2013 National In-Service Conference:

You CAN Teach Jazz”
How to Get Your Students Swinging and Improvising with Confidence

Session Presenters:
Richard Victor & Jennifer McDonel

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You CAN Teach Jazz: How to Get Your Students Swinging and Improvising with Confidence!
Richard Victor and Jennifer McDonel, Session Presenters

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Pedagogical Scat
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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.

Abstract: Many people divide musicians into two types: those who can read music and those who play by ear. Formal music education tends to place great emphasis on producing musically literate performers but devotes much less attention to teaching students to make music without notation. Some would suggest that playing by ear is a specialized skill that is useful only to jazz and popular musicians. There are, however, many reasons to reconsider this position. Around the world, aural transmission of music and ear-based performance are the norm. Music pedagogues have described ear playing as a necessary developmental precursor to becoming a truly fluent music reader. Research supports the idea that playing by ear is a foundational skill that contributes to other aspects of musicianship, including improvising, sight-reading, and performing from memory. Ear playing has even been shown to be a contributor to skilled performance of rehearsed music, the traditional mainstay of school music. Ear-driven activities can involve student musicians in composing and arranging, musical collaboration with peers, and lifelong individual artistic expression.

Keywords: audiation, aural skill, by-ear playing, music-making, improvisation, inner hearing, performance, psychology of music learning

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.
As divided into two types: those who can wonder that some see the musical world literate performers. In fact, it is rare that informal learning experiences, such as the instruction provided by a school curriculum or private lessons. Conversely, many accomplished “ear-only” musicians acquire their performance skills through garage bands, and daily life in musically informal learning experiences, such as are found in groups in places of worship, rich cultures and communities. It is no worry that some see the musical world divided into two types: those who can read music and those who play by ear!

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.²

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 categorization³ 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-me-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.⁴

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, Argentinean 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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
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 technologically 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 improvising, 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. \(^{11}\) 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 afflicting 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. \(^{12}\) “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. \(^{13}\) 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 and performance of rehearsed literature. 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 bad 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 Class-rooms sidebar for additional practical strategy ideas. The most important thing is to do something. There are virtually no ear activities that will harm 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.”

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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.7

After high school, opportunities for music-making are most readily available outside formal instructional 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).18 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 Bass.


13. Robert H. Woody and Andreas C. Lehmann, “Student Musicians’ Ear Playing Ability as a Function of Vernacular Music Experiences,” 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.
Fearless Improvisation: A Pilot Study to Analyze String Students' Confidence, Anxiety, and Attitude Toward Learning Improvisation

Michael L. Alexander

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http://upd.sagepub.com/content/31/1/25
Research suggests that improvisation should be a fundamental component of any music curriculum (Azzara, 1993; Elliot, 1995; Gordon, 1997; Kratus, 1996). Its practice contributes to the improvement of students’ music performance and promotes the acquisition of higher order thinking skills in music (Azzara, 1993). As such, providing students with the abilities and tools needed for improvisation should be a primary goal of music educators (Azzara, 1993, 1999; Gordon, 1997). Our profession has supported this position by establishing the ability to improvise as an achievement standard in the National Standards for Arts Education (Music Educators National Conference, 1994). Improvisation has also been recommended as a major component of music programs in schools of the future (Grant & Kohut, 1992).

Although the ability to improvise has been recommended by researchers and notable educators as an integral part of music education programs, it is one of the National Standards least successfully implemented in the classroom (Adderly, 1999; Azzara, 1993, 1999; K. Smith, 2010; Woody, 2007) and one rarely taught with great rigor (Guilbault, 2009; Lehman, 2000). Many music teachers consider improvisation difficult to teach because of their lack of improvisation experiences and the perceived difficulty of implementing improvisation experiences into an ensemble curriculum (Azzara, 1999; Byo, 1999; Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Hamann & Gillespie, 2009; Reveire, 2006; K. Smith, 2010).

In addition to perceived pedagogical difficulties, previous research has identified a gender bias in students’ instrumental improvisation performance. In her study of gender and jazz improvisation, Wehr-Flowers (2006) found female members of middle school, high school, and collegiate jazz ensembles significantly less confident, more anxious, and have poorer attitudes toward learning jazz improvisation than their male counterparts. Collier (1995) found that more girls and women are participating in jazz than in the past but are reluctant to improvise solos. Other studies found no significant relationship between gender and students’ abilities in jazz improvisation (Bash, 1984; Hores, 1977; Madura, 1999; McDaniel, 1974). If males and females possess similar abilities in
jazz improvisation, why do they have different opinions concerning their abilities? A summary of Wehr-Flowers’s (2006) extensive review of literature reveals the following considerations:

- Jazz education is more accessible than ever, yet male participation continues to surpass that of females.
- The issue of girls’ and women’s participation in jazz might not be one of ability, skills, or talent but rather one based in social psychology.
- If young girls do not see success in jazz improvisation as rewarding for their gender group, they may have a less positive attitude towards learning improvisation (pp. 338-340).

Various instructional methods have been shown to be effective in the teaching of improvisation (Aitken, 1975; Bash, 1983; Burnsed, 1978; Carlson, 1980; Damron, 1973; Guilbault, 2004; Hores, 1977; Kalmer & Balasko, 1987; Partchey, 1974; Paulson, 1985; Wig, 1981). It is also known that instructional sequences related to improvisation may result in improved attitudes toward the act of improvising (Berard, 1998). Although the results of these studies indicate that improvisational achievement improves with instruction, little is known about the comparative effectiveness of individual instructional techniques (D. T. Smith, 2009). A few aspects of improvisation instruction have been studied, with noteworthy conclusions. Amchin (1995) found that instruction using verbal interactions was not effective in improving students’ improvisation ability. Other studies have found variables such as self-evaluation and aural imitation to be good predictors of achievement in jazz improvisation (Greenagel, 1994; May, 2003). Additional variables found to be positively correlated with jazz improvisation achievement were as follows: attitude toward the ensemble, creativity, experience in jazz, listening to jazz, and musical achievement (May, 2003). Wehr-Flowers (2006) recommended that future researchers investigate whether instructional and environmental factors could be successfully controlled enough to foster female participation.

A curriculum for introducing fearless improvisation to string students was developed by the researchers as part of a National Education Association Student Achievement Grant (Williams & Alexander, 2009) based on methodologies recommended by Allen, Gillespie, and Hayes (2002), Brungard, Alexander, Anderson, and Dackow (2004), Hamann and Gillespie (2009), Reviere (2006), Stabely (2001), and Wehr-Flowers (2006). The researchers sought to create a curriculum that would introduce improvisation to middle school and high school string ensembles in a painless and fail-safe environment in order to address the domains of confidence, anxiety, and attitude toward improvisation. At the conclusion of the curriculum, students would be able to improvise short melodic passages over a basic harmonic accompaniment, interact musically while experimenting with various improvisation techniques, and recognize elements of their own improvisations in those of an artist improviser.

Many of the methodologies recommended by the aforementioned authors were designed for the string orchestra classroom, and some were specifically designed to relieve anxiety and build confidence in improvisation. For example, Allen et al. (2002) recommended beginning with only a limited set of pitches so the chances of error are minimized. Brungard et al. (2004) suggested starting with one measure of improvisation and increasing length with mastery, using a seating that allows for students to follow each other without a break in the tempo, and affirming each student after their performance. Reviere (2006) proposed using the term improvisation games instead of exercises so that students would view improvisation as fun and not work. She admonished teachers to set ground rules in order to create a safe environment and not to tolerate laughing or negative comments. She also recommended that teachers should emphasize that there are no wrong notes in improvisation, only notes that need to be resolved. Stabely (2001) proposed that improvisation be introduced with only a few notes, performed over drones, and followed by complete scales over drones. He suggested that improvisations over chord changes be introduced as root position chord progressions so that they are easily read and understood. Hamann and Gillespie (2009) recommended that all students be actively involved in the improvisation process so that they will feel a desire to participate and suggested asking for volunteers when introducing a new concept so that others will follow their example. When learning to improvise over chord progressions, they suggested that students practice improvising over one chord at a time (e.g., I or V) and then put them together (I-V-I). Wehr-Flowers (2006) suggested modeling styles in small, repeatable phrases, giving instruction on how to practice and providing recordings for individual practice at home.

These ideas and others were incorporated into a 36-step sequential curriculum that was applied in each of the orchestra performance classes at a suburban high school (two classes, Grades 9–12) and middle school (two classes, Grades 7 and 8) over a 4-month period. The researchers presented a 30-minute demonstration on the first day of each week of instruction that covered 1 to 5 steps in the curriculum. During the remainder of each week, the classroom teachers practiced those procedures as part of their 10-minute daily ensemble warm-up. The curriculum began with soloists clapping improvised rhythms echoed by the ensemble and concluded with solo improvisations over the ensemble accompaniment of Johann Pachelbel’s Canon in D and Johnny Mercer’s
Autumn Leaves as arranged by Aebersold (1992). As a capstone experience, jazz violinist Jon Raveneau conducted a clinic on jazz string techniques with each class and performed Dizzy Gillespie’s A Night in Tunisia with the high school ensemble. An overview of the sequential steps to Fearless Improvisation is included in the appendix. The guidelines used in developing and implementing the curriculum are included in the next section.

Curriculum Guidelines

1. Although improvisation has traditionally been considered a solo art, any improvisation curriculum for use in the ensemble classroom should provide a means to actively involve all students. In early improvisations, all students can be involved through echo/play of each individual’s improvisation. In more advanced improvisations, the class can provide a rhythmic accompaniment or chord progression while individuals improvise.

2. To create fearless improvisers, the class must accept that the improviser is never wrong. In other words, if an echo/play procedure breaks down, it is the fault of the teacher in their management of the procedure or the inability of the class to properly echo an improvisation that is the problem, not the creativity of the improviser.

3. Student confidence is built by starting small (one- and two-measure improvisations) and using a prescribed set of pitches. Each improvisation should be followed by a smile or positive verbal affirmation from the teacher.

4. Although pitches, key, or scale may be prescribed (limited to those that they can perform), rhythm should have no limitations. There are few, if any, rhythms that students have not experienced at some point in their life. When a rhythmic concept is performed that the students do not yet know how to notate (syncopation, triplet, etc.), take advantage of the teachable moment and show the class what it looks like on the board.

5. Explain to students when their turn to improvise will occur by determining an order of performance, such as rows or seating in sections. This will enable students to mentally prepare for their improvisation and keep the procedure from breaking down between students. Develop a gesture to “cue” each new improviser in rhythm. The procedure should be stopped only to identify a new concept introduced by a student during their improvisation (triplets, appoggiatura, passing tones, etc.). This is both to reassure the improviser in his or her creativity and to introduce the notation of new concepts. These new concepts should be labeled as good.

6. When presenting or creating chord progressions with the class, identify theoretical concepts and terminology; this provides a hands-on introduction to music theory (thirds, root, I, IV, V, etc.). Use the chalk board or white board so that all can see and have the students participate by naming chord tones and so on used in the accompanying chord structures played by the ensemble.

7. When the class is accompanying a soloist, have the class play pizzicato while the soloist uses the bow; this will help with balance issues.

8. Use a rhythmic synthesizer (incorporating Latin, dance, and rock rhythms) as a background to generate rhythmic style and variety during improvisations.

9. Keep improvisation fresh by including it as a part of the ensemble’s daily warm-up, lasting no more than 5 to 10 minutes of each class. In large classes, have a different section improvise each day.

Purpose

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the confidence, anxiety, and attitude of middle school and high school string students toward improvisation after a prescribed course of study and to compare those results with those of the middle school, high school, and collegiate jazz ensemble members studied by Wehr-Flowers (2006). As in the Wehr-Flowers study, the null hypotheses included multivariate equality of means over all groups with no difference between males and females.

Method

The Fennema–Sherman Mathematics Attitudes Scales (Fennema & Sherman, 1976) are composed of nine domain-specific, Likert-type scales that measure attitudes toward learning mathematics. Wehr-Flowers (2006) modified the confidence, anxiety, and attitude scales by replacing some terms specific to math with terms more appropriate to jazz improvisation. For example, the terms ability and musical task replaced the term subject and the term practice replaced the term study. Wehr-Flowers’s reliability coefficients (confidence .93, anxiety .93, and attitude .88) were found to be acceptable. In the current study, Wehr-Flowers’s adaption of the confidence, anxiety, and attitude scales were used to survey string students ($N = 121$) enrolled in one of the two performing groups in their respective orchestra programs at one high
school and one middle school who had completed the 4-month improvisation curriculum designed by the authors. Both schools were in the same school district, classified as suburban. String students were selected as participants for this study because little research in improvisation had been conducted with this population (K. Smith, 2010). Because none of the participants reported having performed in a jazz ensemble or having previously performed improvised solos in their ensemble, it was assumed they had no experiential bias in regard to improvisation.

The survey was administered by the students’ ensemble directors during their orchestra ensemble classes and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. All participants were informed that they could ask questions at any time before, during, or after the survey and that they could choose not to participate at any time during the survey. Eight students chose not to complete the survey. Completed surveys (N = 113) were returned by 50 male and 63 female participants, of which approximately 50% attended high school and 50% middle school. The sample included 57 violinists, 27 violists, 18 cellists, and 11 bassists.

### Results

The means of three dependent variables (confidence, anxiety, and attitude), obtained from two studies (Wehr-Flowers, 2006, or the current study), were compared on the independent variable of gender (male or female). A descriptive comparison of overall means by domain, study, and gender is featured in Table 1.

The assumption of univariate normality in the current study was checked by running Q–Q plots on each domain as dependent variables (Park, 2008). Evaluation results for the assumption of normality were satisfactory for all three dependent variables. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients were found to reflect high reliability (.90 for confidence, .92 for anxiety, and .82 for attitude).

A one-way analysis of variance was used to determine if any of the means were significantly different from each other (see Table 2). At least two of the average mean scores across gender by dependent variables were significantly different, $F(1, 11) = 24.37, p < .001$.

Following the rejection of the null hypothesis of equal group means, a post hoc test, Tukey’s honestly significant difference, was used as a multiple-comparison procedure to test for differences among the group means and as an attempt to control the overall error rate of the study. Significant differences between groups for each domain are illustrated in Table 3.

### Discussion

The male students in both the current study and the Wehr-Flowers (2006) study exhibited very similar confidence levels in their ability to improvise ($p = 1.00$) and were significantly more confident in their improvisational abilities than the females of the Wehr-Flowers study ($p = .006$). The confidence level of females in the current study was not significantly different from that of the males of either study but, with a mean of 3.22, was closer to that of the females in the Wehr-Flowers study ($M = 3.09$) than to that of the males of either study ($M = 3.67$).
The higher confidence level found in females in the current study, as opposed to that found in females of Wehr-Flowers study, may have occurred because of the different populations studied, maturation effects caused by varying ages of participants between the studies, the length of time (4 years) between the two studies, or exposure to a curriculum specifically designed to build confidence and allay fears toward improvisation.

The results of the anxiety domain were very similar in both studies: The males in both studies were significantly less anxious toward improvisation than their female counterparts ($p = .006$ in both cases). There were also very similar responses between the like sexes of both studies ($p = 1.00$). These data substantiate the findings of Wehr-Flowers (2006) that males of these populations are significantly less anxious toward improvisation than females.

The current study found no significant differences between groups in their attitude toward improvisation. This was in contrast to the finding of Wehr-Flowers (2006) that males had significantly better attitudes toward improvisation than females. Wehr-Flowers’ alpha reliability for attitude (.88) was lower than that of either confidence (.93) or anxiety (.93). In the current study, the alpha reliability for attitude also reflected the lowest level of reliability for the three domains (.82). The relatively low level of reliability in both studies on the attitude domain does not provide enough strength to either confirm or reject the conclusions of Wehr-Flowers.

Although the effects of different populations, maturity of populations, time between studies, and completion of a particular course of study in improvisation may have contributed to the increased confidence levels of females in the current study versus those of the Wehr-Flowers (2006) study, any variable(s) that positively affected the confidence level of females in the current study had no significant effect on their anxiety: Both studies found that females were significantly more anxious about improvisation than their male counterparts. This supports the findings of other researchers on anxiety and gender in adolescent and collegiate musical performance (Kokotsaki & Davidson, 2003; Osborne & Kenny, 2008). It must be considered that, for pedagogical reasons, the issue of female anxiousness toward such performance may not be a negative issue at all; rather, it is possible that the lack of similar levels of anxiousness in the male population may limit the quality of males’ performance (Hamann & Sobaje, 1983; Kokotsaki & Davidson, 2003).

Woolfolk (2004) suggests avoiding situations where anxious students have to perform in front of large groups. These students may be best served by improvisation exercises contained in the course of sectional rehearsals. Wehr-Flowers (2006) recommended introducing improvisation in private lessons or peer groups, such as flute

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**Table 3. Significance of Confidence, Anxiety, and Attitude by Study and Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wehr-Flowers: M 3.67</td>
<td>.006*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wehr-Flowers: F 3.09</td>
<td>.006*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current: M 3.67</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.006*</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td>.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current: F 3.22</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wehr-Flowers: M 3.43</th>
<th>Wehr-Flowers: F 2.88</th>
<th>Current: M 3.38</th>
<th>Current: F 2.83</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wehr-Flowers: M 3.43</td>
<td>.006*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.002*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wehr-Flowers: F 2.88</td>
<td>.006*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.022*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current: M 3.38</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.022*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.006*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current: F 2.83</td>
<td>.002*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wehr-Flowers: M 4.30</th>
<th>Wehr-Flowers: F 4.10</th>
<th>Current: M 4.09</th>
<th>Current: F 3.86</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wehr-Flowers: M 4.30</td>
<td>.952</td>
<td>.942</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wehr-Flowers: F 4.10</td>
<td>.952</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current: M 4.09</td>
<td>.942</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current: F 3.86</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td></td>
<td>.887</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p = .05$ (Tukey’s honestly significant difference).
ensemble, all-female groups, or small combos of similar personalities. In addition, we suggest the further development of curricula that present improvisation in a sequential, fail-safe environment, which promotes positive reinforcement of each student attempt. Additional resources and materials beyond those used in the current study may also prove helpful to the curriculum developer (e.g., Gazda & Stoutamire, 1997; B. P. Smith & Froseth, 2003).

In the implementation of our curriculum, we found that the students readily acquired the theoretical material when they used it immediately in performance. We also found that the students were much more eager to improvise than to listen to us talk about improvising; this encouraged us to give instructions of limited scope: tempo, pitches or key used, and duration of improvisation. We found that when we used rows or seating order and kept the metronome playing to give a rhythmic pulse, the entire class could give a brief improvisation within a matter of minutes. Conversely, when the teacher asked for volunteers and then discussed each of their improvisations, very few students had the opportunity to improvise.

Research on the reliability and effectiveness of such curricula may help define its usefulness. Expanding the Likert-type survey instrument to include space for participants to answer not just how they feel but why they feel that way may provide greater insight into the issue of anxiety in female improvisations. Replication of the current study in the area of vocal jazz improvisation or in an all-female or similar-personality setting may provide further definition to those findings of both the current study and those of Wehr-Flowers (2006).

Appendix

*Curriculum Procedures: Sequential Exercises in String Improvisation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>No. of Measures</th>
<th>Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Soloists clap rhythm/class echoes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Soloists play rhythm on open D/class echoes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Soloists play rhythm on open D/class echoes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Soloists play melody using D-E-F# (arco)/class echoes (arco)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Soloists play melody using A-B-C# (arco)/class echoes (arco)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Soloists: D-E-F# or A-B-C# melody (arco)/class echoes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/4-3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Soloists: D-E-F# melody (arco)/class: rhythmic drone on D (pizz)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Soloists: A-B-C# melody (arco)/class: rhythmic drone on A (pizz)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Soloists: D-E-F# or A-B-C# melody (arco)/class alternates drone on A or D as appropriate to soloist (pizz)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4-3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Soloists: D-F#-A arpeggio (arco)/class echoes (arco)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Soloists: A-C#-E arpeggio (arco)/class echoes (arco)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Soloists: D-F#-A arpeggio (arco)/class: rhythmic drone on D (pizz)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Soloists: A-C#-E arpeggio (arco)/class: rhythmic drone on A (pizz)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Soloists: D-F#-A or A-C#-E arpeggio (arco)/class alternates drone on D or A as appropriate to soloist (pizz)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4-3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Soloists: D-F#-A or A-C#-E arpeggio (arco)/class alternates triad over D or A as appropriate to soloist (pizz)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16*</td>
<td>Soloists: D-e-F#-g-A (arco)/class: D triad (I, tonic) on drone (pizz)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17*</td>
<td>Soloists: A-b-C#-d-E (arco)/class: A triad (V, dominant) on drone (pizz)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In 16 and 17 (above), explain concepts of passing tones: upper/lower case, whole vs. quarter notes, magnets with attracting/repelling poles, stealing a base, tension/release</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Combine 16 and 17 (switch every other person)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4-3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Soloists: G-a-B-c#-D (arco)/class: G triad (IV, subdominant) drone (pizz)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20*</td>
<td>Combine 18 and 19 [I-IV-V-I] (switch soloists at each chord change)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before attempting 20 (above), have students use the chalkboard to build chords above the root based on the progression in D major:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A D E A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F# B C# F#</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D Major: D E F# G A B C# D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I IV V I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Appendix (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>No. of Measures</th>
<th>Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Soloists: E-♯-G-a-B (arco)/class: e triad (ii, supertonic) on drone</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22*</td>
<td>Combine 20 and 21 [I-ii-IV-V-I] (switch soloists at chord changes)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/4-3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Before attempting 22 (above), have students use the chalkboard to build the chords above the root as was done for 20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Same as 22 but have soloists perform 2+ chord changes, then all</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24*</td>
<td>Soloist: D-E-F-G-A-Bb-C# harm. minor (arco)/class i-iv-V-i triads on drone (pizz)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Before attempting 24 (above), have students use the chalkboard to build the chords above the root for the progression below:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Harm Minor:</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>iv</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Soloist: D-E-F-G-A-Bb-C# harm. minor (arco)/class - i-ii-iv-V-i triads on drone (pizz)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Soloist: D-E-F-G-A-B-C#/C natural (mel.minor); soloists perform 2+ chord changes. Class plays I-ii-IV-V-i triads on drone (pizz)</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>4/4-3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Soloists: 4 bars in A minor/class: pizz (A minor progression)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Discuss appoggiatura and how to resolve dissonance by ½ step</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Soloists: 4 bars in A minor (*appoggiatura)/class: pizz (A minor)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Soloists improvise over Pachelbel's Canon/class play progression pizz/arco</td>
<td>4, all</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Repeat 29 and introduce ensemble accompanying skills (dynamics and articulation)</td>
<td>4, 8</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Soloists trade 4’s/8’s in G Minor over Autumn Leaves changes in ensemble</td>
<td>4s/8s</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Soloists trade 4’s/8’s over African Skies changes in ensemble</td>
<td>4s/8s</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Introduction of chops, glides, slides, using previous material</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Introduction of chromaticism and resolution of leaps using previous material</td>
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<td>Trading 4’s/8’s and imitation of professional guest artist using previous material</td>
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References


Jazz Style and Articulation: How to Get Your Band or Choir to Swing

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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

“It 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.
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

Select Discography of Jazz Recording for Students

Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz, vols. 1–3 (Sony, 1987).
Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, Town Hall, New York City, June 22, 1945 (Uptown UPCD 27.51, 2005).
Charlie Parker, The Complete Savoy Studio Sessions (Savoy SJE 5500, 1944).
The Quintet, Jazz at Massey Hall (Debut DEB 124, 1953).
Sonny Stitt, Songy Side Up, with Dizzy Gillespie and Sonny Rollins (Verve MGV-8262, 1958).
Sonny Stitt, The Champ (Muse MR 5023, 1974).
Art Blakey, Night at Birdland, vol. 1 (Blue Note 32146, 1954).
Ken Burns Jazz, Definitive Count Basie (Verve 549090, 2000).
Count Basie, Basie Straight Ahead (Verve 822, 1967).
Ken Burns Jazz, Definitive Art Blakey (Verve 549089, 2000).
Ken Burns Jazz, Definitive Duke Ellington (Legacy 61444, 2000).
Woody Herman, Woody’s Gold Star (Concord 4330, 1987).
Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, Central Park North (Blue Note 76852, 1969).
Ella and Basie! (Verve, 1963).
Manhattan Transfer, Bop Doo-Wopp (Atlantic, 1983).
Manhattan Transfer, Vocalese (Atlantic, 1985).
Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, Everybody’s Boppin’ (Sony, 1959).
The Real Group, Jazz: Live (Gazelli Records AB, 1996).
The Real Group, Unusual (Town Crier Recordings, 1995).
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 **bu** 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...
4. When the rhythm pattern of two eighth notes followed by a rest starts on a downbeat, it is almost always articulated with the syllables *doo-dit*. The two-eighth-note combination followed by rest is one of the staples of swing (Figure 11). As exemplified in Duke Ellington’s “C Jam Blues,” the syllables *doo-dit* provide the appropriate interpretation of this rhythm pattern. Should this pattern occur at the end of a phrase, the rhythm should be played (sung) as if it were a triplet with the middle note imagined mentally rather than be articulated. Using the articulation syllables *doo-boo-dit* will help this rhythm keep from rushing, which is a 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). However, even short notes that enter on the upbeat are 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.

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

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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.

When I was a young jazz musician, my varied experiences on the bandstand could at times be enlightening, meaningful, and empowering, while other times, uninformative, embarrassing, or demeaning. The outcome of each experience would often depend on the individuals with whom I was interacting.

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. 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." 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.' 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.

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
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."7

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."8 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 reharshed 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.

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.

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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 U23, 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); Psychograss, 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 Greats (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.

Recommended listening: De la Soul, 3 Feet High and Rising (Tommy Boy TBCD 1019, 1989); Digable Planets, Digable Planets: Reachin’ (Pendulum 7243 8 27758 29, 1993); A Tribe Called Quest, The Low End Theory (Zomba J 2 1418, 1991).

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.

Recommended listening: Don Byron, Don Byron Plays the Music of Mickey Katz (Elektra Nonesuch 79313-2, 1993); The Klezmer Conservatory Band, Old World Beat (Rounder CD 3115, 1991); The New Shetl Band, Jewish & Balkan Dance Music (Global Village Music C 121, 1987); Itzhak Perlman, In the Fiddler’s House (Angel CDC 7243 5 55555 2 6, 1995).

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.

Recommended listening: The Beatles, Revolver (EMI CDP 7 46441 2, 1966); Green Day, Dookie (Reprise 9 45529-2, 1994); Soundgarden, Superunknown (A&M 3154 0198 2, 1994); The Rolling Stones, Hot Rocks (Abbco 60617, 1986).

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, continued on page 41
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


Improvisation: Thinking and Playing Music

Abstract: This article explores and contextualizes improvisation in music from an educational perspective. First, recent brain research that sees improvisation as a distinct cognitive activity is examined and used to illustrate the importance and uniqueness of this often ignored area of music learning. Next, the implications for the music classroom are explored in light of the brain research findings as well as the common misconceptions associated with improvisation in music classrooms. Finally, some overarching principles to help guide the teaching of improvisation in any music classroom are offered.

Keywords: brain research, creativity, fMRI, general music, high school, improvisation, pedagogy, thinking

If you ask a group of high school music students (as I have many times) to say the first word that pops into their minds when you mention improvisation, their most common response will likely be “jazz,” and if one could somehow measure this, their most common emotion may well be fear. So how can it be that an essential element of musical expression and performance, one practiced by musicians in countless cultures and idioms for thousands of years, has been relegated to a single genre of music and associated with such anxiety? In this article, I attempt to explore and contextualize improvisation as a distinctive and creative cognitive activity, speculate as to why we seem to have narrowed our associations so much where improvisation is concerned, and finally, explore some overarching principles to help guide the teaching of improvisation in any music classroom.

While the title of this article might, as guitarist Derek Bailey pointed out, “seem unkind to the non-improviser,” it is not meant as a challenge. Indeed, it is worth noting that the title phrase did not come from an adept improviser, but none other than The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (1954), which stated that improvisation is “the art of thinking and performing music simultaneously.” As a starting point, let me contrast these two processes—improvising versus performing from a traditional notated score—so that we can discover to what extent the thinking processes are different. In deference to the vast number of competent musicians who read and do not improvise, I make the assumption that there is some thinking going on regardless of whether one is improvising, reading from a score, or performing memorized music.

The Cognitive Realm

While the study of music perception and cognition is one of the oldest areas of experimental psychology, the past twenty years have seen a huge increase in the use of technologies such as functional magnetic...
resonance imaging (fMRI, a procedure that measures brain activity by detecting associated changes in blood flow) and scans using positron emission tomography (PET, a nuclear medicine imaging technique that produces a three-dimensional picture of functional body processes) for research in this area. A recent study by neurologists Charles Limb and Allen Braun probed the neural substrates that underlie spontaneous musical performance. The study used fMRI imaging to explore and quantify the cognitive processes involved when a group of test subjects (professional jazz musicians) engaged in four main activities: playing a scale, performing a quarter-note improvisation within that scale, playing a previously memorized jazz passage, and playing a spontaneously improvised solo over the same chord structure as the passage. In other words, the investigators compared brain processing during memorized versus spontaneous musical processes (they called these overlearned and improvised, respectively) on two different levels: a simple scalar level and a more complex harmonic progression. The results are fascinating on two fronts. First, there seemed to be no difference in terms of cognitive processing between a simple, quarter-note, scalar improvisation and the more rhythmically complex harmonic improvisation. Second, and on a much deeper level, it appears, despite the similarity of scalar and harmonic association in the tasks, that improvised or spontaneous playing seems to involve an entirely different area of the prefrontal cortex than does performing memorized or read passages. Furthermore, such spontaneous playing actually deactivates the areas associated with overlearned playing (lateral portions of the prefrontal cortex) and activates portions of the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC). To put it in context, the MPFC (although poorly understood) seems to be associated with “multiple cognitive functions in the pursuit of behavioral goals” and “maintaining an overriding set of intentions while executing a series of diverse behavioral subroutines.” Could this be neuroscientist-speak for complex multitasking? As well, the portions of the prefrontal cortex activated during overlearned playing (and deactivated during improvisation) are associated with more typical, school-like cognitive processing such as planning, stepwise implementation of tasks, and effortful problem solving.

In short, it appears that we access the region of the brain associated with sequence, planning, and problem solving when we play memorized or read passages. During improvisation, we deactivate this region and switch to cognitive processing associated with meditation, daydreaming, and complex, long-term multitasking. In a cruder context, one might see this as right- and left-brain processing with the creative, right side being associated with improvisational tasks and...
the logical, sequencing left side associated with learned-passage playing and sight-reading.

In extrapolating the results of such a study into the educational realm, one must proceed cautiously due to both the dearth of this kind of research in the area of improvisation and cognitive processing, as well as the small and narrow sample of subjects (six professional jazz pianists). Certainly many questions can be raised about whether such processing can be generalized to our student population or even learned, for that matter. However, Limb and Braun do point out that the processing uncovered during improvisation is not necessarily specific to high-level musicality alone and may well be a “defining characteristic of spontaneous musical creativity.”

Still, it would be interesting to see a similar study with Orff/pentatonic percussion instruments done on student populations or on people with little musical training and/or ability. Furthermore, Limb and Braun’s study focused on a kind of genre-specific improvisation idiom (jazz) that is considered by some to be highly structured and creatively deficient. How would a more free improvisational task (e.g., “Go to that piano and play a wind day in the fall.”) cognitively stack up? It is interesting that the researchers fell into the same trap as my high school students—that of associating improvisation with the genre of jazz exclusively.

**Into the Music Classroom**

If we ignore such concerns for now and accept the results at face value, what can we take from the work of Limb and Braun?

The results seem to make a clear, cognitive distinction between playing learned music and improvising. As music educators, we have often associated improvisation and composition as the more creative aspects of our discipline. While some may feel that more traditional performance settings offer much in the way of creativity, from a cognitive standpoint, it may well be that improvisation is a much more creative endeavor, at least insofar as the parts of the brain being accessed. Considering the surprising finding that there seems to be little difference, cognitively, between complex and simple improvisation, we need not be reluctant to provide our students, even the older ones, with uncomplicated improvisational activities. If the goal is to engage students in activities that access and exercise the “creative” parts of the brain, then one need not come up with a complex task or worry about students’ level of improvisational ability. Indeed, simplifying the tasks, at least initially, might well address what I think is perhaps the most common impediment to
the exploration of improvisation in the classroom: the fear factor.

I must admit that in my experience, the fear factor pertains more often to high school students attempting improvisational activities within structured environments than anything I have seen or experienced with elementary or middle school students. Perhaps this is a good place to start: Why does fear of improvising seem to increase with age? Is this a developmental issue or a cognitive one—or a little of both? Or, more pointedly, is it the fear of the kind of task itself? I have come to believe that the task, to a large degree, governs the degree of fear, and this fear increases with age because the tasks are becoming more (and unnecessarily) complex. Furthermore, it seems that when we ask students to improvise in high school and college settings, it is almost exclusively within a structured (and at times complex) jazz context. Research settings with elementary students almost always involve simpler, pentatonic style improvisations on Orff instruments. When one moves to high school—and college-level students, the research points to jazz performance as the only suitable setting to study improvisation.9

I do not mean to suggest that we should have our high school and college students hunker down around some xylophones with the “tricky” notes removed and make some noise, but is it possible to move outside the jazz realm when we think about improvisational activities in the classroom? The brain research just discussed suggests that we still get full cognitive benefits from engaging in simpler activities, but simple does not have to mean elementary. Music educator and researcher Maud Hickey has recently called for a simplification in the teaching of improvisation, espousing a view that it should not be “a product taught in a strict methodological or pedagogical manner, but as a process to be encouraged on the way to learning freedom and self-actualization.”10 Improvisation pedagogy can be complicated by methodologies, especially those relating to jazz. A freer and simpler approach may well “enable our students to be lifelong, creative improvisers.”11

An Expanded Definition of Improvisation

A review of the literature seems to suggest that improvisation is a core part of the elementary music classroom, becomes an exclusive domain of general music (for those teachers that choose to explore it) in the middle school, and finally gets relegated to jazz ensembles in high school and college. Yet if we look at the various historical and cultural aspects of improvisation, it is clear that our educational funneling of improvisation into the jazz realm is in serious error. Consider areas other than jazz in which improvisation is important though often overlooked.

Improvisation has been closely associated with Western classical music since the time when Gregorian chant flourished. As Canadian music educator Jeanne Lee explains,

These chants used additional melodies above the Cantus Firmus (fixed melody in Latin), which were improvised by Medieval musicians to glorify God. In the later periods, improvisation was used in performances outside of churches. J. S. Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and Liszt all excelled in improvisation, which was then referred to as extemporization. Bartok’s Mikrokosmos were originally improvised, as were Beethoven’s famous sketch books (which he later used in formal works). Near the beginning of the 20th Century, improvisation disappeared in the Romantic Period as performers began mastering composers’ works note for note; the art of improvisation was eventually lost.12

Recently, a number of educational initiatives have appeared with the purpose of elevating improvisation back to the prominent position it once held in classical music performance. Perhaps the one most relevant to music classrooms is by Jeff Agrell, “one of the few classical music professors in the country who actively improvises, who passionately advocates for improvisation, who encourages and nurtures the improvisational spirit in his students, and who has succeeded at the often challenging task of obtaining institutional support for a non-jazz improvisation course.”13 Agrell has written a book titled Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians: 500+ Non-Jazz Games for Performers, Educators and Everyone Else.14 The subtitle is telling in itself, speaking to the idea that most people looking at a book on improvisation will assume it was written for jazz musicians. University music faculties are also turning to the idea of making improvisation part of the classical music curriculum, such as the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, which created the Centre for Classical Improvisation and Creative Performance in 2006,15 or DePauw University School of Music in Greencastle, Indiana, which now offers a course called Improvisation and Western Art Music.16 Finally, building on the notion that improvisation is an important aspect of twentieth-century classical or art music, Christopher Keyes, associate professor of composition at Hong Kong Baptist University in Kowloon, has discovered that “teaching contemporary pieces that are largely improvised provides an ideal learning opportunity.”17 Furthermore, he posits that the improvisational aspects of this often-difficult genre are mediated by the fact that improvisation “can engage students at whatever level of playing they are currently capable.”

Moving beyond the classical and jazz realm, improvisation figures into a number of genres of music. Rock (think “jam” bands such as Phish or the Grateful Dead), blues, hip-hop, various African and Asian musics, flamenco, and Inuit music all rely heavily on the art of improvisation. Furthermore, any sort of compositional activity will usually start with some aspect of improvisation, regardless of the genre or compositional task.
Back to the Music Classroom

By expanding our definition of improvisation well beyond the jazz genre, a wealth of possibilities opens up for the music classroom. Because a number of articles have already been published on this topic, I would instead like to suggest a set of more overarching principles that can govern the exploration of improvisation based on both the brain research and the idea that improvisation is an important part of many genres of music:

- **Avoid complexity:** As our brain research tells us, the activity does not have to be complex to gain full cognitive/creative benefits. This might also lessen students’ fear. Bring in complexity gradually when students are comfortable with simpler tasks.

- **Structure the task:** While too much structure can often hinder or remove creative benefits from certain activities, enough structure is required to make students comfortable and keep them focused on the task at hand.

- **Dispel the fear:** The older students are, the more likely they are to both fear improvisation and think it the domain of highly skilled jazz players. It is important to open their ears to the diversity of improvisation and, if necessary, its inherent simplicity.

- **Compose:** Improvisation is almost always a starting point for composition, so when doing composing activities, include improvisational aspects, especially as starting points.

- **Educate:** Convince students of importance/ubiquity of improvisation in so many genres of music including Western classical and popular music.

Thus far, I have avoided discussing the specifics of lesson ideas in favor of exploring larger and more general aspects of improvisation and providing some references to excellent lesson ideas elsewhere. When I read the previous bullet-pointed list, I realize that one activity I have used repeatedly in the past tends to address all of these and yet remains somewhat elusive in the literature. This activity can be used to great effectiveness in a high school performance setting—traditionally an area that finds few outlets for improvisation aside from jazz ensembles.

The Soundscape

The term *soundscape* was coined by composer and music educator R. Murray Schafer and refers to a kind of musical work that attempts to recreate the sensation of being in a particular acoustic environment. Like any great work of art, good soundscapes do not just mimic; they also convey emotional meaning and invite interpretation, in short, sensations that might come from the experience of an event or environment. The advantages of using soundscapes as creative activities in performing ensembles are manifold. The choice of soundscape activity can have immediate and deep relevance to a student’s personal experience (e.g., a creating a soundscape of their bus ride to school). Students’ experimentations and improvisations are, by nature, within their own playing capabilities, so the focus remains on creative improvisation and experimentation rather than trying to master difficult passages (as in a more traditional performance setting). Soundscapes are more open-ended and less rule-bound, so students are more likely to find more self-direction and less fear. Improvisation plays a key role throughout the process and could be an integral part of the final product. Finally, a well-managed but open-ended soundscape activity can find success in large, performance-oriented ensembles.

In this past year, our school has created two large-scale soundscape compositions that were performed at final concerts. The high school concert band, consisting of more than fifty students, began the process by responding to pictures/photographs in small groups of five or six. Students created musical responses to the pictures by improvising themes, exchanging ideas, and adding textures with other instruments. It was important to encourage the students to explore the complete sonic possibilities of their instruments, such as the sound of the keys being pressed, droning with the voice into the bell of the instrument, using very long tones, partial fingerings, and so on. Once the short compositions/improvisations were complete on each picture, groups presented them to the class, where they were discussed in terms of suitability for a final, full-band piece. At this point in the process, the visual aspects of the soundscape were discarded in favor of using a series of musical themes. The themes were chosen by the students and further refined, then stitched together as a complete composition—all without the use of any written notations (graphic, notes, or otherwise). In this respect, the character of the work would change with each presentation due to the improvisational nature of many of the passages.

The high school string orchestra began, as did the concert band, by creating musical responses to pictures as an introductory activity. Next, the students discussed focusing on an event that had a number of different stages that could be conveyed by pictures. They came up with the idea of creating a musical work based on the 2011 earthquake/tsunami in Japan. A story line as a series of events was created, key photographs chosen, and the students went to work in small ensembles to create a section of music. Once complete, the sections were presented in class and students decided which would remain within the sections and which would be performed by the entire ensemble (more than sixty students). For the final concert, each small group (five to ten students) spread out in the theatre and played through the segments sequentially, while the corresponding photos were projected on a screen at the front. As in the concert band experience, no music was written or used at any time during the process, and hence, much of the performance was improvisational in nature. Both examples show how an open-ended and creative
activity based largely on improvisation can flourish in a large ensemble format. It has been noted that overly structured, short, teacher-prompted improvisational activities lack such “student-centered” and “creative dispositions” that “move away from teaching improvisation to facilitating improvisation.”

**Teaching Is Showing How**

In closing, perhaps it is appropriate to return to the source that, many years ago, got me thinking deeply about improvisation beyond the confines of my own notions as a jazz musician and educator. Derek Bailey’s outstanding book *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*, in addition to giving some deep insights into the nature of improvisation, also illustrates, with numerous examples, just how prevalent improvisation is, and has been, in music. In a final chapter titled “Classroom Improvisation,” he interviews John Stevens, “the first musician to run an improvising class” in England. Bailey sums up Stevens’s ideas with the statement:

> The aim of teaching is usually to show people how to do something. What Stevens aims at, it seems to me, is to instill in the people he works with enough confidence to try and attempt what they want to do before they know how to do it. Encouraging them to work empirically, and trusting that they will learn, with some guidance, from the attempted playing experience.

This idea could well be the key point to a successful improvisation experience. Gain the trust of your students and give them the confidence to explore their own creativity and improvisational activities while you, in the words attributed to Thomas Carruthers, make yourself progressively unnecessary.

**Notes**

2. Ibid., 54.
5. Ibid., 4.
6. Ibid., 6.
11. Ibid., 297.
20. My thanks to Nathan Long and Cindy Bulteel at the International School of Beijing for sharing their large-group soundscape process.
23. This is a paraphrase of an often-repeated idea attributed in various places on the Internet to Thomas Carruthers: A teacher is one who makes himself (or herself) progressively unnecessary.
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.
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 conceiv 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 flattened 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.

**Selected Resources**

**Books**


**Play-Alone Materials**


Band-in-a-Box. PG Music, 29 Cadillac Ave., Victoria, BC, V8Z 1T3; 800-268-6272; www.pgmusic.com


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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. If you can tell this to the student by simply saying, "Higher, faster, and louder equals high energy; and lower, slower, and softer equals low energy." While this is an overgeneralization, it works with most beginning and intermediate students.

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-

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, i, i, i
Phrase 2: IV7, IV7, i, i
Phrase 3: V7, IV7, i, i

Second chord changes:
Phrase 1: i, IV7, i, i
Phrase 2: IV7, IV7, i, i
Phrase 3: V7, IV7, i, i

In the key of C, the chords can be identified as : i = C7 (C, E, G, B-flat), IV7 = F7 (F, A, C, E-flat), and V7 = G7 (G, B, D, F).

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

```
C-D-E♭-F-G-A♭-B♭
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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

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C-D-E♭-F-G-A♭-B♭
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JANUARY 2003
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.
Jazz Listening Activities: Children's Literature and Authentic Music Samples
Nan L. McDonald, Douglas Fisher and Rick Helzer
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What is This?
Jazz Listening Activities: Children’s Literature and Authentic Music Samples

By Nan L. McDonald, Douglas Fisher, and Rick Helzer

Many teachers have a tremendous natural passion for jazz, which holds a respected place in any comprehensive general music curriculum. Active student listening experiences can involve authentic jazz sources that are accurately set within their historical and cultural contexts. When pursuing these music-teaching goals, teachers should consider important questions: Why is jazz exciting? Is it the unique combinations of musical sounds or the improvisations that are more intriguing? More importantly, what is the best way to share with students this excitement about a uniquely American musical genre? What teaching methodologies encourage them to learn more about the rich historical context and artistic milieu in which jazz has been and continues to be created by a diverse array of unique personalities? The following observations by a veteran general music teacher may sound familiar:

I keep wondering if I don’t need to do a lot more introductory listening lessons involving jazz and even the stories of jazz musicians. Even though I am really limited in my own background about jazz, I still know it’s just not enough to have my kids play or sing a simple blues scale and listen to one or two old standards! How can I make jazz really mean something to kids?

Music samples used in conjunction with children’s literature can enhance appreciation of the history and variety of jazz musics.

Nan L. McDonald and Rick Helzer are associate professors of music and Douglas Fisher is associate professor of teacher education at San Diego State University in San Diego, California.
Children's books about jazz and jazz artists can heighten students' interest. Although curriculum units often use fiction, the study of jazz provides a unique opportunity to learn about the many styles of jazz through the nonfiction genre of biography. Through biographies, students get an authentic glimpse into history by coming to understand events through the perspectives of those living at the time.2

Furthermore, classroom learning activities in which biographies are paired with authentic music listening samples from the appropriate jazz artists can "emphasize relationships among the arts and relationships between the arts and disciplines outside the arts. Music can serve as a particularly useful framework within which to teach a wide array of skills and knowledge, particularly in social studies and language arts." As an added bonus, the natural integrative learning connections between these kinds of musical learning experiences and students' literacy development can easily be established and articulated to others at school sites, thereby serving to strengthen the important role of music within the larger school curriculum.4

This article offers a teaching model with suggestions for teachers to create active introductory listening experiences for upper elementary and middle school students, paired with engaging biographies about jazz artists. Activities and resources cover prejazz forms and musicians (e.g., West African influences, work songs, spirituals, ragtime, New Orleans jazz, and early blues), jazz (e.g., swing, scat, bebop, cool, hard bop, post bop, and avant-garde), and jazz musicians, as well as styles of popular music derived from jazz (e.g., rhythm and blues, soul, funk, fusion "jazz rock," Latin jazz, rap, and hip hop).5

Student activities within this model curriculum unit include:

- listening to, identifying, analyzing, responding to, and reflecting upon various styles of prejazz and jazz (National Standards 6, 7, 9)
- identifying instruments, vocal and instrumental techniques, and style characteristics used in various types of jazz and related forms by sound and sight (National Standard 6)
- listening to music set in historically accurate contexts (children's literature) that increase students' understanding of the chronological development of jazz and the times, lives, and works of its artists (National Standards 6, 7, 8)
- exploring the relationships between history and culture—for example, the connection between prejazz music and West African musical influences imported by early African-Americans as a result of the slave trade, as well as understanding jazz's historical and cultural contexts through vocabulary, visual arts, photography, poetry, and the biographies of selected artists (National Standards 8 and 9)
- reading and writing, including small-group, cooperative-learning activities, poetry, journals, illustrated student books, and bulletin boards based on musical listening activities paired with children's literature about prejazz, jazz, and jazz musicians (National Standards 6, 7, 8, 9)
- performing informally using created movement, visual arts, and drama about jazz artists and their music (National Standards 6, 7, 8).

In addition to offering model curriculum and performance ideas, this article provides lists of jazz listening resources, children's literature about jazz, video resources, and resources for teaching about jazz.6

**Model Teaching Unit**

This listening unit is organized into five events. Each of these events is a stage of the unit and may require between one and four class sessions, depending on the amount of time a teacher chooses to focus on jazz and jazz artists. These events include suggestions for extended student learning through partnerships with classroom teachers who may be interested in small-group, cooperative-learning processes and performances as described below. Thus, this unit allows music classroom activities to become a focus within language arts instruction. Sources include materials appropriate for grades 4–8.

**Event One**

To introduce this unit, show pictures of a wide variety of instruments common to jazz, as well as pictures of jazz musicians. For background music, use one of the listening selections from the Suggested Jazz Listening Samples sidebar. Video sources listed in the Videos about Jazz sidebar may also be used to set the scene for learning about jazz. Engage students in a preliminary class discussion, using some of the following questions as student responses are listed on the board:

- What is jazz?
- Who plays jazz?
- Where did jazz come from?
- How old is jazz?
- Is jazz heard today? Where?

Begin collecting a list of words that are used to describe jazz and keep it handy for further reference and revision as needed.

Following this class discussion, introduce the book *The Jazz Fly.* This book contains a CD recording of the text, including scat sounds and instruments. Following this shared reading experience, invite students to discuss jazz and to suggest ways that the music is made. Include such questions as the following:

- What instruments are used in jazz?
- Why did the fly want a new sound?
- Why are nonsense words sung during the music?
- Do other kinds of music sound like this?

Add students' ideas to the word list.

As this discussion closes, introduce the book *The Sound That Jazz Makes.* Invite different groups of students to read aloud expressively from this book's poetic two-page text spreads that reflect the chronological history and development of jazz. During each group's read-aloud, play recorded segments of the appropriate jazz style (as mentioned in the text) in the Jazz Listening Samples sidebar. Allow time during each group's read-aloud for students to hear a little of each selection as they look at the illustrations. Following this first event, students will be more interested in jazz and more motivated to learn about it.

**Event Two**

This stage of instruction grows out of student interest in understanding jazz and jazz musicians. Its activities involve active listening and analysis of that listening based on learning about...
Suggested Jazz Listening Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jazz Style</th>
<th>Artist/Recording</th>
<th>Elements/Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Origins: African Influences (Pre-Jazz)</td>
<td>African Tribal Music and Dances, Legacy International, CD 308. Compagnons D'Akaté, Côte d'Ivoire, SBG Video, Grade 6—Dancing and Grade 2—Rhythm (Ivy Coast Drummers and Dancers), and Dou Dou Rose Ensemble, Senegal, SBG Video, Grade 4—Percussion.</td>
<td>Listen for polyphonic and layered rhythms, ostinati patterns, indigenous percussion, African vocal styles. Add visual elements provided within these videos to increase student understanding of percussion instruments, of characteristics of the music, and of the inseparable links to rhythmic dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz Beginnings (New Orleans Jazz)</td>
<td>Original Dixieland Jazz Band, &quot;Dixie Jazz Band One Step&quot; (First recording of instrumental jazz distributed February, 1917), Jazz Classics Compact Disc/Jazz Styles—History and Analysis, compiled and annotated by Mark C. Gridley, Cut 7. Louis Armstrong, &quot;Hotter Than That,&quot; MM, Grade 6—CD 3-20. Jelly Roll Morton, &quot;Black Bottom Stomp&quot; (1926), by Ferdinand Jelly Roll Morton and His Red Hot Peppers, in Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz, RD033, Disc 1, Cut 6. Duke Ellington, &quot;It Don't Mean a Thing If You Ain't Got That Swing,&quot; with Ella Fitzgerald, MM, Grade 5—CD 13-10. Duke Ellington and the Blanton-Webster Band, &quot;Harlem Airshaft,&quot; RCA 5659-2-RB, Cut 15, and &quot;Ko Ko,&quot; Cut 3. Benny Goodman, &quot;Sing, Sing, Sing,&quot; Live at Carnegie Hall—1938, Sony/Columbia. Benny Goodman with Charlie Christian and Count Basie, &quot;I Found a New Baby,&quot; Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz, Disc 2, Cut 23.</td>
<td>This performance also exemplifies the common New Orleans horn lineup of cornet, clarinet, and trombone. The horns play in a polyphonic style. The rhythm section consists of only piano and drums. Listen for Armstrong's trumpet solo and improvised singing (scat solo) with guitar accompaniment. Listen for the three-horn front line and the rhythm section, including string bass and banjo! Morton's unaccompanied piano solo uses syncopation similar to Joplin's &quot;Maple Leaf Rag,&quot; with the added swing feel unique to jazz. Listen for the walking bass line that is the foundation for the swing rhythmic feel. Also notice the short solo improvisations woven into the fabric of the arrangement. Note the use of the plunger mute on the trombone solo, played as if speaking to the musical listeners. Listen for the smooth melodic style and drummer Gene Krupa's driving beat on the bass drum. Goodman is heard with Count Basie. Drummer Joe Jones's style here is an interesting contrast to Krupa's style as he de-emphasizes the bass drum and instead uses the swing-ride pattern on the high-hat cymbals. Vocal improvisation in the scat style of jazz instrumentalists. In this performance, Fitzgerald quotes a number of well-known tunes and weaves them into her melodic improvisations. Listen for the ballad style with piano. Sung in a &quot;rubato&quot; feel, or with the absence of a steady tempo, freely interpreted lyrics and melody. Video performance of varying jazz vocal styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz Women</td>
<td>Ella Fitzgerald, &quot;How High the Moon&quot; (1961), MM, Grade 5—CD 13-13. Sarah Vaughan, &quot;My Funny Valentine&quot; (1973), Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz, Disc 4, Cut 5. Diane Schuur, Jazz Vocalist, SBG Video, Grade 4—Singing Styles. Some important, innovative women of jazz (composers, arrangers, and performers) from 1970 to the present include Carla Bley, Jane Ira Bloom, Geri Allen, and Maria Schneider.</td>
<td>Vocal improvisation in the scat style of jazz instrumentalists. In this performance, Fitzgerald quotes a number of well-known tunes and weaves them into her melodic improvisations. Listen for the ballad style with piano. Sung in a &quot;rubato&quot; feel, or with the absence of a steady tempo, freely interpreted lyrics and melody. Video performance of varying jazz vocal styles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued on page 46


Miles Davis, "Boplicity" (1949), Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz, Disc 4, Cut 1.

Horace Silver and the Jazz Messengers, "The Preacher" (1955), Blue Note CD P 7 46140 2, Cut 6.

Miles Davis, "So What" (1959), Kind of Blue, Columbia CK 64935, Cut 1.

John Coltrane, "Impressions" (1961), Live at the Village Vanguard, Impulse AS 10, Cut 3.

Ornette Coleman, "Lonely Woman" (1959), Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz, Disc 5, Cut 7.

Take 6, "Get Away Jordan" (1988), Reunion 7001 0032726, Cut 7.

James Brown, Foundations of Funk, United Artists/Verve.

Aretha Franklin, Lady Soul, Atlantic/Rhino.

Herbie Hancock, "Watermelon Man," TMC, Grade 7—CD 6-13 and MM, Grade 6—CD 11-10.


Brazilian Samba: Chick Corea, "Spain," Light as a Feather, United Artists/Verne.

Brazilian Bossa Nova: Getz and Gilberto, "Girl from Ipanema," United Artists.

Let your students advise you further here. Suggestions: "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five or "Africa's Inside Me" by Arrested Development.


Jazz-style categories and chronological order correspond to pre-jazz, jazz, and jazz-related styles mentioned in the children's books I See the Rhythm by Toyomi Igus, illustrated by Michele Wood (San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1998), and The Sound That Jazz Makes by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Eric Velasquez (New York: Walker & Co., 2000).
the chronological development of jazz found in the book I See the Rhythm.7

The engaging text, which includes a chronological jazz timeline in each page's margins, was written and illustrated as a poetic response to many styles of jazz.

As in the first event, invite small groups of students to expressively read aloud passages presenting each style of jazz (e.g., jazz beginnings, sounds of swing, blues). Again, use this literature activity as an opportunity to pair student read-alouds with style-appropriate listening samples and/or video viewing suggestions from the first two sidebars.

Recorded music provides a great way to musically introduce each group's poetic read-aloud about a particular period of jazz, while giving listeners added opportunities to hear musical samples during and after each poem. Although this type of scripted listening activity takes a bit of time and preparation, its purposeful pairing of expressive speech with authentic samples of the period offers an engaging and effective musical learning environment.

After these activities, students may be both more curious and more prepared to understand the historical development of jazz. A jazz timeline, made with butcher paper (six to nine feet long), with sections mapped off and labeled by separate eras and styles of jazz, is a helpful visual supplement and should remain on the classroom wall throughout this unit (along with the class list of words to describe jazz). In this way, students can continue to update these displays as they complete their study of jazz.

**Event Three**

Activities in this event further increase students' understandings of jazz through active listening, analysis, identification, and vocabulary development. Students are now introduced to the Listening to Jazz Checklist (see figure 1) as a classification system and eventual assessment tool. Many of the words on the word list created in the first and second events (with help from the teacher) are likely to be found on the checklist (e.g., improv, tempo, instrumentation, and rhythm section). This checklist contains many of the common terms used to discuss jazz. Teachers may want to customize their own checklists for classroom use based on the recordings and vocabulary words they intend to use.

Select recordings of several different jazz styles and invite students to listen to them. As they listen, guide students in how to use the checklist to make individual and large-group decisions about what they are hearing. Use an overhead transparency to discuss the student selections in each column. For instance, if the dynamics in a recorded selection frequently change, invite students to describe these changes in their own words. Once students have been guided through using the Listening to Jazz Checklist, invite them to analyze new (not previously heard) jazz listening samples and apply their knowledge. In addition, students could also work in teams or small cooperative groups during the checklist activity and write their answers on overhead transparencies or large posters to be shared with the larger group. Varying the task each time will increase student interest and motivation.

At the conclusion of this event, invite students to add titles of jazz recordings and artists' names to the classroom jazz timeline. For instance, students may add the title “St. Louis Blues,” written by W. C. Handy and performed by Bessie Smith, to the timeline under the era “Birth of the Blues.”

**Event Four**

No study of jazz would be complete without learning about its artists and their music-making styles. The activities in this event, which involve biographical studies through cooperative learning and creative presentations about jazz and jazz musicians, will probably take several class periods. These suggestions are meant to model the breadth of possible activities that could be included to help students understand the complexity of various artists and the times in which they lived. The biography selections in the Additional Resources for Teaching about Jazz sidebar provide a list of jazz artists appropriate for study, as well as a number of quality biographical books currently available.

In this activity—called “Getting to Know Jazz Musicians”—small groups of four to six students are assigned an artist to study. Adequate time should be allotted for students to read books or search Web sites about their artist, as

---

**Videos about Jazz**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Blues</th>
<th>Bluesland: Portrait in American Music (Masters of American Music Videos)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louis Armstrong</td>
<td>Satchmo (Masters of American Music Videos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke Ellington</td>
<td>On the Road with Duke Ellington (The Robert Drew Archive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke Ellington</td>
<td>Duke Ellington and His Orchestra, 1929–1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella Fitzgerald</td>
<td>Ella Fitzgerald: Something to Live For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Vaughan</td>
<td>Sarah Vaughan, The Divine One (Masters of American Music Videos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles Davis</td>
<td>Miles Ahead: The Music of Miles Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles Davis</td>
<td>Miles in Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Coltrane</td>
<td>John Coltrane (Ralph J. Gleason’s Jazz Casual Series)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Coltrane</td>
<td>The World according to John Coltrane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thelonious Monk</td>
<td>Thelonious Monk, American Composer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thelonious Monk</td>
<td>Monk in Oslo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Many of these videos are available through the Jazz Store at 800-558-9513 (www.thejazzstore.com) or Jamey Aebersold’s 2002 Jazz Catalog at 800-456-1388 (www.jazzbooks.com).
Additional Resources for Teaching about Jazz

Biography Selections

Louis Armstrong:

Duke Ellington:

Benny Goodman:

Wynton Marsalis:

Charlie Parker:

Bessie Smith:

Mary Lou Williams:

Other Resources

Figure I. Listening to jazz checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Rhythm Section</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Tempo/Dynamics</th>
<th>Improv</th>
<th>Artist Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>Walking bass line</td>
<td>Pre-Jazz (West African, work songs, spirituals, New Orleans, Ragtime)</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Solo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Pattern on high hat</td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Solo within the group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drums</td>
<td>Chatter on snare</td>
<td>Early Blues</td>
<td>Slow</td>
<td>Solo with rhythm section</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assorted percussion</td>
<td>Others:</td>
<td>Blues (Country Blues, Delta Blues Guitar, others)</td>
<td>Fast to slow</td>
<td>Playing in the moment (all improvised)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sax</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chicago Stride (vocal/instrumental)</td>
<td>Slow to fast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarinet</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scat</td>
<td>Changes (how?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other winds</td>
<td></td>
<td>Be Bop</td>
<td>Loud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fusion</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic or</td>
<td></td>
<td>Funk</td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computerized</td>
<td></td>
<td>Latin Jazz</td>
<td>Changing (how?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Others:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

well as to work in small cooperative-learning groups (panels) to create a presentation either for the whole class or another class. This “Getting to Know Jazz Musicians” activity may be presented in four parts.

**Part One: All about Our Artist.** The goal for part one is to connect the biography study to an enhanced understanding about jazz and jazz musicians. Remind students to focus on key aspects of their artist—aspects about which everyone in the class needs to know. Provide biographies and other materials about selected jazz artists and their music as “research” resources in the music classroom, library, or general classroom (see the Additional Resources for Teaching about Jazz sidebar for further information).

Provide each group with bulletin board space or large posters to display the opening portion of their presentation, entitled “We Learned about ______.” During this part of the presentation, students may show books, illustrations, and vocabulary terms they found to add to the classroom jazz word list. Students should be encouraged to “teach the class” about their musician. Thus, part one gives an overview of the artist, as well as an opportunity to place this artist in history, style, and jazz era.

**Part Two: Listen to Our Artist.** The group selects a favorite recording of their artist from listening samples provided by the teacher (see the first sidebar). This selection should typify the artist, style, and era in which the music was created. The presenter for this part should lead the whole class using the “Listening to Jazz Checklist” (figure 1) as a discovery activity about the recorded music of this artist. The group may use an overhead or poster format to lead this activity and discussion with the whole class.

**Part Three: Our Artist in History.** In the third part of the group presentation, students will place information that they learned about their artist and music on the classroom jazz timeline. Contributions may include student illustrations; quotes from the artists; titles; musical descriptions and characteristics of key works, events, places of interest; and other information about the artist and the era in which that artist lived.

**Part Four: Meet Our Artist.** The final part of the group presentation involves a conversation with the artist. One or more members of the group dramatize the actual character of the musician featured in their biographical study, possibly in costume or holding a representation of the instrument(s) used by the musician. The group may also create scenery as a visual environment for the character. The character can tell a story about his or her life and experiences making music. Following this introductory characterization, the whole class is invited to ask the character questions (the panel giving the presentation may assist with answers as needed). Depending on the class’s composition, the teacher might want to be ready with questions that help to unveil the character.

**Event Five**

As an outgrowth of the student presentations and as a way to assess student mastery of the standards, the final event is a formal assessment of students’ knowledge using the Listening to Jazz Checklist (figure 1). Students should now be familiar with the terms on the checklist and should be able to correctly identify musical characteristics as well as various jazz

Continued on page 57
looking for inconsistencies, missing labels, or misspelled words. Give the portfolio to a friend to review.

No portfolio is ever done; it will always be a “work-in-progress.” As skills develop, knowledge expands, and thinking becomes more refined—so, too, will the portfolio. Depending on purpose and goals, the portfolio will continue to change. Be prepared to inject, eject, update, reorganize, and overhaul, as needs warrant. A portfolio should always be thought of as a collection of documents that is “living” and subject to modification. Whatever the career stage, the process of preparing a portfolio is a learning experience as important as the final product. In the end, whatever shape or form it may take, a professional teaching portfolio should show exemplary teaching skills and abilities and, when requested, should demonstrate continuing growth as a professional.

Notes


5. See, for example, Giselle O. Martin-Kniep, Diane Cunningham, and Diana Luxworthy Feige, Why Am I Doing This? Purposeful Teaching through Portfolio Assessment (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998).


13. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) provides standards for many different teaching fields. Information regarding the NBPTS and its standards can be found on-line at www.nbpts.org or by calling 800-228-3224.


Jazz Listening

Continued from page 49

recordings by era, style, and artist(s). This final assessment should contain several listening samples that challenge students to apply their listening and analytical skills to new listening mediums. Teachers may also want to include samples that are not jazz (e.g., country western, classical, and world musics) so that students can encounter contrasting forms and venture to analyze unknown styles of recorded music.

Conclusion

Respect for the groundbreaking creative energy and courage of past and present jazz artists drives us to seek out and experiment with innovative ways (much like the improvisational nature of jazz itself) to effectively and actively engage young students in creative and purposeful musical listening activities. Through the creative instructional pairing of quality children’s literature about jazz with appropriate and authentic listening sample activities, our classrooms can serve to educate a whole new generation to appreciate this American art form. May the stories of jazz live on!

Notes


Pedagogical Scat
Antonio J. García
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>> Version of Record - Sep 1, 1990

What is This?
Pedagogical Scat

by Antonio J. García

Students in swing bands and choirs sometimes have difficulty producing the most fundamental and appealing stylistic elements of jazz—those of rhythm and phrasing. Antonio García shows how directors can use listening and scat-singing to help their ensembles and soloists really swing.

I've got a fine group of young students in my jazz band, but they still seem stiff. Could you help them swing better?" "My chorus can't seem to loosen up its phrasing enough to sound natural on a swing tune. What should I do?" "My ensemble's together, but my soloists need assistance. How should I introduce them to improvisation?"

As I visit school jazz band and chorus rehearsals, these are the questions most frequently raised by the groups' directors. Since most of these directors face the challenge of meeting their goals with what seems like too little rehearsal time, it is not surprising that many are reluctant to spend that time doing anything other than reading and rehearsing arrangements in the expected fashion. However, the key to students' accelerated learning lies in making use of their ears and voices. Students in orchestra or band can best play what they can hear and sing, and the same is certainly true for young musicians playing instruments in a jazz band. By using "pedagogical scat" you can develop more than your students' vocal and instrumental skills—you can develop their musicianship. In the process, the swing feel of your ensemble and that of your soloists can improve far more quickly.

I use exactly the same techniques for band and for chorus because precisely the same musical principles apply. The students in most instrumental groups have less experience with scatting than do those in vocal jazz ensembles, however, so I will address the illustrations that follow primarily to the jazz band director.

Laying a foundation

First and foremost, your students must listen to jazz in order to begin to assimilate it or to decide that they even like it. It is impossible to paint a picture of a tree without having first sensed one through sight (perhaps even through sound and touch); similarly, it is unlikely that any student will develop a satisfactory jazz style without having heard some quantity of quality jazz. Although this process of assimilation, which has a long tradition in jazz, is often ignored in the time restrictions of the classroom, students can learn to enjoy jazz outside the classroom (with occasional in-class discussion).

I suggest you attempt to obtain, through your school library or your own resources, at least a dozen jazz albums of large and small ensembles (primarily in the swing and bebop styles). Add a modern "fusion" album to attract contemporary ears, but remember that your goal is to acquaint students with the swing phrasing they rarely hear on Top 40 radio stations. Few ensembles face insurmountable rhythmic troubles on rock, bossa, or Latin charts due to the "straight eighths" that these styles hold in common with classical music.

Then, through band or music appreciation class, require students to listen to an album from their collections or yours and write a one-page report on

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what they do and don’t like about it, preferably describing the means by which the artists seem to accomplish the sounds the students like. Spread additional reports on other albums across the school calendar. By encouraging your students to become aggressive listeners, you will help them improve their ensemble and solo performance styles.

Every student wants to hear recordings by the major performers on his or her instrument, but make sure that students listen to albums of instruments other than their own as well. Any listening list would be too short; but I would start with the Count Basie and Woody Herman orchestras, followed by Miles Davis’s Kind of Blue album, virtually any Sonny Rollins sax recordings (though the ones from the fifties and sixties might be most helpful at first), the breathtakingly lyrical pianist Bill Evans, the beautiful sound of trombonist Urbie Green, vocal stylings of Manhattan Transfer, and the absolutely essential Ella Fitzgerald (who recorded several albums with Basie as well). These artists can provide a good introduction for your students.

From ears to voices

Choose for yourself certain ensemble passages and improvised solos on the albums that you judge to be singable and lyrical. Next, require students to listen on their own to a selected passage enough times to be able to sing along with the recording in class later on. This passage may be chosen by the students, or you may choose it—but remember that it is extremely helpful if a solo is one to which the students are attracted. Singing these excerpts serves several essential functions: It promotes ear-training (aiding pitch), style-training (helping phrasing), and the lowering of inhibitions (bringing about a blossoming of students’ instrumental dynamics as they sing out).

Students’ choices of scat syllables and voice range do not matter as long as they match the pitch and phrasing as closely as possible. (Listening to Ella will help!) If a student “steps in” a rest, he or she is revealing the need to have listened to the recording more. Do not allow any student to notate the passage; the goal here is internalization of the music.

A perfect example of this approach can be examined using Miles Davis’s trumpet solo on “So What” from Kind of Blue. This solo (over D-minor and Eb-minor chords only) is so lyrical and so technically easy that the members of any junior high ensemble could learn to sing along with it individually or as a group. Encourage your students, particularly soloists, to transfer the solo to their instruments a bit at a time (using a sheet of paper to cover the syllables for the syllables associated with sight-singing in class). As you teach it, the rhythmic feel of jazz must be internalized, independently felt without the use of mechanical instruments. The proof of internalization is enthusiastic and accurate scat-singing. Through “pedagogical scat,” students’ “chops” are saved from repeatedly drilling passages that do not need melodic pitch attention. Using it, I can rehearse an all-district band for a long weekend and still have the players fresh for the concert.

Using monotonised scat syllables, concentrate on passages’ rhythmic characteristics and general melodic contours. You must be able to examine a troublesome passage, reduce it to its best rhythmic phrasing, demonstrate it to the students via scatting, and have the students scat it back. With this guidance, your students can learn to examine and reduce passages to proper scat phrasing on their own, providing a major contribution to their musical growth.

Basic scat syllables

Scatting is best accomplished free-style, using syllables chosen by a moment’s inspiration. Teachers and students unfamiliar with what syllables might best match an intended “feel,” however, can benefit greatly from using an assigned set of syllables. These syllables are applied in a manner not unlike that used for the syllables associated with sight-singing in classical theory—though only in rhythmic terms. Begin by assigning the syllable “doo” to all full-value downbeats, “bah” to full-value upbeat beats (in duple divisions of the beat) or middle eighths (for triplet beat divisions), and “dah” to all full-value final eighths in a triplet. Using a sheet of paper to cover the syllables printed below the rhythm line, slowly work your way through the following examples of swing eighths and evenly divided triplets. Once you can maintain a
tempo, be sure to snap your fingers on beats two and four to simulate the drummer’s sock cymbal in a swing feel:

\[
\begin{align*}
4/4 & : \begin{array}{c}
\text{doo} \quad \text{bah} & \text{doo} \quad \text{bah} & \text{doo} \quad \text{bah} & \text{doo} \quad \text{bah} \\
\text{doo} \quad \text{bah} & \text{doo} \quad \text{bah} & \text{doo} \quad \text{bah} & \text{doo} \quad \text{bah}
\end{array}
\end{align*}
\]

Notice how the syllable “doo” encourages full-value downbeats, avoiding the clipped “Mickey Mouse song” interpretation so common in younger students. Also note how these syllables allow relatively easy articulation even at the fastest of tempos. (The appropriateness of the syllables can be proven by attempting to reverse their order.)

For short-value notes, assign “dit” to downbeats, “bop” to upbeats (duple division) or middle eighths (triple division), and “dop” to final eighths in a triple division. The three initial consonants correspond to the full-value syllables, as do two of the vowel sounds. Also, these short-value syllables imply an accentuated attack and well-defined, percussive release; yet the internal vowels encourage enough length for the short notes to “speak.” (Rarely are notes in jazz so short as to be “pecky.”) Explore the following examples, eventually snapping your fingers on two and four:

Given these six syllables, you can drill yourself and your students by swinging any worksheet of classical rhythms built on eighth notes or longer values. Use a published drill or draw up your own for use by your band, asking them to work in unison or pitting one half of the band against the other scattering a different portion of the sheet. Do not allow your students to pencil in the syllables. As problematic as rhythmic reading and swing phrasing are, too few directors encourage their students to work on their rhythmic skills in this concentrated manner. Having the students work with the horns still in their cases is by far the quickest way to solve these problems. Be sure to involve your rhythm section members in these scatting exercises as well; proper phrasing of swing lines will aid their accompanying skills as well as their soloing skills.

The final group of syllables to be employed involves the concept of “ghosted” notes, notes whose articulation is “swallowed” in order to promote the importance of their neighbors in phrasing a swing line (often shown with parentheses or by using x-shaped note-heads). Ghosting is only truly applicable to full-value notes. Removing part of the syllables’ construction, assign “oo” to ghosted downbeats, “b” (not pronounced with a vowel; just closing the previous vowel) to ghosted upbeats (in duple division) or middle eighths (in triple division), and “ah” to ghosted final eighths in a triple division.

Examine the following:
Ghosted notes are not often clearly marked on a published page of music; they may be notated like any other notes. You can use pedagogical scat to help students learn about the concept of ghosted notes and how to identify them, but start with the observation that the final note of any phrase is rarely if ever ghosted; all phrase endings should end articulately, regardless of the dynamic level involved.

**Application: Kicks**

Now that you have learned nine syllables, you'll need only three of them to scat successfully the example in figure 1 (derived from Miles Davis’s composition “Four,” recorded on Workin’ and Steamin’). Don’t look at the printed syllables until you’ve tried working them out yourself, and snap your fingers on two and four once you can maintain a tempo.

Try scatting the previous passage using only “doo” (as many novices will)—it won’t swing nearly as well. So if your ensemble is tripping over such phrasing, have your students use this system to scat it!

The passage from “Four” also illustrates one of the most common difficulties in swing: proper timing of off-beat “kicks.” The secret of success is to supply scat syllables internally for the rests as well as for the kicks, thus simulating drum fills. So, if the horns are to play the upper line in figure 2 (from “Hang Time” by Antonio García, as recorded on the Eastman Jazz Ensemble’s Hot House), they should scat the lower line as a guide for proper placement.

Notice how the syllable “bop” promotes sufficient length for the kicks to “speak.”
Application: Cross-rhythm

You'll need only four syllables to complete the example in figure 3 (from Thelonious Monk's "Rhythm-a-ning," recorded on Criss-Cross, Evidence, and Thelonious in Action).

Measures 5–7 of the Monk example illustrate another common characteristic (and potential difficulty) of jazz phrasing: the cross-rhythm. Examine this group of six notes over three beats:

\[
\text{doo bah doo bah doo bah}
\]

The passage can be made a cross-rhythm by placing these three beats repeatedly across a \(\frac{4}{4}\) bar line, perhaps with the melodic contour shown in the following example. The effect of the cross-rhythm is then aided by an important cross-rhythm rule of thumb: accent changes of direction. This means that the accents fall as shown. Similarly, if a normally weak beat (such as the and of 2 in the first measure) is accented by change of direction, the note immediately following such an accented weak beat is probably ghosted so as to become less accented (and thus less important). By using the rule and its corollary, you'll find that three syllables will give you a true feel of six notes (and not merely three beats) against the common time signature. Don't forget to snap your fingers on beats two and four once you gain tempo.

Cross-rhythm and ground beats

If you've tried scatting the previous example with proper syllables, accents, and finger-snapping, you probably experienced the "tug-of-war" of the passage against the snapping. Well-chosen scat syllables highlight cross-rhythms in a way that a line of "doo" syllables cannot. When working with an eighth-note cross-rhythm, do so over the ground beat: the largest common denominator possible. At a moderate tempo, the sock cymbal's half-note pulse is rooted on beats two and four. As tempos quicken, the pulse moves to half notes on one and three (as in brisk cut time) regardless of the sock cymbal. At the fastest tempos, it is helpful to lengthen the ground beat to a whole note rooted on beat one. (This lengthening of the ground beat at a fast tempo is comparable to a jogger pacing breaths more widely as he or she runs faster, allowing the jogger to stay relaxed and not hyperventilate. The faster a musician plays, the more he or she should relax.) Tapping feet on all four beats, perhaps even just on two, might be a laborious distraction as tempos quicken.

Illustrate the sensation of shifting ground beats at increasing tempos using the example in figure 4. If your sense of pulse seems unstable, set a metronome to match the "snapped" rhythmic pulses as you scat the cross-rhythm simultaneously. (Metronomes work just as well on beats two and four as they do on one and three, but you might want to tell your novice students that you are using a "jazz metronome"—see how long it takes for them to catch on!)

I have adjudicated bands that, when faced with a cross-rhythm, unfortunately shift the ground beat to match it or break up the ground beat into small values (eighths or quarters)—rendering the cross-rhythm effect virtually impotent. Do not deprive yourself and your students of the true sensation of playing cross-rhythms—play the longest ground beat your senses will allow.

Complex/mixed meters

This cross-rhythm/metronome technique can be applied to mixed meters as well: learn the passages not only in the notated meter but also over a quarter, half, and whole-note pulse. This superimposition over simple meters will minimize (if not eliminate) the "rushing" that is so common in mixed-meter performances; now the passage can be practiced with a metronome, heightening the sensation of the cross-rhythm (which is exactly how most listeners, not following scores, perceive the music):
As mentioned earlier, ghosted (de-emphasized) notes are essential to proper jazz phrasing (in which all notes are not created equal). A director or student who is inexperienced in the jazz tradition will find that recognizing which notes should be ghosted is often a challenge when the score offers no indication. I teach students to identify what I call "downbeat passages" and "upbeat passages" (both types are more common at faster tempos).

A series of notes with alternating leaps at a brisk tempo, as in the following example, qualifies as a "downbeat" passage in which the downbeats are emphasized and the lower notes, by virtue of the range in which they are played, become less important until the close of the phrase.

Had the directions of the leaps in this example been reversed, the upbeats would have been more important. "Upbeat" passages often involve cross-rhythms in which the very syncopation of the passage obscures the downbeat pulse:

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**Figure 3**

**Figure 4**

"Downbeat/upbeat" passages

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Most swing-style phrases written for fast tempos fall into one of these categories. The most prominent exception to this rule is the “shuffle” style, in which upbeats are heavily accented. The faster the tempo, the more likely it is that beats one and three of a melodic line will be accented—unless the line contains a prominent change of direction (usually upward). Examine, as an illustration of this effect in both swing and Latin styles, the example in figure 5 (from the closing bars of “Sambandrea Swing,” composed by Don Menza and played by Louie Bellson’s band on Note Smoking).

**Ensemble drill**

Perhaps your band is faced with two rhythmic parts that fit together in a stop-time passage, and players have been “stepping in the holes” of the rests by mistake. Rather than waste the students’ embouchure muscles, divide the ensemble according to like rhythmic passages. Then have each division scat its part alone, in rhythmic unison, before pairing them up for confidence-building. Try the passage in figure 6 from the closing bars of “Just Friends,” composed by John Klenner and played by Rob McConnell and the Boss Brass on Big Band Jazz. Apply your knowledge of syllables, kicks, cross-rhythms, and ghosted notes.

Using these techniques, you and the students in your band or chorus can develop confident, enthusiastic, and accurate swing phrasing—as soloists and as an ensemble. Coupled with a firm foundation of listening to and learning from the style of the recorded jazz masters, pedagogical scat can accelerate your students’ progress and teach them how to teach themselves the expressive language of jazz.

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**Figure 5**

**Figure 6**