

Project Year

2015-2016

Project Title

Jazz Fundamentals Reloaded

Project Team

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Audience

The audience for this project is undergraduates enrolled in the *Jazz Fundamentals* course, primarily freshmen in the Jazz Department. These materials could also be used by advanced preparatory students and others learning improvisation in private study.

Pedagogical Challenge

Students entering Peabody Institute's Jazz program come from different backgrounds with different levels of understanding music theory. In past years, the level of student ability has ranged from those with a strong understanding of complex harmony to those without the basic ability to locate middle C on the piano. Our goal is to create pertinent course materials deliverable in an online forum that will serve students of all levels. For some students, this may be learning concepts for the first time, for others it may be in applying the same concepts in challenging performance situations. For example, while one student may be studying dominant chords for the first time, another may be applying those same dominant chords to exercises in all twelve keys.

Solution

We propose to develop a digital library of music resources that includes a variety of media--audio files, videos and documents explaining the lessons, and audio files for students to use in practice. Lessons will be derived from chapters of The Jazz Language by Dan Haerle.

Video lessons will include playing demonstrations, sheet music, and traditional lectures which demonstrate underlying musical concepts well as their association to jazz improvisation. These videos will cover harmony, melody, rhythm, and study of improvisational language.

Audio files, which reinforce lessons, provide the students with practice vehicles using today's technology. Employing the digital-audio workstation, we will create play-along recordings, which will serve as the rhythm section or musical backdrop for the students' practice and performance sessions. Each exercise, linked to its own related video lesson, will be available in various keys and tempos so all students can be challenged.

Assessment Strategy

Regular playing exams will be administered. During the course, specific musical abilities will be evaluated individually. Certain tests will have chords containing upper extensions; this tests a student's

understanding of scales and modes. Other tests will be in all twelve keys; this measures a student's ability to apply harmonic language in different settings. Furthermore, some tests won't have sheet music as a way of testing the ability to hear harmony, rather than merely understanding its function. Finally, there will be exams in various time signatures and tempos; this assesses rhythmic understanding. In completion of the course, the students, having developed a fundamental command and understanding of the three basic elements of music--melody, harmony and rhythm--should have the foundation to excel in subsequent jazz theory and improvisation courses.

Faculty Proposal

Students enter the Jazz program with varying degrees of experience, ranging from those with only a beginning understanding of basic music concepts to those with the ability to excel in our more advanced courses. Less experienced students find course participation difficult when it comes to playing and singing assignments in the presence of more advanced students.

Our goal is to retool *Jazz Fundamentals* with a user-friendly online learning platform. Though the course's core objective is to teach students the basic aspects of jazz theory, improvisation, and ear-training, in its web-based form, it would provide a sense of anonymity to the students, thus leveling the playing field. Such a course would provide options for our double degree students whose schedules in many cases make face-to-face courses difficult. Though the students who enroll in *Jazz Fundamentals* are generally Peabody Jazz Studies majors, all Hopkins students and faculty members who wish to learn basic jazz theory are welcome to take the class.

Aside from serving as the course instructor, my responsibilities will cover development of the course syllabus, content, and lesson plans, as well as study and practice exercises. I will also evaluate audio and video files before implementation and identify relevant external resources. The fellows (both of whom have considerable hands-on experience with current software and recording technology) will cover the production of relevant audio, video, midi, and image files. They are also responsible for implementation and management of this material online. The course enrollees' final scores and course evaluations will serve as success markers for the project.