

CHAPTER 2A: COMPING FAST TEMPOS WITH YOUR LEFT HAND

The Barry Harris comping transcription from the previous section is played at a brisk tempo. Still, Barry manages to play all kinds of syncopated rhythms at a med/up tempo. As we increase the tempo, the space between the beats becomes smaller and smaller making it increasingly more difficult to play squarely off the beat. Often inexperienced players end up comping in between beats, or at the very least, never find the groove, leading to problems with rushing or slowing down.

One effective solution is to perceive the tempo as half as fast. In this new half time feel we can play familiar comping rhythms like the Charleston. In the fast tempo these familiar CRs take on a new form. Instead of playing:

FIG. 1



at a fast tempo you would play:

FIG. 2

FTCR 1

FTCR 2

In other words, we double the rhythmic value of each note in FIG. 1 to get our new comping rhythm (FIG. 2). In this way, we avoid the “ands” completely and focus on comping on either beat 1, 2, 3, or 4. This decreases the likelihood of finding ourselves comping in the cracks, and we can therefore be more decisive when we comp at the fastest of tempi.

Let’s now add these 2 Fast Tempo Comping Rhythms to our list of CR’s. FIG. 2 consists of FTCR 1 and FTCR 2. As we start to explore left hand comping at uptempos, we turn our attention to one of the most influential and formidable voices in jazz, Bud Powell. Spend some time listening to Bud comp for himself on some of his trio albums such as “Jazz Giant” on Verve.

Bud made famous a distinctive LH comping device that he often employed while soloing. Listen to “All God’s Children Got Rhythm” or “Get Happy” for a reference. The LH figure is at times a pedal point or drone, that contains a rhythmic propulsion that sets off the RH line above it. Below is an example of this LH figure streamlined and simplified to fit the next comping exercise.

Practice the LH alone:

FIG. 3

Also try the following incorporating the V7b5.

FIG. 4

If the tempo is incredibly fast, you will need to practice these left hand figures playing the low “C” on “3” instead of on the “and of 2.” For our purposes, we will focus on the latter placement.

To fully digest these LH figures, we need to be able to freely improvise on top of them with our RH. Here are some exercises that address this obstacle and also build independence between the hands. For FIG. 5-8 use the LH drone figure from FIG. 3 (without the flatted fifth for the dominant chord).

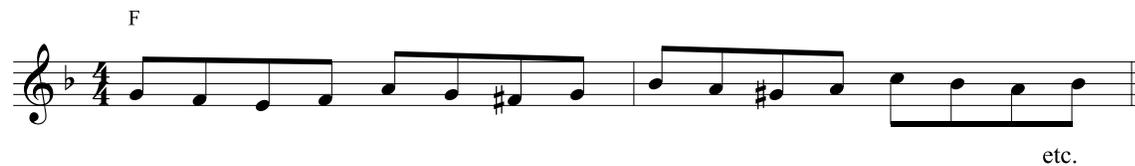
In the RH, practice the following patterns based on major scales. Each pattern has a target note (the note of the major scale that you are on) and diatonic and chromatic neighbors.

The 4-note diatonic pattern (ascending) is constructed like this:

1. diatonic step above target note
2. target note (note of the major scale)
3. chromatic lower neighbor of the target note
4. back to the target note

4-note diatonic pattern (ascending)

FIG. 5



Note that sometimes the chromatic lower neighbor is contained within the diatonic scale.

The 4-note diatonic pattern (descending) is constructed like this:

1. chromatic lower neighbor of the target note
2. target note (note of the scale)
3. diatonic 3rd above the target note
4. diatonic step above the target note

4-note diatonic pattern (descending)

FIG. 6



The 3-note pattern is easier. It is the same ascending and descending. The construction is as follows:

1. chromatic lower neighbor of the target note
2. target note
3. diatonic 3rd above target note

3-note diatonic pattern (ascending and descending)

FIG. 7

Comping Exercise #3: Diatonic Patterns with the Bud Powell Pedal/Drone. Comp using the Bud Powell pedal/drone pattern (from FIG. 3) in your LH as your RH plays the 3 and 4-note diatonic patterns. Feel free to mix and match to create unique melodic patterns. Practice the patterns in both 8th notes and triplets. Also, experiment with accenting different notes of the patterns. Here is one example:

FIG. 8

To better fit the V7b5 Bud Powell pedal/drone pattern (from FIG. 4) we can work with the whole tone scale in our RH. In the key of F we will be using the C whole tone scale. Often when soloing in jazz, look to the dominant of whatever chord you are playing. It provides a feeling of motion; tension that can be easily resolved at any time by moving toward the tonic. The following pattern captures an important aspect of the bebop sound especially when coupled with the LH syncopated pedal/drone pattern (from FIG. 4).

4-note whole tone pattern (descending)

1. target note (the note of the whole tone scale that you are on)
2. diatonic 3rd above
3. target note
4. chromatic lower neighbor