
SHUFFLIN' IN F

Dave Rivello's arrangement of Jim Snidero's *Shufflin' in F* provides a good vehicle for the study of the shuffle style, the concept of solo fills, and basic technics for improvising a piano accompaniment. Because of the moderate tempo, it is also a good tune to start with for pianists who are relatively new to jazz or to the practice of big band piano playing. Throughout the remainder of the text the term "comping" will be used synonymously with the more universal term, accompaniment. This is a common jazz term, which probably was derived from the words "accompanying" and "complementing". It implies, in the best sense, the act of accompanying an individual or a group in a complementary manner.

In the introduction of *Shufflin' in F* the piano plays in unison with the saxophones (right hand) and trombones (left hand). Notice that the phrasing and eighth note feel is precisely together. The shuffle feel begins with the twelve-bar blues theme at letter **B**. In the original shuffle beat, heard frequently in rhythm and blues music during the early 1950s, the drums often play continuous swing eighth notes on the high hat cymbal, emphasizing the pulse and implying a 12/8 or triplet feel, while the snare drum and high hat foot pedal heavily emphasize beats two and four (the so-called "back beats"). The drums play a more modern and subtle variation of the shuffle beat in this arrangement, where a combination of the cymbal strokes on all four beats plus the insistent but not loud snare drum on beats two and four implies the shuffle feel in a manner that is well suited to the musical conception of the piece.

A solo fill is a brief melodic response that occurs during a long note or rest in the melody. The written fills in measures 11–12, 15–16 and 19–20 are slightly varied repetitions of the same simple idea, which respond to the phrases of the theme heard in measures 9–10, 13–14 and 17–18, respectively. This works well, since the three phrases of the theme are also slightly varied repetitions of a single simple idea.

In my improvised fills I played a somewhat more elaborate idea, but developed it in a clear and simple manner. All three fills are descending phrases based on the F blues scale, emphasizing the pulse by stating many of the notes that occur on the beat with a staccato articulation. The second and third fills also include groups of eighth note triplets, which increase the rhythmic momentum of these phrases. All of these elements are characteristic of much of the work of pianist Wynton Kelly. The theme from letter **B** and the improvised piano fills appear in Example 1. The example should be analyzed in detail, so that the ear can clearly recognize and understand the melodic and rhythmic relationships.

EXAMPLE 1: THE THEME AND PIANO FILLS AT LETTER B

9 **B** F7 (tpt./alto) *mf* Bb7 F7 (pno.) ad lib. fill

13 Bb7 (tpt./alto) F7 (pno.)

17 Bb7 (tpt./alto) F7 (pno.) C7

When the trombones begin to play written responses to the saxophone theme at letter **C**, the improvised comping becomes gradually more and more sparse, eventually switching to the written accompaniment through the remainder of letter **C** and all of letter **D**. The written accompaniment at letters **C** and **D** makes use of two common rhythmic elements: landing on “four and” (the second eighth note of the fourth beat) and the short rhythmic figure that is repeated in measures 25–28. This figure is sometimes called the Charleston figure, since it is the main rhythm of the 1920s popular song, Charleston, which is also the name of the famous dance step of the period. This figure happens to be the most common in shuffle pieces, since it is so compatible with the shuffle rhythmic feeling, although it can also be heard to some extent in nearly every jazz style and groove. The use of these two rhythmic elements through letters **C** and **D** gives the written accompaniment a sense of unity as well as a basic feeling of development through repetition and contrast.

Notice that when the piano plays directly on beat one with the bass, even though the ensemble has ended a figure on “four and” (measures 35, 39 and 43), it does not sound inappropriate or awkward. This is mainly because the piano chords on beat one are played with just the right articulation and dynamic. Short notes in jazz are usually played with a slightly fatter articulation than in classical music. This is because jazz rhythms come from the drums, on which every stroke has some reverberation. Short

notes in jazz rarely sound clipped off or choked. This contributes to the loose, relaxed feeling of jazz. Further, if these piano chords were played too loudly, they would detract from the ensemble's emphasis of "four and".

Notice that the bass plays on the beat throughout most jazz tunes, even though the horns are often emphasizing the eighth notes in between the beats (the "ands"). In fact, it is this constant presence of the pulse in the bass that enables the syncopations of the horns to create that special rhythmic effect which is unique to jazz. If the bass begins to play these anticipations with the horns, it tends to make the rhythm feel nervous, and the anticipations often lose some of their special quality. On the other hand, if the bass plays the notes on the beat in a manner that is too heavy or ponderous, it works against the anticipations of the horns rather than simply providing the necessary reference point.

Following the four-bar sendoff at letter **E** there is a bass solo with a written background for the saxophones. The piano makes only a few quiet and discreet comments during the entire bass solo. It would also be fine for the piano to lay out entirely. Since the saxophone background consists of sustained notes, short notes provide a nice contrast if the piano is involved at all. Single notes, octaves or sparse two or three note chords could work just as well as the fuller chord voicings heard in this version.

The same four-bar sendoff at letter **G** leads to an alto saxophone solo. Since there is a written trombone background in measures 73–80, the piano plays only two short chords in measures 77 and 79. Each chord is played during a sustained trombone chord and each occurs on the same beat ("two and", an abbreviation of the Charleston figure). This makes the subtle interjections sound organized and also creates a transition to the more active piano comping at letter **H**.

The improvised piano comping at letter **H** appears in Example 2. The creative use of two rhythmic ideas gives the accompaniment a sense of organization and development. There is also some subtle interaction with the improvising soloist, which is not possible when playing a written accompaniment.

Measure 81 of the accompaniment consists of a pair of eighth notes on beat three. In measure 82 short chords are played on beats one and three, which draw attention to the subtle emphasis of beats two and four in the drums. These elements are reversed in the next two measures. Measure 83 is an abbreviation of measure 82, a single short chord on beat three. In measure 84 the pair of eighth notes heard in measure 81 is extended by a series of chords on the "ands" of the beats, ending with a sustained B \flat 7 voicing on "four and". Notice that, since this voicing anticipates beat one of measure 85, it also expresses the change of chord.

Measure 85 ends with the pair of eighth notes, but this time on beat four. Measure 87 continues with a short chord on beat one, as in measure 82. At the end of measure 85, the soloist states a 3/8 cross rhythm in his improvised melody. Instead of joining this cross rhythm immediately, the piano continues it in a subtle manner at the end of measure 87. Notice that the dynamic is not too loud, so as to draw too much attention to this interaction. Ideally such interaction should sound organic and natural. If it sounds like the accompanist is trying to "broadcast" the continuation or imitation, it spoils the effect by taking attention away from the statement of the soloist and focusing it on the cleverness of the accompanist. In this example, the soloist has already gone on to other material, but the rhythmic connection in the comping is clearly there.

From the third beat of measure 89 through the end of measure 90, the rhythm from measures 83–84 returns. The subconscious aural memory that enables such material to resurface in the course of a single chorus of an accompaniment must evolve through a disciplined practice of using specific rhythmic figures in developing har-

monic accompaniments in relation to particular chord progressions. Many of the most common rhythmic figures will be found in the comping examples discussed here. Of course, it is essential for pianists to transcribe the rhythms and, as far as possible, the voicings from favorite accompaniments by the masters of this art form. The lists of recordings included in this book will be helpful in finding some choice examples.

EXAMPLE 2: IMPROVISED PIANO COMPING AT LETTER H

81 **H** F7 Bb7 F7

85 Bb7 F7

89 C7 Bb7 F7 C7

Notice that in both the written and improvised accompaniments extensions (9, 13) and altered tones (#9 or +9, b9 or -9, etc.) are used, even though the chord symbols are very basic (F7, etc.). Such extensions and altered tones are used quite commonly, regardless of how basic the chord symbols may be, as long as they fit the style of the piece and are resolved in a convincing manner.

Attention should also be paid to the voice leading in this accompaniment. Notice how each line moves mostly stepwise, and often retains notes that are common to two successive chords. While leaps and other melodic possibilities can also be effective, it is essential to master the basic type of comping found here in order to provide a strong foundation from which to explore more complex approaches.

An important point to be made here is that pianists should begin by learning to play the written accompaniments provided in most arrangements. Rhythmic continuity and development, as well as particular types of voicings and attention to voice leading in these accompaniments should be noted. Of course, all written accompaniments are not equally well conceived. Over time the attentive student of the music will learn to distinguish the best from the rest, and will take advantage of the useful musical information that can be found in many of these written accompaniments.

The last chorus of the alto solo at letter I is accompanied by harmonized figures for the full ensemble, so the addition of piano was not really necessary. Besides, the entrance of the piano before letter J is more effective after it has been absent for a while. Once again, pay attention to the rhythmic unity and groove in all the instruments that play the unison blues figure throughout letters K and L. This really creates a hypnotic effect, which leads to the return of the theme at letter M.

Since the written background at letter M provides plenty of harmonic and rhythmic interest, no piano comping was necessary. The two improvised fills in letter N have a common melodic element. The first fill starts with a crushed blue note that leads to the fifth of the F7 chord on beat one, while the second fill starts with a crushed note that leads to the lowered fifth (the same blue note) of the F7 chord on beat two.

EXAMPLE 3: IMPROVISED PIANO FILLS IN LETTER N

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano accompaniment in F major, 4/4 time. The first system, labeled 'mm. 139-140', features a treble clef staff with a melodic line starting on a dotted quarter note (F4), followed by eighth notes (G4, A4, Bb4, C5) and a quarter note (D5). The bass clef staff shows a bass line with a dotted quarter note (F3), a quarter rest, and a quarter note (Bb2). The second system, labeled 'mm. 143-144', continues the melodic line in the treble clef with a dotted quarter note (F4), quarter notes (G4, A4, Bb4), and a quarter note (C5). The bass clef staff shows a bass line with a dotted quarter note (F3), a quarter rest, and a quarter note (Bb2). Both systems include a dynamic marking of *mf* and a chord symbol of F7.

In closing this investigation of *Shufflin' in F*, it is well worth listening to the entire piece several times while paying close attention to the infectious groove of the rhythm section. In most modern rhythm section styles the piano, bass and drums each share an essential musical function with one of the other two instruments. The bass and drums play the pulse together. In fact, they are the only two instruments that often play continuously from the first measure of a piece to the last. The piano and bass delineate the harmony together. The piano and drums provide rhythmic commentary, often of a conversational nature. The piano does this through its comping rhythms. The drums do it through subtle rhythmic interjections on the snare, tom toms, bass drum and, occasionally, the high hat cymbal. Most importantly, however, the rhythms used by the

piano and drums stem from exactly the same rhythmic vocabulary or language. Sometimes the rhythms of the piano comping and the “chatter” of the drums interact with one another. On this piece, however, the most important thing is the total unity of groove in which every comping rhythm of the piano fits the feeling of the pulse and the eighth notes of the drums in a totally convincing manner.

Listen to the entire piece one time through while focusing exclusively on the bass and drums. Then listen a second time, focusing on the piano and bass. Finally, listen a third time, focusing on the piano and drums. This exercise in active listening will bring an awareness of many details in the piano’s role in the rhythm section, which will be enormously helpful both in playing the written part along with the recording and in improvising some or all of the solo fills and comping.

Here is a valuable rhythmic exercise for practicing comping with the recording of *Shufflin' in F*, using the section from letter E through letter I. Play just one chord per measure. Use a detached articulation, like a fat staccato quarter note. For one whole chorus play the chord on beat one of each measure. Use the mid range of the instrument, in the staff. Use mostly stepwise movement in the top voice and follow smooth voice leading when a change of chord occurs. Although it may at first seem boring to play each chord on beat one, keep going until that fat chord on beat one feels like it’s swinging right along with the bass and drums. It requires a moderate dynamic, not too loud, and the right articulation, neither too short nor too long.

EXAMPLE 4: RHYTHMIC COMPING EXERCISE, STEP 1

When beat one is swinging consistently, go to step 2 of the exercise. Play each chord on beat two. In step 3 each chord is played on beat three. In step 4 each chord is played on beat four.

EXAMPLE 5: RHYTHMIC COMPING EXERCISE, STEPS 2–4

In step 5 each chord is played on beat “one and”, the second swing eighth note of beat one. This should feel like an anticipation of beat two, and should actually be played on the last triplet eighth of beat one. In fact, a good preparatory exercise to step five is to tap three triplet eighth notes on beat one of each measure. This develops a clear feeling for exactly where the third of these triplet eighth notes lands. At first there may be a tendency either to rush the “ands”, to play them too loudly or to play them too short and clipped off. Have patience and keep playing along until every “one and” feels perfectly relaxed and in the groove with the bass and drums. If there are ensemble rhythms which land on “one and”, use the feeling of the ensemble phrasing as a guide. Pay close attention to whether or not your “one and” is in agreement with theirs.

EXAMPLE 6: RHYTHMIC COMPING EXERCISE, STEP 5

Steps 6, 7 and 8 place each chord on beat “two and”, “three and” and “four and”, respectively. When playing each chord on beat “four and”, the chord which belongs to the next measure should be played, since beat “four and” is actually an anticipation of beat one of the next measure. In pieces with more frequent chord changes, voicings played on the “and” of a beat just before a change of chord should always express the new chord.

EXAMPLE 7: RHYTHMIC COMPING EXERCISE, STEPS 6–8

When a relative mastery of playing single chords in all possible eighth note positions in a measure of 4/4 time has been achieved, it will be easier to play an actual comping figure beginning in any of these different positions in the measure. While some rhythmic figures may be somewhat awkward in one or more of these positions, many common rhythmic figures work equally well in all eight positions, starting on any beat or on the “and” of any beat. It is often surprising to realize that a figure we hear that may sound new and unfamiliar is actually a figure which we have played countless times,

but beginning in a different position in the measure. It can be a lot of fun to practice comping with a play-along recording by using a particular rhythmic figure, and then displacing it one position at a time until it can be played comfortably and convincingly in all eight positions. With tunes in $3/4$ time, of course, there are only six possible positions.

An important advantage in becoming thoroughly familiar with the feeling and location of each eighth note position is that it rapidly improves rhythmic sight reading ability. The more clear one becomes about exactly where “two and” is and how it feels, the easier it is to play exactly there with conviction when a written voicing or a chord symbol appears on beat “two and” in the piano part. In the same way, a thorough physical familiarity at the keyboard with specific melodic patterns or chord voicings makes it easier to find them immediately when they are visually recognized in a written piano part.

When listening to the recordings from the list provided below, the following steps will be helpful in order to recognize rhythmic, melodic or harmonic elements that are similar to those heard in *Shufflin' in F*.

1. Learn the themes of some of these pieces, and then begin learning comping rhythms from the themes. Notice any aspects of the accompaniment that relate to the theme, especially in a rhythmic sense. Notice how the rhythmic figures relate to the chord changes. The comping rhythms should eventually be compiled in a notebook for future reference as practice material.
2. Try to hear at least the highest notes in the voicings and some of the voice leading from one chord to the next. Smooth voice leading is the single most important skill in order to be able to provide supportive comping for an ensemble or a soloist. After working at this kind of ear training diligently, for at least a few minutes every day, it gradually becomes easier to hear more of the harmonic detail in the piano comping on a recording. Favorite comping phrases should eventually be compiled in a notebook for future reference as practice material. Pay attention to harmonic density. Try to hear, as far as possible, how many notes are used in the voicings accompanying a particular theme or solo, especially when the voicings consist of five notes or less. Two, three and four-note voicings each have a particular quality and weight, and each can be used effectively for entire sections or even choruses of an accompaniment. Because such voicings are economical, the listener is more likely to be aware of special effects created by particular notes in these voicings. Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Gil Evans could all create powerful impressions or moods without using more than four notes in their voicings.
3. Start learning favorite solo phrases from the same tunes. Notice how the individual notes of a particular phrase relate to the accompanying chords and how notes that create dissonance in relation to the harmony are resolved. These solo phrases should eventually be compiled in a notebook for future reference as practice material.

Through this kind of active listening the creative relationships between rhythm, melody and harmony begin to become more and more clear. Although a well written book can save a lot of time by giving useful information about practice routines, specific things to listen for in the music, and recordings that have been especially influential in the evolution of jazz, even the most gifted students can only make progress through their own efforts. The teacher can suggest where to look and what to practice, but the student can only benefit through direct experience and personal effort, through “looking” and “practicing.” Of course, this direct experience and personal effort are also the source of much joy, satisfaction and wonder. It may be interesting to hear a skillful storyteller describe a great adventure he or she has experienced. But it is far more interesting to actually embark upon a great adventure for oneself.

I remember quite vividly the very first jazz recordings I ever heard. I was fourteen years old and was at a friend's house after school. His father was a jazz fan and had a jazz record collection. I had already been studying classical piano for five years, and had mastered some challenging repertoire from Bach through Debussy and Kabalevsky. As soon as I heard a few pieces from recordings of Erroll Garner, the Ahmad Jamal Trio, the Dave Brubeck Quartet and the Modern Jazz Quartet, I immediately recognized that these musicians were using the vast musical vocabulary developed by European composers over the course of three centuries in a fresh and personal manner. In our time it is primarily jazz musicians who perpetuate the essence of this great western musical heritage, revitalized through the infusion of elements from West African rhythms, American popular music and the blues. The music on the recordings listed below certainly has the capacity to launch any truly curious young musician on a lifelong musical odyssey that should prove to be as exciting as it is unpredictable.

Shufflin' in F

♩ = 150

Comp.: Jim Snidero

Arr.: Dave Rivello

Musical notation for the first system, measures 1-4. The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (F major). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 150. The first staff is in treble clef and the second in bass clef. The first staff begins with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The music consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A bracket under the first two measures of the bass line is labeled "L.H. 2nd time only".

Musical notation for the second system, measures 5-8. Measure 5 is marked with a box containing the letter "A". Measure 8 is marked with a box containing the letter "B" and the chord symbol "F7". An accent mark (^) is placed above the first note of measure 8. The right hand continues with eighth-note patterns, while the left hand provides harmonic support with chords and bass notes.

Musical notation for the third system, measures 9-14. Measure 9 is marked with the chord symbol "Bb7". Measure 10 is marked with "F7". Measure 11 is marked with "Opt. Ad Lib Fill". Measure 14 is marked with "Bb7". The right hand features a melodic line with eighth notes and rests, while the left hand plays a complex chordal accompaniment with sustained notes and moving bass lines.

Musical notation for the fourth system, measures 15-18. Measure 15 is marked with "F7". Measure 16 is marked with "Opt. Ad Lib Fill". Measure 17 is marked with "C7". Measure 18 is marked with "Bb7". The right hand continues with a melodic line, and the left hand provides a rich harmonic texture with chords and bass notes.

Musical notation for the fifth system, measures 19-23. Measure 19 is marked with "F7". Measure 20 is marked with "Opt. Ad Lib Fill". Measure 21 is marked with "C7". Measure 22 is marked with a box containing the letter "C" and the chord symbol "F7". Measure 23 is marked with "Bb7" and "F7". An accent mark (^) is placed above the first note of measure 22. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth notes and rests, while the left hand plays a complex chordal accompaniment.

Musical notation for the sixth system, measures 24-29. Measure 24 is marked with "Bb7". Measure 25 is marked with "F7". Measure 26 is marked with "C7". Measure 27 is marked with "Bb7". Measure 28 is marked with "F7". Measure 29 is marked with "C7". The right hand continues with a melodic line, and the left hand provides a rich harmonic texture with chords and bass notes.

30 **Bb7** **F7** **C7** **D** **F7** **Bb7** **F7**

36 **Bb7** **F7** **C7** **Bb7**

43 **F7** **C7** **E** **Bb7** **F7** **C7**

54 **Bb7** **F7** **C7** **F** **F7** **Bb7** **F7** **Bb7**

62 **F7** **C7** **Bb7** **F7** **D7alt.** **Db7alt.** **C13b9** **G**

70 **Bb7** **F7** **C7** **Bb7** **F7**

80 **C7#5#9** **H** **F7** **Bb7** **F7** **Bb7**

Shufflin' in F

86 Λ F7 C7 Bb7 Λ F7 C7

93 **I** F7 Bb7 F7 Bb7 F7

101 C7 Bb7 F7 C7 **J**

108 **K**

114 **L**

119 **ff**

123 **M** F7 Bb7 F7 Bb7

131 F7 C7 Bb7 F7 D7#5#9 Db7#5#9 C7#5#9

137 N F9 Bb7 F7 Opt. Ad Lib Fill Bb7

142 F7 Opt. Ad Lib Fill O

147