



FIDDLE

Improvising from the Beginning Jazz String Curriculum for 4th, 5th and 6th Grade String Orchestra

Part 3: Long and Short Melodies

by Cristina Seaborn

Learn how to improvise from the ground up, and build a strong foundation of rhythm, melody, harmony and form. In a series of articles on basic instruction you can give to your 4th, 5th and 6th grade beginning orchestra students, we will be learning how to play accompaniment parts while half the group practices improvisation all at once. This will be a safe place for you and your students to experiment for the first time with spontaneous composition. You will be able to model this for your students, one step at a time. This table of contents lists the series of lesson plans that will come out, one topic in each String Notes magazine article:

- Sound and Silence
- Melody and Chord Progression
- Long and Short Melodies
- Rhythm
- Groove
- Ornamentation of Melody and Rhythm
- Melody Notes outside of the Chord
- Preparing for Harmonic Change
- Chord Tones
- Guide Tone Lines
- Ornamentation of Guide Tone Lines
- Harmonic Progression

Playing a solo with phrases all the same length is boring! A melodic phrase can vary from one beat to several measures. Think of your musical phrase in three ways: short, medium, and long. We also have three tempos that will determine the length of the melodic phrase.

Tempo in $\frac{4}{4}$	Short Melody	Medium Melody	Long Melody
$\text{♩} = 60-120$	1-4 beats	5-12 beats	over 12 beats
$\text{♩} = 120-184$	1-4 beats	5-16 beats	over 16 beats
$\text{♩} = 184+$	1-8 beats	9-24 beats	over 24 beats

Exercise 1:

Starting with a 2 or 3 note solo improvisation, play and rest using a combination of long and short melodic phrases.

You can start with the notes G A B. Examples of short melodies are: AB, BGA, BABA, BAG, GAB. Examples of long melodies are: AB AB AB AB AB ABG or GAB GAB GAB GAB AA.

Half the class can play the accompaniment pizzicato, while the other half improvises with the bow.

Accompaniment in $\frac{4}{4}$ (pizzicato):

GDGD | // | // | // | DADA | // | // | // |

GDGD | // | // | // | CGCG | // | // | // |

Comment: You might find some of the three notes to be dissonant with the chords. Learn to enjoy dissonance and appreciate suspensions. We will explore chord progressions and note choices later. You can expand from three notes to the whole two-octave G scale right away if you wish! However, by limiting your choices to three notes, you will be able to focus on the purpose of this exercise—varying the melodic phrase lengths.

Exercise 2:

To grow familiar with how the different lengths feel, do these exercises:

- Play a series of short phrases (play 4 beats in one measure and rest one measure).
- Play a series of long phrases (play 12 beats in three measures and rest one measure).
- Play a series of medium phrases (play 8 beats in 2 measures and rest one measure). This will be interesting because the improvisation falls in a different spot on the harmonic progression every time!

Exercise 3:

For advanced solo improvisation, you can vary short, medium, and long phrases. In between the medium and long phrases, you can use as little as 1-1/2 beats of rest. This 1-1/2 beats of rest gives the sense of a comma or period that separates the musical phrases.

Accompaniment in $\frac{4}{4}$ (arco) for advanced solo improvisation:

mm = $\text{♩} = 100$

GGDD | // | // | // | DDAA | // | // | // |

GGDD | // | // | // | CCGG | // | // | // |

Remember to rest. One of the biggest mistakes a beginning improviser makes is playing on incessantly. It's the same as a run-on sentence, or a bad conversationalist, where nobody else can speak!

Exercise 4:

Try all the exercises again in waltz time!

Accompaniment in $\frac{3}{4}$ pizzicato or bowed lightly at the frog

mm = $\text{♩} = 126$

GDD | // | // | // | DAA | // | // | // |

GDD | // | // | // | AEE | // | // | // |

Comment: Now you will experience the foundation of improvisation, which is counting! You need to know where you are in the music at all times in relationship to the beat and the harmonic progression. Did you find you forgot to count? Is your counting a developed skill yet? You can develop a practice plan for however much time you have. Divide your practice time into 3 parts and choose 3 topics for 10 minutes each. Then evaluate which topics

you are improving on, and which ones you need to practice more. There are a hundred topics for improvisation and you can only practice 3 at a time! So far in this series of articles we have covered #1 *Sound and Silence*, #2 *Melody and Chord Progression*, and #3 *Long and Short Melodies*. Be systematic in your practice plan and you will be happy with the results!.

In our next article we will look at #4 *Rhythm*. Stay tuned!

Cristina Seaborn has produced a fiddling instruction video Anyone Can Play Country Fiddle (Mel Bay), CDs Inside the Heart of a Musician, Seaborn Breeze, and Spirit Wind, and arrangements for string orchestra of fiddle music, jazz, Celtic, Cajun and original. †