

“How was my Solo?” - Methods for Evaluating Improvisation.

Martin Norgaard Presenter, IAJE, Long Beach, CA, 2005
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Description: How to adapt advanced “story-telling” devices as evaluation criteria for the middle and high school improvising soloist.

Premise: The reason for an evaluation process should be to suggest ways for the student to improve. This could entail outlining long term goals (“work on your time”) or giving verbal suggestions that the student can immediately put to use (“use more space”). This clinic covers ways to convert story-telling devices into evaluation criteria that the beginning improviser can apply instantly. This approach is especially useful in programs without a separate jazz component.

1. Warm-up. The g-major scale is used as the foundation for improvisation. A sequence of a) scale, b) scale with rhythms, c) scale with changes of direction, d) adding skips, will get all demo group members improvising.
2. Now what! Instead of jumping into chord changes, story-telling devices can be used to expand the beginning improviser’s skills.
3. Jazz and language analogies. Just like the Suzuki method, jazz has traditionally been taught through listening and imitation. A jazz solo can be analyzed as a story*.
4. Miles. Participants will listen to a classic Miles Davis solo and are asked to define why the solo “makes sense”.
5. Devices. A list of devices for solo development is created with suggestions from the participants. These include, but are not limited to range, speed, length of phrases, diatonic to non-diatonic, call and response within the solo.
6. Range and Speed. The two easiest devices, range and speed, are integrated into improvisations by the soloists in the demo group.
7. Phrase length, motives and more. Individualized suggestions are given, prompted by student wishes.
8. Making a sequence. These devices could be turned into a sequence applicable to the middle and high school soloist.
9. Evaluation. Discussion of evaluation criteria based on ideas presented in the session.

*Berliner, P. F. (1994). *Thinking in jazz*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Jazz String Method Books by Martin Norgaard:

Jazz Fiddle Wizard Junior, Pacific: Mel Bay Publications Inc., 2002. (Middle School)

Jazz Viola Wizard Junior, Pacific: Mel Bay Publications Inc., 2002. (Middle School)

Jazz Cello Wizard Junior, Pacific: Mel Bay Publications Inc., 2002. (Middle School)

Jazz Wizard Junior, book 2, available spring 2005.

Jazz Fiddle Wizard, Pacific: Mel Bay Publications Inc., 2000. (High School/College)

Jazz String Orchestra Arrangements by Martin Norgaard:

Swing On A String, FJH Music Company (grade 3)

Swing There Done That, FJH Music company (grade 2) available spring 2005.

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