TEACHING IMPROVISATION TO PIANO STUDENTS OF ELEMENTARY TO INTERMEDIATE LEVELS

DOCUMENT

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ABSTRACT

Improvisation has been an integral part of a keyboardist from the beginning of keyboard music up to the end of the nineteenth century. From the beginning of the twentieth century, improvisation has gone into a decline due to the emphasis on developing techniques and expanding repertoire.

The value of improvisation includes the following: it develops comprehensive musicianship; it promotes concentration; it facilitates aural and sight-reading skills; it encourages self-expression and realizes self-actualization; it brings satisfaction and builds confidence; and it stimulates imagination.

The purpose of this document is two-fold. The first purpose is to provide piano teachers an organized, repertoire-based approach to teaching improvisation. Adapted and developed from Robert Pace Piano Method, it is based on the principle that improvisation is a valuable means of conceptual learning to develop comprehensive musicianship. It is to give students devices to use the concepts in the repertoire to make changes to create a new composition. Three techniques, namely, “Creative Reading,” “Question and Answer,” and “Improvising Based on Chords,” are discussed with examples to demonstrate how to improvise based on an existing repertoire in order to achieve greater comprehension of the
repertoire and to develop the ability to improvise. While there have been studies relevant to
teaching improvisation, none of which are repertoire-based improvisation. This document
provides an alternate approach for teachers to teach improvisation, to enhance their curricula
in the art if they have been teaching it, or to help teachers begin to include improvisation in
their curricula if they have never taught improvisation.

The second purpose is to apply this organized improvisational approach on various
scale systems, such as pentatonic, whole tone scales, twelve tones, modes, as well as jazz, in
addition to major and minor scales, to broaden the musical horizon of teachers and their
students.

The document is organized in the following manner. Chapter 1 provides the
background information on the importance of teaching improvisation and a brief description
of Pace approach to improvisation. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to teaching piano
improvisation to give the reader an idea of how the art has been taught. Chapter 3 provides
rhythmic and keyboard improvisational activities for the beginners as a basis for future
improvisation. Chapter 4 explains the Pace approach to improvisation with examples in the
elementary repertoire. Chapter 5 applies the Pace approach to improvisation on intermediate
repertoire of various styles. Chapter 6 demonstrates improvisation on modes. Chapter 7
explores improvisation on twelve-tones. Chapter 8 investigates jazz improvisation. Chapter 9
offers a conclusion and provides some suggestions for success in improvisation.
Dedicated to the Heavenly Father and my beloved family
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Improvisation has been an integral part of a keyboardist’s skills from the beginning of keyboard music up to the end of the nineteenth century. Bruno Nettl defines improvisation as “the creation of a musical work, or the final form of a musical work, as it is being performed. It may involve the work's immediate composition by its performers, or the elaboration or adjustment of an existing framework, or anything in between.”¹ Keyboardists in the Renaissance and Baroque periods possessed the ability to improvise melodic embellishments and to add one or more contrapuntal voices to an original composition. In the Classical period, musicians improvised cadenzas to the concerti to express their own musical thoughts and demonstrate virtuosity. Composers, usually being accomplished pianists, improvised in public to refine ideas and to keep audience updated with their newest thinking. In the nineteenth century, virtuoso pianists delighted audiences with improvisations on popular airs of the day. Since the beginning

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of the Twentieth Century, pianists have been focused more on studying for stylistic correctness, on developing virtuosic techniques, on building a large repertoire, and on exploring little-known music; as a result, improvisation has gone into a decline.²

Throughout most of the Twentieth Century in the field of music education, there has been great emphasis on performance in school music, as well as in private instrumental instruction, of which piano instruction is not an exception.³ In a school band, a student musician who can play one particular part in a major symphony does not necessarily know how that part is related to the ensemble.⁴ In private instrumental instruction, including piano instruction, too much attention tends to be given to the development of technical skills, and not enough attention to the understanding of the language of music and how music is constructed. It is not a surprise to see a student playing an advanced repertoire from memory but not knowing what is happening harmonically. Nevertheless, in the 1940’s, music educators in the United States recognized the problem of fragmented and incomplete musical knowledge and made a systematic effort to overcome it. As a result, the concept and curriculum of “comprehensive musicianship” was established in the 1960’s.⁵ (See David P. Willoughby, *Comprehensive Musicianship and Undergraduate Music Curriculum* for detailed development of the concepts and curricula.)

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⁵ Mark, *op. cit.*, p.189.
Mark observed that comprehensive musicianship is “the inter-disciplinary study of music, in which theory, history, aural and performance skills are inter-related for developing insights necessary for true musical understanding.”\(^6\) In other words, comprehensive musicianship is an approach that stresses the integration of all musical experiences to teach music with understanding. Teaching the student to improvise is a reasonable tool to achieve this goal of learning for understanding because improvisation, a creative endeavor, encourages a deeper understanding in music and requires application of what is learned into practice. Rabinof states that improvisation is a step beyond acquiring a musical vocabulary for it is applying that vocabulary creatively.\(^7\) Gibson supports creative activities in music instruction as he remarks “creative experiences that promote a properly sequenced development of musical understanding should lie at the heart of the music education process.”\(^8\)

1.2. The Benefits of Learning Improvisation

Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, a Swiss music educator in the early Twentieth Century, recognized the value of improvisation and incorporated movement, solfège, and improvisation into children’s music program, known as Eurhythmics. In Dalcroze Eurhythmics, improvisation functions as a medium for developing musical

\(^{6}\) Ibid.
understanding. Through physically experiencing concepts via improvisational activities in singing and body movements, later in piano improvisation, children develop musicianship. Dalcroze states that “improvisation’s function is to develop rapidity of decision and interpretation, effortless concentration, the immediate conception of plans, and to set up direct communication between the soul that feels, the brain that imagines and coordinates, and the fingers, arms, hands, and breath that interpret; and all this thanks to the education of nervous system, which unites all the particular senses into one organic whole - whether auditory, muscular, or constructive faculties - in time, energy, and space.”

Improvisation has many benefits in a person’s musical learning experience. First, as mentioned, it develops comprehensive musicianship, which contributes to mature interpretation and results in greater enjoyment. In order to improvise, the student has to learn music with understanding so that s/he can use assimilated knowledge to create music. In other words, improvisation relates theory to practice. Berkowitz asserts that improvisational skills “tend to clarify theoretical concepts.” Robert Dennis Bean believes that “improvisational exercises provide an excellent opportunity for the student to explore the keyboard and experiment with various musical elements. This experimentation helps develop the students’ understanding of, and feeling for, such

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elements as melody, harmony, rhythm, meter, and form.”\(^\text{12}\) Rabinof points out that improvisation “gives a superior tactile relationship to the keyboard, and a sense of ‘at homeness’ in any key, better memory and sight-reading ability, a gift for compositional analysis, security, and poise. But over and above all else, improvisation enhances musicianship to the extent the understanding, imagination and creativity make possible.”\(^\text{13}\) She describes improvisation as “the embodiment of rhythm, melody, harmony, and form – the basic elements of music. It links theorist, composer, and performer by combining these attributes in the pursuit of a common objective.”\(^\text{14}\) Randall believes that improvisational study increases pianists’ interpretative ability because they become more sensitive to the various aspects of musical composition.\(^\text{15}\)

**Second,** improvisation promotes concentration, aural skills as well as the ability to think in motion, since it requires the student to listen to what has been played and simultaneously think about what is going to be formulated. Being able to attend to several things simultaneously and to think in motion requires deep concentration.\(^\text{16}\)

**Third,** improvisation facilitates sight-reading ability because students develop the habit of looking for patterns, and gain skills in identifying key elements as they read music.\(^\text{17}\) Sheftel believes that in improvisation the performer gains skills in dealing with

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\(^\text{13}\) Sylvia Rabinof, *op. cit.*, p.228.


musical elements in a spontaneous way, at the same time develops a sense of keyboard

topography, which lead to improved sight-reading ability. The habit of “thinking in

motion” established through the practice of improvisation enables the student to play

without stopping, which is crucial in sight-reading. Rabinof comments that many skills

necessary for fluent sight-reading are involved while improvising, including planning

ahead, concentrating, listening at all times, playing at a comfortable tempo, counting, not

going back to correct errors, or hesitating or pausing at any point. Montano has

investigated a study on the effect of improvisation in sight-reading and concluded that the

study of improvisation can enhance the student’s sight reading skills.


Fourth, improvisation provides an opportunity for self-expression and

self-actualization, and brings satisfaction and builds confidence. It brings satisfaction

when students are free to express their own ideas to please themselves instead of

accurately deciphering a score to please the teacher. In addition, the ability to make good

decisions on the run and keeping the mind collected and calm while one is working fast

with high-pitched emotions is satisfactory and exhilarating. Improvisation builds

confidence when students identify themselves as composers and realize that their own

personal ideas are significant. Improvisation skills increase the confidence in

performing and reduce the fear of memory lapses.

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22 Pace, 1999, *op. cit.*, p.2
Fifth, improvisation stimulates imagination.\textsuperscript{23} It cultivates students’ creativity and imagination when they explore different ideas and experiment with new sounds. Rabinof offers the following description: “Improvisation… synthesizes the human factors that enter into the creative function: experience, imagination, intuition…”\textsuperscript{24}

Lee Evans states that as most students will not make music a career, one of the principal goals of music instruction must be to impart basic musical tools that students may employ for enrichment and pleasure, of which improvisation is an important tool. If students are taught to employ their musical knowledge to express their own ideas, it is possible that piano playing will become their life-long hobby instead of abandoning it too early.\textsuperscript{25} Grunow, Gordon, and Azzara believe that “a musical instrument is an extension of the performer; it simply reproduces and amplifies what is in the performer’s mind and body.”\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, the goal of piano instruction is to help students develop musical skills and comprehension that will remain with them well beyond their formal education, and the best way to achieve greater understanding is through active participation of singing, moving, playing, creating, and improvisation.\textsuperscript{27}

1.3. The Purpose of the Document

The purpose of this document is two-fold. Recognizing the benefits of improvisation in musical study, this writer intends to provide piano teachers an organized

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{23} Lindstrom, \textit{op. cit.}, p.38.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{24} Rabinof, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 228.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{25} Lee Evans, “Popular in Music Education,” \textit{Piano Quarterly}, Summer 1983, p.}  
approach to teaching improvisation. The approach discussed in this document, adapted and developed from Robert Pace Piano Method, is a repertoire-based improvisational approach. It is based on the principle that improvisation is a valuable means of conceptual learning to develop comprehensive musicianship. It is to give students devices to use the concepts in the repertoire to make changes to create a new composition that is essentially the same as the original but with students’ own ideas involved.

Through the application of the learned concepts in the experimentation and improvisation, greater comprehension is achieved. When students understand the rhythmic, harmonic and melodic features, as well as the composer’s musical languages of the composition they are playing, it will be more likely that they inject their own interpretive ideas rather than merely imitating the interpretation of recordings without knowing why. Greater comprehension also enables students to learn and memorize compositions more efficiently. While there have been numerous studies relevant to teaching improvisation, none of which are on repertoire-based improvisation. Therefore, this document provides an alternate approach for teachers to enhance their curricula in the art, if they have been teaching it, or to help teachers begin to include improvisation in their curricula if they have never taught improvisation.

The second purpose is to apply this organized approach to improvisation on various scale systems, such as pentatonic, whole tone scales, twelve tones, modes, as well as jazz, in addition to major and minor scales, to broaden the musical horizon and to expand the musical vocabulary of teachers and their students.

27 Ibid., pp. 4 – 5.
1.4. The Improvisational Approach in the Document

There are many improvisation instruction books available, most of which are based on harmony with a few explanatory examples. They are designed primarily for people previously trained in music, and require a moderate level of technical ability of the learner to apply the theory and principles to practice. They rely mainly on the learner’s self-designed progressive exercises with self-instruction and evaluation. As a result, the learner usually loses interest in practicing improvisation because it requires a great deal of creativity and discipline to practice effectively and productively.

On the other hand, there are piano methods in which some creative activities are included to enhance concepts. These activities usually give a descriptive guideline and the student improvises freely within the guideline. Their purpose is more to inspire the student’s creative potential than to provide an organized approach to developing improvisational ability.

Books on improvisation instruction require learners to be well disciplined to practice the exercise and to apply the theory to their own improvisation. The improvisational activities in children’s piano method books require the teacher and the student of great creativity to improvise on their own to cultivate the ability of improvisation. The approach discussed in this document, adapted and developed from Robert Pace Piano Method, provides an alternative.²⁸ Instead of designing one’s own

exercises and application or freely improvising, this approach helps one improvise based on existing repertoire. It gives devices to change a few things in an existing composition, or use the materials from a composition to create a new one. This is a conceptual approach for the purpose of comprehensive musicianship. Robert Pace believes that greater comprehension is achieved if the learned concept is applied immediately through experimentation and with creation of musical phrases. Three techniques from the Pace approach are discussed with examples to demonstrate how to improvise based on existing repertoire in order to achieve greater comprehension of the repertoire and to develop the ability of improvisation. “Creative Reading,” “Question and Answer,” and “Improvisation Based On Chords,” are the three techniques used to demonstrate improvisation.

To conclude, this document provides guidelines with explanatory examples to demonstrate improvisation by the use of the three techniques mentioned above. These techniques are applied to improvisation based on compositions of different styles, which will help develop sensitivity to the features in the composition and the ability to improvise in the style. Improvisations on various scale systems are also included with the description of the characteristics of each scale system. Pace believes that when students are limited only to major and minor scales, they often reject compositions with other scale systems simply because they are not used to them. If students can have exposure to the sounds of the various scale systems, and use these to improvise at the earliest possible stage, even if they are not enthusiastic about the idioms, they will

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develop the understanding of the systems, and these idioms may become as natural to them as major and minor scales.\textsuperscript{30} This coincides with the Dalcroze principle in improvisation, in which students are encouraged not to improvise on major keys all the time in order to prevent from being slaves of diatonic scales.

1.5. The Organization of the Document

This first chapter provides the background information on the importance of teaching improvisation and a brief description of Pace approach to improvisation. The rest of the document is organized in the following manner. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to teaching piano improvisation to give the reader an idea of how the art has been taught. Chapter 3 suggests some improvisational activities in the beginning stages of piano learning, which may serve as an introduction to the realm of improvisation, and as a basis for future improvisation. Chapter 4 explains the Pace approach to improvisation with demonstrated examples in elementary repertoire. Chapter 5 applies the Pace approach to improvisation on intermediate repertoire of various styles. Chapter 6 demonstrates improvisation on modes. Chapter 7 explores improvisation on twelve-tones. Chapter 8 investigates improvisation on jazz. Chapter 9 offers a conclusion and provides some suggestions for success in improvisation, as well as recommendations for further studies.

\textsuperscript{30} Robert Pace, 1999, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 9.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter will review studies relevant to teaching piano improvisation. The approach to improvisation will be briefly discussed to give the reader an idea of how the art has been taught and to provide information for teachers to develop their own curriculum.

In John Robert Duke’s dissertation (1972), *Teaching Musical Improvisation: A Study of Eighteenth and Twentieth Century Methods*, the author investigated improvisational aspects in the instruction books of the eighteenth century by C. P. E. Bach, Jean Philippe Rameau, Leopold Mozart, Johann Quantz. In addition to the knowledge of harmony, learners in the eighteenth-century acquired an ability to create their own innovations by directly observing and listening to those who were proficient in the art, and by careful studying and practicing with various models created by a successful artist.\(^{31}\) As for twentieth century methods, jazz improvisation, and improvisational courses offered in selected universities are discussed in Duke’s study. Duke did not present an organized analysis in Twentieth Century improvisation. Instead,

various ideas were extracted in order to make available a collection of ideas on how improvisation may be taught.\textsuperscript{32} For example, a teen-age rock combo usually copies records in which the ability to “play by ear” is essential. This process of copying develops the abilities to hear and reproduce harmonic progressions and melodic lines.\textsuperscript{33} As to the course content in universities, the acquisition of skills in constructing chord symbols, and the ability to analyze non-harmonic tones are considered as important elements in class piano improvisation.\textsuperscript{34} Duke concluded that “baroque improvisation has been referred to as melodically based in contrast to much of harmonically based improvisation of Twentieth Century. While melodic decoration and enhancement was a prime consideration, examples found in Quantz, C. P. E. Bach, and Tartini show that the harmonic implications furnished by the melody and the bass opened up expansive possibilities for improvising on the chord progression itself.”\textsuperscript{35}

Damron (1974) developed a course in jazz improvisation specifically designed for the inexperienced secondary school instrumentalist with moderate technical proficiency. The objective was to develop the ability to write and perform dorian scales, minor seventh chords and other chords. Other objectives include the ability to aurally recognize and perform certain principles of melody construction; to transcribe a given recorded solo; to imitate a given recorded fragment; to perform a response to a given recorded

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p. 98.  
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., p. 102.  
\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., p. 107.  
\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 32.
fragment; and to perform and improvise in the jazz idiom. These were discussed and modeled throughout the course.\textsuperscript{36}

The approach in William Barron’s dissertation (1975), \textit{Improvisation and Related Concepts in Aesthetic Education}, focuses on melodic embellishment. His work covers the historical approach to embellishment as a source of melodic enrichment. Types of melodic embellishment discussed include passing tones, upper and lower neighboring tones, appoggiatura, anticipation, suspension, \textit{echappée}, and \textit{cambiata}. These are applied in contextual settings through examples drawn from the field of Afro-American music.\textsuperscript{37}

Jane Michelle Kolar’s dissertation (1975), \textit{A Guide to Elementary keyboard Improvisation Using Selected Twentieth Century Compositional Techniques}, is a demonstration of the Pace approach to piano improvisation in group settings. The Robert Pace \textit{Music for Piano} and \textit{Skills and Drills}, Books I – III are used as demonstration texts. The Twentieth Century compositional techniques used for improvisation in this study include pentatonic scale; modes; whole-tone scale; bitonal, bimodal, and bichordal improvisation; quartal improvisation, and twelve-tone improvisation.\textsuperscript{38}

Lamott (1980) examines the content of the treatise \textit{Nova Instructio pro pulsandis organis} (1670 – ca.1675) by Spiridion a Monte Carmelo (1615 -1685), which is a pedagogical work undertaking the teaching of improvisation of preludes, fugues,

toccatas, and basso continuo. Lamott states that Spiridion’s course of study depends on repetitive tactile response and memorization of a vocabulary of improvisational figures, and the system is mastered primarily through rigorous practice at the keyboard. Once the improvisational figures became part of the player’s improvisatory repertoire, it was “left to the improviser to organize these materials into a musical form according to the stylistic conventions and requirements of the situation.”

Larsen (1986) designed a course to teach basic jazz piano skills to classically trained adult pianists. The first goal of the course is to provide students with knowledge of the jazz idiom, including jazz terminology, jazz chord symbols, and the names of jazz pianists. The second goal is to develop students’ ability to realize seventh chords from letter symbols. The third goal is to develop students’ skills to improvise within a 12-bar blues framework. The following techniques were offered to alter an existing tune: (a) rhythmic alteration of melody, (b) melodic alteration of rhythms, (c) melodic embellishment by the use of grace notes, trills, turns, and (d) the use of all or part of the members of chord tones in arpeggiated form. Motivic developmental techniques, such as repetition, transposition, sequence, inversion, octave displacement, retrograde, rhythmic alterations, diminution, augmentation, and addition of neighbors, are suggested organizers and unifiers of a 12-bar blues improvisation. Instead of improvising on a

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40 Ibid., p. 53.
42 Ibid., p. 143.
43 Ibid., p. 156.
blues scale on the right hand with a bass pattern in the left hand, triads may be used in the
right hand in the blues improvisation.\textsuperscript{44}

Holliger (1987) conducted an investigative study on developing divergent
thinking responses in children using “Question and Answer” activities from Level One
Robert Pace \textit{Music for Piano} books. The result of the study showed that children’s
musical divergent thinking skills can be developed, and improvisational activities may be
an effective method to achieve the goal.\textsuperscript{45}

Resfeld (1989) developed a series of instructional units for teaching improvisation
to pianists. It is essentially harmonic improvisation. Sixteen units of theoretical concepts
were discussed and applied to harmonize the \textit{Ode to Joy} theme from Beethoven’s Ninth
Symphony. In other words, the \textit{Ode to Joy} theme is harmonized in sixteen different ways.
Examples from piano literature demonstrating the same concepts were examined. Other
titles of melodies for further harmonization practice were suggested.\textsuperscript{46}

In Randall’s study (1993), the historical significance of piano improvisation in
Western concert music was examined. Improvisation has existed since the beginning of
music and has been an essential part of musicianship; however, since the second half of
the nineteenth century it has gradually declined in classical piano performance. The
study discussed the following improvisational styles in the pre-classical period: melodic
embellishments, variation, thoroughbass, prelude, toccata, fantasy, cadenza, and

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 184.
\textsuperscript{45} Yolanda Margaret Holliger, \textit{An Investigative Study on Developing Divergent Thinking Responses in Children Using a
\textsuperscript{46} Marilyn Dalgliesh Rosfeld, \textit{The Development of a Serious of Instructional Units for Teaching Improvisation
Reasons for improvised embellishment include: (a) to pad a sonority, (b) to show one’s musical science or knowledge, (c) to prevent monotony, and (d) to express the personality. Types of keyboard improvisation practiced during the late eighteenth century include cadenzas, lead-ins (*Eingange*), embellishments, and variations. A cadenza is the embellishment and delay of a final cadence, and its purpose is to dazzle the audience by showing the performer’s improvisational skill as well as technical virtuosity. *Eingange* is “a term used in the late 18th and 19th centuries for a brief passage (or lead-in) in improvisatory style intended as a transition between sections of a work.” Both cadenza and *Eingange* are indicated by the fermata sign. A cadenza should be played if the fermata is over a tonic 6/4 chord, and an *Eingange* should be played if a fermata is over a dominant chord. The improvisational practices in nineteenth-century, codified from Czerny’s treatise *A Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte, op. 200*, include preludes, fermatas and cadenzas, fantasy-like improvisation. Reasons for the gradual decline of the art in the twentieth century were given, which include the separation between composer and performer, the change of musical styles, and the rise of new types of virtuosity. The study concludes that improvisation provides an opportunity for self-expression, as well as a tool for acquiring a deeper understanding of music.

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48 Ibid., p. 12.
49 Ibid., p. 29.
50 Ibid., p. 30.
51 Ibid., p. 32.
52 Ibid.
Margaret T. Skidmore’s thesis (2002) “Using Renaissance Techniques as a Model for Teaching Keyboard Improvisation to Children” reviews the improvisational methods in the following three Renaissance treatises: *Fundamentum organmisandi* (1452) by Conrad Paumann, *Compendium musices* (1552) by Adrian Petit Coclico, and *Arte de taner fantasia* (1565) by Tomas de Santa Maria. These methods are adapted in developing lesson plans to teach improvisation to children who have had little or no previous piano experience. The study concludes that these children have significant potential to improvise in contrapuntal texture.53

This chapter provided a review of studies relevant to the art of teaching piano improvisation. Conclusions may be drawn from these studies:

1. In order to be proficient in the discipline, one is expected to acquire solid knowledge in harmony, as well as listen to and model from successful improvisers’ performance.

2. Moderate technical proficiency is a prerequisite for mastering the art of improvisation.

3. Historical treatises are very important resources and example providers for teaching and learning improvisation.

4. Above all, it is up to the improviser’s creativity to assimilate the learned theory into practice.

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Quite contrary to the above conclusions drawn from the available studies in the field, this document provides a different perspective of teaching improvisation:

1. Improvisation is a tool for conceptual learning in order to develop musicianship. Therefore, improvisation begins as early as the first piano lesson and there are no prerequisites in terms of theoretical knowledge or technical proficiency. Once a concept is learned, the learner will experience that concept through improvisational activities.

2. No prerequisite in technical ability is needed because improvisation serves as a creative endeavor to experience the acquired concept. Besides, there are many attractive and imaginative compositions in the elementary level, which proves difficulty and complexity are not necessary ingredients for successful improvisation.

3. This document provides repertoire-based improvisation developed from a contemporary comprehensive piano method. It reflects on the current trend of music education -- teaching music through creative endeavor for deeper understanding -- as opposed to the methods advocated in historical treatises, in which improvisational practices often were the products of musical styles of the time. It may have been practical as a result of the training of the time, but it may not be feasible today because of the change of focus.

4. Repertoire-based improvisation provides basic materials for the learner to change a few things in the repertoire to create his/her own, which serves as a starting point in learning improvisation. Through continuous improvisational endeavors based on repertoire, the learner accumulates a variety of musical styles and vocabulary, and
develops the ability of free improvisation. The challenge of making one’s own application is minimized because the repertoire itself provides basic musical ideas and formal structure for improvisation.
CHAPTER 3

IMPROVISATION IN THE BEGINNING STAGES

Improvisation should start as early as possible so that it will soon become a natural routine of a student's learning tool. Pace believes that it is much easier to teach a four- or five-year-old to improvise than a ten-year-old child, because younger children are more likely to play whatever they feel like at the moment, according to their unleashed imagination without the fear of failure which older children tend to have.54 Duke also suggests that improvisation should begin early in a player’s career because “once the ‘tyranny of the page’ has worked its spell on the learner, he is resistant of learning a new mode of response.”55

In the beginning stages of piano instruction, experiencing every concept through improvisation will make the learning fun and will enrich the comprehension. It is important that the teacher first demonstrate some examples before asking the student to improvise.

54 Jan Jones Forester, Robert Pace: His Life and Contributions to Piano Pedagogy and Music Education. DMA Document, University of Miami, 1997, p. 38.
3.1. Rhythm

Rhythm is the most crucial element in music since “it carries the performer’s message in the time continuum.” Rhythm alone without melody or harmony can form a piece of music, and such rhythmic creations are found in both primitive as well as modern cultures. Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, who utilizes rhythmic movement as a means to stimulate the student’s intellect, emotions and imagination for the purpose of developing musicality, believes that rhythm is the source of musicality, and the lack of rhythm is due to the lack of balance between the mental and physical powers, which means that the coordination between the mental picture of a movement and its performance by the body is insufficient. Therefore, it is extremely important to help students acquire good sense of rhythm which becomes a foundation for future music making. Being trained in the Dalcroze Eurhythmic program, this writer prefers to develop the student’s sense of pulse and physical control of rhythm through rhythmic movement because rhythm is essentially physical, and the perfection in rhythm results from the precise calculation of the relationships between time-space-energy. If the student can clap, tap on the floor, step, walk, run, skip, throw a ball, or move his arm rhythmically, he will be able to transfer the sensation of rhythmic control from large motor skills of body movements to fine motor skills of finger movements on the keyboard. Detailed discussion of rhythmic activities will not be included in the document because it is beyond the scope of this study.

However, as a general guideline, the first step is to have the student be able to walk (or any format of moving his body) rhythmically according to a steady pulse. The next step is to introduce different note values and different rhythmic patterns and to experience them with body movements. One part of the body moves according to the pulse and the other part of the body beats the rhythms. For example, walk on the quarter note (the regular pulse) and clap with the eighth notes (the division of the regular pulse). Or step on the quarter note and clap with a rhythmic pattern (a combination of short and long sounds). The purpose is to establish the steady pulse and visually see the relationships between pulse and rhythm.

In the beginning the student imitates the teacher’s rhythmic patterns in call and response format. A response in this study refers to the student’s exact repetition of that same pattern created by the teacher. Rhythmic patterns “help define meter and provide a basis for understanding rhythm and meter.” As the teacher creates rhythmic patterns, it is crucially important that musical rests are included. This not only gives students opportunity to practice counting silently for developing inner sense of pulse, but also demonstrating the importance of including silence in the musical creation, which brings about anticipation and excitement, as well as provides contrasts. If students include rests in their early improvisational experiences in rhythmic creations, it is more likely that they will include rests judiciously in their future improvisation, instead of stringing notes

continuously without breaks, which might create tiredness for the listener. Practice in many different meters is equally important.

After the student has the understanding of rhythmic patterns, he will create his own rhythmic patterns in many different meters. Start with creating two measures, and expand to four measures to introduce the concept of phrasing. In Dalcroze Eurhythmics, changing to a different walking (running) direction is a typical device to physically experience and visualize the concept of phrasing.

Rhythm alone has infinite possibilities for improvisation. Other concepts will be combined in the rhythmic improvisation, including tempo, dynamics, articulation, augmentation (improvise a rhythmic pattern then repeat it twice as slow), and diminution (improvise a rhythmic pattern then repeat it twice as fast), before pitches (melodic invention) are involved. Carl Orff, influenced by the Eurhythmics of Dalcroze, believes that improvisation should begin with rhythmic creativity and allow other musical elements to grow out of it.  

3.2. Improvisation on Black Keys (Pentatonic Scale on Black Keys)

Whether with emphasis or simply providing opportunities for experimentation at the keyboard, more and more piano methods include creative activities to explore improvisation. The Hal Leonard Student Piano Library (1996), and Celebrate Piano (2003) are two examples. The first improvisatory activities in both methods are engaged
on the black keys. In the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library*, the student is instructed to place the third finger of each hand on two adjacent black keys (Db, Eb) and improvise along with the teacher’s accompaniment.\(^{61}\) Even though there are only two black notes involved, there are infinite possibilities. These two notes can be played in any order, repeated any number of times, and if the student is capable, these can be played in different registers and with rhythmic variety. The next improvisatory activity is improvising with three black keys.\(^{62}\) In *Celebrate Piano*, improvisation is associated with creating something about animals to inspire the imagination, which is an excellent way to guide the student to transform the abstractive sounds into concrete subjects. The student is asked to explore the high and low sounds on two and three black keys to imitate an animal with a low sound and an animal with a high sound.\(^{63}\) Then the student is asked to make up a piece about her or his favorite animal according to its high or low sound.\(^{64}\) On a later activity, the student is asked to make up a musical story about an elephant and a mouse, using sounds of high and low, soft and loud, after these concepts have been introduced.\(^{65}\)

In any case, the purpose of these improvisations is to explore the learned concepts and how the concepts can be used in musical creations. Exploration brings deeper understanding of the concepts.

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\(^{60}\) Michael L. Mark, *op. cit.*, p. 87.


Improvising on the black keys is an excellent way to begin piano improvisation because the five black keys happen to be a pentatonic scale constructed with a major triad plus a second and a sixth in which every kind of combination of intervals will sound pleasing. There is no leading tone in the pentatonic scale, so it offers freedom for melodic improvisation. The student has the freedom to play anything according to his imagination without worrying about the consonances and dissonances. Orff even considers it important to limit children to the pentatonic scale in the early stages of improvisation because rather than creating their own music, the children might imitate music they already know if a seven-note scale were used.\textsuperscript{66}

If students are hesitant to create their own music, they can imitate the teacher’s melodic patterns in call and response format as a starting point. For example, after the two- and three- black keys have been introduced, the teacher can be the leader playing two beats (one note at a time or combining two or more notes at a time) and the student will copy what the teacher did. The purpose is to give the student ideas to improvise. After the student has experienced many examples, he or she will be the leader and the teacher follows. Different dynamics and touches can be involved in addition to choices of notes and rhythm.

Another introductory activity is that the teacher plays a familiar tune consisting of only pentatonic scale tones, which are do, re, mi, so, and la, such as "Old McDonald Had a Farm," "Jesus Loves Me This I Know," “Amazing Grace,” on the black keys, and the student improvises freely on the upper register as an accompaniment. The student

\textsuperscript{66} Mark, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 89.
usually feels good about being able to go up and down with absolute freedom on the keyboard, either with single notes, combination of notes, clusters, or glissando. Creating an accompaniment provides students opportunity to establish the sense of phrasing because they need to create according to the phrasing of the tune, either it is an ostinato accompaniment pattern or it is a free accompaniment. While students improvising, the teacher observes what they have done and make suggestions, such as “do that pattern again but in a higher register,” or “do that pattern again but in the opposite direction,” so that students gain ideas from the improvisational experiences.

After the five black keys are introduced, transforming a familiar tune consisting of only the first five tones of a major or minor scale into a pentatonic tune is another fun activity. This is a good opportunity to introduce the pentatonic scale and it gives the student the opportunity to experience the different colors between the original tune and the new pentatonic one. Example 1 shows the traditional tune "Old Woman" in major mode while example 2 shows “Old Woman” in pentatonic.

Example 1: “Old Woman” in Gb Major
Example 2: Pentatonic “Old Woman”

The pentatonic scale is good for improvising Indian dances or Oriental folk songs. The teacher plays an ostinato accompaniment to enable the student to grasp beat, meter, phrasing, and character. The student then can improvise a pentatonic melody accordingly. One example is to use open fifths to accompany Indian dances and play an arpeggiated pentatonic pattern imitating an Oriental stringed instrument to accompany an Oriental folk tune.

Two pentatonic melodies can be played simultaneously to create a contrapuntal composition, which can be done as a duet between the teacher and the student.

3.3 Improvisation on White Keys

After white keys are introduced, the *Hal Leonard Piano Library* asks the student to improvise on C D E with the teacher’s accompaniment. The instruction writes “Listen and feel the pulse as your teacher plays the accompaniment. When you are ready, play C D E. Experiment by playing E D C. Mix with letters any way you want and make up
your own song. Have fun."\textsuperscript{67} Let the student improvise freely with her/his choices of a single note or a combination of notes, as well as rhythm, register, and dynamics, as long as s/he improvises with correct phrasing, and ends the whole piece on C due to its tonal nature. Students might at first improvise on one position, yet after a few times of improvising, they usually will explore on different registers, with different combinations of notes or tone clusters, or even experiment with hand-crossing without the teacher instructing them doing so. Improvising on F G A B is the next activity.\textsuperscript{68}

\textit{Celebrate Piano} asks the student to make up a piece about “mountain climbing” using C D E, melodic and harmonic seconds, as well as \textit{p} or \textit{f}.\textsuperscript{69} After F G A B are introduced, the student is asked to make up a song titled “Dancing Letters” using C D E or F G A B.\textsuperscript{70} This is an effective device for students to connect music with a story, both of which become their own creation.

It is important to mention that, even though improvisational activities in the white keys are done in the key of C Major in many method books, teachers should help students not become “slaves” of diatonic music. Therefore, in some improvisational practices, advise students not to think about C Major. Instead, treat every note the same and see what students can do. This will also open up the possibility for exploring different sound systems, and provide the opportunity for imagination.

\textsuperscript{67} Barbara Kreader, Fred Kern, Phillip Keveren, and Mona Rejino, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{69} Cathy Albergo, J. Mitzi Kolar, and Mark Mrozinski, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 54.
3.4. Improvisation with Bitonality

Introducing bitonality to students in the very early stage will help students not to be constrained in the functional harmony so that they will develop the flexibility of creating imaginative harmonies for a given harmony. It is a fun experiment while students play a melody on white keys with the accompaniment on black keys, which creates bitonality. See example 3.

Example 3: “Old Woman” in bitonality

Bitonality can be obtained by playing the melody on one key while playing the accompaniment on another. Example 4 shows a melody in E major with the accompaniment in D major.

\[\text{Example 3: “Old Woman” in bitonality}\]

Ibid., p. 66.
3.5. Improvisation on the Whole-Tone Scale

Once students learn the concept of whole- and half- steps, they will experience the concept in their improvisation. Help students build a scale with each tone a whole-step apart. Tell students that the scale they just built is called a whole-tone scale.

Improvisation on the whole-tone scale is probably one of the most inspiring activities in the beginning stages. There are two forms of whole-tone scale on the piano: the first is constructed on the three white keys beginning on C, followed by the three black keys. It can be played as the following fingering: LH 432 on C, D, E and RH 234 on F#, G#, A#.

The second is constructed on two black key starting from Db and proceeding to the four white keys starting from F, which can be played as LH 32 on Db, Eb, and RH 1234 on F, G, A, B. Students should familiarize themselves with the first form before the second form is introduced.
Any tune ranging within the first six tones of a major or minor scale can be transformed into a whole-tone tune. Example 5 shows a whole-tone “Old Woman.”

Example 5: Whole-tone “Old Woman”

"Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" can be transformed into a "Whole-Tone Little Star."

Example 6: Whole-tone “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”
Augmented triads and tritones are derived from the whole-tone scale and work well to create accompaniment patterns, as shown in examples 5 and 6.

The whole-tone scale has no leading tone due to its lack of half steps. It is symmetrical because it is constructed with identical intervals (whole steps). Therefore it lacks a “center of gravity” and a feeling of ambiguity is created when the music is composed with whole-tone scale.\(^7\) Thus, students can freely improvise with the whole-tone scale in such titles as “Outer Space,” “Balloons,” “Deep Sea,” “Sails,” “Clouds,” or “Mists.” Use the title as a clue to suggest the mood or a story, and then freely make sounds on the piano according to the mood. There is no need to worry about the meter, phrasing or form in this story-based improvisation for it is to stimulate the imagination.

\[3.6. \text{Improvising on the Five-Finger Position}\]

This section deals with the improvisation on the first five-tones of the diatonic major and minor scales. Numerous nursery songs and folk tunes are composed with the first five tones of the major scale. Since the entire tune can be played in five-finger position without encountering such technical issues as hand expansion/contraction, position shifts, or finger crossing, the teacher should help students play these tunes by ear. Once students have played several tunes, they can use the same five tones to create their own melody. Improvise in different meters and in all the twelve major keys,
preferably in the following order of keys: C, G, F (group I); D, A, E (group II); Db, Ab, Eb (group III); and Bb, Gb, B (group IV). It is easier for students to build the five-finger pattern in any key if they are aware that the third and the fourth fingers of the right hand stick together with no keys in between (half step), while the rest have to have one key between two fingers (whole step). Once the right hand finds the notes, the left hand simply copies it. As usual, students first imitate the teacher’s one-bar melodic segments in call and response format, and then create their own melodic segment after observing enough demonstrations. Expand the melodic creation to two-bar segments and then to a four-bar phrase. Ways to create longer compositions and a systematic approach to improvisation will be discussed in Chapter four.

When students have played music in all twelve keys by ear or in their improvisation, it will be natural for them to transfer these tactile experiences to the musical notation in all twelve keys. This leads to the multiple-key approach to music reading -- one of the major contributions of Robert Pace Piano Method made to the field of piano pedagogy -- which enables students to play comfortably in all twelve-keys from very beginning and provides solid foundation to sight-read compositions regardless of the keys.

Lower the third tone of the major scale so that students can experience improvising in the minor mode at the earliest possible stage instead of waiting until they encounter minor mode compositions. It is also important that each hand improvises the melody so that each hand has equal opportunities for the technical development.

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3.7. Conclusion

This chapter provides improvisational ideas for the purpose of developing deeper understanding of learned concepts. The examples given as by no means complete. Teachers should help students experiment all learned concepts through improvisation.

As a reminder in teaching improvisation in the beginning stage, it is worth bearing in mind that teachers need to demonstrate so students have something to model. One should not be afraid of demonstrating because the process is more important than the product. Besides, the product need not be complicated or huge. Begin with something simple so that students can comprehend how the concept is used in the improvisation. The important thing is to do it and enjoy the satisfaction of freely expressing one’s own ideas through the application of the learned concepts.
CHAPTER 4

PACE APPROACH TO PIANO IMPROVISATION

Through the improvisational activities discussed in Chapter 3, the student’s creative potential is disclosed and the piano learning experience is enriched. The challenge is that these activities require the teacher to be a person of great creativity and that it is not easy for the student to practice improvisation on a daily basis and with a wide variety of ideas. For teachers who are not experienced in improvisation, the approach discussed in this chapter, adapted from the Robert Pace Piano Method, provides a solution to the above situation. Instead of allowing free improvisation, Pace gives students organized devices to change a few things in an existing composition, or use the materials from a composition to create a new one. The procedure in this approach is:

First, students discover and explore the meaning of each concept in the piece they are playing, with analysis and symbolization. Second, after students can play the piece well, they will apply the concept in their own improvisation by creating something essentially the same but with some variations. Third, this learned concept will be combined with new concepts in future improvisation. Such a conceptual learning curriculum allows students to integrate learned concepts into a whole in a upward (in difficulty) and
outward (in understanding and knowledge) learning process.\textsuperscript{72} Camp supports the conceptual learning curriculum as he states “A student’s curriculum must allow for the gradual integration of all subsequent learning with what has already been absorbed into the whole.”\textsuperscript{73} The conceptual learning improvisational approach enables students to improvise in a systematic manner and helps them develop a deeper understanding of the music they are playing when concepts become applicable. In addition, as students integrate the concepts upwardly and outwardly, they will have a large bank of musical ideas and will be able to improvise with a variety of styles.

The techniques for piano improvisation discussed in this chapter are demonstrated upon a simple nursery tune “Old Woman.” The same techniques are applied to the elementary and intermediate repertoire in this chapter and in chapter five. They are readily applicable to the advanced repertoire as well. Three techniques will be discussed, which are “Creative Reading,” “Question and Answer,” and “Improvisation Based on Chords.”

4.1 Creative Reading

The "Creative Reading" technique is demonstrated on varying original melodies; therefore, it is essentially “melodic variation.” This technique not only provides organized procedures for melodic improvisation, but also helps develop a keen awareness

of melodic structures when the student recognizes the direction and interval of the 
melodic contour, and groups the melodic notes into discernible patterns such as 
repetitions, sequences, and inversions.

Improvisation comes after the student can play the original piece with fluency. 
Establish a good habit of learning a new piece in order to get it right the first time to 
avoid undoing the wrong. The same procedure will be used in improvisation after the 
piece is learned. Pace suggests that the student should first look through the entire piece 
to recognize the nature of the melody. Three concepts are used to analyze the melody:

1. **Melodic Contour**: A melody can move up (ascending) or down (descending).

2. **Melodic Interval**: Moving up or down can be stepwise (step), with a leap (skip), or 
the melody can stay at the same level (repeat).

3. **Melodic Pattern**: The basic pattern (motive) of the piece can be repeated (repetition), 
can be stated again on a different level (sequence), or it can be played upside down 
(inversion).

The analysis of the composition provides insights into how composers create 
music, and it becomes an aid to learning new repertoire and memorizing with efficiency.

Example 7 is the traditional tune "Old Woman," which will be used for 
illustration.
Example 7: Old Woman

This melody moves down by skips in m.1; the second measure is its repetition. In m.3, the melody uses three repeated notes then moves up by a skip. Then it steps down in m.4.

The analysis should be done before the student attempts to play it. Think about what concepts are involved in the piece, what needs to be done, and choose an appropriate tempo so that the student can get it right the first time to avoid undoing the wrong. If there are any problems after the first trial, figure out what went wrong and fix the problematic spot; then try it again with a slower tempo and try not to make the same mistake twice. This practicing habit not only requires concentration, but also develops the student’s sight-reading ability.

After playing each piece as written, practice “Creative Reading” on the piece, which will be demonstrated in the following section. The demonstrations are done on the first two measures; the same principle is applicable to the third and fourth measures.

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75 Ibid., Forward.
4.1.1. Creative Reading According to Melodic Contour:

Change the direction of the original melodic contour to create a new melody. The original melody in m.1 descends from the top note. To create a new melody, the student may change the melodic contour to the opposite direction by making it ascend from the bottom note.

Example 8: Melodic contour of “Old Woman” in the opposite direction

![Melodic contour example 8]

The melody may start from the middle note of the pattern (motive) and move up to top then down to the bottom.

Example 9: Starting from the middle tone of the “Old Woman” pattern

![Melodic contour example 9]

Similarly it may begin on the middle note and move down then up.
Example 10: Starting from the middle tone of the “Old Woman” pattern

Instead of using all three notes from the pattern, the student might decide to use only two of them. Example 11 shows some possibilities.

Example 11: Using only two tones from the pattern in “Old Woman”
4.1.2. Creative Reading According to Melodic Intervals

Change the melodic intervals from skips to steps or repeats to create a new composition.

The original melody skips down in m.1. To vary, it can step down (example 12), step up (example 13) or repeat one or more notes (example 14).

Example 12: Stepwise “Old Woman” patterns

Example 13: Stepwise “Old Woman” pattern in the opposite melodic direction.
Example 14: One note repeated in the melody.

The combination of changing melodic contour and intervals will result in infinite possibility.

4.1.3. Creative Reading Utilizing Melodic Patterns:

Comparing the first two measures, we notice that the second measure is an exact repetition of the first. Instead of repeating the pattern, the student can play it as an inversion (example 15), or play a sequence in the second measure (example 16).

Example 15: “Old Woman” pattern with its inversion
Example 16: “Old Woman” pattern with its sequence

In order to be certain that the student understand the concepts of inversion and sequence, the teacher can create a one-bar pattern and ask the student to play its inversion or sequence. Practice with many examples. Once the student understands the concepts, vary nursery tunes by applying inversion or sequence in them. Example 17 is the original tune of “Lightly Row,” which employs sequence.

Example 17: Excerpt from “Lightly Row”

Example 18 shows the use of inversion to create a new composition.
Example 18: Employment of inversion in “Lightly Row”

When these three concepts (the ascending and descending of the melodic contour; the skips or steps between the notes; the repetition, inversion, and sequence of the pattern) are combined in the melodic variation, there are infinite possibilities for creating new melodies.

Like the process of learning a new piece, it is crucial that students think about what they want to change before attempting to play it. Improvisation should not be done randomly, nor in trial and error experience; otherwise the concepts will not be reinforced through the improvisational activities. For example, before a creative reading on “Old Woman,” the student decides to “begin from the bottom note and go up by a skip then step down; the second measure will be a sequence; the third measure starts with stepping up then skip down; begin the fourth measure on the tonic and skip up then back to the tonic.” Example 19 is its result.
Example 19: A variation of “Old Woman”

In the beginning stages, changing only one measure at a time and playing the remainder as written will be sufficient. As students become more experienced, they can change every measure if they wish.

The use of repetition, sequence, and inversion of patterns makes the melodic improvisation more coherent, meaningful, and interesting. Encourage the student to incorporate these in his improvisations whenever appropriate.

4.1.4. Creative Reading on “The Clown Plays Tricks”

Practice the “creative reading” technique with the repertoire the student is playing. This section demonstrates “creative reading” on an elementary composition “The Clown Plays Tricks” (example 20) to create new compositions.

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Example 20: The Clown Plays Tricks

After initial analysis, the student notices that the basic melodic contour of the pattern in mm.1–2 goes up by skips and mm. 3–4 is a repetition. The melody flows down and up in mm. 5–6 and finally goes down to the tonic in mm. 7–8. Measures 10–
13 constitute a coda beginning with skipping up in m.10, repeating the pattern in m. 11, and stepping up to end the piece on the tonic in m.13.

Use the “creative reading” technique to create a new melody by changing the melodic contour to the opposite direction, as shown in example 21.

Example 21: Melody in the opposite direction
Example 22 shows a new melody resulting from a combination of changing the melodic contour to the opposite direction, with changing the intervals from skips to steps.

Example 22: Melody in the opposite direction and in stepwise motion

Repetition appears in several places in the original composition. Example 23 shows a new melody with the employment of sequence, while example 24 employs inversion.
Example 23: Employment of sequence in the melody

Example 24: Employment of inversion in the melody
The original rhythm is observed in order to minimize the complexity. As to the left hand, the student either simply plays exactly the same as written, or lets the left hand follow the right hand half steps away, as seen in example 21, creating an interval of minor second contributing to the funny, humorous sound in the composition.

4.2. Question and Answer

In addition to making melodic variations on an existing piece, the student can use the musical ideas in a piece to create new phrases.

Melodies frequently consist of two phrases, the first of which seems to ask a question, while the second gives an answer. After the first phrase is created, the student can then play another phrase as an answer. Use the “Creative Reading” technique to create a question and end the question on any note other than “Do” (the tonic); thus it will invite an answer. When the answer begins with the same pattern as the question, it is called a parallel answer. A question with a parallel answer is called a parallel period. Starting the second phrase differently makes a contrasting answer. A question with a contrasting answer is called a contrasting period. Use “Old Woman” to illustrate.

4.2.1. Parallel Answer

Example 25 shows one possible set of a parallel question-and-answer, derived from “Old Woman.”
Example 25: Parallel “Question and Answer”

The teacher can generate a few questions for the student to improvise parallel answers. The student should decide what he wants to include for the answer before he plays. Improvise in various major and minor keys, and let both hands have the chance to improvise the melody. As the student feels comfortable with improvising parallel answers, s/he will create her or his own question and improvise an answer to it. In the beginning stages, the activities will be limited on the five-finger positions to minimize the difficulties. As the student becomes more experienced, s/he will naturally explore a wider range for the melody. It is important that the student always thinks out what s/he wants to do before playing it, such as, “For the question, I will use sequence in the second
measure, followed by going up by steps, and use repeated notes in the fourth measure.

For the answer, I want to use inversion in the second measure; go down by steps in the third and fourth measures.” See example 26.

\[ \text{Example 26: Parallel period based on “Old Woman”} \]

\[ \text{4.2.2. Contrasting Answer} \]

As soon as the student is adept at creating parallel answers, s/he can begin the second phrase differently to create a contrasting answer.\(^{77}\) Starting the answer on the

\(^{77}\) Pace, 1999, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6.
note which the question ends is a useful way to carry on the melodic flow, as shown in example 27.

Example 27: Contrasting “Question and Answer”

In the beginning stages, the teacher may establish parameters to avoid the student being overwhelmed by the limitless choices. For example, ask the student to create a parallel answer by only changing the third measure of the original question and ending on the tonic at the fourth measure.

4.2.3. Question and Answer on “The Clown Plays Tricks”

After a composition is learned, the student will create a question based on the composition and then provide an answer for it. Observing the original rhythm and bass
pattern allows concentration on creating melodies. The following examples are derived from “The Clown Plays Tricks.”

Example 28 shows a parallel period in which inversions are employed.

Example 28: Parallel period based on “The Clown Plays Tricks”

Example 29 shows a contrasting period in which the stepwise notes are called for and sequences are employed.

Example 29: Contrasting period with the employment of sequence based on “The Clown”

The above examples demonstrate how to generate questions out of musical compositions. It is advised that the teacher provide the question for the student to create parallel and contrasting answers accordingly. The ultimate goal in the "question-and-answer" exercises is that the student sees (or hears) the structure of the “question” and then formulates in her or his mind an appropriate “answer,” and proceed to play both without stopping. This process should be repeated over and over until a particular “question” has generated many different “answers” with fluency.
4.3. Improvisation Based on Chords

In most homophonic music, improvisers either create the melody first, then harmonize with suitable chords, or design the harmonic progression first and then create the melody according to the harmony. In the previous sections, the discussion focused on creating melodies regardless of the existence of the harmony. When students have the freedom to choose any of the available notes without the boundary of the underneath harmony, their imagination on melodic improvisation will be challenged to the greatest extent. However, eventually they have to learn how to create a melody based on the suggested harmony, so that the melody is logically under a theoretical design. Improvising based on chords is the typical practice in many musical realms, such as jazz. This section will be devoted to improvising according to chords in the hope that when students practice their melodic invention, their melodies will be structurally and theoretically balanced with harmony and form.

4.3.1. Improvisation On the Tonic Chord

The first experience of improvising according to given chords begins with improvising five-finger position melodies with only the “I” (tonic) chord involved. This will not only be easier for students to see and hear the relationship of melody tones to the
accompanying harmony, but also minimize problems of coordinating the eyes, ears, and fingers.

The teacher provides a four-beat rhythmic pattern and asks the student to use chord tones of the tonic (do, mi, sol) to create a melody with the given rhythm. The teacher should first demonstrate a few examples before asking the student to do so. Prolong the pattern from one measure (four beats) to two measures and to four measures. While the student improvises the melody, the teacher may provide simple “I” chord accompaniments. Use nursery tunes that are within a five-finger range for “creative reading” to create new tunes with only the tonic chord involved. Change the melody where the tones do not belong to the “I” chord and substitute with the tonic chord tones. Example 30 shows a new piece transformed from “Old Woman,” and example 31 demonstrates a new composition based on “Lightly Row.”

Example 30: New melody based on “Old Woman” with only “I” chord involved
Example 31: New melody based on “Lightly Row” with only “I” chord involved

The student will first play the newly created melody with the right hand and accompany the melody with the “I” chord in the left hand. Switch hands for the melody and the accompaniment. Transpose to various keys.

4.3.2. Improvisation On Tonic and Dominant Seventh Chords

The dominant seventh chord (V7) will be introduced after the tonic chord is understood. The V7 chord is a chord built on the fifth degree (Sol, Ti, Re) with another
tone a third above added (Fa). First inversion is used for the purpose of a smooth voice leading, and the fifth of the chord can be omitted.

The student will first practice creating a four-beat melodic segment using only V7 chord tones with the rhythmic pattern provided by the teacher.

When the student is comfortable in creating melodic segments using V7 chord tones, the next step is to create a two-measure segment with “I” and “V7” chords in each measure. After the student is able to improvise two measures without stopping, have her or him improvise a four-measure phrase with rhythms and the chord progression provided.

Once the concepts of “I” and “V7” chords are understood, the student will practice the “Creative Reading” technique in a repertoire containing only “I” and “V7” chords, to create her or his own melody after s/he can play the original composition. It is suggested that the student writes down the chord numbers below the bass part on the score. In the first attempts to improvise, use chord tones only and retain the rhythm and chord progressions of the original to minimize the difficulty. Example 32 shows a new melody derived from “Old Woman.” Example 33 is a new melody based on “Lightly Row.”
Example 32: New Melody based on “Old Woman”

Example 33: New melody based on “Lightly Row”

Transpose to various keys and switch hands for the melody and the accompaniment.

Non-chord tones, such as passing tones (PT), upper neighboring tones (UN), and lower neighboring tones (LN), can be added in the student’s improvisation once these
concepts have been introduced. The student should decide what types of non-chord tones s/he will use before attempting to improvise.

Example 34 shows a modified version of example 33 with the inclusion of passing tone, and upper and lower neighboring tones.

Example 34: Non-chord tones added to the melody in example 33

As the student encounters “IV” or “ii” chords or secondary dominant chords in her or his repertoire, analyze these chords and observe how the melody is constructed (the chord tones, passing tones, lower and upper neighboring tones). Procedures for improvising on these chords are the same as improvising on only “I” and “V7” chords; i.e. improvise a four-beat segment with only the IV (or ii) chord involved, then prolong to two or four measures with more chords involved.
The same procedure is applicable to the minor mode improvisation when the minor mode repertoire is encountered. However, minor mode can be experienced by flattening the third and the sixth tones of the major scale.

4.4. Free Improvisation

In the beginning stages, the teacher uses musical materials from repertoire to create questions for the student to create parallel and contrasting phrases. Eventually students will need to be able to improvise their own question-and-answers based on the materials from repertoire. The following questions need to be considered before they improvise:

1. Will I create a parallel or contrasting answer?
2. What key and what chord progression shall I use?
3. Do I want to use sequences, repetitions, or inversions; and where will I use chord tones and non chord tones?

In the beginning these specific parameters can be set by the teacher. For example, when using “Old Woman” to create a question-and-answer, the teacher specifies that the student improvise a parallel question-and-answer in D major with I- I- V- V for the question, I- I-V-I for the answer. Under such a condition, the easiest way is to change the fourth measure of the original for a question and play the original version as the answer. The student can vary more notes after several attempts under the same parameter. As
s/he gains confidence, the teacher may request an employment of sequence in the improvisation. Step by step the teacher adds more items in the parameter, such as an Alberti bass for the accompaniment. The ultimate goal is that students will make their own decisions about what they want to create. Limiting the parameters creates a comfort zone for experimentation so that the student is not overwhelmed with too many choices, which results in confusion and hesitation in improvisation.\textsuperscript{81} Duke suggested that a logical procedure designed to teach the student to make choices should begin with a small number of possibilities and as the student acquires confidence in his/her ability to make choices, the number of alternates may be increased.\textsuperscript{82}

After many experiences creating “Question and Answer” based on repertoire, students develop the ability of thinking creatively and establish a musical bank containing many musical ideas which can be utilized in free improvisation. One set of question and answer is sufficient to be considered a complete composition. To create a longer composition, two or more sets of “Question and Answer” can be put together for a binary (AB), ternary (ABA), or rondo form (ABACA). \textsuperscript{83}

After the first set of Question-and-Answer is played, continue the improvisation with a contrasting set of Question-and-Answer. In addition to employing a different thematic material for the second section, Wallner offers the following ideas: dynamics (loud and soft), range (high register and low register), line (ascending line and

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{81} Bennett Reimer, ed., \textit{Performing with Understanding: The Challenge of the National Standards for Music Education}, 2000, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{82} Duke, \textit{op. cit.},
\textsuperscript{83} Pace, 1999, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 10.
descending line), mode (major and minor), keys (tonic and dominant keys), rhythmic
pattern (short note values and long note values), mood (sad and gay), line (curved and
sharp), touch (staccato and legato), and timbre (left hand and right hand), for creating a
contrasting section. For example, if the A section is vigorous and loud, the B section
can be lyrical and soft. It is helpful to think of imaginary creatures, such as the goblin
and the elephant, when teaching children. Immediately these two creatures suggest
different rhythms, different registers on the keyboard, as well as different dynamics.
Example 35 shows a ternary composition based on “The Clown Plays Tricks,” and the
two contrasting sections suggest goblin and elephant.

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85 Ibid.
Example 35: Ternary composition based on “The Clown Plays Tricks”
The student should explore and improvise with all types of conventional meters (2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 3/8, 6/8), the more contemporary meters (5/4, 7/8), as well as meter changes within a composition.
CHAPTER 5

IMPROVISATION BASED ON INTERMEDIATE REPERTOIRE

The practice of "Creative Reading," “Question and Answer” exercises, and "Improvising Based On Chords" should be continued as the student advances from one level to the next, to the point when the student plays the standard repertoire of the master composers, s/he will use the “creative reading” technique to make melodic variations based on the original melody, create a new melody according to the original chords, or use the motive or musical materials to create new phrases in “question and answer” format. By doing so, the student is more aware of the composer’s musical language and the characteristics of the piece. Besides, it is always exciting and satisfactory when the student is able to improvise in the composer’s style.

Five compositions of different styles at the intermediate level are used to demonstrate how to improvise on master composers' styles. The reader may adapt the ideas and apply them to other composers' compositions with various levels of difficulty.
5.1. Improvisation Based on *Gigue in G Major* by George Philipp Telemann

The student first analyzes the harmony and writes chord numbers below the bass part.
Example 36: *Gigue in G Major* by George Philipp Telemann
5.1.1. Creative Reading

The motive in this composition is a descending figure made up with chord tones only. The student changes the motive into a figure starting from the middle tone of the chord (example 37). The rest of the piece can be kept the same on the first attempt of improvisation. However, the melodic contour has been changed to a different direction for better melodic interest, as seen in mm. 2, 3, 6, 7, 13, and 14 of example 37.
Example 37: Creating Reading based on *Gigue in G Major* by Telemann
Other possible variations on the motive include

1. Change the motivic contour to the opposite direction (example 38).

2. Employ only two notes, instead of three notes, of the broken chord motive, and use inversion to unfold the composition (example 39).

3. Change the broken-chord motive into a stepwise motive (examples 40 and 41).

Example 38: Change the original motive to the opposite direction

Example 39: Employment of inversion in the motive

Example 40: Motive in stepwise motion with the employment of sequence
Example 4: Motive in stepwise motion with the employment of inversion

5.1.2. Question and Answer

After much practice on creative reading to vary the motive -- including turning the contour to the opposite direction, using only one or two notes of the original motive, and employing stepwise motion instead of broken chords -- the student will develop the ability to freely mix these possible forms of motive in one composition. Practice on various keys. The next step will be creating question-and-answers based on the composition. Example 42 shows a question in which the motive is freely transfigured according to the original progression. Examples 43 and 44 show parallel and contrasting answers to this question respectively.

Example 42: “Question” based on *Gigue in G Major* by George Philipp Telemann
Example 43: “Parallel answer” to the question of example 42

Example 44: “Contrasting answer” to the question of example 42.

5.2. Improvisation Based on *Minuet in F Major* by Leopold Mozart

The student first analyzes the formal structure (binary form), the chord progression, and writes chord numbers below the bass part.
Example 45: *Minuet in F Major* by Leopold Mozart
5.2.1. Creative Reading

After the composition is learned, the student uses the original chord progression and rhythms to create a new melody. The student may change the melodic pattern to the opposite direction (example 46), use different members of chord tones (example 47), or change the broken chord pattern to a stepwise pattern (example 48).

Example 46: Melody in the opposite direction of the original

Example 47: Use different members of the chord tones in the melody
Example 48: Stepwise motion in the melody

5.2.2. Question and Answer

The first two phrases of original composition can be viewed as a question followed by a parallel answer. The student can use the same question (mm.1 – 4) to create many different answers. Or do creative reading on the first four measures to create a question and generate parallel or contrasting answers. Examples 46 and 47 show parallel periods, while example 48 is a contrasting one.

5.2.3. Free Improvisation

The student can use the motive but change the chord progression and rhythmic features in her or his improvisation. In example 50, the motive is related to the original, yet many main features are different from the original. These are:
1. The original has a sequence in the first phrase, while example 50 has an inversion.

2. L. Mozart creates a parallel period in the first section (mm 1 – 8), while the first section in example 49 is a contrasting period.

3. L. Mozart starts phrases with an upbeat (anacrusis), while example 49 starts phrases on the down beat (crusis).

4. L. Mozart uses “I” and “IV” chords in the first phrase, while in example 49, “I,” “IV,” and “V” chords are used.

5. In mm. 9 – 12, L. Mozart uses the dominant chord exclusively, which gives a sense of moving to the dominant key without real modulation. In mm. 9 – 12 of example 49 the music modulates to the dominant key creating a sense of suspension and expectation that is not resolved until the music modulates back to the home key at the beginning of the last phrase.
Example 49: A new composition based on *Minuet in F Major* by Leopold Mozart
When students establish the habit of improvising based on the repertoire and practices it on a daily basis, they will develop the ability to internally formulate melodies according to chord progressions, then proceed to use the motive (in the original form or the varied one) to improvise with fluency.

5.3. Improvisation Based on Etude by Robert Schumann

This is a technical exercise on broken chords. The student first analyzes and labels the harmony.
Example 50: Etude by Robert Schumann
5.3.1. Creative Reading

The following are a few possible new patterns that the student will use to replace the original. Playing through the entire composition with the new motive requires concentration as well as coordination, and it is good training for thinking in motion. The student will notice that chords alone can produce an attractive composition.

Example 51: A new melody based on *Etude* by Robert Schumann

Example 52: A new melody based on *Etude* by Robert Schumann
Example 53: A new melody based on *Etude* by Robert Schumann

### 5.3.2. Question and Answer

Create a motive, design the chord progression, such as I - IV - V - I, and then proceed to play a question. Design the chord progression for the answer, such as I - IV - V - I and improvise both parallel and contrasting answers for the question. Example 54 is a parallel answer to the question of example 52, and example 55 is a contrasting answer to the question of example 53.

Example 54: Parallel answer to the question of example 52
Example 55: Contrasting answer to the question of example 53.

Invent different questions. Practice in various keys.

5.4. Improvisation Based on Sorrow by Bela Bartok (from “For Children,” vol. II)

This composition starts with the A minor chord (the tonic) changing to the E minor chord (the dominant, but in minor tonality) on the first measure. The second measure starts with A major chord (modal shift to the parallel major) moving to E minor chord again. The right hand melody uses chord tones with neighboring and passing tones.

The first half of the composition (mm. 1 – 8) is a contrasting period. The second half is the exact repetition of the first.
Example 56: *Sorrow* by Bela Bartok (from “For Children,” vol. II)
5.4.1. Creative Reading

Example 57 shows a melodic variation based on the original chords.

![Example 57](image)

Example 57: A new composition based on *Sorrow* by Bela Bartok

5.4.2. Question and Answer

Use measures 1 – 4 in example 57 as a question. Examples 58 and 59 show parallel and contrasting answers respectively.
Example 58: parallel answer to mm. 1 – 4 of example 57

Example 59: contrasting answer to mm. 1 – 4 of example 57

5.4.3. Free Improvisation

Musical ideas in the composition may be extracted and expanded to create a new composition. In example 60, the left-hand pattern is derived from the first measure of Bartok’s original and is expanded by the use of sequences. A new melody is then
created based on this sequential bass pattern. Use this phrase as a question and create a parallel or contrasting answer. Example 61 shows a parallel answer.

Example 60: Melody created based on the sequential base pattern derived from *Sorrow*

Example 61: Parallel answer to example 60
5.5. Improvisation Based on *March* by Vincent Persichetti
Example 62: *March* by Vincent Persichetti
The student first analyzes the features in the piece. Two rhythmic patterns are prominent in this piece: two quarter notes plus a half note pattern, as in m.1; and the dotted eight notes and eight notes pattern, as in m.2.

In terms of harmony, the left hand uses an ostinato bass pattern consisting of only major thirds, and the right hand consisting of only major triads. A composition containing only major triads suggests a bright and joyful character. In addition, it is a bitonal piece.

As to melody, it uses only major scales (mm. 2, 6, 14, 18, 26, 30) and Lydian (mm. 4, 16, 28), except in mm. 7, 8, 19, 20, 31, 32, where B minor scale leads to the B major triad. Lydian is essentially a major scale with a raised fourth, which sharpens the brightness and joyfulness.

As to the formal structure, it is a ternary (ABA) form with interruptions by the “horn-call” type bi-chordal segments, as seen in mm. 9 – 12, and 21 – 24. A bi-chordal segment from m.33 to the end functions as a coda.

5.5.1. Creative Reading

The student makes the following decisions before beginning the measure-by-measure “Creative Reading” exercise:

1. Create an ostinato pattern, which consists of only major triads.
2. Observe the same rhythmic pattern but use different chord tones for m.1, and for all the other equivalent places.

Example 63: Ostinato pattern

Example 64: new motive for m. 1

3. For m.2 and for all the measures with eighth and dotted eighth notes figures, observe the same rhythm, and use the Lydian scale to improvise freely. Use D
Lydian in the A section and use A Lydian in the B section for contrasts. The following are some possible D Lydian melodies.

Example 65: motive for m. 2

Example 66: motive for m. 2

Example 67: motive for m. 2

4. For the horn-call section, the following bi-chordal segment is created.
Example 6: Bi-chordal motive

Applying the above ideas to the original composition will result in a new composition with similar features.

5.5.2. Question and Answer

Use the motive in mm. 1 – 2 to create a four-bar question, as seen in example 69.

Finish the period with a parallel or contrasting answer. Example 70 shows a parallel answer, and example 71 demonstrates a contrasting answer.
Example 69: Question created based on *March* by Vincent Persichetti

Example 70: Parallel answer to example 69
Example 71: Contrasting answer to example 69

Likewise, the bi-chordal idea (example 68) can be used to create sets of question-and-answer.

5.6. Conclusion

Repertoire-based improvisation is beneficial. It develops sensitivity to notice the features in the composition; it encourages creativity; it develops the ability to think and make decisions in motion; and it provides infinite musical ideas to choose from, to improvise freely.
CHAPTER 6

IMPROVISATION ON MODES

Pace believes that when students are limited only to major and minor scales, they often reject compositions with other scale systems simply because they are not used to it. If students can have exposure to the sounds of the various scale systems, such as pentatonic, whole tone scales, twelve tones, and modes, and use these to improvise at the earliest possible stage, even if they are not enthusiastic about the idioms, they will develop a working understanding of the systems, and these idioms may become as natural to them as major and minor scales. Wollner points out that these experiences will "stir the imagination, encourage inventiveness and exploration, and help to enlarge one's musical horizon." While improvising on pentatonic and whole-tones scales have been briefly discussed in chapter 3, this chapter will demonstrate improvisation on modes. Chapters 7 and 8 demonstrate improvisation on twelve tones and jazz, respectively.
6.1. Introduction of Modes

Modes, in the broader sense, refer to scales. When a piece is written in major key, we may say it is in major mode. In a narrower sense, modes are scale systems that pre-date the existence of the major and minor scales. Developed in the Middle Ages by the Greeks, from whom they received their names, modes were the basis for medieval church music and later Renaissance polyphony, and have been used throughout history in folk music of many countries. The modes are now largely used in jazz music.

Example 72 is a chart of the modes, with the locations of half steps in each mode indicated.

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86 Pace, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 9
87 Wollner, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
Example 72: Chart of Modes

The easiest way to think about modes is their relationship to the major scale.\(^9\) Ionian (exactly the same as a major scale) runs from “do” to “do;” Dorian runs from “re” to “re;” Phrygian runs from “mi” to “mi;” Lydian runs from “fa” to “fa;” Mixolydian runs from “sol” to “sol;” Aeolian (exactly the same as natural minor scale) runs from “la” to “la;” and Locrian runs from “ti” to “ti.” This type of thinking also makes transposition easier. For example, to transpose a “d Dorian” to a “c Dorian,” simply
considering c as the “re” of the new scale, which is in the key of Bb; construct the tones
on the Bb major scale with c as the starting tone. Example 73 shows the d Dorian scale
and the c Dorian scale.

Example 73: d-Dorian and c-Dorian

While knowing where the half-steps are located in each mode is important, it is
essential to capture the distinctive note in that particular mode to give the mode its
unique character. This will be discussed in each individual mode’s section.

Of the above modes, Ionian and Aeolian are essentially the major and minor
scales, and Locrian is rarely used due to its diminished tonic triad. Of the rest of these,
namely, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, and Mixolydian, two have the major mode character
( L y d i a n and M i x o l y d i a n ) and two have the minor mode character (Dorian and Phrygian
) due to the tonic triad quality being major or minor. To keep the mode from being
mistaken as a major or natural minor scale, and to give the distinctive flavor of the

\[ \text{Ibid.} \]
mode, the characteristic tone in the mode is better to be present and to be emphasized while improvising or composing on modes.92

This chapter is devoted to improvisation on modes in the style of Medieval and Renaissance secular music. The use of modes in jazz will not be demonstrated. To improvise in the style of Medieval and Renaissance secular music, it is stylistic if this characteristic tone is approached stepwise instead of constantly being approached by a big leap. Keeping the melodic contour simple, by using more stepwise melodic motions than skips, by using simple rhythmic patterns instead of complicated syncopations, and involving oneself in the times of the medieval era and the Renaissance will contribute to a stylistic modal improvisation.

To introduce modes to students, Dorian is a good start. The teacher should first play some Dorian melodies, such as “What Shall I Do with the Drunken Sailor,” “Scarborough Fair,” or simply improvise a Dorian melody. Transposing a major/minor nursery or folk song to the Dorian mode is equally a splendid idea. Discuss the colorful, exotic sounds of the Dorian mode with students. Encourage the student to express his or her feelings about the Dorian mode. Then the teacher can introduce the Dorian scale on which the songs they just heard are built. The teacher may tell the student there are other types of modes that will be introduced soon.

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Modal improvisation may include the following activities:

1. Play familiar melodies (folk songs, nursery tunes, hymns or famous melodies from standard repertoire) on the modal scale and harmonize them with modal harmonic progression.

In terms of modal harmonic progression, sets of triads may be built diatonically on each scale tone. As in major and minor modes, there are primary and secondary chords. The primary chords are the tonic, plus the two major or minor triads that include the characteristic tone that produces the distinctive flavor of the mode. In each mode there is a diminished triad, which is a difficult chord and puts the mode in question due to its diminished fifth, which tends to suggest the dominant seventh of the major key of the same key signature. The remaining three are secondary chords. Use the Dorian mode to illustrate.

![Example 74: Diatonic triads in Dorian](image)

Example 74: Diatonic triads in Dorian
In the above chart, the primary chords are I, II, and IV. The secondary chords are III, V, and VII. The VI chord is a diminished chord, which suggests the dominant seventh chord of C major scale.

2. Play a modal repertoire of the student’s technical level; get familiar with the sounds and characters of each mode; then use the “creative reading” technique to create a new melody based on the original chords.

3. Freely improvise a modal composition by the use of the “question and answer” technique.

The above activities will be illustrated in selected modes; the same procedures can be applied to the rest of the modes.

6.2. Discussion of Individual Modes

In addition to a brief discussion on the characteristics of each mode provided in this section, the “Old Woman” tune is transposed to each mode for comparison. The Legend of an Ancient Land by Earl Ricker is used to illustrate improvisation based on modal repertoire. Three pieces out of five in this set are selected for demonstration, namely, “Temple Ruins” (in the Phrygian mode), “Legend” (in the Dorian mode), and “Pastoral” (in the Aeolian mode). The employment of unusual meters, meter changes, and uneven phrasing is worth attention in addition to the modal nature of these pieces.

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93 Ibid., p. 33.
6.2.1. Dorian

The characteristic tone of the Dorian mode is its sixth tone, which distinguishes it from a natural minor scale (Aeolian). The seventh tone also contributes to its feature, for it distinguishes the mode from a harmonic minor scale. See example 75 for illustration.

Example 75: Comparison of Dorian mode and minor scales

The following demonstrates improvisational activities on the Dorian mode.
6.2.1.1. Transforming the Major Mode "Old Woman" to a Dorian "Old Woman"

Example 76: “Old Woman” in Dorian mode

The above example is undoubtedly in the Dorian mode. However, notice that the melody employs only the first five tones of the Dorian scale, even with the appearance of the seventh tone in the accompaniment, which avoids its being mistaken as the harmonic minor. This example can be viewed as the natural minor, or Aeolian, as well. Therefore, the teacher may encourage the student to do “creative reading” by the inclusion of the sixth tone in the melody so that the Dorian character is much clearer.
6.2.1.2. Creative Reading on Dorian "Old Woman"

Example 77: Creative reading of Dorian “Old Woman”

Example 77 results from creative reading on “Old Woman.” The Dorian mode is much clearer because of the employment of the 6th tone (E natural) in the second measure of the melody, which distinguishes it from the Aeolian, in addition to the existence the 7th tone (F natural) in the fourth measure of the accompaniment, which separates it from the harmonic minor.

For the aural discretion of the dorian mode and the harmonic minor, the teacher can improvise several tunes in each mode and ask the student to identify them being Dorian or the harmonic minor.
6.2.1.3. Creative Reading on Dorian Repertoire

In addition to the above introductory activities in the Dorian mode, the student can play the Dorian repertoire for further familiarization. “Legend” from *Legend of an Ancient Land* by Earl Ricker is used to demonstrate “Creative Reading” on the Dorian repertoire. Example 78 shows an excerpt from “Legend.” It provides a good opportunity for the student to practice the change of meters within a composition. Example 79 demonstrates a new melody created based on the original harmony.

Example 78 Excerpt of *Legend* by Earl Ricker
Example 79: Creative reading on "Legend"

6.2.2. Phrygian

The characteristic tone in Phrygian is the second tone of the scale, which distinguishes a Phrygian from a natural minor. The half step between the first and the second tones provides its distinguishing flavor. This mode has been described as being dark and mournful. Phrygian melodies frequently end with a major tonality, example 80 being a famous example. 94
Example 80: Phrygian melody ending with major tonality

Example 81 shows diatonic triads in Phrygian. The primary chords are I (tonic), II, and VII (with the characteristic tone involved); the secondary chords are III, IV, and VI.

Example 81: Diatonic triads in Phrygian

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6.2.2.1. Transforming the Major Mode “Old Woman” to a Phrygian “Old Woman”

Play the major mode “Old Woman” on the Phrygian scale, as shown in example 82.

Example 82: Phrygian “Old Woman”

6.2.2.2. Creative Reading on Phrygian Repertoire

“Tempo Ruins” from Legend of an Ancient Land is used to demonstrate “Creative Reading” on the Phrygian mode repertoire. The seven-bar phrasing is a special feature worth attention in this piece. Example 83 is the original composition. Example 84 shows a created melody in which the melody is moving downward stepwise, as opposed to skipping down as seen in the original.
Example 83 “Temple Ruins” by Earl Ricker
Example 84: Creative reading on “Temple Ruins”
6.2.3. Lydian

The Lydian mode is like a major scale except it has a raised fourth. Therefore, the characteristic tone of the Lydian is its fourth degree. The “sharp four” gives the Lydian a bright, joyful quality. Lydian is also suitable for pieces with a pastoral mood. The use of a tonic pedal point is a common practice in this mode. The middle section of Chopin’s Mazurka, Op.68, No.3 is a good example of a Lydian melody over a pedal point.

Example 85 shows the diatonic triads in Lydian. The primary chords are I, II and VII; the secondary chords are III, V, VI.

Example 85: Diatonic triads in Lydian
6.2.3.1. Transforming the Major Mode “Old Woman” to a Lydian “Old Woman”

Example 86 is a Lydian “Old Woman,” in which the Lydian character is presented through the appearance of B natural of the third measure.

Example 86: Lydian “Old Woman”

6.2.3.2. Creative Reading on Lydian Repertoire

As mentioned earlier, the middle section of Chopin’s Mazurka, Op. 68, No. 3 is in Lydian mode (example 87). After the student learns the composition, s/he can practice creative reading to create a new Lydian melody for the middle section. See example 88.

95 Ibid., p. 8.
Example 87: Middle section of Chopin’s Mazurka, Op. 68, No. 3
Example 88: Creative reading on the middle section of Chopin’s Mazurka, Op. 68, No. 3

6.2.4. Mixolydian

The Mixolydian mode is a major scale with a flatted seventh. The flatted seventh tone is important both melodically and harmonically. Melodically it gives melodies the mournful quality that is typical of jazz, and much of folk music.

Harmonically, it is in the construction of a dominant seventh chord that is an important
chord in jazz.\textsuperscript{96} Therefore, when the improviser plays a dominant seventh chord in the left hand, s/he can improvise on the notes of a Mixolydian scale in the right hand.

Example 89 shows the diatonic triads in Mixolydian. The primary chords are I, V and VII; the secondary chords are II, IV, and VI.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node (I) at (0,0) {I};
  \node (II) at (1.25,0) {II};
  \node (III) at (2.5,0) {III};
  \node (IV) at (3.75,0) {IV};
  \node (V) at (5,0) {V};
  \node (VI) at (6.25,0) {VI};
  \node (VII) at (7.5,0) {VII};

  \draw[thick] (I) -- (II);
  \draw[thick] (II) -- (III);
  \draw[thick] (III) -- (IV);
  \draw[thick] (IV) -- (V);
  \draw[thick] (V) -- (VI);
  \draw[thick] (VI) -- (VII);

  \node [above=0.5cm] at (3.75,0) {dim};

  \node [above=0.5cm] at (2.5,0) {secondary};

  \node [below=0.5cm] at (0.75,0) {primary};

  \node [right=0.5cm] at (6.25,0) {\textit{primary}};

\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Example 89: Diatonic triads in Mixolydian

\textit{6.2.4.1. Transforming the Major Mode “Old Woman” to a Mixolydian “Old Woman”}

Example 90 is a Mixolydian “Old Woman.” This melody consists of only the first five tones of the scale and can be viewed as in a major mode. Nevertheless, the appearance of the characteristic tone in the harmony (F natural in m.3 and m.4) suggests its Mixolydian quality.

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Ibid.}, p.10.
Example 9: Mixolydian “Old Woman”

For comparison, example 91 shows a major mode “Old Woman,” with its typical diatonic harmonization.

Example 91: Major mode “Old Woman”
6.2.4.2. Creative Reading on Mixolydian “Old Woman”

Example 92 shows a “Creative Reading” on the Mixolydian “Old Woman,” which has more Mixolydian flavor due to the inclusion of the characteristic tone in the melody.

Example 92: Creative reading on Mixolydian “Old Woman”

6.2.5. Aeolian

The Aeolian mode is actually a natural minor mode. Its characteristic tone is the sixth degree, for it is the sixth degree that distinguishes the Aeolian mode from the Dorian mode. Example 93 shows the diatonic triads in Aeolian. The primary chords are I, IV and VI; the secondary chords are III, V, and VII.

Example 93: Diatonic triads in Aeolian

6.2.5.1. Transforming the Major Mode “Old Woman” to an Aeolian “Old Woman”

Example 94 is an Aeolian “Old Woman.”

Example 94: Aeolian “Old Woman”

Compare the example 94 with example 95, in which the F♯ transforms the Aeolian into a Dorian “Old Woman.”
As mentioned, Aeolian is actually natural minor, which distinguishes it from harmonic minor in the seventh tone of the scale. Example 96 is a harmonic minor “Old Woman.” Although the melody is identical with the Aeolian “Old Woman,” the difference is announced through the seventh tone (G#) in the accompaniment.
6.2.5.2. Creative Reading on Aeolian Repertoire

“Pastoral” from Legend of an Ancient Land is used to demonstrate “Creative Reading” on the Aeolian repertoire. The change of meter is employed in this piece, in which the 4/8 section has the motive representing bell sounds, and the 6/8 section is a shepherd boy’s flute tune. The tune appears twice. The first time is four-measures long, while the second time is five-measures long.

Example 97 is the original “Pastoral,” and example 98 shows a created one.
Example 97: Pastoral by Earl Ricker
Example 98: Creative reading on “Pastoral”
6.2.6. Locrian

The distinguishing tone in the Locrian mode is its fifth degree, because it forms a diminished fifth between the tonic and the fifth. This mode is rarely used because its tonic triad is a diminished chord and it is not pleasant to the ears to accept a diminished triad (a restless chord demanding resolution) as the final chord of a piece. Example 99 shows a Locrian “Old Woman.”

Example 99: Locrian “Old Woman”

The unpleasant sounding of the diminished fifth in the tonic can be avoided by altering the tonic chord chromatically, such as raising the fifth, or by omitting the fifth of the tonic chord. The use of first inversion of the tonic triad also subdues the diminished sounding. See example 100 for illustration.

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98 Persichetti, op. cit.,
99 Ibid.
6.3. Conclusion

Once students are comfortable with each mode, they may freely improvise on each mode to create a modal composition, or use different modes in contrasting sections to create a longer composition. For example, improvise an A section on Dorian and switch to Phrygian for the B section. Then repeat the Dorian section again to get a ternary piece. When students improvise a longer composition, even if they can not remember details of what is played, it is important that they memorize the rhythmic or melodic features in each section to create cohesiveness in the composition.

Example 100: Modified Locrian “Old Woman”

\[\text{Example 100: Modified Locrian “Old Woman”}\]

\[\text{Example 100: Modified Locrian “Old Woman”}\]

\[\text{Example 100: Modified Locrian “Old Woman”}\]

\[\text{Example 100: Modified Locrian “Old Woman”}\]
CHAPTER 7

IMPROVISATION ON TWELVE TONES

To introduce twelve-tone music to the student, the teacher may say: “Composers continually seek different devices and ideas to express themselves. One kind of device is to arrange the twelve tones of the chromatic scale in any order. All twelve tones have to be used in that order in the music before any one is repeated. This set of ordered twelve tones is called a tone row.” Then the teacher can improvise with the tone row to illustrate how the twelve tones are used in the music. (How to improvise with the tone row will be discussed in later sections.) The teacher can also play short excerpts of recordings of twelve-tone music, such as Schoenberg's Suite for Piano, Op. 25; Schoenberg's Piano Piece, Op.33a; Schoenberg's String Quartet, No.4; Webern's Piano Variations; Webern's Concerto for Nine Instruments, Op.24;Webern's String Quartet, Op.28; or Berg's Violin Concerto, and discuss the "strange" sounds with the students.\textsuperscript{101}

7.1. The Arrangement of Twelve Tones

To improvise a twelve-tone piece, the first thing is to have a tone row. One can use any tone row from a twelve-tone piece and improvise on it, or compose one's own tone row.

7.1.1. The Five-Finger-Positioned Tone Rows

In the beginning stage of twelve-tone improvisation, it is easier to improvise if the tones are arranged within a fixed five-finger position for both hands. Pace designs the following hand position for beginning twelve-tone improvisation: the left hand is in E major five-finger position and the right hand is in c minor five-finger position, as shown in the left side of example 101.102

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Example 101: Hand Position for twelve-tone improvisation

To play all twelve tones with only ten fingers, the second finger of each hand will be responsible for playing two different tones; the rest of the fingers will execute one tone per finger, as shown in the right side of example 101.

7.1.2. The Design of Tone Rows

To obtain a tone row under the fixed five-finger position, students can either use any tone row created by other composers, or create their own tone row.
7.1.2.1. Tone Rows Created By Other Composers

Example 102 shows the tone row used by Ernst Krenek in his suite “Twelve Short Piano Pieces.”

Transpose the tones so that every tone is under the designated five-finger position.

Example 103: Transposed tone row of example 102.

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103 Pace, 1968, op. cit., p. 187.
There is one minor technical problem presented in the above tone row. The third and the fourth tones (A natural and B flat) in the row are both played with the second finger of the left hand. Technically if one finger is responsible for two consecutive tones in a row, uneasiness is created and the fluency of improvisation will be affected. Besides, the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth tones in example 103 are consecutive chromatic tones, which suggest chromatic quality and are better avoided. The technical and musical problems will be solved if we switch the fourth and the fifth tones. See example 104 for the modified tone row.

Example 104: Modified tone row of example 103

1.2.1 Self-Designed Tone Row

Students may design their own tone row while bearing the following general guidelines in mind. The twelve chromatic tones may be used in any order, but usually

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104 Kolar, op. cit., p. 165
extensive chromatic is avoided. Pace suggests that one "avoid more than two consecutive tones (half-steps) from the chromatic scale without making a skip or changing direction." “The consecutive use of intervals outlining major and minor triads is avoided in the tone row, since it may give a feeling of triadic harmony.” Example 105 shows a tone row Pace designed. Each tone is numbered for the convenience of playing and keeping track of. This tone row will be used in the following demonstrations.

Example 105: Tone row designed by Robert Pace

7.2. Improvisation on the Tone Row

7.2.1. Creating New Twelve-Tone Melodies for Old Songs.

As an introductory activity, the student can create a new twelve-tone melody from any familiar song or nursery. Preserve the original rhythm and play the melody according to the order of the row. Example 106 shows a twelve-tone “Old Woman;”

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105 Ibid.
106 Pace, 1968, op. cit., p. 188.
example 107 shows a twelve-tone "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." Both examples utilize the tone row in example 105.

Example 106: Twelve-tone “Old Woman”

Example 10: Twelve-tone “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”

In the above examples, each tone is used individually and used without repetition until all tones have been used.

However, as long as the order of the tones is observed, the tones can be repeated any number of times before proceeding to the next; the tones can appear in any octave; each tone can be played individually, or any number of tones may be played simultaneously; in addition, the music can end on any tone of the row. See example 108, which utilizes the rhythm of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

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Example 108: Twelve-tone “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”

The tones can be used harmonically as an accompaniment, as seen in examples 109 and 110.

Example 109: Twelve-tone “Old Woman” with accompaniment
7.2.2. Question and Answer Based on the Tone Row

The teacher plays a four-bar Question for the student to finish with a four-bar Answer in the same style. The teacher designs a four-bar rhythmic pattern then fits the tones of the row into the rhythmic pattern; thus a question is formed. If the question ends any tone other than the last tone in the tone row, the student will surely create a contrasting answer. If the Question ends on the last tone, there will be either a parallel or contrasting answer. Example 111 is a contrasting period in waltz style, and example 112 shows a flowing lullaby of a parallel period.
Example 111: Contrasting period in waltz style

Example 112: Parallel period of a lullaby
7.2.3. Free Improvisation Based on the Tone Row

After experiencing with creating answers for the questions the teacher creates, students can improvise their own Questions and Answers. Before they start to play, they must decide what meter they want to use, what mood they want it to sound, what rhythms they want to use for these tones, and if they want to use the tones individually in the melody or play tones simultaneously to create some harmonies.

Students can play the original notes of the row in any octave when they become more experienced in the twelve-tone improvisation.

7.2.4. Improvisation on Retrograde, Inversion, and Retrograde Inversion of the Row

When the student can improvise with the original tone row, the retrograde row (play the row backwards) can be introduced. The student can improvise the A section with the original row and improvise the B section with the retrograde. Students can even simultaneously play the right hand with the original row and the left hand with the retrograde row; in this case, write down the retrograde form of the original row so that each hand has its own tone row in sight. Example 113 is a retrograde of the tone row in example 105.
The inversion (turn the row upside down) and the retrograde inversion (backwards and upside down) of the row can be used in improvisation as well. The inversion form may be obtained by changing ascending intervals to equivalent descending ones, and vice versa (example 114). The retrograde inversion form may be obtained by reading the inversion form backwards (Example 115). The student may use these as new rows in her/his improvisation. Therefore, there are virtually at least four rows available once one row is created.

Example 113: Retrograde form of the row in example 105

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109 Pace, 1968, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
7.3. Improvisation on Twelve-Tone Repertoire

After learning a twelve-tone piece, the student will improvise based on the repertoire. “Juggling” by Sister Marienne, O. S. F. (example 116) is an interesting introductory composition to twelve-tone music in which the hands are placed in the five-finger position (right hand in the C minor position, left hand in the E major
position). This composition will be used to demonstrate improvisation on a twelve-tone repertoire.

Before playing a twelve-tone composition, it is advisable that the student first write the tones in the order of their appearance in the five-finger position, for the convenience of keeping track (example 116-1). Analyze the form, and how the tones are grouped and used. After the piece is learned, the student can do “creative reading” on the piece. Even though the tones have to appear according to the designated order, there are still many things the student can do, such as inverting the original pattern, regrouping the notes, or changing the meter.\footnote{Kolar, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 168 – 169.}

\footnote{Marienne, O. S. F., \textit{Fanfare, Sick on Saturday and Juggling}. New York: Lee Roberts Music Publication, Inc., 1967.}
Example 116: “Juggling” by Sister Marienne, O. S. F.
Example 116-1: Tone row in “Juggling” in the five-finger position

Example 117 shows an example of improvisation based on “Juggling.” In order to start the B section on a tone other than the first tone, one should bear in mind that the A section should not end on the last tone of the row. End the B section on the last tone of the row so that the return of the A section may be identical to the beginning.
Example 117: Improvisation based on “Juggling.”
CHAPTER 8

IMPROVISATION ON JAZZ

Jazz is recognized as a unique American musical genre where personal expressiveness and improvisation go hand in hand. Many piano method books include jazz pieces and students enjoy playing them because of the uniqueness in melody, rhythm, and harmony. It is the teacher’s job to point out the features contributing to the jazzy feeling of a piece the student is studying, so that the student will perform with deeper understanding, better interpretation, and greater enjoyment. Knowledge of the characteristics becomes the basis for improvisation in jazz style.

The characteristics of jazz style will be discussed, followed by improvisation utilizing these characteristics. The last section in this chapter is dedicated to blues, a unique jazz form.

8.1 Characteristics of Jazz

This section provides basic characteristics in jazz piano music, with illustrations of examples.
8.1.1. Rhythm

The most distinctive difference between jazz and classical music is the syncopated rhythm in jazz. Willi Apel defines syncopation as “any deliberate disturbance of the normal pulse of meter, accent, and rhythm. The principal system of rhythm in Western music is based on the grouping equal beats into two’s and three’s with a regularly recurrent accent on the first beat of each group. Any deviation from this scheme is perceived as a disturbance or contradiction between the underlying (normal) pulse and the actual (abnormal) rhythm.”[114] In other words, syncopation is “the shift of accent from a normally strong beat to a normally weak beat.”[115] Lee Evans provides the following syncopation techniques to jazz up a classical piece, which will be the student’s first experience in jazz improvisation.[116]

1. Accent Displacement

To give musical material a jazzy feel, place accents on the second and fourth beats, instead of the traditional classical usage of accents on the first and the third beats.[117]

[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
Example 118: Accents on the second and the fourth beats

To become more familiar with accents on the second and fourth beats, Lee Evans suggests the student practice all twelve major and minor scales with accents on the second and the fourth beats.\(^{118}\)

2. Anticipation of the Beat

Instead of playing the regular rhythm, as seen in example 119, one may anticipate the beat (play the beat earlier than the original) to create rhythmic excitement.\(^{119}\) Ask the student to experiment manipulating anticipation on different beats.

Example 119: “Old Woman” in regular rhythm
(1) Anticipation on the fourth beat

Example 120: Anticipation on the fourth beat

(2) Anticipation on the third beat

Example 121: Anticipation on the third beat

(3) Anticipation on the second beat

Example 122: Anticipation on the second beat
(4) Anticipation on the first beat

Example 123: Anticipation on the first beat

(5) Combination of the above

Example 124: Combination of the above

Rests (silence) play an important role in jazz style. Instead of using ties, example 125 shows the use of rests when executing anticipation.

Example 125: Employing “rest” in the melody

\[ \text{Ibid.} \]
3. Delay of the Beat

As with anticipation, ask the student to practice the delay techniques on different beats.

(1) Delay on the first beat

Example 126: Delay on the first beat

Or

Example 127: Delay on the first beat

(2) Delay on the second beat

Example 128: Delay on the second beat
(3) Delay on the third beat

Example 129: Delay on the third beat

(4) Delay on the fourth beat

Example 130: Delay on the fourth beat

(5) Combination of the above

Example 131: Combination of the above
(6) Combination of anticipation and delay

Example 132: Combination of anticipation and delay

Practice the rhythmic variations on nursery songs or folk tunes in various keys.

8.1.2. Accompaniment Patterns

Once students are comfortable with jazzing up a classical melody with syncopation, they can add a simple accompaniment to the melody. The following are some patterns often used in jazz.

1. Root Position Chord on the First Beat:

Play each chord on the first beat and rest for the rest of the measure.

Example 133: Root position on the first beat
2. **Single-Note Bass:**

The bass in Example 134 is built on the root of the chord; the bass in example 135 is built on the root and the fifth of each chord.

Example 134: accompaniment pattern built on the root of the chord

Example 135: Accompaniment pattern built on the root and fifth of the chord
3. **Walking Bass:**

The following three are commonly used walking bass patterns at the elementary level. One is built on the root, the third, the fourth, and the fifth of each chord (example 136); the other is a descending scalar pattern, starting from the root of each chord (example 137); another consists of the root, the lowered third, the third, and the fifth (example 138). Emphasize accents on the second and the fourth beats.

Example 136: Walking bass built on the root, third, fourth, and fifth of each chord

Example 137: Walking bass built on the descending scale
Example 138: Walking bass consisting of root, lowered third, third, and fifth

4. Boogie Bass:

Boogie-woogie, or Boogie, is a special type of blues characterized by an ostinato (a short, constantly repeated musical phrase) left-hand bass figure against which the right hand improvises freely. Examples 139 and 140 show two frequently used Boogie bass patterns.

Example 139: Boogie bass pattern

\[ \text{Example 139: Boogie bass pattern} \]

Example 140: Boogie bass pattern

The dotted eighth followed by a sixteenth in the above example should be played with a triplet feeling:

Example 141: “Swing” feeling of the dotted rhythm

8.1.3. Melody

The excitement of jazz melody is created largely by the use of the altered scale tones, called blue tones, which are the lowered third, fifth, and seventh. The inclusion of these blue tones gives a melody a jazzy flavor.

When the student learns a jazz piece in a piano method book, the teacher should help the student identify the blues notes so that s/he knows what contributes the jazzy

sound. For example, in “Shortbread Boogie” of the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Method*, Book 3, the lowered third in the melody gives the piece its fun, interesting feel. By identifying the blues notes, the student will play the music with more enjoyment.

Example 142: Shortbread Boogie

As usual, have the student make melodic variations, as seen in example 143.

Example 143: Creative reading on example 132

In addition to making variations on the jazz repertoire the student is playing, adding blues tones to a nursery song, a folk tune or a classical theme is an equally
interesting activity to familiarize the student with the jazz style melody. Example 144 shows the inclusion of the blues tones in “Old Woman.”

Example 144: Jazzy “Old Woman” with the inclusion of the blues tones

8.1.4. The Blues Progression

Jazz players use a series of chords (chord progression) around which they create their music. Blues progression is the most important jazz structure, which usually consists of twelve bars with the following arrangement of chords:

I I I I IV IV I I V IV I I

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122 Ibid., p. 10.
When the student encounters a piece with blues progression, the teacher should analyze the chord progression and identify the blues notes.

Example 145: "Blue Scales" from Alfred's Basic Piano Library, Level2, p. 35

In example 145, the lowered seventh is used in the scales of the tonic chord (mm.1, 2) and the subdominant chord (mm. 5, 6, 10).
After students can play this piece with fluency, they will create their own blues melody over the same chord progression, either using the same rhythm or varying the rhythm if they desire. The following shows one possibility.

Example 146: Creative reading based on example 145
Motives from nursery songs or folk tunes can be used over the twelve-bar blues progression. Example 147 shows the use of “Old Woman” motive in the blues progression.

Example 147: “Old Woman” motive in the blues progression
8.1.5. Harmony

1. Seventh Chords

Two important chords in jazz are the major and minor seventh chords. Example 148 shows “Old Woman” harmonized with seventh chords, which give the traditional tune a distinctive jazzy sound.

Example 148: “Old Woman” harmonized with seventh chords

2. Chord Substitution

Jazz pianists use various chord substitution techniques to create more idiomatic sounds and to generate greater harmonic interest when they play traditional or

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classical tunes. The most frequently used substitution technique is circle-of-fifths substitution. Evans provides the following procedure to substitute the original chord progression with a circle-of-fifths progression:

1. Work backwards from the destination chord and find its dominant seventh chord.
2. Work further backwards from the destination chord to find the secondary dominant of the destination chord.
3. Change the secondary dominant to minor seventh.

The above procedure results in ii7 – V7 – I progression, which occurs frequently in jazz and is perhaps the most important of all jazz progressions.

Example 149 shows “Old Woman” harmonized with ii7 – V7 – I progression, which are found in mm. 1-2 (Dm7 – G7 – CM7), and mm. 2 – 3 (Am7 – D7 – G).

Example 149: “Old Woman” harmonized with ii7 – V7 – I progression

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125 Ibid.
The skill in manipulating chord substitutions is a significant area in jazz. Evans comments that most experienced jazz pianists use substitute chords by instinct rather than by conscious choices. However, pianists may use the above technique, as well as analyze chord progressions in jazz recordings to develop the skill. Good choices of chord substitutions not only provide richer harmony for the composition but also make one’s playing personal and interesting.

8.2. Improvisation on Jazz

One skill a jazz pianist must possess is to make melodic variations or create a new melody according to the original harmony. Lee Evans suggests that first efforts at melodic improvisation in jazz should be practiced over the blues progression. He suggests a progressive procedure for learning to improvise a blues melody: First, the student should attempt to use only one blues tone (the lowered third) in combination with chord tones; the second step is to use two blues tones (the lowered third and fifth) combining with chord tones; last, use all three blues tones (the lowered third, fifth, and seventh) combining chord tones to improvise over a blues progression. This writer suggests that students use the rhythms appearing in any jazz repertoire, starting from the simpler ones and progressively employing more sophisticated ones if they are not comfortable with creating idiomatic rhythmic patterns. Use one or two rhythmic

126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
patterns in one piece so that there is coherence in the piece and most attention will be
given to creating a melody when making choices of chord tones and blues tones.
Motives or patterns from classical melody, folk songs, or nursery rhymes provide good
resources for melodic and rhythmic ideas for motivic development in jazz
improvisation. As to accompaniment pattern, chose the one that the student is
comfortable with, such as root position chord on the first beat, or single-note bass, so
that most attention may be given to creating a melody.

The following examples illustrate improvising with blues tones. The motivic
idea in example 150 is derived from “Old Woman,” with two blues tones used.
Example 150: Motive from “Old Woman” with two blues tones involved

Example 151 employs scales in the melodic improvisation with three blues tones involved.
Example 151: Blues improvisation with three blues tones involved.

In order to perform jazz with stylistic authenticity, it is important to listen to or play along with recordings of good jazz performance because its easygoing and improvisational nature is beyond exact notation.
CHAPTER 9

SUCCESS IN LEARNING IMPROVISATION

9.1. Playing By Ear

The development of the ear is considered by many to be the most important factor to becoming a good improviser. Bean writes that the first experiences in improvisation should be devoted to developing the ear because hearing the musical idea in the inner ear is the first step in improvisation.129 Chase describes that Clara Schumann was taught to only play by ear in her first year of training, along with improvising and some technical studies.130 Camp views rhythm and aural skills as the key elements in music making as he comments, “A student can learn to make music only if a rhythmic impulse is generated in that person and the ear is brought to life… Physical coordination always needs to be directed by the mental process. The mental perception guides the organization of all the aural and rhythmic aspects. When there is a ‘tune in the ear and rhythm in the body,’ mental and physical processes are automatically

coordinated to make music.”

Camp advises that the beginner “start creating tunes by ear and play rote tunes. Both rote tunes and creative work foster aural awareness.”

Bean notes that “the ear can be further developed by having the student play the melody in various other keys.”

Wallner states, “In improvisation one has to hear beforehand; one has to anticipate the approaching chord and to prepare rapidly for the final choice. In improvisation it is apparent that the ear must be ever alert, not for the sounds that have already passed or are just at the instant being played, but for the sounds heard within, by the inner ear – sounds that must be listened for, detected, brought to the surface, and speedily reproduced on the instrument... It is the inner ear, the quiet listening, that really guides toward better musicianship.”

He believes that one of the first and most inviting steps in ear-training is to learn to pick out tunes by ear. Gradually one will gain a clear sense of tonal distances and relationship.

Wallner describes the procedure as follows:

Make a list of familiar songs you like to sing. Choose an easy one. Then find the first tone; that is, sing a tone and match it on the instrument. Sing the next tone. Ask yourself, ”Does it sound up or down the scale from the first tone?” While singing the second tone, try for it on the instrument. Is it near or far from the first tone? If far, try a wide distance, a wide interval. If near, try the adjacent tone. You will soon learn to listen and to find the exact sounds with assurance. At the same time the satisfaction of playing “by ear” is yours. After picking out familiar tunes and learning

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131 Camp, op. cit., p. 49.
132 Ibid., p. 52.
133 Ibid., p. 44.
134 Wollner, op. cit., pp. 63 – 64.
135 Ibid., p. 64.
in this preliminary way to listen, you will begin to hear your own improvisations springing form within.\textsuperscript{136}

By the same token, Grunow, Gordon, and Azzara view playing by ear the heart of improvisation and believe that the development of listening must precede reading and writing so that students will ultimately “hear what they see” in music notation and “see what they hear.”\textsuperscript{137} Ways to accomplish the goal include singing songs before playing them on the instrument, and learning to play songs by ear. It is as important to sing the bass line by ear as to sing the melody itself, because this helps develop an understanding of the harmonic progression.\textsuperscript{138}

David Baker remarks, “The improvisers conceive an idea, place it in a tonal perspective, translate it into actual notes for his instrument and play, all this in a split second. This demands a very special kind of hearing – an ability to hear everything he plays before he plays it.”\textsuperscript{139} Baker provides useful exercises, including singing and recognizing intervals; singing triads of any quality (major, minor, augmented and diminished triads) in root position and inversions; singing different quality seventh chords (major seventh, minor seventh, dominant seventh, diminished seventh, half diminished seventh); singing scales of any quality (major, minor, diminished, whole-tone) starting on any degree of the scale, ascending and descending; practicing

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 7.

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playing tunes in various keys by ear very slowly without stopping to correct mistakes, and striving to play the tunes in tempo as confidence is gained.  

This writer’s own experience of playing by ear is facilitated by having a good sense of the diatonic major and minor scales because most tunes encountered in daily life are diatonic, either major or minor. Singing the solfège of every familiar song helps develop a good sense of the relationship between scale tones. Being able to sing and hear all types of intervals helps when the melody is chromatic. As for the harmony, the ability to hear different qualities of triads (major, minor, augmented, and diminished) in root position as well as inversions is important. The ability to hear different seventh chords (major, minor, dominant, diminished, and half diminished) is important for transcribing jazz music.

9.2. Acquiring a Vocabulary of Musical Elements

Wollner states that the starting point of improvisation is to acquire a vocabulary of musical elements, which include rhythms, melody, harmony, form, and imagination. He further states that “these elements combine to form a unity that express the improviser's concept and produces fluent music-making. This unity is brought about by directing mind, the excited emotions, and the agile fingers, while the

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140 Ibid.
141 Wollner, op. cit., p. 78.
elements blend in the playing.”\textsuperscript{142} The first stage is the experiencing of each element and then blending them with imagination until all function simultaneously and form an organic whole.\textsuperscript{143}

The following will discuss the tenets of a good melody, the techniques in developing a melody, the nature of formal structure, and the function of imagination in the improvisation.

Baker states that while the tenets of a good melody vary with the circumstances, there are notable ones, including:

1. There must be a proper balance of diatonic movement and skips. Stepwise motion is the general rule in melodic construction, and skips can be added for variety.

2. The melody should aim toward a climax point, which might be at the highest pitch. Buildup to the peak and gradually return to normal point of less intensity.

3. There must always be contrast and interplay between (a) density and lack of density, (b) tension and relaxation, and (c) intensity and lack of intensity.

4. There is evidence of unifying factors, such as repetition.

5. There will be proper balance between the new and the old. In other words, as the melody is unfolded, there must be enough recognizable elements to provide stability but enough novelty to prevent anticipation.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{144} Baker, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 73-74.
While the ability to consistently conceive original melodies is truly a gift, Baker comments that the methods for constructing fluent lines can be learned.\textsuperscript{145} He provided the following techniques for developing a melody:

1. Repetition is an important unifying principle. While exact repetition for more than two times is not effective, one of the easiest techniques for avoiding exact repetition is octave displacement of all or part of a line.

2. Sequence, inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversion are also effective for avoiding exact repetition. Though inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversion are generally not practical because they require a remarkably mathematical mind to remember and transform the theme exactly. The basic idea may be conveyed by presenting a fragment as a musical hint.

3. Rhythmic and melodic displacement may be used to create excitement. For example, move a rhythm or theme in the first and second beats to the third and fourth beats as the line is developed.

4. Change of mode will give the melody a different color.\textsuperscript{146}

The ability to use the learned ideas in one’s own improvisation calls for imagination. Wollner comments that imagination vitalizes a performance of improvisation, and it distinguishes superiority from mediocrity. He also remarks that imagination can be developed, if one is not born with it, through listening and analyzing vast amounts of repertoire, and through the diligent practice of improvisation.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., p. 74.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., pp. 75 – 79.
Emotional imagination requires the performer's full involvement. To achieve emotional involvement while improvising, think of a mood or a picture, a recalled experience, or an imaginary situation that carries the mood. Assigning a tempo marking to the piece will be a good device because these markings usually suggest mood. For example, in addition to fast in tempo, "allegro" suggests lively and happily while "scherzo" suggests humorous and light. Wollner notes that the expression of the emotion "is a subtle part of the improviser's technique and must become part of his music vocabulary."\(^1\) In other words, always fully involve oneself while improvising.

As to formal structure, symmetry is an important factor to structure an improvised composition. It can be achieved by developing a motive (by the use of repetition, inversion, and sequence), and by designing question and answer phrases. Symmetry contributes to unity; otherwise, the improvised composition might sound like unrelated accounts put together.\(^2\)

As opposed to symmetry, an effective improvisation usually consists of contrasts. The vocabulary for contrasts include dynamics (loud and soft), pitch (high and low), range (high register and low register), direction (ascending and descending), mode (major and minor), key (tonic and new keys), rhythmic pattern (short note-values and long note-values), mood (joyful and sad), line shape (smooth and sharp), timbre (tone colors of different instruments, which can be well suggested by the piano), and touch (staccato and legato).\(^3\) “Contrast is a great aid to continuing an improvisation, an

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\(^1\) Wollner, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 78.
\(^3\) Ibid.
addition to the impetus the rhythm gives.” Design contrasts for different sections to avoid dullness and monotony. If the A section is vigorous and loud, the B section can be lyrical and soft. For children, Wollner suggests that imagining different animals (bird and elephant) will help convey contrasts. Different animals will suggest different rhythms, touches, dynamics, and the registers on the keyboard.

9.3. Good Habits of Practicing Improvisation

Making changes on an existing piece is a good start to practice improvisation because the piece itself provides the basic materials and the process is not demanding as far as technical or theoretical knowledge is concerned. With just one note being changed, a new composition is created. As students gain experiences in making change, more notes can be changed and eventually they will be able to start an improvisation with ideas from a composition but depart from it with their own designs of formal structure. When making changes on a composition, students should always think before attempting to play. Always listen like an improviser to the sounds created and play musically with expression. In the beginning stage, do not try to change every measure in the first few attempts. Each time choose one or two different places to vary, and play the remainder as written. After experimenting with new melodic ideas for most

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150 Ibid.
151 Ibid., p. 81.
measures in the piece, the student may take a risk to improvise a new melody for the entire composition.

In terms of free improvising based on repertoire, start with improvising one set of parallel or contrasting questions-and-answers; then with experience, prolong the form by putting more sets of questions-and-answers in one composition. Try not to stop in the middle of an improvisation in order to develop the skill of going on when mental blocks occur, as well as to develop the ability to handle bad notes by resolving them to the nearby notes. Azzara remarks that there are no wrong notes, only bad resolutions, and "the right note is usually a half-step away (by resolving it half-step down or up)." Lloyd & Lloyd advise not to worry about what has happened, but think of what is going to happen. It is important not to stop during improvising. If accidents happen, which is inevitable, keep playing by repeating the previous idea, playing a trill, or pretending a graceful and reasonable rest. Whitmer remarks that instead of correcting the mistake, make use of it by repeating that “error” in the following phrases so that it becomes part of the pattern or scheme itself. Do not get too fussy about how every thing sounds because it is normal to sound awkward and clumsy in the beginning. The ultimate goal is to develop the ability to keep the hands on the keyboard regardless of circumstances.

152 Dr. Christopher Azzara’s Workshop on Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation on 2004 MTNA Conference.
For the beginning improviser, improvisation as a duet allows the student to focus on creating either melody or harmony without the frustration of doing both at the same time. The teacher can play a chord progression for the student to improvise melodies accordingly or the teacher improvises melodies for the student to harmonize.

The improviser can tape her/his own improvisation and play it back for evaluation and to track progress.

Persistent explorations with the masterworks are important to improvisation. Through examining what contribute good melodies and how the master composers develop motives and link episodic materials, one gets insights for one’s own improvisation.

Make sure to improvise with all types of conventional meters (2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 3/8, 6/8, etc.) as well as the more contemporary meters (5/4, 7/8). Compositions with meter changes should be explored, for these compositions not only broaden one’s horizon of musical knowledge and literature, but also develop one’s sensitivity and stability in rhythm.

Even though it is suggested that improvisation should be introduced at the earliest stages of piano learning, it is never too late to begin learning improvisation. In human learning, there is a series of prerequisites, and each level is a preparation for the next. Therefore, Pace asserts that regardless of the learners’ years of piano study and level of repertoire, begin with the first level of improvisational activities in order to
advance to the second level. Teachers and students who are inexperienced in improvisation should begin to improvise with something less ambitious, and work long enough to get past frustration points. Teachers develop the improvisational skills through practicing the approach discussed in this document and from teaching experiences. To nurture students’ creative potential, the teacher should give students respect and trust, behave in an empathetic non-judgmental manner, and encourage self-evaluation. Kolar remarks that since creativity is the externalization of internal feeling, care must be taken to establish an atmosphere of open and free experimentation so that students have the courage to express themselves. Whitmer remarks that any person can learn to improvise provided he allows time to build and fully establish fluency. He believes that great technique is not at all a prerequisite and states that just as there are charming pieces in the early grades, so there may be very delightful improvisational pieces in very simple guise. The improvisational skills are acquired through thoughtful practice over time regularly and diligently, and there is no short-cut.

9.4. The Contribution of This Document

This document provides an organized, systematic approach to repertoire-based improvisation in the hope that through continuous learning in repertoire and

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155 Pace, 1999, op. cit., p.3.
156 Larsen, op. cit., p. 206.
157 Ibid., p. 45.
158 Kolar, op. cit., p. 29.
159 Whitmer, op. cit., p. 2.
improvisation, students will 1) develop the sensitivity to features in the repertoire, 2) build the vocabulary of different styles, and 3) grow upward and outward intellectually as well as technically, to become improvisers who understand what they have learned and enjoy the application of their knowledge in their improvisation. It is indeed an approach for teaching comprehensive musicianship, namely, music literacy, ear training, transposition, harmonization, improvisation, and repertoire in a creative way. Pace encouraged teachers to experiment teaching repertoire and related basics of music in different ways of making “creative variation,” which makes learning more exciting and vital.¹⁶¹ In this environment, even though teachers are using the same repertoire every year, the same musical ideas will come alive in new and various ways because students provide diverse responses and creativity. Both the teacher and the student will enjoy the excitement of discovering creative potential.

The following sums up the contribution this document made to the field of teaching improvisation:

1. This is the first study on repertoire-based improvisational approach, which is adapted and developed from Robert Pace Piano Method. It demonstrates how to apply the Pace approach to any kind of scale system and in all types of musical repertoire so that teachers may apply the approach in their curricula, no matter what piano methods they use or repertoire they teach. The uniqueness of

¹⁶⁰ Robert Pace, 1999, op. cit., p. 3.
this approach is that even though the teacher does not improvise, s/he can still teach improvisation and ultimately acquires the skill through teaching it.

2. While many improvisational instructional books or studies require learners to have basic theoretical knowledge and moderate technical proficiency, chapter three in this document provides conceptual-learning-based improvisational activities from the very beginning of a student’s piano study. These activities are assimilated from this writer’s Dalcroze Eurhythmics training, studies on Pace and other piano methods, as well as from personal teaching experiences. The improvisational experiences will encourage the student’s creative potential and serve as a basis for future repertoire-based improvisation.

3. This document provides theoretical information and progressive improvisational activities on modes and the twelve-tone scale, based on the Pace materials and this writer’s Dalcroze Eurhythmics experiences, as well as research on the topic.

4. This document provides learner-friendly information for Classically-trained pianists to begin their jazz improvisational journey. The Pace approach is equally applicable to jazz repertoire.

9.5. Recommendations for Future Research

While studies on melodic improvisation provide devices to elaborate a given melody or to transform a melody into a new guise, and studies on harmonic
Improvisation offer alternatives for harmonizing a given melody for different colors and different stylistic periods, the following suggests other possibilities for future study relevant to teaching piano improvisation.

1. Studies on **rhythmic improvisation** which provide rhythmic characteristics in different cultures, and develop organized devices to transform a given melody, with different rhythmic features for different styles.

2. Studies on developing ability in **contrapuntal improvisation**, such as improvising a Baroque dance, a canon, or even a fugue.

3. Studies on **improvisation based on other scales systems** -- such as scales in Polish music, Jewish music, or Chinese music -- would be beneficial to expand one’s musical vocabulary.

4. Studies on an organized approach to **improvisation based on quartal harmony** would provide excitement for improvisers to explore systems other than tertian harmony.

5. Studies on **repertoire with improvisational nature**, in which the performer’s participation in the creation of a composition via improvisation is indicated by the composer, such compositions as *the Milky Way* by Andre Hajdu.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


