

# PERPETUAL MOTION BEBOP EXERCISES

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Bebop is much more than just one particular style, it is pretty much the “grammar” of modern jazz, and bebop “licks” are not so much clichés as essential elements of speech within the jazz language. Players such as Chick Corea, McCoy Tyner, Cecil Taylor, Paul Bley and the like all developed original styles that seem far removed from the sound of bebop. But if you take a close look at what they’re playing, you’ll find it’s saturated with bebop principles.

There’s a good reason for this. The early bebop players developed a system that made it easier to improvise strong solo lines. There’s nothing arbitrary in this system, the “rules” are there for sound logical and musical reasons. The key elements of bebop are:

- a) Consistent addition of certain passing tones to scales so that the strong chord tones coincide with the strong beats.
- b) Use of encircling gestures to creatively delay the arrival of any given tone.
- c) Strong chord tones are approached smoothly across the bar by whole-step, half-step or by extending an arpeggio.
- d) Balance between the use of arpeggios and scales.
- e) Balance between the use of upward and downward motion.
- f) Notes are often doing more than one job – eg, appearing as part of an arpeggio and also as part of an extended encircling gesture that follows.
- g) Notes used at the point of change between chords either anticipate the chord that follows or work over both chords.

Actually, these are mostly generally useful guidelines that will make any melodic line in any musical style sound good.

There are plenty of books out there that will give you the details of bebop scale theory. There are also books containing hundreds of bebop patterns, but it has been my experience that when musicians truly internalise just one single pattern, it can transform their playing. Knowing why the phrase is constructed the way it is, is the key to this deeper understanding.

I’ve given a little talk-through of what’s going on in each of the eight figures that follow. Learn them parrot-fashion if you wish, but you’ll get ten times more out of them if you devote some time to analysing how they’re constructed.

The figures given here are composed of lots of different fragments, very common and representative bebop gestures, strung together and designed to repeat across two bars.

They fit the major II-V, II-V-I-VI and minor II-V-I progressions that form the backbone of modern jazz. These chord sequences often repeat in real-life music, so it’s natural to loop them when you’re practising. The fact that these are “perpetual motion” exercises should also help you get more out of your practice time by making the process of repetition logical and musical.

Learning fragments strung together as a line like this is very efficient. Once you have a two-bar figure under your fingers, you may wish to rattle off the whole thing. A much more creative approach is to use fragments from the complete figure when the occasion demands. It’ll also be easier to link fragments in different ways if you’ve learned some examples of how it’s done from the very start.

## RHYTHM

Another keystone of this style is very active use of rhythm. While bebop is predominantly played in a stream of eighth notes, it is common to mix things up using rests and rhythmic displacement. Someone once said of Charlie Parker (I forget who) that the rhythms he played were so strong that any notes would have sounded good over them. Some specific examples of rhythmic devices, and the players associated with them, are as follows:

Use of triplets and classical-style ornaments based on semiquavers (Parker)

Use of crotchet triplets (Bill Evans – whose style was more influenced by bebop than many people recognise)

Use of odd note groupings – 5s and 7s – to fit extended ideas into the space of two or four beats (Dizzy Gillespie, later Coltrane)

The next time you're listening to a good bebop solo, focus on the rhythms – it's actually quite easy to transcribe just the rhythms if you don't worry about the note pitches, and well worth doing to expand the rhythmic possibilities in your own playing.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

- a) Practise the figures round and round as written. Concentrate on what is going on harmonically as you play through them.
- b) Experiment with leaving different tones out to isolate the internal fragments and alter the feel of the whole figure. Leaving notes out and/or compressing parts of the figures into triplets is a good way to bring more rhythmic sophistication into your playing.
- c) Interchange fragments between the different figures, creatively altering the rhythms to fit them together.
- d) Finally, improvise freely over the chord sequences, looking to insert pieces of the figures to launch, extend or end your line.

By the way, it's best to begin by assimilating these kind of lines thoroughly in one key, before you take them round the cycle of Vs. You will eventually need them in all keys, but you'll be able to learn them much quicker in all the keys if you are completely clear about what's going on in one key first.

In no time at all, the bebop language will start to appear naturally in your solos. If you've really internalised the "why" as well as the "what", you'll soon find yourself constructing more musical lines within the bebop idiom.

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Best of luck, and feel free to get in touch with me at:

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### BEBOP PERPETUAL MOTION FIGURE 1



The first six notes are a popular fragment using the segment of the bebop scale with the passing tone. The next four are a truncated version of the same fragment, but in a different place in the bar. The line is extended up the G7 chord in 3rds, using a sharp 11<sup>th</sup> to bypass the “avoid” note, and then back down the G7 scale (when the 11<sup>th</sup> doesn’t need to be raised because it falls on a weak upbeat. This figure also works the other way round – the bars can be reversed against the chords – (where the C# is optional).

### BEBOP PERPETUAL MOTION FIGURE 2



Variation on the first figure. This figure also works the other way round – the bars can be reversed against the chords – (where the C# is optional).

### BEBOP PERPETUAL MOTION FIGURE 3



Treat the first note as a pickup to a very common bebop gesture which is all about lowering the root of Dm7 by semitone steps, seesawing with the 5<sup>th</sup> below, to approach the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the G7b9 chord that follows. The line then climbs the diminished scale that goes with G7b9 in thirds, descends the scale for two tones, and ends with a chromatic approach to the opening pickup. Any of the above three figures can also resolve to C.

### BEBOP PERPETUAL MOTION FIGURE 4



The first three notes are another popular fragment which chromatically encircles the root of the Dm7 chord. Then it’s up the scale that fits both Dm7 and G7 with a skip at the end. The C doesn’t need raising over the G7 chord because it appears on a weak upbeat. In addition, the 7<sup>th</sup> of the C chord (B) is encircled by A and C. Then it’s down an inverted CM9 arpeggio to arrive smoothly by stepwise motion at the 3<sup>rd</sup> of A7 (C#). Finally, we skip up to the root and run down a fragment of the A7alt scale which is the same as the Dm7 scale that follows.

### BEBOP PERPETUAL MOTION FIGURE 5

Dm7          G7          CM          A7b9



*Descending melodic cell pattern (5321) over the Dm7, then the first four notes of the popular fragment of the bebop scale over the G7. This leads smoothly, upwards this time, to the 7<sup>th</sup> of the C chord. Then down a CM arpeggio to a seesaw figure on the A7b9 chord between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and b9<sup>th</sup>. The three final notes (Bb, G and G#) form an extended chromatic approach to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Dm7 chord (A) that we started with.*

### BEBOP PERPETUAL MOTION FIGURE 6

Dm7          G7          CM          A7b9



*That popular bebop scale fragment again, with the first two tones acting as a pickup, then an extended chromatic encircling (G, F, D, D#) of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the C chord. The line then drops to the root of C, then anticipates the A7b9 chord by a beat with its 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. Finally up to the 7<sup>th</sup> and root of the A7b9 chord, arriving back at the pickup.*

### BEBOP PERPETUAL MOTION FIGURE 7

Dm7          G7          CM          A7b9



*The first three notes descend the Dm7 scale. The next four notes just ignore the G7 chord altogether and form an extended chromatic approach to the 5<sup>th</sup> of the C chord. The line then descends a melodic cell (5321) in C and ascends the diminished scale that goes with the A7b9 chord in 3rds.*

### BEBOP PERPETUAL MOTION FIGURE 8

D∅          G7b9/G7alt          Cm



*A little something in minor. The first four notes go up a 7<sup>th</sup> chord in D∅, then the next three notes descend the diminished scale that goes with G7b9 or G7alt. The Ab and F# also form an encirclement of G, which is the 5<sup>th</sup> of the Cm chord that follows. Then down a melodic cell (5321) in C minor, which connects naturally with another melodic cell (431) – very bluesy sounding. The Eb, C and C# then form an encirclement back to the D. Note also that the final four notes in the second bar fit both Cm and A7alt (the VI chord).*

## STRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

This is the sort of thing you can come up with by creatively combining the fragments from the 8 figures with some connective material (the chord sequence is Dm7 G7 | CM A7b9 repeating over and over):

The image displays three staves of musical notation in C major, 4/4 time. The top staff is a treble clef with a common time signature. The second and third staves are also treble clefs. The music consists of a melodic line and a bass line. The melodic line is composed of eighth and quarter notes, often beamed together. The bass line consists of quarter notes and eighth notes, often beamed together. The overall style is a simple, rhythmic melody.