"Stella" Chord-Scale Workout

"These are the scales for each of the chords of "Stella By Starlight". There are other options, but we'll stick with these for now. Play these and pay attention to the sounds of the scales in relation to the bass note.

For simplicity we'll play the roots only.

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E7 Loc. #2 A7(#9) Alt. Dom. D7 Loc. #2


Bm7 Maj.
Play these little scale melodies. Note how starting on each chord note changes the sound of the melody.
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Let's start on the root of each chord. We'll extend each chord to make it 2 bars, this will give us time to hear it back and prepare for the next chord.

Now that there's less action in the r.h. let's play fuller chords so we hear the melody color notes in relation to the bass chord quality.
Now let's start on the 3rd of each chord scale. Notice how the melody starts and ends on the same chord note. Let your ear identify the quality of each top note and hear how they resolve.

Now let's use the same concept, except this time let's invert the motif we used in C. This is sometimes called a mirror. Still returns to its origin.
Now 1 bar each without the extra measure - like in real life...like the pros do :)

Now down from the root.

Now our melody starts with a triad off the root. We'll make it easier by resting on the same chord for a measure like in the previous exercises.
Now let's do it for real (1 bar each). It will be more effective to practice this initially in four bar phrases, then put them all together. We add the extra bar (see example) to get into the next line of the tune.

After learning the previous melodies over "Stella", you may want to learn how to solo on "Stella" using triads derived from the scale. In this first example, we use a two-beat arpeggio sequence. This approach is sometimes called planing. In this case it is diatonic/scalar planing.

Now try it on the next chord. Be sure to practice this concept on each of the chords in "Stella". Note that beats one and three of each measure form an ascending scale.
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If you start on A+ you are in for a surprise. A+ is really an inversion of D♭+ and all the other triads are inversions as well. This is a good sound to explore. It is sometimes called "Triadic Inversion".

Slow Scalar Climb. Now we add another chord but take away the triads leaving only their roots. We're back to our slow scalar climb.

E♭7 ...starting on the 9th... A 7(#9) ...pause for a bar...

E♭7 ...starting on the 3rd... A 7(#9)

E♭7 ...starting on the 4th... A 7(#9)
Now let's embellish this scalar climb with triads. Just for fun, we'll use the root for a starting note.

E7 | A7(#5)

*Remember to adjust the notes to the new scale when you have a new chord. In this case, D7 becomes D♭.

Now try embellishing the climb with...seventh chords!
We'll begin by using planing on one chord at a time.

E7 | A7(#5)
Here we’ll go on to the next chord. Each time starting higher.

Now try the previous idea with syncopation. Note the shorter phrase.

This is a smaller example using the tune. After practicing bars 1 and 2 this way, you’d work on bars 3 & 4, 5 & 6, etc. Then the whole tune.
Here we’ve inverted the seventh chords. First do this on one chord at a time, then go to this example. Note that there aren’t any rests.

Now we do a yo-yo like palindrome (It reads the same backwards).

(Chord lowers to make room for right hand)
Here, we combine four bars at a time. Note the variation in the left hand’s rhythm. Combine this with other 4-bar phrases.

I hope you enjoy mastering these approaches to soloing over “Stella By Starlight”. Learn one approach, then another. Next, alternate them every four or eight bars. Next, solo by playing what you hear without following any set pattern and see what comes out. Give it time and you will notice greater freedom in your playing.