Jeremy Siskind: Improvisation

Week 1

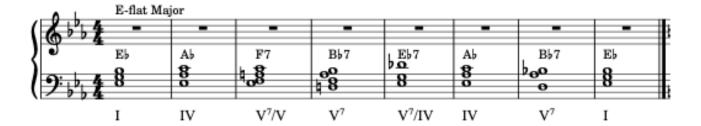
Introduction

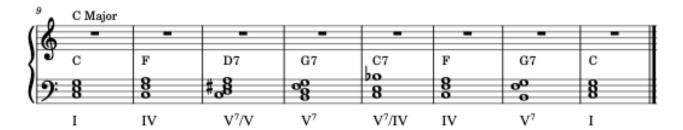
- Jeremy Siskind introduces himself and the course
- Goals of TWI are to be able to improvise a 24-measure ABA improvisation
- No particular style is prescribed
- The idea is to be able to be proud of your own ABA improvisation in your chosen style
- The TWI is designed for both those with some skill in improvisation and those that have no such skills
- Advanced topics such as complex harmonies, swing feel, the rule of the octave, or any other intensive concepts are not the focus of this TWI

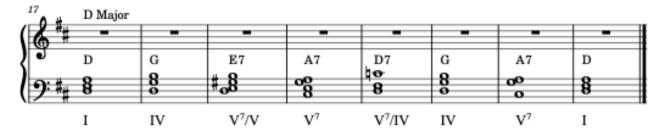
Harmonic Progression

ABA 24-measure improvisation, comprising three 8-measure phrases.

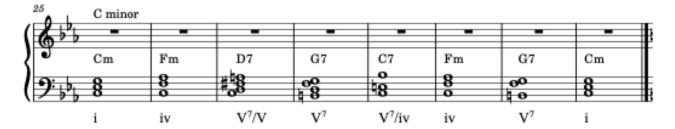
- A single chord progression in major and minor keys.
- Section A can be major or minor, and then section B will be the opposite tonality (minor or major, respectively)
- Symmetrical Chord Progression:
 - One chord per measure
 - First four chords of the progression are analogous to the question, and the last four are the resolution/answer
 - Major: I IV V7/V V7 V7/IV IV V7 I
 - V7/V and V7/IV are called a secondary dominant, or applied chords
 - Chords that aren't diatonic, but are drawn from the key of another chord; e.g. V7/V is the dominant of the key defined by V and V7/IV is the dominant of the key defined by IV.
 - Some chords are inverted to keep hand from leaping around
 - Inversion are not indicated in the chord symbols to allow you to decide what inversion to use
 - ii. Start with the key of E-flat Major: "tattoo the progression into mind"
 - iii. In order to solidify your mastery of the progression, transpose to other keys, such as C Major, D Major, etc. Memorize the progression so that you don't need the roman numerals or music in front you while playing
 - Note alternate ways of thinking of the chords to assist in transposition.
 - For example, V7/IV is like a dominant I chord

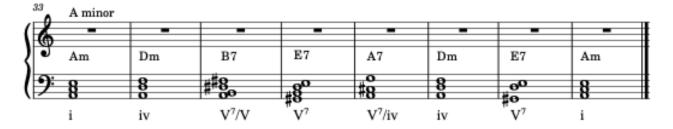


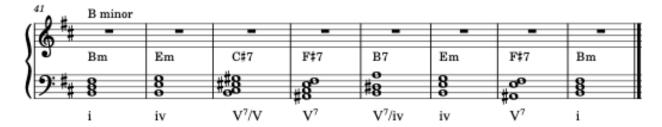




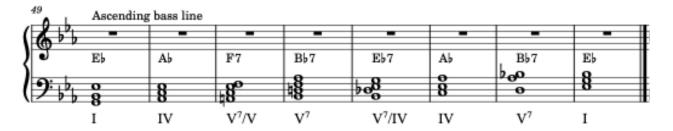
- Minor: i iv V7/iv V7 V7/iv iv V7 i
 - i. Start with relative minor of E-flat Major, which is C Minor
 - ii. The minor is the same as the major sequence, but the progression uses minor chords where indicated.
 - iii. Transpose to relative minors of the major keys you used in the major transpositions.







- o Example of inversions:
 - i. Start in the first inversion of I so that you can have an ascending bass line through the entire progression
 - ii. Experiment in other inversions



Left Hand Accompaniments

Upon mastering of the block-chord, one-chord per measure progression, come up with a variety of accompaniments, keeping chords in the left hand

- Repeat the chord in rhythms (e.g. Waldstein Sonata)
- Imply different style using different repeated chord rhythms
 - o "International Dance Rhythm" (Billy Hart, drummer): 1&2 &3& 4&
 - "March": 12 3 4
- Oom-Pah: alternation between the bass note (b) and other notes of the chord (ch)
 - "Simple 1 2 3 4": 1(b) 2(ch) 3(b) 4(ch)
 - "1 2 & 3 4 &": 1(b) 2(ch)&(ch) 3(b) 4(ch)&(ch)
 - "12 & 3 4": 12(b) &(ch)3(ch) 4(b)
 - o "1 &2 & 3 4": 1(b) &2(ch) &(ch) 3(ch) 4(b)
 - o "1 & ah 2 & 3 & 4 &": 1(b) &(ch) ah(ch) 2(ch) &(ch) 3(b) &(ch) 4(b) &(ch)
 - o "12 & 3 & 4 &": 12(ch) &(ch) 3(b) 4(ch)
 - o "romantic and flowing" (i.e. slurred): 1(ch) &(b) 2&(ch) 3(ch) &(b) 4&(ch)







- Broken Chords
 - Arpeggiated chord
 - Alberti bass and related patterns
 - Repeat first or top two notes, etc.
 - Closed position (chord as given in single hand position within an octave)
 - Open position (chord expanded over more than one octave)



- Combine broken and oom-pah
 - "Stride piano": bass note separated beneath top part of chord outside of closed position
 - "Joplin style" like (i) but with repeated top notes, connecting base notes to create a bit of a bass line (using fifth and third)
 - o "Open arpeggios": wide open voicing of notes of the chord one at a time



Right Hand Improvisation

- Only use notes of the chord (i.e.; arpeggios in various patterns, e.g. Mozart sonata)
- Basic pattern: match the two hands playing exactly the same chords in both hands
- Upward arpeggio in RH: quarter eighth eighth, or eighth eighth eighth
- Mix some up and some down arpeggios.
- Add some skips in the arpeggios



How to practice

- Ask "what if" questions in RH to feel less limited
 - add rests
 - use eighth note triplets
 - use octave leaps
 - use repetition
 - use varied articulations
 - allow RH to venture away from its original closed position chord triad to other octaves
 - use pickup
 - Use short phrases with large rests between RH notes
 - Use long 4-bar phrases
 - Dotted rhythm
 - o etc.
- Goal: be able to connect a LH accompaniment with RH improvisation in Eflat Major and C Minor
 - o One hand at a time at first
 - LH accompaniment first
 - LH holds chord while RH does improvisation
 - Then start at slow tempo and join the LH accompaniment with the RH improvisation
- Always practice in rhythm ("practicing out of rhythm is like playing tennis without a net")
- Write out some possibilities
 - Try to wean yourself off the page, but you can write out the first two measure and try to extend over the whole piece
 - Or write out particularly difficult patterns

Conclusion

- Learn the progression, particularly in Eflat Major and C minor
- Experiment with LH accompaniments in various styles in open and closed positions
- Improvise RH using only chord tones, in closed and open positions
- Practice one hand at a time in rhythm, before putting hands together
- Write out some notes to help in the learning process