

Robbin's Nest - Session 3 (Concert)

This workshop addresses 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:

The image displays two lines of musical notation in 4/4 time, showing chord sequences. The first line starts with a treble clef, a key signature of three flats (B-flat major/C minor), and a 4/4 time signature. It shows two chords: III⁷ (F⁷) and VI⁷ (B^b7). The second line starts with a measure rest labeled '5', followed by two chords: II⁷ (E^b7) and V⁷ (A^b7). Each chord is represented by a whole note chord symbol with a 7, and the notes are written on a five-line staff with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end of each chord.

This is a very common chord sequence, particularly 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 undecorated for now. This is shown below:

The image shows a single line of musical notation in 4/4 time, starting at measure 9. The key signature is three flats. The melody consists of eighth notes. Above the first two measures, the chords F⁷ and B^b7 are indicated. The melody features chromatic approach notes (one semitone below) leading to the 3rd, 5th, and 7th of each chord.

The image shows a single line of musical notation in 4/4 time, starting at measure 13. The key signature is three flats. The melody consists of eighth notes. Above the first two measures, the chords E^b7 and A^b7 are indicated. The melody features chromatic approach notes (one semitone below) leading to the 3rd, 5th, and 7th of each chord.

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:

The image shows a single line of musical notation in 4/4 time, starting at measure 17. The key signature is three flats. The melody consists of eighth notes. Above the first two measures, the chords F⁷ and B^b7 are indicated. The melody features chromatic approach notes (one semitone below) leading to the 3rd, 5th, and 7th of each chord, with the approach note placed between two repetitions of the target note.

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 symmetric 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 (Ionian) scale:

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

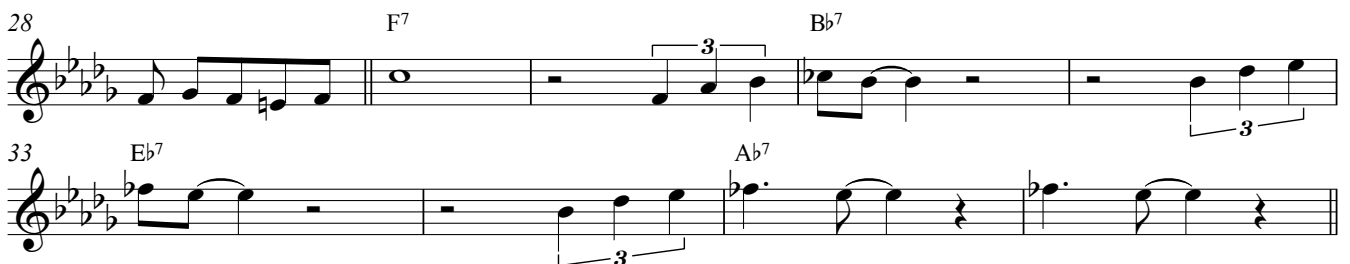
When using the diminished scale starting with an interval of a semitone (as shown above) this outlines the dominant 7 arpeggio - 1, 3, 5, b7 and also provides the following extensions: b9, sharp9, sharp11, 13.

By definition, the symmetry 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 dominant 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 dominant scales.

38 F7 Bb7
42 Eb7 Ab7

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:

46 F7 F7 F7 F7
50 Bb7 Bb7 Bb7 Bb7
54 Eb7 Eb7 Eb7 Eb7
58 Ab7 Ab7 Ab7 Ab7

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).