

## Clean Up Your Act

Right – clean your plate, clean your room; isn't jazz supposed to be a vacation from cleanup? But I'm not really talking about a sterile environment – just one where messes are kept to a minimum.

No wreckage – that's what it's about. There are basically three ways to approach the wreckage issue:

- 1) Stop caring about wrecks – you'll have more of them but they won't bother you so much.
- 2) Play safe so the odds of messing up are lower.
- 3) Turn your wrecks into opportunities.

The three suggestions above go from really bad (1) to bad (2) to decent (3). But is there a better alternative?

## Cleanup Procedures

One way to build up your ability to avoid crashes is to increase how far you can go without one. It's a process of building clean phrases, from shorter to longer. Here are some practice steps to follow:

- 1) Choose an easy play-along track from Practice Pages, or an easier tune from 300 Standards.
- 2) Play a motif cleanly, with no errors or hesitation. (Don't pre-plan what you play.) If you make a mistake, try again until you get it right.
- 3) Stop, then play a short phrase of new ideas, error-free.
- 4) Repeat step 3, each time playing a little longer.

Of course, using SHAPE is essential in this exercise. The other keys are these:

- As you play the phrase, concentrate on driving toward a clean ending.
- Put off the ending just a little bit each time, making it come later and later with each new phrase.
- When the ending does come, it should feel like you could have kept the phrase going, but you purposely ended it at that particular time and spot. It will actually feel like you ended just a little prematurely.

As you do this, your SHAPE skills increase and you gain confidence in playing longer phrases without errors. Eventually, driving toward clean endings will become a strong habit, whether your phrases are long, medium, or short.

You can also reverse the procedure above, starting with a longer phrase and gradually getting shorter.