

PRACTICAL THEORY STUDENT GUIDELINES

By Don Braden (version 2a)

“Jazz Theory comes from the Music, NOT the other way around.”

- Don Braden

At the Litchfield Jazz Camp, we teach Jazz theory via "Practical Theory" Class. The overall goal of this class is to help you better understand, hear, play and/or sing jazz melody, harmony and rhythm, both improvised and written. The general approach is to learn the material in the classroom setting, but we encourage you play and sing everything, and to try to apply it wherever possible. This really reinforces the information, and keeps it from being mere “data” that you will forget after you leave Camp. Remember Practical Jazz theory and Jazz performance or expression can be connected all the time. You may be aware of some music theory elements (key signatures, scales, chords, cycles, etc.) because of previous study, but the spontaneous and realtime nature of Jazz improvisation requires that you be able to execute these elements fluently. After all, music theory elements are part of the "alphabet" of the language of Jazz.

We assess your current Jazz Theory level with our revised Theory Evaluation. Each week, the office will provide your Practical Theory Class instructor with the most recent Theory Eval for most of the students in your class, so they have an idea what you already know.

The Practical Theory Class levels are (subject to adjustment as needed):

A, B - "Advanced"

C, D, E - "Advanced Intermediate"

F, G, H - "Beginning Intermediate"

I, J, K, L - "Beginning"

The specialized Theory Classes are:

Composition Theory (taught by Mario Pavone and his colleagues)

Drum Theory (taught by the Drum Faculty)

Specific Goals by Level

Remember, none of this is about competition. Do the best you can do for where you are now. The goals below are for guidance purposes, so you can target specific things that will help your improvisation and expression.

By the end of the week, our goal is for ALL students to:

- Know the theoretical "building blocks" of music: key signature, time signature, clefs, music notation, measures, 1/2 steps and whole steps, cycle of fourths (or fifths), chord symbols, tempos, etc;
- Know how to transpose from concert pitch to their instrument;
- Know how to build a major (Ionian) scale, and be able to build it in any key (even if slowly);
- Have a basic knowledge of the piano, and be able to play a major scale in more than one key;
- Understand scale numbers (1-2-3-5, etc.);
- Be able to build a major chord to the 7th at least, preferably to the 9th, and play it in at least a few keys;
- Know how to build a minor pentatonic scale (and Blues scale), and to be able to play it in at least a few keys;

- Have a basic understanding of the modes of the major scale, and understand the **chord symbols** that go with each mode;
- Have at least some idea of how the Dorian, Mixolydian and Ionian modes relate to one another to form a ii- V7 I (pronounced “2-5-1”), and how this works and sounds in tunes;
- Be able to play as much as possible of the above mentioned basic scale information on their instrument or piano.

By the end of the week, "beginning intermediate" students should also:

- Be able to play major scales and chords individually (in at least a few keys), and in the context of a chord progression;
- Know how to create a dominant 7th (Mixolydian) scale from a major scale (lower the 7th note 1/2 step), and it's chordal arpeggio (1-3-5-b7-9) in at least the keys of C7 and G7;
- Know how to create a Dorian minor scale from a major scale (lower the 3rd and 7th notes 1/2 step) and it's chordal arpeggio (1-b3-5-b7-9) in at least the keys of Cmin and Dmin;
- Understand thoroughly how the Dorian, Mixolydian and Ionian modes relate to one another to form a ii- V7 I, and how this works and sounds in tunes;
- Be able to play a simple ii- V7 I pattern in C major (D- G7 CMaj), utilizing 1-3-5-7 basic chord tones, on their main instrument and piano.

By the end of the week, "advanced intermediate" students should also:

- Play major, minor and dominant 7th scales and chordal arpeggios (1-3-5-7-9) in at least a few keys;
- Play basic major, minor and dominant 7th scales and chords on the piano;
- Execute basic ii- V7 I patterns on their instrument, individually (in at least a few keys), and in the context of a chord progression;
- Understand how symmetrical diminished scales work;
- Have some understanding of the Melodic Minor modes, and the **chord symbols** that go with them.

By the end of the week, "advanced" students should also be able to:

- Play major, minor and dominant 7th scales and chordal arpeggios (1-3-5-7-9) in 12 keys;
- Play basic chords and ii- V7 Is on the piano, A-position (LH=1, RH=3-5-7-9) and B-position (LH=1, RH=7-9-3-5);
- Have a basic understanding of the modes of the Melodic Minor scale (ascending), and understand the chord symbols that go with each mode;
- Play Locrian, Locrian #2 and Altered scales and chordal arpeggios in 12 keys;
- Play symmetrical diminished scales fluently in all three keys;
- Understand major and minor ii- V7 Is thoroughly and be able to execute patterns with some ease in 12 keys;
- Grasp various advanced theory topics, and figure out how to apply them.