

Notes for Improv Class

Listen, listen, listen! To become fluent in one musical genre, listen specifically to lots of music from that genre. To broaden your musical palette, listen to everything that you can get your hands on.

Keep a journal. What did you listen to today? Did you like it? Did it confuse you? Why? Did you practice? What did you practice? Did it feel easier than yesterday?

To really get to know a piece:

Listen and sing along until you know the melody by ear. Catch the little details, not just the notes: dynamics, intonation, rhythm, accents, timing, inflections...

Record yourself singing the melody and listen back. Are you capturing the essence of the original?

Play it, including all of the little details. Record and listen back, etc

Repeat the process with harmony. To help capture the harmony, sing through chords. Try to catch the bass notes and note their relationship to the melody line. Then fill in the chords. Then see if you can hear the whole chord.

Guide tone lines: Choose a note in the first chord. When the chord changes, move to a pitch in that chord that is closest to where you began. Repeat this starting on all of the notes in the first chord, and experiment with different possibilities. Once you are really comfortable with that, try ornamenting the lines.

Motivic development: Pick a small motif out of the piece and play with it. Invert it, expand it (augmentation), contract it (diminution), sequence it, etc. Have fun! Try starting or ending the motive on the guide tone line pitches. Move it around so that it isn't always on the same beats.

Reading:

Primacy of the Ear by Ran Blake (available at www.ranblake.com/pote)

Lennie Tristano, His Life in Music by Eunmi Shin (available at amazon.com) – check out the chapter about his teaching technique

Questions? Feel free to email me and send me stuff to listen to. Lets keep working on this stuff together!

Warmly,
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