Teaching Jazz Improv in Your Middle School Ensemble

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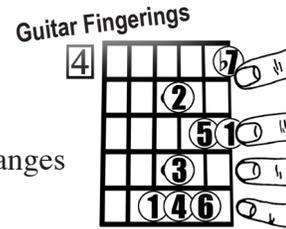## PATTERNS (MOTIFS OR LICKS) - WHY & HOW

1. Patterns provide a "starting point"
2. Patterns develop muscle memory, which is ESSENTIAL
3. Learning patterns helps produce "automatic" performance of ideas
4. Create patterns with chord tones and some passing tones
5. Use patterns that move DOWN as well as UP
6. Teach patterns through Call & Response until memorized
7. Include the drum set player by using a "timekeeping pattern" with rhythmic call & response
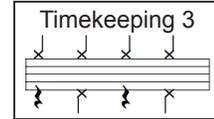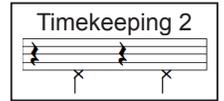
NUMBER NOTATION: WHY & HOW

8. Numbers simplify transposition
9. Numbers force students to memorize chord tones
10. Numbers allow students to focus on guide tones at chord interchanges
11. Teach guitar players to keep scale tones in one "zone"

MODELING

12. Learning to improvise is like learning a language
13. Jazz style is best learned through modeling - "sound before sight"
14. Teacher modeling is more effective than using recorded models - mirror neurons

Riff 1: 5 5 5 ♭7 ♭7 5 5 ♭7

GETTING KIDS STARTED & MOTIVATED

15. Musical conversations with 1, 2, or 3 notes
16. Group improvisation exercises
    A. Create a 2 or 3-part exercise
    B. Practice each part as written
    C. Improvise by changing rhythm
    D. Improvise by adding passing tones

Riff 2: 3 3 3 5 5 3 3 5

Bass: 1 3 5 4 3 2

INVOLVING THE RHYTHM SECTION

17. Develop "comping" skills - appropriate rhythms and walking bass line skills
18. Help piano & guitar players find & create good chord voicings
    A. Dan Haerle's *Jazz Piano Voicing Skills*
    B. *Alfred's Basic Guitar Chord Dictionary*
19. Drum set players can double on VIBRAPHONE

Walking Bass Line Rules
1. Play the root on beat 1 every measure or two
2. Use mostly chord tones, with passing tones on beats 2 & 4
3. Use altered passing tones on beats 2 & 4
4. Approach each interchange with 2, 5, or 7 of the new chord

FITTING IMPROV EDUCATION INTO THE SCHOOL YEAR

20. Keep curriculum limited in scope - crayons instead of oil paints, bottle instead of fire hose
21. Choose your "improvised solo" chart early in the year
22. Focus on the chord(s) in THAT chart all year long
23. Use the Blues Scale sparingly - avoid it at first

CONQUERING CHORD CHANGES

24. Interchange patterns - like ii-V-I's, but using chord interchanges your solo section requires
25. Multi-chord group improv exercises
26. Guide tone patterns
    A. Pattern 1: at first interchange go from 7-3
    B. Pattern 2: at first interchange go from 3-7

Multi-Chord Group Improv

Riff 1: ♭7 ♭7 5 ♭7 3 3 5 3

Riff 2: 3 3 1 3 ♭7 ♭7 1 ♭7

Bass: 1 5 5 1 5 5 1 ♭7

Interchange Pattern

♭7 6 ♭7 5 ♭7 3 4 ♯4 5

I Chord   IV Chord

Guide Tone Pattern 1

I ♭7 5 3 5 ♭7 1 ♭7 IV 3 1 ♭7

I 3 5 ♭7 3 5 3 3 5 3 ♭7 1 ♭7 V 3

FINDING AND CHOOSING REPERTOIRE

27. Use *jwpepper.com* to look at the chords in charts with "View" or "Watch" options
28. Zach Poulter's *Teaching Improv in your Jazz Ensemble* catalogs over 180 grade 1-3 jazz charts by 1) key and 2) number of chords in the solo section

CREATING AN "IMPROVISING GUIDE" FOR YOUR BIG "SOLOING" CHART

29. Scale, Arpeggio, and Extended Arpeggio for each chord
30. Basic patterns for each chord/scale
31. Interchange patterns for each chord combination
32. Guide Tone Patterns for the whole progression

See attached example of the *Backseat Driver Blues* Improvising Guide.

Scale, Arpeggio, Extended Arpeggio, and Patterns

Interchange Patterns

TRANSCRIBING IN CLASS

33. Start transcribing as a class with short, skill-appropriate excerpts
34. Use numbers to make notation simple...it's okay to continually reference the home scale over all chords in the progression

DEVELOPING IMPROVISATION SKILL THROUGH 9 "PATHWAYS"

35. Vocabulary - learn essential concepts such as inversion, flat 7, altered tones, and trading fours
36. Patterns - muscle-memorize progressive jazz patterns through call & response
37. Group Improv - repeat harmonized riffs to get the improvisation juices flowing
38. Expression - explore scoops, bends, growling, grace notes, and other expressive devices
39. Comping - study and practice comping rhythms, voicings, and walking bass line conventions
40. Improvising - explore various soloing strategies such as varying a pattern and story telling
41. Transcribing - listen to, write, and reproduce solos that increase in length and complexity
42. History - learn about the most important styles and influential players in jazz
43. Performing - perform charts that showcase improvising skills over a few learned chords

Improv Pathways: Beginning Jazz Improvisation Method

Tons of FREE pdf and audio content available at:
www.improvpathways.com/midwest-clinic

- **18 thirty-minute lessons**
- **6 head charts**
- **2 hours of audio content**
- **9 pathways to develop improvisation skills**

"As a non-jazz person, this method book has made it so much easier to teach improv to my students. I have tried so many things, and NOTHING has worked like Improv Pathways. The lesson plans are very specific and easily laid out. After just three lessons, my students are amazed at how comfortable they are feeling with improv. Their eyes literally light up each day in class!" -Emily S.

Student Page
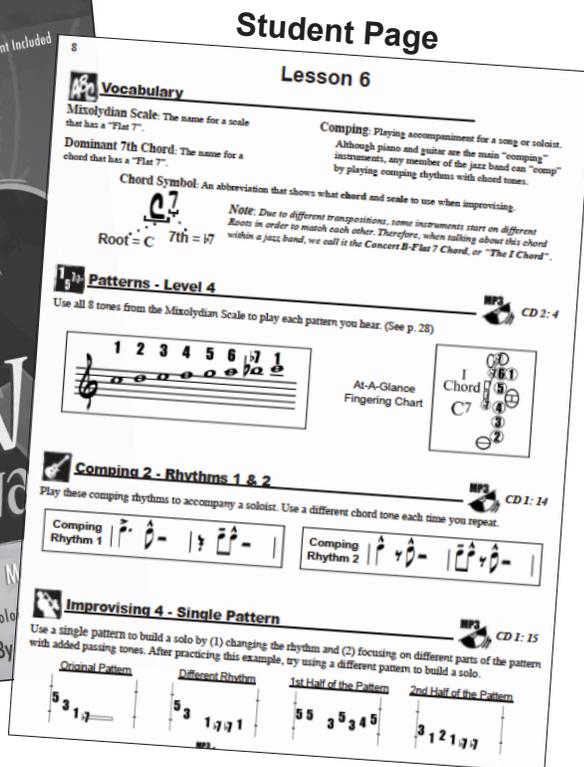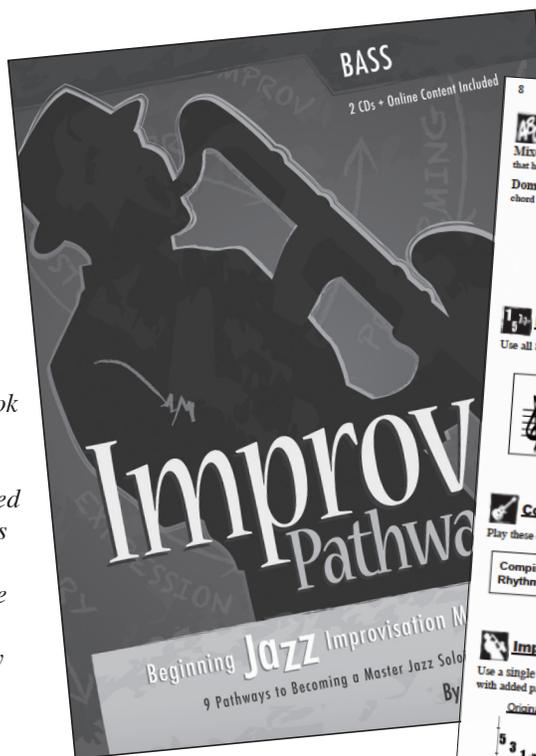
Teacher's Manual
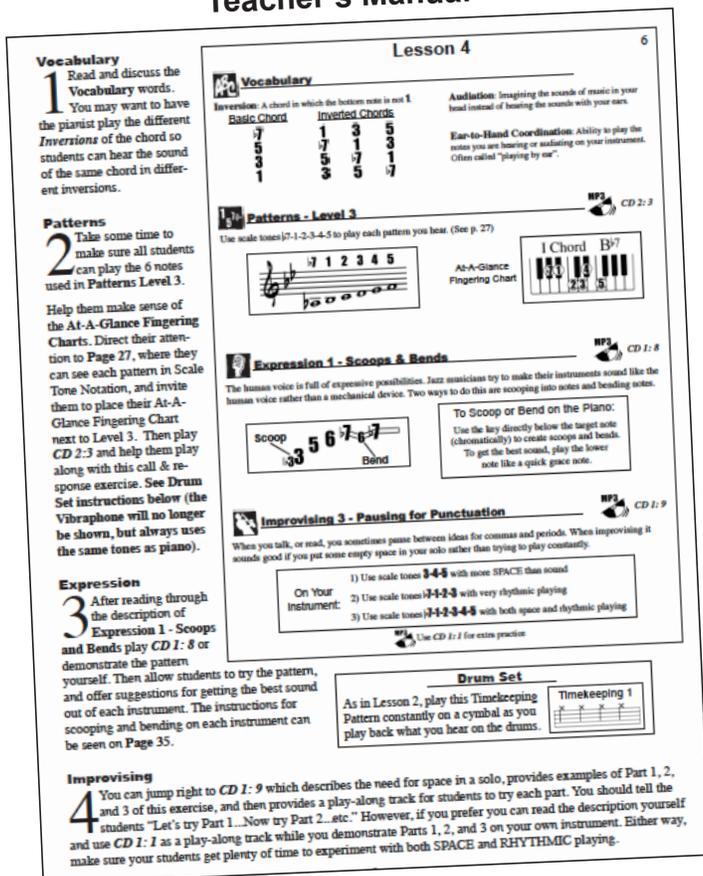
- **132 pages of useful content**
- **18 lesson plans provide detailed guidance**
- **Track lists for 12 accompanying CDs**
- **Conductor's scores for 6 jazz head charts**
- **Reproducible references & worksheets**
- **Patterns shown in both numbers and standard notation**

The entire Improv Pathways Classroom Set is available as a reproducible PDF/MP3 set for under $100!

www.improvpathways.com

Backseat Driver Blues
Improvising Guide

Mr. Winters

Alto Sax.

5

Backseat Driver Blues

Improvising Guide

Piano

Mr. Winters

Chord 1: Concert B♭7

Chord 2: Concert E♭7

Chord 3: Concert F7

I – IV Interchanges

IV – I Interchanges

I – V Interchanges

V – IV Interchanges

Guide Tone Pattern 1

Guide Tone Pattern 2

Sample CD

FREE download at www.improvpathways.com/midwest-clinic

Call & Response Patterns

In each pattern, numbers are used to represent the scale tones of the I, IV, and V Chords. Each level of patterns is presented in a *Call-and-Response* format on the CD.

Black numbers (**1**) = I Chord (Concert B♭7)
Striped numbers (**1**) = IV Chord (Concert E♭7)
White Numbers (**1**) = V Chord (Concert F7)

Level 1 - I Chord: 3 Notes
MP3 Track 1

1A 1B 1C 1D

1E 1F

Level 3 - I Chord: 6 Notes
MP3 Track 2

3A 3B 3C 3D

3E 3F 3G

Level 5 - I Chord with Altered Tones
MP3 Track 3

5A 5B 5C 5D

5E 5F 5G

Level 6 - IV Chord: 4 Notes

Track 4

6A   1   1 ♭7 1 1

6B   1 ♭7 1 2 3 3

6C   1 2 1 3 ♭7

6D   3 1 ♭7 1   2 1

6E   ♭7   1 ♭7   1 — 3 2 1 ♭7 1

```
1 → 5
♭7
6 → 3
5
4 → 1
3 → ♭7
2
1 → 5
I    IV
```

Level 7 - I Chord to IV Chord

Track 5

7A   1   2 3 1 3 | 1   2 3 — 2 1

7B   3 4 ♯4 5 3 — ♭7   1 ♭7 1   5

7C   ♭7   6 ♭7 5 ♭7 | 3 4 ♯4 5

7D   1   2 3 — 1 3 | ♭7 5 6 ♭7

Level 11 - V Chord: 4 Notes

Track 6

11A   1   1 ♭7 1 1

11B   1 ♭7 1 2 3 3

11C   1 2 1 3 ♭7

11D   3 1 ♭7 1   2 1

11E   ♭7   1 ♭7   1 — 3 2 1 ♭7 1

```
2 → 5
1
♭7 → 3
6
5 → 1
4 → ♭7
3
2 → 5
1
I    V
```

Level 12 - I Chord to V Chord

Track 7

12A   3   ♭3 3 5 6 ♭7 3 | 1 7 ♭7

12B   1 5 6 ♭7 — ♭7 3 — 4 5

12C   3 ♭3 3 2 1 2 3 | 5 4   3

12D   1   2 ♭3 3 1 3 ♭7 — 5 6 ♭7

Practice Tracks

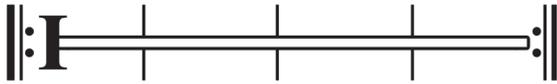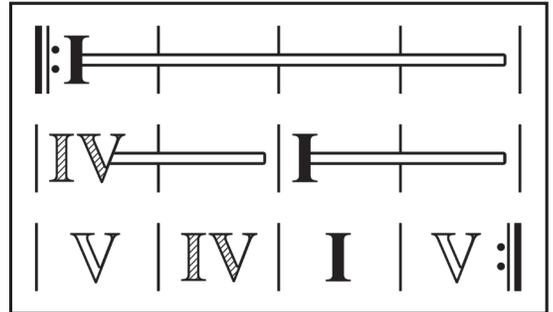| Track 8	Track 9	Track 10
I Chord - Concert Bb7	*IV Chord - Concert Eb7*	*V Chord - Concert F7*

Head Charts & Solo Sections

Track 11
I Chord Swing
Solo Section

Track 12
I Chord Rock
Solo Section

Track 14
I Chord Swing Chart:
It's a Figure of Speech

Track 15
I Chord Rock Chart:
One For The Road

Track 13
Blues Swing
Solo Section

Track 16
Blues Swing Chart:
Backseat Driver Blues

All instrumental parts may be downloaded from
www.improvpathways.com for a limited time.

Solos for Transcribing

I Chord Swing Solos
Track 17 - Alto Sax Solo
Track 18 - Trombone Solo
Track 19 - Guitar Solo
Track 20 - Bass Solo

I Chord Rock Solos
Track 21 - Tenor Sax Solo
Track 22 - Piano Solo

Blues Swing Solos
Track 23 - Tenor Sax Solo
*Track 24 - Trumpet Solo*
Track 25 - Piano Solo

Improvising Pathway Samples

Track 26
Improvising 2:
Rhythmic Playing

On Your Instrument:
1) Use scale tone **1** to echo the sentences
2) Use scale tones **2-3** to echo the sentences
3) Use scale tones **b7-1-2-3** to have a conversation

Track 27
Improvising 4:
Single Pattern

Original Pattern   Different Rhythm   1st Half of the Pattern   2nd Half of the Pattern
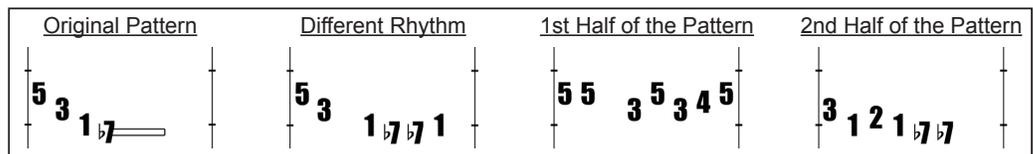
Track 28
Improvising 6:
Telling A Story

Scenario 1
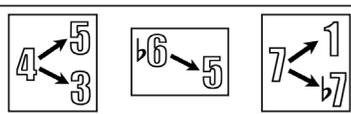You had a miserable day, and must tell us ALL about it!

Scenario 2
You see someone you want to meet, but don't know what to say.

Scenario 3
You just scored the winning goal in the final seconds!

Track 29
Improvising 9:
Fixing Mistakes

Fix These "Wrong" Notes By Moving Up or Down:

✏️ Transcribing Pathway Sample

Track 30
Transcribing 4:
Trumpet Solo

Use your ear-to-hand coordination skills to figure out the notes for the Trumpet Solo.

Transcribe the first 8 measures onto the worksheet below and check your answers.

5 5
1

Blank Transcribing Worksheets may be downloaded from *www.improvpathways.com* on the PDF Downloads page.

Transcribing Answer Key

5 5
1   ♭3 3 1   1 2 3 5

♭3 4 5 5 ♭3 3 1 1 1   ♭7 1 2 ♭3 3

🎺 Group Improv Pathway Samples

Track 31: *Group Improv 1*

Riff 1: 5   5 5 ♭7 ♭7   5   5 ♭7

Riff 2: 3   3 3 5 5   3   3 5

Bass: 1   3   5 4 3 2

Track 32: *Group Improv 3*

Riff 1: ♭7 ♭7 5 ♭7   3   3 5 3

Riff 2: 3   3   1 3 ♭7   ♭7 1 ♭7

Bass: 1   5 5   1   5 5 1 ♭7

🎵 Guide Tone Pattern Sample

Track 33: *Guide Tone Pattern 2*

♭7 5 3 5 ♭7 1 ♭7 ♭3 1 ♭7 3 5 ♭7 3 5 3 5 3 ♭7 1 ♭7 3