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How to Improvise Jazz on the Clarinet

ClarinetFest® 2000
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** Many of the teaching ideas presented here are based on the original teachings of Barry Harris, Dave Glasser and John McNeil, of which I find to be the most accessible and effective method to learn how to play and listen to this wonderful music. I use this method in conjunction with a focus on playing by ear.

Listening - To try to make this topic understandable I'd like to give it a theme-listening. Everything we cover here today is centered around the idea of using our ears, which is the basis for playing this music.

Concepts and techniques - In organizing the material I thought it best to try to keep it simple. So I divided my material into two categories: concepts and techniques; in other words, ideas and ways to implement the ideas. For more detailed information on these ideas please refer to the resource book listed at the end of this paper. The resource list includes explanations of the concepts and techniques, recommended recordings, web site links-some of which have sound clips to sample the style of various artists and some exercises to practice.

Rhythm and harmony - The foundations that we base our improvisations on are rhythm and harmony. Without these musical elements it would be like trying to tell a story without a theme or characters. To demonstrate rhythm I like to use the Clark Terry tune Mr. Mumbles. I sing the melody and then a rhythm and you can sing the rhythm back to me. Then I'll sing the melody again and a rhythm and you can sing the rhythm back to me again but vary it a little this time.

Mr. Mumbles

Hey Mr. Mumbles, what do you say? Doo dot doo dot doo doo doo dot

Audience repeats rhythm

Hey Mr. Mumbles, what do you say? Doo dot doo dot doo doo doo dot

Audience repeats rhythm but varies it this time.

Ears and instincts - This little exercise shows us that our ears are quicker than our eyes. By reacting to what we hear without the visual element (reading the music on paper, then thinking and interpreting, then playing it,) we bypass the conscious thought process and rely purely on our ears and instincts. This type of listening, using the ears and instincts is how this music is learned, played and passed on to others.

Rhythm - What makes jazz music unique though is really the rhythm. One can play the hippest chords and lines imaginable but without the stylistically rhythmic elements, the music just doesn't sound like jazz. These elements are ingrained by listening and imitating the master musicians. We'll talk more about how to do this later in the lecture.

Harmony - The next concept is harmony. The function of harmony in any music is to create tensions and releases that propel the music forward or leave it feeling stationary. Rather than talk about chord extensions and variations like b13 or #11, I like to use the approach that the pianist Barry Harris and saxophonist Dave Glasser use.

V chord and the I chord - This concept is based on scales. It breaks things down essentially to most of the music being centered around the V7 chord and the I chord. The V7 chord being the tension chord and the I chord being the stationary chord. Let me give you some examples of these sounds and how they are used in some music. Now this may seem like basic theory 101 but what makes it challenging in jazz music is it's application within the stylistic framework of the music.

I play up the dominant 7th chord (1-3-5-7), then resolve it to the 3rd of the I chord.

Next I play the dominant 7th scale, then the tonic scale.

These are the beginnings of our vocabulary in this music. The I chord and the V7 chord.

Mozart Clarinet Concerto - Next let's look at how they sound in the music. In this example I'll have the audience sing the roots of the tonic and dominant chords while I play the opening of the Mozart Clarinet

Concerto. Now I've reharmonized this tune a bit because it doesn't actually go directly to the dominant chord but for the purposes of this demonstration it will work and demonstrate our point.

I play the first 4 bars of the Mozart clarinet concerto with audience singing I and V. (have audience sing I and V, then play Mozart) Then I demonstrate the Mozart again by starting on different notes, which makes the player insist upon using their ears and not thinking so much or relying on written music.

Recap: So now we've looked at two basic elements that give us the foundation for improvising-rhythm and harmony. And we've seen how by using our ears we cut out the step of thinking and rely almost entirely on our ears and intuition. This helps us to use our instruments as our ears and voice by learning to hear and react without thinking something through. And of course we saw how a melody fits in with the harmony and we also learned to hear the harmony.

Creating a Line - Now let's move on to what the improviser actually does. This is how things are put together so we can learn what to actually play. Our job, as improvisers is to create a line or melody that has some rhythmic and harmonic interest against the backdrop of the rhythm and harmony of the tune which the rhythm section is playing.

Telling a little story - Now what we're doing when we improvise is essentially telling a little story. This story peaks the listeners interest when the player uses some rhythmic variety and when they choose notes in their lines which create tensions and releases, either strong or subtle, against the harmonic background of the tune being played. So it's really like speaking a language, including all of the inflections, style and vocabulary necessary to speak a language.

Dominant 7th scale - The words and sentences of our story are really the scales. And to keep it simple we'll start with our 2 scales-the dominant 7th scale and the tonic scale.

Let's now apply this scale idea to our tune, the Mozart Concerto. Audience sings the bass notes of the harmony while the melody is played first in a straight fashion, then with a jazz feel and finally improvisation over the chords.

What makes our musical story convincing (and sounding like jazz) to the listener are the stylistic elements and inflections. So let's talk briefly about one of the main stylistic elements of this music, articulation.<</p>

Articulation - In music one of the elements to help us get the rhythm across to the listener and as well as the swing feel is articulation. A good way to get a player started on swing feel is outlined by trumpeter/educator/composer John McNeil in his book *The Art of Jazz Trumpet*. He asserts that swinging modern jazz eighth notes is really a matter of playing rhythmically even eighths while articulating and accenting every even numbered eighth. This is a good way to get a player started relating the articulation, rhythm and swing feel.

In other words, in a group of eight eighths the second and third notes would be tied together and the fourth and the first of the next grouping would be tied together. And each of the first tied notes would be accented. This combination of articulation and accenting over rhythmically even eighths makes the notes swing. An example of this is listed in the resource guide.

Once this type of articulation is mastered jazz musician, Dave Glasser, suggests practicing a variety of articulations so that the player has the flexibility to play many types of articulations in their lines.

To recap we now saw how the melody fits with the harmony, how important articulation is.

Tritone scale - Now, getting back to the scales. Remember we have the tension and relaxed sounds -the dominant 7th and Tonic. Let's add one more, this is moving along quickly but I don't want to leave it out. The other scale is the tritone scale. In other words a dominant 7th scale a tri tone away from the original dominant 7th scale. For instance in the key of C, the dominant 7th scale is G7. The tri tone scale is C#7 or Db7.

If we make a line up using these two scales and finally resolve it to the tonic scale, we're creating harmonic tensions and releases. These scales would be used over a ii-V7 chord progression. Again that's conceptual. Listening and playing along with recordings will demonstrate these sounds to your ears.

Less Categorization of Sounds - The reason we use the tri tone scale is that it gives many colors to the lines we play. This concept was developed by Barry Harris and David Glasser. This is not my original idea. The concept is based on the idea that we are dealing with sounds, which have colors. If we categorize sounds too much they lose their uniqueness. For instance if we have a C7 (b9) chord and we play a g# now it needs a new name. Barry Harris' concept does away with all these complicated names and boils things down to some scales which add the colors and which don't matter if a note is changed here and there, because the actual names are not the important thing, the sounds are the important part.

I strongly recommend using the Barry Harris Workshop Video and if possible to have either of these artists, Barry Harris or Dave Glasser to the school to give a class and hear these concepts directly from them.

Playing by Ear - The next technique, playing along with recordings and by ear is the most important. The only way for us to really get the style and inflections ingrained, so they are a natural part of our playing is to go to the country to speak the language. In other words practice along with the master improvisers-listen and imitate, just like a spoken language.

Noodle around - In order to make this task less intimidating and to give the students a starting point which isn't way over their heads, and therefore frustrating, start off with a simple vocal recording of someone like Dinah Washington. She sang the melodies very straight. Put the recording on and just noodle around and let your ears guide you. This is actually a fun assignment and if done consistently can really raise our aural awareness of the music we're listening too and playing.

Transcribing Solos - The next step is to learn some solos from the recordings to ingrain the style and inflections. This teaches us to speak the language the way it is actually spoken. And start simple. Don't write things down, do things by ear. If you forget what you did the day before, redo it. Only by repetition and patience will your ears and instincts become acute. The goal is not to have 2000 solos memorized but rather to learn each solo meticulously with all the inflections and style.

Happy Birthday - Another exercise is to start with tunes or melodies you know like Happy Birthday. Try playing the melody by ear. Slowly figure out the melody by trial and error. Make as many mistakes as you have to. Mistakes are not bad. What you're doing is to teach your ears to kind of pre hear things.

After you can play the song try starting the song on different notes and working it out in different keys. Remember that this process is a gradual one which is cumulative when done with consistency. Playing by ear for 5-10 minutes a day will work wonders for the ears.

As long as you don't try to get everything perfect immediately, you'll probably find yourself having fun doing this kind of practice. And you'll find as you get better at it that this is probably the best thing one can do to train the ears.

Depend on your Ears - The hard thing for musicians to comprehend about this type of learning process is that it seems somewhat unstructured. We are used to getting specific assignments from our teachers like learning an etude or a specific scale. But an assignment of simply playing along with a recording and picking out pieces of what you hear on your instrument doesn't give the player something as concrete to grasp onto - no book or manuscript to actually hold in our hands. All we have to depend on is our ears.

After trying this for a while it becomes sort of liberating though. We realize we have the ability to hear and remember more than we thought we could. And we also realize that the printed music can be a hindrance instead of a crutch. This is because the ears tend to miraculously organize sounds without labeling them with names. The ears and mind work together without the sight, and organize these sounds in a very non-academic way. We just tend to remember the sounds as we remember the essence of a conversation. The more carefully we listen the better we are able to recite exactly what we heard.

So once we have the abilities to hear and comprehend certain chords, scales and rhythms while using our instruments as our sets of ears, we are well on our way to becoming a good improviser.

Musical scrapbook - So you're clear on how this process works, a good improviser has quite a bit of information and technique at their command. They don't spontaneously come up with new material every time they improvise a solo. They are speaking a language and creating a story within the framework of that language. So when working with recordings try to create your own little musical scrapbook of patterns or phrases that you like. Take each of these and experiment with them till they become part of your vocabulary. You can play them in various keys or vary them rhythmically by starting them on different beats of the bar.

But don't become too attached to each of these devices. Be adventurous and always try to vary things. Start things on a different note of the scale or on a different beat. This is really where the creativity comes in. It's not about playing new and innovative material all the time but rather developing the ability to create uniquely rhythmic and harmonically interesting lines within the context of the chords of the song.

Don't think! Our ears and minds can miraculously organize and remember many things if we don't put limitations on ourselves. By writing things down we see how hard things look on paper and immediately put limits on ourselves. Just let the ears do what they can already do - LISTEN. Don't think! Don't let your mind get in the way.

To Recap - the goal of the improviser is to create lines that have rhythmic and harmonic variety. The improviser is essentially telling a story. The words and sentences are the scales and pronunciation and inflections are the style.

How do we learn the style? We can do this by playing along with recordings, both casually noodling around and also more carefully learning solos with inflections and feel. Just like learning a language by imitating and practicing with those who speak it well.

And above all, don't underestimate your ears. We can tend to limit ourselves and let our thinking, interpreting and self-judgment get in the way. Our ears have an amazing memory, recall and intuitive ability so train your ears and instincts so they can do what they were made to do - LISTEN. And above all try to enjoy the process of this type of learning because there is no final goal of playing a perfect solo. The goal is to have finely honed ears and instincts so that our musical reactions and feelings are expressed articulately and are interesting to listen to and within the stylistic language. .

Jazz Clarinet Resource Guide

Preface

This resource guide is truly just a guide. It offers information for the student as well as teacher. It is intended as a guide for people who want to learn to play jazz, just know more about the music, or want to know how to teach it. It offers a combination of recommended recordings and books. With access to the internet this guide can offer an infinite amount of information. Since Jazz music is so aurally based this guide has the special feature of sample sound recordings on web page links under the 'Artist and Artists since 1945' sections. These offer a truer flavor what an artist's style is like rather than descriptions in words. Many of the teaching ideas presented here are based on the original teachings of Barry Harris, Dave Glasser and John McNeil, which I included along with some of my own ideas. I offer these artists complete credit for their pedagogical innovations and try to credit their ideas throughout this lecture.

Contents

- Overview
- Learning Process
- Noodling Around
- Less Time with Books
- Recordings
- Favorite Jazz Clarinet recordings
- 100 historically significant jazz recordings from Doubletime Jazz
- Len Lyons's "The 101 Best Jazz Albums"

Educational tools

- Video - Barry Harris Workshop Video
- Books
- Play Alongs
- Lectures
- Jazz Clarinet Artists since 1945 - links to web page with bios and sample recordings
- Artists, including 'pre-1945' - links to web page with bios and sample recordings

Web Sites

1. Learning Process - Jazz music is learned, practiced and performed by the great artists primarily by ear without the use of printed music. So try to spend as much time with your instruments and the recordings as possible. Play along with recordings, transcribe tunes and solos by ear without writing the music down. This is where the real learning of the *language* will happen.

Out of the numerous *methods* on how to learn to improvise jazz on the market, I've found that the teachings of pianist Barry Harris and saxophonist Dave Glasser, both in New York City, to be the most complete without getting too academic and with great concentration on learning things by ear. I strongly recommend contacting either of these wonderful teachers if in the New York City area to take some lessons with them<</p>

2. Noodling Around - Even just noodling around and not learning the music on the recordings verbatim is an extremely valuable practice. It perks up the ears and helps train one's instincts. It also helps ingrain the *rhythmic and swing feel* and stylistic tendencies.

3. Less Time with Books - Time spent with books will sometimes facilitate the learning of some aspects of the music, but try not to get too caught up in the *study* of the material in books. This music is a *language* and the only way to really learn a language is to hear it *spoken* properly and practice *speaking* it. And playing with recordings is the way to do this

4. Recordings - three lists are included here. The first is devoted to some favorite Jazz Clarinet recordings and the second and third are devoted to historically significant jazz recordings.

5. Favorite Jazz Clarinet recordings

- Art Tatum - Buddy DeFranco Quartet (Verve 8229, 1956)
- John Carter/Horace Tapscott: West Coast Hot (Novus 3107-2-N, 1991) Reissue of 1969 recordings
- Kenny Davern: My Inspiration (Music Masters)
- Eddie Daniels: To Bird With Love (GRP 9544, 1987)
- Marty Ehrlich and the Dark Woods Ensemble: Live Wood (Music and Arts, 1997)
- Benny Goodman Live at Carnegie Hall
- Jimmy Hamilton with Duke Ellington: The Far East Suite (RCA, 1966)
- Tony Scott: Sung Heroes (Sunnyside, 1959) with Bill Evans, Scott LaFaro, Paul Motian
- Artie Shaw: The Last Recordings
- Barney Bigard, The Barney Bigard Story, 1929-1945
- Irving Fazola, Faz, Living Era Records
- George Lewis, Doctor Jazz, Good Time Jazz Records
- Jimmie Noone, Apex of New Orleans Jazz, ASV Records
- Sidney Bechet/Mezz Mezzrow King Jazz Story, Vol. 2: Really The Blues Storyville Records
- Edmund Hall, At Club Hangover 1954, Storyville Records

6. 100 historically significant jazz recordings from Doubletime Jazz

http://www.doubletimejazz.com/ban_100_clb.htm

7. Len Lyons's "The 101 Best Jazz Albums"

<http://charon.nmsu.edu/~mmarley/Jazz.html>

Educational tools - the most popular jazz education aids are published by Jamey Aebersold and can be accessed at <http://www.aebersold.com/>.

1. Video - The Barry Harris Workshop Video - Barry Harris, the world renowned jazz pianist has a book/video out that demonstrates his method for learning to improvise. Out of all the products on the market today, I recommend this one the most strongly. Barry has developed a system of understanding and ingraining not only the theory behind playing this music, but also a way of internalizing the stylistic elements which make this

music sound the way it does. It can be ordered by calling in the US 1-800-267-1625 or overseas 905-824-0566 (Ontario, Canada) or on the internet at <http://barryharris.com/>.

** The reason this educational tool has a video as well is because Barry Harris' approach requires verbal explanation as well as musical demonstrations to be effective. This sets this method apart from the many other excellent products on the market today. This method is really worth the money!!

2. Books

- John McNeil - The Art of Jazz Trumpet , Gerard and Sarzin, pub. Superior explanations and examples of how articulation can help the player to swing. Not only for trumpet players, this book offers recommended recordings and many items applicable to any jazz player. It comes with a book and CD. This is a *must have* on one's music stand. Order this book at <http://www.changingtones.com/trmp02.html>
- Jamey Aebersold Jazz Publications <http://www.aebersold.com/>
 - Jamey Aebersold's Jazz Ear Training. Two cassettes or 2 CD's with book. Two hours of ear training exercises with aural instructions before each exercise. Beginning to advanced. Starts very simply, gradually increases in difficulty.
 - How To Listen To Jazz by Jerry Coker.
 - How To Practice Jazz by Jerry Coker
 - Effortless Mastery by Kenny Werner. Kenny's remarkable work suggests ways to let our natural creative powers flow freely.
- Advance Music - excellent jazz education publications <http://www.advancemusic.com/>
 - Ready, Aim, Improvise! Exploring the Basics of Jazz Improvisation by Hal Crook
 - Training the Ear for the improvising musician by Armen Donelian
 - Teaching of Jazz by Jerry Coker
 - Hearin" the Changes by Jerry Coker , Bob Knapp , Larry Vincent
 - How to Improvise by Hal Crook

3. Play alongs recordings

- Volume 1 JAZZ: HOW TO PLAY AND IMPROVISE. Includes chapters on scales/chords, developing creativity, improv fundamentals, 12 Blues Scales, Bebop scales, pentatonic scales and usage, time and feeling, melodic development, II/V7s, related scales and modes, practical exercises/patterns and licks, Dominant 7th tree of scale choices, nomenclature, chromaticism, scale syllabus, and more. Recorded tracks include Blues in Bb and F, Dorian minor tracks, four-measure cadences, cycle of dominants, 24-measure song, II/V7 in all keys.
- Volume 24 MAJOR AND MINOR. Recordings contain 30 extended tracks of recorded background. Great primer for learning basic skills in Major and Minor keys.
- Volume 21 GETTIN' IT TOGETHER. It covers (all twelve keys) major, minor (dorian, harmonic and melodic), dominant 7th, half-diminished, lydian, and sus. 4. It also has a very slow blues in F and one in Bb. This is an extremely thorough practice set. The tempos are not fast, which allows everyone, beginner or advanced, to have an opportunity to sharpen his skills. The booklet contains a wealth of information on practicing, ear training, nomenclature, chromaticism, digital patterns, cycle exercises, fourth exercises, double-time passages, comments to band directors (concert, stage/jazz, orchestra and vocal), backgrounds for warm-up period, and exercises which correspond to the written tracks, and more.

4. Lectures - Billy Taylor lectures on Jazz-Vast wealth of information on jazz music

http://town.hall.org/Archives/radio/Kennedy/Taylor/bt_017.au

5. Jazz Clarinet Artists since 1945, compiled from the web page The Clarinet In Jazz Since 1945 by Matt Snyder <http://www.agoron.com/~msnyder/clarinet/clar1945.htm>. This web page contains excellent bios of these artists as well as sample sound recordings of most of the artists.

- ALVIN BATISTE
- DON BYRON
- JOHN CARTER
- EDDIE DANIELS
- KENNY DAVERN
- BUDDY De FRANCO
- ERIC DOLPHY
- MARTY EHRLICH
- JIMMY GIUFFRE
- JIMMY HAMILTON
- GUNTER HAMPEL
- THEO JORGENSMANN
- ROLF KUEHN
- JOHN LaPORTA
- JOE MANERI
- DAVID MURRAY
- KEN PELOWSKI
- PERRY ROBINSON
- PEE WEE RUSSELL
- LOUIS SCLAVIS
- TONY SCOTT
- ARTIE SHAW

- BILL SMITH

6. Artists - more complete listing including pre-1945 artists (compiled from the Jazz Clarinet Homepage on the internet at <http://www.mikecassara.com/clarinet/>.

Excellent listing of most of the great clarinet jazz artists with bios, some sample recordings and excellent links to other clarinet and jazz sites on the internet.

- Braxton, Anthony
- Breuker, Willem
- Byron, Don
- Carter, James
- Carter, John
- Custer, Beth
- D'Rivera, Paquito
- Daniels, Eddie
- Davern, Kenny
- DeFranco, Buddy
- Dolphy, Eric
- Ehlich, Marty
- Fountain, Pete
- Giuffre, Jimmy
- Glover, Frank
- Goldson, Harry
- Goodman, Benny
- Hamilton, Jimmy
- Kumpf, Hans
- Laughlin, Tim
- Lewis, Larry
- Lukasik, Joe
- Most, Abe
- Murray, David
- Peplowski, Ken
- Robinson, Perry
- Reinhardt, Gordy
- Russell, Pee Wee
- Sagi, Zoltan
- Scott, Tony
- Shaw, Artie
- Sherwood, Andy
- Skoler, Harry
- Sletten, Dave
- Smith, Bill
- Stoltzman, Richard
- VachÃ©, Allan
- Woods, Phil

7. Jazz Web Sites

- Jazz Internet Radio Station: <http://www.jazzradio.org/>. Excellent jazz programming.
- Barry Harris. Barry's web site offers info about his teaching styles which are the basis for playing modern jazz on any instrument. <http://barryharris.com/>
- Dave Glasser. One of the top alto saxophonists in the world today. A disciple of Barry Harris' school of playing jazz, and an excellent teacher of this method as well. <http://www.daveglasser.b3.nu/>
- John McNeil. This jazz trumpeter and composer has developed excellent ways to teach people to swing through the study of articulation, as well as being extremely adept at understanding the music of Charlie Parker. <http://www.johnmccneil.com>
- Jamey Aebersold. Jamey Aebersold's jazz aids help the student with many areas of jazz education, especially by offering a full line of play along recordings. <http://www.aebersold.com/>
- Advance Music. Excellent jazz education publications. <http://www.advancemusic.com/>
- Web Site for ear training. Download a free trial from the Website. <http://www.earmaster.com>
- The Jazz Clarinet Home Page by Michael Cassara. <http://www.mikecassara.com/clarinet/>
- The Clarinet In Jazz Since 1945 by Matt Snyder. <http://www.agoron.com/~msnyder/clarinet/clar1945.htm>
- 100 historically significant jazz recordings from Doubletime Jazz. http://www.doubletimejazz.com/ban_100_clb.htm
- Len Lyons's "The 101 Best Jazz Albums". <http://charon.nmsu.edu/~mmarley/Jazz.html>.

Jazz Exercises from "How to Play Jazz on the Clarinet"
ICA ClarinetFest 2000 Research Presentation by John Cipolla

These exercises are all intended to train the ears. Numbers 1, 2, 3 are from Barry Harris and Dave Glasser's teachings and number 5 is the teachings of John McNeil, "The Art of Jazz Trumpet". So play them slowly to get the "sound" of the scales in your ears. Playing them fast will train the fingers but we want to get "used" to the "sound" of a scale.

1. **Dominant 7th** Scales from each degree of the scale both up and down the scale



2. **Dominant 7th** sound to tonic sound. In the Barry Harris method we play a dominant sound over both the ii and V chord.



3. **Tri-Tone exercises V7-Tri Tone-Tonic** - By playing two dominant 7th scales a tri-tone apart, we get the same colors of chords that methods refer to with complicated names like C7b9#11. Barry Harris developed this system because it is more accessible for the student closer to the way was actually created by the master artists.



4. **Diatonic 7ths** - Play each up and down the entire range of the instrument. These should be played slowly to hear the sound of the scale then gradually faster to develop finger technique.



5. **Articulation** plays a bigger role than many think in punctuating the rhythm and helping the eighth note line to swing.

