

More Displacement Exercises

I like to drive my daughters crazy by singing in the car. No, it's not my voice quality (although some would disagree) or choice of tunes (we all sing together anyway). It's because I use that ancient form of musical torture – displacement. We'll all be singing "Hey now, you're an all-star ..." with the car CD player and then I'll suddenly displace the melody backwards by one beat or two to create a very annoying canon. OK, so I seem to enjoy it more than they do ...

But there are actual benefits to practicing displacement:

- You build your sense of independent time.
- You gather interesting development ideas for solos.
- You become more aware of the rhythmic intricacies of the music you hear.

Shiftiness

It's fun to practice displacement, although you may end up doing it by yourself with a CD. Here are some suggestions:

1. Select a recording with an easy melody that you know.
2. Sing or hum along exactly with the melody for a few bars, then pause for 1, 2, or 4 beats (assuming the tune is 4/4). 4 beats is usually easiest – delaying by 2 beats or 1 beat gets progressively more difficult.
3. Resume the now-displaced melody and sing or hum it against the original melody.
4. After a while, stop and rejoin the melody back on the original beat.
5. Follow steps 2-4 with the same displacement or try a different one.

As you do this, it often helps to conduct your own 4/4 time pattern with your hand to guide your displaced melody. That keeps you from unintentionally running back into the melody in the original time.

You can also displace ahead by skipping a few beats and going 1, 2, or 4 beats ahead of the original rhythm. That can *really* get annoying.

For more advanced practice, try humming and displacing a jazz solo on CD. I like to occasionally try that with new or unfamiliar solos, so I am basically copying an improvised line with one measure's space to hear it and repeat it. That's great ear training.

Do Musicians Actually Do That?

So do jazz artists really use prolonged displacement? Check out the Marcus Roberts recording of Cherokee, either with the Wynton Marsalis quartet or on his solo CD "As Serenity Approaches." He plays entire passages 1/8 ahead of or behind the beat. See also Art of the Artists for more details.

Yes, besides "driving" car passengers crazy, you can put displacement to good use in your solos and in creating unusual approaches to tune melodies.