

As Soloist:

- 1) Accurate/consistent time keeping is the most important skill to master: it allows you to plan your rhythm in advance and then fill in the notes as you go along so you do not have to think about so many things as you solo. It also lets you focus more on note selection and not be distract by trying to stay in time, giving you less to think about in the moment.

Accurate and consistent time also keeps you in sync with the other people you are playing with, and makes you sound better to the audience. Always remember that rhythm, unlike melody or harmony, creates a very strong physical sensation. People don't tap their feet or dance to the notes, they do so to the rhythm and they do so in time. The audience hears notes but *feels* time and rhythm.

The point of time keeping exercises like the diminishing click is that you are learning to feel the "big beat" (accents on the level of the half note and whole note) that marks the beginning of every measure (or every two measures). Listening for the big beat while you improvise is an important tool in helping you figure out where you are. Eventually you will learn to feel the higher level rhythmic accents that mark larger units like sections in AABA form'.

-In addition to feeling these large beats, your goal is also to create these as improviser and accompanist. The accompanist typically uses big beats to mark the beginnings and endings of phrases and sections. The accompanist also uses big beats on the level of the half note and the whole note to mark the changing of chords (chords normally change every half measure (half note) or every whole measure (whole note)). This helps the soloist hear/feel the chord changes.

For the improviser, nailing the changes is not just matching the correct note with the correct chords, it also has a rhythmic component. You need to create "big beats" in your improvised melody on the level of the half and whole note and at the beginnings of sections that align with the large accents (big beats) being created by the pianist. This ensures that your solo "rhythmically aligns" with the pianists accompaniment.

- 2) Rhythmic structures: The following are the most common structures, and it is easier to understand them when they are compared to written language.

Sub Phrases, similar to parts of sentences: 2 measures, 3 measures, 4 measures.

Phrases, similar to sentences: 4 measures and 8 measures.

Forms, similar to paragraphs: 12 measures, 16 measures, 32 measures.

Performances, similar to musical essays: playing a song and then improvising over a its form several times, to continue our analogy to written language, is similar to writing a musical essay by combining paragraphs. The song is a paragraph, each time the melody is played or the chords improvised over it is like writing paragraphs, and those paragraphs are taken together and when the performance is finished and heard as a musical essay.

- 3) Your goal as a soloist is to create arches in the melody and in the dynamics in each phrase (and even between phrases or sections of music). Your improvised melody and its dynamic contour should go up and down or down and up within the phrase you are on.
- 4) Content of your phrases: slow, quiet, lower pitch, silences/breaths and less dramatic material should come at beginning of your solo. Faster, more dramatic, flashy, and high pitch material with less breaths/silences should come at the end of your solo. Thus your solo starts somewhere and ends somewhere different. This creates narrative to the solo and a sense of drama.

5) rhythmic structure: outline sub phrases 2, 3, and 4 measures (and sometimes 8 measures for longer musical thoughts) with long notes or breaths (breaths means no sound, pauses) at beginnings and ends of the sub phrases. Place faster/rapid passages within the sub phrases in between the long notes and breaths that mark the beginnings and endings of sub phrases and phrases. This will create an outline for each phrase and provides structure to your solo for the listener. The sub phrases get shorter breaths between them than the full phrases. This helps articulate the greater significance of beginnings and endings of phrases in relation to sub phrases.

You can also stick with a single melodic and rhythmic idea (motive, or in jazz “riff”) for a phrase, even modifying it only slightly and continuing it for an additional phrase or phrases. When not using a riff, you will often want a contrast between phrases or sub phrases. If you had a really fast idea in sub phrase 1, use sustained longer notes or more breaths to balance it out in the following sub phrase. The same can be done on the level of the phrase. This creates a kind of dialogue or call and response between phrases or sub phrases. You can also think of it as a kind of musical question and answer.

You group sub phrases of 2 and 4 measures in many ways to create 4 or 8 measure phrases (1+1=2) (2+2=4) (4+4=8). Depending on the speed of the piece and the way you structure your solo you can also have 2 or 16 measure phrases, depending on how you look at it. most important is that you are thinking structurally about your improvisation, the labels to your structure and the structure you choose are secondary and part of the experience..

You shape your rhythmic phrasing, melodic contour, and dynamics based on how you decide to create phrases with the sub phrases. So, for example, your melody might rise in 2 measures and fall in the subsequent 2 measures (creating a 4 measure phrase). Alternatively, your melody can rise over the course of 4 measures and fall over the course of the following 4 measures, creating an 8 measure phrase. You may also use slower notes in the first 4 measures and faster notes in the last 4 measures, creating narrative to your solo within that phrase.

You create rhythmic variety in your improvised solos by using a rhythmic pattern inside each sub phrase or phrase and then changing what pattern you use as you move on to another sub phrase or phrase. Usually you do this in groups of four measures (or 8 for larger rhythmic ideas). So once you establish a rhythmic pattern within a 4 measure phrase/sub phrase, you maintain it for that 4 measures of your solo. When you get to the next 4 measure phrase/sub phrase you can change what rhythmic pattern you are emphasizing in your solo. This creates clear divisions and a sense of form or “musical grammar/syntax” to your improvisation while also creating variety.

Thinking even more big picture, you may choose in the context of a 32 bar form to start with slow, low pitched, mellow improvisations, gradually build the piece by increasing the amount of rapid notes, high pitches, and your volume throughout, and then saving your most rapid, high pitched, high volume dramatic material in your improvised solo for the last 8 measures, giving the larger form a sense of narrative and structure.

As Accompanist:

- 1) Your primary role is to make the soloist sound better, be they singer or instrumentalist, and both in the context of improvising and playing the written melody. You do this by maintaining consistent time, appropriate rhythm to the style you are performing, good chord voicings and voice leading that facilitate the soloists singer or instrumentalist, and by articulating the form of the piece with the rhythmic patterns you use in your accompaniment.
- 2) Chord voicings should facilitate singing (if you can't sing over the chords you are using, your singer probably cant either and it may be harder for your improvising soloist to create a good solo).
- 3) Within each 4, 8 or 16 measure phrase (depending on the structure of the piece), keep a consistent rhythmic pattern in your accompaniment. You change accompaniment patterns to articulate the form and changes within the form.
- 4) So, in a 32 bar form with an AABA structure (very common in jazz), it is typical to maintain a consistent rhythmic pattern in your strumming for all the A sections, and change it for the B sections. An example of this in jazz is free comping in the A sections and Freddie Green comping in the B section. This approach creates a rhythmic structure for the audience to hold on to and allows them to more clearly hear and understand the form and when it changes. This also gives the soloist a structure to work with and helps them know where they are at.
- 5) This Also provides a rhythmic narrative to the piece. By changing the rhythm in your accompaniment at the B section and then returning to the original accompaniment pattern at the reprise of the A section, you help the soloist and listener hear the form change to the B section and then the return to the A section. It creates a rhythmic narrative and sense of drama to the song.
- 6) Remember, think macro when you are thinking about changing your accompaniment's rhythmic pattern. Keeping a rhythmic pattern for an entire A section or multiple A sections might seem boring or pedestrian, but in reality its not as much time as you might think, and for the audience and the soloist it can make the music a lot easier to understand. You are not the soloist when you are accompanist, and you are not the primary voice people are listening to in the music. Your goal is to HELP the soloist and make the music enjoyable for the audience. You are "playing the band" when you are an accompanist, not your instrument.
- 7) MAKE SURE YOU ARE QUIETER THAN THE SOLOIST
- 8) Always be listening to the soloist. Don't just strum away and space out. You should be able to remember specific parts of their solo because you are listening. Listening will also help you create a musical dialogue between you and the soloist. Look at the soloist so they know you are following. For sure look up and not at your instrument, always listen to everyone.