

Chapter 2 – Turnarounds

When jazz musicians use the term “turnaround,” they are most often referring to a two-measure progression that occurs when the melody has reached a temporary resolution and has become inactive. It usually happens at the end of a section or of a chorus. Typically the two bars will have four chords lasting for two beats each so they are perfect for using the four-note cells. The progression is used to keep the harmony in motion and to target the first chord of the next section or chorus. The first chord of the next section or chorus may be a I chord or a II chord or a VI chord or sometimes a IV chord. The I chord is the most common, and once you know how to create turnarounds to the I chord the others should be easy.

Standard turnarounds

The most commonly used turnarounds to the I chord are based on the famous I-VI-II-V-I progression. In the key of C major this would be Cmaj7-Ami7-Dmi7-G7 and back to C. This progression is entirely diatonic. Of course the chords could have some modifications and/or extensions and still be diatonic, for example C6/9-Ami11-Dmi9-G13. Since the turnaround happens when the melody is inactive, most jazz players will use some chromatic alterations and re-harmonizations during the turnaround to make things more interesting. Let’s check out some actual recorded examples.

Some actual examples of standard turnarounds

Play Ex.2-1, from a recording of an improvised solo by Joe Pass.