

Improvisation

One of the defining and unique characteristics of jazz music is improvisation. What is improvisation, you ask? We do it every day when we talk with our friends and family. Our conversations are improvised because they are not rehearsed or written down. You choose your words based on what you want to say as well as what others say. In jazz, musicians improvise melodies on the spot in a kind of musical conversation!

How does an improvising jazz soloist know what to play? Take a look at the chart on the right to learn some of the guiding principles that make up the “three-by-threes of jazz improvisation.”

Three-by-Threes of Jazz Improvisation

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| a. making up music at the spur of the moment | a. imitation | a. knowing the form of a song |
| b. using whatever resources are available | b. playing around with the rhythm and melody | b. staying in the groove |
| c. putting your feeling and personality into it | c. using sound effects: slurs, vibrato, trills | c. listening and responding appropriately |

Vocabulary

Call and response	Improvisation	Slur
Form	Melody	Trill
Groove	Rhythm	Vibrato
	Section	



ACTIVITY: Putting it All Together

Use your vocabulary list, the glossary, and what you learned from the the lesson to find the right word for each clue; then write the word next to the appropriate number in this brainteaser. The boxed letters will answer the final clue.

1. A trembling of tone
2. AAAB is an example of this
3. The answer to a call
4. The organized motion of sound and rests; patterned repetition of a beat or accent
5. The basic tune of a song
6. The interaction of rhythms to form a pattern
7. Moving quickly and smoothly back and forth between two consecutive notes
8. Sliding from one note to another
9. A group of instruments in a band or orchestra that are part of the same family

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____
8.	_____
9.	_____

How do jazz musicians express themselves?



**This lesson was adapted from Jazz at Lincoln Center's Jazz for Young People Curriculum*