

Take Note Online Jazz Workshops – Series 2

Episode 9: Improvising Practice Tips

There is a lot of information here and the more you get into this music, the more you realise there is to learn. It can be overwhelming at times so it's important to break your practice up into manageable chunks. Here are some tips on how to practice improvisation.

Improvisation practice tips:

1. Set limitations before you get started
 - For example - this could mean that you focus on only one rhythm and change up the notes, or you could choose a chord change you want to develop some ideas on (eg. ii-V-I chord progression)
2. What is the intent of your practice?
 - Be clear about what you are aiming for. Is it to work on your eighth note lines, articulation or language?
3. Practice freely over one chord – work on your 'ears'
 - It's important to start being able to hear a lot of common sounds in the jazz idiom. It's great to play through a tune out of time and get some ideas on each chord to really internalise the sounds.
4. Practice with a metronome!
 - It's very important to practice with a metronome – you should have a metronome on for the majority of your practice
 - You can switch up what beats you have the metronome on – it could be all four beats, the 2 & 4 or maybe just the 1st beat of each bar
5. Put a backing track on
 - There are a lot of backing tracks you can find online to help playing through ii-V-I progressions in different keys – this can create a bit of variety in your practice routine when you are working on this chord change
 - Put a backing track on of a tune you are learning and play along
6. Play along with recordings of your favourite musicians
 - It's really fun to play along with recordings of your favourite musicians playing your favourite tunes. You can think about it like you are improvising with them
7. Transcribe your favourite musician's solos
 - This is a much more structured type of practice than just playing along and improvising with them. This is a detailed study of a solo where you should learn a solo aurally, not just focusing on the notes and rhythms but also phrasing, articulation and tone

8. Play through famous solos

- It's also good practice to read through solos that are written out. The Charlie Parker Omnibook is a great book of Charlie Parker solos that are important to learn.