



FIDDLE

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

Part 8: Preparing for Harmonic Change

by Cristina Seaborn and Lynnea Skeate

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

As you approach the topic of *Preparing for Harmonic Change*, it is important that you thoroughly learn the rules and practice before you break them!

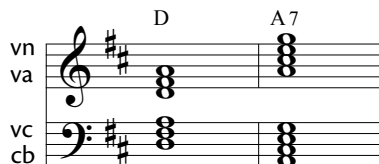
There are two ways to create interest in an improvised solo: 1) Create a leap (more than a major second) in the melody. Or, 2) Change the chord.

When you create a leap, it attracts attention to the notes on both sides of the leap. Think of the octave leap from *Over the Rainbow* and how much interest that creates in the melody.

I teach my students that a chord is every other note, and that a chord is made of at least three notes. I show that you can use your fingers to spell out the notes (A B C D E) and choose every other note to create the chord (A C E) on your thumb, middle finger, and pinky. In this way, you can build a chord on every note of the scale.

Let students know they can spell the notes of the D chord on their fingers, starting with D E F# G A, then choose every other note or finger to spell the chord. (D F# A)

Now your students will need to use two hands to spell the notes of the A7 chord (A, C#, E and G).



When you are improvising, how do you prepare for a chord change? You can do this one of two ways:

- 1) First you can use two consecutive notes from the chord.



- 2) Secondly, you can use a note from the upcoming chord before changing to the new chord. Borrowing notes from a future chord can create suspense, tension, and intrigue! What is the soloist thinking playing this note? It creates an air of mystery and tantalizes the ear of the listener. Then there is resolution once the new chord arrives, and the audience realizes the soloist knew exactly what they were doing.



Exercises 1-5:

Use a two-chord pattern in four bar phrases, with two measures per chord.

Practice changing the note right on the new chord changes, using notes from the same chord for two measures.



- 1) Play the root of the chord, then the third. Try the same notes up an octave.
- 2) Play the third of the chord, then the fifth. Play up an octave.
- 3) On the A7 chord, play the fifth of the chord, then the seventh. Go up an octave.
- 4) On the A7 chord, play the seventh of the chord, then the third. This creates the tritone, which is famous in jazz and rock.
- 5) Do the same sequence (exercises 1-4), with a note from the new chord right before measure three.

Now we will be adding a third chord, G with the chord tones G, B, and D. We are using open string chords so that improvisation is easier for the string player. The chord progression we are using comes my original composition *Seaborn Waltz*.

Exercises 6-15:

- 6) Play the entire chord arpeggio in one octave going up, starting on the root

and ending on the octave.

- 7) Play the entire chord arpeggio in one octave going up, starting on the third and ending on the third an octave higher.
- 8) Play the entire chord arpeggio in one octave going up, starting on the fifth and ending on the fifth an octave higher.
- 9) Play the entire chord arpeggio in one octave going down, starting on the root and ending on the octave.
- 10) Play the entire chord arpeggio in one octave going down, starting on the third and ending on the third an octave lower.
- 11) Play the entire chord arpeggio in one octave going down, starting on the fifth and ending on the fifth an octave lower.
- 12) Play the entire chord arpeggio in two octaves going up.
- 13) Play the entire chord arpeggio in two octaves going down.
- 14) As your next step, have the soloist try a new chord tone spontaneously every time the chord changes.
- 15) Improvise and dare to anticipate the chord tones of the upcoming chord.

To practice improvisation, jazz musicians often use CDs that have back up tracks, such as the Jamey Aebersold series. <http://www.jazzbooks.com/> These are recorded with the rhythm section of a small jazz ensemble, such as piano, bass, drums, and guitar. The recordings give an authentic jazz feel with swing eighth notes.

I also highly recommend Jody Harmon's *Improvise!* and *Jazz Improvisation Made Easy*, as these are written specifically for string players with string friendly keys! These are available through Shar Music, ASTA, and directly from Jody Harmon. http://www.astaweb.com/Public/Member_Resources/Adjudicators/Jody_Harmon.aspx

<http://www.sharmusic.com/Suzuki/Violin-School/Supplemental/Improvise-Violin-Part-CD-by-Jody-Harmon.axd#sthash.uscLE8a1.dpbs>

Other excellent improvisation methods for string players have been created by Randy Sabien, Julie Lyonn Lieberman, Bob Phillips, and Martin Norgaard. As you know, string friendly keys are D, G, C, Bm,

Seaborn Waltz

Em, and Am. It is difficult to use some jazz method books geared towards woodwind and brass instruments because they favor flat keys. String players like the sharp keys.

<http://www.alfred.com/Products/Jazz-Philharmonic-00-26303.aspx>

<http://www.alfred.com/Company/Authors/MartinNorgaard.aspx>

<http://julielyonn.com/>

<http://www.alfred.com/Company/Authors/BobPhillips.aspx>

These exercises are more easily explained by ear than by reading. With practice using the recommended resources, you can continue your journey in improvisational creativity. Enjoy!

Expert at fiddling and jazz improvisation, Cristina Seaborn holds a Bachelor of Music Degree in jazz violin performance from Berk-

lee College of Music in Boston, and a Masters in Conducting for Orchestra from St. Cloud State University. She has produced an instructional video for fiddling through Mel Bay entitled Anyone Can Play Country Fiddle, CDs entitled Inside the Heart of a Musician, Seaborn Breeze, and Spirit Wind, and many string orchestra arrangements of fiddle music, jazz, Celtic, Scandinavian, Cajun, and original. Her influences include classical, jazz, Celtic, bluegrass and Texas swing.

Violinist/fiddler Lynnea Skeate is a member of the St. Cloud Symphony and one of the Assistant Conductors with the SCSU Youth Orchestra. She has her own private studio and enjoys fiddling with her siblings and friends. ♪