

Modal Jazz

Modal jazz (and modal music in general) places an emphasis on one of the standard "church" modes (such as the Dorian or Mixolydian modes) as opposed to relying on the melody/chords balance of other jazz styles. This is not to say that modal jazz does not have melodies and chords, but that it deemphasizes the reliance on traditional chord progressions and "changes" such as the ii V I progression, or the tendency to modulate through the circle of 5ths or 4ths.

While doing away with certain traditional elements (like chord progressions), some examples of modal jazz retain the AABA form:

Miles Davis' "So What"
John Coltrane's "Impressions"
Miles Davis' "Milestones"

In turn, the melodies in modal jazz pieces are certainly at times "melodic" in a traditional sense, but with the lack of or fewer chord changes going on, the melodic notes mostly or exclusively come from a single mode (i.e., not so chromatic). However, some modal jazz songs not only do away with traditional chord changes, but also traditional melodies, leaving only short melodies, or none at all—and leaving the chords to just one or two and resembling (not by accident) the drone aspect of music from the Far East:

John Coltrane's "India"
Miles Davis' "In A Silent Way"

In other instances, modal jazz songs might retain or be modeled after a 32-bar (or similar) format for the head in and out, but will depart from that structure during the solo section(s)—the solo section will of course focus on a specific mode and not follow traditional chord changes:

John Coltrane's version of Richard Rodgers' "My Favorite Things"
Freddie Hubbard's "First Light"