

COMMON MELODIC OUTLINES for CONNECTING CHORDS:

There are three basic melodic outlines that an improviser playing over standard harmonic progression must know. Outlines are harmonically specific lines that connect chords through guide tones. The structural simplicity of the outlines allows the improviser/composer much room for developing them in their own personal way.

Examples of outlines can be found in any musical style period that uses traditional harmonic progressions. Outlines are plentiful in the be-bop jazz vocabulary. There are entire solos by Clifford Brown based on nothing but outline no. 1. Knowing the outlines should not in any way stifle creativity. On the contrary, knowing them should inspire creativity. The outlines are a given over any harmonic progression. They are the linear equivalent of knowing the chords to a tune. Knowing them gives a sense of harmonic direction to improvised or composed melodies. The outlines are not the only valuable material available as building blocks for constructing musical lines, but they are excellent tools for beginning improvisers and will be familiar material to any advanced player.

Outline no.1 begins on the 3rd of one chord and moves down the scale to the 3rd of the next chord. Outline no. 2 begins with a 1-3-5 arpeggio for the first chord then the 7th resolves to the 3rd of the next chord.

The image displays two rows of musical notation, each containing three variations of melodic outlines. The first row is for a ii7 - V7 progression in C major (Dm7 - G7). The second row is for a iiø7 - V7 progression in A minor (Bø7 - E7). Each variation is labeled 'Outline No. 1', 'Outline No. 2', or 'Outline No. 3'. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 3, 7, and 3 below the notes.

The basic construction for the outlines are shown above in for a ii7 - V7 in C major and a iiø7 - V7 in A minor. Outlines may be used over chords that progress in downward 5ths. If you change the chord symbols and add the correct accidentals the outlines shown above could work for any of the following progressions:

Dm7 - G7	ii7 - V7 in C major
D7 - Gmaj7	V7 - I in G major
Dmaj7 - Gmaj7	I - IV in D major
Dmaj7 - G#ø7	IV - vii°7 in A major
Dm7 - Gm7	VI - iiø7 in F#m
	iii7 - vi7 in Bb major
	vi7 - ii7 in F major
	i - iv in D minor
D7 - G7	V7/V - V in C
Dø7 - G7	iiø7 - V7 in C minor

In actual music and improvisations these outlines occur as simply as shown above and very in intricate forms with using non-harmonic tones and rhythmic displacement. They may be sequenced through several chord changes and may be combined in numerous ways.

Upper and lower neighbor tones and leading tones have been added to the basic outline no. 1 shape below.

Musical notation for shape 13. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The first measure is labeled 'Dm7' and the second measure is labeled 'G7'. The melodic line in the treble clef starts on D4, moves to E4 (upper neighbor), then F4 (lower neighbor), then G4 (root), then A4 (leading tone), then Bb4 (root), then C5 (leading tone), then D5 (root), and finally E5 (octave). The bass line consists of a whole note D3 in the first measure and a whole note G2 in the second measure.

Upper and lower neighbor tones and chromatic approach tones have been added to the basic outline no. 2 shape below.

Musical notation for shape 16. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The first measure is labeled 'Dm7' and the second measure is labeled 'G7'. The melodic line in the treble clef starts on D4, moves to E4 (upper neighbor), then F4 (lower neighbor), then G4 (root), then A4 (leading tone), then Bb4 (root), then C5 (leading tone), then D5 (root), and finally E5 (octave). The bass line consists of a whole note D3 in the first measure and a whole note G2 in the second measure.

An arpeggiated tone (A), and chromatic tones have been added to the basic outline no. 3 shape below.

Musical notation for shape 18. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The first measure is labeled 'Dm7' and the second measure is labeled 'G7'. The melodic line in the treble clef starts on D4, moves to E4 (upper neighbor), then F4 (lower neighbor), then G4 (root), then A4 (leading tone), then Bb4 (root), then C5 (leading tone), then D5 (root), and finally E5 (octave). The bass line consists of a whole note D3 in the first measure and a whole note G2 in the second measure.

It is good practice to play simple outlines over a progression before trying to do elaborate detailed harmonic improvisations. Learn to play each outline without error or hesitation throughout the entire progression. If the tune includes the follow progression: Em7 – A7 – Dm7 – G7 – Cmaj7 (iii7 – V7/ii – ii7 – V7 – I in C major), practice the following basic outlines to prepare for improvising. Learn to hear the 7th resolve to the 3rd. Put the metronome on 2 & 4 and make it swing. Change a rhythm occasionally, but make sure you connect each chord.

Outline no. 1 connecting through the progression:

Em7 A7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

20 3 7 3 7 3 7 3 7 3 7 3

Outline no. 2 connecting every other measure:

Em7 A7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

25 7 3 7 3 7 3

Outline no. 2 connecting every other measure:

Em7 A7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

30 3 7 3 7 3

Outline no. 3 connecting every other measure followed by a 3-5-7-9 arpeggio:

Em7 A7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

35 7 3 5 7 9 7 3 5 7 9

3-5-7-9 arpeggio followed by outline no. 3 connecting every other measure:

Em7 A7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

40 3 5 7 9 3 5 7 9 7 3

There are hundreds of outline examples shown in the following books: *Connecting Chords with Linear Harmony* (entire book deals with outlines), *Comprehensive Technique for Jazz Musicians* (chapter 15), *Jazz Theory Resources* (chapter 10).