

Introduction

This is the third of a series of publications by Schott, following on from *Exploring Jazz Piano 1* and *Improvising Blues Piano* (IBP). Having covered most of the basic jazz chords in Vol. 1, including major, dominant and minor ninths, this book ventures into slightly more exotic territory.

Beginning with modal jazz and quartal harmony, we'll be expanding our harmonic vocabulary to include sus 4, sharp eleventh, thirteenth, diminished and altered chords, and to widen our range of improvisational techniques. For an overview of the harmonic material covered, see the 'Chord Voicings Chart', Appendix VI, p. 280.

As in Vol. 1 and IBP, easier pieces are found at the start of every chapter. However, the technical progression is not always predictable. If you get bogged down with a piece, skip it and try the next one. Or go to the start of the next chapter, returning to the harder piece(s) later.

The ability to play jazz and improvise convincingly does not come without dedication and application. Appendix VII (p. 282) contains some useful practice routines drawing on material from both volumes.

Don't get discouraged if the way seems a little thorny. Although learning theory may seem like an intellectual process, jazz is also all about personal expression, so the feeling of conveying your improvisations are ultimately more important than the notes you play. Cast aside any preconceptions and let your muse take over.

I hope you'll be as much out of this as I have in writing the book.

Tim Richards
2005

At the end of the book you will see references to YouTube where you can watch me demonstrate the topics, play through some of the pieces and improvise. There's a clip for each chapter.

You can find them on the Schott website – go here <https://en.schott-music.com/tim-richards-piano-books/> and click on the YouTube videos link.

The CD

Every piece in the book can be heard on the CD. Get into the habit of listening to it as well as reading the music – learning pieces by ear is a viable alternative.

Tracks played on piano alone are recorded in stereo, just like an ordinary audio CD. However, some of the other tracks may sound a little strange as the instruments have been panned left and right for educational purposes.

If you've just picked up the book, and would like to get a taste of the pieces it contains, please contact your local music player to play the following tracks:

1 – 7 – 10 – 27 – 32 – 33 – 43 – 46
Select the 'mono' setting on your amplifier, if it has one, to eliminate the panning.

● **Drums** The drum accompaniment have been recorded in stereo separation. Although drums and piano were recorded at the same time, they have been panned left and right in the recording studio. If you wish to silence the piano from the recording, you can play along with the drums alone by silencing the right-hand channel. There are two ways of achieving this:

- Turn the balance knob on your amplifier to the left, so that no sound comes out the right-hand speaker.
- If you have no balance control, use headphones, but only listen to the left can. The other one can be positioned behind your ear so that you don't hear it.

In the pieces with drums, the piano generally plays a bass line in the left hand, which is why the bass is not necessary.

● **Bass and drums** The trio tracks have the piano on the right, bass on the left, with the drums split between both channels. By silencing the piano as described above, you can play along with bass and drums, as if you were the pianist in my trio!

● **Playing along** All the tracks can be used for this purpose, without using the stereo separation. Initially, practise each hand separately, at the same time as the piano on the recording. If you can't keep up, practise at a slower tempo, away from the CD, and try again when you've had a chance to get up to speed. When the left- and right-hand parts are both known, try them together. At this point, you should silence the piano and play along with just the drums (or bass and drums) to guide you.

● **Improvisation** *Reflections* (track 1), *Eleventh Hour* (track 2), *The Message* (track 9), *Blue in Green* (track 32) and *Seventh Heaven* (track 37) are 'mini performances', complete with improvised solos that demonstrate the topic under discussion.

I improvise for a single chorus only on *Summertime* (track 24), *Softly as in a Morning Sunrise* (track 41) and *Twelve by Three* (track 46), switching to chords (comping) for the remaining chorus(es), before recapping the head. I hope these solos will start you off in the right direction, so that you'll fill the 'blank' sections yourself. Try these sections without the piano too, focussing on the bass in the left-hand channel as a guide.

If you'd like to hear solos that stretch out a little more, please listen to my commercially available recordings, many of which include pieces from this book (see p. 4).

● **Comping** This term is short for 'accompanying' and refers to the playing of chords behind your own or someone else's solo. Examples can be heard in the solo sections of the following tunes:

- 10 *Thirteenth Groove*
- 13 *Ladybird*
- 22 *Crossing the Tracks*
- 23 *Don't Stop the Carnival*
- 29/33 *Tension & Release Blues #2*
- 34 *Tune Up*
- 39 *Blue Bossa*
- 44 *Beautiful Love*

Try out your own comping where you like, with the CD. If you want to practise your own comping, accompany me, silently, on the piano as described above. Practise the comping in the various altered shapes but also their rhythmic variations and studies in comping.

- 11 *Hot and Cold – Montuno*
- 12 *Blue Nova Comping #2*
- 13 *Don't Stop the Carnival*
- 14 *Caravan*
- 15 *On Green Dolphin Street*
- 16 *Blue Bossa*
- 17 *Hot and Cold – Montuno*
- 18 *Blue Nova Comping #2*
- 19 *Don't Stop the Carnival*
- 20 *Caravan*
- 21 *On Green Dolphin Street*
- 22 *Blue Bossa*
- 23 *Hot and Cold – Montuno*
- 24 *Summertime*
- 25 *Softly as in a Morning Sunrise*
- 26 *Twelve by Three*
- 27 *Reflections*
- 28 *Eleventh Hour*
- 29 *The Message*
- 30 *Blue in Green*
- 31 *Seventh Heaven*
- 32 *Blue in Green*
- 33 *Tension & Release Blues #2*
- 34 *Tune Up*
- 35 *Blue Bossa*
- 36 *Beautiful Love*
- 37 *Seventh Heaven*
- 38 *Blue in Green*
- 39 *Blue Bossa*
- 40 *Beautiful Love*
- 41 *Softly as in a Morning Sunrise*
- 42 *Twelve by Three*
- 43 *Minor Turnaround Workout – Comping*
- 44 *Blues in Fourths*

No melody or improvisation is played on these tracks. You can however use them as play-along tracks for practising improvisation, with or without the piano chords on the right channel.

● **The workouts** These tracks alternate two- or four-bar phrases with gaps, during which you should repeat what you've just heard or improvise a response to it. In *Short II – V Workout* (track 11), the gaps are four bars long. In the following pieces, the gaps are two bars long:

- 21/25 *Turnaround Workout #1 & #2*
- 28 *Diminished Scale Workout*
- 31 *Blues Turnaround Workout (first 8 bars)*
- 43 *Minor Turnaround Workout – Diminished*

● **Walking bass lines** Playing a walking bass line and chords in the right is a useful exercise. It is a good style for any situation without a bassist. Walking bass lines are used in the following tracks:

- 14/18 *Walking Comping*
- 15 *Domino*
- 16 *Seventh Heaven*
- 17 *Minor Turnaround Workout – Comping*

The following tracks begin with a walking bass, but the left hand plays chords when the bassist enters the head of improvisation:

- 10 *Thirteenth Groove*
- 13 *Ladybird*
- 22 *Crossing the Tracks*
- 23 *Don't Stop the Carnival*
- 29/33 *Tension & Release Blues #2*

● **Latin bass lines** These are featured in the following tracks:

- 11 *Hot and Cold – Montuno*
- 12 *Blue Nova Comping #2*
- 13 *Don't Stop the Carnival*
- 14 *Caravan*
- 15 *On Green Dolphin Street*
- 16 *Blue Bossa*

Before you start

No book on playing jazz piano can claim to cover comprehensively the vast range of styles that have come into existence since the beginnings of the music over 100 years ago. Jazz has become so diverse that it is in danger of becoming a meaningless word.

● **Listening** Faced with this bewildering variety, the jazz pianist has a lot of choices to make. The most important thing is to keep an open mind, and to listen to other musicians as much as possible, on records, on the radio, and at live gigs. At the end of Vol. 1 (p. 228) you'll find a 'Suggested Listening' discography outlining some of the most important pianists to be aware of, and their best recordings. Check out as many as possible of these and immerse yourself in the music. It's also essential to listen to other instruments too – see Appendix V in this volume (p. 278) for more recommended albums.

● **Learning the language** Learning to play jazz (or any other musical idiom) is very similar to learning a language. In order to sound like a native speaker, you have to constantly listen and copy. All the great innovators in jazz have had a sound knowledge and experience of earlier styles.

Improvising can be compared to having a conversation. When speaking to friends we don't plan in advance what to say, but use our knowledge of sentence construction, grammar, vocabulary and so on to express ourselves spontaneously. Jazz is different. Some improvisers and pianists use the basic elements of jazz to communicate their ideas.

● **The Improviser's Toolkit** You'll find many suggested licks and patterns in the given style. These are often a scale, arpeggio, pentatonic scale, etc. You are not obliged to use all the licks; nor do you have to play them in the order given. You can use the register of the notes too, and play them in your own rhythm. Remember that they're just suggestions – other notes may sound good too, or you can do your own thing!

● **Rehearsing Ideas** Most improvising musicians prepare phrases a split-second before playing them. Imagine the contour or rhythm of a phrase and let your fingers try to find the notes as best they can. Perfecting this connection between what you hear and what you play is vital if you want to play jazz. If you don't hear anything in your head, there's a danger you'll be just moving your fingers and playing notes at random – not very inspiring for the listener!

● **Singing** Even if you're not proud of your voice or confident at singing, incorporate it into your practice. Everytime you learn a new scale or pattern, sing it as well as playing it. Then sing a variation on it and try to play that. This is particularly beneficial with arpeggios, pentatonic scales and blues scales, since they contain only a few notes and their sound is easy to retain in your head. Many musicians sing along in unison with their improvised lines, the ultimate proof that they're playing what they hear. Singing is a great way of playing along with records. It's the logical extension of the process. If you can't play something, sing it first.

● **Articulation** The piano is a percussive instrument. Classical piano technique always brings this to the fore, whereas many jazz pianists emphasise the piano's melodic aspect. This is an important aspect of his/her style, which is the reason why classical players don't always sound convincing when interpreting jazz material. Try to personalise individual notes or phrases by articulating them.

● **Feel** Jazz usually needs a constant, metronomic pulse in order to sound authentic. The concept of a 'groove' is not so prevalent in classical music, which often calls for a more flexible rhythmic approach, especially at the transitions between sections. Always tap your foot to feel the music in your body, and play with a steady beat. The metronome is your friend!

Chords

- The five basic chord-types and their chord symbols are shown in Fig 8.1, p. 121. See also 'Symbols used in this book' (p. 284) and the 'Chord voicings chart' (p. 280).

- Open triads: **R53, 3R5 or 53R**
- Shells: **R7 or R3**
- Tritones: **37 or 73** (dominant chords)
- Three-note rootless voicings: **735 or 379**
- Four-note rootless voicings: **3579 or 7935**
- Two-handed voicings: **R7/35, R5/37 or 79/35**
- Five-note voicings: **R7/359 or 73/795**
- Quartal voicings: **369** (perfect fourths for major chords)
- Shearing block chords (drop 2 voicings)

- Major scales in all keys (and their relative minors)
- Scale patterns (three- and four-note shapes, thirds, etc.)
- Major and minor triads and patterns
- The blues scale and its variations and top harmony
- Major, minor, and natural minor scales
- Mixolydian, Dorian, Phrygian and Phrygian modes
- Whole and half steps

- If many of these topics are unfamiliar, you are strongly advised to spend some time with Vol. 1, which deals with them all from first principles. If you are new to improvising, I suggest starting with the previous volume, *Improvising Blues Piano*. Because blues generally uses only one chord-type (the dominant seventh) and has an easily grasped twelve-bar structure, it's the ideal place to begin developing your improvisational ability.

Chapter Six

Elevenths,
fourths &
quartal harmony

We now continue to add notes to the basic four-note seventh chords, as begun in Vol. 1. Having dealt with ninths in Chapter 5, the next extension is the eleventh, the same note as the fourth of the scale. As well as exploring eleventh chords, this chapter will also show you how to play any chord in fourth intervals, by using quartal harmony.

Adding the fourth to a major seventh chord causes a clash between it and the major third, which is only a semitone away. This clash is still heard if the fourth is an octave higher than the third, as in Fig 6.1(a) below:

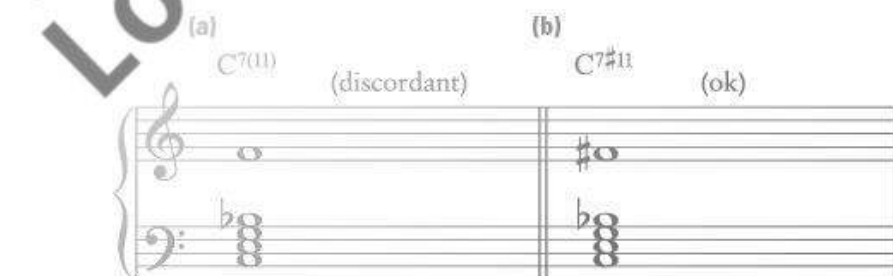
Fig 6.1: Major eleventh chord



To avoid the clash, the fourth is usually raised by a semitone, as in Fig 6.1(b). This 'altering' chord is given the symbol $C\Delta\sharp 4$ or $C\Delta\sharp 11$, pronounced 'C major seven sharp four', or 'C major seven sharp eleven'. The meaning of these two symbols is the same.

Dominant seventh chords can also have fourths added:

Fig 6.2: Dominant eleventh chords



In Fig 6.2(a) the same clash can be heard between the fourth and the major third as in Fig 6.1. Very often, this clash is avoided by leaving out the third of the chord, given rise to the term 'sus 4', short for 'suspended fourth' (see overleaf).

Another solution is shown at Fig 6.2(b) – raising the fourth. This chord symbol is pronounced 'C seven sharp 11'. In a chord symbol, remember that **7** without a Δ , 'maj' or \sharp in front of it always indicates a $\flat 7$.