

# A GUIDE FOR PRACTICING ANY SCALE, CHORD, PATTERN OR IDEA

Improvisors' ultimate goal is to be able to reproduce instantly on their instrument the sounds they heard mini-seconds ago in their mind. To people who only read music, this may seem impossible. Nothing is impossible. This way of thinking has only led to the mysticism which at times clouds the horizon for those wishing to improvise.

A logical way to go about practicing is outlined below. You should also know the *chromatic scale* from the lowest note you can play to the highest.

## **The chromatic scale is our *musical alphabet*.**

The main purpose of this approach is to give you facility and independence which will allow you to be more spontaneous and creative.

Let's say you are working on a scale that is giving you trouble. Do this:

1. Play the scale from *root to the 9th* and back down slowly, slurred, several times. Then gradually increase tempo. (The 9th means the 9th note of the scale, also called the 2nd)
2. Play the *first five notes* up and down several times, gradually increasing tempo.
3. Play the *triad* up and down, slurred, gradually increasing tempo.
4. Play the *seventh chord* up and down, slurred, gradually increasing tempo.
5. Play the *ninth chord* up and down, slurred, gradually increasing tempo.
6. End by playing up the *scale to the ninth* and back down the *ninth chord*.
7. Or, end by playing up the *ninth chord* and then down the *scale*.

To see what these exercises will look like turn to either page 62 (treble clef) or 63 (bass clef).

**Note:** see page 26 for further suggestions when working on an actual song.

You may do these exercises with or without the recording. When playing with the recording you occasionally will have to alter your phrase lengths to match the chord progression of the recorded tracks.

The above exercises may be played with any note value you choose. It would be logical to begin at the level that is most comfortable for you. You may want to use a metronome so you can measure your progress. *8th notes are used in jazz more than any other note value.*

A beginner may want to start with *whole notes*. Someone who has been playing for six months may begin with *half notes* or even *quarter notes*. People who have been playing jazz and have several years on their instrument may be able to begin with *eighth notes* or even *sixteenth notes*. Most people play up and down each exercise several different times before moving to the next.

**"You're born with a spark...to search for the truth, for the best you can be. Practice. Discipline. Preparation. Try and try again. Then one day you're on top and they say you're an 'overnight success,' a 'natural.' You smile, you know."**

**Anonymous**

Whenever you are confronted with a new chord/scale progression, use the above method of practice to find where your weak spots are, then work on them as I have suggested. Keep in mind the tempo in which the chord/scale progression will eventually be played. Work toward that tempo in your practicing.

Exercises 1 through 7 above are written out under the heading **Ten Basic Patterns** on pages 62 and 63. **Note:** They are written primarily in sixteenth note values. Play them slowly at first and then gradually increase the tempo.

When you begin to tackle an actual chord progression such as blues, use this same method of attack to better equip yourself for improvising. Take each scale as it appears and work it through the various exercises until you feel comfortable with each note and fingering in each scale. A good way to begin practicing the blues would be to play the scale to the 9th of each chord symbol in the blues. Then, play the first five notes of each scale in the blues. Then play each triad. Then play each 7th chord, 9th chord, and finally, play up each scale and down each chord. See the chapter on Blues.

When practicing with the recorded blues tracks, you will have to modify some of the longer exercises such as up the scale and down the chord (or play them super fast) in order to fit them in.

As you gain proficiency with the scales and chords, you will stop playing certain simpler exercises such as the first five notes, or the triad, or the seventh chord, and dive right in running up the scale, and then down the chord, or vice versa. Eventually, you will just begin improvising because you will already **know** the scales and chords.

When you are working on a **pattern** or **lick**, use this same approach to iron-out the musical phrase. Take it note by note and gradually increase the tempo until you can **hear** you are reaching the desired tempo. Break the pattern down into small groups of notes so your fingers and mind can digest them more easily. As you begin feeling comfortable, add several notes to the phrase until you can play the entire pattern in one key. Make sure you have mastered the pattern or lick in one key before moving on to the next key. I like to move (practice) patterns up and down my instrument chromatically (in half-steps). Example: Play a C7 pattern then try it in C#7 then D7, etc. This is excellent ear training and does wonders for coordination among fingers, mind, and ear. The book and recording set *Gettin' It Together* (Vol. #21 in the play-a-long series) is designed for this kind of practice. Check it out.

Set aside a certain amount of time each day to work on mastering the scales and chords and patterns you need. They are your tools, your building blocks. Track 1 has three scale/chords, so that is where you should begin. Track 3 has seven chord/scales, but three of them are also in the previous track, so, you are really only learning four new scales.

*Remember*, when moving from one scale to another there are always one or more notes that are common. . . found in both scales. Learn to recognize them. These are called **common tones**.

By now, you are probably thinking. . . do jazz players really switch from one scale or chord to another that fast, without making mistakes? The answer is **YES!** And *you* can do it, too! The more familiar you become with the fingerings for the various scales, chords, and patterns, the quicker you will become at moving from one chord symbol to another and playing logical musical phrases in a connected, smooth manner. *A good improviser can often disguise a very difficult harmonic passage and make it seem simple. Repetition and sequence play an important role, too. They allow the listener to anticipate upcoming events. When listeners can anticipate, they enjoy the music more.*

If you approach practicing in an orderly, disciplined fashion your results will come much closer to your expectations. Jerry Coker's book "How To Practice Jazz" is a valuable resource. We all have the same twelve notes in the chromatic scale to work with. It's foolish to think that some "have it" and others don't. The ones that "have it" have made better use of the musical tools that surround us all and they have used them more constructively during each day's 24 hours.

**The famous altoist Charlie Parker practiced 11 to 15 hours a day for three to four years!**

**Make each new idea YOUR idea. Then use your imagination.**

**It's okay to feel good about going slowly and carefully through this material.  
Just don't give up!**

**The greatest solos all begin with a single note**

## **HOW TO BEGIN PLAYING WITH THE RECORDING**

After you feel comfortable with the flow of the rhythm section, having listened to one or more of the recorded tracks and followed the chord progression, get your instrument ready and let's begin the journey to improvisation. Turn to the proper chord/scale progression for TRACK #2 ("F minor, E flat minor, D minor"). Be sure you have the section that is for your instrument. See Table of Contents if you are not sure. Tune up with the concert Bb or A tuning note on the recording (Track #1).

**CONCERT INSTRUMENTS** Tuning note = Bb or A (keyboards, guitar, flute, violin & strings, harmonica)

*NOTE: All of the musical examples in this book are written in concert key.* This means that piano, guitar, flute, violin, and all other concert (treble clef) instruments can read the musical examples right out of this book along with the written text. Other instruments may have to transpose some material.

**Bb INSTRUMENTS** Tuning note = C or B (trumpet, tenor or soprano sax, cornet, clarinet)

If you play a trumpet, tenor or soprano sax, clarinet, cornet, or any other Bb instrument, use the transposed chord/scale progressions beginning on page 73. (The first 20 musical examples are transposed for you. They begin on page 78.)

**Eb INSTRUMENTS** Tuning note = G or F# (alto and baritone sax)

If you play an alto or baritone sax or Eb clarinet or any other Eb instrument, use the transposed chord/scale progressions beginning on page 83. (The first 20 musical examples are transposed for you. They begin on page 88.)

**BASS CLEF INSTRUMENTS** Tuning note = Bb or A (bass, trombone)

If you play trombone, bass, or tuba or any other bass clef instrument use the chord/scale progressions beginning on page 93. (The first 20 musical examples are written in Bass Clef beginning on page 98.)

# PREPARATORY EXERCISES - TREBLE CLEF

Below are several exercises every musician should memorize and be able to play in all MAJOR, MINOR (Dorian minor), and DOMINANT 7th keys. These are basic exercises which will help you gain speed and dexterity. Begin by practicing slowly, then gradually increase speed. Strive for smoothness and slur each exercise. Keyboard and string players should play legato. After you get the feel of several, consult the ARTICULATIONS chapter. These exercises are great for warming up each day. You can apply these to ANY scale or chord, regardless of quality. Due to space considerations, I have only listed three qualities.

(Learn the CHROMATIC SCALE from your lowest note to the highest)

**1** CHROMATIC SCALE ONE OCTAVE

**2** Major C△ FIRST 5 NOTES

**3** C△ FULL SCALE TO THE 9TH

**4** C△ ROOT, 3RD, 5TH (TRIAD)

**5** C△ 7TH CHORD (ROOT, 3RD, 5TH, 7<sup>th</sup>)

**6** C△ 9TH CHORD (ROOT, 3RD, 5TH, 7TH, 9TH)

**7** C△ 9TH CHORD ASCENDING & FULL SCALE DESCENDING (PLAY 4 TIMES)

**8** C△ FULL SCALE ASCENDING & NINTH CHORD DESCENDING (PLAY 4 TIMES)

**9** EXERCISES ON BLUES SCALE

**10** EXERCISES ON BLUES SCALE

Minor (DORIAN)

Dominant 7th

C- 9TH CHORD SCALE

C- 9TH CHORD SCALE

I strongly urge you to practice the above exercises, using as a guide any of the following root sequences to assure yourself of practice in all keys.

1. C Db D Eb E F F# G Ab A Bb B C
2. C F Bb Eb Ab Db Gb B E A D G C
3. C D E F# Ab Bb/ Db Eb F G A B Db
4. C Eb Gb A/ Db E G Bb/ D F Ab B
5. C B Bb A Ab G Gb F E Eb D Db C
6. C Eb Db E D F Eb Gb A G Bb Ab B A C

"Adults often have to fight their way back to intuition." - George Bouchard

# PREPARATORY EXERCISES - BASS CLEF

Below are several exercises every musician should memorize and be able to play in all MAJOR, MINOR (Dorian minor), and DOMINANT 7th keys. These are basic exercises which will help you gain speed and dexterity. Begin by practicing slowly, then gradually increase speed. Strive for smoothness and slur each exercise. Keyboard and string players should play legato. After you get the feel of several, consult the ARTICULATIONS chapter. These exercises are great for warming up each day. You can apply these to ANY scale or chord, regardless of quality. Due to space considerations, I have only listed three qualities.

**Major**                      **Minor**

**Dominant 7th**

1 CHROMATIC SCALE ONE OCTAVE

2 CA FIRST 5 NOTES

3 CA FULL SCALE TO THE 9TH

4 CA ROOT, 3RD, 5TH (TRIAD)

5 CA 7TH CHORD (ROOT, 3RD, 5TH, 7TH)

6 CA 9TH CHORD (ROOT, 3RD, 5TH, 7TH, 9TH)

7 CA 9TH CHORD ASCENDING & FULL SCALE DESCENDING (PLAY 4 TIMES)

8 CA FULL SCALE ASCENDING & 9TH CHORD DESCENDING (PLAY 4 TIMES)

9 EXERCISES ON BLUES SCALE

10

Jazz is creative. Creation involves change. How much are you willing to change?

- I strongly urge you to practice the above exercises, using as a guide any of the following root sequences to assure yourself of practice in all keys.
1. C D $\flat$  D E $\flat$  E F F $\sharp$  G A $\flat$  A B $\flat$  B C
  2. C F B $\flat$  E $\flat$  A $\flat$  D $\flat$  G $\flat$  B E A D G C
  3. C D E F $\sharp$  A $\flat$  B $\flat$ / D $\flat$  E $\flat$  F G A B D $\flat$
  4. C E $\flat$  G $\flat$  A/ D $\flat$  E G B $\flat$ / D F A $\flat$  B
  5. C B B $\flat$  A A $\flat$  G G $\flat$  F E E $\flat$  D D $\flat$  C
  6. C E $\flat$  D $\flat$  E D F E $\flat$  G $\flat$  E G F A G B $\flat$  A G B $\flat$  A B A C