

Developing Fluency in All Keys

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Objective

This clinic is designed to encourage each of us to devote significant practice time to the development of fluency in all keys and to the practice of many tunes in all twelve keys.

Materials to assist you in developing practice strategies

Your voice!

Develop a mindset that states: "If I can sing it, I can play it."

In order to develop your ear, sing all of the exercises suggested in this clinic.

Sing scales, sing chords, sing tunes, scat sing solos in all keys etc.

Our singing is often freer than our playing...we allow the music to flow...our ideas may exhibit more daring...our time might be more secure...isn't this the "voice" we wish would emerge from our instrument?

In every Aebersold Volume you will find in the textbook the 10 Basic Preparatory Exercises. Start here. Use a metronome (try quarter note = 80, then 100, 120, 140) Note the 6 recommend root motion progressions: practice each of the 10 patterns following all 6 progressions. (this sheet is available as a handout at this clinic). Make sure scale practice evolves from quarter notes, to eighth notes, to eighth note triplets, to sixteenth notes. It is really important to execute all your scalar and chordal with precise subdivisions and strict pulse.

A significant number of the Jamey Aebersold Play-Along Volumes address the need to practice in all twelve keys. Here are the volumes I have found to be the most helpful in developing and extending my fluency and technical facility. I list them in the order I would recommend for study (beginning to advanced).

Scales, Chords, Patterns

Volume 24 Major and Minor

Volume 21 Getting It Together

Volume 3 The ii-V7-I progression

Volume 16 Turnarounds, Cycles, and ii-V-Is

Staples of the jazz tradition

Volume 42 Blues in All Keys

Volume 47 I Got Rhythm in All Keys

Volume 57 Minor Blues in All Keys

Tunes in All Keys

Volume 67 Tune Up

(Four, Tune Up, New Bossa (blue), Sweet Georgia Brown, Autumn Leaves, Rhythm, Perdido in all 12 keys)

Volume 68 Giant Steps

(This I Dig, Giant Steps, Confirmation, Stella By Starlight, It's You Or No One, All The Things You Are)

Volume 61 Burnin' (contains a fast Cherokee in all twelve keys)

Book

Keys Unlocked! Author-Jerry Coker; Publisher – Jamey Aebersold Jazz

Where to Purchase

www.jazzbooks.com

Examples of exploring these materials

Volume 24 Major and Minor - Let's select as an example the track on concert Bb major

Let's follow this check list of technical skills we wish to practice in every key.

1. The major scale in whole notes to the 9th and back; repeat in half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes.
2. The major scale in thirds (1-3, 2-4, 3-5, 4-6, etc.)
3. The Herbert Clarke Study #2 pattern (1-2-3-1, 2-3-4-2, 3-4-5-3, etc)
4. Diatonic triads on all scale notes (1-3-5-3, 2-4-6-4, 3-5-7-5, etc)
5. 1-2-3-5 patterns on each scale step (1-2-3-5, 2-3-4-6, 3-4-5-7, etc)
6. Diatonic 7th chords on each scale step (1-3-5-7, 2-4-6-8, etc)
7. Improvise over the track "play what you hear"

Volume 3 The ii-V7-I progression – the major ii-7/V7/I/I progression

1. sustain roots of the chords
2. 1-2-3 patterns from roots of each chord
3. 1-3-5 patterns from roots of each chord
4. 1-3-5-7 pattern from roots of each chord
5. full scale (root to root) on each chord
6. resolution exercise
example in C major:
D-7 D-F-A-C resolving by half-step to B (7-3 resolution D- to G7)
CM7 C-E-G-B resolving by whole step to A (7-6 resolution on CM7)
7. Improvise over the track "play what you hear"

Volume 16 Turnarounds, Cycles, and ii/Vs – Let's use Track 1: Plain Old Turnaround (I – vi – ii – V or iii-vi-ii-V)

1. Sustain the roots (half notes) of each chord

2. 1-2-1-2 pattern (4 eighth notes per chord)
3. 1-3-5 patterns (2 eighths and 1 quarter note per chord)
4. 1-2-3-5 patterns (4 eighths on each chord)
5. Improvise over the track “play what you hear”

Volume 42 Blues in All Keys let’s use concert Bb

1. Sustain the roots of each chord
2. 1-3-5 patterns on each chord (root position triads)
3. 1-3-5-7 patterns on each chord
4. 3-5-1 (first inversion triads)
5. 5-1-3 (2nd inversion triads)
6. entire scale over each chord (for half note chords use 1-2-3-5 patterns)
7. improvise over track “play what you hear”

Simple Tunes in All Keys – play phrases from or entire tunes in all 12 keys

1. Row, Row, Row, Your Boat
2. Happy Birthday
3. Mary Had A Little Lamb
4. Twinkle Twinkle Little Star
5. Here Comes The Bride
6. When The Saints Go Marchin’ In

Start in a comfortable key. Progress upwards by ½ steps.

Volume 67 Tune Up!

Let’s select I Got Rhythm

1. Start by improvising in all keys.
2. See if you can play the melody to the first phrase or first 8 bars in all keys
3. Now start digging into the changes – start with sustaining the roots of each chord
4. Now 1-2-3 patterns, followed by 1-3-5 triadic patterns
5. Now 1-2-3-5 patterns (1-2-3-4-5-3-2-1 patterns for whole note duration chords)
6. Now 1-3-5-7 patterns (if the play-along track is too fast use a metronome at a slower speed)
7. Try 1st and 2nd inversion triads (3-5-1 patterns and 5-1-3 patterns)
8. Start improvising again, how does the work on #3-7 impact these choruses?

Seem KEY insights

Noted jazz saxophonist, educator and author Jerry Coker would seem an unlikely candidate for developing fluency in all keys. He is well-known as an extremely accomplished artist with a thorough knowledge of both traditional and contemporary jazz language materials. Yet Jerry Coker writes in his most recent publication *Keys Unlocked* the following assessment of his own recording of a bebop tune played in all twelve keys:

“My improvisation on the tune in the original key of concert Bb went smoothly, filled with quick, familiar lines shared by many other players. The result ½ step higher was very different. I didn’t play any wrong notes or fail to keep up on the road map (the form of the tune, but I perceived other serious shortcomings:

- (1) the rhythmic level (of the improvised lines) was generally at a slower pace
- (2) there were more spaces/rests
- (3) the note choices were simpler, less imaginative
- (4) triadic and pure scalar content were more commonplace, rather than chord extensions (9ths, 11ths, and 13ths)
- (5) there were far fewer instances of arbitrary altering chords and scales
- (6) passing chords of short duration were being omitted in favor of harmonic generalization
- (7) the melodic lines became what might be termed archaic
- (8) virtually all familiar substance (the types of lines and common practice devices readily apparent in the solo over the traditional home key) disappeared.”

Jerry Coker wanted to be able to improvise **equally well in all keys**. As a result of Jerry’s discovery he writes the following statement in his book:

Of all the potential elements of daily practice, I know of no more important element than twelve-key study of as many tunes as possible!

Concluding Thoughts – A List of Ten

1. I am incredibly inspired by the freedom and authority of the following improvisers: Louis Armstrong, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, JJ Johnson, Wes Montgomery, Charlie Christian, and others. The instrumental proficiency and command of the language of the music demonstrated by each artist shows clearly how freedom flows from discipline. For we know from interviews and written sources how seriously these artists practiced.
2. When Mutt Carey spoke about Louis Armstrong he stated the following: “I never knew the blues had so much music in it...it was a pleasure just to listen to Louis warm-up his horn.” It is amazing how your hearing and creativity expand as you acquire a more comprehensive technique.
3. Jazz pianist and master teacher Barry Harris speaks of how Coleman Hawkins practiced. He said Hawk would say “I practice motions.” When you practice scales and chords don’t forget to practice these over those common root progression motions such as chromatic, whole step, minor third, fourth cycles (ascending and descending).
4. Pianist Kenny Werner talks about the way technical practice sharpens his solo. He doesn’t want to sound like his practice, rather he likes the way he hears and creates when he does practice. The difference between good and

- great improvisers seems to be that ability to hear unexpected intervals and the facility to connect angular and asymmetrical phrases fluidly.
5. As you expand the number of scalar and chordal ideas you can play in all keys fluently, you will begin to feel the music in a performance setting “slow down.” By this I mean that you will retain the ability to allow the subconscious mind to be a part of the moment. Too few repetitions forces a player to THINK too hard about what to play next. The conscious mind can’t listen to the flow and collective sounds of the music...the subconscious mind remains open and responsive in the moment.
 6. Repetition is one of the strongest habits of the disciplined practicing musician. Try to conceive of the investing in your “onstage hearing and performing account.”
 7. Take a long term approach to acquiring, developing, and polishing technique. Select 1-2 items for each individual practice session. The repetition will carry over into other skill sets. If you have the capacity to view your jazz artistry as a lifestyle, you can begin to embrace the pleasure and joy of daily practice. Granting yourself the patience to improve and enjoy the slow and steady improvement is a wonderful gift to yourself.
 8. Don’t be surprised at how your transcribing skills will evolve as your technical skill sets expand and improve. Great players use the fundamentals in very creative and personal ways. The more you practice technique creatively and systematically, the more you will begin to hear the ideas and lines of players we wish to emulate.
 9. Alternate practice sessions: one day improvise early in the session before doing scalar and chordal work, one day hit the exercises before improvising. Monitor the outcomes.
 10. Improvise and play new tunes daily. Don’t get caught up feeling that there is a magical level of exercises that you MUST conquer before granting yourself privilege to enjoy soloing. Technique is a means to expression. Having a solid group of tunes under your belt provides you with an outlet to create and to enjoy playing with other musicians.