

Improvising by using triads

By
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In earlier articles (see back issues) we have discussed chord and scale relationships. When using a scale over a specific chord or chord progression, the goal is to cover all the essential notes such as 3rd, 7th and applicable alterations. If we compromise a little we can also use one scale for several chords, which is called a blanket scale. By using this approach we can create a melodic and linear way of playing.

When improvising by using a triad approach we are able to be more specific about the choice of notes. Also, the sound becomes more vertical which is a good contrast to linear playing. The use of triads is a nice addition to whatever style you are playing. When triads are over-used however, the solos tend to sound like an etude, so be careful and use your judgment and taste.

Let's start with a regular ii-V-I progression. Below you can see the triads that the chord is built on and what notes these triads cover.

Chord	Triads	Notes Covered
CMaj7	C Em	1, 3,5,7
Dmin7	Dmin F	1, 3,5,7
G7	G Bdim	1, 3,5,7

As the chords becomes more complex there might be more than two triads in the chord. Try to pick a pair of triads that are within a half or a whole step from each other.

Chord	Triads
C ⁶ ₉ #11	C D
	5 6 3 #11 1 9

This is where your old piano teacher's scale and arpeggio exercises come in handy. If you have forgotten them, go back and practice the triads in all inversions.

Chord

Triads

Dmin11

C

Dmin

Make sure to alternate the pattern when you practice these triads. Along with adding this sound to your playing, it's also an excellent way of practicing technique.

Chord

Triads

G7#11

G

Aaug

Chord

Triads

GAlt

Gaug A#m

CAlt G \flat A \flat

$\flat 9$ $\sharp 9$
 7 1
 $\sharp 11$ $\flat 13$

On an altered dominant chord, if you play major triads built on the tri-tone and the minor sixth, all the alterations will be covered. The third of the chord will not be covered, but the sound is still very strong because of all the alterations.

Dm7($\flat 5$) C Ddim

11 $\flat 5$
 9 3
 7 1

By experimenting with this concept you will be able to add a new dimension to your playing. It will become one more thing to put in your bag of tricks.

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