

# Expressions

These quotes, over 100 of them, are found in The Art of Improvisation books. In this document, I add some commentaries to show how the quotes can relate to aspects of improvisation. There are many more correlations as well – as you think about the quotes, they will most likely come to you and provide you with extra inspiration.

## Communication

- 1 \*Words differently arranged have a different meaning, and meanings differently arranged have a different effect. *Pascal*
  - > In outside playing, the order of notes and keys produces many different effects. Also, notes create motifs, and motifs create phrases, in countless combinations.
- 2 \*The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said. *Peter F. Drucker*
  - > What does the group play between the soloist's phrases? What are the nuances of the notes and phrases in the solos? There is a wealth of ideas that goes unsaid but only imagined.
- 3 \*Many can argue; not many converse. *Bronson Alcott*
  - > Sometimes it sounds to me like band members are arguing musically when they should be conversing. Maybe it's the desire to dominate the conversation, or nobody's listening, or players lack the skills to communicate in the language of jazz. The art of musical conversation is one of the most amazing gifts of improvisation.
- 4 \*It takes two to speak the truth -- one to speak, and another to hear. *Henry David Thoreau*
  - > I remember years ago when I was first getting into jazz – I bought a recording of "Miles Davis, Live in Europe." I listened to it once and shelved it. Where was the melody? Too weird. Then about four years later I heard a recording at a friend's house that amazed me with its wealth of imagination and ideas. It was "Miles Davis, Live in Europe."
- 5 \*It is better to have less thunder in the mouth and more lightning in the hand. *Cheyenne Chief*
  - > Save the talk and the rhetoric – just play. And you don't need to be higher, faster, and louder to make the point. Use your musical tools wisely. And lightning certainly brings to mind quick reflexes and reactions.
- 6 \*After all is said and done, sit down. *Bill Copeland*
  - > How true! If I had a nickel for every solo I've heard that went at least one chorus too long ... Occasionally I hear a solo that's too short, but that's the exception. The art is in saying something meaningful in a shorter amount of time than you might like to take.
- 7 \*The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do. *Thomas Jefferson*
  - > This is useful advice but shouldn't be taken to the extreme. Still, cutting out the baggage in solos is an important skill. And each "one word" should be a good word – what makes a lean solo great is not just economy of notes but meaning of notes: expression, development, etc.
- 8 \*Silence is not always tact, and it is tact that is golden -- not silence. *Samuel Butler*
  - > Use silence to separate and frame good ideas, not just to take a musical vacation.
- 9 \*Examine what is said, not him who speaks. *Arabian Proverb*
  - > When you hear play with another soloist on a gig, do you mentally criticize the solo ideas so you come out the winner, or do you look for what works in the solos and you could learn from it? Even if there isn't much to imitate, then there is much to avoid – therefore you can learn from it without making it personal.

- 10 \*I may disapprove of what you say, but will defend to the death your right to say it. *Voltaire*  
> How well do we nurture less experienced improvisers? Do we essentially shut them up with criticism, or do we give them the freedom to learn and the guidance to grow?
- 11 \*For more than forty years I have been speaking prose without knowing it. *Moliere*  
> This reminds me of how easily most players can learn to improvise, because they have been speaking "scales" for a long time. Taking the next step to flexible scales is natural evolution – and opens the door to creativity in solos.
- 12 \*Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves. *Thomas Carlyle*  
> Most players don't use silence effectively enough. It can frame your motifs and phrases, and it can give the rhythm section space to converse musically. And it gives you time to see and think ahead – if that's what your goal is.
- 13 \*Correction does much, but encouragement does more. Encouragement after censure is as the sun after a shower. *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*  
> This is good advice for working with band members. Improvisation is a team effort, and the motivation to play together has to remain strong, even when criticism and improvement are needed.
- 14 \*When one has no design but to speak plain truth, he may say a great deal in a very narrow compass. *Steele*  
> Look for the best SHAPE, the best sound, the best ideas. They usually consist of fewer but better executed notes and phrases. Don't forget the power of expression with well-executed ideas – it truly helps you say more in less time.
- 15 \*They talk most who have the least to say. *Matthew Prior*  
> An interesting proposition! If taken too literally, it means there's no place for density in solos – I disagree with that. But density needs purpose, and that is often lacking in "dense" solo passages. Usually the problem with improvisers who "talk" too much is that they don't know what they are saying (no concept of SHAPE or development) – they just like to hear themselves talk.
- 16 \*A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices. *William James*  
> This is similar to rearranging your favorite licks and patterns instead of using SHAPE and listening to take you into new musical territory.
- 17 \*Fear always springs from ignorance. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*  
> Fear confronts us at the beginning – improvising is scary, because it's hard to think of what to play. Then when we get past that, fear keeps us from trying new directions in music. The more we understand where we are trying to go, and the more we improve our skills, the less we fear about making the progress we really should make.
- 18 \*If fifty million people say a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing. *Anatole France*  
> Great players can still "say" some foolish things once in a while. Also, a lot of players copy, overuse, or misuse licks or ideas to the point that those ideas become somewhat foolish.
- 19 \*Every man is a volume if you know how to read him. *Channing*  
> This is a key in working with other musicians. Do you inspire them by how you play? Or do you ignore, intimidate, or confuse them? There is a lot of unused or undiscovered potential in most improvisers, and you can encourage it and draw upon it. A lot depends on the skill and care of your musical conversations.

- 20 \*It is not sufficient to know what one ought to say, but one must also know how to say it. *Aristotle*  
 > Here's my argument for expression and musical timing! Those extra touches, when the material (the "what") is strong, make all the difference towards interesting solos. Many otherwise good solos are ruined because they lack proper rhythmic timing or effective use of expression.
- 21 \*Don't talk unless you can improve the silence. *Vermont Proverb*  
 > Good advice, but don't let it intimidate you. There are times, especially when you are practicing alone, when you need to be anything but silent.
- 22 \*The mind is a wonderful thing. It starts to work the minute you are born, and never stops until you get up to speak in public. *John Mason Brown*  
 > Or perform in public. SHAPE is the key to getting your ideas off the ground. But in front of an audience, we sometimes think our ideas somehow aren't good enough – so we unconsciously shut down the creative process. That process needs space to grow in live performances, instead of being restricted.

## Creativity / Imagination

- 23 \*Imagination is as good as many voyages -- and how much cheaper. *George William Curtis*  
 > That's one of the ultimate joys of improvisation – your musical imagination can be instantly translated into music that's exciting, peaceful, thoughtful, wild, beautiful, or quirky. And then you can do it all again the next time, only differently.
- 24 \*Imagination is more important than knowledge, for knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand. *Albert Einstein*  
 > This is one of my favorite quotes. If it sounds a little far-fetched, consider who's talking – it certainly worked for him. And for us with "smaller" minds, the creative process still stretches and embraces the universe, but perhaps in smaller doses.
- 25 \*The object of art is to crystallize emotion into thought, and then fix it in form. *Delsarte*  
 > What a great way to describe the whole process of SHAPE, or improvisation as a whole for that matter. Your creative energy gets poured into a musical vision or shape, then you set about to fill out that shape with notes, motifs, and phrases. The result is sometimes breathtakingly good.
- 26 \*Genius means little more than the faculty of perceiving in an unhabitual way. *William James*  
 > And with improvisation, you get to think "unhabitually" at the speed of chord changes. Fortunately you can slow things down in practice and learn to play outside the lines a bit. It also helps to listen to players who play outside the lines as well.
- 27 \*If you would create something you must be something. *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*  
 > This is good motivation for solid practice habits and intelligent listening. What you are, musically, will definitely come across in your playing.
- 28 \*Tell the truth. But tell it slant. *Emily Dickinson*  
 > There is a lot of room for slightly unusual perspectives in improvisation. Yet so many soloists play the same old ideas the same old ways, over and over. Life's too short for that!
- 29 \*Why shouldn't truth be stranger than fiction? Fiction, after all, has to make sense. *Mark Twain*  
 > See the comment above ...
- 30 \*Don't talk to me about a man's being able to talk sense; everyone can talk sense -- can he talk nonsense? *William Pitt the Elder*  
 > And see the comment above, again ...

- 31 \*To know how to hide one's ability is great skill. *Rochevoucauld*  
> This is great advice for the many soloists who try to go from zero to 60 in just a few bars. One of the best ways to impress an audience is to keep surprising them in small doses. Let your solos unfold wisely – there's usually plenty of time and space to develop a few good ideas.
- 32 \*Wit is the salt of conversation, not the food. *William Hazlitt*  
> Too much expression or too many special effects can ruin a solo. Even using the wrong timing with expression or effects can be like using the wrong spice on the wrong dish. Although I'm no gourmet cook, I know what tastes good to me, and a lot of the flavor does depend on the "salt."
- 33 \*His imagination resembles the wings of an ostrich. *Thomas Babington Macaulay, of Dryden*  
> What a great insult (if an insult can be great) ... This reminds me of a player who has spent huge amounts of time on technique and very little on ideas or development. The tiny "idea wings" just can't get the "ostrich" technique off the ground.
- 34 \*Chance is always powerful. -- Let your hook be always cast; in the pool where you least expect it, there will be a fish. *Ovid*  
> There are so many interesting ideas to be had, right within your grasp – whether in your own solo ideas or from the rhythm section behind you. One of the great disappointments is listening to a soloist who stumbles upon an interesting idea and promptly lets it go without developing it. Be ready when chance smiles kindly!
- 35 \*Sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast. *Levis Carroll*  
> I love this quote! If this one doesn't get you thinking outside the box, I don't know what will ... Even believing one impossible thing would make my Wheaties all the more sweet.
- 36 \*Solitude is as needful to the imagination as society is wholesome for the character. *James Russell Lowell*  
> Even extroverts need some quiet time to work out ideas, techniques, patterns, and sounds. Then when you join with your band members (or even play-along recordings), those ideas can come to life.

## Discipline

- 37 \*Good habits are as easy to form as bad ones. *Tim McCarver*  
> I had to look at this one several times before it made sense. Any habit is practiced over and over – that's how it becomes a habit. The difficulty in establishing good habits may be our fears, prejudices, or lack of knowledge. Once we overcome those, practicing good habits may be even easier than practicing the bad ones, because we see the results and have extra motivation to achieve. This is certainly true with practicing improvisation skills.
- 38 \*Produce great pumpkins, the pies will follow later. *Anon*  
> This is great advice for being patient with your progress. Developing vision and agility with flexible scales and virtual practice will pay great dividends later. So will humming bass cheater notes, practicing melodic connections, creating and altering your own patterns, and a host of other "small-scale" skills. A great solo is comprised of great smaller pieces.
- 39 \*'Tis the mind that makes the body rich. *William Shakespeare*  
> This is a great perspective on how the improvisation process works. When your musical vision is sharp, your mind is fully engaged in the creative process. You make good, small decisions and carry them out into improvisation. As you do, your body responds to the mind, producing physical sensations that are heightened by the oneness of mind and body. That's a wonderful aspect of improvisation – the opportunity to engage the mind and body in real-time creation.

- 40 \*Always do what you are afraid to do. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*  
> Good advice for practice routines. By stretching yourself in practice, you get used to the idea of stretching yourself in performance, a mindset that can take your improvisation farther than you ever imagined.
- 41 \*Carelessness does more harm than a want of knowledge. *Benjamin Franklin*  
> In a recent clinic, I asked a band director a question about swing phrasing. He gave the right answer immediately. Yet his students weren't practicing that knowledge, and it was keeping them from achieving a unified swing concept. Too often we amass bits of technical knowledge but fail to find the myriad of ways we could apply that knowledge. Interestingly, applying knowledge in creative ways often leads to acquiring new knowledge. Another aspect is clean execution – if you play the right pitches with careless rhythms, your solo still sounds careless.
- 42 \*The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep.  
*Robert Frost*  
> It's so easy to practice and play the same old things – music we know, music we feel safe with, and music that poses no threats or challenges. How many of us sound "bad" in practice because we are walking those miles towards new musical goals?
- 43 \*Guard your spare moments. They are like uncut diamonds. Discard them and their value will never be known. Improve them and they will become the brightest gems in a useful life. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*  
> Spare moments are what Virtual Practice is all about. Standing in lines, riding in cars, in the shower, waiting for a concert – these are all opportunities to practice flexible scales, learn chord progressions, try development techniques, and much more. When you get back to your instrument, your Virtual Practice has already sown the seeds for new ideas.
- 44 \*Duty makes us do things well, but love makes us do them beautifully. *Phillips Brooks*  
> Great improvisers have a deep love of the music they are playing. They attend to their practice duties, to be sure, but love of the art draws them faster and farther towards greatness than only discipline would.
- 45 \*No horse ever gets anywhere until he is harnessed. No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunneled. No life ever grows great until it is focused, dedicated disciplined. *Harry Emerson Fosdick*  
> Well said, and there are plenty of opportunities to harness our energies in practicing improvisation. For example, you can develop a full range of dynamics instead of just loud and soft. You can practice special effects that are powerfully subtle. And you can play double-time passages that, with all their speed and technique, still go somewhere interesting.
- 46 \*Command large fields, but cultivate small ones. *Virgil*  
> See the earlier quote about pumpkins and pies!
- 47 \*I owe all my success in life to having been quarter hour before time. *Thomas Jefferson*  
> Be prepared. Know the chord progressions, show up on time to the gig, be warmed up in your instrument and with your mind.
- 48 \*No man is free who is not master of himself. *Epictetus*  
> Wynton Marsalis constantly preaches the value of effective practice. I often think I'd give anything to play with as much freedom as he does. But for all my wishing, he has given more to his practice, has mastered his art, and has so much the more freedom. Yet in my own world, I can see the freedom I have achieved by following correct principles. That freedom is priceless.
- 49 \*I am a great believer in luck. The harder I work the more of it I seem to have. *Coleman Cox*  
> See the earlier quote on fishing!

- 50 \*You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge one for yourself. *Froude*  
 > I think both dreaming and forging are necessary. Just dreaming about improvising won't improve your skills, but hammering and forging scales and patterns without musical vision won't create great solos.
- 51 \*Failure is more frequently from want of energy than from the want of capital. *Daniel Webster*  
 > Artistic success in jazz music, especially improvisation, usually requires a high degree of skill. But commercial success sometimes depends more on the money than on the art. Personally, I would rather make just enough money to live on, but also make art that lives on, even when I'm gone.
- 52 \*A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step. *Lao Tse*  
 > Improvisation, that 1,000-mile journey! I prefer to divide it into many smaller journeys. There are 7 journeys to begin with: Melody, Rhythm, Expression, Development, Chords, Performance, and Analysis. Within each of those, there are also smaller journeys. But each journey, regardless of size, begins with that first step, which is often a painful or difficult one. Once our feet are moving, the next steps aren't so bad!

## Learning

- 53 \*A little learning is a dangerous thing; Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring. *Alexander Pope*  
 > The key here is what you do with that "little learning." If it serves as a springboard to more learning, then it's a good thing. If it becomes all you need or want, then it is indeed dangerous. The more I know about improvisation, the more I'm convinced there is to know, and that principle holds true in any area of deep learning.
- 54 \*Is not life a hundred times too short for us to bore ourselves? *Friedrich Nietzsche*  
 > Then why are there so many boring solos? We owe it to ourselves to reach for something more interesting. Even if our solos are technically accomplished, they will dead-end unless our vision guides us to the next level. Surprise yourself each day – believe a few impossible things before breakfast!
- 55 \*There are many great truths which we do not deny, and which nevertheless we do not fully believe. *J.W. Alexander*  
 > What keeps us from embracing these truths? Do we have a problem with who proclaims them? Would they cause us some pain if we embraced them? Perhaps we don't understand them well enough to embrace them. In any case, there is work to be done.
- 56 \*Some books are to be tasted; others swallowed; and some few to be chewed and digested. *Bacon*  
 > You may taste, swallow, or digest *The Art of Improvisation*. However you do it, I hope it serves you well. As you search for musical knowledge in the myriad of books and publications available today, keep Bacon's words in mind!
- 57 \*Man's mind stretched to a new idea never goes back to its original dimensions. *Oliver Wendell Holmes*  
 > This is true wherever you pick up new ideas – at a concert, at a rehearsal, reading this book (?), or trying new practice methods. Why go back when you're going forward?
- 58 \*There is nothing so captivating as new knowledge. *P Latham*  
 > It may not be new knowledge to others, but when it's new to us it's exciting! This is especially true when we can see how to apply that knowledge, because it will then lead to additional knowledge.
- 59 \*Strange how much you've got to know before you know how little you know. *Dr. Samuel Johnson*  
 > See the quote by Pope on "a little learning."
- 60 \*The best effect of any book is that it excites the reader to self activity. *Thomas Carlyle*  
 > If *The Art of Improvisation* can do that, then I consider the time I put into writing it well spent!

- 61 \*It is one thing to show a man that he is in error, and another to put him in possession of truth. *John Locke*  
> When you analyze solos, think of how you would have played it differently, and how a particular passage could have been improved. There is a lot you can learn, even if it's learning what not to do in a solo.
- 62 \*A prudent question is one-half of wisdom. *Francis Bacon*  
> To get where you need to go, you need to ask the right questions. What exactly are the problem areas with your technique? How can they be improved? What are the blind spots in your use of SHAPE and ideas? What would help you improve your double-time ideas? Why do certain solos passages rush or lag behind? Getting the questions right means you're on the way to getting some answers.
- 63 \*Neither human applause nor human censure is to be taken as the test of truth; but either should set us upon testing ourselves. *Whately*  
> Chapter 3M: Soling Live gives my perspectives on live performances. The advice is this quote is good; the end is not in what people think – the end is in how we improve.
- 64 \*Ever building to the clouds, and never reflecting that the poor narrow basis cannot sustain the giddy, tottering column. *Schiller*  
> The basis or foundation elements we build on in improvisation include ear training, instrumental technique, playing solid downbeats and offbeats, hearing chord progressions, and SHAPE. Examples of building on shaky foundations include: playing outside with weak interval recognition; playing double-time passages with poor instrumental technique; playing complicated rhythms without secure downbeats and offbeats; playing Giant Steps without being able to hum the bassline; and trying to develop a solo without seeing musical shapes.

## Music / Art

- 65 \*After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music. *Aldous Huxley*  
> Music, after all, is beyond words.
- 66 \*Architecture is frozen music. *De Stael*  
> And music is architecture that moves. Your development and musical shapes in your solos unlock the architecture to your music.
- 67 \*A man that has a taste of music, painting, or architecture, is like one that has another sense, when compared with such as have no relish of those arts. *Joseph Addison*  
> A good argument for not cutting the budget for the arts in our schools! Our society becomes what we value and teach.
- 68 \*Nature does nothing uselessly. *Aristotle*  
> Sometimes the reasons are hard to see at first. Saxophonist Stan Getz once said he never played a note he didn't mean. That's a goal to strive for.
- 69 \*See some good picture -- in nature; if possible; or on canvas hear a page of the best music; or read a great poem every day. You will always find a free half hour for one or the other; and at the end of the year your mind will shine with such an accumulation of jewels as will astonish even yourself. *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*  
> What do you listen to? What do you see? And how do those experiences affect you? There is much more to listening than just turning on the CD player. The more intelligently you listen to jazz artists, the better you understand their artistry, including *why* their ideas work, instead of only how they work.

- 70 \*All poetry [is] putting the infinite within the finite. *Robert Browning*  
> And improvisation is musical poetry, written on the spot. How infinite it is, is another matter. Perhaps that depends on shades of meaning, on deep expression, on wise use of development, or the way the group communicates. When everything lines up correctly, sometimes it does seem infinite.

## Perspective

- 71 \*We put up with being surpassed more easily than with being equaled. *A. Vinet*  
> There seems to be a “threatening” zone where someone plays about the same level as us, or just a little better. It’s as though we can’t accept a tie – we have to be better than our competitor. And we can’t stand “losing” by just a little bit; we’d rather be blown away by someone obviously far ahead of us. Bottom line: there’s no winning and losing, and there’s something to learn from everyone.
- 72 \*No man can do anything well who does not esteem his work to be important. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*  
> No matter how far along the road you are, you need to believe in yourself and what you’re doing. That will propel you along the path to what you want to finally achieve.
- 73 \*It is no great thing to be humble when you are brought low, but to be humble when you are praised is a great attainment. *St. Bernard*  
> Ironically, praise can make you more humble if it turns you to gratitude and a realization of how wonderful an art form you are involved with.
- 74 \*If you treat every situation as a life and death matter, you’ll die a lot of times. *Dean Smith*  
> I know an improviser who used to stop and moan every time he played a wrong note in a solo. I guess he had a lot of dead solos ...
- 75 \*A man who never made a mistake never made anything worth a darn. *Unknown*  
> The great players turn performance mistakes into opportunities; they either get back on track quickly or actually use the “mistakes” as a springboard for new ideas.
- 76 \*These things are good in little measure and evil in large; yeast, salt, and hesitation. *The Talmud*  
> This is especially true for seizing opportunities in improvisation. It’s good to wait a bit and not latch on to each and every idea you hear. But when a good idea comes along, whether yours or someone else’s, you need to grab it quickly and use it effectively. This takes a skillful balance between technique and judgment.
- 77 \*There is no limit to what can be accomplished if it doesn't matter who gets the credit. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*  
> Acknowledge your jazz influences – who you listen to and how they contribute to your playing. And during gigs and rehearsals, take the time to tell others what specifically you like about their playing. (That means you’re paying attention to what they are doing, of course.)
- 78 \*You don't have to blow out the other fellow's light to let your own shine. *Bernard Baruch*  
> Friendly competition is fine once in a while in improvisation. But the more you build others, the more inclined they will be to build you.
- 79 \*Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. *Henry David Thoreau*  
> This is a great metaphor for time and rhythm in improvisation! Knowing when and where to “cast” your notes in the stream makes all the difference. All the notes and all the silence you produce in that stream makes up the musical experience. I am constantly amazed at how rich with possibilities the time-stream really is. Ready to fish? See also the "Numbers Game" article in the Insights folder.



- 80 \*All experience is an arch, to build upon. *Henry Adams*  
> Some of us only sit on the arch while some of us constantly build on it. Each key piece of knowledge allows us to build, if we understand how. Knowing a Db Major flexible scale, you can explore its color tones, non-harmonic tones, and color intervals; you can use it in chord progressions; and you can use it as an outside key. The more advanced skills in improvisation can almost always be broken down into a number of easier skills that are combined or adjusted in some way.
- 81 \*The winds and waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators. *Gibbon*  
> The "able navigators" of improvisation are keenly aware of the winds and waves of the music. Group interaction itself is an ocean to navigate. Then you have chord alterations, development, sound vs. silence, and a host of musical elements that offer many small opportunities for choices and explorations. So build your sailing skills, recognize the wind and waves, and navigate the endless possibilities in jazz solos!
- 82 \*From the errors of others a wise man corrects his own. *Publius Syrus*  
> Listening to live performances or recordings gives you many opportunities to find weaknesses or errors. As you consider errors, be sure to get a sense for which are most significant and which are least. A cracked note in the middle of a tricky double-time passage may be obvious but certainly understandable. On the other hand, a missed opportunity to develop or the wrong approach to a tune may not have any technical errors, but it could be far worse than a cracked note. Learn to see missed opportunities as well as missed notes.
- 83 \*The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about. *Oscar Wilde*  
> If you're active in the jazz scene, people will have opinions about you, good or bad.
- 84 \*Nothing ever happens but once in this world. What I do now I do once for all. It is over and gone, with all its eternity of solemn meaning. *Carlyle*  
> The irony of improvisation is that it's created once and that's how it stands. If it's recorded, it can become its own song with enough repetition. If it's unrecorded, it becomes a memory in the minds of those who were there to experience it. Certain live, unrecorded performances take on an other-worldly kind of magic, partly because they will never be heard again.
- 85 \*The foolish and the dead alone never change their opinions. *James Russell Lowell*  
> I think that depends on which opinions. Certain opinions about music grow stronger over time; others change and evolve with experience. Actually, just about any opinion changes, if you count evolution and growth as a "change."
- 86 \*Applause is the spur of noble minds; the end and aim of weak ones. *Colton*  
> When you think about the effect of a spur on a horse, you get the idea of what applause is really about – it's encouragement to get to the next level. Commonly we think of applause as a reward for a job well done. This quote puts the emphasis back where it belongs, on improvement and growth.
- 87 \*Never put that which matters most at the mercy of that which matters least. *Montaigne*  
> This is good advice for many aspects of improvisation. We should practice skills that will be of the most benefit, such as sound, technique, development, ear training, etc. We should not sacrifice the logic and beauty of the improvisation melody just because the chords are changing. We should keep our time and rhythms steady, no matter the tempo of the piece. And we should not be so obsessed with the "nits" in a solo that we miss the "wits." (Sorry about the nitwit comparison ...)
- 88 \*Trust, not tricks, will keep customers loyal. *Author Unknown*  
> I've heard some artists whose main purpose seems to be showing off those few licks, riffs, or special effects that wow the audience. Until you've heard them a few times ... I've also heard artists who I could listen to for hours on end, because they truly understand how to speak the language. They build melodies with beautiful shapes, their harmonies and colors are rich, they develop ideas as though they were telling a story.

- 89 \*I have a friend who's a weather forecaster. He bases his forecasts on reports cabled him by experts in all parts of the world. And he's a rotten forecaster -- because he never looks out the window. Dr. *Harvey Cushing*
- > Forgetting to do the obvious can really mess you up sometimes. For example ... tuning your instrument, checking sound equipment, reviewing the form and chord changes of the tunes, making sure intros and endings are understood, knowing the address, time, and pay agreement for the gig ... the list goes on. Having the details taken care of will leave your mind free to focus on the music instead of scrambling to handle the next emergency.

## Potential

- 90 \*Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. We are making use of only a small part of our physical and mental resources. Stating the thing broadly, the human individual thus lives far within his limits. He possesses power of various sorts which he habitually fails to use. *William James*
- > So true. The great players amaze us with their virtuosity and their musical sense, but they were not born at that level. They worked with their talents and gifts, unlocking doors along the way, until they could stand at the top and see the view from there. The thing I love about improvisation is that it's so deeply layered, with so many levels and possibilities, that it draws us onward to unlock new resources in our minds and bodies.
- 91 \*Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon 'em. *Shakespeare*
- > This is a good metaphor for being prepared. When I moved to Los Angeles years ago, I got a gig at a jazz club with some excellent musicians. However, I realized I didn't know nearly as many standard tunes as they did. Long story made short -- of necessity I developed an approach to learn standard tunes faster, and that approach eventually grew into what you read in Chapter 3L: Learning Standard Tunes. Your opportunities for "greatness" may come when you least expect them.
- 92 \*The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do. *Walter Bagehot*
- > And doing what you've told yourself you'd never be able to do, too.
- 93 \*Everybody wants to be somebody; nobody wants to grow. *Goethe*
- > Fame and popularity are the traps of life. On the one hand, they get us gigs and they win us approval. On the other hand, they can stunt our growth if we turn our attention from improvement towards indulgence.
- 94 \*A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for. *John A. Shedd*
- > The very act of improvisation is like setting sail from the harbor. Yet even out of the harbor and into the bay there are safe spots and there are new currents to explore. I am amazed at how many improvisers will set sail and learn the basics of improvisation, only to later languish in the doldrums with no wind in their sails.
- 95 \*For in becoming all things to all people, one eventually becomes nothing to everybody, including, and particularly to oneself. *Stephen R. Covey*
- > Shakespeare also said it, but a bit differently: "This above all -- to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."
- 96 \*Only a mediocre person is always at his best. *W. Somerset Maugham*
- > True, but what about the great artists? It sounds like they are always at their best. Once you attain a certain level, you can execute beautiful ideas cleanly, and that sounds like "best" to most of us. But the great artists are looking beyond, to new challenges and new musical territories. And any time you set off exploring, you're sometimes going to be at your "worst," however great that may be.
- 97 \*There is nothing so easy but that it becomes difficult when you do it with reluctance. *Terence Heauton Timorumenos*
- > "Aw, I gotta practice those lousy flexible scales again ..."

- 98 \*Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just stand there. *Arthur Godfrey*  
> There is so much competition and so much progress to be made in the music business. Young players are grabbing hold of the right concepts and doing amazing things with their talents. As the Doors would put it, "The time for hesitation's through ..."
- 99 \*Every artist was first an amateur. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*  
> And hopefully still an amateur, because the root of the word "amateur" is "one who loves." So if you perform for the love of it, you're an amateur. If you get paid for it, you're a professional. I am proud to be a professional amateur.
- 100 \*Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for? *Robert Browning*  
> Heaven is a beautiful place, made all the more beautiful by the realization of how barren our understanding once was. Our journey to heavenly music is as significant as the heavenly music itself.
- 101 \*Ambition is like love, impatient both of delays and rivals. *Denham*  
> Delays in our improvisation progress can be discouraging, and so can others who seem to be able to do so well all those things we struggle to do at all.

## Thought

- 102 \*I light my candle from their torches. *Robert Burton*  
> We are all dependent on the great jazz improvisers who have gone before us, as well as those who continue to light our way with their skill, imagination, and innovation. Perhaps we will someday carry an improvisation torch for those who come after us.
- 103 \*However skillful an artist may be, and however perfect his technique, if he unhappily has nothing to tell us, his work is valueless. *Jacques Maritain*  
> I have heard so many solos in my life that were certainly skillful and technical, yet they had very little to say. I've also heard solos that seemed to hold worlds of meaning in each chorus. What are we trying to say, if anything, when we improvise? The quest to create a beautiful melody, an unexpected harmony or rhythm, and then to develop them into a living and growing thing is surely worth pursuing. Does it take skill? Yes. Technique? Certainly. But it takes more – the desire to live in the creative process.
- 104 \*Grasp the subject, the words will follow. *Cato*  
> I listen to a lot of music every day – it's one of the advantages of writing, where I can line up the MP3s and CDs and let 'em rip. As I listen, I grasp the subject of improvisation and see many of its aspects. When I get up to play, the notes often do follow.
- 105 \*You would be surprised at the number of years it took me to see clearly what some of the problems were which had to be solved ... looking back, I think it was more difficult to see what the problems were than to solve them. *Charles Darwin*  
> Sometimes it's so difficult to see what our weaknesses really are, including all the problems that we should really be solving. Once we find them and face them, it seems we often have renewed energy to not only solve them but use them as part of our newly expanded life-experience.
- 106 \*Criticism comes easier than craftsmanship. *Zeuxis*  
> As I explain in the Introduction to *The Art of Improvisation*, criticism that comes too early in the creative process can actually stop the creative juices. Yet we need to keep analyzing what we create in order to keep on track and make our creation what it should be. The challenge in improvisation is to quickly size up what we just played and see where to go next, without getting bogged down in the tiny problems.

107 \*Change starts when someone sees the next step. *W. Drayton*

> See the earlier quote by Darwin ...

108 \*Man's greatness lies in his power of thought. *Bronson Alcott*

> And such a power that is. I am continually amazed at the multiprocessing that goes on in the brain during improvisation. You see a musical shape in your mind (that alone takes a lot of compute cycles). You begin translating it into notes, which need pitches, rhythm and expression, and integration with chords. Once these decisions are made, all the necessary muscles are coordinated to play the notes correctly on the instrument. While the notes are being played, the brain makes continual adjustments on a low level (touch sensations and instrument command) and on a high level (what chords are coming up, how the melody is developing, what corrections need to be made, etc.) Add to this the complex decisions of interaction with the other musicians, and you begin to glimpse the awesome brain power that we use in improvising. Good thing I don't stop and think about it while I'm playing ...

109 \*The risk of a wrong decision is preferable to the terror of indecision. *Maimonides*

> Fortunately, improvisation doesn't give us much time for indecision. It does, however, give us plenty of opportunity for decision refinement. The improv guidance system should always be in the "on" position, adjusting and moving our ideas in the right directions. We may make "less-than-good" choices on the way, but we can turn them into better choices as we go.

110 \*I'm always fascinated by the way memory diffuses fact. *Diane Sawyer*

> And I am intrigued by how seldom improvisers seem to remember what they played (or someone else played) just one measure ago. Keen hindsight is the gateway to ongoing musical vision.

111 \*The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook. *William James*

> The first things we should usually overlook are the minor errors or misses we make along the way. After that, we need to overlook (or choose to let go by) many of the possibilities that present themselves to us. Choosing some directions means avoiding others, especially musical baggage, clichés, and ruts. Finally, we overlook much of the group interaction we *could* experience to find that which we *should* experience.

112 \*The one prudence of life is concentration. *Emerson*

> Especially relaxed concentration. This is a practice that has huge benefits for practicing and performing improvisation. You block out distractions, you focus on the creative process, and you get lost in it ... happily. At times the concentration becomes more intense, when there are technical or other challenging problems to solve. Other times, the mind wanders to appreciate the beauty of the experience that's happening right in the moment.

113 \*Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is the probable reason so few engage in it. *Henry Ford*

> But thinking gets easier – a) with practice, b) when the problems to solve are clearly understood, and c) when the thinking is focused on small enough tasks. Thinking small and thinking big both take effort and have their own rewards.

114 \*It is hard for an empty sack to stand upright. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

> Here's a good "empty sack" test: 1) Can the soloist negotiate the tune and play a decent solo? 2) (and this is my favorite test ...) Can the soloist still surprise and interest you with his/her solos by the end of the gig?

115 \*It isn't what you know that counts, it's what you think of in time. *Benjamin Franklin*

> "Thinking of what to say in time" has to be one of the most underrated skills ever. I play with soloists from time to time who have a tremendous amount of knowledge and technique, but they don't seem to be able to let that knowledge unfold gracefully. There is so much value in understanding how to converse in improvisation, not just talk or ramble on.

116 \*Nothing is more terrible than activity without insight. *Thomas Carlyle*  
> There are at least two levels that come to mind here – one is practicing without goals, and the other is playing a lot of notes without meaning. Either way, we fill up time and space with something less than our best.

117 \*A peacock has too little in its head and too much in its tail. *Swedish Proverb*  
> A not-so-subtle reminder that we need to concentrate more on thoughtful development and expression, and perhaps less on flashy technique.

## Vision

118 \*Would that we could at once paint with the eyes! -- In the long way from the eye through the arm to the pencil, how much is lost! *Lessing*  
> And improvise with the eyes! Sometimes SHAPE is a long route, from seeing to hearing to playing. But it's the way to go, because it gives you a direct path along the creation process. Just as the pencil is attached to the arm which is guided by the eye, the instrument is attached to the hands, guided by the ear and the musical eye.

119 \*The eternal stars shine out as soon as it is dark enough. *Thomas Carlyle*  
> A number of things interrupt the darkness – pollution, dust, city lights, etc. In music, hype, fame, or criticism can act as the cosmic dust that hides the true value of the performance. Great performances and recordings stand the test of time, long after the applause has died down or cynicism has its say. Sometimes great solos are simple, sometimes they're deep – either way, their beauty lasts.

120 \*Hindsight is an exact science. *Guy Bellamy*  
> Sure, we can all see what we should have done better after the fact. When you record your own solos and listen to them, you get immersed in the whole hindsight thing. But there's another application of hindsight in improvisation – the ability to clearly see backwards a measure or more and remember what you played. The "20-20 Hindsight" article is a summary of how this approach works. So in real-time improvisation, hindsight is not an exact science but it's an important one.

121 \*When I am . . . completely myself, entirely alone . . . or during the night when I cannot sleep, it is on such occasions that my ideas flow best and most abundantly. Whence and how these come I know not nor can I force them . . . Nor do I hear in my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them gleich alleszusammen (at the same time all together). *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*  
> This is an interesting insight into a creative genius. The process may work somewhat differently for the rest of us, but it is an honor to be involved in creativity and bring great ideas into fruition.