

FEARLESS VOCAL IMPROVISATION

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I. RHYTHM AND SYLLABLES

- A. Sing through written rhythm/syllables exercises. Drill them repeatedly so that the syllables become second nature. The exercises should represent rhythmic combinations and patterns that are common in the jazz language. Also, be sure to try them at different tempos and alternating between swing and straight 8th grooves. Below are a few examples. (Repeat each example four times.)

1. da ba doo dot
2. bop doo dot
3. doo dot
4. ba ba doo ba
5. dal ya dal ya doo ba doo da
6. da
va doo dot
ba doot dot doo yot

- B. Articulation is an important factor in making any given rhythmic figure or melodic line sound like jazz. In any given line, some notes will tend to be accented more than others, and some will tend to be "ghosted." (Half-sung.) Check out the examples below:

1. ba doo ba da (n) doo dot
ba doo ba da (n) doo dot
2. ba doo(n)doo da (n) da (n) doo ya doo bop
ba doo(n)doo da (n) da (n) doo ya doo bop

II. MELODY

- A. Diatonic Melodic Lines

1. B^bmaj7 G-7 C-7 F7
2. B^bmaj7 G-7 C-7 F7
3. B^bmaj7 G-7 C-7 F7
4. B^bmaj7 G-7 C-7 F7

- B. The Bebop Language. Once you've had experience listening to jazz and improvising over a period of weeks or months, you can move on to licks that incorporate the chromaticism that is characteristic of the bebop language. Licks like these can be found in countless pedagogical books, or extracted from recorded solos. Here are a few examples:

1. B^b7 B^b7 2. B^b7 B^b7

3. B^bmaj7 G7(b⁹) C-7 F9 4. B^bmaj7 G9 C-7 F9

Notice in the above ideas that there are instances of chromatic passing notes that lead to a chord tone:

1. B^b7 2. F9

and, approach notes that surround a chord tone "goal note:"

1. C-7 F9 2. B^b7

III. HEARING THE CHANGES

A. Singing the Changes

One of the biggest challenges in learning to improvise is to hear the shifting key centers characteristic of jazz standard songs. Using the first 8 bars of this familiar chord progression as an example, here is a process for practicing which will help you to better hear the chord progression: **(see page 3)**

B. What's Next?

1. Use the process above and apply it to various other tunes. Good beginning level tunes to start with include: Blues tunes (such as Centerpiece, Route 66, Red Top, Alright, OK, You Win), and other songs such as Take the A Train, Autumn Leaves, Summertime, How High the Moon, Doxy, and so on.
2. Generally, improvisation practice should include a combination of listening, singing licks, working on the chord changes, and freely improvising on tunes.
3. Don't skimp on taking the time to freely improvise! This is an important part of the equation. Improvise with a recorded accompaniment such as the ones provided by Jamey Aebersold at www.jazzbooks.com. You need ample chance to try out the things they've been practicing.

IV. TIPS FOR IMPROVISING IN PERFORMANCE

- A. Don't be in a hurry to begin your solo, and avoid singing ALL of your licks in the first 4 measures! Be patient, and let the solo unfold naturally.
- B. Initially, focus your awareness on rhythm, time and groove, rather than searching for intricate melodic lines. Simple melodies in "the pocket" are much better than complicated melodies that are *not* in the pocket.
- C. Strive to make your solo different each time you sing it, even when in rehearsals.
- D. Practice with a recorded accompaniment. You need ample chance to practice; more time than is probably available in class!
- E. Strive to make good music. (Sometimes less is more.)
- F. If you don't already have basic jazz piano skills, go get them, now! It's not that tough to learn to play simply chords at the piano.

SINGING THE CHANGES: (see page 2)

1. Sing the roots in whole notes, with live or recorded accompaniment.
(Or, singers can make up rhythms while singing the roots of the chords.)

Cmaj7 Cmaj7 D7 D7

2. Sing 5-note (and later, 7-note) scales on each chord.

3. Arpeggiate the chord changes.

4. Using the roots as home base, improvise freely on the tune.

D-7 G7 Cmaj7 D-7 G7

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