

Improvising over ii/V7/I chord progressions

This progression is the most common in jazz and advanced blues pieces. It is essential that you become familiar with it.

STEP 1

In the key of C:

the first chord is CMaj7 (CEGB)

the second chord, chord ii, is Dm7 (DFAC)

the fifth chord, chord V, is G7 (GBDF).

Notice that all these notes added together give the scale of C Major. Therefore, the simplest thing to do is play notes from the C Major scale over these chords. Some notes will sound better than others at different times, but it is all acceptable.

Chord Sequence

CMaj7 Dm7 G7 CMaj7

Scale

C major scale

STEP 2

The next step is to use arpeggios, especially arpeggios which add in the seventh and ninth notes, e.g.:

CMaj9 – C E G B D (= 1 3 5 7 9)

Dm9 – D F A C E

G9 – G B D F A

Try the same chord sequence (CMaj7/Dm7/G7/CMaj7) and improvise using ninth arpeggios and scale runs from the C Major scale.

STEP 3

Now, notice the upper three notes of each chord:

CMaj9 = CEGBD – the upper notes are GBD, which is an arpeggio of GMajor

Dm9=DFACE – the upper notes form an arpeggio of Aminor

G9=GBDFA – the upper three notes form an arpeggio of Dminor

That means you could use the following arpeggios:

Chord:	CMaj7	Dm7	G7
Arpeggio:	GMajor	Aminor	Dminor

If you play piano, you could play a CMaj7 chord in the left hand, and a GMajor chord in the right hand.

STEP 4

Use an Altered Dominant – the G7 (or G9) chord gets altered to G7#9 or G7b9:

G7#9 = G B D F A#

G7b9 = G B D F Ab – the upper four notes = a diminished 7th chord

Note that the Ab and A# are outside the C major scale of STEP 1. This is the beginnings of what is known as **Outside Playing**. Some players prefer to play outside as much as possible, while some never go there. Most players go outside at some point in their solos. It adds tension, which demands resolution, and drives the music forward.

STEP 5

Related arpeggios. This is an extension of what we covered in STEP 3, where we played an arpeggio of one chord over another chord, e.g. GMajor arpeggio over CMaj7. This time we shall use arpeggios which go outside the CMajor scale. You can zigzag across the table, e.g.: Am7...Abm7...Em7. Notice that the Dominant 7th chord (G7) has the most alternatives.

CHORD SEQUENCE:	Dm7	G7	CMaj7
List of possible alternative arpeggios	Dm9 DFACE	G9 GBDFA	CMaj9 CEGBD
	Am7 ACEG	Fm7 FAbCEb	Am7 ACEG
		Bbm7 BbDbFAb	Em7 EGBD
		Abm7 AbCbEbGb	Bm7 BDF#A
		Ebm7 EbGbBbDb	
		C#m7 C#EG#B	
		G#m7 G#BD#F#	
		Db7 DbFAbB(=Cb)	

STEP 6

Mix up all the STEPs...

STEP 7

Transfer to all 12 keys! It would be great if you could do this, but in reality some keys are more used than others. If you are in a guitar-based band, sharp keys are used a lot (E/A/D/G), whereas in a horn-based band, flat keys are used more often (F/Bb/Eb).