

When and How Should I Start Introducing Students to Jazz?

by Arlington J. Jones II

If I had one simple answer to this question that would solve everyone's problems, I would freely share it. I don't believe one answer exists that will suffice for every situation, and there is no perfect age for introducing jazz. However there are guidelines that can help determine which students are good candidates. Anytime one feels like broadening a student's creativity or imagination is a good opportunity to bring in some jazz concepts. Those instances when piano students seem less motivated to practice and are questioning whether to continue taking lessons are perfect times to introduce a different approach. This does not mean that you must cease studying classical music and solely study jazz, but adding a few techniques to classical study will enhance anyone's musicianship.

Many people feel overwhelmed when it comes simply to listening to jazz. For some, trying to *play* jazz seems out of the question. Granted, to become a skillful jazz player one would need to take up the study of jazz very intensely. But let me ease your apprehension by assuring you one does not have to become a serious connoisseur to teach simple jazz techniques. I teach students on a weekly basis that are not trying to become the next great jazz pianist; they simply want to become better at playing the piano. I use jazz techniques to expand their knowledge and apply it to whatever style of music they play. My goal is to expand their creativity, strengthen their understanding of music theory, and help them feel comfortable enough to improvise at any level. More importantly, I intend for them to have fun while doing it.

There are many ways to include jazz techniques in a basic piano lesson. A big part of jazz that seems to scare everyone (including those who actually play the music) is improvisation, the art of creating music on the spur of the moment that is not written out beforehand. I have discovered that allowing a student opportunities to improvise sparks a newfound interest in playing the piano, or any other instrument. This can be useful at any age or level of piano study. You will make an important statement in showing the student you are willing to take a chance and

improvise for them. This will allow the student to feel more comfortable about improvising with you.

At the early levels I give the student three to five pitches on the piano. They are free to play these pitches in any order, rhythm, or octave. When working with beginners I will play a groove or rhythm on only one chord while the student makes up a melody. For example, I might give a student pitches C, D, and E. I begin by playing an accompaniment using any type of C chord. He or she joins in, playing the given pitches in any way he or she desires. The accompaniment can be as simple as this:

Example A

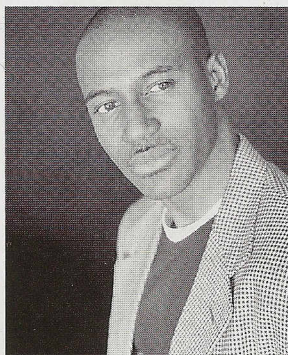


One may wonder why I use only one chord to accompany the improvisation. I have found that the less you have to think about, the more you are free to concentrate on creating spontaneously. I always suggest starting out as simple as possible. This activity can be easily modified as the student advances by playing an accompaniment using a ii7-V7-I7 progression, which is very prevalent in jazz music. In the key of C, the ii7-V7-I7 progression is dm7-G7-CMa7. The teacher can play this progression in any style. I suggest the progression be played in two-measure cycles, as shown below:

Example B: An example of the chord progression using a very basic rhythm



Example C: An example of the chord progression with more rhythmic activity



Arlington J. Jones II is adjunct professor at Cedar Valley College, teaching private piano lessons and courses in theory and jazz composition. He maintains an active performing schedule with his band, The Arlington Jones Trio, and with artists Tom Braxton and Wayman Tisdale.

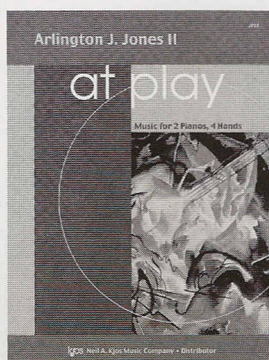
This progression can be repeated for as long as desired while the student improvises using the C major scale. I suggest practicing this in several different keys. This allows the student to improvise using the major scale of whatever key the progression is in.

Jazz improvisation is a great way to reinforce comprehension of music theory. Assist the student in learning how to find a ii7, V7, or I7 chord in any key. Encourage them to understand that a minor seventh chord is created by adding a minor seventh to a minor triad. By approaching these exercises in this manner one is laying a great foundation in jazz theory and jazz playing. Serious jazz musicians learn chords, patterns, and scales in every key. This gives them a better chance of executing a skillful improvisation and polished performance.

I know these activities require a great deal of accountability on the part of the teacher. If the student is required to know something in every key, the teacher must carry the same responsibility. This type of commitment will create well-rounded students and enhance the musicianship of teachers. It is also important to be honest with our students. If an area of music we are exploring is new to me or it is not my expertise, I inform the student. If it is worth studying, I want to be willing to learn along with them and investigate new territory. My fondest memories of my classical teachers include their honesty and willingness to explore new things. I believe those relationships caused me to be a better musician.

Though there exists much to be discussed when it comes to jazz techniques, I hope this lays a foundation for how to begin. One thing I've learned about playing jazz is that I must be willing to take chances. I'm still working on applying this to my piano teaching. I hope you'll join me.

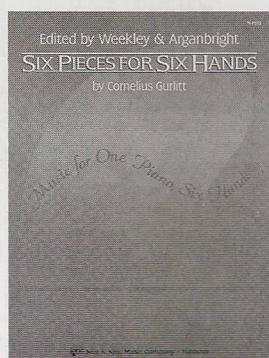
New Ensemble Repertoire from Kjos!



At Play

by Arlington J. Jones II

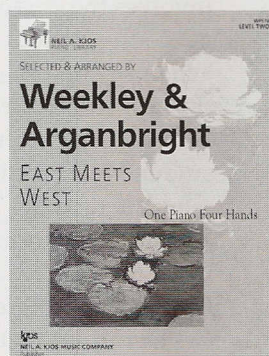
At Play is a collection of early intermediate to intermediate jazz duets for two pianos, four hands. More advanced secondo parts provide the perfect opportunity to duet with a teacher or a more advanced student or sibling. Each primo and secondo part can also be played as a solo. Titles reflecting "play" include *Kite in the Wind*, *Fun in the Park*, *The Chasing Game*, and *Summer in the Country*.



Six Pieces for Six Hands

by Cornelius Gurlitt,
ed. by Weekley & Arganbright

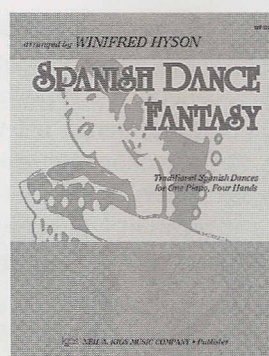
This special edition for one piano, six hands features character pieces by one of the great composers of teaching pieces for piano. Carefully edited, this edition is sure to take its place among favorite ensemble literature. Includes titles such as *Capriccietta*, *Serenata*, and *Impromptu*.



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Six widely known tunes from around the world and one original piece have been uniquely and beautifully arranged for one piano, four hands. These pieces are accessible for late elementary to early intermediate students, but not at the expense of a mature musical sound. Includes *Frog Went A-Courtin'*, *Korean Folk Song*, and *Taps*.



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by Winifred Hyson

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