Tutorial 2K: Preparing Concert Material

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Welcome! In this tutorial you'll learn how to:

1. Handle tune melodies effectively
2. Build tune sets
3. Get variety in tune sets

Enjoy the learning!

Other Level 2 Tutorials

2A: More Scales

2B: Melodic Shapes

2C: Swing Rhythms

2D: Three and Four

2E: Embellishments

2F: Melodic Development

2H: Tune Forms

▶ Successful live performances depend on a lot of things, but especially the preparation. It's essential to learn how to build sets of tunes with good variety for your performances, and to handle tunes in original, inventive ways.

Part 1 – Handling Tune Melodies

A) What are some good ways to handle tune melodies?

1) One player on melody

2) Melody plus background line

3) Two or more players on melody

*One Player on Melody

*The most common approach is where one person, usually a horn player, plays the tune melody. For variety, a rhythm section player can play the melody while a horn plays a softer background part (see *Melody Plus Background Line* below). Or, musicians can take turns playing parts of the melody, such as a horn on the A section, piano on the B section, etc.

*With slower or medium tunes, the melody player usually has space to add expression to the melody or change a few of the rhythms and pitches. Most often, the changes should be subtle so the original melody stands out.

Melody Plus Background Line

Another player can improvise a background part behind the melody by:

• Playing longer notes that harmonize with the melody. The harmony notes should be softer than the melody and usually in a lower range. You can get started on background lines by using melodic resolution with whole notes (see Tutorial 3B: *Melodic Connection*s).

• Playing fills when the melody has *long notes* or *rests*. The melody player may also want to fill in some of these places, so be ready to go back to longer notes.

• As a drummer, tuning some drums to key pitches (like 1, 3, and 5 of the home key) for a background.

Two or More Players on Melody

If two or more players play the melody, they should use the same phrasing and rhythms.

1) For slower tunes with more room for expression, use one melody player.

2) For medium-tempo tunes, one player or a melody plus background is best. If the tune is rhythmically complex, use two or more melody players.

(Part 1 – Handling Tune Melodies)

3) Fast melodies have less room for expression but can be more technically challenging, so two or more melody players can be very effective. Consider having the bass and keyboard/guitar also double the melody instead of outlining chords.

Also consider using two- or three-part harmonies, or two or more players in unison for *some* of the melody.

▶ **TRY IT –** Select a familiar tune and play long notes that harmonize with the melody. Then play fills around the rests in a melody. Then try two players on melody; switch between unison and backgrounds.

B) What about tune endings?

*The ending of a tune can be exciting but also risky. You could write out an exact ending, which might be better for more complex endings or for recording situations. Or, your group could agree on a basic format for the ending (lower risk, but maybe less creative), or you can "discover" the ending as it comes (higher risk, but often pleasantly surprising). You should balance risk with creativity in endings.

C) What are some good ways to end tunes?

• *Fermatas*: Hold the last chord and have one or more players fill. For variety, use fermatas on the last

2, 3, or 4 notes, with fills alternating between soloists.

• *1-2-3- Go*: Repeat the last few bars of the tune two more times, with a fermata after the third time.

• *Vamp and Fade*: Keep repeating the last few bars or several "made-up" bars with arbitrary chords.

Fade by getting softer, by playing fewer notes, or by going from strict tempo to a looser tempo.

• *Extension*: Don't hold the last chord together, but have one or more soloists fill at the end of the written tune, out of tempo. The fills should be brief and conversational, with an eye towards "feeling" when the tune should end.

• *Cadenza*: Stop and let one player solo freely, then bring in the last chord on cue. In a cadenza, you can vary between rubato and rhythmic playing. (See *Cadenzas* in Chapter 5D: *Rhythmic Freedom, Part 2.*)

(Part 1 – Handling Tune Melodies)

You can also use *segues* between tunes, where you go directly from the final notes of one tune to the first notes of the next tune.

▶ **TRY IT –** Choose one of the 300 Standards for which you know the melody. Try the Fermata and 1-2-3-Go methods.

Part 2 – Building Tune Sets

A) How do I build good tune sets for concerts?

1 Decide the best length for each tune set (such as 45 minutes). See *Set Length* below.

2 Decide the average length per tune (for example, 6 minutes). This may depend on the styles of tunes or the number of solos in each tune.

3 Figure the average amount of time between tunes (perhaps 1 minute), and add that to the average tune length (now 7 minutes per tune).

4 Figure the number of tunes in the set. In this example there's time for six tunes (7 x 6 = 42, which just about hits the 45-minute limit).

5 Select the tunes, balancing different styles and considering the audience's background and tastes.

6 Put the tunes in order (see *Order of Tunes* below).

7 Mark one or two tunes as lower priority so they can be skipped if the set is taking too long (this happens quite frequently). Have one or two backup tunes ready if a certain tune doesn't seem right to play, or if the set is running ahead of schedule.

8 When appropriate, decide solo order and length.

B) How do I plan the length of a set?

• The more solos, the longer the tunes will be.

• Soloists may decide to stretch out and lengthen solos if things are going well.

• You may need to allow time for talk between tunes, such as describing the next tune, introducing group members, announcing upcoming gigs, etc.

(Part 2 – Building Tune Sets)

• In multiple sets, make each new set a little shorter if necessary to avoid fatigue. Often, sets tend to be too long, with too many tunes. Your audience is working hard to appreciate your improvisations, so don't overload their ears.

• It's a good idea to prioritize tunes beforehand and keep an eye on the clock during the set. If time is running short, lower-priority tunes can be canceled, or some solos can be dropped from tunes to speed things up. But if a tune is stretching out and really getting exciting, let it stretch; it's better to cut a later tune than to stop the excitement when it's happening.

C) How do I balance styles within a set?

*Unless your group is emphasizing a certain style, each set should contain a balance of jazz styles, such as swing, latin, ballads, fusion, etc. (You should lean towards the styles your group plays best or towards styles your audience might be expecting.) Each set should also contain a variety of tempos, with a slower tune in each set, a few fast tunes, and the rest of the tunes in at medium tempos.

*Within a given tune, you can arrange to switch styles one or more times (such as from swing to latin to reggae, etc.). These switches can be pre-planned or spur-of- the-moment.

*Switching styles can add variety and be very exciting (especially when it's spontaneous), but avoid forcing a switch or switching too often. For ideas on style switching, see Tutorial 4J: *Group Interaction*.

D) What about the order of tunes?

1) Choose strong opening and closing tunes for the set. The first tune should help the group get into a good groove, and the closing tune should be energetic or unique in some way.

2) Choose the order for middle tunes:

• Alternate styles between tunes. If two tunes in a row are the same *style*, alternate their tempos.

• Alternate tempos between tunes. If two tunes in a row of the same *tempo*, alternate their styles.

• If a piece is very demanding on a certain player, put that tune earlier in the set.

(Part 3 – Variety in Tune Sets)

• If a soloist does several feature pieces, spread them out through the set (or sets).

• If two tunes have similar intros or endings, spread the tunes apart in the lineup.

Choosing tune order can be subjective and sometimes tricky. Be open to the input of the group members for the order of tunes. You may decide to scrap or swap tunes in order to get better balance or length to the set.

► **TRY IT –** <u>Basic</u>: Build an effective 30-minute set of tunes. <u>Medium</u>: Build a 60-minute set. <u>Challenge</u>: Build two 45-minute sets.

Part 3 – Variety in Tune Sets

A) How do I get more variety in a set?

• Play a mini-tune as a closer after the last tune of the first set. A group member can talk to the audience during the first part of it.

The tempo can be fast to pick things up, or medium to ease down.

• Use a solo introduction or cadenza before the tune.

• Use *interludes* or *segues* between some tunes. In an interlude between tunes, one or more players play softly while another player talks to the audience.

• Change the style of an entire tune. For example, play a swing tune as latin or vice versa.

For more ideas on effective tune sets, attend quality live concerts. Take notes on the styles, order, and tempos of tunes in each set; see what makes a good set.

B) How do I avoid solo order problems?

• *Problem* 1: Everyone solos on every tune. This is predictable; it leads to longer tunes or shorter solos (unless your group is a duet or trio).

• *Solution* 1: Decide beforehand who will solo on each tune. Unless one player is clearly the solo leader, try to get a balance in how much each soloist is heard. For a performance, make sure the soloist feels comfortable with soloing on a tune.

(Part 3 – Variety in Tune Sets)

You can also use "feature" tunes, where only one or two players stretch out.

• *Problem* 2: The soloists always go in the same order, (horns, then chords, bass, drums).

• *Solution* 2: For a recording, decide the order of solos beforehand. For a live performance, use one of these *visual cues* to signal you're taking the next solo:

• Raise your instrument or lean forward a bit.

• Make eye contact with other group members.

If two players want the next solo, work it out quickly. If a player *doesn't* want the next solo, he or she should signal that before the solo starts.

C) What do I say?

*If it's a more formal concert, you probably won't be saying much at all; you might just introduce tunes. In less formal concerts or even clinics, what you *say* may be almost as important as what you play. Here are some suggestions for things you can talk about during informal and interactive concerts.

*For informal concerts:

• Announce upcoming gigs.

• Briefly describe tunes before or after they're played.

• Briefly introduce band members

Interactive concerts or clinics:

• Answer questions from the audience.

• Describe your instruments.

• Talk about the history of your tunes or composers.

• Tell about the group.

Keep the interactions brief and focused so they don't detract from your concert music.

That's all for Tutorial 2K!

There is no quiz for this tutorial.