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Jazz for the 'Legit' Player (Abstract)

ClarinetFest® 2002
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Many classical clarinetists express an interest in playing jazz, but do not know where to begin. In this presentation, the process of improvising will be demonstrated. Participants will need to bring their clarinets. The presentation will be in five parts: a warm up, which will lead to an ear-training exercise, chord study, which will lead to bass-line building, and, lastly, improvising on a blues "head."

For a warm up, the presenter will play a simple phrase. The next player will repeat that phrase and contribute another phrase. The following player will repeat the last phrase and contribute another. The warm-up exercise will continue in this fashion. Next, will be an ear-training exercise in the form of "call and response," one of the African-American underpinnings of jazz. The presenter will play an idiomatic phrase and the participants will answer it together. Although there are no "wrong" notes in jazz, the intervallic and rhythmic discrepancies will be discussed without singling out individual players.

The presenter will then introduce a 12-bar blues and lead the group in an analysis of the chord changes. This analysis will incorporate the original classic blues changes and the more modern form, which eliminates the retrogression that occurs in the last four bars of the classic blues.

Chord analysis naturally leads to bass line construction. The bass line is essential to giving jazz its swinging character and contributes to an organic understanding of the music. The group will improvise bass lines in quarter notes. This improvisation will lead to the introduction of Thelonius Monk's "Straight, No Chaser," a well known blues head chosen for its chromatic quality and rhythmic interest. The presenter will furnish a simple background arrangement of this blues and the participants will alternate roles, some playing the background arrangement, one person improvising a bass line, and one person soloing, all by turns.

The improvisations will be critiqued with an emphasis on jazz phrasing and esthetics. The presenter will invite an American jazz guitarist living in Stockholm to accompany the group. The presenter will write a scholarly paper for publication, delineating the results and effectiveness of this presentation.