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Etude 1: Begin with This

(Comping chords with the right hand and playing a bass line with the left hand)

If you ask me, it all starts with the blues. *Etude 1* is a typical blues progression with a walking bass line in the left hand and an ostinato comp in the right hand. The interaction between the two hands sets up a nice swing feel; therefore, this is a good etude to begin the process. The focus is on developing proper independence and interdependence of hands. The bass line places the roots of each chord on the strong beats 1 and 3 and passing tones on beats 2 and 4. Check out the melodic quality of the bass line. It is this melodic quality that gives a nice sense of forward motion and color to a bass line.

The first chord voicing is a typical dominant 9th voicing with the 9th on top, dominant 7th under that, and 3rd on the bottom. You can also add an A (6th) under the B \flat , which I do on some of the subsequent dominant chords. Like most of the other voicings, this one does not have the root of the chord in the voicing. It's not needed. It is more important to include color notes such as the 9th, 11th and 13th. Notice that the voicing in measure 2 is a standard 13th voicing, with the 13th on top and the 3rd and 7th below. This voicing has a nice spacious and colorful sound due to the large interval between notes and the presence of the 7th and 13th. By the eighth measure, I begin to configure the chords with a close interval in the center of the harmony surrounded by larger intervals. The A7(#5) has a C next to a C#. I think it is the dissonance of this minor 2nd interval framed by two consonant intervals of a major 3rd and perfect 4th that gives this voicing its unique sound. In measure 9, I use the same configuration with the D9 chord. In measure 23, the first chord is C13, where you will find two close intervals—D and C, and B \flat and A, separated by a major 3rd. This also creates a colorful voicing due to the dissonance surrounding consonance.

On this etude, strive to gain consistency on the quarter-note pulse, with the bass line played up on top of the beat but still in a relaxed way. It is the combination of playing “on top” of the time, but with a relaxed feel, that creates the sense of swing. Play this with a metronome with the ultimate goal being that your internal clock becomes the metronome. Having the ability to comp is something you will use frequently as a teacher, a composer experimenting with new ideas, and as a means of learning new tunes. And as a result of being able to play a walking bass line with chordal accompaniment, you will gain some serious insight into the world of the rhythm section, which, as a horn player, is invaluable information.

Etude 1: Begin with This

Chords: C⁹ F¹³ C⁹ Gm⁷ C⁹

Chords: F¹³ F[#]o⁷ C⁹ F¹³ Em^{7sus} A⁷([#]5) D⁹

Chords: G¹³ Em⁹ A⁷([#]5) Dm⁹ G¹³ C⁹ F⁹

Chords: C⁹ Gm⁹ C⁷([#]9) F¹³ C⁷([#]5) F¹³ F[#]o⁷ C¹³ F⁹

Chords: E⁷([#]5) A⁷([#]5) D⁹ Dm⁹ G¹³ C¹³ A⁷([#]5) Dm⁹ G¹³