

*Jamey Abersold's*

# **POINTS TO REMEMBER**

***Taken from his "Anyone Can Improvise!" Seminars***

- Two factors that stop people from improvising are fear of getting lost and fear of playing a wrong note.
- Tape your own playing and listen to yourself. Don't be critical. Just Listen.
- Humor is an important part of creativity.
- TV kills imagination.
- Ignorance kills. So does smoking.
- Can you practice for one hour without interruption?
- If you don't think before you play a phrase, it is not improvisation - just an exercise.
- Sing! Sing! Sing!
- It is easier to sing what you hear in your head than it is to play it on your instrument - your objective is to be able to play what you hear in your head.
- Think each note before you play it.
- Did anyone ever die from thinking too much?
- The Blues is most commonly played in the keys of F and B flat by Jazz musicians.
- Don't practice the same thing forever - break new ground.
- Scales are REALLY IMPORTANT!
- Most music is grouped in 2, 4 and 8 bar phrases.
- Most drummers sing the melody to themselves to keep their place but they can learn to hear in phrases.
- The chromatic scale is your musical alphabet, know it from the lowest playable note on your instrument to the highest.
- There are only two whole-tone scales and only three diminished scales.
- Jazz players usually play eighth notes - play scales and exercises this way.
- Use Jazz articulation when playing chords and scales, not tonguing every note or slurring every note but something in between. Articulation is a key ingredient of your musical personality.
- Practice articulation - in 4 to 6 weeks you can transform your musical personality. Listen to the pros. When doing articulation exercises, play in a comfortable range where it is easy to finger. In this way you can concentrate on the articulation.
- One of the reasons you don't sound like the guys on record is because you haven't practice articulation.
- Play a solo along with a record in order to practice articulation - imitate the Jazz greats.
- Inspire - refers to the spirit within you - in spirit.
- Listen and lift ideas off records.
- LISTEN! -over and over and over! All the answers to your questions are on the records.
- Listen to Jazz every day.
- If you are well equipped technically you can take chances.
- Don't just use the play-a-long CD's to keep time, use them to learn to hear the TONALITY of each key that is played.
- In live Jazz there is an interaction between players.
- The best things in life are free and the free jazz handbook is one of them.
- It is great to play with people who are a little or a lot better than you - they will push you to improve.
- No one is a born player. Good instruments and teachers are important but the player makes himself.
- You can't imagine how much time and energy and thought Jazz musicians put into their craft.
- Conjure up your own harmony. Sit at a keyboard and explore.
- Play an arpeggio and keep it going in your head (mentally) while you sing a melody based on that chord.
- Sing a 12-bar blues (it's not that hard) just think and sing while driving or waiting for a bus.
- Move a blues up a half step and back down, just think of exercises - it will make it easier when you get to the practice room.
- Don't spend practice time on ear training, chord spelling and other exercises that you can do while commuting or in the shower. In this way you will get the most musical training out of your day.
- Charlie Parker practiced 11 to 15 hours per day for three years to four years.
- Ear Training - once you can hear what you are trying to play, things get a lot easier.
- Learn the distance between notes - intervals.
- Scales are based on the intervals of half and whole steps, chords are based on minor thirds (3 half steps) and major thirds (4 half steps). Learn to hear these intervals without batting an eye.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER -- cont'd

- When you sing, visualize the keyboard. If you don't know what key you are in, just think in C. Do these important things away from the practice room - don't waste practice time.
- Whenever you see a chord symbol be aware that it implies a horizontal scale (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) and a vertical chord (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 1) most chords are built from every other note of the scale - but not all!
- A keyboard is very important for learning harmony and for hearing chord qualities. On a keyboard everything is laid out simply for you. You can get an electric keyboard for under \$100. They are very visual.
- Play "Mary Had A Little Lamb," "Happy Birthday" and "Twinkle, Twinkle" in twelve keys to get the music from your mind to your instrument.
- If you start or end a phrase on a chord tone (root, 3rd, or 5th) you can't go wrong.
- Practice a scale for two minutes solid, fast 8th notes, until it becomes automatic. Close your eyes, too.
- I have the notion that people learn instruments as an exercise in patience - to get to know themselves.
- Moving downward by half steps is easy to do with your voice but more difficult on your instrument.
- I, Jamey, know a lot and I can do a lot but I can't do it for you!
- If you THINK a lot about what you are doing, you will remember a lot.
- To learn a tune, memorize the changes one measure at a time. Play the scale for each chord then arpeggiate each chord; next, improvise. Memorize, memorize, memorize!
- If you have a doubt about anything in music, find a piano and play it. Does it sound like what you hear on record?
- If you want to put a 4th in a major chord you must raise it (F#/C) Lydian, or play the regular 4th as a passing tone.
- Perhaps the major scale should have been constructed this way: CDEF#GABC Lydian. Think sharp 4 not flat 5.
- On Piano: Learn two note voicings with the right hand (3rd and 7th can tell you everything that is going on).
- If you are a non-keyboard player just play the roots with your left hand - memorize the roots to songs.
- III VI II V I (Turnaround) Turnarounds get you back to the top of the tune.
- A piano player (when playing for rhythm section) should play in the register from an octave below middle C to an octave and a half above middle C, so as not to crowd the horn players in the upper register.
- Jazz history has a protocol - don't overplay.
- Watch how independent a piano player's left hand is while they solo with the right hand.
- By using different voicings you can play chords without moving up and down the keyboard.
- Practice scales and exercises in time and without stopping - this is how we play music, after all.
- When you voice a chord on guitar or keyboard, you don't have to play a lot of notes to sound good.
- B half diminished: BCDEFGAB. The C natural does not always sound so great so use it as a passing tone on an upbeat - You can play sharp 2 anytime (C#).
- SEQUENCE means to repeat a chord, a chord pattern or a melodic phrase in a different key.
- Spend 15 or 30 minutes per day with a keyboard even if you are a horn player.
- Jazz uses a few things over and over, it is a great relief to realize this - things do not seem so vast.
- There are only twelve keys, we play mostly in six of them ( C, Bb, Eb, Ab, F and G) not so often in (B, E, F#, C#, E and A) but jazz tunes modulate like crazy - we end up in all keys at one point or another.
- A key signature is for the melody (notational convenience); it can have very little to do with the harmony (key).
- Look at the last chord in a tune, (or the next to the last measure) if it is major and lasts for a full bar, that is probably the key the tune is in. Especially if the first chord is similar.
- This is my college education - my pitch pipe!
- A chromatic pitch pipe gives you independence - you can learn the musical universe on your own.
- Use a pitch pipe to learn all the intervals within an octave - don't use practice room time for ear training - do it on the fly ( hustle while you wait).
- Point to the "paper keyboard" and sing the notes as you point to different keys - after a few bars, check your accuracy with a pitch pipe.
- Grab a tune and just sing the roots.
- Don't just sing a scale, visualize the keyboard or your instrument, keep checking yourself with the pitch pipe. Next change key and do it again.
- Write a tune!
- It's not hard to write a tune, Steve Allen wrote 450 tunes with lyrics in just one sitting, one day.
- Written music is a crutch! Memorize, instead.
- Transposed parts are a crutch! In the old days there were no fake books, we transcribed everything from records and learned to transpose in the process. We used our ears and memory.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER -- cont'd

- A good musician has a large repertoire in his head - he doesn't rely heavily on books.
- Music doesn't care who plays it.
- "Play what is there, we don't need to hear you lying" - Art Blakey
- When you finally play what is in your head, you will meet yourself for the first time.
- "It takes a long time to play like yourself" - Miles
- You can answer all your questions about jazz by listening: LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN!
- When you solo, use repetition and sequence, don't ramble. This allows the listener to anticipate what you are doing. This is known as thematic improvisation. Sonny Rollins' solos are a great example of this.
- The interval from B flat to E contains three tones (Bflat =>C=>D==>E ) hence the name tritone.
- Very few adults take the time required to learn to play jazz (or even simply to listen to it!)
- If you want to keep the harmony outlined, play chord tones on beats one and three.
- The root third, fifth and seventh outline the harmony.
- A characteristic of Bebop solos is that they outline harmony very explicitly.
- Do you have a dozen tunes memorized? Know the melody and the form, be able to write out the chord progressions (Jamey has 1000 tunes memorized!)
- Learn some tunes, and listen to music throughout the day to keep them in your head.
- Put your tune repertoire in a notebook so you can review it.
- As an exercise in getting your solos to sound like what you hear in your head, put a play-a-long CD on and play four bars, then sing four bars, then play four bars ... then sing, etc.
- To execute your objective: Think it - Say it - Do it!
- The average person has to learn to play in time - it does not come naturally. You can use a metronome.
- In jazz, time is very important - use a metronome for practice. When you practice scales and chords always practice in time and use proper articulation.
- Start to improvise early in your musical education.
- I'm interested in seeing people play music throughout their entire life.
- If you don't improvise every day what is the point of practicing scales and chords?
- Music is supposed to be fun - have fun when you practice.
- When I asked some musicians how much of the day they spend thinking music they responded 24 hours per day!
- When you solo, look for common tones between changes, anticipate, think ahead. Think about the subsequent chord scale while you are improvising on the current one. It is not that hard, do it soon to prove this to yourself. This is called "playing across the bar lines."
- The melody to a song is called the head.
- Obstacles are opportunities. Turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones.
- Don't approach your practice as if you have to learn a great deal of information and acquire a great deal of skill so you then can play - instead start playing NOW! ! !
- If you play straight 8th notes you can play the bebop scale for a measure and end on the degree of the scale that you started on (most of our scales have seven notes and don't work out this way.) The Bebop scale gives you 8 notes per measure instead of seven when played in 8th notes.
- The effective use of the Bebop scale often separates those who can play from those who are trying to play.
- Don't forget that a chord symbol implies a scale (horizontal) and a chord (vertical).
- You can't listen to records enough - it is so very important!
- If you don't have a good sound who is going to care about what you have to say - even if you have great ideas.
- To find a lowered 7th just go down a whole step from the root.
- To find a sharp 9 go up a minor third from the root.
- The 3rd and 7th are the most important notes in outlining chord quality. The root is always assumed.
- Tape yourself and listen back objectively. Don't be afraid to hear yourself as others hear you.
- In 4/4 time, if you want to give harmonic stability, play chord tones (1,3,5, and 7) on beats one and three.
- Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" (in 5/4) is really bars of 3/4 followed by bars of 2/4. 12 3 12, 1 2 3 1 2, 1 2 3 1 2
- Lydian is a favorite substitute for major (especially in tune endings).
- Chuck Sher's New Real Books are accurate.
- The tunes that jazz players like and that are challenging often have pretty chord tones in the original melody. Pretty notes can be the major 7th, 9th or #4 in MAJOR; b7, 9 and 4 in MINOR.
- Strive to solo on a tune, without playing the melody and without a rhythm section, in such a way that a listener could name the tune (this means you are doing a good job of outlining the harmony).
- ***The music is between your ears...***