

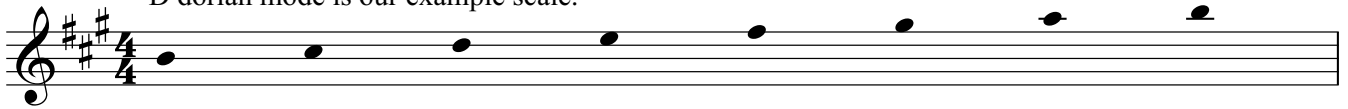
Basics of improvisation and developing ideas.

Alto Saxophone

Lachlan Davidson

1. Start with a scale. (Any group of notes.)

D dorian mode is our example scale.



2. Learn to play it fluently straight up and down in time with a metronome, (or just by yourself.)
(Up to the ninth note helps it fill 2 bars nicely.)



3. In crotchets, (1/4 notes) Play up and down, changing direction when you feel like it.
Get good at this and keep it in time. (Improvise your own piece after playing each of my examples.)
You might like to gradually increase your tempo but stick within the rules.
You'll get the chance to break out later.



4. Add some long notes and rests. These create phrases and musical sentences.
Have fun with how long and short your phrases are, and your rests or long notes.



Alto Saxophone

4. Can you add some leaps (skip a scale note)?

Yes you can, but not too many at once as you'll start to not-make-sense.

Do try to make sense.

Listen to where each note is leading you. Do you follow or not??

Initially you should play the things that occur to you first, and the most obvious, simple things.

You can get more clever later.

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5. What you played first can give you an idea for what to play next and later in your story,

..I mean improvisation. You can repeat a phrase, either exactly or with a bit of a variation at the end.

Don't necessarily repeat every bar or two bars. Hmmm...Interesting.

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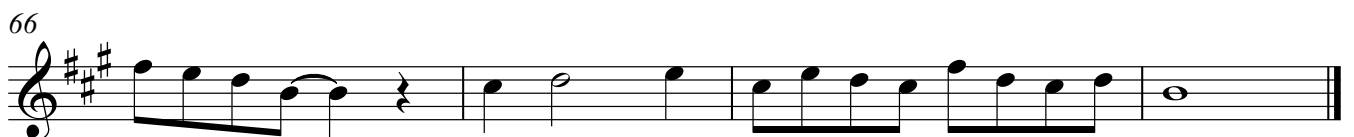
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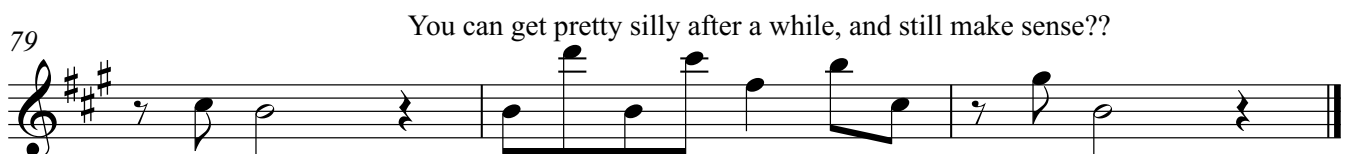
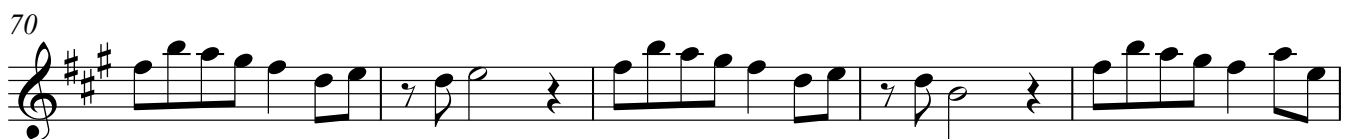
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6. You've probably already added some quavers by mistake. Well, now you have permission. Remember to keep part of your mind focussed on staying in time while the other part of your mind is deciding what to play, remembering some of the things you've done in the earlier exercises. What were they again?



7. By now the randomness factor has probably made your music sound very confusing. Here is a 2 bar rhythm which will allow your notes to be random but the rhythm must remain the same. A good trick is to just change one note each time you repeat the rhythm. (Make up your own rhythm.)



Alto Saxophone

8. Rhythmic variation. Now we concentrate on rhythm and leave the note choices aside for a while. Lets take a simple rhythm and see what we can do with it, bit by little bit.



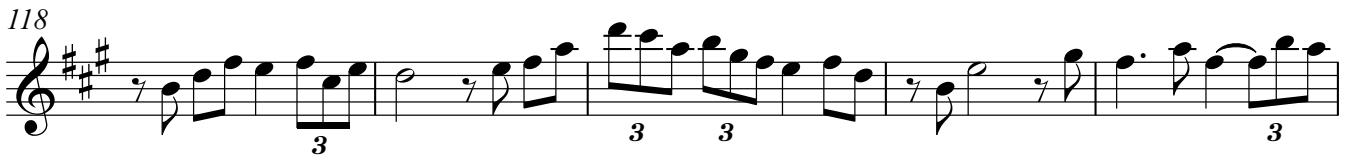
Now lets add a few extra notes plus some variation in the rhythm and notes.
I could do this forever. Things are freeing up.
Your choices get broader but look out for too much randomness.
Simplicity is strength.



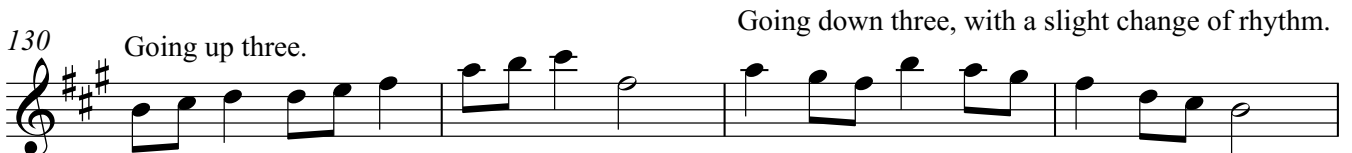
9. Accents. A brainteaser is to play the same phrase but move the accents around. Play each one two or three times so you really hear the difference it makes.



10. Add some triplets. I like them because they break the rhythm up, and give you a lot more syncopation possibilities. Don't feel too tied to the original theme. You're on an exploration.



11. Now lets look at some little shapes and then transpose them. It's a way to create a sequence.



11. A start on outlining chords. Very simply, put scale note between two chord notes every now and then. Play just chord notes the rest of the time. You can keep using some of the ideas from earlier exercises. In fact you'll get bored if you don't.

142 Bm⁷ E⁷ Bm⁷ E⁷ Bm⁷

147 E⁷ Bm⁷ E⁷ Bm⁷

151 E⁷ Bm⁷ E⁷

154 Bm⁷ E⁷ Bm⁷

Ah! A repeated note. Good idea.

12. Playing with themes. Lets take an idea and mess with it. We'll turn it upside down, back to front, stretch it up, alter it, transpose it, displace it, but not in that order. See if you can spot the method. Of course we could do two things at a time, but maybe later.

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13. Fitting themes to chords. Alto Saxophone

Using the method from 11. with some slight variations, but still using mostly chord notes we can adjust a theme to fit some different chords.
Of course you would add rhythmic and thematic variations in real life.
You also need to have some idea about chords to make best use of this method.

168 Bm7 E7 Amaj7 Dmaj7
172 C#m7 F#m7 Bm7 E7

14. Slow melody ornamentation and extrapolation. Big words but it simply means that if you have long notes in mind you can wander around them with little notes. Auxiliary notes and stuff like that.
This is a very useful method if you have a tricky chord progression.
You can focus on one note per chord and add your frills.

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187 Still lots of E's.

191 Variations on a melody.

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15. Cyclical line development.
Cycle 3 or 4 notes, changing one at a time. Careful, it's addictive.

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With a few variations. Can you work out what is going on?

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a random break-away.

Fitting the theory into chords.

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Bm7 E7 Amaj7 F#m7 Bm7 E7 Amaj7 F#m7

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A7 D7 E7 A7

16. To avoid getting too boring it's good to be able to start phrases at different points in the bar.

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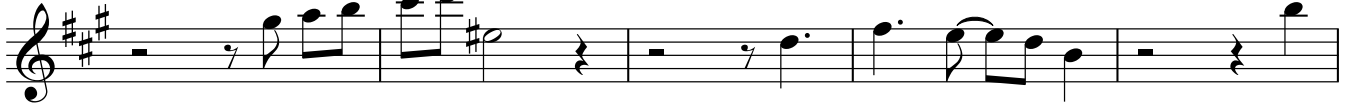
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