

**LESSON 4.**  
**EARS, HABITS & RHYTHMIC TIME FEEL.**

**4.1 Harmony.                      *The 7th chord.***

We will now introduce our first FOUR note chord which has an important function in chord progressions.

If we add another MINOR 3rd above the major triad we produce what is known as a 7th chord. Note that we are still adding THIRDS to build up this chord, this emphasises the importance of the material on thirds from the start of the course in lesson 1. The new note is 7 notes above the root, hence the term 7th chord, but the new note is NOT A SCALE NOTE. See Ex.1 and below. The new chord has four notes in it so has four close position distributions, or inversions. Any of its notes can be doubled. See Ex.2 for the complete list of 7th chords.

For the time being we shall use the 7th chord on the dominant only. The general symbol will be V7. In the key of C the chord will be G7, and this 7th chord of G is found much more often than the triad we studied in lesson 1, especially at the end cadence.

We know about the tendency for a chord to move to a chord a 5th lower, G to C for example, but when the 7th note is present in the chord this FORWARD URGE IS MUCH STRONGER.

We should reflect on why the urge to move on is stronger when the 7th is added?

The G7 chord is not related to the key of its root G because it contains the F natural whereas the key of G uses an F#. The G7 is, in fact, PART OF THE KEY OF C and the G7 will want to return 'home' to C and, particularly, the F will want to resolve down onto the important major third, E.

We suggest that you don't just read the above paragraph but get to a piano or guitar and play the chords and listen critically to the way the sounds move. Don't take our word for it; can you, yourself, feel these tendencies?

These 'feelings' we experience when listening to music are important for the improviser to understand. The choice of notes and the progression of notes must be influenced by the EXPECTATIONS of listeners. This does not mean that expectations must be fulfilled, SURPRISE is an essential part of musical interest. However, before we can surprise we be aware of what is expected.

Bearing this in mind we can recap on where we have got to.

A note sounded in isolation is pretty meaningless, two notes are not much better although a pleasant consonance or unpleasant dissonance could result. Three notes begins to imply a scale or a specific chord. We very soon feel the expectation that the fourth note will be part of a RECOGNISED pattern, a scale or tonal centre.

Once the tonal centre is recognised, we find that within the tonal centre there is apparent ORGANISATION –

- tonics, 3rds and 5ths sound consonant
- notes outside of the major scale seem 'surprising' or 'out of tune'
- notes moving to the 5th below (or the 4th above) tend to sound good
- tonic triads tend to be pulled to the subdominant and dominants tend to move to the tonic
- enhanced smoothness when chords progress as voiced in 1.7
- 7th chords emphasise the downward 5th urge.

Once order is apparent we then become aware of DEPARTURES from it, and it is the 'surprise' departures which create the EXCITEMENT in music.

We should note that these tendencies WILL ONLY BE APPARENT DURING THE DYNAMIC FLOW of music. Music is always going somewhere, its cohesion has little meaning in static isolation. See 2.1.

We cannot satisfactorily explain why these tendencies or expectations should be experienced, it maybe partly 'nature' or partly 'nurture', but they are the fundamental 'principles' of western music. Without some sort of framework there would be chaos, but remember we are only talking about 'tendencies' or 'expectations' not 'strict' rules.

This course tries to teach you to improvise by following the 'rules' to create expectations in the listener's mind and then shows you how excitement is created by surprising departures from the expected. You have already started along this road by becoming familiar with some of the rules and some of the surprising tricks. This is the raw material you will use to develop an individual rhythmic style which you and, hopefully, others will find exciting.

#### **4.2 Technique.                      *Proficiency through practice.***

As you work through exercises and practice routines your technique on your chosen instrument will be developing and improving. Every hour you spend with your instrument you will improve. Like any other skill or accomplishment we gain technical proficiency through practice. There will be aspects of technique which are peculiar to your instrument –

- tone quality, embouchure, vibrato control, breathing, posture, finger dexterity, intonation, instrument maintenance.

these issues do not form part of this course because the course is not instrument specific, however –

**THESE ASPECTS MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN.**

The objective is technical proficiency through practice, or full command over your specialised instrument with fluency, particularly with chords, but also, including the chromatic scale.

**PRACTICE EVERYTHING, EVERY WHICH WAY YOU CAN THINK OF.**

For example, chords should be practised LEGATO (smoothly) and STACCATO (attacked), and with various combinations accents. Play chords from memory, not from reading, and try to make them sound like jazz. Yes, even when practising chords and scales, the sound and jazz interpretation are important!

We mention practising chords and scales but, as we stressed in the very first lesson, we feel it is far more important to play SONGS and this has some advantages –

- it is much more FUN!
- every song is based on chords and scales so if you are conscious of the chords and scales involved, practising songs is just as effective as cold playing of BORING chord and scale sequences
- at the end of the day it is songs that you will be playing and time spent on FAMILIARISATION is time well spent

Songs from your repertoire and course material can be supplemented by your written work, which should also be practised!

During your practice don't forget to try some improvisation. The trick is to become so VERY FAMILIAR with the basic song or exercise that 'embellishing' it with a few added notes, (appoggiaturas and chromatic runs?) or a few thirds, or a few phrases from your records, becomes excitingly possible. But be warned don't try to mess with unfamiliar material it will end in tears!

#### **4.3 Melody.                      *Chromatic passing notes.***

We will now look at chromatic passing notes. These notes are not part of the major key scale and because they are 'unexpected' they can create 'surprise' and interest. In a similar way to appoggiaturas their function is to create tension by delaying the arrival of the 'expected' chord note.

The rule of usage is that these unessential notes fill in the intervals FROM ANY CHORD NOTE TO ANY OTHER CHORD NOTE by chromatic steps. If this basic note run is given rhythmic

form it can produce interesting material for use in improvisation. See Ex.3 to 10. Chromatic passing notes can be combined with the ideas from lesson 3 to give lots of further interest. See Ex.11 to 25.

All these exercises should be practised, memorised and transposed. When working through these examples remember the comments we made in 2.4 and 3.4, all this material is grist for the improviser's mill.

All the combination, recombination and displacement techniques discussed in 3.4 can be used on lesson exercises, producing endless forms for experiment and improvisation. Don't forget to ANALYSE the material as an integral part of the exercise.

Ex.26 combines material with a chord sequence. Ex.27 shows repetition and combinations of 2 rhythmic phrases and Ex.28 illustrates rhythmic fragments from different lessons, together with the combination.

An important word of warning. Don't over do chromatic runs. The essence of the jazz idiom is SIMPLICITY. We should aim to get the right note in the right place at the right time and not, as we might suppose when listening to some showmen, try to concoct a flowery profusion of cascading trills and runs!

In improvisation the chromatic scale should be used SPARINGLY and with a definite purpose. It should not become a substitute for invention. It is the choice of notes in time that is important not the quantity of notes played. Jazz has an unfortunate reputation for being fast and furious, but good jazz is RELAXED SWING. Slow down and select the right note at the right time!

#### **4.4 Rhythm. *Four bar phrases and rhythmic 'time feel'.***

All the rhythms we have presented so far in the course so far have been WITHIN the bar variations. We will now extend these possibilities and also look at tied notes ACROSS the bar line. See Ex.29, a repeated one bar pattern. Ex.30, a repeated 2 bar pattern and Ex.31, 4 bar patterns and variations.

Remember our comments in lesson 2.3 that we play phrases not bars, thus crossing a bar line is not important as long as the phrase itself is consistent with a 4 bar section. Crossing a bar line complicates the writing but not the sound!

The bar pattern exercises from these first four lessons should have built up your understanding of rhythm through studying the way the bar can be subdivided into different rhythmic elements and then the bars themselves combined, recombined or displaced to produce phrases. We started with a basic four to the bar, then split the timing possibilities into eighth notes and then introduced the important jazz element of syncopation or getting off the beat and now we have let our patterns 'spread' over bar lines. We can see this as a PROGRESSION OF MORE AND MORE COMPLEX ARRANGEMENTS OF TIMINGS from which we can build 4 bar phrases. We are taking the four to the bar FOUNDATION and building up a RHYTHM TREE of possibilities within the 4 bar section.

We now want to say more about how best to practice these rhythmic bar patterns which have been presented and will continue to be presented. We mentioned in lesson 2.4 the importance of absorbing material, and in the last lesson we developed the idea of SOUND / FINGER associations through HABIT, in this lesson we suggest that it is the practice of rhythmic groups which will produce a 'TIME FEEL' for 4 bar song sections.

We have stressed that the rhythmic concept is the essential part of jazz and that this concept has to be built into bar patterns, particularly four bar phrases. For many of you this may well be an intuitive 'feeling', this will be especially so if you come from a musical background, but others will have to work at it. Whatever your rhythmic 'sensitivity' you will benefit from a METHODOICAL approach to the study of these rhythms –

- first establish a feel for the basic four to the bar. Whenever you listen to music bang out the one, two, three, four of the ground beat. Always practice with the metronome 'ciick'. Most of you will find this relatively easy but nevertheless tap your foot to the music continually so that eventually the beat will become so ingrained that it will be felt

instinctively even when the metronome is off or the music does not have an explicit beat. Get to the stage where you can FEEL THE BEAT even if YOU CANNOT HEAR IT! the next stage involves practising simple patterns IN TIME WITH the basic ground beat. START WITH THE SIMPLE PATTERNS of lesson 1 and build slowly. You are SUBDIVIDING the basic four beat in different ways but the beat is still there you are not destroying it. Remember the 'tree', you are subdividing the timings, sometimes lengthening, sometimes shortening, sometimes resting but always the basic beat will be felt and your patterns will always come back to the beat at some stage

- as you tap out the rhythms you will probably be mentally counting but we suggest it is invaluable at this stage to SING as you tap. Singing encourages you to think in terms of phrases and not simply the count position in the bar. Try ARTICULATING RHYTHMICALLY EXPRESSIVE WORDS to the rhythms as in Ex.29. Use any words that are meaningful to you, the ones we use are only suggestions –
  1. quarter note & longer a solid dah
  2. straight eighth notes da – dy
  3. offbeat eighth -dy
  4. off beat quarter note & longer (da) – bah

Singing the rhythms is better practice because it mimics the instrumental playing and there is no doubt that YOU CAN GET INTO TROUBLE TRYING TO COUNT. We suggest the following 'rules' to avoid problems –

1. never try to count the beat you start on, you are already alert to where you are, otherwise you wouldn't be starting!!
2. don't count after an off beat quaver, you are already 'kicking' into the next beat
3. never count an off beat eighth note rest, the beat has already gone!
4. we also suggest that it is pointless counting the 1st beat of any note, it is simply a 'dah' as your foot comes down, or a 'bah' as your foot comes up
5. however it may be helpful to count the 2nd, 3rd or 4th beats of long notes, you do need to know how long to hold the note.

Don't get confused between mental counting and foot tapping, foot tapping is an ESSENTIAL part of 'feeling' the beat, but mental counting is a PREOCCUPATION of the mind. During improvisation you are trying to rid the mind of conscious material and relax so that the subconscious mind can take over. Counting is only really useful when you are consciously working out how to play new patterns to get them right.

- initially you will be singing your rhythms to a metronome, but alternatively try singing the rhythms as you WALK AT A CONSTANT PACE. We all do a fair amount of walking and it is an excellent time to practice, you have a ready made 'metronome' and mental practice on such occasions can be very rewarding, you can put in extra hours which are a bonus. Each stride should feel like a beat against which you superimpose the different rhythms in your mind. Until such time as you can feel the beat instinctively you must keep the groundbeat going somehow and the one, two, three, four of a brisk walk is an excellent timekeeper
- focus your attention on feeling the STRONG FIRST BEAT of each bar, this is your benchmark. First just concentrate on each bar so you can feel the passing of each bar. Then try combining patterns to give a 2 bar continuity, making sure you can feel the strong first beat of ALTERNATE bars. Eventually build up to 4 bar continuities. But be careful don't rush, its no good trying to cope with 4 bar rhythms if you aren't confident about 2 bar phrases.
- in addition to singing the dah's and da - bah's experiment with different ACCENTUATIONS. This is another method of breaking up the regularity of the four beats.
- build up your rhythmic phrases by COMBINATION and RECOMBINATION of patterns, sing the phrases as you 'feel' the beat, wherever you go during the phrase make sure you can HIT THAT FIRST BEAT OF THE 5TH BAR when a new phrase is to start. This must

become instinctive. You drum out your phrase but you KNOW you can hit that bar 5 beat EVERY TIME

- the most rewarding part of the progression of rhythmic skills is when you are so confident about the four bar sections that you start DISPLACING the patterns. This builds up counter rhythms which come alive as new unexpected poly rhythms are set up. Your target is to FEEL THE FOUR BAR TRAJECTORY and introduce rests or speed up motifs so that you can return HOME and be ready for that intro to bar five.

This procedure will only become meaningful as you practice and work through the stages. This approach with EIGHT STAGES FOR METHODICALLY ACCUMULATING RHYTHMIC SKILLS is highly recommended. But DON'T WORRY if it all sounds too difficult at this stage. We suggest your rhythmic sense will evolve slowly as you work. You will probably very quickly be able to feel the beat, it will take some time before you can fit the simple patterns into this beat and even longer as the patterns become more complex and longer. But the principle is exactly the same; if you can fit a simple pattern into a one bar groundbeat you will eventually be able to fit more complex patterns into four bars.

If you find this section a little intimidating and find tapping and singing rhythms difficult (or boring!) you can, of course, drum out the rhythms on your instrument! An excellent vehicle for learning to feel four bar sections is to play 'Sweet Georgia Brown'. This song has a very obvious four bar feel because the chords change every four bars, THE HARMONIC RHYTHM WILL HELP TO REINFORCE YOUR TIME FEEL. This is exactly what we mean by a 'four bar time feel trajectory'. Play it as written, play it with different rhythms but always try and hit that 1st beat of bar five!

Don't forget to feel for those four bar sections whenever you are LISTENING to jazz!

#### **4.5 Learning Processes.                    *Establishing patterns in the brain.***

Learning is a process of EXTENDING OUR ABILITIES associated with some particular activity. It can take two main forms, both result in improved ability –

- learning can be conscious in the sense that we are aware of the nature of the stimulus patterns we experience, and that we SELECT what we wish to absorb and reject what doesn't interest us. The selection / rejection mechanism is controlled by MOTIVE and PURPOSE. We establish a GOAL
- learning can also be subconscious in the sense that we are constantly taking in information from external sources and responding to it even though we are not aware of it.

In lesson 2.4 we suggested that the brain worked through recognising patterns and it follows that such patterns must be initially introduced into the brain. There is an analogy with the computer which must be fed with some information input before any information output is possible. It is easy to see that the computer will supply information which is ENTIRELY DEPENDANT ON THE MATERIAL WHICH HAS BEEN FED IN, and it is the same with the human brain. in 2.4 we suggested that patterns could be established in the human brain through conscious absorption of material. That is by conscious learning.

Conscious learning is a question of directing energies and focusing attention on certain definite activities which have been selected because they are expected to lead to successful realisation of our goals and purposes.

We have described the conscious way to learn jazz improvisation through the formation of HABIT SYSTEMS. Activities, through repetition, become habits which are consolidated and become INGRAINED, the subconscious then takes over and the activity can be reproduced intuitively. The same process is involved in any accomplishment, learning to drive a car and to play a clarinet, we ingrain the habit and then perform subconsciously. The methodical accumulation of rhythmic skills outlined in 4.4 above is an example of conscious learning followed, hopefully, by subconscious performance.

Subconscious PERFORMANCE must not be confused with subconscious LEARNING. Subconscious learning can also be important for jazz improvisation. An example of the subconscious learning process is the way a child learns to talk. The child absorbs the sounds and meanings of speech through constant repetition and imitation without being aware of what is happening.

Improvisation can be learned in a similar way through immersion in the sound of jazz and responding 'by ear'. However, we must conclude that it is a tortuous and long winded method of learning in comparison to the method outlined in this course. LEARNING 'BY EAR' IS POSSIBLE BUT IT IS INEFFICIENT. We suggest that anyone wishing to learn a new language will make faster, more reliable progress if the learning is conscious and motivated. The vocabulary, the grammar, the idioms should be selectively marshalled and consciously learned. We suggest progress in learning a language would be much slower if we adopted the approach the child takes. We know from experience that the same argument applies to music, THE BEST WAY IS TO CONSCIOUSLY LEARN THE 'VOCABULARY', THE 'GRAMMAR' AND THE 'IDIOMS'. See also 4.6 below.

The time that must be invested to learn and to educate the subconscious depends on the nature of the activity, the efficiency of the learning technique and the MOTIVATION or desire to achieve the goal. But the point is that TIME IS NEEDED.

We should, therefore, guard against the natural tendency to HURRY, and the equally natural tendency to seek QUICK SOLUTIONS and MAGIC FORMULAS.

Habit systems can only develop through REPETITION, and material will be absorbed in proportion to the time spent.

These comments should be studied in relation to the points outlined in 4.4 above and also remembering 2.4 and 3.4 –

THROUGH HABIT YOU WILL SUBCONSCIOUSLY AND INSTINCTIVELY, 'KNOW' THAT

- 'THIS SOUND' comes from 'THESE FINGER POSITIONS' and that
- 'THIS' is the FIRST BEAT OF BAR FIVE!

#### **4.6 Advice.**

#### ***Music.***

You can see, even at this early stage, that we aim to provide you with a fairly complete understanding of the various theoretical musical components which are available.

It maybe appropriate to summarise why we feel a knowledge of music theory will assist you to improvise. Specifically we suggest that understanding theory helps –

- to SPEED UP THE LEARNING PROCESS by enabling you to avoid time wasting 'trial and error' and perceive the logical sequence of music, there are 'tendencies' if not strict rules.
- to IMPROVE INSTRUMENTAL TECHNIQUE because you will be able to anticipate the next step; the next combination, recombination or displacement and you will be able to avoid the problem dissonance
- CONFIDENCE because you know why the sequence sounds right
- MEMORY by providing recognisable patterns. Instead of having to memorise everything by rote, you can memorise the pattern and know that it is exploitable in an endless variety of ways. More about this in the next lesson.

Although this course is designed as a study of improvisation techniques, we hope that the stress on the importance of understanding what is going on musically means that the material should be valuable in many different ways. It should help as a guide to general practical musicianship, arranging, composition and teaching.

If you learn to improvise from this course you will also understand the basics of ANY and ALL music! Style is a matter of changing the idiom not changing the fundamentals .

#### 4.7 Written work.

Produce a 12 bar continuity based on the following specification –

Harmony – I IV I V7 I

Bars – 4 2 2 2 2

Rhythm – Prepare from the material given in this lesson and previous lessons.

Melody – This should be prepared on the basis of this lesson and lesson 3. See Ex.28.

NB. Lesson 4 is a companion lesson to lesson 3 and together they provide two melodic techniques which can be co-ordinated to produce a very versatile resource, even though the chord basis is still relatively simple it is all grist to the mill.

Furthermore, lessons 3 and 4 cover, perhaps, the two most important principles of jazz improvisation, namely, sound finger patterns and rhythmic time feel.

Remember, we don't expect that you will acquire full control over the techniques in these lessons in a few weeks or even months. The material and concepts are available for years of practice.

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