

Chapter 14

The Uninvited Fan

There's a fellow here in town by the name of Zass who always goes by his first initial, Y. Mr. Y. Zass is a jazz aficionado of sorts, but the local jazz musicians cringe when he walks in the club. You see, Y. is very knowledgeable about music, knows what he wants to hear, and is remarkably willing to share his criticism of your playing (to your face) at every opportunity.

Several years ago he called me over after a set. "So, Randy," he began, "here's what I'm hearing: your solos have all these holes in them—'rests,' I think you call them—and they all line up with the shifts in the harmony. Every time there's a change of key, your improvising stops for a beat or two. So I'm thinking, 'Is he choosing these rests based on what sounds best, or is it just because he can't make the transitions into the new keys smoothly?' So I don't trust your phrasing decisions. What do you have to say about that?"

I just shook my head, thanked Y. Zass for his input, and walked away. But as I drove home that night, I realized that he had nailed me: I wasn't making my transitions. So I cooked up an exercise for myself and called it the **endless 8th drill**. Simply put, I improvised through a set of changes using eight 8th notes in every bar. I took special care not to hesitate at the seams between the scales. Even if I had to miss a few notes, I kept my fingers moving. Actually I didn't miss too many notes because I took the drill at a very slow tempo so I could look ahead to the next scale. First I practiced the exercise over the random II-V chart (page 303 in the appendix). Then I applied it to standard tunes such as "It Could Happen To You":

Endless 8th drill

The image shows a musical exercise titled "Endless 8th drill" written in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The exercise consists of four measures of music, each containing eight eighth notes. The first two measures are labeled "Eb major scale" and "Eb MA7". The next two measures are labeled "F minor bebop scale" and "C7". The first two measures of the second line are labeled "Eb major scale" and "F MI7". The next two measures are labeled "G minor bebop scale" and "D7".

It took a while, but after a few weeks I was shifting from scale to scale with relative ease.