

# The Jazz Piano Book

≡ By Mark Levine



Sher Music Co.

# ENDORSEMENTS

“There’s a Mark Levine book...it’s fun to get a sense of what’s going on with music anyway. I would suggest getting it and doing two pages a day just to study it and learn to read some basic piano, even if you can only pick out one note at a time. I think It’s really important for all musicians to have a basic ability to read piano music, it’s not like you have to be able to sight read Bach inventions, but just to know where the notes are to pick them out on the piano. Start by reading two pages, then practice the two pages. The next day recap what you’ve done and do a page or two more. I think if you’re starting in middle school or high school just work your way through that book and as you work through it you’ll notice the way you hear and the way you sing, will automatically start to change. It’s like looking at the world and not knowing it’s all blurry. You can make your way through and then you get glasses and everything gets clearer and clearer. I think that’s really important.”

**ESPERANZA SPALDING**

“Man, I’m really happy to so many folks (rightly) acknowledging your books and music here on Facebook. As it should be. The information is all there ~ a gift!”

**JOE LOCKE**

“One of the best jazz piano books I’ve ever seen - very easy to understand.”

**KENNY BARRON**

“A brilliant, comprehensive, exciting and highly readable book. It unlocks door after door of contemporary piano jazz sounds.”

**DOWN BEAT MAGAZINE**

“I really like this book because it covers all the bases. An invaluable resource for any keyboard player.”

**JAMEY AEBERSOLD**

“This is a great book!”

**EDDIE PALMIERI**

“For anyone who is interested in acquiring the basics of contemporary jazz piano playing, this book is a must!”

**HAL GALPER**

“Your book sets into motion the thought process for someone who actually has to sit down and improvise music. Years back, in a conversation we had about your ‘Jazz Piano Book,’ the late Kenny Kirkland very much agreed with this point. Thank you for your wonderful contribution to understanding the grammar of our musical language.”

**SERGE KASIMOFF**

“An incredibly thorough and yet personal look at the vast subject of jazz piano. The scholarly historical perspective combines with excellent practical examples of different styles and approaches to the keyboard. Applause for one of the truly fine pianist of our time for putting his vast expertise, experience and musicality into book form.”

**ART LANDE**

# *The* **Jazz Piano** *Book*

≡ By Mark Levine

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Title page photo of Duke Ellington by Lee Tanner*

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## ≡ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

# M

ark Levine, recipient of two Grammy Nominations, is a Bay Area based pianist and composer. He has been a member of bands

led by Woody Shaw, Joe Henderson, Mongo Santamaria, Cal Tjader, Willie Bobo, Blue Mitchell, Tito Puente, and countless others. His songs have been recorded by Tjader, Henderson, Santamaria, and Pete Escovedo, with too many others to list.

Mark's teachers and mentors include Hall Overton, Herb Pomeroy, Barry Harris and Hilario Duran, with whom he studied in Havana, Cuba.

Mark was born and raised in Concord NH, and after a zig-zag life in Florida, Boston, New York, Los Angeles, and Idaho, settled in Berkeley CA, where he now lives with his sweet Greyhound Candy.

Mark is the author of several highly-acclaimed books for Sher Music Co. He currently leads a trio and quintet and is very active on the Bay Area Jazz and Latin jazz scene.

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## *Pianist*      *Photographer*

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**W**elcome to *The Jazz Piano Book*. Acoustic jazz piano is a vast subject, and to cover the idiom from James P. Johnson through Cecil Taylor would take a book a thousand times the size of this one. *The Jazz Piano Book* includes beginning through advanced techniques and covers the period from Bud Powell to the present. The information offered here is based on what I learned from the pianists who have influenced and inspired me: Bud Powell, Horace Silver, Thelonious Monk, Wynton Kelly, Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner, Chick Corea, Eddie Palmieri, Kenny Barron, and many others, including such non pianists as John Coltrane, Joe Henderson, Wayne Shorter, and Charlie Parker. I was fortunate to be able to work with, and probe the minds of, several great musicians, especially Woody Shaw and Dave Liebman. I have also had the good fortune to study with four great teachers: Joe Pace, Jaki Byard, Hall Overton, and Herb Pomeroy.

Although *The Jazz Piano Book* is meant primarily for pianists, other instrumentalists can use it as well, both as an introduction to jazz piano and as an aid to understanding harmony on their own instruments. The visual element of the keyboard makes jazz harmony more accessible than on other instruments. Many great horn players, bassists, guitarists, and drummers have been excellent pianists as well, including Charles Mingus,<sup>1</sup> Joe Chambers,<sup>2</sup> Jack DeJohnette<sup>3</sup> (all three of whom have recorded piano albums), and Joe Henderson.

Nobody has ever learned to play jazz from a book only. This one will help guide you while you study with a good teacher, listen to as much live and recorded jazz as you can, transcribe solos and songs from records, and, in general, immerse yourself as much as possible in the world of JAZZ.

Much of this book involves music theory. There's a good reason why music *theory* is not called music *truth*. The only truth is in the music itself. Theory is an intellectual dance we do around the music, trying to explain its dynamics. Theory varies from era to era and from musician to musician. Although there is a continuity in the evolution of jazz, the music that James P. Johnson played in the 1920s had changed radically by

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Mingus, *Mingus Plays Piano*, Impulse A60.

<sup>2</sup> Joe Chambers, *Double Exposure*, Muse MR 5165.

<sup>3</sup> Jack DeJohnette, *The Piano Album*, Landmark LLP-I504.



the time Art Tatum and Fats Waller arrived in the 1930s, Bud Powell in the 1940s, Bill Evans in the 1950s, McCoy Tyner and Herbie Hancock in the 1960s, Mulgrew Miller in the 1970s, Benny Green in the 1980s, and so on. Keep your ears, and your mind, open.

This book has an unusual format. Rather than group all voicings in one section and theory in another, the subjects alternate throughout the book, easy material progressing to more advanced techniques. Above all, I have tried as much as possible to put the musical examples within the context of tunes that are a jazz musician's daily language, from standards like "Just Friends" to Wayne Shorter's beautiful and unusual "Infant Eyes."



*Art Tatum*

Phil Stern Photo ©1958

**Note:** To use this book, you should be able to read music in both the treble and bass clef, know the major scales and key signatures, and have some basic knowledge of intervals and chords. Intervals and triads will be reviewed in Chapter One.

**Tune Sources:** *The New Real Book* and *The World's Greatest Fake Book*, both published by Sher Music Company, P.O. Box 445, Petaluma, CA 94953, are the two best published sources of standards and jazz originals. The very best way to learn tunes is to transcribe them off of records yourself, and as your ability to do so improves, should become your primary source.

## ***A note on terminology and chord symbols***

**T**he unhappy fact that the chord symbols C, C $\Delta$ , Cmaj7, CM7, C6, and C69 all mean pretty much the same thing and are often used interchangeably can be discouraging to a beginner. In this book, I'll use the  $\Delta$  symbol for all major chords. Many musicians use shorthand symbols, writing G7alt rather than G7b9, +9, +11, b13 (which would *you* rather read?), and I'll do the same. As each new chord symbol or term is introduced, I'll list alternate terms or symbols.

I'll notate raised and lowered notes within a chord as + and b (C7+11, C7b9), instead of the equally common # or - symbols (C7#11, C7-9).

The fourth and eleventh are, strictly speaking, the same note in a chord. I use the term "fourth" on major and sus chords (C $\Delta$ +4, Csus4), and "eleventh" on dominant and minor chords (C7+11, C-11).

The sixth and thirteenth are likewise the same note in a chord. I follow standard practice, using the term "sixth" on major and minor chords (C6, C-6), and "thirteenth" on dominant chords (C7b13).

The dictionary definitions for the terms "scale" and "mode" are almost identical, and because most jazz musicians use them interchangeably, I do the same. I make a distinction when the mode is in direct reference to its parent scale, as in "the D Dorian mode of the C major scale."

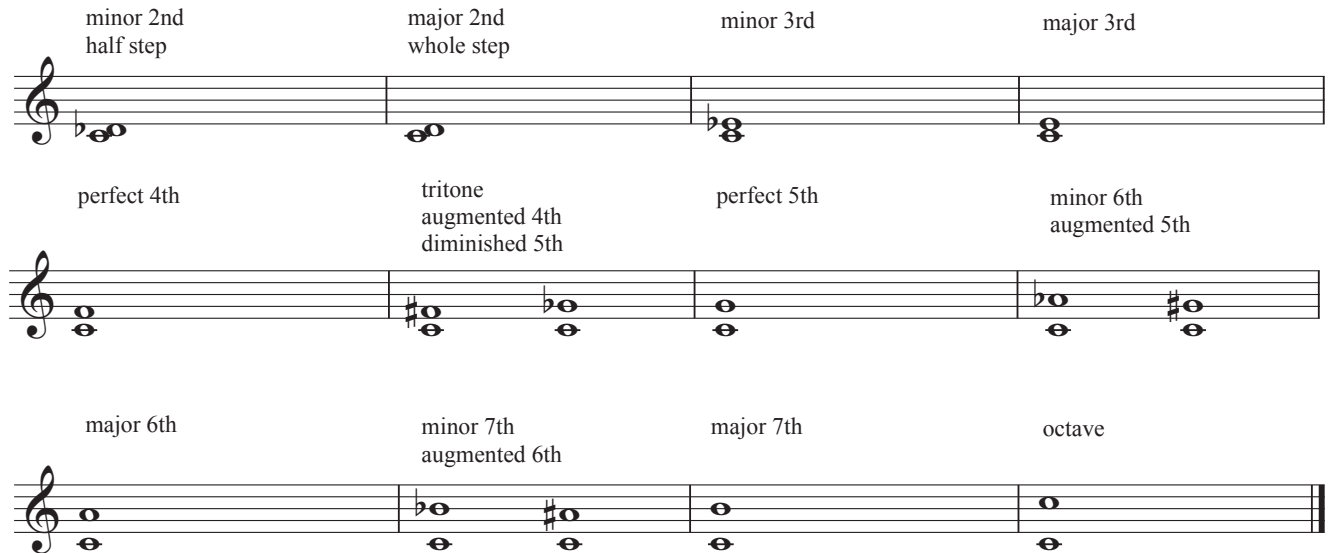
Most jazz pianists use the terms "chord" and "voicing" interchangeably, and I do the same.

# Intervals and Triads – Review

## Intervals

A good definition of an *interval* is “the space between two notes.” **Figure 1-1** shows the intervals from the half step/minor second up to the octave, all based on middle C. The most commonly used term is shown above each interval, along with any alternate terms.

**Figure 1-1**



The chart that follows shows all the intervals, both ascending and descending, as they occur in tunes from the standard jazz repertoire. Unless otherwise noted, the interval in question is the first two melody notes of the song. Play each example and *sing* the interval. If you can sing an interval accurately, it will be easier to play when improvising. Listen carefully to all the voicings in the examples. All of them will be covered in this book. A footnote reference after each song title lists a great recording of the tune—in many cases, the original recording.



### Intervals by selected tunes

G7<sup>b</sup>9    C $\Delta$   
minor  
2nd

**ascending minor second**  
Bob Haggart's "What's New?"<sup>1</sup>

F7<sup>b</sup>9    Bb-  
minor  
2nd

**descending minor second**  
Duke Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady"<sup>2</sup>

Bb- $\Delta$

**ascending major second**  
Billy Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge"<sup>3</sup>

G-7    A7alt.

**descending major second**  
Miles Davis' "Blue In Green"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Woody Shaw, *Setting Standards*, Muse 5318.

<sup>2</sup> Duke Ellington and Ray Brown, *This One's For Blanton*, Pablo 2310-721.

<sup>3</sup> Joe Henderson, *The Kicker*, Milestone 9008.

<sup>4</sup> Miles Davis, *Kind Of Blue*, Columbia 40579.



**ascending minor third**  
Thelonious Monk's "Evidence"<sup>5</sup>

$E_b\Delta+4$        $G-7$        $C7^{+11}_b9$

minor 3rd

**descending minor third**  
Chick Corea's "Mirror, Mirror"<sup>6</sup>

$C\Delta$        $E7^{alt.}$

minor 3rd

**ascending major third**  
Chick Corea's "Windows"<sup>7</sup>

$B-7$

major 3rd

**descending major third**  
John Coltrane's "Giant Steps"<sup>8</sup>

$B\Delta$        $D7$        $G\Delta$        $Bb7$        $E_b\Delta$

major 3rd

<sup>5</sup> Thelonious Monk, *The Tokyo Concert*, Columbia 38510.

<sup>6</sup> Joe Henderson, *Mirror, Mirror*, Pausa 7075.

<sup>7</sup> Stan Getz, *Sweet Rain*, Verve 8693.

<sup>8</sup> John Coltrane, *Giant Steps*, Atlantic 1311.



A $\emptyset$  D7alt G9sus

**ascending perfect fourth**  
McCoy Tyner's "Search For Peace"<sup>9</sup>

G-7 C7 F#-7 B7

**descending perfect fourth**  
Thelonious Monk's "Ask Me Now"<sup>10</sup>

C7

**ascending tritone**  
Joe Henderson's "Isotope"<sup>11</sup>

G $\Delta$  E-7 A-7 D7 G $\Delta$  G# $^{\circ}$

**descending tritone**  
bars 18 and 19 of  
Duke Ellington's  
"Sophisticated Lady"<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> McCoy Tyner, *The Real McCoy*, Blue Note 4264.

<sup>10</sup> Thelonious Monk, *Solo Monk*, Columbia 9149.

<sup>11</sup> Joe Henderson, *Power To The People*, Milestone 9024.

<sup>12</sup> Duke Ellington and Ray Brown, *This One's For Blanton*, Pablo 2310-721.