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# INTRODUCTION

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## TECHNIQUE

Part of a musician's development is the building of technique necessary to execute musical ideas. For each instrument the list of obstacles is different and the subject of much debate around the practice rooms as to whose instrument is the hardest to learn to play. Playing music will develop some musical technique. However, learning to play certain things before hand gives the musician a better chance at creating a musical performance that transcends the technical difficulties of the piece. A major part of what we practice as musicians is control. This is no different from an athlete mastering the control of a backhand return, a curve ball, a series of turns or leaps on the gymnastics floor. To master any sport, athletes their coaches and trainers break the event into smaller manageable drills to master individually before putting them all together. Drills imply repetition of singular concepts or motions until they become second nature. When we see an athlete or musician and speak of how natural they are, we are seeing the result of hours of practice and drill in order for it to appear natural.

Many of the techniques necessary for an improvising jazz musician are universal for any musician. They must learn to be fluid and in control of their instrument's range of sounds and dynamics, and be in command of the musical heritage and language. At the most basic level all melodies either move in steps or leaps, so they must practice steps and leaps: scales and arpeggios.

While many of the musical techniques necessary are universal, there are some techniques that are unique to the jazz improviser. When the jazz improviser creates music, not only does he need the skills to play notes of the scale or arpeggiate a chord, but he also needs the skills to develop musical ideas in logical ways. Experienced improvisers seem to develop these musical ideas spontaneously and effortlessly. The techniques of developing musical ideas need to be practiced and cultivated along with the muscle skills and techniques.

How does a student develop both sides of this technique dilemma? What actions will develop the muscle skills and the mental control skills to improvise meaningful music?

First, there is no magic solution or shortcut. I had a student who had great difficulty playing a simple scale passage from the week before. I asked him how often he practiced the scale that week. Once. I asked how many tennis serves he practiced. His face lit up when he told me about eight hundred. Guess which area showed the most improvement. Some techniques and skills require hundreds and thousands of repetitions. Routine. Repetition. Major league ball players (even with average salaries over a million dollars) still drill the basics in Spring training. The trick to cultivating the muscle control and mental control is very simple: you have to think while you are practicing. Invent or play exercises that train the muscles and the brain. While you repeat the drills actively think about the musical applications. If the idea works in one musical setting, will it work in another? What if the modality changed? Would it sound good played backwards, upside-down, or fragmented?