Dominant 7 (no 5) Backing Track Practice Tips

In my personal experience, I find that many players shy away from learning a lot of hip licks over a dominant 7 chord because they often “clash” or “just don’t sound good” when they play them with their group. Many times it is no fault of the soloist, but it is because many guitarists and pianists comp dominant 7 chords with the 5th and 9th chord members. Why is this such a bad thing, you ask?

The two most important tones of a Dominant 7 chord are Root, 3rd and the 7th. They are UNCHANGING. Virtually every scale that is successfully used over this chord has those three notes. As for the other notes in the scale… that is another issue. Lets look at all the common, go-to options for playing over a G7 chord.

Option 1) G A B C D E F - G Mixolydiain

This is the one approach I've seen taught the most in public schools. It works well because you can stick to the same notes when it resolves to a 1 chord (C Maj7). It sounds pretty bland in my opinion and doesn't offer much color.

Option 2) G A B C# D E F - G Lydian Dominant

This is the 4th mode of a Jazz Minor (Melodic Minor Scale). D Melodic Minor in this case.

Here we come across out first **Altered Tone** in a dominant 7th chord. Altered tones happen when you flat the 9th, sharp the 9th, flat the 5th (also written enharmonically as sharping the 11), or sharp the 5th (sometimes enharmonically written as flatting the 13). The C# in this scale is a b5 (or #11 as written). We can quickly see that If the rhythm section were to play the 5th in the dominant 7 chord, we might hear the C# clash a bit too much for young ears. The C# is usefully because it can lead up traditionally to the 9th of 1 chord (D) or resolve down a half step to the root of the 1 chord (C).

Option 3) G A B C D Eb F - G Mixolydian b6

This is the 5th mode of the Jazz Minor (Melodic Minor). C Melodic Minor in this case. This scale gives us another altered tone. This time we get to experience the b13 (or #5). This tone will end up resolving to a E natural (the third of the 1 chord) or more traditionally down to the 9th of the 1 chord (D).

Option 4) G Ab B C D Eb F - G Phrygian Dominant

This is the 5th mode of the Harmonic Minor Scale. This mode has the b13 (Eb) from the previous scale. We also get our first altered 9th scale degree with a b9 (Ab). This Ab will resolve up a half step to the 6th of 1 chord (A). It could also resolve down a half step to the 5th of the 1 chord. Notice how all these altered tones are a half step away from being resolved to a consonant note in the 1 chord.

Option 5) G Ab Bb Cb (B) Db Eb F - G Altered Scale

This is the 7th mode of the Melodic Minor Scale. Ab Melodic Minor in this case. We get all 4 alterations of the 9th and the 5th in this scale. We get the b9 (Ab), b5 (Db), and b13 (Eb) from earlier. We also get the #9 (Bb or enharmonicallyy, A#). This scale degree can also resolve a half step up or down to the A (6th of the 1 chord) or B (7th of the one chord.

Notice every altered tone of the 5 chord can be resolved down or up a half step when resolving to the 1 chord. This brings true meaning to the saying, “You are only a half step away from the right note.”

Option 6) G Ab Bb B Db D E F - Octatonic HW

This special symmetric 8 note scale has all the altered tones with the exception of the #5 (b13). One interesting way to practice this scale is to use its symmetrical nature in your own favor. Because the pattern repeats every

minor 3rd, you can play any arpeggio or pattern that is a minor 3rd or tri-tone higher or lower. Here is an example.

We can make a G7 arpeggio out of the scale. We can also make a Bb7 because it's a minor 3rd higher. How about a E7 a minor 3rd lower? And a Db7 a tri-tone away.

G7 - G B D F
Bb - Bb D F Ab
Db7 - Db F Ab Cb (B)
E7 - E G# (Ab) B D

Try playing these 3 arpeggios any way you can. You don't have to play them from the root. You can invert them if you'd like.

Maybe play them in 4 groups of 8th notes like this.

G7	E7	Bb7	Db7
G B D F	E D B G#	F Ab Bb D	Db F Ab Cb (B)