

AN INTRODUCTION TO JAZZ

JAZZ VOCAB: TALKING JAZZ

Chorus(es): Many jazz songs are sung, played, and improvised over the chorus to early American popular songs. This chorus serves as the form of the song, which loops until the song is over. When jazz musicians specify the number of times played through the form, they say choruses.

Comping: “Comping” is playing chords underneath the band in order to *compliment* what they’re doing. It is done by the harmony instruments, such as the piano and guitar.

The Head: “Head” is the jazz word for melody. When someone refers to the head, they’re referring to the main melody of the song that is being performed; similar to Da Capo in classical music.

Lead Sheet: A lead sheet is a piece of sheet music that has the main melody of the song along with the accompanying chords, or “changes.” A lot of smaller jazz groups, such as jazz combos, use these on their gigs.

Standard/Jazz Standard: If a song is referred to as a “standard,” which means that it’s a song that has been a proven member of the jazz repertoire for years. Some good examples of well-known standards are “Autumn Leaves”, “Take the A-Train”, “Misty”, and “Satin Doll.” Many of the songs found in the Real Books are regarded as “standards.”

Chart: Jazz songs and arrangements are often called “charts.” Chart can refer to the written music or the song itself.

JAZZ STYLE: JAZZ IS A RHYTHMIC LANGUAGE

Jazz Style Checklist

1. 2 & 4 emphasis - move emphasis from 1 & 3 to 2 & 4
2. "Da" tonguing - notes are not articulated unless specified
3. Swing 8ths - not regular 8ths and not triplets, somewhere in between
4. Back Accents - accent the second 8th note to move the beat forward
 - o Tongue Every Other Note - only on fast tempos, tongue upbeats
5. Natural Line Accents - accent notes when the line changes direction

Articulations

Accent - specifies attack of note: hard and emphasized, doesn’t affect the length

Cap Accent (Marcato) - same as accent: emphasized and shortened note length

Staccato - specifies the length of note: shortened note length, 50-60% of normal length

Tenuto - specifies the length of note: full value length, overemphasized if needed

LISTENING: MUSIC IS AN AUDITORY ART FORM

You can instantly discern what is good jazz and bad jazz. Don’t think of notes first, think of the emotion you feel while hearing the notes. In this music, it’s more important to be emotionally correct rather than academically exact.

Spotify playlist! → bit.ly/JazzListening

“To play a wrong note is insignificant; to play without passion is inexcusable.” - Ludwig Van Beethoven

SOLOING IN SHORT: IT’S EASIER THAN YOU THINK

John Kratus’s 7 Improvisational Levels

1. Exploratory Improvisation - Making noises with no predetermined goal, nonsensical
2. Process-oriented Improvisation - Audiating before improvising, music makes sense to self
3. Product-oriented Improvisation - Awareness of constraints, sense to others & form
4. Fluid Improvisation - Technical mastery, sense of instrument
5. Structural Improvisation - Improvising with a plan, sense of form & microform
6. Stylistic Improvisation - Internalization of style, sense within history
7. Personal Improvisation - Personalization or combination of pre-existing style(s)

TIPS WHEN STARTING TO SOLO

Improvise within a style: This gives context and credibility to your spontaneous creation. Start improvising within a style you are already familiar. For instance: funk, blues, rock, country, folk/bluegrass, hip hop, R&B, fugues, etc.

Have a plan before you improvise: John Kratus in “Growing With Improvisation” noted that all experts had an idea for their solo before they began, as opposed to beginners who did not have a plan and improvised aimlessly

Solo Arc: Same as a story arc: Introduction, Rise, Climax, Fall. Convey a literal story to the listener with real characters, places, and themes. Make the improvisation real and convey emotion, rather than just random notes.

Limit Your Playing at First: Begin with three notes - root, flat third, flat seventh. Start on the tonic and use plenty of rhythms, jazz is a rhythmic language after all! Limiting the notes in your soloing will force your playing to be deliberate. This limitation will also let you focus on communicating emotion using rhythm and note patterns.

Steal, Steal, Steal: If you hear a lick or solo that you enjoy, then learn it! There’s no shame in taking an idea that works then adopting it as your own. Don’t reinvent the wheel if you don’t need to.

Things to Remember: Have a game plan and pace yourself. Know how many choruses you plan to solo so you can pre-plan your solo arc and story. At the start of your solo use more space, use less notes, play lower on your instrument, and use duple rhythms. The start of your solo arc is lower than jazz masters because your climax is lower--take into account the limits of your own ability. To build intensity, play more notes, get higher on your instrument, and start to use triplets. When you come up with ideas that work, repeat them! Great improvisers aren’t afraid of replaying and using a lick that worked once because they know it’s bound to work again.

WHY JAZZ? ADVOCACY FOR JAZZ MUSIC

Jazz is American music. By teaching it, you are teaching your students the history of our country and how other cultures affected it.

Jazz is commercial music. Modern Pop, RnB, Rap, and Rock music all come from jazz in some way.

Jazz is multicultural. Like the drum set (which is a direct invention from jazz), many different cultures have contributed and still contribute to the lineage of jazz.

JAZZ ALBUMS TO LISTEN TO

Vocalists: “Chet Baker Sings” - Chet Baker, “Get Happy” - Ella Fitzgerald, “After Hours” - Sarah Vaughan, “A Social Call” - Jazzmeia Horn, “Anita” - Anita O’Day, “One of a Kind” - Benny Benack III

Saxophone: “Boss Tenors” - Gene Ammons/Sonny Stitt, “Charlie Parker With Strings” - Charlie Parker

Trumpet: “Kind of Blue” - Miles Davis, “Study in Brown” - Clifford Brown, “Blue’s Moods” - Blue Mitchell

Trombone: “The Trombone Master” - J.J. Johnson, “A Day in Copenhagen” - Slide Hampton/Dexter Gordon

Piano: “Portrait in Jazz” - Bill Evans, “The Genius After Hours” - Ray Charles, “Takin’ Off” - Herbie Hancock

Guitar: “The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery” - Wes Montgomery, “Undercurrent” - Jim Hall/Bill Evans

Bass: “Night Train” and “The Trio” - Oscar Peterson Trio, “Somethin’ Else” - Cannonball Adderly

Drums: “Moanin’” - Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers, “Red Sparkle” - Jeff Hamilton Trio

Big Band: “Kansas City Suite” & “April in Paris” - The Count Basie Orchestra, “Central Park North” - The Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, “Incredible Journey” & “Get Up” - Bob Mintzer Big Band

Vocal Ensembles: “Sing! Sing! Sing!” - New York Voices, “Summertime” - Lambert, Hendricks and Ross, “Mecca for Moderns” - The Manhattan Transfer, “A Capella” - The Singers Unlimited

JAZZ RESOURCES

Teaching Resources: The Vocal Jazz Ensemble (by Paris Rutherford), The Red Jazz Handbook (by Jamey Abersold), A Teacher’s Resource Guide to Jazz for Young People (by Wynton Marsalis, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Sharon Birch)

Music/Etudes: The Real Books, Aebersold Jazz Play-Alongs, Hal-Leonard Jazz Play-Alongs, Jazz Conception and Essence of the Blues Vocabulary (both by Jim Snidero), Effective Etudes For Jazz (by Mike Carubia and Jeff Jarvis)

Apps: iRealPro, Drum Genius, Band in a Box, Metronome, Tuner, Garage Band (to slow down transcriptions)