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EASY

JAZZ CHORD PROGRESSIONS

Part of the Matt Warnock Guitar Easy Guitar Series

Easy Jazz Guitar Progressions

12 Essential Progressions for Jazz Guitar

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How to Use This eBook

Before you dive into this material, take a minute to learn how to get the most out of this eBook in your practice routine.

The first thing to know, is that jazz progressions are not usually thought of as “easy” as the book’s title suggests.

But, with the right practice approach, you can make any progression sound easy in your comping and soloing.

By understanding their construction, and working fun and essential exercises, any jazz progression can be easy to outline in your playing.

The material in this eBook does just this, breaks down seemingly difficult progressions into easy to understand concepts.

Doing so builds your confidence and allows you to outline any of these progressions in jazz standards with ease.

When learning any progression in this eBook, work it in the following ways to get the most out of your practice time.

- Learn the chords in the given key.
- Work those chords over the backing track.
- Take those chords to other keys.
- Learn the single-note material in the given key.
- Take that material to soloing over the backing track.
- Work the single-note material in other keys.

Working progressions this way teaches you to recognize these changes in jazz tunes and outline them with confidence.

This is why the first part of any chapter is often the most important.

It's no good to have a ton of great chords or licks over a backdoor ii V I if you can't recognize that progression in a tune, for example.

Recognizing the progressions in a jazz standard is the first step to being able to comp or solo over those changes with confidence.

Because of this, don't skip the intro theory to jump into the chords and soloing material.

As you learn these chord progressions, take out your Real Book and see if you can find those changes in jazz tunes.

This is a powerful complimentary exercise to the material in this eBook.

With that said, you're ready to learn these essential jazz chord progressions on guitar.

About the Backing Tracks

For some of the progressions below, you can play them as 2 or 4-bar phrases.

Because of this, the material is presented in both of those lengths.

When this happens, the backing tracks are the 4-bar versions.

This allows you to stretch out, take your time, and work the material until it's comfortable and confident.

Any of the 2-bar material can also be played over the 4-bar backing track; you just need to adjust the rhythms.

Introduction to Chord Progressions

Before digging into the essential progressions, take a few minutes to learn or review how progressions are constructed.

Chord progressions are built by mixing diatonic and non-diatonic chords based around the tonic key of the song.

Those chords are built by stacking notes on top of any note in the diatonic scale, or borrowed scale in the case of non-diatonic chords.

As progressions are built by adding chords to each note in a scale, the first thing to know is the notes/degrees of any major scale.

The same thing can be done for minor scales, but to keep things simple you look at major progressions in these examples.

Here's a C major scale written with a 5th-string bass note.

The letter names and scale degree numbers are written below each note in the scale.

Scale degrees will be very important going forward, so keep a close eye on those.

Lastly, when talking about single-notes, scale degrees for example, you use Arabic numerals, 1-2-3-4-5, etc.

Then, for chord numbers you use Roman numerals, I-ii-iii-IV-V, etc.

This lets you quickly understand which one someone is talking about when referring to either single-notes or chords.

C D E F G A B C
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

T
A
B 3 5 7 8 10 12 14 15

To make things easier to build chords under these scale notes, you put the scale on one string.

You can see this here with the C major scale written on the 5th string.

C D E F G A B C
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

T
A
B 3 5 7 8 10 12 14 15

Once you have the notes in a key on one string, you can add chords to each one of those notes.

For every major scale, no matter the key, you use the following chords.

- Imaj7
- iim7
- iiim7
- IVmaj7
- V7
- vim7
- viim7b5

Here are sample chords for all the changes in the key of C major.

If you were to take these chords to the key of G major, for example, it would all be the same order, just different notes.

In G major it would be Gmaj7, Am7, Bm7, Cmaj7, D7, Em7, and F#m7b5.

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains eight chords: Cmaj7, Dm7, Em7, Fmaj7, G7, Am7, Bm7b5, and Cmaj7. Below the staff, the Roman numerals for these chords are listed: Imaj7, iim7, iiim7, IVmaj7, V7, vim7, viim7b5, and Imaj7. Below the Roman numerals is a guitar fretboard diagram with six strings (T, A, B) and frets 5 through 17. The fret numbers are: T (5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17), A (4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16), B (5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17), and 3 (3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15).

Now that you have the diatonic chords worked out, you can arrange them in a new order to create progressions.

Here's an example of the C major chords in the first line, as well as a common progression in the second line.

To build that progression, you take the I, vi, ii, V, and iii chords from C major and arrange them into the progression below.

All diatonic progressions are built this way; you figure out the chords in a key and then match those chords to the numbers in the progression.

Cmaj7 Dm7 Em7 Fmaj7 G7 Am7 Bm7b5 Cmaj7
 Imaj7 iim7 iiim7 IVmaj7 V7 vim7 viim7b5 Imaj7

T	5	6	8	10	12	13	15	17
A	4	5	7	9	10	12	14	16
B	5	7	9	10	12	14	15	17
B	3	5	7	8	10	12	14	15

Cmaj7 Am7 Dm7 G7 Em7 Am7 Dm7 G7

Imaj7 vim7 iim7 V7 iiim7 vim7 iim7 V7

T	5	13	6	12	8	13	6	12
A	4	12	5	10	7	12	5	10
B	5	14	7	12	9	14	7	12
B	3	12	5	10	7	12	5	10

Non-Diatonic Chords

Besides seeing chords from the key you're in, you also see non-diatonic chords in popular jazz progressions.

While these chords are temporarily outside the key, they can be labeled and thought of as variations of diatonic chords.

You see this in the example below with the ivm7 bVII7 chords in a C major progression.

Normally those chords are Fmaj7 (IVmaj7) and Bm7b5 (viim7b5) in the key of C.

While Fm7 and Bb7 aren't in the key of C, they're leading to a Cmaj7 chord, and are only being sounded for one bar each.

Though they aren't in C, they're only temporarily outside the key, and they jump back to C major right away.

Because of this, it's easier to think of them as variations of chords in C major, rather than a new key for such a short amount of time.

The image shows a musical example of secondary dominant chords in the key of C major. It consists of a treble clef staff with four measures of chords: Cmaj7, Fm7, Bb7, and Cmaj7. Below the staff, the Roman numerals are given as Imaj7, ivm7, bVII7, and Imaj7. At the bottom, a guitar fretboard diagram shows the fingerings for the strings T, A, and B across six frets.

	5	5	4	3	5	5
T	4	4	4	1	4	4
A	5	5	5	3	5	5
B	3	3	3	1	3	3

Secondary Dominant Chords

You also encounter secondary dominant chords in this eBook.

These are 7th chords that you find in jazz songs that aren't the V7 of the tonic key.

The most famous example is the V7/V7 chord, also called II7, as it's a dominant built from the second note of the scale.

Secondary dominants are used to create tension and stronger movement to a diatonic chord that's not the tonic.

The V7/V7 example below, taken from Take the A Train, shows a D7 in bars 3 and 4.

Here, D7 is the V7 of G7, the V7 of Cmaj7; therefore it's the V7/V7.

If this is confusing, not to worry, just know that you will see 7th chords in jazz that aren't the V7.

Most of the time, by far, those chords are the V7 of another diatonic chord, such as the V7/iim7, V7/vim7, or V7/V7.

Here's that Take the A Train example to check out before digging into secondary dominant chords further in the progressions below.

Cmaj7 **D7**

Imaj7 _____ V7/V _____

T 5 5 7 7
A 4 4 5 5
B 5 5 7 7
E 3 3 5 5

Dm7 **G7** **Cmaj7** **Dm7** **G7**

iim7 V7 Imaj7 iim7 V7

T 6 6 5 6 6
A 5 7 4 5 7
B 7 5 5 7 7
E 5 5 3 5 5

Major ii V I Progression

As it's the most famous progression in jazz, the major ii V I is the first set of changes you study in this eBook.

This progression is found in countless jazz standards, and it's the most essential progression to practice for any jazz guitarist.

Below, you work on 2 and 4 bar versions of this progression, as you do for many progressions in this eBook.

The backing track is the 4-bar version to keep things spread out and slowed down when practicing.

But, any 2 bar material can be applied to the 4-bar version and vice-versa, you just need to speed up or slow down to fit the phrase.

Building the Progression

To build the progression, you take the 2nd, 5th, and 1st chords from the key of C major and play them in that order.

Here's a harmonized C major scale with the Roman numerals for each chord written below the changes.

From there, you can see how you take the 2nd, 5th, and 1st chords, Dm7-G7-Cmaj7, to form the ii V I progression.

Cmaj7 Dm7 Em7 Fmaj7 G7 Am7 Bm7(b5) Cmaj7
 Imaj7 iim7 iiim7 IVmaj7 V7 vim7 viim7b5 Imaj7

Dm7 G7 Cmaj7
 iim7 _____ V7 _____ Imaj7 _____

Comping Exercises

Now that you know how to build this progression, here are chord exercises to take those shapes onto the fretboard.

The first group of chords brings 9 and 6 colors to the G7 and Cmaj7 chords respectively.

Each chord in this eBook is written with a plain rhythm to make it easier to learn.

After you learn these shapes, experiment with various rhythms as you take these chords to the backing track.

Audio Example 1

Dm7 **G7** **Cmaj7**

Treble clef staff: Chord diagrams for Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, and Cmaj7.
 Bass clef staff: Fret numbers for strings T, A, B, and E.
 Labels: G9, C6

In this chord phrase you bring m9, 13, and 6/9 colors to each change in the progression.

Make sure to work these, and all chords, in 12 keys as you take them around the fretboard in your studies.

Audio Example 2

Dm7 **G7** **Cmaj7**

Treble clef staff: Chord diagrams for Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, and Cmaj7.
 Bass clef staff: Fret numbers for strings T, A, B, and E.
 Labels: Dm9, G13, C6/9

To take these chords further, here are four positions of drop 2 chords that use voice leading to outline the major ii V I.

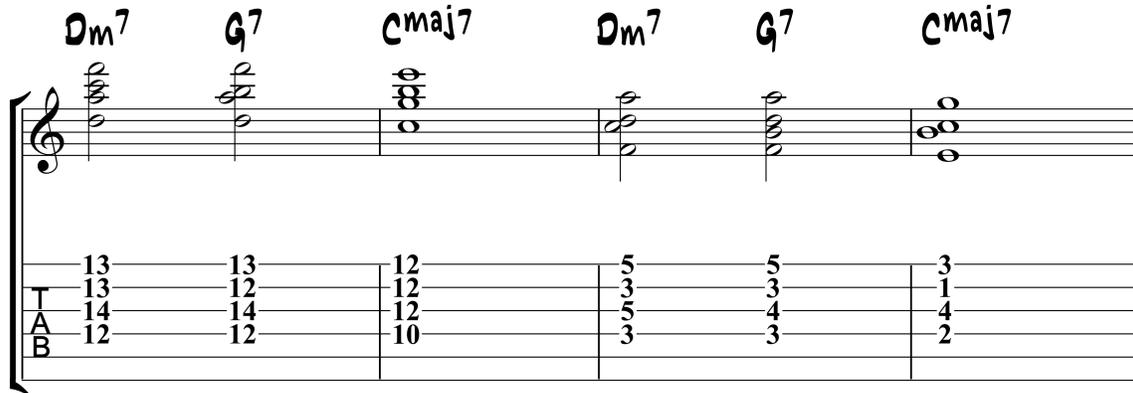
Here, you start by playing an inversion of Dm7, then you lower the b7 of that Dm7 chord by one fret, C to B, to form a rootless G9 chord.

Any time you have a ii V progression, you can play the iim7 chord, lower the b7 by one fret, and you get a V9 chord without a root.

Check out these shapes and have fun with these jazzy sounding ii V I's.

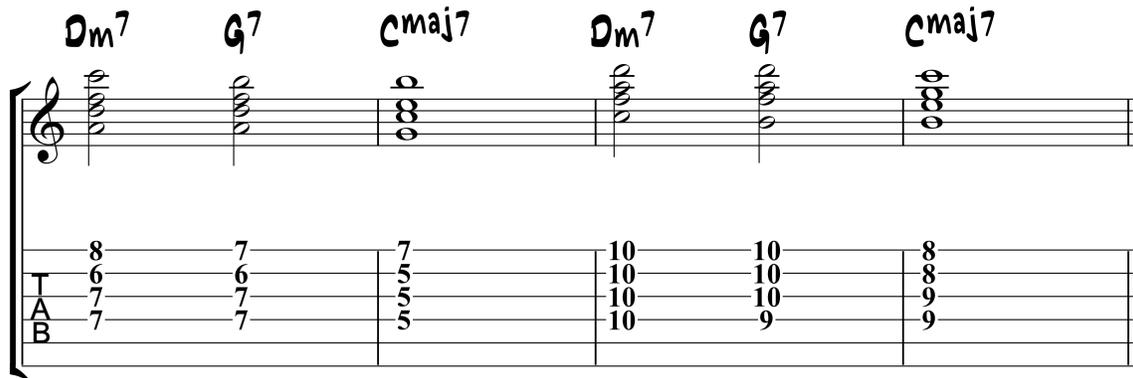
Audio Example 3

Dm⁷ G⁷ C^{maj7} Dm⁷ G⁷ C^{maj7}



	13	13	12	5	5	3
T	13	12	12	3	3	1
A	14	14	12	5	4	4
B	12	12	10	3	3	2

Dm⁷ G⁷ C^{maj7} Dm⁷ G⁷ C^{maj7}



	8	7	7	10	10	8
T	8	6	5	10	10	8
A	7	7	5	10	10	9
B	7	7	5	10	9	9

4 Chord Licks

Here are 4 chord licks to learn over the major ii V I, and then add them to your comping, chord soloing, and chord melody playing.

The first line is an Ed Bickert style line that uses syncopation and different chord colors to create interest over the progression.

Audio Example 4

Dm⁷ **G⁷** **Cmaj⁷**

Dm7 Dm9 Dm7 G7 G13 G9 Cmaj7 C6/9

	13	12	10	7	12	10	7	10	8
T	13	10	10	6	10	8		10	8
A	14	10	10	7	10	9		9	7
B	12	10	10	5	9	10		9	7

This is a busier Joe Pass inspired line that uses a number of chord colors over the written shapes.

If these chords are new to you, write them out on a separate sheet of paper to start building your chord dictionary.

As you learn new shapes that you like, add them to your chord dictionary until you build a solid vocabulary of colorful chords.

Audio Example 5

Dm⁷ **G⁷** **Cmaj⁷**

Dm7 Dm11 Dm9 Ab9 G9 G13 G7sus G13 G7b13 Cmaj7

	6	8	5	8	12	11	10	12	13	15	12	11	8
T	6		6		10	11	10		13		10	10	8
A	5		5		10	11	10		12		10	10	9
B	7		5		10	10	9		12		9	9	9

Here, you use three-note chords, no roots, to outline the changes.

Often fast-moving chords are easier to outline with smaller shapes, such as these.

Working up a few chord lines that use smaller shapes prepares you to apply them to fast-moving chords or tunes played at fast tempos.

Audio Example 6

Audio Example 6 shows a sequence of three-note chords in D minor. The notation includes a treble clef staff with chord symbols Dm^7 , G^7 , and $Cmaj^7$ above it. Below the staff, the underlying chords are identified as $Dm11$, $G7alt$, $B6/9$, and $C6/9$. A guitar fretboard diagram below shows the fingerings for the top three strings (T, A, B) for each chord: $Dm11$ (6, 5, 5), $G7alt$ (9, 8, 8), $B6/9$ (7, 6, 6), and $C6/9$ (8, 7, 7).

These three-note chords bring some color to the underlying changes.

Don't forget to take this, and other, chord line to other keys in your practice routine.

Audio Example 7

Audio Example 7 shows a sequence of three-note chords in D minor. The notation includes a treble clef staff with chord symbols Dm^7 , G^7 , and $Cmaj^7$ above it. Below the staff, the underlying chords are identified as $Dm7$, $Dm6$, $G9sus$, $G9$, and $Cmaj7$. A guitar fretboard diagram below shows the fingerings for the top three strings (T, A, B) for each chord: $Dm7$ (5, 6, 5), $Dm6$ (7, 8, 7), $G9sus$ (8, 10, 10), $G9$ (7, 10, 10), and $Cmaj7$ (7, 8, 9).

Arpeggio Exercises

You now work on soloing over the major ii V I progression, beginning with arpeggios.

Here are four positions of one-octave arpeggios over those changes.

Each of these positions is written up, down, and alternating to demonstrate those variations over these changes.

These variations won't be written out again in the eBook, or else the book would be 500-pages long.

So, study these variations, and as you move on to other progressions, always work arpeggios and scales up, down, and alternating.

This teaches you the shapes, as well as gets you away from always starting on the root when soloing with arpeggios.

Audio Example 8

Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷ Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷

The first variation shows a treble clef staff with eighth-note arpeggios for the progression *Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷ Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷*. The guitar fretboard diagram below shows fingerings for the T, A, and B strings. For *Dm⁷*, the T string has notes 10 and 13, and the B string has notes 12 and 10. For *G⁷*, the T string has notes 9 and 12, and the B string has notes 10 and 12. For *Cmaj⁷*, the T string has notes 5, 4, 7, and 6, and the B string has notes 5, 5, 8, and 7.

Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷ Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷

The second variation shows a treble clef staff with eighth-note arpeggios for the progression *Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷ Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷*. The guitar fretboard diagram below shows fingerings for the T, A, and B strings. For *Dm⁷*, the T string has notes 13 and 14, and the B string has notes 12 and 15. For *G⁷*, the T string has notes 9 and 12, and the B string has notes 10 and 12. For *Cmaj⁷*, the T string has notes 5, 8, 3, and 6, and the B string has notes 5, 5, 3, and 7.

Here are the descending versions of the arpeggios to study.

Audio Example 9

The first example shows descending arpeggios for Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7. The treble clef staff contains the notes: Dm7 (D, F, A, C), G7 (G, B, D, F), Cmaj7 (C, E, G, B). The guitar fretboard diagram shows fingerings: Dm7 (10, 12, 13, 10), G7 (10, 12, 9, 10), Cmaj7 (12, 12, 9, 10). The second example shows descending arpeggios for Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7. The treble clef staff contains the notes: Dm7 (D, F, A, C), G7 (G, B, D, F), Cmaj7 (C, E, G, B). The guitar fretboard diagram shows fingerings: Dm7 (13, 14, 15, 12), G7 (12, 12, 9, 10), Cmaj7 (8, 5, 6, 6, 3, 4, 5).

Here are the alternating versions of the arpeggios to explore.

Audio Example 10

The image shows two musical examples of two-octave arpeggios for Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7 chords. Each example consists of a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar tablature staff with fret numbers.

Example 1:

- Dm7:** Treble clef notes: D4, F4, A4, Bb4. Tab: 10-13, 12, 10, 12-9, 10.
- G7:** Treble clef notes: G4, Bb4, D5, F5. Tab: 9-12, 12, 10, 12-9, 10.
- Cmaj7:** Treble clef notes: C4, E4, G4, Bb4. Tab: 5-8, 7, 5, 6, 7-4, 5, 5, 8, 7.

Example 2:

- Dm7:** Treble clef notes: D4, F4, A4, Bb4. Tab: 12-15, 14, 13, 15, 12, 12.
- G7:** Treble clef notes: G4, Bb4, D5, F5. Tab: 10, 9-12, 12, 7, 6, 5, 8, 6-3, 4, 5.
- Cmaj7:** Treble clef notes: C4, E4, G4, Bb4. Tab: 5, 5, 3-7.

Here are the two-octave arpeggios for each chord in a major ii V I.

Once you can play them from memory up, work them down, and alternating to get the most out of these shapes.

And, don't forget to solo with these shapes over the backing track to add them to your improvisations.

Audio Example 11

The first example shows a melody in the treble clef over three measures: Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7. The fretboard diagram below shows fingerings for the treble clef notes: 10-13, 12, 10-12, 10, 10-13, 12, 10-13, 8, 7-10, 10, 9, 8, 7.

The second example shows a melody in the treble clef over four measures: Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, and Cmaj7. The fretboard diagram below shows fingerings for the treble clef notes: 5-8, 7, 5-7, 6, 5-8, 3, 2-5, 3-5, 4, 3-6, 3, 2-5, 4, 5, 5, 3-7.

Scale Exercises

Because you can outline all three chords in a major ii V I with the major scale, you'll challenge yourself with new scales in this section.

For each chord in the progression, you use the related bebop scale, minor bebop, dominant bebop, and major bebop.

These bebop scales are built by adding one chromatic note to a major mode, like so.

- Minor Bebop = Dorian with added 7
- Dominant Bebop = Mixolydian with added 7
- Major Bebop = Major with added b6

Here are four positions of playing the arpeggio up and scale down for each chord in the major ii V I progression.

For each one you play up the 1357 arpeggio and down the bebop scale for each chord.

After you can play these exercises, take them to other progressions in this eBook if you want that extra challenge.

You don't have to work arpeggios and scales together like this, but it does challenge your fretboard knowledge and technique on the guitar.

Audio Example 13

Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷

Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷

4 Single Note Licks

To help you take these technical items to a musical situation, here are four major ii V I licks to learn and add to your solos.

The first lick is a bebop line that mixes arpeggios, scales and chromatic notes to build a slippery sounding phrase over the chords.

Audio Example 14

Audio Example 14 shows a four-bar lick over the chords Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The lick consists of a sequence of notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. The notes are grouped into four measures: the first measure is a triplet of D4, E4, and F#4; the second measure is a quarter note G4 followed by an eighth note A4 and a quarter note B4; the third measure is a quarter note C5 followed by an eighth note B4 and a quarter note A4; the fourth measure is a quarter note G4 followed by an eighth note F#4 and a quarter note E4. The guitar tablature below the staff shows the fret positions for each note: Measure 1: 11-12 (D), 10 (E), 10-13-10-11-12 (F# triplet); Measure 2: 10 (G), 12-11-10-8 (A, B); Measure 3: 9 (C), 9-12-10 (B, A); Measure 4: 10 (G), 13-12-10-9 (F#, E).

In this line, you mix scales, arpeggios, and passing notes to create a four-bar major ii V I phrase.

Audio Example 15

Audio Example 15 shows a four-bar lick over the chords Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The lick consists of a sequence of notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. The notes are grouped into four measures: the first measure is a quarter note D4, an eighth note E4, a quarter note F#4, an eighth note G4, and a quarter note A4; the second measure is a quarter note B4, an eighth note C5, a quarter note B4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note G4; the third measure is a quarter note F#4, an eighth note E4, a quarter note D4, an eighth note C5, and a quarter note B4; the fourth measure is a quarter note A4, an eighth note G4, a quarter note F#4, an eighth note E4, and a quarter note D4. The guitar tablature below the staff shows the fret positions for each note: Measure 1: 7-6-5 (D, E), 7-5-7 (F#, G); Measure 2: 5 (A), 8-7-6 (B, C), 4-7-6 (B, A); Measure 3: 5 (G), 8-7-4-5 (F#, E), 5 (D); Measure 4: 5 (A), 8-9-8 (B, C).

Here's a lick that alternates an arpeggio up and scale down over the ii V that resolves to the 3rd of Cmaj7.

Playing the arpeggio up and scale down is a common bebop exercise, so work this concept in other positions to take it further in your playing.

Audio Example 16

The musical notation for Audio Example 16 consists of a treble clef staff and a guitar fretboard diagram. The treble staff shows a lick over three chords: Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7. The lick starts with an ascending arpeggio for Dm7 (D-F-A-C), followed by a descending scale for G7 (G-A-B-A-G), and ends with a half note C for Cmaj7. The guitar fretboard diagram shows the following fingerings: Dm7 (5-8-7-5-4), G7 (7-5-8), and Cmaj7 (7).

The last lick uses alternating arpeggios, this time starting with descending, to outline the changes.

After you can play this lick, experiment with the rhythms to create variations that you can use in your solos.

Audio Example 17

The musical notation for Audio Example 17 consists of a treble clef staff and a guitar fretboard diagram. The treble staff shows a lick over three chords: Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7. The lick starts with a descending arpeggio for Dm7 (D-A-F-C), followed by an ascending scale for G7 (G-A-B-A-G), and ends with a half note C for Cmaj7. The guitar fretboard diagram shows the following fingerings: Dm7 (5-6-7-5-4), G7 (7-6-5), and Cmaj7 (8).