

# JAZZ IMPROVISATION: YOU CAN DO IT!

Presented by

**Vince Corozine (ASCAP)**

## CREATIVE MUSIC EDUCATION IN A WORKSHOP ATMOSPHERE

APPROACH: The following approach to jazz improvisation is designed for teachers of melodic instruments. The major strength of this approach is that it presents improvisation solely by melodic means without requiring a thorough background of traditional harmony. Since this system operates on an instant feedback principle, and should be taught on a one-to-one basis or in a small group situation. The complexity of melody and rhythm that the student can assimilate will depend upon his/her background, technique, ear, and creative spontaneity. It must be remembered that this is only one of many “workable” approaches that are available for teaching jazz improvisation. The informality and spontaneity of improvising appeal to the teenage temperament. Improvisation gives young musicians an opportunity to gain confidence in playing alone.

The ability to improvise is based on:

1. Knowledge of chords, scales, chord progressions, styles, and songs.
2. Creativity: a combination of environment, personality, heredity, and deduction.
3. Technique: the physical ability to carry out musical ideas....this takes practice. The fingers must instantly do what the brain or ear tells them to do.

*A great jazz solo consists of:*

*1% magic*

*99% stuff that is*

*Explainable*

*Analyzable*

*Categorize able*

*Doable*

(Quote from “The Jazz Theory Book” by Mark Levine pg. vii)

LISTENING: Each student must know what jazz sounds like before he/she can play it. Listening to and analyzing jazz recordings is an important part of one’s development in jazz. (see CD listing on pg. 10)

In improvising, nothing exists for the teacher to work with until the student produces it. Improvising is spontaneous. Therefore, it includes a certain amount of trial and error.

Tell the student:



**A. Paraphrase:** Simplicity of style, anticipating some notes, delaying others, changing note values, “playing around” with the melody. (*Louis Armstrong*)

**B. Outline Chords:** Typical of 1930-40s Swing Era (*Coleman Hawkins, Don Byas, Harry James, Benny Goodman*)

**C. Complex Ornamentation:** Embellishment and rephrasing of the original, variations over a set chord progression. Use of chromatic tones. (*Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Clifford Brown, John Coltrane*)

**D. Simplification and Distillation:** Omit notes, truncation, sketchy-skeletal approach. (*Theolonius Monk, Miles Davis, Count Basie*)

Examples of the above four jazz styles based on *Oh Susannah*.

Chord progression 1: Cma<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup> Em<sup>7</sup> Fma<sup>7</sup> Em<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>o<sup>7</sup>

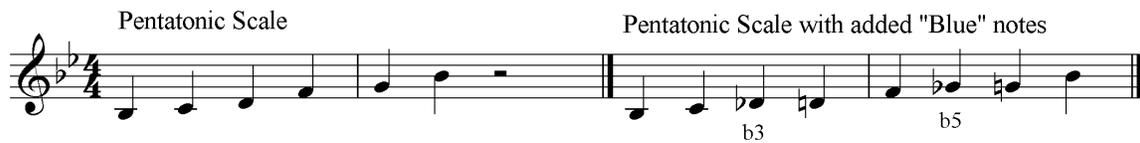
Chord progression 2: Dm<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> Cma<sup>7</sup> Fma<sup>7</sup> Em<sup>7</sup> Am<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> D<sup>b</sup>ma<sup>7</sup> C<sup>6</sup>/<sub>9</sub>

## II. First Encounter

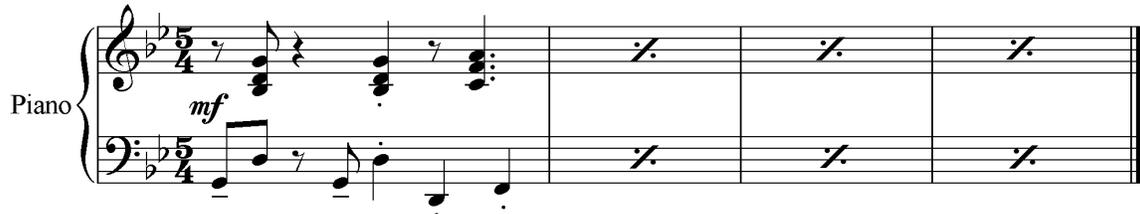
1. Play Bb major scale with rhythm section playing swing time (8 counts per note).
2. Play Bb major scale with rhythm section (short-long, Dot-du etc). (Quarter notes).
3. Play Bb major scale accenting every other note....eighth notes.
4. Rhythm section play 5/4 rhythmic vamp in Eb minor, while students improvise at the piano playing only th6e black keys. (They can't make a mistake; the pentatonic scale has no half steps) They will achieve instant success!

Piano

5. Students play the pentatonic scale on their instruments.
6. Students play the pentatonic scale with added “Blue” notes, on their instruments.



Emotional response: The rhythm section plays the 5/4 pentatonic vamp in Gminor, while the students improvise using the pentatonic or pentatonic scale with added “Blue” notes.



Outcome: Students will lose their concern for playing the “right” notes and will depend more on his ear due to the threat of failure being removed. “The pentatonic scale will sound consonant with the vamp, and the student will feel successful in his/her first attempt to improvise.

### III. The 12-Bar Blues

The Blues is a 12-bar form using three basic chords (I, IV, and V). It is in *Iambic Pentameter* verse and utilizes a call and response pattern. Blues has always been a solo vehicle (call and response) based on a rather dreary or difficult personal social situation. Almost every jazz musician has played or recorded a blues at one time or another. The Blues is the most basic of jazz forms (AAB) and should be learned thoroughly by all musicians.

Blues is more than a musical form; it’s a sound, a feeling, and an attitude.

#### Rock and Latin Style

4/4 straight eighth notes  
 Quarter note---long  
 Eighth note---short

#### Swing Style

12/8 uneven feel or eighth notes  
 Quarter note---short “dah-t”  
 Eighth note---long and rolled  
 (uneven), except at the end of a phrase  
 The slower the tempo, the more pronounced the triplets.

# EAR TRAINING EXERCISE

Clapping reinforces the rhythmic figures and projects the body into the music. Singing aids in pitch placement and in ear development.

1. Teacher plays
2. Students clap
3. Teacher plays
4. Students sing
5. Teacher plays
6. Students play (by ear)

1 Easy 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 9 10

11 Medium Difficult 12 13 14

15 16 17 18

20 21 F<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup>(#9) G<sup>7</sup>(#9) C<sup>7</sup> F

Students should play the F Blues scale (in eighth notes), accenting every other note.

## Blues Scale

b3 b5 b7

Teacher plays F Blues on the keyboard (using motives from the above Ear Training exercise).

Students should answer using the same notes---by ear.

F Blues

1. Teacher plays Blues. Students (one at a time) answer (playing in the empty measures) using Blues scale notes.
2. Teacher plays Blues. Students play roots of chords from score.
3. Students play whole note background, select a note from the score and try to move smoothly from one chord to the next. Guide Tones
4. Each student improvises, in turn, using quarter or eighth notes only. Student may use blues scale or other scales in his solo while the class is playing a whole note background. (Select whole notes from guide tone sheet).

Guide Tones

Left Hand Piano (no roots)

Chord progressions have certain notes that link together in a smooth manner, and reflect the chord sound of the moment. These notes are usually the connecting notes (color notes) between chords, such as the chord third or chord seventh. “Guide Tones.”

**Gettin’ Around** by Gene Ammons

5. As students solo, add unison riffs behind soloists on second chorus.
6. “Trade Fours” with all students before going back to the top of the chart.

**IV. Scales and Chords**

There are four scales that one must learn fluently in order to play jazz. Fluently means that the player can play all scales in all twelve keys.

1. Major (Ionian)
2. Melodic minor
3. Diminished (half-step/whole-step; and whole-step/half step)
4. Whole tone

Musicians prefer to think in broad key areas, rather than play melodies that outline chords.

It is easier to remember scales than to remember a series of chord tones. Develop a scale language more than a chord language.

After learning the scales, be concerned with direction and rhythm more than notes. Plan a melodic shape and then translate it into notes.

# Just Friends

Chord progression for 'Just Friends':

- Measures 1-4: B<sup>7</sup>, B<sup>b</sup>ma<sup>7</sup>, B<sup>b</sup>m<sup>7</sup>, E<sup>b</sup>7
- Measures 5-8: Fma<sup>7</sup>, A<sup>b</sup>m<sup>7</sup>, D<sup>b</sup>7
- Measures 9-12: Gm<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>, Fma<sup>7</sup>, Dm<sup>7</sup>
- Measures 13-16: G<sup>7</sup>, Gm<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>, Cm<sup>7</sup>, B<sup>7</sup>

## MODES

The Dorian mode is one of the most popular modes used in jazz. Miles Davis, in his modal composition “So What” uses only two chords throughout the piece. Dm for 16 measures, Ebm for 8 measures, and then back to Dm for 8 measures. The Dorian mode is used by the soloist for the selection of notes for this modal tune.

There are seven modes in use for jazz playing:

- |       |                |   |  |
|-------|----------------|---|--|
| 1.    | Ionian (Major) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8   | <i>Each mode gets darker (adds one more flat )</i> |
| 2.    | Mixolydian     | 1 2 3 4 5 6 <b>b7</b> 8                                 |  |
| 3.    | Dorian         | 1 2 <b>b3</b> 4 5 6 <b>b7</b> 8                         |  |
| 4.    | Aeolian        | 1 2 <b>b3</b> 4 5 <b>b6</b> <b>b7</b> 8                 |  |
| 5.    | Phrygian       | 1 <b>b2</b> <b>b3</b> 4 5 <b>b6</b> <b>b7</b> 8         |  |
| 6.    | Locrian        | 1 <b>b2</b> <b>b3</b> 4 <b>b5</b> <b>b6</b> <b>b7</b> 8 | <i>(Darkest mode)</i>                              |
| <hr/> |                |   |  |
| 7     | Lydian         | 1 2 3 <b>#4</b> 5 6 7 8                                 | <i>(Brightest mode)</i>                            |

An easy way to learn the modes:

Any major scale beginning on the 5<sup>th</sup> note is Mixolydian

Any major scale beginning on the 2<sup>nd</sup> note is Dorian

Any major scale beginning on the 6<sup>th</sup> note is Aeolian

Any major scale beginning on the 3<sup>rd</sup> note is Phrygian

Any major scale beginning on the 4<sup>th</sup> note is Lydian

Any major scale beginning on the 7<sup>th</sup> note is Locrian

One must strive to achieve variety in his/her solos through the use of:

1. Chord tones
2. Diatonic scales
3. Modal scales
4. Blues scale
5. Diminished scales
6. Pentatonic scales
7. Whole-tone scales

The following scales may be used with the following chords:

1. **Minor Blues** *C Eb F Gb G Bb C* use with Cm7 (I), C7 (I), Cm, Cm11, G7 (V in minor).
2. **Major Blues** *C D Eb E G A C* used with major 6/9, Dominant 4,7,13 chords, Characteristic of swing and rock styles of the 40's and 50's. It also applied to Dixieland and blues.
3. **Major Blues with b7** *C D Eb E G A Bb* used with dominant 7,9, 13 chords
4. **Major Blues with added #5** *C D Eb E G G# A C* used with (same as Major blues scale)
5. **Mixolydian** *G A B C D E F G* use with Dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords with no alterations
6. **Diminished whole tone** *C Db Eb E Gb Ab Bb C* (last 4 notes are a whole tone) use with altered dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords (b9, #9, b5, #5.) and Lydian Dominant *C D E F# G A Bb C*. This is an alternative to the whole tone scale (the first six tones are whole tones)
7. **Diminished (half-step)** *C Db Eb E Gb G A Bb C* (the note following the diminished chord tone is a half step higher. Use with altered dominant seventh chords. C7b9, Eb7b9, Gb7b9, A7b9
8. **Diminished (whole-step)** *C D Eb F Gb Ab A B C* used for diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords, bitonal chords, dominant 7ths altered, and minor 7<sup>th</sup> b5 (half diminished). May also use Phrygian scale.
9. **Dorian** *C D Eb F G A Bb C* use with minor 7<sup>th</sup> chords. Can also use the pentatonic minor scale for minor 7<sup>th</sup> chords *C Eb F G Bb C*
10. **Lydian** *C D E F# G A G C* use with Major 7<sup>th</sup> #5 chords; Bitonal effect
11. **Major pentatonic** *C D E G A C* use with F Maj 7, Bb Maj 7 #11, D7 sus, C9, Dm9, C6/9,
12. **Minor pentatonic** *C Eb F G Bb C* use with Cm7, Cm11, G7 (V7 in minor) Cm.
13. **Major pentatonic add b7** *C D E D A Bb C* use with C9, C13, Em7b5
14. **Pentatonic "Blues"** *C D Eb E G A Bb C* use with Dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords
15. **Whole Tone** *C D E F# G# A# C* use with Dominant 7ths #5 or b5.
16. **Harmonic Minor** *C Eb F G Ab B C* use with minor triads and minor 7<sup>th</sup> chords

17. **Jazz Melodic Minor** *C D Eb F G A B C* use with Ebmaj 7, Cm6, Am7b5, D7b9, B7#5 (b9),#9) C blues

Common chord progression iim7-V7b9 Im6 in a minor key

Am7b5 use an F7 scale beginning on A

D7b9 use a G harmonic minor scale

Gm6 use a G melodic minor scale or a C7 scale

Most jazz players avoid playing the 4<sup>th</sup> degree of a scale...an “avoid tone.”

Dm7 (no avoid tones) G7 (avoid C) 4<sup>th</sup> degree C major (avoid F) 4<sup>th</sup> degree

The prettiest sounding note is the scale 3<sup>rd</sup>

The scale 5<sup>th</sup> is neutral

2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>s add color and bite, and demand resolution

How to play “outside” the changes”

**Chord**

**Scale**

G7 Play C scale very conservative

G7 Play F scale conservative (adds Bb #9)

G7 Play Bb scale (adds Bb, Eb) #9, b9

G7 Play Eb scale (adds Bb, Eb, Ab) #9, #5, b9

G7 Play Ab scale (Bb, Eb, AB, Db) (#9, #5, b9, b5) furthest out

Each scale becomes richer and more complex, due to the addition of more altered or extended “hip” tones.

Players may also play notes that are not in the chord, stretch the length of one chord into another, and play “free” with no chord structure.

## Recordings

Listening to and analyzing jazz recordings is an essential part of learning how to improvise. Build a collection of jazz recordings:

Miles Davis *Kinda Blue* (Columbia)

Miles Davis *Milestones* (Columbia)

Charlie Parker *The Genius of Charlie Parker* (Savoy)

Charlie Parker *Bird with Strings* (Verve)

Sonny Rollins *Saxophone Colossus* (Prestige)

John Coltrane *Blue Train* (Blue Note)

Bud Powell *The Amazing Bud Powell* (Blue Note)

Wes Montgomery *Full House* (Riverside)

J.J. Johnson *The Eminent J. J. Johnson* (Blue Note)

Diana Krall *Live In Paris* (Verve)

Tony Williams Trio *Young at Heart* (Columbia)

Each player should own at least ten CDs of the top players who play their instrument.

**Trumpet:** Clifford Brown, Conti Candoli, Freddie Hubbard, Lee Morgan, Donald Byrd, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Wynton Marsalis, Arturo Sandoval, Thad Jones, Woody Shaw, Louis Armstrong

**Trombone:** Urbie Green, Bill Watros, Bob Brookmeyer, Slide Hampton, Eddie Bert, Carl Fontana.

**Saxophone:** Charlie Parker, Sonny Stitt, Stan Getz, Sonny Rollins, Joe Henderson, Dexter Gordon, Paul Desmond, Phil Woods, John Coltrane, Lester Young, Art Pepper, Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, Branford Marsalis, Joe Lovano, Gerry Mulligan, Lee Konitz

**Clarinet:** Benny Goodman, Jimmy Giuffre, Eddie Daniels, Buddy De Franco,

**Piano:** Hampton Hawes, Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson, Horace Silver, Tommy Flanagan, Art Tatum, Al Haig, Hank Jones, Theolonius Monk, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Wynton Kelly, Bud Powell, Mulgrew Miller, Ramsey Lewis, Lennie Tristano, Erroll Garner, Mary Lou Williams, McCoy Tyner

**Bass:** Charles Mingus, Ray Brown, Oscar Pettiford, Milt Hinton, Ron Carter, Jaco Pastorius

**Drums:** Tony Williams, Art Blakey, Buddy Rich, Roy Haynes, Philly-Joe Jones, Mel Lewis, Louis Bellison, Max Roach, Shelly Manne, Roy Burns, Charlie Persip, Kenny Clarke, Peter Erskine.

**Guitar:** Joe Pass, Charlie Christian, Johnny Smith, George Benson, Tal Farlow, Jim Hall, Wes Montgomery, Herb Ellis, Gene Bertoncini, John Pizzarelli

**Vibes:** Gary Burton, Mike Manieri, Milt Jackson, Lionell Hampton, Red Norvo, Cal Tjader

**Vocalists:** Billy Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Diana Krall, Sarah Vaughan, Carmen McRae, Mel Torme, Joe Williams, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Etta Jones, Nancy Wilson, Dinah Washington, Betty Carter, Sheila Jordan

The following 15 exercises should be practiced in order to develop fluency on one's horn.

1. Dm7 G7 C maj7 2. Dm7

G7 #5 C maj7 Whole tone 3. Dm7 G7(#5) Cma7

4. Dm7 G7(#5) Cma7 5. Dm7

G7 Cma7 6. D7(b9)

Gma7 7. G7(b9) Cma7

8. D7(b9) Gma7

9. D7(b9) Gma7

Gma7 10. Dm7

G7 Cma7 11. Dm7 G7 Cma7

2

Musical score for three staves. Staff 1: Measure 12 (G7), Cma7, Measure 13 (Dm7 with triplet), G7, Cma7. Staff 2: C7(#9), Fma7, Measure 14 (G7(#9) with triplet). Staff 3: Cma7, Measure 15 (Dm7), G7, Cma7.

- Vince is the author of the popular book, **Arranging Music for the Real World** (with CD), published by Mel Bay Publications, Inc. It has received five-star reviews on Amazon and on Barnes and Noble.
- Vince teaches twelve music arranging courses online. Check out the syllabi on his website [www.vincecorozine.com](http://www.vincecorozine.com)
- To view Vince’s videos about “The Creative Process” SUPERNOVA, visit [www.banddirector.com](http://www.banddirector.com) (Jazz Commission Project)
- \*For questions, or to book Vince for commissioned works, workshops, or guest conducting contact him at:

Norvin1@hotmail.com