

ESSENTIAL JAZZ PATTERNS AND 'LICKS'

It has often been the case that students of improvisation will learn the theoretical aspects of the subject, but are prone to sounding simplistic, academic, sometimes aimless, and a noticeable absence of what David Baker has termed "the language of jazz" ...those patterns and licks which are continually shared by virtually all the great improvisers, as a part of the content of their solos. In other words, a reasonable percentage of most solos will and should contain familiar jazz phrases, as they are an essential means of musical communication. All of the patterns and licks shown in this study are extremely commonplace, yet effective and needed by all.

Be sure to practice each pattern/lick in every possible way, as such practice will ingrain the phrase into the fingers, ears, mind, and memory. Play the lick in all keys, using different modulation patterns (chromatic, cycle, etc.). Can it be altered slightly to enable it to fit different harmonic situations? Does it sound well when played from a different note of the chord? Is it effective when played backwards (retrograde)? If it is an ascending contour, is there a descending possibility (and vice versa)? Can it be connected smoothly to another pattern? Can it become a double-time pattern, if need be? Does it have potential for sequences or side-slips?

The process of ingraining is extremely important. An insufficiently-ingrained lick will not occur to you in the 'heat of battle', and even if it did, you'd probably be afraid to try it, because of the high risk of error(s). Therefore it would be wise to follow the format given here, to insure ingraining:

- (1) practice pattern/lick, alone, without accompaniment (all keys, sequences, permutations, etc.);
- (2) play pattern/lick (only) against an appropriate play-along exercise (i.e., a track from Aebersold's Volume 1, 3, 16, 21, etc., not a tune);
- (3) improvise against the exercise track, but lean toward rather frequent use of the pattern/lick;
- (4) practice the pattern/lick against a play-along tune that is harmonically appropriate for many applications of that phrase (i.e., Baker's "Le Miroir Noir" in JA-10, for apply-diminished scale), using only the pattern/lick whenever possible; and
- (4) improvise against the play-along tune, but exaggerate your use of the lick (you can moderate its use, once it is sufficiently ingrained). Look for other play-along tunes to which the pattern/lick may be applied. If you have an adjustable speed on your tape machine, play the tune(s) in other keys, to maximize your experience with playing the phrase.

Remember that you're trying to achieve a balance between the familiar (patterns/licks) and the unfamiliar (new and/or original ideas). Learning and ingraining these licks will not stifle your creativity. It will lend communication to your solos, and serve as springboards to original ideas. Your creativity will only be stifled if you never play anything original. The one thing you cannot afford to do is to operate in a stylistic vacuum.

ESSENTIAL JAZZ PATTERNS AND LICKS

A. DIGITAL PATTERNS

(1) (2) (3) (4) D-7

2 3 5 5 3 2 1 1 2 3 4 5 3 2 1 1 2 3 4 5 7 6 5

B. II-V LICKS

(5) D-7 and/or G7 (6) D-7, G7 (7) D-7, G7 (8) D-7, G7 (9) D-7, G7 (10) D-7 (C.E.S.H.), G7, CΔ

C. V7-I LICKS

(11) G7 (12) G7, CΔ (13) CΔ (or C-Δ)

D. I-VI7 LICKS

(13) CΔ, A7 (14) CΔ, A7, D-7

E. FLEXIBLE LICKS

(15) CΔ (D-7) (D#o7) CΔ or E-7 (16) (17)

F. DIMINISHED SCALE PATTERNS

(18) (19) (etc.) (20)

G. AUGMENTED SCALE PATTERN

(21)