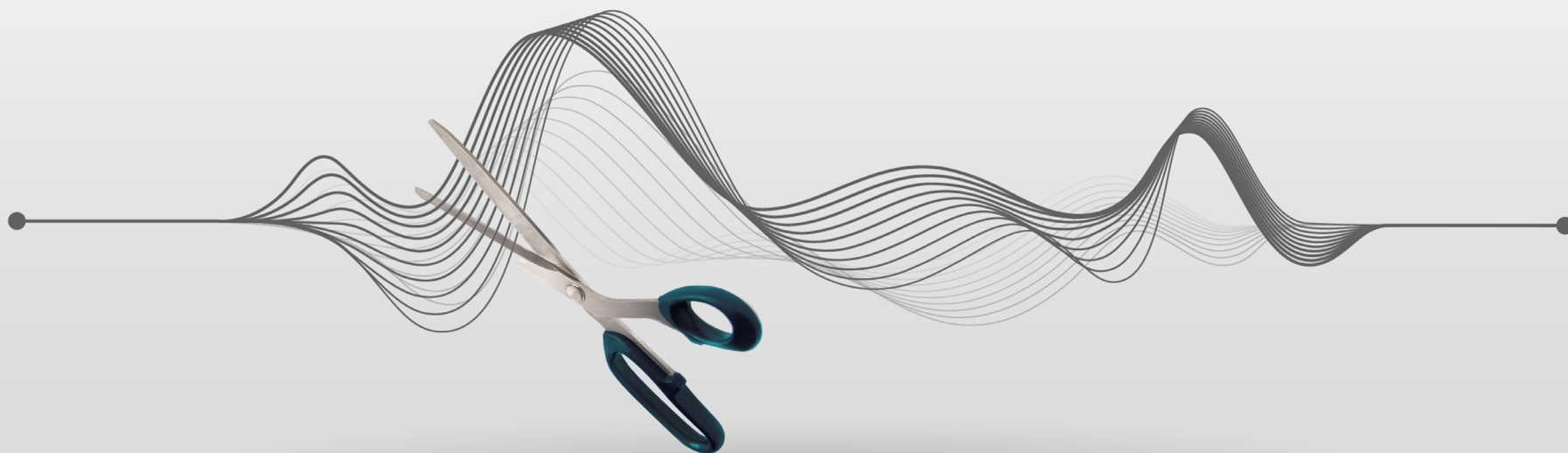


Silence for Jazz Ear Excellence

by Michael Lake



The key to improvising well is to hear the sound in your mind of the harmony of a tune as it progresses. In other words, instead of having to wait to hear each chord or tonal center once it's played by the rhythm section, you should already hear it in your mind's ear.

Much like good driving demands that your vision extends to the cars in front of you, well past just the front of your vehicle, good improvisation demands an ability to “hear” and anticipate the harmony.



This ability relies on you being very familiar with the chords of common progressions and the harmonic movement of the tunes you play.

That familiarity can be gained through continually listening to music, building your knowledge of standard tunes, playing a capella melodies to common tunes while hearing the harmony in your head, and comping chord changes on piano or guitar.

These exercises will confirm your innate familiarity with these harmonies and make that familiarity deeper and more instinctive.

■ How to use these exercises

The following 7 exercises consist of common progressions and of tunes from the jazz repertoire. Two audio files exist for each exercise. The first plays the full segment or tune section. The second audio file contains the same full segment, but with specific chords cut from it (muted). Your challenge is to hear in your mind's ear the harmony/ chord changes within the silent portions of the cut audio file.

It's those moments of silence within the following audio tracks that provides the opportunity to practice hearing the chord resolutions and transitions. Ideally, you hear those missing chords in your mind within the silence. If it helps you to sing the root or other chord tones, feel free to do so. You can also play those tones or melody fragments on your instrument.

But the surest and most important indication that the sound of these chords are in your mind is to hear them in your imagination. As an example, imagine a song you know well, from start to finish. Can you “hear” it? It is that clarity that will propel you to improvise fluidly over the tunes you play.

Resist thinking about the chords in the silence and instead, mute your internal dialog. Your internal chatter makes “hearing” the chords more difficult.

Once you “hear” the chords through the silence, next improvise through them. In other words, begin playing a melody fragment at the start of the progression and continue through after the rhythm cuts off. Can you maintain a melodic flow through that silence that reflects the continuing harmony of the progression?

The 7 segments are arranged in order of difficulty. It is suggested that you start on number 1 in order to get used to the process.

■ The Audio Files

Each exercise in the book is associated with two audio files. The first audio file called the *Complete Segment Track* contains all the chords for that segment. Nothing is cut from it. This is the model of the harmony. Play this file first and get it into your ear.

The second audio file called *Cut Segment Track* begins like the Complete segment file but is cut off at certain points where you need to “hear” the missing chords. You are encouraged to sing or play in order to get the sound into your ear, but “hearing” the full rhythm section harmony is the goal.

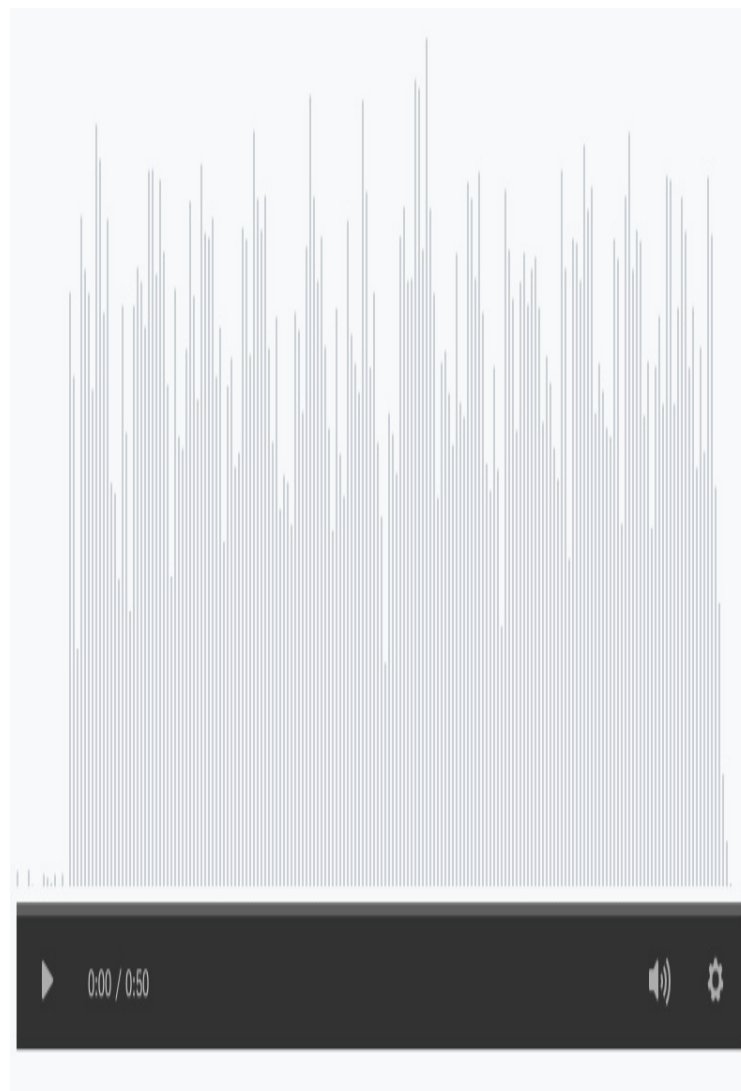
Simply click or tap the icon associated with each segment to hear each audio file. The audio files stream from Dropbox. Play the files in your browser by tapping play, stop, pause and repeat. Download each file as you wish from Dropbox.



The Complete Segment track plays the entire segment with each of the chords.



The Cut File track plays the Complete Segment track only up to the point at which the segment is cut, leaving you to imagine the chords of that missing part. The missing chords are ghosted after a suitable silence.



V - I Segment

Tap to play the audio files:



The full progression



The Cut File

This segment consists only of two chords in a ballad tempo. The V chord leading to the I chord. This is the most basic of all progressions and one of the most important for you to hear clearly. Think of the three note jingle from the aftershave product Mennen. “Buy Mennen”.

The full progression consists of the two-bar V - I repeated once. Listen to the full progression, then play the cut audio file which is the I chord, and “hear” that chord (the tonic) resolving from the V (the dominant).

I - IV - V - I Segment

Tap to play the audio files:



The full progression



The Cut File

This segment consists of the common four-bar progression I - IV - V - I. The full progression track plays the four-bars repeated once. Listen to the full progression, then play the cut audio file which is the I chord and “hear” the I chord (the tonic) resolve from the V in bar four each of the two times through the progression.

II - V - I Segment

Tap to play the audio files:



The full progression



The Cut File

Jazz tunes are filled with II - V - I chords, and therefore it is important that you have a clear sense of this progression in your mind.

The progression consists of a repeated II - V - I sequence. The cut file challenges you to hear two different chords within the sequence. In the first II - V - I, the I chord is cut. In the second sequence, the V chord is cut and therefore the chord you are to hear in your mind.

You can easily practice this on your own as you listen to rhythm tracks to the tunes on which you are working. Hit the pause button as the chords progress, stopping before the I chord or even before a particular II - V - I segment within the tune.

The Blues

Tap to play the audio files:



The full progression



The Cut File

The blues are characterized by the move from the I7 chord to the IV7 chord. While there are dozens of variations, the IV chord typically comes in bar two and/or bar five.

In the segment, your challenge is to hear the second instance of the IV chord in bar four that lasts for two bars.

As examples, the IV chord comes in on bar two in Monk's *Straight, No Chaser*. It comes in bar four in Miles's *All Blues*.

To play the blues well, you must have a clear sense of the movement from the I chord to the IV chord.

Rhythm Changes bridge

Tap to play the audio files:



The full progression



The Cut File

Like the blues, rhythm changes comprise many tunes over which you'll improvise. Many less experienced players stumble as they start playing over the bridge. Their entrance to the first bar of the bridge lacks the confidence in that abrupt harmonic change.

The cut file for this segment is silent in the first and the third bars of the bridge. Try also stopping the track at that first silence and imagining the entire bridge as it works its way counterclockwise around the circle of fifths.

Can you hear each of those four progressing seventh chords as they resolve in bar eight of the bridge to the I chord in the third A section?

All the Things You Are 8-bar Resolution

Tap to play the audio files:



The full progression



The Cut File

This popular tune gives less experienced players difficulty as the chord in bar five transitions to a distant key. To play over this tune well requires that you weave your improvised melodies smoothly through that transition.

The cut file on this segment mutes the V - I chords in bar six for three bars. This would be a great exercise with your instrument to see if you can play a line over the missing changes in these three bars. If you can, playing over this tune will be made much easier.

Miss Jones Bridge

Tap to play the audio files:



The full progression



The Cut File #1



The Cut File #2

Many players struggle with the 8-bar bridge of *Have You Met Miss Jones*. The II- V - I progressions of the bridge are major thirds apart which are very distant in the circle of fifths.

The cut file #1 removes the first chord of the bridge as well as the II - V in the modulated key of bar four. Cut file #2 removes II - V chords in bar two and again bar 6. Both audio files begin four bars from the bridge and provides a hint to the melody in those four bars in order to make it more intuitive to hear the start of the bridge.

There could be several variations on this exercise, an example of which could be cutting out the II - V on bar two to test your hearing of the both central keys of the bridge.