**ii-V Chord Progressions**

Bob Keller  
October 2001

---

### Meaning of ii-V

- **ii** is the chord built on the second degree of the scale.
  - The seventh is implied, so this would be a minor-seventh chord.
  - Other extensions (9th, 11th, and 13th) can also be used.
  - In other words, all chords in the major scale can be used over this chord. The 13th needs to be treated carefully, as it is more dissonant.

- **V** is the chord built on the fifth degree.
  - The minor seventh is implied, so this would be a dominant-seventh chord. Extensions and alterations can also be used.

---

### Commonality

- ii-V progressions are ubiquitous in jazz.
- They often precede a I chord and can provide a smooth aural transition to it.
- Wherever there is a V chord, a ii can usually be inserted in front of it.
- They can be used "out of the blue" to establish a different key.
- They may occur in several different keys in a given piece.
- They may also be used in isolation and in sequence.

---

### Major ii-V-I Progressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>ii</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Dm7</td>
<td>G7</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Db</td>
<td>Ebm7</td>
<td>Ab7</td>
<td>Db</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Em7</td>
<td>A7</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>Fm7</td>
<td>B7</td>
<td>Eb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Fbm7</td>
<td>B7</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gm7</td>
<td>C7</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gb</td>
<td>Abm7</td>
<td>D7</td>
<td>Gb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Am7</td>
<td>D7</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>Bbm7</td>
<td>Eb7</td>
<td>Ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Bm7</td>
<td>E7</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>Cm7</td>
<td>F7</td>
<td>Bb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>C#m7</td>
<td>F#7</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### Examples

- The bridge of "Cherokee" is a series of ii-V-I progressions in keys that ascend through four keys in whole steps:
  
  (key of B): C#m7  F#7  BM7  
  (key of A): Bm7  E7  AM7  
  (key of G): Am7  D7  GM7  
  (key of F): Gm7  C7  
  (key of Bb): Cm7  F7  

---

### More Examples

- "Giant Steps" by John Coltrane:
  
  BM7  D7  | GM7  Bb7  | EbM7  |  
  Am7  D7  | GM7  Bb7  | EbM7  F#7  | BM7  |  
  Fm7  Bb7  | EbM7  |  
  Am7  D7  | GM7  |  
  C#m7  F#7  | BM7  |  
  Fm7  Bb7  | EbM7  |  
  C#m7  F#7  |
Examples Using ii-V (with or without I)

- "Confirmation", by Charlie Parker:
  FM7 | E | A7 | Dm7 G7 | Cm7 F7 ...

- "Joy Spring", by Clifford Brown:
  G | Am7 B7 | G | Cm7 F7 | Bm7 E7alt |
  Am7 D7 | G | Bbm7 Eb7 |
  Ab | Bbm7 Eb7 | Ab | C#m7 F#7 |
  Cm7 F7alt | Bbm7 Eb7 | Ab | Bm7 E7b9

Which tones are emphasized most?

b7 resolves to 3.  b7 resolves to 3.

Fm9  Bb13  Eb Maj7

Conversely

- In the ii chord, don’t over-emphasize the 6th, since it is the tone to which the seventh will resolve (the 3rd of the dominant).
- In the V chord, don’t over-emphasize the 4th, since it is the tone that was the seventh in the ii (emphasizing this is called a suspension).
- In the I chord, don’t emphasize the 4th, since it is the tone that was the seventh in the V (and is an avoid tone in I).

Outlining vs. Generalization

- The preceding assumes the soloist wants to “outline” the chord changes.
- Another way of playing is called “generalization”, which means playing in the same key, but without outlining the changes so clearly.
- In generalization, one could play in the major scale of the I for all three chords. But it may not sound as crisp if the chords aren’t outlined.

Key Awareness

- Whether using outlining or generalization, it is important to be aware of the key in which one is playing a ii-V, if for no other reason than getting the notes right.
- The key is a whole step below the root of the ii (and a fifth below the root of the V):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>Cm7</th>
<th>Cm7</th>
<th>Cm7</th>
<th>Cm7</th>
<th>Cm7</th>
<th>F#7</th>
<th>A7</th>
<th>A7</th>
<th>B7</th>
<th>Cm7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Oct5)
Building ii-V Melodic Lines

- Play in the key
- Usually use a combination of:
  - Scalar movement
  - Arpeggiation
  - Sawtooth
  - Chromatic alterations
  - Smooth connections between chords

Possible Mnemonic Devices

- Establish the key
- The b7 of the ii chord is the 1 of the key.
- The 3 of the ii chord is the 4 of the key.
- The b7 of the V chord is the 4 of the key.
- The 3 of the V chord is the major 7 of the key.
- So in the key, the guide tones for ii-V-I are:
  1    7
  7    4
  4    3
  The top line is the melody of "I should care".

Building ii-V Melodic Lines

- ii chord: play 1, b3, 4, 5, b7, 9
  - use 6 less chromatic alterations: 7 (leading tone), b6, 3
- V chord: play 1, 3, 5, b7, 7, 9
  - avoid 4 chromatic alterations: #4, b9, #9 (= b3), #5

Examples

- 1-bar vs. 2-bar ii-V
  - 1-bar: each chord is one half bar long
    [diagram]
  - 2-bars: each chord is one bar long
    [diagram]

Practicing ii-V

- I find it more enjoyable to practice these in the context of a longer cyclic progression:
  - ii-V-I-VI7 alt e.g. Fm9-Bb9-Eb-C7 alt
  - ii-V-iii-VI7 e.g. Fm9-Bb9-Gm9-C9

- These sound more interesting and are less tiring. Plus they frequently occur in tune contexts, such as blues, rhythm changes, "A Train", "Satin Doll", etc.
- You can always cut before the I-VI7 alt if you don’t wish to play the whole cycle.
- You can also alter the V chord for variety.
- In many songs, I comes first, i.e. I-VI7-ii-V
Recalled Altered Dominant

C7 alt. (= Gb9)  C7 alt. (= Gb9)

Type B:  7-#9-3-#5  Type A:  3-#5-7-#9

Altered Scale

- The "altered scale" captures the notes that sound good over an altered dominant.
- It is a scale in which everything in a major scale but the root has been lowered a half step: 1 b2 b3 b4(=3) b5 (=#4) b6 b7
- This scale is also known as:
  - diminished whole-tone scale
  - super-locrian scale
  - Pomeroy scale
  - seventh mode of melodic minor
- Some people say this scale is not really used as such.

C Altered Scale

Prototypical Altered Lick

- "Cry Me a River" lick:
  - descending: #9 b9 #5 3 #9 b9
  - In C altered: Eb Db G# Eb Eb Db
  - In A altered:

Major ii-V-I-VI7alt. Progressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>ii</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>V7alt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Dm7</td>
<td>G7</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Db</td>
<td>Ebm7</td>
<td>Ab7</td>
<td>Db</td>
<td>Bb7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Em7</td>
<td>A7</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>B7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>Fm7</td>
<td>Bb7</td>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>C7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>F#m7</td>
<td>B7</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>C#7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gm7</td>
<td>C7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>D7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gb</td>
<td>Abm7</td>
<td>Db7</td>
<td>Gb</td>
<td>Eb7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Am7</td>
<td>D7</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>E7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>Bbm7</td>
<td>Eb7</td>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>F7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Bm7</td>
<td>E7</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>F#7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>Cm7</td>
<td>F7</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>G7alt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>C#m7</td>
<td>F#7</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>G#7alt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example ii-V-I-VI7alt. Progression

(generated by Band-in-a-Box)
Substitutes for ii-V

- iv\(^7\) - bVII\(^7\)  (“back-door” progression)
  Example: key of C: Fm\(^7\) - Bb\(^7\)
- ii\(^7\) - bII\(^7\)  (tritone substitution)
  Example: key of C: Dm\(^7\) - Db\(^7\)(#4)
- bVII\(^7\) - VII\(^7\)
  Example: key of C: Bb\(^7\) - B\(^7\)
- V\(^7\) - V\(^7\)
  Example: key of C: Ab\(^7\) - G\(^7\)

Practice Sequence ii-V-I Step-Down

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gm7</th>
<th>C7</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cm7</td>
<td>F7</td>
<td>Bb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bbm7</td>
<td>Bb7</td>
<td>Ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abm7</td>
<td>Db7</td>
<td>Db</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fm7</td>
<td>B7</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em7</td>
<td>A7</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C#m7</td>
<td>F#7</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bm7</td>
<td>E7</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am7</td>
<td>D7</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gm7</td>
<td>C7</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fm7</td>
<td>Bb7</td>
<td>Bb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebm7</td>
<td>Ab7</td>
<td>Db</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose one alternative.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choose one alternative.