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Jazz Mandology

Again the Tonal Centers: Understanding the 'ii V7 I'

by Ted Eschliman



Let's open the door a little more...

It's one thing to talk music theory, it's another to let it unravel before your eyes into something magical and practical. Like some sort of undecipherable code, or some secret fraternity handshake, in my college days as a trombone major, I'd hear jazz musicians banter about the vocabulary like I was never to be a part of some kind of exclusive club.

"Yeah, at the bridge it's just "circle of fifths," and a little extended soloing in Dorian..." (What the ...???)

My goal in the Jazz Mandology series has never been to exclude you, but to INCLUDE you. The idea here is that jazz theory is not only usable, but a magical shortcut to some of the most ear-enticing music on the planet.

Now Preparing for the Dominant (V7)!

I've explained Dominants and Dominant Preparations in previous articles; in particular go back and

review the issue on [Tonal Micro-Centers](#). Now, let me lay it out for you in a very specific and perhaps familiar melody. Stick around, and I'll introduce you to an exercise that will familiarize you and your fingers with this magic progression up and down the fretboard. To do this, we're going to steal a couple measures from one of my favorite Standards, from the pen of Nancy Hamilton and Morgan Lewis, "How High the Moon."

The image shows a musical score for a mandolin. It consists of two systems of notation: a standard musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a corresponding guitar-style TAB below it. The first system covers measures 1 through 4. Measure 1 is in G Major (G Maj7, I). Measure 2 is in G Major (G Maj7, I). Measure 3 is in G minor (Gm7, ii7). Measure 4 is in C7 (C7, V7). The second system covers measures 5 through 8. Measure 5 is in F Major (F Maj7, I). Measure 6 is in F minor (Fm7, ii7). Measure 7 is in Bb7 (Bb7, V7). Measure 8 is in Eb Major (Eb Maj7, I). The text "For educational purposes" is centered below the second system.

[Listen to an MP3 of the above](#)

If you know this tune, it starts in the key of "G Major" but in the 3rd measure, the G transforms into minor chord (drop B natural to Bb, and F# to F natural). Note we don't go into G minor at all! Instead this Gm7 prepares the subsequent Dominant chord, C7, and resolves tension with an F Major (Fmaj7). Within two measures, we've established a new tonal center or key, into F Major.

Here we have a barebones, classic example of a Dominant Preparation, Dominant, to Tonic progression. Starting with the F in the 6th Measure a definite "rest stop" of resolution (Tonic), we can analyze "backwards" and observe the 5th measure Dominant chord (C7) and see it "prepared" by the Gm7 'Dominant Preparation' in the 4th measure.

Why exactly is analyzing any tune, this way, relevant? Because this is duplicated in this song and the majority of others of your favorite tunes. You'll see the F transform itself into an Fm7, follow up with a Bb7 and resolve into yet another key, the key of Eb.

Use your harmonic analysis skills, and you'll note the 'ii V7' relationship:

Gm7 C7 F(Maj7)
Key of F: ii7 V7 I

Fm7 Bb7 Eb(Maj7)
Key of Eb: ii7 V7 I

Understanding and absorbing this 'ii V7 I' relationship in the major and minor keys will open the doors to 90% of the jazz standard tunes ever written. Note, we aren't talking a key signature change necessarily, at least not in the classical sense. We are only venturing slightly out of the "home" key with these brief "tonal centers." Identifying these centers gives you the tools to understand, improvise, and "comp" through the music.

As you play through the following exercise, notice not just the new key, but how you arrive at the new key. You will find this a common "trick" of jazz/pop composition. If the chord you are playing is major and becomes a minor (same root, just the lowered minor third), it's very likely a preparation for an upcoming Dominant chord, which transitions into the new key. (I don't think there is a pop

tune out there where this could be more blatant!)

One thing I've done for academic purposes is change the key signatures in the exercise. You won't find it this clear when you're analyzing other tunes, but nonetheless, trust your ear, and your newfound knowledge of 'ii V7 I' to your benefit!

How High the Minor Two

'ii V7 I' Study

Mandolin

TAB

5

10

14

18

22

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But wait-there's more!...

As you finish, notice we have covered only six of the twelve possible keys. The progression moves down in whole steps. A good extra credit project would be to finish the other six keys on your own.

Perhaps start the above in the key of C, and progress in the tonal centers of C, Bb, Ab, Gb/F#, E, D. Mastering the 'ii V7 I' progressions of all 12 major keys is the biggest shortcut to jazz productivity you could ever achieve.

How can we help?

Again thanks for your suggestions and the letters of encouragement; if you're new to Jazz Mandology, or mandolinsessions.com, be sure to review the previous articles by clicking the appropriate links to [back issues](#). Let me know how you're doing at mandohack@aol.com and drop in on the www.jazzmando.com website!

mp3 links

www.tannah.net/ted/jazzmandomp3/HowHiEx.mp3

www.tannah.net/ted/jazzmandomp3/HowHiM2.mp3

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