

Smooth Jazz Solo #1

Song structure

The first track is an upbeat medium tempo tune with a simple catchy melody. After a 16 bar intro, the tune consists of 32 bars, repeated a few times, and consisting of two 16 bar sections ('A' and 'B'), e.g. from bar and 17-32, and 33-48, and so on.

The first part, A section, uses Amaj7 and Dm9 chords, and the main scales to use are A major, and D Dorian.

The second part, or B section, goes to Gsus and B^b sus. On Gsus you can keep playing D Dorian (in fact Gsus9 can be seen as Dm9 with G added in the bass), and then go to F Dorian for the next sus chord, and back. So, basically there are three scales involved, so not too complicated, although they do change fairly rapidly (2 bars). To practice improvisation for this tune, play these three scales across the fretboard, and practice going fluently from one into the other. Especially that, going 'seamlessly' from one scale to the other is what makes the solo sound natural: it doesn't feel like the scales are 'squeezed in' to fit the harmony. If the transitions are hardly noticeable, the whole solo sounds flowing and not forced in any way. If the scale transitions are obvious and conspicuous, for instance when all phrases start or end at exactly these chord transitions, then the solo sounds unnatural; then it sound like a bunch of licks glued together. So, making the necessary transitions inconspicuous, is what makes a smoothly flowing and natural sounding solo.

The transition from the A to B section in fact implies no key change (not until the B^b sus) so you can play from A into B without any hesitation or reserve, just play on!

On the last chord B^{b9b5} (substitute for E^{7#5}) you can use various scales that are often used on a dominant seventh chord, like E diminished, E augmented, or E altered, which is sort of a mix between the first two. Also, it is quite common to already return to A major during part of the last bar(s), as a lead-in for the A major chord ahead. Then, melodic logic takes precedence over harmonic 'correctness': if the melody makes strong sense, the exact harmony can become secondary momentarily. So, if the melody clearly leads towards A major, then some small harmonic inconsistencies do not matter much.

About the solos

There are three extensive example solos provided, with increasing level of difficulty. The first solo starts, after the theme, (bar 27) with only small embellishments around the theme. In the B section (bar 35) the melody drifts away a bit from the theme, but still not too many notes are used. The next A section, still some parts of the theme are heard, an octave higher, and after that the solo continues with relatively few notes. The last part plays with a D minor arpeggio and fades away with some falling notes. The whole solo is fairly low key and laid back.

The second solo on this track, uses the theme a bit less obviously, but it is still clearly there. The approach is the same as before, and the solo is similar to the first one, just slightly more notes are played, so a bit more complex.

In the third solo, the theme is partly played in octaves, and after that the solo is more complex and varied, with longer lines, more passing notes and chromatic parts.

Of course there is no law that says when you have to use passing notes and chromatic scales, that's totally up to you when you improvise. You have to try it, and develop a feeling for it, and listening to-, and playing these examples will guide you in the right direction.

Note that much is played in 7th-10th positions and higher, and much less in the lower positions; firstly, the sound in the lower positions tends to be a little sharper, less mild and round, and secondly, the middle of the neck is a good base to go up and down from, while the lower positions tend to limit the possibilities.