

Constant 8th Note Improvisation

The Idea

By feeling comfortable playing an uninterrupted stream of notes at a strict tempo with no rhythmic variation, we prove to ourselves that we can fill all space, if necessary. Then, when we improvise with intention, we can choose to pause that endless stream at different points to create rhythmic interest.

This is a **maximalist** approach to improvisation where we start with everything and erase to create form, in contrast to an **additive** approach where we glue tiny phrases together in the hopes of crafting something that sounds seamless.

The Method

You can only play eighth notes. You can not stop playing or deviate from this rhythm.

You may play any notes you like.

You may repeat a note if you need to rest during the practice.

Thoughts

- Work up to 5 minutes or more without interruption.
- Set a timer and be disciplined about this practice.
- Start with a reasonable tempo. Speed will come naturally as you progress.
- Consider using accompaniment:
 - A metronome, drum machine, or looper pedal with a simple background to keep yourself honest about your timing.
- Consider taking video of your practice so that you can study your playing afterwards. You may stumble across things you would like to repeat, or things you would like to avoid that are difficult to analyze and process while you are playing.
- Check in with your mind, body, and creativity as the improvisation unfolds:
 - Is your breathing shallow, unsteady?
 - Are you holding tension in your neck, shoulders, arms, wrists, fingers, back?
 - Is your mind focused/wandering? Can you observe your thoughts without judgement while continuing to play? How does this observation affect your playing?
 - Are you recycling ideas? Is there a way to explore and experiment at the pace you are playing at? Is the tempo too fast for new ideas and are you relying solely on muscle memory and pattern recognition?
 - When the time is up, do you feel inspired, relieved, disappointed, indifferent?
 - Are you getting lost? Can you move through all scales efficiently?
- How has your normal improvisation changed after this practice?