

Strings Without Boundaries
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Advanced Jazz Improvisation
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What are the skills of an advanced improviser?

- Hears melodic ideas internally, away from any instrument
- Has technical prowess required to express melodic ideas
- Has the rhythmic and harmonic clarity to improvise without an accompanist
- Not only knows the chord/scales, but has an intuitive grasp of their location
- Able to substitute chord/scales in order to create any color desired (chromaticism)
- Is present while improvising, free from self-judgement

When you improvise with no framework, it's easy to be intimidated by the possibilities or wind up relying on musical tendencies. Using rules and restrictions in the practice room is a great way to challenge yourself, which in turn strengthens your improvisational abilities. Once your performing, allow yourself to be present and create spontaneously; your practice routine will show through your playing.

“Highly regarded soloists in (bop) styles typically imply the movements of chords...either by creating lines that voice-lead smoothly from one chord to another or by confounding the harmony pull through anticipating or delaying harmonic resolution.” - David Ake, Jazz Cultures

How do we improve our improvisational skills?

Mind - Thought - Ideas

- Study music theory
- Re-harmonize standards
- Practice piano

Body - Technique - Facility

- Physically internalize chord/scale shapes on the fingerboard
- Transcribe straight to your instrument
- Bring awareness to any physical tension while playing

Soul - Expression - Emotion

- Listen to and transcribe great improvisers
- Create stories for your compositions/improvisations
- Do something that makes you feel strong emotions

Schematic for acquiring new information (David Liebman):

Intellectual understanding → disciplined and organized practice → integration into technique → emotions shape expressive content of idea → communication of idea

Demonstration Song - Gaia's Warning (see PDF)

-Intellect Exercises-

- Exercise #1: Voice lead through chord tones
- Exercise #2: Ascending/Descending chord tones
- Exercise #3: Ascending/Descending scales
- Exercise #4: Avoid the root
- Exercise #5: Emphasize color tones
- Exercise #6: Melodic chromaticism
- Exercise #6: Practice in all 12 keys

-Facility Exercises-

- Exercise #7: Change meter/groove
- Exercise #8: Start every phrase on a specific beat in the measure
- Exercise #9: Emphasize a rhythmic subdivision or pattern

-Expression Exercises-

- Exercise #10: Create variations on the melody
- Exercise #11: Vocalize an improvised solo
- Exercise #10: Play What You Sing (Not Sing What You Play!)

Recommended Resources:

- Patterns for Jazz - Jerry Coker
- A Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody - David Liebman
- Effortless Mastery - Kenny Werner
- The Strum Bowing Method: How to Groove on Strings - Tracy Silverman
- Arpeggios for Jazz Violin, Cello, and Viola - Christian Howes