

BASIC JAZZ THEORY

VOLUME I



JONATHAN HARNUM

author of *Basic Music Theory: How to Read, Write and Understand Written Music*
and *Sound the Trumpet: How to Blow Your Own Horn*

Praise for Harnum's book, *Basic Music Theory: How to Read, Write, and Understand Written Music*:

"Finally someone came up with a basic music theory book that's actually understandable and readable. Mr. Harnum explains complicated concepts in a way that even someone like me without any music background can easily understand them. I am looking forward to playing an instrument thanks to his help. This is by far the best music theory book I have ever read!"

~ G. Donald, Ellicott City, MD, USA

"The author of this book obviously had those of us who are scared of the complexity of music theory in mind when he wrote this book. *Basic Music Theory* is a down to earth book that moves gently through the landscape of music theory from the layout of the staff to chords and their inversions. The author also has interludes on practicing and conducting among others. I highly recommend this book if you want to understand music theory whether to compose music or to play it better."

~ Patrick Regan, Northampton, MA, USA

"*Basic Music Theory* by Jonathan Harnum, is an excellent book for people of all levels. Whether you are a beginner, or learned musician, this book is a very comprehensive source of material, that is both accessible, easy to read & understand, and very enjoyable. I have played various instruments over 24 years. And because of Harnum's matter of fact, conversational tone, this book has lent more to my understanding of basic music theory than all my private instructors combined."

~ Remy Durant, Los Angeles, CA, USA

"Fun and engaging. A real winner!"

~ Terrie Lyons, PhD, P.C.; Portland, OR, USA

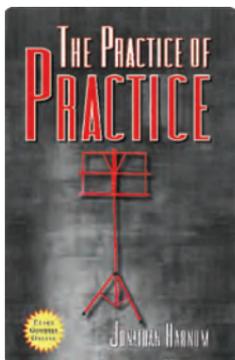
"Jonathan Harnum has taken an overly complicated subject matter and made it learnable for anyone. And I do mean anyone!! As he explains early in the book, previous music theory books lack in completely explaining WHY things are the way they are. Harnum de-cryptifies all that is involved with music theory for the non-musician. But this book is not just for the non-musician! I have been a student of music for over 13 years and a teacher for 3 and I found myself finding new and interesting (and humorous) facts about music theory. This book can teach anyone music theory and keep a smile on their face the entire time."

~ Robin Giebelhausen, Chicago, IL, USA

In *Basic Music Theory: How To Read, Write, And Understand Written Music*, Jonathan Harnum draws upon more than ten years of experience and expertise as a music teacher to present the non-specialist general reader with a definitive and accessible introduction to music theory. At the end of each short chapter a review has been placed to insure that the reader has understood and assimilated the informative provided. Also provided at the conclusion of each chapter is a "practical use" exercise. At the end of each major section or "Part" is a comprehensive review (complete with cross-referencing to the page number on which the information first appears). After every few chapters and covering other topics are "interludes" ranging from ultra-brief history of musical notation, how to practice, conducting, and a lesson in Italian musical terms. *Basic Music Theory* is an ideal and highly recommended text for anyone of any background wanting to become proficient in the reading, composing, and performance of written and notated music."

~ Midwest Book Review, Oregon, WI, USA

BETTER = SMARTER + FASTER



Practice takes many shapes. The word means different things to different people. What does it take to get better?

The Practice of Practice will help you understand ways of getting better more clearly. The information will help you become a more aware musician, a more informed teacher, and a more effective parent of a young musician.

Whether you play Beethoven or Bach, are into Indie pop or classic Rock, *The Practice of Practice* will help you become a better musician.

The book covers 6 aspects of practice:

Written by a musician, *The Practice of Practice* is a result of 8 years of research, including interviews with world-class professional musicians in many genres: jazz, singer-songwriting, Western classical, Indian classical, West African djembe, and others.

Jonathan Harnum, PhD, is a multi-instrumentalist, has played music for over 30 years, has 20 years of teaching experience, and is the author of five books.

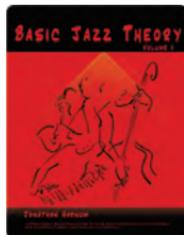
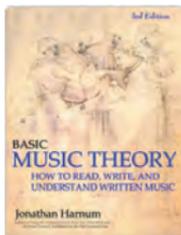
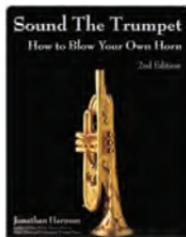
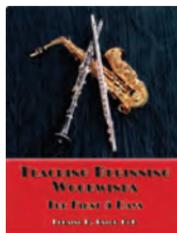
- » **WHAT:** Definitions, and what music practice does to your brain.
- » **WHY:** Motivation is crucial. Learn ways of keeping the flame lit in this section
- » **WHO:** A lot of people including yourself will impact your practice. Learn to use them to your advantage.
- » **WHEN:** This section covers how much, and what times of the day are best for practice, & more.
- » **WHERE:** Where you practice matters, & more.
- » **HOW:** The longest section of the book includes information about goals, structuring your practice, as well as specific techniques tested by researchers, and specific strategies pros use to get better.

**BE A BETTER MUSICIAN.
DON'T PRACTICE LONGER, PRACTICE SMARTER.**

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Basic Jazz Theory: volume 1

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BASIC JAZZ THEORY

VOLUME 1



[WWW.BASICJAZZTHEORY.COM](http://www.BASICJAZZTHEORY.COM)

THE CHAPTER EVERYONE SKIPS

*The forceps of our minds are clumsy forceps, and
crush the truth a little in taking hold of it.*

~ H. G. Wells

In This Chapter

- Theory Isn't Everything
- Skills You'll Need
- Icons in the Book
- Overall Book Structure
- Chapter Overviews

Terms to Know

- This section will give you definitions for words in the chapter and, where there's room, jazz slang.
- book: the tunes a band plays regularly.
- clams: mistakes while playing music.
- finger zinger: someone who plays very fast.
- sitting in: to substitute or play with a group temporarily.

INTRODUCTION

Lester Young is one of the smoothest cats you'll ever hear. A jazz legend of the tenor sax, Lester Young—nicknamed *Pres* as in President—had a sweet tone and the tastiest approach to music. Check the YouTube vid of his solo on *Fine and Mellow* (<http://bit.ly/nyfKt>) to see and hear what I mean. Legend has it that Pres was about to take a solo and a bandmate handed him the chord changes. He waved them off, saying they messed with how he heard the music; the theory limited him in a way he didn't like. He wasn't alone. Both Bix Beiderbecke, jazz legend of the cornet, and Louis Armstrong, the jazz godfather said written notation interfered with their music. Biederbecke said he never learned how to read, but Armstrong did while in Fate Marable's band on a paddle-wheeler on the Mississippi. Pretty much all these cats could read music with ultimate fluency, but a lot of them *preferred* to use their ears because it made for better music.

The music comes first and the theory is worked out later. Step one is listen. Step two is listen some more. Step three is playing along. Then start in on the theory. Of course, in reality, it's more likely that you'll be doing all of these things at once, so my first piece of advice is that while you're trying to wrap your head around jazz theory, make sure you listen like crazy. Stuff your ears with wonder. Play along with these recordings. Later, in *Basic Jazz Theory volume 3*, I'll give you some fantastic tools to help slow down recordings to make them easier to hear and play with. For scads of links to great jazz recordings and other resources, check out www.BasicJazzTheory.com.

The other thing you should know is that *no* book will teach you *how to play jazz*. Books can teach you *about* things, but to actually *do* them takes something extra. Playing jazz is an art that is absorbed through intense listening, focused imitation, and fearless experimentation. The jazz

masters learned on the bandstand. Literally. Another story about written music comes from the great Duke Ellington band, if memory serves. At any rate, a trumpet player was *sitting in* and when he reached for the *book*, one of his section mates said, “Oh, don’t use that. We don’t play it like that any more. Just listen and follow along.” How would *you* do in a situation like that?

An old Zen koan says *The finger pointing at the moon is not the moon*. Jazz theory is like that. Knowing the theory behind jazz can be helpful, for sure, but it’s not as helpful as listening, imitating, and emulating. Clark Terry, jazz master of the flugelhorn (a type of trumpet) said, “Imitate, assimilate, innovate.”

Think of it like language. It’s pretty likely that you don’t know the ins and outs of semiotic theory, or what Chomsky goes on about in his generative grammar, but that doesn’t interfere with your ability to speak, right? Same deal. You don’t learn to spell and write until *long* after you’re able to speak and be understood. Take that approach to heart with your study of jazz.

This book *will* help you understand the basics of the theory that underlies what you hear. It will also give you tools to help with the process of listening, imitating and assimilating. The innovation part is up to you. This book will help you understand things like scales, chords, progressions, standards, and a whole lot more. It’s a useful book, but only one tiny piece in the jazz puzzle. It’s good to remember words of wisdom from Yogi Berra: *In theory there is no difference between theory and practice, but in practice, there is.*

WHY SHOULD YOU LISTEN TO ME?

A question you’re probably asking is “Why should I listen to you?,” so here’s my quick bio: I’ve been playing trumpet for over 30 years and during those decades I’ve also learned to play piano and guitar, as well as a smattering of percussion instruments like drum set, conga, and djembe. My current project is learning to play tabla badly (even playing tabla badly is difficult). I’ve been teaching music for a long time and have a few music education degrees including a Master’s and am almost finished with a PhD from Northwestern University, a leading institution in music performance, research, and teacher education. I’ve written a few books besides this one: *Basic Music Theory: How to Read, Write, and Understand Written Music*, and two trumpet-related books including *Sound the Trumpet: How to Blow Your Own Horn*, and *All About Trumpet*.

Improvising is where I’m at right now, though I’ve spent many years as a classical trumpet player, mainly in brass quintets and quartets and hammering away at my orchestral excerpts. I’ve sat in with countless bar bands and a multitude of open mic sessions. In fact, I got started improvising on pop tunes in small restaurants in southern Baja, Mexico. From there I’ve toured with a Gypsy Jazz group and formed my own professional jazz quartet, Jazzology. I’ve also played with the top-notch Northwestern University Jazz Ensemble in the solo trumpet chair from 2005-2007, one of the most intense (and intimidating) learning experiences in improvisation I’ll probably ever get. For my last books I’ve been fortunate to play with some of the best jazz rhythm section players in Chicago, and that was a hoot! I should point out however, that they didn’t play with me because they love my playing. I paid them to play with me. I’m just saying.... They’re professionals of the highest caliber. I’m pretty good, but I’m not on that level, not by a long shot. I mean, these guys are monsters in the best sense of the word!

And this speaks directly to my philosophy as a teacher and musician. It’s why I write these books. I’m a believer in the amateur musician, and champion of the aficionado. As Michelle Shocked says, “Music-making should not be left to the professionals.” While the information in this book could lead you to fame and fortune and legendary status as a jazz icon, that is *not* the

purpose of this book. The purpose of this book is to help you understand a little more clearly some of the underpinnings of jazz theory so that you can be a better musician no matter what level you aspire to reach. This book is geared toward the comeback player, the late bloomer, the young musician, and the dabbler; it's also useful for the serious, focused student who wants to learn more. I believe that the more of us that are out there making music and sharing it with each other, the better all our lives will be. Music—jazz in particular—and musical improvisation in general are beautiful and fulfilling ways to connect with others.

SKILLS YOU'LL NEED TO MAKE THIS BOOK WORK

You'll need a basic understanding of written music to get the most out of this book, especially note names and other basic music-reading skills like sharps and flats, key signatures, rhythms, meters, and all that easy stuff. I will present information in both bass and treble clef, so if you read either one of those, you're all set. The bonus is that this is a good chance to get better at reading a clef you're unfamiliar with. For basic note-reading skills and other important information, check out another book of mine, *Basic Music Theory: How to Read, Write, and Understand Written Music*. You can get the whole thing for free online at www.sol-ut.com.

You'll need an instrument, of course, and if your instrument isn't piano, a piano will help a lot. It doesn't have to be a 12 foot grand piano either. A cheap electronic keyboard will do the trick. If you play guitar, that will also work. Other options are computer programs that allow you to hear chord progressions, programs like *Band in a Box*.

The point is that simply reading about these concepts isn't enough; you've got to *hear* them, and *use* them. You've got to swim around in the music yourself so you can *feel* the difference between Gypsy Jazz and Hard Bop, and *feel* what it's like to mess around with these progressions, these notes, these styles. That's the only way all this theory will make sense. You've got to *own* these concepts, and the only way to do that is to get them in your ears and under your fingers. Actually *in* your body. To do that you need some way to play *and* hear the harmonies, melodies, and concepts we'll be covering in the book.

You've got to have a basic ability on your instrument, too. You should have tone production and fingering and range and dynamic control down to at least an advanced beginner's level. If you're struggling with the instrument, it'll make getting these concepts under your fingers more difficult. But you've got to practice something, right? And the stuff you'll learn in this book is a rich source of practice material, for sure. A lifetime's worth, really.

It almost goes without saying that the computer is one of the most useful tools for the modern musician. Programs like *Band in a Box* and *Audacity* will take your playing, listening and your understanding to higher levels. An Internet connection is the other major tool. In a few clicks you can have access to lessons and information and video and audio that were simply unavailable even ten years ago. In fact, the computer is such an important tool, a couple chapters of *Basic Jazz Theory, volume 3* are devoted to it exclusively.

Other helpful things are curiosity, perseverance, and a willingness to experiment with your horn. Another vastly important trait is a willingness to try anything and to fail spectacularly and not let it concern you. Failing means you're pushing your limits, which means you're learning. If you're not taking lessons, I'd highly recommend it. Getting a regular source of feedback is probably *the* best way to learn quickly.

BASIC JAZZ THEORY, VOLUME 1: THE BIG PICTURE

Chapters in *Basic Jazz Theory, volume 1* are short, well-paced, and as simple as possible. At the end of each chapter is a short quiz so you can test how well you've absorbed the stuff in the chapter. In addition to the review, each chapter has practical use exercises and suggestions for ear training so that you can get these concepts into your ears and heart, where they belong.

ICONS IN THE BOOK:

IMPROVISE NOW



There's absolutely no reason to wait until you've got a bunch of theoretical knowledge in your head before actually *playing*, which is to say *improvising*. That would be like owning a Ferrari, but keeping it in the garage, refusing to drive it until you learn how to take the engine apart and put it back together. That's crazytalk! This icon represents exercises to get you started and contains many useful suggestions to get you messing around with sound. This is where the fun is!

BRAIN BOOSTERS



It can be a challenge to remember all the things in this book, but there are strategies to help. This icon can be found next to strategies that will help you remember important aspects of jazz theory.

THEORY GEEK ALERT



There are times when it's really important to know certain facts about music theory. You'll find this icon next to information that is particularly useful and/or helpful.

NOTICE!



In 30 years of playing and 20 years of teaching, I've learned there are certain aspects of playing and music theory that are troublesome and tend to trip people up. This Icon is to alert you that this information should receive a little extra attention so you don't mess up.

WHAT'S INSIDE: THE DETAILS

CHAPTER 0: THE CHAPTER EVERYONE SKIPS

You're reading it. Basic info, not entirely necessary, but it's good to have an idea what you're getting yourself into....

CHAPTER 1: TUNE UP

A beautiful melody is a joy to play. All the theory you'll ever learn or need is embedded *right there* in those great melodies. The sooner you get them by heart, the sooner you'll have the practical aspects of all that theory for your very own. Every melody you memorize is a gem that nobody can ever take away from you. But wait, there's more! Most good players say that they have the melody in their head when they're improvising. It helps you keep your place and gives you the flavor of the tune so that whatever improvised dish you cook up yourself, it'll go with the melody.

CHAPTER 2: MAJOR SCALES

If melodies are the genetic material of jazz, then scales are the DNA, and the major scale in particular is an important base pair, if you'll allow me to stretch the analogy to the breaking point. The major scale is used as a reference for all kinds of things, like intervals, chords, and even other scales, all of which are covered in the coming chapters. It's crucial to know them, to know about them, and to have them under your fingers.

CHAPTER 3: GOING MODAL

Modes are a type of scale that have a close relationship with another scale. The modes this chapter covers are associated with the major scale. Modes are very important because they're associated with very common chords and chord progressions in jazz. And if you're interested in playing modal jazz, they are, as you might guess, essential.

CHAPTER 4: INTERVAL TRAINING

Humans love (and need) to measure things, and this includes music, which is measured with intervals. An interval tells us the distance from one note to another. When you talk about written music, you need a way to explain relationships between notes, and intervals are one way to do this. If you don't know intervals, listening to someone talk about music can be like listening to a scientist talk about an experiment using degrees Kelvin. It doesn't really make sense unless you know the measurement unit. Learning about intervals is crucial to understanding chords, chord extensions, and the blues scale, covered in the following chapters. Intervals are pretty simple and this chapter will teach you what you need to know.

CHAPTER 5: CUTTING THE CHORDS

A chord is three or more tones sounding at the same time and it's chords that give a piece of music its feel: happy, sad, energetic, or just about any other emotion, and probably some that can't be described with words, only felt; chords provide the forward motion in a tune. In this chapter you'll learn about how to build chords, how to listen for them, and how chords in one key are related to each other. This chapter will also teach you how to read the symbols that go along with chord changes.

CHAPTER 6: EXTENSION CHORDS

Chords in music are usually more complex and interesting than simple triads. When we stack more notes on top of the triad, these are called extensions and they obey simple rules, most of which you'll learn in this chapter. Chord extensions enhance functional harmony and increase the complex flavor of chord progressions. If you're going to play jazz, you've got to know about chord extensions and how to read them.

CHAPTER 7: PENTATONIC SCALES AND THE BLUES SCALE

There are many, many scales to learn, and the blues scale is one of the most important because jazz is suffused with the blues. The scale is very similar to a minor pentatonic scale, so this chapter will introduce pentatonic scales and then the blues scale. Blues scales are associated with particular major scales, and you'll learn about these in this chapter, too.

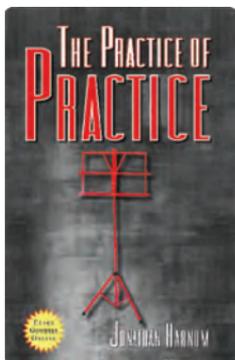
CHAPTER 8: LISTEN LISTEN LISTEN

This interlude takes listening to the next step. The listening tips you've gotten so far are like riding an exercise bicycle in the gym to get yourself in shape. Good for you, and helpful, and sort of related to real bike-riding, but not really all that fun. The kind of listening I'm talking about in this chapter is like taking a mountain bike ride on a forest trail to see the country, smell the smells and explore. Way more fun! I'm talking about listening to fantastic recordings made by world-class jazz musicians, and the importance of listening to live music. Learn about listening here and find great albums and musicians in several jazz styles.

CODICIL

In the back section you'll find a book index so you can locate specific topics within the book, scales (major, natural minor, blues), and a piano keyboard and guitar fretboard that will help you understand jazz theory concepts in this book. Also included are some practice aids, all of which can also be found for free at the *Basic Jazz Theory* web site.

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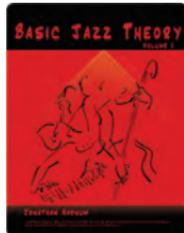
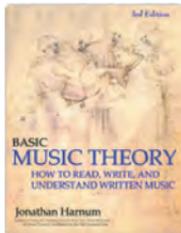
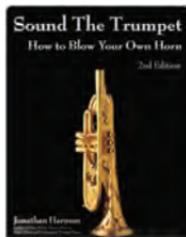
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DO YOU WANT TO PLAY JAZZ?

Jazz is best learned by listening and imitation, *not* theory. Still, the theory behind the music *will* help you understand both why jazz sounds the way it does, and how to play jazz in a way that sounds great. Theory will also help you communicate with other musicians.

Jazz musicians share a musical language of tunes, chord progressions, licks, and stories. If you “speak jazz,” you can walk into a jam session anywhere and communicate through music even if you don’t speak the native language.

Basic Jazz Theory, vol. 1 will get you started on the basics of jazz theory and will help you build the skills you need to be an excellent jazz player.

What’s Inside:

Tunes: melodies are the basis of a jazz player’s vocabulary. Learn about jazz standards and how to play them.

Scales: major scales, modes, pentatonics and the blues scales are covered in detail.

Intervals: intervals help you understand chords and notation more clearly. Learn the specifics inside.

Chords: the basic building blocks of jazz harmony. All you need to know about basic chords is here.

Extensions: jazz players add extra notes to chords to give them more flavor. Learn what they are and how to do it for yourself.

Listening: this is one of the most crucial aspects of learning to play jazz. Find some of the best recordings and players to listen to inside this book.

Ear Training: playing jazz means you have to listen and understand what you hear. This takes work. Every chapter has ear training exercises.

Improvising: jazz without improvising would be like a birthday cake without frosting or candles. Find suggestions to improve your improv.

Whether you’re a comeback player, a beginner, or are just curious, *Basic Jazz Theory, volume 1* will help you understand what makes jazz jazzy.

Chapters are short, well-paced and enjoyable, sometimes funny and always friendly.

Every chapter includes:

- review questions to test your knowledge.
- ear training exercises to get concepts in your ears.
- practical use exercises so you use what you’re learning.

Jonathan Harnum has been playing music for over 30 years, has taught music for over 20 years, has advanced degrees in music education and is the author of *Basic Music Theory*, *Sound the Trumpet*, and *All About Trumpet*.

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