

# Improvisation? Yes, anyone can improvise!

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## Improvisation? Yes, anyone can Improvise

## Beginning Improvisation

Improvisation in music is just like a conversation. In a conversation we need to know the alphabet then words and then put those words into sentences.

So, in music we need to know the notes, then scales and arpeggios, and then how to put them into phrases.

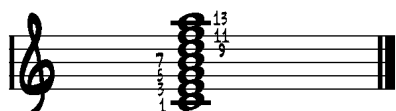
The 1<sup>st</sup> step we're going to take is to learn our Major scale and arpeggio.

There are many ways to learn scales. At Jazzworx we have found it best to use the "Musical Alphabet". The "Musical Alphabet" uses the first seven letters of the alphabet **A B C D E F G**. It is also important to learn the "musical alphabet" as **G F E D C B A** and being able to recite from any given letter.

C Major Scale has no flats or sharps and therefore it's musical alphabet starts on C and ends on C e.g. **C D E F G A B C**. The C Major Arpeggio is every second letter of the "Musical Alphabet" e.g. **C E G**.

In Jazz harmony the "extensions" of the Scale get used frequently. These extensions are the 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> degree of scale), 11<sup>th</sup> (4<sup>th</sup> degree of scale) 13<sup>th</sup> (6<sup>th</sup> degree of scale). The reason they use these "extension notes" instead of just calling it "the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree of the scale" is when we stack all the arpeggio notes of the scale on top of each other it is numerically sequential with odd numbers. These extensions also get used in classical harmony but aren't notated the same.

In C Major, the full arpeggio (with extensions) are,



So, to learn the extensions is easy. Just take the musical alphabet and skip every second letter until you get back to where you started. **C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C**.

Learn the scale and arpeggio to the ninth in 8<sup>th</sup> notes. This puts the scale into a 4 bar phrase and you don't have to repeat any notes e.g.



Rhythmically alter the Major Scale. Do this process a number of times until you feel you have exhausted all possibilities. Make sure that you stick to the order of the scale, without skipping or adding any notes.



That is the 1<sup>st</sup> step of improvisation. You have had to be creative with getting up and down the scale using your own rhythms. The only boundary here is that we made you use these notes in this order.

The next step is to make up your own rhythms, using any of the notes from the scale, in any order you wish.



Now we can come back to the Improvisation Vs Conversation idea. You can think of different punctuation marks musically. The “full-stop” is used at the end of a sentence. We can think of the “full-stop” as the root note of the key. So, at the end of a phrase work your way back to the root note to finish the phrase. The “comma” can be used in line with the 5<sup>th</sup>. It doesn’t have to end the phrase but can keep the phrase going from one phrase to another.

The next main issue is 4 bar phrasing. The trick of 4 bar phrases is an invaluable tool to learn as 99% of western music moves in 4 bar phrases. Basically a 4 bar phrase will end at the start of the 4<sup>th</sup> bar, and the rest of the 4<sup>th</sup> bar we need space to get prepared for the next phrase. So, when improvising in one key make sure to keep to 4 bar phrases.

We now need to do the same process in all of our Major scales. The Jazzworx Improvisation CD’s takes 1 key at a time e.g. C Major, then to F Major, then joins the 2 keys together in 4 bars so that you can get used to making chord changes e.g. C & F Major.

## Western Harmony made easy!

In western music there are 12 notes. These notes, arranged in semi-tones or half –steps make up an octave (C, C#, D, D#, E, F, F#, G, G#, A, A#, B)



These notes arranged a perfect 4<sup>th</sup> from each other make the Circle of 4ths.  
C F Bb Eb Ab Db F# B E A D G.



The circle of 4ths is essential in learning about western harmony. And we are going to see how everything evolves from the circle of 4ths.








When thinking of our “Modes” we are taught, the names, the notes and how they relate to the Major scale. What we don’t always learn is how this gets used in harmony. The diagram below shows the main way in which the modes get taught.

Ionian (Major)	
Dorian (Minor)	
Phrygian (Minor)	
Lydian (Major)	
Mixolydian (Major/Dominant)	
Aeolian (Minor)	
Locrian (Minor/Diminished)	

What we don’t always get taught is (a) each of these modes has chord symbols and (b) how to use them in harmony.

The confusing thing about teaching the modes only in this way, is, that it is hard to recognise the difference between each of the modes as there is technically 3 Major modes and 4 minor modes. If we work out the chord symbol for each mode we can recognise exactly which mode is being used.

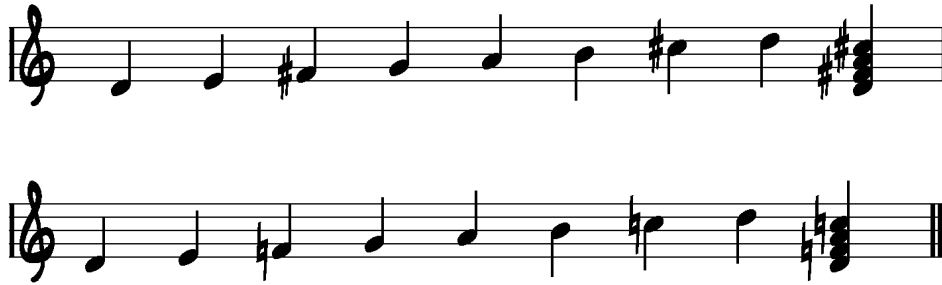
Below is the same diagram with the chord symbols and all extensions.

Ionian (Major)	
Dorian (Minor)	
Phrygian (Minor)	
Lydian (Major)	
Mixolydian (Major/Dominant)	
Aeolian (Minor)	
Locrian (Minor/Half- Diminished)	

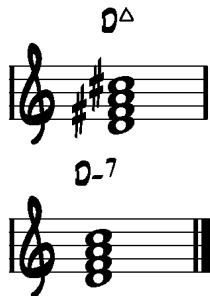
### Chord Symbols

All chord symbols are worked out in comparison to there Major scale e.g. The difference between C Major (triad) and C Minor (triad) is that the 3<sup>rd</sup>, E is

flattened to Eb. So therefore the difference between D Major and D Dorian Minor is that the 3<sup>rd</sup> F# and 7<sup>th</sup> C# is flattened to F and C natural.

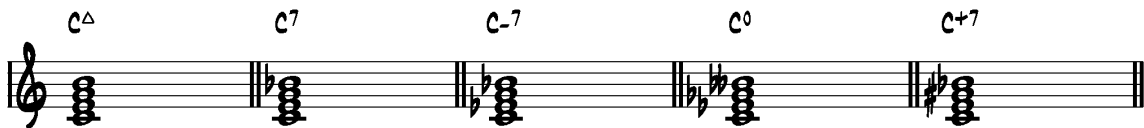


This can be differentiated by a chord symbol.



We know that D Dorian comes from C Major so therefore has no flats or sharps. We can now see, with the chord symbol that the difference between D Major and D Dorian Minor is a flattened 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. Use this as an exercise for the rest of the modes i.e. compare them to there Major scales.

Below is a table of the main chord types, there chord symbols and there basic chords.



The most practical use of the “Modes” is what we call the “Circle of 4ths within the key”. There are 12 of these circles for all the 12 notes. The circle of 4ths within the key, in the key of C is:

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff contains four chords: CΔ, FΔ#11, B-7b5, and E-7(b9). The bottom staff contains four chords: A-7(b13), D-7, G7, and CΔ. Each chord is represented by a vertical line with dots indicating the notes on a five-line staff.

Now we can see some fundamental harmonic concepts that get used. In classical harmony the first harmonic concept we learn is the “Perfect Cadence” we can see that in the last 2 bars of the above diagram. In Jazz harmony one of the first harmonic concepts we learn is the “ii-7/V7/I” chordal progression which we can see in the last 3 bars of the above diagram.

### The difference between Classical Music and Jazz

As there is only 12 notes in our western harmony, the main difference between classical music and jazz and contemporary music is the rhythm and “feel” between them. One other difference is that in classical harmony a very common chord progression is IV/V7/I and in Jazz a very common chord progression is ii-7/V7/I.

If we look at the difference between these 2 chord progression’s we actually see there are more similarities than differences.

The image shows two staves of musical notation comparing classical and jazz chord progressions. The top staff shows a classical progression: F IV, G V, C I, C. The bottom staff shows a jazz progression: D-7 ii-7, G7 V7, CΔ I. Each chord is represented by a vertical line with dots indicating the notes on a five-line staff.

We can see that the IV Chord and the ii-7 Chord have a different root note, but all the other notes in all the other chords are the same. We have just put the extensions on the ii-7/V7/I chord progression.

One other difference between classical music and Jazz and contemporary music is that there are no chord symbols in classical music. Below we have analysed the first 8 bars of “Bach’s Prelude No.1 In C Major BWV 846”, here we have put chord symbols to the music. We can see the harmonic concept of the “Circle of 4ths within a key” being used. Not in it’s entirety but enough to realise that this concept, the “Circle of 4ths within a key”, is a very if not the most practical use of the Modes.

# Prelude I BWV 846

The image displays the first eight bars of the Prelude I in C major, BWV 846, by Johann Sebastian Bach. The score is presented in four systems, each consisting of a treble and bass staff. The first system covers bars 1-2, with a C chord above the first bar and an F6/C chord above the second bar. The second system covers bars 3-4, with a G7 chord above the first bar and a C chord above the second bar. The third system covers bars 5-6, with an A- chord above the first bar and a D7/C chord above the second bar. The fourth system covers bars 7-8, with a G7 chord above the first bar and a C chord above the second bar. The music features a characteristic 'Circle of 4ths' bass line in the left hand, where each chord is a perfect fourth above the previous one (C, F, C, F, C, F, C, F).

Now we are going to look at the first 8 bars of “Autumn Leaves”. Here we will see the Circle of 4ths within a key being used extensively.

## AUTUMN LEAVES

In conclusion, we have a wonderful world of music in which we live in. We get to experience many different types of sounds, forms, structures, chords, instruments, noises, Classical, Jazz, Rock, Pop, Country, Electronic, Heavy-Metal and everything else that is thrown into the mix of what we call "Music".

The more we understand harmony and its relationship to all styles of music, the more we can show students how to enjoy all forms and styles of music, help them understand what to listen for, help them appreciate and understand the importance of learning from the "Masters", whether the "Masters" be Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Lennon-McCartney, Ellington, Mingus or Stock Aitken and Waterman.

Improvisation is not scary. To create music you need 2 ingredients, Rhythm and Melody/Harmony. If you take one from the other you end up with scrambled noise. When a person is improvising they are playing "in time" using harmony (chords) to make up melodies however simple or complicated they sound. The main issue with people being scared of improvisation is that they listen to someone else do it and think they won't be able to do it themselves. Start simple, with one key or one chord and build it slowly, you can't expect to sound like Louis Armstrong, Oscar Peterson or John Coltrane in your first lesson of learning jazz. Take the time to experience your musical awareness and listen to what you are creating.

Jazzworx! offers a range of courses from to Certificate I-IV and up to Advanced Diploma of Music. These courses take a holistic approach in learning music in all genres (Classical, Jazz, Contemporary, Rock and pop) and its direct application to performance.

Jazzworx! also offers a teacher training course, multi-skilling in either Guitar-Bass-Drums-Keyboard-Vocal or Brass-Woodwind-Percussion. The graduates of this course will be trained to be able deliver and assess from Certificate I-IV in Music Performance.

We are also working towards higher education to be able to offer a degree in music which we expect to be available in 2007.

For more information contact Jazzworx! on 07 3216 1110 or visit [www.jazz.qld.edu.au](http://www.jazz.qld.edu.au)