



# JAZZ **BASS CLEF**

*Expressions & Explorations*

A New and Innovative System for Learning to  
Improvise for Bass Clef Instruments & Jazz Cello

by  
**DAVID N. BAKER**

*Jamey Aebersold Jazz®*



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**Editors**  
LIDA BAKER  
APRIL BAKER-LERMA

**Engraving**  
PETER KIENLE

**Layout**  
APRIL BAKER-LERMA

**David Baker Photo**  
STEVE SHELDON

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Dedicated to my dear friend and colleague

Janos Starker,

One of the giants of twentieth century string music

I wish to God that some neurologists would sit down and figure out how the improviser's brain works, how he selects out of the hundreds of thousands of possibilities, the notes he does and at the speed he does -- how in God's name his mind works so damned fast! And why, when the notes come out right, they are right ... Composing is a slow, arduous, obvious, inch-by-inch process, whereas improvisation is a lightning mystery. In fact, it's the creative mystery of our age.

Alec Wilder

## PREFACE

Although there are countless books dealing with virtually every aspect of jazz improvisation, very few - with the exception of bass books - are aimed at the problems of the improvising jazz string player. This book addresses many of the problems that confront all aspiring jazz players on bass clef instruments and is written specifically for cellists.

*Part I, Approaching the Instrument from a Jazz Perspective*, offers a great deal of basic information. Some of this information is undoubtedly familiar, some of it less so; but all of it is presented with its application in a jazz setting as the primary objective. A common thread which runs through the entire book is a concept which I call "fretting." This concept is explained in *Part I*. It is of the utmost importance that the concepts, techniques, theoretical information, and approaches in *Part I* be understood and thoroughly internalized before proceeding to *Part II*.

In *Part II, Learning To Speak the Language of Jazz: Public Domain Materials*, chapter 8 gives a brief introduction to the concept of public domain materials. Chapter 9 contains a body of shared, "must-know" patterns that jazz musicians use to realize some of jazz's most important scales. This group of patterns is by no means exhaustive, and supplementary materials are suggested at the conclusion of each scale section. Chapter 10 provides information and practical exercises for dealing with some of the all-important structural building blocks of jazz: harmonic formulae such as II-V7, II-V7-I-I, turnbacks, cycles, and the III-VI7-II-V7 progression.

*Part III, Using Bebop Compositions as a Means of Memorizing and Internalizing the Jazz Language*, offers techniques for using bebop tunes as vehicles for learning to speak the language of jazz in a natural, effortless manner. It also shows how to use those same bebop tunes as vehicles for using the fretting concept as an aid to memorization and instant transposition of tunes to all keys.

While the information in this book - if understood, utilized diligently and intelligently, and applied practically - guarantees the prospective player a certain measure of success, it is by no means intended to replace the wealth of excellent available string materials aimed primarily at producing a classical player. The materials from classical studies should work in conjunction with the materials and information presented in this book.

Experiment, explore, investigate, and - above all - don't be afraid to try!

David Baker  
May 1995

## **ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR ALL OTHER BASS CLEF INSTRUMENTS**

This book was initially written specifically for cellists; but upon its completion, a number of highly respected jazz performer-educators suggested to me that its value extended well beyond the needs of cellists to all bass clef instruments. After considerable reflection I found myself in agreement and added the following guidelines for the use of this book by non-cellists:

1. If you play an instrument other than cello, ignore the suggested fingerings; they apply only to the cello.
2. **Adjust every exercise to apply to the range of your instrument; take into account the lowest and highest notes as well as the tessitura.**
3. The principle of fretting applies to all string instruments, although the examples given are cello-specific.
4. Double stops (the playing of two notes simultaneously) apply only to instruments capable of sounding two or more notes at the same time.
5. The instructions "in position" or "remain in position" apply only to string instruments. Non-string players might create similar constraints for themselves by limiting the notes in a particular exercise to the notes enclosed within a specific octave.

Keeping the foregoing suggestions in mind, virtually all of the materials presented in this book become applicable to and of significant consequence to all bass clef instruments. The exceptions are to be found in Chapter 3, in which all non-string players should simply play the exercises in all keys, and Chapters 7 and 13, which are aimed specifically at string instruments.

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## Chapter 1

### Chord-to-Scale Exercises

The goals of Chapter 1 are as follows:

1. To immediately present the all-important basic information regarding the conventional relationships between chords and scales; and to teach, encourage, and foster the visual and aural recognition of this invaluable material
2. To help condition automatic responses to the chords/scales in root position, in all inversions, and in a wide variety of configurations
3. To render chord/scale sound synonymous
4. To form an automatic and infallible connection between sound and playing apparatus (fingers)
5. To develop, through fretting principles, complete performance command of all information in all keys
6. To help develop a set of practical improvisational skills and techniques

### Practicing the Chord-to-Scale Exercises

The following are some practical (though not exhaustive) suggestions for practicing the materials in this chapter.

1. Visualize, auralize and sing all exercises in root position and all inversions before playing them. Strive to make the chord and its accompanying scale indistinguishable in your mind's ear, then try fingering your instrument mentally while singing and keep in mind that repetition is the mother of memory.
2. Commit to memory the notes of the various chords and their accompanying scales.
3. Sing/play the chord-to-scale exercises in all keys as presented here around the key circle, but don't neglect moving the exercises chromatically and by various other root movements.
4. Don't neglect the inversions!
5. Practice the following variants:
  - a. Play only the chord and its inversions.





b. Play only the scale and its inversions.



c. Play the chord and its scale in root position and various inversions.



d. Mix the chord and scale positions, as in the following example in which the chord is played in root position and its scale is played in 3rd position.



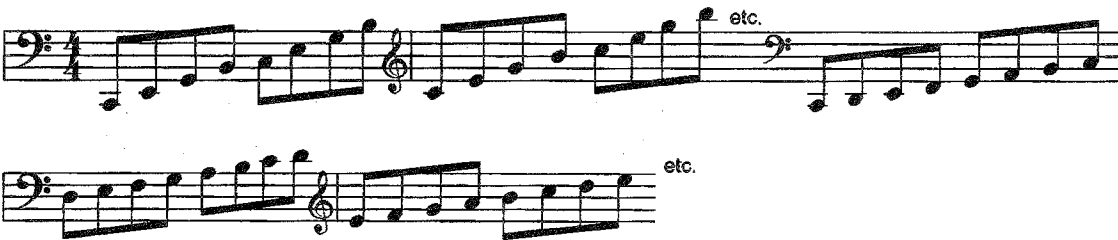
e. Play descending versions of the exercises.



f. Mix ascending and descending versions of the exercises.



g. Extend both chords and scales to encompass the entire range of your instrument.



h. Experiment with many different configurations (patterns) for both chords and scales.

