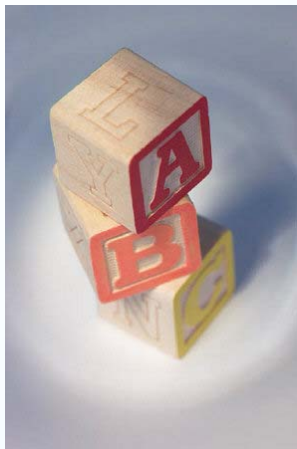




Jazz Articles by Bob Taylor
from *The Art of Improvisation, Sightreading Jazz, and More!*
Visual Jazz Web site: <http://www.visual-jazz.com>
E-mail: info@visual-jazz.com

**Article 11:
Feeling Displaced**

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Feeling Displaced

by Bob Taylor – ©2006 Visual Jazz Publications

Feeling displaced is uncomfortable for most people. For example, what if you had lived your whole life in New York City and then suddenly moved to North Dakota? Or what if you had to make the switch from Bismarck to the Bronx? (Hmm ... I wonder which would be the tougher transition?)

When we perform music, we want to be secure that we're on the right beat, that the time is steady, and that we know where we are in the chord progression. And that's all good.

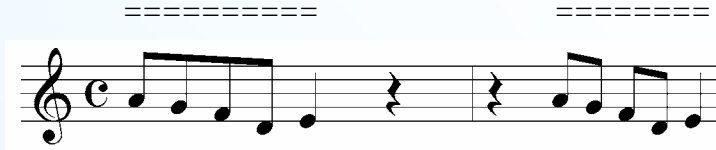
But what if we wanted step into a different neighborhood sometime, just for fun? We can do that in our solos, by creatively using *rhythmic displacement*.

A note before we begin our journey: we're talking about moving to real musical neighborhoods, not getting stranded in some vague place. Good displacement moves you to real places in the music, each with its own setting and surroundings – and sometimes more colorful as well.

About Displacement

(from *The Art of Improvisation*)

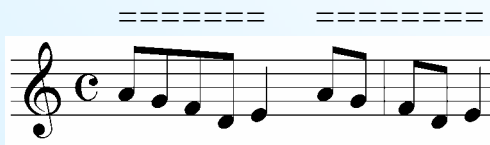
Displacing is repeating a motif in a different spot from the original motif. For example, if a motif starts on beat two, you can displace the repetition to start on beat three or beat one of a later bar. When you displace a motif, leave space after it so the repetition starts clearly. In the example below, the motif is displaced one beat because it starts one bar and one beat later.



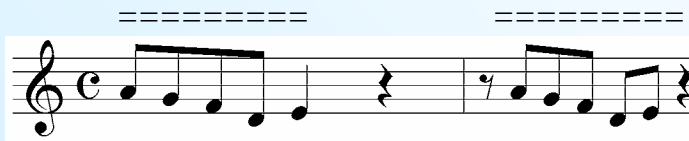
Example A - Displacing: second motif starts 5 beats later

In addition to the example above, here are some common ways to displace a motif in 4/4:

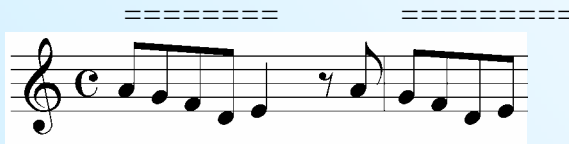
- Three beats later (like 3 against 4)
- One bar plus an eighth-note (4 1/2 beats)
- One bar minus an eighth-note (3 1/2 beats)



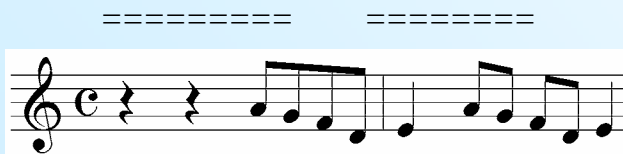
Example B - Displacing: 3 beats later (3 against 4), varied



Example C - Displacing: 4 1/2 beats later



Example D - Displacing: 3 1/2 beats later



Example E - Displacing: 3 beats later, first motif starts in middle of bar

When you use displacement, always recognize which beat (or offbeat) your original motif started on. Then you can repeat it one beat later than normal, one beat sooner than normal, an eighth-note sooner or later, etc.

Notice that displacing a motif by an eighth-note – so it goes off the beat – can be very effective, but a bit tricky to do. The important thing is to keep both the rhythm (time) and the motif solid enough so the shift sounds convincing. Give it a try!

Benefits of Displacement

There are definite benefits to being able to displace motifs at will. Displacing helps you:

- 1) Focus clearly on motifs so you'll know where and how to displace them.
- 2) Inject more rhythmic color and interest into ideas.
- 3) Recognize and use other rhythmic development tools, such as augmenting, compressing, and fragmenting.

Here's another topic from *The Art of Improvisation* that takes displacement even a step further.

More Displacement Exercises

(from *The Art of Improvisation*)

I'll admit that I like to drive my daughters crazy by singing in the car. No, it's not my voice quality (although some would disagree with that) or choice of tunes (we all sing together anyway). It's because I use that ancient form of musical torture – displacement. We'll all be singing “Hey now, you're an all-star ...” with the car CD player and then I'll suddenly displace the melody backwards by one beat or two to create a very annoying canon. OK, so I seem to enjoy it more than they do ...

But there are actual benefits to practicing displacement:

- You build your sense of independent time.
- You gather interesting development ideas for solos.
- You become more aware of the rhythmic intricacies of the music you hear.

Shiftiness

It's fun to practice displacement (although you may end up doing it by yourself with a CD if none of your friends want to help). Here are some suggestions:

1. Select a recording with an easy melody that you know.
2. Sing or hum along exactly with the melody for a few bars, then pause for 1, 2, or 4 beats (assuming the tune is 4/4). 4 beats is usually easiest – delaying by 2 beats or 1 beat gets progressively more difficult.
3. Resume the now-displaced melody and sing or hum it against the original melody.
4. After a while, stop and rejoin the melody back on the original beat.
5. Follow steps 2-4 with the same displacement or try a different one.

As you do this, it often helps to conduct your own 4/4 time pattern with your hand to guide your displaced melody. That keeps you from unintentionally running back into the melody in the original time.

You can also displace ahead by skipping a few beats and going 1, 2, or 4 beats ahead of the original rhythm. That can *really* get annoying.

For more advanced practice, try humming and displacing a jazz solo on CD. I like to occasionally try that with new or unfamiliar solos, so I am basically copying an improvised line with one measure's space to hear it and repeat it. That's great ear training.

Do Musicians Actually Do That?

So do jazz artists really use prolonged displacement? Check out the Marcus Roberts recording of Cherokee, either with the Wynton Marsalis quartet or on his solo CD "As Serenity Approaches." See also Art of the Artists in The Art of Improvisation for more detailed explanations on these techniques.

Yes, besides "driving" car passengers crazy, you can put displacement to good use in your solos and in creating unusual approaches to tune melodies. It may be time to start displacing yourself (you can always try New York – or North Dakota ...)