

Tip of the Month - Right Hand Improvisation Part 1

The first thing we teach our students to do when they begin to improvise from a fake book or lead sheet, is to use a variety of different left hand rhythm patterns. See Tip of the Month - March 2010 – for those ideas.

The second thing we do is to begin improvising with the right hand. That's what this month's Tip of the Month will cover.

The easiest kind of right hand improvisation is to change the rhythm of the song, by adding more eighth notes using the melody notes.

A simple fake version of Michael is shown below. On the following page you will see sheet music which goes three times through the tune of Michael over simple quarter note LH chords. Each time the arrangement gets more complex by adding more and more extra eighth notes.

For example, in the first version, the 2 quarter notes in the first measure have each been changed to 2 8th notes.

Often these additional rhythm notes make the song “swing” so play the 8th notes as uneven pairs of long-short.

You can hear the full example of the three times through Michael with the additional rhythm 8th notes right here on the website. Simply go to Recordings – Demo Improvisations – then it's the first example in the Right Hand Demo section.

Take any fake book you have and change the rhythm by adding extra 8th notes of the melody. Have fun!

Michael Row the Boat

The musical notation for "Michael Row the Boat" is presented in three staves, all in 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes: C4, E4, G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. A chord 'C' is written above the second measure. The second staff starts at measure 4 and features a half note F4, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. Chords 'F', 'C', and 'Em' are written above the first, second, and third measures respectively. The third staff starts at measure 7 and features quarter notes C4, E4, G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. Chords 'Dm', 'C', 'G7', and 'C' are written above the first, second, third, and fourth measures respectively. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the third staff.

Michael - Extra Rhythm Notes Improvisation Example

Measures 1-5 of the piece. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment of chords.

6

Measures 6-9. The right hand continues the melodic pattern with some phrasing slurs, and the left hand maintains the chordal accompaniment.

10

Measures 10-13. The right hand melody becomes more active with eighth notes, and the left hand accompaniment remains consistent.

14

Measures 14-17. The right hand continues with a melodic line, and the left hand provides harmonic support with chords.

18

Measures 18-21. The right hand melody features some phrasing slurs, and the left hand accompaniment continues.

22

Measures 22-25. The right hand melody concludes with a final note, and the left hand accompaniment ends with a final chord. The piece concludes with a double bar line.