

## **Music Improvisation within a Tonal Context with iReal Pro Accompaniment**

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**Abstract:** The art of improvisation is a field that is continuously explored in music education. The purpose of this paper is twofold: a) the application of musical theoretical knowledge based on recent survey on improvisations over melodies that are based on fixed harmonic progressions, and b) to demonstrate how non-free improvisation may be applied both in the private teacher studio and the music classroom.

**Keywords:** improvisation over melodies, theoretical knowledge, inhibition and difficulties

One of the standard goals in music education is "improvising melodies, variations and accompaniments"(Music Educators National Conference. 1994). Several music education approaches use improvisation as part of their teaching methodologies such as the approaches of Emil Jaques-Dalcroze and Carl Orff (Choksy 1986) while others are specifically oriented towards improvisation such as seen in jazz improvisation studies. Apart from these approaches, improvisation is a field that is continuously being advanced in general music education. In order to enhance musical improvisation ability, various musical exercises are adopted ranging from structured to free improvisational exercises as can be seen in books such as "Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians" (Agrell 2008) and "Free to be Musical: Group improvisation in Music" (Higgins and Campbell 2010). The range of improvisational exercises reflect the spectrum of improvisational behaviors which Campbell points out "is wide ranging, from those experiences that are highly structured and restricted to particular musical specifications to those with little structure and few restrictions to shape the performance" Campbell (2009 p. 124).

Contrary to free improvisation which has little predefined structure or musical restrictions, improvising melodic phrases that are based on fixed harmonic progressions require the application of musical theoretical knowledge. The lack of such knowledge may lead to what may be referred to as "musical mistakes" i.e. notes that conflict with the underlying harmonic progression. Understanding these mistakes and rectifying them during improvisation practice leads to a better understanding of the musical elements. Indeed, according to Sarath, music theory may be learned through improvisation as expressed in his book "Music Theory through Improvisation: A New Approach to musicianship training" (Sarath 2013). Campbell also concurs claiming that "more than

any other experience, improvisation as an instructional technique allows music students to receive a holistic musical training in which music theory, ear training, and performance can be woven together in an information-rich context" (Campbell 2009, 119-142).

One of the musical aids that are commonly used mainly amongst jazz students while practicing improvisation are musical accompaniments to exercises and songs that were originally recorded on LPs (nowadays on CDs) and usually performed by a rhythm section which include piano, bass and drums. These type of recordings were as Witmer and Robbins described "anticipated by the 'Acompa Records' of the late 1930's (with orchestral accompaniment), the 'Jam at home' records (with rhythm section accompaniment) of the late 1940's and the 'Music Minus One' series , which began in the 1950's" (Witmer and Robbins 1988, p.12). Of this type of accompaniment records, the ones that have become immensely popular amongst jazz students are the Jamey Aebersold play-along series (Prouty 2006, p.324). These recordings, which were first introduced in 1967, accompany a total of 133 of the "Jamey Aebersold Jazz" book and cd series (Aebersold, n.d.). This series includes according to Ake "renditions of standard songs, typical jazz chord progressions, and canonic jazz compositions" (Ake 2002, p.122). The benefits of these type of recordings have been criticized by some in that they "lead to a sense of stagnation, limiting the opportunities for real interaction with other musicians" (Prouty 2006, p.328). However, as a means of learning to improvise, especially for the beginning improviser who has not yet had a chance to improvise with others, these recordings provide a musical accompaniment that may create both a fun way of practicing as well as a didactic means for developing harmonic awareness while improvising.

Today such accompaniments are available in various applications such as the iReal Pro (Biolcati 2008) which simulates a real sounding rhythm section. This application includes hundreds of song charts as well as the ability to create chord progressions. The benefits of such an application compared with the original recorded accompaniment is that it includes a feature that enables the user to transpose the accompaniment to any key, to choose the metronome speed of the accompaniment and to choose the musical style in which it will be played (styles include three prototypes: Jazz, Latin, Pop, all of which have several different styles). Another feature of the program is that the user may export the backing track as a wave or midi file. This feature is particularly helpful for teachers who teach students that do not have this application.

Musical improvisation is seen in the natural behavior of children, however inhibitions towards improvising grow as they get older. According to Campbell "prior to schooling and in spite of schooling, children are playfully musical in ways that are

undeniably improvisatory" (Campbell 2009, 119-142) whereas inhibitions towards improvisation begin at the onset of adolescence. Inhibitions towards improvisation are also displayed by classically trained musicians who have had no experience or training in improvisation. This is partly due to the dissonance between their high level of classical musical ability and what they perceive as their inferior improvisational ability. Agrell aptly describes the feelings of the classically trained musician when trying to improvise a melody: "At first we are scared because we are used to performing at a high level, and we can't create at the same level we have learned to re-create. It takes courage to begin, to dare, and patience to learn" Agrell (2008 p.29).

Despite the abundance of literature that exists today regarding jazz improvisation (see for example Witmer and Robbins 1988, 7-29) as well as general improvisation books such as those mentioned by Agrell (2008) and Higgins and Campbell (2010), there is a need for learning more about how to teach improvisation as has been expressed in a recent survey of music education majors (Bernhard and Stringham 2016, 383-390). Also from personal conversations with private studio teachers who teach mainly via notated music, it is apparent that they too lack a method for teaching their students basic elements of improvisation.

The purpose of this paper, is to present a methodological approach to melodic improvisation. This approach is built around a number of musical improvisation exercises. The word "exercise" in the context of improvisation may at first seem contrary to the concept of improvisation. Agrell (2008) prefers using the word "games" instead of drills or exercises. As he points out "using the term 'games' helps lighten up and lets creativity and imagination flow, instead of blocking it by fear of mistakes" (Agrell 2008). On the other hand, when trying to learn a specific concept of improvisation it is important to focus on that particular element. Crook has described this as the Target Approach. As he explains, "It should be strongly emphasized that the target method is more appropriate for practicing improvisation than for performing" (Crook 1991).

The melodic improvisation approach begins with playing the C major scale in a given four-bar rhythmic pattern. This rhythmic pattern is then applied to improvised four-bar phrases in the key of C major that are performed to the accompaniment of the iReal Pro application (as are the rest of the exercises). The same exercise is then applied to the Db Major scale followed by an improvisation exercise that alternates between two four-bar improvisations in C major and two four-bar improvisations in Db major. To this exercise a pick-up rhythm is added so that in the bar preceding the scale change the pick-up is performed in one scale and immediately resolved in the next bar to the second scale. The last improvisation exercise addresses the three minor scale possibilities (natural

minor, harmonic minor and melodic minor) of the C minor scale. The last issue discussed the improvisation over harmonic progressions

The exercises that are presented are applied to two melodic pieces while addressing the issue of melodic and harmonic interaction. The first of these pieces is the jazz standard "Blue Bossa" by Kenny Dorham (Sher 1988). This piece was chosen for three reasons: a) the piece is performed in a bossa nova style which means that the rhythmic values of the eighth notes are equal to one another as is the case in classical music (this is unlike swing style jazz pieces where the eighth notes are unequal and the eighth note that falls on the beat is longer than the eighth note that falls on the offbeat), b) the piece is 16 bars long and is composed of four musical phrases which are four bars in length. Therefore four-bar improvisation phrases that were practiced during the initial phase may be easily applied to the composition, and c) the piece includes two keys that alternate between two phrases in the key of C minor, one phrase in the key of Db major and then a phrase that is in C minor again. These keys that were already practiced in the preceding four-bar improvisation exercises may now be easily applied to the current tune. The second piece is the classical Minuet in G from the Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach (Bach 2001). This piece which is considered very popular for beginning students and was chosen to exemplify how these exercises may be applied already at the beginning stages of learning classical music.

### **The practice of scales**

The classical procedure of practicing major and minor scales is usually done by playing the scale up and down in constant rhythmic values such as quarter notes, eighth notes, triplets or sixteenth notes<sup>1</sup>. This prevalent practice develops both the knowledge of the scale, the ability to perform in different rhythms, and dexterity of the fingers. However, another possible way of playing the scale could be as a musical phrase which is four bars in length. Performing the scale in such a manner develops and strengthens the sense of a four-bar musical phrase which is one of the basic elements of Western music. Fig. 1 and fig. 2 present a rhythmic possibility for playing an ascending or descending C major scale so that a four-bar musical phrase is formed (the rest in bar 4 is considered as part of the musical phrase). The origin of the rhythmic pattern is from a melodic phrase presented in the book "Learn to Improvise Jazz: Major & Minor in Every Key" (Aebersold 1981). The choice of this particular rhythmic pattern is due to the fact that it consists of eight notes and therefore is convenient in terms of playing all the eight notes of the scale.

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously, there are other ways of practicing scales and many etude books confirm this, however they are almost always performed in a constant rhythmic value.



Fig. 1: Ascending C major scale as a four-bar musical phrase.



Fig. 2: Descending C major scale as a four-bar musical phrase.

A possible chord progression accompaniment that may be used with the scale exercises presented in figs 1 & 2 includes the diatonic seventh chords of the first, second and fifth degree of the scale as presented in fig. 3.

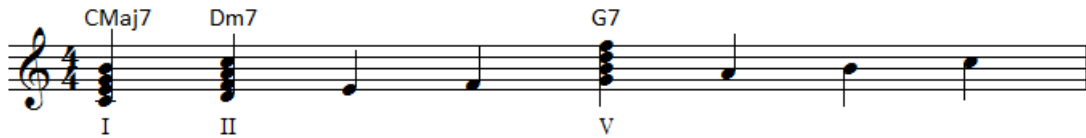


Fig. 3: Diatonic seventh chords of the I, II, and V degrees of the C major scale

The chord progression accompaniment of the four-bar phrase using these chords could be: | I | II V | I | I | or if the exercise is repeated a number of times the progression could end with a II – V pattern so as to lead to the beginning of the next phrase in the following manner: ||: I | II V | I | II V :||

### Improvisation over a fixed rhythmic pattern

After performing the scale according to the rhythmic pattern in an ascending and descending fashion (fig. 1 & 2), the next step would be to "improvise" using only the notes of the scale in adherence to the rhythmic pattern presented. The quotation marks that are added around the word "improvise" are to stress the limited amount of improvisation that is actually required. In reality since the rhythmic pattern is already given and the notes are limited to the seven different notes of the scale, the only element that is improvised is the choice and order of the notes to be played. Fig 4 presents a melodic improvisational possibility that adheres to these rules<sup>2</sup>.



Fig. 4: Melodic improvisational possibility in the key of C major.

<sup>2</sup> This is the original musical phrase that is presented by Aebersold (1981).

## **Overcoming improvising difficulties**

Although this exercise may seem quite simple for some, for others the transfer of playing an ascending or descending scale in the rhythmic pattern to improvising using some or all notes of the scale in the same rhythmic pattern may be somewhat harder and would therefore require breaking down the exercise into a number of smaller exercises. The first exercise would be to continue playing the ascending or descending scale but instead of ending on the tonic to change the last note so that another note of the scale ends the phrase. This may be followed by changing the last two notes and so forth. This process by which the number of notes that the student can "improvise" (i.e. replace with notes of his choice) is initially limited and gradually enlarged, allows for the student to focus on one or two notes at a time while the other notes are constant. Gradually the number of notes in the phrase which may be changed according to the student's choice is extended thereby leading to a complete improvised phrase.

Another problem that may be encountered while teaching improvisation is the negative self-judgment of students regarding their improvisation. This may be particularly true of the older students and especially of the classically trained musicians who, as mentioned before, may experience a high level of frustration due to the dissonance between their classical musical ability and what they perceive as their inferior improvisational ability. To these students it is necessary to explain the fact that performing from a written score and improvising are two different skills and each has to be learned and acquired. What I find is that within a relatively short time after the classically trained musicians overcome their negative self-judgment, their improvisations begin to reflect their high musical ability that was developed during years of classical playing.

The final issue that should be addressed is the spontaneous reaction of stopping an improvisation due to an "error". These spontaneous reactions exist also in classical performance however in improvisation one of the basic skills that should be learned is accepting and incorporating the "error" into the music without stopping the flow of the musical improvisation. The reason therefore that I choose to place "error" in quotation marks reflects the idea that in reality a musical error can be viewed also as a source for a new musical idea that would not have occurred if not for the error itself. The improvisation exercise therefore is well fitted to start acquiring this type of skill.

## **Common errors**

Common errors that occur while improvising on the notes of the scale in the required rhythmic pattern include note errors, rhythmic errors, and inappropriate positioning of correct notes. Note errors usually occur due to lack of confidence in the notes of the

scale. A possible way of solving this problem is performing the ascending scale or descending scale between every improvised phrase thus helping the student recall the notes of the scale after every improvised phrase.

Rhythmic errors during improvisation may be corrected in the same manner. It should be noted however that at times rhythmic errors or to be more precise rhythmic variations occur sometimes due to an advanced musical sense. These types of musical variations usually occur after performing an improvisation in the correct rhythmic pattern yet hearing it as an antecedent phrase. Those who are musically advanced will almost automatically answer their first phrase with a consequent phrase which will include a rhythmic variation of the prescribed rhythmic pattern. In this case the musical task may be changed so that the student alternates between a musical improvisation based on the prescribed rhythmic pattern and a rhythmic pattern that varies according to the student's preference.

The last type of error is more musical in nature for although the student may improvise while abiding by the set rules (notes of the scale in the prescribed rhythmic pattern), some improvisations will sound better than others. The most pronounced musical "error" that may occur when improvising on the current rhythmic pattern is the performance of the 4<sup>th</sup> note of the scale as either the first or final note of the phrase. This creates a dissonance with the accompanying first degree chord. Not all students will be aware of the dissonance and even for those who are aware that a dissonance occurs, it may take time for them to realize that they should avoid beginning or ending on the 4<sup>th</sup> note. One of the ways of solving this problem and allowing the students to realize the different qualities of each of the scale notes is to request that while improvising they begin each phrase with a different note of the scale. This can be done in a sequential manner so that each phrase begins with the next note of the scale. In this manner the student begins to hear the different qualities each note has when it is used at the beginning of the scale. This type of exercise may be applied also to the last note of the phrase. The idea behind this solution is that the learning process is guided by the ear and not by theoretical explanations.

### **Musical "fixations"**

Musical "fixations" may be defined as a sort of repeated musical habit that appears during improvisation. This usually occurs during the first attempts in these particular improvisational exercises. These "fixations" may include: a) beginning or ending the improvisations on one or two specific notes, b) improvising within a limited range usually within an octave and finally, c) limited use of intervallic movement during the

improvisation as opposed to scalar movement. All of these musical "fixations" can be easily overcome by first making the students aware of them. After being made aware, specific guidelines may be made such as requiring the student a) to begin or end on a note that has not been used, b) apply some intervallic motion, or c) extend the phrase beyond one octave.

### **Transposing a melodic phrase**

As mentioned before the scalar and improvisational exercises that were shown may be applied to any scale. Performing a different scale in the required rhythmic pattern is in a sense an act of simple musical transposition. However transposing a given musical phrase such as the one in fig. 4, to the scale of Db (fig 5) without notating it beforehand is more challenging and helps the player to develop the skill of transposing musical phrases on his instrument.



Fig. 5: Melodic improvisation transposed to the key of Db

It is helpful to analyze the phrase before transposing it. For example the current phrase begins on the second note of the scale and within the first bar descends in diatonic thirds. This simple musical analysis gives the student a starting point for transposing which may be continued either by analyzing the rest of the phrase or by playing and using the ear to complete the transposition.

### **Improvising on two scales**

After improvising on several different scales the next step combines two scales in such a manner that 8 bars are performed in one scale and 8 bars in the next. This is repeated a number of times consecutively. For example 8 bars in C major scale followed by 8 bars in Db scale would total 16 bars in all and these bars may be repeated for a number of times. Since the melodic/rhythmic phrase that was learned is four bars in length, the student will actually be performing two phrases in one scale before moving to the next scale to perform two phrases. This is repeated a number of times according to the number of repeats programmed in the iReal Pro accompaniment. The exercise may begin by playing an ascending and descending scale in the prescribed rhythmic pattern in each key as seen in fig.6 followed by playing the melodic phrase twice in each key as shown in fig 7. Following these preliminary exercises the student improvises in the same fashion that



was explained earlier however this time improvising two phrases on each scale moving back and forth from one to the other.



Fig. 6: Ascending and descending scale in C and Db major



Fig. 7: Melodic phrase in C and Db major

### **Adding a pickup to the phrase**

A noticeable feature of the previous exercise is that there is a whole bar at the end of the phrase which allows for the student enough time to prepare for the next scale. An inclusion of three eighth notes at the end of the phrase as seen in fig. 8 produces a pickup to the next performed phrase.



Fig 8: The rhythmic phrase with a three eighth note figure added to the last bar.

This change is not so demanding when performing in one key however when performing in two keys the musical outcome is such that the pickup is played in one key and resolved in the following key as may be seen in fig. 9 (bars 8-9.).



Fig. 9: Melodic phrase with the added eighth note figure

## Minor keys

All the exercises may be performed in minor keys however it should be noted that the diatonic seventh chords of the harmonic accompaniment to a minor scale includes a minor 7 chord for the first degree and a half diminished chord on the second degree as seen in fig. 10.

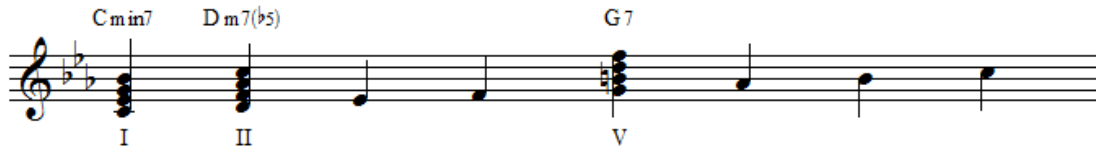


Fig.10: Diatonic seventh chords of the I, II, and V degrees of the C minor scale

Since there are three types of ascending minor keys (natural, harmonic, melodic), there are also three possible ways to play the ascending scale in the rhythmic pattern. An Ascending natural minor (Fig. 11), a harmonic minor (fig. 12) or a melodic minor (fig. 13).



Fig. 11: Ascending natural minor



Fig. 12: Ascending harmonic minor



Fig. 13: Ascending melodic minor

All these variations may be applied when improvising on the minor scale. For example, the melodic/ rhythmic phrase that was performed in the major key (with the three added eighth notes at the end of the phrase: fig 9) may be performed either in the natural minor scale (fig 14) or in the harmonic minor so as stress the B natural that coincides with the major third of the G7 chord (fig 15)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that a G7(#9) occurs when playing the Bb of the natural minor together with the B natural of the G7 chord.



Fig. 14: Melodic/ rhythmic phrase in the natural minor key



Fig. 15: Melodic/ rhythmic phrase adjusting to the harmonic minor when playing on the V chord.

### Improvising over a harmonic progression

After improvising within a scale while responding intuitively to the underlying harmony, exercises relating specifically to harmonic progressions may be introduced. For example one popular harmonic progression based on the first, second and fifth degree is the progression II – V – I – I. The improvisational exercises may be more specific regarding note choices. For example the student should start each improvisational phrase with a specific note of the chord (for example the root). This could be followed with ending the phrase on a specific note of the chord. These exercises can later be followed by allowing the student to choose beforehand which note of the chord the phrase will start or end and finally the choices will be made randomly during the improvisation itself. Further exercises may include playing an improvisation on a rhythmic pattern only on notes of the chords. A popular exercise used among jazz students is to arpeggiate the notes of the chord in eighth notes. For example, fig. 16 shows the arpeggiated chords of a II-V-I-I progression in C minor performed in eighth notes upwards. This type of exercise assists in strengthening both the cognitive memory as well as the motor memory of the chord tones.



Fig. 16: Notes of the chord performed in eighth notes upwards.

### Application of exercises to the harmonic progressions of Blue Bossa

The above exercises may be applied to tunes that are composed in four-bar phrases and have diatonic harmonic progressions. Blue Bossa is a 16 bar tune that is written in C minor and includes a 4 bar progression in Db major. The harmonic progression that

accompanies the C minor part of the tune includes the diatonic seventh chords of degrees I, II, IV and V of the scale (fig. 17).<sup>4</sup>

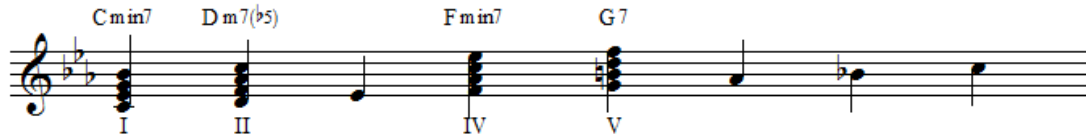


Fig. 17: Diatonic seventh chords of degrees I, II, IV, and V in C minor scale

The harmonic progression that accompanies the Db major part of the tune includes the diatonic seventh chords of degrees I, II and V (fig. 18).



Fig. 18: Diatonic seventh chords of degrees I, II, and V in Db major scale.

The harmonic progression of the tune is presented both in chords and scale degrees in Fig. 18. As can be seen the first eight bars are in C minor, the following four bars are in Db major and the last four bars are again in C minor. After understanding that the harmonic progressions of the tune are diatonic chords of two scales the improvisation exercises that were done previously may be applied in such a manner that two phrases are improvised in the key of C minor, one phrase in the key of Db Major and finally one phrase in C minor.

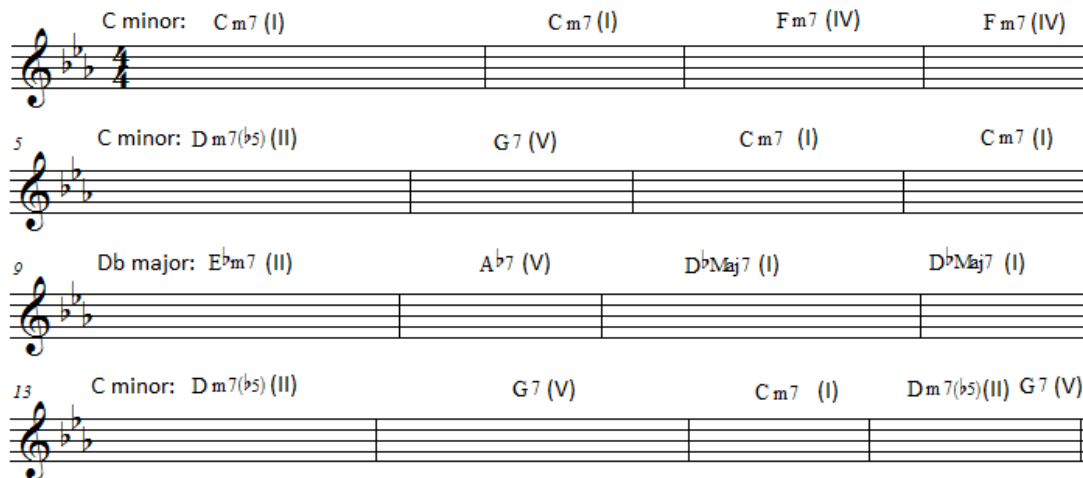


Fig. 19: Harmonic progression of Blue Bossa

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the I degree is originally a Cm6 chord.

The improvisations on Blue Bossa may be done on either the rhythmic pattern that was presented earlier or on the rhythmic pattern of the original melody (fig. 20). This first phrase of the melody is a descending C minor scale from the fifth note to the sixth note ending with an intervallic leap up to the fifth note resolving on the fourth note.

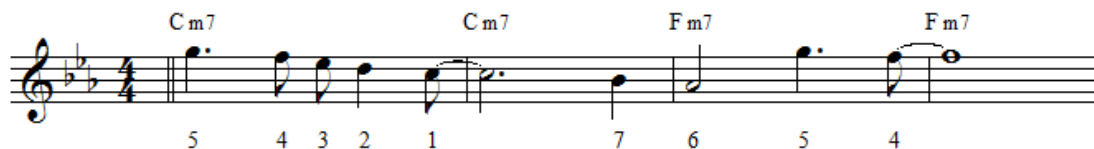


Fig.20: Melody of the first four bars with scale note numbers.

### Melodic and Harmonic Interaction

An emphasis should be made regarding the importance of the chord tones in the inherent structure of the melody and thereafter in the structure of the improvisation. As can be seen in fig.20 the notes at the beginning of each bar are notes of the chord. The melody begins on the fifth of the Cm7 chord and on the second bar begins on the root of the Cm7 chord. The third bar begins on the third of the Fm7 chord and the phrase ends in bar 4 on the root of the Fm7 chord. This interaction whereby the melody begins each bar with a relatively long chord tone continues almost throughout the tune with the exception of two bars (bars 11, 14) that begin with a non-chord tone yet resolve half a step down to a chord tone within the next beat as can be seen in the third bar of figure 21 (which is the 11<sup>th</sup> bar of the tune). Obviously this musical structure is the basis for diatonic music however its application to improvisation is of utmost importance if the improvisation is to convey not only the scalar structure of the melody (8 bars in C minor, 4 bars in D major, 4 bars in C minor) but also the harmonic progression that exists within the scale such as the II-V-I-I progression.

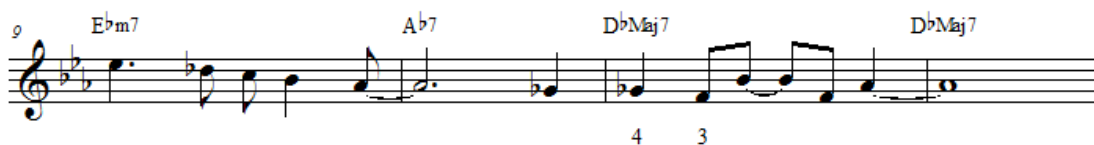


Fig 21: Bar 11 of the tune (bar 3 in the figure) begins on a non-chord tone and resolves to the third of the chord

The first step in building an improvisation that relates not only to the scale but to the harmonic progression requires harmonic analysis and understanding. It is also very helpful to memorize the chord progression of the tune. The memorization process is not as difficult as it may sound since the harmonic progression of the tune is highly repetitive. Apart from the first line of the tune which is a I – I –IV – IV progression, the

rest of the tune is a II – V – I – I progression in C minor, Db major and back to C minor.<sup>5</sup>Singing and playing the chord degrees along with the musical accompaniment of the iReal Pro application assists in this memorization process. Once the progression is memorized various exercises may be applied. For example arpeggiating the notes of the chord by memory as shown previously in figure 16. Another exercise consists of improvising according to the original rhythmic pattern yet beginning the improvisation with the notes of the chord in the first bar of the improvisation as exemplified in figure 22. As can be seen in this example each improvised phrase begins with the first three notes of the chord. Furthermore in this example the last note of each phrase ends on the note of the chord which appears on the third bar.



Fig. 22: Two phrases that begin the first bar with the notes of the chord.

### **Application to the harmonic progression of Minuet in G**

The improvisation exercises presented may be applied to easy classical pieces such as the Minuet in G from the Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach. The first part of this piece which is written in G major and is 16 bars long includes three diatonic degrees: the I and IV degrees which are triads, and the fifth degree which is a seventh chord (fig. 23).



Fig. 23: Diatonic degrees I, IV and V of G major scale

Being a classical piece these chords are not written in the tune and have to be inferred from analysis of the melody and accompaniment. As can be seen in fig 24 the harmonic progression is very simple.

<sup>5</sup> The last line bar of the tune may be played as a I instead of the II-V/

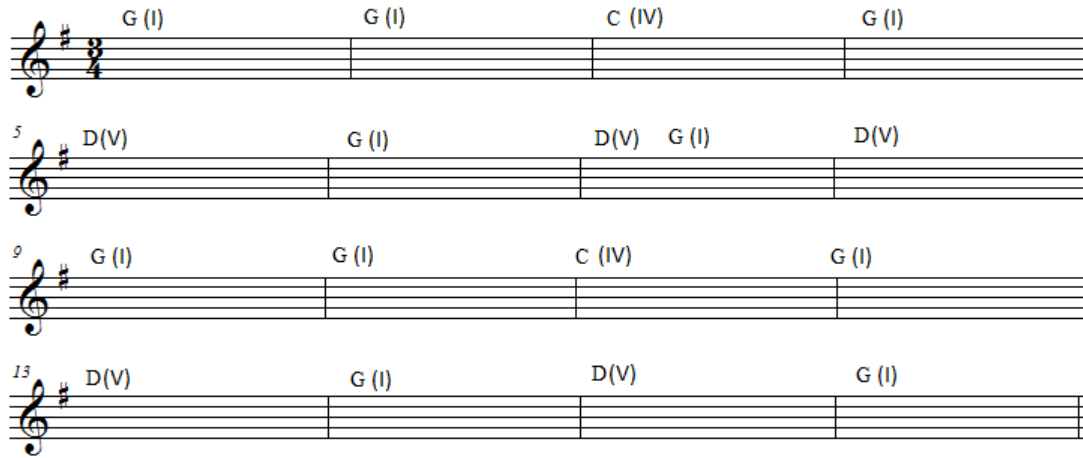


Fig. 24: Harmonic progression of Minuet in G

In essence the exercises that were presented previously may be applied to this minuet. Compared to the previous tune (Blue Bossa) this tune is easier since it remains in one scale. However due to the 3/4 time signature and the inclusion of two bar phrases in the pieces such as the phrases in bars 1-4 as well as four-bar phrases such as the one in bars 5-8 (fig 25), it is worth developing melodic and rhythmic exercises that fit the style of the piece.



Fig.25: The first 8 bars of the Minuet in G.

Like Blue Bossa, all musical phrases of the piece begin and end on notes of the chord. Therefore this should also be taken into account when creating specific exercises for this tune. For example a descending G major scale in the rhythmic pattern of the first two bar phrase results in a musical scale that coincides with the harmony of these bars (each bar begins with a note of the chord). Playing part of the same descending scale but from the 6<sup>th</sup> note of the scale (e) to the tonic in the next two bars achieves the same result (fig 26).



Fig. 26: A Descending G major scale performed in the rhythmic pattern of the tune.

After the harmonic progression has been learned then improvisation to the accompaniment of the iReal Pro may commence in a fashion that was presented earlier.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to present a methodological approach to melodic improvisation. The approach began with the playing of scales in a given four-bar rhythmic pattern. This rhythmic pattern was then applied to improvised four-bar phrases that were performed to the accompaniment of the iReal Pro application. These exercises were then applied to the harmonic progressions of the tunes Blue Bossa by Kenny Dorham and Minuet in G by Bach.

Teaching and learning improvisation in a tonal context may begin already at the first stages of instrumental study. The methodology presented here exemplifies how learning a scale can be used not only as an exercise of dexterity for the fingers but also as a source for improvising four-bar musical phrases. Furthermore, these same scale notes are also the musical source of the accompanying diatonic chords. Performing these improvisational exercises to musical accompaniment such as that available with the iReal Pro application has the added benefit of not only making the improvisational task fun, but also that of learning to hear the harmonic background. The iReal Pro application enables the user to program personal chord progressions as well as to fit the tempo to the player's musical ability and to change the style of accompaniment according to his preferences.

The application of these exercise to the tune Blue Bossa exemplified how improvising four-bar phrases according to the appropriate scale assists the player in keeping the form of the tune. Understanding the harmonic progression of the tune and gradually choosing notes of the scale that coincide with the notes of the chord is a more advanced task. This task may be preceded by arpeggiating notes of the chord as demonstrated. The application of the exercises to the Minuet in G was done to demonstrate that improvisation may be done also to classical pieces.

This paper was originally presented as a workshop. The attendants were mostly an international group of classically trained musicians who had not practiced any form of tonal improvisation. However, within the course of an hour a classically trained pianist who, according to his own words, had never improvised before was improvising over the tune Blue Bossa. The method presented here is a simplification of what is learned and



practiced in jazz education. However, this improvisation knowledge which is not specific only to jazz but is part of improvisation practice in many musical cultures as well as styles such as pop rock and traditional folk music, is not part of the performance practice of teachers and students in the classical field. This is articulated by Agrell when addressing musical training for improvisation: "I don't know about you, but no one ever asked me to create a melody on my horn – ever - at any time during my musical education, although I had to recreate melodies aplenty" (Agrell, 2008, p. 29). Hopefully the early exposure of music instrumentalists to improvisation and the incorporation of some of the exercises presented here, either in a private studio setting or in a class setting, may make the type of experience articulated by Agrell a rare one.

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