

# Teaching Jazz

By  
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As a teacher of jazz, I'm often approached by classical students wanting to learn jazz "just for the fun of it," without realizing the amount of work and practice involved. Usually after the first couple of lessons the student realizes that learning jazz is not as easy as he or she thought it would be, and that the study of jazz needs to be approached with the same sincerity and discipline as classical music.

At most universities, jazz majors are required to study classical music which is essential in order to have an understanding of the delicate sides of one's instrument. It also teaches the jazz musician technique and control which is also important in jazz. Since jazz musicians are improvising and composing on the spot we need proficiency on our instrument in order to quickly be able to play our ideas and to be spontaneous.

## So where do we start when student X walks in for his/her first jazz piano lesson?

**1. Technique:** Make sure the student has the technical ability to play jazz. If not, give him exercises in the form of scales and etudes. It's a waste of time teaching a student material that they can't play.

**2. Basic chord construction:** Check the student's knowledge of simple chord construction. Depending on the skill level, you might have to start with basic concepts like triads, dominant chords, major/minor chords.

**3. Locate 3rd&7th:** Before learning the standard jazz voicings, including chords with altered notes, the student must be familiar with the 3rd and 7th notes of the chord. These notes are the foundation of many jazz chords and it is important to understand their function.

**4. Left Hand Voicings:** The basic left hand voicings will serve as a foundation of more complex two hand voicings. These voicings include 3rd, 7th, 9th or 13th depending on the quality of chord.

**5. ii-V-I progression:** The ii-V-I progression is perhaps the most common chord progression in jazz and should be understood as soon as possible. There are a wide variety of exercises that can be applied depending on the level of the student. For the more advanced student more complicated voicings should be explored. Every jazz pianist should be comfortable with many different ii-V-I voicings in all the keys.

**Step 1. Melody in Right Hand  
3rd and 7th in Left Hand**

FMaj7      Em7(b5)    A7(b9)      Dmin7    G7      Cmin7    F7

BbMaj7      Bbm7    Eb7      Amin7    D7      Abmin7    Db7

Gmin7      C7      FMaj7    D7      Gmin7    C7

**Step 2. 3rd and 7th in Right Hand  
Root in Left Hand**

FMaj7      Em7(b5)    A7(b9)      Dmin7    G7      Cmin7    F7

BbMaj7      Bbmin7    Eb7      Amin7    D7      Abmin7    Db7

Gmin7      C7      FMaj7    D7      Gmin7    C7

### Step 3. 3 note voicing in Left Hand

F <sup>b</sup> Maj9	E <sup>b</sup> min7	A7 <sup>b</sup> 13	D <sup>b</sup> min9	G13	C <sup>b</sup> min9	F13	B <sup>b</sup> Maj9	B <sup>b</sup> min7
9	7	b13	9	13	9	13	9	5
7	3	3	7	3	7	3	7	3
3	1	7	3	7	3	7	3	7

  

E <sup>b</sup> 9	A <sup>b</sup> min7	D9	A <sup>b</sup> min7	D <sup>b</sup> 9	G <sup>b</sup> min7	C9	F <sup>b</sup> Maj7
9	5	9	5	9	5	9	7
7	3	7	3	7	3	7	3
3	7	3	7	3	7	3	1

F <sup>b</sup> Maj7	Em7( <sup>b</sup> 5)	A7( <sup>b</sup> 9)	D <sup>b</sup> min7	G7	C <sup>b</sup> min7	F7

  

B <sup>b</sup> Maj7	B <sup>b</sup> m7	E <sup>b</sup> 7	A <sup>b</sup> min7	D7	A <sup>b</sup> min7	D <sup>b</sup> 7

  

G <sup>b</sup> min7	C7	F <sup>b</sup> Maj7	D7	G <sup>b</sup> min7	C7

### Step 4. ii-V-I voicings in all keys

D <sup>b</sup> min7G7	C <sup>b</sup> Maj7	D <sup>b</sup> min9	G13	C <sup>b</sup> Maj7

  

G <sup>b</sup> min7	C9	F <sup>b</sup> Maj7	G <sup>b</sup> min9	C13	F <sup>b</sup> Maj9

Make sure the student practices the above voicings or similar voicings in all 12 keys. Treat it like an etude and use the metronome to ensure that progress is being made.