

*It is simplistic to view 'So What' merely as Dorian.*

### ***So What***

In improvising on *So What*, begin with the melody, which is in the bass. It is comprised of the following melody pitch collection: D, E, F, G, A, a *pentachord*. In addition, its salient intervals (gestures) are perfect fourths (up and down), down a major third, and stepwise diatonic movement up a perfect fourth. On measure seventeen, the A section is transposed up a half step for eight measures, which serves as a bridge. There are also rhythmic motives that can be mined, such as the *Charleston Rhythm* beginning on beat three of the horn response to the bass line. Develop these. The players on Davis's recording seem to treat this piece merely as a traditional D minor (especially Paul Chambers on double bass—but not pianist Bill Evans), only sans a chord progression in favor of an oscillation between two modified quartal voicings; and they pepper it with the normal chromatic non-harmonic tones (especially saxophonist Cannonball Adderly).

Using *quartal harmony* (voicings in fourths) for comping on *So What* is the norm. The *So What* voicing is a *modified voicing in fourths*, with a third between the top two voices constituting the *modified*. The voicing appears as two voicings that oscillate between the first (B, G, D, A, E—from the top down) and the second (A, F, C, G, D). (While chords are properly spelled from the bottom up, voicings are spelled from the *lead* down.) The *So What* voicing can be *planed*, moved up and down the D Dorian (C major) scale in similar motion (there are two ways of planeing: diatonic—as in this case—and chromatic, in which you keep all of the same exact intervals while planeing). You could also plane a first inversion triad up and down the scale to good effect, for example: F, D, and A up to G, E, and B, and so on.

In soloing on *So What*, it is a bit simplistic to view this merely as D Dorian, as novices do. Miles Davis and his sidemen did not limit themselves to a seven-note scale, since the entire chromatic scale is available. Practice vamping on D minor with a metronome with all its implied scales: melodic minor, harmonic minor, and pure minor. Stressing the melodic minor (with its C#, for example), gives a bright lift to your sound material. Base your improvisations on the melody: Memorize the lines and practice running choruses, developing the composition in the process.