

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD JAZZ SOLO?

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When playing jazz, the number of notes you play is not as important as how and where you play them. This is called “taste.” Taste requires hours of practice and hours of listening to develop. Taste is riding the time and the proper placement of the notes. It is a balance of overstatement and understatement.

Fast technique is acceptable if it says something musical. Playing high, loud, and fast have their moments, but you should use them as an exception rather than the rule.

- Judge the mood of the piece and add your own personal feeling to the music. Develop a simple idea; use a one or two-measure motive at first.
- Repeat an idea more than once, (this adds continuity) and don't wander aimlessly from one idea to another.
- Use “open” spaces (no playing) to set up your next idea. This provides interest. Let the rhythm section work between ideas.
- Build tension and excitement. Start simply and build to a climax. When you run out of ideas and have nothing more to say-STOP!
- Develop rhythmic variety and a mixture of dynamics (first chorus *p* and the second chorus *f*) and use crescendos and diminuendos for added interest.
- Try playing scales creatively; up or down, or begin in the middle and go either way.
- Listen to the rhythm section and “ride” the time. Keep the constant feeling of the hi hat and bass part in your head at all times. Playing the “time” is more important than the notes you play. If you can't think of anything to play—wait and listen to the rhythm section—let them spur you on---lean on them, talk to them...
- Aim for a relaxed, *legato* flow to your sound. Blow freely with the whole body, don't hold back. Get a forward feeling in everything you do. Sound like you mean it; tension clouds your thinking—think free! Be mindful that tonguing IS important.
- Remember that sustained notes give a player a chance to think of what to play next and gives the listener a chance to absorb what he/she has just heard. Nothing is as dull as a jazz solo that fills up every beat with notes and more notes. Fight the urge to fill it up.
- Incorporate material from the song and save your best “shot” for the end.

## **BASIC TOOLS OF JAZZ**

- You should own at least 10 CDs by a professional who plays your instrument.
- Technical facility in all keys (it may take months to learn one simple figure in all 12 keys).
- Knowledge of scales and chords; (Major, Melodic minor, Diminished, Whole-tone) (Know which notes are more important than other notes).
- Repertoire (Jazz songs, including 12-bar blues).
- Learn to apply them with a rhythm section, (know what's happening in the bass line...what the meter is).

**Listen. Listen. Listen!**