

## Introduction

A book about jazz improvisation is, like jazz improvisation itself, a work in progress. It is impossible to cover everything on the subject because jazz is constantly evolving and morphing into something new and different. This book is an overview of many topics. If you find an approach or device that resonates, don't be afraid to see where it takes you. There are many great studies available by fabulous educators that are technique specific. If a certain device grabs your interest, investigate further.

The Techniques are in an order that will help a beginner. Experienced players can start anywhere. Remember, learning jazz involves in depth listening, drilling of techniques, learning the repertoire and molding oneself after master improvisers. Practicing aimed at eliminating weak areas should be the focus. Don't get off track! Don't stagnate by repeating what you already know because it simply "feels good."

While studying a particular technique, force that technique into the song that you're working on. Put it anywhere it will fit. At first this sounds very "drill-like," but eventually you will hear the technique work in places you wouldn't expect. When improvising and letting things just flow, the drilled technique will reveal itself in its own time becoming part of your personal language. New techniques sometimes like to incubate a bit before they blossom and feel natural, so be patient while being persistent. See Chapter 25 for examples of how some of the techniques fit into chord changes of certain tunes.

This book, like jazz improvisation itself, is meant to be flexible. While theory can be boring and drill-like to learn, experiment and adapt the exercises to keep things fresh and interesting. Players and teachers find endless ways to be creative. Most importantly: Keep it fun!

DDB

### **A note to instructors:**

**A single person or group can use this book. Teaching improvisation in a group setting is always challenging. That being said, it is possible for a large group to drill the information used for improvising.**

**For group practice, exercises in chapters 1 thru 21 are organized with the treble clef on the left page and the bass clef on the right. The treble clef page (Left side) has (C), (B<sup>b</sup>), and (E<sup>b</sup>) marked at the top of the starting lines for the instruments in those keys making it possible for any instrument to use the same book. Simply start on the line for the key of a particular instrument. When at the bottom of the page go to the top and continue until all keys have been played.**

**These exercises have corresponding chord symbols at the top of the staff. Once a line is learned in all keys go to the chord sheet (second page of chapter containing chord symbols only) and play the lines looking only at the chord symbols. *Make any octave adjustment necessary to put exercises in the best range for a particular instrument.***

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## Creative Way to Learn Songs

1. **Memorize Melody**
  - A. Analyze form. AABA, ABA, etc. Many tunes have large sections that repeat.
  - B. Learn melody rubato first then play in time with metronome.
  - C. Improvise around melody using your ear only. (In time)
2. **Memorize Chords – First rubato then in tempo (A through F).**
  - A. Play roots throughout tune in time.
  - B. Play chords - Root, 3, 5, 7 in time up and down.
  - C. Play chords – Root, 3, 5, 7, 9 in time up and down.
  - D. Play chords – Root, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 in time up and down.
  - E. Play chords – Root, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 in time up and down.
  - F. Improvise through tune using chord tones only.
3. **Scales**
  - A. Make scale choices for all chords and drill through form ascending and descending.
  - B. Play scales in thirds in time through form. (Slow)
  - C. Improvise through tune using scales only. (Slow)
4. **Write Out Solo**

Write out a solo that can be played on your instrument. Focus on a special technique,  
ex. pentatonics, 3rds, and 7ths on beats 1 and 3, altered dominants, fourth patterns, etc.
5. **Comp Chord Changes on Piano (Rubato at first)**

Even if you can't play the piano at least play the root in your left hand along with 3rds and 7ths in your right.
6. **Improvise a quarter note bass line through the changes in time on your instrument.**
7. **Solo unaccompanied on the tune while recording it. See if you are outlining the changes properly.**
8. **Transcribe a solo of someone playing the chosen tune.**
9. **Pick a selected pattern or technique and plug it into the entire song.**

Don't worry about not being musical right from the start. This is a drill that enables you to play something later that you normally would not.
10. **Play on the tune for 20 minutes or more.**

Exhaust all of the 'stuff' that you would usually play. At first you'll probably play the same material again and again. When you feel like quitting, keep going. You want to break through the wall and get to the other side where you actually create and don't just play the same old licks. The longer you can stay on it, the deeper you will get into the tune, creating and yourself.

# #1 The Major Scale

The Major Scale contains seven individual tonalities or modes depending on what step of the scale you start on. By learning the Major Scale you actually learn seven tonalities.

## Modes of the Major Scale

- #1 fits Major (Maj) chord (Ionian)
- #2 fits Minor (min) chord (Dorian)
- #3 fits min 7th chord (Phrygian)
- #4 fits Maj7+11 chord (Lydian)
- #5 fits 7th chord (Mixolydian)
- #6 fits min 7-6 chord (Aeolian)
- #7 fits min 7-5 chord (Locrian)

Play in all keys

CMaj7 Dmin7

Emin7 E7<sup>+9</sup> Fmaj7+4

G7 Amin7-6

Bmin7-5 CMaj7

Play in all keys

CMaj7 Dmin7

Emin7 E7<sup>+9</sup> Fmaj7+4

G7 Amin7-6

Bmin7-5 CMaj7

Major Scale

(C) C Maj7

D♭ Maj7

(B♭) D Maj7

E♭ Maj7

E Maj7

F Maj7

F♯ Maj7

G Maj7

A♭ Maj7

(E♭) A Maj7

B♭ Maj7

B Maj7

Major chord to 13th

The image displays 12 musical staves, each representing a major 7th chord and its corresponding 13th scale. The chords are listed above each staff: C Maj7, D $\flat$  Maj7, D Maj7, E $\flat$  Maj7, E Maj7, F Maj7, F $\sharp$  Maj7, G Maj7, A $\flat$  Maj7, A Maj7, B $\flat$  Maj7, and B Maj7. Each staff shows the chord notes and the 13th scale notes in a specific rhythmic pattern.

## #2 The Jazz Melodic Minor Scale

The Jazz Melodic Minor scale contains seven individual tonalities or modes depending on the step you start on.

### Modes of the Jazz Melodic Minor

- #1 fits a min+7 chord (Dorian+7)
- #2 fits a min7 -9 chord (Phrygian Natural 6)
- #3 fits a Maj7 +5+4 (Lydian-Augmented)
- #4 fits a 7+11 chord (Mixolydian+4)
- #5 fits a 7-13 chord (Mixolydian b6)
- #6 fits a min7-5 chord (Aeolian b5 (Locrian Natural 2)
- #7 fits a 7alt chord (Altered)

Play in all keys

Diagram showing the Jazz Melodic Minor Scale in treble clef, divided into seven modes with their corresponding chords:

- Mode 1: Cmin<sup>+</sup>7
- Mode 2: Dmin7-9
- Mode 3: EbMaj7<sup>+</sup>5
- Mode 4: F7<sup>+</sup>11
- Mode 5: G7-13
- Mode 6: Amin7-5
- Mode 7: B7Alt

Play in all keys

Diagram showing the Jazz Melodic Minor Scale in bass clef, divided into seven modes with their corresponding chords:

- Mode 1: Cmin<sup>+</sup>7
- Mode 2: Dmin7-9
- Mode 3: EbMaj7<sup>+</sup>5
- Mode 4: F7<sup>+</sup>11
- Mode 5: G7-13
- Mode 6: Amin7-5
- Mode 7: B7Alt

## #5 Major ii7, V7, I (Bracket Method)

(Dorian, Mixolydian, Ionian)

You can play the major scale of the I chord over a major ii7, V7, I progression. Example: Dmin7, G7, Cmaj7 all come from the C major scale, so in essence the C major scale fits over the entire progression. This is called 'Bracketing.' It is a very basic way to play over a ii7, V7, I progression. If played hitting the 3rds and 7ths of the chords on the strong beats (1 and 3) it can sound quite convincing.

This method can sound very effective and is a good way to begin improvising over this common progression. By inserting a passing tone on the weak part of the beats (upbeats) you begin to get that “be-bop sound.” The passing tones in the exercises will be in parenthesis.

When soloing on the I chord don't emphasize the 4th note of the major scale, as some call this an 'Avoid Note.'

### Play in all keys

The first staff of the exercise is a single line of music in treble clef. It contains three measures of music, each with a different chord indicated above it: Dmin7, G7, and CMaj7. The notes are as follows:
 

- Measure 1 (Dmin7): D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5.
- Measure 2 (G7): G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5.
- Measure 3 (CMaj7): C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4.

### Play in all keys

Diagram 1: Musical notation for the bass line of "The Sound of Silence". The notation is written on a single staff with a bass clef. It consists of three measures. The first measure is labeled "Dmin7" and contains a descending eighth-note scale: D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. The second measure is labeled "G7" and contains an ascending eighth-note scale: D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4. The third measure is labeled "CMaj7" and contains a descending eighth-note scale: D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Bass line for 'The Sound of Silence' (Example 10.10). The line is in bass clef and consists of three measures. The first measure is labeled 'Dmin7' and contains the notes D2, F2, A2, and C3. The second measure is labeled 'G7' and contains the notes G2, B2, D3, and F3. The third measure is labeled 'CMaj7' and contains the notes C3, E3, G3, and B3. The line ends with a double bar line.



(C)  $C7^{+11}_{-9}$

$D\flat7^{+11}_{-9}$

(B $\flat$ )  $D7^{+11}_{-9}$

$E\flat7^{+11}_{-9}$

$E7^{+11}_{-9}$

$F7^{+11}_{-9}$

$F\sharp7^{+11}_{-9}$

$G7^{+11}_{-9}$

$A\flat7^{+11}_{-9}$

(E $\flat$ )  $A7^{+11}_{-9}$

$B\flat7^{+11}_{-9}$

$B7^{+11}_{-9}$

# DiBlasio's Pathways To Improvisation

Cmin<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

D $\flat$ min<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

Dmin<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

E $\flat$ min<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

Emin<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

Fmin<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

F $\sharp$ min<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

Gmin<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

A $\flat$ min<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

Amin<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

B $\flat$ min<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

Bmin<sup>+7</sup><sub>-5</sub>

## #23 Song Structure Using Roman Numerals

A way to improvise a song in any key is to learn the chord progressions and root movements using numbers. If you understand the chord movements by numbers (or intervals), playing in different keys becomes easier.

The method of Roman numerals might be good for some tunes but not practical for others. You have to decide when numerals will work best. Some tunes (especially modal) have changes that follow each other in terms of weight or color and not necessarily root movement. These progressions are better off being just plain memorized.

Because some songs change key in different sections, it's easier to just change key and continue to use the roman numerals in the new key. Ex: 'Key - up a minor 3rd,' would let you know that the key center went from C to E $\flat$ . There isn't a set way to do everything. Some chords go down chromatically so it would be easier to just know that and dispense with the numbers. Whatever makes it easiest is usually the best way to go.

Remember this is a method that is meant to be used on the stand at the time of creating a solo. The fewer the rules, the better.

Try playing some of the following songs assigning different keys while only looking at the roman numerals.

### 1. Blues



## #24 Non-Committal Lines

Lines that have no particular tonality or key center can make for “interesting” ideas. To make these sounds work, you must listen to modern players who play in the harmonically “out” or “modern” style.

The success of this device is in how and when you dip back into the original tonality. By staying too long in a non-committal line you can sound as if you don’t know the actual song you are playing. These lines work best if you already know the correct harmony of a tune. With practice you will find your own equilibrium of when to go in and out harmonically.

The chosen line sounds best when used at tempo that is not too slow. And finally you must alter these lines based on your own sense of phrasing and rhythm.

Let’s take this line.



Ex. 1 Emphasize any note. Change the rhythm of the line.



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



Here is another way to work these lines. Alter the line by making the second note the first. Shift the entire line forward or backwards one or two beats.

Forward 1 note



Backward 1 note



Combine shifting the starting note with changing rhythms and you have unlimited potential from a single non-committal line. These lines can stop or start anywhere within themselves. Try working smaller segments of a line at random. It doesn’t matter because it’s just a ‘sound,’ not a tonality. Many modern players use this type of technique. A good practice is to play a non-committal line in the first four bars of a blues, making sure that you lock back into the harmony at measure five. Experiment.