

## Improvising On The Piano: Jazz Musicians Do It -- Why Not Other Styles?

Why jazz piano improvisation?

Why not gospel piano improvisation?

Is it not possible to improvise classical music, or sacred music, or any other kind of music?

Bach improvised many of his fugues and inventions while playing organ in church. Many others in all musical styles have improvised within the context of their own persuasion. So why study improvised jazz? Why not study improvised classical music, or improvised gospel music?

The answer is access.

Jazz piano improvisation is so much more accessible than is improvisation in other areas. Some classical pianists do improvise, but at performances they are generally expected to play Chopin or Debussy or Mozart, rather than to make up their own music. There are gospel pianists who do improvise, but the expectation of their listeners is not primarily to hear music created on the spot.

But the expectations of an audience of jazz fans is expressly to hear music created extemporaneously, without benefit of written score. And so jazz, far more than any other musical style to date, has become the music of improvisation. Not because there is anything inherent in the tunes jazz musicians play that calls for improvisation, but because of the expectation of improvisation that has built up over the years.

This fact makes it possible for an interested observer to study jazz improvisation like he could study no other kind of improvisation. He has easy access to concerts, recordings, transcriptions of jazz recordings, and even local jam sessions. When can he attend a classical concert and be sure of hearing music improvised? When can he attend church with assurance that the pianist will improvise? But with jazz, his sources are many and are readily available.

Can the principles derived from jazz improvisation be applied to other musical styles?

Of course.

Every pianist uses the same 88 notes of the keyboard. All music consists of some kind of melody, some kind of harmony, some kind of rhythm. Elements from one style can be transplanted to another style; in fact, this is happening all the time. Notice lately how much of contemporary pop music is flavored with elements from jazz, country-western, and even classical music. Cross-pollinization of styles abounds in contemporary music.

So improvisation can be studied by the student of classical music, the church pianist, the worship team keyboardist, the new-age pianist, the country-western piano player, and any other style of music. The benefits and rewards of learning to improvise on the piano are enormous.

So next time you see or hear a jazz pianist play, pay close attention to what she or he is doing. Ask yourself what's going on musically -- what chords and chord progressions are being used, what rhythms are in play, and how the tune of a song is being altered as the pianist improvises the melody line.

Then go home and apply what you've learned to your style of music. You'll be surprised how much you can learn by simply observing and then applying what you've seen and heard to your own playing

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

### About the Author

Duane Shinn is the author of the popular free 101-week online e-mail newsletter titled "Amazing Secrets Of Exciting Piano Chords & Sizzling Chord Progressions - Intelligent Piano Lessons For Adults Only!" available at <http://www.playpiano.com> with over 84,400 current subscribers.