

How To Dress Up "Naked Music" On The Piano

What in the world is "naked music?"

You know it when you hear it, but the words that describe it sound strange, don't they? We've all heard of popular music and rock music and gospel music and jazz music, but naked music?

Naked music is simply the notes on a piece of sheet music. It's "naked" - not dressed up or arranged at all. No fills, no slurs, none of the ingredients that make a song come to life.

Not a single professional musician plays the music exactly as it appears on a piece of sheet music. Instead, they use the written music as a map, or an outline, and then proceed to do their own thing with it. They twist it, bend it, add to it, subtract from it, put fills in it, change the key, change the words, change some of the melody notes, and on and on.

So when you hear your favorite artist perform a piece of music, if you look at the written sheet music while they are performing it, you will see it is MUCH different and MUCH better than the plain old "naked music!"

So how can the average musician dress up naked music? There are many ways, but here are seven of my favorites:

1. Change the chords slightly by adding color tones. What are color tones? Color tones are notes added to the basic chord, usually expressed as 6ths, 7ths, 9ths, etc. For example, instead of playing just a straight C chord as it is written - C, E, G - try adding a color tone to it, such as a 6th (A) or a 7th (Bb) or a major 7th (B) or a 9th (D). In fact, try adding a couple together, like a 6th and a 9th. So instead of being a plain vanilla chord made up of C, E, and G, you've made it a tasty variation adding A and D to the equation.

2. During the pause between phrases, add a counter melody. How? Take the given melody notes and turn them upside down or inside out, or change the rhythm slightly so the tune is still recognizable, but different.

3. Add chord substitutions. Instead of always using the chords that are written, ask yourself this question: "Into what other chord will this melody note fit?" For example, if the melody is G and the chord is C, what other chords contain the note G in them? There are several answers to that question. G is not only in the C chord, but it is also in the Em chord, the Eb major chord, the G chord, the Gm chord, etc. Try one of those alternate chords until you like the sound combination, then use it instead of the C chord. It will add an originality and freshness to your playing almost immediately.

4. Add fills and runs between phrases. How do you do that? Simply break up the chord that is in force at the moment, and run it up the keyboard as a broken chord - one note at a time. Or start at the top of the keyboard and come down. Or play with the chord a bit by playing 2 of the 3 notes instead of the entire 3 note chord.

5. Use melodic echos. After you have played the melody, echo it by playing it an octave higher, or two octaves higher, or an octave lower.

6. Use half-step slides. If the chord progression is from D7 to G7, instead of going to G7 directly, "slide into it" by playing the chord that is one-half step above - namely, Ab7, then quickly sliding off Ab7 to G7.

7. Use "blue notes." Blue notes are created by sliding off a black key onto a white key quickly. For example, if the melody is E, slide off Eb to E quickly using the same finger.

This is just a tiny sampling of what you can do to dress up your music. There are literally hundreds of other techniques, from pseudo-modulations to inside blues moves to deceptive cadences to tremolos to twangs to crunches to straddles to 3-1 breakups to walk-downs and walk-ups and on and on.

By simply adding a few of these techniques to your playing you can easily double and triple the excitement created by your piano playing as you "dress up naked music!"

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