

Piano Jazz Preparation Pack

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Congratulations on your successful audition to study Jazz at Leeds Conservatoire. We are very much looking forward to welcoming you to our community!

This booklet has been designed to give you some advice as to the sort of things you might want to spend some time looking at between now and the onset of your course. The idea is to make sure that we 'hit the ground running' in September, by giving you a bit of notice as to the sort of topic areas that may be covered.

It's important to clarify that you will be assigned to a 1-to-1 tutor upon enrolment, and the content of the lessons you receive will be determined by them once they have met you and got a sense of what you would benefit from the most. Naturally, your own interests and aspirations will come into it as well – we don't deliver 'one size fits all' lessons. Having said that, though, there are certain fundamentals that every Jazz musician needs to deal with in one way or other, and the purpose of this booklet is to give you a bit of a head start in these areas.

The idea of this pack is to give you some resources to use and practice so that you have some fundamental concepts and ideas in place for when you begin the course here at Leeds Conservatoire in September.

The idea is to work through these ideas slowly making sure you have internalised the material presented and that you are able to play/demonstrate these when needed.

No-one expects you to have fully mastered all of this before you start, but any progress you can make towards that goal will be time very well spent!

Technique

There are many approaches to developing your technique, depending on the specific area you are looking at. Here are a few suggestions of exercises, books and pieces, to be working through, ahead of your study at Leeds Conservatoire, with a view to developing control of sound, strengthening muscles, fingering and coordination.

- Hanon - The Virtuoso Pianist Book 1
- Scales - ABRSM Grade 8 Piano
- Bach - 2 part inventions, Preludes and Fugues
- Piano Yoga - Transform your Hands – A Complete 10 Week Course of Piano Exercises

Another great way to work on technique is by learning other pianists' solos – transcribing by ear is the best way to do this. When transcribing for piano, learn the left hand and the right hand as you go along. Don't be tempted to take the right hand down first. This way you will develop a more integrated approach from the offset.

Transcribe solos by ear and learn by memory. Singing the melody through is a good idea too. Go through this process to internalise the language and the way that ideas flow. If you can start to make these connections aurally, your playing will sound idiomatically informed (convincing). See the transcription section for more advice.

Left Hand

Make a point of studying left hand techniques and finding different ways to bring the left hand into your improvisations. A little finesse in this area goes a long way.

There are many approaches to creating different sounds and textures with the left hand, here a few techniques to get you started. Work on these approaches whilst improvising with the right hand.

Practice positioning the left hand chords on the quaver before the chord is written – so typically on the ‘and’ of beat two or the ‘and’ of beat four.

Accompanying the right hand, this might look like:

Also practice playing the left-hand chord in the gaps:

And hooking-up the voicing at the ends of the phrases:

Practice these three techniques whilst you are improvising. Integrating your left hand in this way, gives a stronger rhythmic foundation to your playing. It also forces us to position phrases with consideration and think about space.

Voicings

Here are a few basic shapes that you should be able to play over a chord sequence, from sight. Practice them with a bass player or a play-along. Also practice all voicings ascending and descending chromatically, in whole-tone movement, in minor thirds, in major thirds and round the cycle of 5ths. This will help with transposition and sequential development.

At this stage we are covering basic chord types. We will explore harmony that is derived from alternative modes (to the major scale) at a later stage.

These voicings do not resonate well in the low register – use your ears to work out the best inversion, to compliment the right hand.

Common Left Hand Shapes

As with two handed shapes, there are a wide range of possibilities and variations. It is important to start with a systematic approach, building a level of continuity. Once you have a good amount of options at your disposal, invention will follow.

Here are some common four note left shapes to start with.

Four measures of music in bass clef, each with a Cm7 chord symbol above. The notes are: 1. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 2. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 3. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 4. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3.

The above includes the guide tones and the 5th and 9th.

Four measures of music in bass clef, each with a C7 chord symbol above. The notes are: 1. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 2. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 3. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 4. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3.

The above includes the guide tones and the 9th and 13th.

Four measures of music in bass clef, each with a Cmaj7 chord symbol above. The notes are: 1. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 2. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 3. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 4. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3.

The above includes the guide tones and the 5th and 9th.

Here are the same voicings with one note taken out to give a lighter texture. The four note shapes can sound quite dense.

Four measures of music in bass clef, each with a Cm7 chord symbol above. The notes are: 1. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 2. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 3. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 4. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3.

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Four measures of music in bass clef, each with a Cm7 chord symbol above. The notes are: 1. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 2. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 3. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3; 4. C2, Eb3, G3, Bb3.

4 C⁷ C⁷ C⁷ C⁷

Cmaj⁷ Cmaj⁷ Cmaj⁷ Cmaj⁷

To strip it back to two notes, leave the guide tones (3rds and 7ths).

The examples below are written in treble clef with the root note in the left hand. Practice playing in this way, then practice playing the guide tones in the left hand with a bass player or play-along covering the root notes.

31 C⁷ F⁷ B^b7 E^b7 A^b7

The above example is based upon dominant 7 chords. Practice with major and minor chords too.

D^bmaj⁷ G^bmaj⁷ B[♯]maj⁷ E[♯]maj⁷

The above example is based on Maj7 chords.

A[♯]m⁷ D[♯]m⁷ G[♯]m⁷ C[♯]m⁷

The above example is based on Min7 chords.

Once you can play through the guidetones in all keys and comfortably apply them in the left hand, whilst playing through an unfamiliar chord sequence, start to add notes to the right hand. Here are some effective two note combinations (avoiding doubling the left hand guidetones).

The next step is to apply alterations to the dominant chords. Be mindful of the melody note on the HEAD. Solo sections can be approached with more freedom.

3 Fm7 Bb7(b9) Ebmaj7(#11)

The first system of music shows three measures. The first measure is Fm7, the second is Bb7(b9), and the third is Ebmaj7(#11). The notation is on a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The melody line (treble clef) has notes on the staff lines: F4 (first space), Ab4 (first space, flat), and Bb4 (second space, flat). The bass line (bass clef) has notes on the staff lines: Bb3 (second space, flat), D4 (third line), and F4 (third space).

5 Fm7 Bb7(b13) Ebmaj7

The second system of music shows three measures. The first measure is Fm7, the second is Bb7(b13), and the third is Ebmaj7. The notation is on a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The melody line (treble clef) has notes on the staff lines: F4 (first space), Ab4 (first space, flat), and Bb4 (second space, flat). The bass line (bass clef) has notes on the staff lines: Bb3 (second space, flat), D4 (third line), and F4 (third space).

2 Fm7 Bb7(b9 #9) Ebmaj7

The third system of music shows three measures. The first measure is Fm7, the second is Bb7(b9 #9), and the third is Ebmaj7. The notation is on a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The melody line (treble clef) has notes on the staff lines: F4 (first space), Ab4 (first space, flat), and Bb4 (second space, flat). The bass line (bass clef) has notes on the staff lines: Bb3 (second space, flat), D4 (third line), and F4 (third space).

Practice using these techniques, with a rhythmic approach, over the following standards to start with:

- Autumn Leaves
- All the Things You Are
- Have You Met Miss Jones
- Beatrice
- Bod and Soul

Pianists & Albums To Check Out

There are so many great Jazz pianists to check out. Good advice is to find a small number of artists that you really connect with, and immerse yourself in their music.

Some influential musicians and albums to check out are:

Erol Garner

Ready Take One, *Contrasts*, *Concert by the Sea*

Bud Powell

The Amazing Bud Powell Volume 1-4, *Blues in the Closet*, *Live in Louisiana*

Amed Jamal

Live at the Pershing Lounge, *Ahmad Jamal at the Blackhawk*

Thelonious Monk

Monks Blues, *Monks Music*, *Straight no Chaser*

Marian McPartland

Anything Goes, *Just Friends*, *Bossa Nova + Soul*

Bill Evans

Sunday at the Village Vanguard, *Alone*, *Undercurrent*

Geri Allen

The Gathering, *The Life of a Song*, *The Printmakers*

Herbie Hancock

Speak Like a Child, *Mwandishi*, *Herbie Hancock Trio with Ron Carter and Tony Williams*

Chick Corea

Now He Sings, Now He Sobs, *Return To Forever*, *Selected Recordings – ECM*

John Taylor

Peter Erskine Trio- As it Was, *Songs and Variations*, *Azimuth '85*

Keith Jarrett

My Song, *Standards Vol 2*, *Expectations*

Brad Mehldau

Art of the Trio Volume One, *Largo*, *Seymour Reads the Constitution*

An Approach to Improvisation

Study of improvisation is endless – learning and internalising devices and concepts, to enable us to navigate our way around varying structures (or not). Try to find exercises that will help you develop solos for the pieces you are working on now, whether for a concert, audition or band rehearsal. Transcription is great for developing language (see the worksheet on this). Playing with other musicians is vital (learning from what those around you play and what feels good to you). Over time, you will figure out all kinds of methods and approaches.

This is a straightforward compositional approach that helps generate strong points of resolution. Remember, the resolution is the moment when the idea becomes complete.

Choose strong chord tones to resolve on strong beats. The strong chord tones are 1/3/5/7 and the strong beats are 1/3. You can also consider creating an inner melodic structure by developing a gradual descending, ascending or pedal-point line. This is an ascending line with target notes on beat 1. The example below uses 7th, 7th and 5th.

The image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb) and a 4/4 time signature. The staff is divided into four measures, each containing a single half note. Above each measure is a chord symbol: $E_m7(b5)$, $A7(b9)$, C_m7 , and $F7$. The notes on the staff are: a whole rest in the first measure, G4 in the second, Bb4 in the third, and Eb4 in the fourth.

Now approach the target note, creating forward motion through the approach notes. Adjust your left hand to lock in with this, or anticipate - emphasising the resolution.

5 $E_m7(b5)$ $A7(b9)$ C_m7 $F7$

How else might you elaborate on the sections that lead to the target note? Here's a chromatic approach.

9 $E_m7(b5)$ $A7(b9)$ C_m7 $F7$

Now try approaching the approaches! Often the target note (resolution point) will become the starting note of the next approach. This is a good way to make longer phrases – lots of shorter phrases that overlap.

13 $E_m7(b5)$ $A7(b9)$ C_m7 $F7$

You can try the same process using enclosures as approach notes:

Enclosures are a type of approach that create a circle around the target note.

Enclosures are used a lot in bebop language, where improvisors often create tight loops around the target note, resulting in chromatic movement.

This exercise uses three note enclosures to lead to the 7th, 5th, 3rd and root of the chord. The three-note enclosure enables us to create a continuous flow of eighth notes/quavers that always resolve on beat one and three.

Each of the lines below and on the following page use three variations of enclosure to add variety to the phrase.

Learn to sing these before playing them.

$C7$

5 C_m7

9 C_{maj7}

Splitting melody into these two sections – approach notes and target notes is a good way to formulate your lines. But make sure you can hear the line you want to play – let your ear be your guide.

If you have any questions about your offer,
please don't hesitate to contact our Admissions
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