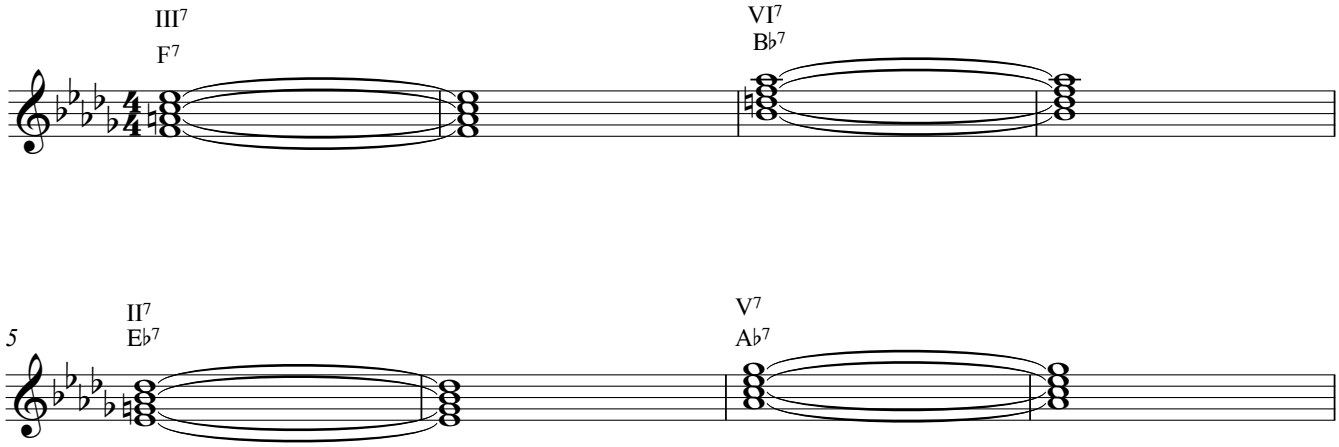
Robbin's Nest - Session 3 (Concert)

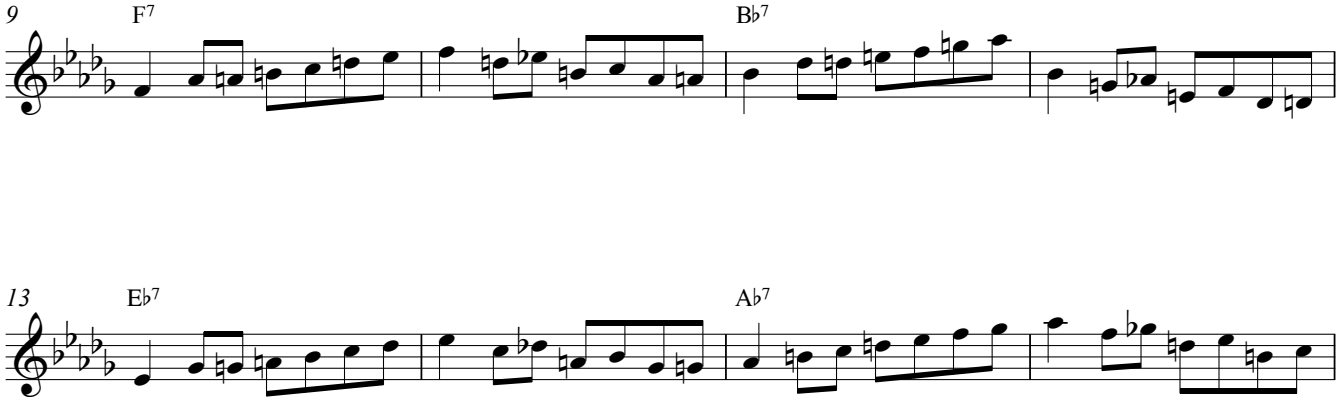
This workshop adresses the bridge - with a look at the harmonic sequence, the melody, and how cells from the melody can be used to explore the harmonic options while improvising through this sequence.

The chord sequence is shown below:

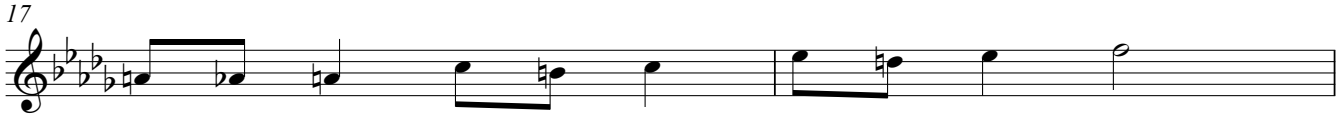


This is a very common chord sequence, particulalry at the bridge. It is often referred to as the 'Rhythm changes bridge' as it famously occurs in the middle 8 of the Gershwin composition 'I Got Rhythm', however it has also been part of countless other compositions both before and since. I have included roman numerals above the chords as this is a particularly useful section to practice in multiple keys.

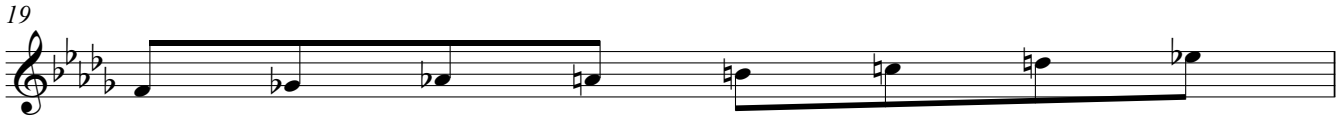
Building on some of the chromatic decoration exercises from previous workshops, let's now add some chromatic approach notes, one semitone below, to the 3rd, 5th, and 7th, leaving the root undrecorated for now. This is shown below:



Try improvising using this exercise as a guide. As well as placing the chromatic approach note below the chord tone or 'target note', it can be placed inbetween two repetitions of the target note, as below:



Continuing on the chromatic decoration theme, if we now decorate the root not with a semitone below but a semitone above, this gives us a diminished scale:



This eight note (or octotonic) scale is part of the family of semetric scales, so called as they are made up of a repeating pattern of intervals which is the same ascending or descending - in this case the intervals are:

ST - T - ST - T - ST - T - ST - T

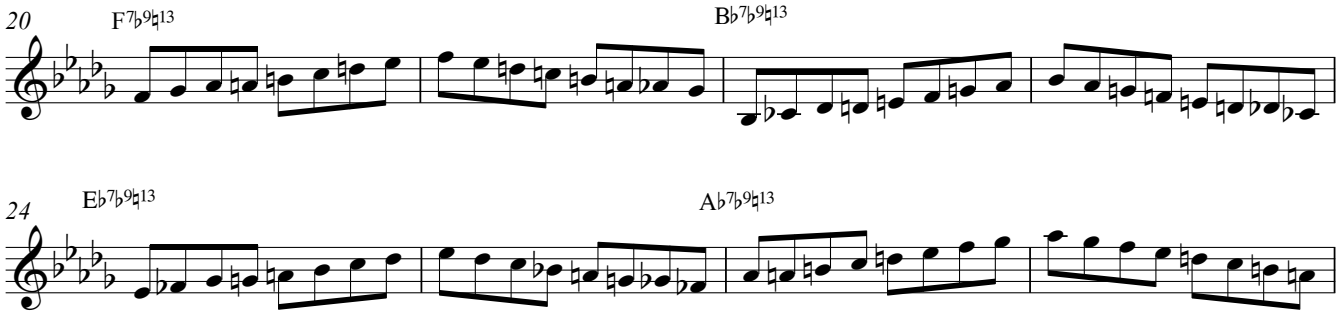
As apposed to the asymetry of any diatonic mode, for example the major (Ioanian) scale:

T - T - ST - T - T - T - ST

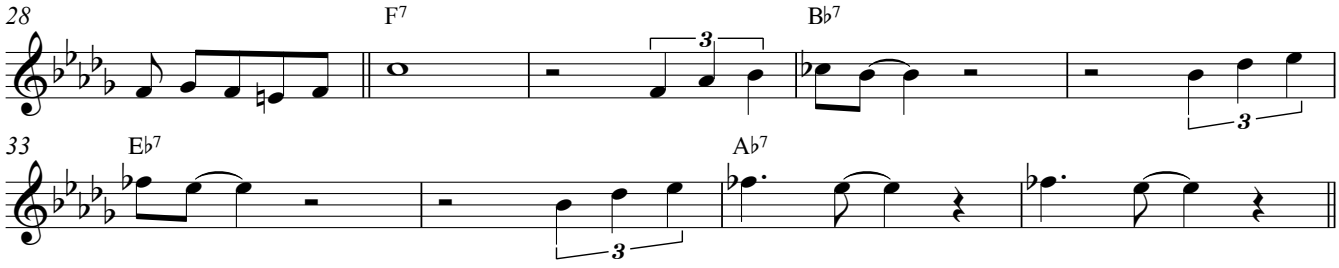
When using the diminished scale starting with an interval of a semitone (as shown above) this outlines the dominant 7 arpeggio - 1, 3, 5, b7 and also provides the following extensions: b9, sharp9, sharp11, 13.

By definition, the symetry of this scale can give an uncentered feeling, resulting in melodic and harmonic tension. Although this may be the desired effect, thinking of the scale as outlined in this workshop can help to add harmonic gravity to the scale, by seeing it as the 4 note arpeggio of the dominant 7 chord, with chromatic approach notes below the 3rd, 5th and 7th, and above the root.

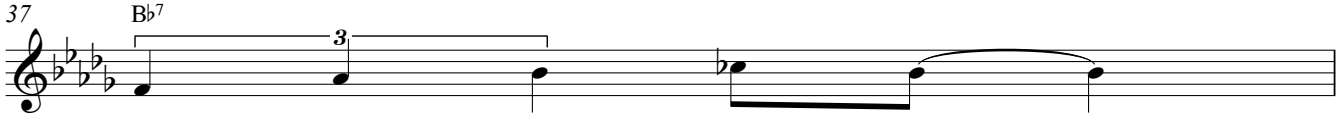
The scales corresponding to each chord are shown below:



Now to take a look at the melody and how the diminished dominnant sound we have been exploring can be a frame work for the melodic cells found in the bridge. The melody is shown below:

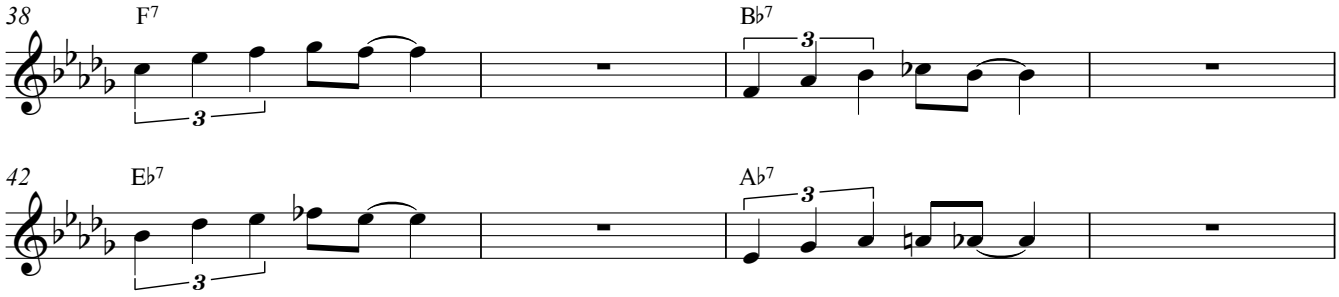


The main melodic theme or 'cell' is the five note pattern shown below:



This cell can now be applied to each chord, as shown below:

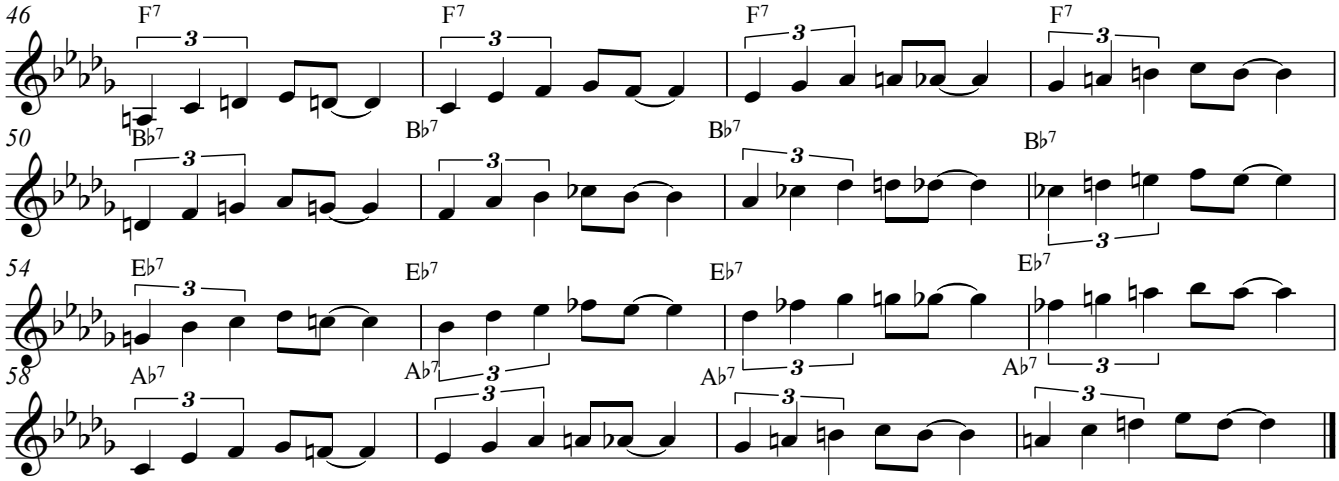
Try improvising with this exercise and altering the rhythm as well as joining up the phrases with your improvisation based on the diminished dominnat scales.



We can now practice using this cell through various inversions within the diminished scale - transposing this cell with the exact sequence of intervals:

'Ascending Minor 3rd, Ascending Tone, Ascending Semitone, Descending Semitone'

Can be played starting on the 3rd, 5th, 7th and b9th of each chord:



These cells can now become a feature of your improvisation through this sequence, simultaneously outlining the diminished dominant sound and referencing the melody. Altering the rhythm will immediately make the melodic reference more subtle. Don't feel the need to include every inversion on each chord - this exercise is designed to give you the option to include the most appropriate one(s).