

Beginner's Guide to Improvisation

Lesson 4

In the last lesson, we learned about how we can use chord tones to navigate a two-five-one chord progression. You probably go to bed each night and hear a two-five-one loop spinning through your dreams from dusk until dawn. Great - you're on your way to becoming a harmony pro!

If you listen to the greatest improvisers of the 20th and 21st century, however, you will notice that they very rarely just play up and down chord tones and soar through changes using guide tone lines alone. They use interesting rhythms, patterns and melodic ideas to create musical magic.

Licks

A stand-out phrase that describes harmony can be referred to as a "lick". These short melodic ideas can be used to open our ears up to the vast world of opportunities that a chord progression holds. No one is expecting you to improvise like Charlie Parker right away, but learning a few licks and putting them into practise will make you think about chord progressions in a much more creative way!

Here's an example:



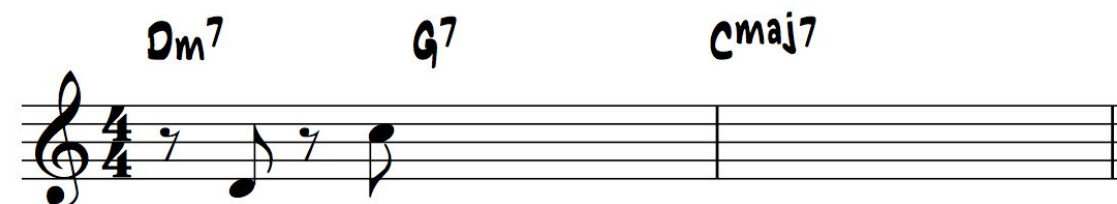
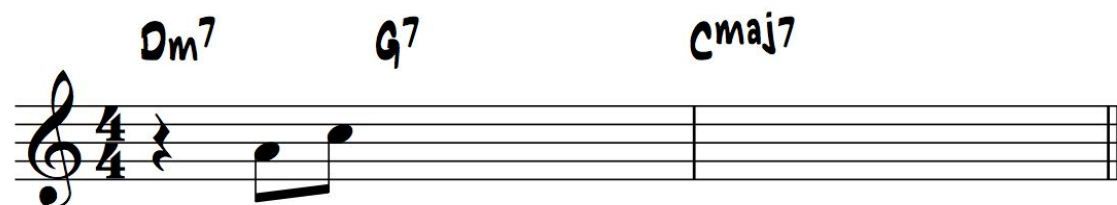
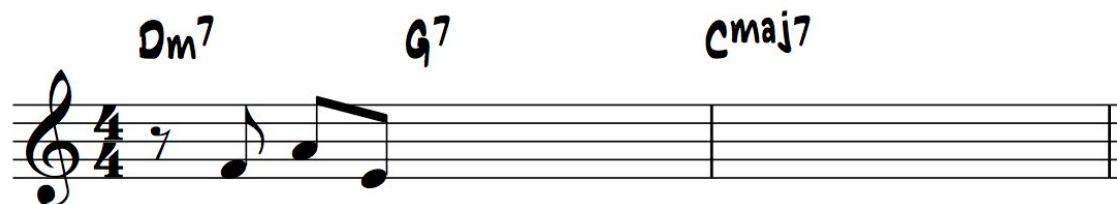
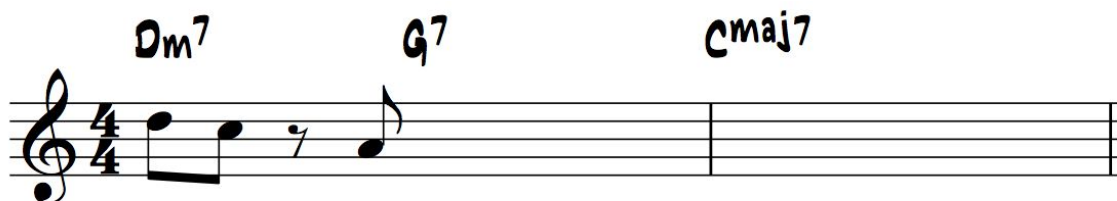
Notice how the "lick" describes the harmony, but doesn't necessarily have to use every beat of the bar. Rests are your friends!

It's also important to consider that some of the best phrases don't use every note in a chord, or start on a note other than the root of the chord...

This is the fun part - we can now use our knowledge of guide tones, chord tones and harmony to compose our very own licks! Now, we know that writing and reciting licks isn't quite improvising, but you'll find that the more you experiment with the possibilities a chord progression holds, the closer you will get to being able to make them up on the spot - that's real improv!

EXERCISE:

We've made a start on a few new licks already for you - have a go at completing them!



Now have a go at making up a couple of your own from scratch!

