

Three Cool Vamps for Bossa Novas

by Brenda Earle Stokes, BFA, M.Mus

For anyone who is a jazz instrumentalist, vocalist or enthusiast, you know that the Bossa Nova is a staple of this music. Songs by Antonio Carlos Jobim and Joao Gilberto are part of our repertoire, and we love to perform them!

In this video, I am going to show you three different vamps that work really well in Bossa Nova and other Latin-influenced styles. Each one of these vamps works great as an Introduction, a solo section or an ending of the song. You can even apply these vamps to Jazz Standards and I bet they might work in your original music too. Give them a try!

First off, what is a vamp? If you are not familiar with this term, a vamp is a short section of music that repeats over and over. Usually it is either 2 or 4 bars that are repeated over and over. Each of the three vamps I am going to give you works great as Introduction, a solo section or an ending for a song. ****Do not use the same vamp as the intro, solo section AND ending, as that would be overkill and bore your audience!****

In this tutorial, I'm not just going to show you the chords, but I am also going to include voicings that sound great over each progression, plus what linear pitch material (scales or modes) work to improvise with.

Once I show you each of the vamps, you can apply them to a favorite song. You should also learn them in different keys, so you always have some good material ready to go when someone calls a song at a rehearsal or jam session.

If you are working on learning to improvise as either a vocalist or instrumentalist, these vamps a fantastic place to work on your soloing skills. Since there are only a couple of chords, it's much easier to improvise over than an entire song. And since I'm giving you some great piano voicings and the scales that go along with each chord, you have a great place to work from. **Let's get started!**

"The Jobim"

Antonio Carlos Jobim was one of the great composers of Bossa Nova and wrote many iconic songs like "Girl From Ipanema" and "Corcovado". This first vamp is one that shows up in his music, most notably in his composition "Wave".

"The Jobim"

Dorian scale for soloing



voicings D-7 G7 D-7 G7

bass notes

This vamp is harmonically tricky, as it is a ii-7 to V7 in the key of C, even though the song is in the key of D. I like to remember that it starts on a minor 7th starting on the root of the key. I have written a suggested D Dorian scale to play over the two chords.

Bluesy pattern for soloing



In this example, I am using the same chord voicings, but I am offering a suggested bluesy pattern that works well over this progression. Jazz players often play bluesy material over this set of chords.

The “Up a Half Step”

The next vamp is something I call the “Up a Half Step” (no cool name for this one, folks!). There are two different versions of this vamp, each one offering a slightly different harmonic texture.

"The Up a Half Step" - version 1

C Major Scale	Db Lydian Dominant (#4, b7)
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When we move from Cma7 to Db7#11, we are actually playing a tritone substitution of Cma7 to G7. Since Db7 and G7 each share the same 3rd and 7th, we call these two chords tritone substitutions. Db7 is a more interesting sounding progression and we add the #11, since it helps ties the two chords together with the shared G. For the Db7#11, you can use the Db Lydian Dominant scale, which is a mixolydian scale (b7) that has a #4.

HW: Practice sustaining the G between both chords. Then practice sustaining the B between both chords. (The B is the 7th of C major 7 and is also the 7th (Cb) of Db7).

"The Up a Half Step" - version 2

C Major Scale Db Lydian Scale



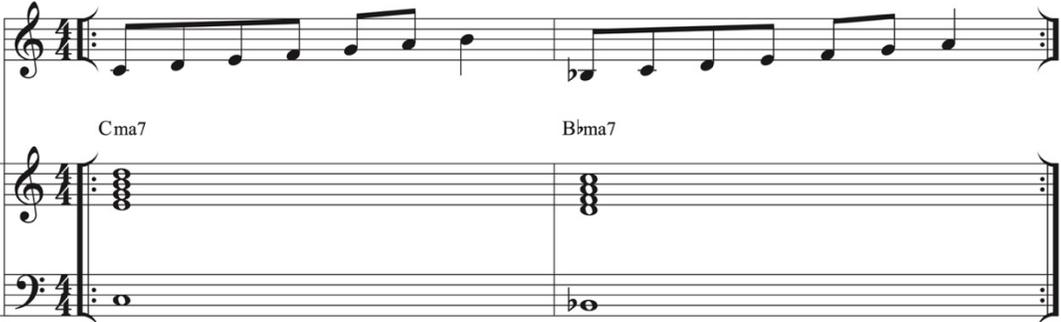
In this version of the “Up a Half Step” we are using a Dbma7 chord instead of a Db7. We will add a #11 to this one as well, making the Db scale a Lydian scale.

“The Dindi”

This vamp is bored from the verse of Jobim’s luscious song “Dindi” (pronounced *jinji*). The parallel major 7th chords create a warm and open sounding harmonic movement that is deeply satisfying to hear and easy to play.

"The Dindi"

C Major Scale Bb Lydian Scale



Using the Bb Lydian Scale helps to tie the chords together when you improvise.

A note for educators or new improvisors: A vamp is a great way to get started improvising! Since it only contains two chords and repeats, it is a great way to improvise without having a lot of chords or scales to negotiate!

Brenda Earle Stokes is a pianist, vocalist, composer and educator with is the owner and creator of Piano and Voice with Brenda and Piano Skills for Singers, unique online courses designed to get your playing to the next level. Brenda has toured the globe as an internationally-recognized performer, composer and educator and has released 7 albums as a bandleader. Although her main genre is jazz, Brenda works as both pianist and vocalist in a wide range of styles from Music Theater to Pop and has taught students of all levels how to grow as musicians. Her online courses have hundreds of students worldwide and provide high quality, affordable training for people of all levels and interests.