

# Jazz Improvisation

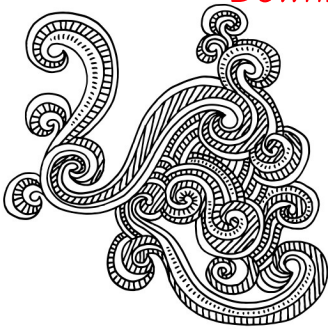
## A Creative Activity for Students / by Carol Matz

Since I started teaching, I've incorporated improvisation activities into my lessons. Students really enjoy the freedom of improvising, but they need to feel a sense of security...too many options can be overwhelming. So I developed a system that slowly introduces students to improvisation by adding an increasing number of note choices, using a variety of rhythm patterns. ***This activity is one of many in a new section called "Pro Piano Skills," from the Interactive Piano Method's new Level 3.***

## About "Pro Piano Skills"

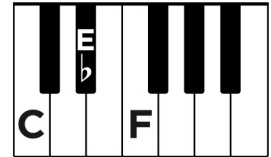
Along with the free improvisation activity, I've included sample pages from the *Interactive Piano Method's* new section "Pro Piano Skills," part of the newly released Level 3. This is a great way to work on a variety of skills with your students, including playing from lead sheets, chord charts, improvisation, notation, and composition. Find out more about Level 3 and "Pro Piano Skills" at [carolmatzpiano.com](http://carolmatzpiano.com)





Improvisation

# Jazz Improv



RH 1 3 4

For jazz improvisation, use **SWING RHYTHM**. Be sure to play the 8th notes with an uneven long-short pattern.



## Swing Rhythm Warm-Ups

Play the music below using swing rhythm.




- ✓ Choose one note from the keyboard diagram at the top, and play all the rhythm patterns below. Start counting out loud before playing. Remember to swing the 8th notes.

### Rhythm Patterns (all in $\frac{4}{4}$ )



- ✓ Then, choose two notes from the keyboard diagram. Play the rhythm patterns again switching between the two notes. You may switch between these two notes any way you like!
- ✓ Repeat the same steps using all 3 notes.

**(Go on to next page!)**



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LEVEL **3**

**Pro Piano Skills**  
**Unit 4**  
Page 2 of 2 (right page)

(Student part, continued)

## Improvise!

Use some of the rhythm patterns you were given, and feel free to add some of your own ideas! As your teacher starts playing the accompaniment, *feel the beat of the music*. Start playing whenever you're ready!

**Hint:** Start with only one note, and when you feel comfortable, slowly add in more notes.

## Jazz Improv

Teacher Duet



RH 1 3 4  
(Student notes)

**Teacher Duet** (Student plays *higher than the teacher*.)

**Moderately, with swing** (♩ = ♩<sup>3</sup>)



4

7

10

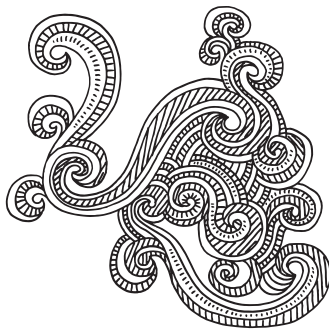
*repeat ad lib.*

# Pro Pi@no

## SKILLS

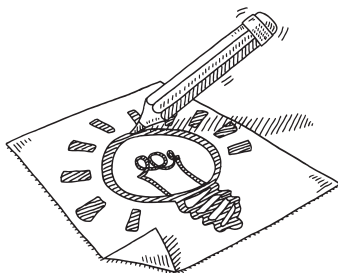
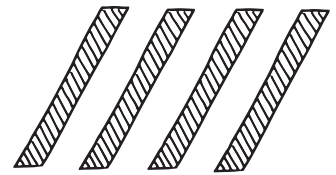
### Level 3

Lead Sheets

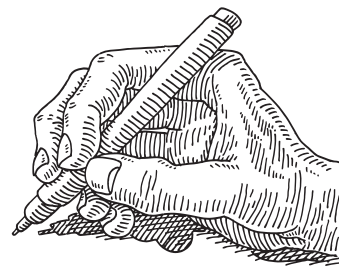


Improvisation

Chord Charts



Composition



Notation

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# A Note to Students

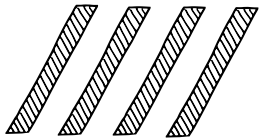
Have you ever wanted to play piano or keyboards in a band with friends? Write down your own songs? Play piano for a singer in a school talent show? The **Pro Piano Skills** section will help you learn to do all these things and take your piano studies to the next level! You'll learn:

## Lead Sheets

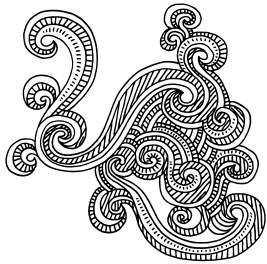


**LEAD SHEETS** - You'll build on what you learned about lead sheets in the Lesson Book and learn to play several familiar pieces.

## Chord Charts

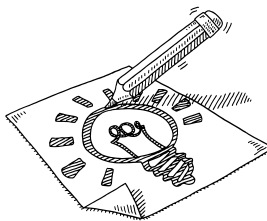


**CHORD CHARTS** - When you know how to play from chord charts, you can sit down at the piano and start playing just by looking at the chord names on sheet music, such as pop or rock sheet music. You need this skill to play in a band, sing songs while you play piano, or accompany other singers.

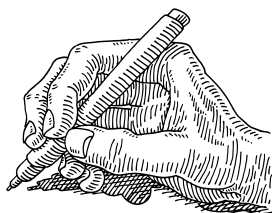


Improvisation

**IMPROVISATION** - Did you ever hear a pianist in a band "jamming" and making up the music as they went? That's improvisation! You'll learn jazz, rock, and other types of improvisation.



Composition



Notation

**COMPOSITION** and **NOTATION** - Learn to compose your own pieces of music and properly write it all down (notation). This way, you can remember what you composed and even have other people play your pieces!

# A Note to Teachers

**Pro Piano Skills** takes students beyond the printed page and puts them on the path to becoming well-rounded musicians. Some of the skills help develop a more social type of musicianship—such as playing in a band or accompanying a friend by using chord charts. Going further than reading traditional music notation gives students a greater overall appreciation and understanding of music, and makes playing the piano even more enjoyable and relevant to students' everyday lives.

## About the Lead Sheets and Chord Charts

The lead sheet and chord chart activities are intended to provide extra practice for developing the skills introduced on pages 3 and 15 of Lesson Book, Level 3.

Before each **lead sheet**, a **Chord Review** provides a quick refresher of the specific chords used in the lead sheet (in the order that the chords appear). As the units progress, various LH rhythm patterns are suggested to expand the student's lead-sheet-reading abilities. Consider these suggested patterns jumping off points. Students should feel free to improvise other rhythms and patterns when they are comfortable doing so.

Each **chord chart** has an optional teacher part, which provides the melody to be played above the student's *comping* (chord accompaniment). The lyrics, given in both the student part and teacher part, can be sung by the student, teacher, or both. Students should be encouraged to sing or hum the familiar melodies as they practice comping.

Triad *inversions* are introduced in Unit 4 of **Pro Piano Skills**, to allow for smoother chord progressions in the comping activities. (Inversions are formally introduced in Level 4.) Chords in *1st inversion* are indicated by a superscript **1** next to the chord symbol in the chord chart; chords in *2nd inversion* are indicated by a superscript **2**. Note that this shorthand notation applies *only to the RH chord*; the student should play the root of the chord in the LH. In Unit 5, *slash chords* are introduced, allowing the student to use notes in the bass other than the root of each chord.

## About the Improvisation Activities

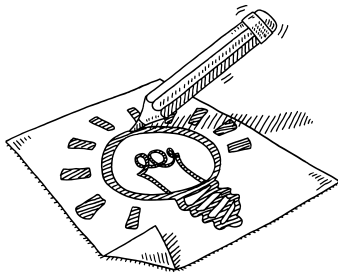
Five of the units contain an improvisation activity to be played with the teacher in the lesson. Students are given a set of notes plus various rhythm patterns that serve as a starting point for their improvisation. Stress the importance of repeating various rhythm patterns and note combinations while improvising. Accompaniments for these improvisations are written out. Feel free to simplify or expand upon them. To begin each improvisation, start the accompaniment and have the student jump in at any point when they're comfortable.

So that students may continue practicing improvisation at home or in a lab setting, there are also *Improvisation Play-Along Tracks* that can be found along with the MP3 recordings for the level. There are no count-off clicks. Students hit play (▶), feel the beat of the music, and begin improvising when they're ready. Students don't have to improvise all the way through the tracks; the recordings give ample time for experimentation and practice, as the music loops for a few minutes.

For full flexibility controlling the play-along track tempos, import the MP3s to a device, and use an app that allows you to vary the speed while retaining the same pitches. Variable-speed playback apps are available for various operating systems and devices.

## About the Composition and Notation Pages

The **Composition** and **Notation** pages develop and add to the skills students learned in the Activity Sheets from Levels 1A–2B. Students should apply the skills they learn in the notation sections (proper music spacing, correct placement of articulations, etc.) to the pieces they write in the composition sections.



## Composition

# Compose a Ragtime Piece!



**RAGTIME** is a style of music from the early 1900s that features a steady LH and syncopation.

- ✓ **LH** - Write the missing LH notes by following the Roman numerals (I, IV, or V7) and using the same pattern as measure 1.
- ✓ **RH** - Compose the RH melody. Use the rhythm pattern in the box above measure 1 for each measure. Choose notes for each measure while playing the LH part. Pick RH notes that sound good with each LH chord. In measures 4 and 8, use the rhythm given above the staff.
- ✓ Play your rag and choose a title for it.

## Rag

(Choose title.)

By \_\_\_\_\_



4/4

*mf*

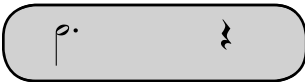
Key of C

I

1/3

I

4

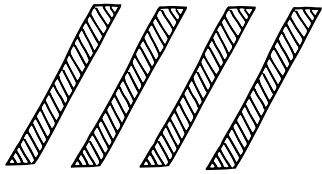


IV

1/2

I

# Chord Charts



LEVEL 3

**Pro Piano Skills**  
Unit 5

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## Slash Chords

**SLASH CHORDS** have a note in the LH that is different from the chord name.

(Example)

**Q** Think of this slash chord as "C over E":

C/E =

C

---

E

RH CHORD  
on top

LH NOTE  
on bottom

1. Draw a line from each slash chord symbol to the matching keyboard.

(Example)

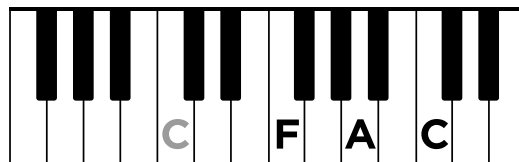
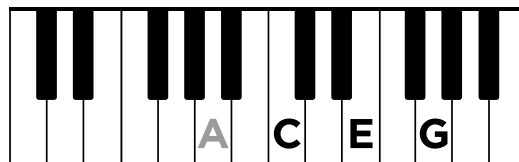
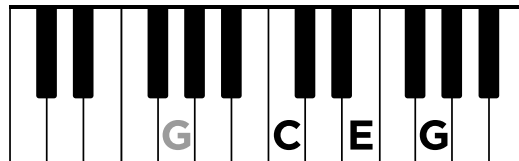
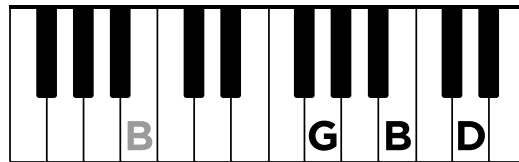
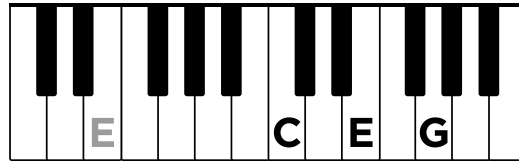
**C/G**

**C/E**

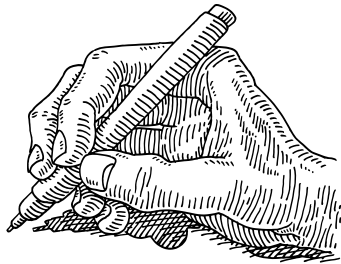
**G/B**

**F/C**

**C/A**



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Notation

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LEVEL **3**

**Pro Piano Skills**  
**Unit 7**  
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# Stem Direction

## Beamed 8th Notes

**Remember:** Stems go **UP** for notes below the middle line:

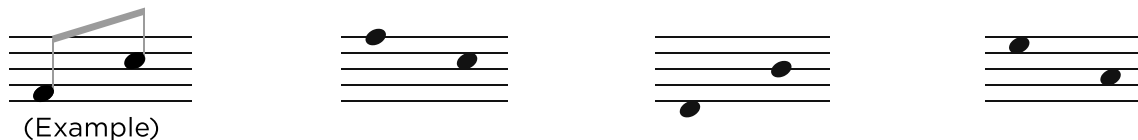


**Q** If two or more notes are beamed together, the note *farthest from the middle line* decides the stem direction for all the notes.

**PRO TIP** To count the distance from the middle line, place your pencil tip on the middle line. Then, point and count lines and spaces.

3 steps from middle

**1.** Add stems and beams to the 8th notes.

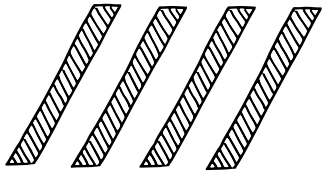


**Q** If beamed notes are the *same distance from the middle line*, the stems go **DOWN**.

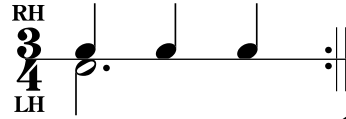
**2.** Add stems and beams to the 8th notes.



# Chord Charts



- ✓ Tap this rhythm with both hands, and repeat it several times without stopping.
- ✓ Play that rhythm pattern with a RH A minor triad and a LH single-note A.
- ✓ Use this rhythm pattern in each measure of the chord chart below. Change the chords and LH notes at each new chord symbol.
- ✓ Add pedal. Change the pedal on beat 1 of each measure.



## Inversions

- C<sup>2</sup>** = G C E
- D<sup>2</sup>** = A D F#
- F<sup>2</sup>** = C F A
- E<sup>1</sup>** = G# B E

# House of the Rising Sun

**Moderately**  
**3/4**

**Singer/Teacher:** There is a house in New Orleans, it's called the Rising Sun. It's been the ruin of many poor boys and God, I know I'm one.

Chord symbols: Am, C<sup>2</sup>, D<sup>2</sup>, F<sup>2</sup>, E<sup>1</sup>, Am

## Other Rhythm Patterns

Play the "House of the Rising Sun" chord chart using each of these rhythm patterns.

**Am**

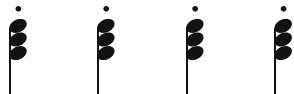
**Am**

**Am**

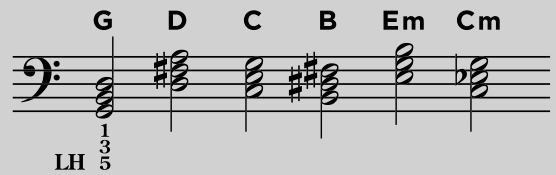
# Lead Sheets



- ✓ Practice the RH melody.
- ✓ Play the **Chord Review** with your LH. Then, play all the chords in the lead sheet.
- ✓ Play the lead sheet hands together. Each time you see a chord symbol, play and hold the chord with your LH while your RH plays the melody.
- ✓ Finally, play hands together using this **LH RHYTHM PATTERN:**



## Chord Review



# The Stars and Stripes Forever

John Philip Sousa (1854-1932)

Quickly

Musical score for "The Stars and Stripes Forever" in G major, 4/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music with the following chord symbols and fingerings:

- Staff 1: **G** (5), **D** (1)
- Staff 2: **G** (2, 1), **C** (2, 1), **D** (3), **D** (5)
- Staff 3: **G** (2), **B** (2, 1), **Em** (2)
- Staff 4: **Cm** (2, 1, 3), **G** (5), **D** (1), **G**

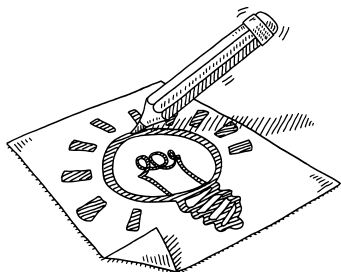


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LEVEL **3**

**Pro Piano Skills**  
**Unit 10**  
Page 1 of 2 (left page)

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## Composition

# Compose a Sonatina Movement

- ✓ First, write in all of the LH notes. Use the **ALBERTI BASS** pattern, and follow the Roman numerals and chord symbols given.
- ✓ Complete the melody by choosing notes that sound good with the LH part. The small notes above each measure tell you the rhythm to use.
- ✓ Add *slurs*, *staccatos*, *dynamics*, and any other markings you like.
- ✓ Play your sonatina, and add a title.

## Sonatina

By \_\_\_\_\_

**Moderato**

C Major      I                      IV                      V7

4

I                      IV                      I                      IV                      I