

Practicing Jazz

by Rob Boone

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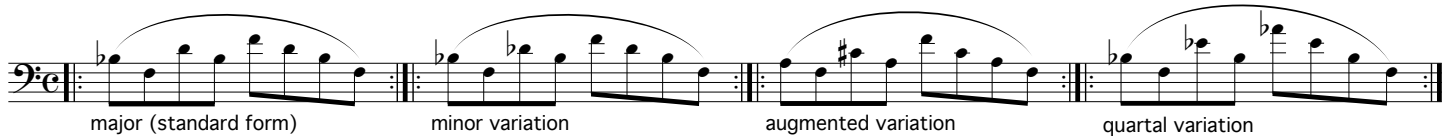
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One of the first things noticeable when listening to great jazz trombonists is their mastery of the instrument, a seemingly effortless swing and an astonishing command of creative improvisatory skills. Although many of the best players in jazz and other musical fields probably possess a good dose of natural ability, much practice is necessary for a player to develop into a great performer. In addition to learning tunes, jazz theory, listening and playing with other musicians, jazz craftsmanship must be practiced diligently.

Try to modify limited practice time to include jazz elements. Adapt your current warm-up and practice sessions to cover jazz scales, harmony and patterns. Long tones provide a useful opportunity to experiment with slide vibrato. Play transcribed solos during etude practice to provide an additional workout in melody, phrasing and endurance. There are many books in bass clef available today that provide a wealth of information pertaining to jazz. A list of some of these books appears at the end of this article.

Use harmonic variation in warm-ups to keep the drills interesting. Exercises that traditionally outline major triads can be altered to outline minor, diminished or augmented triads (**Example 1**). Arpeggiating different chords breathes new life into old stale exercises and provides wonderful ear training. After achieving a degree of success with triads, advance to seventh chords such as major seven (MM7), minor seven (mm7), dominant seven (Mm7), and others. When one chord becomes too familiar, throw in a harmonic “curve ball” and modify it. Try your hand at half diminished, minor major seven (mM) and augmented seven chords.

Example 1: use of harmonic variation in traditional warmups



major (standard form) minor variation augmented variation quartal variation

Modify your scale practice to include scales often used in jazz music with a variety of traditional and jazz articulations (**Example 2**).

Example 2: scale practice in swing style



D dorian mode Eb dorian mode E dorian mode cont. sim.

Prominent scales for the three main harmony groups include:

- 1) Major harmony: major scale, lydian mode and major pentatonic
- 2) Minor harmony: dorian mode and minor pentatonic
- 3) Dominant seventh harmony: mixolydian mode, lydian flat 7, diminished, bebop (**Example 3**), whole tone, diminished whole tone and blues scales. Many other scales are useful for jazz improvisation and will become apparent as your harmonic knowledge increases.

Example 3: descending scale pattern



F bebop scale E bebop scale Eb bebop scale cont. sim.

Chord arpeggiation has always been an important part of warming up for brass players and flexibility practice. **Example 4** contains an expanding chord outline pattern that can be modified to target higher or lower registers. Try outlining a variety of chord types to keep the exercises from becoming uninteresting. Build a repertoire of chords and scales that can be comfortably drawn from in jazz improvisatory situations.

Example 4: chord outline pattern. Vary harmony, key and articulation

Trombonists can adapt and create exercises that explore other idiomatic jazz and contemporary techniques such as doodle tongue, turns (**Example 5**), multiphonics and against-the-grain playing.

Example 5: expanding turn exercise on a descending scale. Use alternate positions to create a natural slur.

The next exercise provides a good workout with pentatonic against-the-grain exercises that cover many keys by “fretting” the shape of the drill up and down the slide (**Examples 6a and 6b**). Pay attention to intonation in the alternate positions, especially with the top target note in each exercise.

Example 6a: against-the-grain exercise (descending version). Use a light tongue on the first note of each slur group.

Example 6b: against-the-grain exercise (ascending version)

Modify exercises to create several variations usable as “licks” in your improvisation (**Examples 7a and 7b**).

Example 7a: against-the-grain “lick” (descending version)

Example 7b: against-the-grain “lick” (ascending version)

Great jazz players can be identified not only by their sound and rhythmic sense but also by their melodic devices, patterns and “licks.” Analyze and learn melodic ideas found in available jazz pattern books and listen and transcribe the improvised solos of other players. Be sure to draw melodic material from other instrumentalists and vocalists in addition to other trombone and low brass players. Expand your playing and musicianship by building an arsenal of chords, scales, patterns and “licks”. Take advantage of the extensive collection of recordings and jazz materials that exist today. Many of the following list of publications should be of interest to jazz improvisors. Several are available in bass clef editions.

A Complete Method For Improvisation by Jerry Coker
A Chromatic Approach To Jazz Harmony and Melody by Dave Liebman
Advanced Flexibility Studies for the Jazz Trombonist by Greg Waits
Alternate Position System for Trombone by Tom Malone
Art of Improvisation by Bob Taylor
Bebop Jazz Solos (bass clef) by David Baker
Bebopper’s Method Book by Wendell Harrison
Building A Jazz Vocabulary by Mike Steinel
Charlie Parker Omnibook (bass clef) published by Atlantic Music Corp.
Chop Monster Series by Shelly Berg
Circular Breathing For The Wind Performer by Trent Kynaston
Clear Solutions For Jazz Improvisers by Jerry Coker
Chord Studies for Trombone by Phil Wilson and Joe Viola
Complete Method For Jazz Improvisation by Jerry Coker
Contemporary Jazz Series by David Berger
Creative Jazz Improvisation by Scott Reeves
Doodles, Exercises For Mastering Jazz Trombone by Dale Cheal
Doodle Studies and Etudes by Bob McChesney
Effortless Mastery by Kenny Werner
Exercises and Etudes For The Jazz Instrumentalist by J. J. Johnson
Fond Memories of Frank Rosolino
Hearing The Changes by Jerry Coker
How To Improvise by Hal Crook
How To Practice Jazz by Jerry Coker
How To Play Bebop by David Baker
Intervallic Improvisation by Walt Weiskopf
Jazz Bass Clef Expressions & Explorations by David Baker
Jazz Styles and Analysis by David Baker
Jiggs Whigham, Authentic Solo Transcriptions by Musikverlag Kurt Maas
J. J. Johnson Transcribed Solos published by Jamey Aebersold
Masters of the Trombone: Frank Rosolino by Austex Music, Inc.
Modal and Contemporary Patterns by David Baker
Modern Concepts In Jazz Improvisation by David Baker
Patterns For Jazz (bass clef) by Jerry Coker
Plunger Techniques by Al Grey
Practicing Jazz, A Creative Approach by David Baker
The Be Boppers Method Book by Wendell Harrison
The Jazz Sound by Dan Haerle
The Music of Bill Watrous
Trombone Technique Through Music by Ed Neumeister
Trombonisms by Bill Watrous & Alan Raph
Twenty-One Bebop Exercises by Steve Rawlins

A majority of the titles listed above may be purchased on the Jamie Aebersold website at:
http://aegersold.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=JAZZ&Category_Code=TROBOO

These books provide an enormous amount of source material for concepts in jazz improvisation.