Creating ii-V-I lines (Major)

Major and minor ii-V-I chord progressions are the most essential harmonic unit to be found in both standard tunes and mainstream jazz compositions. It is therefore essential to build up a repertoire of lines and approaches that can be played over this progression.

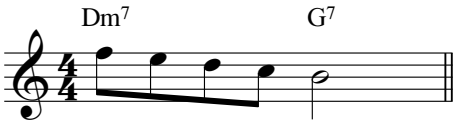
One useful method when tackling the ii-V-I is to break it down into separate components: ii-V, V-I, I. As a general rule, the ii-V sets up the phrase, the V-I provides tension and the I chord provides release.

Let's deal firstly with the major version of the progression and concentrate on the ii-V component. The three outlines listed below have been identified by jazz educator, Bert Ligon as fundamental ii-V patterns:

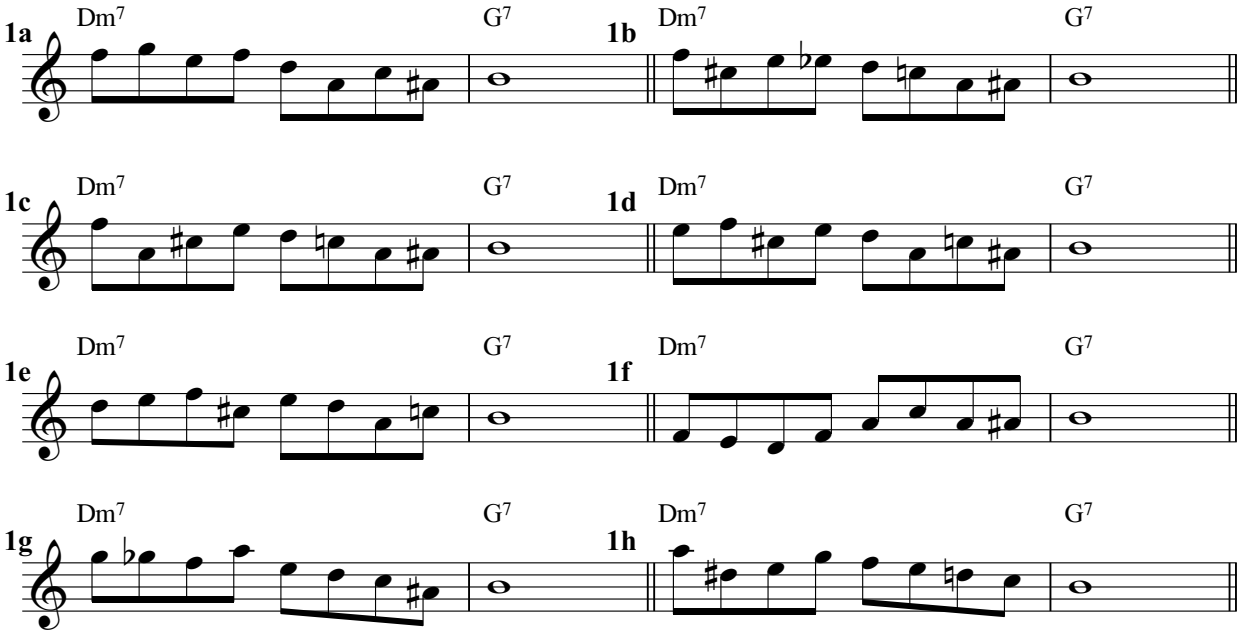
Outline 1: Descending scale from the 3rd to the 7th of the ii chord connecting to the 3rd of the V chord.
Outline 2: Ascending arpeggio from the root to the 7th of the ii chord connecting to the 3rd of the V chord.
Outline 3: Descending arpeggio from the 5th to the 7th of the ii chord connecting to the 3rd of the V chord.

I have taken each of these 'archetypal' outlines and extended them into two-bar phrases in the key of C major. The pitches and general profiles have been retained although certain notes in the examples are displaced by an octave for the sake of variety (examples 1f and 2c).

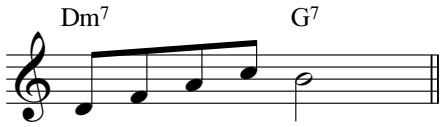
Outline 1:



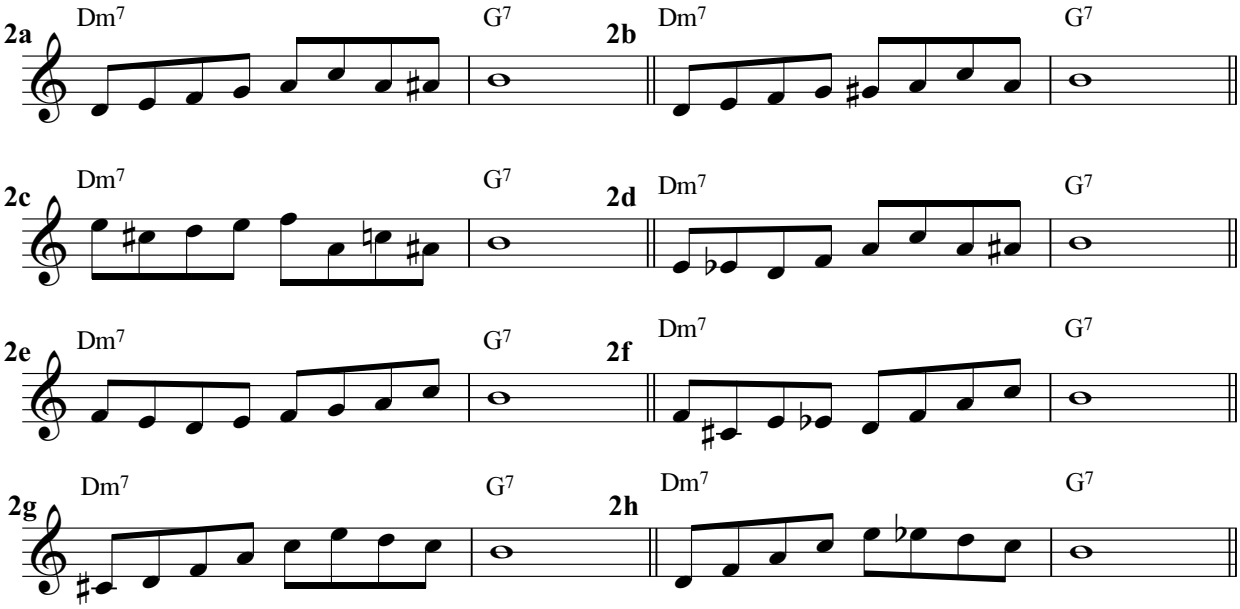
Extended Variations:



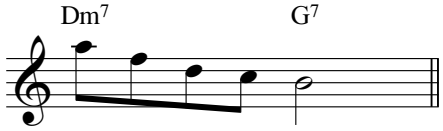
Outline 2:



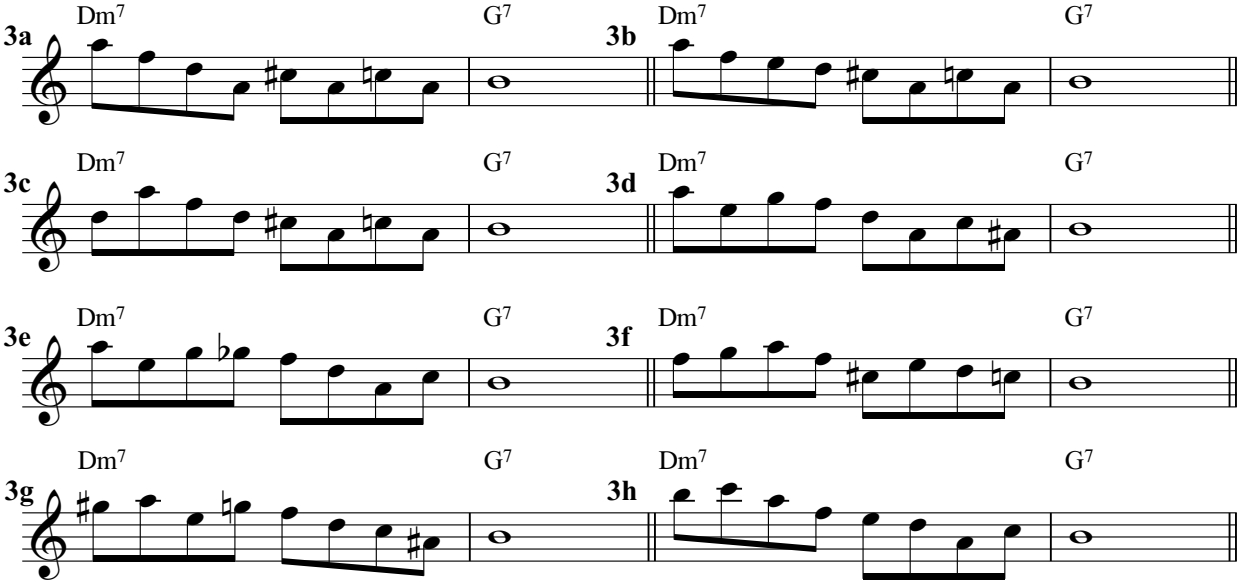
Extended Variations:

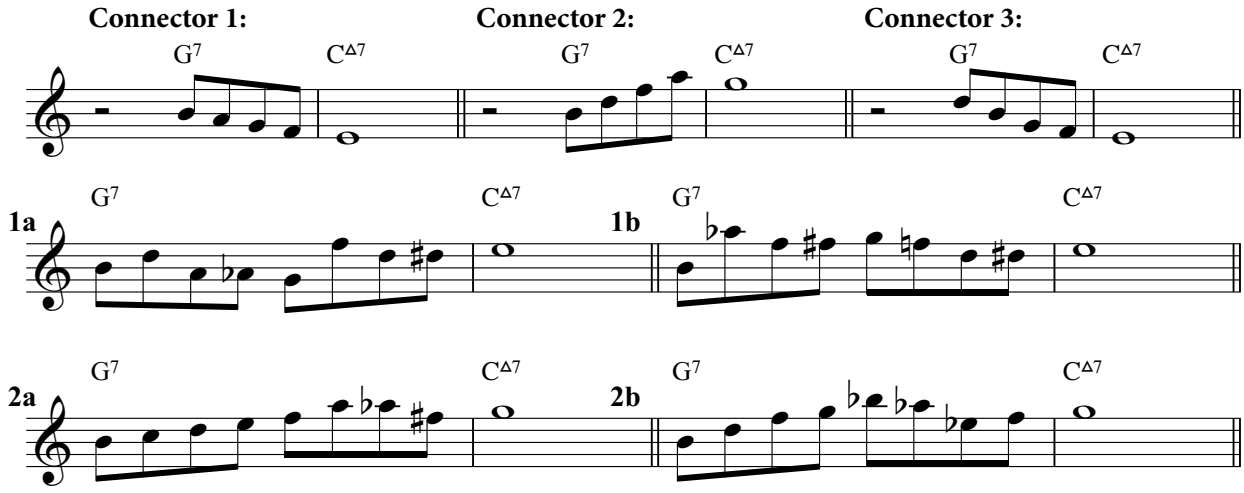


Outline 3:



Extended Variations:




Connector 1:
Connector 2:
Connector 3:
G7
CΔ7
1a
1b
2a
2b