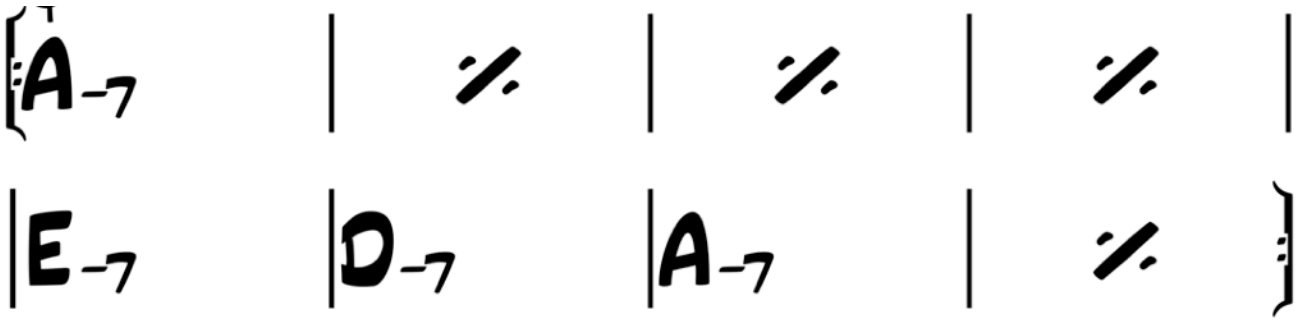
Concert Key

Improv Techniques over Minor Chords

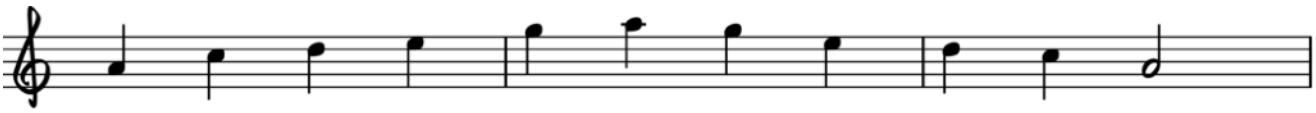
For this lesson we are using the chord progression from Ain’t No Sunshine, the Bill Withers classic standard tune.
This progression is great for developing improvisors since it only has 3 chords and they are all the same quality: minor7
All examples below are in concert key. You will have to do the necessary transposition for your instrument if you play saxophone.

Chord Progression



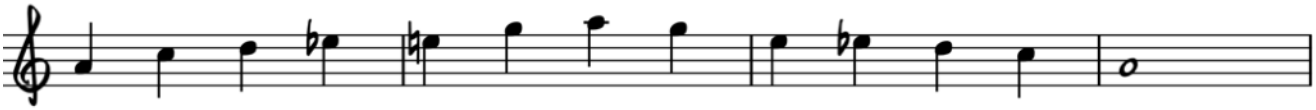
1. A minor pentatonic over all of it

The simplest approach is to just play A minor pentatonic scale over the entire progression. These 5 notes work well everywhere (the melody comes entirely from this scale save for one note). However this approach can feel limiting after a while.



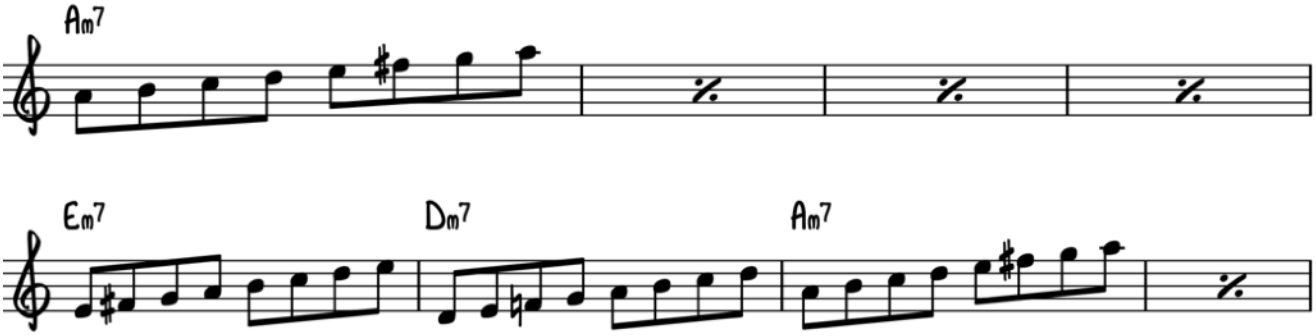
2. A blues scale over all of it

We can upgrade our A minor pentatonic scale to include the flat 5 note making it the A blues scale. This can also be played over the entire progression.



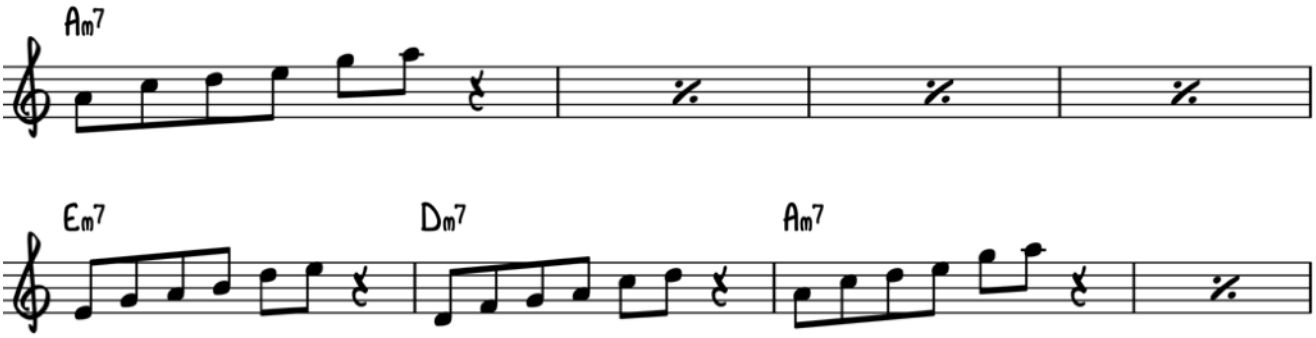
3. Modal Approach

The modal approach will open up some more note possibilities and colors allowing us more options to express ourselves musically. In the example below we play A dorian over A-7, E aeolian over E-7 and D dorian over D-7.
Notice that we have the same note options (just ordered differently) for every measure except bar 6 where we must play F natural rather than F#.



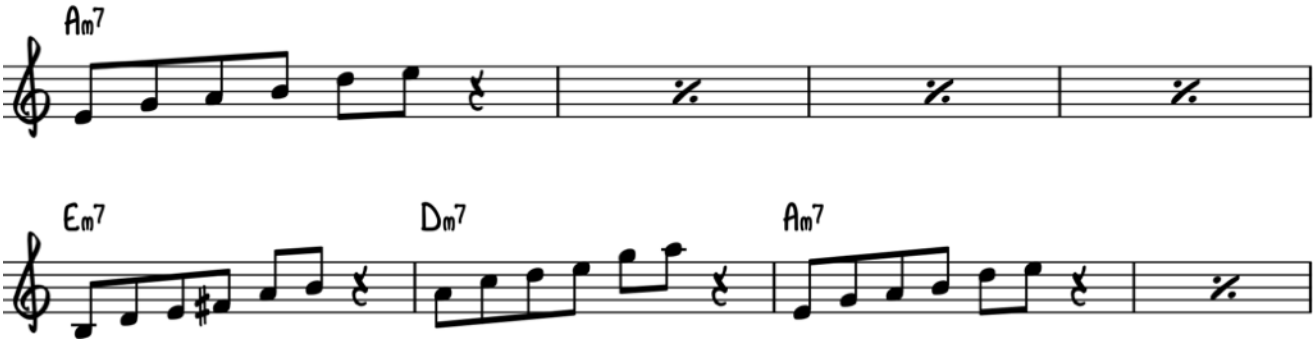
4. Minor Pentatonic Scales corresponding to chords

Another approach is to play the corresponding minor pentatonic scales over each chord. In the example below we play A minor pentatonic over A-7, E minor pentatonic over E-7 and D minor pentatonic over D-7



5. Minor Pentatonic starting on 5th of each chord

The last approach for this lesson is playing the minor pentatonic scale that starts on the 5th of each chord. In the example below we can play E minor pentatonic over A-7, B minor pentatonic over E-7 and A minor pentatonic over D-7.
This results in a more colorful sound and gets us away from the expected notes while still remaining diatonic to the chords. In other words we’ve added some nice tensions without venturing outside the harmony.



Suggested Resources

1. Play Sax by Ear Crash Course (Free)

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2. Pentatonic Foundation Course

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3. Harmonic Foundation Course

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4. Better Trax

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Eb Instruments

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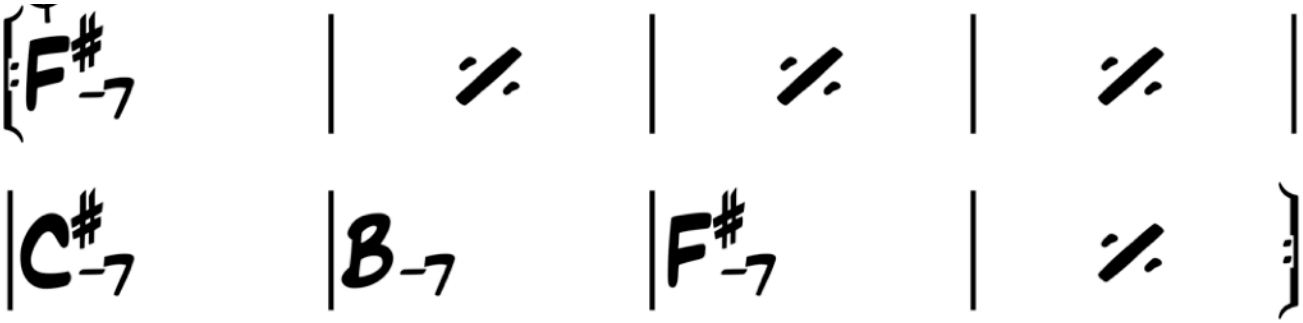
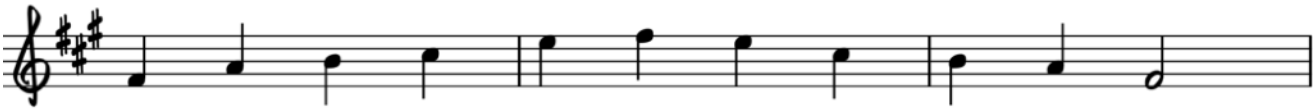
Chord Progression



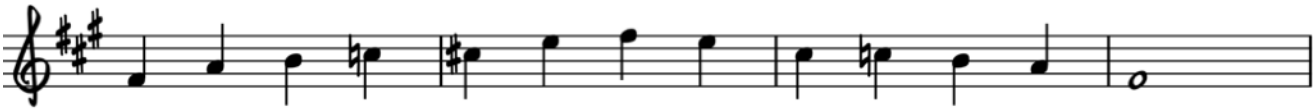
1. F# minor pentatonic over all of it

The simplest approach is to just play F# minor pentatonic scale over the entire progression. These 5 notes work well everywhere (the melody comes entirely from this scale save for one note). However this approach can feel limiting after a while.



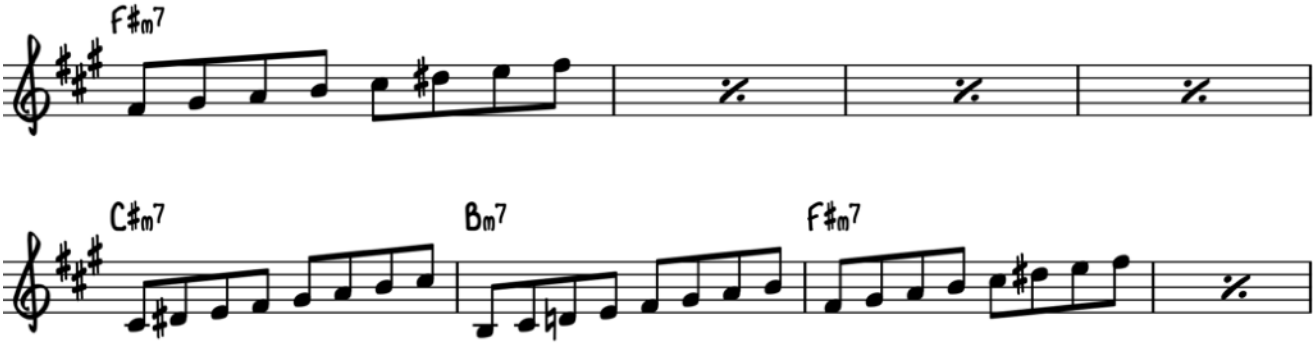
2. F# blues scale over all of it

We can upgrade our F# minor pentatonic scale to include the flat 5 note making it the F# blues scale. This can also be played over the entire progression.



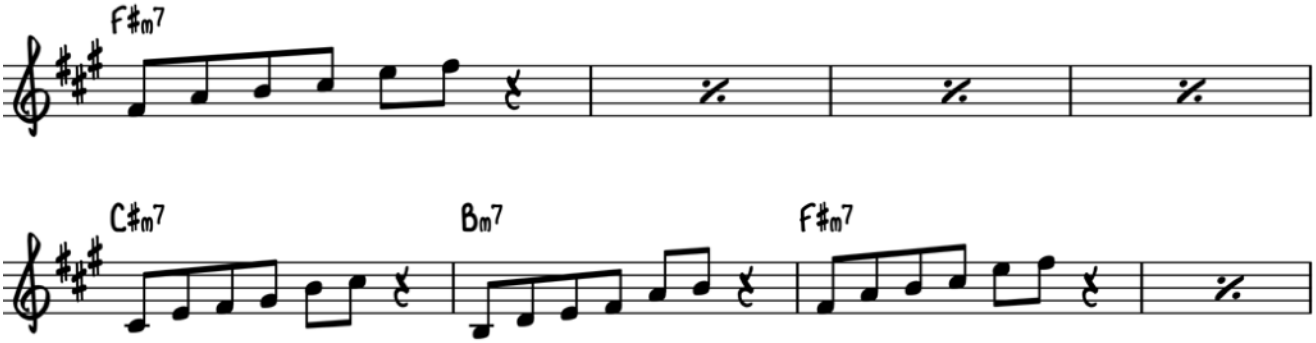
3. Modal Approach

The modal approach will open up some more note possibilities and colors allowing us more options to express ourselves musically. In the example below we play F# dorian over F#-7, C# aeolian over C#-7 and B dorian over B-7.
Notice that we have the same note options (just ordered differently) for every measure except bar 6 where we must play D natural rather than D#.



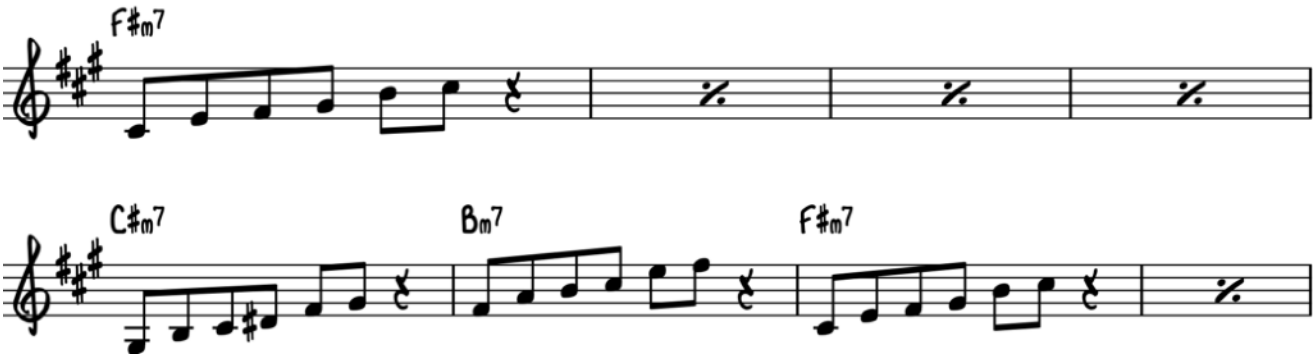
4. Minor Pentatonic Scales corresponding to chords

Another approach is to play the corresponding minor pentatonic scales over each chord. In the example below we play F# minor pentatonic over F#-7, C# minor pentatonic over C#-7 and B minor pentatonic over B-7



5. Minor Pentatonic starting on 5th of each chord

The last approach for this lesson is playing the minor pentatonic scale that starts on the 5th of each chord. In the example below we can play C# minor pentatonic over F#-7, G# minor pentatonic over G#-7 and F# minor pentatonic over B-7.
This results in a more colorful sound and gets us away from the expected notes while still remaining diatonic to the chords. In other words we’ve added some nice tensions without venturing outside the harmony.



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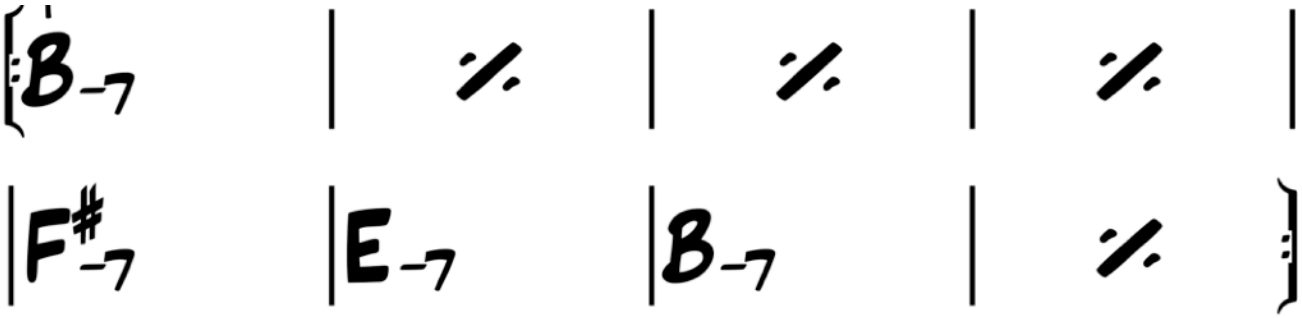

1. B minor pentatonic over all of it

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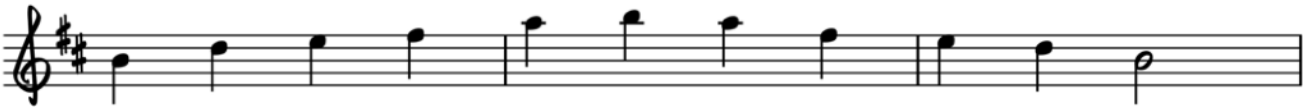
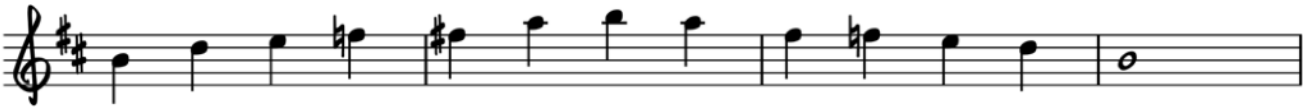


2. B blues scale over all of it

We can upgrade our B minor pentatonic scale to include the flat 5 note making it the B blues scale. This can also be played over the entire progression.



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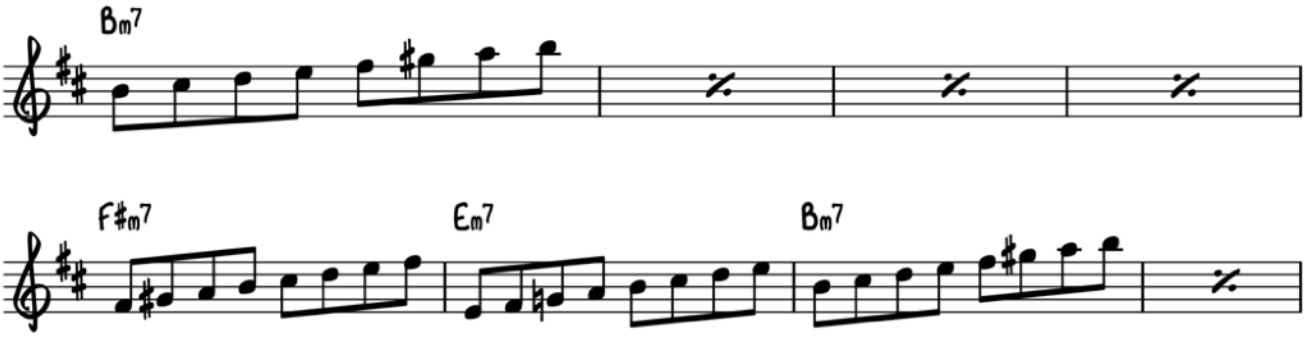

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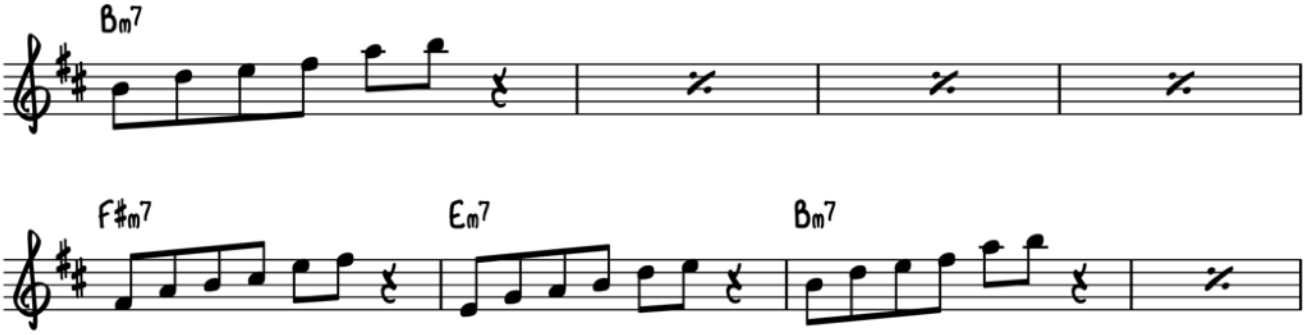

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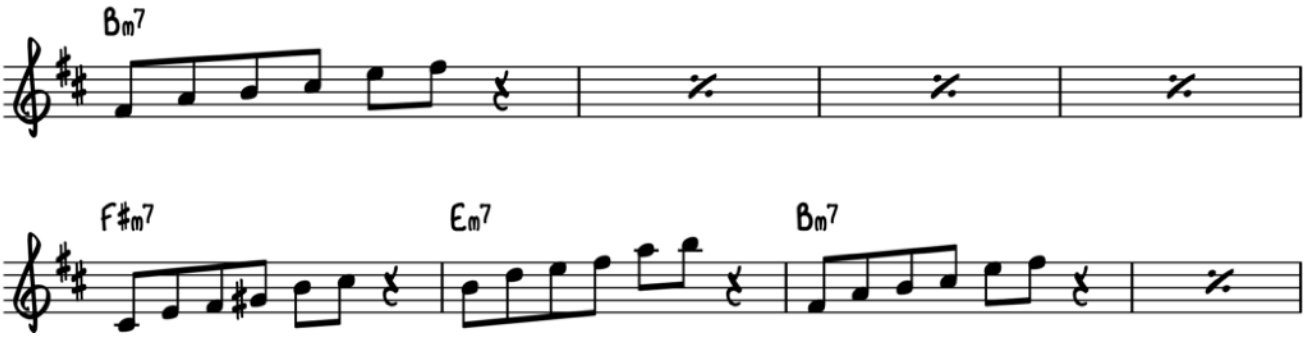

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