

MOTIFS

Motifs are short musical phrases which can be developed using various methods in jazz improvisation just as in classical music . Read on.

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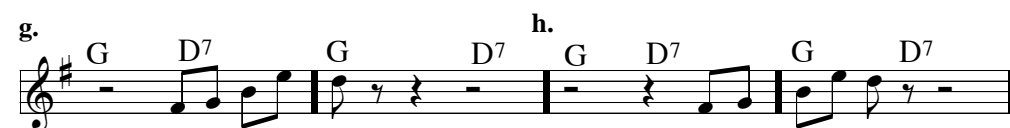
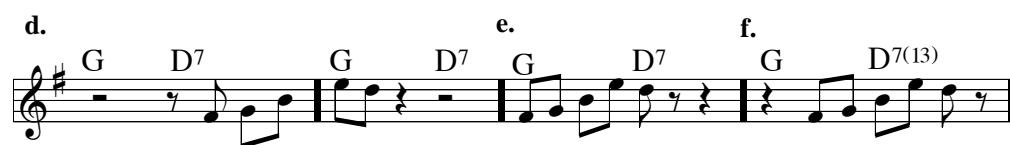
A motif is a short phrase which can be developed in different ways. I use the word 'motif', which is also used in classical music, so I hope I can get to the end of this file before the jazz police get to me. The various means by which a motif can be developed can be applied to jazz improvisation and to composition, even if that is merely confined to thinking up introductions, endings or riffs.

Listen to any jazz solo and you will hear many instances of how motifs are developed. Even in long phrases there are often short sections in which a short melodic fragment is repeated, starting on another note, ie. a 'sequence', or perhaps a rhythmic figure is repeated. It is very unusual to find solos without any of these devices, which will now be shown. Let's start with the original motif.



So what can you do with it?

The most obvious way is by simply repeating it. This can be an exact copy (**a**), or the phrase could start on a different beat (**b-d**) or be offset by half a beat or more (**e-h**). Notice how this will affect the accents and the colour of the phrase in relation to the chords.



The timing can be changed by playing it in half-tempo (**i**), double-tempo (**j**), in triplets (**k-l**) or in a completely different rhythm (**m-p**):

i. 

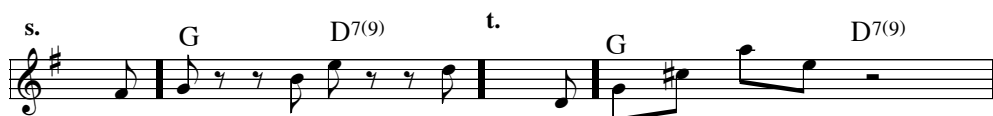
k. 

m. 

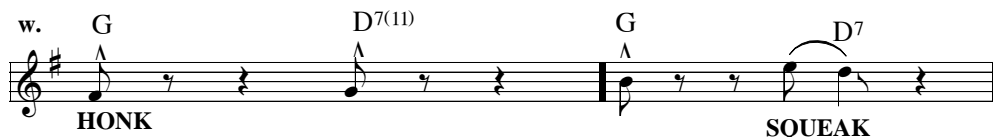
p. 

The phrase can be extended by a few notes (**q**), shortened (**r**) or fragmented (**s**). The general contour of the phrase can be repeated using other intervals (**t**) and if it is not too elaborate, it can be stood on its head (**u**), attacked from the rear (**v**) and severely mutilated (**w**).

q. 

s. 

u. 

w. 
 HONK SQUEAK

It is also possible to use **sequences** whereby the phrase is repeated once or more, starting on different notes in the same key (**x**) or in another key (**y**). Failing all this, you can just mime it - what you call a 'hidden motif', (**z**):

x.

y.

The G# and A# in the example at letter x. are neighbouring notes a semitone below two notes within the key, as is the norm. They do not serve the purpose of modulation.

Be aware also of good phrasing. Many inexperienced players just ramble on until they have no breath left. The silence in between phrases can be very powerful from a musical point of view (it also gives time for the improviser to come up with new ideas); more importantly, it enables bar staff to hear customers' orders. Now that is important.