

Develop an Aural Connection to the Piano

As a musician playing jazz, developing your ear is one of the most important activities you'll practice. There are a number of ways to maintain this aural connection. First, if you are a beginning student, practice playing and singing (play, then sing) white key intervals above middle C (You can sing any C that is in a comfortable register). These include C to D, C to E, C to F, and so forth. Work your way up to the octave. Once these intervals are relatively easy to sing, work on other intervals such as C to the black keys, and white key intervals down from C. Eventually, practice all intervals from C to an octave higher, and C to an octave lower. More advanced students can practice playing short phrases and singing them, and singing short phrases (that they make up), and playing them. Most important, practice singing the phrases that appear in the pieces you are playing, particularly when the music is melodic in nature. For pianists, the following approaches are useful:

A. Right hand only:

Exercise #1

1. Play a chord, scale, or short phrase (such as a riff, lick, or motif).
2. Sing it after you play it. If you have trouble singing the notes in the chord, arpeggiate it.

Exercise #2

1. Sing a chord, scale, or short phrase.
2. Play it back.

Exercise #3

1. Play a chord, scale, or short phrase, and sing it at the same time.

B. Right hand with left hand:

Exercise #1

1. Play a chord in the left hand.
2. Sing the notes in the chord. If you have trouble singing the notes in the chord, arpeggiate it.
3. Sing the scale that is implied by the chord, that seems to work, or that you hear going with the chord. Generally, this means connecting the chord tones by step.

Exercise #2

1. Do all of the above with various chord progressions in a tune.
2. This could include two or more chords, up to the entire form.
3. Sing a solo for an entire chorus while you play the chords in the left hand.
4. Points to remember:
 - a. Regardless of what you play (or don't play) *always* keep your place in the tune. This is, perhaps, the most important aspect of all. If you lose your place in the tune, slow down, or work with the left hand or right hand separately before putting the hands together.
 - b. Allow for some space between your melodic improvisations. Think about how the breath supports the phrases that you sing. This allows for a natural

approach to phrasing, and a vocal, melodic quality. Contrast sound with silence (the notes of the melody with its rests).

c. Experiment with ornamentation (embellishment) and variation of the melody.

d. Improvise using rhythmic and motivic relationships, such as repetition, variation, and contrast. Experiment rhythmically with repeated groups of notes.

e. The interaction between the left hand and right hand is at least as important as how both hands sound together. Don't feel a need to play with both hands all the time.

f. Do all of the above with rhythmic spirit and vitality. How you sing or play something rhythmically is almost always more important than what notes you play.