

20-20 Hindsight

We usually talk about the concept of “20-20 hindsight when we regret making mistakes or missing opportunities. But there is another way to look at the concept. 20-20 hindsight can also mean quickly and accurately seeing back into the past a few seconds and learning from it.

Part 2 of 3-Way Vision

The three kinds of vision spoken of in *The Art of Improvisation* are present past, and future. I like to use them in that specific order, too.

- 1) First, you see a shape, hear it, and play it in the present.
- 2) Then you look back to see what was interesting or important about what you played.
- 3) Finally, you carry some or none of the past with you into your next shape and idea.

Problem 1: Neglecting the Past

When you fail at step 2, you’ve broken the bridge that carries you forward – you’re left to constantly meander among new ideas, looking for one that finally works. Development, an essential tool in all types of music, depends greatly on the ability to find and reuse good ideas from the past.

Problem 2: Dwelling on the Past

Although most players are more likely to neglect the past, some tend to dwell too much on thinking about what they just played. This can inhibit spontaneity and slow down the idea flow. Improvisation takes quick reactions and split-second decisions, so it’s important to gather what you need from the past quickly and then move on.

Using the Bridge

To capture and use past music effectively (whether yours or someone else’s), try these suggestions:

1. See and hear shapes clearly.
2. As you play the shape, quickly find the part or parts that are most interesting (some, all, or none) and that you want to carry into your next idea.
3. If you carry something forward, quickly decide *how* to do that. What development tools will you use?
4. Go back to step 1 and create the next idea.

The more you practice this skill, the better you’ll get at linking the past with the future. The result is that your ideas will flow nicely – you’ll leave behind the less interesting parts and capitalize on the intriguing ones. And that will help you create solos that really make a statement.