

Jazz Bass Lines

ii-V-I

By Cliff Engel

D Dorian

Dm7 Arpeggio

1



G Mixolydian

G7 Arpeggio

5



C Ionian

CMaj7 Arpeggio

9



Dm7

G7

CMaj7

13



17



21



25



29



33



77



81



There have been lots of chord progressions utilized by musicians in every style of music. Some have obviously been used more than others. However, in jazz music no other chord progression has been played more often than the ii-V-I. Along with the twelve-bar blues and rhythm changes, the ii-V and ii-V-I changes make up the most common chord progressions used in the jazz repertoire. They are the very basic foundation of music in the jazz idiom, and by mastering the blues and rhythm changes along with ii-V-I's, you have an enormous amount of information at your disposal.

The original source of the ii-V-I progression is the modes of the major scale. The I chord is a major 7th chord, and its parent scale is the Ionian mode or the first mode of the major scale. The ii chord is a minor 7th chord, and its related scale is the Dorian mode or the second mode of the major scale. Finally, the V chord is a dominant 7th chord, and its parent scale is the Mixolydian mode or the fifth mode of the major scale. These three chord types and modes are the most commonly utilized in jazz. Since all three chord types have a root and perfect fifth, the only variables between them are in the third and seventh scale degrees. Major 7th chords (Maj7) have a major third and a major seventh, minor 7th chords (m7) have a minor third and a minor seventh, and dominant 7th chords (7) have a major third and a minor seventh.

In the key of C Major, the ii-V-I progression would look like this: Dm7-G7-CMaj7. Locating ii-V-I's within the standard jazz repertoire is very simple, and it is crucial for every successful jazz musician to be able to perform this identification on the fly at a moments notice. The quicker you can identify these progressions, the better you'll become at navigating chord charts. Keep in mind that the ii chord is always going to be a minor seventh chord, the V chord is always going to be a dominant seventh chord, and the I chord will always be a major seventh chord. Also, the ii-V doesn't always necessarily have to resolve immediately to the I chord. In fact, you'll see just as many ii-V progressions which will frequently appear within the space of a single measure instead of two. Often, ii-V's will be linked together in an almost a chain-like fashion, descending or ascending in whole steps and half steps as transitory chords moving from one key center to the next before they resolve to the point of harmonic stability on the I chord.

With this information in mind, I've constructed several walking bass lines over the ii-V-I chord progression in C Major (Dm7-G7-CMaj7) using chord tones, scale tones, and chromatic approach notes. When playing over a Dm7 chord, you can play the notes contained within the D Dorian mode. Likewise, you can play the notes within the G Mixolydian mode on the G7 chord and the C Ionian mode while playing over the CMaj7 chord. After you've practiced these examples as written and internalized the sound of the ii-V-I progression, take the chord progressions as well as the walking bass lines and transpose them to every key across the entire range of the fingerboard. Then, try to improvise your own walking bass lines over ii-V-I's utilizing rhythmic embellishments such as skips, ghost skips, pull-off skips, slurred skips, syncopated rhythms, and triplets.