



Analytical Approach in Teaching Jazz Piano Improvisation

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Abstract

The article discusses the methodological problems of teaching jazz improvisation and the importance of developing the students' analytical thinking as a factor contributing to freedom and individuality in creating improvisations. The problems are highlighted through a description of the basic components of jazz piano improvisation and comparative analysis methods used in practice in jazz piano class to develop students' analytical, improvisational, and compositional skills.

Keywords: jazz improvisation, components of jazz piano improvisation, methodological issues in jazz, comparative analysis.

Introduction.

Jazz improvisation is a unique phenomenon of musical art, an amazing combination of variation and stability in a single temporal space. In his article on improvisation in the "New Grove Dictionary of Jazz", Barry Kernfeld writes: «The essence of improvisation in jazz is the delicate balance between spontaneous invention, carrying with it both the danger of loss of control and the opportunity for creativity of a high order, and reference to the familiar, without which, paradoxically, creativity cannot be truly valued».

The main part.

Not surprisingly, the analysis, study, and mastery of improvisation in a jazz piano class represents one of the most exciting and challenging goals that the student, along with the teacher, must achieve in the learning process. For a teacher, for example, in terms of curriculum planning, improvisation as a subject is one of the most varied and challenging, precisely because of the individual focus of teaching. Jazz piano teachers working with students on improvisation must accept and consider all variables affecting the educational process in the classroom without relying solely on teacher intuition. Of course, teachers realize that hundreds of ideas, directions, and experiments in jazz music are at the fingertips of the modern student, in walking distance, on the one hand simplifying access to such important material, on the other hand, showing essentially a huge, at times overwhelming amount of information. Naturally, for the young musician, improvisation is primarily a moment of freedom and creative initiative, so sometimes jazz improvisation textbooks with lots of charts, blues and altered modal scales, exercises look depressingly unfriendly. Instead of the so-called "jazz tree," the student is faced with the harsh, impenetrable wilds of the forest... A recent survey of young jazz musicians conducted by the famous American musician Timothy Gondola showed that they find the rules of jazz harmonization theory much more problematic and confusing than classical music theory.

In the "Birth of the School: Controversial Methodologies in Jazz Education", Tony Whyton highlights some criticisms of the academic jazz educational process in this regard. He cites as one important reason for the unpopularity of improvisation education the detachment of the academic educational process from practice, from the reality of contemporary jazz performance in general.



He also cautions educators against common pedagogical methods in teaching, as this is at odds with the development of individuality in students. Teaching based on chronological history and with uniform standards does qualitatively simplify academic integration, but relegates the art form of jazz to a museum piece and reduces the power of the student's independent analytical understanding of music.

As a result, we often see that students from very different continents have remarkably similar, predictable courses of thought in improvisation, precisely because jazz methodological principles are so widely disseminated. The once revolutionary ideas of jazz have at some point turned, sadly enough, into dogma, replicated in hundreds of textbooks and methodological studies. One can understand the creative stupor that this kind of "vivisection" of jazz can cause. The formalistic approach leads sometimes to absurd results, both in theory and in practice.

As a consequence, many young musicians simply refuse an academic education, falling into the trap of populist myths about jazz musicians as people who create outside any framework or laws of the universe. The fact of the titanic work of the discoverers of jazz, who devoted many and many years to the search for their own handwriting and style, is hushed up. Unfortunately, both the formal academic approach to the study of jazz and the rejection of education equally lead to the extinction of the creative initiative of the young musician, to the so-called creative collapse. Lack of knowledge of the architectonics of musical form, lack of understanding of the importance of harmonic analysis, the desire to follow the "hackneyed", lying on the surface techniques, makes improvisation hopelessly boring and predictable, both in terms of academic education, and outside it.

Here, more than ever, the development of the student's analytical skills as a method of fostering the creative initiative, the creative freedom of which Barry Kernfeld speaks. It is the presence of these two factors - mastery of analytical skills and at the same time the ability to create, to create - that is an indispensable, obligatory component for the formation of a jazz musician-performer, improviser, composer, arranger in one person. If, a priori, the task of an improvisation teacher is to help develop a jazz musician as a multi-vector musician, then he or she should also, to some extent, combine these qualities - to be a performer, a composer, an arranger. The universality of improvisation as such requires flexibility and versatility on the part of the teacher, his loyalty to the unexpected and unpredictable results of improvisation practice in his classroom. It is the teacher who creates, structures, and evaluates the necessary educational context for each individual student's improvisation, defining the tasks and framework within which the student must create his or her improvisation. The teacher creates a so-called "comfort zone" within which the student can experiment and create music in accordance with his or her individual musical characteristics and the objectives set by the teacher. In planning the curriculum for improvisation classes, the teacher must nevertheless have a one-size-fits-all approach to making progress in the classroom learning process. In addition, the teacher must be able to brilliantly analyze the aesthetics and expressiveness of jazz improvisation and composition, and keep the student motivated for inner growth and self-development. Teaching improvisation in a jazz piano class relies on the process of learning, and is not reduced to a situation in which the teacher merely encourages students to find themselves in the infinite universe of jazz improvisation. Developing each student's musical skills becomes one of the most productive methods of teaching jazz improvisation. Learning through practice, showing examples, developing critical thinking skills, and developing creative individuality is a must in this class. Communication between students and the instructor should encourage a better understanding of roles and responsibilities on both sides. The emphasis, then, is on the quality of teaching improvisation rather than on imparting the range of skills necessary to do so. Moreover, the teacher creates an environment in which students are



willing to share the skills, experiences, and insights they have gained, which develops their toolbox of an analytical approach to the study of jazz improvisation.

There are a number of basic characteristics of jazz music and performance that the teacher should draw students' attention to when analyzing examples of improvisation transcription together in a jazz piano class. There are generally seven in the world classification, and they may be present in varying degrees and combinations in almost all jazz compositions, none of which are mandatory, but some of which will always be around.

1. *Theme*. The drawing of jazz melismatics is as similar as possible to human speech, they are exactly replicas, statements. And, as a consequence, the melodic lines born in this way are a direct reflection of the musical language and style of the performer, thereby helping to create an individual image of the work.
2. *Rhythm*. The use of jazz rhythmic techniques in the creation of compositions has a pronounced individuated character in jazz masters, and is the starting point for the creation of a "viable" jazz work. The study of these techniques with an analysis of the individual performance traits of the performer's rhythmic stage freedom is directly linked to the students' continuous listening practice.
3. *Harmony*. The blues, the blues harmony, the blues notes are themselves a harmonic characteristic of jazz. Thus, the sound of the blues is the sound of jazz. Also, it is the structure of the 12-bar blues that is one of the main formative structures in jazz.
4. *Improvisation*. Improvisation is a specific factor in jazz, which is the main method of achieving personal self-expression of the musician. In this case, the creativity and individuality of the performer is placed above the composer's intentions, and sometimes in the process of improvisation there is a complete rethinking of the theme as such, essentially creating a new work, sometimes not even remotely resembling the original source.
5. *Conflict*. Conflict, ambiguity, tension, and allegory are ubiquitous in jazz in all the basic elements of music: harmony, rhythm, and melody
6. *The antiphonal technique in jazz*. The question-and-answer technique adopted in jazz is one of the most transformative and influential in the process of creating new musical material.
7. *Spontaneity*. Spontaneous communication between performers can influence the musical result, especially in the improvisational parts.

All of the above characteristics of jazz music are inherent to piano jazz performance, but meanwhile methods of comparative analysis of piano improvisation are specific, due to the universal, multidimensional role of the piano in the jazz ensemble, and are based on comparing such components of jazz improvisation as:

- theme and solo improvisation, (techniques of varying, structuring the melodic pattern, the use of so-called patterns, characteristic features of the pianist's style in the use of blues and altered harmonies),
- harmony (analysis of the harmonic chord structure as a whole, the chord arrangement technique in the accompaniment part of the work), the technique of harmonic duplication of the melodic line (block chords) and, actually, the bass part of the pianist, which is the basis of the entire harmonic ensemble structure,
- rhythm, (rhythm formulas inherent in this performer's style, varying throughout the formation and evolution of the composer's style).



Theme and improvisation.

The construction and variation of the melodic pattern of improvisation, the use of blues and modal harmonies in the motive work of the right hand of the pianist become the subject of the comparative characterization of the composer's melodic style. This method is especially progressive in the comparative characterization of improvisations of representatives of different periods and styles, for example, swing and cool jazz, bebop and Latino. Comparing the improvisations of Duke Ellington (swing, 1930s) and Bill Evans (cool jazz in 1950-60s) the student sees Ellington's adherence to antiphonal improvisation techniques, his skillful ability, being within the limits of blues standard, to sound absolutely free, as if he would play outside the narrow limits of blues harmony. Later on, when the student becomes acquainted with Bill Evans' improvisation technique, he understands how, based on the same basic blues techniques, the composer becomes the pioneer of modal jazz, and moves away from the generally accepted concept of "melody" as a theme for improvisation, creating the so-called "motives-puzzles", then making new combinations from them, with the improvisation sounding as organic and natural as Duke Ellington's. Both the blues technique of working with the theme and Bill Evans' motive modality can become a reference point for the student to compose his own solo improvisation, to find his own handwriting in the development of the theme.

Harmony (chord structure analysis, soloist accompaniment technique, and pianist's bass part)

The analysis of the harmonic structure of a work may be conducted in comparative characterization with the improvisation of another author, another era of jazz, or it may be a comparative characterization of the evolution of the harmonic style of one author. For example, it is possible and necessary to note the main significant periods of creativity and to link the transformation of the harmonic style by studying the compositions composed during these periods of creativity. The subject of analysis will be the question of complication or simplification of the harmonic structure, the departure from the blues traditional harmonic techniques, turning to folklore, modal, altered methods of harmonic development, etc. Probably one of the brightest examples of stylistic evolution and, at the same time, adherence to his own handwriting in music is the creativity of Herbie Hancock, which includes almost all styles and trends of 20th century jazz. Essentially, Hancock's work is a kind of mirror of the evolution of jazz music itself. The fresh, revolutionary sound and ambiguous, unpredictable tonality of Hancock's music fits perfectly into the modal world of modern jazz.

Rhythm

The subject of study in the comparative characterization of the rhythmic style is both the traditional rhythmic techniques of working with melody and rhythmic chord accompaniment, and all kinds of individual specific techniques of playing jazz performers. And the result here is directly dependent on the amount of "listening-hours," since any best transcription will not convey the performer's mannerisms in his art of "playing out of time." Since the jazz piano on an equal footing with all participants in the rhythmic section qualitatively and directly influences the rhythmic idea, the structure of the piece, the subject of comparative analysis here becomes the accompaniment technique, the so-called "comping". Both hands of the pianist in this technique represent independent rhythmic formulas, so the right and left hands of the pianist individually, as well as the technique of joint rhythmic performance are considered in this question. This can either be a consistent rhythmic pattern or it can be in the nature of spontaneous rhythmic choice, a cross rhythmic effect so characteristic of the role of piano participation in the "question and answer" of collaborative jazz improvisation. Here, of course, music-making in an ensemble is mandatory, because it is often not easy for young pianists to play in a group right away, even as an accompanying instrument, because unlike wind and percussion players, the pianist does not feel part of the orchestra from his first steps in music, and comes to play collectively much later.



Two relatively new approaches to the analysis of jazz improvisation that have been used in the jazz piano class are the so-called "linguistic" and "ecological" ways of perceiving the improvisation process. While the linguistic approach draws parallels between spoken language and jazz music, the ecological approach suggests an analogy between the jazz musician creating the improvisation and the navigator exploring a certain space of harmonic and rhythmic schemata, into which improvisation introduces a greater variety of stylistic norms than any scheme can represent. In the linguistic concept of jazz improvisation, common chord sequences are likened to phrases common in spoken language. Just as each phrase has a frequency of use and a relevant context in speech for better use, so called formulas, patterns, and other "clichéd" developments of the jazz musician have specific uses that the instructor discusses in class with jazz improvisation students. From the perspective of jazz improvisation, the soloist-improviser evaluates the space of improvisation, trying to appreciate and take advantage of all the momentary opportunities that he and his ensemble tirelessly create during co-creation and avoid or minimize the risks that are inevitably generated by the variability of the improvisation space. The analysis and wisdom of the momentary decisions made during improvisation on stage, and the courage and experience of great jazz improvisers, should be the subject of special discussion with the student in the jazz piano class.

The methods used in analyzing and working on improvisations in the jazz piano class are valuable tools of investigation necessary for developing analytical, improvisational, and compositional skills. In this regard, the creativity of the young Uzbek jazz pianist and composer Sanjar Nafikov, a person who combines exactly the poly-vector image of a modern musician, is of particular interest to jazz students now. Having completed his academic education at the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan, Sanjar is an active jazz composer and performer, one of the founders and leaders of the ethno-jazz group "Jazirama", author of music for theatrical performances, and participant in jazz projects around the world. Meanwhile, the subject of his constant study, an aid in the search for his own style, his own vision, is maqom, with its cyclical structure and the system of interaction between canon and improvisation. The study of Oriental culture, philosophy, traditions in general, affects the sound of Sanjar's music, thoughtful, subtle, but at the same time devoid of deliberate use of Orientalism as such. This is the result of many years of painstaking work, creative initiative, and the desire to learn the world, to know a true himself along with it. Being at the peak of active musical creative activity, encountering enormous variability of contemporary music, Sanjar continues to grow as a musician, and his work becomes an example, proving that academic classical education, serious study of poly-stylistics of contemporary music, is an essential support in formation of modern successful jazz musician. Not only does it not stifle creative initiative, but on the contrary, it is an essential foundation for the further growth of the musician.

Regarding the question of the "boundaries" between composing and improvisation, jazz and classical music, and the methods of working on them in a jazz piano class, it is the analysis as such that makes students realize there is no need to attach undue importance to this question. In making music, should a musician puzzle himself with the question, "in which department will this be taught, which critic will write the review, and finally, in a music magazine, in which section, jazz or classical, will this review be printed?" The great Chick Corea had the following thought on the subject: «It's impossible not to get bogged down in arguments if you set out to label the music.

Summary.

Although, in fact, the only function of the artist is to strive to create, and to create without fear of whether your composition will fit within the accepted framework...from this point of view, such a question should not be asked». Thus, the teacher in a jazz piano class has a responsibility to interest students in the great variety of ways in which music is created in jazz culture; to help them



love jazz so that they cannot help wanting to study, explore and master the skills of jazz performance. The only guarantee of success in this difficult journey is the desire to be part of this culture, to be part of the performing and research process of the amazing phenomenon of musical culture- jazz improvisation.

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