


# Teaching Jazz



## An Important Starting Point

The main point of this clinic is to establish proper techniques and good habits to our students, right out of the gate. The two most important aspects to improvisation are first and foremost, FEEL, followed by a solid knowledge base of scales. For us educators, we need a solid grasp of these techniques so we can demonstrate these concepts through singing and playing for our students. Think of teaching this music like you would a language

### Speaking with the right accent

**Swing 8<sup>th</sup>-notes** – There is one dreaded technique taught in schools across America. Public enemy

number one, the dotted 8<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> . Note the legato and staccato markings are there too. Here are my issues with this:


- The subdivision of  is 16<sup>th</sup> notes, while jazz since the 1930's is based in the 8<sup>th</sup> note triplet 
- The staccato marking teaches a separation, or sectioning off notes in pairs of two

Though the concept may seem like “close enough for jazz” with the dotted 8<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup>, it couldn't be further from the truth. Here's the real starting point for the proper swing rhythm:

## Swing Rhythm

First, clap the triplet subdivision

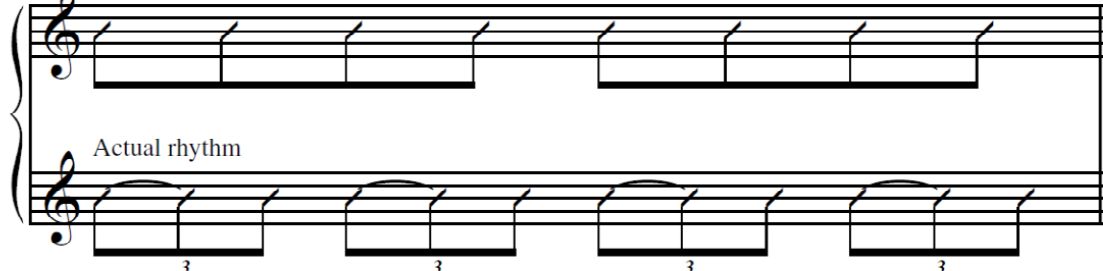
Now, tie the first two notes of the triplet together to create the "Swing" rhythm



Here's how things line up:

3 Written rhythm

Actual rhythm



We're not done yet. Now that we have the proper subdivision, the sound of the clapping creates notes separated in pairs. Slurring up-beats to down-beats with a continuous airflow, while putting a re-attack on the up-beats is how we accomplish this continuous flow of 8<sup>th</sup> notes. Note how there is no articulation written here:

Sing with continuous airflow, no separation

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "Da da ah da ah da ah". The notes are connected by a continuous slur. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment, also with a continuous slur. It features triplet markings (the number 3) under groups of three notes, indicating a triplet subdivision.

I mention the lack of articulation markings, because it's quite common for the legato/staccato to make its way into the triplet subdivision. This is unnecessary and ruins the flow. The simple fact that we tie the first two 8<sup>th</sup> note triplets together while leaving the last as-is, creates the longer/shorter relationship. Remember, this is NOT to be confused with "long/short." As soon as you introduce the word "short," you unwillingly introduce separation.

### Important Characteristics to Remember:

Triplet Subdivision – Swing is based in triplets, not 16<sup>th</sup> notes

Continuous Airflow – Keep that air flowing

Lack of legato/staccato markings – No need for these articulation markings, it confuses the issue.

Slurring up to down – Last step, slur those up-beats to down-beats, while reattaching the up-beats, and don't forget that airflow...

## Basic Grammar

Scales and chord outlines, which I refer to as linear and vertical structures, are basic grammar for learning the language of jazz improvisation. In this section, we'll talk about the big three scales/chords. Through this practice, we familiarize ourselves with scale degrees, alterations and the swing feel from above.

### Major (Ionian):

The image displays three staves of music, each representing a different key signature for the Major (Ionian) scale and its chord outlines. The top staff is for B<sup>b</sup>Maj7, the middle for E<sup>b</sup>Maj7, and the bottom for C<sup>b</sup>Maj7. Each staff shows the scale notes with fingerings (1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9) and a chord outline. The scale degrees are indicated by numbers 1 through 9, with 10 being the octave.

Note the emphasis on scale degrees 1,3,5,7 and 9. Familiarize yourself with these scale degrees, they're your friends. I refer to these as the "main characters." Scale degrees 4 and 6 are "supporting characters." When soloing, you want to feature your main characters, and the supporting characters enhance the main and are not meant to be featured.

### Dominant (Mixolydian):

6  $B^b7$   
C 1 2 3 4 5 6 (7) 8 9 8 (7) 6 5 4 3 2 1 3 5 (7) 9 7 5 3 1

6  $G7$   
Eb 1 2 3 4 5 6 (7) 8 9 8 (7) 6 5 4 3 2 1 3 5 (7) 9 7 5 3 1

6  $C7$   
Bb 1 2 3 4 5 6 (7) 8 9 8 (7) 6 5 4 3 2 1 3 5 (7) 9 7 5 3 1

Be sure to point out the difference from Major to Dominant, we lower the 7<sup>th</sup> degree by a  $\frac{1}{2}$  step.

### Minor (Dorian):

11  $B^b\text{min}7$   
C 1 2 (3) 4 5 6 (7) 8 9 8 (7) 6 5 4 (3) 2 1 (3) 5 (7) 9 (7) 5 (3) 1

11  $G\text{min}7$   
Eb 1 2 (3) 4 5 6 (7) 8 9 8 (7) 6 5 4 (3) 2 1 (3) 5 (7) 9 (7) 5 (3) 1

11  $C\text{min}7$   
Bb 1 2 (3) 4 5 6 (7) 8 9 8 (7) 6 5 4 (3) 2 1 (3) 5 (7) 9 (7) 5 (3) 1

Again, be sure to point out the differences from Major to Minor, we lower the 7<sup>th</sup> AND 3<sup>rd</sup> degrees by a  $\frac{1}{2}$  step.

## Important Characteristics to Remember:

1,3,5,7 and 9 – Main “characters” you want to feature

4 and 6 – Supporting “characters” to enhance the main, do not feature these.

1 and 5 – Main characters with little defining personalities. Note how they remain unaltered between the three modes. Out of the main characters list, these should be featured least due to their over stable sound.

3 and 7 – Main characters with very defining personalities. 7<sup>th</sup> tells you Major or Not-Major, 3<sup>rd</sup> tells you Minor or Not-Minor.

9 – Main character with little defining personality, but the most naturally in-depth character (so far).

VERY IMPRTANT – Don’t take my word on blind faith. You need to sit down at the piano and realize these characteristics for yourself.

## Continued Reading:

- Great improvisation/theory text books
  - “Concepts for Improvisation: A Comprehensive guide for performing and teaching” by Rich De Rosa
  - “Creative Jazz Improvisation” by Scott D. Reeves
- Great jazz play-alongs
  - Jamey Aebersold...any and all!
    - Start with Volume 1, 2 and 3

## Essential Listening:

- |                                |                             |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Cannonball Adderly– Alto Sax | • Joe Henderson – Tenor Sax | • Lee Morgan – Trumpet      |
| • Chet Baker – Trumpet         | • Milt Jackson – Vibes      | • Charlie Parker – Alto Sax |
| • Art Blakey – Drums           | • J.J. Johnson – Trombone   | • Bud Powell - Piano        |
| • Clifford Brown – Trumpet     | • Elvin Jones – Drums       | • Sonny Rollins – Tenor Sax |
| • Ray Brown – Bass             | • Mel Lewis – Drums         | • Horace Silver – Piano     |
| • John Coltrane–Tenor Sax      | • Pat Martino – Guitar      | • Clark Terry - Trumpet     |
| • Miles Davis – Trumpet        | • Thelonius Monk – Piano    | • McCoy Tyner – Piano       |
| • Freddie Hubbard- Trumpet     | • Wes Montgomery– Guitar    | • Phill Woods – Alto Sax    |