

A SIMPLE TECHNIQUE FOR OUTSIDE PLAYING

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This article will give you a simple, easy to remember, but very effective formula for taking a solo line outside the changes.

When I say simple and easy to remember, I mean it. You'll grasp the principle inside 10 minutes, and be able to put it into practice within an hour. If this weren't one of my free online articles, I'd offer a money-back guarantee...

WHAT MAKES GOOD OUTSIDE PLAYING?

1. The notes you play should be identifiable and clearly *against* the underlying harmony.
2. Some sense of structure should be evident when you're against the harmony.
3. You should resolve back inside logically and smoothly.

The clearest structures for indicating harmony are triads, particularly major ones. There's the added benefit that most musicians have an easy familiarity with triads – in fact, people learning to play jazz usually spend ages trying to get beyond playing in simple triads.

So what are the most promising triads for use in outside playing? Put another way, which triads sound the most revolting against the harmony, or provide the fewest consonant chord tones?

We'll begin with a dominant chord, Bb7. The tones will either be consonant tones (C), alterations (A), or outside tones (O).

Triad	Analysis
Bb	R(C) 3(C) 5(C) – three consonant tones.
B	b9(A) sus4(A) #5(A) – three alterations. These particular alterations don't often go together, but they do convey a susb9 or Spanish Phrygian sound.
C	9(C) #11(A) 13(C) – two consonant tones, one alteration. Lydian Dominant – a legitimate alteration.
Db	#9(A) 5(C) b7(C) – two consonant tones, one alteration. Can be seen as either 7b9 (diminished scale) or m7 alteration.
D	3(C) #5(A) maj7(O). one consonant tone, one alteration, one outside tone.
Eb	sus4(A) 13(C) R(C) – two consonant tones, one alteration. Sus Dominant – a legitimate alteration.
E	#11(A) b7(C) b9(A). one consonant tone, two alteration. 7b9 (diminished scale) or Altered Dominant – legitimate alterations.
F	5(C) maj7(O) 9(C). two consonant tones, one outside tone.
F#	#5(A) R(C) #9(A) – one consonant tone, one alteration. Altered Dominant – A legitimate alteration.
G	13(C) b9(A) 5(C) – two consonant tones, one alteration. 7b9 (diminished scale) – a legitimate alteration.
Ab	b7(C) 9(C) sus4(A) – two consonant tones, one alteration. Sus Dominant – a legitimate alteration.
A	maj7(O) #9(A) #11(A) – two alterations, one outside tone.

When we play “upper structure” triads like this, the ear simultaneously understands the notes as part of the underlying chord and as a coherent triad in their own right.

The most promising candidates for outside playing, then, are B, D and A triads. The triad on E is also very effective, even though it spells out a legitimate dominant alteration, because it lies a tritone away from the root.

The way to remember this set of useful outside triads is to move up a semitone from the root of the dominant chord and continue round the cycle of fifths:

B E A D

To use this approach, you don't even have to be aware of the identity of each tone from these triads over the home chord (although you'll soon acquire this). To begin with, just work out the triads you need in advance over a given chord and treat them as your "outside" options.

USING THE TRIADS FOR AN OUTSIDE LINE

We get a good outside effect by simply stringing these triads together in random order and different inversions – just letting our ears guide us. Mix and match. We don't have to play each triad fully before moving into another, but the line will seem more structured if we convey at least some sense of the triads.

This approach naturally works well because we are using three-note structures in a string of eighth notes, so we'll tend to flow asymmetrically through a number of different triad sounds.

We can think in terms of two different types of resolution:

1. Having got outside the Bb7 sound, we can bring the line back in to the Bb7 itself. In fact, where we have an extended section of a dominant chord we have the time to weave in and out of the chord sound repeatedly.
2. We can resolve to the expected I chord, EbM. (The tritone sub resolution, AM, isn't really a suitable context for this kind of approach, because the outside stuff is actually just the sound of the A that follows. A good rule of thumb when using tritone subs is to play very simply over the substitute chords. The substitution is hip enough on its own – attempts to "hip" it up further will usually result in "unhipping" it...)

Resolving this kind of line is simplicity itself, because all the triads are a semitone away from a consonant triad in either the Bb7 or EbM scales. Just shift up or down a half-step and you've resolved into a strong chordal figure.

Incidentally, we can always opt to treat a II-V as a V:

Over the whole of: Fm7 Bb7
Play: B E A D triads

APPLICATIONS

a) Any II-V (long-form – where each chord gets a bar to itself – is best, since there's more time to convey the "outsideness" and bring it back in). Ignore the II, play straight into the V, take the line outside and aim to bring it back in on the I chord. *Tune Up* is a good practice vehicle. Incidentally, it's an excellent idea to practise this tune in different keys. The original is in Bb – work on it also in Db, E and G, and you'll have practised II-V-Is in all keys.

b) One-chord funk or Latin tunes.

c) Blues – think in terms of the very simplest blues form:

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||: Bb7 | % | % | % |  
| Eb7 | % | Bb7 | % |  
| F7 | % | Bb7 | F7 :||
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and treat the whole thing as a workout on this approach. The “in-and-out” motion provides an interesting counterweight to the simplicity of the changes.

d) *Caravan* – the A section sits on C7 for 12 bars before resolving to Fm. The bridge is a cycle of dominants, F7, Bb7, Eb7, leading to the relative major, AbM.

e) *Rhythm* changes: the bridge is a chain of dominants, but you can also play the A section as just being “in Bb”, and treat it in a semi-bluesy fashion by playing Bb7.

f) The Bb7 pedal section at the end of *Moment's Notice*. This approach can sound rather odd if the comping uses the original diatonic triads underneath you. A sensitive rhythm section will pick up on what you're doing and adjust (or just “stroll”), but it might be worth a word in advance.

OTHER POSSIBILITIES

And that's it. Start by mucking around with these four triads over a constant dominant backing – it may sound strange at first, but you'll get the hang of this approach very quickly.

Incidentally, lobbing one of these outside triads into a more conventional bebop line can sound great too.

I've focused here on the dominant chord, simply because it provides the most possibilities for alteration. You can work out similar triad groups for use over other chord types. You can also investigate the use of minor triads in this context as well.

Best of luck with this approach. Free to e-mail me with any (preferably constructive) comments at jlyon@opus28.co.uk.

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