

Tritone Sub Licks

Now that you covered the basics with jazz licks, you can explore a more advanced concept, tritone subs.

Tritone subs are built by looking at the written 7th chord, such as G7, and playing a 7th chord a tritone away, in this case Db7.

The reason this sub works is that G7 and Db7, the original and tritone chords, share a 3rd and 7th.

The 3rd and 7th of G, B and F, are the 7th and 3rd of Db7, Cb(B) and F.

These two notes lock the original and subbed chord together, preventing your lines from sounding random with this concept.

As well, when choosing a scale to use over the tritone scale, use Lydian dominant.

This scale, built R 2 3 #4 5 6 b7, contains the root of the original chord.

For example, Db Lydian dominant has a G as the #4 of that scale, which links it further to the original chord change, G7.

Here's how that looks on paper for a comparison.

Audio Example 42

The musical notation for Audio Example 42 consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff shows a melodic line with notes G4, B4, D5, F#4, G4, F#4, E4, and D4. The bass staff shows a bass line with notes G3, B2, D3, F#2, G3, F#2, E3, and D3. The notation is divided into three measures. Above the treble staff, the first measure is labeled 'G7' and the second measure is labeled 'Db7'. Below the treble staff, the notes are labeled with their chord functions: R (Root), 3 (Third), b (Flat), b7 (Flat Seventh), b7 (Flat Seventh), b5 (Flat Fifth), 3 (Third), b9 (Flat Ninth), and R (Root). The bass staff has fingerings: 5, 4, 3, 6, 6, 6, 4, 6, 5.

Now that you know what a tritone sub is, and what scale to use over it, here are licks to add to your soloing vocabulary.

In this first lick you use a Db7 arpeggio to outline the tritone sub over G7, with the Db resolving down by half step to the Cmaj7 root.

It's easy to put tritone subs into your solos; it's hard to resolve them properly and musically.

As you learn these licks, focus on how the sub resolves back into the written chord progression.

This is where your lines will be successful or fall on their face when using tritone subs over 7th chords in your solos.

Audio Example 43

The image shows a musical score for a guitar solo. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line. Above the staff, the chord progression is written as Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7. The G7 chord is replaced by a tritone sub, Db7, indicated by a horizontal line with 'Db7' written above it. The bottom staff shows the guitar fretboard with fingerings: 7, 6, 5, 8, 7, 4, 6, 6, and 5. The letters T, A, and B are written vertically on the left side of the fretboard staff.

In the next tritone sub lick, you use a Db7 arpeggio over G7 in that section of the line.

When using tritone subs, the best way to outline that subbed chord is an arpeggio, as that contains all the chord tones in your line.

As you progress with this technique, solo over 7th chords with their tritone sub and only use arpeggios to solidify this concept.

Audio Example 44

In this tritone sub lick, you use a variation of the bebop scale over the G7 chord.

Here, rather than play only the Lydian dominant scale, you add the bebop passing tone into that scale.

This forms an 8-note scale with the following interval pattern.

R 2 3 #4 5 6 b7 7

When doing so, you bring a bebop flavor to your tritone lines, and maintain the connection to the original chord at the same time.

Audio Example 45

In this final lick, you play a lower neighbor in the first bar, C#, and in the final bar, D#, which adds continuity to the phrase.

In between, you have a Db7 outline over the G7 chord, creating the tritone sub in that section of the lick.

The Db7 line uses arpeggios and the #11 sound, linking it to both the original and sub chords in your playing.

Audio Example 46

The musical notation for Audio Example 46 consists of three measures. The first measure is labeled Dm^7 and contains the notes C, D, E, F. The second measure is labeled G^7 and contains the notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, with a flat sign over the A and B notes. The third measure is labeled $Cmaj^7$ and contains the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. Below the treble clef is a guitar fretboard diagram with three strings labeled T, A, and B. The fingerings for each measure are: Measure 1: T (9), A (11-12), B (9); Measure 2: T (10), A (9-12), B (11-9, 12); Measure 3: T (9), A (8-9), B (10, 12).