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Formerly editor in chief, The Billboard; featured columnist, Sponsor Magazine, radio/tv trade paper; director, Artists & Repertoire, RCA Victor; vice president in charge, Eastern Operations, Capitol Records; president Csida-Greene Associates, talent management & production firm; personal manager for Eddy Arnold, Bobby Darin, Jim Lowe, John Gary & others; president, Trinity Music, Inc., Towne Music, Inc., Sculpture Music, Inc., Davidson County Music, Inc., Recording Industries Corporation, New York Chapter National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences; executive producer, The Eddy Arnold TV Film series; producer, The John Gary nationally syndicated tv show.

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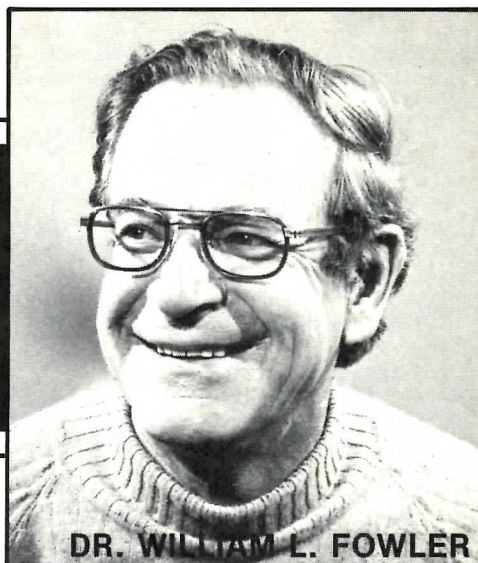
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## HOW TO

### Beat The Combo/ Improvisation Shortage

by Dr. William L. Fowler  
and Dr. John Kuzmich, Jr.



WARWICK HANSEL

"T here's something about jazz music that ignites fantasies which have to do with creative thinking. And that's what the whole world needs today — more creative thinking. And improvisation is the basis of creative thought: it should be compulsory." — Stan Kenton at the NAJE Convention last December.

In Stan's audience was John Kuzmich, already doing something about creativity in the jazz program at his school, University City High School in St. Louis. Less than two years ago, John set up a combo/improvisation course, after having perceived that the school's traditional stage band program was not serving all the needs of all the jazz-oriented students in his own and neighboring schools.

Since daytime class scheduling made multi-school participation impossible, and since no one wished to interfere with the core traditional music activities, John put his initial combo/improvisation course into an evening time slot through the School of Continuing Education, with the blessing of his principal, Earl Beeks, who pointed out, "The jazz curriculum is not solely performance-oriented. It reaches out to the general student body."

Principal Beeks' prognostication proved right. The evening course reached out not only to University City students, but to many from other high schools, colleges, and the adult community, as well. Program expansion quickly followed, an expansion noted by the St. Louis press. And now there are six combos, a class in jazz/rock history, an arranging course, and, equally important, performance, performance, performance. And not only in St. Louis!

This year, for example, University City students put on a combo/improvisation clinic, teaming with Jamey Aebersold, at the Anaheim MENC Biennial Convention, then filled six other concert and demonstration dates, all intermixed with a ten-day cultural exchange program with Southern California high schools. And John's home school district classified this tour as a credit-producing official musical field trip.

For those educators who wish to expand their own school jazz activities, here is the account from Dr. Kuzmich of how he and his administrators accomplished their wide-ranging music education goals.

"Justification for curriculum change

rested in meeting several student needs:

- To teach improvisation to all interested students, not merely to the elite of the stage band.
- To form small training groups for those with no previous jazz experience.
- To train several rhythm sections, and more thoroughly than is possible in a single big band format.
- To provide small performance units as vehicles for improvisation, and as convenient groups in arranging studies.
- To include in a jazz program students who could already improvise, but whose reading skills precluded participation in a big band.

"We felt that our traditional stage band approach was not meeting these student needs as adequately as a combo/improvisation approach would. Our first curriculum change, then, was the institution of the combo/improvisation course. Its immediate success and the resulting program expansion generated yet another need—to get the combos, playing music from the arranging students, out into public view. We put improvisation clinics into local school assemblies; we included combos in the monthly chamber music schedule; we even organized jam sessions at pizzarias, with half the profits going into our band fund. And we started our own annual Jazz Week, with its clinics, its symposia, its combo concerts, and its big-band festival, complete with Artists-in-Residence.

"To our administrators, Jazz Week is particularly attractive. The general student body of the high schools, plus many non-high-schoolers, flock to all the events, and show special interest in lectures on jazz history and black music. And why not? St. Louis produced a big chunk of ragtime, and contributes mightily to current jazz through native sons Grant Green, Oliver Nelson, Lennie Niehaus, Clark Terry, Ernie Wilkins and the others. And Pee Wee Russell was a St. Louis man, too.

"Now, as if to underscore the St. Louis jazz heritage, the Board of Education has passed a proposal for a matching grant in jazz and ethnic studies.

"Student Linda Seifeth's observation, 'There are more and more kids involved in the jazz program,' promises to become the understatement of the year, for the jazz enrollment has already more than doubled, with adult participation skyrocketing, too. And the signs of growth in quality are all



around. High school junior David Schechter confidently conducted his very first original work before a Jazz Week crowd, despite its being in odd meter. And during the first year of the new program, the University City Wind Ensemble brought home the top award from the Missouri State Concert Band Contest, thus bearing out Bob Share's recent contention that 'The same high school that has a good jazz program has also a good (total) music program. One is not really that far apart from the other.

"At our school jazz students join classical ensembles to gain technical and reading skills, while non-jazz students join combos to learn relaxation and improvisation.

"Meanwhile, we are giving all our students the opportunity to be creative—our combo/improvisation course and its arranging/composition counterpart, together with constant performances, guarantee that opportunity. "Okay, Stan?"

By all quantitative criteria, the high school jazz band movement now appears to be a solid success. Enrollment figures annually rise by the thousands; jazz festivals proliferate; teaching job specifications include stage band expertise while Masters' and Ph.D.'s theses concerning the high school stage band regularly appear from institutions of higher education. But a danger lurks in this type of bandwagon success—the danger of too much structure. So how can this now-important segment of music education retain vitality? High school educators might add courses in theory and arranging. Yes, but this particular curriculum expansion would merely shore up the big band concept, with its emphasis on the section. One might say that further progress in high school jazz should now come from more attention to the individual performer. That means small performance units, with the resulting concentrated musical responsibilities for every member. Perhaps John Kuzmich and his cooperative associates right now are pioneering a high school combo curriculum just as valid as Gene Hall's pioneering of the educational big band at North Texas State a quarter century ago.

## BOOKS

**Six Blues-Roots Pianists: A Thorough Guide to Early Blues Piano Styles** with *Instruction, Historical Notes, Discography, and Complete Music Transcriptions of Boogie-woogie, Barrelhouse, and Ragtime Solos*, by Eric Kriss. Oak Publications: New York, 1973. 104 pp., \$3.95.

While this book's scope may not be as all-inclusive as its subtitle suggests, *Six Blues-Roots Pianists* nonetheless presents an informative and accurate collection of 17 early blues piano (and sometimes vocal) transcriptions by six masters of this form: Jimmy Yancey, Champion Jack Dupree, Little Brother Montgomery, Speckled Red (Rufus Perryman), Roosevelt Sykes, and Otis Spann. The solos range in difficulty from the relatively uncomplicated *Yancey's Bugle Call* to the moderately challenging *Tremblin' Blues* by Little Brother Montgomery. Along the way, the reader is treated to such other blues classics as *Cow Cow Blues* and *Trouble In Mind*.

The catchall adjective "blues-roots" en-

compasses such divergent early piano styles as Dupree's, on the gospelish *Mercy On Me*; Montgomery's ragtime mannerisms on *Tremblin' Blues*; and the rollicking eight-to-the-bar feeling of Speckled Red's *Dirty Dozens*. The majority of the tunes, though, share several distinct features: their melodies are derived largely from the blues scale; their harmonic form is some version of the traditional eight- or twelve-bar blues; their left hand patterns are usually based on repetitive boogie bass figures; and their melodic rhythms are complex, involving intricate triplet, quintuplet and septuplet figures which are perhaps more easily felt than counted. As Kriss (who is a **db** record reviewer) implies, "blues-roots" piano is by no means premeditated academic music (as much of ragtime was); its canon consists of visceral, earthy pieces performed by self

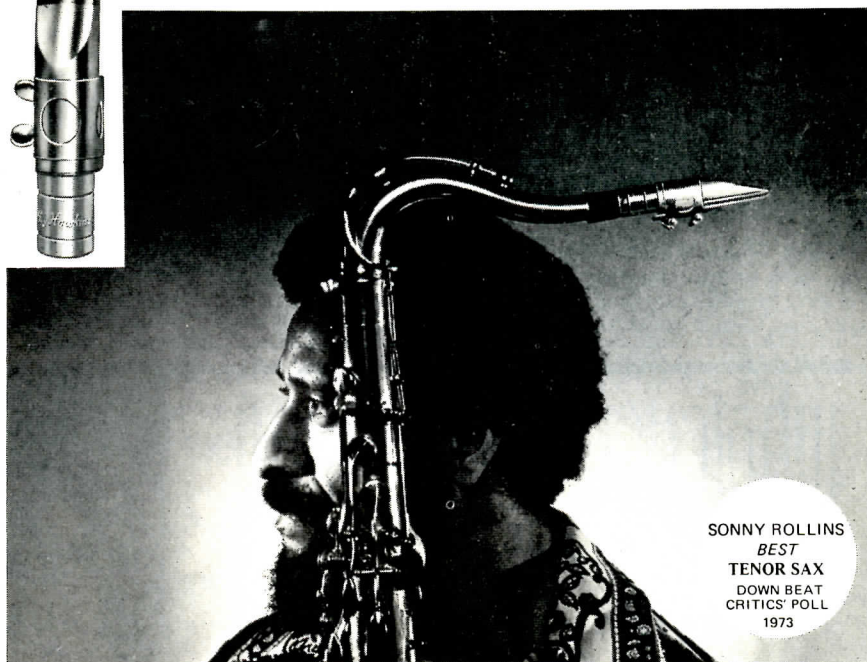
taught musicians who relied more on intuition and inspiration than on formal training. Thus, given the limitations of conventional notation, listening to the recordings of these tunes is essential to grasp their idiomatic flavor. Most of the recordings Kriss cites are currently available.

Kriss' anthology has several additional features worth mentioning. The author provides detailed, colorful biographies of these six blues artists, an annotated bibliography of books and magazines dealing with blues and early jazz, a full piano discography, and a useful list of addresses of record companies specializing in blues records. Thus, *Six Blues-Roots Pianists*, like any serious work, is valuable not only for the information it itself contains, but also for the leads it provides to other detailed sources of information on its topic.

—jon balleras



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