

Practice This!

Hadley Caliman

Tenor saxophone giant and recent Golden Ear Award winner Hadley Caliman is one of the few musicians remaining from a generation where there was no formal jazz-education system for young musicians. Practice This! interviewed Caliman about his early jazz education and the common problems he has seen in students during his years of teaching privately and at the Cornish College of the Arts. In our first article of a two-part series, Hadley Caliman discusses misconceptions about key and tonic-versus-dominant, then gives us two exercises to help illustrate his points.

Caliman described one problem most young players seem to have: understanding and hearing key centers. “You cannot stretch a key,” says Caliman. “You have to chop it up into pieces.” Most students are told to play one scale for the tonic, and one scale for the dominant, yet, according to Caliman, this system just doesn’t help students hear the overall feeling of tonic and dominant and the motion from tonic to dominant. “It’s basically the idea of blues harp, where blowing out is tonic, and sucking in is dominant. These two

things work hand in hand to give us the sense of key, but they are both OF the same key. Most of the time, students are taught two different ideas and they don’t tend to relate.” Caliman recommends two simple exercises to help students hear this symbiotic relationship.

Exercise 1: In the key of C, play the seven modes in the following way: C major ascending, D Dorian descending, E Phrygian ascending, F Lydian descending, G dominant ascending, A Aeolian descending, B Locrian ascending, C major descending, B Locrian ascending, A Aeolian descending, G dominant ascending, F Lydian descending, E Phrygian ascending, D Dorian descending, C major ascending. “This way, all your ascending scales work on the tonic (C major) and all the descending scales work on the dominant or turnaround (G7 or Dmin7-G7),” says Caliman. Remember, these are all just the C-major scale—it might be easier to think about it this way, rather than thinking of all of the modes individually.

Exercise 2: In the key of C, play the following series of notes: B-C-D-E-F-E-D-C-B-C-D-E-F-E-D-C-B-C-D-E-F-D-C-B-C. “This is a classical



Photo by Daniel Sheehan

flute exercise, but it really helps us hear dominant-to-tonic motion,” says Caliman. From here, you can go to the key of Db, where the C you ended on in C Major becomes the leading tone in the key of Db Major.

These two exercises, when learned in all twelve keys, will give any player a stronger theoretical and aural understanding of the relationship between tonic and dominant. “I think of the tonic as the Papa and the dominant as the Mama—you’ve got to have them both to get a sense of key.”

In Part 2 of our series with Hadley Caliman, we’ll look at some of the things he practiced “back in the day” and see what drove the direction of his practicing.

Practice This! is an educational project organized by David M. Marriott, Jr. for Earshot Jazz with sponsorship from The Seattle Drum School. Each month new lesson by a different local jazz artist will appear for students to learn from and for non-musician readers to gain insight into the craft of improvising. An expanded video version of the lesson can be linked to from www.earshot.org.



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Practice This!



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In the second part of our Practice This! series with master tenor saxophonist and Golden Ear Award winner Hadley Caliman, we will look at the days before an organized jazz education system. When Caliman was “coming up” there were no Aebersold play-alongs, no half-speed transcribing devices, and certainly no computers or looping mechanisms, not to mention an abundance of schools or qualified teachers. Instead, Caliman learned the language of jazz and improvisation from a variety of tried-and-true methods that still yield great rewards in today’s technologically advanced world.

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One of the many things Caliman did early on was to learn and understand chords at the piano. “A friend of mine won a piano in a raffle, and after a few months of not seeing him, he came back killin’! I knew I had to learn what he was learning,” he says. Many great horn players have preached the gospel of learning some piano, including Dizzy Gillespie and Kenny Garrett—both solid piano players, like Caliman. Caliman still spends much of his time at the piano to achieve a clearer, quicker understanding of chords and harmony.

Caliman was also inspired by players near his own age: “I loved Dexter Gordon, but I also saw Johnny Griffin with Lionel Hampton’s big band when he was only 16. Eric Dolphy was a few years ahead of me and on the scene, too.”

Additionally, Caliman used whatever resources he could find to hone his knowledge, including flute methods. “I had one flute book that had over one hundred dominant scale passages and patterns.” Classical method books are often overlooked today as a source of material despite generally having clear harmonic implications.

In developing his own, more personal sound, Caliman used composition as a tool to discover his voice. “Whatever kind of idea I was working on in my practicing—a major scale, a pentatonic pattern, a melodic phrase—I would write a tune using that concept and explore all the possibilities that way.” If you have never tried your hand at composing, it is a very useful tool for discovering what you truly hear in your mind’s ear.

So, where to begin? Take some piano lessons, or pick up a copy of Mark Levine’s *The Jazz Piano Book* for starters. Identify the players in your peer group who inspire you—go hear them play, and try talking to them! Look back at your old instrumental method books (especially the ones that look like a phone book) for improvisation applications. Try writing four measures based on whatever it is that you practiced today. These methods for learning how to improvise generally don’t require anything more than paying attention to your own musical voice and creative instinct. They worked for Hadley Caliman, and they just might work for you.

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