

Alfred's

Book 2

Essentials of JAZZ THEORY

LESSONS • EAR TRAINING • WORKBOOK

SHELTON G. BERG

FOREWORD

MUSIC IS THE MORTAR OF HUMANITY. It binds people of all backgrounds and experiences, as it poignantly expresses universal human emotions. It is an amazing and elusive complement to our existence. And yet, this spiritual art form is rooted in concepts that are easily explained in the practical realm. Music theory is the study of these concepts. The yin and yang of music results from the fact that it is created out of a limited supply of simple, theoretical formulas, and yet, any piece of music can be entirely unique.

When a musician composes or improvises, the material emanates from two creative wells. There is the "spiritual" well, which houses our emotions and experiences, and also the "technical" well, in which resides the theoretical elements that we have practiced and perfected. Music is at its best when the impetus is from the spiritual well. The technical well will be unconsciously called upon to provide the raw materials of expression. So, a study of theory is not merely a dry analysis of technical functions, but rather an exploration of how the elements can provide fuel to the creative process, an energizing activity toward the goal of meaningful music making.

WELCOME TO JAZZ—welcome to an exhilarating journey to musical freedom!—Shelly Berg

To successfully navigate this jazz theory course, you should be versed in basic music theory concepts, such as those taught in Books 1 and 2 of *Alfred's Essentials of Music Theory*. You are encouraged to play and/or sing the examples in this text, at first along with the enclosed recording, and then on your own.

BOOKS 1, 2, 3: *Alfred's Essentials of Jazz Theory* is made up of three books, 40 pages each, with each book containing six units. A unit consists of four or five pages of instructional material (including written exercises), an Ear Training page and a Review page.

COMPLETE BOOK: *Alfred's Essentials of Jazz Theory* is also available as one complete book of 120 pages that contains all the pages included in the separate books.

COMPACT DISCS: Each book in *Alfred's Essentials of Jazz Theory* is packaged with a CD, allowing students to hear the musical elements discussed, and offering students the opportunity to test their listening skills. Music examples are played by a variety of instruments.

TEACHER'S ANSWER KEY: A *Complete Book* with the answers for the exercises from the Lesson and Review pages and music for the Ear Training pages. Also included is a reproducible sheet for listing student names and grades for the Ear Training and Review pages.



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Counterpoint—Bass and Melody

COUNTERPOINT is the simultaneous occurrence of two or more musical voices. The beauty of counterpoint lies in the interest created by the voices and the harmony that arises from them. Counterpoint between melody and bass has been an organizing principal of Western music for hundreds of years. In jazz, the bass voice establishes the harmony, which the melody clarifies and augments with “color” tones, such as 3rds and 7ths.

Track 1

The joyful, forward momentum of swing music is due in large part to walking bass lines. WALKING BASS is a continual, quarter-note bass motion in which, more often than not, the chord root is on the downbeat of each measure. These lines typically are played in a register more than an octave below middle C, creating a polar counterpoint to the melody. String and electric basses have a range down to (at least) the E almost three octaves below middle C. (Note that bass sounds an octave lower than written.)

Track 2

Track 2 demonstrates that walking bass is always played very legato; otherwise the feeling of swing is lost. Beats 1 and 3 are the *functional* beats, and are more apt to feature the chord root, 3rd, or 5th. Beats 2 and 4 are the *energy* beats. By energizing beats 2 and 4, and playing passing tones and other less structural pitches on these beats, the bass creates an energetic tendency to resolve to the next functional beat.

A TWO FEEL is created when the bass plays either half notes in each bar, or a dotted quarter, eighth-note pattern. This causes the music to feel in a 2-beat meter (cut time, $\frac{2}{2}$), as opposed to $\frac{4}{4}$. The bass plays almost exclusively an alternation of root and fifth.

Track 3

Exercises

- 1 Analyze these walking bass lines by circling and identifying the chord tones. Label any passing (p.t.) or neighboring (n.t.) tones as well.

- 2 Compose a jazz melody to the bass line above. Remember that 3rds and 7ths (and even 9ths) complete the “picture” of counterpoint.

- 3 Compose a two-feel bass line to the progression.

Walking Bass Lines

The most important things a bass line can do are: 1) reinforce the groove and momentum of swing, and 2) make the chord changes clear. The first element is a matter of performance (as discussed in Lesson 26), while the second is one of construction.

The two simplest ways for a walking bass to establish the chord progression are:

by playing roots and fifths. . .

or by arpeggiating the chords.

Passing and neighboring tones are also effective for walking bass construction. Typically, these tones are employed on the weak beats (2 and 4), and lead to structural (chord) tones on the strong beats (1 and 3).

One of the most appealing devices for walking bass lines is the usage of CHROMATIC APPROACH TONES (leading tones), which are notes a $\frac{1}{2}$ step below or above the next chord tone. As with other non-harmonic tones, approach tones most often occur on the weak beats.

Exercises

- 1** Analyze this walking bass line by circling and identifying the chord tones. Label any passing (p.t.), neighboring (n.t.), or chromatic approach tones (a.t.).

- 2** Compose a walking bass line to this progression.