

LEARNING TO IMPROVISE 2

Brigitte Harris

Adding a second part

Brigitte Harris believes anyone can improvise their own music and sets out to prove it in the second of a three-part series, which offers an approach to improvisation primarily for church service playing and is intended for novices to improvisation.

In the first article we looked at working with single melodic lines. The next stage involves experimenting with textures of two and three parts.

1 Preparation

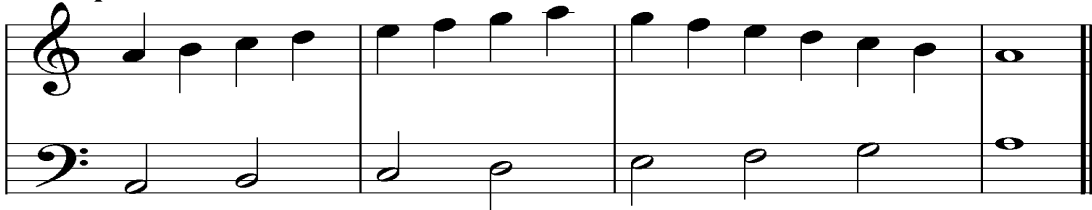
A simple way to achieve fluency in playing two parts simultaneously is to play scales. Familiarize yourself with a scale such as the natural a-minor scale:

Example 1



Then play the scale in note values of crotchets in your right hand and minims in your left, as shown in the next example. You can change the direction of the scale at any time, there will always be a convincing harmony implied, as all notes of the scale combine with each other. Experiment!

Example 2



Now start the scales with hands in contrary motion, first with right hand crotchets against minims in the left hand, then with groups of three crotchets (triplets) against minims, as shown in Example 3.

Example 3

Musical notation for Example 3, a 4/4 piece. The right hand plays a scale with triplet markings, and the left hand plays a steady bass line of minims.

After this play the reverse, with minims in the right hand combined with crotchets in the left. This will need a considerable amount of practice, but it is well worth it, as it provides you with the technical tools to invent your own music.

2 The first pieces in two parts

The next stage is creative: freely combine a line consisting of groups of two and three crotchets in your right hand above a scale played steadily in the left hand. As in all your playing, always aim for a well-shaped line. Natural breathing spaces and interesting articulation will add interest.

The following example 4 is just one possibility for a short piece. It is a very brief invention, an illustration of the many possibilities that exist. Remember too, that by using interesting registration you will show off your instrument and enhance your music.

Example 4

Musical notation for Example 4, a 4/4 piece. The right hand plays a melody with a checkmark above the fourth measure, and the left hand plays a steady bass line of minims.

3 Hymns and Songs with scale accompaniment

A simple scale-based accompaniment is especially suited to folksongs and those hymns rooted in folk music as well as those based on modal scales. The following examples are based on the melody Picardy and show how a scale can be combined with this modal melody.

First, play semibreves in your left hand to accompany the melody in the right hand. The example shows the left hand scale in thirds, so you are in fact playing in three parts already. Start very steadily, in order to control each move, and try to hear the music ahead of your playing.

Example 7

$\text{♩} = 72$

There are many folksongs and hymns with which to try out this type of two-part playing. To start you off, perhaps experiment with *As the deer pants* (Nystrom). Here a scale of descending minims in the left hand combines well with the melody.

The melodies of *Martyrs*, *Psalm 135 (Ministres de Léternel)* and *Noël Nouvelet* are also ideal for scale accompaniments.

It is important that you keep trying things out –improvising a little and often will bring not only pleasure at creating your own music, but also steady improvement.