

JAZZ LICK OF THE WEEK #15

"ALL BLUES" - AND THE DORIAN MODE

IMPROV STUFF

As covered in the harmony side of this week's offerings, All Blues (Miles Davis) didnt originally follow the standard blues progression. ie, it didn't use chord IV7 in bars 5-6 as most blues progressions do. Its original setting actually used Imin in this "spot". (If you look in most real books, it is generally published as using chord IV7. Why? Just comes more naturally to people I guess, so why fight it?)

nb. I'll be trimming the harmonic look back a bit to get onto improv. If you want a better description on the harmonic side see the other section in this same week.

Whilst this tune is quite mixolydian in character, bars 5-6 are very Dorian. (This session assumes a basic knowlege of modes. The basics are quite simple, but you do need to know them).

So bars 5-6 are Gmin. But Gmin could mean anything. The striking note of Dorian however is the maj6. (In G min this is the E). The "riff" (as notated in the piano), is very important to maintaining the integrity of the mode, and you can see that the E is part of it.

Example 1 shows the original setting by Miles Davis in "Kind Of Blue".

Have a listen to the head to get a feel for the tune. (track #1) I've boosted the bass a bit in the mp3 to help you hear the repetition of the bass line.

Then listen to the same tune played by Freddie Hubbard (track #2), and you can hear the difference in that he uses the conventional chord IV in bars 5-6. (not notated in the example - just have a listen to it.)

All Blues - track #1 (Miles)

All blues - track #2 (Freddie Hubbard)

EXAMPLE 1 - CONCERT PITCH

G⁷ (melody is simplified for these purposes)

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system is for Miles Davis's original setting, featuring a Lead line and a Piano line. The second system is for Freddie Hubbard's version, also with Lead and Piano lines. The third system shows a simplified piano accompaniment with specific chord voicings: D7(♯9), Eb7(♯9), D7(♯9), and G7. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 8/8. The melody in the lead parts is simplified, focusing on the essential notes of the mode.

Just quickly, the reason IV7 (C7) has been more commonly used than the Gmin is because the notes are effectively the same. (In fact, it's more that Miles chose to use G dorian instead of C7)

G dorian - G A B \flat C D E F G
C7* - C D E F G A B \flat C

* I'm using the mixolydian scale here which are the "first choice" notes.

As you can see, the notes are the same. Same notes, but the context means everything (as you can hear from the examples). Maintaining a modal feel takes a bit of work, and the repetitive bass line - emphasising the G, and the riff (notated in the RH of the piano) make shure there's no doubt what the harmonic intention was.

Dorian has a whole other "flavour", than other minor chords which can be very effective in trying to create some contrast in your soloing.

I'll first look at some licks over these Dorian chords in Miles's All Blues version. Each example is bars 5-6 of different choruses (including a couple of Cannonball Adderly's solo in the same recording.)

Later I'll look at a bit of applying the mode in "Song For My Father".

What I want you to take note of with these examples is

- Absence of any chromaticism (or any notes outside of the scale)
ie, modal tunes or lines are generally quite simple in nature.

- the effect of the maj6 (the E). The amount of useage of this scale degree, and where it is placed can make it sound even more Dorian-ish. Ex 1, 4, 5, and particularly 6 stand out a bit more than the others.

track #4

1

EX 1 G \flat m dorian (G7)

EX 2 G \flat m dorian (G7)

EX 3 G \flat m dorian (G7) EX 4 G \flat m dorian

EX 5 - ADDERLY G \flat m dorian EX 6 - ADDERLY G \flat m dorian

* please excuse the notation which may not be 100% correct,
its the notes that are the focus.

So what to take from this so far?

There's not a whole lot of licks for you to take away yet I admit. But that's the thing with Miles. He's not the first choice player to go to for "vocab". Style and effective simplicity is his thing, and these examples are a good example of this. So at this point hopefully it's been worth the read for some awareness, and something to think about in your soloing.

But let's see if I can offer something in applying it.....

Dorian in Improv

Modes can be used in various ways in improvisation. I think one of the simplest and really effective is to use Dorian over a minor chord. Not any minor chord though! Without getting into a whole new topic, this isn't in the case of a II- V I. The spots to use it is in more the "resolution chord", or the I chord if the tune is minor.

Why is it effective?

Some tunes spend a lot of time on one particular chord. This could be in a minor blues, or many tunes in a minor key. It's easy in these situations for you to run out of ideas, and the listener to get bored. Sometimes applying a mode can add some instant variety to the solo.

A good one to try this out on is in "**Song For My Father**".

There's a lot of the tonic chord - Fmin, in the tune. (12 out of the 24 chords in fact) To really set a chorus apart from the others try applying an F Dorian scale over the Fmin chords. As with Miles and Adderly in All blues, keep it simple. We're going for colour here - not speed.

As opposed to All Blues however, the rhythm section's not likely to be spelling out a Dorian riff, so you will need to spell it out a bit more (ie, use a bit more of the 6th).

We'll now be in 4/4 and I'll construct a few little licks to try based on Miles and Adderly's. (I'll put them into the standard key for this tune of Fmin - so the dorian characteristic note is D).

Track #5 demonstrates the licks. Then try them out over track # 6 which is just a looped Fm chord. Once you've got a feel for a few, try them out on the actual chord sequence provided next.

track #5 - the licks
track #6 - Fmin looped

The image displays four musical licks for the F minor Dorian mode in 4/4 time. Each lick is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb). Lick #1 is marked 'LICK #1 Fm' and consists of two measures: the first measure starts with a quarter rest followed by a half note Bb, and the second measure contains a quarter note Eb, a quarter note D, and a half note C. Lick #2 is marked 'LICK #2 Fm' and consists of two measures: the first measure starts with a quarter rest followed by a half note Bb, and the second measure contains a quarter note Eb, a quarter note D, and a half note C. Lick #3 is marked 'LICK #3 Fm' and consists of two measures: the first measure starts with a quarter rest followed by a half note Bb, and the second measure contains a quarter note Eb, a quarter note D, and a half note C. Lick #4 is marked 'LICK #4 Fm' and consists of two measures: the first measure starts with a quarter rest followed by a half note Bb, and the second measure contains a quarter note Eb, a quarter note D, and a half note C.

And finally - in context!

Here's the full progression to Song For My Father. Try sticking to the Dorian licks over the minor chords. To make the licks "mean more", try repeating the idea into the chord/s that follow (but modify the notes to work with the chord). It lengthens the phrase, and gives the listener more to lock onto. I'll demonstrate what I mean in track #7

With the V7 into the minor chord (C7), refer to week #1 for how to approach this pattern using a b9 extension.

track #7 - demo track showing extension of the "motif"
track #8 - Song For My Father backing track

SONG FOR MY FATHER

The musical notation consists of four staves, each representing a different harmonic progression. The first staff shows a progression from Fm to Eb7. The second staff shows a progression from Db7 to C7 to Fm. The third staff shows a progression from Eb7 to Fm. The fourth staff shows a progression from Db7 to C7 to Fm. Each staff contains rhythmic slashes representing notes, with a double bar line at the end of each staff.

Summary

I hope this week hasn't been too confusing. The look at All Blues was intended mainly as an interesting read, since I was very interested when I was only made aware of this very recently. The main point being Miles's original use of Imin (dorian) in bars 5-6, instead of the conventional IV7.

As far as improv goes, I haven't really provided a lot in the way of licks for you to try. What I wanted to pass on is another way of approaching a chorus when you're improvising. Simply approaching a new chorus a different way can add some variety and interest to your solo. In this case, when you see an Fmin chord (that's not part of a II V progression), you could approach it as a blues, harmonic min, or a min mode. In this case dorian is a good one as it's not too hard to think about. It's important though to use the same approach for the whole chorus so that it doesn't sound like a "mistake", and it also provides a bit of a "theme" to that particular chorus.

Other good minor tunes to try this over are "Mr PC", "Softly As In A Morning Sunrise", "Stolen Moments".

This minor application is only one example. You can approach other non minor tunes similarly. Take "Maiden Voyage" for example. I've heard so many students year after year dredging through all the sus chords, boring us to death. There's nothing wrong with using some good dom7 bebop lines, or even some II V patterns to change things up a bit. (The rhythm section can take care of the sus chords).

But I digress....

Hope you enjoyed it!

Rob