

Take Note Online Jazz Workshops – Series 1

Episode 2 & 3: Call & Response

What is Call & Response?

In music, call and response is a short melodic or rhythmic idea, followed by another idea responding to it.

How does this relate to jazz and improvisation?

Early jazz music drew influence from the blues, where call & response was one of the main musical features. It is often used by vocalists and instrumentalists in the main chorus of songs, but also as a way to improvise with each other and interact - to have a musical 'conversation'.

What is syncopation?

Syncopation refers to rhythms occurring on the 'off-beat'. See the example here:



What notes can I hear in this video?



Call & Response is a really easy way to start improvising without having to think too much, especially if the idea of taking a solo and being put on the spot is daunting! Start with making up very basic rhythms that a friend or teacher can clap back to you. Take it in turns to be the person doing the 'call' and the 'response'. Being the 'responder' also helps you get new ideas from other people. You can get more complex with your rhythmic ideas as you get comfortable.

Practice ideas:

- Use call and response to play off ideas (on your own, or over a video call with a friend works!)
- Play around with using different 'phrase lengths'. E.g. - start out aiming to make your rhythm 4 beats long (using a metronome or stomping along is really helpful for your sense of 'time' while doing this exercise!) and then see if you can make a rhythm that lasts 8 bars long, to be clapped back to you.
- Think about contrast – use one idea as your 'Call' and use the contrasting opposite as the 'Response'.

Ideas for how to improvise and be creative with contrast:

- PITCH: Low VS High notes
- PITCH: Lots of different pitches VS just the same pitch
- MELODIC CONTOUR: Flat line VS Curvy
- MELODIC CONTOUR: Up VS Down
- RHYTHM: Busy VS sparse/spacious (no rests VS lots of rests)
- RHYTHM: Long notes VS short notes (e.g. semibreves VS semi-quavers)
- ARTICULATION: Legato VS staccato
- DYNAMICS: Loud VS Soft
- TEMPO: Fast VS Slow

Can you think of any other interesting contrasting sounds you can make?

Songs to check out from the Spotify Playlist

- Moanin' by Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers
- So What by Miles Davis
- Work Song by Cannonball Adderley/Nat Adderley
- Walk by Faith by Iona Locke

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Episode 4: Improvising with the Pentatonic Scale



Practice Ideas:

- Try to play melodies and musical phrases that start on other notes of the scale, not just the root note.
- Try hearing melodic ideas based off the pentatonic scale. Sing the melody to yourself first, then try and play what you sang.
- Incorporate interesting rhythms into your improvising with the pentatonic scale. Write out a few rhythms and try to play them (on loop) with one note, then add more notes/pitches.

Here are some rhythms to give you some ideas and get you going – after you’ve tried these, come up with some of your own!



Songs to check out from the Spotify Playlist featuring the minor pentatonic scale

- Equinox by John Coltrane
- Song For My Father by Horace Silver
- Footprints by Wayne Shorter
- Cantaloupe Island by Herbie Hancock

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Episode 5: Improvising with Melody

'Sonnymoon for Two' by Sonny Rollins

SONNYMOON FOR TWO
IN THE KEY OF C MINOR FOR CONCERT INSTRUMENTS



SONNYMOON FOR TWO
Bb INSTRUMENTS



SONNYMOON FOR TWO
Eb INSTRUMENTS



Practice ideas for using melody to improvise:

- Practice the melody to the point where it is natural under your fingers and to your ears, the less you have to think about it the better!
- Try embellishing parts of the melody
- Change the contour/direction of the melody in certain parts
- Do some 'call and response' with the melody, where you play a small part of the melody and respond to it
- Try and move the rhythm around, and use different rhythms whilst using the same notes of the melody
- Elongate/extend the melody over more bars than it goes for
- Shorten the melody and bring it in earlier than it usually comes in

Songs to check out from the Spotify Playlist

- Sonnymoon for Two by Sonny Rollins