

## How To Play Jazz! A Conceptual Approach

How do you play jazz? How do you learn to improvise? The answer is simple, deal with the fundamental elements of music! Secondly, learning Jazz must be treated like learning a new language. Most people who teach jazz will say something like, “play this scale over this chord”. A statement like this is not wrong, but can be confusing to a student that does not know how to use that tool musically.

What are the fundamentals of Music? I have devised ten. Can you come up with more?

1. Notes (Pitch)
2. Articulation
3. Technique
4. Emotion
5. Dynamics
6. Rhythm
7. Tone
8. Phrasing
9. Space (rests)
10. Listening

The great thing about improvising is that you can always work on these elements at any level. The student should practice these concepts one at a time so that they become second nature. Also, it is of the utmost importance to interact with native speakers when learning any language. How do you do that? Listen to current jazz greats and especially the ones that came before us. Also find a good teacher in your town. Lastly, play with musicians who play jazz and are better than you.

For the sake of time, we should look at how to practice these elements separately so we apply them in our improvisations. (Sometimes you will be sub-consciously practicing two or three at the same time i.e. Pitch, Rhythm, Dynamics.) For the sake of the exercise, one should be your focus.

So Let's get to Work!

### **Tone**

Your tone is what defines you. It is your most valuable tool you have. It is your voice.

- Do long tones to improve your sound
- Improvise with or without accompaniment thinking **ONLY** how you sound
- Improvise with mental thoughts and such feelings and ideas i.e. warm, elegant, fiery, cool, angry, love

- Play one or many different pitches with mental thoughts of particular color i.e. red, blue, chocolate, gold

## **Space**

Space is golden in music! We always focus on what to play, but the great improvisers know when not to play.

- Improvise freely resting for a pre-determined amount of time i.e. 2 seconds, or 5 seconds
- Improvise with or without accompaniment resting for a certain amount of beats i.e. playing for four beats resting for 2, playing for 6 beats, resting for 3 and 1/2, resting for 1 beat playing for 10. (this will help you create more of an awareness of where you are in a form and or measure.
- Improvise with or without accompaniment playing for a random amount of beats and resting for 3 beats and vice-versa