

## The Art of Conversation

It's interesting to compare improvisation with conversation. After all, when you improvise, you communicate

1. With yourself
2. With your group
3. With the audience

And that's a good order of priority. You must first feel a sense of direction about what you are saying (SHAPE). Then you can relate what the group is playing through group interaction, and finally you can see how the music is coming across to the audience.

## Hang-ups and Clear Connections

There are several common problems in conversation, whether spoken or musical. Below are five examples, with descriptions of how these problems

- *Problem 1:* Not knowing what to say, or being too reluctant to speak.  
*Solution:* As a soloist, you need food for musical thought. Concentrating on SHAPE and flexible scales will usually give you something interesting to say. Seeing and hearing musical ideas clearly gives you the confidence to play them strongly.
- *Problem 2:* Saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, or going off on a tangent.  
*Solution:* This is usually due to shaky time or rhythms, lack of preparation on the chords, or not enough attention to development. Fixing these areas will avoid the problem and strengthen your solos.
- *Problem 3:* Talking too much and listening too little.  
*Solution:* While you need to concentrate on your own ideas at first, remember to leave room for the ideas of the other musicians. When you build on their ideas, your solo will be more meaningful than if you end up only talking to yourself.
- *Problem 4:* Changing the topic too often, or going off on a tangent  
*Solution:* The key here is development. You need to keep track of what you have said and what your group has said, so you can musically “discuss the topics” and arrive at the right conclusions.
- *Problem 5:* Having too many people talking at the same time  
*Solution:* This is sometimes due to group insecurity and wanting too much to be heard. There needs to be enough space and silence for sounds to be assimilated, and enough variety in texture to keep the conversation interesting. Otherwise a sound overload will likely develop, which deadens sensitivity toward your musical ideas.