

## Learn to Improvise in 15 Minutes a Day: A Scherzo

This is the fourth article in a series exploring the second octatonic mode:



We've practiced this scale in parallel octaves, minor thirds, sixths, tritones, and the very odd alternation of major third – perfect fourth. We've created various patterns and clusters from this scale, and octatonicized hymn tunes. We've also noted that the scale contains traditional triads on C, E-flat, F#, and A, in both major and minor. Next, we'll use triads, arpeggiated clusters, and a hymn tune to create a scherzo.

The term 'scherzo' has assumed different meanings at different times. To Chopin, it could be quite gloomy. But to an Italian the word means 'joke' or 'trick.' Drop off the 'o' and it means the same to a German. We use it here in its playful sense. What makes a joke funny, of course, is expectation thwarted: a surprise outcome, an unthought-of answer, first the setup, then the punchline.

There's an inherent *scherzoso* quality to a familiar tune octatonicized, since we expect a traditional harmony. The next time a friend has a birthday, see how this goes over:



Are some intervals inherently funnier than others? Does the humor depend at all on the shape of the melody? Parallel intervals are one scherzistic tool. Triads are another:



What about combining our 4 traditional major triads, 2 at a time, in an ostinato pattern? Think C major in one hand and E-flat major in the other, for example, and arpeggiate:





The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The notation consists of rhythmic patterns of eighth and quarter notes with various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals). The piece concludes with a double bar line.

All of these suggestions are merely options, of course. The main goal to keep in mind: have fun!