

# TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Top jazz educators choose the resources they can't teach without

COLLECTED & EDITED BY JEFF TAMARKIN



Jazz education begins with the ears and eyes. Nothing beats immersion in the music as both listener and player, and exposure to great jazz from throughout the music's history. But after one has absorbed the landmark recordings and observed the day's virtuosos at work, where can a student of jazz turn for more in-depth study?

We posed this question to several leading jazz educators: What teaching resources do you find the most effective?

## All About Aebersold

Over the years I have used the Jamey Aebersold Play-A-Longs as an essential part of my program. The quality has never changed from its early days on vinyl through the transition to CD. Jamey takes great pride in getting it right. From melody to changes, transcriptions to tempos, it's researched and prepared to the highest level of accuracy for the classroom and for pros who want to practice all levels of jazz improvisation—any time, anywhere.

As an early student of Jamey's I've watched him



put this wonderful tool together from its beginnings. For his first effort, *Volume 1: How to Play Jazz & Improvise*, he asked his students what they felt was important to use as an improvisation clinic/practice tool for growth and understanding. He used us to help form the vision for what was to become the standard for music-minus-one Play-A-Longs, and has served our needs at the highest levels.

Some 39 years later there are 118 choices, including special volumes for bebop, blues, drums, fusion, Latin, bass, singers, standards and the inner workings of improv. Without sounding like a salesman, I really believe in this product, as it allows students to move forward when there is no rhythm section at the school or at home. The accompanying musicians on each volume are of the highest quality; on a number of the CDs are musicians who performed at one time during their careers with the featured artist. I have always used these in my improvisation classes at Booker T. and when I pass the torch I'll recommend that this wonderful tool continue to be used with aspiring artists.

*Bart Marantz*

*Director of Jazz Studies*

*Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts  
Dallas, Texas*

There are many excellent resources now available for jazz educators and their students. I will focus on the beginning to intermediate student. I have found *Volume 54: Maiden Voyage* from the Jamey Aebersold series to be invaluable, with limitless options that can be used with all instruments.

This book and CD set contains excellent tunes played by a truly professional group at slightly slower tempos. The student can work on scale/chord relationships and standard chord changes, including ii-V7-I phrases, while beginning to build repertoire by memorizing tunes and progressions. I stress the importance of listening to the original recordings, which they can easily find, while working on selected tunes. Their listening skills will be sharpened and I encourage students to play along with the masters, which reinforces jazz phrasing and, most importantly, articulation.

Wind players are encouraged to work on sound and tone production; pianists and guitarists to work on voicings; bassists and drummers on time and style (swing, Latin, etc.). Another major asset is that there are excellent supportive materials: transcribed piano/guitar voicings, basslines and drum parts—even written out solos for all instruments. *Volume 54* is a great tool for the teacher and student, especially if the set is used as an ever-evolving educational tool.

Other materials I like to use include the *Charlie Parker Omnibook*, the Bob Mintzer Series (excellent contemporary selections from beginner to very advanced—great for reading and soloing), Jerry Coker's *Patterns for Jazz* and Aebersold volumes 3 (*The ii/V7/I Progression*) and 16 (*Turnarounds, Cycles & ii/V7s*). Personal transcribing is a must.

*Michael A. Tracy*

*Director, Jamey Aebersold Jazz Studies Program*

*Professor of Music*

*Fulbright Senior Specialist*

*University of Louisville*

*Louisville, Ky.*

I always recommend my students check out what Jamey Aebersold's company is offering. There you can find a plethora of jazz study material related to the student's instrument, harmony, theory and



structures.

Finally, for my drumming students, I also recommend Steve Smith's wonderful *History of the U.S. Beat* DVD. Beautifully recorded and Steve articulates his message clearly. The exercises and demonstrations are musically relative to group performance and totally relate to what you do in a working context with other musicians.

*Jae Sinnett*

*Drummer, composer, educator*

*Adjunct drumset, jazz ensemble instructor*

*Christopher Newport University*

*Newport News, Va.*

I've used two particular Jamey Aebersold volumes since they came out in the late '70s: *Volume 3: The ii/V7/I Progression*, and *Volume 16: Turnarounds, Cycles & ii/V7s*. Although all of Jamey's Play-A-Longs are great, these "workout" volumes are the gems of the series, putting you through your paces in all keys. As a saxophonist, particularly with younger students, I've gravitated toward jazz etude books based on standard progressions, series by Bob Mintzer, Dan Higgins, Jim Snidero and Greg Fishman. All of these series really get students into the modern-jazz language, in a graded difficulty that allows them to succeed and progress.

Conceptually, Paul Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz* has had a deep effect on me, my students and a lot of professionals I know. The interviews really get inside the minds of some of the great performers in unique ways: The meaning and importance of mistakes in their playing, how they practice and gain inspiration and growth.

*Dr. David Demsey*

*Coordinator of Jazz Studies*

*Curator, Living Jazz Archives*

*William Paterson University*

*Wayne, N.J.*

## **(Vocal) Instrument Instruction**

As both a performing artist and vocal jazz instructor who strives to keep improvisation front and center in vocal jazz performance, I use Scott Reeves' book *Creative Jazz Improvisation* as my "go-to" text on the subject. I originally used the book as a text for a jazz improvisation course I taught, and I found it to be quite invaluable in my planning and delivery.

I've been using it ever since, both with my studio jazz-voice students





Janice Borla

and vocal-jazz ensemble and for my own further development. The book, though certainly intended for instrumentalists, works just as well for any vocalist interested in learning jazz improvisation from an essentially instrumental standpoint.

It's very well organized and loaded with resource material: exercises and suggested ways to learn the standard vocabulary of jazz improvisation, by way of jazz theory, ear-training exercises, patterns and motifs and melodic quotes from recordings of exemplary jazz artists. Because the

chord progressions of the exercises in each chapter are in sync with play-along recordings, my students can practice them with recorded accompaniment.

The lists of related compositions in each chapter are especially helpful as a reference to tunes and recordings of them that give my students the means to apply the related theory and learn the standard jazz repertoire. The solo transcriptions closing each chapter are another great resource, all keyed to classic recordings. I've used them with my students, both individually and in ensemble, not only to learn and sing and analyze, but also to start them off on the preparation of their own transcriptions. Best of all, the book opens with a great chapter on jazz rhythm.

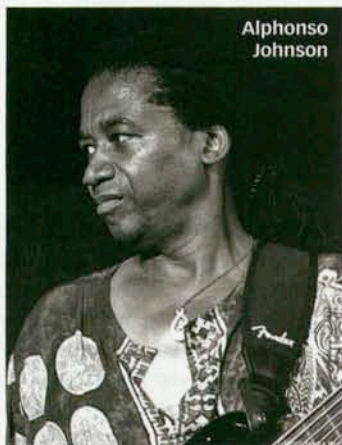
I also think the book is an excellent resource for self-study, regardless of one's level of skill and knowledge. As I explore modern jazz compositions and encounter non-formulaic harmonic progressions, I use the book often to help me fill in the gaps as I work to continually expand my own knowledge of jazz harmony.

Janice Borla  
 Director of Vocal Jazz  
 Director, Janice Borla Vocal Jazz Camp  
 North Central College  
 Naperville, Ill.

## Curriculum Done DIY

For the past eight years I've been teaching bass lessons using my own curriculum. This covers most of the information that I feel is necessary for a bassist to know in order to go out and work at having a successful career. It covers theory and harmony, ear training, bass styles (rock, blues, Latin, etc.), bass history, sight-reading, groove therapy and improvisation.

Here are a few sources for my material: *A History of Western Music* by Donald J. Grout and Claude V. Palisca; *The Music of Black Americans* by Eileen Southern; *Music Notation (Berklee Guide)* by Mark McGrain; *The Improviser's Bass Method* by Chuck Sher; *Charlie Parker Omnibook* from Jamey Aebersold; *True Cuban Bass* by Carlos del Puerto and Silvio



Alphonso Johnson

Vergara; *A New Approach to Sight Singing* by Berkowitz, Fontrier and Kraft.

Alphonso Johnson  
 Bass Instructor  
 CalArts  
 Valencia, Calif.

## Crook's Books

There are so many excellent resources these days that to pick just one is difficult. I think I use Hal Crook's books more than any other resource. *Ready, Aim, Improvise!* has a wealth of information presented in a clear and thoughtful manner. Hal's approach is practical and efficient—students can apply his suggestions quickly and are encouraged by the sequential presentation and helpful suggestions. Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* is also a favorite resource. Although students are usually familiar with the compositions, they are always surprised by an in-depth study of the recording.

Dave Ballou  
 Assistant Professor of Music  
 Coordinator, Jazz/Commercial Music Division  
 Towson University  
 Towson, Md.

## Mad About Mintzer

One jazz resource that I have routinely used over the years is a series of etude books by Bob Mintzer. They have been an endless source as assignments for my jazz students, sight-reading material for auditions, prepared etudes for jazz auditions, and basic sight-reading in applied studio lessons. To date there are four books: *12 Contemporary Jazz Etudes*, *15 Easy Jazz, Blues & Funk Etudes*, *14 Blues & Funk Etudes* and *14 Jazz & Funk Etudes*. (All books are published by Belwin Jazz and are available for all instruments.) Each book comes with a play-along CD, which includes demonstration tracks with Bob playing the etudes. There is also a play-along track (minus the solo) for each etude. The rhythm sections on these CDs are some of the best players in the business: Phil Markowitz, Rufus Reid, John Riley, James Genus and, on the *14 Blues & Funk Etudes*, you get to play along with the rhythm section from Yellowjackets.

It's hard to choose a favorite out of the four, but his latest book, *12 Contemporary Jazz Etudes*, is pure Mintzer. I'm intimately familiar with Bob's playing, as I co-authored a book with him titled *The Music of Bob Mintzer* (also available from Belwin Jazz). In this book, I transcribed hundreds of bars of Bob's improvisations. Mintzer's solos are some of the most intriguing to transcribe because they all make sense; he doesn't play wrong notes and his playing is very melodic. In essence, these etudes are flowing improvisations that work incredibly well as concise musical journeys.

The *15 Easy Jazz, Blues & Funk Etudes* book is a great way to

Miles Osland





get your middle school/high school students started with good jazz phrasing. There is even a transcription project in the back of the book. The *14 Blues & Funk* and *14 Jazz & Funk* books are challenging excursions into funky, bluesy performance techniques. Lots of 16<sup>th</sup> notes, and lots to practice!

*Miles Osland*  
 Director of Jazz Studies  
 Professor of Saxophone  
 University of Kentucky  
 Lexington, Ky.

### Don't Read About It—Live It

An aspiring student of the music we call jazz must have a vast vocabulary, a broad knowledge of many types of music, and the compositional skills to write music as a vehicle for their particular style of playing. The key ingredient is learning repertoire by studying how the jazz greats played the music, then going on to write and arrange their own repertoire for performance. Studying classical music and various other musics of the world is paramount in developing an intelligent approach to playing jazz, both from a vocabulary standpoint as well as a compositional angle.

That said, it's really about developing a work ethic that covers all of the above on a consistent basis. Between iTunes and YouTube, one can access almost any music that exists. Some of the books can provide information that becomes a seed for further practice and study. I like the Don Sebesky book *The Contemporary Arranger* and *Inside the Score*



Bob  
Mintzer

by Ray Wright for composition and arranging issues. Jerry Bergonzi and Gary Campbell have some interesting books on lines and patterns. Dave Liebman has a good book on a chromatic jazz concept (*The Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody*). I've written several jazz etude books.

But ultimately it's about one's ability to isolate various aspects of the books and expand on the concept in a way that makes it your own. Being a bandleader, writing for my own bands and others, and getting called to play in different bands revealed far more than books or DVDs. It's about playing, trying things, writing, gathering folks together to play, and putting the notes together in real time.

*Bob Mintzer*  
 Bandleader, member of Yellowjackets  
 Buzz McCoy Endowed Chair Professor of Jazz Studies  
 University of Southern California  
 Los Angeles, Calif. **JT**

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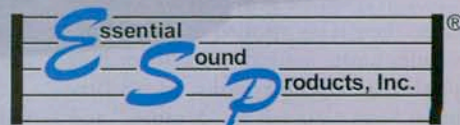
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