

Ear Training: The Jazz Kitchen

If one was to compare ear-training to say, cooking, ear training would represent the preliminary stages of putting together a meal. It would be before choosing the ingredients, it would be before choosing what utensils to use and it would even be before designing your menu. Ear training is like tasting each type of food and creating a memory for the tastes. When a baby tastes a lemon for the first time, there is usually a distinct and universal reaction. When they eat/drink milk, they have another reaction. As they get older, their reactions and acceptance of ‘tasty food vs ‘yucky food’ changes. It is much the same in interval recognition. This might seem like a strange analogy but it really works (bare with me). In order to be able to recognise and identify flavors in a dish, you have to know what the individual flavors are in the first place. Once you have built up a knowledge of flavors and categorized them (herbs, spices, meaty, fishy, fruity etc) we can then get very good at deciphering what ingredients are in any given dish. This isn’t always easy but as well as taste, we can use logic and guess-work. This is exactly how we should approach learning intervals. Intervals are simply flavours. The building blocks of melody and harmony. The meat AND two veg of the music world.

Cor Don Bleu Training: Ingredients (Notes)

If you are not a chef, you’ll probably go through life getting to know flavours as and when they crop up and this is perfectly fine. However, if you are more serious about food and you want to know how to rustle up a michelin grade Boeuf Bourguignon then you need to be able to instantly recognise flavours and quantities. As Jazz musicians, we need to be able to instantly identify intervals and how melodies are constructed. We need to be able to know what notes are in that melody just by hearing it. Ok, enough of the food analogies, I’m sure you get the idea.

Here are the 12 important musical intervals:

Number of semitones	Minor, major, or perfect intervals	Shorthand	Other Name	Flavour (e.g)
0	Perfect unison	P1		<i>Vanilla (nice but bland)</i>
1	Minor second	m2	Semitone	<i>Tamarind (Bitter)</i>
2	Major second	M2	Whole tone	<i>Nutmeg (interesting)</i>
3	Minor third	m3		<i>Salt (sad)</i>
4	Major third	M3		<i>Sugar (happy)</i>
5	Perfect fourth	P4		<i>Chinese Five Spice (Exotic)</i>
6	Augmented Fourth	#4	Tritone	<i>Cayenne Pepper (Hot)</i>
7	Perfect fifth	P5		<i>Ginger (solid, edgy)</i>

8	Minor sixth	m6		<i>Cinnamon</i> (pleasant, sweet, aromatic)
9	Major sixth	M6		<i>Cumin</i> (familiar yet exotic)
10	Minor seventh	m7		<i>Saffron</i> (expensive!)
11	Major seventh	M7		<i>Sichuan pepper</i> (numbs mouth)
12	Perfect octave	P8		<i>Turmeric</i> (all colour, no flavor)

If you have never really sat down and listened to each of these intervals (in depth) then I recommend you spend a week listening to each interval (1 per week) over and over again in different keys and ranges. Then slowly, I want you to write a word in the ‘flavor column’ of the table. The word can be absolutely anything. It doesn’t have to be a ‘flavor’ it can be a colour, herbs, spices, an adjective. It must be something that the sound reminds you of. Imagine images like the reaction of a baby tasting lemon-juice etc. If you have been on my courses before and have already done this, please do it again. Remember that our tastes are constantly changing and so some of your ‘words’ might not fit the sounds anymore.

Cor Don Bleu Training: Recipies (Chords)

Individual flavors are only the beginning. We all know that when you mix flavors together, amazing things can happen. Garlic, Onions, Chili and Ginger, Chocolate and Mint (or Orange), Tea and Milk, Toast and Butter, etc etc. When we start mixing intervals and notes together we get chords. Chords are what give forward motion and meaning to melody and individual notes. We are now looking at the bigger picture of the meal : do the flavours work in tandem with each other, do they compliment the other flavours. How are we left after the meal is finished? Did the wine go, did the dessert compliment the main course and so on. Chords can and do have a dramatic effect on music. If you can understand and manipulate chords, the world is your menu!

OK, no more food analogies, I promise. As jazz musicians, we need to be able to recognise at the very least 3 basic chord types. Major Sevenths, Minor Sevenths and Dominant Sevenths. The reality is that in jazz, we use more than the three basic 7th chords so I will explain what they are in due-course.

This is easy! Lets take the key of C. C has no sharps or flats (all the white notes on the piano from C to C).

If we build chords on each of the notes in the C major scale, we get this:

C E G B
D F A C
E G B D
F A C E

G B D F
A C E G
B D F A

Each of these chords have functions and symbols. You need to understand fully what they are and mean. Fear not though, its not difficult!

C E G B - C major 7th and we often call this 'Chord I (one)'

D F A C - D minor 7th and we often call this 'Chord II (two)'

E G B D - E Minor 7th and we often call this 'Chord III' (three)'

F A C E - F Major 7th and we often call this 'Chord IV' (four)'

G B D F - G7th and we often call this 'Chord V (five)'

A C E G - A minor 7th and we often call this 'Chord VI (six)'

B D F A - B Minor 7, Flat 5 or B 'Half Diminished' and we often call this 'Chord VII (seven)'

Degree of Scale	Name	Symbol	Notes
I	C Major Seventh	Cmaj7, CΔ, Cma7	C E G B
II	D Minor Seventh	Dm7, D-7, Dmi7, Dmin7	D F A C
III	E Minor Seventh	Em7, E-7, Emi7, Emin7	E G B D
IV	F Major Seventh	Fmaj7, FΔ, Fma7	F A C E
V	G Seven or G 'Dominant' Seventh	G7	G B D F
VI	A Minor Seventh (relative Minor)	Am7, A-7, Ami7, Amin7	A C E G