

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 cliches 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.

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

jlyon@opus28.co.uk

Jason Lyon
London
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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 7th of the C chord. Then down a CM arpeggio to a seesaw figure on the A7b9 chord between the 3rd and b9th. The three final notes (Bb, G and G#) form an extended chromatic approach to the 3rd 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 3rd of the C chord. The line then drops to the root of C, then anticipates the A7b9 chord by a beat with its 3rd and 5th. Finally up to the 7th 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 5th 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

DØ G7b9/G7alt Cm



A little something in minor. The first four notes go up a 7th chord in DØ, 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 5th 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 melodic line consisting of eighth and quarter notes. The second staff is also a treble clef with a similar melodic line, featuring some chromaticism. The third staff is a bass clef with a bass line consisting of quarter and eighth notes, including some chords. The music is a continuous melodic and harmonic exercise.