

# Getting Started on Jazz Clarinet

10 Tips to Assist You on Your Musical Journey



Licorice Stick Jazz

# Introduction

Learning to play jazz on the clarinet is a singularly rewarding experience. I, myself, have enjoyed playing the clarinet for over 30 years. (Even though I still feel like I am just beginning to master the basics.) It's a fantastic instrument with a great sound and its legacy in the world of jazz music is profound.

I am hoping that this list of 10 tips (with one bonus tip!) helps you to reach the next step on your licorice stick journey (for those of you new to jazz clarinet playing "licorice stick" is a friendly term we jazz musicians often use to refer to our horn of choice). The tips are divided into two sections, the first for listening and the second for practicing. These 10 tips are hardly comprehensive. There is so much to learn about jazz clarinet that you can't possibly learn it all in 10 tips. But I hope you find them to be valuable and I wish you the greatest amount of success on your musical journey.



# Listening Tips

## **\*Listen to Jazz Clarinetists\***

Immersing yourself in the recordings of jazz clarinet legends such as Sidney Bechet, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, and Eddie Daniels is crucial for understanding the essence of jazz clarinet playing. Take note of their distinct tones, intricate phrasing, and fearless improvisational techniques. Listening actively helps internalize these elements, guiding your own journey towards developing a unique jazz voice on the clarinet. Whether it's the New Orleans flair of Bechet, the swing of Goodman, the virtuosity of Shaw, or the modern innovations of Daniels, each clarinetist offers insights that can inspire and shape your musical approach.

## **\*Pick out one jazz clarinetist to emulate at first\***

Begin by studying the playing style of a single jazz clarinetist who resonates with you deeply. Whether it's the lyrical sweetness of Benny Goodman, the virtuosic flair of Artie Shaw, the big New Orleans tone of Sidney Bechet or Pete Fountain, or the modern innovations of Eddie Daniels, immerse yourself in their recordings and performances. Focus on replicating their tone, phrasing, and improvisational approach, using their style as a springboard for developing your own unique voice on the clarinet. As you become more comfortable, gradually incorporate elements from other clarinetists to broaden your stylistic range and musical palette.


## **\*Listen to clarinetists from other genres\***

Broaden your musical palette by exploring clarinetists beyond the jazz realm, such as classical virtuosos like Richard Stoltzman or klezmer maestros like Giora Feidman. Each genre offers distinct techniques, interpretations, and cultural contexts that can enrich your jazz clarinet playing. Classical clarinetists emphasize precision and classical repertoire interpretation, while klezmer musicians showcase lively, expressive melodies and ornamentation. Drawing inspiration from diverse clarinet traditions expands your musical horizon, fostering versatility and creativity in your jazz improvisation and performance.



# Listening Tips (cont.)

## **\*Transcribe Jazz Clarinet Solos\***



Transcribing is taking an audio recording and attempting to reproduce what you hear, either through playing it on your own instrument or writing it out on musical staff paper. Transcribing solos by your favorite jazz clarinetists is an invaluable learning tool that sharpens your ear, deepens your understanding of jazz phrasing, and expands your improvisational vocabulary. Analyze the nuances of tone, articulation, and rhythmic feel in each solo, dissecting how clarinetists approach melody and harmony. Transcription challenges you to mimic and internalize the stylistic nuances and techniques of jazz masters, guiding your own improvisational development. Through transcription, you develop a deeper connection with the jazz tradition while honing your personal voice on the clarinet.



# Practicing Tips

## **\*Plan your practice time\***

Before each practice session, set clear goals and objectives tailored to your musical aspirations and current skill level. Whether it's refining a specific technique, learning new jazz standards, or practicing improvisation, a well-structured practice plan keeps you focused and productive. Allocate time for warm-ups, technical exercises, repertoire study, and creative exploration. Planning your practice sessions cultivates discipline, maximizes efficiency, and accelerates your progress on the clarinet. Regularly reassess and adjust your practice plan to ensure continual growth in and enjoyment of jazz clarinet.

## **\*Practice consistently\***

Establishing a consistent practice routine is fundamental to mastering any instrument, including the clarinet for jazz. Even short, regular sessions can yield significant improvements in technique, breath control, and overall comfort with the instrument. Consistency builds muscle memory, enhances finger agility, and reinforces good habits essential for fluid jazz improvisation. Whether it's scales, arpeggios, or specific jazz licks, regular practice solidifies your foundation and prepares you for the spontaneity of jazz performance.

## **\*Practice improvisation\***

Improvisation lies at the heart of jazz, offering freedom of expression and creativity. Start by experimenting with simple melodic ideas over jazz standards or blues progressions. Don't be afraid to explore different scales, rhythmic patterns, and articulations to develop your improvisational vocabulary. Embrace mistakes as learning opportunities, as they often lead to new discoveries and innovative playing styles. With time and practice, improvisation becomes more intuitive, allowing you to confidently navigate jazz music.



# Practicing Tips (cont.)

## **\*Practice a clarinet method book\***

Utilizing a clarinet-specific method book, such as "Celebrated Method for the Clarinet" by Hyacinthe Klosé, provides structured guidance for improving technique and musicality. These resources focus on essential skills like tone production, articulation, and phrasing specific to clarinet playing. Working through exercises designed to build dexterity and control prepares you to tackle jazz standards and improvisation with greater ease and confidence.

## **\*Practice a jazz method book\***

Supplement your practice routine with a dedicated jazz clarinet method book, such as "The Jazz Method for Clarinet" by John O'Neill or "Jazz Conception for Clarinet" by Jim Snidero. Another excellent jazz method book not specific to the clarinet is "Around the Horn" by Walt Weiskopf and its sister "Beyond the Horn" also written by Walt Weiskopf. These books focus on jazz-specific techniques, articulations, and improvisational exercises tailored for clarinetists. Working through jazz method books helps you develop a deeper understanding of jazz harmony, chord progressions, and stylistic nuances essential for authentic jazz performance. Practice scales, arpeggios, and rhythmic patterns in various jazz styles to strengthen your improvisational skills and musical fluency on the clarinet.

## **\*Practice *The Real Book*\***

Dive into *The Real Book*, a compilation of lead sheets containing jazz standards and popular tunes. Clarinetists can benefit immensely from practicing these tunes, as they provide opportunities to apply jazz theory, improvisational techniques, and stylistic interpretations in a real-world context. Start with simpler tunes and gradually progress to more complex compositions, focusing on melody interpretation, harmonic awareness, and improvisational creativity. Playing from *The Real Book* enhances your repertoire, prepares you for ensemble playing, and cultivates your ability to interpret and perform jazz standards with confidence and authenticity.

# Bonus Tip! (for doublers)

## *\*Practice alternating between your instruments frequently\**

If you double on multiple instruments like saxophone and clarinet, practicing the transition between them enhances your versatility and technical proficiency. Each instrument demands unique embouchures, fingerings, and breath control techniques. Regularly switching between instruments maintains fluency and ensures you're prepared for diverse musical settings, whether it's jazz bands, orchestras, or small ensembles.

