7. Rhythm and Swing Feel

- Good rhythm is all about how the music feels. Most importantly the pulse must be steady; beyond that, the feeling you aim for depends on the type of music.
- **Listening** to jazz music is a critical part of obtaining the right feel. Listen for **how** the music is being played as well as **what** is being played.

**Swing Quavers**

- Swing quavers are uneven, unlike straight quavers. Think of them as notes one and three of a triplet (played smoothly).

**Practice**

7a) Practice swing quavers with a metronome
- Start with any scale, and swing the quavers. Try it with other sequences.
- Some metronomes can play you the swing quaver rhythm to help.

**Swing Feel**

- Rock music is built on a feeling of strong downbeats. **Swing** uses the opposite effect – **emphasising the offbeats**.
- We can call the effect we achieve ‘forward motion’
- It feels like it keeps rolling on and on.

**Practice**

7b) Try the same scale as in 6a, but emphasise every **offbeat** quaver.
7c) To practice a swing feeling with chords, set a pulse, and play a chord once per bar, **anticipating** it by one swing quaver each time – on beat 4+.
- Feel as though you are pushing the chord through the barline.
7d) You can develop this in a few ways:
- Use two alternating chords, and then try longer patterns.
- Change chords every 2 beats instead of every 4.
- Use a sequence of chords from a tune you’ve played already

**Count 1, 2, 3, 4** out loud if that helps.

- The most important thing is to **absorb the swing feeling** rather than think about the theoretical placement of each note or chord.
- Ultimately, we want strong rhythm and feel to be natural. Nothing is better for this than listening to good jazz records, and particularly the way the music feels.
8. Bass - Moving and Walking

- So far we have only played bass notes in line with changes of chord. We can develop this to provide more interest and a feeling of pulse.

Moving bass - minims

- Play notes 1 and 5 of the chord as minims on beats 1 and 3 of the bar.
- If the chord changes on beat 3 of the bar, play that chord’s bass note as normal.
- Keep the bass notes on the beat at first. You could anticipate them as you might do melody notes or chords, but this requires a very effective pulse and feel.

Practice

8a) Play just the melody and bass of Take The A Train or All The Things You Are, applying a moving bass as described above. Experiment with other tunes.
8b) Try the same with chords instead of melody in the right hand.

Developing Moving Bass

- Try notes 1&3 (instead of 1&5) in the same way.
- Add a bridging note on beat 4:
  - Use any note that chromatically approaches note 1 of the next chord.
- Add a bridging note on beat 2:
  - Use a note that bridges well between 1&5 (e.g. 3) or between 1&3 (e.g. 2)

Practice

8c) Using any tune, with RH playing melody/chords, develop moving bass as above.

Walking Bass

- Combine the ideas above to generate a walking bass, one note per crotchet.
- A decent general rule for walking bass is as follows:
  - Beats 1 and 3 should have strong notes of the chord (1, 3, 5 or 7).
  - Beats 2 and 4 can have any other note.

Practice

8d) Find simple walking bass patterns that satisfy the general guidelines above.
9. Comping

- The word ‘comp’ comes from the word *accompaniment* and it means to improvise a background for a solo or melody.
- The choice of notes in each chord is important (discussed in the early chapters and later on), but equally crucial are the rhythm and feel that you apply.

**Comping rhythms**

- Playing a proper swing accompaniment requires a bit more creativity than just playing all the chords a swing quaver early.
- You can play on downbeats, as long as you retain the swing feeling.
- Playing chords in patterns or motifs is a good way to start.

**Practice**

9a) Create some good comping rhythms by using short, simple rhythmic motifs

  - Example 1: You could play on the first two quavers of the bar
    → Remember that they are swing quavers
    → Make sure the offbeat quaver is emphasised (“doo-dat”)
  - Example 2: Play on 3+ (short) and 4+ (long) (“dat dow”)
    → This is particularly good when the chord is going to change – the chord on 3+ is the chord from the first bar, and the one on 4+ is the chord from the second bar.

**General Advice**

Try to achieve a good feeling of swing in everything you do from now on. Remember that a good place to start is to anticipate each chord by a quaver, and then branch out into more complicated rhythms, always retaining the right feeling.

It’s good to practice chords and comping with each hand – you might use the left or the right to play chords depending on what situation you’re playing in.

**Practice**

9b) Play chords along to a tune you know, mixing up the rhythm of your chords.

  - Find rhythms where the offbeats are emphasised more than the onbeats.
  - Be guided by how much they feel like they swing.
10. The Rhythm of Melodies

- Many Real Books write melodies very ‘woodenly’ to offer the flexibility to interpret and develop rhythms yourself.
- We develop the rhythm to give it a **swing feeling**.
  - Use the same idea of anticipating notes that we did with comping rhythms.
  - Emphasising the offbeats more than the onbeats to keep it swinging.
  - As a general rule, quavers are to be played long, and crotchets are to be played short (but not quite staccato). Listen to how this works in a lesson.
- A great way to help is to listen to a melody as played on a jazz record – it will have a strong rhythm, the right feel and all the subtleties that go along with that.

**Practice**

10a) Listen to some recordings of **How High The Moon** or **All The Things You Are**. Notice how the melody varies from artist to artist, and how different it can be compared to the notation.
   - **Spotify** is a good resource for listening. See the Teaching Materials section of my website to find out more.

10b) Play the melody to either of the above tunes, and experiment with the rhythm in the ways described above. You could also try to copy the way the melody is playing on one of the recordings.

**Attaching chords and melody together**

- You might decide to anticipate a melody note that is written on the first beat of the bar (i.e. play it on the 4+ of the previous bar).
- If there’s a chord written on the first beat of the bar as well, it’s a great idea to anticipate the chord as well – attaching the melody and chord together.
- This creates the best feeling of swing – if you anticipate one and not the other, then you lose a lot of the swing feeling you’re looking for.