

Unit 6:Evaluating Improvised Solos in Jazz

Content Area: **Music**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Marking Period 1**
Length: **Ongoing**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

This unit focuses on developing students' critical listening and analytical skills through the study and evaluation of improvised solos in jazz.

Revised August 2025

Standards

ELD standards:<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wdmsiGOdCHlrjU-WPvAtENnEgi0EStZXo0uiFYv1Nu4/edit>

1.3C.12adv.Pr4a	Develop and apply criteria to select varied programs to study and perform based on an understanding of theoretical and structural characteristics and expressive challenges in the music, the technical skill of the individual or ensemble, and the purpose and context of the performance.
1.3C.12adv.Pr4b	Examine, evaluate, and critique, using music reading skills (where appropriate), how the structure and context impact and inform prepared and improvised performances.
1.3C.12adv.Pr4c	Demonstrate how understanding the style, genre and context of a varied repertoire of music informs prepared and improvised performances as well as performers' technical skills to connect with the audience.
1.3C.12adv.Pr5a	Develop, apply, and refine appropriate rehearsal strategies to address individual and ensemble challenges in a varied repertoire of music.
1.3C.12adv.Pr6a	Demonstrate an understanding and mastery of the technical demands and expressive qualities of the music through prepared and improvised performances of a varied repertoire representing diverse cultures, styles, genres, and historical periods in multiple types of ensembles.
1.3C.12adv.Pr6b	Demonstrate an ability to connect, engage and respond to audiences through prepared and improvised performances.
1.3C.12adv.Re7a	Use research and personally developed criteria to justify choices made when selecting music, citing knowledge of the music and individual and ensemble purpose and context.
1.3C.12adv.Re7b	Demonstrate and justify how the analysis of structures, contexts and performance decisions inform the response to music.
1.3C.12adv.Re8a	Justify interpretations of the expressive intent and meaning of musical works by comparing and synthesizing varied researched sources, including reference to other art forms.

1.3C.12adv.Re9a	Develop and justify evaluations of music, programs of music, and performances based on criteria, personal decision-making, research, and understanding of contexts.
1.3B.12adv.Cn10a	Demonstrate how interests, knowledge and skills related to personal choices and intent when creating, performing and responding to music.
1.3B.12adv.Cn11a	Demonstrate how interests, knowledge and skills related to personal choices and intent when creating, performing and responding to music.

Transfer

Essential Questions

- • Can you hear specific techniques being used during an improvised solo?
- • How are artistic ideas conveyed in music?
- • How do musicians develop a “sound,” and how can that sound be used to identify an artist?
- • What do you hear when listening to an improvised solo?
- • What musical characteristics are unique to each instrument in improvised solos?

Essential Understandings

- • artistic expression can be predetermined or improvised.
- • improvised solos can be analyzed using musical elements common to all music (melody, rhythm, range, phrasing, form, etc.).
- • music theory is an essential part of improvised solos.
- • musicians often quote or paraphrase from their mentors and musical influences or historical recordings.
- • there are unique expressive elements that are characteristic of each wind and percussive instrument.

Students Will Know

- • common improvisation devices that are unique to wind and percussion instruments (ex. Altissimo, mutes, glissando, etc.).
- • how an understanding of music theory is used in creating improvised solos.
- • how artists transfer inspiration in improvised solos.
- • how to identify musical thoughts and phrases in improvised solos.
- • the importance of historical improvisation in modern day performance.
- • the important solo artists in the evolution of jazz.
- • the listening responsibilities of the soloist and rhythm section during improvised solos.
- • the theoretical and artistic elements that are used to evaluate original solos.

Students Will Be Skilled At

- Articulating ideas heard within artists solos
- Dictation of rhythm and/or pitch of given examples
- Identifying performers of jazz upon hearing them
- Identifying styles of jazz upon hearing them

Evidence/Performance Tasks

- • demonstrate understanding through writing and performance of the identified music theory needed to evaluate improvised solos including, but not limited to, chords, modes, scales, form, and phrasing
- • evaluate improvised solos from within the ensemble with class developed rubric.
- • evaluate improvised solos through the application of standard criteria developed by the class
- • identify standard recordings of improvised solos in formal assessment.
- • listen to and describe improvised solos in each of the major classifications of jazz music (ragtime, Dixieland, swing, bebop, cool jazz, hard bop, avant-garde, fusion, contemporary).
- • participate in group discussions of the essential questions.
- • transcribe and analyze a given solo.
- • transcribe and perform improvised solos.

Learning Plan

- • Analyze improvised solos as a group—written; aural.
- • Develop rubric with class to evaluate student improvised solos.
- • Discuss and experience the essential questions and connect to learning throughout the unit.
- • Expose students to chord scales—learn formulae, apply to various key signatures, use in rehearsal warm up, use in improvised solos.
- • Introduce concepts of repetition, chromatics, phrasing, varying range, etc.
- • Introduce concepts of trading four-bar phrases, stop time, communication between soloist and rhythm section.
- • Learn the required theory needed to evaluate improvised solos.
- • Listening quiz – predetermined solo artists and tracks.
- • Model and play appropriate listening examples of artistic expression in improvised solos.
- • Perform improvised warm-ups and have students evaluate their peers and suggest a course of improvement.
- • Play and evaluate appropriate recording examples to demonstrate music theory and chord structure in improvised solos.
- • Play appropriate recording examples to demonstrate chord scales in improvised solos.
- • Play appropriate recording examples to demonstrate four-bar phrases, stop time, communication between the soloist and rhythm section.

- • Play appropriate recording examples to reinforce concepts of repetition, phrasing, varying range, etc.
- • Provide the opportunity for each student to solo during open and definitive solo sections in musical literature.
- • Quiz—identifying solo artists and influences.
- • Quiz—individual analysis of an improvised solo.
- • Require the students to transcribe and analyze a specific solo.

Materials

- program capable of slowing music down for transcription
- smartboard
- speakers for playback of examples

Suggested Strategies for Modifications

[Jazz Band QSAC Accommodations and Modifications](#)

- • Choose solos of various rhythmic complexity depending on the level of the student.
- • Require varying levels of depth in the analysis of the improvised solos.
- • Vary the difficulty of the solos chosen for each student to analyze.
- • Vary the length of solos used for analysis by the students of various levels.
- • When working in a group, aim different levels of questioning at the different levels of students.