5 Coltrane Lines for So What

In this section you study five lines inspired by John Coltrane's solo on the original recording of So What.

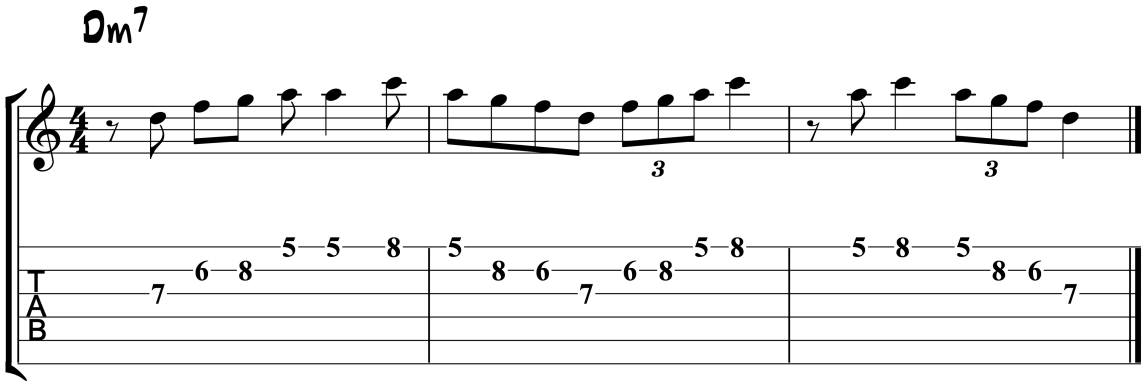
Work these lines over Dm7 and Ebm7 as you build your soloing vocabulary over So What in the woodshed.

The first line uses only notes from the Dm pentatonic scale, and runs up and down that sale in a repeated fashion.

Notice that even thought Trane plays similar ideas in each bar, the rhythms change to give those ideas variety.

Work this line in both Dm and Ebm so you can add it to both sections of So What in your solos.

Audio Example 34

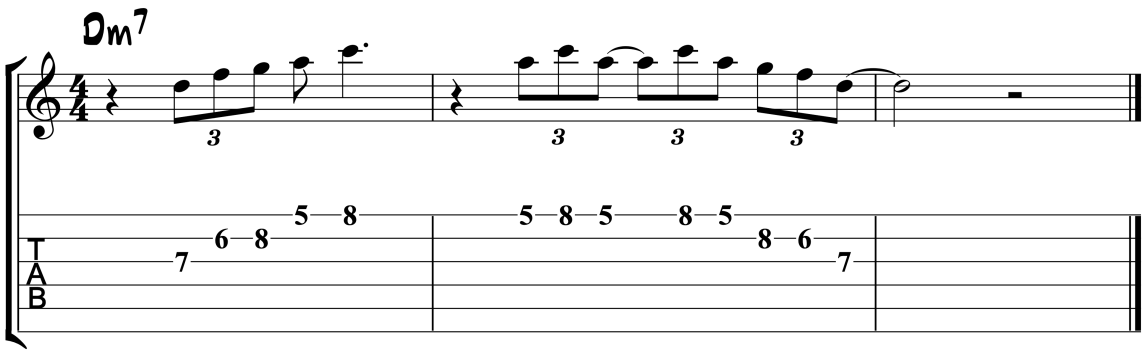


Here's a line built almost entirely of triplets, and all of the notes coming from the D minor pentatonic scale.

Triplets are a nice bridge rhythm between 8th notes, which can sound slow depending on the tempo, and the much faster 16th notes.

Make sure to count these triplets at 1-trip-let, 2-trip-let, to make sure you're nailing the rhythm of this line in your solos.

Audio Example 35



The next Coltrane line uses a Bb passing note in bar two, second note, and the melodic minor scale in bar 3, C#, of the line.

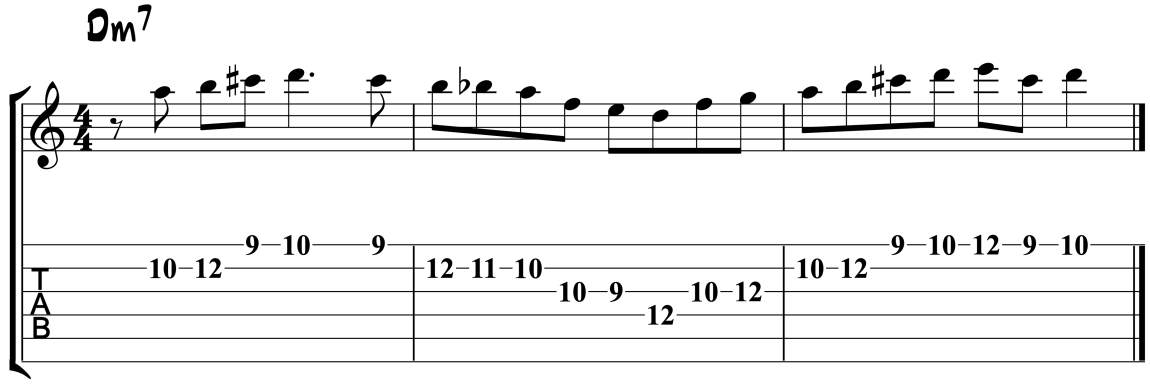
Mixing Dorian and melodic minor is something Coltrane does often in this solo, and it's something you can explore in your playing as well.

Lastly, if you like the sound of the passing note, add more passing notes to your lines over So What.

To do so, look for 1 fret open between any two scale-notes, then fill it in going up or down.

So, if you have C-D in the scale, you can play C-C#-D, or D-Db-C, to add a passing note to those diatonic notes.

Audio Example 36



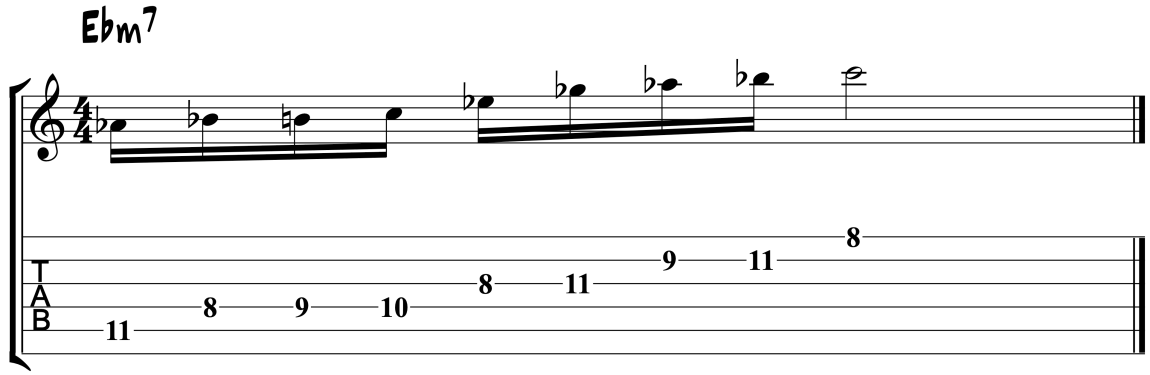
The next line is over Ebm7 and uses 16th notes, 4 notes per beat, which is a common Coltrane rhythm over So What.

To count 16th notes, you say “1 e & a, 2 e & a,” etc. over each beat.

The only non-scale note here is the B passing note on the 3rd 16th note of the first beat.

After you work this line over Ebm7, transpose it to Dm7 so that you can add this line to both chords in your solos.

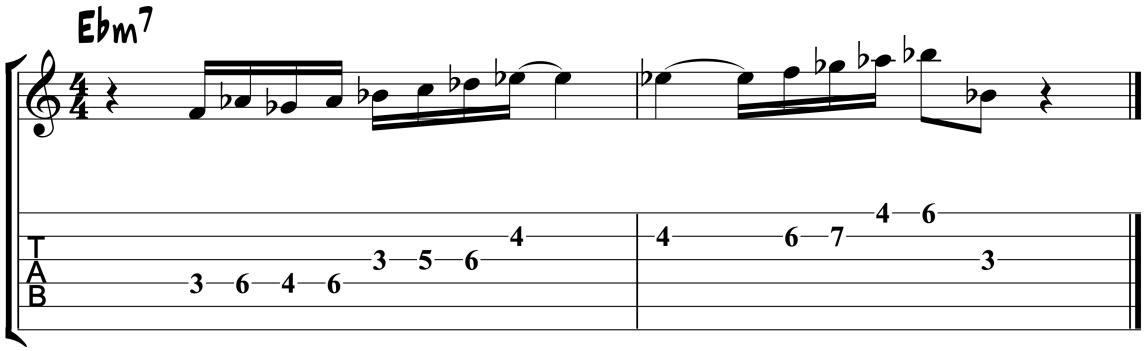
Audio Example 37



The last line also uses 16th notes in an ascending run that goes up the Eb Dorian mode slowly, before ending with 8th notes in bar 2.

Again, go slow, count along as much as needed, and when ready, add this line to your solos.

After you can play this line with confidence, practice soloing over the backing tracks with as many 16th notes as possible.

Then, over time, blend in 16th notes here and there to build energy and rhythmic interest in your solos over So What.

Audio Example 38