

# Beginner's Guide to Improvisation

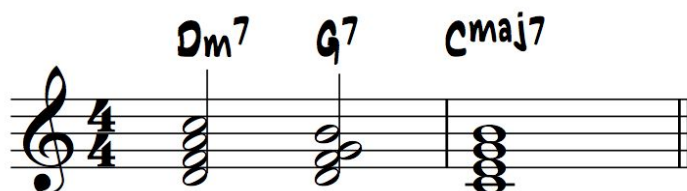
## Lesson 2

In the last lesson, we looked at functional harmony and learned how to play a two-five-one, or "PERFECT CADENCE", in C major. In this lesson, we are going to discover how our new knowledge can help us to make a start at jazz improvisations using GUIDE TONES.

### Guide Tones

What are guide tones, I hear you ask? Guide tones are a note-by-note path through a chord progression, using key notes from each chord that lead to the closest key note in the next chord - like stepping stones through the harmony of a song.

In order to get started, we first have to think of our two - five - one progression a little differently:

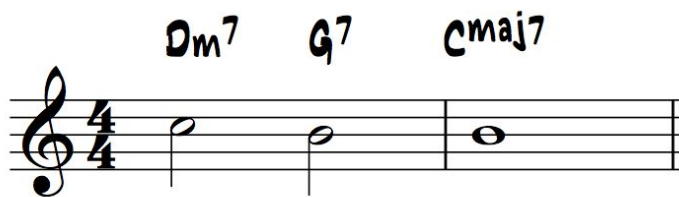


Can you spot what is different about this chord progression? Essentially, it is exactly the same - the same chords, the same notes - the only difference is that the G7 chord is voiced as a **SECOND INVERSION CHORD**. This means that the 5th of the chord (D) is played at the bottom, instead of the root (G). Although the harmony is the same, you may notice that the leap between the chords has disappeared, making it easier to play and much more satisfying to the ear! It also makes it much easier to see our holy grail - the guide tone lines.

In any perfect cadence, there are two most important guide tone lines. Why are some guide tone lines more important than others, you may ask? Well, the 3rd and 7th of a chord are the notes that best describe the chord's harmony and function.

If we pick out the 7th degree of D minor 7, we can find our first guide tone line through a two-five-one chord progression.

See below how the 7th of Dm7 (C) leads to the 3rd of G7 (B) and then the 7th of Cmaj7 (B):



This is our first guide tone line. See if you can sing or play it whilst your teacher plays a two-five-one in C major - you're already sounding hip!

Now, what happens if we start on the 3rd of Dm7?

See below how the 3rd of Dm7 (F) leads to the 7th of G7 (F) and then the 3rd of Cmaj7 (E):



See how it works? You are describing the functional harmony using only one note per chord, and it sounds great!

Now, have another look at the first example in this lesson again - our two-five-one progression with the G7 in second inversion. Can you spot these guide tone lines within the notated chord progression? Cool, right?!

How is this relevant to improvisation, you might ask? Try this...

#### EXERCISE

- Ask your tutor to play the chord progression at the beginning of this lesson in a loop.
- Start off by singing or playing one of the above guide tone lines through the first few repeats of the chord progression.
- Once you're feeling confident, begin to embellish each note of the guide tone line. Trust your ear - you will have heard the progression a few times now, so will already have begun to absorb the rest of the harmony.

Voila, you're improvising!