



the  
**serious  
Jazz  
Practice  
Book**

for all instruments

by  
**Barry Finnerty**

**SHER MUSIC CO.**

# The Serious Jazz Practice Book

*Melodic Materials for the  
Modern Jazz Soloist*

**By BARRY FINNERTY**

Editor and Publisher - Chuck Sher  
Cover Graphics - Attila Nagy  
Cover Artwork by Peaches, [www.peachesstudio.com](http://www.peachesstudio.com)

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ISBN 1-883217-42-3

***For Clarita and Ruth...  
The two ladies I adore  
most in the world...  
and without whom  
this book would  
not have been  
possible.***

**Love you, B.**

## **Special Thanks**

SPECIAL THANKS: Chuck and Attila at Sher Music for all their help; Randy Vincent, Chuck Gee and Ruth Finnerty for their eagle-eyed proof reading; the people at Sibelius for their great tech support; Dave Creamer, who started me on this intervallic path long ago; Randy Brecker, Dave Liebman, Hubert Laws, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and all the musicians who have been an inspiration to me over the years.

## **About The Author**

Barry Finnerty is a guitar legend, having played and recorded with many of the best musicians in jazz and fusion—including Airtio & Flora Purim, Chico Hamilton, Hubert Laws, Joe Farrell, Ray Barretto, Blood Sweat & Tears, Taj Mahal, the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis band, and Billy Cobham.

Barry was the guitarist on several seminal recordings in the 1970s and 1980s, including Miles Davis' "The Man With The Horn", the Brecker Brothers' "Heavy Metal Bebop" and the Crusaders' "Street Life".

Born in the San Francisco Bay Area, Barry moved to New York in 1973, played with the above-mentioned artists and many more, toured with the Crusaders for four years, and then moved back to the Bay Area in 1998, where he currently plays, composes, teaches and records. His latest records are available at [www.barryfinnerty.com](http://www.barryfinnerty.com). He can be reached at [barry@barryfinnerty.com](mailto:barry@barryfinnerty.com).

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# Foreword

In order to become an accomplished modern jazz soloist, one will need talent, inspiration, and imagination. One will have to have a lot of love for and dedication to the art of improvisation, of spontaneous musical creation. And one will have to have the FEELING! There are a lot of musical emotions and grooves that meet and interact in the world of jazz, but to me, the most important one, the one that imbues and informs all the others, is the feeling of the blues. Not always the NOTES of the blues, because jazz is a far more melodically and harmonically diverse kind of music, but the FEELING. Never forget that.

But also do not forget that to be a good modern jazz soloist, two things are required: mastering one's instrument and mastering one's materials. And for the modern jazz soloist, the two go hand in hand. In order for improvisational imagination to take flight, one needs to be able to play anything one can hear...to have so many possible note combinations under one's fingers, and to KNOW WHAT THEY ARE, WHAT THEY SOUND LIKE, and HOW TO USE THEM, that it becomes automatic.

The technique becomes a servant of the musical idea. The intellect and the emotion work together at such a high level that they are indistinguishable from one another. Creativity and inspiration rule.

But this book is not about musical intangibles. This book was written to give jazz players a thorough MUSICAL VOCABULARY for melodic improvisation, together with a solid WORKING KNOWLEDGE of their materials.

Part of this WORKING KNOWLEDGE will come from the fact that the student will have to do a lot of the WORK! For example, all of the diatonic, pentatonic, and arpeggio studies will have to be transposed and practiced through the other 11 keys. It is ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL that this be done if proper mastery of this method is to be achieved. The diminished studies will be transposed and practiced in the other two diminished scales, and the whole tone studies in the one other whole tone scale.

In the case of diatonic, you can photocopy each page and just add a key signature if you like, but I think the modern jazz soloist will get more out of it if he simply plays the scale of the key he is going to practice the exercise in, then works on the patterns until they become comfortable under his fingers. That way they will be better memorized, and he will better understand what they ARE, than if they were merely read off the page. Do it with your mind, your hands, and your instrument...you'll be better off! You could do the same thing with the diminished and whole tone exercises, but if it feels like too much of a brain drain, I recommend copying them out by hand.

NOTE: To teachers working from this book, or students working alone, I suggest focusing on one or two exercises at a time. Each one should be practiced through every possible applicable scale before moving on to the next one. Practice them slowly and evenly at first, then build up speed until you feel you have achieved command.

You will notice, as you go through the book, that every exercise has a NAME. I think this will also be helpful in establishing a working knowledge of the musical vocabulary we are laying out. The modern jazz soloist needs to have a practical understanding of his melodic materials. Having a handle on them will make them easier to use!

You may also notice, as I mention several times in the book, that NOT all the possible combinations and permutations of the various note groups have been included. This is INTENTIONAL. While it is true that there is enough stuff contained herein to keep most people practicing away for years, it is also true that there is a LOT more stuff out there. And I want YOU to find it! This book is not an encyclopedia; it is a practice guide based on a logical method of organizing notes for improvising that, if followed correctly, will surely pay HUGE dividends in your musicianship, no matter what instrument you happen to play.

All the patterns and exercises in the book are written out in 8th notes, mostly either as triplets or groups of 4 (there are a few odd 5's and 6's mixed in). They should be practiced as written, because 8th notes are the easiest way to insure that the notes will be securely under your fingers. BUT it is VERY IMPORTANT to remember that once the modern jazz soloist has learned his melodic materials, it is his (or her) sole responsibility to use them in a creative way. And endless strings of 8th notes are not particularly creative, at least from a rhythmic point of view.

So once you have practiced a particular bit of melodic material and have it securely under your fingers, a little rhythmic variation can open up those dull straight 8th notes into a world of melodic creativity! For example, let us take one of our most basic bits, the diatonic 4ths:

### CD TRACK 1

*Diatonic 4ths*



*Add a little bit of rhythmic bounce, and that same pattern can become:*



An 8th note pattern of 4th descending while alternating up and down...



...can become this fairly modern-sounding beboppy little riff:



Take 8th note triplets or groups of five and play them in fours. Take fours and play them in triplets (examples of this sort of thing will appear later in the book). Develop motifs (see Appendix for more on this subject). Experiment with phrasing, rhythms, dynamics, and space. And those same principles apply to all the patterns and exercises in this book. All the raw materials are here for the learning. Their applications and various uses are the creative domain of the modern jazz soloist. So enjoy your study of these materials, practice them, learn them, and CREATE with them!

"The thing that distinguishes artists is the choices that they make"...my father, a wonderful actor, once told me that. Everyone has the same canvas and paints, the same blank page, or in the case of musicians, the same 12 notes to work with. So take these notes and go make some GOOD CHOICES! Good luck!

*Benny*



# Section 1 - Diatonic Exercises

## THE DIATONIC SCALES

Scales are the basic source from which all melodic materials are derived. The aspiring modern jazz soloist should have the knowledge of the diatonic scale throughout the range of his instrument, in all keys, before commencing these exercises.

For the sake of simplicity, these examples will be written in the key of C. However, it is recommended that they be applied to all the keys, and modified to fit the range of your particular instrument.

*3's (Triplets)*

The first exercise is a diatonic scale in the key of C, written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The exercises are composed of eighth-note triplets, indicated by a '3' above the notes. The first staff shows an ascending eighth-note triplet scale from C4 to G4, followed by a descending eighth-note triplet scale from G4 to C4. The second staff continues the ascending eighth-note triplet scale from A4 to E5. The third staff continues the ascending eighth-note triplet scale from F5 to B5. The fourth staff shows a descending eighth-note triplet scale from B5 to C4.

One can also take an exercise like the above, and play it not as triplets but in groups of 4.

The second exercise is a diatonic scale in the key of C, written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The exercises are composed of eighth-note groups of four notes, indicated by an accent (>) above the notes. The first staff shows an ascending eighth-note group of four notes scale from C4 to G4, followed by a descending eighth-note group of four notes scale from G4 to C4. The second staff continues the ascending eighth-note group of four notes scale from A4 to E5. The third staff continues the ascending eighth-note group of four notes scale from F5 to B5, ending with a final note on C4.



There are plenty of ways to utilize your basic diatonic scale materials to make great jazz solos. We are going to get into a LOT of them later in this book. But for now, try practicing your scales as if they WERE a solo! Weave your way up and down, using DYNAMICS, soft to loud, loud to soft, and try to create some kind of melodic flow, while using ONLY the single note intervals within the scale.



There is some additional discussion of scales on **CD TRACK #2**

It is also permissible to throw in an interval jump or two, while focusing primarily on your scale-based melodic lines.



Another thing you can use to spice up your scale-based improvising is a little trill-type ornament. For example, a rather dull line such as:



...can sound a lot more melodic and soulful with the addition of the trill ornamentation:



Here is an exercise using this ornament through the scale:

The image shows a musical exercise on a treble clef staff in 4/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The exercise consists of three lines of music. The first line shows the ascending scale: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Each note is followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The second line shows the descending scale: C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. Each note is followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The third line shows the ascending scale again, but with a triplet of eighth notes before each note.

Notice the chromatic approach notes on the ascending part. The chromatic scale is actually of immense value to the jazz improviser. It can be used to connect tones of the scale from either above or below. There is an old Charlie Parker lick that is a good example of this:

The image shows a Charlie Parker lick on a treble clef staff in 4/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The lick consists of two lines of music. The first line shows the ascending scale: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Each note is followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The second line shows the descending scale: C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. Each note is followed by a triplet of eighth notes.

So, except for the two places in the major scale where there are half steps (E to F and B to C, in the key of C, for example), the chromatic scale will bridge the gaps between the scale tones. And in those places, you can always add a chromatic approach note from the other direction:

The image shows two lines of music on a treble clef staff. The first line shows the ascending scale: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Each note is followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The second line shows the descending scale: C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. Each note is followed by a triplet of eighth notes.

When you are doing an upward chromatic approach, you can use the same 2-note lead-up throughout:

The image shows a musical example on a treble clef staff. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The example consists of two lines of music. The first line shows the ascending scale: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Each note is followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The second line shows the descending scale: C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. Each note is followed by a triplet of eighth notes.

2 up and one down, or 2 down and one up:



3 up and one down, or 3 down and one up:



We will deal with the melodic possibilities that spring from the chromatic scale a LOT more later in this book. But it is important to study and be always aware of this extremely useful aspect of it: Every scale tone can be connected to the next by one or two half steps. It's the shortest distance between two musical points.