

# JAZZ SCHOOL UK PLAYING LEVELS

## LEVEL 1

For players of any instrument, with or without jazz playing experience. You do need to have fairly good instrumental ability, musical knowledge and some jazz listening history.

At entry level you will be working on basic jazz repertoire, harmony, rhythmic concepts and ensemble and improvising skills.

You will be aiming to gain or consolidate the following skills:

- comfortable with swing and simple latin feels at medium tempo
- able to tap three against two
- know by heart the standard jazz-blues and I Got Rhythm progressions in C F G and Bb (concert)
- familiar with modes, dominant-tonic harmony in major and minor keys and with chord construction and chord-scale relationships
- know how to use the harmonic minor scale when approaching the II chord
- recognise the dominant II chord
- recognise the dominant I and the movement to IV
- starting to join up chord tones with lines
- able to voice a range of chords without roots (pianists and guitarists)

## LEVEL 2

The main requirement for entry to this level is that players should be starting to feel relaxed about the basics - instrumental technique, repertoire, harmonic description, practical application of theory, rhythmic security, form recognition and aural skills. You will be aiming to gain or consolidate the following skills:

- very good instrumental ability
- knowing more than 10 tunes (melody and chords) by heart
- fluency in rootless lefthand voicings (piano)
- knowledge of smaller chords in different positions (guitarists)
- able to play in a good range of feel, key and tempo
- able to tap a rhythm in one hand against a pulse in the other
- able to communicate time feel reliably to the rest of the band
- starting to be able to describe underlying harmony just in a solo line
- awareness of the connection of sound and feeling
- starting to 'tune in' to band conversations (especially with the drummer!)
- starting to recognise forms, and the patterns that make them, more quickly
- starting to extract tune language (rhythmic and melodic) and feed into improvisation
- knowing scales thoroughly, ie starting from any note
- starting to be comfortable with enclosures
- understanding the application of the harmonic minor scale, and its relation to diminished chords (especially in turnarounds)
- starting to think about melodic minor dominants
- awareness of the Back Door
- starting to transcribe tunes and solos
- gaining confidence as an improviser, able to solo for several choruses over a number of tunes known by heart

# LEVEL 3

More or less at good gigging level - this is, incidentally, the sort of playing level that is mostly required these days for college entry. What is there left to learn, you may ask, if we can already play? Well, as in all fields, there's a huge difference between 'decent professional function' and the high-level creativity of top practitioners. Many, many players reach this stage and never get any further - the reason being that this is as far as we can get by desire and instinct alone. Reaching beyond requires a period of systematic work - focusing attention on any existing blank patches in knowledge and understanding, and examining and overhauling the full range of foundation skills. This is what we set out to do in the Level 3 ensembles.

You will be aiming to gain or consolidate the following skills:

- knowing more than 20 tunes (melody and chords) by heart
- fluency in rootless lefthand voicings and right hand comping shapes (piano)
- thorough knowledge of the fingerboard (guitarists)
- able to play in a wide range of feel, key, idiom and tempo
- able to tap three against two (either hand) while speaking either time aloud
- able to join up chord tones in a continuous flow of quaver time
- extending range of feeling within sound
- able to hold time and changes without rhythm section
- strong awareness of tune forms
- starting to think about different paths through forms
- awareness of rhythmic shapes within melodies
- know thoroughly, ie starting from any note, 41 scales (12 major 12 harmonic minor 12 melodic minor 2 whole tone 3 diminished)
- awareness of diminished relations
- starting to use melody suspensions and sideslips
- happy with all bananas
- understanding the different uses of melodic minor dominants (altered and lydian dominant sounds)
- comfortable with chord substitutions
- regularly transcribing tunes and solos
- confident improviser, able to cope with the demands of a small group gig, and to solo for several choruses over a number of tunes known by heart

## LEVEL 4

Players have a high level of instrumental ability, a solid grounding in the skills covered in the lower Ensembles, extensive improvising and performance experience, and the desire and belief to take their playing to a good professional and creative standard.

You will be aiming to gain or consolidate the following skills:

- knowing more than 30 tunes (melody and chords) by heart
- able to play in a wide range of feel, key, idiom and tempo
- able to set up new pulse layer within existing time (metric modulation)
- able to target and resolve suspensions within continuous flow of quaver time
- developing musical personality
- able to internalise and decode longer and more complex tune forms
- able to maintain and choose when and how to resolve dissonance
- awareness and use of less common scales eg harmonic major, hijaz
- awareness and use of Axis Theory
- use of fragments (rhythmic, melodic) to create layers
- able to manage and maximise musical space within group
- quick and economic harmonic description
- able to improvise in different time signatures
- aware of solo shape within group performance
- wide choice of improvising approaches
- confident improviser, experienced gigster, able to lead a small group performance

# JAZZ SONG

In studying the Jazz Song repertoire accompanists will learn that playing with and for singers is a very special art - doing it well will not only bring in the gigs but also immeasurably improve all-round musicality and improvisation and ensemble skills.

For the singers - topics covered will include:

- jazz repertoire
- jazz styles
- vocal technique
- rhythmic concepts ▸ jazz harmony
- song interpretation
- improvising skills
- microphone technique
- finding the vocal range
- listening skills
- counting in
- intros and outs
- and much more!