

# Tutorial 4J: Group Interaction



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

1. Use interaction
2. Use textures
3. Use solo formats
4. Play effectively in duets and trios

Enjoy the learning!

Other Tutorials

- 4A: Soundscapes
- 4B: Double-time & Half-Time
- 4D: More Development
- 4F: Chord Substitutions
- 4G: Variations on ii-V-I's

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- ▶ When you discover how to interact smoothly in your jazz group, your own improvisation will grow. Ideas take on new life when they are copied, varied, supported, and appreciated.

## Part 1 – Using Group Interaction

One of the most enjoyable challenges for the soloist is learning to interact musically with the members of the group. Good interaction can take a solo beyond its borders, making it an exciting group experience.

### A) What are the keys to communicating in solos?

\*Contrary to what some players think, the soloist is not the only one who is playing important ideas. The other members can greatly inspire the soloist, or in some cases can even join in as multiple soloists.

\*A successful solo is like a conversation among the group members. The soloist leads the discussion, and the group members are like the supporting actors who feed the leader ideas. When members of the group hear interesting ideas from the soloist (or from the other members), they can react in any of these ways:

1) *Let the idea go by.* This helps the idea stand out, but does not necessarily build communication. Even when you let it go by, someone else may be communicating with it, so you'll get your turn soon.

2) *Play against the idea.* For example, if the idea uses offbeats, play against it with downbeats, or vice versa; if the idea is ascending, play descending, etc.

3) *Play under the idea,* such as repeated tones, pedal notes, drum rolls, etc. This simplifies the rhythm or chords and draws attention to the soloist and can enhance a solo that's building intensity.

4) *Copy the idea* (explained below).

5) *Alter or develop the idea* (explained below).

**Important:** The group can use any or all of the above methods at the same time. It's not necessary for all members to copy or play against at the same time; variety makes an effective engine behind the soloist.

### B) When and how should I communicate in solos?

\*Whether and how to copy a soloist's idea are ongoing decisions made with split-second timing. Here are the basic choices for imitation:

1) Copy the whole idea. This works best with shorter ideas. But don't overdo it; conversing with a soloist is not an imitating contest; it's communication.

## (Part 1 – Using Group Interaction)

2) Copy part of the idea (the most intriguing part, or the part you can manage to hear and play accurately).

Remember: you can copy one or more pitches, but don't forget about copying part of the *rhythm* (such as a triplet group or offbeat).

3) Alter or develop the idea. This is the most subtle way to communicate - you take a few notes of the idea, alter them and play them back. This leaves the door open for more twists and turns and tends to pull the audience into the conversation. You can play a sequence or semi-sequence on the original idea, or augment the rhythm.

\*The more the soloist and group members respond, the farther the communication goes. This can be exciting when it occurs naturally and isn't forced. But too many groups get in the habit of conversing too long on a single idea (like talking too long on a limited subject).

\*Unless the idea is developing well, it's usually better to create a short (or very short) conversation and be ready to develop the next exciting idea. Remember: the next idea could be something the group just played; the soloist isn't always the originator.

C) How can I use style and rhythmic transitions?

\*One of the most exciting events in a tune is when the entire rhythmic style changes unexpectedly for one or more bars. For example the feel could change from bossa to samba, from ballad to double-time swing, from swing to funk, etc. You can trigger this with a rhythmic idea, or someone else can trigger it.

\*However, too often the style shifts feel forced, predictable, or unsteady. Here are two common misconceptions about style shifts:

Misconception #1: The whole group needs to shift styles.

Fact #1: It's OK to have one or more players not join in the shift sometimes (unless the shift is a radical one).

For example, half the group could shift to double-time while the other half stays is single-time.

Misconception #2: The shift needs to happen as quickly as possible, preferably all at once.

Fact #2: The style shift can build gradually, with one player joining at a time so the intensity builds. (And yes, sometimes it is cool when everyone shifts styles at once.) For ways to create rhythmic shifts, see Chapter 5E: *Rhythm Pulses*.

## Part 2 ~ Ensemble Texture

### A) What are background riffs?

\*Background riffs can sometimes add excitement behind solos, but they must not interfere with the solo. The riffs can be pre-planned, or they can develop out of something that happens during a solo. Below are some ideas of how to use background riffs:

- 1) During a rhythm section solo, the horn(s) can play a simple repeated background riff.
- 2) During latin or fusion drum solos, the bass can play a repeated pattern over one or two chords.
- 3) The keyboard or guitar can intersperse motifs in a bass solo and sometimes during a drum solo.

### B) Can multiple players solo at once?

\*Occasionally, two or more soloists can play at once. Trading bars is a safer alternative, but simultaneous soloing can be effective if the players use space, timing, and development wisely. Here are some tips:

- 1) Have the second soloist wait for a bar or so after the first soloist starts. Try to keep an active musical conversation going.

2) For shorter durations, have two soloists play together. Make sure the rhythms are solid.

3) Keep listening for where to build and end the solo.

\*You can get into multiple soloing by practicing jazz duets and learning how to give and take with ideas.

\*Usually, a soloist improvises uninterrupted for several choruses. But there are many other solo formats to use; for variety, try any of the techniques below.

### C) How can I use half-chorus solos?

\*In ballads or tunes with longer solo choruses, it's often a good idea for one soloist to take the first half of the chorus and another soloist the second half. This also lends contrast to a feature piece; a secondary soloist can take half a solo, allowing one and a half (or more) choruses for the featured soloist.

### D) What about trading bars in solos?



\*Trading bars is where two or more soloists divide up the chord progression and play short solos. Usually, each player takes four bars (called "trading 4's"). Other common trading lengths are eight bars, two bars, or 12 bars if the tune is a blues. Trading is usually done with the drums (horn, drums, guitar, drums, bass, drums, etc.) or around the group (piano, horn, bass, drums, etc.).

## Part 3 – Solo Formats

\*The trading continues for several choruses as soloists repeat the order until trading is finished.

Here are guidelines for successfully trading bars:

1) Clearly signal when trading is to start. Specify the kind of trading (with drums, or around the group) and how many bars to trade. Anyone who wants to be left out of the trading should signal that.

2) Be ready for your turn; don't be unprepared.

3) Try to develop on the ideas the previous soloist just played, when appropriate.

4) Clearly signal when it's time to end trading and return to the tune melody. Don't let the trading go on too long.

\*Sometimes, brief quotes from other tunes can be effective during trading (see *Using Quotes* in Chapter 4D: *More Development*).

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Basic: In a blues, trade 4-bar solos w/ a friend. Medium: Trade 4-bar solos for one chorus, 2-bar solos for the next.

### E) How do I use solo fills?

\*You can build solo fills into the structure of the tune melody. These are most effective as stop-time fills, where everyone drops out during the fill except the soloist. This builds suspense well, but it requires clean and imaginative playing on each fill. Here are some suggestions for playing stop-time fills:

- Use double-time frequently (see *Practicing Double-Time Fills* in Chapter 4B: *Double-Time and Half-Time*).
- Use interesting rhythms.
- Develop ideas from previous fills.

A great example of stop-time fills is Wynton Marsalis' solo on Buggy Ride on the CD "Joe Cool's Blues."

- ▶ **TRY IT** – On a play-along recording, mute or turn off volume every 2 bars; play solo fills.

### F) How do I end a solo effectively?

\*The end of your solo leaves a lasting impression on the audience. Some do's and don'ts for ending solos:

- Don't end your solo in the middle of the progression, unless you're intentionally (and clearly) doing a half solo.

## (Part 3 – Solo Formats)

- Don't commit to another solo chorus unless you can feel momentum or new ideas spurring you on.

Likewise, if some good intensity is building, don't bail out on the solo too soon.

- For variety, try extending your solo a few bars into the next soloist's progression.

- At the start of your solo, try to pick up on the last idea of the previous solo for a smooth transition.

\*The group should always know which is the last solo, and someone should signal the immediate return to the melody to avoid annoying delays. During solos, you can look around and see who else wants to solo later or who wants to skip a solo.

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Extend a solo a few bars into the next chorus; make the ending solid. Start a solo by developing the last idea played by the previous soloist.

## Part 4 – Playing in Duets and Trios

### A) What are the priorities when playing in duets & trios?

\*When you play in duets or trios, there's a new set of challenges and opportunities. The basic jazz functions are now handled by two or three people instead of four or more. In duets and trios, the priorities are:

- 1) Melody (horn, vocalist, or chord instrument)
- 2) Chords (piano, guitar, vibes, etc.)
- 3) Bass (acoustic or electric bass, or chord instrument)
- 4) Drums

\*Notice that chord instruments can play melody, chords, and bass. Duets almost always include chord instruments, but usually don't include drums.

### B) What instruments combine in duets & trios?

Some typical instrument combinations for duets and trios are listed below.

#### **Duets:**

- Chords and bass
- Horn and chords

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- Vocalist and chords
- Two chords. This is usually piano and guitar, piano and vibes, or two pianos. The piano can occasionally fill in the bass line.

### **Trios:**

- Chords, bass, and drums.
- Horn, chords, and bass.
- Two chords and bass.
- Horn, bass, and drums (for advanced players. In this combination, the horn player has a more chordal responsibility.

### **C) How are roles switched in duets and trios?**

\*One of the best ways to keep a duet or trio sounding fresh and interesting is for the players to occasionally switch roles in the music. Here are some examples:

- Running bass. Instead of walking with quarter-notes, the bass “runs” with faster rhythms. This is like a double melody (see below).
- Horn held notes and trills. A horn player can hold out harmony background notes, or trill on the held notes. The held notes shouldn’t compete or conflict with the melody player or soloist.

- Bass chords. These can be played behind the tune melody or behind solos.
- Bass lines in other instruments. The chord instrument can sometimes fill in with a walking bass line.
- Percussive effects. One or two players can play staccato notes behind the soloist, or all players can play staccato notes or patterns together. In the latter case, it’s vital to keep a solid sense of time.
- Double melodies (counterpoint). Two melodies can be played during the tune melody or during solos.

### **D) How do time and form relate to duets and trios?**

\*Because many duets and trios don’t have drums, it’s very important for each player to be accurate with the tempo and confident with rhythms. You can still take rhythmic chances, but every “liberty” should be compared against a solid framework of rhythm and form.

\*This is especially true when players switch roles for a while (see *Switching Roles* above). Players should always know exactly where they are in the tune form.

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That’s all for Tutorial 4J!

There is no Quiz for this Tutorial.