

TARGET APPROACH IMPROVISATION

The key to good improvisation practice is to focus on only **one aspect at a time** known as the target approach. Because this approach will not necessarily yield improvisation that sounds complete, actual "performance practice" is just as important. Practice the topics below and record, listen to, and critique the results.

① I. CHORD & MELODY REDUCTION

Memorize the tune's melody and chords using the "reduction method" (see the "AUTUMN LEAVES" REDUCTION for an example).

② 2. SCALE RUNNING

Run all of the chord's associated scales across several octaves out of time. Then improvise over each of the individual chords in time.

③ 3. ARPEGGIATING CHORDS

Arpeggiate the tune's chords across several octaves out of time. Then improvise using only chord tones over each of the individual chords in time.

④ 4. EMBELLISHING THE MELODY

Practice the tune in the following ways:

- Play the original melody while adding or deleting notes.
- Play the original melody notes while changing their rhythm by shortening, lengthening, repeating, or displacing them.
- Playing phrases that consist of a couple of measures of the melody followed by improvisation.
- Playing a complete phrase of the melody followed by a completely improvised phrase.
- Playing a mostly improvised solo with occasional quotes from the melody.

⑤ 5. RHYTHM PRACTICE

Create a one or two-measure rhythm pattern. Improvise by repeatedly using this rhythm in combination with notes from the appropriate chords/scales. Use both step-wise motion and chord tones. Expand on this idea by using multiple rhythms.

⑥ 6. LITTLE SCALE EXERCISE

Staying within a random limited range of a 5th, only play notes from each chord's scale that fall within that range. Once that range of the keyboard starts to feel comfortable, use a different range. Start with half-notes at a slow tempo if necessary, gradually increasing to shorter rhythmic values at faster tempos.

⑦ 7. LITTLE ARPEGGIO EXERCISE

Staying within a random limited range of a 5th, play arpeggios only on the notes of the chord that fall within that range. Once that range of the keyboard starts to feel comfortable, use a different range. Start with half-notes at a slow tempo if necessary, gradually increasing to shorter rhythmic values at faster tempos.

⑧ 8. GUIDE TONE LINES

Compose a guide tone line consisting of a single note per chord change with each note moving to the next using mostly stepwise motion. Try to differ notes from chord to chord with a preference for extensions. Once you've created a line you're happy with, memorize it. If the tune's actual melody isn't too dense, it could also be used as a guide tone line.

Solo over the progression using the guide tones as targets in a very simple manner and then get successively more complex as you start to feel more comfortable. Make an effort to precede the guide tone notes chromatically. After practicing this for some time, embellish your guide tone line with additional notes and improvise with this version.

Create a different guide tone line and repeat the process again.

⑨ 9. BIG SCALE EXERCISE

Play each chord's associated scale ascending to the top of the keyboard and then back down once you've reach the top. As you change into each new chord, begin with the closest possible note from within that chord's scale. Start with half-notes at a slow tempo if necessary, gradually increasing to shorter rhythmic values at faster tempos.

⑩ 10. BIG ARPEGGIO EXERCISE

Play diatonic 7th chord arpeggios over the tune's chord changes going straight up and down the entire keyboard. As you change into each new chord, begin with the closest possible note within that chord. Start with half-notes if necessary, gradually increasing to shorter rhythmic values at faster tempos.

① II. CHORD TONE SOLOING

Improvise on the chord progression you're working on using only chord tones. Improvise freely or with a set rhythmic pattern (e.g. ♪♪♪♪_♪). After you get more comfortable with this, try moving to new chords by half-step movement.

🎯 12. THE "PLAY-REST" APPROACH

Purposely insert periods of resting into your solos. Don't be afraid to rest longer than you play. Just when you think you should start playing, rest even a little longer. When you do play, make your entrances surprising and unpredictable. During the resting period, think of the last idea you played and decide whether or not to develop it or go to something new.

Practice using any one of these EVEN-BAR play-rest combinations:

Play 1 bar/Rest 1 bar Play 2 bars/Rest 2 bars Play 3 bars/Rest 1 bar Play 1 bar/Rest 3 bars

Also try using the more difficult ODD-BAR combinations:

Play 1 bar/Rest 2 bars Play 2 bars/Rest 1 bar Play 3 bars/Rest 2 bars Play 2 bars/Rest 3 bars

🎯 13. PHRASE LENGTHS

Using the play-rest approach, improvise while controlling your phrase lengths throughout the solo as follows:

- Short phrases only (approximately 1 - 4 beats of playing and then resting).
- Medium phrases only (2-4 measures each).
- Long phrases only (5-8 measures each).
- Rotate between one short phrase and one medium phrase.
- Rotate between one short phrase and one long phrase.
- Rotate between one medium phrase and one long phrase.

🎯 14. RHYTHMIC DENSITY

Using the play-rest approach, improvise while controlling your phrases throughout the solo as follows:

- Using only notes of long duration.
- Playing sparsely using notes of various duration.
- Using only notes of short duration.
- Playing densely using notes of various duration.
- Rotate between one sparse phrase and one dense phrase.
- Begin each phrase sparsely and end densely.
- Begin each phrase densely and end sparsely.
- Play each phrase going from sparse to dense back to sparse.
- Play each phrase going from dense to sparse back to dense.

🎯 15. OVER-THE-BAR PHRASING

Over-the-bar phrasing occurs when a phrase ends with a sustained note of at least a quarter note before the next measure, and then holds into that measure.

- Improvise on a progression/tune with a number of pre-determined rhythms that hold across the bar line as described above.
- Repeat the same exercise incorporating the the Play-Rest approach

🎯 16. MELODIC LEAPS AT CHORD CHANGE

Pick two different chords within a progression you are working on and practice making leaps from the last note you play on the first chord into the next chord.

🎯 17. FOCUS ON RHYTHM

Practice improvising using only a SINGLE NOTE. The single note should be harmonic to all or most of the material being practiced; often the root or 5th of the key works best. Combine this approach with various play-rest techniques.

This concept may also be expanded upon by using two notes or three notes only. The main objective is to help one improve their rhythmic concept by eliminating too much thought going into note choices.

🎯 18. FOCUS ON MELODY

Practice improvising using QUARTER NOTES ONLY. Vary articulation by going between using staccato and legato. Combine this approach with various play-rest techniques. Quarter notes may also be syncopated by starting them on off-beats. This concept may also be expanded upon by using only notes of the chord. This technique may be also be used with half notes only, or any other note value.

The main objective is to help one improve their melodic concept by eliminating too much thought going into executing rhythmic ideas.