

Appreciating Jazz Improvisation Concepts and Terms

1. Listening Techniques:
 - a. listen in a relaxed manner (until you are able to hum some of the tune)
 - b. pick out the sound of the bass
 - c. focus on the drums (esp. the cymbals on beats 2 and 4)
 - d. notice the harmony (the chords and the chord changes)
2. Some common ways to focus your attention during a performance:
 - a. listen to the improvised lines as unique tunes in themselves (some jazz, however, such as jazz rock-fusion and avant-garde jazz emphasize mood, tone color and rhythm over melody)
 - b. separate the individual sounds into layers, all moving forward in time. Notice the interplay between the lines
 - c. hum the original tune to yourself while listening to the improvisations
 - d. try listening to every note in a soloists performance (this proves difficult for even trained musicians at times)
3. Know what to expect with a tune's formal construction:
 - a. the blues
 - b. AABA
 - c. trading 4's, 8's
 - d. absence of a steady tempo
 - e. double-time
 - f. half-time
 - g. stop-time
4. Four common ways to begin a tune:
 - a. play the final four or eight bars
 - b. play a common four or eight bar chord progression with an improvised melody:
 - c. use a common or famous introduction the whole group knows
 - d. the rhythm section performs a "vamp" over and over until the melody comes in
5. Seven common ways to end a tune:
 - a. immediately
 - b. slow down (called a "ritard") and hold the last chord
 - c. rest or sustain the final chord while the soloist takes a "cadenza" (an improvisation leading to the final chord)
 - d. repeat the final four measures of the tune
 - e. use a well known ending
 - f. let the rhythm section play a vamp
 - g. let the rhythm section play a common chord progression
6. Know the skills possessed by the jazz improviser:
 - a. an effortless, conversational command of the instrument
 - b. expert in chord construction and chord progression (music theory)
 - c. a well trained ear for pitch and rhythm
 - d. a remarkably good memory for sounds and standard tunes
 - e. a keen ability to recognize chord progressions

7. A jazz musician's ability to read and write music is essential:
 - a. the ability to pre-read and practice a tune prior to performance is common
 - b. the ability to "sight read" or read the music and perform it immediately
 - c. the ability to make up a tune and write it down for other musicians to perform
 - d. the ability to listen to somebody else's music and write it down note for note (called transcribing) is a key way improvisers learn to solo
8. Know the primary instrument roles:
 - a. the Bass
 - b. the Piano/Guitar (or any chording instrument)
 - c. the Drums
 - d. the Soloist

Vocabulary Review:

Bridge

Turn-around

Double-time

Contrast

Chorus

Walking

Form

Two-Beat style

Stop-Time

Half-Time

Trading "Fours" (trading measures of improvisation between soloists)

Pizzicato

Arco

absence of a steady tempo

perfect pitch