

## Jazz Clinic Review Session II Motifs

A motif is defined as any germ of any idea that can be expanded, contracted, repeated, juggled in any which way to create musical development. Usually the simpler the better. Examples of masterpieces built off of simple motifs are Beethoven's Fifth and Mozart's Eine Kleine Nachtmusik.

- A. Rhythmic motifs are the easiest way to get started exploring the world of motifs.

Try a 1 measure rhythmic motif on a II V I in the key of C as in example 1.

Notice there is also a melodic motif in that example as well. More on that in a minute. Now, try a 2 measure rhythmic phrase as in example 2. These are called melodic rhythms, i.e. melodies inspired by the rhythm. We will get more into this in Session IV: Rhythms and phrasing.

Next let's take just any old rhythmic concept that happens to catch our ear and literally play around with it throughout the sequence as in example 3.

As you can see the rhythmic motif is an eight plus 3 triplets plus 2 eighths, and it is placed anywhere in the sequence, even over the bar line. Once you get a rhythmic motif you like, stretch, compact it, contrast with another motif, etc. all the way through a chorus of a tune. Rhythmic motifs can truly inspire an endless fresh supply of ideas for improvising.

- B. Melodic motifs are those inspired by the relationship of the pitches, as in an interval (or collection of intervals) or common tones to multiple chords. In example 1, we saw the intervals of a third (up and then back again) followed by up a fifth and down a third.

Here's another simple melodic motif in example 4. What is the motif? It's 'up a 6<sup>th</sup>, down second, down third (major and minor intervals are used indiscriminately here for purposes of simplicity). Thinking this way makes your lines sound logical and musical rather than just piles of notes.

Another type of melodic motif would be simply a note that catches your ear that works for a bunch of chords in a tune. In example 5, it's the 'b' note that we play with. Of course it could be any note, even one outside the scale, as in example 6.

Analyze any standard and you will see that what makes the melody great is its use of creative yet logical motifs, either rhythmic or melodic, or both. Just as an example, "Autumn Leaves" is built off of the intervals 'second, second, second, fourth' (again we are using minor and major seconds indiscriminately here for the purposes of simplicity), plus each phrase of the first section has the same exact rhythm!

