

Left Hand Workout

By
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Most Jazz pianists have more flexibility in the right hand compared to the left. The reason being that we spend countless hours practicing the melodic jazz language in the right hand while the left is taking care of the comping. I would also like to point out that more attention should be paid to the left hand comping, which is often sloppy. The left hand, when played with rhythmical and harmonic perfection, will add a tremendous amount to the overall sound of a solo. In other words, we tend to develop different techniques in the left and right hand. In a perfect world it would be nice to have equal technique in both hands which classical players seems to manage much better than jazz players.

When fluent in the left hand, new musical options become available. Add rhythmic independence to the picture and you will be close to technical perfection, which means that all the concentration can be focused on the creative part of the music. One of the best lessons in jazz piano technique is to listen to Art Tatum. His technical perfection was totally unique and he influenced not only pianists, but all jazz instrumentalists.

How to practice:

1. You have to think about the left hand as a separate entity. If you duplicate something that you play in the right hand you have to think of it as a new quest when played in the left. **Since the left hand is a mirror image of the right, new fingering is necessary.**
2. Practice transcribed solos with the left hand. When you feel comfortable, try a simple accompaniment in the right hand.
3. When playing unison lines, make the right hand follow the left. If you do it the other way around the left hand tends to become sloppy, since you are probably more efficient in the right.
4. Write two part Jazz Inventions. Also try to get to the point where you can improvise two independent lines at the same time.
5. If you have read these articles before, you know that I highly recommend practicing classical music. Practicing Bach music is a very useful tool to help achieve technique in the left hand. Also, the music of Bach is beautiful so it should be played for that reason as well.

Etude #1

Practice this etude like this:

1. Play the left hand slowly together with a metronome. Take a few moments to work out a good fingering. The key to speed on the piano is well planned fingering.
2. As you get comfortable, increase the speed and play the etude relaxed and controlled.
3. Add the right hand. You will find out how much easier it is to play both hands together when you know the material in the left hand.
4. Increase speed in both hands

The musical score for Etude #1 is written in 4/4 time and consists of three systems of piano and bass staves. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The first system includes chords F7, Bb7, and F7. The second system includes chords Bb7, F7, Am7(b5), and D7(b9). The third system includes chords Gm7, C7, Am7(b5), D7(b9), Gm7, and C7. The score features a consistent eighth-note pattern in the left hand and a more complex melodic line in the right hand, with several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over the notes) in both hands.

Etude #2

Practice this etude like etude 1. When you are comfortable with the notes, try to create a counter melody based on the chord changes. You can also practice comping in your right hand while soloing in the left. This will create some new and interesting musical material. Also practice improvising a counter line. This might sound complicated, but after your hands have become independent the two line improvisation will be much easier

Chords: C⁶ Fm⁹ B^b9 C⁶ A7^b13

System 1: Measures 1-4. Treble clef: C⁶, Fm⁹, B^b9, C⁶, A7^b13. Bass clef: eighth notes with triplets.

Chords: Dm⁹ G7^b13 Em7(^b5) A7^b13 Dm⁹ G13(^b9)

System 2: Measures 5-8. Treble clef: Dm⁹, G7^b13, Em7(^b5), A7^b13, Dm⁹, G13(^b9). Bass clef: eighth notes with triplets.

Chords: C⁶ Fm⁹ B^b9 C⁶ A7^b13

System 3: Measures 9-12. Treble clef: C⁶, Fm⁹, B^b9, C⁶, A7^b13. Bass clef: eighth notes with triplets.

Chords: Dm⁹ G13 C⁶ B9

System 4: Measures 13-16. Treble clef: Dm⁹, G13, C⁶, B9. Bass clef: eighth notes with triplets.

Chords: Emin7 F⁺m7(^b5) B7^b13 Em⁹ A13 A7^b13

System 5: Measures 17-20. Treble clef: Emin7, F⁺m7(^b5), B7^b13, Em⁹, A13, A7^b13. Bass clef: eighth notes with triplets.

Dmin9 Em 7(b5) A7b13 Dmin9 G13

c8 Fmin7 Bb9 c8 3 A7b13

Dmin7 G7b13 Em 7(b5) A7b13 3 Dmin9 G7(b9)

c8

Good Luck!

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