

Getting Chromatic or Turning all of Those Scales into Jazz.

In this article we are going to take a look at how we can take all of the scales and arpeggios we have learned over the years and turn them into “jazzy” sounding phrases. This is a big obstacle and one that not everyone will get over. Hopefully by working through this material we will be able to use simple and comfortable material to hip up our lines.

Example 1

For the purposes of keeping things simple all of the examples in this article will be written over top of a iim7 - V7 - I - VI7b9 chord progression in the key of C major. This progression is shown in Example 1.

Example 1



Example 2

We will now take a look at four different ways to add chromatic notes to the major scale. All of these riffs will be two beats, four eighth notes, long in order to allow us to get them under our fingers quickly and to transpose them easily.

The first example uses what is normally referred to as the dominant “bebop scale.” This is where a chromatic passing note is added between the 5th and 4th notes of the major scale. It is normally used over a dominant chord, G7 in this key, but it can also be used over any chord in the parent key, C major.

The second example outlines a very common chromatic passage. This is where we start on the third, in this case E, of the major scale and then play #1, 2 and back to 3. Think of it as starting on the third and playing back to the third using a chromatic approach to the 2nd note, D, of the scale.

The third and fourth examples are the same chromatic idea applied to two different scale tones. The best way to approach these licks is to think of it as connecting the two half steps within the major scale. The first connects the 4th note, F, of the scale to the 3rd

note, E, by way of two chromatic approaches from below E. The last example is the same concept, only this time applied to the root, C and the 7th, B.

Example 2

Once you have these under your fingers in the key of C we are ready to move on to example 3. You can practice punching them into scale fingerings you already know, or treating them as separate entities and thinking of them as individual units that you can move around to different chords.

Example 3

Here we have a bebop sounding line written in the key of C major using the patterns outlined above. In the first bar there is the 1st and 2nd lines, the second bar has the 3rd and 4th lines, the third bar has the 1st and 2nd lines and the last bar has the 3rd line. We might notice that the line sounds like an exercise, and it should. At this point we are trying to get these shapes under our fingers and these sounds into our ears. Once you have them down it will be easier to develop more creative and musical lines.

Example 3

Example 4

Now that we can apply these two beat ideas we can add some basic harmonic substitutions to the chord progression. The chords that we will be adding will be one half

step, one fret, above the following chord. So in this example we have added a Db7 that resolves to the Cmaj7 in the next bar. Again for the purposes of this exercise the line is written in eighth notes, once you have this line down try changing the rhythm to gain more interest in the line.

Example 4

Example 4 musical notation showing a melodic line in 4/4 time. The line consists of eighth notes. The chords indicated above the staff are Dm7, G7, (Db7), Cmaj7, and A7b9. Below the staff are three lines of guitar tablature labeled T, A, and B.

Example 5

In this line we are now adding an Ab7 chord that resolves to the G7 chord. Even though we are stepping further “out” with this and the following lines, the fact that our two beat motives outline the harmony so well helps to keep the idea from falling apart.

Example 5

Example 5 musical notation showing a melodic line in 4/4 time. The line consists of eighth notes. The chords indicated above the staff are Dm7, (Ab7), G7, (Db7), Cmaj7, and A7b9. Below the staff are three lines of guitar tablature labeled T, A, and B.

Example 6

We are now at the limit of adding chromatic approach chords with the Bb7 resolving to the A7b9. Once we have these substitutions under your fingers and in our ears we can choose which ones we want to use and when we want to use them. Remember just because we know all of these cool harmonies does not mean that we have to saturate our lines with them. The biggest lesson to learn is that “out” lines only work when they are played after or in between “in” lines that give them their contrast.

Example 6

The musical notation for Example 6 consists of a single staff in 4/4 time. The melody is written in a key with one flat (F major or D minor). The notes are: F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Above the staff, the chords are labeled: Dm7, (Ab7), G7, (Db7), Cmaj7, (Bb7), and A7b9. Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with three strings labeled T, A, and B. The fret numbers are: T: 8 7 6 8 7 4 5 6; A: 3 4 5 6 5 4 6; B: 5 2 3 4 3 2 1 3.

Example 7

Since the first four two note ideas have been highly chromatic and mostly descending in nature we can now look at three ways to play ascending and more “inside” the scale/chords. As was mentioned above, playing out only works if we define what is in, so these three ideas are great ways to outline the harmony and help “setup” our outside ideas.

The first idea is what is commonly referred to as “1235”, where each chord is outlined using the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th note of the scale or mode that corresponds to it. The second idea is the arpeggio, 1357, on each chord in the progression, and the last idea is the arpeggio with a chromatic approach tone below the root. Though these ideas have been written out over the chords in the progression, they can be used over any chord in the key we are playing in. So for example in this progression, in the key of C, we can outline Cmaj7, Dm7, Em7, Fmaj7, G7, Am7 and Bm7b5, all of the chords found in the key of C major.

Example 7

Chord progression: Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, A7b9, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, A7b9

Fingerings: 1 2 3 5, 1 2 3 5, 1 2 3 5, 1 2 3 5, 1 3 5 7, 1 3 5 7, 1 3 5 7, 1 3 5 7

Chord progression: Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, A7b9

Fingerings: 3, 5, 3, 5

Example 8

We will now apply these three ideas to our chord progression. In this example we start out with a mixture of the new and old ideas. Notice how each bar starts off sounding inside on the first two beats and then is led into a more chromatic sound in the last half of the bar before resolving on the downbeat of the following bar. This helps create a tension and release element to the line and makes the major scale that we are basing our lines off of sound much more in the jazz idiom.

Example 8

Chord progression: Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, A7b9

Fingerings: 3, 5, 3, 5

Example 9

In the next line we will add the chromatic approach chord leading into the Cmaj7 chord in bar 3. This idea is similar to what we have already done but notice how the arpeggio in the first half of the 2nd bar really sets up the substitution nicely.

Example 9

Example 9 shows a melodic line in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of four measures. The first measure has a Dm7 chord and a triplet of eighth notes: D4, E4, F#4. The second measure has a G7 chord and a descending eighth-note arpeggio: G4, F#4, E4, D4. The third measure has a (D♭7) chord and a descending eighth-note arpeggio: G4, F4, E4, D4. The fourth measure has a Cmaj7 chord and a descending eighth-note arpeggio: G4, F#4, E4, D4. The fifth measure has an A7♭9 chord and a descending eighth-note arpeggio: G4, F#4, E4, D4. The bass line consists of four measures with the following notes: 4 5 3, 5 4 3 6 6 5 4 6, 5 7 5 8 8 5 6 7, and 10 9 8 10.

Example 10

Here we are adding a chromatic approach, A♭7, to the G7 chord in bar 2.

Example 10

Example 10 is similar to Example 9 but includes a chromatic approach chord. The first measure has a Dm7 chord and a triplet of eighth notes: D4, E4, F#4. The second measure has an (A♭7) chord and a descending eighth-note arpeggio: G4, F#4, E4, D4. The third measure has a G7 chord and a descending eighth-note arpeggio: G4, F#4, E4, D4. The fourth measure has a (D♭7) chord and a descending eighth-note arpeggio: G4, F4, E4, D4. The fifth measure has a Cmaj7 chord and a descending eighth-note arpeggio: G4, F#4, E4, D4. The sixth measure has an A7♭9 chord and a descending eighth-note arpeggio: G4, F#4, E4, D4. The bass line consists of six measures with the following notes: 4 5 3, 5 4 3 6 6 5 4 6, 5 7 5 8 8 5 6 7, and 10 9 8 10.

Example 11

In this last example we are adding the B♭7 resolving to the A7♭9 in bar four. As before, now that we have all of the chord substitutions added we can choose which ones we would like to play at any given time. Sometimes a really simple, well placed “outside” lick is much more effective than a longer more complex line that weaves in and out against the harmony.

Example 11

The image shows a musical score for a solo line in 4/4 time. The solo is written on a single staff in treble clef. The chord progression is indicated above the staff: Dm7, (A^{b7}), G7, (D^{b7}), Cmaj7, (B^{b7}), and A^{7b9}. The solo line consists of the following notes: $\dot{2}$, $\dot{3}$, $\dot{4}$, $\dot{5}$, $\dot{6}$, $\dot{7}$, $\dot{8}$, $\dot{9}$, $\dot{10}$, $\dot{11}$, $\dot{12}$, $\dot{13}$, $\dot{14}$, $\dot{15}$, $\dot{16}$, $\dot{17}$, $\dot{18}$, $\dot{19}$, $\dot{20}$, $\dot{21}$, $\dot{22}$, $\dot{23}$, $\dot{24}$, $\dot{25}$, $\dot{26}$, $\dot{27}$, $\dot{28}$, $\dot{29}$, $\dot{30}$, $\dot{31}$, $\dot{32}$. The solo line is a descending eighth-note scale starting on $\dot{2}$ and ending on $\dot{1}$. The chord progression is: Dm7 (measures 1-2), (A^{b7}) (measures 3-4), G7 (measures 5-6), (D^{b7}) (measures 7-8), Cmaj7 (measures 9-10), (B^{b7}) (measures 11-12), and A^{7b9} (measures 13-14). The solo line is a descending eighth-note scale starting on $\dot{2}$ and ending on $\dot{1}$.

Tune Down

Here is a solo written out over the chord changes to a famous Miles Davis tune, here it is called Tune Down, see if you can guess the original name. Try and read through the solo with a play along CD or band in the box to get a sense of how each line sounds against the underlying harmony. Once you have these exercises under your fingers try playing them in different keys, and if you haven't already, playing them in different parts of the neck. Learning to play a line from memory is only the beginning of the process, once we can manipulate a line, by changing the rhythm, playing it in different octaves and different areas of the neck, we have truly ingrained the concept.

Tune Down

Em⁷ A⁷ Dmaj⁷ (E^{b7})

5 Dm⁷ G⁷ (A^{b7}) Cmaj⁷ (D^{b7}) (D^{b7})

9 Cm⁷ (G^{b7}) F⁷ (B⁷) B^bmaj⁷

13 Em⁷ (G^{b7}) F⁷ (B⁷) B^bmaj⁷ (B⁷)