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Improvising Jazz (A Fireside Book)



Synopsis

This work offers useful information on how jazz music can be improvised.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have to admit, when I first got this book I thought, well, it's sort of small, so it must not have very much in it. Boy, was I wrong. What I found was a pretty comprehensive summary of jazz theory and how it can be applied to various situations, from the solo performer to the band. Coker is very concerned with the "education" of jazz and strives to make the reader put together pieces of the musician (thought, intellect, practice, etc.) to make a coherent whole. What I found particularly helpful were the chapters on motifs, superimposition, and altered extensions. Although this can be found in almost any good jazz book, Coker's book uses understandable charts and clear idea presentation. He helps develop ideas for motifs and how they can be modified in improv, gives good information on how polychords work and some possible superimpositions, and a great summary of what good tone extensions are for various chord types. Also, there are chapters on rhythm, particularly in band settings, basic theory such as chords and scales, and ideas for transcription off records. Each chapter has practice ideas (which of course I'm way too lazy to do), and there is a big appendix at the end of all types of chord progressions to practice, or at least in my case, look at. Definitely a book to check out if other theory books don't seem to "sum it up" well.

I started improvising Jazz back in the early 70's. Back then every serious player I knew owned a copy of Jerry Coker's "Patterns for Jazz". Somehow, I missed owning a copy of "Improvising Jazz" until just a week ago. This book, published in 1964, is awesome. It's packed with insight and applicable techniques regarding improvisation that are as fresh today as they were nearly 40 years ago. If you already own Pattern's for Jazz, this book is totally different. "Patterns" is a 99% music whereas "Improvising" is 90% discussion and application with the music used to illustrate the discussion. My favorite passage is an excerpt the author takes from Richmond Browne on what makes a solo interesting to various listeners. Find this on page 15! It's a small book to be sure. However, this just means that it can be read over and over and physically kept in your case. Think of it as a "Strunk & White" for jazz.

I already owned the paperback version of this very useful little booklet. Now that I have a Kindle, I thought it would be a good idea to have the ebook version for further versatility....also because my paperback is turning yellow with age. However, the electronic rendition of the book is horrible. The purely text parts of the book are just fine. While the music sheet examples as well as the most important part of the book (at least from my point of view) appendices B, C and D are almost illegible: they are far too small and, since they are images and not text, they are not zoomable....It is definitely not enough to just scan a book and then convert the document into a format readable by the Kindle, whoever does the job needs to look at the finished product and "test drive it" or else you might end up with a very bad result. The bottom line is I just blew \$9.19 for nothing.....I could have probably done a better job if I had scanned the paperback, which I already possess, and made a pdf version of it. M@Z

If you're starting to learn playing jazz, this is *not* the book. There are plenty of others like Amadie's and Ferrara's that are more immediately helpful in this regard. With that out of the way: "Improvising Jazz" is an excellent source of unique perspective, advice, and experience from a noted jazz educator, Jerry Coker. Coker focuses not only on how to play but, on another level, how to learn and how to develop further. You will want this book in your collection to gain further depth and perspective on the subject. There is advice on how to approach your first jam session, developing the ear, combining intellect with spontaneity. The later chapters on analysis of melody and functional harmony, first written in 1964, were probably the one of the first systematic attempts to "organize" jazz theory. You definitely get the sense that this is a major source material for reference books such as "Modern Jazz Piano" by Brian Waite.

I purchased my first copy of "Improvising Jazz" in 1980. I had been practicing and performing jazz at high school for about a year and this book said all the things I needed to hear at that time in my music career. What's interesting is that the content isn't really meant to be practiced or developed or anything like that. It's more of a general overview of the basic concepts and ideals of jazz improvisation. "Improvising Jazz" explains things like Swing, Melodic Development, the Role of the Rhythm Section, the Diminished scale and Functional Harmony. Thanks to this book, I had a firm understanding of "functional harmony" before I even entered college and this was partly responsible for my success in all of my theory classes.

This is the finest general introduction to playing jazz I've ever come across. The chapters about tertian superimposition and construction of melodies are particularly helpful. Even if you've been playing jazz for some time I recommend you look these chapters over. I also recommend--for all instrumentalists--PENTATONIC SCALES FOR THE JAZZ-ROCK KEYBOARDIST by Jeff Burns.

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