

# AUTHOR'S PREFACE

## A Personal Account

A few years ago I acquired a cassette tape machine that featured a speed control that was wide enough to play tapes in all twelve keys. Since I had been practicing daily on my tenor saxophone with the Aebersold play-alongs for many years, I thought it might be a good idea to improvise in all 12 keys on every track in all volumes (about 35-40 volumes at the time, now numbering well over a hundred). I had begun to tire of only improvising on the tunes in their original keys and was remembering that, in the past, playing a tune in a different key often led to fresher content.

However, before embarking on the project with my new tape player, I had second thoughts.

Was I really going to benefit from this effort? After all, I had been studying and teaching improvisation for nearly a half century; I knew well over a thousand tunes; I knew all the scales needed for improvisation (major and all seven of its modes, minors, Lydian augmented, diminished, whole-tone, augmented, etc.) in all keys; and I had never experienced difficulty improvising in any key. In fact, my older brother (a superb jazz pianist) and I used to jam together, playing predominantly simple tunes in 12 keys when I was in my mid-teens.

Nevertheless, I decided to at least get under way as a trial effort to see if indeed there was anything to be gained. Volumes 1-3 were of little help, since they were primarily 'exercise volumes,' slow tempos, and already contained tracks that stressed easy content in 12 keys.

Volume 4 got my interest up, however, as the tunes are relatively difficult, some at pretty brisk tempos, and because they are all contemporary chord progressions (as opposed to standards, which generally contain many simpler progression cells, i.e. II-V-I progressions), I encountered my first need for ‘road maps’ as a way to plot the harmonic sequences in any of the 12 keys, since they are not provided in the accompanying books in any key other than the original. The mental ‘road map’ concept was going to be needed for virtually every track from then on, so it became a skill that was necessary to acquire.

Shortly after that, in Volumes 6-8, I began encountering tunes based on “I Got Rhythm” (generally referred to as “Rhythm Changes”) and other similar tunes at very bright tempos. There I made an alarming discovery!

# THE APPROACH

With respect to engaging in such a study, it might be necessary to approach it in clearly-defined stages, the number of those stages depending upon the condition of the player. At that point in *my* development, the only two stages needed were learning road map skills and monitoring the qualitative substance of my improvisation to be sure it was equal in all 12 keys. For younger, less-experienced players, other stages, however temporary, might need to be added, to include (each of these will be discussed in greater detail, following the list):

(1) gaining relative mastery of all scales needed for improvisation, in all keys;

(2) assimilating many patterns on each of the scales;

(3) assimilating 'elements of the jazz language';

(4) learning/practicing the application of certain scales to certain chord-types;

(5) learning/recognizing commonplace aspects of chord progressions;

(6) devising/utilizing road maps for tunes that are universal to all keys;

(7) improvising on tunes in 12 keys; and

(8) monitoring carefully and honestly the resulting improvisational content of (7).

NOTE: Many students of improvisation, before tackling the foregoing list, have found it very helpful to practice playing melodies in all 12 keys. The

melodies might be simple folk songs, anthems, hymns, repetitious modal tunes, or easy blues melodies, or they might be the melodies of standard tunes, bebop 'heads,' contemporary tunes, harder blues tunes, or even a transcribed solo.

Choose the level of what you can handle at first, going on to more complex melodies later. You might also consider playing the melodies, in all keys of the 12-key play-alongs ( i.e., Aebersold's Vols. 67 and 68). A melody like "Confirmation" might be too difficult, for awhile anyway, but most of the other tunes would be possible, and it would help in becoming acclimated to each of those tunes.

Remember, before the age of books on jazz theory and improvisation, earlier players developed their skills by retaining the melodies of the tunes in