Seth Carper
2014

Kenny Garrett's Solo on "XYZ"

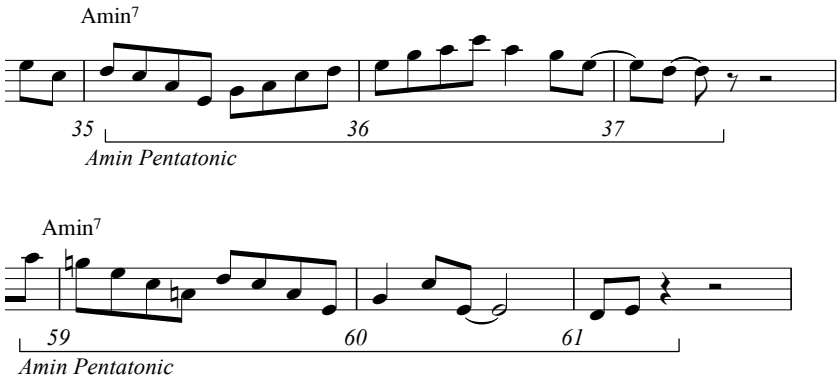
From *Standard of Language*

On his 2003 Warner Bros. release *Standard of Language,* Kenny Garrett proves that playing firery post-bop lines and making beautiful melodies need not be mutually exclusive. Garrett exemplifies this on his composition "XYZ." The chord changes rely heavily on minor sonorities, but include a few brighter major seventh chords to break up the darker sounds. Likewise, Garrett sings out

Pentatonic Material

Garrett makes ample use of pentatonic scales throughout this solo. Some passages contain obvious choices such as mm. 35-37 and 59-61, using A minor pentatonic over an Am7 chord.

Fig. 2: mm. 35-37, 59-61

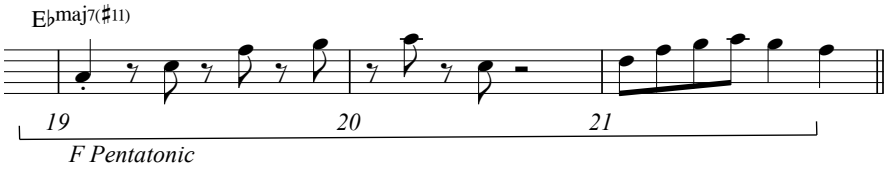


There are some less direct associations with Garrett's pentatonic superimpositions. For example, over the Ebmaj7(#11) Garrett favors using the F

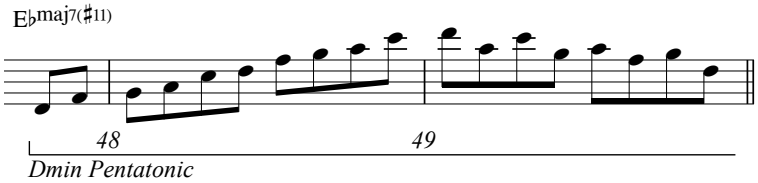
major and D minor pentatonic scales, both of which emphasize the upper extensions of the chord quality. The chord immediately following the Ebmaj7(#11) is a Dmin7, so the use of the D minor pentatonic strengthens the modal flavor of the solo with the common tones.

Fig. 3: F major & D minor pentatonic over Ebmaj7(#11)

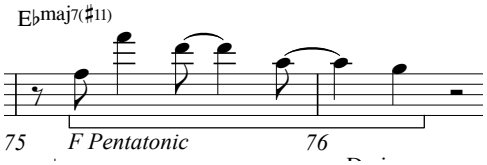
mm. 19-21 F



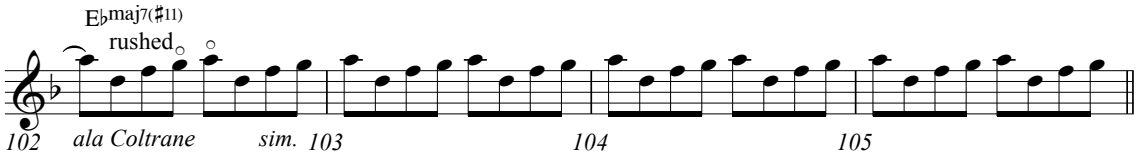
mm. 47-49 D



mm. 75-76 F

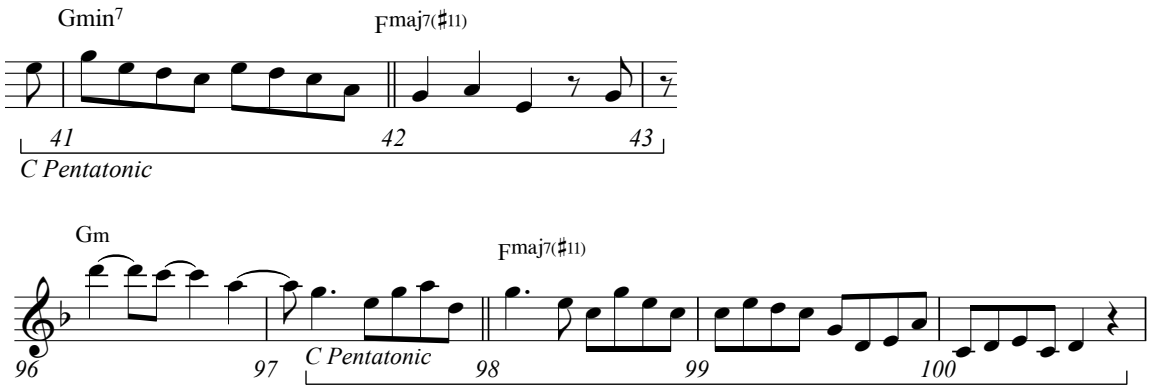


mm. 102-105 D



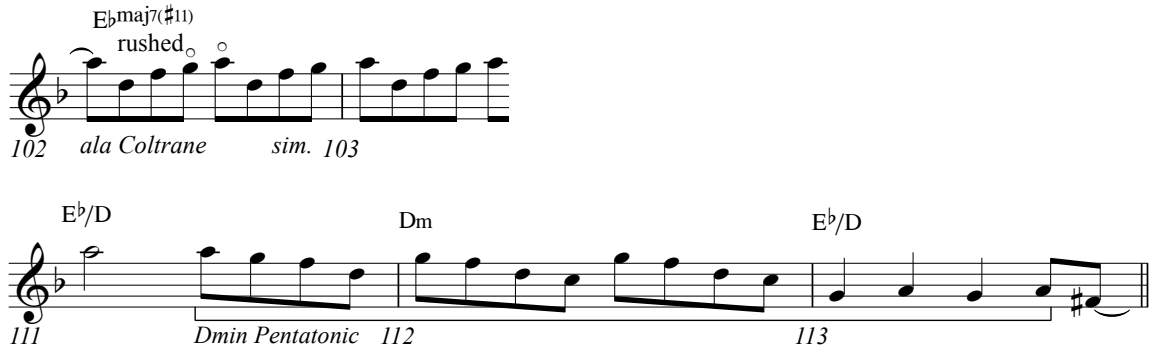
In mm. 41-42 and 96-100 Garrett uses the C pentatonic scale as common tone material between the Gmin7 and Fmaj7(#11), again adding to the modal sound of the solo.

Fig. 4: C pentatonic over Gmin7 & Fmaj7(#11)



At the end of the solo, Garret employs a classic Coltrane modal device, utilizing a four-note cell of the D minor pentatonic scale over a pedal point of D in the bass. He begins the line over the Ebmaj7(#11) shown above, and repeats the cell numerous times over the D pedal, allowing the upper notes to produce overtones. Garrett concludes the riff with a diatonic pattern descending through the D minor pentatonic scale.

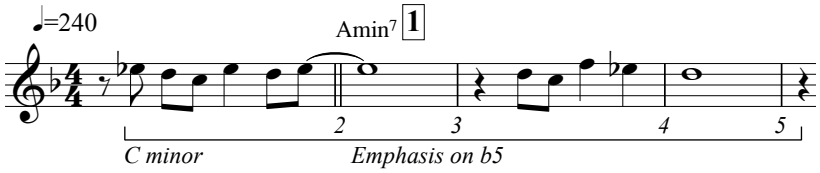
Fix 5: D minor pentatonic cell and diatonic pattern



Motives and Non-Diatonic Pitch Relationships

Kenny Garrett is known for playing dissonant pitches on strong beats for uncomfortably long durations. In this solo he begins with a strong sustained Eb over the initial Am7, emphasizing the b5 (or #11) of the chord. This could be a superimposed C minor sound or an extension of the Eb/D harmony from the end of the previous chorus. He resolves the Eb by m. 4, but because of the strength of the sequenced motive, the whole four measures sound just like a natural part of the progression.

Fig. 6 mm. 1-4



Another use of the #11 sound on a minor 7th chord occurs in mm. 25-28 (Fig. 7). Here Garrett begins his motive on a G# over the D pedal point. He resolves the tension up to an A in m. 29, transposing the motive for the impending Amin7. Once again the strength of the motive carries the dissonance as Garrett sequences the idea down in mm. 29-33 (Fig. 8).

Fig. 7: mm. 25-28

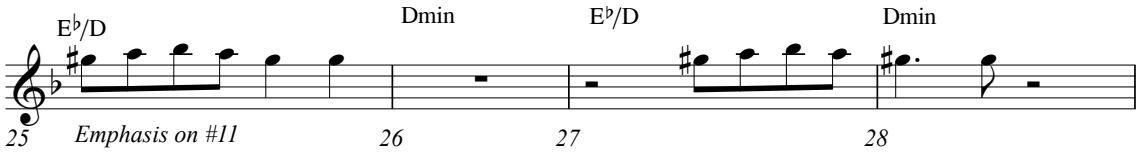
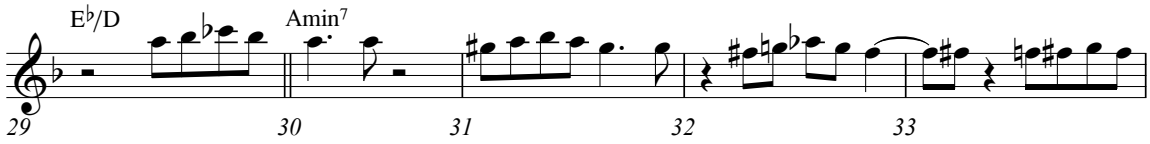
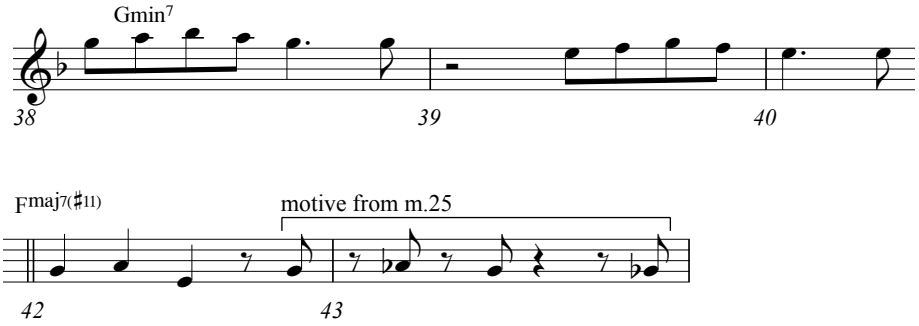


Fig. 8: Resolved tension and sequence



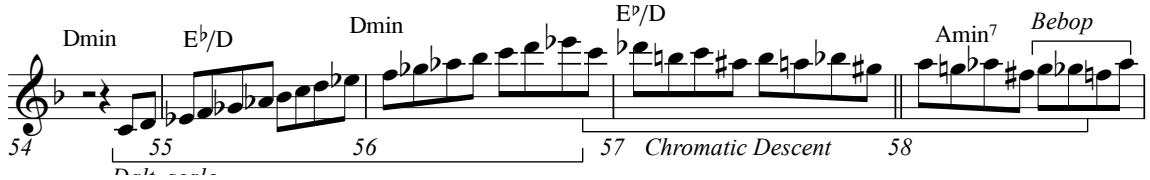
Garrett departs from the idea for a few measures but returns to the motive in a less dissonant form in mm. 38-40, and with a brief abstracted form in mm. 42-44 (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9



Measures 57-58 are an example of a classic Kenny Garrett lick. After running up a D altered scale in mm. 54-55, Garrett plays a descending chromatic scale with lower chromatic neighbors to each scale tone, linking the following pentatonic pattern with a bebop lick.

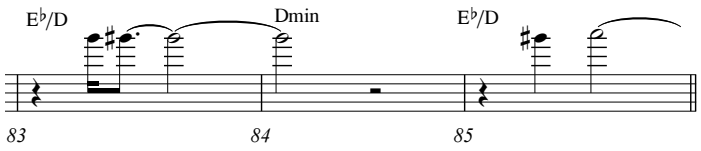
Fig. 10: Chromatic descent



The most striking use of a strong dissonant pitch within a motive occurs in mm. 83-85. In the middle of a screaming chromatic ascent, Garrett lands on a G#, again emphasizing the #11 over the Dmin-Eb/D pedal. He resolves to the A just

prior to the chord change, but with shifting substituted harmonies in the rhythm section, Garrett's resolution is effectively turned into a dissonance.

Fig. 11: mm. 83-85



Rhythm and Solo Arc

Garrett's rhythm is one of the most important aspects of this solo is also the hardest to accurately notate. He uses slower rhythmic values to help pace the development of the solo from the beginning. He tends to play less rhythmically intense passages over the first 16 bars of the form, gradually introducing more syncopation or harder driving lines in the last 4-8 measures preceding the D pedal. Remarkably the most memorable part of the solo, utilizes some of the most sustained rhythmic values and repetition (mm.66-97). It is also interesting that these measures contain the peak of the solo arc. This arc is contrary to many solos, rhythmically speaking, as it "slows down" at the peak. The fastest rhythmic activity comes at the end of the arc, mm. 102-113, almost spiraling to the end. The rhythmic tension and release, along with the tessitura, dynamics, and density from the rhythm section, help support the unconventional build. His ability to bend the rules of pitch and rhythm is one of the reasons Kenny Garrett has become such an important voice in modern jazz.