

# The Cirillo Method



Toward Musical Self-Actualization

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## The Cirillo Method: Thoughts on 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 method 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?

## The Cirillo Method: 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 and infinite number of shapes within the paradigm.

# Induction and Reductionism

# Generalizability

## The Cirillo Method: Scales

In my opinion, scales are a tool, not a rule. All twelve tones are available, as well as a myriad of microtones and microtonal gestures. Scales degrees are a subset representing potential areas of emphasis one can strategically place to conjure various emotional affects such as tonality, resolution, tension, familiarity, and/or comfort. Scales should be thought of as a palette of colors one can employ as does an impressionist painter rather than a ladder to be tediously ascended and descended.

With this in mind, I found the traditional scale methods to be of limited use as an improviser. The linear ordering is too immutable and tightly coupled to specific fingering patterns to be generalized for creative use. These methods also lack affordances for the musical explorer to discover how each scale degree behaves and interacts with other scale degrees within it's harmonic environment.

The Cirillo Method: Toward Musical Self-Actualization seeks, among other aspirations, to transform the advanced study of scales from a mindless exercise in muscle memory to a mindful creative musical experience.

## The Cirillo Method: Zen Waves Ionian Guide

The piece opens with a one octave scale in the Ionian Mode of the indicated key played over a drone on the modal root. You will then hear a series of tones, each repeated three times. These tones are generated stochastically from the pitch set of the Ionian Mode. The drone roots the tonal center of the mode.

You are then free to find each note on your instrument. The note repeats three times for several reasons:

- To give additional time for explorers who need more time to find the note.
- To give more experienced explorers the opportunity to find the note in several places on their instrument.
- To give the experienced explorer time to practice shifting by playing the note in the same place, but different positions.
- To give the experienced explorer time to mentally identify the degree of the note in relation to the drone.
- To give the experienced explorer time to mentally identify the interval of the note in relation to the drone.

One is welcome to experiment with locating the note on the instrument before identifying the scale degree. One is also welcome to experiment with identifying the scale degree before locating the note on the instrument.



## The Cirillo Method: Zen Waves Ionian Explorer

The piece opens with a chime echoing over a simple root position major chord drone. This signals the beginning. Go to the score and find the row corresponding to the appropriate day of the week. You are free to explore the neck using the tones from the first column. With each chime be free to append the pitch set with the note from the next column. Proceed sequentially to the final. At this time the pitch set will contain all degrees of the Ionian Mode.

## The Cirillo Method: Self-Diagnostic

I created these exercises for many reasons. I want to develop an intimate understanding of every scale degree and its relationship with the tonal center. I want to know where all these notes are on the fingerboard and make them effortlessly available. I want to improve efficiency. I want to refine tone and intonation.

These exercises also provide a strategically constrained environment for both discovering and strengthening areas of weakness. Most people, when facing technical challenges, often become tense. This is not helpful. These exercises allow one to practice cultivating a calm, relaxed, and focused inner state while leaning in to difficult technical challenges.

Where is your unrealized potential? Are there certain techniques that you avoid because you are concerned about making mistakes? Do you avoid practicing these techniques because of the unpleasant sensations of frustration and tension that accompany this practice?

For example, I am challenged by downward finger-substitution shifts. I use these exercises to experiment with this technique over the entire fingerboard permuting through many different finger combinations. I do not become tense and distracted, but remain relaxed and focused. The tedious and uninspiring is rediscovered as refreshing and enlightening.

Do not circumvent that which you find difficult. Enjoy the challenge. This is how we grow.

## The Cirillo Method: Zen Waves Ionian Explorer

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.

Sunday



Monday



Tuesday



Wednesday



Thursday



Friday



Saturday

