

The Magic of Markers

The whole process of three-way vision (remembering what you played, deciding what to play now, and seeing where to go) can seem intimidating. I have found a useful technique that helps me make these vision choices a little faster and easier: it's the concept of finding and using "markers" in the music.

Markers help you remember where you've been, something like bread crumbs along a musical path. When you use them, you have a better grip on remembering what you played, and how you can develop it now and later. As you reuse a marker, you usually put it in a *different location* for variety.

What Are Markers?

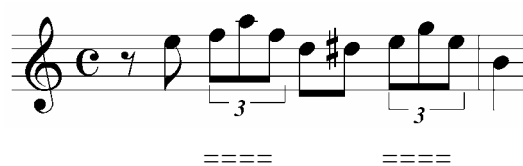
A marker is an unusual spot in a phrase or idea. There are several basic kinds of markers:

- A different rhythm
- A contrasting skip or interval
- An expression

Below are examples of each of these types of markers, as well as how they might be used in development.



Example A: Rhythmic marker; triplets among eighths



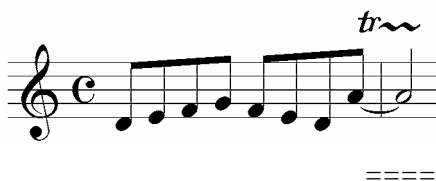
Example A1: Rhythmic marker development



Example B: Interval marker; wide interval among smaller ones



Example B1: Interval marker development



Example C: Expression marker



Example C1: Another expression marker

Making it Happen

To use markers in your improvisation,

1. Play a phrase and capture it in your mind with SHAPE.
2. If there's a good marker to use, remember it; otherwise, play another phrase until you find a marker.
3. Play the next phrase and insert the marker in a different place in the phrase.

Repeating a marker helps the solo gel around interesting points (markers) you choose. Using markers is ideal for developing two-part phrases and ideas that you played over a measure ago (see *Developing Earlier Motifs* in Chapter 1G: of *The Art of Improvisation*). Remember, the goal is to use markers in a subtle way – try to fool the listener (and yourself, occasionally) as to where and how you use markers. With practice, markers can be a valuable and enjoyable development tool in your improvisation.