

**JAZZ**  
**IMPROVISATION**

**A**  
**WHOLE-BRAIN**  
**APPROACH**

by **Joe Riposo**

*Jamey Abersold Jazz®*



**JAZZ**

**IMPROVISATION**

BY JOE RIPOSO

***"A Whole - Brain Approach"***

Improving Improvisation Through Understanding Hemisphericity



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## **FOREWORD**

With regard to Jazz education, saxophonist Paul Desmond once stated something along the lines of "Jazz....like all art forms, can be learned but it *cannot* be taught." I've done a considerable amount of thinking about that statement, mostly agreeing but wishing for a method by which we could teach other people this fabulous art form. It wasn't until I read Betty Edwards' "Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain" that I believed there might possibly be a way to, if not teach a person to improvise, at least open up some "doors of perception" regarding the creative process as well as the learning process in general. I've been experimenting, searching, and mostly hoping for some workable information utilizing this whole-brain approach. I'm exhilarated over the release of this new book by Joe Riposo. I'm also quite certain that it will become a vital guideline for anyone desiring to learn and/or teach jazz improvisation. I wish Paul Desmond were here to observe and comment.

BOBBY SHEW  
JAZZ RECORDING ARTIST/CLINICIAN  
TRUMPET CHAIRMAN, NAJE

**What Others Say About This Approach**

**Edward Lisk, Oswego City Schools**  
Director of Music Education

"Joe Riposo has developed an effective instructional process which opens many "new avenues" for the study of jazz improvisation. Performance is focused toward the "feeling or awareness state" through wholistic concepts of hemisphericity. Most interesting is the identification and analysis of the mental processing of jazz performance through the four quadrants of the brain.

The text is explicit with graphics and musical examples which provides the jazz student with a solid base of materials. These musical examples are then explored through many original tunes with parts provided for piano, bass, Eb, Eb, and C instruments

A valuable book which goes beyond the traditional "mechanical/exercise" procedures!"



**Diana Spradling, Syracuse University**  
Founder-director, Vocal Jazz Ensemble

"This text book clearly defines the processes through which the instrumentalist and the vocalist must go to develop skills in improvisation.

Mr. Riposo dispels the myth that only the naturally talented or highly refined theoretician can be creative jazz performers.

Not only are specific "how to's " included, but tunes for the practical applications of the "how to's" are provided.

This book will revolutionize the way we teach and learn jazz improvization."



**Arnie Lawrence, Director of Instruction**  
The New School, New York N.Y.

After receiving Joe Riposo's book I immediially gave it to two of my developing students (not advanced) to use and respond. After they used the method book for a period of time their comments were:

"This is a great method for classically trained musicians coming over to Jazz"" This is the first Jazz method book that not only shows you how to do it, but explains how you learn and process information, thus developing an understanding of what you are learning "

My own opinion is that Joe Riposo has seriously worked out ingenious ways to broaden a developing player's scope and vistas, creating hope for growth.



**Jamey Aebersold, Jazz Educator**  
Clinician, Performer

First of its kind ! An exciting new book that explores the concept "hemisphericity" and opens up new avenues for the study of Jazz Improvisation. Find out how to get both sides of the brain working together.



## **PREFACE**

JAZZ IMPROVISATION "A Whole Brain Approach " is the result of 20 years of searching for a successful method for teaching jazz improvisation and research in hemisphericity as it relates to jazz improvisation. It is applicable for middle school, high school, college level classes and studio instructional programs. This text will also provide jazz instructional techniques for those in music education teacher preparation programs.

As a high school student, I can remember my bewilderment when I realized some of my fellow students could not play without the use of printed music while others could play music quite well *by ear*. This difference raised several questions in my mind.

When I entered college as a music major, my bewilderment continued because it seemed that the more theoretical knowledge the students obtained, the more restricted they became in their ability to perform music *by ear*.

Observing this phenomena brought about some interesting notions. Two basic questions came into focus; how does the brain process information and how does learning take place?

I began to read a number of books about hemisphericity and split-brain studies. Although the research at that time was mainly concerned with brain damaged patients, results were documented which produced specific conclusions important to the understanding of how the brain processes information. As a result of numerous split-brain operations performed in the '60s, a surge of research became available documenting specialized functions of the left and right brain.

Among psychologists, interest in what part of the brain controlled various functions of human behavior dramatically increased. They became more interested in developing a better understanding of the learning process. As I

started to relate these concepts to the learning of improvisation, I developed specific concepts for teaching improvisation.

Since I began teaching composition and jazz improvisation a number of traditionally trained music students expressed a desire to learn to improvise. As a result of their participation in my classes, they became knowledgeable about scales, chord progressions, and harmonic and theoretical concepts involved in developing the skill of improvisation. Somehow they still found it difficult to improvise with a degree of self-satisfaction. Their improvised line sounded contrived and often mechanical. I believe this is a result of their inability to *shift* from improvising in the left brain through the use of knowledge to improvising in the right brain through the use of expressing one's feelings. I further discovered that some students quickly learn to improvise and show a greater degree of maturity when just a few basic concepts and ideas are demonstrated. This perhaps is achieved because these students were able to develop a mental picture of what is needed to make the *mental shift* from improvising in the left brain to improvising in the right brain.

By using teaching techniques formulated as a result of this discovery has produced students who are able to improvise in a more imaginative fashion.

You will find the material in this book much like the material presented in most books aimed at the teaching of jazz improvisation. However, this book presents the learning of improvisation through developing an understanding of the whole-brain approach.

The unique difference is the approach used to develop an understanding of this mental process. The process used to teach creativity is clearly identified and labeled through out the book.

With the introduction of each new concept, you are reminded of the specialized function of the four basic quadrants of the brain as related to improvisation. It is the understanding of this process that will produce improvisors who can use the theoretical information presented as applicable knowledge and unfasten their creative potential.

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