

Dear Jazz Jammers,

I would like to volunteer some guidelines to make our jams a wee bit more organized. Just enough to put us on the same page. There are different types of jams. Ours is a closed jam, so there is no need to follow the "walk-in" type format. The idea is to have fun, and this should help us to do just that, rather than spending time trying to figure out what's going on. Here is the plan:

Logistically:

1. Sit in as close proximity as one another as possible. Being at a distance creates problems with both viewing hand signals and hearing cues. And it's impossible to get us all in one camera shot. We need to be in a close huddle!
2. Keep your eyes open while you play and watch me and each other at all times. Orchestras have a conductor waving a visible baton for a reason. It would be nice for us to actually know WHEN it's our turn to solo, as opposed to having dead comping because no one knows it's their turn.

Starting a tune:

Someone (an instrument) will count off. This is even more important here than with rehearsed bands. I'll do it, or one of you, but someone has to set the tempo.

Volume: We need not play at full volume. Keeps the amps low enough to hear any acoustic guitars or piano. Drummers, keep volume to a bare minimum with brushes only.

Song Format/Soloing: We will follow the traditional jazz/blues song format, even if we are playing a rock (or whatever) song. Here it is.

1. The "Head" of the song will be fully played. If there is a vocalist, the singer will sing the entire head (song). Or, one of the instruments if there is no singer.
2. We will take our solos in turn, using the the head chord changes, two rounds per person. We will solo for the entire length of the song, bridge included. The order will be guitars first, followed by bass (if there is one), then sax or other instruments, then pianos. Piano is always last as per tradition.
3. Once the piano solo is over, it's time to go back to the head (melody). If there is a singer this is his/her cue that he is on deck, and should come in accordingly. If there is no singer, the same instrument that played the head in the beginning should play it again at the end.
4. This means that the song is over. If you care to solo again, you need to do it before the melody is replayed. The melody being sung/played again is telling us the song is done. We can then all end together.

This can of course be tweaked by the use of hand signals. If someone wants to go another round, or is not getting a good solo, the next person would need to come in earlier or be delayed. We need to LOOK at each other so there is some non-verbal communication during the song. No

playing blindly!

Song Selections:

Let's decide in advance. You can post in the comment fields what songs you would like to play. Please bring the sheet music for those songs. Better yet, make copies! Or at least post. Full music/lead sheet is best but if all you have is chords/lyrics, fine. But the rest of us may not know the melody.

We strive to play jazz tunes, or at least blues. We can always add some rock at the end of the night but our primary goal here is jazz.

Notes to individual instruments:

Vocalists: (or instrumental lead melody) We are following jazz format. This means the instrumental solos play for the entire length of the song, not just a verse. You will not be singing again at the bridge. You will have quite a long break, depending how many musicians there are and how long each one wants to solo. But please remain on alert. You are back on deck after the last solo (piano), taking the song from the very beginning, repeating the entire song exactly as you sang before. Don't come in too soon! You don't want to step on someone's solo. Likewise, please come in on time.

Saxophones, flutes, or any instrument: You're on deck first to solo so decide who among yourselves will go first, second, third. The bass goes after guitars. Keep your comping low during solos of acoustic instruments such as acoustic guitar, piano, flute, or electric bass.

Guitars You go after the saxophones or other instruments.

Piano/keyboard: This will be last, \id there is no bass or drums, so be ready to comp with the head afterward. You may need to signal the singer if you are last. And if he is not paying attention. :-)

Bass: You solo after piano.

Percussion: Your solo is last. Please use the tempo of who ever counted off. This will be set by one of the instrumentalists. You are playing throughout. Please keep your volume to minimum. We don't want to play louder than we have to in order to hear ourselves over the drumming.

Drum kits: We are no longer using full drum sets. Even a mini jazz kit is pushing it, and use brushes only. Even if there is room for a full kit, this is not what we want. We need to be able to hear ourselves and each other. Full drum sets/sticks is just too loud for our purpose. You are welcome to play any auxiliary percussion, Congas (softly!), Bongos, etc.

Non-Musicians are welcome to play auxiliary instruments such as tambourine, maracas, etc. These are supplied, or you can bring your own.

Filming: If you're taking video, please aim the camera at who ever is soloing. The singer should be filmed during the head and ending. If no singer, film the instrumentalist as well as the band in general. During solos, please aim the camera at who is playing the lead. No one wants to watch comping. Kindly aim the camera at the instrument, hands, and face of the person soloing.

Photos: Still pictures should include as many band members as possible. (another good reason we should sit closer together!). You may also take pics of audience members/non players.

Have fun!!