

Speaking of Jazz: Essays & Attitudes



Ed Byrne

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*In an extemporaneous art form such as jazz, how one thinks
has a direct and profound impact on performance.*

PREFACE

This book constitutes my advice from a lifetime as jazz artist and educator on how to think and prepare for jazz performance. What follows is a series of essays written extemporaneously in response to students' questions. Since no documentation is offered, they do not constitute scholarly dissertations. While topics have been grouped together in rough categorical sequence, this is not a text or method book; and they do not constitute complete studies. It is my hope, however, that this collection will inform, inspire, and provoke aspiring jazz performers and educators alike.

Know your story and be able to deliver it in a powerful personal style.

INTRODUCTION

We approach our practice regimens on two essential tiers. The first involves idiomatic formulas: the blues scale, ii7 V7 IΔ cadential formulas, the twelve-bar blues, jazz rhythms, articulations, inflections, and vibratos—all of which must be learned in all twelve keys throughout the entire range of your instrument. This is the traditional way in which jazz practitioners have learned their craft. The challenge is to then personalize these idioms and link them to the essential compositional material of specific tunes, which constitutes the second tier: the *Linear Jazz Improvisation* method.

In an extemporaneous art form such as jazz, how one thinks has a direct and profound impact on performance. Jazz is a language; its practitioners are public speakers. When you learn to speak, you first learn by listening and picking up figures of speech; then you learn to use them in your own personal manner by combining them into sentences and paragraphs to tell your story. The process is the same when learning jazz.

The public speaker must have stories to tell (a repertoire), know them (the compositions), and have the vocabulary necessary to tell them in a compelling manner. We therefore practice telling each story, work out the rough parts, and then learn how to vary it in a variety of ways: short versus long versions, various introductions and endings, substitute words, phrases, rhythms, moods, and pacing. As with public speakers, there are all kinds of jazz performers: insincere, slick, spontaneous, those who use easy-to-understand vocabulary, those who use complex language, and those who deliver memorized statements.

Moreover, jazz demands a different approach than that demanded by pre-composed music. Most jazz practitioners regularly practice things that the classical musician does not. These skills can best be learned in a focused and systematic manner.

The aim of technique is to be able to play what you hear.

Primary Activities of the Jazz Artist

1. Practice formulas—all keys, in the instrument's entire range.
2. Learn vocabulary.
3. Sing to internalize.
4. Transcribe.
5. Learn functional keyboard harmony.
6. Analyze scores and lead sheets.
7. Build a repertoire and a book of lead sheets.
8. Compose and arrange.
9. Practice, play, rehearse, and perform.
10. Improvise on everything you practice.

CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTS

The only difference between jazz and any other spoken language is that you can't order a cup of coffee with it.

Jazz as Language

Since you can't count on more than one lifetime to master what you need in order to accomplish your goals, it's a question of priorities. If you wish to nurture the spontaneous in performance, you have to have a lot of different ways to tell your story. It's up to the individual to decide to what degree he wants to be spontaneous, and then develop and master it. Everything must be internalized by the time you perform.

Do not, however, confuse the process of *practicing* with that of *performance*. There are many things to practice, and a lot of different ways of going about it. Don't limit yourself to any ideology, or any one way. When you feel the need to expand in one direction or another, adopt new strategies for the woodshed. Seek out new vocabulary, and do trial runs to incorporate it into your story. Having done this, go out and perform what you sing. View your practice activities as relatively exclusive of performance in the now. Leave the woodshed behind. Trust that practicing will demonstrate a meaningful effect on your performance as it is organically ready to do so—as it evolves in your subconscious mind.

Chord Scale Theory is not the best starting point for jazz improvisation.

Chord Scale Theory

While all or most of the current jazz masters are well-versed in chord scale theory, they must also have a deep understanding of the composition from which their statements derive meaning. Scales and modes are now given prominence in jazz pedagogy—to the point of being the *primary focus*. While chord scale theory can be useful, it is not the best starting point for the student. Many students are frustrated after years of that discipline, finding in the end that their playing just sounds like a bunch of scales. The very talented can overcome this and develop meaningful melodic styles, but all too many cannot. Chord scale theory is an easy refuge for the lazy and uninformed teacher.

If you're thinking that you especially need these scales to play modern jazz compositions such as *Maiden Voyage*, *Dolphin Dance*, and *Naima*, think again. There's a great deal of melodic and rhythmic motivic material to be mined in such themes, and if there weren't and you were improvising on a vamp, you could nonetheless create a few of your own and develop *them*. You can't begin to develop meaningful improvisations until you've narrowed the subject matter down. Lines based on development of the melody will work against any accompaniment style whatsoever. The most effective way to learn a tune is to first learn it *without* its chords. Practice paraphrasing the melody as though the chords were not an issue; they merely co-exist.

In learning vocabulary, any and all approaches are good. The question is where best to start—priorities. Scales can also be used to gain vocabulary without a rigid chord-equal-scale dogma, but incorporating the melody and its rhythms along with other compositional material is the best way to improvise—the best starting point and the best focal point to bear in mind at any stage. Every other approach should be treated as adjunct to that.

With regard to modern tunes with chord *successions*, there is no difference between the traditional developmental processes needed in improvising on such material and that of the music of today. While the harmony may be different, lines based on the melody, guide tone line, and root progression are just as relevant over any harmonic style; and lines developed in this manner will work over virtually any harmonic style. Miles Davis, for example, imitated Maurice Ravel's *Concerto for the Left Hand* to create a kind of Impressionist

jazz for over thirteen years. In the process, however, he never forgot to develop the exposition line and the composition's other salient characteristics in his improvisations. (See, for example, *Filles de Kilimanjaro*.) When you are struggling with a sophisticated Wayne Shorter composition, once the simplified melody, guide tone line, and root progression are reduced, you will suddenly *get it*: Your comprehension of the piece's essential elements and intent is clear in the very next run-through.

It's often easier for the musically illiterate to learn by ear than it is for the educated.

Internalizing Tunes

Learning tunes is accomplished by degree. The more you run choruses, the more ideas present themselves—and your sonic fingerprint organically evolves, forming itself into the composition. The more you work on a tune in this fashion, and the more you perform it, the more it will grow; the composition will begin to speak to you. But some songs, such as *Lush Life*, take even a master a lifetime to internalize, so don't expect to gain intimacy upon one listening or practice session. Here's how to internalize a tune:

1. Reduce the melody down to whole or half notes (depending on the melodic rhythm of the particular tune) by placing every note on the beat and removing all repeated notes, pickups, and non-harmonic tones. You are left with the song's essentials.
2. Play the reduced melody on the piano.
3. Sing the entire song repeatedly.
4. Sing the first four measures repeatedly until it sinks in.
5. Sing the second four measures repeatedly until it sinks in..
6. Put the two phrases together.
7. Go through the entire tune in this manner: simple and corny, so that it will stick in your memory.

Do all of the above with a metronome. Since you want to program your subconscious mind to remember the exact melodic rhythm for further development, take care never to add or drop a beat. There are usually only two primary ideas in a given song. It helps to study recorded performances of the tune. After you finish with this preliminary process, you can then concentrate on developing your own personal phrasing style and improvisations on the piece without fear of forgetting its essentials or getting lost.

Use the same process to internalize the chords. Guitarists and pianists in particular must remember the chords in some fashion, since they will need to accompany as well as solo. Develop the ability to remember both the melody and the chords, but first learn the melody, then the chords, and then put them together in the manner cited above. As you get more practice at it, the process will become easier, and with practice you will eventually be able to do both at once.

Transcribe and analyze many songs of different types. The more different tunes you examine, the easier it will be for you to recognize their various types. Gradually you will be able to adapt to new tunes rapidly, whether reading or hearing. Once you are capable of recognizing the various song styles, you will only need to remember those things that are *different* from its type. Try to get past the intellectual and analytical. After the tune is learned, forget all calculations and work by ear. Eventually, you'll be able to skip the intellectual process altogether.

The talented and illiterate often develop the essential memory skills much faster than the literate, since the former have gotten into a habit of relying on their ears out of necessity. Intellectual skills, although helpful in many ways, are not *essential* to an extemporaneous art form such as jazz. Many masters have been musically illiterate. Moreover, no matter how intellectual and literate one becomes, one still needs to ultimately lose such thinking in order to tap into the most direct and spontaneous forms of improvisation. Therefore, internalize progressions by singing them in the form of arpeggios through the entire form, and sing the guide tone lines and root progressions. First you need to be able to sing arpeggios of each and every chord separately: the four triad types, the twelve seventh chords, and the various ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords. The more you develop and rely upon your tonal memory, the less you will need to intellectualize and analyze: You just *know*.

This process begins with the blues and standard tunes, which are still the types of tunes most often used in jazz. Tunes containing late nineteenth-century extended harmony and twentieth-century non-functional chord successions are more advanced and therefore more difficult at first to learn, yet they too can be memorized in this same manner. It just takes dogged determination, hard work, and time to develop. In transcribing chord changes, transcribe the lead line first, then the bass, and then ascertain the chord quality (sing the thirds and sevenths). After enough such transcriptions, you will get to where you hear entire progressions as clichés.

Reading Lead Sheets

Reading lead sheets involves more—and different—strategies than those needed for merely reading lines. It involves *recognition* through rapid analysis and a quick understanding of the composition's construction, its song type, and harmonic clichés. Ultimately, when reading a lead sheet for the first time, you will think, *that's like such and such, except for this four-measure extension or that chord substitution*. Therefore, reading lead sheets requires song analysis skills.

Basic Process of Song Analysis

1. Determine the primary and secondary keys.
2. Determine the recurring form of the tune—its phrase and key progression.
3. Analyze the syntax of every chord in the progression (or *succession*).
4. Analyze the syntax to each and every melody note with regard to the key it's in, as well as the chord over which it resides.
5. Do this to many different types of tunes by a variety of different composers. Start with your own repertoire, then the various blues forms, and then all the standard song types.

In practicing, it is always better to think *globally* (in the overall phrase and key) than *locally* (chord to chord, or chord-scale to chord-scale); the results will be more musical and logical. Once you have internalized a tune, begin running choruses while keeping the themes in mind. Learn to recognize the licks that you continually attempt to play, and when they are rough, stop and work them out; then continue the process, putting them back into context. As you memorize a tune, you will not have to think about any of these things in performance.

Stop your fingers from running amok.

How to Learn to Improvise on a Tune

The three primary elements of jazz (tonal music) are all lines: melody, guide tone lines, and root progression. Harmony, the result of these coinciding lines, is secondary. Internalize the entire composition by singing:

1. Reduce the melody by eliminating repeated notes and non-harmonic notes.
2. Learn the guide tone lines, based on the thirds and sevenths, which constitute the essence of the tune's harmonic progression.
3. Learn the song's root progression.
4. Develop these essential compositional elements by applying chromatic targeting.
5. Reduce the song's rhythms, and then develop them through permutation.
6. Combine all of these elements systematically and then ultimately intuitively.

Solo lines developed in this fashion will work with any harmonization.

Also: Learn a Bird blues line in all keys, and improvise on that. They are frozen improvisations, and have been paradigms for generations of jazz artists. The other important element is the rhythm of the composition at hand, which can be systematically permuted (developed). In the case of standards, which often don't come with pre-composed hip rhythms as do jazz compositions, you will first need to create rhythms for the exposition head, and then develop them in your improvisation. If you practice this way, you will gradually and naturally begin to shed the scales and runs naturally and organically; the composition will speak to you, suggesting ideas. The special challenge of playing the guitar, piano, and saxophone is that it's too easy for your fingers to run amuck, so sing everything you practice—both with these instruments and without. This helps you get directly to the source of melodicism, since you will be disinclined to *sing* mindless scales and patterns.

Four Triad Types

Major (capital letter), e. g., C

Minor (m)

Augmented (+)

Diminished (o)

Twelve Basic Jazz Seventh Chords

Δ

$\Delta-5$

m7

m Δ

\emptyset

7

7sus4

7-5

+7

+ Δ

o7

o Δ

These chords are the basic harmonic vocabulary of jazz. *Linear Jazz Improvisation Books II and III* will help you internalize them by applying ten different chromatic targeting patterns to each one.

Seven-note scales are often too much information.

Practicing Pentatonics

As the Greek term suggests, a *pentatonic* scale is a *pentachord*, a five-note pitch collection. There are many different kinds of pentatonic scales. The most ubiquitous type is termed the *anahemitonic pentatonic* (AP): C, D, E, G, A and C, commonly known as *pentatonic*. The AP seems to have been the basic scale of all ancient cultures throughout world history, although each culture tended to make those same five notes behave differently. It has five *modes*, or inversions, all of which can be transposed into twelve keys. The most common *blues* scale is comprised of the AP, but with one (blue) note added (A, C, D, D# (Eb), E, G), making it a *hexachord* (six-note pc).

When transposed in line playing, the AP is capable of rapidly coalescing into the tonality of the moment, due to the fact that, when compared to the major scale, it lacks its two most active notes, scale four and the leading tone, whose most active of pitches comprise the *tritone* that establishes the dominant to tonic (active to passive) resolution needed to create tonal music. Regarding the rapid transposition of the AP, a common example is to drop the fifth note and transpose the resulting tetrachord at the tritone relationship: C, D, E, G; Gb, Ab, Bb, Db; C, and so on (this works over C7, Gb7 and other chords); there are many such examples.

Dominant seventh-type chords have the most options for pentatonics. On C7, for example, the most inside choice is C pentatonic; Db pentatonic gives you b9, +9, 4, b6 (b13), and b7; Eb pentatonic yields +9, 4, 5, b7, 1; F: 4 (11), 5, 13 (6), 1, 9; F#: b5 (+11), b6 (b13), b7, b9, +9; Ab: b6 (b13), b7, 1, +9, 4 (11); Bb: b7, 1, 9, 4 (11), 5. These can also be used in combinations. Any others can be used in passing as a sort of harmonized side-slipping. Work this out for all twelve seventh chord types.

Below is a chart of the APs which normally go with the various seventh chords—from the most to the least inside. In each case we are referring to the first *mode*: C, D, E, G, A (on C), so when a D pentatonic is called for, for example, it would have the same interval relationship of 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 (D, E, F#, A, B). It's unnecessary to distinguish between the various inversions (modes) of these scales when merely applying them to chords, since in these contexts there is no priority note for the pentatonic scale in question. While the above

examples stay fairly *inside*, in playing *outside* of the prevailing chord sound or key, anything goes.

Pentatonic Applied to Seventh Chords

CΔ: G, C, D, Bb, Eb (last two are blues relationships)

Cm7: Eb, Bb, F

Cø: Gb, Ab

CmΔ: F, Bb, Eb (last two are blues relationships)

C7: C, Bb, F, Eb, Gb, Ab, Db

C7sus4: Bb, F, C, Eb, Ab, Db

C7-5: Gb, C, Eb, Ab

C+7: Gb, Ab

C+Δ: E

CΔ-5: D

There is no *inside* solution for applying pentatonics to the diminished seventh chords Co7 and CoΔ. It is a matter of personal tastes which and how you apply APs. There are a great many more choices available in addition to these if you drop the fifth note of these pentatonic scales in their various inversions, which is the most common manner in which they are used, since most phrases are built in four-note groupings, rather than five.

CHAPTER 8

RHYTHM INSTRUMENTS

Comping

Transcription is the best way of extending your accompanying (comping) vocabulary. Take your three favorite guitarists and compare how each comps on similar tunes—a bossa, for example, at the same tempo. Pretend you recorded each track many years ago and you've forgotten what happened. Take note of what surprises you, what you wouldn't have done. Figure out why it works. Learn how to do it. Learn the entire comp—at least by just singing or beating the rhythms. Some principles you will find:

1. Withholding of forces: Don't comp on the head in the same way as you would the solo sections. Play fewer attacks, and place more of them on the beat than off. Use the compositional elements in your accompaniment, as Herbie Hancock does best.
2. While the head is often about creating tension with hits, the developmental sections (solos) should level off and swing with fewer interruptions. It should also make you dance. Use rhythmic repetition in your comps, and when you go into a Freddie Green bag, do it long enough that the recurring quarter-note groove can be felt—at least for eight measures. It has to be felt *physically* in order to be effective. On a guitar or piano solo, comp also for yourself. Lines should not become redundant, sounding as filler to keep it all going, so allow them to breathe.
3. Supporting parts build in intensity behind the soloist in a variety of ways as he builds towards a climax.

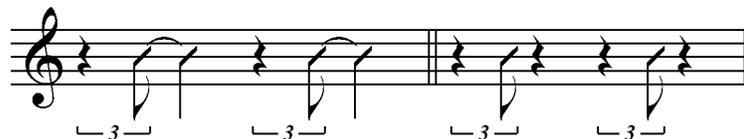
Joe Pass's Comping Style

Guitarist Joe Pass developed another strong swing jazz guitar comping style, in which *hits* (rhythmic punctuations, accents) are played off beats one and three. These attacks can be played either long or short. For an example of this playing, listen to him with singer Ella Fitzgerald in *That Old Feeling* from the album *Fitzgerald and Pass...Again*, Fantasy Records, 1976.

Written



Played



In the example below, the rhythmic pattern above is applied to the ii7 V7 I69 cadence. Since this example employs both chords and bass notes, it's especially suitable for guitar duos in which there is no bassist:

Dm7 G13 C⁹ Dm7 G13 C⁹

T	6	5	3	3	6	5	3	3
A	5	4	2	2	5	4	2	2
B	5	3	3	2	5	3	2	2

Pianist Red Garland's Comping Style

Pianist Red Garland's comping style consisted of short chord punctuations rather than long sustained chords, an approach that promotes swing and leaves space for the soloist by creating a yin and yang between the piano's anticipations and the bass' quarter-note *walking*.

Written



Played



For variety, place an occasional chord on the beat instead of anticipating it—but not too often, or the hypnotic swing groove will be lost.

Charleston Rhythm

Charleston, a prominent African rhythm which became a popular social dance style in the 1920s named after the famous Eubie Blake song, is another important swing rhythmic comping pattern. The examples below show the basic rhythm with three of its variants:



Applied

Applied Charleston rhythm with chords: Dm9, G7#5, CΔ9, C⁶, Dm9, G7#5, CΔ9, C⁶.

T	5	4	3	3	5	4	3	3
A	5	4	4	2	5	4	4	2
B	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	2
B	5	3	3	3	5	3	3	3

Applied Charleston rhythm with chords: Dm9, G13, CΔ9, C⁶, Dm9, G13, CΔ9, C6.

T	5	5	3	3	5	5	3	1
A	5	4	4	2	5	4	4	2
B	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	2
B	5	3	3	3	5	3	3	3

Bossa Nova and Samba Comping

The bossa nova, which emerged in the U.S. in the 1950s, can be viewed as a jazz version of the Brazilian samba. While the samba is most often played in *cut time* (2/2 meter), the basic two-measure 3–2 rhythmic pattern (clave) is put into *common time* (4/4 meter) at a moderate tempo in the bossa nova. Below we will explore a few basic rhythms of this style.

Bossa-Nova Clave



C⁶

A musical score for guitar in 4/4 time, featuring the Bossa-Nova Clave comping pattern. The score is in the key of C major with a C⁶ chord indicated. The guitar part consists of two measures, each with a C⁶ chord. The tablature below the staff shows the fretting for the strings: T (Treble), A (Acoustic), and B (Bass). The rhythm is 3-2-2-3 in the first measure and 3-2-2-3 in the second measure.

T	•	3	3	3	3	3	•
A	•	2	2	2	2	2	•
B	•	3	3	3	3	3	•

As an introduction to bossa nova comping rhythms we will use Brazilian singer and guitarist João Gilberto as the model. João Gilberto was part of the bossa nova movement from the start, and his comping style provides a model for the style. The example below is a comping pattern used by Gilberto on his recording of *The Girl From Ipanema*:

C⁶

Applied to ii V I

Dm7 G13 C⁶

