2013 National In-Service Conference:

Teaching Jazz for the “Non-Jazzer”

Session Presenter: Chad West

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Jerry Tolson

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What is This?
Jazz Style and Articulation
How to Get Your Band or Choir to Swing

Abstract: The interpretation of jazz style is crucial to the element of swing in any jazz ensemble performance. Today, many charts for both large and small instrumental and vocal jazz ensembles are well marked with articulations and expression markings. However, in some cases, there is nothing to guide the musician. This article addresses some common jazz articulations and style situations and provides a set of guidelines to help instructors and students decide how to treat notes and rhythms in swing style. Use of these concepts can help an ensemble sound more authentic and can help students better understand jazz articulations and styles.

Keywords: articulation, education, ensemble, jazz, pedagogy, rhythm, swing

“I don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing,” said Irving Mills and Duke Ellington in 1932. It’s still true today, and you can help your ensemble learn to do it better.

Jerry Tolson is a professor of jazz studies and music education at the University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky. He can be contacted at jerry.tolson@louisville.edu.
generalized into a set of guidelines that can be used to guide decisions regarding the treatment of notes and rhythms in the swing style of the jazz idiom. Armed with this set of general guidelines, your ensemble will find it easier to sound more stylistically accurate and authentic. The ultimate goal of this article is to provide useful tips for helping your students understand jazz articulation and style.

Jazz encompasses many styles—from Dixieland to big band swing to bebop and fusion. Anecdotal evidence from adjudicators and directors indicates that by far, the most challenging element for both instrumentalists and vocalists to interpret is the swing style common to both big band swing and bebop. Much of today’s printed jazz music is based on performance practices established in the big band and bebop eras of the 1930s and 1940s. In the swing styles of jazz, what you see on the page is only an approximation of what actually sounds when the music is performed. It should be noted that jazz, from its inception, has always been a performer’s and an arranger’s music rather than a composer’s music. Thus, interpretations of style have varied from individual to individual and from band to band throughout the course of the history of the music. This makes generalizations about stylistic performance even more challenging.

The repertoire of present-day instrumental school jazz ensembles often consists of vintage charts from the libraries of the Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Woody Herman, and Stan Kenton bands as well as originals by a host of talented young composers and arrangers. While school vocal jazz ensembles have not been around for quite as long, the repertoire for these groups is populated with great arrangements of jazz classics—songs from great vocal groups, such as the trio Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross; The Manhattan Transfer; the Hi-Los; and New York Voices—as well as originals by talented writers in this genre. Attempts have been made to codify the style and articulation used by most players. These codification efforts have been undertaken to make the music more accessible to students and younger performers. Much progress has been made in the standardization of jazz markings and articulations in published jazz material by the Music Publishers Association and organizations such as the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), the International Association for Jazz Education (now disbanded), and the Jazz Education Network.* Still, it must be remembered that because jazz has its roots in the aural traditions of African American culture, the printed page merely approximates the ultimate sound. What happens in the actual performance is far more crucial than what is on the printed page. The most efficient way to become familiar with jazz articulation is to listen to recordings of the music being played by master soloists and ensembles and to emulate what they do as closely as possible. Most students in today’s world no longer have ready access to hearing this music live or on the radio, but through modern digital technology and the Internet, access to vintage performances is rapidly increasing. Listening, therefore, is crucial to successfully and authentically playing jazz in the swing style. Please refer to the jazz discography sidebar for a representative listening list of artists, bands, and vocal groups.

Likewise, singing is very effective for the internalization of the swing feel and style. If the rhythm cannot be verbalized using syllables that approximate the desired articulation, the performance will never be truly authentic. The history of jazz has long documented the symbiotic relationship of the voice and instruments in jazz. Louis Armstrong’s singing is a direct extension of how and what he plays on his horn and vice versa. Listen to the example of him singing and playing on “Hotter than That” from the Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz, volume 1. A combination of long and short syllables, such as doo, dah, day, ba, da, va, daht, dow, and dit, are some of the staples of the vocal vocabulary that helped him create the appropriate articulations. These syllables, known as scat syllables, can help students verbalize rhythmic figures that they can then transfer to their instruments. Even

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for singers and nonwind instrumentalists, the verbalization of such syllables will enhance the swing factor of a performer’s technique. For singers, this is true when performing lyrics or scatting. To be sure, there are as many different scat syllables used by jazz artists as there are jazz performers. Comparison listening to scat solos by Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and Sarah Vaughan will demonstrate the wide variety of scat syllables that jazz performers use. Although the previously mentioned syllables are not the only ones used to indicate jazz articulations, they have been selected to offer a basic set of syllables that will provide accuracy and consistency for your students. These syllables are typically used in the following manner:

- **Doo** is used for long sounds that occur on downbeats. The articulation symbol used is (–).
- **Day or dab** is used for accented long sounds on either downbeats or upbeats (>).
- **Va, da, or ba** is typically used on unaccented upbeats (no symbol is used).
- **Daht** is used for accented short sounds, whether downbeats or upbeats (^).
- **Dit** is used for unaccented short notes (.).
- **Dn** is used for notes that are ghosted or swallowed. These notes are often designated by an X on the staff in place of the notehead or a notehead in parentheses.
- **Dow** is used for notes that are followed by a fall—a descending glissando to an undefined ending pitch (\).
- **Doo-dle-da** is used to articulate eighth-note triplets.

Keep in mind that the articulation symbols are not always used in the sheet music. Also note that accented short notes use a different syllable than unaccented short notes and are, as a result, played slightly longer, or as one would say in the jazz vernacular, “fat” or “phat.” The notes are still short, but they have more weight and length.

In swing style, the eighth note is the traditional underlying subdivision. Although tempo somewhat affects the treatment of these eighth notes, the overriding principle is that “all eighth notes are not created equal.” Remembering this so-called Jazz Bill of Rights is effective in performing the music more authentically. Through the use of accents and an underlying subdivision that, depending on the tempo, lies somewhere between the triplet feel of 12/8 time and the exact even subdivision of rock music, the jazz performer can create that ever-elusive swing groove. Also crucial to the groove is the importance of swinging the rests as well as the notes. A performance where the notes are swung but the rests are not swung is just as inadequate as one where the notes are not swung.

The swing feel in moderate to slower tempos is characterized by an underlying subdivision of the eighth notes into triplets as shown in Figure 1. You will often see this indication at the beginning of a chart or in the conductor’s score to indicate that the eighth notes should be swung. Any or all of the rhythms in Figure 1 may be used to indicate swing eighth notes.

Practicing eighth notes with the middle syllable of the triplet silently articulated, but not verbalized, will help develop your students’ style (Figure 2). Keep in mind that both instrumentalists and vocalists can utilize this exercise as well as all of the other articulation guidelines.

It is equally important that the student think of the upbeat notes resolving to the downbeat. Using a legato articulation with slightly more emphasis on the upbeat will connect the upbeat to the next downbeat and will increase the authenticity of the swing feel. This concept can be verbalized as “doo Da-doo, Da-doo” (Figure 3). One caveat to this technique is that as the tempo gets faster, there is less emphasis on
the upbeat, and the upbeat eighth notes are often slurred into the next downbeat (Figure 4). Once the quarter note reaches M.M. = 180+, the eighth notes are performed evenly, and the swing feel is created by slurring three or more notes together and accenting selected notes (Figure 5). Scales can be used as exercises to practice this feel.

Once students become comfortable with swing eighth notes, then interpreting jazz rhythms and applying the appropriate articulations will be easier. Consider the following guidelines when preparing your next jazz performance. Remember that because jazz is like a language, there are always exceptions to each guideline.

1. Unless specifically marked otherwise, any quarter note or eighth note followed by a rest is played or sung short.

Notice that the articulation ends with a “t” sound, which is achieved by stopping the tone with the tongue (Figure 6). While typically not used in classical performance technique, the tongue-stopped tone is standard in jazz.

Notice that some of the short notes in this example are accented and some are not. This will be addressed in Guideline 4.

Quarter notes or eighth notes followed by rests often occur in jazz in the middle and at the ends of phrases and lines. More clarity is achieved when these notes are played short. It is also easier to coordinate the precision of larger ensembles when these notes are played short.

If not followed by a rest, then quarter notes and eighth notes are usually played/sung long unless one of the following situations applies:

2. Quarter notes that occur on the downbeats of beats 1 or 3 are usually played/sung long.

3. Quarter notes that occur on the downbeats of beats 2 or 4 are usually played/sung short.

In the last measure of the example in Figure 7, the quarter note on beat 3 is played/sung short because it is followed by a rest (Guideline 1).

In many styles of music, including marches, beats 1 and 3 are the strong beats and are therefore emphasized more strongly. In jazz music, beats 2 and 4 are more strongly emphasized. This is where the eighth notes occur in the drummer’s ride cymbal pattern (Figure 8). The drummer usually creates a long sound on beats 1 and 3 with the ride cymbal. The hi-hat is always played on beats 2 and 4 in jazz.

Because of the strong impact of the hi-hat cymbals when they come together in a sort of “chick” sound on beats 2 and 4, quarter notes that occur on these beats receive more attention. This action also simulates the beats where finger snaps would occur to keep time to the music. To better coordinate the ensemble articulations with the rhythm section sounds, short quarter notes on beats 2 and 4 are more effective. An exception to this rule is when there is a string of more than four quarter notes in a row. In this situation, all the quarter notes are typically played (sung) short and accented (Figure 9).

Likewise, there are certain rhythm combinations, such as the one shown in Figure 10, that call for both quarter notes to be played or sung short, even though
common malady, especially in young jazz groups.

5. A quarter note (or the equivalent thereof) that occurs on an upbeat between two eighth notes (or rests) is played/sung short.

The eighth-note/quarter-note/eighth-note syncopation pattern, as shown in Figure 12, is very common in jazz music. Usually the quarter note is performed short and is accented to take advantage of the syncopated rhythm. Figure 13 shows several ways that this syncopated rhythm is articulated. If followed by a rest, the figure should be articulated with the syllables doo-daht-dit (Example 1). If the last note is tied to a longer note, the figure is articulated doo-daht-day (Example 2). Even if the beginning of the figure is an eighth note rest, the figure is still articulated in this manner (Example 3). Example 4 shows how the figure would be articulated if the last note of the figure is not tied but is followed by another note.

When the upbeat quarter-note equivalent occurs as a part of a sequence of eighth notes and is tied across the bar line or the imaginary midpoint of the measure, it is played (sung) long, as seen in Figure 14.

6. Upbeat entrances after a rest, especially those that are a dotted-quarter-note length or longer, should be “anticipated with an accent” (AWA).

Entrances on the upbeat after a rest are particularly crucial to an authentic jazz style. Anticipating them with an accent keeps them from sounding late and provides the appropriate emphasis for the rhythm pattern (Figure 15).
7. A succession (three or more) of quarter notes (or equivalent) on consecutive upbeats is usually played/sung long and accented.

When three or more quarter notes occur on successive upbeats, they are all played (sung) long and accented to prevent the sound from being too choppy and allowing the beat to rush (Figure 16).

8. In a line of eighth notes, accent the highest note and any wide-leap changes of direction. Ghost (swallow) the lowest note and notes that occur on the weakest upbeats (2 and 4).

The concept of ghosting, or swallowing, a note is achieved by using the syllable *dn* rather than *doo* and actually simulating swallowing rather than blowing during these notes. This results in a less defined tone for that note, making it more suggested than clearly articulated. Often this type of note is indicated in the music with an *X* rather than a notehead or parentheses around the chosen note. This technique is often heard in music of the bebop era. Listening to the music of Charlie Parker provides the ultimate guide for performing this articulation style authentically. A careful analysis will indicate this practice being used on long lines of eighth notes, as shown in Figure 17. Use of this practice can be heard on many Charlie Parker recordings. Listen to examples from the discography included as a sidebar in this article.

9. The eighth-note triplet rhythm is usually articulated by slurring the first two notes and tonguing the last one. The most commonly used articulation syllables are *doo-dle-da*.

Using this articulation will allow the performer to play or sing a line of successive triplets with speed and smoothness (Figure 18).

10. All notes of a quarter-note triplet should be played/sung long unless otherwise indicated. Sometimes they are accented, and sometimes they are not.
In jazz, the quarter-note triplet is known as the drag triplet. The purpose of this rhythm is to pull against the regular eighth-note pulse. A common error is to play the last note of this figure short, which changes the impact and causes the figure to rush. Imagining this rhythm as if it comprised six eighth-note triplets tied together in groups of two will make it easier to perform. This rhythm should not be confused with the dotted eighth-note-sixteenth-note tied to eighth-note-eighth-note rhythm shown in Figure 19.

Two sixteenth notes followed by a rest are articulated with the syllables *spit-it* or *did-it*. The first sixteenth is usually accented.

While this rhythm pattern does not occur as often, it is often challenging for students, who tend to play the sixteenths too slowly. Using this articulation will help solve that problem (Figure 20).

By following these guidelines, your instrumental or vocal jazz ensemble should be a swinging, hot-sounding jazz machine. To be sure, there are exceptions to these guidelines, just as there are exceptions to the guidelines for English language pronunciation. Even so, just as one learns a new language by listening to it spoken and mimicking the speaker, listening to and mimicking authentic jazz examples will provide the prime model for your jazz ensemble to articulate better. The discography in this article will provide good examples for your students to listen to and emulate.

**Notes**


9. Ibid., 75.

Check out some of the Jazz-Related Lesson Plans in My Music Class® at musiced.nafme.org under “Lessons.” Put “jazz” in the search box.
An Aural Learning Project
Assimilating Jazz Education Methods for Traditional Applied Pedagogy

Abstract: The Aural Learning Project (ALP) was developed to incorporate jazz method components into the author’s classical practice and her applied woodwind lesson curriculum. The primary objective was to place a more focused pedagogical emphasis on listening and hearing than is traditionally used in the classical applied curriculum. The components of the ALP for the applied studio are (1) listening to at least two professional recordings of the works currently being studied and analyzing the performances, (2) recording projects with a written evaluation of the performance, (3) SmartMusic practice, (4) memorization and transcription projects, (5) assigned readings and research on works studied, and (6) composed and improvised warm-up and technique exercises. This article is a report on the project and a description of its implementation and assessment.

Keywords: applied instruction, aural learning, improvisation, jazz, listening analysis, memorization

Two students enter practice rooms with intentions of practicing their private lesson assignments. Both practice tone and technique studies, both use written music, both use metronomes and tuners, but there, the similarities end. One student, Sylvia, has been taught to consider the written music as if it were a blueprint, to be interpreted in the style of a notable performer, but ultimately to make it her own. The other student, Hilda, is dutifully following every technical and interpretive indication provided in the notation. Sylvia spends forty minutes of her practice session aurally transcribing a solo; Hilda spends forty minutes working out the technique of a twenty-four-bar sixteenth-note passage. Sylvia spends another twenty minutes memorizing the head and changes to “Body and Soul” and then incorporating her composed and memorized ii-V patterns into

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her improvisation. Hilda spends another forty minutes playing through her recital program while trying to remember the piano part from one hearing of a recording several months ago.

By now you might have gathered that Sylvia is practicing for her jazz lesson and Hilda for her classical one. Which one of these two students is having a more challenging and a more developmentally enriched auditory experience? As an applied woodwind instructor, is my classical-based student, Hilda, accessing her auditory learning modality as fully as is my jazz-based student, Sylvia?

As a woodwind doubler primarily trained in the classical tradition, I spend a portion of my flute, saxophone, and clarinet practice pursuing the specific activities typical of jazz study: listening to recordings, transcribing tunes and solos, practicing with play-along resources, and developing a jazz technical and improvisational vocabulary. In the summer of 2006, it occurred to me that perhaps my classical practice, as well as my woodwind teaching, could benefit from some of the aural learning modality resources of jazz study. As a result, I began to develop components that could be incorporated into my classical practice and the applied woodwind lesson curriculum. This was the impetus for the Aural Learning Project (ALP).

**Analysis of Jazz Study**

Jazz and classical studies differ in their primary learning modes and activities. Jazz study emphasizes aural learning, memorization, creating new music and/or arrangements of standards, and improvisation. Although most serious classical students listen to recordings and certainly listen to themselves when practicing and performing, classical study relies significantly on visual learning, giving deference to the composer’s written intentions of melody, harmony, rhythm, and aspects of expression notated by the composer and/or by a respected editor. By necessity, classical study also requires a great deal of focus on technical development, leaving less time to focus on aural training in the practice room.

With the possible exception of orchestral excerpts, it has been my experience that classical players generally shun upon intensive recording imitation, even for study purposes. As well, I would venture to guess that far fewer classical musicians compose, arrange, and improvise than do jazz musicians.

How do jazz musicians practice? First and foremost, jazz musicians learn by listening. For the jazz musician, this means more than simply recognizing the tune and chord progression. Details of every note and inflection are aurally absorbed, as are aspects of style, expression, improvisatory vocabulary, tone, articulation, and technique. Second, transcribing solos of a model jazz player offers important training for the jazz musician. Jazz musicians often claim that most jazz skill sets can be developed through listening and transcribing solos. These skill sets include learning an artist’s style and vocabulary, tone, expressive character, articulation, and technique as well as acquiring general skills associated with aural training, memorization, and general stylistic elements (e.g., swing vs. bebop). They also experience the “in-the-moment” quality of an artist’s improvisation and capture the feel of performing with a top-quality rhythm section. The remainder of the jazz musician’s practice is devoted to learning tunes (memorizing the melody, form, and chord progressions as well as common arrangements, including introductions and endings), practicing improvisation, and borrowing techniques from classical training (tone development and technical exercises). In addition, many jazz musicians compose new music and arrange previously composed music for small- and ensemble performance.

**Adapting Jazz Methods for Classical Training**

How can classically trained pedagogues assimilate the jazz methods’ aural learning modality qualities? My primary objective in developing the ALP was to place the pedagogical emphasis on listening and hearing in a much more profound way. The components of the ALP for my applied studio students are (1) listening to at least two professional recordings of the works currently being studied and analyzing the performances (see Figure 1), (2) recording projects with a written evaluation of the performance, (3) Smart-Music practice, (4) memorization and transcription projects, (5) assigned readings and research on works studied, and (6) composed and improvised warm-up and technique exercises (see Figure 2).

**Implementation of the Aural Learning Project**

In a postjury meeting, the student and I discuss the literature to be studied in the semester to follow and, with scores, listen to selections to be chosen for study. During this shared listening experience, it is important to pay close attention to the student’s reactions. The student’s first hearing impressions often reflect a strong affinity or aversion for a work or style. An affinity can become an opportunity for the student to choose a portion of their repertoire. An aversion for a particular piece often reflects a student’s intimidation of technical challenges or unfamiliarity with modern harmonic language. This reaction requires a pedagogically thoughtful approach, perhaps by exploring preparatory works of a similar style but less technically and/or harmonically challenging. After this initial listening session, I put together a compact disc of professional recordings, including those agreed on in the listening session as well as others for future or alternative study. The time it takes to assemble these playlists is well worth the reward. By allowing some student choice in selecting works, the student’s developing musical preferences are validated, and students experience a greater “caring” investment in the work that lies ahead. L. Dee Fink, in *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, identifies a focus on caring as a learning goal: “When students start to care about learning and want to learn, either in general or about particular things, then truly powerful things can happen educationally. Then students not only care about phenomena, ideas, and the like, they also care about learning about them.”

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**Figure 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Professional recordings, transcriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording</td>
<td>Self-recordings, analysis of recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Smart-Music practice, improvisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorization</td>
<td>Memorizing tunes, chord progressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>Writing out solos, arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Assignments, research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exercises</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warm-up</td>
<td>Improvisation, technique exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technique</td>
<td>Aural awareness, expressive vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Improvised tunes, arrangements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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FIGURE 1
Woodwind Studio Recording Analysis

Name: _______________________________________

Work to be studied (title/composer): ________________________________________________________

Recording Information/Performer’s Name: ___________________________________________________

Obtain at least two professional recordings and do multiple active listening sessions (with score study).
Write comments on the following categories. Specify measures, as is applicable, in your comments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musical Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musical Expression,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style and Phrasing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone Quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note Accuracy, Intonation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm Tempo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamics</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aspects to Emulate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### FIGURE 2
Aural Learning Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components:</th>
<th>Due:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Listening to professional recordings – evaluating, analyzing, absorbing style characteristics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Recording projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Smart Music practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Memorization and Transcription project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Assigned readings and research on works studied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Composed and improvised warm-up and technique exercises</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments:</th>
<th>Due:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Research literature and composer background on the work(s) you will be studying.</td>
<td>2nd Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Obtain at least two professional recordings, and do multiple active listening sessions. Write comments using recording analysis template.</td>
<td>4th Week Midterm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Complete recording projects.</td>
<td>As assigned, sent 2 days before next lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Use Smart Music for a portion of each practice session.</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Work on transcription/memorization project, to be performed in studio class.</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Prepare for studio class discussion of assigned reading.</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Create warm-up and technique exercises.</td>
<td>As assigned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I was pleased to receive the following response from a student demonstrating her attitude toward this component of the ALP. Malory was a clarinetist and senior music education major and was scheduled to perform her senior recital in October. For one of her selections, she had expressed an interest in Vaughan Williams’ *Six Studies in English Folksong*. While I preferred that she work on a more challenging selection, her affinity for English folksong settings was a guide for my literature search. After receiving recordings of works by Finzi, Bliss, Bax, Dunhill, Hurlstone, and William Lloyd Webber, she wrote, to thank me, “It was exciting to listen to [the CDs] and find pieces that suited me. I’m excited to start practicing!”

My students typically come to college without having had the opportunity for private lessons and, before they begin their music history sequence, do not have an abundance of classical recordings among their listening selections. Their summers usually do not include music camps and performance opportunities, and they often work long hours to fund the next school year, leaving little energy or inspiration to practice. I am hopeful that with the listening incentive, my students have greater focus and investment in their practice sessions because they...
have a choice in selecting their repertoire and because they enjoy listening to excellent performances.

Listening Analysis

Every semester there seems to emerge, quite early on, a pedagogical theme for each student. One of the first indicators of this theme is found in the student’s professional recording analysis. For example, in the “aspects to emulate” section of the analysis, a student who devotes the entire discussion to articulation and technique but has nothing of significance to say about musical expression, style, and phrasing will prompt focused instruction on those qualities. The musical expression/style/phrasing theme is developed in lessons and becomes a primary intention in their recording projects and self-analyses.

There are additional benefits from the listening analysis. It has been my experience, with this activity especially, that students begin to develop an appreciation for technical expertise on music that they are beginning to study and, later, with which they are more intimately familiar. Perhaps more important, students enrich their development of the common practices of expression, for example, the pacing of a cadence, the subtlety of a phrasing issue, the artistic use of vibrato. In discussions about their analysis, I often emphasize their freedom, with respect for the style, to develop their own interpretation. Conversely, historical recordings also put in perspective the impermanence of expressive style boundaries and further emphasize that musical expression, even in classical music, can evolve.

Recording Project Component

After five semesters of assessment and revision, I concluded that the most effective recording assignments are those that specify realistic tempos and expressive goals and have had adequate practice and instruction. The process and the self-assessment have obvious benefits for the student. As the instructor, I gain insight into my students’ listening and analysis skill development as a self-assessment activity, and I am able to collect a record of their progress throughout every semester of study (filed as an iTunes playlist for each student, each semester). These sessions are recorded using SmartMusic, Audacity, Garage Band, or any digital recording method that can be sent to me electronically.

Memorization and Transcription Components

The purposes of the memorization and transcription components are to intensify aural learning, to understand the role of memory in musical performance, and to explore the relationship between memorized musical performance and expression. The memorization and transcription components have been used as assignments for the selected student’s woodwind studio class. Memorization assignments are made for currently studied music (students have the printed music) and vary from a few phrases to entire works, depending on the level of the student. The transcription assignments (recording only, no printed music) are typically short melodic movements. With the assistance of digital recording technology and programs such as the Amazing Slow Downer, the transcription project delivers a depth of hearing that was not previously available. Familiar to jazz musicians but perhaps not to those classically trained, the Amazing Slow Downer is a software program capable of independently manipulating the speed and pitch of a recording. The program allows students to choose an exact starting and ending point, change the tempo by percentages from 20 percent to 200 percent of the original, and lower or raise the pitch by cents or by semitones, which is useful with A-442+ recordings or for transcribing music into a new key. Ear-training benefits for both the memorization and the transcription projects are exactly those found in jazz study; these include hearing style, tone, expression, and technique and experiencing the in-the-moment quality of performance.

Music psychology and cognitive neuroscience reading selections and discussions inform the memorization and recording projects and are an integral part of the weekly studio class. Past and current classes have and are exploring Robert Jourdain’s *Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy: How Music Captures Our Imagination* or Daniel J. Levitin’s *This Is Your Brain on Music.* My initial intention for assigning readings for the memorization and transcription projects was to explore the cognitive connection between memorization and expression. However, students have expressed a number of additional benefits derived from the readings and discussions. In their own words, comments have included the following: “Usually when you take lessons, you learn the notes and rhythms, get some instruction on how to play it correctly, but you don’t think about how your brain is processing the music. When I recall what we have read [Levitin], I have ‘a-ha’ moments every time I practice.” “Learning that scientists have found that master musicians will practice their craft for 10,000 hours in order to develop expertise, well it just even the playing field for the rest of us.” For me, these studio classes are an opportunity for all of us to be held in a state of wonder together about the phenomenon of music and how it affects our minds and emotions. It has transformed the studio class into a laboratory of discovery and is perhaps one of the most rewarding teaching experiences of my week.

Improvisation and Composition Components

Some of the ALP improvisation and composition correlated activities are concerto cadenza composition, composed and improvised warm-up/technical exercises, and “out-of-context” practice. Students not only learn classic warm-up and technical exercises but are also asked to compose and improvise new ones. Since these are the practice activities that occur first in every practice session, they serve as the “hearing warm-up” of every practice. They also emphasize student ownership of the physical requirements for good tone and technical development. Out-of-context practice is a technique...
that aids in technical and expressive development. Beyond the well-known rhythm variation technique for working through difficult passages, this approach asks the student to improvise variations for the rhythm, tempo, articulation, or expression of a particular passage. While meeting technical and expressive objectives, this approach also allows the student to hear technically complex and expressively important moments in new ways and with greater depth.

**ALP Assessment and Concluding Thoughts**

In an assessment instrument, students were asked to express their impressions of various aspects of the project. In assessing the recording analysis component, students’ responses indicated that although their first impression was positive for most of the recordings analyzed, after studying the piece and revisiting the recording at a later date, they were better able to comprehend the artistry of the performers. The transcription project assessment seemed to evoke the most affective responses; students commented that they enjoyed the process but also the pleasure in hearing music so intimately. Students found the recording assignments to be valuable for evaluating both their technical progress and their expressive gestures.

Transferring the techniques described here to the K–12 curriculum is quite possible. Many wind band, orchestral, and choral literature professional recordings are available through publishers and educational companies. The listening analysis for performing ensembles could be administered as a rehearsal exercise or assigned individually, possibly using a listening practice room or a limited-access website. While music memorization assignments are not unheard of in K–12 music education, transcribing music is perhaps less common. Students with a basic technical command of their instrument or voice could manage even short pieces or portions of a larger work for transcription purposes. The transcription could be a preinstruction assignment for a new work and an extension of the listening analysis assignment. Many school programs are dedicating a practice room to the SmartMusic program. School and home subscriptions are reasonably priced, and the software is very user-friendly. The website has valuable resources for teachers to manage their assignments and grade book and to receive recordings and practice records from the students. While Garage Band requires a purchase, both Audacity and the Amazing Slow Downer have free, downloadable versions. A single computer in a music classroom can easily run all four programs. Certainly, the recording assignments can be accomplished with an analog tape-recording device as well. The technology matters far less than the experience of accessing aural learning in a variety of ways.
Aural learning in informal learning settings has been recognized in at least two studies, in which the very act of learning music aurally created enjoyment, deep musical involvement, and motivation to learn and perform more. Indeed, Gary McPherson argues that traditional music methods need revision—that “aural and creative activities, such as mentally rehearsing music away from an instrument, and playing music by ear, from memory, and by improvising may well be more important to musical development than has commonly been assumed.” Certainly, all areas of musical learning must be accessed and an enriched curriculum that employs multiple learning modalities is ideal when teaching instrumental music in the classical genre, regardless of the instructional level. It is no surprise, as revealed in Michael Kendall’s 1988 study comparing two instructional methodologies—one engaging all relative modalities in an enriched lesson sequence and the other focused on only the aural components of the former—that using all relative modalities is more effective than using only aural components in a number of tested areas. It is not my intention to eclipse the visual learning modality with the increased emphasis on aural learning, but to merely find a fine balance in all the learning modalities applicable to musical study.

The ALP clearly demonstrates recognized educational merit through the application of National Standards 2, 6, and 7. In the spirit of music learning theory, true and profound auditory comprehension is the ultimate objective of the ALP. Components of the project evoke the types of audiation and many of the stages of audiation processing found in Edwin Gordon’s music learning theory. As well, Bloom’s landmark work, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, and subsequent revisions, such as Marzano and Kendall’s New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, describe the types of cognitive processing of the ALP. The Robert Marzano and John Kendall publication includes psychomotor procedures among the knowledge domains, an aspect of cognitive processing especially relevant to music learning.

Another recurring theme that is woven among the research, both educational and neuroscience, is the element of “caring.” Earlier I referenced the importance of the caring component in regard to student caring about the process of learning. Musical memory for performance, as well, is greatly affected by the level of caring in the form of the emotional importance that we place on the information. With this in mind, it is essential for my students’ aural, visual, kinesthetic, and intellectual experiences with their repertory to have an aesthetically compelling quality. Another important aspect of caring is referenced in literature concerning culturally responsive pedagogy. Especially compelling is the research demonstrating the intensely significant effect of teacher attitudes on student achievement. This is especially pertinent for students of different ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds than their peers.

Irrespective of the theoretical foundation for the project, a university-level applied lesson curriculum’s primary assessments are juries and recitals. Although performances cannot be an exclusively quantitative assessment of the ALP, it is my observation that my students are technically and expressively better prepared for having participated in these aural learning activities. The positive response and similar perception of success from the students certainly indicates a student-centered validation and a desire to continue these activities. Perhaps the best outcome of this project has been the development of a system that fulfills a much more broad and long-term goal, that is, in the words of L. Dee Fink, a learning system that “help[s] students develop a strong and proactive sense of themselves as learners.”

**Notes**

1. My iTunes copyright agreement allows up to seven legal reproductions per purchase, and my lending procedures follow educational-use guidelines.


5. Davis, “‘That Thing You Do!’”


Sharing the Gift of Jazz: An Interview with Willie L. Hill Jr
Brad Howe

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What is This?
The Society for Jazz Education seeks to meet the needs of MENC members concerned with jazz education—to provide them with a strong voice within MENC in the hope that every student in America might experience jazz in ways that broaden and deepen their musical lives. The society was established to improve the quality of jazz teaching and research at all levels, and at its heart is its founder and director, Willie L. Hill Jr. Currently a professor of music education at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst and the director of the UMass Fine Arts Center, Hill has served as director of education for the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. He is a past president of MENC: The National Association for Music Education as well as of the International Association for Jazz Education, which ceased operation in 2008. He taught instrumental music education for sixteen years and has served as instrumental music supervisor in the Denver Public Schools. In this December 2010 interview with Brad Howe, Hill reflects on jazz education in the United States today.

You clearly bring a great deal to the purpose and mission of the MENC Society for Jazz Education. How would you describe your primary interest in the society?

Thank you. I’m ultimately interested in providing teachers with what they need in the classroom—to help them achieve a better understanding of the language of jazz and to do whatever I can to help them to become comfortable teaching jazz to their students.

In your view, what is the value of jazz study?

When you stop to consider the great history and the many styles that jazz has to offer—the theory and the tremendous opportunities for creativity it provides through improvisation, composition, and arranging; the reality that while so much of music education involves a preponderance of Western European styles; and the fact that jazz study introduces students to something exciting about this country and about its history—when you consider all of those things, you have to see jazz study as having tremendous value for young people.

I’ve been teaching instrumental ensembles in the public schools and at the college and university level for more than forty years, and you know what I’ve discovered? That the students in my jazz bands were consistently better listeners, had better rhythmic feel, and played with better intonation than the students in my other ensembles did, because they had to have all of those skills to play one-on-a-part in a jazz band. And I found that playing jazz builds students’ confidence and their ability to work as a team. Studying jazz is great for the students, it’s great for the school, and it’s great for parents and the community. It really has that kind of positive impact on people’s lives.

But in order for students to benefit from all that jazz study has to offer, they must have teachers who are equipped to deliver outstanding jazz instruction to their students. That is why greater emphasis on teacher preparation is desperately needed. Too many young teachers leave college believing they are ready to teach music, but soon find that the first class they run into is jazz band—and many have little or no experience with jazz. Young teachers need to be prepared enough to feel comfortable teaching jazz and jazz-related techniques in all of their classes. When they’re comfortable, they’ll enjoy it, and I can tell you that students who have teachers who enjoy teaching jazz are going to get into this music!

Photo courtesy of Willie L. Hill Jr.
What would you tell teachers who are less familiar with jazz and jazz education but would like to know more about it?

Many teachers have become better informed about jazz and jazz education, but they often don’t take full advantage of the many resources that are available to them. These include fully developed curricula, such as is available from Jazz at Lincoln Center, from the Thelonious Institute of Jazz, and from right here at MENC. Other sources are technology-based helps, such as SmartMusic, and book-and-CD sets such as those produced by Jamey Aebersold. In many cases, community members and local musicians can serve as a tremendous resource and will come into the classroom and work with students for little or nothing. Many conferences and summer programs are available as well—though I know that in some schools music educators receive little support from their administrations for this kind of training.

Obviously teacher preparation and training are critical if students are to get the most out of their jazz education experience. Do you have any additional concerns about the future of jazz education?

You know, I really do. I am deeply concerned about what I’m seeing out there in terms of diversity and the arts. Over the years, the various positions in which I have served have afforded me the opportunity to conduct and to observe a tremendous number of state and regional honor bands; and it has been a joy to watch so many students take part in all that music and arts education have to offer. But I have grown increasingly alarmed over the last several years as the number of minority students participating in these ensembles has dwindled. There are many instances where I may only see one Latino or African American student in an entire ensemble—and there are some ensembles where there are none at all. When you consider the critical role that minority individuals have played in the making of this great music, you cannot help but be concerned: If there are no minority students participating in these and other outstanding programs, then where will the outstanding minority music teachers and musicians of the future come from, and what is the future of a national music education system that cannot maintain diversity among its professional teaching staff? Every band director, choral director, and leader in the field needs to be concerned about this trend.

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts at a busy time. Any final words?

Although there are concerns, the good outweighs the bad because there are so many great successful and thriving jazz education programs throughout our country. Why? Because there are still talented, dedicated, and hardworking educators who care about their students and love to see them enjoy the riches that this music has to offer.

Willie L. Hill Jr. was interviewed by Brad Howe, a doctoral candidate in education at the University of Idaho, Moscow. The author of numerous jazz and education articles, Howe has also taught in the Sitka, Alaska, Public Schools and serves as an educational consultant for the Lionel Hampton International Jazz Festival in Moscow, Idaho. He can be contacted at brad@jazz-works.com.
Lessons from the Bandstand: Using Jazz as a Model for a Constructivist Approach to Music Education

John Barron

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What is This?
Lessons from the Bandstand: Using Jazz as a Model for a Constructivist Approach to Music Education

School is on the bandstand." I was nineteen years old when I heard these five words uttered by jazz pianist Hal Galper at a master class given by the Phil Woods quintet, of which Galper was a member. These words have helped guide me through my experiences as a musician and educator. Galper was speaking to an audience of jazz students and educators and trying to convey, in the simplest terms, how to reach proficiency as a jazz musician. Learning on the bandstand suggests that the developing musician is more likely to learn at an efficient pace and with depth of understanding when interacting with more knowledgeable performers—older musicians and more experienced peers—and by participating in authentic musical experiences.

Such an experience-based approach to learning music is not restricted to jazz. While the ideas presented in this article emphasize a constructivist vision of jazz education, they can easily be transferred to music education in general.

I can recall the memorable moments onstage when I was encouraged by an older musician and it was expected that I would express myself and take chances musically. The skills I had to offer were valued and considered an integral part of the music being performed. I can also recall the negative, yet equally memorable, moments when a bandleader would rule over the music like a dictator and expect everyone present to conform to a musical vision that was often rigid, unclear, or irrelevant.

The music classroom can be strikingly similar to that of a professional bandstand. The environment that the teacher establishes, whether in a band or choir rehearsal (or performance) or general music class will leave a lasting impression on students and greatly influence their lifelong attitudes toward music making. For the sake of music and the students' education, the music educator should make a concerted effort to abandon any of the teacher-controlled practices that have, in the past, been the norm in music instruction.

Valuing the Experiences of Past, Present, and Future

When teaching jazz, which is such an expressive and personalized genre of music, one of the most effective ways to proceed is to listen to students. I have to listen to my

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students' ideas and value them. By listening to my students, I can begin to understand and respect their prior experiences. This helps me plan my teaching around the interests of my students and consider related instruction for the future.

As I determine and value my students' experiences, I am able to clarify where they are musically and where I would like them to go with some assistance, a phenomenon Lev Vygotsky describes as identifying students' actual developmental level and then working within their zone of proximal development.2 The zone of proximal development is the place where teaching takes place—the place between what students can do on their own and what they can do with the support of others, both peers and teacher. Only by truly being open to my students can I effectively lead them to a level of musical understanding that will enable them to be successful.

This openness, however, should take into account each student as a unique individual—a person who is bringing a palette of unique experiences to the classroom. Not every student will be able to nor should be expected to demonstrate understanding in a generically prescribed way. As Howard Gardner remarks, "How easy if understanding could simply be assimilated, like a good meal, and if the same diet worked for everyone."3

For me, it has been important to realize that students are more likely to achieve understanding when they are learning things they want to learn. This does not mean that I believe teachers should cater to every student whim. It does mean, however, that teachers should be willing to motivate students by being receptive to them and encouraging their ideas and interests. Learning is likely to take place in situations where, as Eunice Boardman suggests, "students are allowed to ‘process, analyze, and examine experience for meaning and understanding and where they can relate what they have learned to their own purpose.’"4 The students need to discover why something is worth learning.

Too Much Emphasis on the Extramusical

A common approach to teaching jazz used by many music educators—especially those teaching general music—has been to develop teacher-directed lessons that promote an appreciation of the music through a combination of listening to and learning about the major figures who have contributed to its evolution. This is all well and good, but it should not be the emphasis in the experience-based music classroom. Merely teaching about the historical and cultural significance of any genre of music is something best done in a social studies class.

This is not to say that a historical and cultural perspective of jazz has no place in the music program. Understanding music in relation to history and culture is indeed one of the national content standards for music education. However, as Jackie Wiggins suggests, it is the responsibility of the music teacher to make sure that any exposure to the history and culture surrounding the music is tied directly to authentic, interactive experiences that emphasize performing, listening, and creating.5

Why is it that so many music educators shy away from teaching jazz in a manner that allows for authentic, meaningful experiences? Perhaps the answer can be found within the prior experiences of the teacher. It is quite understandable for a musician or music teacher who has spent countless hours practicing and performing only prewritten

The classroom environment a music teacher establishes will leave a lasting impression on students and will greatly influence their lifelong attitudes toward music making.
notes on a page to have a fear of or even a dislike for the improvised nature of jazz music. On the other hand, a music teacher who has an extensive jazz background may not have the slightest notion of how to begin teaching students in ways that, as Boardman describes, allow for the learner to function as a musician, albeit a novice.6

**A Constructivist Approach to Jazz Education**

Through a synthesis of new and prior experiences with authentic elements of jazz, students are able to construct their own meaning in relation to their world. This synthesis of experiences into meaning is the foundation of a constructivist theory of learning. Boardman states that “humans do not find or discover knowledge, but rather construct or make it.”

Constructed knowledge, however, is unlikely to occur in isolation. Not unlike the professional bandstand, constructed knowledge and developed understanding in the classroom are most likely to occur, according to Wiggins, “as a result of interaction between teacher and students and also as a result of interaction among students.” Although the developing jazz musician must inevitably devote the necessary time alone in the practice room, depth of understanding can be enhanced only through meaningful and repeated interactions with others. The very essence of jazz is interactive and communal.

To implement a constructivist-based jazz studies program that is meaningful and relevant, educators can draw on the ideas of Wiggins, who gives a workable description in six points of what teaching and learning might look like in what she calls a **musical cognitive apprenticeship**:  

1. Learners need to engage in real-life, problem-solving situations.  
2. Learning situations need to be holistic in nature.  
3. Learners need opportunities to interact directly with the subject matter.  
4. Learners need to take an active role in their own learning.  
5. Learners need opportunities to work on their own, with peers, and with teacher support, when needed.  
6. Learners need to be cognizant of the goals of the learning situation and their own progress toward goals.9

Suggestions for how these ideas might be applied to jazz education follow.

**Learners need to engage in real-life, problem-solving situations.** On the bandstand, the jazz musician is faced with the problem of having to navigate through a set of chord changes that can range from one-chord vamps to all-out harmonic explorations involving altered chords and unconventional modulations. Before a musician can set off on such a dynamic trek, a sufficient amount of music readiness must occur.

All too often, as an introduction to jazz performance, students are merely given a set of chord changes with corresponding scales and are expected to begin the treacherous task of improvising completely out of context. A more appropriate and authentic “doorway in”10 to performing jazz, whether in an elementary general music class, band, or orchestra, is to start with familiar tunes that have the most basic chord progressions (e.g., I–V–I) and are simple enough for students to perform on their ensemble instruments, keyboards, mallet instruments, or recorders.

Familiar songs from general music classes and folk music are an excellent source for simple, yet expressive material.11 With familiar melodies and simple harmonies, students can begin to experiment with improvisation through rhythmic and melodic permutations. By starting with what is already familiar and relevant, the teacher can lay the necessary groundwork to prepare students for exploration of the more sophisticated dimensions of jazz improvisation.

**Learning situations need to be holistic in nature.** There are many educational resources available that contain scale exercises and patterns that will fit over standard chord progressions found in much of the standard jazz canon (rhythm changes, twelve-bar blues, and so on).

While there may be value in such a structured approach to learning how to improvise, the material is often studied outside the context of an actual piece of music. The experienced jazz musician not only improvises off the harmonic structure of a tune but also develops thematic ideas off a tune’s melodic content. By building up a storehouse of familiar tunes, students will have an ever-growing wealth of melodic ideas to incorporate into their improvised solos that are holistic in nature and build upon prior experiences.

A wonderful way to immerse students into the deep well of jazz tunes is through the blues. The jazz literature is sufficiently stocked with wonderfully simple blues melodies (heads) that are riff-oriented, can be easily modeled by a teacher, and will not take more than one class period to learn. (See the sidebar for examples of twelve-bar blues.)

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### Some Twelve-Bar Blues Melodies Your Students Should Hear

Here are some examples of simple twelve-bar blues melodies that will enhance a student’s jazz vocabulary.

- “C-Jam Blues” by Duke Ellington
- “Blues in the Closet” by Oscar Pettiford
- “Chitlins con Carne” by Kenny Burrell
- “Bag’s Groove” by Milt Jackson
- “Freddie Freeloader” by Miles Davis

*Author’s note: Encourage students to learn these melodies by ear and in different keys. Students should be given the opportunity to hear high-quality recordings of these tunes before learning them.*
Learners need opportunities to interact directly with the subject matter. In a constructivist-based music classroom, regardless of the subject matter, there should always be less emphasis on talking about music and more on doing—performing, creating, and listening. Direct involvement with the music will allow students to make relevant and ultimately meaningful connections between the music and their own lives.

For example, a teacher may be trying to explain the difference between straight eighth notes and eighth notes that swing. This could probably be explained in two minutes (not much of a lesson). If students are truly expected to understand this stylistic musical difference that is so vital to the nature of jazz, they should almost immediately be involved in appropriate listening, performing, and creating activities that provide opportunities for individual, small-group, and large-group experiences.

Learners need to take an active role in their own learning. The teacher should seek ways to teach music that have less emphasis on large-group, teacher-directed instruction. When they are forced to deal with overcrowded performance ensembles, music teachers’ jazz instruction can be reduced to teaching watered-down big band arrangements that are usually rehearsed in much the same manner as a concert band selection. While the large-ensemble big band sound certainly has its rightful place in the history of jazz, it should be only one of many genres for students to listen to, perform, and create.

For the individual student, the opportunity to initiate and carry out original ideas is more likely to occur in smaller ensembles. Here, students will have more opportunities to take risks with the music and engage in music that they find interesting and meaningful.

Learners need opportunities to work on their own, with peers, and with teacher support, when needed. The ability to listen to and interact spontaneously with other performers is a vital component of jazz performance. Young musicians need the opportunity to test the waters and try out new ideas with other like-minded musicians. Quite often in a social learning environment, students will scaffold one another, and musical growth will occur with minimal intervention from the instructor.

This does not mean that the opportunities for students to practice jazz on their own should be eliminated. Students need time alone to develop their own ideas. When working individually (or with peers), students can use software such as Band-in-a-Box and Super Duper Music Looper to create their own backing tracks as an aid to their practicing. Technology has the potential to give students the opportunity to work on specific dimensions of the music (tempo, articulation, phrasing, and the like) while operating within a holistic and authentic context.

Learners need to be cognizant of the goals of the learning situation and their own progress toward goals. By allowing students to assume ownership in the classroom, teachers can help create a need to know in students that will foster understanding relationships between what they are experiencing and what they already know. When elementary students are able to construct understanding of jazz after improvising a few variations of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” on the recorder, they are well on their way to achieving independence as musicians and musical learners.

The Importance of “Why”

So much of jazz education is concerned with the what and how (e.g., this scale will fit over this chord change). A crucial element that is often missing when planning and executing a lesson dealing with jazz is the why. Students deserve to know, for example, why the blues is such an integral part of understanding jazz, or why musicians like Charlie Parker and Thelonius Monk played such an important role in the development of jazz as a uniquely American art form.

I believe that teaching the why can encourage a need to know among students and lead to musical experiences that foster curiosity and generate enthusiasm for continued learning. The teacher needs to be careful, however, not to fall back into the traditional role of the all-knowing dispenser of knowledge by simply telling the students why they need to know something. The need to know must come from within the students.

Music teachers certainly have the ability to create an on-the-bandstand learning environment that provides students the opportunity to participate in authentic, real-world musical experiences that bear a resemblance to those encountered by professionals. It is important to remember that the result of any musical experience will depend on the openness, sincerity, and flexibility of the educator.

Notes

1. Constructivism refers to an individual constructing knowledge and, therefore, a unique understanding of the world, through a synthesis of new and prior experiences.


7. Ibid., 3.


9. Ibid., 18.

10. See Wiggins, Teaching for Musical Understanding, for a description of the role of a “doorway-in” lesson design, 70.

Improvising Jazz a Beginner's Guide
Eddie S. Meadows
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What is This?
A few simple principles lie at the heart of jazz improvisation. Eddie S. Meadows offers a primer for students and teachers.

For many years, musicians outside the jazz community believed the ability to improvise was a gift, not something that could be learned. While acknowledging Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Charlie Parker as giants of improvisation, as musicians who learned their craft primarily from oral sources, and as performers who achieved greatness, however, we teachers and our students must realize that we can also learn to improvise. Teachers of beginning instrumentalists can adopt several pedagogical ideas that might foster the development of skills in jazz improvisation.

The ability to improvise jazz depends upon learning the “tools of the trade” (chords, scales, repertoire), applying the tools to actual musical situations, phrasing and articulation, learning to swing, and shaping creativity through structure and design.

Jazz improvisation both encourages and expects diversity within continuity. Central to this premise is the importance of individuality: jazz improvisers should attempt to develop their own personally expressive style. Musicians can use their mastery of the tools of improvisation to express their views.
of the world; this is what distinguishes improvisers from each other—John Coltrane from Stanley Turrentine, Lee Konitz from Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis from Dizzy Gillespie. Each of these players has a different style, yet all are masters of the art of jazz improvisation. Unlike Euro-American classical music, which tends to discourage individual interpretation, jazz musicians are expected to incorporate their individual interpretations into a performance. This can extend beyond improvisation to include accents, inflections, and a personal sound. A musician does not become an improviser until he or she has developed both an individual sound and original ideas. Verbatim imitation of the masters does not make one an improviser, although incorporating their ideas into solos, on a limited basis, is acceptable and demonstrates a musician's knowledge of their improvisational styles.

From a jazz perspective, how does one begin to improvise? The first step should be to listen to as many approaches to improvisation on a specific tune as you can find. It is important for the nonjazz musician to hear many different approaches in order to open his or her ears and intellect to what is possible. If you are a pianist, you might want to compare the Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, and Art Tatum versions of "Tea for Two." Tenor saxophonists might want to compare the John Coltrane and Stan Getz versions of "Lush Life." Instrumentalists may want to listen to the Eddie Harris (tenor saxophone), Miles Davis (trumpet), and Miroslav Vitous (bass) versions of "Freedom Jazz Dance."

After listening to individual interpretations of specific songs, the beginning improviser should listen to the myriad compositions based on single harmonic structures: the chord progressions of tunes like "I Got Rhythm." By listening to improvisations based on this harmony, a musician can expand his or her knowledge of both creative and melodic possibilities that are possible within one harmonic structure. "Anthropology," "Crazeology," "Moose the Mooch," "Oleo," "The Serpent's Tooth," "52nd Street Theme," "Lester Leaps In," and "Cottontail" are a few of the tunes based on "I Got Rhythm" harmony. The harmonies of "Cherokee," "What Is This Thing Called Love?," "How High the Moon," "Love Me or Leave Me," and "Back Home Again in Indiana" are also common to many jazz compositions.

Jazz improvisers must be able to play within many scales as they implement their improvisational ideas and apply these scales spontaneously to the correct harmonic situation. Teachers should first introduce students to a small selection of scales, however, and only gradually expand student's facility to include the scale-chord relationships listed by Baker. For these beginning students of jazz improvisation, the performance of all major and minor scales is critical in establishing a foundation of sounds "under the fingers" and "in the ears." Next, students can be introduced to the major pentatonic, blues, Dorian, Mixolydian, and diminished scales and modes. These scales and modes will become storehouses of musical ideas that find their way into jazz improvisation.

Students can practice the scales in figure 1 in order to improve their psychomotor skills. These scales can be played in rhythms of quarter, eighth, triplet, and sixteenth notes, or with the characteristic "shuffle" rhythm of dotted eighth and sixteenth notes. The beginning improviser could also expand his or her technical facility by adding dynamics—accenting every other note, for example.

After the beginner has begun to hear and recognize different performances of the same compositions, as well as different compositions using the same chord changes, and has begun to play selected scales in various rhythms, he or she can learn to improvise.

The best next step is for the teacher to demonstrate the relationship of chords and scales to improvisation, followed by the student's attempts to follow the model. A blues piece is a good starting point. Blues can vary in terms of the number of measures or bars, from twelve to sixteen to thirty-two bars, but the "twelve-bar blues" is the most common form. Two basic non-substitutive chordal progressions are outlined in figure 2.

Students of piano might begin by

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**Figure 1.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chord</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>1-2-3-4</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>11-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2. Traditional twelve-bar blues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chord</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>1-2-3-4</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
performing the harmony of a blues progression in C major. When the chords are comfortable for the left hand, a melody based on the C major pentatonic scale can be added. (For woodwind, brass, and string players, the melody is of course the first and only phase, so the teacher may want to play the chords.) The result could be something like “Five-Note Blues” (figure 3).

When students have relaxed into the C major pentatonic blues and begin to vary the melodies according to individual expression, improvisation has occurred. Because they have also learned the Dorian and diminished scales, they can be guided toward the function of these scales in melodies over the same twelve-bar blues progression. Teachers can ask students to read and vary the Dorian melody for “Reggie’s Blues” (see figure 4).

The teacher and students can do the same with “J.J.,” a melody on the twelve-bar blues progression that features the diminished scale. See figure 5.

Students should be encouraged to create their own melodies on their instruments using any and all of the scales they rehearsed earlier. The melodies of these scales can be laid over the chords of the blues progression. Beginning improvisers might be eventually guided to expand the relationships of chords to scales further by learning the ii-V7-I progression, which is the most common of several bebop chord progressions. In the key of C major, this progression is as follows:

```
| ii7 | V7 | I |
```

Root Position

When attempting to improvise melodically, a good choice for the ii chord would be a melody in the Dorian mode, spelled from D. In fact, if the ii chord were extended to include a thirteenth, it would then include all of the notes of a Dorian mode: D, F, A, C, E, G, B. The Mixolydian mode would be a good choice for a melody over the dominant chord (V7), followed by a melody based on the pitches of the tonic chord (I).

Of course, these scale choices vary in practice, depending upon the individual musician’s taste in chords, scales, and their melodies. The ii-V7-I progression can be

---

**Figure 3.** Five-Note Blues

**Figure 4.** Reggie’s Blues
heard in the hard bop and bebop improvisations of Clifford Brown, Fats Navarro, and Charlie Parker. In fact, when hard bop and bebop players of the 1940s and 1950s heard this progression, they may have been "thinking" scale or mode as they improvised. Note the ii-V7-I chord/scale relationship in figure 6, a short improvisational excerpt from "Joy Spring" by Clifford Brown.2

It is, then, simple to introduce the beginning student—and perhaps the teacher as well—to the art of improvisation. Jazz improvisation can be taught to those who diligently listen; practice their scales, chords, phrasing, and articulation; develop a sense of swing; and shape their creative ideas through structural features of melody, rhythm, and texture. The relationship between chords and scales is one of the critical keys that will unlock the door to the joys of jazz improvisation. The beginning improviser can gain access to myriad educational materials that are designed to quantify theory and practice of jazz improvisation: they are practical supplements to the lesson or to class instruction. The "tools of the trade" of jazz improvisation can be sharpened through listening practice and pedagogical guidance in this important musical genre.

Notes

Selected resources


Evans, Lee. Several jazz method books: Beginning Jazz Level, Intermediate Jazz Level, Beginning Jazz Improvisation, Learning to Improvise Jazz Accompaniments, and so on. All published by Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation, Milwaukee, WI 53123.


Putting It Together: Integrating Jazz Education in the Elementary General Music Classroom
Laura Ferguson
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>> Version of Record - Jan 1, 2004

What is This?
Putting It Together: Integrating Jazz Education in the Elementary General Music Classroom

Laura Ferguson

If you think about jazz as a core area of the curriculum rather than as an “extra,” you can ensure that all students are exposed to this important genre in the general music classroom.

American schools have great secondary performance programs, and many of these programs do wonderful things with jazz education. As wonderful as these programs are, only a small percentage of secondary school students join them, and usually the percentage of students participating in the jazz components of these programs is even smaller.

As many children as possible should be exposed to jazz. Nearly all public school students have music education in the elementary grades. Therefore, elementary general music classes would seem to be the most likely place for all students to be exposed to jazz styles and to come to understand the genre.

However, as a teacher of elementary general music, you already face a daunting task: “Music for every child, and every child for music,” regardless of time, resources, ability, or training. How can you feasibly be expected to do one more thing? Anything added to the curriculum is done so at the expense of something else. What can you get rid of from the curricular shelf to make space for jazz? Can you really justify not emphasizing singing mastery, or reading skills, or playing recordings, or providing instrument experience, or listening to time-tested works? How can you give students a little jazz can go a long way in the elementary music classroom.
background in jazz without sacrificing what you are already doing well?

The answer to these questions may be to use an integrated approach. Rather than having a jazz "unit" in which the genre is the focus for a short period of time and is then put away, consider using the genre as you would any other type of time-tested music. If you look at what you know and do well, you may find many places where jazz styles can slip seamlessly into your existing curriculum without loss of time, other activities, or conceptual focus. Not only will the issue of finding more time be moot, but using this approach brings jazz into the canon of the curriculum, whereas having a jazz "unit" relegates the genre to an "extra" rather than a "core" area of the curriculum.

**Elementary general music classes would seem to be the most likely place for all students to be exposed to jazz styles and to come to understand the genre.**

Regardless of your level of experience with jazz, there are many ways to do this successfully. If you feel you are a jazz novice, you may find preexisting materials in the series texts to be very useful in your planning. Or, if you have some experience with the genre, you may easily find outside materials and recordings to supplement your current classroom practice. And you may even want to create new lessons around the genre, if you feel at home with this style of music.

**Start with What You Know and Have**

With a little creativity and index searching, you may find you already have everything you need to bring a basic foundation of jazz into your classes. Appropriate pieces for the classroom may be available in the series text sitting on your desk, and appropriate ways of presenting the genre may already be in place in your existing classroom practice.

Do you use singing games in your classroom to promote and assess vocal mastery? Consider replacing one or more of the traditional sol-mi-la echo songs with a singing game from urban African-American folk tradition. "Telephone Song," found in the Grade 3 *Share the Music* series, is a four-tone song that uses the flat seventh "blue" note essential to many jazz harmonies, and it allows you to hear each child individually for vocal assessment.

Do you like to begin classes with a gathering song or end with a dismissal song? “Good Mornin’ Blues,” found in the Grade 5 *Share the Music* and Grade 2 *Music Connection* series, would be a wonderful opening song to get the class going while also emphasizing the flat third “blue” note found in jazz styles. “Oh, Won’t You Sit Down,” available in the Grade 3 *Music Connection* series and the Grade 4 *Share the Music* series, is a great gathering/settling piece, and it is also a wonderful vehicle for exploring vocal pitch bends. By changing a few lyrics in “All Around the Kitchen,” found in the Grade 1 *Share the Music* and Grade 1 *Music Connection*, you can sing instructions to students such as “Line right up!” or “Walk, don’t run!” This will get students focused for the transition from your music room to the classroom while also acclimating their ears to syncopated rhythm and “blue” thirds.

Do you want to use more jazz examples in class listening but feel you don’t know where to start to find materials? Look to your series texts’ composer indexes for appropriate examples and see where that leads you. Composers to look for include Charles, Ellington, Gershwin, Jarrett, Joplin, McFerrin, Monk, Parker, Rodgers and Hart, Strayhorn, and Watson.

**Supplement Your Activities with Outside Music**

Once you begin to integrate jazz into your teaching, you may find yourself ready to supplement your lessons with other music resources not available in the series texts. The sheer volume of recorded jazz music can seem overwhelming. Taking advantage of the many “Best of” CD sets put out by labels such as Verve, Telarc, GNP, and BlueNote can give you a lot of “bang for the buck,” as many different artists and styles will be highlighted on a single disc. These collections can also help you to develop your own preferences for artists and time periods. Once you find pieces you feel your students will enjoy, you can shape existing classroom activities around the new repertoire.

**How can you give students a background in jazz without sacrificing what you are already doing well?**

Do you regularly use pentatonic improvisation on barred instruments? Consider having students improvise over “Camptown Races” by the Dave Brubeck quartet using the black keys of the piano or keyboards, all the black bells of your resonator bell sets, or, if you are fortunate enough to have them, the chromatics of your Orff xylos. (See the Discography sidebar for a list of recordings referred to in this article.) By using only the chromatic notes, students can play pentatonic scale improvisations that fit nicely with the tonality of the piece. Compared with other jazz pieces, this two-minute piece is quite short, allowing for ample repetitions of the activity within a single class period.

Do your students regularly play chord tones to simple harmonic rhythms on choir chimes or other
kinds of instruments? Replace the traditional classroom song with a twelve-bar blues, assigning children to root or chord tones in the I, the IV, or the V7 chords. Help them initially find the harmonic rhythm of the piece through a visual reminder such as signaling “one,” “four,” and “five” with your hand or using flash cards with the appropriate numbers until students learn to follow the harmonies aurally. Some examples to use would be “Nicest Blues” (in the key of E) by Muddy Waters and “Hittin’ Twelve” (in the key of F) by the Count Basie Band. Because these are instrumental blues, they can help your students make the distinction between the harmonic form and lyric form (AAB) of blues, and you don’t have to worry about the potentially risqué lyric content of some blues singing.

Do you regularly discuss instrument families with your students? Consider presenting traditional orchestral instruments playing in jazz styles rather than using orchestral excerpts. Good choices include Joe Venuti playing “Sweet Georgia Brown” on violin, Buddy Rich’s Big Band playing “My Man’s Gone Now” with trombone solo, Ken Peplowski playing “Blue Room” on clarinet, Freddy Hubbard playing “All or Nothing at All” on trumpet, and the L.A. 4 playing “My Romance” on flute.

Making your own materials for class presentation can be a very rewarding creative process.

If you regularly use familiar songs from children’s movies because of their immediate appeal, keep your eye out for “covers” of well-known children’s tunes by jazz artists. There are many sophisticated renditions of old favorites, such as Harry Connick Jr.’s “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” played in New Orleans march style or Cassandra Wilson’s sage interpretation of “Someday My Prince Will Come.”

Being able to determine changes of meter is an important skill for elementary school students, and adding a movement element to meter listening is a tried and true practice in the elementary classroom. Wynton Marsalis’s “Tick-Tock (Nightfalls on Toyland)” moves back and forth between duple and triple meters in themes clear enough to be heard by even novice listeners. Instruct young students to march during duple-meter passages and sway during triple-meter passages, and then be
prepared for them to find a favorite piece of music.

For a choral class to achieve good blend in performance, students need to understand the difference between solo voice and group voice. Listening to a jazz choir, such as Take 6 singing "He Never Sleeps," rather than to a traditional choral ensemble will acclimate students' ears to balance and blend while also opening their ears to the close harmonic inversions used in jazz styles.

Do you get Nutcracker overload every year at Christmas time? Consider having your students compare "Russian Dance" and "Waltz of the Flowers" with "Blues à la Russe" and "Valse of the Flowers" as performed by The Classical Jazz Quartet. You will gain a well-deserved change in holiday music, and your students will exercise higher-order thinking skills when discussing the similarities and differences between the versions.

If folk-song games are a large part of your curricular activities, consider using examples such as "Johnny Brown" from Step It Down, a collection of authentic African-American singing games. Jazz genres have strong roots in both the participatory and improvisatory nature of such folk games.

Create Your Own Materials
You may find you want to create activities around particularly rich pieces so students may know them deeply. Making your own materials for class presentation can be a very rewarding creative process. Depending on
If you feel a bit out of your element using jazz, think of the genre as another type of multicultural music that you bring to your students. You don’t need to know everything about a kind of music to share it in a meaningful way in your classroom.

Assess your goals for an activity. If the activity (e.g., playing a simple bass line, learning a folk dance) is more important to you than the actual music you use for the activity, this would be a perfect place to slip in a jazz replacement for a more traditional song or piece.

When creating play-along arrangements, remember that simpler is better, especially at first. Aim for arrangements that use stagnant rhythm patterns and a limited amount of pitches, and plan for many repetitions. Remember that the recording will add the aural interest for the students as they play.

Listening maps work best with short excerpts of pieces anywhere from thirty seconds to one minute long. When creating a listening map, focus on just one musical concept at a time, or else the map may be confusing or messy. For example, the map of “Blue Rondo à la Turk” (figure 1) shows only melodic contours, even though there are many other things to hear in the piece. A simple map allows students to add things to their individual maps according to what they hear, and comparing the different student maps encourages class dialogue.

Listen like crazy! The more your ears are attuned to jazz styles, the more likely it is you will find ways to slip your personal favorites into your teaching. “Best of” compilation recordings from well-known jazz labels are excellent starting places for new listeners, as are Internet radio stations that are dedicated to jazz.

Above all, remember that jazz is based on improvisation. Never fear trying something new! Improvisation in teaching, as in playing, is a creative and thoughtful endeavor.

Very sophisticated pieces of jazz music can often be arranged for students to play recorder or other classroom instruments along with the recordings. Jazz pieces tend to be rather lengthy, especially when multiple improvisation solos are played. This can work as an advantage if you prefer using authentic assessment for instrument playing and would like to repeat a playing activity multiple times so all students can be assessed. Simply have students play the arrangement over the “head,” or form, of the tune as many times as needed. This gives you ample time to focus on listening to individual students as the class plays together over the recording.
Milestone pieces of jazz, such as “Salt Peanuts” and “Freddie Freeloader,” can be absorbed by students while they focus on the challenge of using more technically difficult fingerings on recorder or improve playing skills on barred instruments. (See figures 2 and 3 for music examples.) The pieces are sophisticated enough to add interest to otherwise simple arrangements, which motivates the students to play the part well and often. For more ideas, see the Principles of Success for Integrating Jazz in Elementary General Music sidebar.

Conclusion

Using an integrated approach to jazz in the curriculum is more a way of thinking about how to slip this musical style into the repertoire of music used in class than making an actual change in teaching practice. If jazz pieces are viewed as core components of the classroom canon rather than as special, fun “extras,” you can easily bring this aspect of rich musical culture to general music students without sacrificing time or content.

Notes

1. Special thanks to Eric Elftman for sharing this idea with me in my classroom.
3. Special thanks to Julie Hutchinson for sharing this listening map with me.
Teaching Improvisation outside of Jazz Settings: Musical genres that lend themselves to improvisations by beginning student musicians include bluegrass, blues, ska, reggae, rap, klezmer, and rock.

Michael Bitz

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What is This?
TEACHING IMPROVISATION OUTSIDE OF JAZZ SETTINGS

Musical genres that lend themselves to improvisations by beginning student musicians include bluegrass, blues, ska, reggae, rap, klezmer, and rock.

BY MICHAEL BITZ

When children hear the word "improvisation," they often think of hot jazz—fast solos, syncopated rhythms, and complex harmonies. Students in general music classes may be familiar with bebop and later jazz eras. Charlie Parker and John Coltrane are some of the first jazz greats that may come to mind. Children who learn jazz from their parents' or grandparents' record collections might know the music of Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington, Paul Whiteman, or Count Basie. Others may be familiar with jazz improvisation groups that mix jazz with hip-hop sounds, such as Us3, whose 1993 version ("Cantaloop") of Herbie Hancock's "Cantaloupe Island" received extensive airplay on MTV and major radio stations.1

However, when it comes to teaching improvisation, jazz may not be the best or most logical genre to start with. First of all, as children get older they prefer faster jazz tempos, which, as one might expect, are the most difficult for beginning improvisers.2 Second, jazz rhythms and "swing feel" are based upon syncopation. Most young improvisers, on the other hand, are only familiar with simple downbeat and upbeat relationships. Finally, jazz harmonies often veer away from major and minor tonalities and contain seventh chords and chord substitutions. These harmonies may sound strange and unresolved to ears that are accustomed to orchestra and band arrangements of popular music.

Essentially, collaborative efforts mean greater possibilities for critical thinking in the classroom.

Where to Begin

If not jazz, what genre should be used for beginning improvisation? To answer that question, one must decide what improvisation means—not for professional jazz musicians but for young music students. Improvisation is the spontaneous, creative generation of melody, rhythm, and phrases, without specific preparation or premeditation.3 The adjectives "spontaneous" and "creative" need not mean "complex," however, and the very first improvisation exercises should start with no more than one or two notes. Both instrumentalists and vocalists can improvise timbres, dynamics, and rhythms on a single tone to get familiar with making music without the written page. As students become more experienced with improvisation, they can naturally add notes to their creations, without improvising in a specific genre. Improvising on standard melodies with chord changes, embellishments, riffs, and licks can come later.

One reason students are often shy about improvising is that many times it means playing alone in front of other students who will watch and perhaps judge them. Although this may often be the case in jazz, improvisation education does not necessarily have to mean that students have to play solo. Just as musicians play written music in ensembles, they can improvise in groups as well. This approach to improvisation establishes a high level of creativity because ideas are passed from one improviser to another. In his article "Opening the Door to Classroom Improvisation," Michael Bitz is a doctoral candidate at Teachers College at Columbia University in New York City and an active performer and teacher of the double bass and string improvisation.
Paul Goldstaub recommends several suitable activities for group improvisation. Essentially, collaborative efforts mean greater possibilities for critical thinking in the classroom, and improvisation does not necessarily mean a solo performance.

Eventually, students will probably want to improvise solos in a particular genre or style. Specific musical genres that lend themselves to improvisations by student musicians include bluegrass, blues, ska, reggae, rap, klezmer, and rock. Vocalists and players of any instrument can use these genres as a basis for creative improvisation. The melodic complexity, harmonic complexity, and tempo elements of these genres make them conducive to improvisation. Furthermore, many children listen to some or all of these genres in their leisure time. They may already be familiar with the necessary musical "vocabulary" of one of these genres and, therefore, be able to concentrate on improvisation itself. These genres are described below, along with examples of recommended recordings.

Bluegrass

Bluegrass is a traditional form of American music that usually involves stringed instruments and provides a model for beginning string improvisers. However, the music need not be exclusively for string players—everyone can enjoy bluegrass.

Melodic complexity: Melodies tend to be very simple, and beginners can master them quickly and easily.

Harmonic complexity: Harmonies are usually relegated to a few major chords or a major tonality that moves to the relative minor. Modulation and complex harmonic motion are rare.

Tempo: Tempos can be fast but perceived in cut time, which makes bluegrass feel slower.

Recommended listening: Bill Monroe, 16 Gems (Sony CK 53908, 1996); Psychogras, Like Minds (Sugar Hill SHCD-3851, 1996); The Tennessee Mountain Bluegrass Festival (CMH CD-8012, 1995); 20 Bluegrass Originals (Deluxe DCD-7909, 1987).

Blues

The blues have been played on practically every instrument. Because the blues are a basis for rock and rhythm and blues, the sound of this genre is usually familiar to most students' ears. The blues are as much a feeling as a form or genre, and students can create effective improvisations with a few notes and a lot of emotion.

Melodic complexity: Melodies are relatively simple and very repetitive. Call-and-response is an important part of many blues melodies and a good technique for beginning improvisers.

Ska music ... now stands as one of the most popular new genres in the United States.

Harmonic complexity: The simplest form of the blues consists of three chords: I, IV, and V. The standard twelve-bar blues form can repeat without variation to provide a base for first improvisations.

Tempo: Tempos are very often slow to medium with definite backbeats.

Recommended listening: Willie Dixon, The Big Three Trio (Columbia CK 46216, 1990); Blues Guitar Greatests (Delmark DE 697, 1996); B.B. King, Live at the Apollo (GRP GRD-9637, 1991); Muddy Waters, Trouble No More (MCA CD9291, 1989).

Ska

Ska music, combining traditional Caribbean rhythms and jazz, originated in Jamaica, stormed through Britain, and now stands as one of the most popular new genres in the United States. The song forms are generally very simple to follow, and many ska songs consist of two or three chords. Improvisation is an important element of this music because it provides catchy melodies and rhythms for the beginning soloist.

Melodic complexity: Melodies are simple and repetitive.

Harmonic complexity: The harmonies generally consist of a few chords that do not wander from major and minor tonalities. Even more complex ska songs often feature simplified improvisation sections.

Tempo: Traditional Jamaican ska styles, such as "rock steady" and "blue beat," feature slow to medium tempos with a relaxed but steady beat. More contemporary groups play the music faster.


Reggae

Now a popular form of dance music in the United States, reggae is Jamaican music that evolved from ska. Reggae is also a good basis for improvisation because of its defined rhythm, relaxed tempo, and easy-to-follow chords.

Melodic complexity: Melodies are simple, yet melodic, and are easily sung or played. Reggae melodies tend to feature a melodic "hook" that can be an effective springboard for improvisation.

Harmonic complexity: Harmonies often consist of two or three chords. Minor tonalities are prevalent, which can lead improvisers to discover new sounds.

Tempo: Tempos tend to be slow and relaxed with a definite beat. Tempos are, in part, defined by interesting bass lines that can be played and then altered on any instrument.

Recommended listening: Burning Spear, Man in the Hills (Mango CCD 9412, 1976); Bob Marley and the Wailers, Legend (Tuff Gong 422-846-210-2, 1984); Ernest Ranglin, Below the Bassline (Island IJCD 4002/524 299-2, 1996); Junior Reid, Listen to the Voices (Ras CD 3200, 1996).

Rap

Most students in high school or lower grades are at least somewhat familiar with rap music. For improvisers, rhythm is an intriguing aspect of
Sample Improvisation Exercises

Reggae

Reggae bass lines are excellent for teaching beginning improvisers. The following set of improvisation exercises is based on the bass line featured in Bob Marley and the Wailers' “Stir It Up” from the collection of hits titled Legend (Tuff Gong 422-846-210-2, 1984):

1. Have students in the class learn the bass line by listening to the recording and figuring out the notes and rhythms together. They can transcribe the bass line to enhance dictation and note-writing skills if applicable to the curriculum. They can try to capture the feel of the music by playing along with the recording.

2. Have students begin improvising by varying the dynamics. This allows them to feel “safe” by retaining the notes and rhythms that they know while they begin to create their own sounds. An improvisation of dynamics might sound like:

3. Have students improvise on the rhythms of the line. A possible rhythmic improvisation might be:

4. Have students improvise on the notes of the bass line. For example:

5. Have students improvise a complete improvisation of the bass line by varying several elements at a time. These improvisations can take many different forms, such as the following:

Rap

Rap music is an excellent genre for the study of rhythm and timbre. One improvisation exercise based on rap music is to have students use their voices as a “beat box.” For example, students can “sing”:

Ask students to answer the following questions to encourage them to explore rhythms and timbres with their vocal beat boxes:
1. How many different sounds or timbres can you improvise with your beat box?
2. How many different rhythms can you improvise with your beat box?
3. Working in groups, can you create an improvised rap with just the rhythms and timbres?
4. Can you find a rap song and improvise on the rhythms and timbres provided in it?
rap music, and a soloist can use rap rhythms on a few notes to create entire improvisations.

*Melodic complexity:* Melodies are simple, but rhythmically complex. This combination can be especially effective for improvisers on percussion instruments or other students who have experience with more advanced concepts of rhythm.

*Harmonic complexity:* Harmonies are very simple. Rap music tends to be based on one tonality as defined by a simple bass line.

*Tempo:* Tempos are moderate and very definitive.


**Klezmer**

Klezmer is Jewish folk music that originated in eastern Europe before World War I. When Jewish immigrants came to the United States, they brought their music with them, and it became fused with jazz and Dixieland. Klezmer has had a recent renaissance, and it makes for great improvisation music, especially for more advanced improvisers. Clarinet and violin are traditional improvising instruments in klezmer music.

*Melodic complexity:* Melodies are complex, but usually based on a single tonality: the Phrygian scale. Klezmer is a good introduction to improvisation based on modes other than major and minor.

*Harmonic complexity:* Harmonies are simple, based on a few chords. The songs are often in minor keys.

*Tempo:* Tempos are fast but steady and rhythmic.


**Rock**

Though the term covers a broad range of music, rock is a genre with which most children are familiar. Of course, there are complex forms of rock, but simplicity is often a virtue in this music. Students especially enjoy improvising on songs they know well.

Klezmer has had a recent renaissance, and it makes for great improvisation music, especially for more advanced improvisers.

*Melodic complexity:* Melodies are generally simple and often melodic. Many rock songs are based on “hooks” or “riffs,” which provide improvisational fodder.

*Harmonic complexity:* Harmonies are usually based on a couple of repetitive chords.

*Tempo:* Tempos are moderate to fast, with a definitive backbeat.


**Classroom Implementation**

Analyzing a genre for its improvisational merit is easy, but the implementation of ideas is a much more difficult process. The following sequence, although by no means set in stone, can help teachers organize classroom improvisation in less familiar genres.

1. **Choose a genre.** The idea of choosing a genre may seem self-evident, but some teachers find vacillating between genres tempting. Students, however, find this confusing. They need time to absorb their roles as improvisers in the genre, particularly if their instruments are not used in the style being studied (for example, a bluegrass bassoon is a nontraditional idea).

2. **Research the genre.** The more teachers know about a style of music, the better they can guide students through an improvisation exercise. Therefore, they need to move beyond preconceptions and learn as much as possible about a genre before introducing it in the classroom. Students themselves are an excellent resource—they very often know more about their favorite music than critics or magazine writers.

3. **Gather resources.** A little work can go a long way in improvisation education. Therefore, find appropriate recordings, program accompanying beats and sequences on a synthesizer, and have exercises ready (see the Sample Improvisation Exercises sidebar).

4. **Introduce the genre.** Asking a student to simply begin improvising is intimidating and counterproductive. Introduce the genre with recordings, your own knowledge, and student input. As students hear and understand what they are going to improvise, they will become excited about the process. For example, if rap is to be used as a basis for improvisation, students might explore different beats and timbres that they might find in rap music.

5. **Encourage group improvisation.** Students can learn a great deal from each other when they pass musical ideas around the classroom. Some students absorb stylistic contexts faster than others, and group improvisation allows for dialogue between students with different levels of understanding. When students are ready to improvise alone, the teacher can schedule a balance of both group and solo improvisations.

6. **Let students explore.** The purpose of using different genres of music as a basis for improvisation is to allow students to expand their abilities as well as their notions of what they can do. Obviously, a cellist playing reggae will have to go through a good deal of exploration. This is a positive process,

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Teaching Improvisation

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However, and will eventually lead to a higher level of learning.

Conclusion

These recommendations are in no way meant to disparage jazz or diminish its importance in the history of improvisation. After all, many consider jazz to be “America’s classical music,” and the music is undoubtedly one of the greatest products of American culture. However, because of its complexity, jazz is not the best music for beginning improvisers (especially young students) unless they are truly committed to improvising in that genre. In the end, a genre is only a vehicle for creative learning. If one genre works better than another, the teacher should use it.

Teachers who want to incorporate improvisation into their lessons will find that there are very few classroom improvisation materials, especially for nonjazz areas. As improvisation becomes a more integral part of the music curriculum, publishing and curriculum design companies may begin to meet the demand for improvisation materials and musical works. Until then, classroom teachers will have to be extra creative with their improvisation strategies. Branching into different genres of music is a good place to start.

Notes

Beginning Blues Improvisation Pedagogy for the Non-Jazz Specialist Music Educator

Benjamin Tomassetti

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What is This?
When I hear great jazz soloists, I can appreciate that they are making beautiful music—improvised music that transcends the choice of notes and rhythms and communicates with the audience on many levels. With this in mind, I have always questioned why the typical jazz improvisation lesson or college course has focused almost exclusively on scales and chords at the expense of logically and beautifully expressed musical lines. This is not to say that studying chords and scales is without value. Quite the contrary—disciplined practice of these rudiments of jazz is the best context for my own approach to teaching improvisation.

I have developed this method and used it for more than ten years in private lessons, workshops for high school students, and college courses. This method has worked consistently with students aged twelve and up, although this article focuses on the beginning- and intermediate-level improvisation student. This method is most effective when used with popular play-along recordings, such as Jamey Aebersold's jazz improvisation series, or computer applications like Band-in-a-Box (see Selected Resources on pg. 18). Both the teacher and the student must have access to these types of materials during lessons and for practice outside of lessons.

Learn a step-by-step method for teaching blues improvisation that does not require previous jazz experience.

Benjamin Tomassetti is director of the audio technology program at American University in Washington, D.C.
The ideas expressed in this article, as far as I know, are original. For this reason, there are no bibliographic references. I have never heard of a teaching approach similar to this, and my own education in jazz was in every aspect different from what I recommend here.

This approach to teaching blues improvisation does not rely upon having the student transcribe, memorize, or practice jazz and blues licks. The focus here is on teaching students basic phrase-based melodic principles and having them apply these principles to improvising melodic music within the context of a twelve-bar blues (for definitions see the Basic Jazz and Blues Terminology sidebar). This method teaches students to trust and develop their own sense of creativity and to conceive of each solo as an artistic musical composition. For students wishing to continue their education in the jazz and blues field, there will be ample opportunity to learn and memorize licks, transcribe solos, and practice standard jazz technical patterns and études.

The three steps of this method are simple:
1. Students explore the two types of phrases—question (antecedent) and answer (consequent)—using the blues scale.
2. Students work on the melodic energy and dramatic shape of a solo.
3. Students use basic compositional techniques for thematic development.

By mastering these three concepts—phrase structure, dramatic shape, and rudimentary thematic development—the student can successfully improvise a meaningful melodic solo that emotionally and intellectually communicates with the audience, exhibits a mature dramatic shape, and has a cohesive musical ending.

There is a lot of material for the student to absorb and master. Be patient and allow the student several class sessions or private lessons to come to terms with each concept. A realistic schedule for getting through all of these concepts, in one key, is three to four lessons. For middle school and high school students taking a weekly one-hour private lesson, an entire school year is a reasonable timetable for getting through all twelve major keys while using this material. In a college setting, with the class meeting at least twice a week, a single semester is reasonable.

**Phrase Structure**

Students must first learn one blues scale. I recommend that they begin with concert B-flat, but any would work. The B-flat blues scale is illustrated in figure 1.

Once students can successfully play the blues scale, ascending and descending, for the entire range of their instrument (not just one octave), they can move on to the study of phrase structure. For this purpose, a phrase is four measures in length. There are two types of phrases: question (antecedent) and answer (consequent). A question phrase is any phrase that does not end on the tonic and therefore ends on another note of the blues scale. An answer phrase is any phrase that ends on the tonic. Don’t let students use pitches outside of the blues scale.

**Improvisation exercises during the lesson.** All of the exercises can work in a small-group or whole-class setting. Use one of the play-along series. If you are not comfortable playing the exercises, simply have the students take turns, trade fours, and so forth. For the remainder of the article, descriptions will focus on a typical private lesson, but it should be emphasized that I have used this approach in classroom situations and group lessons, as well as in private lessons.

After the two types of phrases have been discussed and the student seems ready, begin by trading four-bar phrases with both you and the student using only answer phrases. The purpose of this exercise is to make the student comfortable with targeting a specific note while improvising short statements. This step is very important and should not be omitted.

After the student seems comfortable with this, progress to trading fours using only question phrases. This exercise is equally important. Have the student end phrases on different notes in the blues scale. Ask the student questions about the sound of each phrase. What does it sound like to end on the minor third from the blues scale? What about ending on the flatted fifth? By having the student use different notes of the blues scale as ending notes in a question phrase, you are building a mental connection between the sound of the music and the student’s technique. This is very important ear training and is crucial for successful improvisation.

After the student is comfortable with this exercise, trade fours, alternating question and answer phrases. At first, you should play the question phrase, and the student should play the answer phrase. Then alternate who plays which phrase. By spending an entire lesson on these exercises, the student will learn to begin improvising cohesive melodic thoughts that exhibit an open (question phrase) and closed (answer phrase) structure. This is the same structure as a composed melodic line, but in this case, the line is improvised.

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**Selected Resources**

**Books**


**Play-Along Materials**

Jazz: How to Play and Improvise. A series of twenty-four books with recordings. Jamey Aebersold Jazz, PO Box 1244, New Albany, IN 47151-1244; 800-456-1388; www.jazzbooks.com
Band-in-a-Box. PG Music, 29 Cadillac Ave., Victoria, BC, V8Z 1T3; 800-268-6272; www.pgmusic.com

By mastering these three concepts—phrase structure, dramatic shape, and answer (consequent)—using the blues scale. An answer phrase is any phrase that ends on the tonic. Don’t let students use pitches outside of the blues scale. Improvisation exercises during the lesson. All of the exercises can work in a small-group or whole-class setting. Use one of the play-along series. If you are not comfortable playing the exercises, simply have the students take turns, trade fours, and so forth. For the remainder of the article, descriptions will focus on a typical private lesson, but it should be emphasized that I have used this approach in classroom situations and group lessons, as well as in private lessons.

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The next step is to have the student improvise an entire twelve-bar blues chorus (three four-bar phrases). The pattern of the phrases is question—question—answer. Demonstrate this and have the student try to improvise several during the lesson period. Figure 2 illustrates a one-chorus blues solo consisting of three phrases (question—question—answer) that are indicative of a simple improvisation. Don't let the student play outside the blues scale yet. This is important because the goal is to create melodically meaningful improvisations that utilize the resources of the blues scale. Only after the student can improvise on all twelve blues scales should you allow him or her to use the melodic resources of the chord progression (e.g., major mode with major-seventh chords, Mixolydian mode with dominant-seventh chords, Dorian mode with minor-seventh chords). A student who has mastered this method and progressed to the study of harmony will be able to improvise fairly mature multichorus solos that have definite dramatic shapes with cohesive musical endings. Once the melodic structure has been internalized, introducing more advanced melodic and harmonic concepts is easier and takes less time for the student to learn.

**Melodic Energy and Dramatic Shape**

The next step is controlling the melodic energy and dramatic shape during an improvised solo. First, define what constitutes dramatic energy in a solo. Typically, we think of musical lines that exhibit less dramatic energy as consisting of longer note values, having more and longer musical rests, being of a quiet nature, and not using the extreme registers of the instrument or voice. If these elements characterize a melody of low dramatic energy, then the opposite is true for melodies that exhibit a high level of dramatic energy. Specifically, high-energy melodies use shorter rhythmic values and syncopation, have fewer and shorter rests, are often mezzo forte and louder, and explore the extreme registers of the instrument or voice. These elements characterize a melody of low dramatic energy, then the opposite is true for melodies that exhibit a high level of dramatic energy. Given these elements, define the general melodic energy of this demo solo can be defined as small—medium—big in terms of the three phrases. After your demonstration, have the student try to improvise one. Coach the student while he or she is playing the instrument, specifically in terms of bringing the energy up and down.

**Basic Jazz and Blues Terminology**

**Blues changes.** The chord progression for any given blues tune. Two sets of standardized blues chord changes are taught. These are notated using standard harmonic Roman numeral designations. All of the chords are typically major-minor seventh chords or dominant seventh chords. Both sets of chord changes consist of one chord per measure of music.

- **First chord changes:**
  - Phrase 1: I 7, I 7, I 7, I 7
  - Phrase 2: IV 7, IV 7, I 7, I 7
  - Phrase 3: V 7, IV 7, I 7, I 7

- **Second chord changes:**
  - Phrase 1: I 7, IV 7, I 7, I 7
  - Phrase 2: IV 7, IV 7, I 7, I 7
  - Phrase 3: V 7, IV 7, I 7, I 7

In the key of C, the chords can be identified as: I 7 = C 7 (C, E, G, B-flat), IV 7 = F 7 (F, A, C, E-flat), and V 7 = G 7 (G, B, D, F).

**Blues scale (blue note).** The scale that has evolved from the blues tradition. See below for the C blues scale:

```
1 3 4 5 6 7 8
```

**Chorus.** One complete performance of the structure of the tune. For example, in a twelve-bar blues, if the trumpet player plays a solo that is three choruses long, then the solo went completely through the twelve-bar structure three times, for a total of thirty-six measures.

**Twelve-bar blues.** The length of a standard blues tune. A twelve-bar blues contains three four-bar phrases.

**Trading fours.** The act of two or more people trading four-measure improvised phrases.

**Figure 1. The B-flat blues scale**

```
1 3 5 7 9
```

**Improvisation exercises during the lesson.** After you have explained melodic energy and dramatic shape, begin with one-chorus blues solos. Start by demonstrating a simple solo that climaxes at the beginning of the third phrase and concludes with an answer phrase. The general melodic energy of this demo solo can be defined as small—medium—big in terms of the three phrases. After your demonstration, have the student try to improvise one. Coach the student while he or she is playing the instrument, specifically in terms of bringing the energy up and down.

Having a predetermined dramatic shape for an improvisation is very important at this stage. Always pre-
define the dramatic shape that the student will strive to realize during an improvisation exercise. This teaches the student to explore different levels of musical energy while improvising and, when learned, will contribute to a natural and mature flow of musical energy.

Do not forget to incorporate the ideas about phrase structure that have already been covered. A successful strategy is to require the student to conclude each solo with an answer phrase. Other specific phrase requirements can be made, but concluding each solo with an answer phrase during these exercises teaches the student to end each solo with a logical musical statement that comes to rest on the tonic note.

Experiment with various dramatic shapes for a one-chorus solo. Some successful combinations are small-medium-big, big-small-big, and big-medium-small. Figure 3 shows a sample one-chorus solo using the small-medium-big dramatic shape.

Once the student has achieved a level of success with the one-chorus solo, it is time to move to a two-chorus solo. The important factors are building energy from the transition of the first chorus into the beginning of the second chorus, bringing the energy down at the end of the second chorus, and solidly ending the solo on the tonic note. Figure 4 illustrates a sample two-chorus solo. The dramatic shape of the first chorus is small-medium-big, and the dramatic shape of the second chorus is big-medium-small. The last phrase of the solo ends on the tonic.

Using Thematic Development in a Solo

Using thematic development simply means introducing the student to improvisation as a method of composition. This can be accomplished in a straightforward manner by introducing the student to three basic concepts:

1. The “idea” is your first improvised phrase for the chorus.
2. Any “repetition” that is similar to but not exactly the same as the idea is a type of thematic development.
3. “Something different” is an intentional deviation from the idea, containing new material, and it helps
keep the solo from becoming too repetitious.

With these basic concepts introduced, demonstrate for the student a one-chorus blues solo that follows the thematic pattern of idea—repetition (development)—something different for the three phrases of the blues chorus. This type of AAB formal structure is very common in blues lyrics, and it works quite well in instrumental improvisation instruction.

Figure 5 illustrates a one-chorus blues solo that follows the thematic pattern of idea—repetition—something different, while exhibiting the dramatic shape small—medium—big.

Once the student has become comfortable with one-chorus blues solos that possess a defined dramatic shape, use clearly communicated thematic ideas, and have a coherent musical ending, it is time to expand into multi-chorus blues solos that use these new principles. Have the student begin with two-chorus solos that follow this thematic pattern:

• first chorus: idea—repetition—something different
• second chorus: new idea—new repetition—bring back something from the first idea as an answer to end

Figure 6 illustrates this type of two-chorus solo.

After the student is beginning to feel comfortable with this level of artistic control, start adding predetermined dramatic shapes to the thematic structure. For example, have the first chorus (idea—repetition—something different) follow the energy pattern of low energy—bring it up a little bit—build energy into the second chorus on the phrase level as the student is simultaneously controlling the thematic ideas. The second chorus should follow the energy pattern of keep the energy up—bring it down a little bit—bring the energy down and conclude with a solid musical answer.

Once a student can successfully play a logical two-chorus blues solo while controlling the musical energy into and out of a climax, using clearly communicated thematic ideas and digressions, and concluding with a coherent musical ending, then the student is beginning to master the art of jazz improvisation. As a teacher, performer, composer, and lover of jazz, I feel that this moment with my students makes it all worthwhile.

Conclusion

Through the concepts of phrase structure, musical energy and dramatic shape, and thematic development, you can effectively teach any student to improvise a musically meaningful solo. While the concepts are fairly simple, the implementation requires discipline and, above all, practice. By incorporating this system with the use of teaching aids such as Jamey Aebersold's Blues in All 12 Keys play-along books and recordings or Band-in-a-Box software, the teacher and student have a practical means to explore these principles in the lesson and at home. This is a very teachable system, and once the teacher is used to the specific order of the exercises, it becomes second nature. Being able to improvise a musically satisfying blues solo is, in my opinion, one of the first and most important steps in the lifelong pursuit of fluid jazz improvisation.
Improvisation, the least structured element in jazz, often proves the most difficult to teach. Lee Bash shows how being alert for certain "flags" can help you lead the way to a dramatic improvement in your students' solos.

Improvisation

by Lee Bash
There is a "law of conservation" among educators, which simply states that individuals only learn something when they are ready to learn it. This is based on the observation that different individuals learn at different rates. One notable area in which music educators can apply this law is jazz improvisation. Understanding this general principle can give the jazz instructor a sense of when a student is ready to progress toward improvising in a more mature and musical manner. But much of this readiness can be brought about more easily by raising the consciousness of the student, and this consciousness-raising can be readily achieved when the teacher provides insightful analyses of the student's performance.

Assessing improvisation

Though your students may have mastered the "technical" mysteries of jazz improvisation to the point where they are using the right scales or chord changes, their improvised solos may still seem to lack characteristics that usually are associated with more polished and satisfactory models. By learning to recognize various attributes of students' improvised solos, you can begin to identify specific problems and then alert your students to their deficiencies and raise their consciousness as to how to create more sophisticated solos in a systematic manner. As in any jazz improvisation situation, this can usually be achieved best by supplementing your instruction with selected listening assignments in which notable jazz improvisers implement these musical qualities in their playing. Once the student has grasped the basic concept through guided listening experience and your pinpoint analyses of these attributes—"flags"—creating improvised solos with each specific characteristic as a performance strategy will become easier for them.

Improvised solos may seem hard to analyze or evaluate critically for instruction, but in order for you to identify problems your students may be having it is essential to look for specific characteristics in their performances. Actually, once you begin to identify these attributes on a regular basis, they become so apparent that they seem to wave flags at you to assist in your evaluation. In fact, there is nothing subtle about these flags—they also wave blatantly at adjudicators when your jazz group competes at festivals. Therefore, recognizing your soloists' problems will often enable you to improve your competitive ratings as well.

Young soloists tend to exhibit at least one, and often combinations, of these characteristics. There is no apparent hierarchy among them, but it is a better strategy to deal with them one at a time rather than as a group of problems. Usually, it is helpful to address the most blatant, obvious need for remediation, and sometimes, while it is being improved, other less offensive deficiencies may automatically be eliminated.

Before you begin to analyze potential problems young improvisers are exhibiting, however, you should understand the first fundamental principle about improvisation performance. The nature of any good musical performance, whether it is taken from previously composed material or fresh from the musician's imagination, relies upon good communication skills. In other words, in order for an improvised solo to make sense, the
improviser should attempt to express ideas musically. Because we all normally express our thoughts each day through language, many of these flags can be correlated to language deficiencies. It is also helpful if you make language analogies in your improvisation instruction. A description of these problems is presented below with solutions that should enable the student soloist to sound better almost immediately.

**False starts**

The use of *extreme range* is particularly notable (in the negative sense) when an improviser uses it at the beginning of a solo, but it can be a giveaway anywhere. Extreme range is a device that experienced improvisers use sparingly, and even then with caution and preparation. The mature soloist has learned that whatever impact extreme range may bring to a solo, it is quickly dissipated, and therefore he or she often avoids using it altogether. Not only does its use quickly lose impact, but it also tends to restrict the choices the improviser has, since it normally only allows pitches to go in one direction.

Perhaps this is one of the main reasons that the use of extreme range sounds unsatisfactory: good improvised solos should have a quality of unpredictability about them (while at the same time they should be logical). When extreme range is used, the listener is left with no uncertainty whatsoever, so that the overall impression of such solos is almost inevitably uncomplimentary.

**"Speaking" eloquently**

No *space* in the improvised solo creates a sense of "stream of consciousness," which suggests that no meaning or communication is taking place between listener and performer. We've probably all encountered the verbal equivalent of this problem with a speaker who rambles nonstop through a series of topics, never indicating the relationship among ideas or any clear-cut objective as to where he or she is leading us. For student improvisers, the solution is to try to communicate only one idea or concept within the context of a solo chorus.

Another version of this same problem is encountered when students use *lots of notes but they don't really "say" anything*. This need to communicate ideas is integral to other aspects of "flags" as well and is central to mature solos. As a result, in most instances, you will need to try to get your students to "say" something if they want to present more musical, mature solos, but this is one problem area where direct reference to this approach should help rectify the problem almost immediately. Because young improvisers often approach solos like children in a candy store and try to choose "one of everything," it can be particularly difficult to get them to refine their focus on one idea, but it will inevitably mark the beginning of significant improvement in their playing if you can get them to become more selective. In addition, we all use space in language to indicate punctuation in our speech. Musical phrases also need punctuation, which is most easily achieved through the use of space.

Another related flag is encountered when students attempt to *compress all technique and ideas* into one short solo. This is akin to someone trying to tell their entire life history in one hundred words: it will probably end up as either gibberish or a boring story. Young students need to practice economy in their solo presentation, and this can often be enhanced with *implication*. Encourage your students to give the impression that, when they are done with their solo, there's still a lot more that they could have played. They just wanted to cover a smaller area for this particular solo. Also, encourage your students to concentrate on one (or at the most, two) technical aspects in any single solo and to develop these as fully as possible.

Encourage your students to concentrate on one (or at the most, two) technical aspects in any single solo and to develop these as fully as possible.

Photograph by Tim Collins
Economy and pacing in this area can really improve the nature of an improvised solo.

**Repetition and planning**

Somehow, young improvisers seem to have the notion that there is a law in music that forbids them to use repetition (of either notes or phrases). Not only is this common perception inaccurate, it is easily remedied and can immediately enhance a young improviser’s performance. Merely require the improviser consciously to repeat the same note in a solo (this may often be the tonic, but not necessarily). The difference in the solo’s construction will be amazing.

After improvisers break down the “no-repetition myth,” they can also begin to repeat phrases, and once again this becomes a very powerful communication skill. When we want to say something really important, one of the most effective, yet simple, strategies is to repeat it—and repeat it again.

Getting students to actually plan what will take place in their improvised solos can be a major task! Most students’ solos suggest that they have a lack of strategy as they construct their improvisation. Another myth associated with improvisation is that the musician must always begin with a fresh slate and neither draw on past work nor use any type of “game plan.” Good speakers typically know pretty much what they’re going to say in advance and they have some sense of how they will present their material. That is not to say that the student improviser needs to know every note and event that will take place, but as good communicators they must understand that it is wise to have a purpose in their presentations and some notion of how that purpose can best be achieved. The student improviser needs to know the form, chord progression, melody, and style of a piece in advance and have a plan on how he or she will construct a meaningful and effective solo within those parameters.

**Rhythm and melody**

Another one of the more obvious flags student improvisers wave deals with the beat: either no beat is evident or what exists gets turned around. The pulse is paramount in practically any jazz or rock situation, so any metric ambiguity in the improvised solo can be particularly problematic. Since some students have trouble with pulse and tempo even when they are performing written music, this can be a particularly troublesome difficulty. The initial solution is to encourage students to perform simple, strongly metric solos that carefully conform to the rhythm section’s insistent pulse (and, of course, you need to make certain that your rhythm players perform accurately). Blues solos are especially helpful in addressing this problem. Get students who have significant difficulty with pulse and tempo to concentrate on the rhythm section (particularly the backbeat stresses on two and four provided by the drummer) and make staying in time their first priority (even if it means only playing one note per measure). Eventually this problem will be resolved, and the student will inevitably play much more strongly in all areas as a result.

If you’ve ever encountered a monotonous speaker, you’ve experienced the equivalent of the student improviser who does not use variation in his or her articulation. There are a whole range of articulations for the improviser to choose from, and simply employing two contrasting articulations within the context of the style. Phil Woods and Clark Terry are two jazz musicians who immediately come to mind in their extensive use of various articulations. Some examples of the more compelling applications of this activity include articulations indigenous to jazz such as legato or staccato against heavy accent, the use of a short or long gliss either up or down, and so on. These articulations have been standardized by Matt Betton and are available from the International Association of...
Jazz Educators (IAJE). If your students are unfamiliar with these, this is another wonderful opportunity to do some controlled listening with them. Again, this is one of those simple and obvious flags that can be easily addressed and remedied.

Some improvised solos lack relevance—that is, they don’t relate to the melodic material or they are stylistically inappropriate. During many improvised solos among the best musicians, listeners can internally hear the theme even though the soloist is producing an entirely different melody. In this way, listeners are constantly able to compare what is happening in the improvised solo with how things were initially presented in the “head” (initial presentation) of the music. Some improvisers are notable for their ability to create innovative and delightful “solutions” to this problem that heighten the listener’s appreciation of the process.

Young improvisers, however, often ignore the melodic theme to the point where their solo doesn’t relate in any way to the head. Often, this is carried to such an extreme that the improvised material is not only thematically inappropriate but stylistically out of place. This may seem like a basic issue, but students often have a hard time putting it all together. Once again, this is an instance where structured listening sessions can really help—especially if you have a recording of the piece they are performing. Sit down with the student and carefully point out just what is taking place in an improvised solo and how it relates both stylistically and melodically to the initial thematic material. Of course, this means you will have to do some homework to select examples that really substantiate your observations. The right choice, however, can do a marvelous job of demonstrating the importance of this concept, and ultimately this will make your task easier.

Form and finality
Just as business letters have specific parts, each with its own special function, so should an improvised solo. But for many student improvisers, the beginning doesn’t start and the end doesn’t finish, which leaves the listener with a “so what?” response to the solo. Analyses of Charlie Parker’s solos indicate the importance of creating a strong beginning and end for an improvised solo. Parker, who many consider to be the most outstanding improviser ever, would pay particular attention to the first and last parts of his solo and place the middle, which used essentially new material for each performance, between patterns that he developed over the years and utilized for the crucial start and finish. This strategy provided Parker with a secure sense of opening and closing from which to launch his solo and bring it to a logical conclusion, while at the same time creating for the listener an impression of substance based upon the most memorable parts of any solo—the beginning and the end.

Finally, there is a rather self-serving motive for students to develop skills in this area. Solos that don’t end conclusively don’t elicit approval and appreciation from the audience. So if your students want the audience to respond after their solo is over, they need to learn how to communicate they are finishing, and then that they are done. And if they really want to enhance the audience’s approval, they will develop skill in how they begin their solo as well.

There is more to creating an outstanding improvised solo than playing the right notes within the chord changes. Because jazz and rock have roots in the aural tradition, mimicry, based on careful listening, has always been an integral part of the learning and developing process for young musicians. With the assistance of focused listening sessions and awareness of the kinds of flags young, inexperienced improvisers often exhibit, the progress of your students can be accelerated so that their improvisation performance is more likely to sound really polished and professional.
Playing by Ear: Foundation or Frill?

Robert H. Woody

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What is This?
Learning to play by ear can give our students better skills both in the music classroom and when they engage in music on their own.

Skilled painters and sculptors possess an eye for detail. Great food critics have unusually refined taste buds. And it is easy to understand the phrase “hands of a surgeon.” In music, it is the ear that defines great musicianship. Sound is the material of music and what the ear is designed for. For understanding, creating, and expressively organizing sound as music, the ear is the musician’s ultimate asset.

In some ways, the music education profession has always recognized the importance of the ear to music-making. Most school ensemble directors feel they constantly implore their students to listen: listen to high-quality music recordings as homework outside of class, listen carefully during individual practice, and definitely listen when rehearsing with the rest of the ensemble. These types of listening activities build students’ aural skills in critical ways.

When we speak of musicians’ being able to “play by ear,” however, we refer to a more specific feat. It does not mean they listen in order to make expressive decisions about, say, dynamics or tempo. Playing by ear means that the notes they play—that is, the pitches and rhythms—are informed by an inner hearing. Skilled ear players do not require cues from notation (or another source) to know what notes to play, but instead are guided by an internal model of what the music should sound like.

This aspect of musicianship has traditionally gone underdeveloped by school music instruction. In instrumental music classrooms, for instance, it is not uncommon for every note that students play to be indicated by guest on July 15, 2013mej.sagepub.comDownloaded from

Robert H. Woody is an associate professor of music education at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He may be reached at rwoody2@unl.edu.
by a printed page before them. If this is the exclusive classroom routine, students run the risk of never adding to their performance range the ability to play by ear, improvise, and perform pieces from memory. While notation-guided performance offers opportunities for aural skill development, it has limitations.

Formal music education has a long record of success in producing musically literate performers. In fact, it is rare that someone learns to read music without the instruction provided by a school curriculum or private lessons. Conversely, many accomplished “ear-only” musicians acquire their performance skills through informal learning experiences, such as those found in groups in places of worship, garage bands, and daily life in musically rich cultures and communities. It is no wonder that some see the musical world as divided into two types: those who can read music and those who play by ear! Some members of each group view the other with a certain degree of contempt. When asked whether he could read music, jazz great Louis Armstrong is said to have replied, “Yes, but not enough to hurt my playing.” Coming from a seemingly opposite perspective, many teachers dismiss learning music by ear as a simplistic and inefficient alternative to doing it the right way, through notation.

Music educators generally endorse the importance of the ear in music-making and would appreciate if their students had stronger aural skills. Who would not want to lead an ensemble of young musicians who can both read music expertly and freely generate ear-based improvisations and rehearsed performances? Realistically, though, teachers must carefully choose how to use instructional time. If ear playing is primarily valuable only to jazz and popular musicians, then it seems unwise to devote too much attention to it outside those stylistic contexts. One might even think that getting students up to speed on reading music is enough of a challenge, such that also teaching ear playing and improvisation is impractical. This article offers a variety of reasons to reconsider the notion that playing by ear is a specialized skill with limited educational applications.

Cues from the Musical World

To judge the value of ear playing, we might begin outside our own personal experiences and beyond the confines of traditional school music. Is it possible to consider this issue globally? Around the world, most cultures pass on and advance their musical traditions from generation to generation through oral/aural transmission. This fact may be easily overlooked by those of us working exclusively in scholastic environments. Much in music can be learned by ear only, and it is the most common learning approach universally. Experienced musicians sing and play instruments, while younger people watch, listen, and imitate. It is natural and effective, and it has been happening as long as music has existed. Timeless musical values are passed down, complex physical skills are acquired, and huge song repertoires are learned.  

Of course, this is not just a characteristic of primitive cultures on far-off continents. Ear-based models of music transmission are commonplace in many corners of Western society. For example, most school playgrounds are symphonies of sound. The culture of childhood is extremely musical and is dominated by singing and playing by ear as well as improvisation, composition, and musical creativity that defies categorization. Even as they grow older, many young people continue this path of ear-driven exploration, though often outside school walls. A garage or basement becomes their musical playground, as groups of friends collaborate to reproduce their favorite songs on hand-made-down guitars, keyboards, and drum sets. A number of researchers have suggested that studying the learning processes of vernacular musicians has much to offer to classroom educational practices.

This learning approach cannot be dismissed as merely being done out of necessity due to lack of resources. Its learners are not just kids who are too young to read and teenagers without access to private lessons. Many religious cultures around the world comprise amateur musicians who rely on their ears to learn music for worship services. Additionally, performance skills in other sophisticated music styles—American jazz, Irish Celtic music, Argentine tango, and Indian raga, among a myriad—traditionally have been aurally developed and maintained. While ear-based musicianship may be more common in informal learning settings, it is not always the case. In much formal instruction in Asian art music, for instance, the musical modeling of a teacher is offered to students for strict imitation, with little accompanying verbal instruction.

In general, as we survey the world of music, we see that aural transmission of music and playing by ear is the norm. It is perhaps more readily found in cultures outside the United States—especially the current formal education systems therein—but is by no means exclusively a non-Western phenomenon. Ear-based learning was more prominent in European society prior to the invention of the printing press and the increased availability of sheet music and instrumental method books. We have advanced so much in this way that a strictly notation-based musicianship has become a viable option to some. This has largely happened among school-trained musicians. The question, however, is not whether it is possible, but whether it is educationally wise. This is a question many have already sought to answer.

Voices Gone Unheard?

Educators have long questioned the specific role of the ear in music learning. American music educators might look to their professional origins in considering this issue. In the 1830s in Boston, Lowell Mason, commonly regarded as the father of public school music education, strongly advocated aural fluency before introducing music notation to students. Mason’s educational approach was based largely on the teachings of Swiss pedagogue Johann Pestalozzi, who promoted active experiences of concepts (e.g., creating and performing musical sounds) before introducing passive knowledge (e.g., symbols representing music).

In the early to mid-twentieth century, prominent British music educator
thought is to language.”

James Mainwaring offered tremendous insight into the cognition behind music learning. In investigating the learning process, he became one of the first researchers to advance the importance of ear playing in formal music education. His work, which spanned the 1930s to the 1950s, explicitly stated that students should “proceed from sound to symbol, not from symbol to sound.” It would seem this advice runs contrary to the teaching practice of today, in which beginning instrumentalists are given elementary method books from the outset and taught to play from their pages.

More modern influences include Japanese pedagogue Shinichi Suzuki and German composer-educator Carl Orff, whose teaching approaches have long been staples in American music training. The Suzuki method makes heavy use of sound recordings and teacher modeling as the primary means for young students to learn music material. This allows the postponement of notation reading until students are technically well established. The Orff approach emphasizes opportunities for children to learn by ear on instruments and voice, realize familiar folk songs and chants, and improvise music in various contexts. Common to these and other approaches is the likening of learning music to learning language. The Suzuki method is called the “mother-tongue approach” because its prescribed musical experiences duplicate the sequence in which children learn to speak their native language. The Orff approach similarly uses rote learning and relies on rhythmic speech as an important foundation for later musical skills. The language-learning model has been further advanced by Edwin Gordon, who coined the term audiation to describe the inner hearing that underlies musicianship. Among his many contributions to the field, Gordon keenly noted that “audiation is to music what thought is to language.”

The music-as-language analogy suggests that music learning follows the natural stages of language development. Infants first listen to the spoken sounds around them and come to identify patterns in what they hear. They then attempt to vocally imitate what they have heard. Over time, their babbled approximations of language give way to actual words and phrases. Soon they achieve speech fluency and can effortlessly recite memorized texts (nursery rhymes), retell familiar tales, and spontaneously create original stories. Only after these ear-based competencies are attained are children introduced to the symbols that represent their language, and these symbols (letters and words) are linked to the sounds they already know so well. Transferring this developmental sequence to music learning—specifically to learning to perform on an instrument—students should have much exposure to musical models to aurally imitate on their instruments. They should have opportunities to play familiar songs by ear, embellish simple musical material, and improvise. When this performance fluency is reached, young instrumentalists are then ready to learn the written language of music. The symbols of notation can then be linked to the sounds they represent (as opposed to the keys or fingerings used to produce them).

Of course, these ideas have been championed by more people than those mentioned earlier. The question that remains, however, is why these theories are not better reflected in the mainstream practices of modern music classrooms. Have past pedagogues and researchers failed to present a compelling case? Have music teacher training programs failed to impart sound instructional strategies to their students? There are no easy answers to this line of questioning, but clearly, putting theory into practice has not been easy. A pragmatist might correctly point out that although the preceding theories may describe ideal musical development, it is definitely not the only way for students to gain performance skills. Many students have rewarding school music experiences without gaining much fluency in ear playing and improvisation. This likely describes many who go on to become music teachers. Is it possible, then, that we do not value ear playing for our students because we never adequately developed the skill for ourselves? At best, however, we guard against letting our own limitations weaken the educational experiences we offer. We aspire to bring the entire musical world to our students, not simply the segments that are easy to deliver.

Musicianship Revisited

Perhaps the question we should ask ourselves is whether there is any reason to deprive students of musical experiences that come only with greater ear development. Put another way, would increased attention to ear playing detract from growth in other important performance skills, such as sight-reading and playing rehearsed music? Some have blamed the ear emphasis of Suzuki training when its instrumentalists struggle with reading as older students. Referring back to the language-learning analogy, though, it is fairly easy to dispel this accusation. No one would think to blame the problem of language illiteracy on the fact that people first gained aural fluency in the language. The breakdown comes in the failure to connect verbal language to the symbols used to represent it. If, in fact, some Suzuki students struggle to comfortably read notation, the solution comes in giving them proper reading experiences and motivating them to attain that skill. Teachers must build on their ear foundation, not wish it undone.

Empirical research has provided evidence that ear-based musicianship is a facilitator—and not an obstacle—to other performance skills that are traditionally valued in school music programs. Australian music education researcher Gary McPherson has done much recently to advance this line of inquiry. He conducted a three-year longitudinal study that looked at a variety of environmental influences and several types of instrumental performance skills. Through his methodology, he was able to go beyond just finding associations and overlapping skills, and to ultimately identify which skills contribute to others. In considering the five skills of improving, performing rehearsed music, playing by ear, playing from memory, and sight-reading,
he found that playing by ear was the only one that contributed to the other four skills. Not surprisingly, ear playing offered much to learning to improvise; it was also, however, a strong contributor to sight-reading ability. Playing by ear was even shown to facilitate performing rehearsed music, the traditional mainstay of school music education.

To better understand music learning and to diagnose student problems, it is helpful to consider the cognitive abilities underlying music performance. One model identifies three interrelated cognitive skills: goal imaging—creating an expectation of what the music should sound like, motor production—generating the movements and physical actions on an instrument, and self-monitoring—accurately hearing one’s own performance of the music. Performance depends on a musician’s goal image, whether it is built from notation (as in sight-reading) or from a mental image already stored in memory (as in ear playing). Linking that goal image to motor production is key; it is the difference between “knowing a song” such that you can hum it and knowing it to where you can play it readily on your instrument. Becoming fluent on a musical instrument—making it a natural extension of oneself, as is often said—boils down to building an automatic connection from goal imaging to motor production, that is, a musical ear-hand coordination. When reading notation, the visual cues should bring to mind sounds that are already cognitively linked to the instrumental action needed. For some instrumentalists, a less ideal process occurs: notation prompts the recall of a fingering or bodily movement. Whether the right sound is produced depends less on the player’s musicianship than on the mechanics of the instrument and the body. This is why “earless” note reading is more easily learned on piano, on which every pitch has its own discrete key, than on a horn, on which a single fingering can produce many different tones.

With this in mind, we can diagnose some common performance problems. In fact, we can see the same underlying issue affecting choir members who have great difficulty reading music and band members who can perform only from notation. Both ensembles are lacking in goal imaging development. The struggling choir members can do little with the notation and instead likely rely on other singers around them (or an accompanist plunking out their part on piano!) to know what their part should sound like. The notation-bound band members use their mechanically produced approximations to gradually inform their goal images of the music. In both cases, the path to a finished performance product would be shorter if students had the ear skills to decode notation into more precise images of what the music should sound like.

In his writings, Zoltán Kodály decried the undeveloped ears of brilliant pianists who could not sing simple melodies, even after multiple hearings. “They play only with their fingers,” he lamented. “They are not musicians but machine operators.” While he surely meant this as pointed criticism, he was not altogether discrediting these accomplished musicians. Their virtuosity and technical prowess on the instrument could not be challenged. Kodály did, however, question the completeness of their musicianship and the full effects of their limitations. Herein lies a potential danger of musicians’ learning primarily by sight and not by sound. Students who learn exclusively from print notation may be precluded from engagement in other performance activities. At the very least, failing to gain adequate aural experience as beginning instrumentalists may severely hinder them from ever developing ear-playing skills in the future.

Music researcher Andreas Lehmann and I recently investigated the potential gap between notation-based musicians and those also possessing ear-playing skills. In the experiment, twenty-four college instrumentalists learned simple melodies by ear such that they could perform them accurately. These were all music majors whose primary instruments included piano, flute, bassoon, horn, mallet percussion, saxophone, trombone, and trumpet. Half these students had backgrounds in “vernacular” music (e.g., jazz, rock, worship ensembles), and the other half had learned their skills almost exclusively in formal instructional settings (school and private lessons). We used two eight-measure melodies with equivalent pitch and rhythm content, drawn from a second-year beginning band method book. With one of the melodies, the musicians learned it and sang it back, and with the other melody, they played it back on their principal instruments. We tracked the number of times through the listen-then-perform cycle that each musician needed to reach accurate performance. I suspected that the vernacular musicians would be better at playing melodies by ear on their instruments, but I wondered how pronounced this difference would be, given that the formal musicians were music majors and the melodic material was relatively simple. I was also interested to know whether performance problems could be attributed more to difficulty committing melodies to memory (goal imaging) or to an inability to realize them on their instruments (motor production).

The results were rather striking. The vernacular musicians were far better at this task than the formal musicians, both in terms of singing and playing on their instruments. On average, the vernacular musicians required three (3.0) attempts to sing back a melody accurately and just 3.8 to learn one on their instruments. In contrast, the formal musicians needed an average of 6.4 attempts to correctly sing a melody back and 10.6 to play one on their instruments. These data suggest several important things. First, singing by ear is a good indicator of goal-imaging skill, since it requires only remembering a melody and no other physical skill learning. It seems the vernacular musicians had developed better remembering skills—twice as good, on the basis of the numbers (3.0 compared to 6.4). Furthermore, the vernacular musicians also showed a better connection between their goal imaging and motor production. That is, the difference between singing and playing was very small for them (3.0 to 3.8), whereas it was more sizeable for the formal musicians (6.4 to 10.6).
Our study also included a follow-up interview in which the participants shared their thought processes during the performance task and answered some questions about their musical development. The most interesting comments related to the amount of attention they devoted to producing melodies on their instruments. Most of the formal musicians consciously focused on fingerings, slide positions (trombone), and mallet strokes (percussion). Said one of them, “I knew what the notes needed to be; I just couldn't find them on the horn.” This was quite different from the vernacular musicians, who spoke very little about fingerings. For them, this process had become more or less automatic.

At first glance, the results of this study may seem to reinforce the traditional idea of two discrete types of musicians. We must remember, however, that the vernacular musicians in the study were also formally trained musicians. They were products of school music and, accordingly, skilled in sight-reading and performance of rehearsed literature. They helped populate their university’s bands and orchestras. It would seem that these players had developed broad performance skills, whereas, according to the results detailed earlier, the exclusively formally trained students face some serious limitations in musicianship.

School Experiences for Lifelong Participation

Most music educators are committed to providing the best learning experiences they can so their students will be able to enjoy the rewards of being musical. If at all possible, we would like our students to attain a musicianship that connects them to the immense world of music, embraces the unique benefits of school music, and is personally meaningful to them. In most cases, the musical training that students gain during primary and secondary schooling is what they will rely on for the remainder of their lives. Perhaps the most disheartening aspect of the current status of music education is this: only a minority of students receive music instruction at the secondary level, and the vast majority of them permanently retire from music-making upon graduation.

As described here, a growing body of research supports the admonitions of music pedagogues past and present. Providing ear-based music-making experiences serves only to enhance student development. Teachers do not need to choose between preserving traditional ensemble performance and giving way to a revolutionary ear-based curriculum. If thoughtfully planned, instructional time can be allocated to ear-playing activities without worrying that it will somehow erode progress in other aspects of musicianship. Ironically, this advice may be most pertinent to teachers whose favored learning objectives involve reading notation. Ear playing is a key contributor to music literacy. After a thorough study of the processes of musical development—and notation reading, specifically—music researchers Gary McPherson and Alf Gabrielson concluded that an emphasis on notation separate from opportunities to play by ear and develop music reading fluency “restricts overall musicianship and the types of skills needed for a musician to succeed long-term.”

What exactly are the kinds of experiences that advance students’ ear musicianship? In our study mentioned earlier, the posttask interview prompted participants to list the kinds of activities that contributed to their vernacular musicianship. They most often mentioned playing familiar songs on their instruments, using recordings to learn music, transcribing the solos of other performers, and improvising in various music groups. Many of the formal musicians in the study reported not being “made to use their ears” until entering aural skills classes as college music majors. Ear playing is not something best left to the “jazzers.” In fact, many of the formal musicians in our study had been members of school jazz bands and came away without having developed ear-playing skills. It is possible for instrumental teachers to deviate from the genre’s ear-based roots and run their jazz bands just like their concert bands.

For music teachers wanting to integrate more ear-based music making into their classes, it is not just a matter of finding the right published materials. Many method book series include sound recordings and lesson suggestions that incorporate ear playing, and these can be a part of effective teaching. But instead of looking for an expert’s prescription, teachers should trust their instincts and adapt what they are already doing to engage their students’ ears. Elementary teachers can do copycat and call-and-response games on instruments. They can use solfège to help students connect sounded pitches to visual representations of them (the hand signs can be transitioned to a written staff to introduce proper note reading). Secondary teachers, before handing out printed parts to their ensembles, can teach prominent or recurring melodies by ear. They can assign ear-playing time into at-home practice requirements. Students also can be directed to recordings of excellent performers on their instruments and challenged to reproduce what they hear, in terms of not only tone quality and technical precision but also the actual melodic content. See the Ear-Building Strategies for Music Classrooms sidebar for additional practical strategy ideas. The most important thing is to do something. There are virtually no ear activities that will harm musicianship!

Growing Musicianship

There are many instructional possibilities available to teachers, depending on their curricular objectives and the needs of their students. Ultimately, however, teachers will not incorporate such approaches into their methods unless they value the skill of ear playing and what it offers to their students’ musical development. Given the evidence, it is clear that learning music by ear is an effective and foundational part of any kind of musicianship. Virtually all young children enter formal music instruction already adept at it, from their language-learning and previous informal music.
experiences. Unfortunately, some music teachers fail to build on this, and they thus allow their students’ ear skills to atrophy. Some young people look elsewhere to advance their musical skills and keep their ears growing. Their intrinsic motivation toward music and their chosen instruments drives them to observe and imitate more experienced performers, analytically listen to recordings, and in the Internet age, learn from YouTube videos. For years, educational psychologists have explained the power of observational learning, both within and outside formal instructional settings.77

After high school, opportunities for music-making are most readily available in informal settings. Teens and young adults can be active participants in music as they turn to their peers, recordings, and the Internet. Few will find membership in organized programs that duplicate the traditional large ensembles of secondary schools (e.g., community bands, and choirs and instrumental groups in places of worship).78 Ideally, music education should equip young people to be lifelong music participants—not mere consumers. Greater attention to ear-playing development may be a critical ingredient to making this happen. Ear-driven activities can effectively facilitate development of composing and arranging, improvisation, musical collaboration in groups, and individual artistic expression, not to mention more fluent notation reading. These are all skills that will empower music education graduates to direct their own continued musical growth and enjoy the rewards of music making for life.

Notes
3. Books on the musical culture of childhood include Patricia Shehan

Ear-Building Strategies for Music Classrooms

Elementary General

• Echo Sing-a-Play—This can be done with students on recorders or at barred “Orff” instruments. Sing a short melodic phrase, have students sing it back, and then have them play it on their instruments. Depending on the level of the students, you can limit the length of the phrase and the melodic content. For example, give lower elementary students three-note phrases containing only sol, mi, and la. Move upper elementary students toward longer melodies that are pentatonic (and eventually diatonic).

• Hidden Note Game—When students are fairly adept at echoing melodic phrases, challenge them with this game. Choose a particular note that students must “hide” in their singing. If, for example, you designate mi as the hidden note and sing “sol–sol–mi–do,” the class would replace the mi with a rest (during which they mentally hear the pitch) and echo back “sol–sol–rest–do.” The game can be made into a fun competition; either the class or the teacher scores a point for each melodic phrase depending on whether students successfully hide the note in their echo singing.

• Elementary Instrumental

• Ten-Tune Challenge—Once beginners have learned how to produce a good number of pitches on their instruments, they can carry this out several weeks. Assign the task of teaching themselves to play by ear ten melodies that they already know. The tunes may be ones from general music class, playground games, folk songs, melodies from pop music, television jingles, and so on. As students play each, you have opportunity to assess their developing musicianship in terms of tone production, sense of pulse, articulation, and intonation, among others. Boost student motivation by tracking their progress to ten tunes on an achievement chart.

• A Root Awakening—If using a method book, teach students by ear a “root melody” to accompany a melody or exercise from the book. A root melody is a bass line consisting of only chord roots, set to a complementary rhythm. Your aural model can be sung or played on your instrument. Creating the root melody should be quick work for you, as the chord changes of most method book melodies are not complex (a method’s accompaniment recordings can be helpful in this way too).

Secondary Instrumental

Blast from the Past—Student instrumentalists can build their ears by trying to play music they previously learned by notation. If, for instance, your middle school band students have moved on to book 2 of a method, ask them to recall some of the more popular melodies from book 1. At the high school level, months of ensemble rehearsal can pay dividends beyond the concert if, after printed parts have been collected from students, you have them play some of their favorite passages from past repertoire.

Eyes-Closed Warm-Up—Many bands and orchestras warm up by playing scales and arpeggios. Using varying rhythms and pitch sequences, sing or play patterns for your students to imitate. Control the difficulty through the length of your patterns and the complexity of the rhythmic and melodic content (e.g., stepwise versus larger intervallic motion). Playing Bach chorales is another popular warm-up approach among band directors. These can be taught by ear, especially if the group works on only a phrase or two of a chorale. Student musicians still reap the benefits, namely, the focus on tone production, balance and blend, and intonation. In fact, development of these skills may be enhanced if students close their eyes in order to open their ears even more.

Secondary Choral

Spot the Difference—Choir students can struggle when reading an arrangement of a song they “know” from a popular recording. Build their ear-based reading skills with this activity. Sing for your choir two versions of a phrase, differing only slightly in terms of rhythm or pitch content. Have students repeat each version until they can sing both version A and version B correctly. Then show them the printed notation for one and challenge them to decide whether it denotes version A or B. Prepare your choir for future classes by drawing the “correct” versions from the repertoire you will soon be rehearsing.

Vocal Improv Practice—Although we want choir students to read notation accurately, we do not want their singing skills to be entirely dependent on a written part in a choral score. Students often hear pop singers and gospel soloists vocally improvise, especially at the end of a song. Give your students opportunities to try this for themselves. To prepare them for this potentially intimidating experience, share with them some recorded examples. Guide them in identifying some of the more common vocal embellishments. Ease them into their own vocalizing by having them improvise along to familiar recordings, first silently (mentally hearing their improv ideas), then en masse so no one is put on the spot. Once they are ready to sing out, let them try in smaller groups. Of course, ultimate success in improvisation depends heavily on listening; so always encourage students to do much listening outside of class.

Note: Special thanks to James B. Karas (instrumental music teacher, Lefler Middle School, Lincoln, Nebraska) for his contribution to these strategies.


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**Request for Submissions: Centennial-Themed Articles in Honor of MEJ’s First Hundred Years**

Music Educators Journal, whose antecedent was Music Supervisors Journal, will celebrate a century of publication in 2014. MEJ’s Academic Editor Patrick K. Freer is seeking submissions of articles that reflect high points during the past hundred years or provide an overview of the contributions of this journal to the music education profession.

Prospective authors may query Patrick Freer about potential topics prior to submission (pfreer@gsu.edu). Authors should follow the “Manuscript Submission” guidelines found at www.mej.sagepub.com. As usual, all submitted manuscripts will be reviewed by members of the Editorial and Advisory Committees. Accepted pieces will be published during the 2013–2014 volume year or shortly thereafter. Some of these may also appear on the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) website, www.nafme.org.

Of special interest are historical articles that look back on the way we were, and articles that offer ideas about where MEJ might head in its second century.

Ideal length should be no more than 12 double-spaced typed pages with references. Substantive, shorter pieces are also welcome.

All centennial-themed manuscripts must be submitted by March 1, 2013, per instructions found at www.mej.sagepub.com.
Instrument Selection and Gender Stereotypes: A Review of Recent Literature
John Eros
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What is This?
Instrument Selection and Gender Stereotypes

A Review of Recent Literature

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Choice of instrument is among the most important factors in determining the course of a student’s music education. Instrument selection can be a lengthy process accomplished through a variety of factors. The stereotyping of instruments by gender can be one of those factors. The association of gender with particular instruments can significantly influence a student in choosing an instrument, thereby resulting in numerous negative consequences—including fewer instrument choices, limited ensemble participation, and peer disapproval. The purpose of this literature review is to examine recent scholarship on this issue and make recommendations for future investigation and possible interventions. By examining post-1996 literature, this article demonstrates that this issue still affects music education; it discusses recent aspects of the issue; and it proposes areas for further inquiry.

Keywords: gender; musical instruments; choice; selection; stereotypes

Sex Versus Gender

There is inconsistency in the literature regarding terminology. Gender and sex are often used interchangeably, as are boy/girl and masculine/feminine. O’Neill (1997) discusses this topic and identifies a changing trend in the literature, beginning in the 1990s, toward using sex and gender interchangeably or using only gender. Previously, it was most common to use the term sex in research literature. O’Neill states,

The category of sex has been used to refer to biological distinctions . . . between males and females, such as the criteria used to identify the sex of a newborn infant, whereas the category of gender has been used to infer the social traits and characteristics that are learned through the socialization process. (p. 48)

Sinsel, Dixon, and Blades-Zeller (1997) also questioned the interchangeability of the terms sex and gender. They proposed that gender association issues should be considered not in terms of biological sex but in terms of psychological sex type. As such, they conducted a study to investigate the relationship between

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psychological sex type and instrument preference. In this study, 64 girls and 44 boys were given the Children’s Sex Role Inventory, developed by Boldizar (1991), and a survey assessing musical instrument preferences. The inventory, based on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974), is a self-assessment that delineates four typologies: feminine sex-typed, masculine sex-typed, androgynous, and undifferentiated. Participants are given hypothetical descriptions of themselves and are asked to rate how well each description applies. The results yield the four typologies: masculine (high masculine, low feminine), feminine (high feminine, low masculine), androgynous (high on both), and undifferentiated (low on both).

The inventory yielded 20 feminine sex-typed students, 26 masculine, and 62 androgynous, with the results of the survey showing a definite relationship between sex type and gender association of instrument selection. Intriguingly, androgynous children showed the greatest preference (41.9%) for neutral instruments. The researchers concluded that psychological sex type is an important factor in students’ choices, with androgynous children showing an ability to choose instruments from a broader range than that of masculine and feminine sex types.

**Gender Stereotypes**

Numerous researchers have revisited the presence and nature of gender stereotypes in music programs (Boulton & O’Neill, 1996; Elliot & Yoder-White, 1997; S. D. Harrison, 2003). Although not explicitly stated, the research literature presents few disagreements that brass and percussion are male-stereotyped instruments whereas high woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet) and high strings (violin) are female stereotyped.

In addition, this literature review includes studies performed in England (Boulton & O’Neill, 1996; A. C. Harrison & O’Neill, 2000, 2003), Australia (S. D. Harrison, 2003; Pickering & Repacholi, 2002), Canada (Cramer, Million, & Perreault, 2002), and Britain (Bruce & Kemp, 1996; Crowther & Durkin, 1982; Green, 1993; MacKenzie, 1991). Although it is certainly true that there may be cultural differences among these countries, the research literature has not examined these differences. Furthermore, researchers in this area commonly cite the results of research related to gender stereotypes from a variety of countries.

Boulton and O’Neill (1996) individually interviewed 153 students between the ages of 9 and 11. Students indicated which of six instruments (two masculine, two feminine, and two neutral) they would prefer to play and in which order of preference. Students were also asked to explain their reasons and to comment on whether certain instruments should not be played by boys or by girls. Boulton and O’Neill concluded that gender associations did indeed remain and had changed little in the time since similar studies were performed.

Previous research has suggested that stereotypes have a more significant impact on boys, frequently in the form of increased social pressure and fewer instrument choices (Cramer et al., 2002; Delzell & Leppla, 1992; Sinsabaugh, 2005). S. D. Harrison (2003) used five studies to investigate the role of gender in the larger scheme of boys’ musical experiences and activities. In the first study, 102 primary students were asked to indicate their first choice of instrument to play. Drums and guitar were the top two instruments for both sexes, suggesting a pop music influence, followed by saxophone and trumpet for males and piano and voice for females.

In his second study, 98 students completed a survey modeled on the work of Griswold and Chroback (1981). The results described the drums, trombone, and trumpet as the most masculine instruments and the flute as the most feminine. In the third study, 903 secondary students were surveyed about their primary performing instrument, with results being largely consistent with previous findings. Boys’ top instruments were tuba, trombone, guitar, bass, and percussion; girls’ top instruments were oboe, flute, and bassoon. As a side note, bassoon has rarely been included in gender–instrument research—that a large, low-register instrument was a top female choice demonstrates a possible anomaly in the assumption that low register is masculine stereotyped. In addition, although gender was not specifically addressed, it was included in some students’ comments, such as in one boy’s stating that the flute was his least preferred “because it’s a girl’s instrument” (S. D. Harrison, 2003, p. 151).

Harrison’s final study (2003), a 3-year longitudinal study of secondary students, again showed a proclivity for males to favor brass and percussion and for females to favor woodwinds and strings. In an example of gender transition, however, the saxophone moved from being a gender-neutral instrument to a female-identified instrument. Harrison concluded by observing that stereotypes exist and are damaging, particularly for the topic of his study—namely, boys. He observed that this situation will be a difficult one to address, requiring “a long-term...
Repeating the text from the image:

attitudinal change . . . to change the perception of the feminine as being inferior” (p. 169).

Elliot and Yoder-White (1997) investigated the question of gender associations with instrumental timbres. In an attempt to remove any visual recognition, the researchers designed an investigation in which no images of the instruments were present. In sum, 106 children listened to a tape of eight instruments playing the same four-measure excerpt. Flute and oboe were the instruments most strongly associated with femininity, whereas the trombone and bassoon were those most strongly associated with masculinity.

Gender association was determined by the students’ selecting between two sets of drawings, one drawing of two boys and one of two girls, although the drawings were themselves arguably stereotypical. Boys were depicted holding either a skateboard or a fishing pole, whereas girls were depicted either jumping rope or holding a stuffed animal. The idea of removing any mention of the instrument is perhaps advantageous, but the images used in their place must also be carefully examined for gender stereotype implications.

Kelly (1997) also investigated timbre as a possible influence on instrument selection. In the study, 261 third-grade students listened to a tape of seven instruments playing two short songs and then indicated whether the instrument in question “sounded like an instrument a boy would play or an instrument that a girl would play” (p. 47). Five instruments (flute, violin, trumpet, trombone, cello) were chosen along recognized gender lines, although two (clarinet, saxophone) did not produce clear distinctions. This is most significant for the clarinet, which is otherwise strongly identified in the literature as a female instrument. It is also significant in that Elliot and Yoder-White (1997) found clarinet timbre to be feminine identified in a study published during the same year. The difference between the studies suggests that timbre associations might not be consistent for all instruments.

**Perceptions by Other Students**

Cramer et al. (2002) surveyed 98 college students about their perceptions of femininity and masculinity of fictional male and female musicians who played either a male- or female-stereotyped instrument. Participants were first assessed using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (see above discussion of Sinsel et al., 1997) and were then given a survey in which they evaluated the four possible combinations of male/female students and masculine/feminine instruments. Participants evaluated each hypothetical player/instrument in terms of nine personality stereotypes (three male, three female, three gender neutral).

The study found that those who played feminine instruments were characterized as warm, caring, and sensitive and that female musicians were judged to be more dominant, active, and strong leaders. Male players of female instruments were judged harshly on the masculine traits. The researchers concluded that females are indeed allowed to choose from a broader range of instruments than that of males and that males face significant social penalties when they cross the gender line.

A. C. Harrison and O’Neill (2003) explored the question of children’s extending their preferences to the preferences of others. Using a 26-item survey, the researchers assessed 312 children, ages 8 to 9, about their first choice of six instruments, as well as their gender association for each instrument. Students were then asked, using one of two scenarios, to speculate on whether a hypothetical new student would be more likely to play masculine instruments or feminine instruments. In the first scenario, children were asked which type of instrument a “new boy” or a “new girl” would play. In the second, children were told that the new student played either flute or drums, but they were not told the sex of the student. Results indicated that students not only held stereotypical associations but also believed that other children held the same associations. Results also indicated that students thought that other-sex children were more likely to choose cross-gender instruments, thus suggesting a projection of students’ beliefs onto other children.

**Directors’ Role in Instrument Assignment**

Among the factors used in choosing an instrument, director input can be significant. Although many studies have focused on student perceptions, recent research has examined teacher perceptions of gender stereotypes in terms of gender stereotype presence in the selection process and the role that gender plays in directors’ assignments.

Johnson and Stewart (2004) investigated sex identification in the process of beginning band instrument assignment. Eighty-four band directors were asked to individually assign students to an instrument on the basis of a whole-face picture or a picture of the mouth area only. The researchers concluded that knowing the sex of the student did not have a significant impact on which instrument band directors recommended for a particular student.
In a 2005 follow-up study, Johnson and Stewart added race to their investigation. In sum, 201 music educators were asked to individually assign 14 students to one of six beginning band instruments. The participants were shown full-face pictures of students or pictures of the mouth area only. The 14 students, 7 male and 7 female, included European American students (n = 8) and African American students (n = 4), as well as a Native American student and a Latino American student. The researchers concluded that race and sex identification did not play a significant role in directors’ assignments of students. This study is commendable for expanding the scope of gender and instruments to explore ethnicity—although ethnicity, or race, played a limited and arguably minor role in this investigation. Furthermore, the absence of other ethnicities, such as Asian Americans, is notable.

Bayley (2004) submitted a 26-question survey to 322 beginning band instructors regarding methods used in their instrument selection processes. Gender association was among the areas addressed, although teachers indicated that they thought that students’ friends formed the strongest factor in their choices. The majority (95.2%) indicated that they guide their students in the selection process, although it was frequently in the name of balanced instrumentation. Bayley called for teacher education to assert its role in countering stereotypes: “It is . . . essential that gender-stereotyping issues be addressed more effectively during preservice teacher education” (p. 32).

In a study based on Bayley’s investigation (2004), Bazan (2005) surveyed 56 beginning band directors about instrument selection processes in their programs: 91% of directors indicated guiding students to instruments, although 6% indicated that they did the actual selection. Similar to Bayley’s participants (2004), those in this study believed that peer influence was the strongest factor influencing students’ choices. Directors believed that students’ preferences were consistent with typical gender stereotypes (brass and percussion for boys, high woodwinds for girls). The participants were not asked if they thought that gender played a role in their guidance of students, although they did indicate that they believed gender bias to be present and influential in their programs.

**Demonstration**

A substantial amount has been written on the effects of the method used in presenting instruments to students. Studies have indicated that the manner in which instruments are demonstrated to beginning students, particularly in terms of the relationship of the performer’s gender to the instrument’s gender, has a powerful impact on instrument preference and perception. The gender of the performer has often been more compelling than the gender stereotype of the instrument itself.

A. C. Harrison and O’Neill (2000) used demonstration concerts with gender-consistent performers and gender-inconsistent performers to study students’ instrument preferences and gender associations. In sum, 357 children were asked to rank their order of preference for learning to play six instruments, as well as state their gender associations for each instrument. The students were grouped into three clusters of schools, with one school receiving a gender-consistent concert, one receiving a gender-inconsistent concert, and one control group who did not receive a concert. The results indicated that gender-inconsistent concerts influenced students’ preferences for gender-consistent instruments. For example, after seeing a male pianist, girls had a lower preference for the piano, a traditionally female-associated instrument. A. C. Harrison and O’Neill added a new factor to presentation investigation by interviewing students individually before the demonstration concerts, with the goal of removing immediate peer influence and allowing the students to speak candidly. Although they are more time-consuming, individual interviews seem to be a way to counter social pressure, which has shown to exert a strong influence. By speaking individually, students might be able to candidly discuss their instrument ideas.

In an effort to consider performers’ age as well as gender, Pickering and Repacholi (2002) used high school–age gender-consistent performers and gender-inconsistent performers as models, based on the idea that children might be more responsive to adolescents than adults and that seeing older students might provide more sense of relevance. A total of 618 children viewed videotapes of performances or instrument-only displays. The preferences of those who saw the gender-inconsistent performers did not fall as strongly along gender lines as it did for those who saw gender-consistent performers or instruments alone. Pickering and Repacholi suggested that whereas the more immediate goal is for children to not be limited by gender stereotypes, the true goal is gender neutrality for all instruments. They further cautioned that if too heavy an emphasis is placed on counterexamples, “we run the risk of creating a new
set of stereotypes, when the goal should be to encourage children to view these instruments as gender neutral” (p. 642). Although their point might seem excessive given the current evidence pointing toward firmly entrenched stereotypes, it is not inconceivable.

**Ensemble Composition**

Gender associations and stereotypes make their presence known in more ways than who is playing what. Who is playing what becomes who is playing where. When gender associations affect instrument selection, it influences the musical ensembles themselves, and it limits performers’ future ensemble options as well, considering that many traditional ensembles have standard instrumentation that falls along gender lines. Although it is true that all instrument choices result in at least some form of limitation for performers and ensembles, there is cause for concern when the prevailing reason behind the choice is a gender stereotype.

Therefore, a boy who follows traditional gender lines in the instrument selection process is significantly lowering his chance of playing in a woodwind quintet. Similarly, if a girl makes her initial selection according to traditional gender lines, then she will have few opportunities to play in a jazz ensemble. In those cases, the stereotyped choices have removed students’ access to entire genres of music. S. D. Harrison (2003) investigated the question of gender distribution in ensembles by observing them in a large music festival. He found that there were twice as many stage bands from boys schools as there were from girls schools, that concert bands were relatively even, and that string ensembles were weighted toward girls schools.

McKeage (2002, 2004) performed two studies investigating female participation in jazz ensembles. Of the standard jazz ensemble instruments, only the piano has been shown to lean toward the feminine preference. McKeage investigated 628 students representing 15 college programs: 28% of females and 72% of males played a primary instrument that was common of jazz. As a reference for the music education profession, 42% of women and 12% of men indicated never playing instrumental jazz at any level. Given that many instrumental teaching positions include a jazz component, students with limited jazz experience are at a distinct disadvantage. Therefore, a clear link exists between gender-influenced instrument choice and career opportunities.

In a similar study in 2002, McKeage presented a finding that demonstrates a possible strategy to counter stereotypes—namely, that stereotypes had less of an effect on secondary instrument choices. She concluded that perhaps students feel themselves being safe if they declare primary allegiance to a gender-consistent instrument. Given the tradition of instrument doubling, particularly in jazz ensembles, this may be a point of access for students to reach music and ensembles previously impeded by gender stereotypes.

**Crossing the Gender Line**

Despite the strong presence of gender stereotypes and their effects on programs and students, there are those who choose to play gender-atypical instruments. Conway (2000) interviewed 23 high school students who had broken gender stereotypes in their choice of instruments. Students who had crossed the gender barrier reported a desire to be different, as well as encouragement from elementary music teachers and parents. Those comments point to the strong influence that adults have on the selection process and the fact that there are students who are perfectly happy to go against stereotypes. Initially inspired by a viola student who came to his lesson with a black eye, Sinsabaugh (2005) studied eight cases of students who had crossed gender lines: two boy flutists, two boy violinists, two girl trombonists, one female trumpeter, and one female percussionist. Her study provides substantial insight into the experiences of those who choose reverse-gender instruments. In terms of the selection process, the students reported common factors, ranging from student choice to assignment, although two boys researched their instruments before choosing them. Most of the students believed that any student should be able to play any instrument (gender consistent or inconsistent) and stated that their parents had played an encouraging role, which included pointing out reverse-gender role models. In addition, all students believed that girls had more choices than boys did, a finding consistent with numerous other studies. Interestingly, however, only one of the students stated that she regularly carried her instrument openly; others either carried instruments in their bags or had two instruments. Both flute players (boys) reported harassment and did not carry their instruments openly. They described using additional support mechanisms, including seeking male flutist role models and even changing schools. In describing his choice of instrument, one flutist remarked that the music was...
more important to him than the particular instrument: “It’s the music, not the instrument itself” (p. 87).

Sinsabaugh’s study (2005) included a mixture of ethnic and racial backgrounds. One of the flute players had come to the United States from Korea when he was 13; the other was of mixed Puerto Rican–Dominican descent; and the female trumpet player was Indian. A variety of other ethnic backgrounds were represented, which asks the question of the gender–stereotype relationship among different ethnicities. Sinsabaugh’s study brings us to the present state of our students’ experiences with the effects of gender association and stereotype. The presence remains strong; the effects remain limiting; and the consequences for students can be damaging in numerous ways.

**Possible Interventions**

Given that the research indicates an absence of gender stereotype influence in the early elementary grades, one possible intervention involves collaboration between band/orchestra directors and elementary general music teachers in creating plans for musical instrument presentation. Dialogue might begin as early as kindergarten, with directors and general music teachers examining curricular materials and treatment of instruments, as well as developing a timeline for when and how students will experience instrumental performers.

In addition, all music teachers must be proactive in allowing their students to experience live instrumental performers. The research suggests that students are strongly affected by meeting with and seeing live performances—more so than pictures, videos, and recordings. When trips to symphony orchestras and wind ensembles are not possible, string quartets, brass quintets, jazz combos, or any number of small ensembles might give school performances, followed by opportunities for student–performer dialogue afterward.

Research has also suggested that performers who are closer to students in age, such as high school students, have an even more powerful effect as demonstrators of instruments. The strategy of performance demonstrations of countergender stereotype might be more influential if students directly observed the performers while sitting or standing next to them as they played. An additional extension of experience with high school players would include countergender high school performers teaching lessons and sectionals to beginning instrumentalists, thus creating an extended experience with mixed-gender performers. As it becomes more common to see male flutists and female trombonists, the effect of gender stereotypes might be lessened through direct experience with performers who have crossed the gender line. One male flutist might lead to three the following year.

Music educators must be aware of the effects of these gender stereotypes and so use their powerful ability to model an unbiased view of all musical instruments. Research suggests that adult perception and presentation of instruments are strong influences on students (Abeles & Porter, 1978; Boulton & O’Neill, 1996; Conway, 2000; Fortney et al., 1993; MacKenzie, 1991). Boulton and O’Neill (1996) suggest, “It is likely that children’s perceptions of instruments is influenced by their perceptions of gender differences in musical participation in the adult world” (p. 181). Although a number of factors concerning this complex issue are difficult to address (e.g., peer influence, popular culture), the behavior of adults is something that is within our grasp. We cannot control the influence of media-based gender representations and images. We can, however, bring mixed-gender brass quintets, woodwind quintets, string quartets, and jazz combos for our students to experience. We can also establish private lesson programs and relationships with gender-inconsistent instrumentalists. Research has indicated that the gender of performers is a powerful influence on student audience.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

A number of studies have illustrated the fact that gender stereotypes are difficult to address, given that gender as a component is nearly impossible to account for. A. C. Harrison and O’Neill (2000) observe that “more systematic investigation is needed to examine processes involved in the influence of interviewer sex on children’s gender-typed instrument preferences” (p. 96). The gender of the presenters, researchers, and anyone directly involved must always be considered among possible factors affecting the research. Whether a trombonist in a demonstration is male or female is significant, but it may also be significant if a researcher conducting interviews is male or female because students may respond differently on the basis of the interviewer’s gender.

Ethnic culture should also be investigated for a possible relationship with gender stereotypes and instrument choice. The majority of studies of gender stereotypes assess students without considering ethnicity as a factor. Elementary and secondary schools
Conclusion

Because of persistent gender stereotypes, students may have fewer available instruments to play, fewer ensembles in which to participate, fewer career opportunities, and they may even face verbal and physical abuse. There is good news, however, thanks to continued research: Not only are educators more aware of the presence and effect of stereotypes than in past, but students are also becoming more aware themselves. The proper attitude is best summed up by a male flutist—someone who has broken what may be the most tenacious instrument stereotype of all—in giving his views on his instrument: “The flute is for both. This is the twenty-first century” (quoted in Sinsabaugh, 2005, p. 101). Music educators in the 21st century have the responsibility to see that musical instruments remain, first and foremost, just that: musical.

References