

The Gestalt of Jazz Practice

1 Practicing (and performing) with both brains:

the ABABC, whole-brain approach.

Re "...problem solving... the right hemisphere presents an array of possible solutions, which remain live while alternatives are explored. The left hemisphere... takes the single solution that seems best to fit what it already knows... studies...reveal a tendency for the left hemisphere to deny discrepancies that do not fit its already generated schema of things. The right hemisphere, by contrast, is actively watching for discrepancies, more like a devil's advocate. These approaches are both needed, but pull in opposite directions.

Iain McGilchrist The Master and His Emissary Yale University Press. 2009/2012

For improvisors... combining **refinement** and **opening up** through **systematic manipulation** and **open improvising**.

Objectives:

- Deep memory - **embed an approach** through **repetition**, in **context**.
- **Combine** specific strategies with improvisational process from **both brains**.
- **Integrate** a **desired** approach within our **existing** improvisational approach.
- Adapt, **manipulate** and personalise approaches, progressing from **literal** to **nuanced** and **personal** use.
- **Smart practice**, combining left, right brain and whole brain.

CREATE YOUR OWN ABABC

Prerequisites

1. Objective

- a. Know why you are practicing: In this case, using "X" (approach/solo/transcription/device) to:
 - i. model **creating/doing** "X"
 - ii. Develop your **improvisational will** in "X" (*don't underestimate the will!*)

2. Attunement

- a. In this strategy, it is helpful to **familiarise** yourself **deeply** with "X" through examples (solo, song etc). Use *YouTube, Spotify* etc.

3. Context

- a. Select a **simple context** for practice. In this case it is ...?
- b. Don't over-load your improvisational-mind by presenting **too much material**  or **multiple tasks** .

Review

You have decided on

- a) objective/desired outcome

- b) simple context.

Now let's proceed...    

The Process

- **A** (right brain) **begin with the general idea** (“set up” the improvisational mind by repeated listening to **“X”**).
- **Guided intuition** towards desired outcome. Play your intuition’s version of **“X”**.
- **Keep on task, return to task if distracted, always allow your intuition to lead.**
- *Sensing* not thinking.
- approx **5-10 mins.**

- **B1** (left brain) Now use deliberate, specific, **targeted practice.**
- Limit practice to ingredients that you can **manage and monitor exactly.**
- If you can’t monitor, you’re doing too much!
- approx **5-10 mins.**

- **B2** (optional) If/when **B1** is comfortable, perhaps add another strategy but handle with care
- approx **5-10 mins.**

- **A** (right brain) again. This is the **guided intuition** again... approx **5-10 mins.**

- **B1 (& B2)** (left brain) again. **5-10 mins each**

- **C** (Gestalt/whole brain/open awareness/from the heart) - improvise in context, influenced by the previous work, now with **intuitive permission** to do as much or as little as you like.
- Sense instead of think.
- Be as literal, nuanced or curious as you like. Most important, be expressive, approx **5-10 mins.**

Practice like this for several days until the processes become familiar and you are able to maintain desired outcomes for extended periods.

How can we make things easier for our 🧠 left brain?

Practice slowly, simplify context and minimise practice targets/devices,

one thing at a time

**How can we make things easier
for our right 🧠 brain?**

*Listen to source repeatedly,
attune ears as much as possible,
copy and sense instead of thinking or analysing*

**How can we make things easier
for our expressive ❤️ brain (heart)?**

*Let go, trust
Play in the vibe (rather than the thinking)
(but keep one ear on the sensation/echo/vibe
of the previous exercises)*

Next steps might be:

- ?
- ?

Transfer... which tunes/contexts next?

- ?
- ?

What needs more clarification?

- ?
- ?

ABABC - Example

Prerequisites

1. Objective

- a. Know why you are practicing: **example: using a motific approach in modal music:**
 - i. model - **Example: doing motivic improv**
 - ii. **Example** - develop my *improvisational will* re motivic improv

2. Attunement

- a. Familiarise yourself deeply with motivic improv through listening
- b. **Examples** Wayne Shorter on “Witch Hunt”, Sonny Rollins on “Vierd Blues”.

3. Context

- a. Select a **simple** and **suitable context** for practice. **Example:** 1 chord, i.e. F7 or D-7
- b. Don't over-load your improvisational-mind by presenting **too much material** 🗨️ or **multiple tasks** 🗨️. **Example** simplify anything that requires thinking about information.

Mini Review

You have decided on

- a) objective/desired outcome

- b) simple context.

Now let's proceed... 

The Actual Practice...

- **A** (right brain) **begin with the general idea**. You have already “set up” the improvisational mind by repeated listening.
- **Guided intuition** towards desired outcome.
 - Example: Play “motivically” guided by your intuition’s version of “motif”.
 - See how many times you can play the same idea.
 - How can I make it feel good?
 - How can I make it the same but different?
 - Notice all guidance is **general**.
- **Keep on task, return to task if distracted, always allow your sensing mind to lead.**
- approx **5-10 mins**.

- **B1** (left brain) Now use deliberate, specific, **targeted practice**.
- Limit practice to ingredients that you can **manage and monitor exactly**.
- **Example:** with one 4-note motif , i.e. D E G A (will sound good on D-7).
 - Uniform rhythm + uniform order of notes
 - Vary the rhythm + uniform order of notes
 - Uniform rhythm + vary order of notes
 - Vary rhythm + vary order of notes
- Stay on task. When you lose focus, breathe, look at something else and restart.
- If you can’t monitor, you’re doing too much!
- approx **5-10 mins**.

- **B2** (optional) If/when **B1** is comfortable, perhaps add another strategy but handle with care. You must not overload the mind with information.
- **Example:** make slightly longer motifs (5 or 6 notes from the 4-note set)
- approx **5-10 mins**.

- **A** (right brain) again. This is the **guided intuition** again... approx **5-10 mins**.

- **B1 (& B 2)** (left brain) again. **5-10 mins each**

- **C** (Gestalt/whole brain/open awareness/from the heart) - improvise in context, influenced by the previous work, now with **intuitive permission** to do as much or as little as you like.
- Sense instead of think.
- Be as literal, nuanced or curious as you like. Most important, be expressive, approx **5-10 mins**.

Practice like this for several days until the processes become familiar and you are able to maintain desired outcomes from extended periods.

Next steps might be:

- *A new set of notes*
- *Same chord/context but transposed. i.e. You started with D-7, now repeat on Eb-7.*
- *Different chords*

Transfer... which tunes/contexts next?

- *“So What” and “Impressions”. How will this work on F7?*

What needs more clarification?

- *Review your practice, record yourself. What is working? Where do I struggle?*
- *Discuss with your 1:1 teacher.*

You might find it useful to develop your improvisational mind through the “4Ps” – the idea that **Play** is most likely to occur when **Product**, **Process** and **Person** are in balance.

For more information [click here](#), or look for the **4 Ps** at:

<https://simonpurcell.com/the-4-ps>

For more materials re the Gestalt ABABC approach [click here](#)