

Unit 13: Improvising Music in a Jazz Style

Unit code:	H/600/6970
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to develop the ability of performing musicians to improvise in a range of jazz styles.

● Unit introduction

Improvisation is the composition of music in real time. Almost all styles of music feature some form of improvisation, but jazz music is almost entirely formed of improvisation, from the way a melody is played, to the musical structure, and everything in between. In order to improvise jazz successfully learners must first gain an understanding of the musical theory and harmony on which much of the traditional styles are based. Learners should do this by studying the performances of significant musicians.

It is essential that learners do not feel restricted by technical limitations when improvising jazz. They should, therefore, develop appropriate techniques as part of their personal practice routine and rehearsal schedule.

The performance of jazz improvisation usually takes place in a group context, but can be performed by a soloist in some situations. Learners should be encouraged to improvise stylistically appropriate contributions in a range of musical situations, as a natural part of their music making.

The emphasis of this unit is on improvisation across a range of musical styles. For learners who wish to study improvisation in a broader context *Unit 12: Improvising Music* can be offered as an alternative, or it can be studied in addition to this unit.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Understand the musical theory that underpins jazz improvisation across a range of styles
- 2 Be able to develop instrumental or vocal techniques appropriate for improvisation in jazz styles
- 3 Be able to improvise jazz music in response to a stimulus in contrasting styles
- 4 Be able to improvise jazz music responding to other musicians.

Unit content

1 Understand the musical theory that underpins jazz improvisation across a range of styles

Musical theory: scales; chords; modes; musical elements eg rhythm, melody, tonality, lyricism, altered and extended harmony; sonic trademarks eg instrumental tone, distortion of guitar amps, effects, synthesiser sounds, vocal effects

Stylistic interpretation: artistic phrasing and detail; appropriate stylistic requirements of the music eg note choice, groove, instrumentation, choice of musical equipment, use of effects, performance attitude

Styles: eg Dixieland, swing, bebop, straight-ahead, mainstream, hard bop, freeform, fusion, avant-garde, European

2 Be able to develop instrumental or vocal techniques appropriate for improvisation in jazz styles

Developing: types of rehearsal eg group rehearsal, personal practice, jamming sessions, workshops, master-classes

Techniques: eg working from lead sheets, solo breaks, extemporisation, phrasing, note choice, call and response, groove, instrumentation, choice of equipment

Styles: eg Dixieland, swing, bebop, straight-ahead, mainstream, hard bop, freeform, fusion, avant-garde, European

3 Be able to improvise jazz music in response to a stimulus in contrasting styles

Stimulus: sheet music eg lead sheet, written part, chord chart, real/fake book, score; aural stimulus eg rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, tonal, lyrical; sonic trademarks

Styles: eg Dixieland, swing, bebop, straight-ahead, mainstream, hard bop, freeform, fusion, avant-garde, European

4 Be able to improvise jazz music responding to other musicians

Responding to other musicians: communication eg call and response, imitation, interplay, counterpoint; collective musical decisions eg choosing material, choosing key signature, tempo, dynamics, structural decisions

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 explain the musical theory that underpins jazz improvisation across a range of styles [IE, RL, SM]	M1 illustrate the musical theory that underpins jazz improvisation across a range of styles	D1 analyse the musical theory that underpins jazz improvisation across a range of styles
P2 develop instrumental or vocal techniques appropriate for improvisation in jazz styles [CT, RL, SM, EP]	M2 develop instrumental or vocal techniques appropriate for improvisation in jazz styles competently	D2 develop instrumental or vocal techniques appropriate for improvisation in jazz styles with confidence and flair
P3 improvise jazz music in response to a stimulus in contrasting styles [CT, RL, TW, SM]	M3 improvise jazz music in response to a stimulus in contrasting styles competently	D3 improvise jazz music in response to a stimulus in contrasting styles with confidence and flair
P4 improvise jazz music responding to other musicians. [CT, RL, TW, SM]	M4 improvise jazz music responding to other musicians competently.	D4 improvise jazz music responding to other musicians with confidence and flair.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers CT – creative thinkers	RL – reflective learners TW – team workers	SM – self-managers EP – effective participators
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Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

The majority of this unit should be delivered through practical opportunities. Learners will need to attend regular rehearsals, jamming sessions and workshops as well as final performances, where appropriate. Tutors will need to guide learners in the formation of ensembles and the selection of appropriate material to ensure the continuous development of technique and musicality. To ensure learners perform material in a range of styles, tutors must ensure that they are guided as to the opportunities available, for example a series of performances themed around different styles, preceded by structured rehearsals/workshops and supported by personal practice.

When delivering this unit, tutors will be faced with the task of ensuring that a range of instrumentalists and vocalists can work alongside each other. Tutors are encouraged to give learners a wide range of stylistic examples of jazz improvisation that clearly display defining stylistic characteristics.

Tutors should ensure that learners are exposed to working musicians as much as possible to appreciate of the importance of improvisation in this genre of music. Workshops and/or master classes should be provided so that visiting musicians can have a direct influence on the development of this aspect of learners' musicianship.

It is important that the tutor directs learners and focuses their development and performances on key detail, and it would be beneficial to concentrate on stylistic authenticity in every aspect of improvisation. The tutor will need to set parameters and guide learners towards a selection of jazz styles. Each learning outcome reflects the importance of 'range', and this must be carefully controlled with reference to the assessment guidance.

Learners are required to recognise, and therefore gain an understanding of, the key stylistic elements of jazz improvisation in each jazz style they study. One way of doing this is to listen to examples so that learners understand the 'sound' of improvisation in each style. They can then separate each element of the piece, eg separating rhythmic devices from melodic devices, and from instrumentation and effects, which will allow them to see how the elements combine to make the improvisation recognisable as representative of the style.

Learners are not obliged to treat learning outcome 1 as an entirely theoretical exercise preceding any practical work. The analysis that learners perform as a natural part of the work they carry out for learning outcome 2 could form the basis for the work required for learning outcome 1.

For the development of appropriate technique, as well as scales, arpeggios and generic exercises, tutors should provide learners with a selection of specific improvisations to recreate as musical studies. This gives learners opportunities for learners to work on their technical skills in order to recreate what they hear. This technique and the accompanying knowledge of musical theory can then be applied when improvising in practical workshops or jamming sessions.

Learners are required to improvise in a manner that is stylistically accurate to the genre. This may be achieved by working with either existing or original material. There are several ways in which learners may develop material. For example, they may aurally analyse a piece and then develop stylistically accurate improvisations within a group context. Alternatively, learners may develop original material but again the improvisation should be in the style of the chosen style. Peer identification and feedback of the material produced would be one way of identifying whether learners have developed something that is stylistically accurate. This process should be supplemented by structured personal practice.

Learners will be required to demonstrate that they have reached a standard where they can contribute improvisations in a performance situation and in more than one jazz style without the need for lengthy rehearsals. It is likely that this will take place towards the end of the course, where learners have developed appropriate skills through personal practice and rehearsals/workshops. Solo performances can be given but it should be noted that group performance is also required to meet learning outcome 4.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to the programme and structure of the programme of learning.
Understanding the musical theory that forms the foundation of jazz improvisation – learning outcome 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifying styles analysing recordings analysing performances from video identifying theory and harmonic elements analysing stylistic interpretation.
Assignment 1: Jazz Theory and Harmony – P1, M1, D1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners to prepare written work/presentations. Learners to give presentations, if appropriate.
Developing techniques for improvisation – learning outcome 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal practice (unguided) – 20 hours rehearsals (unguided) – 20 hours rehearsals/workshops (guided) – 10 hours.
Assignment 2: Preparing to Improvise Jazz – P2, M2, D2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observed rehearsal/workshops.
Improvising in performance – learning outcomes 3 and 4; rehearsal (not assessed) events could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recording sessions workshops live events (solo and group performance),
Assignment 3: Improvising Jazz in Contrasting Styles; observed events could include P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recording sessions. Workshops. Live events (solo and group performance).

Assessment

This unit requires the musician to actually play or sing, and create improvisations in the chosen styles. Written work should be minimised. Performance situations can be many and varied but it should be remembered that it is the practical understanding of jazz improvisation and the supporting stylistic detail that is being assessed rather than performance skills, which are examined in other units. Therefore, a technically successful improvisation that bears little relation to the genre of the chosen piece will not achieve the higher grades.

The practical evidence required for this unit will be generated by practice, rehearsal and performances of material from different genres. The assessment could take place during classroom activity, workshops, rehearsals, and personal practice, as well as during a public performances or studio-based recording sessions. The practical assignments should be recorded or captured on video to provide the required evidence.

Learning outcome 1 could be evidenced through a written report, and with the development of computer software for this purpose. However, the nature of evidence required for higher grades suggests that giving a recorded oral presentation using suitable software might be a more appropriate method of assessment. It is up to the course leader to decide the most appropriate option for the learning styles of each cohort. For P1, learners will provide simple unelaborated explanations of the musical theory and harmony that lies at the foundation of jazz improvisation. To satisfy the requirement for a 'range', learners should be asked to provide evidence for three jazz styles. It is not, however, necessary to prove that the theory behind each style is exclusive to that style, as this is not the case. In fact, it is more likely that learners may provide links between styles based on theory and harmony. To meet M1, they will elaborate their explanations with reference to suitable examples. For D1, learners will analyse the relative importance of each example component, and the contribution it makes to the style from which it is taken. Cross-referencing to other genres could also be used to support their arguments.

Learning outcomes 2 and 3 require learners to demonstrate that they know and can perform the fundamental elements of the improvisation in the styles studied, and can reproduce the essence of them in a practical context.

Learning outcome 2 requires learners to take part in workshops or jamming sessions. If a workshop approach is used, this may be led by a visiting musician or the tutor. Whether a workshop or jamming session is used, the following key points must be addressed for assessment purposes:

- the session must be captured on video
- each learner must have the opportunity to improvise.

To meet P2 the evidence will show that learners have developed stylistically appropriate techniques for improvisation over the course of time through personal practice and participation on workshops/ rehearsals. The use of the word 'contrasting' in the learning outcome/grading criteria implies that a minimum of two contrasting styles should be developed. Merit level learners' contributions to rehearsals/ workshops will be competently developed and clearly recognisable as examples of the chosen genres. Distinction level learners will contribute to the workshop or jamming session confidently in a way that is stylistically accurate and shows musical flair. Their contribution will show they have understood the finer performance details of improvisation in the chosen styles.

To meet learning outcome 3, learners will demonstrate that they can improvise in a performance situation, given the stimulus appropriate to the chosen style (for example calling a tune known by ear, using a lead sheet, working with a motif played by another band member, and so on). Capturing on video is the most effective way to evidence this outcome

Performance situations could include studio-based recording sessions and live performances. Where the learning outcome refers to 'contrasting styles' this should be taken as a minimum of two. To meet P3, the evidence will show that learners have contributed improvisations to each performance situation in a way that did not detract from the overall effect. Evidence for M3 will show that learners' contributions are clearly recognisable as examples of the chosen style, demonstrating appropriate 'substance' (duration and musical content). To achieve D3, learners will have a confidence of improvisational musical skills to a degree where they can contribute to each performance with creativity and flair.

It is likely (but not essential) that learning outcome 4 will be met in the same performance situation(s) as learning outcome 3, and they are easily combined into a single assignment. To meet learning outcome 4 the evidence will show that the learner is interacting with other musicians, and it is possible to separate the two learning outcomes by setting up separate solo and group improvisation performance opportunities. To meet P4, the learner will be responding to other musicians while improvising in a way that does not detract from the performance. An improvisation that evidences clear communication with other musicians in a way that is beneficial to the performance will meet M4. To meet D4 the improvisation will demonstrate imagination, flair and creativity with a confident level of communication between musicians.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Pearson assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1	Jazz Theory and Harmony	Analyse improvisations from a range of jazz styles (minimum of three) identifying musical elements and interpretive devices that define each style.	Written piece or individual presentation to include audio examples.
P2, M2, D2	Preparing to Improvise Jazz	Personal practice and group rehearsals are required to prepare for performance (see P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4 below).	Evidence to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> video evidence of rehearsal.
P3, M3, D3 P4, M4, D4	Improvising Jazz in Contrasting Styles	Participate in one or more performances in which learners will improvise in contrasting (at least two) jazz styles. Alternatively, this assignment could be split into a solo performance (P3, M3, D3) and a group performance (P4, M4, D4).	Evidence to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> video evidence of performance.

Links to other BTEC units

This unit forms part of the BTEC Music and Music Technology sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Music and Music Technology suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
		Music Performance Techniques
		Pop Music in Practice
		Working and Developing as a Musical Ensemble
		Live Music Workshop
		Improvising Music
		Solo Music Performance Skills

Essential resources

Learners will need access to adequate practice and rehearsal facilities, with instruments and equipment of suitable quality, where learners do not supply them. Opportunities for workshops and/or master classes will need to be provided, with a reasonable timescale that fits the delivery of the unit. An appropriate range of workshops/master classes and jamming/rehearsal opportunities will need to be provided to cater for the needs and interests of the whole group. Where facilities do not exist within the institution to offer a range of performance situations, arrangements will need to be made with external organisations such as theatres and recording studios in order to provide a suitable range of performance situations.

Classroom resources that allow the viewing of video material and monitoring of audio examples, together with suitable word-processing or presentation software will also be needed. Access to a wide range of historically and culturally important music (as audio and video resources) will also be needed.

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS)

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	analysing improvisations in various styles
Creative thinkers	improvising in rehearsal and performance
Reflective learners	monitoring their own progress when practising
Team workers	rehearsing with others
Self-managers	organising a personal practice routine
Effective participators	rehearsing with others.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	researching different styles of improvisation
Creative thinkers	developing practice routines for improvisation
Reflective learners	responding to feedback from instrumental tutors
Team workers	planning performance repertoire
Self-managers	organising rehearsals
Effective participators	playing in a recording session.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Find and select information	
Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task	preparing written piece/presentation
Access, search for, select and use ICT-based information and evaluate its fitness for purpose	preparing written piece/presentation
ICT – Develop, present and communicate information	
Enter, develop and format information independently to suit its meaning and purpose including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • text and tables • images • numbers • records 	preparing written piece/presentation
Bring together information to suit content and purpose	preparing written piece/presentation
Present information in ways that are fit for purpose and audience	preparing written piece/presentation
Evaluate the selection and use of ICT tools and facilities used to present information	preparing written piece/presentation
Select and use ICT to communicate and exchange information safely, responsibly and effectively including storage of messages and contact lists	preparing written piece/presentation
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	taking an active role in discussions at rehearsals
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	preparing written piece.