



Improvisation Tips
and Tools for the
BOSSA ROCK

etude

(Based on the changes to "Little
Sunflower")

-What is Modal Jazz?

The chord changes and style of this tune are very representative of a style known as “Modal Jazz”. Modal Jazz has some characteristics that set it apart from lots of other styles of Jazz.

1. Slow moving chord changes
2. Pedal points and bass ostinatos
3. Lack of traditional functional harmony (no or few 2-5-1's, etc)
4. abundance of quartal harmony (harmony stacked in 4ths, 5ths, 7ths, and 9ths. No or few thirds.

The first chord we see in the form is a Dm7. Note that we see it for a long time. 16 measures long.... As a guitarist or pianist, we need to learn some quartal voicings that fit this style. The easiest thing to do is to stack notes in 4ths in the D dorian scale. This is easy because this scale has no sharps or flats (black keys). This type of chord voicing will be the ones you will predominantly hear on the tracks accompanying the examples in this lesson.

-Min7 chord = Dorian

Let's take a look at the dorian mode and see what sets it apart from the minor mode (aeolian).

D Dorian Mode = D E F G A B C D

D Minor Mode = D E F G A B \flat C D

Notice the 6th scale degree of the dorian mode is a half step higher than the minor mode.

The Dorian mode is preferred because the B \flat is too dissonant and pulls towards the 5th with too much tension. The Dorian scale has more evenness in its texture. Just about anytime you see a minor 7 chord in jazz, you need to associate the dorian scale. They are synonymous. Also, you can go ahead and assume min7, min9, min11, and min13 chords all are the same thing and can be substituted for one another. This is especially true in modal jazz.

Let's get the Dorian mode in our ears with the following examples.

Ex 1a

Dorian Mode

Alto Sax

Trumpet in B \flat

Piano

A. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

9 Ex 1b

A. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

13 Ex 1c Up to the 9th

A. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

17 Ex 1d Scale Pattern

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

21 Ex 1e In Thirds

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

25 Ex 1f min9 down 3x

A. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

27 Ex 1g min 9 up 3x

A. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

-maj7 chord = Lydian

E♭ Lydian Mode = E♭ F G A B♭ C D E♭

E♭ Major Mode = E♭ F G A♭ B♭ C D E♭

D Lydian Mode = D E F♯ G♯ A B C♯ D

D Major Mode = D E F♯ G A B C♯ D

Notice the Lydian scale has a #4 compared to the major scale. Like the b6 scale degree of the dorian, the fourth scale degree of the major mode is thought to be too dissonant being only a half step from the third.

Anytime you see a major 7 chord in modal jazz, go ahead and play the lydian mode. Also you can assume the chord quality is major 7 #11 (the #11 is that raised fourth).

Let's get the Lydian mode in our ears with the following examples.

29 Ex 2a Lydian Mode

A. Sax.

B♭ Tpt.

Pno.

A. Sax.

B♭ Tpt.

Pno.

37 Ex 2b

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

41 Ex 2c

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

45

Ex 2d

A. Sax.

Musical staff for A. Sax. in Ex 2d. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, starting with a repeat sign and ending with a double bar line.

B \flat Tpt.

Musical staff for B \flat Tpt. in Ex 2d. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B \flat). It contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, starting with a repeat sign and ending with a double bar line.

Pno.

Musical staff for Pno. in Ex 2d. The staff is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat (B \flat). It contains a piano accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes in both hands, starting with a repeat sign and ending with a double bar line.

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Ex 2e

A. Sax.

Musical staff for A. Sax. in Ex 2e. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, starting with a repeat sign and ending with a double bar line.

B \flat Tpt.

Musical staff for B \flat Tpt. in Ex 2e. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B \flat). It contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, starting with a repeat sign and ending with a double bar line.

Pno.

Musical staff for Pno. in Ex 2e. The staff is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat (B \flat). It contains a piano accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes in both hands, starting with a repeat sign and ending with a double bar line.

53 Ex 2f

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

55 Ex 2g

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

57 Ex 3a

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

61

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

65 Ex 3b

A. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

69 Ex 3c

A. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

73 Ex 3d

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

77 Ex 3e

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

81 Ex 3f

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

83 Ex 3g

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Pno.

-Go for it!

Use the following track to play over the form. Let's look at the chord changes.

16 bars of Dm7
4 bars of Ebmaj7
4 bars of Dmaj7
4 bars of Ebmaj7
4 bars of Dmaj7
16 bars of Dm7

Just start out by playing the roots of the chords until you can hear the form instinctually.

Here are some tips:

- 1) Play slow. Work on making singable melodies in a modest range. Don't play the entire range of the scale! Pick just a handful of notes.
- 2) Leave space. You don't have to play all the time
- 3) Play over the bar! Find notes that are common to both chords when you go over to a new chord change and hold that note out then resolve to the new key. The notes D and A are common to all three scales!
- 4) Play in tune. Get every note to "lock in" to the harmony in the track. Always listen for this.

-Play with Creative Restrictions and watch your Creativity Grow!

One way to grow your creativity muscle is to put musical restrictions or boundaries on your improvisation. This will make you be more creative with other elements of music. One example is to only allow yourself 3 notes per chord change. For example, you can try this:

Dmin7 - D, E, F

EbM7 - D, Eb, F

DMaj7 - D, E, F#

Notice I chose the notes D, E, and F. When the chord changed, I changed the accidentals to reflect each mode.

You will have to focus on the other aspects of your playing like articulation, dynamic, and rhythm to make this approach effective.

Alternatively you could play with a flat dynamic level, a static rhythm, etc.