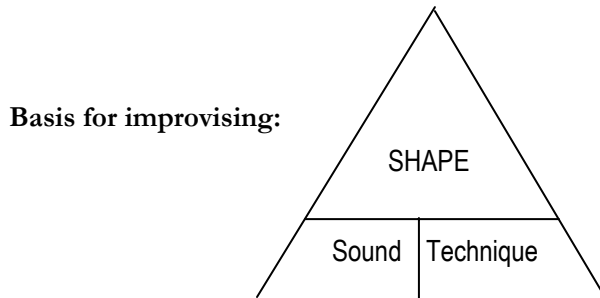


## SHAPE, Sound, and Technique

SHAPE (See, Hear, and Play Expressively) is the way I describe musical vision. Most players need to work on constantly expanding their musical vision to open up new ideas and possibilities. But even the best vision won't help much if you can't play what you're hearing and seeing. Sound and technique are the vehicles that actually take you where your vision leads.

### Three Pieces that Fit Together

SHAPE, sound, and technique fit together, something like this:



Sound and technique form a foundation for your musical vision, so weaknesses in sound or technique will affect SHAPE. For example, if your sound is weak, you'll be less likely to explore shades of expression, which narrows SHAPE. If your technique is weak, you're trapped in an easier range of ideas, with little room for growth and limited SHAPE.

But if your sound and technique are strong, you can leverage them to increase your musical vision. Once you see an idea in your mind and hear it, solid sound and technique help you play the idea well. Then SHAPE will push you towards you'll be looking for new horizons. That is, of course, if you're using SHAPE. Sadly, many players rest on their sound and technique abilities and become prisoners of their comfort zone.

### A Question of Balance

That's not to say you that you need stellar sound and technique to become a good improviser. We don't all have the sound and technique of Marsalis, Corea, McLaughlin, and Brecker, and it's clear they use those talents to expand their music vision. What about the rest of us mortals?

It's our responsibility to work out a good *balance* of sound, technique, and SHAPE so the ideas will flow and come out our instruments the way we intend. When we have a problem with SHAPE or technique, the root of it may actually be in our sound. Or, we may get so wrapped up in technique that we fail to see we could get far better results with better use of SHAPE.

Work constantly to get a good balance of sound, technique, and SHAPE, and watch your improvisations soar!