

Some Thoughts on Improvisation and Jazz Horn Resources

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While improvisation on horn can seem overwhelming and intimidating (simply because we are not asked or encouraged to do it at an early age, like trumpets or saxophones), learning to improvise can be a process by which the player eventually learns how to be more comfortable and free in playing. This inevitably reduces anxiety in performance, adds to a sense of control of the instrument, and improves musicality and flexibility in performing different styles. As in any learning situation, patience and appreciation for the process, rather than the product, will eventually lead to success. Learning to improvise can begin with simple tunes like Mary Had a Little Lamb, Hot Cross Buns, Twinkle, Twinkle, etc. Don't be afraid to start simple-- success also comes from a sense of confidence, and playing easy tunes well will build confidence faster than intense study.

Suggestions for Beginning to Learn to Improvise Jazz Tunes

There are two approaches to improvising which can be used individually or combined:

1. Improvising around a melody
2. Improvising around chord changes

For #1, the following suggestions are offered:

- a. memorize the melody
- b. analyze the melody for structural elements, mood, tempo, dynamics, etc.
- c. analyze chord progressions to determine individual note relationships, target pitches, notes common to multiple chords. Look for "typical" patterns-- I-IV; V7-I; I-IV-V-I; ii-V7-I, etc.
- d. Look for melodic and harmonic scale patterns, portions (motives), derivations, to discover common patterns of notes that reach across several chord changes.

For #2:

- a. learn all scales and arpeggios-- this is your vocabulary (see scale sheets)
- b. practice "circle of fourths" arpeggio exercises, e. g. I-I7-IV (new I) and ii7-V4/2-I cadence patterns
- c. learn to anticipate and recognize or "hear" common tones between chords
- d. study chord symbols to learn what they mean and how they change chord qualities.

When constructing solos across chord changes (as opposed to hoping your natural talents will take care of you) begin by playing roots, then filling in spaces between roots with motion by step or skip. Integrate thirds, fifths, sevenths, and additional chord or "color" tones specified in the chord symbols, to discover notes common to more than one chord, interesting melodic progressions, target pitches, resolutions, and patterns. It is only through much preparation and experience that a person learns how to be spontaneous and coherent and interesting. Search for a balance of variety and repetition, surprise and stability, innovation based on fundamentals. And whatever you do, keep going-- treat the "wrong" notes as part of the plan, the color-- part of the fun is getting out of the situation you get yourself into.

Some suggested materials, based on my (limited) experience:

Methods, texts

Jamey Abersold Play-A-Long-- Recordings and music, over 100 volumes, including scales, chord patterns, standards, tunes by specific artists/composers.

Scott D. Reeves, *Creative Jazz Improvisation*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 2006).

Great text for learning all scales, chords, substitutions, etc.

Eric Marienthal's Comprehensive Jazz Studies and Exercises. Warner Bros. WB042. Great patterns in all keys.

Chuck Marohnic, *Jazz Keyboard Study*. www.chuckmarohnic.com.

Any collection of transcribed solos (including your own) for any instrument. Also called "omni-books."

Jeffrey Agrell, *Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians: 500+ Non-Jazz Games for Performers, Educators, and Everyone Else* (Gia Publications: Chicago, 2008). Great place to start.

Specific to HORN or Horn in F books provided

"Improvisation Clinics" and other articles by Jeff Agrell, Kevin Frey, and others in *The Horn Call*.

Essential Elements for Jazz Ensemble (Horn book) Hal Leonard (HL 00841622)—a good, slow introduction to jazz style and improvisation

Standard of Excellence: Advanced Jazz Ensemble Method (Horn book) Neil A. Kjos (W35HF)

Standard of Excellence: Jazz Combo Session (Horn book) Neil A. Kjos (W41HF)

Ken's Jazz Lounge, compiled by Ken Wiley. Krug Park Music. www.kenwiley.com

Play the Duke: 11 Ellington Jazz classics. Hal Leonard (HL 00841520)

Jazz Café, Vol. 1, compiled by Tom Bacon. Southern Music Co. (B541). Lead sheets with written out

"improvisations" of tunes composed by jazz horn players, including Bacon, Varner, Clark, Chancey, Todd.

Recordings of Horn players playing Jazz

Bibliography

Curtiss Blake, "Jazz Discography by Player," *Horn Call* 13/1 (October 1982), 83ff. Major reference.

Tom Varner, "Julius Watkins," *Horn Call* 19/1 (October 1988), 21.

Tom Varner, "Jazz Horn--Post Julius Watkins," *Horn Call* 19/2 (April 1989), 43.

Snedeker's Top 10 Jazz Horn CDs

Julius Watkins *Julius Watkins Sextet* 1954

Julius Watkins *Les Jazz Modes: The Rare Dawn Sessions* 1956

Julius Watkins *The Quota* (1961, with Jimmy Heath)

Tom Varner *Jazz French Horn* 1985

Tom Varner *Covert Action*

Arkady Schilkloper *Hornology*

Arkady Schilkloper *Magic Horn* (LP)

John Graas *Coup de Graas* (LP, now out as part of *Jazz Studio* CD series)

Oscar Pettiford (*Deep Passion* 1957)

Rick Todd *Rickter Scale*

Jamey Abersold Recordings (suggested order):

Vol 1 *Getting Started*; Vol 24 *Major and Minor*; Vol 21 *Gettin' It Together* (various chord patterns); Vol 2 *Nothing But Blues*; Vol 42 *Blues in All Keys*; Vol 3 *The ii-V-I Progression*; Vol 16 *Turnarounds, Cycles, and ii/V7*; Vol 54 *Maiden Voyage*...

While these are good for your fingers and mind, your soul needs to be fed, too: as soon as you can, move on to collections of your favorite jazz standards.

Hornists who have appeared in the field of Jazz

(Selected List)

by Jeffrey Snedeker

Studio/Ensemble Players

Jack Cave
Bob Northern
Dick Berg
Gunther Schuller
John Barrows
Jimmy Buffington
Vince DeRosa
Earl Chapin
Paul Ingraham
Sandy Siegelstein
Addison "Junior" Collins
Ray Alonge
Irving Rosenthal
Arthur Maebe
Tony Miranda
Richard Perissi
Alan Robinson
Brooks Tillotson
Donald Corrado
James Decker
Joe DeAngelis
Walter Wechsler
Albert Antonucci
Robert Swisshelm
Fred Klein

Soloists/Combo Players

Julius Watkins
John Graas
David Amram
Peter Gordon
Bob Rutch
Willie Ruff
Doug Hill
Brad Warnaar
Sharon Freeman
Tom Bacon
John Clark
Tom Varner
Arkady Shilkloper
Rick Todd
Vince Chancey
Mark Taylor
Jim Rattigan
Alex Brofsky
Marshall Sealy
Ken Wiley
Jeff Snedeker
(Barry Tuckwell)
(Burton Hardin)
(Joan Watson)

Groups/Big Bands to look for:

Claude Thornhill Orchestra (by 1948, Wechsler, Siegelstein, Collins, Antonucci)
Miles Davis Nonet (Collins, Siegelstein, Schuller; *Birth of the Cool* 1949/50, *Porgy and Bess*)
Pete Rugolo and his Orchestra (Graas; *Rugalomania* 1955)
Oscar Pettiford Sextet/Big Band (Watkins, Amram; *Deep Passion* 1957)
Shorty Rogers and his Giants (*Birth of the Cool*, v.2)
Stan Kenton (*Cuban Fire* 1956)
John Coltrane (Watkins, Corrado, Northern, Swisshelm; *Africa Brass*)
Quincy Jones Big Band (Watkins; *Lausanne* 1960)
Dizzy Gillespie Big Band
Robb McConnell Boss Brass
Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Big Band (*Consumation*)
Nelson Riddle Orchestra
Paul Winter Consort (Clark)
Gil Evans and Ten/Monday Night Orchestra at Sweet Basil (Clark)
Lester Bowie Brass Fantasy (Chancey, Brofsky, Taylor)
Carla Bley Band (Clark)
New York Composers Orchestra (Sealy)
Vienna Art Orchestra (Varner, Shilkloper)

Bands/Other artists that frequently use(d) horn(s)

Thelonius Monk
Mitchell-(Willie)Ruff Duo
Freddie Hubbard
Michel Legrand
Sonny Rollins
Maynard Ferguson
Grover Washington, Jr.
Stanley Turrentine
Stan Getz
Gato Barbieri
Gerry Mulligan
Jaco Pastorius
Deodato
Bob James
Modern Jazz Quartet
Lionel Hampton

Stanley Clarke
McCoy Tyner
Michael Davis Brass Nation
Blue Mitchell
Gil Melle
Art Farmer
J. J. Johnson
Kenny Dorham
Cal Massey
Benny Golson
Benny Bailey
Art Pepper
Buselli/Wallarab Jazz Orchestra
Henry Mancini
Jimmy Heath/ Jimmy Heath Sextet (Watkins)

CDs/Recordings to look for:

Julius Watkins *Julius Watkins Sextet* 1954, *Les Jazz Modes* 1956, *Four French Horns* 1957, *French Horns for my Lady* 1961, *The Quota* (1961, with Jimmy Heath), *Roll 'em Bags* (Milt Jackson)
Tom Varner *Jazz French Horn*, *Covert Action*
John Clark *I Will*, *Il Suono*, *Faces*
Arkady Schilkloper (anything!)
Rick Todd *Rickter Scale*
John Graas *Coup de Graas*, *Jazz Studio Sessions 1-6*
Mark Taylor *Circle Squared*

Les Jazz Modes (Watkins)