

## On the Record

Recording yourself as you practice improvisation is a great learning experience. All you need is an inexpensive microphone to plug into your computer (generally \$25 or less – the microphone, not the computer). Or you can even use a cassette player. As you use the Practice Pages or the 300 Standards on the CD-ROM, record yourself frequently to see areas of progress and areas for improvement.

Before you record, make sure to test your recording setup to get a good balance between your sound and the accompaniment.

## The List

Here are some of the areas for improvement you'll likely discover as you record your solos.

1. Sound quality – Is your pitch consistent? Is your sound full enough to let you pursue your ideas?
2. Initial attacks and ideas – Does your first idea come across secure and interesting? Can you use it to develop your next idea?
3. Control of ideas – Are you following SHAPE well enough? Do ideas seem rushed or too slow to develop? Are you avoiding the up-and-down “sine wave” approach?
4. Chords – Do your ideas fit the chord qualities, or leave them appropriately? Are you getting enough melodic color (color tones, non-harmonic tones, dominant alterations)?
5. Time and rhythms – Do your ideas lock into time? Are you using rubato effectively? Are you getting enough rhythmic color (offbeats, 3 against 4, triplets, ties)?
6. Rhythmic transitions – When you switch from slower to faster notes, or vice versa, do your rhythms remain solid and your time secure?
7. Phrases – Are you ending phrases too predictably, in the same places in the tune form? Do your notes form solid ideas and developments, or are there “baggage” notes that don't belong?
8. Articulations and style – Do your articulations come across consistently and well? Are you conveying the style and nuances of the tune (swing, latin, fusion, etc.)?
9. Expression and dynamics – Are you missing opportunities for expression and dynamics? Are you overdoing it or using the same devices too often?
10. Use of density and intensity – Does the solo feel too empty or too crowded? Does it build in intensity in a way that makes sense? Is it too high, fast, or loud?

## The Other List

With all the improvements to make, don't forget to take note of the things that turn out well on the recording. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Clean execution – in tune, well articulated, well expressed.
2. Interesting development – ideas that carry forward with the right amounts of repetition and contrast.
3. Places where you surprise yourself a bit – an unexpected contour, an idea that doesn't fit the mold.