Rhythmic Compieg For Piano
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The role of the piano player in a jazz ensemble usually involves three components: playing written melodic or chordal material with the ensemble, providing accompaniment for soloists (called "comping"), and improvising jazz solos. Since many published jazz ensemble pieces already include suggested chord voicings for you, the focus of this sheet is not what notes to play, but what rhythms to use.

Most jazz comping rhythms are simple and straightforward. Once you have learned a few of these patterns you will be able to combine them in a number of ways to create a solid jazz feel. Here are the basic patterns we'll start with:

EXAMPLE 1A

EXAMPLE 1B

Notice that in Example 1B the rhythms are the same as in 1A except that the last note note of the rhythm pattern is sustained. Also be aware that when you play on the beat in music that swings that note should be long. For example, if you play measure 2 of 1A with two short notes the result will be choppy and "stiff" sounding.

Using just the rhythms from Example 1, you can construct very convincing comping patterns. Example 2 demonstrates one way you might use these rhythms to comp for a chorus of blues:

EXAMPLE 2

Play through Example 2 several times using the rhythms that are written. Once you are comfortable doing that, try making up your own comping patterns based on Examples 1A and 1B. You can practice this Bb blues with Jamey Aebersold vol. #2 called Nothin' But Blues (track #5). Also, there is a CD that your director got when they purchased the chart that included this rhythm sheet. That CD has many tracks with just a rhythm section playing. Listen to the piano player on the recording and try to identify the rhythmic patterns he is using. You will probably be able to hear some of the same patterns shown in Examples 1A and 1B.
The next step in your rhythmic development (after you become familiar with the rhythms on page 1 and feel comfortable using them in your comping) is to shift each of the rhythms to begin on different beats within the measure. For example, in bar one of 1A, instead of playing on beat 1, you could shift it to beat 2, 3 or 4. Example 3 demonstrates some other "rhythm shift" possibilities.

EXAMPLE 3

A On beat 1 Shifted to beat 2 (Beat 3) (Beat 4)

B Upbeat of 1 Shifted to upbeat of 2 (Upbeat of 3) (Upbeat of 4)

C On beat 1 Shifted to the upbeat of beat 1 On beat 2 On beat 3

So, using just the eight rhythms from examples 1A and 1B along with the nine variations shown above will give you enough basic rhythmic material to create your own comping grooves in just about any chart in the swing style. A word of warning: Now that you have all these great rhythmic ideas at your disposal, it is important to keep in mind that you don't necessarily have to play in every measure! As with all music, leaving space in jazz comping is vitally important.

Example 4 puts all these ideas together using the changes from FIRST IMPRESSIONS. You can practice this example and create your own comping patterns using the FIRST IMPRESSIONS practice track on the CD.

EXAMPLE 4