

Two Five One Progressions

One of the most common progressions in jazz is a two five one. The two five one is a simple progression, and underneath is an explanation of how to recognise it, and then a few examples for you to fill in.

The major two five one

The major two five one is easy to notice after a bit of practice. For the example we will take G major as our key/tonal centre.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|
| G | A | B | C | D | E | F# | G |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 |

If we start on the second position we get an A, then if we devise a chord from this (in thirds) we produce A C E G, also known as A minor.

Then if we start on the fifth (also known as the dominant) we get a D. Again by producing a chord we get D F# A C, also known as D7.

This only leaves the root chord starting on the G, producing G B D F#, better known as G major 7 or G Δ .

So this leaves you with a two five one progression in G that will look like this, Am D7 G Δ . So to solo horizontally over this you can just use the G major scale, to solo vertically you can use the chord tones more prominently.

Now this theory also applies to a minor two five one.

The minor two five one

For this example we are going to take G harmonic (harmonic as harmony instruments are producing the chords) minor as our example. So we take the G scale from above and flatten the third and sixth, giving us G harmonic minor. Other people will understand that G minor has two flats in its key signature and then sharpen the seventh, giving the same result.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|----|---|---|----|----|---|
| G | A | Bb | C | D | Eb | F# | G |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 |

Now follow the same procedure as for the major two five one. If we start with the second position we get an A, and then produce a chord we get A C Eb G. This is the same chord as major, but the fifth note of the A is flattened, so this becomes a b5, so the chord is written Am7b5 or A \emptyset (\emptyset implies a minor third, flat 5th and 7th).

If we then move to the dominant (or fifth) we get D; again if we devise a chord from this note we produce D7. In many minor two five ones this chord then has a b9 added to emphasise the minor progression. To understand why a b9 look at the D above, on a D scale the second note (or ninth) is usually an E, in this case it is an Eb, hence b9.

Then for the one chord, we start the chord on the root G and we produce G Bb D and F#, producing a G minor chord with a major 7th which is written Gm Δ . Although many people will disregard the major 7th and the chord becomes Gm, or they flatten the 7th to produce a Gm7 chord to reflect a natural minor or descending melodic minor scale. So our progressions will be, Am7^{b5} D7^{b9} Gm.

To solo over this you can use the same procedure as the major, and use the G minor scale shown above throughout the progression horizontally, and the chords tones for vertical improvisation. As melodic instruments, some musicians like to use an F natural producing the natural minor scale or descending melodic minor, although for the dominant chord the third of the chord will clash, D7 (F#) and the F natural.

Underneath are a few examples with gaps for you to fill in.....

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------|
| Dm7 | | C△ |
| Em7 | | D△ |
| | C7 | F△ |
| Bm7 | E7 | |
| Em7 ^b 5 | A7 ^b 9 | |
| Bm7 ^b 5 | | Am(△) |
| | B7 ^b 9 | Em (△) |
| Dm7 ^b 5 | | Cm(△) |