

**Rob Parton**, Associate Professor of Trumpet  
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McCormic Place West Room W192

## *Skills for teaching jazz I wished I had learned as a Music Education Major*

When working with a jazz band, symphony orchestra, wind ensemble, concert band or rock band, it is crucial that you start listening on a regular basis to the type of music you are expected to teach. While working in an area of music in which you may feel a bit deficient, it is possible to gain this new knowledge with a little bit of listening, coaching or mentoring. Isn't this the reason we continue to study and practice music? While listening, figure out what the basic role of each instrument is and the responsibilities attached to it. With a note pad, take notes based on what you hear. The conception of swing in Jazz is aural and cannot be notated although many have tried.

The majority of us have been trained classically from day one. When we get the instrument in fourth grade we are given a book that contains the correct valve combinations, slide positions and or fingerings. We are trained to recognize right notes and wrong notes by seeing the note, knowing the fingering or position and then blowing through the horn. The information goes in through our eyes and out of the horn. The music page is like training wheels. This musician never wants to play without the "music" even if someone is playing a note and asking him/her to match it. Students, especially young middle school students do not want to be embarrassed so they likely freak out when asked to play without music. Getting them to just play without music can be great for all musicians. The sooner you start this practice, the easier it is. "Fake" happy birthday every time someone has a birthday in the band but start on a different note!

1. Music Choices
  - Walrus
  - UNC Jazz Press
  - Sierra Publications
  - Doug Beach Music
  - Kendor Music
2. Listening for YOURSELF! YOU MUST ATTEND CONFERENCES! Get to know what is popular in the Jazz world every bit as much as you already do in Wind Ensemble or the Marching Band world. Great educator's are those that never stop being a student.  
Big Bands to check out (big bands mentioned due the probability that you will likely be teaching a big band)
  - Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band
  - Lincoln Center Jazz Band
  - Maria Schneider's Jazz Orchestra
  - Rob Parton Big Band (Sea Breeze Records)
  - Village Vanguard Jazz Orchestra
  - Count Basie Band
  - Woody Herman Band
3. Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions when you are around specialists in any field.
4. Bring in specialists from your area to work with your band.
5. Remember that IMPROVISATION IS THE BACKBONE of Jazz.
  - Spend time listening with your group, it is not a waste of time
  - Read up on Jazz History

6. How do students get the “Conception” of swing? Listen and sing the parts!
7. You have to understand it for yourself, and not be afraid to understand that proper swing feel really cannot be NOTATED.
  - Jim Snidero Jazz Conception Series, Easy, Intermediate and Advanced
  - Bob Mintzer Play Along series
8. IMPROVISATION-LISTEN-TRANSCRIBE!
  - Jamey Aebersold series
  - Jim Snidero
  - Hal Leonard Play Along Series
9. Getting your lead trumpet players to step up to that very important role of not only high note playing and styling, but also leadership and mentoring.
10. Private lessons are imperative in developing range, strength and leadership qualities needed in the lead trumpet player, jazz trumpet player and the classical trumpet player.
11. Start introducing Jazz early!
  - Doug Beach Music Kendor
12. Stage Set Up
  - Keep everyone close together
  - Have the kids sit/stand in the correct order

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**Rob Parton**, one of Chicago’s busiest and versatile trumpet players, is well known and highly regarded as a studio/theatre/jazz musician, performer-educator and band-leader. Recently Parton accepted a position as Associate Professor of Trumpet at Capital University in Columbus Ohio. Rob will divide his time both in Columbus and Chicago for a while.

As a jazz musician, Parton has been performing five nights a week for the past four years as featured artist at Chicago's Catch 35. The list of musicians who have played in the Rob Parton Trio is like a who's who in Chicago Jazz. Parton performs weekly from Tuesday through Saturday.

As a studio musician, Parton has played on hundreds of both local and national radio and television commercials and many local CD projects not only as lead trumpet but as contractor. Parton has performed with the Chicago Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Chicagoland Pops Orchestra, Doc Severinson, Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra Jr., Mel Torme, Beach Boys, Christopher Cross, Sheena Easton, Peabo Bryson, Celine Dion, Nick Carter, Yolanda Adams, Josh Groban, Enrique Eglasius, Natalie Cole and Maynard Ferguson to name only a few. Parton has traveled with Natalie Cole and most recently been a featured member of the Music Now series offered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

As a theatre musician, Parton has played the national tours and local productions of Wicked, Full Monty, Sweet Charity, Music Man, Legally Blonde, Disney’s High School Musical, Color Purple, Young Frankenstein, In the Heights, and Billy Elliot.

As an educator, Parton is Associate Professor of Trumpet at Capital University in Columbus Ohio. His duties include teaching trumpet, Jazz History, Jazz Combo's, Performing with the Capital Brass Quintet and the faculty Jazz group "Spectrum." When Parton is not working in Columbus or Chicago you will often find him directing an All-State jazz band or acting as a guest artist with many high school and college jazz programs throughout the country. He has presented concerts or clinics at the Midwest Clinic in Chicago, International Association of Jazz educators convention, MENC and many other music educators’ conventions.

Rob Parton is well known nationally and internationally for the JAZZTECH Big Band and its seven critically acclaimed compact discs’ on the Sea Breeze Jazz label. Most recently Parton disbanded the JAZZTECH Big Band and has now started a new band called the Rob Parton Big Band.

Rob Parton is currently working with Fred Powell and the EK Blessing Corp.  
**DON'T MISS THE ROB PARTON BIG BAND FRIDAY AT 4:00PM in Ballroom W196**

# Capital University

Ask. Think. Lead.

## TEACHING IMPROVISATION

### A. Can everybody really learn to improvise?

#### 1. Acknowledge differences in ability levels

- a. challenge those with superior aptitude and more experience
- b. encourage the efforts of others; avoid letting one or two kids play all the solos
- c. reward those who put forth the effort with more opportunities to solo

#### 2. Get the students while they are young-jr. high

- a. students are less inhibited at a younger age
- b. jazz phrasing concepts can be developed ahead of technical skills (See Berg)

### B. Think long term when teaching improvisation

#### 1. Don't always expect immediate results: adopt a "long term" approach

- a. think of your job as laying the groundwork or "pointing the students in the right direction" encourage students to work on their own and study privately
- b. encourage the creative act of improvising in a positive environment
  1. don't discourage students' efforts (see section III-J)
  2. try to demystify the process of improvisation

(see section III-I, "right brain stuff"—this type of activity helps to bring students out of their shells)

#### 2. Problems with overemphasis of competition/performance preparation

- a. rehearsal time devoted only to ensemble performance
- b. directors writing out solos while discouraging experimentation
  1. instead, as a point of departure, have students aurally transcribe their own solos more educationally sound, but not an end—only a means
  2. encourage embellishment and paraphrase of aurally transcribed (or written out) solos
  3. make sure students know the melody (see III d)

## II. Practical suggestions for common problems

### A. Director's inexperience with the idiom

#### 1. Attend workshops/clinics—as a student

- a. work on improvising yourself—keep your horn up—strive to be a role model: you're a better teacher if you can improvise a little because you are more aware of the problems involved and can diagnose students' problems easier
- b. the ability to provide authentic aural modeling is the best way to teach jazz

2. **Bring in clinicians (college students, local semi-pros, etc.)**
3. **Develop a basic jazz record library: listen to the music and share it with your students, both formally and informally (Double-Time Jazz Catalogue)**

## **B. Time constraints**

1. **Incorporate improvisation concepts into the regular rehearsal time (see III)**
  - a. As a “Warm-up”
    1. call-response activity
  - b. Repertoire: To an extent, learning to improvise jazz is about learning jazz tunes—so emphasize charts from the jazz repertoire
    1. jazz classics (vs. TV themes and pop “top-40” tunes)
    2. arrangements of standards & jazz standards
    3. teach “head” charts aurally (or have students make them up)
      - a. blues/“rhythm” tunes and vamp tunes
  - c. Use your jazz band music to teach elements of melody and form:
    1. have all students learn melody to jazz band charts, preferably by ear
    2. write out the chorus form and, while a recording (or rhythm section) is playing, point to the chord changes as they change
      - a. have students sing/play melody as you point to changes
      - b. have students clap at the top of each chorus; or at the bridge, etc.
2. **Designate specific rehearsals for work on improvisation and listening**
  - a. If this is not practical:
    - 1) make time available to coach those students who are genuinely interested (or those who have the solos—this is no different than coaching solo and ensemble performances);
    - 2) make materials available for students to work on their own (methods, play-alongs, etc.)
  - b. If rehearsal time can be allocated for them, see the activities in section III below.

## **III. Activities for Teaching Jazz Improvisation Fundamentals**

- A. Students must develop a concept (learned by listening and imitating)
  1. jazz is a language (“you are what you listen to”)
    - a. teachers should play jazz records for students at every opportunity
    - b. refer to the basic discography
- B. Encourage basic ear-training and the development of aural skills (vs. too much theory) *Note: see methods listed below (Rinaldo, Pickens, LaPorta, Berg, Thomas, et al.)*
  1. matching pitch
  2. playing by ear (familiar nursery rhymes, Christmas tunes, pop tunes on radio, etc.)
  3. basic transposition to other keys (patterns, phrases, melodies, etc.)
  4. sing/fingersing/play; try to sing/finger improvised phrases (vs. playing them on instruments)--then play to check for accuracy
  5. aural transcription (“lifting” licks, phrases, and solos off of records)
- C. Emphasize time-feel and phrase-feel vs. theory

1. work with a metronome
  - a. internalizing beats (all 4 beats; beats 1 & 3; beats 2 & 4; etc.) w/varying tempi
  - b. subdividing beats
    1. legato triplet feel (“doo-dul-ah”) for swing
2. call-response method
  1. using only one pitch, two pitches, etc
  2. using a scale (tonality)-use basic chord-scales: major, mixolydian, and dorian
  3. play along with real recordings, not just play-along records

#### D. Playing off of the melody

1. embellishing/paraphrasing of nursery rhymes and any tunes learned by ear
2. thinking (internally hearing) of the melody while improvising helps the student not lose his/her place in the tune
3. melodic embellishment is especially effective for developing a lyrical solo ballad concept

#### E. The Blues as a vehicle for teaching improvisation concepts

1. Horizontal vs. Vertical (in-the-key vs. in-the-chord)
  - a. horizontal: ingrain tonality of blanket scale
    1. call-response using minor pentatonic and major/minor blues scales
  - b. vertical: guide tones, chordal articulation
  - c. combination of vertical and horizontal approaches; improvise walking bass lines
  - d. Aebersold procedure: Practice learning the (blues) progression by practicing with a play-along track using this order: chordal roots, 1-2-3, 1-2-3-4-5, 1-3-5-7, and chord-scales
  - e. emphasize time-phrase feel and simplicity (i.e., hearing what your playing)

#### F. Harmonic analysis of improvisation sections of jazz band charts

1. For chord progressions used for improvisation sections in jazz band charts:
  - a. analyze chord progressions and their relationship to the key (tonic)
  - b. consolidate all key areas find “blanket” scales (horizontal: key areas vs. individual chords)
  - c. find harmonic lines (guide tones, more vertical) use guide tones (chordal 3rds ‘ & 7ths) as goal tones
  - d. Aebersold procedure (listed above: III-E-1-d)
  - e. encourage playing progressions at the piano (2-,3-,4-note voicings)

#### G. Consonance-Dissonance Spectrum: the chromatic scale (see III-J-1&2)

1. Of the 12 chromatic tones:
  - a. 4 function as basic chord tones at any given time (1-3-5-7)
  - b. 3 function as scale tones or extensions (tensions) of the chord (2-4-6 or 9-11-13, depending on your point of view)
  - c. 5 (chromatic) notes remain: they function best as non-harmonic or decorative tones, and reside only a ½ step away from consonant tones.

#### H. Jazz as communication: aspects of coherence and pacing and drama

1. story telling and speech as analogies to improvising solos
  - a. listen to great orators and speakers—how do they maintain your interest?  
Listen for aspects of: phrase structure/relationships;

use of range, dynamics and inflections; pause/pacing

- b. coherence: keep to the point (w/o a lot of digressions) by limiting the material used

I. Right brain stuff (see The Listening Book)

1. improvising from pictures, images, feelings, graphs, etc.
2. group interaction improvisation
3. improvise with restrictions imposed

J. Encouraging words for those students who are afraid to improvise:

1. “Don’t be afraid to play a ‘wrong’ note—remember, there are no bad notes, just bad resolutions. You’re only a half-step away from a ‘right’ note.”
2. ”Hey, there are only 12 notes.”
3. “If you play a mistake, play it with conviction...like you meant to play it. Then play it again so the listener thinks you meant to play it. Miles Davis made an art out of ‘mistakes’.”
4. “You’ve got to be able to walk before you can run!”

#### **IV. Resources**

- A. Jamey Aebersold, “Anyone Can Improvise” (video tape)
- B. John Rinaldo, Jazz Beginnings (method for jazz band)
- C. Willie Pickens, Ear-Training Tips
- D. Jerry Coker, Listening to Jazz
- E. W.A. Mathieu, The Listening Book
- F. Willie Thomas, Jazz Anyone?
- G. Shelly Berg, Chop-Monster Series (Jazz Language Tutor)
- H. Jim Snidero, “Jazz Conception”