



Presents:

Listening and Recording Rehearsals

By Jeff Jarvis

Back in 1987, I only had a few charts published, along with one recording as a leader that was released on a small label. Most of my meaningful work was on recordings as a sideman, so I didn't have much in the way of name recognition, except that I was co-owner of Kendor Music. That year, I was hired to do a jazz improvisation clinic for a state music educators conference. I prepared a lecture/demonstration on how I learned to improvise. When I became interested in jazz, I was a high school student. But in the 1960's, there weren't too many jazz books, so my introduction to improvisation was organic – mostly melodic embellishment and a lot of listening. Thanks to the Arban's Method for Trumpet, my scale and arpeggio fluency helped me to construct ideas that would fit the corresponding chords. During the clinic, I carefully explained the rationale for points I was making. The blank faces in front of me indicated I was failing miserably. The clinic came to an end, punctuated by polite applause, and a few directors came up to introduce themselves and say thanks. One attendee was a friend, so I asked him why I got such a lukewarm response. He said, *"You should have played your trumpet more. Most of these directors came to hear an up-close and personal performance; they're not as interested in the improvisation clinic because all you guys say the same thing anyway ... Know your scales and arpeggios and listen to lots of jazz."* As for the remainder of the audience, they were hoping to learn the secret key to improvisation that proficient jazz soloists are keeping hidden from the general public.

Discovering that many are searching for quick-fix techniques was indeed an epiphany for me. I'm betting this scenario is true of any type of music, sports, and business. Nonetheless, the acquisition of skill requires a thorough understanding of the basics before moving on to more advanced pursuits. In the case of jazz improvisation, the building blocks of advanced skills are scales, arpeggios, and critical listening. Void of that, aspiring soloists are merely imitating jazz-like sounds. And due to a lack of analytical listening, they have been imitating their bandmates, not proficient soloists.

"You need to listen to more jazz". These words are the mantra of nearly every jazz clinician, yet active listening remains the single most neglected aspect of jazz education. Furthermore, it is the #1 reason aspiring young instrumentalists struggle with jazz interpretation. But telling people to listen is not enough. Achieving a proper balance of listening and practical application is key. You must be able to understand you hear, and "hear" what you see.

Active vs. Passive Listening

Examples of passive listening include playing music in your car while driving, or playing music as you go to sleep. Active listening requires your attention, repeated listening events, and a systematic process of analyzing what you hear. Both types of listening can positively impact your understanding of the music, but for the most part, we'll be dealing with the active listening process.

Audiation

Audiation is the process of mentally hearing and comprehending music, even when no physical sound is present. It is a cognitive process by which the brain gives meaning to musical sounds. In essence, audiation of music is analogous to thinking in a language. The term *audiation* should not be confused with audition, the mere perception of sound. Audiation is also more than just a musical form of auditory imagery. Developed audiation includes the necessary understanding of music to enable the conscious prediction of patterns in unfamiliar music.

The term audiation was coined in 1975 by music education researcher Edwin E. Gordon. According to Gordon:

“Although music is not a language, the process is the same for audiating and giving meaning to music as for thinking and giving meaning to speech. When you are listening to speech, you are giving meaning to what was just said by recalling and making connections with what you have heard on earlier occasions. At the same time, you are anticipating or predicting what you will be

hearing next, based on your experience and understanding. Similarly, when you are listening to music, you are giving meaning to what you just heard by recalling what you have heard on earlier occasions. At the same time, you are anticipating or predicting what you are hearing next, based on your musical achievement. In other words, when you are audiating as you are listening to music, you are summarizing and generalizing from the specific music patterns you have just heard as a way to anticipate or predict what will follow. Every action becomes an interaction. What you are audiating depends on what you have already audiated. As audiation develops, the broader and deeper it becomes and thus the more it is able to reflect on itself. Members of an audience who are not audiating usually do not know when a piece of unfamiliar, or even familiar, music is nearing its end. They may applaud at any time, or not at all, unless they receive clues from others in the audience who are audiating. Through the process of audiation, we sing and move in our minds, without ever having to sing and move physically.”

HOW TO LISTEN

Here are some ways to develop and/or improve your active listening skills. Listen to a recording asking yourself the questions listed below. It may take several replays of the piece before you start to digest usable information.

1. 1) What is the general feeling you get from the music? Does it evoke any emotions?
 2. 2) What instruments are playing, and are they suitable to the music?
 3. 3) Does the music have historical relevance?
 4. 4) What is the song form? (AABA, blues, rhythm changes, etc.)
 5. 5) How would you describe this music?
 6. 6) How would you rate the quality of the performances?
 7. 7) Did the quality of the recording enhance or detract from the music?
 8. 8) Do the musicians seem to be blending with one another?
 9. 9) Can you tell who the players were without looking at the credits?
 10. 10) Do the musicians seem influenced by the identifiable styles of other players?
 11. 11) Does the rhythm section seem to be supporting the soloist(s)?
 12. 12) Can you detect a conversational tone between the rhythm section and the winds?
 13. 13) Do the solos seem in or out of context with the composition?
 14. 14) Did you hear any references to other pieces of music – any quotes?
 15. 15) Did the players appear to be sharing music with you or trying to impress you?
 16. 16) Did the players alter the sound of their instruments?
 17. 17) Did you notice anyone alternating between a “busy” approach and a conservative style?
- 18) Were both softer and louder dynamics utilized?
- 19) Did you hear both syncopated and continuous, flowing lines?
- 20) Did any of the players superimpose one time feel over another?
- 21) Were there any rhythmic figures or other motives used repeatedly?
- 22) Did you hear any pitch-related ornaments such as, glissandos, flips, scoops, etc.? 23) Did the music favor one register or did you hear interval leaps?

Due to the inherent lack of time in the school day, it is understandable that some music educators have found their version of “teaching to the test”. The students learn their performance music through repeated rehearsal, and along the way, some educating occurs. Well today, I’ll discuss techniques that you’ve all heard before – but they have worked well for my university big bands and they will work for your students.

Repeated rehearsals of a piece will indeed result in some improvement, such as learning fingerings and such. But without meticulous attention to detail, the repetition also imprints errors that are difficult to change later in the process. In addition to learning the music mechanically, we must help our students to understand what they are playing – right or wrong.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my job is bringing life to other writers' music. As a rule, writers are counting on conductors and ensembles to bring their point of view to the music. Obviously, there is a difference between interpreting a piece and making unacceptable modifications. But common sense will guide you here. For instance, it is not acceptable to re-arrange, re-voice, or add new music to an existing chart. But adding some soloists would be considered acceptable. As a writer myself, my biggest fear is hearing a band play one of my charts exactly as I wrote it!

How does one go about interpreting a chart?

- Score study
- Listening to multiple recordings of the chart
 - Publisher demos
 - YouTube videos – as many as you can find
 - Professional recordings, if the chart is advanced

Not every performance will be a gem, but you will get ideas on how others have interpreted the music. Share this experience with your students through guided listening during a rehearsal period. For those with limited meeting time who feel this will rob them of valuable rehearsal time, consider this; Would you rather have 3 rehearsals where you simply “run” the charts over and over. Or a listening session where you share multiple recordings with your students, followed by 2 far more productive rehearsals where the band practices with a purpose.

Another great activity to promote interpretation and understanding of the music – Give your students some homework, in addition to their personal practice. Have them listen to one or more recordings of the chart and have them annotate their impressions of the performances. Instruct them to include the timings of the events they annotate.

1:26 - Trumpets rushed the tempo.

2:12 – Sax intonation issues during the octave unisons.

Hearing other musicians play the music is very informative. Even more important is to record your own rehearsals and follow the critical listening procedures explained above. It is human nature to play a performance and think it went pretty well/. The music goes by quickly, and we tend to remember the good aspects. But as you and your students listen back to the live recordings, it is surprising how many areas in need of improvement will be identified; it is easy to fill an entire page with comments of this nature.

Require your students to make suggestions for improving the issues they identify. It is humbling, but very educational to “dig in” to the music in this way. It promotes high standards. I am reminded of a freshman saxophonist in my top college big band who played a great concert that included a magnificent solo. He graciously accepted the applause and the praise from me. Then he went home to practice the 10 things he thought went wrong with the solo. That is holding yourself to a high standard and it all but guarantees progress.

