

PROBLEM: Compulsive eighth-note playing shows the student cannot phrase or leave space: there is a "forced" quality to their playing.

Analysis: These students have reached a mid-point in their studies where they have worked very hard and achieved a level of expertise wherein they *can* hear an internal, steady eighth-note line and *can* articulate most of what they hear. This is because they have achieved the mid-point goal of all practicing: the development of a strong brain-signal-to-hand-response. At this point in their careers, such students actually will have difficulty *not* playing.

Teachers must move them past this stage to a new understanding: they must first hear everything, be able to play everything they hear, and then *play as little of what they hear as possible*. The admonition "less is more" is applicable here. Miles Davis was once quoted as saying, "never finish an idea; let the rhythm section finish it." Since most students practice "finished" ideas, they have difficulty in sensing the end of a phrase when improvising.

It's also human nature to want to enjoy the fruits of labor as a reward for hard work well done. Consequently, one keeps on repeating the achievement (the ability to hear and play busier and extended ideas) as a form of immediate self-gratification.

Solution: Compliment these students on their achievement! This is a positive development which has put them in a position to go on to higher levels. However, explain your analysis: they are settling for less by accepting the rewards of immediate self-gratification, actually denying themselves any further growth toward acquiring the ability to phrase.

Ask your students: "Have you ever noticed how many ideas you have when playing along with someone else's recording?" They should then understand that they already have their own internal resource for musical ideas. Encourage them to *be selective* in playing ideas based on this "internal record"- as opposed to trying to play everything they hear. Communicate to them that space is an illusion created by the performer: there is *always* something going on in space that is not being articulated; and that space is controlled by thinking an internal melody or rhythm in that space. Students who understand this will immediately be more spontaneous, playful, and relaxed. They will be *relieved* now that you have lifted from them the misplaced burden of playing everything they hear.

If students' "internal clock" is based on the "swing beats" of a 4/4 bar (two and four) or even quarter-note time, compulsive playing can also result. Watch their body motion for excess physical movement-or if they tap their foot or nod their head on swing beats. An explanation and demonstration of playing in "half time" will solve this problem. (See my article "Playing in Half Time").

Also check to see if students have fears of getting lost or losing momentum if they stop playing. While the student improvises on a given tune, cue him or her to "stop articulating" (*but keep hearing internally*) ideas while the tune proceeds. Expand these pauses to longer periods of time than the student is used to, getting them more and more comfortable with not responding to every internal signal.

PROBLEM: The student rushes the beat, over-articulates the eighth-notes, or emphasizes them by playing "loud-soft, loud-soft."

Analysis: This is another holdover from childhood practicing techniques. Teachers of beginners by necessity focus their students' attention toward achieving clean attacks. This tacitly creates the belief that one achieves the articulation of notes in time by controlling a series of attacks. However, the beginning of a note is only a nano-second long-too short a rhythmic event for the mind to grasp and successfully control. So the

student compensates for the inevitable lack of rhythmic security this approach to articulation promotes and thus "pushes" the beat.

The "loud-soft" articulation comes from the students' desire to achieve the "hop" they perceive as contributing to the swing of a melody. This attempt is usually habitual and uncontrolled. Their lines do not achieve this "hop" because their melodies are not "spelling out" the chord changes by synchronizing chord tones with downbeats and non-chord tones with upbeats. This technique of "Forward Motion" creates the natural "hop" they sense their lines should have. (See my series of articles on "Forward Motion.")

Solution: Explain that there is more to a note than just the beginning of it. The focus should be upon what is going on in between the beginning and the end of a note: on *duration* not attack. There are only two things that can occur in the middle of a note: space or tone. Focusing on duration tends to "grab" the beat, making a melody more rhythmic. The adage "the music is in between the notes" applies in this instance!

Have them try to articulate a melodic fragment using five, discretely different durations (ranging from extremely legato to staccato)-a different duration each time the fragment is repeated. (*See Example 1.*) To develop control over each of the five durations, request they solo at length using just one of the five at a time.

DURATION

Example 1.
Variations in Duration

Example 2.
Interval is created in a line when the durations are mixed:

Example 3.
VARIATIONS IN LEGATO & STACCATO

Take a one bar, 8th. note line and apply the following variations:
L= LEGATO, S= STACCATO

LLLL LLLL	LSSL LSSL
LLLL SSSS	SLLS SLLS
LLSS LLSS	SLLL SLLL
SSLL SSLL	LSSS LSSS
LSSL LSSL	LLLL LLLL
SLLS SLLS	Etc.
LSSL LSSL	
SLLS SLLS	Then mix freely.

Once such a student develops some control, the next step is to mix durations on a repeated fragment-then trying to mix on a variety of fragments. (*Example 2.*) This process makes students aware that the duration and end of a note can be as rhythmic, if not more so, than the beginning of a note. Another way of illustrating a mix of lengths might be listing a matrix of all the combinations of "long-short" articulations one could apply to eight eighth notes, as in a "be-bop" scale (*Example 3*), then employing a mixed selection from that list.

This same technique should also be applied to variations in volume: have students articulate a melodic fragment using five different levels of volume (ranging from

pianissimo to triple-forte)-a different level each time the fragment is repeated. (See *Example 4.*) Request they solo at length using just one of the five, then mix volume levels on a repeated fragment, then mixing at will.

VARIATIONS IN VOLUME

Example 4.

Four Volume levels: Practice each level separately.

The image shows musical notation for 'Example 4' under the heading 'VARIATIONS IN VOLUME'. It includes a title 'Example 4.', a subtitle 'Four Volume levels: Practice each level separately.', and four staves of music labeled 'Softest 1', '2', '3', and 'Loudest 4'. Each staff shows a sequence of notes (G, D, E, F, G, F, E, D) with varying dynamics. Below these is a section titled 'Use variations in volume to create drama in a melodic line.' which shows the same sequence of notes with a dynamic arc over the entire phrase.

By suggesting these exercises, teachers can demonstrate that students have been listening to music one-dimensionally: not perceiving these variations in articulation and dynamics *that have been there all the time!*

Students should also understand the difference between "playing good time" (stating the beat) and "playing with good time" (floating over the beat). Making no judgement as to which is better, ask them if they are aware of the way they want to play time: one way or the other. Some musicians have an instinct to articulate their melodic ideas at *one* particular place on the beat to create for themselves a sense of rhythmic security, i.e., their rhythmic "center." These musicians (for example Sonny Stitt) can be said to "play good time." Others have an instinct to subdivide the beat by articulating their melodic ideas *in relation to* their rhythmic "center" by making fine subdivisions of the beat. These musicians (for example Sonny Rollins) can be said to "play *with* good time.

Students who are not aware of this latter instinct in subdividing will feel constrained by attempting to articulate at only one place on the beat and may assume they have bad time. Those who try to float over the beat and feel uncomfortable may also come to the same mistaken assumption. Assure them that they probably have excellent time but are trying to do something that is unnatural to them. Suggest that they let go and stop trying to play at just one place on the beat, letting the melodic line fall wherever they feel it is comfortable for them. Only in this way will they gain the confidence to be accurate subdividers.

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