

Jam Session™ Advanced Workshop

Level 2 Upgrade: Making Solos Sound Like Songs Instead of Exercises

Core Idea

Level 1 players can navigate chord changes. Level 2 players make solos feel like composed melodies instead of scale exercises. The goal is to create solos that listeners can remember and hum after the song ends.

Level 2 Skills Focus

- Motif development
- Phrasing like a vocalist
- Dynamic shape and storytelling
- Tension and release
- Use of space
- Targeting chord tones

Step 1 – Solo Like a Conversation

A good solo should feel like speech, not scale practice. Have students sing short phrases and then play them. Limit players to a small set of notes to encourage musical phrasing.

Step 2 – Motif Development

Create a short musical idea, repeat it, adjust the rhythm, and move it through the chord changes. Development makes solos sound intentional instead of random.

Step 3 – Question and Answer Phrasing

Teach solos in sentences. One phrase asks a question, the next answers it. Encourage call-and-response phrasing to prevent rambling solos.

Step 4 – Use Space

Professional players leave room between phrases. Practice playing two bars followed by two bars of silence to develop patience and phrasing.

Step 5 – Dynamic Shape

Build solos like a story: start simple, increase intensity, reach a peak, then resolve calmly. Avoid staying at the same energy level throughout the solo.

Step 6 – Target Chord Tones

Guide players to land on chord tones—especially the 3rd and 7th—when chords change. This instantly connects lines to harmony and sounds more professional.

Workshop Exercise

- Solo using only quarter notes
- Repeat and develop phrases
- Leave intentional space
- Avoid fast scale runs
- Focus on melody and clarity

Teaching Reminder: If people cannot hum your solo after the song, you played exercises instead of music.

Improvisation Levels Summary

- Level 1 – Can play through chord changes
- Level 2 – Makes solos sound like songs
- Level 3 – Makes the entire band sound better