

Jeremy Siskind: Improvisation

Week 1

Introduction

- Jeremy Siskind introduces himself and the course
- Goals of TWI are to be able to improvise a 24-measure ABA improvisation
- No particular style is prescribed
- The idea is to be able to be proud of your own ABA improvisation in your chosen style
- The TWI is designed for both those with some skill in improvisation and those that have no such skills
- Advanced topics such as complex harmonies, swing feel, the rule of the octave, or any other intensive concepts are not the focus of this TWI

Harmonic Progression

ABA 24-measure improvisation, comprising three 8-measure phrases.

- A single chord progression in major and minor keys.
- Section A can be major or minor, and then section B will be the opposite tonality (minor or major, respectively)
- Symmetrical Chord Progression:
 - One chord per measure
 - First four chords of the progression are analogous to the question, and the last four are the resolution/answer
 - Major: I IV V7/V V7 V7/IV IV V7 I
 - i. V7/V and V7/IV are called a secondary dominant, or applied chords
 - Chords that aren't diatonic, but are drawn from the key of another chord; e.g. V7/V is the dominant of the key defined by V and V7/IV is the dominant of the key defined by IV.
 - Some chords are inverted to keep hand from leaping around
 - Inversion are not indicated in the chord symbols to allow you to decide what inversion to use
 - ii. Start with the key of E-flat Major: "tattoo the progression into mind"
 - iii. In order to solidify your mastery of the progression, transpose to other keys, such as C Major, D Major, etc. Memorize the progression so that you don't need the roman numerals or music in front you while playing
 - Note alternate ways of thinking of the chords to assist in transposition.
 - For example, V7/IV is like a dominant I chord

E-flat Major

I IV V⁷/IV V⁷ V⁷/IV IV V⁷ I

⁹ C Major

I IV V⁷/IV V⁷ V⁷/IV IV V⁷ I

¹⁷ D Major

I IV V⁷/IV V⁷ V⁷/IV IV V⁷ I

- Minor: i iv V⁷/iv V⁷ V⁷/iv iv V⁷ i
 - i. Start with relative minor of E-flat Major, which is C Minor
 - ii. The minor is the same as the major sequence, but the progression uses minor chords where indicated.
 - iii. Transpose to relative minors of the major keys you used in the major transpositions.

²⁵ C minor

i iv V⁷/IV V⁷ V⁷/iv iv V⁷ i

³³ A minor

i iv V⁷/IV V⁷ V⁷/iv iv V⁷ i

41 B minor

Bm Em C#7 F#7 B7 Em F#7 Bm

i iv V⁷/IV V⁷ V⁷/iv iv V⁷ i

- o Example of inversions:
 - i. Start in the first inversion of I so that you can have an ascending bass line through the entire progression
 - ii. Experiment in other inversions

49 Ascending bass line

E_b A_b F⁷ B_b⁷ E_b⁷ A_b B_b⁷ E_b

I IV V⁷/IV V⁷ V⁷/IV IV V⁷ I

Left Hand Accompaniments

Upon mastering of the block-chord, one-chord per measure progression, come up with a variety of accompaniments, keeping chords in the left hand

- Repeat the chord in rhythms (e.g. Waldstein Sonata)
- Imply different style using different repeated chord rhythms
 - o “International Dance Rhythm” (Billy Hart, drummer): 1&2 &3& 4&
 - o “March”: 12 3 4
- Oom-Pah: alternation between the bass note (b) and other notes of the chord (ch)
 - o “Simple 1 2 3 4”: 1(b) 2(ch) 3(b) 4(ch)
 - o “1 2 & 3 4 &”: 1(b) 2(ch)&(ch) 3(b) 4(ch)&(ch)
 - o “12 & 3 4”: 12(b) &(ch)3(ch) 4(b)
 - o “1 &2 & 3 4”: 1(b) &2(ch) &(ch) 3(ch) 4(b)
 - o “1 & ah 2 & 3 & 4 &”: 1(b) &(ch) ah(ch) 2(ch) &(ch) 3(b) &(ch) 4(b) &(ch)
 - o “12 & 3 & 4 &”: 12(ch) &(ch) 3(b) 4(ch)
 - o “romantic and flowing” (i.e. slurred): 1(ch) &(b) 2&(ch) 3(ch) &(b) 4&(ch)

57

Simple Repeat Dance March Simple Alternation Alt. Variation 1

62 Alt. Variation 2 Alt. Variation 3 Alt. Variation 4 Start with upper notes

66 Flowing

- Broken Chords
 - Arpeggiated chord
 - Alberti bass and related patterns
 - Repeat first or top two notes, etc.
 - Closed position (chord as given in single hand position within an octave)
 - Open position (chord expanded over more than one octave)

67 Alberti Alberti Variation 1 Alberti Variation 2

- Combine broken and oom-pah
 - “Stride piano”: bass note separated beneath top part of chord outside of closed position
 - “Joplin style” like (i) but with repeated top notes, connecting base notes to create a bit of a bass line (using fifth and third)
 - “Open arpeggios”: wide open voicing of notes of the chord one at a time

70 Stride, Joplin, Bass-line Open arpeggios

Right Hand Improvisation

- Only use notes of the chord (i.e.; arpeggios in various patterns, e.g. Mozart sonata)
- Basic pattern: match the two hands playing exactly the same chords in both hands
- Upward arpeggio in RH: quarter eighth eighth, or eighth eighth eighth eighth
- Mix some up and some down arpeggios.
- Add some skips in the arpeggios

72

RH-LH Matched	RH Arpeggio LH Chord	RH Up/Down Arpeggios LH Chord	RH Skipping Arpeggios LH Chord
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The image shows a musical exercise labeled '72' on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). It is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines. Above each measure, there are labels for the right hand (RH) and left hand (LH) parts. The first measure is labeled 'RH-LH Matched' and shows a simple chord in both hands. The second measure is 'RH Arpeggio LH Chord', with the RH playing an arpeggiated chord and the LH holding a chord. The third measure is 'RH Up/Down Arpeggios LH Chord', with the RH playing an arpeggio that moves up and then down, while the LH holds a chord. The fourth measure is 'RH Skipping Arpeggios LH Chord', with the RH playing an arpeggio that skips between octaves, while the LH holds a chord.

How to practice

- Ask “what if” questions in RH to feel less limited
 - add rests
 - use eighth note triplets
 - use octave leaps
 - use repetition
 - use varied articulations
 - allow RH to venture away from its original closed position chord triad to other octaves
 - use pickup
 - Use short phrases with large rests between RH notes
 - Use long 4-bar phrases
 - Dotted rhythm
 - etc.
- Goal: be able to connect a LH accompaniment with RH improvisation in Eflat Major and C Minor
 - One hand at a time at first
 - LH accompaniment first
 - LH holds chord while RH does improvisation
 - Then start at slow tempo and join the LH accompaniment with the RH improvisation
- Always practice in rhythm (“practicing out of rhythm is like playing tennis without a net”)
- Write out some possibilities
 - Try to wean yourself off the page, but you can write out the first two measure and try to extend over the whole piece
 - Or write out particularly difficult patterns

Conclusion

- Learn the progression, particularly in Eflat Major and C minor
- Experiment with LH accompaniments in various styles in open and closed positions
- Improvise RH using only chord tones, in closed and open positions
- Practice one hand at a time in rhythm, before putting hands together
- Write out some notes to help in the learning process