

Jazz Clinic Review Session V

Rhythm

The two quotes that best describes the utmost importance of rhythm are both by all-time master Dizzy Gillespie: "You construct from a point of the rhythm. Melody conforms with what you have in your mind. How you want the rhythm to go. Then you put your notes to that. I think of rhythm first." "I fill my head with rhythm."

- A. First, let's try something as simple (but effective) as starting the phrase on the beat and finishing off the beat, as in example 1. Then, start a phrase off the beat and end on the beat as in example 2.
- B. Next try starting your phrases on each part of the beat, i.e. 1, the "and" of 1, 2, the "and of 2, etc. as in example 3.
- C. Next try ending your phrases on each part of the beat, i.e. 1, the "and" of 1, 2, the "and of 2, etc. as in example 4. These might seem easy enough in the key of C but can you take each one (all 16 combinations – i.e. starting and ending on each eighth note) all the way through a tune?
- D. From there we can take a rhythm and repeat it exactly, for any number of bars, as shown in example 5.
- E. In that case it was a 2 bar phrase, but try playing 1 bar phrases, 4 bar phrases, or even 3 bar phrases all the way through a tune. It can require quite a bit of concentration to keep the rhythm exact, especially through tricky changes.
- F. Of course, we can always take a rhythm and repeat most of it but vary the ending. Blues players are long familiar with this as it sets up a sort of question and answer technique as in example 6.
- G. Finally, just experiment with giving your phrases rhythmic variety. Can you make phrases that use all the range of note values from whole notes to 16th notes as in example 7?

Just by being conscious of your rhythmic usage and variety your playing will start to take on a whole new meaning.

