



# Note-Centric Ear Training With Pentatonics

**THE ABILITY TO START A LINE OR PHRASE ON ANY NOTE OF THE chord is one of the marks of a mature improviser. To help get you there, one helpful ear-training exercise can be practiced with the assistance of a chord instrumentalist like a keyboardist or pianist.**

To start, play and hold the note C (concert pitch). After the note sounds, have the keyboard player randomly play a chord within the modes of the C major scale: Cmaj7, Dm7, E phrygian, F lydian, G7, Am7b6 or Bm7b5. Once the chord sounds, develop the line from C using Jerry Bergonzi's eight formulas found in his popular book *Inside Improvisation Series Volume 2—Pentatonics*. See Examples 1, 2.

By not knowing the mode of the major scale beforehand, you will train your ear to recognize the relationship between your starting note and the chord's quality and root. In the same way, you can also play the same line through all seven modes. Saxophonist/educator Bobby Stern's highly recommended e-book *Slick Licks That Stick* thoroughly demonstrates this "note-centric" concept.

Once you play through the major scale modes, move onto the melodic minor modes: CmMaj7, D phrygian natural 6, Ebmaj7#5, F7#11, G7b13, Am7b5 natural 9, B+7#9. See Example 3.

Although there are no "modes" of the diminished scale, using C as a launching point the accompanist could play through C/Eb/F#/A7#9 or dom7b9 (half-/whole-step diminished scale) or C/Eb/F#/Adim7 (whole-/half-step diminished scale). See Examples 4, 5. Exercises can also be developed for harmonic minor, whole tone and other scales. See Example 6.

If this isn't enough to practice, you can also use C as a non-chordal tone to launch a line. This is a favorite technique of Chicago saxophonist-educator Rich Corpolongo. As before, play and hold a C and then have the accompanist play a chord that does not have a C in it, such as Bmaj7, Bb7#9, AbmMaj7 or similar. As Bird once said, you are always a half-step away from a "right" note, and your ear will help you resolve the line into the chord by playing a half-step in either direction. See Examples 7, 8.

This exercise has expanded my vocabulary and has helped me break out of my improvisational ruts. It has also prepared me for the times I sit in with a band, an unfamiliar tune is called and I am simply told, "You'll hear it." If you haven't been in a situation like that yet—find one. **DB**

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## EXAMPLE 1

## EXAMPLE 2

## EXAMPLE 3

## EXAMPLE 4

## EXAMPLE 5

## EXAMPLE 6

## EXAMPLE 7

## EXAMPLE 8