

Why This Works

Mommy, where do jazz solos come from?

The etudes in this book lead to real music, -improvised phrases played by master level improvisers while improvising. Making sense of a scale compendium or a solo transcription can be pretty daunting for the beginning improviser. Putting them to use and making practical sense is often a mind-numbing struggle for the intermediate level improviser. This text presents process. Mature improvisation requires a highly developed sense of process. This text shows valid musical choices that lead to sophisticated improvisation while retaining and insisting on quality improvisation in the simplest of examples.

A given page of etudes outlines a progression from basic to more sophisticated. The conceptual and theoretical elements of an improvised excerpt are fleshed out and made functional and musical at each of the stages presented. While the etudes often progress from simple to more complex, they are composed with the intent that any etude at any stage is a legitimate musical choice for the harmony at hand. Your taste and ability will guide which etudes serve more as exercise or primer, and which ones come more literally in to play as you shape a musical solo.

The Composer in the Improviser

This material focusses on compositional process as it relates to developing a voice in improvisation. An improvised solo is the model that inspires a concept's introduction and development. The concept and excerpt motivate a series of progressively more sophisticated musical examples that work to instill the tools and maturity (experience) that enable improvising the given solo excerpt. Recognizing the compositional process that evolves through a series of etudes is equally as important as playing proficiently. One of this work's greatest achievement would be to aid your discovery of process and progress on a level that enables you to author a text specific to your sonic goals.

Patience is more than a virtue.

This works when you allow yourself to become immersed in a single phrase. Becoming a Complete Improviser is best accomplished one seemingly incomplete step at a time. Learn a specific idea over a specific harmony. You are then equipped with a tool. Many methods ask you to learn a scale and then follow a prose description on usage. This may equip you with how to build a tool, if you are willing to experiment and research. Ultimately, such work is essential to building your own sound however the elusive nature of it turns many people off. Acquiring the collection of tools presented here will yield tool building skills in time, as well as provide immediate access to tools for use on the spot. The tools for translation and variation become apparent after absorbing the information of several pages. Your patience and need to focus and repeat one line is crucial. A completed page might be two months of work. An effective plan of action might be to have three different pages/concepts in the works at any one time. Balance that with a Bach Partita for technique and musicianship, cd transcription for feel and line, and jam sessions to feel how your efforts matter.

Some excerpts may hold a rhythmic sophistication that is too much to manage comfortably at the original tempo. Play as slowly as necessary and don't even begin to worry about it. Some of the most staggering moments in the history of jazz have been ballads with velocity requirements that an elementary school recorder ensemble could play. Each of the etudes here is carefully composed so that a given concept may be addressed and used in real life playing situations as your level of comfort dictates. Progressing through and absorbing every etude and corresponding solo excerpt is a tall order for the beginning improviser.

Render me obsolete.

There is no need to begin at the beginning or end at the end. As much as my ego would like to have you love every line of music here, there is no need. Scan the pages. Identify a challenge that interests you and hit it. Working at this long enough should lead to inspiration to transcribe and create your own process of skill acquisition. Send me your pages to practice.

Original inspiration inspires original inspiration.

The models that inspire the etudes are extraordinary. They are moments of supreme inspiration and improvisation played by master-level improvisers in the heat of the moment. Vardan Ousepian and Tim Miller are two of the strongest voices in contemporary jazz today. Enough care devoted to your work will lead to original inspiration of your own. Take heart in the fact that your creation and shaping now follow world-class models. I do.