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PRACTICE THIS!

The Calendar as a Practice Tool

By David Marriott, Jr.

With so many things to work into our practice routines -- chords, scales, transcriptions, vocabulary, and more -- one can easily get overwhelmed with trying to deal with everything all the time. But there's a tool out there that many of us overlook, that can help us organize all the harmonic-related material of our practice routine into manageable, focused chunks. That tool is your calendar. Yes, that calendar! The one that maybe hangs on your wall, sits on your desk in a book, or perhaps resides online. Regardless of your preferred scheduling method, many of the natural divisions of time that our calendar inherently provides correspond directly to groups of harmony and theory that we must practice for our development.

For starters, we have twelve months in a year. As it happens, we also have twelve keys. Jiggs Whigham coined the phrase "Key-of-the-Month Club" for this kind of practicing: taking one key each month and focusing all your efforts into that key. If one key per month is too drawn out for you, then try one key every two weeks and get through all twelve keys every six months. Another variation is one major/minor pair per month, either parallel keys (C Major and C minor) or relative keys (C Major and A minor).

Each month is roughly made up of four weeks. Lucky for us, there are four main types of chords and scales: major, minor, augmented, and diminished. So the first week of the month, I might practice all my major scales, then work on minor scales in the sec-

ond week, continuing on to augmented and finishing the month with diminished scales. As before, if this pace is too slow, work on major and minor for a week, then switch it up to augmented and diminished the next week.

However, it is the day-to-day, week-to-week practice schedule that tends to give many musicians the most trouble. As it turns out, the seven days in a week can correspond to the seven modes of the major scale. Monday is Ionian, Tuesday is Dorian, Wednesday is Phrygian, and on through the Locrian on Sunday. For more advanced students, Week One could be the seven major modes, Week Two the melodic minor modes, Week Three the harmonic minor modes, and Week Four the harmonic major modes.

Any one of these means of organization can help bring balance and focus to your practice regimen. By no means are these the only ways to use the calendar, just some common ones. Maybe you want to practice all twelve keys every week, so you practice two keys per day and take one day off. Put your "math brain" to work and come up with one that works best for you. Regardless, harness the power of your calendar as an organizational tool for practicing and start seeing the positive effects in your playing. Good luck!

Practice This! is an educational project organized by David M. Marriott, Jr. for Earshot Jazz with sponsorship from The Seattle Drum School. Each new lesson by a different local jazz artist is intended for students to learn from and for non-musician readers to gain insight into the craft of improvising.