strongest characteristics. In "The Sixteen Men of Tain" these dissonances is being played discreetly on the Sythaxe, making sure that they are perceived as beautiful and not as harsh. In the chords played on the guitar we here chords with a consonant and clear sound, largely based on 3<sup>rd</sup>'s, 4<sup>th</sup>'s and 5<sup>th</sup>'s. As a result of the SynthAxe and the guitar operating in much of the same pitch, and also being held close together in the mix, these two instruments form one single voice. With the musical esthetics of a standard jazz-trio influencing the entire album, it is natural to assume that this has been done intentionally in order to maintain a sense of intimacy in the music.

One feature that is not typical of any standard jazz tune is the change of time-signature. As we can see in the notation of the "head" each of the four phrases in part A consist of four bars in where the first bar is a 3/4 and the three following bars are in 4/4. In chapter two I quoted Holdsworth on speaking of odd time-signatures: "I can't count anyway, so everything is in one to me(..). <sup>57</sup>" We can therefore assume that the aspects of changing time signature is in most cases directly related to his wish for the melodic structure in the song.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> http://www.innerviews.org/inner/holdsworth2.html

Going forward to part B we see a new, but even shorter, rhythmic motif dictating the structure of the phrases. This time it is a two-note motif stringed together, presented as an upbeat followed by a short pause, then a sustained chord. The strong structural relationship between the two parts (A and B) is reviled partly through these short motives making up the phrases.

Harmonically the modulations are much more frequent in the B-part. With each of the longer chords presenting basically a new tonality, this creates a contrast to more sustained tonality in part A. The featured major chords reminds us once again of Holdsworths love for the raised 4<sup>th</sup>.

26 seconds into the song the A-part is once again presented, this time with some "guitar fills" over the long chords. These small melodic parts are all in the key of F, so this confirms the implied tonality from the first presentation of part A.

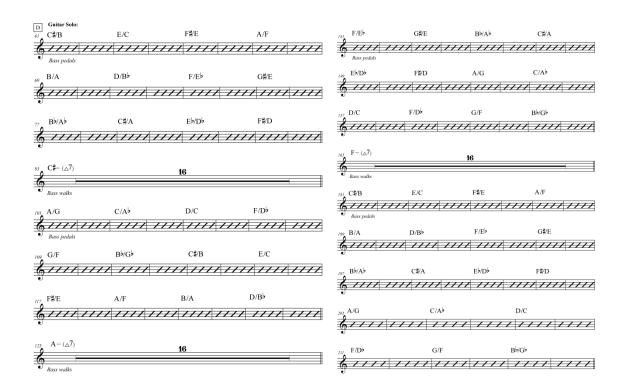
As a suitable contrast to these prior musical structures based on two- and three-note motifs, the C-part takes on a much more horizontal and restless character. Starting off with an A-pedal in the bass and a phrase based on an even rhythm, it is easy to overlook what is actually going on in the rhythm. Although the music gives a very clear feeling of the notes being on-beat, implied through accentuation in all instruments, there is actually a simple polyrhythm present. Since it is almost impossible to detect the underlying pulse this can also be articulated as temporary metric modulation; a change of tempo based on a certain subdivision of notes from the original tempo.

### **3.3.4 The solo**

Although the bass solo, following the first presentation of the head, is based on those same chord progressions, the guitar solo introduces a completely new part within "The Sixteen Men of Tain". Not only is a slight change of character and dynamic apparent, but there is also a completely new harmonic landscape and structure of the chord progressions. In example 3.2 we see the chord changes for the guitar solo. One of the first things that catch ones attention is the three sixteen-bar stretches, each over a single major-minor chord. As indicated by notes in the music, these stretches are based on a walking bass that gives the music a very clear be-bop reference. On the other hand we see long chord progressions

entirely based on slash chords. These are featured in three different parts, each lasting for 24 bars except from the forth part which has a 12 bar extension in the end. Each of these parts presents the same chord progression but in different keys. Each chord has a major triad with either a minor 7<sup>th</sup> or a minor 6<sup>th</sup> in the bass, and the intervals between the chords vary between a major 2<sup>nd</sup> and a minor 3<sup>rd</sup>. There does not seem to be any symmetry or system to what chord or what interval between the chords that are implied any given time. The extension on the forth part found in bar 205 through 216 features the same structures and lack of symmetry as the 24-bar progression. The instrumentation as well as character is divided between the slash chords that are played as long notes on the SynthAxe, sustaining for two complete bars, and the 16-bar stretch that is played almost only by drums, bass and solo-guitar. Character-wise these two parts differ between the SynthAxe symphonic sound that hints to an almost ambient feel, and the walking-bass that creates association to a classic small jazz-ensemble with a vivid tempo.

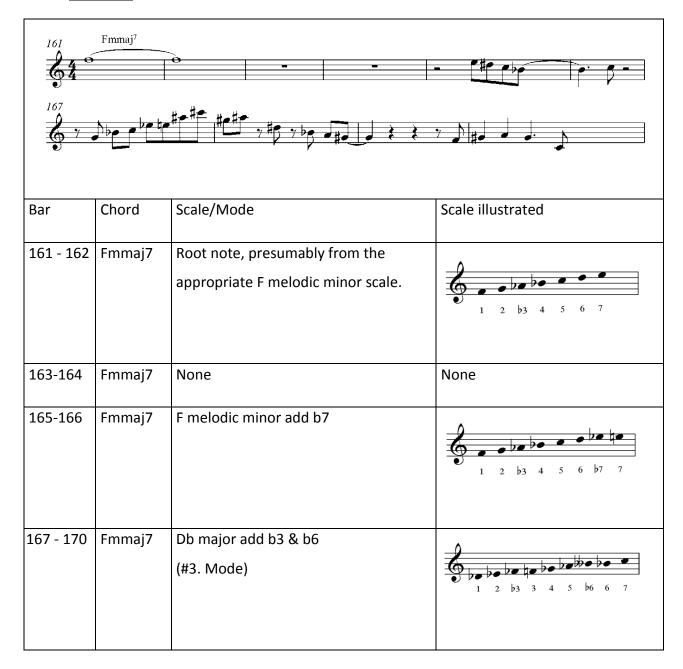
Example 3.2



In order to make an efficient and representative analysis of a guitar solo stretching for 155 bars and lasting for almost three minutes, I have chosen to include only the last 55 bars, starting in the third 16-bar stretch. On some of these following illustrations the same bar

may sometimes be presented twice. This is only a result of my intention to show the phrases in their entirety in each musical example.

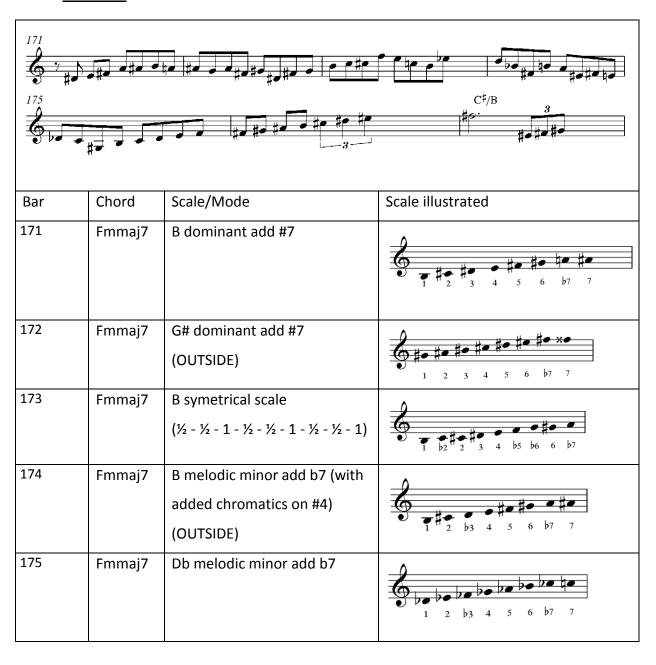




We start the analysis in bar 161. It should be noted that the long F is the last note of a previous phrase. In the following two bar pause the SynthAxe plays a small fill, not presented in the transcription. Going further we see Holdsworth keeping his phrases relatively short, as he often does in the beginning of any new part, and plays with articulation and accentuation

on many notes. In other words; a slightly different character that that which dominates his style. In bar 167 through 170 he takes use of the Db major scale with added minor 3<sup>rd</sup> and minor 6<sup>th</sup>. As previous mentioned Holdsworth considers any scale that contains the chord in question to be an appropriate scale to improvise from. In this scale we find all the notes from the Fmmaj7 chord; F, Ab, C and E (illustrated as an Fb), in other words; it meets the criteria perfectly.





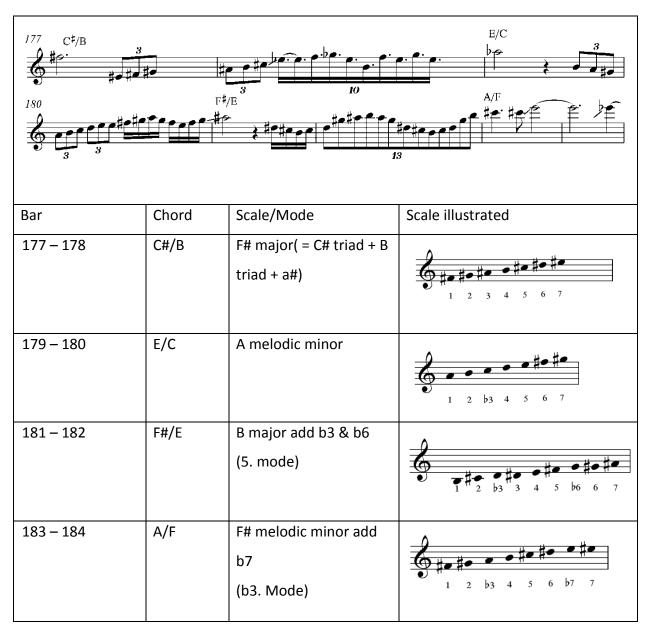
176	Fmmaj7	F# major	^
		( = C# triad + B triad + a#)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Yet another be-bop reference to be noticed is the steady stream of eight-notes from bar 171. Throughout Holdsworth's solo playing we generally see a clear preference of rhythms that give a feeling of flexibility and fluidness. These structures appear in groups of notes subdivided into closely related number on notes. It is therefore interesting to observe these long phrases of eight-notes and how they contribute to the overall expression and sound of the album. There is also a significant feeling of swing-feel in the music. This is partly because of the hi-hat playing in actual swing, but although Holdsworth's eight-notes are straight, he also contributes to this sensation. When we look closely at the melodic structure from in bar 171 and 172 we see that each on-beat note is preceded by a lower note, functioning as an upbeat. This creates a string of two-note groups, actually creates an illusion of the notes not being even.

It does not note take long before we are introduced scales that are not compatible with the underlying chord. In other words; he takes us "outside" in bar 172 and 174. In bar 173, though, he plays a B symmetrical scale where all the four notes from the Fmmaj7 chord are present. Because there are 16 bars of unchanged underlying harmony this creates an opportunity to explore and push the boundaries scale-wise since the music provides us with a strong harmonic foundation.

The reason why the F# major scale in bar 176 is not considered an outside-scale in this analysis becomes clear when we look to the next bar, and further more the melodic structure in the following phrases. As we will examine more closely in the next example, Holdsworth plays four phrases in the coming bars with a similar form, all leading up to a high note at the introduction of a new chord. The F# major scale can be considered a combination of a C# major triad and a B major triad, supplemented with a single note; A#. In bar 177 we see the chord C#/B in the transcription. It is therefore clear that the F# major scale belongs to the harmony of the chord which the phrase aims for.

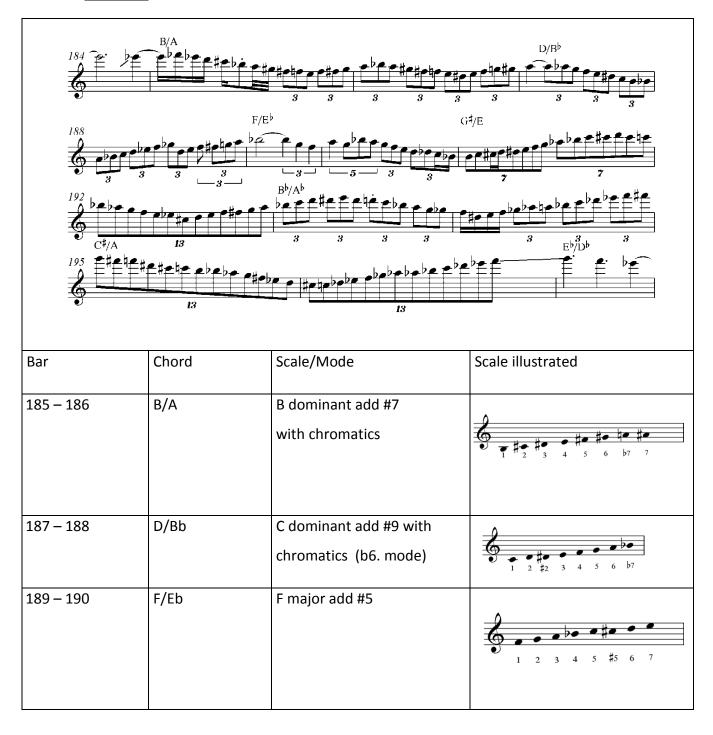




In the four phrases leading up to the high notes in the beginning of bar 177, 179, 181 and 183 Holdsworth sticks to scales that contain the notes of the underlying chords. Still, these are as always not the most commonly used scales, and often feature added notes. The rhythmical structures however are far more challenging. With a clear ambition of making the notes accelerate towards the last note, we see some extreme demonstration of polyrhythm through subdivisions that can make anyone question if this was really intended or if Holdsworth has taken the liberty of disregarding any formal rhythmical value of notes. In bar 178 he plays 10 even notes over 3 beats and in bar 182 he plays 13 notes over a complete

bar. In both these cases there is no way of grouping the notes in smaller segments, without giving the notes at least two different types of rhythmical value. It is in other words up to each person to either bow in admiration or raise a skeptical eyebrow. In any case it works great, and that should always be the only thing that matters.





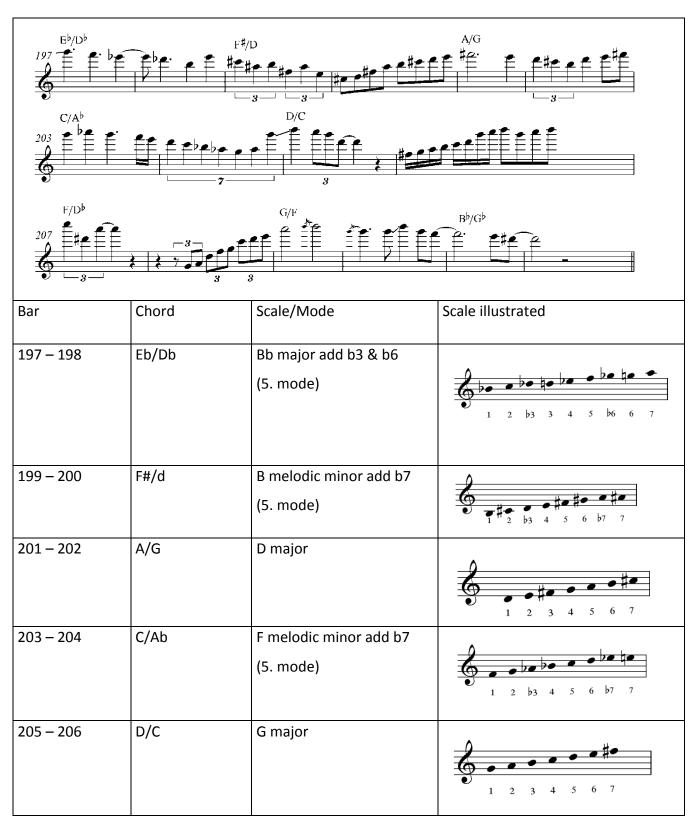
191 – 192	G#/E	G# major add b3 & b6 (with chromatics)	1 2 b3 3 4 5 b6 6 7
193 – 194	Bb/Ab	F major add #5 with chromatics (4. Mode)	1 2 3 4 5 #5 6 7
195 – 196	C#/A	G# dominant add b3 & #7 (4. mode)	1 2 b3 3 4 5 6 b7 7

Also in bar 185 through 196, presented above, we can see the 13-note rhythmical grouping, which shows us the consistency and his conscious attitude to the idea-development in his playing. He demonstrates continuously how the fluidity in his solos, in addition to the legatotechnique, is created through imitation of acceleration and deceleration of notes with the use of all available subdivisions. Another vital factor to the fluidity in question is the wave-like phrases consisting of step-wise melodic structures shifting direction generally after three of four beats, and the ascending lines continuously stretching for a higher top-note. Although Holdsworth often speak of his intention to make the guitar sound like a horn, there is a remarkably absence of any pause in the music from example these bars.

Throughout the analysis of any of the three songs we observe the usage of scales with added notes. In contrast with the traditional "jazz scales" where notes have been added for the purpose of passing-notes, Holdsworth use every note in his scales as material for creating chords. As mentioned earlier, he dismisses any scales with more than four semitones in a row as useless. It is therefore interesting to find chromatic melodies in his playing that exceeds this number. It is natural to conclude that although it can be hard to distinguish his use of chromatic passing-notes that are not fixed notes within the scale, from his use of for

example nine-note scales, he does from time to time take advantage of this commonly used technique.





207	F/Db	C melodic minor add b7 (5. mode)	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 7
208	F/Db	F major	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
209 – 210	G/F	C major	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
211 – 212	Bb/Gb	Eb melodic minor add b7 with chromatics (5. mode)	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 7

Entering the very last bars of the solo, Holdsworth departs from his wave-formed phrases and takes the time to slow down and introduce both wider intervals and different ideas in the melodic structure than what has characterized the prior bars. The reintroduction of pauses also creates shorter phrases that gives the solo a natural decrees of intensity and a conclusion appropriate to the length of the solo.

#### **3.3.5 Summary**

The character of the *The Sixteen Men of Tain* album presents a mature and patient expression that is very different from any previous releases. The steps Holdsworth took by using a double bass instead of a bass guitar, as well as the more jazzy approach of his new drummer, contributes greatly to the elegance of the album. Also the sound of the SynthAxe, benefiting from the technological development, adds to the acoustic perception of the music as a whole. This is true even to songs where the musical textures consist mainly of the sound of SynthAxe; The entire sonic specter still sounds light and uncompressed. However, the complexity of the music is in no way being victim to any minimalism. The harmonies are still very much in his style, and the melodies remain unorthodox in their structure. His preference for melodic minor is seldom emphasized as strong as we see in the repeating 16 bar stretch in the guitar solo. This long period of unchanged harmony also creates a great

opportunity for us to see some of the many possible scales he may choose over a certain major minor chord. Also his use of slash chords is put to an extreme, but with these chords being constructed of only four notes it gives us yet a great opportunity to witness his principles put to good use. It is a testimony to his capacity and oversight that the analysis shows us that no scale is overly represented or preferred.

Throughout this thesis the reference to Holdsworths love for saxophone and his wish to imitate it in his playing, is central. However the guitar solo from the song "The Sixteen Men of Tain" is remarkably unlike anything that would come from a horn. The notes are often much more static than in for example the solo from "Pud Wud". Many of the phrases are also quite long so any horn player would have to have a great lung capacity to pull them off. It is therefore my opinion that he draws inspiration from the keyboard in this case. As we know he is as much of a SynthAxe player as he is a guitar player, and to Holdsworths outspoken appreciation this instrument does feature keys. It is therefore interesting to speculate on whether the inspiration to this way of playing has its origin in his performance on the SynthAxe, or if this development within his style is a result of any other underlying factor.

#### 3.4 Countdown

# 3.4.1 In an unfamiliar setting

In 1996 Allan Holdsworth released an album titled *None too Soon* featuring his own interpretation of well known songs, mostly jazz-standards. It is on this album he chose to include Coltrane's "Countdown". This was the first, and till this day the only record he had ever done where he present traditional jazz-songs. In an interview with Richard Hallebeek around the time of the album-release he explains his motivation behind the project;

"I have heard people say to me for years and years that they want to steal what I'm doing but they don't understand the music! On one hand I take that as a compliment, on the other they might think that maybe I don't know what I'm doing. In essence, my music is the same as Jazz, we improvise over chord changes. It's just that it ends up sounding different, because of the way it was composed or maybe because I'm an idiot, I don't know. Piano player Gordon Beck once suggested that I should do an album with more well known tunes so people can hear what I sound like over these tunes. It's easier to hear in standards because the harmonic structure is easier to understand for people who have listened and played this kind of music before. But I don't play bebop, I just do what I always do, how strange that sometimes may sound in this context."<sup>58</sup>

As Holdsworth himself states, the outcome on this record bares little sign of him trying to adapt to or recreate any particular musical genre. It is all done in the same style as his original material, although due to his reluctance to dictate his fellow musicians, the rest of his ensemble tends to embraces the sound of more traditional jazz. This reluctance is a legacy from his time playing with Tony Williams who encouraged Holdsworth to do his own thing with the music, something he time and again refers to as a big encouragement in his early career. But Williams was only one of the people who inspired Holdsworth to go his own way. In an interview with Steve Adelson from *Twentieth Century Guitar Magazine* he speaks of his first encounter with the music of John Coltrane:

"I needed a different direction. I soon purchased some records by John Coltrane and this changed my whole life. (..)I just bought everything I could find that he was on. (..) "Coltrane's Sound" is probably still my favorite recording of all time. When I heard people like Cannonball Adderly, I loved it but I could hear where it was coming from. I heard the history and evolution. But Coltrane

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<sup>58</sup> http://www.richardhallebeek.com/interviews/index.php

sounded like he short-circuited or bypassed something and he got to the heart and truth of the music. He was playing over the same things but he wasn't doing it the same way. He didn't sound like anyone else. I thought this would be great, to play over chord changes, from something other than a bebop perspective. Basically this is what I've been trying to do from the beginning. Unfortunately, I never saw Coltrane perform. When he died, I cried for hours. I felt like I knew him."<sup>59</sup>

# 3.4.2 The background and structure of Coltrane's composition



Despite his brief career from the late 50's up to his death in 1967, John Coltrane managed to produce some of the most important and influential music in jazz. His contributions include albums like Blue Train (1957), Giant Steps (1959) A love Supreme (1964) and Ascension (1965) which in their own way became huge milestones in the stylistic development of the modern jazz scene. Still, despite his huge importance, Coltrane was no child prodigy. In the book Giant Steps – Bebop and the creators of modern jazz 1945-65 (1999) author Kenny Methieson quotes jazz scholar Lewis Porter on his observation of Coltrane's personal development as a musician: "He was not, as one might have thought, a great talent who took a long time to get recognized. He was, rather, someone who did not begin with obvious exceptional talent, and that makes his case all the more interesting – one can become one of the great musicians of all time and not start off as some kind of prodigy."<sup>60</sup>

In the coming years Coltrane would frequently play with musicians like saxophonist Benny Golson, trumpeter Lee Morgan, and pianist McCoy Tyner. There he continually exchanged ideas and worked with his fellow musicians on new ways of approaching the music. One of these was the use of different modes from the major/minor-scale, a development that set the foundation for the new modal-jazz that would change not only the way musicians thought when improvising but the sound of the jazz scene as a whole.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> http://www.myspace.com/allanholdsworth1/blog/455809739

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Originally from the book *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (1998) by Lewis Porter: reprinted in Mathieson 1999:302.

In 1957, while part of Miles Davis' Quintet he recorder his debut-album, issued simply as *Coltrane*. This marked the beginning of his solo career that followed with albums such as *Blue Train* (1957), *Soul Train* (1958) and Lush Life (1958). His creative process in the late 1950s had broken new ground with Coltrane's experimentations and approach to reharmonizing tunes and improvising over them. His choice of new chords that where distantly related, stacking them on top of each other and then while improvising trying to acknowledge every note within the chords and every scale that might be compatible to the changes, was unprecedented. This, of course, was done with such speed that journalist Ira Gitler famously lounged the term "sheets of sound" to describing Coltrane's furiously paced stream of notes. This characteristic approach finally reached a peak with the 1960 release *Giant Steps*. It was the first album where all the tracks was composed by Coltrane himself and includes the tracks "Countdown" and "Giant Steps" which soon caught the attention of those able to recognize both the complexity of the compositions as well as the overwhelming skill and control displayed in the solo playing.

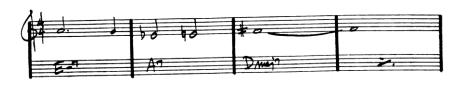
In July 17 1967, while planning the release of the album Expression John Coltrane died from liver cancer. His music had by this point grown increasingly abstract with the absence of clear beats, dissonant tonalities and extreme experimentations with timbre. His upcoming album followed faithfully on this path, and Coltrane told producer Bob Thiele he wanted no linear notes on Expression: "By this point I don't know what else can be said in words about what I'm doing. Let the music speak for itself" (Mathieson 1999:302).

Coltrane had since his studies with Dennies Sandole at the Granoff School in Philadelphia been obsessed with chords and harmonies, and since then perceived tunes more as series of chords than melodies. Wanting to push the envelope on the harmonic possibilities in jazz he started to play multiple chords over the space of one, often playing the chords entire scale. To make this possible he not only had to play extremely fast, but also use different rhythmical solutions: "(I) had to put notes in uneven groups like five and sevens in order to get them all in. . . . I thought in groups of notes, not of one note at a time. (I'm) trying for a sweeping sound (Nisenson 1993:49)". This, as earlier mentioned brought about the description of his playing as "Sheets of sound".

In 1959 this whole process seemed to culminate into his first album with Atlantic; *Giant Steps*, containing seven original compositions recorded under his own leadership. One of the areas where Coltrane now had the possibility of breaking new ground, being fully in charge of the music, was chord-progressions. Today the term "Coltrane-changes" directly referrers to the way he moved the tonal center by major thirds within a single phrase, dividing the octave into three equal parts. Though this is most audible on the title track, "Giant Steps", it also sets the foundation for the chord-progression of "Countdown" which is actually a reharmonization of the Miles Davis-track "Tune Up" from his 1954 release *Blue Haze*. (Levine 1995:359) As appendix to this thesis I have included the lead-sheet for both "Tune Up" and "Countdown".

When listening to this legendary Coltrane-track it is obvious that there are several aspects of its form and structure that breaks with the traditions of its time, one of them being the first thing you hear when pressing play. Thirty-six bars of drum solo, played by Art Taylor, sets the mood for the intensity of what is to come, followed by eight rounds of furious soloing, where only the last four rounds is accompanied by piano. Not before the very end of the track does the double bass enter the mix, when the "head" is presented along with a short epilogue. Author of the book *John Coltrane* (1976) Bill Cole writes: "The whole arrangement is reminiscent of a West African ensemble, with the bell beginning, followed by the entry of different parts. The bell set the pace, like the gong in Indonesian music" (Cole 1976:84). The time signature is changed from Miles Davis original 4/4 to 2/2, a natural consequence of the much higher tempo Coltrane chose for his new version of "Tune Up".

Example 3.3:



Miles Davis: "Tune Up".



John Coltrane: "Countdown".

Above we see the first four bars of both "Tune Up" and "Countdown" (Ex.3.3), the first tune presenting a traditional II-V-I progression, and the other a more complex series of chords. When we look at the first and the two last chords of the example from Countdown we see that these together make up the same changes that we find in Davis' tune. Coltrane has on the other hand inserted two extra V-I movements with first Bb-major and then Gb-major as tonal centers. The phrase thus modulates from its original key of D (the E-minor being the II-chord in this key), down a major 3<sup>rd</sup> to Bb, continuing another major 3<sup>rd</sup> down to Gb and finally moving yet another major 3<sup>rd</sup> down landing back in the key of D. In other words we have just witnessed the famous "Coltrane changes" in effect, as the tonal center moved across the octave in three "giant steps" (hence the name of the album) from D to Bb to Gb to D. The same re-harmonization has been used for the next two phrases, and in the final four bars Coltrane has left the chords unchanged (see appendix 1 and 2).

Example 1.2 shows the first round of Coltrane's solo following the opening drum-solo. It can be argued that one would have little difficulties revealing the chord-changes from looking at the transcription of his playing. Having deep roots in the Be-Bop tradition, we can here clearly see his use of small melodic fragments over each chord in the way bop-musicians tend to string together these previously learned fragments into phrases in aliens with the chord-progression at hand. On the first chord, Em7, he starts on a high E and moves diatonically stepwise up to the 4<sup>th</sup> (A) using eight-notes leaving the root and 3<sup>rd</sup> on the emphasized beats of the group, first and third note. On the following chord, F7, he again returns to the root note (F) as the starting point, this time moving chromatically downwards to the 7<sup>th</sup> (Eb) before returning to the root on the forth note of the grouping. Going forward we see very clear similarities in the way Coltrane outlines the harmonies, spending usually two or three of the notes in every group emphasizing the structurally strongest notes in each chord; the root, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, often starting on the root. Another aspect of his playing that helps communicate the changes to the listener is the way his melodic fragments more often than no moves using 2<sup>nd</sup>s and 3<sup>rd</sup>s, and ascending 4<sup>th</sup>s moving from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the root of the chord. These fragments also have a continuing tendency to consist of three notes moving in one direction, and the forth either continuing the movement or changing direction. In the fourteenth and fifteenth bar Coltrane breaks away from his sweeping scales and arpeggios and presents a very linear movement, changing between playing A and C which serves as

the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> over Em7, and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> over F7. It is important to remember that not only was these progressions revolutionary in their time, but the four first rounds of soloing is accompanied by no more than drums, and so communicating the harmonies was surely Coltrane's main aim when choosing witch notes to play.



# Example 3.4:



# 3.4.3 Holdsworth's Countdown



# TRACK 20

When listening to Holdsworth's version of the track the first thing you notice may be the difference of the form and arrangement. Where Coltrane's original have an AB form with the drum solo and saxophone solo preceding the head which ends the track, this version has more of an ABA'B'A form. This allows for more variation in dynamics and sound. While the three guitar solos in the song are both rough in terms of the electric guitar sound as well as

#### Form:

00:00 – 00:45: Intro (Solo) 00:45 – 00:59: Head

00:59 – 02:06: Solo 02:06 – 02.20: Head

02:20 – 02:32: Epilogue

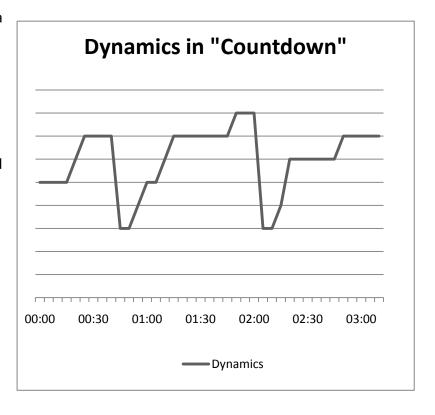
02:32 – 03:11: Solo

the sound of band, the head has a gentler, acoustic feel to it. In the illustration below we see the development of the dynamic of the music as a whole and the different parts occur as presented in the box to the right.

Holdsworth plays the song in its original key, but has set the tempo slightly lower than

Coltrane, around 285 beats per minute as opposed to 300 BPM.

In the following text we'll examine the musical details of the different parts.



#### 3.4.4 Intro



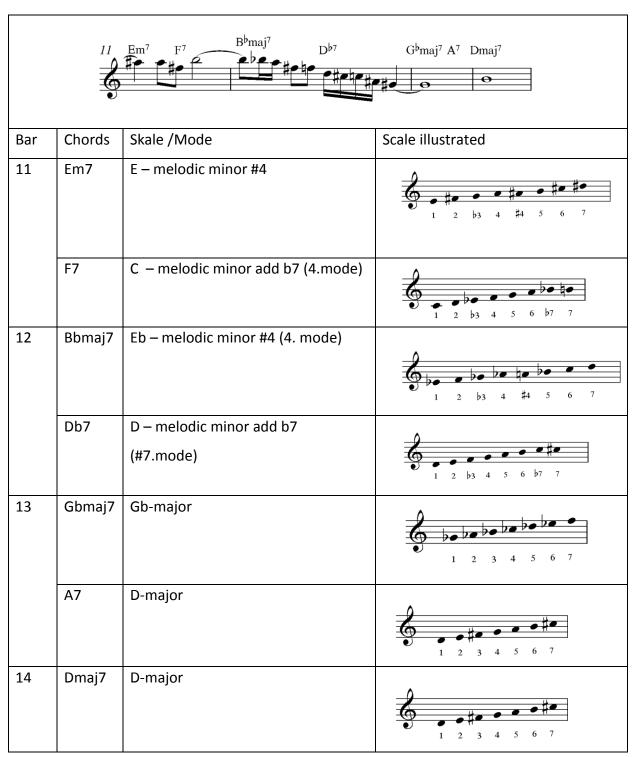
# Allan holdsworth: Countdown

John Coltrane



In a way Holdsworth starts off the track in an equally surprising way that Coltrane did with his thirty-six bars of drum solo, but replacing it with a science-fiction-like sound as if a spaceship was shutting down its engine. Following shortly after drummer Kirk Covington lays down a clear beat with the snare drum marking the half notes. As soon as Holdsworth starts to play he leaves this clear accentuated beat in favor of an intense and almost chaotic rhythmic landscape. Holdsworths first ten bars of soloing appears almost free to both beat and tonality. There is no way of concluding with an absolute certainty what scales and harmonic progressions he uses, since there is no instruments laying down the chords in the first section. We know that Coltrane simply played over the chords of the chorus, but since this does not add up with the number of bars, one must assume that Holdsworth had another plan. With regards to the first ten bars the plan might very well be a tribute to the Coltrane changes. It appears he modulates in major 3<sup>rd</sup>s from Bb to Gb to D using the Bb major scale with an added raised 4<sup>th</sup> (bar 1-4), continuing with a regular Gb major scale (bar 5-7), ending up on a D major scale with added minor 7<sup>th</sup> and minor 2<sup>nd</sup> (bar 9-10, disregarding the A# as belonging to the harmony of the upcoming bar). Starting the 11<sup>th</sup> bar it is reasonable to believe that he now starts to play over the changes since this is clearly audible many places in the intro. With 32 bars of soloing to go we can examine his choice of scale based on two rounds of the changes from the lead sheet. In the following text I will present the remaining part of the intro as well as the excerpt from the second solo using the same phrase-by-phrase approach as applied to the two previous analyses.



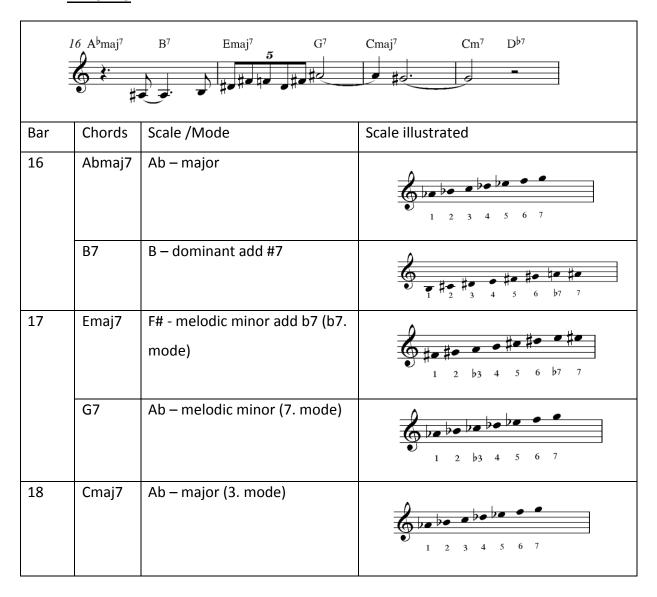


As we have seen earlier the melodic minor with a raised 4<sup>th</sup> is one of Holdsworths most frequently used scales. Here he starts his phrase by emphasizing that raised 4<sup>th</sup> over the E-minor chord. On the following chord, F7, he introduces another well-used modified melodic minor scale. This one has an added flat 7<sup>th</sup>, making it compatible for dominant chords as

well. The F dominant chord that appears on the fourth step in the C melodic minor add b7 scale has both a natural and a raised 4<sup>th</sup>. It is this raised forth he uses in the end of the eleventh bar. In the twelfth bar he again reaches for these two scales, though this time in different keys and modes. Two long notes conclude the phrase; a G# first taking the role as the 9<sup>th</sup> in the Gb major scale, then as the high 7<sup>th</sup> in the A – dominant scale with added #7. Then finally a B which is the 6<sup>th</sup> in the D major scale. Rhythmically this fluid phrase almost sounds as a subject of gravity. After climbing to the high B the melody enters an accelerating fall, plunging down to the G# before eventually landing on another B, this one an octave lower than the first.



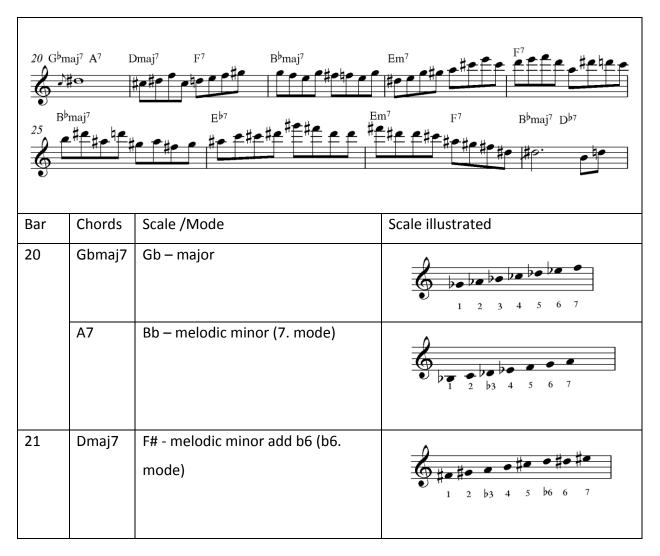
# TRACK 23



19	Cm	Ab – major (3. mode)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Db7	None	

In the next phrase we see Holdsworth applying groups of five notes over one beat. This kind of subdivision is as we know very typical in his playing and makes for fluid lines that sound as if the notes accelerate and decelerate as opposed to clearly changing note-value. He also slightly stretches the rhythm to achieve this. Harmonically, he again see that he takes much use of melodic minor scales and the dominant scale with an added raised 7<sup>th</sup>, starting the phrase by introducing this added note over a dominant chord.



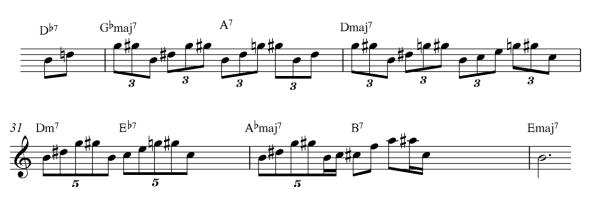


	F7	F # - dominant add b3 & #7 (#7. mode)	1 2 b3 3 4 5 6 b7 7
22	Bbmaj7	D – major add b3 & b6 (b6. mode)	1 2 b3 3 4 5 b6 6 7
23	Em7	B – major #5 (4. mode)	
24	F7	F – dominant add #7	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 7
25	Bmaj7	B – major add b3 & b6	# # # # # # # # # # # # # # # # # # #
26	Eb7	Eb – dominant #2	1 #2 3 4 5 6 b7
27	Em7	E – melodic minor add b7	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 7
	F7	Db – Major add b3 & b6 (#3. mode)	1 2 b3 3 4 5 b6 6 7

28	Bbmaj7	Bb – major	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Db7	D – melodic minor (7. mode)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

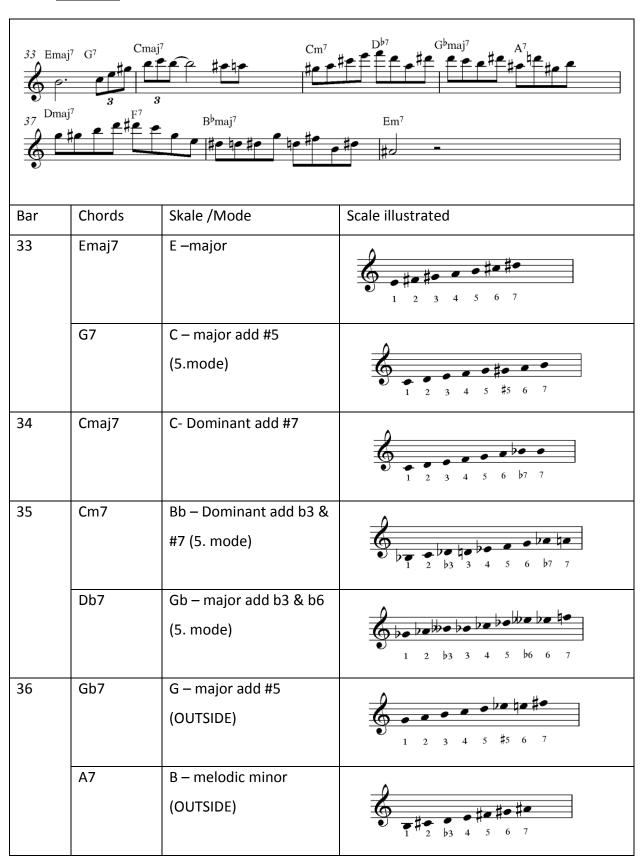
Continuing, Holdsworth now base this next considerably longer phrase on a rhythm of straight eights. He also introduce nine note scales like the dominant scale with added minor 3<sup>rd</sup> and major 7<sup>th</sup> and the major scale with added minor 3<sup>rd</sup> and minor 6<sup>th.</sup> In many cases he chooses scales that doesn't have share the root of the chord. Since he does not consider any note of a scale to be more important than any other, the mode where we find the chord in his scales is in principal just as likely to be any of them.





From the end of bar 28 throughout bar 32 we see a repeating sequence. In this entire phrase, except from the first two notes in bar 28 and the first chord of bar 29, Holdsworth disregard the chord changes completely. Starting with an appropriate Ab major scale with added b3 and b6 (also seen in bar 79) over the Gbmaj7-chord, he continues for four bars without changing the scale. Starting with the eights subdivided in groups of three, he then switches the subdivision into groups of five notes, giving the feeling of fluid acceleration.



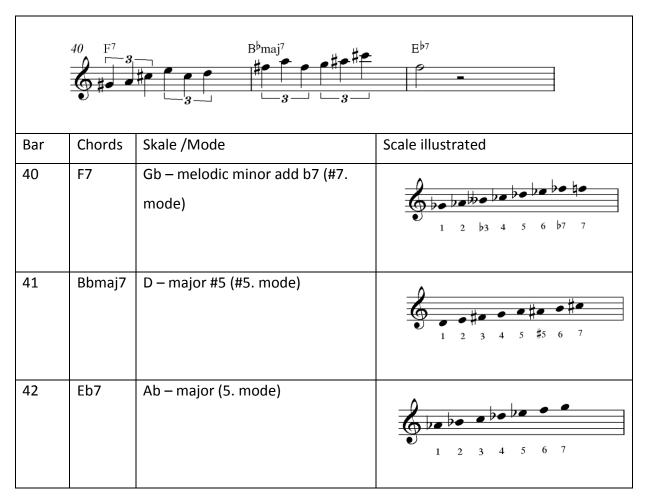


37	Dmaj7	A – dominant add #7 (4. mode)	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 7
	F7	F – dominant b3 & #7	1 2 b3 3 4 5 6 b7 7
38	Bbmaj7	G – major add b3 & b6 (b3. mode)	1 2 b3 3 4 5 b6 6 7
39	Em7	E – melodic minor #4	1 2 b3 4 #4 5 6 7

Also in this next phrase starting in bar 33 Holdsworth leaves the harmony in bar 36 and goes "outside", choosing G major scale with added raised 5<sup>th</sup> over Gb7 chord. Then, on the following A7 chord, he plays the traditional melodic minor scale. He quickly returns to the written harmony in the next bar and ends the phrase over on the raised fourth of the E melodic minor scale.

Holdsworth continues in bar 40 with a short and very rhythmically articulated phrase consisting of two bars of fourth-notes subdivided in groups of three. These twelve notes are themselves divided in to three groups of small ascending micro-phrases of four notes each. The phrase lands on a half vote long high F, and this concludes the 45 seconds long intro.





#### 3.4.5 The second solo

Following the intro, the head is played once before Holdsworth plays he's second solo. So before we take a look at the head, I'd like to present the analysis of his second solo. In the intro there were no accommodating chord-instruments, and so he was not forced to comply with any tonalities. In this solo, however, both bass and eventually piano is present in the music, and so we can now get a clear idea of his choice of notes and scales in the context of the chord changes of the tune. We know Holdsworth choose his scales based on whether the underlying chord can occur within the scales interval permutations. But since he does not instruct his musicians in what way they should contribute, it can be interesting to take a brief look at a complete score of the phrase found in bar 81 – 84 from this solo, (drums excluded).



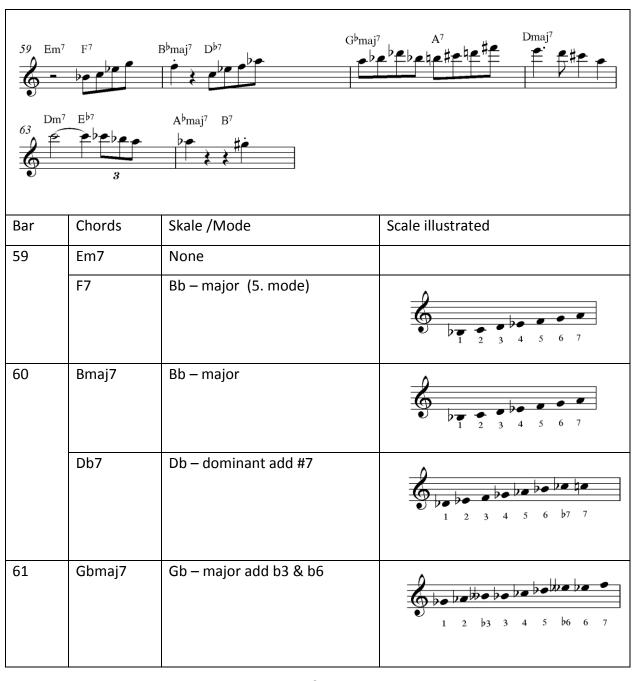


Holdsworth opens his phrase by playing the E dominate scale with added major 7<sup>th</sup>. Interestingly enough Gary Willis on bass plays a D on the second beat, suggesting an E dominant chord. It thus seems that they both chose the same 8-note scale, and although in traditional sense that an added note in a scale is often used as a passing note, Willis treats it like Holdsworth often does; as just another note in the scale worthy of as much space and attention as any other. On the following G7-chord Holdsworth reaches for the D melodic minor scale where we find the G7#11 chord on the fourth step. Willis plays the root followed by the major third, and this time it's Gordon Beck on piano that steels our attention. On the first beat of the G7-chord he actually plays the former Emaj7 chord before playing the implied dominant chord on the last beat of the bar.

In the next bar the C major chord sets the harmonic premise for the whole bar and both Holdsworth and Beck plays strictly in accordance with the harmony. Willis, though, challenges the harmony by introducing a chromatic passing note (c#) on the first beat before resolving to D. This is often sometimes referred to as a "forbidden" place to play such a note, since chromatic passing notes sound conventionally better as an up-beat to scale notes played on-beat. In the next two bars no "conflicts" of harmony is to be found, and we see the Willis demonstrate a conventional chromatic passing note on the last beat of bar 84,

where he plays an Eb which in the next bar resolves down to a the root of the following Dmaj7 chord. In conclusion we see that pianist Gordon Beck keeps his chords close to the original harmony with no big expansions. Willis on bass seem to take the harmonies a bit further, sometimes in a different way than Holdsworth does, but presented in a very convincing way. Also the tempo of this tune allows for potential dissonances to pass quickly enough for no audible conflict to take place. So after a quick in-depth look at the whole band; it is time to take a look at the first two choruses from Holdsworth's second solo.

# TRACK 28



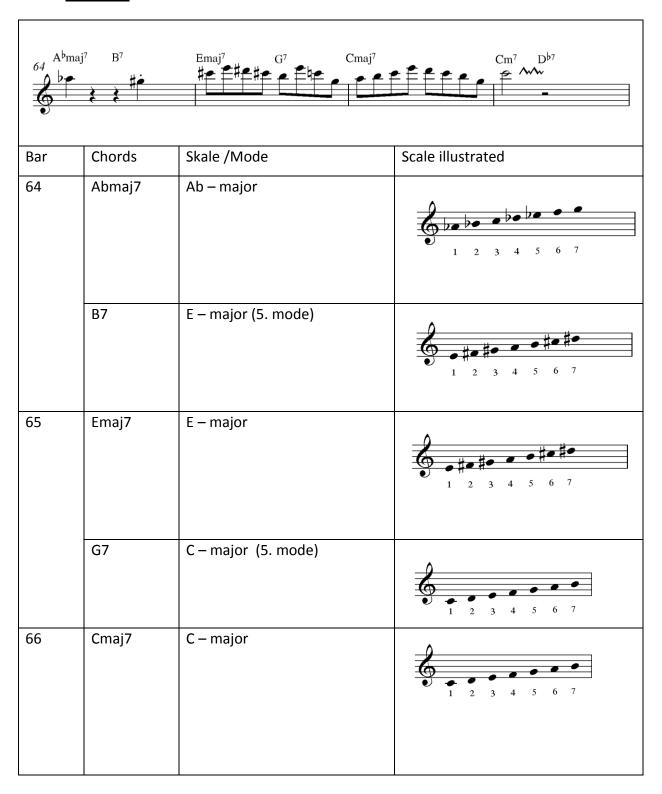
	A7	D – major (5. mode)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
62	Dmaj7	D – major	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
63	Dm7	F – major (6. Mode)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Eb7	Ab – major (5. mode) (with chromatics)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
64	Abmaj7	Ab – major	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	B7	E – major (5.mode)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

In the table above we actually have two phrases: One short phrase starting in bar 59 and ending in bar 60, and a longer one starting in that same bar and ending in bar 64. The dominant scale with added raised 7<sup>th</sup> proves to be one of Holdsworths most frequently used scales in the intro, and he also makes use of it over Db7 in bar 60. Again we see that although conventional use of this added note would be as a chromatic passing note, he uses it with no stepwise preparation or continuation. In bar 61 the nine-note major scale with added b3 and b6 is used over a Gbmaj7 chord, proving Holdsworth is fully prepared to implement his altered scales over conventional harmonies. In bar 63 to 64 a chromatic run

with 5 notes is played, once again proving his willingness to use chromatic notes in addition to the scales. Holdsworth ends the phrase by playing the Ab over an Abmaj7-chord.



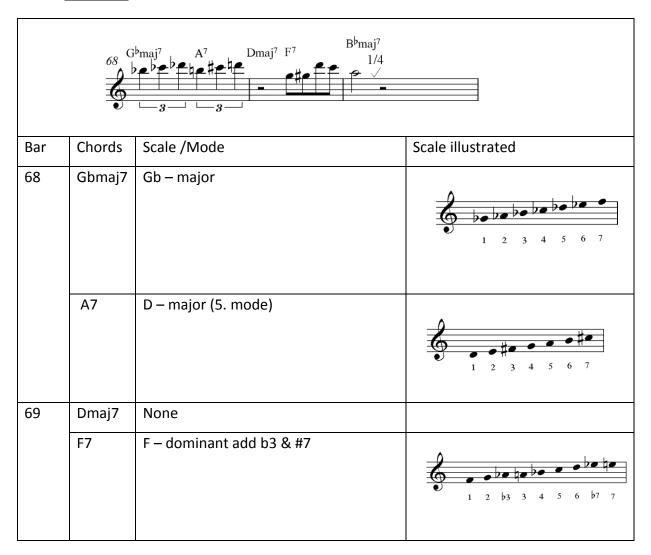
## TRACK 29



67	Cm7	Eb – major (6 mode)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Db7	None	

In the phrase starting in bar 64 Holdsworth strictly uses the major/minor scale. There is however something to be said about the vibrato occurring on the C in bar 67. He starts the tone with no vibrato and quickly goes for a very wide vibrato. This sounds very much like that of a saxophone and stands out as yet another hint of Holdsworth's mission to make the guitar sound more like a horn.

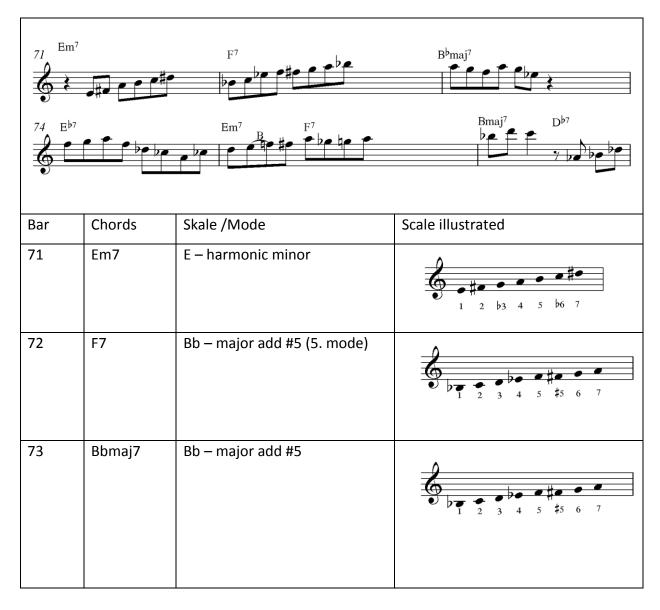






Also in bar 70 we witness one of the most characteristic features of his playing. Instead of using vibrato he holds the note straight until the very end where he bends it up a half semitone. He cuts the note while in its ascending movement, so the effect does not suggest any alternative frequency of any note, but rather the effect a horn player would create by forcing more air into his instrument.

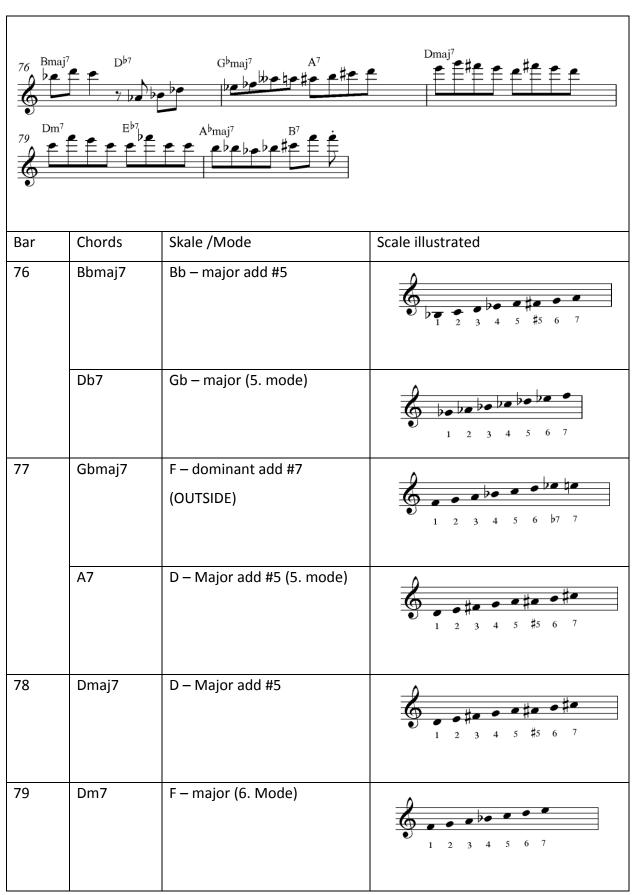
# TRACK 31

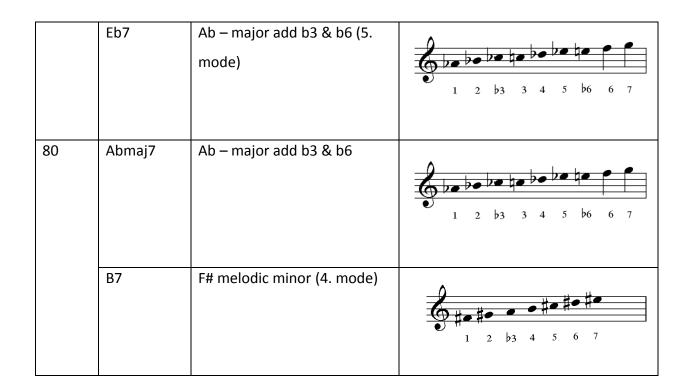


74	Eb7	Eb – Whole tone scale	1 2 3 #4 #5 #6
75	Em7	C – dominant add #7 (6. mode)	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 7
	F7	B – major add #5 (5. mode)	
76	Bbmaj7	Bb – major add #5	2 3 4 5 #5 6 7
	Db7	Gb – major (5. mode)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

In the second of the two phrases shown in the table above Holdsworth uses the whole-tone scale over an Eb dominant chord, resulting in a raised 4<sup>th</sup>. This six-note scale has a major third and a minor seventh, and is therefore commonly used over dominant chords. It also include both a raised forth and a raised firth.

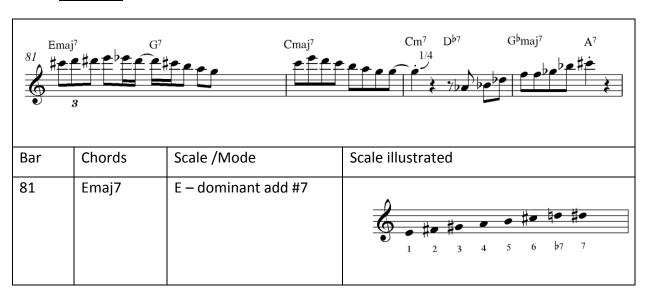


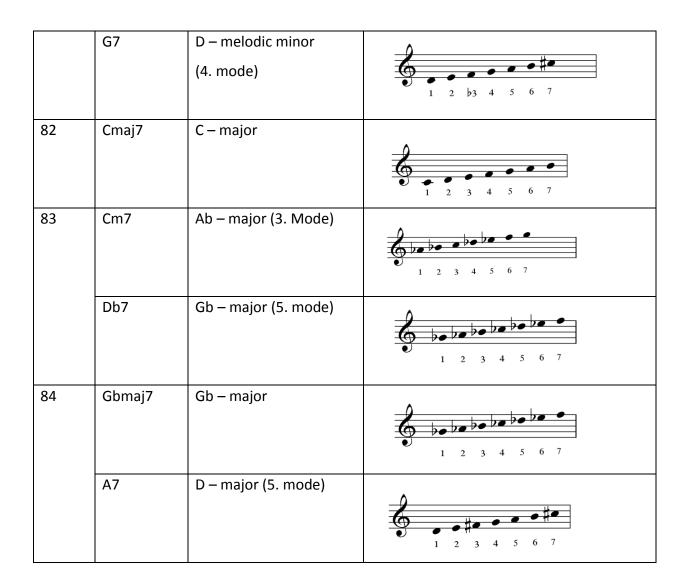




In bar 77 Holdsworth goes outside the harmony, as he plays an F dominant scale with added raised 7<sup>th</sup> over a Gbmaj7-chord. Mark Levine writes in his 1995 publishing *Jazz theory book*; "It's very common to play a half step away from a chord to get outside. Playing up or down a half step is popular because it creates the most dissonance, and dissonance is mostly what playing outside is all about (Levine 1995:187)." Holdsworth get back "inside" over the next chord, A7.

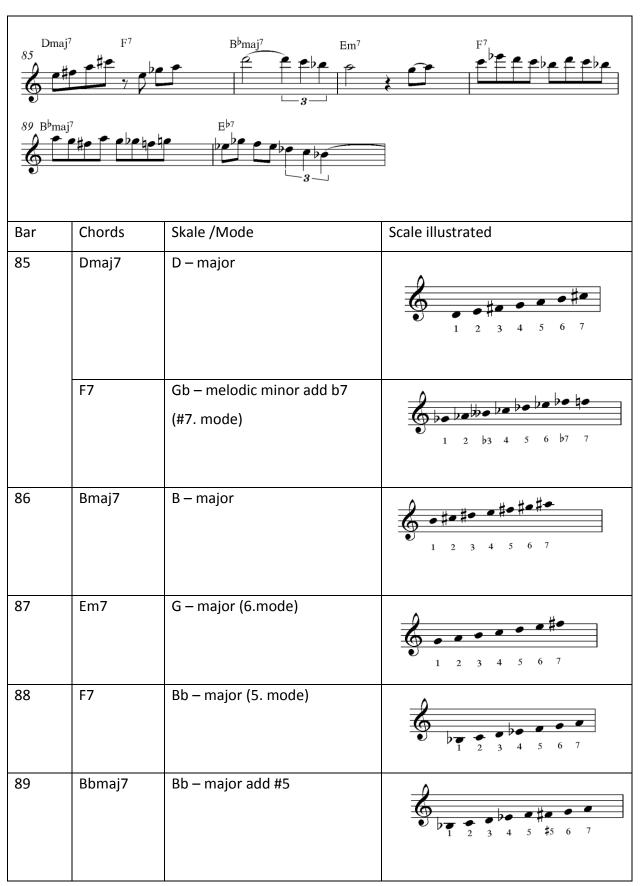


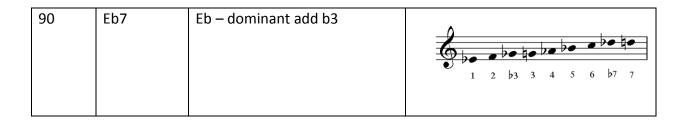




In bar 83 we again see the characteristic half semitone bending he often uses to end phrases. Harmonically, in this phrase he uses the major/minor scale a lot, with exception of bar 81 where the dominant scale with added #7 once again occurs. Also the melodic minor scale's forth mode is featured over the G7- chord allowing for the raised 4<sup>th</sup>.







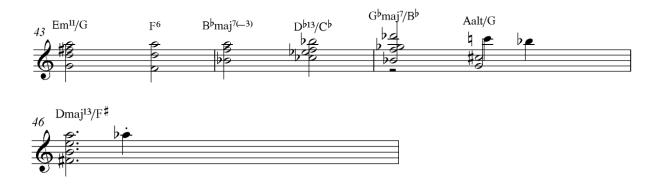
Finally, in these two last phrases of the analysis of this solo, he use a scale we haven't seen since the intro; the eight note dominant scale with an added minor third. In conclusion we see Holdsworth being a little more faithful to the harmony in this solo, but still showing that he is willing to implement altered scales and play *outside* the chord changes.

## 3.4.6 The head



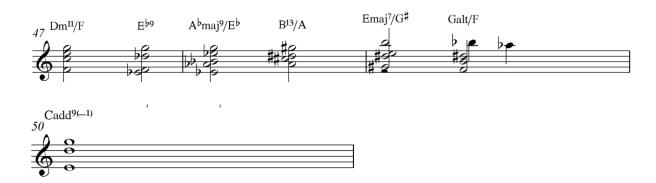
## TRACK 35

The head is presented two times in the track; the first following the intro, then again after the second solo. In the latter one an epilogue is also played, as Coltrane also did on his original version, but in a different way. One interesting aspect of the head is that it is actually very calm and subtle. Holdsworth switches to a soft acoustic sound on the guitar and plays the head using chords with the melody on top. The piano stays absent both times.

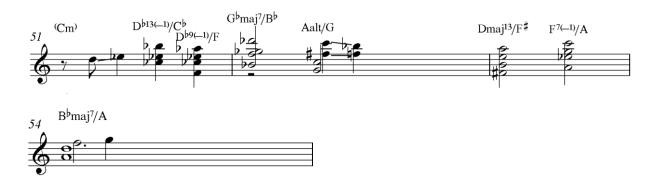


In many of the chords he uses in the head, the bass note is often different from the root, and sometimes the root is not played at all. This is to be expected since Willis accompanies on his bass guitar, and there is therefore no need for Holdsworth to emphasize the chord changes. Still, the chords sound much more traditional than what we hear in his original compositions. In the third bar of the first phrase (bar 45) he plays an altered chord; this is actually a part of

the composition as presented by Coltrane. Although the chords on the lead sheet does not reflect this, the melody goes from a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> to a minor second 2<sup>nd</sup> over a dominant chord, a feature we find in the seventh mode of the melodic minor scale.



A repeating characteristic in the chords he uses is the interval of major seconds. It is not very common to find this interval in the mid-voices of a guitar chord, and so this reminds us of Holdsworth's influence of the piano, where this kind of voicing is part of the tradition. It is also much more idiomatic to do this on piano than on guitar, since these chords often force the guitarist to stretch his fingers a little more.



In bar 52 Holdsworth demonstrates his persistence in defying the instrument's limitations by sliding two fingers simultaneously, one sliding one fret and the other sliding two, while holding the C and G throughout. This kind of combination of multiple glissandos over sustaining notes very rarely occurs in guitar playing since it requires extensive stretching and clenching of the left hand.

#### Holdsworth:



#### Coltrane:



TRACK 36: (Complete head from Coltrane's original)



The final phrase is the only thing in the head that has been changed profoundly from Coltrane's original. Here Holdsworth has replaced Coltrane's phrase which revolves around the high A with 5 accentuated "hits", also articulated by the bass and drums.

After the second head the following epilogue takes place. Using the SynthAxe, Holdsworth plays chords and melody based on the first phrase of the head, but replacing the D major chord in the end with a C dominant chord with 6/4 suspension before resolving the 6th down to the 5th. Finally the phrase ends on the slash chord F/C, a mixture of the root and third of both chords. It can also be viewed as an Fmaj7/C. This chord is held for 10 bars while the band improvises over the chord, before the track ends with jet another guitar solo over the changes before the music gradually fades out.





#### **3.4.7 Summary**

It is clear that much of the secret behind Holdsworth's characteristic sound and music is found in the melodic minor scale and the different alterations of this scale. In his version of "Countdown" we see this scale widely used in the intro, often as a dominant scale. The mode found on the seventh step of the traditional melodic minor scale is of course the altered scale, a scale frequently used by most jazz-musicians. Not only does Holdsworth make use of the altered scale, but also uses the fourth mode of the melodic minor scale with added minor 7th, where we find a mixolydian scale with added minor 3<sup>rd</sup>. He also play the melodic minor scale over some minor and major chords on the track. However, in his second solo we see much more traditional choice of notes and scales, and the major/minor scale dominates much of his playing.

It is very difficult to say anything regarding his choice of notes to emphasize. He is working hard to avoid repeating himself or getting stuck in signature licks, and is quite successful at this. The notes that are long, articulated or at the beginning or the end of the phrases in this track seem to vary from any of the notes in the scale. By a small margin a preference for the root, fourth, fifth and seventh can be suggested, especially in the second solo, where the bass and piano creates some structure that needs to be considered.

In contrast with his original material Holdsworth base much of his soloing in this track on continuing eight-note patterns with spars use of subdivisions in groups of three, five, seven, and so on, though the use of these has become a significant part of his style. It is therefore fair to say that the opening part (bar 1-41) is in many ways more true to his own style of playing than the soloing that occurs later in the song, with respect to the much freer harmony, and flexibility and unpredictability of the rhythm.

The changing dynamics presented through-out the track creates a very clear form that in a way lends itself to popular music in the sense of clear parts with different feels to it. Instead of an organic development stretching in one line from the beginning to the end, we hear a very clear dynamic retreat on the head, offering a different sound and feel, as a solid pillar in a restless and vigorous music landscape. A landscape overall dominated by the sound of electric bass-guitar, electric piano, loud drums and Holdsworth doing what he always does, though this time with a slightly different touch.

## **Chapter 4: Thoughts of review**

## 4.1 Seeing the whole picture?

Much has been said in the past three chapters regarding Holdsworth and his music, and it might be beneficial to take a step back in order to get some oversight. In this chapter I intend to discuss what I consider to be the main points from these previous chapters, both with respect to his thoughts on music and his main characteristics in relation to what we discovered through analysis of the three songs, "Pud Wud", "Sixteen Men of Tain" and his version of Coltrane's "Coutdown". In this discussion my intention is to show the coherency between the three different aspects we have examined, musician, principles and music, and establish a wide-angle view of Allan Holdsworth. In addition to this I will also introduce some new thought on his music that I believe have been neglected and may hold some truth to the overall secret to his music as well as the roots to his unique expression. I will start off by introducing an ever more important aspect to jazz analysis that has not been given much attention in the previous chapter.

Interaction between musicians is today at the heart of jazz analysis after being neglected in the early attempts to analyze jazz through methods that had been used to approach classical music. Today, examining interaction within an ensemble is a vital part of understanding the music, since the improvisers musical choices are greatly influenced by the context provided by his fellow musicians. Examining motives and melodic development in a jazz solo without taking the other instruments into account is in other words destined to provide an incomplete and sometimes misleading representation of the music. Jazz scholar Roger Dean stresses this in his book New Structures in Jazz and Improvised Music since 1960: "One major feature of improvisation, (...), is that it permits interaction between individual musical creators at the time of conception of music; in this it is unlike composition" (Dean 1992:x). So why has not interaction between Holdsworth and his fellow musicians been given more focus? There are two main reasons for this. One is the fact that interaction within a jazz ensemble is based on the element of live communication and how the performance of each single musician is influenced by the other band members in the moment of playing. However, Holdsworth rarely record his music collectively with the band, but rather in the typical manner of popular music; one layer at the time. This is made clear by the fact that he is constantly featured on both guitar and SynthAxe in most of his songs. This necessarily

means that he is well acquainted with the musical landscape he is soloing over, and will use as many takes as necessary to produce a result he is satisfied with. To study interaction between musicians or featured instrumental voices in music that is recorded in this fashion can therefore be considered a study of arrangement rather than interaction. A perfect example of this can be heard in bar 105 and 106 (03:47) in the solo from Pud Wud where a very audible "fill" is played on SynthAxe while the guitar takes a pause that would otherwise sound very unnatural. It is also obvious that Holdsworth is aware of this when playing his solo, since he is the one playing both instruments. (The discussion whether his music is really "jazz" when the studio recording as not based on any collective improvisation is a valid one. On the other hand it is a discussion that I believe does not hold any relevance to my subject, and it will therefore not be given any further attention in this thesis.) However, a study of Holdsworth's complete arrangements would none the less be an extremely fascinating read and this brings me to my next point; format. An analysis of this kind could not be included in this thesis without exciding the format of this text by an additional hundred pages. I have therefore chosen to mainly focus on the guitar parts in order to best illuminate the relevant information within the confines of a master thesis.

#### **4.2 Sound**

We established early on that one of the absolute key elements to his unique sound is his continued effort to make his solos as legato as they would be on any wind-instrument. However, when listening to the sound of saxophone or a clarinet it does not necessarily sound legato. In fact, the use of articulation is even more present in music played on wind instruments than on guitar and keyboard, since the nature of a wind instrument force the player to be active throughout the whole note, and not just the initial attack. When a musician is faced with the necessity to take an active decision on how every note will sound, it is natural that there will be a more diverse choice of articulation than with a guitarist who actually does not "need" to worry about it at all. (This is also true for string instruments like the violin, which Holdsworth also experimented with in the late seventies.) On both guitar and piano the note will naturally die out when the movement in the string decreases, or when this movement is interrupted in any way. There is also another vital explanation to why someone that plays a wind instrument will be more active with respect to articulation;

namely that the use of the breath to produce sound is closely related to speech. It is completely unnatural for any living being to communicate orally in an unarticulated manner; whether it is a human language, a sound from a dog, an elephant or a chimpanzee *the sound* is always articulated and phrased in a certain way. A musician who uses breath to produce sound will in other words be more likely to find it natural to articulate in their playing, than someone who uses hands and fingers to operate their instrument.

One can almost say that "Holdsworth plays legato" has become somewhat of a standard phrase in articles, interviews and also this very thesis. It is however a slightly misleading phrase when regarding the fact that "legato" is both a musical and an instrument-technical term. These words are of course united in their common subject, but for a non-guitarist it might seem strange that this word has made up so much of the focus in the discourse regarding Holdsworth. To provide the appropriate perspective we must regard both the technical challenges of the guitar and how its construction provides these challenges. It is common on the guitar to pluck the string for every new note that is required. However, it is possible to "pull-off" or "hammer-on" the string using only left hand to avoid having to pluck the string with the right hand. As opposed to plucking which always gives a slight accent to the new note, "pull-off" and "hammer-on" adds very little accent and leaves no space between notes. This technique is also referred to as "slurs" or legato. In other words, when this term is used among guitarists it is commonly a reference to this specific technique and not necessarily to the musical expression. It must be noticed that it is absolutely possible to play legato on guitar while plucking the strings and this is obtainable with a soft use of the plectrum or fingers. However, this is not traditionally regarded as "legato-playing" among guitarists. The problem with the pull-off/hammer-on technique is that it generally requires all of the notes involved to be on the same string. In addition to this the notes that follow each other will have to be within reach of the fingers, since any position shift would naturally result in a pause between notes, effectively restricting legato to take place. Most often a guitarist will only be able to cover a major 3<sup>rd</sup> or a perfect 4<sup>th</sup> within the stretch of the hand, and so to create legato between wider intervals one has to use "slide". (A position shift while pressing a note, allowing movement in the string to maintain while shifting note) The limitation of the slide-technique is that it basically only works between two notes, before the movement of string is decreased so much that it fails to provide the note with any significant

volume. Other legato options include pull-off/hammer-on between a chosen fret and the open string, but this requires that the note from the open string is appropriate for your melody line. At last you can also use the right hand to hammer on the string in a technique referred to as right-hand tapping. The practicality of this technique is however extremely limited since it requires the right hand to move 5-15 centimeters from its original place, only to reach one or two single note or create a fast repeating arpeggio.

The result of all these challenges, relating to performing legato, is that the typical guitar-style of playing is executed in a way that Holdsworth referrers to as percussive, featuring lots of accentuation and legato lines often limited to including no more two or three notes. But I believe it is extremely important to remember; *Holdsworth does not claim to strive for legato. He strives to make the guitar sound like a horn.* And as we have talked about; sounding like a horn or a wind instrument is not the same as playing only legato. I believe guitarists who emulate Holdsworth's sound only by playing as much legato-technique as they possibly can has to a certain degree misunderstood the essence of his effort. However, if we consider the music of a horn player and try to adapt to their balance in use of articulation, their way of phrasing and the way their notes are created and completed; we will end up being much closer to the spirit of his goal. The result will in other words be closer to the human way of oral articulating of sound. I will therefore make the following statement: *Allan Holdsworth way of playing is not legato; it is organic*.

Consider his music throughout the years; it is very often both packed with accentuation and other articulation in every instrument. Listen to songs like "City Nights", "Ruhkakah", "Clown", "Devil Take the Hindmost" and "Looking glass" for perfect examples of *organic articulation*. Let's take a closer look at some typical aspects to Holdsworth's guitar sound.

Although the refinement of sound through effects units is always present in Holdsworth's guitar sound he plays a lot of acoustic chords in his songs. On both these chords – as well as his distorted soloing sound - he also uses very little middle and treble in order to minimize the accent that occurs when plucking the strings. The effects vary, but most often he use a significant amount of reverb and effects that supply a duplication of the notes, but with a slight touch of synthetic "strings" in the background. In many cases he also uses a volume pedal to make the sound swell up, hiding the initial attack at the start of the notes. These

chords are played as arpeggios or with all the notes picked simultaneously using the fingers. However, he *never* uses the traditional "strumming" technique to play notes (using a single pick to hit all the desired strings in one motion), as he explains in an 1992 interview by Andy Aledort for *Guitar Extra*; "(...)and for the chords, I use a volume pedal to sound more like a keyboard, and not so chinky. And I hate strumming, the sound of strumming drives me nuts. It's the same thing about how the guitar is kind of not the right instrument for me, but I'm too old to start worrying about another one."<sup>61</sup>

We have learned that his dissatisfaction with the guitar drove him into the world of the SynthAxe. The role of this instrument in Holdsworths music really can not be overestimated. It plays a significant part on every album from *Atavachron* (1986) up to his latest, *The Sixteen Men of Tain* (2000). Although the possibilities of a midi controller like the SynthAxe are endless it can be said that he has obtained three different roles in his music.

One of the most important roles is related to the swelling chords we just talked about. These are in many situations played on guitar, but also lend itself to the SynthAxe at least equally well. In fact, because of the breath control replacing the rather unintuitive volume pedal it actually works better. The choice of sound for this musical effect is mostly string-like effects that have a sustaining sound. Good examples of this can be hear in songs like "0274", "Secrets", "Sand", "Prelude" and "House of Mirrors". The way Holdsworth present the chords often gives the sensation that each of them is an individual picture in a long string of art-works with a more or less related subject; much like walking through an exhibition. This might sound pompous, but this is also much in the spirit of how Holdsworth regards chords as we heard him talk about in chapter two; "(..) the way I do think about chords is; I just think of them as being, say, members of a family. (..) Say you have a, imagine a seat with eight family members on it and you say "Four stand up; Steven, George, Sarah, Winston", or whatever, "Stand up!" And then you take a picture of those and that's that particular chord, but their all members of that one family. So when I hear chords moving from one chord to another, I don't just hear the static voicing of that particular chord (...) I see it more as being the families that changes; you change from one chord to the next." Although Holdsworth say this in relation to the subject of chords and chord progressions as a whole, I believe this

<sup>61</sup> http://www.angelfire.com/oh/scotters2/allanint.html

thought process has materialized into a musical expression that is apparent throughout his albums.

The second typical role Holdsworth gives of the SynthAxe is through solos. The chosen sound is then often, not surprisingly, a horn- or flute-like sound. By using the breath control this brings him musically very close to his wish of sounding like a horn. Perfect examples of this can be heard on song like "Edison", "Secrets", "House of Mirrors" and one of my own favorite Holdsworth tracks; "Downside Up". However he also frequently uses a keyboard-like sound when soloing. Examples of this include songs like "Non Brewed Condiment", "Against the Clock" and "Postlude". One should however be aware that some actual keyboard solos are present on the albums, so a clear distinction between keyboard and SynthAxe will be hard without being able to recognize Holdsworth's style of playing.

The third typicality I wish to give attention to is the more percussive sound sometimes given to the instrument. This varies between the sound of bells (featured in for example "Sand" and "Against the Clocks" and "Hard Hat Area", "Questions"), Xylophone ("The 4.15 Bradford Executive") to violin pizzicatos ("Hard Hat Area"). Any categorization of sound will always be in conflict with the nuanced reality, but I do believe these three different sounds to be among the main features of the SynthAxe within Holdsworth's music. Now let us move on to the musical structures behind the sounds; the harmonies.

#### 4.3 Harmony

In many ways the subject of harmony is the most important in this thesis, and has already been discussed in great detail. I will not repeat everything here, but rather address some aspects of chords and scales, as well as explain why I believe so many responds to his music with notion that they don't understand what he is doing. But let's start with chords.

Among those guitarists who have tried to play Holdsworths music, many have reacted to the extreme difficulty of his chord voicings. He is actually known for using voicings that requires a great stretch in the hand, hence the name of the book "Reaching for the uncommon chord". The truth is that there is no reason to believe that he prefers technical difficulties. Instead it seems that he is reluctant to compromise with his own musical taste. This result in

the fact that a good portion of his chords are more or less challenging to play and a lot of them are also quite easy. In the CD-appendix from the book "Just for the Curious" he illuminates the subject of uncommon chords in relation to the opening chord progression from with the song "Looking Glass" and its wide intervals; "But I like to do that because than you can give each tune a color, rather than just playing the same for, you know; your favorite voicings in every tune. I like to try and make each tune a little more specific than that, so that they have a specific thing that happens more or less in that tune alone, and it's not something that's found consistently in any of the other ones."

The interval structure within Holdsworth's chords might be a lot less unorthodox than the notes he choose to include in his chords. However, he proves himself to be very fond of the close interval of major 2<sup>nd</sup>. In addition to having a great potential for being perceived as dissonant, this interval is rarely featured in guitar chords, unless there are open strings involved, since it often requires a stretch of fingers. As for this stretch we have established the fact that this is no reason for Holdsworth to reconsider the chord. The element of dissonance however is much more interesting. Despite what the average listener might perceive as strange music, and sometimes dissonant in regards to their tonal comfort zone, he does not have a favorable view of dissonances. We remember him from chapter two referring to a very common major-seventh chord voicing, constructed strictly by intervals of thirds, as "a really ugly, disgusting, dissonant sounding chord". It is in other words clear that "dissonance" can be a subjective observation, and when listening to his music it is clear that all these close intervals are executed with a great caution and gentle timbre. Examples of this can be seen in the themes of every song analyzed in chapter three, and especially so in "Pud Wud" and "Countdown".

It has been mentioned earlier, for example in regard to the analysis of "Countdown" in chapter three, that people have expressed their lack of understanding when it comes to Holdsworth's music. Not necessarily with its expressing, but with the theory behind it all. In an interview by Mark Gilbert with guitar legend John Mclaughlin published in *Jazz Journal Magazine* in 1996 he too formulated his confusion; "I went to see him a couple of years ago and I went backstage and I said, 'If I knew what you were doing I would steal all of it, 'cause I

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Track 22 from CD-appendix to "Just for the Curious".

have no idea what you're doing'."<sup>63</sup> With the greatest humility I wish to propose an explanation that might shed some light on the mystery behind Holdsworth's unique style.

I believe much of the key lies in a departure from functional harmony and extensive use of melodic minor scales. As I will explain, these two are in close relation to each other. But first; consider his list of "most usable scales" presented in chapter two. Scale number 2, 3, 4, 8, 9 and 11 are all defined as minor, but only number 3 and 11 are *not* melodic minor scales. When taking into account that melodic minor is used to a rather small and limited degree in jazz, this is actually quite extraordinary.

When reading the "The jazz theory book" by Mark Levin we learn what I believe to be the reason for the Holdsworth's preference of melodic minor scales. In this book Levin introduces the term "avoid" notes; "A note from the scale of a chord that sounds dissonant when held against the chord. The term usually refers to the 4<sup>th</sup> of a major chord and the 11<sup>th</sup> of a dominant chord" (Levine 1995:11). Both these examples speak to the relationship between the major 3<sup>rd</sup> and the perfect 4<sup>th</sup> in the chords, where the interval of minor 2<sup>nd</sup> creates a harsh dissonance. A minor second is not necessarily a bad thing, like for example in a major seventh chord, but has as earlier mentioned a potential to be perceived as unpleasant in some circumstances. The solution to the issue of these "avoid" notes has generally been to raise the problematic note one half step. In the issue of the major chords this effectively means that the chord Cmaj11 is replaced by a Cmaj#11. The same applies to the dominant chord; a G11 will be replaced with a G7#11. The major/minor scale has "avoid" notes on no less than three of the scales respected modes/chords, including the major tonic/Ionian mode (4<sup>th</sup>), the dominant chord/mixolydian mode (11<sup>th</sup>) and the submediant of Tonic/Aeolian mode (b9). (Note that I consistently use the term "major/minor scale" when referring to the scale, since this is one and the same scale.) The practical result of this is a limitation for composers and improvisers as to what chords can accompany certain notes within a melody, and vice versa, since there is a constant risk of unfortunate dissonance between chords and melodies within a major/minor scale. The fact that this makes every chord quite unique to its purpose also contributes to the sensation of the functional

<sup>63</sup> http://www.italway.it/morrone/jml-JmL.htm

harmony that the overwhelming majority of western music subscribes to; a harmonic system that has become so essential to our experience of music that anything that does not base itself on it makes no sense to us. And that brings us to the melodic minor scale.

As we learned in chapter two melodic minor is a minor scale where the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> are both major. In other words, the only difference between a major scale and the melodic minor scale is the minor 3<sup>rd</sup>. Like the major/minor scale it also has its own seven chords built from each of the seven modes. In for example a C melodic minor they would be as follows; Cmmaj7, Dsusb9, Ebmaj#5, F7#11, Cm-maj7/G, A half-diminished, B7alterd. Although these chords are featured in jazz music from time to time, they usually occur as single chords within a functional harmonic context. The dominate chord with raised 11<sup>th</sup> (forth mode) and the altered dominant chord (seventh mode) are maybe the most commonly used melodic minor chords since dominant chords are meant to create tension, often through dissonance. The introduction of "strange notes" is therefore more likely to fit in with other more conventional chords. But of course, the melodic minor scale also works great as a soul basis for compositions. As with the minor/major scale it is all about creating chords and melodies from the notes that are within the scale. The sound will however not be the same. Mark Levin writes about this; "However, melodic minor scales sounds completely different –much darker and more exotic -than major scale harmony. The melodic minor scale has greater melodic and intervallic possibilities than the major scale" (Levine 1995:57). Levin explains this with the observation that among the diatonical intervals of 4<sup>th</sup> within the major/minor scales six of them are perfect 4<sup>th</sup> and one is an augmented 4<sup>th</sup>, in other words a triton. In the melodic minor scale however only four are perfect 4<sup>th</sup>, one is a triton and two are diminished 4<sup>th</sup>, in other words enharmonic to major thirds. It can be interesting to speculate if these intervallic possibilities, easing the effort to sound new and fresh, are one of the reason why Holdsworth very often to use this scale. We can also hear that his music very often has a dark melancholy to it, and this might also be worth crediting the melodic minor scale for.

But there is another major factor to this scale that allies with Holdsworth's theoretical approach in a very interesting way. Levin writes about this in his book:

"However, there is a very big difference between major and melodic minor harmony. For the most part, there are no "avoid" notes in chords from melodic minor harmony. The lack of "avoid" notes means that almost everything in any melodic minor key is interchangeable with

everything else in that key. Play a lick, pattern, phrase, chord voicing, motif, and so on, on Cm-maj7, and it will work as well on Dsus4b9, Ebmaj7#5, F7#11, Aø, and B7alt. (...) The only difference between these chords is the root, and unless you're a bass player, or a pianist playing root position chords, there is no difference between any of the chords. (..) The interchangeability doesn't work in chords from the major scale. As an example, although both Dm7 and Cmaj7 are from the key of C, a voicing for Dm7 won't work for a Cmaj7 chord because Dm7 has an F, the "avoid" note of a Cmaj7 chord. (...) Again, because there are no "avoid" notes in melodic minor harmony, the resulting interchangeability of all the chords means that you're playing the whole melodic minor "key" much more than any individual chord within it" (Levine 1995:72-74).

The fact that the chords from melodic minor do not have a very strong individual sound means in other words that the melodic minor as a harmonic system is to a large degree *not* functional harmony.

Now consider this: We have learned that Holdsworth does not think of the voicings of chords as having any significant effect on the direction of the music. However, the voicing of chords are absolutely essential in functional harmony in order to give the music a clear, understandable structure. It is therefore an established fact that Holdsworth disregards the function of chords. When speaking of his composition "House of Mirrors" in the CD-appendix to his book Just for the Curious, he explains; "It kind of reminds me of being in a house of mirrors because it modulates a lot, and I like that. That's why that system of numbering chords, like for example 2-5-1, or whatever, doesn't really work too well for me with my music, cause they move around too much to ever have one that stays a one."64 Now, if we consider the interchangeability of the melodic minor along with Holdsworth's thoughts on chords they add up quite well. This might be part of the reason why he has found this scale to be so useable in his music, since it allows him to move between scales and keys in a smooth way, without cheating any harmonies and dissonances from their traditional resolution or way forward. In chapter two I spoke about Holdsworth as having a modal approach to his compositions. When remembering that modal jazz characterized itself by staying on one chord for several bars and then changing to another key for a the next several

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Just for the curious, CD appendix, track 26.

bars (hence Mark Levin's definition; "Few chords, lot's of space."), we might suggest in a humoristic way that his music is sort of like modal jazz on fast forward.

I will never suggest that this is the complete truth behind Holdsworth's style and that he has a framed picture of the melodic minor scale above his bed and a copy of Mark Levin's *The Jazz Theory Book* on his nightstand. I also highly doubt that there is any musician out there who maintains a strict legion to any one set of principles. However, I do believe that the relationship between the nature of the melodic minor scale and his musical approach compliments each other, and makes up one important component to the basis of his overall style and sound.

It is important to remember that there are plenty of factors and nuances not taken into account in the text. This is merely because nuances have a way of disruption and overcomplicating any attempts of explaining something that is not meant to answer all the questions. I will however shortly address a few of them in order to set the issue "avoid" notes and functional harmony in some perspective. As we saw in chapter two Holdsworth not only uses the traditional melodic minor scale but also variations with slight changes of intervals and some with added notes. What makes all these scales melodic minor is the presence of minor 3<sup>rd</sup>, major 6<sup>th</sup> and major 7<sup>th</sup>. Any change beyond this criterion does not change the essence of the scale. But as earlier mentioned, Holdsworth is very fond of the melodic minor scale with raised 4<sup>th</sup> and also frequently use melodic minor scales with an added b7 or b6. It is obvious that these scales will have notes that in certain situations qualify as "avoid" notes, and that it is possible to construct chords from these scales that would sound terrible. But the fact that it has to be used with some sense of caution really doesn't change anything; and at the end of the day Holdsworth himself will naturally avoid any notes or chords that do not sound good to him.

Another issue worth addressing is that although Holdsworth disclaims the system of functional harmony, his music does sometimes sound to a large degree functional. A good example of this is the head from "Pud Wud" where we find very traditional and predictable chord progressions. In relation to this I believe that it can be helpful to remind ourselves that he too is subjected to the same popular music as everyone else. So it is perfectly natural that some of his music will be perceived as more "available" to the general public than much of

his other material. And let's not forget that one of his most commonly used scales is actually our very own major/minor scale. In addition to this we must also remember that any coincidental combination of notes and chords that can also be found in the major/minor scale will sound like functional harmony to us and we might naturally assume that Holdsworth himself perceives it in the same fashion. Whether this is the case we might never know.

## 4.4 Roots to the impressionism

## 4.4.1 Giving the music the appropriate context

Allan Holdsworth has stated that his fascination with Coltrane was partly due to the fact that he could not hear the connection between Coltrane and anything else. I might say the same thing about Holdsworth. In the very beginning of my master degree in musicology my plan was to write a thesis on musical structures within the jazz-rock fusion tradition. I began my research by examining three famous player within the genre; John Scofield, Frank Gambale and Allan Holdsworth. Although I loved the music of both Scofield and Gambale I had a very hard time seeing the connection between their music and the music of Allan Holdsworth. The complete absence of any elements from blues and funk seem to give his music a completely different character. As I continued to examine other player like John McLaughlin, Scott Henderson, Pat Metheny, Al Di Meola, Mike Stern etc., I started to see the contour of what jazz-rock fusion really was, and to me it the music of Allan Holdsworth did not fit the profile.

I have never been a very devoted listener when it comes to music from the impressionistic era, but I have for many years been fascinated by Claude Debussy's (1862–1918) piano music. I was puzzled to find that Holdsworth's music felt to me closer to Debussy than to any of the mentioned jazz-rock players. This is of course not in relation to sound, arrangements, instrumentation and so on, but the share sensation of the musical expression. I have come to believe that there is a link between the two that has been neglected in the literature regarding his music. I wish therefore to use this opportunity to present an analysis of the relationship between the music of Allan Holdsworth and the music from the impressionism.

In chapter two I presented a quote from Hodsworth talking about his main inspirations, and I believe it bears to be repeated;

"Most of them are classical composers such as Ravel, Debussy, Stravinsky, Copland, and Bartok—particularly his string quartets. I still can't listen to Debussy's "Clair de Lune" because, if I do, I'll cry [laughs]. I can't get past the first two bars. It's really weird, man. It tears me up. What I took from those guys was how their tunes make me feel in my heart. It's about the emotion, rather than what the piece actually is. I think that's because I want to be influenced, which is a whole lot different than trying to work out precisely what someone is doing." <sup>65</sup>

It might seem ironic that despite his view on what it means to be influenced we will now systematically compare his music with some of his inspirational sources. However, in lack of a good way of measuring and analyzing musical experiences I believe there are some interesting observations to be made in the more concrete area of musical theory and stylistic similarities. I have chosen to focus mainly on Debussy on the basis of the following reason; there seem to be a much more audible relationship between Holdsworth and Debussy, than with Stravinsky, Copland and Bartok; Ravel's music is in large degree known for being based on the musical techniques of Debussy; and finally, Debussy effectively represents the essence of the musical impressionistic era and he therefore makes an excellent object of the analysis. However, we will also take a look at some similarities to structures within Bartok's music, despite the gap between his and Holdsworth's musical expression.

In the online edition of the "Grand Norwegian Encyclopedia" (Store Norske Leksikon) the music from the impressionism is described as being mainly connected to the compositions of Debussy, with roots in the French tradition (Édouard Lalo and Emmanuel Chabrier) and impulses from Modest Musorgskij. It also emphasizes that the musical impressionism was heavily inspired by the impressionistic art of painting and lyricism, and that the impressions and moods from nature played a similar role in music and painting alike. With regards to compositional techniques in music, it offers the following description:

"Stylistically the impressionism showed itself by resolving regular melody lines, the symmetrical motif development and traditional forms in favor of a mosaic-like music, based

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<sup>65</sup> http://www.therealallanholdsworth.com/allansinterviewgp.htm

on the composition of irregular entities to an effective whole, especially with regards to timbre. Generally speaking Debussy's music is tonal, but it is liberated from the rules of traditional functional harmony, something that was technically achieved by avoiding the leading-note tension, through the use of whole-note scale, pentatonic scale, parallel-chord movement, and unresolved dissonances. Since the melody had to yield in favor of timbre, the harmony came to play a very important role."

In light of our knowledge on Holdsworth it is already clear that this definition speaks to some of the same issues that have been subject to discussion in this thesis. In the following text we will take a closer look at what specific similarities there can be found with respect to harmony, chords and melody.

#### 4.4.2 Harmony

As with Holdsworth's music, Debussy is known for his departure from the tonal system that had been at the core of previous classical music. With his music being closely related to paintings he often chose to focus more on creating a mood in the music through harmonies, rather than traditional melodies. But as we can read in Mark Devoto's article "The Debussy sound: colour, texture, gesture" in The Cambridge Companion to Debussy also he had elements that could be perceived as functional; "When we say that Debussy's characteristic harmony is often independent of its tonal function (at least as we define tonal function according to the principles of common practice), we mean that he chooses a harmony first and foremost for its value as sound and sonority. There are many places in Debussy where a classical tonal progression can be perceived, with strong root motion in the bass, even as strong as dominant and tonic in imperfect or perfect cadence; but these are not what we consider to be distinctive of Debussy's harmony" (Trezise 2003:188-189). This brings us back to the very important point in trying to map out stylistic structures in music; a musician/composer will always keep all options on the table in persuade of the best possible result and strive for personal development of style. It would therefore be highly unlikely that any techniques or musical structures could be found consistently in all compositions by Debussy, Holdsworth or anyone else. We will therefore have to consider those things that are detectable in a significant quantity.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Translated from Norwegian by the author; <a href="http://www.snl.no/impresjonisme/musikk">http://www.snl.no/impresjonisme/musikk</a>

One of the things that we have learned about Holdsworth is that he is very fond of the melodic minor scale with raised fourth. Although not similar in musical expression one of Holdsworth's other main inspirations, the Hungarian composer Bèla Bartok (1881-1945), also had a love for the melodic minor scale as well as the raised fourth. Though his music is not defined as impressionism, but nationalism due to the incorporation of folk music in his compositions, it is however a curious observation. In fact the fourth mode of the melodic minor scale is actually referred to as the "Bartok scale" after he discovered it in Romanian folk music. This scale is also known as a Lydian dominant scale, as it is essentially a mixolydian scale with a raised fourth. It is also commonly referred to as the acoustic scale, or the overtone scale, since it naturally occurs in the overtone series<sup>67</sup>. Also Debussy used this scale in his compositions as we can hear in his composition L'isle joyeuse (1904)<sup>68</sup>. The big difference between the way Bartok and Debussy used the melodic minor in contrast to jazz, is that they used it as tonal basis for compositions and not merely as individual chords in a functional harmonic context. In other words in much the same way as Holdsworth use it. We must however always remember that Holdsworth will approach any scale without regarding the element of "modes", but seeing the scale more as a pool of available notes.

But as in Holdsworth's music they did not necessarily base complete compositions on one scale or even stay within the confines of any. Nils E. Bjerkestrand describes major-minor music in his book, *Regarding the compositional technique of Claude Debussy* (Om satsteknikken i Claude Debussys musikk), as generally using two different scales: major and minor. He continues by drawing reference from the modal period where composition could contain several keys, represented with different modes, to the music of Debussy.

"With Debussy it once again becomes common to use several different types of scales in one composition – listen for example to *Voiles* (Seil, from *Preludes 1* for piano) where both the whole-tone scale and a pentatonic scale is used. In this way Debussy expands the tonal limits in a characteristic way, but without abandoning it. And even though Debussy does not cultivate the chromatic scale, there are many examples of all twelve notes being pulled into the "tonality" through the use of chromatics. It is thereby achieved a form of timbral "embracement" of all twelve notes, something that contributes to creating atonal sections.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Source: Bjerkestrand, Nils E.: Om satsteknikken i Béla Bartóks musikk

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Source: Bjerkestrand Nils E.: Om satsteknikken i Claude Debussys musikk, page 13

Listen for example to *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* (What the west wind has seen) from *Prèludes* 1" (Bjerkestrand 1998:10).<sup>69</sup>

When looking back at the analysis in chapter three, this description seems strangely fitting to the way Holdsworth himself both compose and improvises. Not only with respect to the vast number of scales that is used within a short period of time, but also to the way he incorporates chromatic notes in his scales as well as beyond the scales. This combination sometimes pushes to the very edge of our perception of tonality and challenges the listener to "let go" of any attempts of finding a tonic and instead appreciating every harmony for its immediate context.

### 4.4.3 Chords, Melody and Rhythm

One typical element in impressionistic music is parallel chord movement. This applies not only to Debussy but also in large degree to the music of fellow impressionistic composer Maurice Ravel. Bjerkestrand described parallel led, unresolved chords as being an easily recognizable stylistic feature: "Those notes that are added to a triad based on thirds, is in this case not intended to create dominant tension in relation to the resolution chord. The additional notes is however intended to create harmony for the harmonies own sake. Thereby the chord can also be moved forward freely" (Bjerkestrand 1998:25-26). In addition to the subject of added notes for harmonic effect, parallel chord movement is also a feature heavily present in Holdsworth's music. Although it is also common in every genre of rhythmical music this is mostly diatonically fourths, fifths or triads. In most cases this is also a result of the idiomatic ease of moving chords on stringed instruments and does not projects any musical effect similar to that typical of the impressionism, but mostly used as accompaniment to melodies. More similar to the way of Debussy, Holdsworth emphasizes the parallel chords as melodic motives in the head of his songs, and often in a way that appears symmetrical in character. Examples this can be heard in songs like "The 4.15 Bradford Executive", "0274" and "5 To 10".

Debussy is also known for his repetition of rhythmical and melodic motives. As with parallel chord movement, this is again something that is also common in most popular music, but

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> All guotes from Bjerkestrand are translated by the author.

executed in a style that is very distant to that Debussy. It is once again my opinion that Holdsworth is closer to the impressionistic expression in his method of using motifs than much other rhythmical music. This is in part due to the fact that it is not only a component in the musical arrangement, but a structural centerpiece that heavily characterizes the song and is often emphasized by the whole ensemble. Examples of this can be heard in songs like "City Nights", "The Sixteen Men of Tain", "Road Games" and "Ruhkukah". Bjerkestrand also brings our attention to another similarity; "Another characteristic feature in the melody lines/thematic is the descending movement. This is a parallel to a similar phenomenon on the harmonic level, namely a "resolution tendency". In harmony this is often effective in unfunctional chord relations" (Bjerkestrand 1998:15). With his music built on constructed scales and with no apparent tonic, it might not be surprising that also Holdsworth takes this technique to good use, maybe even more so in his later albums than his earlier. When listening to the intro track to his album Hard Hat Area, "Prelude" we can almost hear a natural gravity in the way his melody lines climb up using wide intervals and slides back down again, often more or less stepwise. One of his very few typical melodic signature movements, the descending third, also contributes to the sensation of resolution. However, many of Holdsworths musical themes and heads are based on the descending movement, and it often occurs within the very first notes. This can be heard in songs like "Tullio", "City Nights" and "The drums were yellow".

With Allan Holdsworth being a part of the rhythmical tradition, playing with drums and bass, it is no less than obvious than the rhythmical aspect of his music will not bare striking resemblance to impressionistic music. But as another curious factor it might be worth noticing than the all his albums feature musical parts or often entire songs where there is more or less a complete absence of pulse. Typically this is in favor of ambient chords progressions played either with volume pedal or SynthAxe, as well as long, sustaining harmonies. On the albums *Atavachron* and *Secrets* these are also the very same tracks that feature vocals. It is maybe on these un-metrical and atmospheric tracks that Holdsworth's music seems most related to Debussy. Good examples of this can be heard on songs like "Shallow Sea", "Distance vs. Desire", "Endomorph", "Above and Below (Reprise)", "All our Yesterdays" and "Oneiric Moor".

#### 4.4.4 Putting it in perspective

Through the analysis of the relationship between Holdsworth's music and impressionistic music, I believe there are many elements that suggest that there is a link between the two. We saw for example that there was a close resemblance between Holdsworths theoretical approach and choice of scales, as well as similarities in the treatment of chordal and melodic structures. Also on the rhythmical aspect there are times when Holdsworth departs from the accentuated, fixed pulse and gives us a glimpse of what his music sounds like without the element of rock in the mix. I would argue that there are much more to this other half than only jazz. However, it is important to emphasize that I am not suggesting that Holdsworth play impressionistic music or that he base his compositional techniques on this tradition. Although it holds little resemblance to the jazz-rock tradition, the simple meaning of the word jazz-rock fusion might be the most descriptive of his music. My suggestion is merely that the reason for his unique sound and musical expression may hold roots far beyond what has been suggested in the popular discourse regarding Holdsworth. I also believe that the impressionistic music, as well as other classical impulses from the early 20-century, have been a significant piece of the puzzle making up the musician and composer, Allan Holdsworth.

#### 4.5 Words of conclusion

It has now been three years since I first started listening to Allan Holdsworth and in that period it is fair to say that I have spent more time listening to him than any other single artist or band. I have spent countless hours transcribing his music, analyzing it, attempting to play it, as well as listening for my own personal enjoyment. Fellow students and friends have asked me on several occasions whether or not I have grown tired of listening to it and my answer is always the same; I feel I barely know him. With basically all other music that has captivated me through the years I have established a sort of ownership to it. It has always felt like the songs have steadily become my own, and the expression of the music has transformed into a personal statement to the outside world. I have no doubt that this is a very common perception of music, and speaks to the very core of availability through compositional use of standardized structures. The very fact that the music speaks a "language" that is familiar to us undoubtedly assists us in relating to it in a positive way.

However, this ownership has never evolved in the traditional manner with Holdsworth's music. Still today, it challenges my tonal comfort zone and gives me the sensation of being in musically unfamiliar territory. This is a feeling equivalent of moving to a new city; it is an enjoyable experience to walk through new streets and look at buildings you have never seen before, but you also know that this sensation will change as you get used to walking through those very same streets. In other words; his music still feels like a newly bought record to me. Still, through my work on this thesis I have come to learn many things regarding his way of composing and improvising. But I have also constantly been reminded of how very little information regarding his musical thoughts, techniques and methods that have been made available for the general public. The little that has been shared through instructional publications, both literature and other, is very simplistic and only touches the very surface of something that I assume is a very deep well of knowledge and interesting perceptions on musical concepts. Sadly, he is no eager prophet for his own approach to music and seems to be more interested in encouraging others to do figure things out on their own. After all, this is probably one of the most important reasons why his music is so unique - instead of following other schools of thought, he taught himself through personal interpretation and study of structures and practice within the music he loved. In an interview by Richard Hallebeek in 2003, he also explains another difficulty with instructional literature; "The guys don't pay you any money to do books, you know if somebody says uh ok, we'll give you \$1500.- to do a book, by the time it takes you to do a book, you're broke. (..) What I'm gonna try to do now is, now that I've got a computer is to write one over long period of time. So I don't have to worry about it, I can do it in my spare time. And whenever I decide it's there, Maybe sell it through my site."70

Despite some remaining details we have gotten to know Allan Holdsworth quite well in these previous chapters. The story of a barely musically interested young boy, who started playing at the late age of seventeen and ending up as one of the greatest pioneers on the guitar, should be an inspiriting to all ambitious musicians. I believe that this thesis, however small it might be, is one of the most comprehensive presentations of his personal story, as well as his musical style and approach to composition and improvisation. To my knowledge there are no other musical analysis available that is based almost exclusively on Holdsworths own

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> http://www.richardhalleb<u>eek.com/interviews/holdsworth03.php</u>

principles. But any such analysis will always be in conflict with the complexity of the truth, and can only offer a slight glimpse into the thought process of the composer. It is therefore important that the reader approach the analytical material with this in mind. I will however claim that we have been familiarized with as musician that can be best recognized by three main factors: First, a highly unorthodox compositional style that mainly characterizes itself through the absence of functional harmony, a strong presents of melodic minor harmony, constant change of key and forms that favor long solo improvisations. Secondly, the smooth timbre that gives both the guitar and the SythAxe a horn-like sound in addition to the organic phrasing and articulation that also resembles that of a horn player. And thirdly, an improvisational style that combines an unprecedented use of the legato technique, a very noticeable departure from the lick-based guitar tradition, unconventional scales, and finally, a speed that is nearly unmatchable. Although not as noticeable, I will also highlight his roots to John Coltrane, Debussy and classical music from the early 20th century as important influences to his style.

Whether he will ever release a comprehensive instructional book addressing the many subjects related to his music, is unclear. The only thing we can say for certain is that he operates with methods and techniques that have only been hinted to in interviews and short articles. He has for example mentioned on several occasions scales that need two or three octaves to complete themselves, and in a 1987 article from the magazine *Guitar* we can read a brief reference to his alleged concept of constructing scales by combinations of triads. In addition to this we find rumors among video bloggers crediting him for unconventional methods of executing the legato technique, having his own "Dorian Chromatic Concept" and having a musical understanding that will blow your mind.

Meanwhile, the main character of the story remains more or less silent. While the guitar community regards him as "one of the most musically charismatic artists that modern improvisation has ever produced"<sup>72</sup>, he continue to downplay his status and instead focus on the music. Reluctant to take on the role of teacher, the details to his compositional and improvisational techniques also continue to be unknown with the general public. We can

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RycO2YoQWHM

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Guitar Technique Spring 2010 page 62.

only hope that one day we will be granted a great, big, heavy book unlocking all the secrets. Until then, the mystery of Allan Holdsworth remains.

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Holdsworth, Allan 1996. "Countdown", None Too Soon, Cream Records CR 400-2.

Coltrane, John 1960. "Countdown", Giant Steps, Atlantic SD 1311.

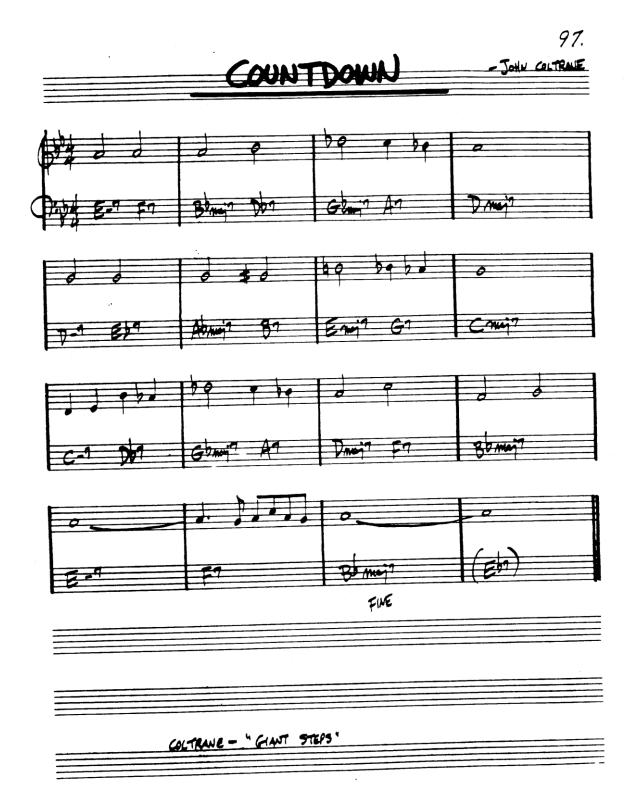
#### CD track list:

- 1. "Pud Wud": Complete track
- 2. "Pud Wud": Head, bar 1-25
- 3. "Pud Wud": Solo, bar 75-82
- 4. "Pud Wud": Solo, bar 83-88
- 5. "Pud Wud": Solo, bar 88-93
- 6. "Pud Wud": Solo, bar 93-99
- 7. "Pud Wud": Solo, bar 99-105
- 8. "Pud Wud": Solo, bar 106-111
- 9. "Pud Wud": Solo, bar 112-118
- 10. "Pud Wud": Solo, bar 119-126
- 11. "The Sixteen Men of Tain": Complete track
- 12. "The Sixteen Men of Tain": Head, bar 1-57 (+ end of bass solo\*)
- 13. "The Sixteen Men of Tain": Solo, bar 161-170
- 14. "The Sixteen Men of Tain": Solo, bar 171-177
- 15. "The Sixteen Men of Tain": Solo, bar 177-184
- 16. "The Sixteen Men of Tain": Solo, bar 184-197
- 17. "The Sixteen Men of Tain": Solo, bar 197-212
- 18. John Coltrane: "Countdown"; Complete track
- 19. John Coltrane: "Countdown"; first chorus, noted as bar 2-17\*
- 20. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Complete track
- 21. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Intro, bar 1-10
- 22. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Intro, bar 11-14
- 23. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Intro, bar 16-19
- 24. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Intro, bar 20-28
- 25. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Intro, bar 28-33
- 26. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Intro, bar 33-39
- 27. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Intro, bar 40-42
- 28. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Second solo, bar 59-64
- 29. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Second solo, bar 64-67
- 30. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Second solo, bar 68-70
- 31. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Second solo, bar 71-76

- 32. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Second solo, bar 76-80
- 33. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Second solo, bar 81-84
- 34. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Second solo, bar 85-90
- 35. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Head, bar 43-58
- 36. John Coltrane: "Countdown"; Head, noted as bar 141-144\*
- 37. Allan Holdsworth: "Countdown"; Epilouge, noted as bar 155-159\*

<sup>\*</sup>Note: Bar number in the musical notation does not accurately reflect what would be the bar number in a complete score.

## Appendix 1:

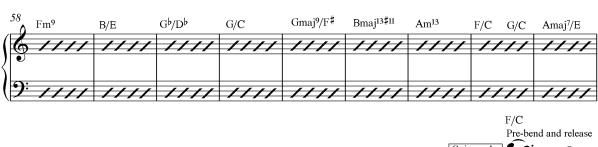


# Appendix 2



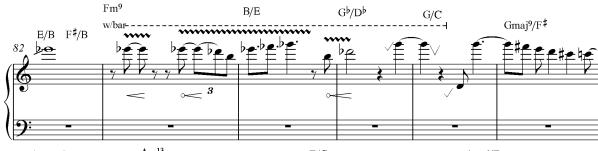
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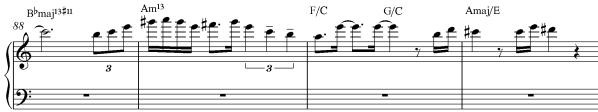


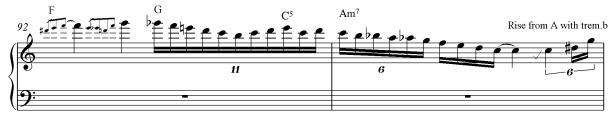


















### **Appendix 4:**









### **Appendix 5:**







