

RECOMMENDED READING FROM

BLOOM
SCHOOL
OF **JAZZ**

10

COMMANDMENTS OF JAZZ SOLOING

DAVID BLOOM

The Ten Commandments Of Jazz Soloing

by David Bloom

These Ten Commandments are designed to stimulate an enlightened level of jazz soloing for those seeking to move beyond mere imitation in the language of jazz and achieve a level of individual mastery. I derived them from listening and identifying the best concepts present within the most remarkable solos of the most revered masters. Embracing these commandments will serve to guide and focus talented musicians to create solos of profound musical value. You may note similarities from one commandment to another, but thinking about each one separately should afford the serious musician many different solutions to common problems.

1. THOU SHALT TELL A STORY.

Any art involving time as an essential part of the presentation must strive to tell a story. The story may be literal or abstract, but should produce an arc (a series of events having a connection or progression.) You can't tell a good story if your characters and plot are not developed. Every element of the story is critical to its effectiveness. The beginning determines whether we want more. The second act amplifies our interest. The third act is the conclusion or payoff (or lack thereof). The solo must travel to a destination in the player's mind, in order to take the audience along. Otherwise, why would anyone want to listen? Tell a story every time you play.

2. THOU SHALT PLAY ONLY WHAT'S NECESSARY.

We experience a dramatic difference between listening to musicians playing what's important and those whose performances are self-indulgent and frivolous. When you're on the bandstand you should imagine the jazz greats listening to you (and if you don't think they are, you should probably not be up on the bandstand). One good way to accomplish this is to record a one-chorus solo, then assess what should and shouldn't have been played. After you can play a lean one-chorus solo, you have earned the right to play longer solos.

3. THOU SHALT NOT ABANDON IDEAS.

Many jazz musicians end musical ideas before they're fully developed. This is similar to telling the set-up of a joke and forgetting to deliver the punch line. Both amateur and professional musicians desert good ideas only to end up with weaker ones, random fragments with nothing much in common. Appreciate the potential of every idea and develop the gems you play.

4. THOU SHALT NOT ABUSE REPETITION.

Players who aren't mindful about the level of interest they are creating, risk playing the same gestures forever. Over-playing and under-expressing sours a few more audience members on jazz. If you listen carefully to yourself, you will start pruning what you play and end up with only the best stuff.

5. THOU SHALT PLAY WITH THE REST OF THE BAND.

Cooperation and camaraderie have a power palpable to the listening public. Nothing is as exciting as hearing selfless musicians playing together. This is not to be confused with musicians playing at the same time, but not with each other. One way to guarantee a more communal result is to look at each other with admiration while playing together. Appreciation inspires the best in each other.

6. THOU SHALT LISTEN AT ALL TIMES TO WHAT WAS JUST PLAYED AND BY THE REST OF THE BAND.

Listening deeply is the greatest way to comprehend the presence of important things going on outside of us, things which demand our attention. It is rather easy to perceive a "jazz band" whose players aren't listening to each other. It sounds like a chicken coop. No one answers or responds to what others are playing—they are just frantically trying to get noticed. This is not even close to a real jazz band. The remedy to this affliction is to imagine you are in a verbal conversation with good friends, without words.

7. THOU SHALT ALWAYS USE THE FULL RANGE OF MUSICAL ELEMENTS.

The polarities of musical contrast—loud-soft, short-long phrase lengths; slow-fast rhythmic and rest values, low and high registers and consonance-dissonances—must be used constantly. For example, if a loud volume is used exclusively, it becomes an element of extreme predictability and hence little interest. Loud is an important gesture, but when used with no relief, refreshed by soft sounds, its value gradually decreases. Using the polarities of music eliminates the dullness of uniform musical values.

8. THOU SHALT SHOW THE AUDIENCE APPRECIATION AND TREAT IT WITH DIGNITY.

The best way to convince an audience of your respect is to never take them for granted. Every piece, mood, groove, tempo, arrangement and solo should show the public how much you love music, and how much you appreciate their interest.

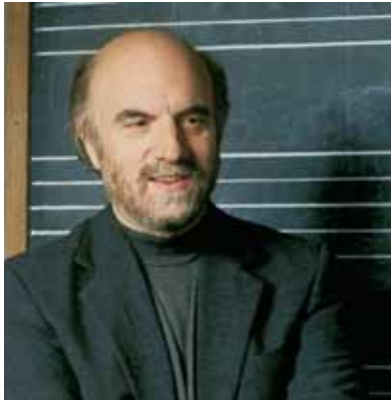
9. THOU SHALT USE SILENCE WITH THE SAME COMMITMENT AS PLAYING SOUNDS.

Silence has profound purity. It shouldn't be disturbed unless you have a damn good reason. Whether it's one sixteenth note rest or twenty measures, silence creates anticipation, providing us with the ultimate question: "When will another sound occur, and what will it be?" Silence also frames and emphasizes the last phrase played and makes it important. If you don't use silence, you don't understand language.

10. THOU SHALT STOP WHEN THE STORY IS OVER.

Many jazz players don't know when their story is over. The first half of many wonderful solos have been ruined by a five-chorus epilogue. The players were good enough to start a very compelling story, but not wise enough to know when the story was over and stop playing. The ability to know when to end your solo isn't just a matter of stopping at some arbitrary point; it's having a vision of the entire solo, and knowing how to complete your musical statement with an artistic ending. Dramatic musical story telling seduces audiences to love your music.

David Bloom



David Bloom, recipient of “Jazz Educator of The Year” 2017 Award from the Jazz Institute of Chicago, has directed the Bloom School of Jazz since 1975. A highly regarded flutist and guitarist, composer, arranger and author, Bloom has written eight books on jazz including *The Minor Blues*, *The Major Blues*, *Melodic Chords*, *II-V-I Progressions*, *The Mode Book*, *Melodic Continuity - Modal Linkage*, *The Question and Answer Book* and *Anatomy of a Beat*. These books have been recommended by guitar icons Joe Satriani and Mike Stern. Plus, Grammy winners

are among the School’s alumni. The Bloom School teaches musicians of all ages and instruments how to tell musical stories in the tradition of master jazz artists: making the power of jazz expression and improvisation accessible to all musicians.

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