

Improvisation Outlines

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(with thanks to Bert Ligon)

Outline #1-starts from root

Dmi7 G7 CMa7 Dm7 (b5) G7 (b9) Cmi 7 CMa7

Outline #2- starts from 3rd

(optional 8va displacement) (optional 8va displacement)

Outline #3-starts from 5th

Outline #4-starts from 7th (inversion of Outline #1)

Learn to play each of these patterns through all keys. Then apply each pattern through the harmony of a tune you are working on, creating a kind of etude. Get comfortable enough it to phrase it musically and from memory. This will help train your ears to hear the harmony and its resolutions clearly. Before long, you will be able to hear and apply other vocabulary in a similar manner into the context of tune forms. Remember: this is only a practice activity to train our ears; in the end when we play music, we just listen, feel, and sing.

Here are some ways of tailoring the patterns to common specific harmonic situations:

If the ii-V or ii-V-I is long form (a bar of ii and a bar of V), elongate the rhythm:

Gmi7 C7 Fma7

If the ii-V does not resolve, just apply the first part of it without the resolution:

Ami7 D7 Abmi7 Db7

Note that these patterns outline the chord tones of major and minor chord qualities but not unprepared dominant (V) chords. If there is an unprepared V chord in the progression, substitute a ii-chord into the pattern even though it is not stated in the progression. If the dominant sound is altered, be sure to use the altered version of the pattern with a b9 :

A7 alt

If there is a quick (only 2 beat) V chord which resolves, use the resolution half of the pattern without the ii chord outline:

Cmi7 G7 Cmi7