

INTERVALIC IMPROVISATION

The Modern Sound

A Step Beyond Linear Improvisation

by Walt Weiskopf



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Introduction

There are many books available to jazz lovers, students of jazz and professional musicians on the subject of improvisation. Many of these books deal mainly with linear improvisation. This book is one that codifies a method of intervallic improvisation.

When jazz players learn to “play on changes” they learn linear improvisation. Bebop is the earliest form of true linear improvisation and much of modern jazz is directly related to bebop and therefore, linear improvisation. In very general terms, the basis of learning linear improvisation is learning what scale to play over each particular chord. When players reach a certain competence as jazz improvisers they often feel a large piece of the puzzle is still missing. This is because many modern jazz musicians improvise intervallically and while a good student of jazz hears this in the music, he or she lacks a method for developing this vocabulary.

In the pages that follow you’ll discover a parallel universe of jazz improvisation. It’s a different way of playing changes. Ultimately Intervallic Improvisation will become part of your general knowledge of jazz along with other techniques you have studied.

Intervallic Improvisation is not more complicated than linear improvisation, just different. In fact the principle is the same: The jazz improviser plays material that he or she has chosen to sound good over the underlying harmony. This material is usually based on scales. In Intervallic Improvisation material played over the harmony beneath is based on intervals; specifically triads and pairs of triads.

For any given chord there is one scale or more than one scale that sounds good on that chord. In Intervallic Improvisation certain notes are extracted from that scale (or scales) and organized into a “triad pair” that will also sound good on that chord. For every scale there is a triad pair (or in many cases more than one) that can be derived from that scale.

In a nutshell, when you improvise intervallically, you are taking one step beyond choosing to play a certain scale over a particular chord. Combined with linear improvisation, Intervallic Improvisation is a more comprehensive approach to jazz improvisation. In fact, learning Intervallic Improvisation will improve your linear improvisation.

The objective of this book is to introduce this other way of approaching improvisation to the jazz player and through the exercises and etudes in the book, teach the player how to incorporate Intervallic Improvisation into his or her playing.

The way to achieve this goal is to first read carefully the text that follows (pages 4-19). Learning the exercises/patterns in the second section (pages 24-93) is just as important in Intervallic Improvisation as is learning scales in linear improvisation. It will be impossible to improvise intervallically until you are as familiar with these exercises as you are with scales!

Finally, the etudes in the third section (pages 94-135) demonstrate how this new material might be applied in an improvisatory setting.

Scales and Triads

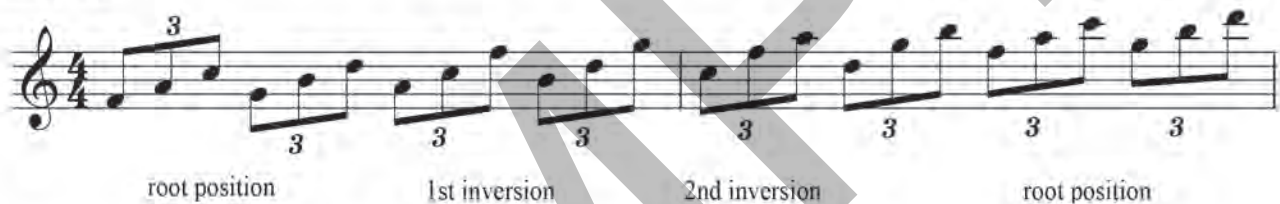
When you see the chord symbol $Dm7$, you automatically associate a certain scale (or scales¹) with that chord. In this case you probably think of the D dorian scale (D,E,F,G,A,B,C). The most efficient way to begin to think intervallically is to pick two triads that capture a certain tonality. In this case, Fmaj and Gmaj triads played alternately capture the tonality of $Dm7$ because they are derived from the D dorian scale. The two triads, in this case Fmaj and Gmaj, are called a “triad pair.”

Example 1.



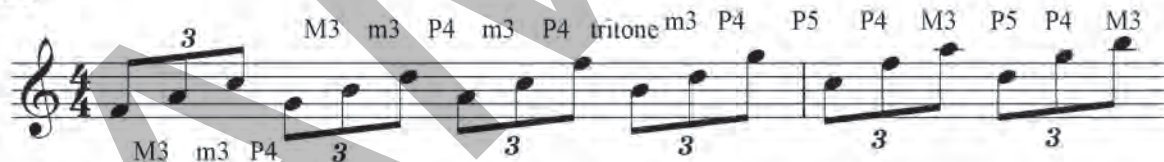
In example 1, the six notes in these two triads contain all the notes in the D dorian scale except one; E. Practice the triads alternately – that is, F (root position), then G (root position). Then, F in 1st inversion, G in 1st inversion; F in 2nd inversion, G in 2nd inversion, then back to root position.

Example 2.



Several different intervals are represented by these two triads and their inversions.

Example 3.



When you are as familiar with this set of notes as you are with the D dorian scale you can begin to get a sense of improvising intervallically. Although the triad pair is comprised of just two triads; it doesn't mean that the only thing a soloist will play on a $Dm7$ are these triads, verbatim. The player will ultimately teach himself many different permutations of the triad pair and perhaps have some of his or her own favorite “licks” based on the triad pair.

Example 3a.



¹ $Dm7$ could also imply D melodic minor and/or D harmonic minor; these will be dealt with later.

CHURCH MODES

MODES OF THE MAJOR SCALE - TWO MAJOR TRIADS A WHOLE-STEP APART

Exercise 1 - ascending triads

F,G

Two staves of musical notation for the F,G mode. The first staff contains the first two measures, and the second staff contains the next two measures. The music consists of ascending eighth-note triads in a 12/8 time signature.

Gb,Ab

Two staves of musical notation for the Gb,Ab mode. The first staff contains the first two measures, and the second staff contains the next two measures. The music consists of ascending eighth-note triads in a 12/8 time signature.

G,A

Two staves of musical notation for the G,A mode. The first staff contains the first two measures, and the second staff contains the next two measures. The music consists of ascending eighth-note triads in a 12/8 time signature.

Ab,Bb

Two staves of musical notation for the Ab,Bb mode. The first staff contains the first two measures, and the second staff contains the next two measures. The music consists of ascending eighth-note triads in a 12/8 time signature.

A,B

Two staves of musical notation for the A,B mode. The first staff contains the first two measures, and the second staff contains the next two measures. The music consists of ascending eighth-note triads in a 12/8 time signature.

Bb,C

Two staves of musical notation for the Bb,C mode. The first staff contains the first two measures, and the second staff contains the next two measures. The music consists of ascending eighth-note triads in a 12/8 time signature.

HARMONIC MAJOR MODES - ONE MAJOR TRIAD AND ONE AUGMENTED TRIAD A HALF-STEP APART

74

Exercise 26 - ascending and descending arpeggios

G, Ab+

Ab, A+

A, Bb+

Bb, B+

B, C+

C, Db+

The image displays a series of musical exercises for the Harmonic Major Modes. Each mode is represented by two staves of music: the first staff shows the ascending arpeggio and the second staff shows the descending arpeggio. The modes are: G, Ab+; Ab, A+; A, Bb+; Bb, B+; B, C+; and C, Db+. The notation includes treble clefs, key signatures, and specific notes for each mode, with accidentals (sharps and flats) indicating the altered intervals characteristic of the Harmonic Major mode.

ETUDE 12
SIoux CITY

WALT WEISKOPF

♩ = CIRCA 132 UP-TEMPO SWING

4/4

A C^{ma}7 G^m7 C7(♯11)

5 F^{ma}7 B^b7(♯11)

9 C^{ma}7 A^m7 D7

13 D^m7 A7 D^m7 G7

17 C^{ma}7 G^m7 C7

21 F^{ma}7 B^b7

25 C^{ma}7 D7

29 D^m7 G7 C^{ma}7

LONG STORY

WALT WEISKOPF

♩ = 100 MEDIUM SWING

A $D7(\sharp 5)$

4 G^{ma7} $G\sharp m7$

8 $C\sharp 7(b9)$ $F\sharp m7$ F^{ma7}

12 $E7$ A^{ma7}

B $D7(\sharp 5)$

20 G^{ma7}

23 $G\sharp m7$ $C\sharp 7(b9)$

BASED ON THE CHORD PROGRESSION TO "MY ELEGY" BY TOSHIKO AKIYOSHI