

CHAPTER 5

Syncopation

A common jazz technique for interpreting melodies is *syncopating* rhythms—playing them off the beat. This can enliven an otherwise static melody.

Here is an example of a melody in its original form.



Fig. 5.1. Melody without Syncopation

To add syncopation, first consider the underlying subdivision of the basic pulse. This is also known as the “feel.” This example has an eighth-note feel.

Fig. 5.2. Subdivisions

Then move some of the notes that originally occurred *on* the beat instead *off* the beat, either before (anticipating) or after (delaying) the original attack.

Fig. 5.3. Syncopated Rhythm

This yields the following line.

Fig. 5.4. Syncopated Rhythm

PRACTICE

These practice exercises will help you become comfortable incorporating syncopations into your playing. Practice each lead line using the approach in each exercise. Then apply these skills to the tunes in appendix A.

Exercise 5.1. Melody and Bass Line

Practice this syncopated version of the melody to "Avalon" with roots in the bass.

Melody

Subdivision

Syncopated Melody with Bass Line

Chord symbols: C7, F#^o, G⁻, F#^o, G⁻

Chord symbols: C7, F6, C7, F6

Exercise 5.2. Melody and Active Bass Line

Practice the first four bars of the melody to "Avalon" with a more active bass line of roots and fifths than in exercise 5.1.

Avalon

Melody

Subdivision

Syncopated Melody with Bass Line

Exercise 5.3. Melody, Chords, and Bass

This exercise harmonizes the first four measures of "Avalon" while using roots and fifths in the bass.



TRACK 21

Avalon

Melody

Subdivision

Syncopated Melody and Harmony with Bass Line