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Introduction

Exploring Jazz Piano is the sequel to my 1997 Schott publication *Improvising Blues Piano*. Overall, the technical and theoretical level is a little higher and players are strongly advised to work through the earlier book first, as it deals with many important (but more basic) concepts in depth. If you have problems with co-ordination between the hands, or with improvising around simple chord sequences, the blues is a great place to begin.

Like its predecessor, this book uses harmony as a starting point for the introduction of various concepts relating to melody, rhythm and improvisation, progressing in Vol. 1 from basic triads to seventh and ninth chords. Vol. 2 continues the progression via eleventh and thirteenth chords, to diminished and altered harmony, featuring more complex and colourful chords and scales. Both volumes contain interesting and challenging pieces to play and improvise over.

Unlike some jazz piano tutors, this method does not place harmony, rhythm and improvisation in separate compartments. As pianists, we are expected to have a good grasp of harmony and to be able to lay down chords for ourselves or others to improvise over. We are also expected to be able to create a good groove or accompaniment. Because of the pianist's unique role as soloist, accompanist, and member of the rhythm section, these topics are dealt with alongside each other throughout the book.

Jazz piano is a complex and demanding subject, requiring many years of study and practice before anything approaching mastery can be achieved. Throughout the book I have stressed the importance of listening to jazz recordings, playing with other musicians, and hearing live jazz as an essential part of the learning process.

I hope that *Exploring Jazz Piano* sends you on a journey from which you will gain a lifetime's enjoyment. Good luck on your travels!

Tim Richards
London 2005

How to use this book

As with IBP (as I shall refer to it in future) each chapter in *Exploring Jazz Piano* is approximately graded within itself, the pieces towards the end of the chapter becoming considerably harder. This means that there are relatively easy pieces in the book at the start of every chapter.

However, this grading is not quite as clear-cut as with IBP – a certain basic competence is assumed, and some quite challenging topics or pieces are occasionally introduced quite early on. You may wish to skip these pages the first time you work through a chapter, returning to them at a later date. It is recommended that you work through the book several times, selecting the easiest material first, so that you have a superficial understanding of the whole. Then go over it again in more depth, progressing further through each chapter and increasing your skill and knowledge. You'll probably need to repeat this process several times over a period of months or years.

I believe that this non-linear approach most closely duplicates the way that most professional musicians learn their craft. Understanding comes in layers – if you get bogged down in one chapter, move to the easier pieces at the start of the next, coming back later to the harder material.

The CD

Every piece in the book can be heard on the CD. Get into the habit of listening to it as well as reading the music – learning pieces by ear is a viable alternative.

Tracks played on piano alone are recorded in stereo, just like an ordinary audio CD. However, some of the other tracks may sound a little strange as the instruments have been panned left and right for educational purposes.

If you've just picked up this book, and would like to get a taste of the pieces it contains, programme your CD player to play the following tracks:

3 – 5 – 7 – 9 – 12 – 13 – 17 – 18 –
25 – 28 – 33 – 34 – 35 – 36 – 39

Select the 'mono' setting on your amplifier, if it has one, to eliminate the panning.

● **Drums** Tracks with drums accompaniment have been recorded with stereo separation. Although drums and piano were recorded at the same time, they have been panned left and right in the recording studio. If you wish to eliminate the piano from the recording, you

Chapter One

Major triads

Triads are three-note chords, the basic harmonic building blocks of Western music.

A thorough knowledge of them is essential to help you deal with the more complex chords found later in this book.

There are four types of triad: major, minor, diminished and augmented. In this chapter we'll deal with major triads, which are formed from the first, third and fifth notes of the major scale. The first note of a scale is called the 'root', indicated by a bold **R**. Other notes of the scale are given numbers according to their position in the scale. These also appear in bold type. **R35** therefore describes the formation of a major triad.

Fig 1.1: Derivation of C major triad from the first five notes of C major scale



The numbers above the notes are the fingering:

Thumb = 1 Index finger = 2 Middle finger = 3 Ring finger = 4 Little finger = 5

In Fig 1.1 make sure you allocate a different finger for each note, ending with the little finger on G. This hand position is called a 'five-finger position'. The major triad should be played with 135 fingering, from the same hand position.

Now try playing the chord in the left hand (an octave lower) with the little finger on C and the thumb on G. Notice how the fingering, 531, is the opposite way round. Now with the right hand play the first five notes of the scale, up and down:

Fig 1.2: Five-finger exercise with left-hand accompaniment



Foot-tap: / / / /

The chord symbol C is a standard abbreviation for 'C major triad'.

In preparation for *Threesome* overleaf, play Fig 1.2 for the chords of F and G, with the right hand playing the first five notes of the scales of F and G major.

- 1 straight 8s
2 swing – with play-along section

♩ = 120

Threesome

The melody and improvisation section of this piece are based on the three five-finger positions of C, F and G major.

Tim Richards

A1

A2

Solo

B