

# PLAYING JAZZ PIANO

BY BOB MINTZER



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# BOB MINTZER BIOGRAPHY

In the jazz world, Bob Mintzer is a household name, usually associated with being a saxophonist, bass clarinetist, composer, arranger, leader of a Grammy-winning big band, member of the Yellowjackets and educator.

Bob has written over 200 big band arrangements spanning a 34-year career, many of which are performed all over the world by both student and pro bands. His own big band has been nominated for four Grammy awards and won a Grammy for Best Large Jazz Ensemble recording in 2001 with *Homage to Count Basie* on the DMP label. Bob has recorded 26 solo CDs with both big band and small jazz ensembles. He is an 18-year member of the Grammy award-winning Yellowjackets, and has recorded 12 CDs with the band. Bob tours four months out of the year with the 'Jackets.

Bob has published four jazz etude books (Belwin Jazz), a solo transcription book (Belwin Jazz), a saxophone method book, four saxophone quartets, 200 big band arrangements (Belwin Jazz, Kendor Music), and has composed several pieces for orchestra. His "Rhythm of the Americas" piece for sax quartet and orchestra (or concert band) was premiered in 2001 by the American Saxophone Quartet and the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. His "Concertino for Tenor Saxophone, Strings and Winds" was premiered in New York City by the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble in 1992.

In addition, Bob has had a diverse career as a free-lance musician in NYC. He has recorded with people like Steve Winwood, James Taylor, Aretha Franklin and Queen. He has toured with Buddy Rich, Thad Jones, Mel Lewis, Jaco Pastorius, Tito Puente and Eddie Palmieri. He's performed with the New York Philharmonic and the American Ballet Theatre. Bob has been on the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music and recently joined the faculty of USC in Los Angeles. He also performs 20 workshops at universities all over the globe annually.

## PERFORMANCE NOTES

To use this book effectively:

1. Learn the notes slowly at first, then in tempo.
2. Learn to play the etudes with good time and a steady groove.
3. Strive for a feel that fits with the style of each etude  
(swing-triplet inflection, Latin even eighth-note feel).

However, always keep in mind that listening to world-class pianists like Red Garland, Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, Hank Jones, McCoy Tyner and Eddie Palmieri (to name only a few) is an integral piece of this process. I listened and still do!

The 22 etudes utilize three basic categories:

1. Comping chords with the right hand and playing a bass line with the left hand.
2. Comping chords with the left hand and playing a melody with the right hand.
3. Comping chords with both hands.

Some of the later etudes incorporate both the second and third category, because a soloing pianist will typically combine single-note melodic lines with two-handed chordal motion.

Another important focus of this book is to illustrate how pianists employ a melodic quality to the formation of chord progressions, known as voicings. That is, the top note of each chord in a given progression will generally create a strong sense of melodic motion.

At the end of the book you will find a Chord Voicing Glossary reference section with a variety of more advanced chord voicings that I have written throughout the book. **Transpose these chords to all keys.** Keep in mind, there are countless variations of these chord voicings. By no means is this a complete method for learning to play jazz piano. It is merely a tool to help you get up and running, particularly if you play another instrument.

*Bob Mintzer*

# Etude 1: Begin with This

Chord symbols for the first system: C<sup>9</sup>, F<sup>13</sup>, C<sup>9</sup>, Gm<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>9</sup>

Chord symbols for the second system: F<sup>13</sup>, F<sup>#</sup>o<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>9</sup>, F<sup>13</sup>, Em<sup>7</sup>6<sup>9</sup>, A<sup>7</sup>(<sup>#</sup>9), D<sup>9</sup>

Chord symbols for the third system: G<sup>13</sup>, Em<sup>9</sup>, A<sup>7</sup>(<sup>#</sup>5), Dm<sup>9</sup>, G<sup>13</sup>, C<sup>9</sup>, F<sup>9</sup>

Chord symbols for the fourth system: C<sup>9</sup>, Gm<sup>9</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>(<sup>#</sup>9), F<sup>13</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>(<sup>#</sup>5), F<sup>13</sup>, F<sup>#</sup>o<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>13</sup>, F<sup>9</sup>

Chord symbols for the fifth system: E<sup>7</sup>(<sup>#</sup>5), A<sup>7</sup>(<sup>#</sup>5), D<sup>9</sup>, Dm<sup>9</sup>, G<sup>13</sup>, C<sup>13</sup>, A<sup>7</sup>(<sup>#</sup>5), Dm<sup>9</sup>, G<sup>13</sup>



# Etude 3: The Blues Basic Comp

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time. It consists of six systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The chords and bass lines are as follows:

- System 1:** Treble clef has a  $D7(\#9)$  chord. Bass clef has a walking bass line starting on D.
- System 2:** Treble clef has a  $G13$  chord. Bass clef has a walking bass line starting on G. A measure rest of 5 is indicated at the beginning.
- System 3:** Treble clef has an  $A7(\#9)$  chord. Bass clef has a walking bass line starting on A. A measure rest of 9 is indicated at the beginning.
- System 4:** Treble clef has a  $D7(\#9)$  chord. Bass clef has a walking bass line starting on D. A measure rest of 15 is indicated at the beginning.
- System 5:** Treble clef has a  $G13$  chord. Bass clef has a walking bass line starting on G. A measure rest of 17 is indicated at the beginning.
- System 6:** Treble clef has an  $A7(\#9)$  chord. Bass clef has a walking bass line starting on A. A measure rest of 21 is indicated at the beginning.

# Etude 5: The Blues Comp Chords

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of six systems of piano accompaniment. Each system includes a treble and bass clef staff. The chords and their positions are as follows:

- System 1:** Treble clef starts with a whole rest. Bass clef starts with a whole note G. Chord:  $F7_{sus}$  (measures 1-4).
- System 2:** Treble clef starts with a whole rest. Bass clef starts with a whole note B $\flat$ . Chord:  $E\flat 7$  (measures 1-2), then  $F7_{sus}$  (measures 3-4).
- System 3:** Treble clef starts with a whole rest. Bass clef starts with a whole note C. Chord:  $C7(\sharp 9)$  (measures 1-2), then  $F7_{sus}$  (measures 3-4).
- System 4:** Treble clef starts with a whole rest. Bass clef starts with a whole note G. Chord:  $F7_{sus}$  (measures 1-2),  $F7/O$  (measures 3-4), and  $F7(\sharp 5)$  (measures 5-6).
- System 5:** Treble clef starts with a whole rest. Bass clef starts with a whole note G. Chord:  $B\flat 7_{sus}$  (measures 1-2), then  $F7_{sus}$  (measures 3-4).
- System 6:** Treble clef starts with a whole rest. Bass clef starts with a whole note C. Chord:  $C7(\sharp 9)$  (measures 1-2), then  $F7_{sus}$  (measures 3-4).

85

8b6 G7(#9) Cm7 F9 Dmi7sus G13(#9) Cm9 F13(b9)

89

Abmaj7/Bb Bb7(#5) Ebmaj9 Ab7 Ebmaj7/F F13(b9) 1. Bb6/9 F13

95

2. Bb6 G7(#9) Cm7 F13 Dmi7sus G7(#9) C7 F13

97

D7(b9) G7(#9) Cm9 F13(b9) Dmi7sus G7(#9) Cm9 F13

41

Bb15 Ab15 Bb15 Ab15

45

Bb15 Ab15 Bb15(#11/b9)

15

F#m9 8b7(#9) Ebm9 Eo7 Cm9sus F#11(b9) Bb6/9 Bbm9sus

17

Am9sus D7(#9) Ab11 G#11 G7sus G#11 G7(#9)

18

C7 C9(#4) C9sus C9 Cm9 F7(#9)

19

Bb6/9 G#11(b9) Cm7 E11 F#11 Dm7sus G7(#9) Cm9 F#11(b9) F7(#9)

20

8b7(#9) Eb11 C7(#9) Fped

21

Fped 8b7alt



# Etude 13: Standard #2 Comp Chords

C6/9
E7(<sup>#9</sup>/<sub>5</sub>)
E9(<sup>#9</sup>/<sub>5</sub>)
Ami9sus
Gmi9
C7(<sup>#9</sup>/<sub>5</sub>)
F6/9

E7sus
A7(<sup>#9</sup>/<sub>5</sub>)
D15(<sup>#11</sup>)
Dmi9sus
G15(b9)
C6/9
Bmi7(b5)
E7(<sup>#9</sup>/<sub>5</sub>)
Ami9sus
Abmi9sus

Gmi9sus
C15(b9)
Fmaj9
Bb15(<sup>#11</sup>)
Emi7
A7(<sup>#9</sup>/<sub>5</sub>)
Dmi9sus
G15(b9)
C6/9
Abmi9

Gmi9
C15(b9)
Fmaj9
Bbmi9sus
Eb15(<sup>#11</sup>)

Amaj9
Abmaj9
Dmi9
G15
C6
Bmi7(b5)
E7(<sup>#9</sup>/<sub>5</sub>)
Ami9sus

Gmi9sus
C15(<sup>#11</sup>/<sub>b9</sub>)
Fmaj9
Bb15(<sup>#11</sup>)
Emi7
A15(<sup>b9</sup>/<sub>b5</sub>)
A7(<sup>#9</sup>/<sub>5</sub>)
Dmi9sus
G15(<sup>#11</sup>/<sub>b9</sub>)
C6/9
G15(<sup>#11</sup>/<sub>b9</sub>)

## **Etude 18: Another Blues Right-Hand Solo**

**(Comping chords with the left hand and playing a melody with the right hand)**

For *Etude 18*, as in the other etudes, there are places where both hands join together to play a two-handed voicing. You will find dominant 7 sus chords throughout this etude. In measure 16, there is a tritone substitution (instead of Fmi7/Bb7, I use Bmi7/E7).

Check out the sound and shape of the piece, and see how the two hands interact. There is a real conversational quality to the relationship between hands. One always compliments the other. When this same kind of empathy can happen between an instrumental soloist and the pianist, then you're really saying something. This is why it is so crucial that, as a horn player, you are familiar with the language of piano comping. With this familiarity comes the ability to truly converse with the pianist in a call-and-response fashion, constructing your phrases in a way that breathes and leaves room for input from the pianist.

I've found that accompanying instrumental students on the piano has increased my awareness of the relationship between piano and soloist. You can really feel if the soloist is phrasing in a sensible way from the piano chair. When a horn player constructs phrases that make good musical sense in their improvisations, it is easier to accompany on the piano. When the instrumentalist is over-playing, or playing in a way that is not in context, you have to work much harder at the piano to keep the music moving forward.

## Etude 20: Ballad

(Combine: Comping chords with the right hand and playing a bass line with the left hand, and comping chords with both hands)

This piece should be played at a slow tempo, ♩ = 60. The key to making this etude effective is to focus on playing in a legato fashion where there is a smooth connection between notes and a beautiful sense of phrasing. In general, all notes should be played long.

Try to think horizontally, moving gracefully from one chord to the next. You will find instances of inner motion, where a secondary melody is played and, if possible, bring these moving lines out a bit. In the 10th measure I use a G pedal with an ostinato chord progression that creates a sense of suspension for four measures. The ostinato rhythm continues in measures 14–17, but this time in the left hand.

What I tried to do with this piece is to provide a variety of textures from phrase to phrase. In a slow tempo like this, it is imperative that you play in a beautiful and interesting way. There is no place to hide when playing slow tempos. I sometimes think of making each phrase “sing.”

## Etude 20: Ballad

The image shows the first eight measures of the musical score for 'Etude 20: Ballad'. The score is written for piano in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation is split into two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. Chord symbols are written above the treble staff, and a bass line is written in the bass staff. The first system contains measures 1-4, and the second system contains measures 5-8. The bass line in measure 5 starts with a '5' below the first note, indicating a fifth finger position.

Chord symbols for the first system (measures 1-4):  
Measure 1: Gmaj9  
Measure 2: C#11  
Measure 3: Gmaj9  
Measure 4: F#11  
Measure 5: Gmaj9  
Measure 6: C#m7(b5)  
Measure 7: F#7(b9)  
Measure 8: Bm7sus  
Measure 9: Em7sus

Chord symbols for the second system (measures 5-8):  
Measure 5: Am(b6)  
Measure 6: D7sus  
Measure 7: Gadd2  
Measure 8: Gmaj(b6)  
Measure 9: Gm(maj9#11)  
Measure 10: G#11  
Measure 11: G7(#5)  
Measure 12: F7sus  
Measure 13: Em7sus