

PREFACE

As with all of my other books, A Creative Approach To Practicing Jazz is a response to my own needs and those of my colleagues and students. When, where, what and how to practice are questions that confront all serious musicians from the beginning to the end of their careers. This book represents a modest effort at addressing some of these concerns. It is not intended to replace strategies, techniques, and practice routines that have proven successful to the individual performer but rather to energize the act of practicing by offering alternatives and imaginative, often unusual, routes to the goal of excellence.

The materials contained in A Creative Approach To Practicing Jazz are the result of more than 45 years of trial and error, experimentation, and observing and analyzing the practice habits and attendant successes of the world's most accomplished musicians, resulting in the formulation and refinement of various techniques and strategies for deriving maximum benefits from the time spent in the practice room. While many of the routines in this book are applicable, and indeed beneficial, to the practicing of any kind of music, the main purpose, objective, and thrust is the development and enhancement of skills particular to the jazz idiom.

Some of the strategies suggested are simply highly focused and sophisticated variants of practice habits already in place for many musicians; others represent the codification of such informal approaches as playing with actual recordings (not play-a-longs) or practicing performing. All of the exercises involve the imposition of constraints designed to sharpen focus and intensify the powers of concentration.

If approached with an open mind, a healthy work ethic, a willingness to invest quality time, and the courage to be forced out of an all-too-familiar comfort zone mentality, A Creative Approach To Practicing Jazz will provide the challenge and modus operandi to take your playing to new and exhilarating heights.

David Baker
Summer 1994

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8. Sing/play two-octave scales through the changes.

Exercise 8 musical notation: Two staves of a two-octave scale. The first staff contains the first octave with chord changes C, C, D7, D7. The second staff contains the second octave with chord changes D-, G7, C, C.

9. Sing/play various altered chord/scales in melodic form.

Exercise 9 musical notation: Two staves of a melodic line. The first staff contains the first octave with chord changes C Δ #11, C Δ #11, D7#5, D7#5. The second staff contains the second octave with chord changes D- Δ , G7b9, C, C.

10. Practice various substitutions for this progression.

Exercise 10 musical notation: Two staves of a progression. The first staff contains the first octave with chord changes C, C, A-, D7, Eb-, Ab7. The second staff contains the second octave with chord changes D-, F-, E-, A7, D-, G7.

Learn as many of the tunes based on this formula as you can.

- Practice formulae in various keys, tempos, and styles (swing, Latin, rock, fusion, ballad, etc.).
- Memorize and internalize the changes.
- Create a treasure trove of melodies based on the most frequently-used formulae. They will serve as a storehouse of raw material to be used creatively.

The image shows four staves of musical notation, each representing a player's part. The notation is in 4/4 time and uses a treble clef. Brackets and arrows indicate specific intervals between notes in different parts:

- Player #1:** Shows a "descending major 2nd" interval between two notes in the final measure.
- Player #2:** Shows a "descending major 2nd" interval between two notes in the first measure and a "descending 1/2 step" interval between two notes in the final measure.
- Player #3:** Shows a "descending 1/2 step" interval between two notes in the first measure and an "ascending perfect 5th" interval between two notes in the final measure.
- Player #4:** Shows an "ascending perfect 5th" interval between two notes in the first measure, a "descending major 2nd" interval between two notes in the final measure, and the word "etc." at the end of the staff.

The players should prepare for the game by learning the opening interval of as many tunes (in all idioms) as possible. The following tunes, for example, all begin with an ascending half-step:

1. "What's New"
2. "Getting Sentimental Over You"
3. "Serenade in Blue"
4. "Early Autumn"
5. "I Remember You"
6. "Fascination"
7. "You and the Night and the Music"

For maximum benefit the players should make an effort to learn as many tunes in their entirety as possible. Ideally, to function properly in this game, players need to be able to play the melodies in all keys. The players must work diligently to break free of tonal restrictions that might prevent them from hearing intervals in an unrestricted way. For example, in the musical example given on how to play the game, the first player played "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." The last interval of that line is 2 to 1 in the key of C, but the second player's line ("Three Blind Mice") begins 3 to 2 in the key of Bb. The pitches in both examples are the same (D followed by C) and if the ear persists in hearing the first key area, it will prevent the mind from functioning unimpaired in hearing 3 to 2 in the new key and will insist on trying to find a phrase that moves 2 to 1 as in "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

CHAPTER I

General Suggestions for Constructive Practice

1. Determine the amount of time that you can realistically spend in practice.
2. When possible, spread the practice sessions out across the day.
3. Practice every day, preferably at the same time(s).
4. Articulate your goals and purposes, both general and specific as well as long-range and short-range.
5. Your practice sessions should include:
 - a. maintenance (warm-ups, flexibility exercises, articulation and range exercises, and other daily routines)
 - b. scales and arpeggios
 - c. formulae such as II V7 patterns, cycles, turnarounds, melodic-rhythmic and harmonic patterns (clichés), bebop and contemporary patterns, etc.
 - d. solo transcription (written and aural)
 - e. listening
 - f. ear training
 - g. sight-reading changes
 - h. preparing specific assignments (if you are studying)
 - i. learning tunes (include all types -- blues, ballads, bebop, standards, Latin, free, contemporary, etc.)
 - j. whatever else is relevant to you musically

When practicing the above materials, vary all of the components -- tempo, dynamics, rhythm, meter, articulation, phrasing, octave placement, vibrato, inflection, mood, style, etc. Don't spend all of your practice time on things that you can already do. When the things on which you're working become comfortable, then something has to change if growth is to continue. Play the material faster, cleaner, louder, softer, higher, lower, in a different key, or with alterations; or simply add new material).

6. Develop the habit of singing your ideas before you play them. Sing along with your playing if your instrument does not involve blowing. If you play a wind instrument, "sing" in your mind.
7. Use a metronome as one means of measuring growth.
8. Play chord changes and tunes on a keyboard instrument.

CHAPTER XI

Transcribing as a Practice/Study Technique

In the years before jazz instruction was formalized, jazz players learned to play in a variety of ways. The transcription of solos was one of the most efficient and practiced ways of learning the jazz language. More often than not the aspiring improviser eschewed the practice of writing these solos down, opting for memorizing the specific solo or portion thereof. Eliminating this intermediate step forced the player to come to grips with the material first hand.

In the halcyon days of bebop (pre-LPs and CDs) I wore out many a 78 recording learning the latest J.J. Johnson solos. The modus operandi was to play the recording until I could sing the solo one phrase at a time, chorus after chorus until I could finally sing the entire solo. At this point I would begin the arduous but exciting and ultimately rewarding task of committing the solo to the horn. After years of learning the solos of my hero and favorite trombonist I realized that I began to be able to anticipate to some degree what his musical choices might be in a given situation: the tempo, the key, the changes, the mood of the piece, the musical environment (rhythm section, other participants, time limitations). I would later realize that the learning process that I was employing was being replicated by players everywhere.

As a teacher I have tried to have my students replicate this procedure with specific guidelines to expedite and enhance the learning process. The student and I choose a soloist on the student's instrument and together we determine how long the period of study with the chosen giant will be (usually 4-6 weeks). Our goal is to allow the student the opportunity to "study" with the recordings of a player of his/her own choosing.

Learning the Solo

1. Play the head and solo. Match tone quality, articulation, and every other aspect of the player's performance.
2. At first don't be too concerned with being analytical; just match everything including blemishes, intonation peculiarities, and phrasing.
3. Repetition is the mother of memory! Play phrases over and over until it is impossible to distinguish your sound from the recording. If necessary, work the solos at half speed until all of your mentor's nuances and mannerisms are perfected.