Exploring The Galaxy Of Melody

Understanding relationships of consonance and dissonance and beginning to be able to use them effectively is a huge leap in your understanding of how to create different musical effects.

One important thing to be aware of is that when the chord changes, so does the set of note relationships. So what was '1 3 5' when a G chord is playing is now something else when the chord changes. With time this becomes easier to keep track of. Don't worry about it when you're working with a drone - the type of detailed work you're doing now with different groups of melodies will allow you to create interesting melodies even if the music stays on the same chord for a few bars. When you write short phrases they will typically happen over one bar in any case. As your experience grows this will be easier to keep track of - but in case you had already thought 'so, when I'm on a new chord, do I have a new 1, etc?' - the answer is yes.

You can do even more with this knowledge to craft melodies with different atmospheres and create contrast between melodies in different parts of your song.

Different groups of notes are associated with different genres. It's a bit reductive to say this particular note = that genre, but there are tendencies that we can usefully identify.

For example, adding the b7 to the 12356 major pentatonic gives us quite a classic rock sound, in the melodic world of Creedence Clearwater Revival etc.

If we leave out the third, and use notes 1 2 4 5 b7, we tend to get a more haunting sound - quite beautiful, because there's an open quality caused by the absence of the third.

We can also reserve certain notes for different sections. Maybe my verse melody will use mainly notes 1 2 5 and have more of a rhythmic hook, but my chorus will drop in the 3 as the note of maximum impact, and it will sound so fresh when it comes in. Within each phrase, the notes have a different hierarchy. Some are passing notes and some are the more structurally important notes in the phrase.

Take a drone, perhaps the ones in soundtrap or another, and create some short phrases using the groupings of:

1 2 4 5 b7 (you can add a 6, but start with those five)

1 2 3 5 b7 (classic rock sound, you can add the 6 here too but start with the ones written).

1 2 b3 5 6 is a nice grouping - minor, but mellow.

1 b3 5 6 b7

The diagrams for the note patterns are written out. The point here is not to play fast licks, but to start populating your own library of associations as to what kind of grouping creates what kind of effect.

Try creating one or two short motifs with three separate pitches and then create a third where you include a new pitch. What is the effect? Use the guitar to experiment with, but then try humming or vocalising the notes when you've worked something out.