

Transcription and Learning by Ear in a Jazz Style

Please read the other lesson in this series before reading this one, and remember some of the helpful hints listed at the end of that lesson!

Learning an instrument is similar to learning a **language**. We learn the musical alphabet, start to put notes together the way we learn to make words, and then we try to get better at reading music, which is like starting to read sentences on the page.

That covers the written part of language, but we also learn how to *speak* a language, and that comes from hearing other people talk. From a very early age we start to imitate the people we hear, and music works in a similar way.

The style of music we call jazz has an important history of learning by listening to other people play, and because of that there are important parts of the style that we don't get by reading them off of the page. To play jazz the way it has been intended, we *have* to listen to it.

In addition, listening to the music is also how we start forming ideas for **improvisation** and soloing. If we go back to the language idea, you can't speak correctly just by reading words out of a dictionary and memorizing them; you have to hear how people put the words together. For improvisation, we have to learn pieces of other musicians soloing – their musical **phrases** - and practice using those phrases in our own solos. If we don't try to learn other musician's phrases we often end up just running through scales and random notes, when we want to be putting together musical sentences that listeners can follow.

Because we may not know jazz songs as well as other music we like, it can be hard to choose where to start learning jazz by ear. Here are some suggestions for jazz songs that may be a good beginning:

- Lou Donaldson, "Blues Walk"
- Paul Desmond, saxophone solo halfway through "Take Five", by Dave Brubeck
- Miles Davis, "So What"
- Miles Davis, "All Blues"
- Lester Young, "Blue Lester"
- Sonny Stitt/Gene Ammons, "There is No Greater Love"
- Sonny Stitt/Gene Ammons, "Autumn Leaves"
- Dexter Gordon, "Blue Bossa"

If you already have some favorite jazz songs, feel free to try those! Just remember that learning by ear is slow at first and it is normal to have to go *one note at a time*.