

## DEVELOPING A PRACTICE ROUTINE

To maximize your musical growth, you should organize a daily practice routine that emphasizes building skills, learning repertoire and vocabulary, and improvising. Just as athletes get faster and stronger with training, you will improve with consistent practice. This process requires discipline, persistence, and patience. I encourage you to include the components below in your practice routine. This routine gives you a framework for your practice while allowing flexibility to explore different concepts. Further information about each of these components follows later in the book.

- **Scales** (5-10 minutes per hour of practice)  
Traditional study of major, melodic minor, and harmonic minor scales is a great introduction to practicing scales. It is important to develop the technique to play these scales and the ears to recognize their distinctive sounds. In jazz we also use bebop, whole tone, and diminished scales along with different modes of major and ascending melodic minor scales. In addition to playing these scales in a traditional fashion, you can practice them in broken intervals or in different rhythmic patterns. Examples are shown later in the book. Practice scales with a metronome, and visualize the each scale's picture as you practice.
- **Repertoire** (15-20 minutes per hour of practice)  
Building a repertoire is an essential part of your development as a jazz musician. If you learn just one new tune each week, you will know 50 new tunes in a year. Fakebooks are great tools, but they are not always accurate. So, when learning compositions, consult recordings by jazz greats. For standard tunes, recordings by vocalists are especially helpful. If you know the words, you will have an easier time memorizing the melody. Good vocalists also have distinctive phrasing and personalize the music; you, too, should work to make the melodies your own. It should sound like you wrote it and not as if you are reading out of a book. In addition, by practicing melodies with a metronome, your overall time sense will improve.

After learning the melody, work to incorporate different concepts you have been studying (scales, chord voicings, and vocabulary) into these specific tunes. Apply these concepts to pieces you are performing with your big band or combo, as well.

Keep a list of tunes you know and review them periodically. Standards should be the "meat and potatoes" of your repertoire. However, you should learn tunes in a variety of keys, tempos, and time feels. Recommended tunes to start with are listed later in the book in categories: blues heads, bebop heads, ballads, Latin tunes, jazz compositions, and standards. Learning these tunes will help you internalize good melodies; in turn, this will help you develop melodic sensibility, an important attribute of an improvising musician.

- **Chord Voicings** (10 minutes per hour of practice)  
To function in a jazz group, pianists need to quickly translate chord symbols into voicings. I encourage new students to begin by making sure they understand how to build triads and seventh chords. After understanding basic chord construction, I introduce students to jazz chord voicings. I encourage you to master one voicing at a

time by practicing them through all the keys and applying them to melodies you have learned. Familiarity with chords helps not only when comping, but also when soloing, composing, or arranging.

- **Vocabulary** (10–15 minutes per hour of practice)  
I encourage you to glean vocabulary from bebop heads, improvised solos, or common jazz “licks.” Practice playing different melodic ideas and new vocabulary through all the keys and over standard progressions.
  
- **Transcription** (10-15 minutes per hour of practice)  
Listening to the masters is the best way to absorb the jazz language. I encourage you to listen to a solo you would like to learn whenever you have a spare minute. A sing-able solo by Miles Davis or Chet Baker is a great place to start. I generally have students start with Miles Davis’ solo on “So What” (*Kind of Blue*) or his solo on “Blues by Five” (*Cookin’ with the Miles Davis Quintet*). To transcribe a solo, you can work through the following steps. This will take some time, but I believe this is the best way to internalize the music.
  1. Listen repeatedly to the recording.
  2. Sing along with the soloist, trying to match every nuance.
  3. Sing the solo alone without the recording.
  4. Play the solo with the recording. Try to match every nuance. For some students, it is helpful to write down the solo at this stage. If you do so, I encourage you to be neat about your work, writing four measures per line.
  5. Play the solo by memory without the recording.