



FIDDLE

Practice app: iReal Pro

by Cristina Seaborn

My bass player friend recommended the iReal Pro app to me for practicing jazz standards. This includes fiddling and bluegrass tunes, as well as the ability to create your own chord progression.

What a bargain for a lifetime of practicing! iReal Pro is \$12.99 for iPhone or tablet, and \$19.99 for the computer. Some of the features of iReal Pro include sounding like a live jazz, bluegrass, or Latin rhythm section, the ability to change the tempo or key easily, and the number of repetitions through any chord progression. To get an idea of what the program offers, go to <http://www.irealpro.com/>

I decided to start with the blues in all 12 keys and set up a practice plan for myself.

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7 G#dim7

7 D7 F#m7B7 Em7A7 D7B7 Em7A7

Know the notes of the chord

In the lowest octave possible, play the root of the chord for four beats if there is one chord in the measure, two beats if there are two chords in a measure, or one beat if there are four chords in a measure. The second time through the progression, I played the root an octave higher, then the third time another octave higher. The next step was to play the 3rd of the chord using the same octave leap each time through the changes, then the 5th, and 7th.

Playing the root of the chord (change octave every time through sequence using 1st and 3rd positions):

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

25 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Playing the 3rd of the chord:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

25 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Playing the 5th of the chord:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

25 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Playing the 7th of the chord:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

25 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

These first steps seem easy, but the payoff is later when you are doing the chord arpeggio up and down in 8th notes. As a lifetime student of the violin, I look for ways to improve. This practice plan has especially helped me improve my understanding of the half-diminished and full-diminished chords. I noticed that I need to improve my knowledge of chords in the 4th position. As I was practicing, I wrote these discoveries down in my practice plan.

This next step is still basic and rudimen-

tary, but be patient for the payoff later.

These exercises help me think of the chord within the octave block, and my finger patterns.

Playing the root and octave of the chord:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Playing the 3rd and octave 3rd:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Playing the 5th and octave 5th:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Playing the 7th and octave 7th:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Descending, play the octave and root:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Play octave 3rd, 3rd, lower root:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Play octave 5th, 5th, lower root:
D7 G7 D7 Am7D7 G7

Play octave 7th, 7th, lower root:
D7 G7 D7 Am7D7 G7

Building Chord Arpeggios going up

Playing the root and 3rd of the chord:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Playing the root, 3rd and 5th:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Playing the root, 3rd, 5th and 7th:

1 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

13 D7 G7 D7 Am7 D7 G7

Invent a rhythm to play the root, 3rd, 5th, 7th and octave.

Building Chord Arpeggios going down

- Octave, 7th
- Octave, 7th, 5th
- Octave, 7th, 5th, 3rd
- Octave, 7th, 5th, 3rd, root

UP and DOWN the ARPEGGIO

- Root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, octave, 7th, 5th, 3rd, root
- 3rd, 5th, 7th, octave, 7th, 5th, 3rd, root, 7th, 3rd
- 5th, 7th, octave, 7th, 5th, 3rd, root, 7th, 5th (I needed to slow this one down a lot! mm=70)
- 7th, octave, 7th, 5th, 3rd, root, 7th, 5th, 7th
- Octave, 7th, 5th, 3rd, root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, octave

- 7th, 5th, 3rd, root, 7th, root, 3rd, 5th, 7th
- 5th, 3rd, root, 7th, 5th, 7th, root, 3rd, 5th
- 3rd, root, 7th, 5th, 3rd, 5th, 7th, root, 3rd

After you have practiced arpeggios, now you can practice solos using the notes of the chord.

Free Improvisation Non-Tonal

Parameters

- Phrase length
- All short phrases
- Phrases of 3 notes
- Short phrase followed by a long phrase
- 3 note phrase followed by 8 note phrase
- use all 8th notes
- use all triplets

Free Improv

(Relax about playing only chord tones and focus on which beat to start on.)

- Start on beat 2
- Start on beat 3
- Start on beat 4

Record your solo

The final step is to improvise over the blues changes, and see how your practice affects your improvisation. Do a new key every day. Ask yourself, am I easily finding the chord tones? Am I varying my phrase lengths to make the solo interesting? Do I leave enough space between the phrases? The rest gives you time to reflect on your improvisation, and the audience time to absorb what you have created.

Jazz violinist Christian Howes is offering online lessons, where you can send him a recording and he will give you a critique within 24 hours. Some advice I received from Christian Howes was to play the scale of each chord using swing 8th notes up to the 9th note of the scale. The C7 scale is: C D E F G A B^b C D C B^b A G F E D C

Here are some great youtube videos he has created:

- Christian Howes Scales <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRJIAOKb17c>
- Christian Howes Arpeggios <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5R6l5bxm1Fw>

More advice from Christian Howes includes:

Jazz Arpeggios For Violin, Viola, and Cello

- Memorize & internalize arpeggios.
- Focus on locking into the triplet grid.
- Consider the difference between ambiguous rhythm for expression vs.

ambiguous rhythm for lack of clarity.

- Create your foundation of 100% rhythmic intention and clarity.
- Play triad in root position.
- Play all inversions of the triad.
 - 1 3 5, 3 5 8, 5 8 3, 1 3 5
 - 8 5 3, 5 3 1, 3 1 5, 8 5 3
- Play all major and minor triads.
- Play triad in extended range. (extended range is the entire range of instrument in one position)
- Play every inversion of extended range going up smoothly.
- Play every inversion of extended range going down smoothly.
- Take one root note and play every kind of chord from that root note.
- Major triad
- Extended major triad
- Extended major triad in every inversion
- Minor triad
- Extended minor triad
- Extended minor triad in every inversion
- 7th chord
- Root position
- Extended range
- Every inversion extended range
- Up and down
- Build up your speed

As you can see, there is an infinite number of ways you can design your own practice program.

Using iReal Pro, you can “Edit any chart to fit your choice of chords, or create your own charts from scratch. The play along will generate great sounding accompaniments for any chord chart.” Here is a video explanation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6w3CNP71Yn4>

I have noticed great improvement in my playing by focusing on rhythm and knowledge of the chord progression, especially on my improvised solos. I hope you enjoy creating your own practice plan with this great app iReal Pro!

Expert at fiddling and jazz improvisation, Cristina Seaborn holds a Bachelor of Music Degree in jazz violin performance from Berklee 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 Anyone Can Play Country Fiddle (Mel Bay), CDs Inside the Heart of a Musician, Seaborn Breeze, and Spirit Wind, and many arrangements for string orchestra of fiddle, Celtic, Scandinavian, Cajun and original. ♪