

IMPROVISATIONAL TECHNIQUES FOR JAZZ ENSEMBLE GRADES 7-12 (plus 5&6?)

EXPLORING THE “INS” AND “OUTS” OF BEGINNING TO
ADVANCED IMPROVISATION.

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IMPROVISATION

Although improvisation has been a vital part of music making throughout history, it is inexplicably missing from most school music curricula today. With the exception of jazz and some instructional activities in elementary general music classes, improvisation occupies comparatively small place in a comprehensive music education.

IMPROVISATION

Even though most people admire individuals who can improvise, instrumental or vocal experiences rarely elicit improvisational skill from every student. Due in large part to this lack of experience, students may become increasingly apprehensive about attempting improvisation. However, regardless of one's musical background, it is never too late to start learning how to improvise.

IMPROVISATION

Grove's Dictionary of Music defines improvisation as "***the art of creating a musical work as its being performed***".

→ SPONTANEOUS COMPOSITION ←

Improvisation in music is comparable to the impromptu expression of ideas in language. As a spontaneous expression of musical ideas, improvisation is a creative activity, but important differences exist between the terms "creation" and "improvisation."

IMPROVISATION

Creativity involves fewer restrictions than improvisational activity.

Improvisation involves specific guidelines that provide a framework for the performer (*i.e. the tonality, the harmonic progression, the meter, and the form of the music*).

Challenging these "restrictions" by playing inside and outside of them results in creative improvisation. In fact, many improvisers and composers find that they are most creative when making music within certain restriction.

IMPROVISATION - Where to begin?

Improvisational skill begins with some important activities:

- **listening to improvised music**
- **learning a repertoire by ear**
- **understanding harmonic progressions**
- **taking the risks necessary to improvise.**

Beginning improvisational activities include spontaneous, unchoreographed movement to music and unconstrained singing and harmonization of familiar tunes.

IMPROVISATION - Where to begin?

In learning language, individuals develop four ways to use their vocabularies:

- **listening**
- **speaking**
- **reading**
- **writing**

Musicians also acquire a vocabulary and develop various ways of using it; improvisation in music plays the role that speech and conversation play in language.

IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

Learn to sing and play the bass lines of tunes by ear. This activity will help you to develop an understanding of harmonic progression.

Knowing/learning many melodies and bass lines is an invaluable resource for improvising.

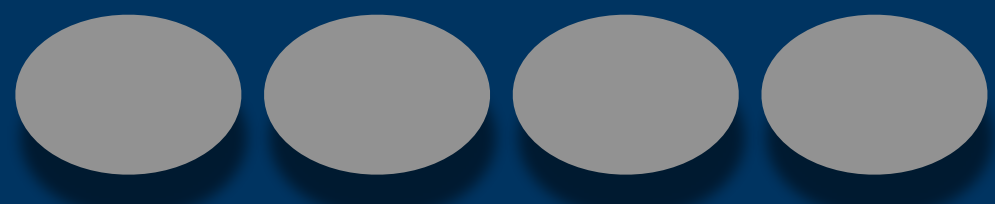
IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

Use your ears. To develop improvisational skill, don't rely on notation to remember music; rely on your ears (rote learning).

Interact regularly with people who have a large repertoire and who have experience improvising and learning by ear. Look for musical models of tunes, bass lines, and improvised melodies.

IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

Sing/play rhythm patterns to define meter and provide a basis for understanding rhythms and meter. Start with easy rhythms in a ***“call and response”*** setting.



IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

Sing/play tonal patterns that outline the function of the harmony to develop aural skills and a sense of harmonic progression.

As a result of learning patterns, tunes, and bass lines, you will develop an understanding of how melodies combine to make harmony and how tones function within the harmony.

Start with tonic and dominant patterns in major and minor keys.

IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

Tonic - Dominant examples:

Major:

- Apples & Bananas
- Down In The Valley
- Five Little Ducks

Minor:

- Joshua Fought The Battle
- Snake Charmer
- Go To Sleep Little Baby

IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

Tonic - Dominant - Subdominant examples:

Major:

- Jingle Bells
- Alphabet Song
- Kumbaya
- Amazing Grace

Minor:

- Erie Canal
- This Old Hammer
- Pat-a-Pan

IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

Tonic - Dominant - Subdominant - Secondary Dominant

examples:

Major:

- Home On The Range
 - Jingle Bells
 - My Bonnie
-

IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

Learn solfège and jazz/rhythm syllables by ear. Tonal syllables, rhythm syllables and Jazz Language syllables will provide a system for organizing and comprehending tonality, harmonic functions, and meter.

In order to facilitate improvisation, the syllable systems should define the harmonic functions and rhythmic movement of the music. Tonal syllables and rhythm syllables are also valuable teaching tools that can help students learn how to read and write music.

IMPROVISATION - Suggestions


Improvise

- (1) rhythm patterns with and without rhythm syllables
- (2) tonal patterns with and without tonal syllables
- (3) rhythm patterns to familiar bass lines
- (4) rhythms on specific harmonic tones from particular harmonic progressions

Improvise a melody by choosing notes that outline the harmonic functions of the progression (i.e., notes chosen from arpeggios) and perform them on each beat.

IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

Take risks by making up your own melodies. Initiate the idea of improvisation by creating responses to musical phrases and familiar songs performed by another individual. Combine improvising rhythm patterns with improvising tonal patterns, and improvise a melody.



IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

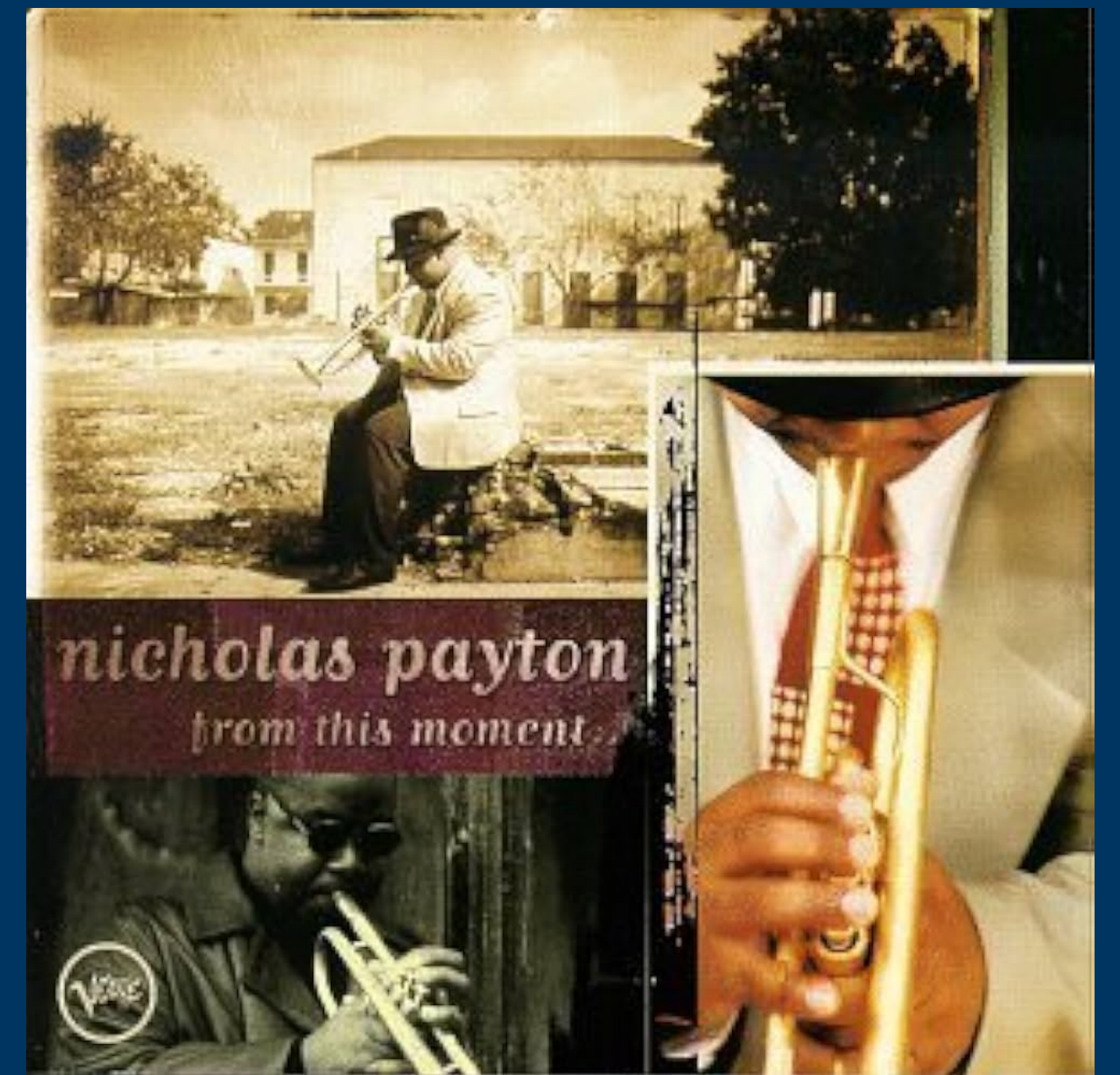
Embellish a melody and its harmonic parts, countermelodies, chord tones, and bass lines. For example keep the pitches of the melody the same, and improvise rhythm variations. Or, embellish melodies, harmonic parts, and bass lines with upper and lower neighbors and passing tones.

Use dynamics, phrasing, tone color, and space (rests and long notes) for variation and contrast.

IMPROVISATION - Suggestions

LISTEN to improvisers and learn improvised solos by ear; thinking of the improvised solo as a tune and **SING IT**.

Nicholas Payton:
“You Stepped Out Of A Dream”



IMPROVISATION - Final Thoughts...

Thank you for listening and participating!

**Also check out the "All The Things" PDF
on the Guidebook App**

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