Keyboard

Jeff Lorber Pumps Up Your Solos with ii-V Progressions

BY JEFF LORBER November 19, 2013

When you're soloing, your ideas should flow organically and not sound like musical formulae plugged into chord changes. All of the concepts of my last few columns—pentatonics, blues licks, and modal playing—are more or less constructed by placing phrases into chords. But while you can start out by analyzing the musical landscape, plotting out a strategy to play through chord changes, eventually you want to get to a point where it's all just pure artistic expression.

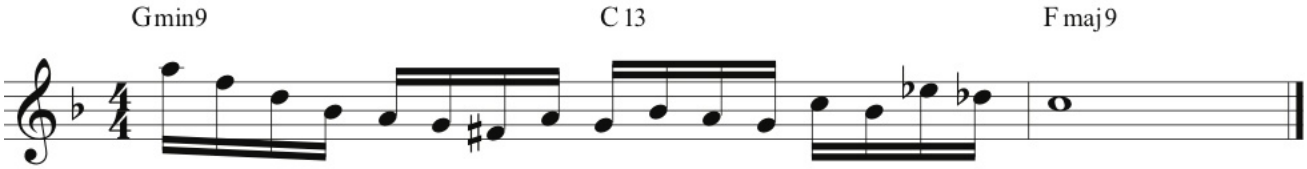
This month, we're going to use one of the most powerful tools to help you find your way through chord changes when you're soloing: *ii-V* patterns.

1. Basic *ii-V-I* Patterns

Ex. 1 is a basic *ii-V-I* melodic pattern in the key of *C* that arpeggiates through the chords.

2. Building Out

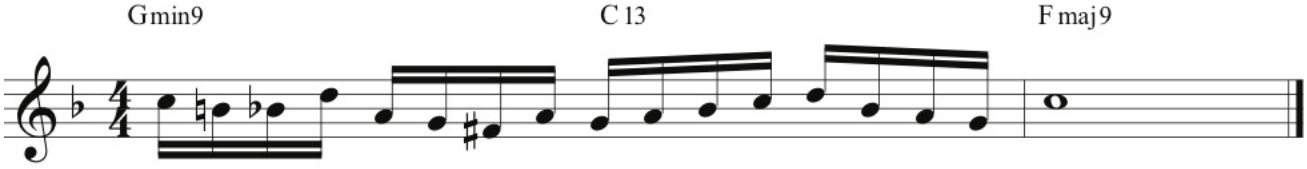
Ex. 2 is a *ii-V* pattern that's a little more sophisticated in the key of *F*. The phrase starts out with a descending *Gmin9* arpeggio (starting on the ninth), continues with a modal phrase, and then plays the *#9* and *b9* over the *C13* chord before it resolves to the fifth degree of the *Fmaj9* chord, which adds some nice color to the lick. Playing a *C7#9b13* would also sound good here.



---

3. Chromatic Approaches and Indirect Resolutions

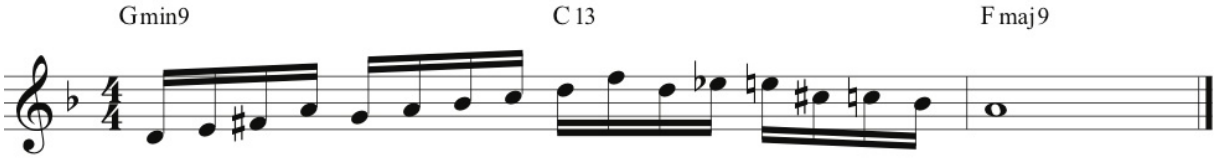
Ex. 3 demonstrates both a chromatic approach to *Bb*, the minor third of the *Gmin9* chord, and then an indirect resolution (chromatic from below but modal from above) to *G*, the fifth of the *C13* chord.



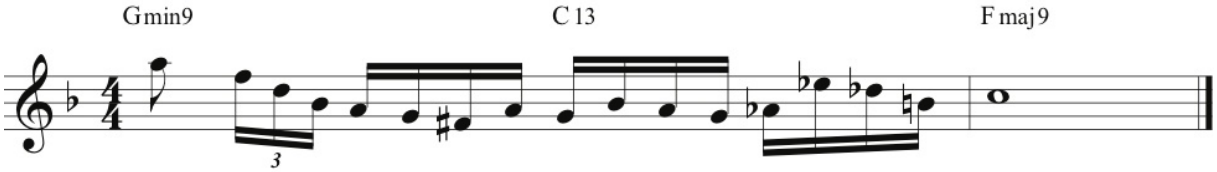
---

4. Expanded ii-V Patterns

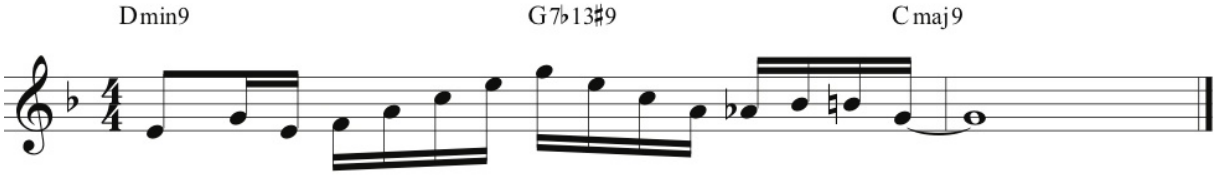
Ex. 4a



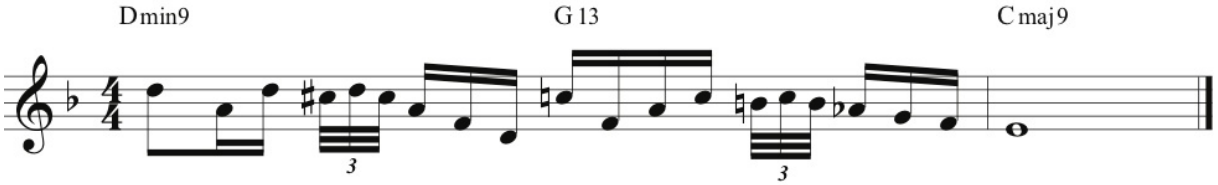
Ex. 4b



Ex. 4c



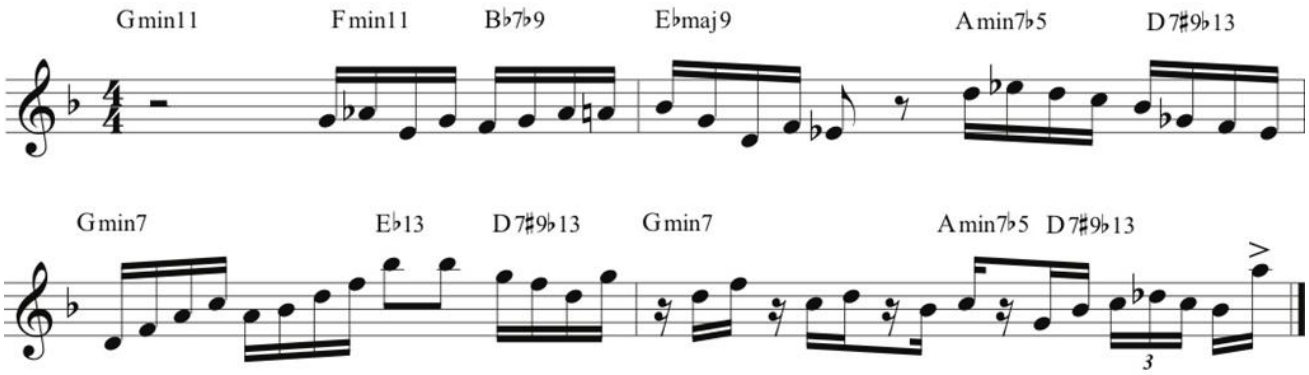
Ex. 4d



Exs. 4a through **4d** are more *ii-V* patterns for you to get into your ears and under your fingers. Try analyzing them on their own to see the chord-to-scale relationships inherent in each. Notice how starting lines on different scale degrees of the target chords can impart unique flavors to your improvisations.

---

5. ii-V Patterns in Use



Ex. 5 is the beginning of my solo over part of the harmonic structure for my song "Rain Dance." That song, which has been sampled by hip-hop and soul artists like Notorious B.I.G., Li'l Kim, Erykah Badu, and most recently Ariana Grande, consists of ii-V sequences and you can even analyze its melody as being made up of ii-V patterns as well. Note how you can seamlessly connect solo lines by linking up different ii-V patterns as demonstrated here.