

# FENDER PLAYERS CLUB JAZZ-ROCK TRIAD IMPROVISATION

## SUBSTITUTION AND SUPERIMPOSITION TECHNIQUES IN TONAL MUSIC

In contemporary music, the use of triads is an important element in improvisation and composition. They are as prevalent as scales, modes, arpeggios, rhythms, and intervallic ideas. Like scales and modes, triads can be substituted in tonal and modal music. They can also be superimposed, creating bitonality or polytonality. Superimposed triads give us synthetic scales such as hexatonic (6 note scales = 2 triads), or nonatonic scales (9 note scales = 3 triads).

### TRIAD SUBSTITUTION

Triad substitution is where one triad is substituted in place of another. One of the most common is flat-five or tri-tone substitution. This is when a triad a flat-fifth degree (tri-tone) away is substituted for a chord. For example: instead of playing a G major triad over a G7 chord, a Db major triad (Db is a flat-fifth away from G) is “substituted.”

### TRIAD SUPERIMPOSITION

Triad superimposition is where two or more triads are played one after the other, creating a “dispersed scale” effect of bitonality or polytonality. Of course all triads can be substituted or superimposed in both tonal and modal music, either using the single-note approach or voiced in chord form.

FIG. 1 offers an example of tri-tone substitution on the V (G7b9) chord of a II–V–I progression in the key of C major. Notice that over the G7b9 harmony, a Db major triad is substituted in the second half of the measure.

FIG. 1 Dmi G7(b9) Cma7

D<sup>b</sup> triad -----|

T		10	7	9	8	6		5		7	4	5	6	6	4	7		8	
A							7												
B																			

▶ [AUDIO-Fig.1.mp3](#)

In FIG. 2 we have triad substitution on the II chord, as well as tri-tone substitution on the V chord. Over the Dmi7 (II) harmony, an E minor triad is substituted. Notice that the connecting note (D) creates a full Emi7 arpeggio.

FIG. 2 Dmi7 G7(b9) Cma7

Emi7 arp. -----| D<sup>b</sup> triad -----|

T						7	10		11		11		10	8	9	9	10		8
A																			
B						7	10	9											

▶ [AUDIO-Fig.2.mp3](#)

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FIG. 3 is an example of triad superimposition. Over the V chord ( $A7(b9)$ ) we find two substitute triads: the first is an  $E^b$  major triad (tri-tone sub) followed by a  $D^b$  major triad. Notice that the  $D^b$  triad can be seen as a half-step approach to the I chord ( $Dma7$ ).

FIG. 3

FIG. 3 shows a melodic line in 4/4 time over three measures. The first measure is over an  $Emi7$  chord. The second measure is over an  $A7(b9)$  chord, featuring two substitute triads: an  $E^b$  major triad (tri-tone sub) and a  $D^b$  major triad. The third measure is over a  $Dma7$  chord. The fretboard diagram below shows the following fret numbers for the strings (T, A, B):

7	6	5	8	5	7	5
8	8	6	8	9	6	6
					6	7

◀ [AUDIO-Fig.3.mp3](#)

The next example superimposes two triads over both the II chord ( $Emi7$ ) and the V chord ( $A7(b9)$ ). In the first measure we have an ascending B augmented triad, followed by a descending A major triad that resolves on the downbeat of the V chord measure. The line continues with a climb up a G major triad, and down a  $G^bma7$  arpeggio, finally resolving on the fifth degree of the I chord ( $Dma7$ ).

FIG. 4

FIG. 4 shows a melodic line in 4/4 time over three measures. The first measure is over an  $Emi7$  chord, featuring a B augmented triad and an A major triad. The second measure is over an  $A7(b9)$  chord, featuring a G major triad and a  $G^bma7$  arpeggio. The third measure is over a  $Dma7$  chord. The fretboard diagram below shows the following fret numbers for the strings (T, A, B):

8	8	7	10	9	10
9	8	8	7	6	7
					6

◀ [AUDIO-Fig.4.mp3](#)

In this minor II-V-I, a  $D^b$  augmented triad (harmonized from the third degree of the  $B^b$  melodic minor scale) is substituted over the II chord ( $Gmi7(b5)$ ). An  $E^b$  major triad (from the C half-whole diminished scale) is used as a substitution over the V chord ( $C7(b9)$ ).

FIG. 5

FIG. 5 shows a melodic line in 4/4 time over three measures. The first measure is over a  $Gmi7(b5)$  chord, featuring a  $D^b$  augmented triad. The second measure is over a  $C7(b9)$  chord, featuring an  $E^b$  major triad. The third measure is over an  $Fmi7$  chord. The fretboard diagram below shows the following fret numbers for the strings (T, A, B):

9	5	6	6	8	6	6	6
8	8	11	11	8	11	9	8

◀ [AUDIO-Fig.5.mp3](#)

