

Sample Workshop: Jazz Improvisation with Snaggle

Time: 1 Hour/ Grades 9-12

Materials required: Drum kit, bass amplifier, guitar amplifier, keyboard amplifier, everybody's instruments.

Context: This is a self-contained workshop. It helps if the participants have some exposure to improvising, but it's not necessary. They do require a rudimentary understanding of how to play their instrument.

Warm Up

10 Minutes: Performance - Improvisation Demonstration

The band will play one or two tunes. This serves two purposes: it gets the learners immediately engaged with what is going on, introduces them to the kind of material we will be exploring together and also establishes our credibility and ability as musicians and improvisors.

Main Activities:

A)5 Minutes: The Need to Sound Good

We discuss the 'need to sound good' and its roll in stage fright and anxiety.

- This need can be productive in the practice room but causes anxiety in a performance situation. We talk about why it can be a problem as well as how to let it go.

B)20 Minutes: Single Note and Rhythm Improvising

The rhythm section plays a groove over D dorian and after a demonstration by a member of the band, learners are invited to improvise using one note and any rhythm they like.

- This exercise is designed to take the learners outside of their comfort zones but with a task that is relatively simple. This is designed to get them listening and thinking more creatively while at the same time removing the most common first time improviser stumbling block: deciding which notes to play.
- The same process is then done for the next exercise: improvising with any note, but a single rhythm. During this exercise all of the learners who aren't improvising are clapping the rhythm along with the improvisor.
- During these exercises we bring up the ideas of starting with more space, developing a single idea and using tension.
- During this exercise we start to incorporate rhythm section players of the learners into the groove

C)20 Minutes: Call and Response Improvising

One of the horn players plays a short phrase and a learner responds to it. Emphasis is placed on taking a chunk of what the call was and responding with a variation, almost like a conversation.

- After awhile we start having one learner play a call and another respond to it.
- This is done to reinforce the idea of developing a single idea in one's solo

Closure

10 Minutes: Questions and final tune

The learners will have the opportunity to ask any questions they may have to any of the members of the band. We also talk a little about what to expect from pursuing a bachelors degree in contemporary music. We revisit all of the main take-aways of the workshop and then we play a final tune.