

“Herding the Cats”: Reflecting Your Priorities as you Teach Jazz Improvisation

presented by

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The Midwest Clinic

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Thank you for coming today!

- We’ll discover which of you teach Improv classes or lessons for a grade or for no grade—and then lead the dialogue from the middle:
 - What are your objectives teaching improvisation?
 - Can you assist students’ creative expression vs. chords and scales?
 - If you grade, does your grading-structure reflect your instructional priorities?
 - Even if you don’t teach Improv for credit, let’s use grading as an analogy for what you believe are the priorities within your improvisation-instruction—and for what your *students* may believe your priorities are.
- We’ll explore an informal survey of the environments in which the you teach Improvisation—whether in a class or in a private lesson—by raising hands. ***There are no right or wrong answers***, only facts to be learned and questions to be prompted for later regarding:
 - Instructional Setting
 - Instructional Delivery
 - Grading Policy

Even if you don’t teach Improv for credit, let’s use grading as an analogy for what you believe are the priorities within your improvisation-instruction—and for what your *students* may believe your priorities are. After all, even if you’re not grading students, you’re assessing their progress—and they’re assessing your teaching and effectiveness.

We’ll discover what you want to talk about! Let’s make a list and then address as many topics as possible. There is *so* much to learn from digesting the different, effective means by which any number of successful jazz educators address the art of teaching—and grading—Jazz Improvisation courses.

We—as a jazz-educating collective over recent decades, standing on the shoulders of those before us—campaigned mightily to get jazz education into the schools as an extra-curricular, co-curricular, and finally curricular option for our students. The academic system has already forced us to make a grading decision; so what are we doing with it? My position is simply that since academia demands that we grade the credited courses we teach, Improv instructors must (a) assess where that line in the sand falls between the development of artistic content and the development of the tools and/or ability to express it and (b) decide what portion of which elements we are willing to grade within that course (and find defensible doing so). Furthermore, schools typically require us to then publish that decision in our syllabi (as best we can), despite the fact that our collective goal for our students is indeed a complex, high level of musical communication that defies definition.

By focusing on the potential dichotomy and intersection between the teachable and unteachable elements of improvisation, plus the concrete and the abstract, as well as the technical and the creative, we will be better equipped to address and reconcile these factors in our own teaching and grading. To ignore these contrasting and interwoven factors would in my view be a disservice to our students and to our profession. Dialogue is preferable to avoidance. Let’s explore the possibilities and learn from one another!

Additional Resources for Jazz Pedagogy (no cost):

I archive most of my published articles on my web site at www.garciamusic.com/educator/articles/articles.html, including:

- *Getting Started with Jazz Improvisation*
- *Where's the Beat?*
- *Unlocking Standard Tunes: Use Your Keys!*
- *Transcribing Jazz Solos without Pitches*
- *Learning Swing Feel, or How to Sculpt an Elephant*
- *Improve Your Groove*
- *Clear Chord Symbols*
- *Teaching Jazz: Scope and Sequence of Instruction*
- *Improve Your Improv—Not Just What You Say, But How You Say It*
- *Different Strokes for Jazz Folks*
- *Thematic Dissonance: No Wrong Notes!*
- *Fine-Tuning Your Ensemble's Jazz Style*
- *Pedagogical Scat*

I received permission from a number of other authors to archive some of their most helpful articles at www.garciamusic.com/educator/iaje.journal/iaje.jej.html, including:

- *Vocal Jazz and its Credibility in the University Curriculum*
- *Freddie Green: Birth of a Style*
- *Jazz Bass: Crawl Before You Walk*
- *Singers are from Krypton and Instrumentalists are from Ork*
- *Jazz Studies Objectives, Rationales, Activities, and Evaluation: The New Trier High School Model*
- *Learning with Intent: Get a Plan*

I've also created rhythmic reading sheets and matching sound files that folks around the world are using for free to improve their sight-reading. For example, it's required for all students auditioning for VCU Jazz ensembles. They can practice by scat-singing the rhythms along with the annoying MIDI trumpet player; so they *know* if they're right or wrong! Visit <http://arts.vcu.edu/music/ensembles/jazz-ensembles/>; the sheets and sounds can be found within the lower menu.

And One at Small Cost:

Finally, I revel in showing new improvisors how they can be soloing over jazz standard tunes in minutes. It's no secret: it's what's been done as the entry-level improv approach on the bandstand for about a century now, and it remains in the expressive toolbox of every acclaimed jazz improvisor. But only one book shows you how it's done: [*Cutting the Changes: Jazz Improvisation via Key Centers*](#) (Kjos Music) by yours truly. It's available in five editions (C treble, C bass, Bb, Eb, and Eb) with a play-along CD for 13 standard tunes, plus an included CD-ROM that includes PDFs of fully notated rhythm parts for each tune and a related PDF jazz theory book linked to audio examples from the book.

Thank you again for coming today!

In a few minutes I'll be hosting the 4:30p concert by the University of North Florida Jazz Ensemble. But I expect to be at the J.W. Pepper booth #1407 tomorrow (Friday) from 9:45-10:30a; please come by to share your thoughts!

My presentation today would not have been possible without support from Meredith Music, Hal Leonard, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Conn-Selmer—many thanks! I hope that you will find the following information of interest.

Meredith Music & Hal Leonard

Jazz Improvisation: Practical Approaches to Grading is published by Meredith Music Publications and distributed by Hal Leonard. I hope that you will find it very useful towards prioritizing the elements within one's improv instruction, whether for a graded course or not. The instructors whose responses are presented in this book represent over 700 years of combined experience teaching Jazz Improvisation—over 400 of those years for credit. I

know that it will fill an important need in Jazz Pedagogy and Music Education courses as well as for Improvisation instructors in classrooms and private studios around the world. It is available in paperback (144 pages, \$19.95) or e-book (as low as \$9.99):

ISBN-10 Number: 1574631446

ASIN Number: B01M3NGRMG

ISBN-13 Number: 978-1-57463-144-9

UPC Number: 888680650803

Hal Leonard Number: HL 00200478

(<www.halleonard.com/product/viewproduct.action?itemid=200478&lid=6&promotion=996>)

Jamey Aebersold JazzBooks.com: JIPA

(<www.jazzbooks.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=JAJAZZ&Product_Code=JIPA&Category_Code=>>)

As with many e-books, a free preview of the opening sections of the book is available. For more information, you can visit my own page at <www.garciamusic.com/educator/books/books.html>.

Among many other fine resources published by Hal Leonard, check out their *Omnibook* series, with transcribed solos by Davis, Parker, Pass, Coltrane, Marsalis, Adderley, a vocal book, and more (<www.halleonard.com/search/search.action?c&seriesfeature=OMNIBK>). Also see *The Jazzer's Cookbook* (published MM, distributed HL, <www.halleonard.com/product/viewproduct.action?itemid=114424>), in which nearly 60 jazz educators, performers, and industry pros (including yours truly) offer concise and effective tips on instrument technique, rehearsals, programming, technology, improvisation and much more.

Jazz Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University

The VCU Jazz Studies program provides its students outstanding opportunities to pursue jazz performance and writing, as evidenced in part by alumni who have performed with such artists as Chick Corea, Wynton Marsalis, Abbey Lincoln, Ray Charles, Count Basie Orchestra, Mandy Moore, k.d. lang, Bon Iver, and Foxygen; have appeared on Saturday Night Live, Conan O'Brien, The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, and David Letterman; have composed film, TV, and videogame scores; and who are superb educators, composers, and performers throughout local, national, and international venues. For more information, please visit <www.jazz.vcu.edu>.

Conn-Selmer, Inc.

I have played Bach trombones exclusively for decades and am pleased that Conn-Selmer has co-sponsored me as a clinician for so many wonderful educational events at schools and festivals over the years. My tenor trombone is a Model LT16M with a Vincent Bach 6-1/2 AL mouthpiece; my bass trombone is a Model LT50B3LG with a Vincent Bach 3G mouthpiece; and they are simply exceptional horns. They assist me in creating my best possible sound, and they respond to me as no others do. I have performed on them around the world and recommend them without reservation! For an application form for Conn-Selmer support towards bringing me to your school or event as a clinician, please contact me at <ajgarcia@vcu.edu>; visit <www.conn-selmer.com>.

Antonio J. García is a performer, composer/arranger, producer, clinician, educator, and author in both instrumental and vocal genres. The Director of Jazz Studies at [Virginia Commonwealth University](http://www.vcu.edu), his newest book, *Jazz Improvisation: Practical Approaches to Grading* (Meredith Music), explores avenues for creating structures that correspond to course objectives. His *Cutting the Changes: Jazz Improvisation via Key Centers* (Kjos Music) offers musicians of all ages the opportunity to improvise over standard tunes using just their major scales. He has performed as trombonist, bass trombonist, or pianist with 70 major artists including Ella Fitzgerald, George Shearing, Mel Tormé, Billy Eckstine, Doc Severinsen, Louie Bellson, Dave Brubeck, and Phil Collins. A Bach/Selmer clinician/soloist and avid scat-singer, he is Associate Jazz Editor for the [International Trombone Association Journal](http://www.international-trombone-association.com), Past Editor of the International Association for Jazz Education *Jazz Education Journal*, Past President of IAJE-IL, Board Secretary of [The Midwest Clinic](http://www.midwestclinic.com), Advisory Board Member of the [Brubeck Institute](http://www.brubeckinstitute.com), is Co-Editor/Contributing Author of *Teaching Jazz: A Course of Study*, and authored a chapter within *The Jazzer's Cookbook*. He serves as a Network Expert (for Improvisation Materials) for the [Jazz Education Network](http://www.jazzeducationnetwork.com). His articles have been widely published; and his compositions have been published by Kjos, Hal Leonard, Kendor, Doug Beach, eJazzlines, Walrus, UNC Jazz Press, Three-Two Music, and his own company. García is also the subject of an extensive interview within *Bonanza: Insights and Wisdom from Professional Jazz Trombonists* (Advance Music). He formerly taught at Northern Illinois and Northwestern universities (including directing the Northwestern Vocal Jazz Ensemble), has been a nominee for CASE "U.S. Professor of the Year," and has received the NIU Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award and the VCU School of the Arts' Faculty Award of Excellence. Visit his web at <www.garciamusic.com>; e-mail him at <ajgarcia@vcu.edu>.



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