



SMALL STEPS:
IMPROVISATION FOR THE BEGINNING JAZZ ENSEMBLE

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Introducing Improvisation in the Beginning Jazz Ensemble

Create a fun and meaningful experience by:

- Selecting effective literature that supports beginning improv (charts, performances)
- Modeling scales and basic digital patterns
- Developing ear training strategies (chords, C&R)
- Incorporating listening into each rehearsal

- Effective Literature for Beginning Jazz Ensembles
- Keep the strengths of the ensemble in mind
- Engaging/fun to play
- Making Connections with Jazz History
- Begin with the end in mind!
- Scaffold the charts
- Build confidence by starting with very easy selections that use block scoring and/or call response
- Don't be afraid to change direction - if the chart is not working....it's not working
- Have back up charts to go to just in case!

CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITY BEGINNING AND YOUNG JAZZ ENSEMBLE LITERATURE

- Easy to read
- Articulations are clear and consistent
- There are repetitious elements (melodies, rhythm section parts) - builds confidence!!
- Room For Solos/Guide Solos
- Improvisation Sections have Limited Harmonic Palettes
- Rhythm Section parts are carefully notated
 - Guitar parts have limited technical demands
 - Piano voicings are age level appropriate
 - Bass lines/figures are repetitious & attainable
 - Drum parts are easy to decode (or to explain)

EFFECTIVE WARM-UPS: CALL & RESPONSE

- Effective Warm-Ups are a free download at www.mikekamuf.com >free resources
- Call & Response
- Play a simple 2-bar rhythmic pattern on one pitch and have students play (or sing THEN play) it back to you. Keep playing the SAME pattern until pitch, rhythmic and articulation accuracy is mastered (assess quickly)
- Change same rhythmic pattern to now include a second pitch

- Change rhythms
- Add pitches
- Gently demand accuracy

Effective Tools and Strategies for Starting Improv

- One Scale approach:
 - Teach the ensemble the scale
 - Model soloing using:
 - 1,2,3
 - 1,2,3,5 (or 1,3,4,5 or 1,2,3,4,5 for dorian)
 - 1,2,3,5,6 (pentatonic) or 1,3,4,5,7 (minor pentatonic)
 - Scale and into other octaves

Resources

- [Learn Jazz Standards Play Along Playlist](#)
- [Bret Primack Jazz Video Guy YouTube Channel](#)
- [Jazz Everyday YT Channel](#)
- [Jamey Aebersold's Jazz Handbook](#)
 - Page 8 - suggested artists by instrument
 - Page 9 - historically significant recordings