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American Eurhythms Society 5th Annual National Conference

Session #3: Having Fun with Improvisation

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1. Playing common movements on the black keys

1) Walking

- a. Participants walk in order to get the feeling, rhythm, tempo and beat of the movement.
- b. Participants vocalise the rhythm with “ta” considering the articulation (normally legato), rhythm (normally all quarter notes), and time signature (normally 4/4) while they are walking.
- c. Participants go to the piano walking and vocalising the rhythm.
- d. Participants sit in front of the piano and play matching with their vocalised rhythm on the black keys with their dominant hand.
- e. When participants feel comfortable playing with their dominant hand, add the other hand, and use both hands to play the same rhythm and articulation in the middle range of the piano.
- f. Participants add dynamics into their walking music in order to use this improvisation for quick reaction and follow exercises: students experience dynamics.
- g. Participants play with a wide range of the piano: the right hand plays on the high notes; the left hand plays on the low notes. This can be applied to a quick reaction exercise to teach students to recognize high notes (students clap) and low notes (students step) for the class.

2) Marching

- a. Participants march in order to get the feeling, rhythm, tempo and beat of the movement.
- b. Participants pay attention to how the feeling differs from walking: the knee is raised high and every step of marching is detached.
- c. Participants vocalise the rhythm with “ta” considering the articulation (normally detached: marcato), rhythm (normally all quarter notes), and time signature (normally 4/4) while they are marching.
- d. Participants go to the piano marching and vocalising the rhythm.
- e. Participants sit in front of the piano and play matching with their vocalised rhythm on the black keys with their dominant hand.
- f. When participants feel comfortable playing with their dominant hand, add the other hand, and use both hands to play the same rhythm and articulation in the middle range of the piano.
- g. Participants try to add dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythms or triplets, or both rhythms in the right hand.
- h. Participants try to play an ostinato in the left hand: pick two notes for the ostinato.

3) Running/Jogging

- a. Participants run/jog in order to get the feeling, rhythm, tempo and beat of the movement.
- b. Participants vocalise the rhythm with “ta” considering the articulation (staccato, light), rhythm (normally eighth notes), and the time signature (2/4 or 4/4).
- c. Participants go to the piano running/jogging and vocalising the rhythm.
- d. Participants sit in front of the piano and play matching with their vocalised rhythm on the black keys with their dominant hand.
- e. When participants feel comfortable playing with their dominant hand, add the other hand, and use both hands to play the same rhythm and articulation in the middle range of the piano.
- f. Participants play with a wide range of the piano: the right hand plays on the high notes; the left hand plays on the low notes. This can be applied to a quick reaction exercise to teach students to recognize high notes (students clap) and low notes (students step) for the class.

4) Swaying/Swinging

- a. Participants sway on the piano bench in order to get the feeling, rhythm, tempo and beat of the movement.
- b. Participants vocalise the rhythm with “ta” considering the time signature (normally 6/8), rhythm (quarter eighth quarter eighth), and articulation (legato).
- c. Participants make an ostinato for their left hand with the rhythm they vocalised: quarter eighth quarter eighth
- d. Participants use the damper pedal in order to have continuous sound.
- e. Participants add the right hand and play on the macro beats (dotted quarter note).

f. When participants feel comfortable, participants try to add 6/8 rhythm patterns such as three eighth notes, quarter and eighth, or sicilian (dotted eighth sixteenth and eighth).

g. For swinging, which is a bigger movement than swaying but has the same feeling, participants use a bigger range and octave/tone clusters in their right hand. The left hand keeps playing the ostinato.

5) Skipping/Hopping

- a. Participants skip in order to get the feeling, rhythm, tempo and beat of the movement.
- b. Participants vocalise the rhythm with “ta” considering the articulation (staccato, light), rhythm (quarter-eighth), and the time signature (6/8). (It is possible to play in 2/4 using a dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythm.)
- c. Participants go to the piano skipping and vocalising the rhythm.
- d. Participants sit in front of the piano and play matching with their vocalised rhythm on the black keys with the right hand.
- e. When participants feel comfortable playing with the right hand, add the left hand and play dotted quarter notes on the macro beats.
- f. Participants try to play an ostinato in the left hand which has the same rhythmic pattern with the right hand. Play both hands together.

6) Gliding

- a. Participants glide in order to get the feeling, rhythm, tempo and beat of the movement.
- b. Participants vocalise the rhythm with “ta” considering the articulation (legato), time signature (normally 3/4), and rhythm (quarter-half: “three-one (two: silent), three-one (two: silent) like a pick up measure).
- c. Participants go to the piano gliding and vocalising the rhythm.
- d. Participants play vocalised rhythm as an ostinato in the left hand with the damper pedal to have continuous sound.
- e. Participants add the right hand and play dotted half note on beat one using a wide range of the piano.
- f. Participants play an ostinato as a chord in the left hand, add more rhythmic patterns of three in the right hand.

2. Playing common movements with one hand on the black keys and the other hand on the white keys

Participants approach this the same way as playing on the black keys only (above) but playing with one hand on the black keys and the other hand on the white keys. Participants alternate keys and their hands while they play: they start the left hand on the black keys and right hand on the white keys, then they move the left hand to the white keys and the right hand to the black keys while they are playing.