HOW TO PLAY JAZZA JAZZA PIANO

Pam Wedgwood



For online audio tracks scan the QR code or go to fabermusic.com/content/audio



Session 5

Starting to improvise

One of the things I like about jazz is that I don't know what's going to happen next.

Bix Beiderbecke

One of the note patterns that is most commonly used in music is the pentatonic scale – a group of 5 notes.

Pam says

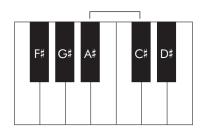
Studying the pentatonic scale will give you a great starting point for your improvisations. All the notes lie well under the fingers and generally sound good together.

Major pentatonic scales

The major pentatonic scale uses notes 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 of a major scale and has a very natural feel to it. It's commonly used in jazz and popular music – in fact, there are a huge number of pop songs based entirely on the major pentatonic scale!

Starting to improvise on the black notes

Play a pentatonic scale starting on F^{\sharp} – this uses all the black notes and is ideal to improvise with. Notice that the interval from note 3 to 5 is a minor 3rd (one semitone smaller than a major 3rd).



Try improvising over these two backing tracks – any black note will fit. Here's how to get started:

- Play up and down the black-note scale in time with the backing track.
- Then try skipping some notes of the scale.
- Finally try adding different rhythms, using only a few notes of the scale.

Black-note boogie

Black magic

Listening post: Well-known songs that use the pentatonic scale

Auld Lang Syne Trad.
Stairway to Heaven Led Zeppelin
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot Trad.
Old Macdonald Had a Farm Trad.
Just the Two of Us Bill Withers
Summertime George Gershwin
Chameleon Herbie Hancock

Perfect pentatonic practice

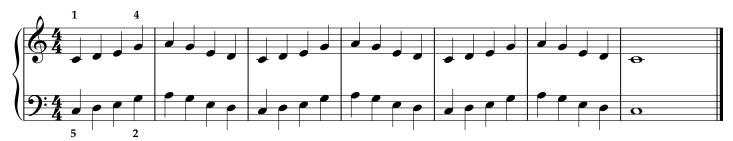
Now that you're familiar with how the major pentatonic scale sounds, let's try it in different keys. Have a go at playing these four scales over each backing track rhythm.

- Try hands separately at first, then hands together.
- Try skipping some notes of the scale or mixing up the note order to create your own melodies.
- Try playing the scale / melody using different rhythms.
- Finally, work out how to play a pentatonic scale starting on D and E flat.

Listening post

The power of the pentatonic scale Bobby McFerrin

25 C major pentatonic



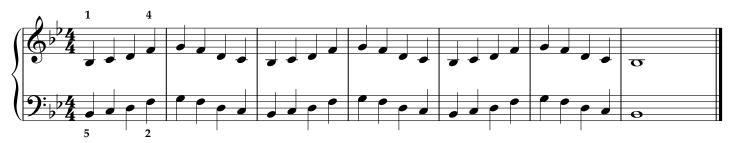
26 G major pentatonic



F major pentatonic



B → major pentatonic



Filling in the gaps

Improvise over the left-hand chords, using notes from the pentatonic scale given. Start off by improvising over the backing track given.



Improvise pentatonic responses in the right and then left hand. Can you remember the scale each time?



Minor pentatonic scales

Here are some minor pentatonic scales. Use them to improvise over the backing tracks as you did for the major pentatonics.

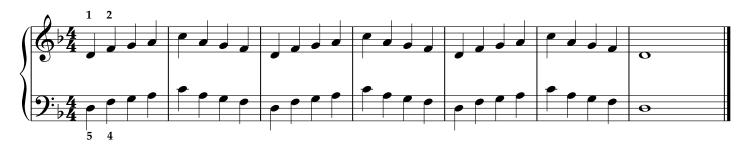
A minor pentatonic



26 E minor pentatonic



② D minor pentatonic



G minor pentatonic



Improvising with minor pentatonics

Improvise in the boxed bars: try it using the audio tracks first.

3 Skinny-rib swing



