Jazz PIANO VOICING SKILLS

A Method For Individual Or Class Study

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Introduction

This text is designed for either jazz piano classes or individual study. The purpose of the book is to help a pianist gain useful skills. These skills are necessary for success as a writer or player. Therefore, the goal is to achieve control of each skill at a minimum tempo. A judgment should not be made about the quality of the performance of any skill. Rather, each skill should be viewed as either perfect (learned) or imperfect (not fully learned). Playing wrong notes and/or hesitating during execution indicates insecurity and, accordingly, an unlearned skill.

I have used this method with a high degree of success for many years. The student's self-motivation is an important factor in this success. In a field such as musical performance, the ultimate goal is the ability to perform at consistent high levels. An artist is not awarded letter grades of B+ or A- for a performance; it is simply expected that the performance will be accurate and musical. Therefore, in private study or practice, the student must become his own teacher. This method gives him clear, tangible evidence of his progress. Passing each skill proves that his ability is increasing. In a typical class situation, the student can determine his own grade by the number of skills passed rather than by a subjective evaluation by the teacher.

Placing responsibility for progress on the individual is a course of action that must occur at some point in every teacher's efforts. This book initiates that approach and offers the student a healthy environment for learning, one in which he can challenge himself and know he is succeeding.

Dan Haerle

Practice Tips

1. Voicings in this book are notated in the staff to make them easy to read. However, many voicings will sound better if played an octave lower than notated to be in a fuller register of the piano.

2. Try to see relationships in voicings and progressions.(intervals, voice-leading, etc.).

3. Play some things out of tempo to give yourself a chance to familiarize yourself with the problem.

4. Work at slow tempos first, using a metronome while you play.

5. Do a practice run, at tempo, of a particular skill to see your current stage of progress. Set more advanced tempo goals if you wish; speed generally is one indicator of security. Be sure to play the skills without mistake or hesitation!

6. Practice the various skills through all keys using other types of progressions such as half steps, whole steps, and major or minor 3rd's. Also, drill them around the cycle as they would be tested.

7. For variety, use different styles to make things more musical and fun to play. For example, play each voicing with a repetitive swing or bossa nova rhythmic pattern.

8. When working with progressions that connect smoothly, try not to look at your hands any more than you absolutely have to. In fact, concentrate on the feeling of various voicing shapes and try to let yourself play them without looking rather than making yourself play them!

9. Be sure to wean yourself off of the printed page as soon as possible.

10. As you progress, you may want to start doing some sight-reading of simple chord progressions, using the voicings studied.

Block Chords

The goal of this section is familiarity with chord structures. As preparation for learning voicings, one needs to solidify the spelling of the chords first. Consider some of the following possibilities:

1) Play the block chords as written (with the root in the left hand) or play them as block chords in both hands.

2) Arpeggiate the chords up or down in quarter notes or up and down in eighth notes. Keep the same harmonic rhythm of four beats to each chord.

3) Play four inversions of each chord on the root, 3rd, 5th and 7th. Double the harmonic rhythm and play the inversions in eighth notes.

Block Chords

♩ = 120

Skill 1: Major 7ths

♩ = 120

Skill 2: Dominant 7ths

Block Chords

♩ = 120

Skill 3: Minor 7ths

Skill 4: Half-Diminished

♩ = 120

Block Chords

♩ = 120

Skill 5: Diminished 7ths

Skill 6: Dominant 7ths sus4

♩ = 120