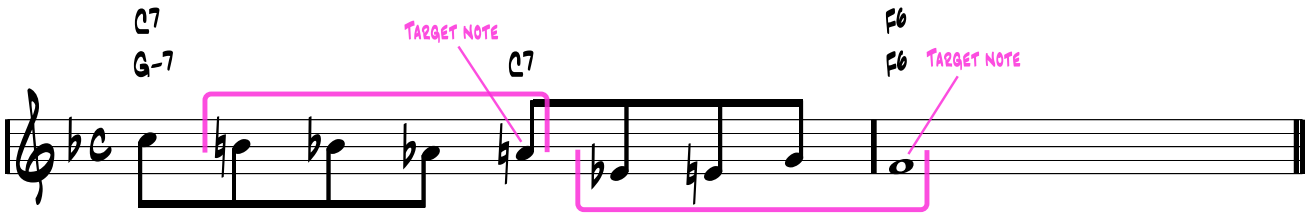
JazzKeys.fyi

This is a PDF version of the full tutorial on bebop enclosures, with audio and animated keyboards, at JazzKeys.fyi →

Bebop enclosures

The phrase below demonstrates a foundational jazz pattern called ‘enclosures’. There are a couple of them here, marked with brackets:



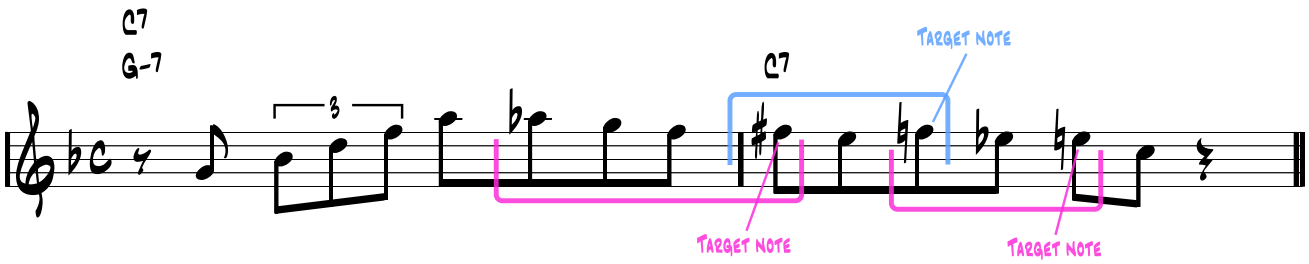
The basic idea is that you move around a target or destination note, starting a whole- or half-step below then moving above, or vice versa. An enclosure can have three notes, or you can extend the melody with additional notes, before arriving at the destination note.

The most typical, idiomatic enclosure employs the notes a half-step above and below the target note, but this need not always be the case, such as in the second enclosure above.

The harmony in the above example is a classic ii-V^7-I (or V-I) cadence. We’re in F major so the ii is G minor 7, the V^7 is C dominant 7 and the I is F major 6.

Try playing it in all 12 major keys.

Another phrase containing enclosures:



Practice tip: hold down a chord, say G minor 7, and work out your own enclosures over it.

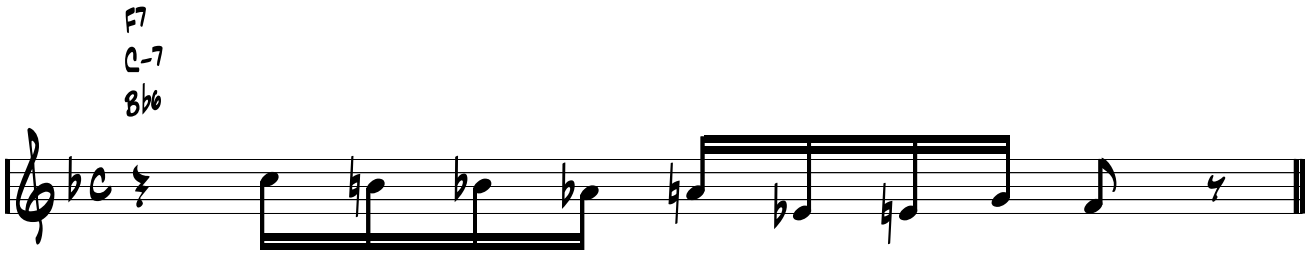
Here's another bebop phrase. Can you identify the enclosures?

Answer:

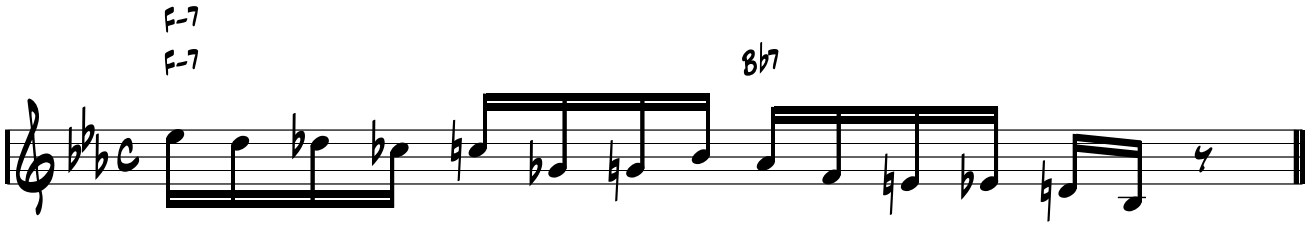
Practice tips

A great way to improve your command of bebop and improvisation in general is to take a phrase and modify it melodically and rhythmically and see how it sounds against different chords.

Here's the first example, played in double-time (sixteenth notes), offset by a beat, set against B flat 6, C minor 7 and F dominant 7:



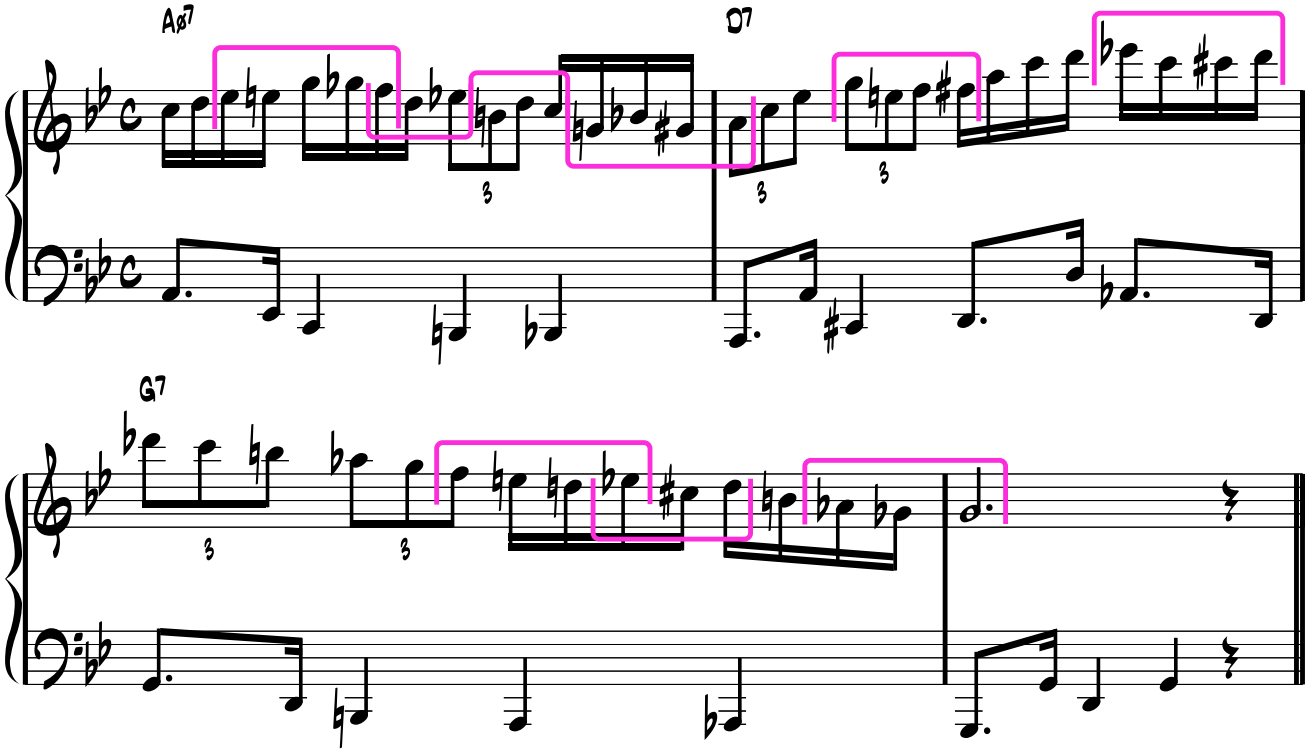
Here's the figure again, followed by another bebop-esque figure to end the phrase. Try playing it in all twelve major keys.



The same figure repeated in a descending sequence:

Example: ‘Stella by Starlight’, Keith Jarrett

You can hear enclosures in virtually any jazz recording, of course, but here’s a few bars from one of my favourite Keith Jarrett performances, a 2006 solo recording of ‘Stella by Starlight’. Enclosures are highlighted.



If you’d like to view the full transcription — it contains many cool lines worth studying — it’s available here or by subscribing to Michael Lucke’s Patreon.

In conclusion, gaining a command of bebop enclosures will really help your jazz improvisation, whether you’re playing straight-ahead or more contemporary jazz. A great resource I’d recommend is the Bud Powell Omnibook, which contains transcriptions of some of Bud’s amazing solos.