

A Step-by-Step Approach to Becoming a Jazz Musician

Part 2. Hopefully you have listened to some good jazz since reading **Part 1** of this guide and explored the 'Jazz Greats' suggested listening list. Becoming a competent and creative improviser takes time and patience. Playing with a rhythm section for the first time can be a daunting experience like driving a high performance car when you are only just learning to drive a basic model. Following a progression chart with chord changes can be confusing if you don't know what the chords mean. If you want to know how the jazz language works, you need to familiarize yourself with the functions of scales and chord progressions.

1. Let's start simply in the key of C with no flats or sharps to think about. The letters C F or G above the melody line indicate the root note of the chord and the other signs like Cm F7 and GØ beside the letters define the type of chord like a major or minor arpeggio. We also need to know how to construct a solo around the progression or chord sequence we are exploring and follow the style e.g. 3 chord tune, Blues, Jazz Standard or in a Contemporary style. Being able to play different scales like major, minor, pentatonic and blues will make our first steps to improvisation easier.
2. Before we move on to playing please refer to the ArtForms Woodwind Green Award (I can improvise in a jazz style) which explains swing quavers, displacement of the accent and constructing a simple solo. You need to understand these basic factors first.
3. Playing the blues is an essential part of learning to play jazz and playing Duke Ellington's C Jam Blues is a good place to start (refer to the tune and chord sheet on the next page). As you can see the Head or tune only has 2 notes and the 3 chord sequence is easy to follow. Playing the tune accompanied by the sample Bass line (see B1 on the next page) will help the tune groove and will give you structure to follow.
4. If you are taking your first steps to improvisation why not make it easier by just soloing in bar 4, 8, and 12. Think of this as a question/answer musical game. Restrict yourself to playing the same 2 notes repeated, inverted, or like a trill.
5. More confident students can try playing a solo on bars 1-8 where the chords move slowly, before soloing on all 12 bars.
6. Constructing a solo based on the blues scale (see page 2) will make your solo easier and replicate the blues style and form.