

# MINOR MISHAP

## TOMMY FLANAGAN SOLO

This is a transcription of the two-chorus solo that pianist Tommy Flanagan takes on his own composition *Minor Mishap*. You'll find it on the classic album *The Cats* (with John Coltrane, Kenny Burrell and Idrees Sulieman).

The tune is a good blowing vehicle: [A<sup>1</sup>] short turnarounds in Bbm, [A<sup>2</sup>] short turnarounds in Fm, [B] long turnarounds in EbM and DbM, [A<sup>3</sup>] short turnarounds in Bbm.

I've given the book changes for comparison, but Tommy's a bebopper at heart – he usually ignores the II chords and focuses on dominant-tonic motion. Also, even though the written changes give the dominants as 7+9s, Tommy's preferred alteration is 7b9. Actually, if you think about it, the alt and diminished dominant scales have more in common than not – six tones – so a lot of patterns are compatible with both.

The book changes are virtually irrelevant to what Tommy's doing in the final 4 bars of each A section. The solo line indicates that at these points he's just thinking *in Bbm*, or *in Fm*, using the relevant dominant chords (7b9s, natch) to weave out and in again – creating and resolving tension. *Don't believe everything you read in fakebooks – use your ears...*

The minor blues scale is used extensively on the Bbm A sections to generalise over the changes (note how Tommy energises the line with strong rhythms). In contrast, on the Fm A sections he prefers to chase the changes in a more beboppy way.

Confused about the Ab7alt voicing in bar 6 of the second chorus B section? It's the same as an *unaltered* rootless voicing a tritone away (D7). The top voice of this chordal fragment descends the bottom three notes of the Ab7alt/7b9 scale, landing on the 5<sup>th</sup> of the target DbM. This is a common comping gesture over a V-I and well worth knowing in all the keys.

A word on the key signature: the tune is in Bb minor and the classically correct key signature is 5 flats. But jazz tends to use melodic, rather than classical minor. Also, a jazz chart is going to involve a lot of use of the natural 7<sup>th</sup> of the key – which is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the dominant chord.

For these reasons, it's often much clearer and simpler to notate a jazz solo with the *major* key signature and flat the 3<sup>rd</sup> where required in the chart (this trick is often employed by arrangers). That's what I've done here. By the way, leadsheets in minor tend to be written with the correct classical key signature.

### THE BEBOP DESCENDING SCALE RUN

Look at what Tommy plays in bar 6 of the second A, first chorus. What he's actually doing here is adding a temporary C7 chord and resolving it to Fm (we'll ignore the turn at the start):

C7            → Fm  
G F E Db C Bb    Ab

Tommy is fond of this kind of thing, but it's a classic bebop gesture (you'll hear it in the hands of everyone from Bud Powell to Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett and onwards).

Tommy places the line so that he only descends as far as the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the target chord. The full expansion of this sort of thing is descending a seven-note scale for a full bar and landing on the root. The natural place to start is the 9<sup>th</sup>. Let's start with the F major scale:

G F E D C Bb A G | F

This works perfectly with the harmony if we treat the two bars as a dominant-tonic resolution:

C7 → F  
G F E D C Bb A G | F

Sounds very tame indeed, doesn't it? Bear with me. What we get is strong chord tones on downbeats (underlined) – the 5<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, root and 13<sup>th</sup> of the C7 chord, then the root of the F chord. Now the 13<sup>th</sup> of the dominant (A) belongs to the chord but isn't as strong as the other tones we've been through. However, it's the same as the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the tonic chord that follows.

So the harmonic sense here is that the final emphasised tone in the first bar is simultaneously sort of saying goodbye to the dominant chord it is leaving and saying hello to the tonic chord coming up. This is a large part of what makes this descending run work so well.

To put this figure into minor, we can just flat the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the tonic (which then becomes the b13<sup>th</sup>/#5<sup>th</sup> of the dominant – a perfectly acceptable alteration on a dominant):

C7 → Fm  
G F E D C Bb Ab G | F

We are now descending the *melodic* minor scale. Still not great sounding, but it's always an option. The beboppers recognised that the b9<sup>th</sup> on a dominant is a great sounding alteration, particularly so when leading to a minor tonic. So we flat the 9<sup>th</sup> and arrive at this:

C7 → Fm  
G F E Db C Bb Ab G | F

The best-sounding, and most used, of the lot. We are now descending the *harmonic* minor scale. Many people choose to see this run in this light and it's fine as shorthand. Just remember that in the first bar the chord is actually C7b9b13 – it's not really F anything, although the choice of these tones strongly indicates that we are *in F*.

Next, look at what Tommy plays over the EbM and Db chords in the B section, first chorus, and the EbM in the B section, second chorus. Again, we'll ignore the turn as well as the placement in the bar:

EbM  
F Eb D C Bb G F Eb

DbM  
Eb Db C Bb Ab F Eb Db

Again, we're descending from the 9<sup>th</sup> of the tonic chord, but this time we skip the 4<sup>th</sup>. Why? Well, as we heard with the descending run in F major and F melodic minor, descending an unaltered scale sounds rather rinky-dink. It sounds even plainer when we're just playing over the tonic, as here, when there isn't even a resolution to look forward to. The 4<sup>th</sup> is the tone most often omitted from the tonic scale – doing that here allows us break up the plain scale and land on more interesting chord tones at strong beats: 9<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> again. Treating this as a gapped scale and running up and down over three or more octaves is good practice and gives you familiarity with the possible starting positions.

There are lots of variations of these descending runs, incorporating different rhythms and interposed chromatics, but it's best to get these basic full runs into your hands in all keys first.

Best of luck, and feel free to e-mail me with any queries or comments at [jlyon@opus28.co.uk](mailto:jlyon@opus28.co.uk).

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2nd chorus

[A] *Bbm* *C7* *F7+9* *Bbm* *C7* *F7+9*

[A] *Fm* *G7* *C7+9*

*Fm* (*Bbm*) *Fm* (*G7 C7*) *Fm*

[B] *Fm7* *Bb7* *Ebd*

*Ebm7* *Ab7alt* *DbΔ*

[A] *Bbm* *C7* *F7* *Bbm* *C7* *F7*

*Bbm* (*Ebm*) *Bbm* *C7* *F7*

*Bbm*

straight 8s