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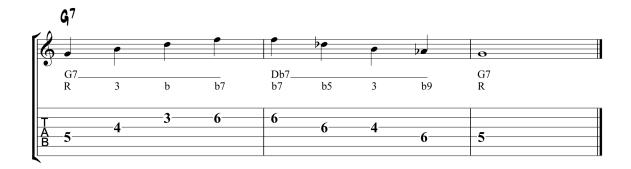
As well, when choosing a scale to use over the tritone scale, use Lydian dominant.

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

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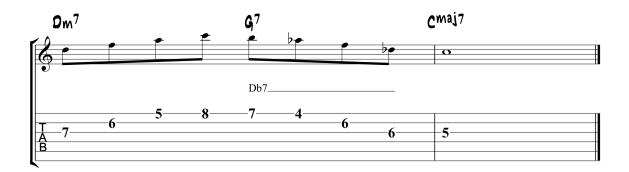
In this first lick you use a Db7 arpeggio to outline the tritone sub over G7, with the Db resolving down by half step to the Cmaj7 root.

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.
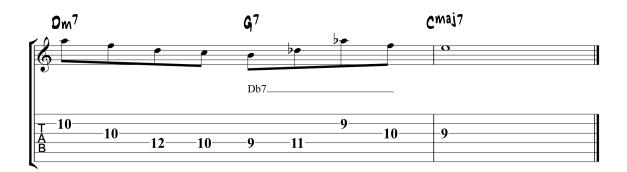
Audio Example 43

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

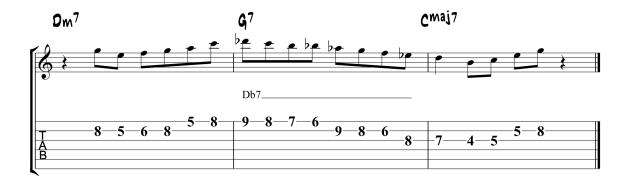In this tritone sub lick, you use a variation of the bebop scale over the G7 chord.

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