

Tenor Madness - Session 3 (Eb)

Session 3 focuses on the melody, and how it can be used as a tool for improvising. Below is the complete melody and chord sequence. Notice that for the first 8 bars, the only note which wasn't included in our triad exercise in the previous sessions is the 2nd (or 9th) degree of chord 1.

Chord progression for measures 1-13:

- 1-4: G⁷, C⁷, G⁷, G⁷
- 5-8: C⁷, C^{#o}, G⁷, E⁷
- 9-13: A⁻, D⁷, G⁷, E⁻, A⁻, D⁷

Unlike Jazz standards which were composed as songs and have been recorded in many different ways, compositions such as this one (written by a Jazz musician as a vehicle for improvisation) are usually played fairly similarly, without much room for rhythmic or phrasing interpretation. This can be effective, especially when the melody is played in unison, but that doesn't mean that the melodic material isn't free to be manipulated during solos. Sonny Rollins' solo in particular is a great example of how the melody can be referenced and manipulated to great effect on this tune. I suggest improvising several choruses, playing only the melody, but altering it only by missing notes out, repeating notes or delaying and/or anticipating phrases rhythmically.

Building on the triad exercise from previous sessions, I suggest experimenting with different inversions, creating some wider intervals. In the example below I have attempted to illustrate how we might improvise with the triads, looking for chances to repeat shapes with minimal movement, only altering the specific notes by either a tone or a semitone in order to outline the harmonic progression.

Chord progression for measures 14-21:

- 14-17: G⁷, C⁷, G⁷, G⁷
- 18-21: C⁷, C^{#o}, G⁷, E⁷
- 22-26: A⁻, D⁷, G⁷, E⁻, A⁻, D⁷

One of the reasons I think this melody is so effective is the sudden burst of chromatic detail in bars 9 and 10. Contrasting with the repetitive blues phrases which set the scene from bars 1 - 8, using only 5 notes, this device is even more pleasing. Below I have outlined 2 devices used in these bars which can be developed in our improvisation:

Device 1: extended chromatic surround

At the start of bar 10 (the V7 bar) the 3rd degree of the chord is surrounded by blaying one semitone above, one full tone below, and finally one semitone below before settling on the target note. In the example below I have applied the same rules to the 3rd of each chord. (Notice how this doesn't work very well on the minor chord at all, so I have suggested a similar alternative)

26 G⁷ C⁷ G⁷ G⁷

30 C⁷ C^{#o} G⁷ E⁷

34 A- D⁷ G⁷

Device 2: chord substitutions implied with the melody.

Notice how the accented notes in the melody (from bars 8-10) create a descending chromatic line. This is not a coincidence, this line outlines some implied chord substitutions, shown below, with The original chords above and substitutions underneath them:

A- D⁷

38 A- E⁷ A- D⁷

These chords can be outlined with triads, with a similar approach to the triad exercise in session 1 and 2, always aiming for minimal movement between the shapes, shown below.

A- D⁷

40 A- Minor Triad from root E⁷ Augmented Triad from root/3rd/6th A- Major Triad from 3rd D⁷ Diminished Triad from 3rd/7th/b9th