



**TOWARD MUSICAL
SELF-ACTUALIZATION**

BY

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Improvisation and “Method”

- Reality Check:** Although many great improvisers are now advocating various methods, few of these players actually learned using these methods. Most of them just dove in and did it. (I am not saying that these methods don't have value)
- Jazz and fiddling is about individual expression. In my opinion, one of the reasons for the wonderful diversity of styles in jazz violin is the lack of method. As jazz has left the wild vernacular and is becoming an academic discipline, I have noticed it becoming more homogeneous.
- Can one create a method that encourages a student to seek out her or his own path? To discover what inspires her or him, create personal goals, and develop a unique and individually optimized strategy for getting there? Could this be a broader lesson for life?
- Jazz is about creating something individual, new, and different, while negotiating within a group and a tradition. Could this be a broader lesson for life?

Ideas to get started

- Put together a band and jam.
- Listen. Figure out what inspires you. Create a virtual composite mentor.
- Learn jazz and/or fiddle tunes off recordings.
- Play along with recordings of great players.
- Alternate learning by written music and by ear.
- Learn a tune then play it in different keys in real time.
- Learn a tune then play it in different positions on the instrument in real time.
- Play the melody, slightly ornamenting and varying it as you please.
- Don't improvise mindlessly. Listen. Think. What do you want to sound like?
- Learn to accompany on a chording instrument like piano or guitar.
- Musical "conversations" or trading licks with musical friends.
- Relax! Can you find an easier way to do what you are doing?
- Get control of your vibrato. Temporarily eliminate it and reintroduce it mindfully.
- Don't neglect rhythm and feel. This is very important.
- Have fun! If it isn't fun, why do it?

The Paradox and Zen of Improvisation

- Balancing deep tradition, canonical musical vocabulary, and complex theoretical underpinnings with real-time highly individualistic self-expression/improvisation (finding your own voice within the tradition)
- On one hand: You can't just play anything you want. Improvisation is a highly disciplined art with complex consensus heuristics.
- On the other hand: You can play anything you want. There is no music police. If it sounds cool, it sounds cool. (Of course, not everyone agrees on this!)
- Thomas Kuhn's "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" (1962): Jazz is the "paradigm" and the individual player is a "model". You can have many models within a paradigm. If the paradigm is Euclidian geometry, one can model an infinite number of shapes within the paradigm.

Warm Up with Tonal Pitch Sets

One may wish to find a place where one will not be disturbed.

One may wish to be aware of breathing.

One could use these etudes to locate and release tension.

One could use these etudes to explore how notes function within and interact with the triad.

How do you feel about these sonorities? What do they do to your brain?

One could use these etudes to explore potential roles for sonorities within improvisations.

One could use these etudes to explore and sensitize oneself to intonation.

One could use these etudes to explore positions and wander the neck.

One could use these etudes to explore fingerings.

One could use these etudes to explore tone.

One could use these etudes to explore process.

One could use these etudes to explore physicality and sensations.

One could use these etudes to explore cognitive processes.

You cannot make a mistake if process is the goal.

Warm-up Etude #1

The boxes below contain degrees of the major scale.

Feel free to explore these notes and how they interact with the background track.

The background track is a simple major chord (1, 3, and 5). The lowest note is the root.

Feel free to begin with the first box and proceed sequentially

1

1,2

1,2,5

1,2,5,6

1,2,5,6,7

1,2,3,5,6,7

1,2,3,4,5,6,7

Subdominant Chords and the Lydian Mode

The Lydian mode is built on the 4th degree of the major scale.

A more useful conceptualization:

The Lydian mode is a major scale with the 4th degree raised a half step.

This scale works well over subdominant chords

Warm up Etude #2

The boxes below contain degrees of the Lydian scale.

Feel free to explore these notes and how they interact with the background track.

The background track is a triad (1,3, 5).

The lowest note is the root.

Feel free to begin with the first box and proceed sequentially

1

1,2

1,2,3

1,2,3,4

1,2,3,4,5

1,2,3,4,5,7

1,2,3,4,5,7,6

Dominant Chords and the Mixolydian Mode

The Mixolydian mode is built on the 5th degree of the major scale.

A more useful conceptualization:

The Mixolydian mode is a major scale with the 7th degree lowered a half step.

This scale works well over non-altered dominant chords.

Warm up Etude #3

The boxes below contain degrees of the Mixolydian scale.

Feel free to explore these notes and how they interact with the background track.

The background track is an unaltered dominant chord (1, 3, 5, and flat 7).

The lowest note is the root.

Feel free to begin with the first box and proceed sequentially

1

1,7

1,7,2

1,7,2,5

1,7,2,5,6

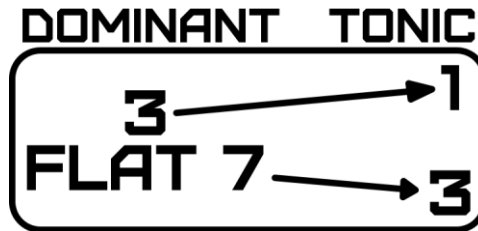
1,7,2,5,6,3

1,7,2,5,6,3,4

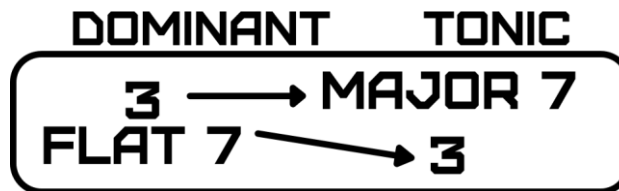
Dominant to Tonic Voice Leading

The 3d of the dominant acts as the leading tone of the tonic.

It wants to resolve upward to the root of the tonic.



Often in Jazz the 3d of the dominant does not move and becomes the major 7 of the tonic.



If two players:

Play through voice leading in all twelve keys.

Players may then wish to switch voices and play all twelve keys again.

If three players:

One player can play the root moving from the 5 to the 1.

The other two players play the voice leading.

Players may wish to switch roles so each player has the opportunity to play each voice.

Section 2

Boil Them Cabbage Down

Improvise in All Twelve Keys

Improvise Up and Down the Neck