Jazz Improvisation: “Anyone Can Do It”

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SPONSOR: TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

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Outline of Presentation

I. Introduction: Let’s begin together with “Bags Groove” by ear.
   • Learn Melody with voice/instrument
   • Learn duet harmony line
   • Play-a-long with Miles Davis recording
   • Call & response blues licks
   • Embellishments to melody
   • Blues scale (1, b3, 4, #4/b5, 5, b7, 8)
   • 4-step rhythm exercise (single note & blues scale) to develop the “swing feel”
   • Group Improvisation
   • Go around the horn (everyone take a solo)
   • Play melody/harmony out to end tune

II. Discussion and questions regarding Introduction and the following points:
   • Teach beginners by ear
   • Any language (English, French, German, …..Jazz) is first learned by ear
   • Natural learning process:
     o Observation
     o Imitation
     o Trial & Error
   • Play-a-long with actual jazz recordings
   • Call & response – earliest historical approach to jazz improvisation
   • The Blues is in the very fabric of most, if not all, American music – It’s already in our mind’s ear, and in our blood
   • All jazz musicians play, or continually strive to play, with excellent rhythm (i.e., quarter notes on/off the beat, swinging 8th notes, & double-time 16th notes)
   • Group Improvisation (safety in numbers) interspersed with individual solos

III. Jazz Transcription Process: Demonstration of John Fedchock’s solo on “What’s New, and vocal scat of all solos on “It Don’t Mean A Thing.” (both tunes from Woody Herman’s 50th Anniversary CD).
   • Listen to one’s desired solo, over and over again, until the goal of singing it from memory with the recording becomes unstoppable.
   • Learning ii7-V7-I language in both major and minor tonalities.
   • Listening to, learning and internalizing the style and language of the role model being transcribed.
   • Performing the transcription for an audience
IV. Let’s learn “Autumn Leaves” (in G minor) by ear & with sheet music.
   - Learn Melody with voice/instrument
   - Learn lyrics & song form
   - Play-a-long with Aebersold recording
   - Play Bb major, G harmonic minor scales & and its blue scale equivalents
   - 4-step rhythm exercise with the above mentioned scales
   - Play any note you like, but with good rhythm
   - Group Improvisation
   - Go around the horn (everyone take a solo)
   - Play melody/harmony out to end tune
   - Listen to recordings of the jazz greats playing this tune
   - Learn basic piano voicings for practice and sound as found in Jazz Piano Voicing Skills by Dan Haerle

V. Conclusion and questions regarding today’s presentations with the following points:
   - No wrong notes in jazz improvisation, just rhythm that may not swing very well. “It don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing.” (Duke Ellington)
   - As quoted by Wynton Marsalis on numerous occasions, Jazz is made up of “Blues & Swing.”
   - Acquire the “taste” for jazz, or getting “bit” by the jazz bug, by non-stop listening to the music and going to live performances
   - Lighting the students “fire” by your enthusiasm for jazz.
   - Playing along with Youtube videos of jazz artists

Sample of Suggested Jazz Materials


