

Jazz Piano Tricks

By
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Studying jazz piano is like all other serious music disciplines. It requires dedication, practice, listening and of course, study of the masters. Even though jazz is an improvisational art form, learning what has been done before is extremely important in order to fully understand the concept of jazz. Remember that the feel and style of jazz can only be learned by listening. I have had students who have progressed quickly because of listening to historically important jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Bud Powell, Bill Evans and Miles Davis.

Every time I hear someone quote material from an important musician, I look at him/her as a well educated performer who has studied and listened to the historical jazz literature, and I respect that person's playing all the more. I realize that jazz is based on improvisation which is the ultimate musical freedom. However, if you learn something from another player, there's nothing wrong with using it. Let your creativity be based on all the recordings you have heard, and on all the material you have studied.

The examples below are a few standard jazz cliches that are good to know. Some of them are materials that are frequently used on your typical standard jazz gig. Experiment with these rhythms, phrases and chords and add your own flavor to it. That's what jazz is all about.

Intro:

It's common to do an improvised introduction using the 1-6-2-5 progression. In order to make it more interesting a pedal note is very useful. Below you can see how a C pedal works over a 1-6-2-5 intro in the key of F. Try to change the quality of the chords while keeping the C pedal to see what sounds you can come up with.

The musical notation shows a 1-6-2-5 progression in the key of F major. The right hand plays chords: FMaj7, D7(#9), Gm9, C7(#9), FMaj7, D7(#9), Gm9, Gb13, and FMaj7. The left hand plays a C pedal point (C4) throughout the progression, with a dotted quarter note rhythm. The tempo is marked as common time (C).

Comping Patterns: There are of course endless rhythmic patterns you can use when comping. But the two following patterns are the first ones that should be mastered. Practice these patterns with a metronome and work on getting a nice relaxed swing feel in different tempos. It is also useful to use these figures in your left hand when you are accompanying your right hand solo playing. Suggested listening to learn about comping: **Red Garland, Bobby Timmons, Wynton Kelly.**

Pattern 1:

C9 E^b9 D9 D^b9(#11) C9 E^b9 D9 D^b9

Pattern 2:

C⁶ A7^b13 Dm9 G13 Em9 A13(^b9) Dm9 G^b9

Endings: There are a few standard endings that are good to know. You might have been on a gig when somebody yells, “Basie ending!”, “Flat five!”, “A Train!” etc. These are all call signs for standard endings that all jazz pianists should know.

Basie Ending:

Basie > C13

A Train Ending:

C⁶

Flat 5 Ending: It's called Flat 5 ending because the chord progression starts on the flat 5 of the tonic. For example, if the tune is in the key of F, the ending would start on B. Look at the example and pay attention to the quality of the chords.

Bm7(b5) Bbm7 Am7(#5) Abm7 Gm7 GbMaj7 F⁶

Standard Bossa Ending 1:

Vamp C⁶ D^{b6} C⁶ D^{b6}

“Killer Joe” Ending: Named after the famous tune “Killer Joe” by Benny Golson, this progression also works well as an introduction.

Vamp C⁶ B^{b13} C⁶ B^{b13}

Ray Charles Ending:

B^b B^{b13}