

**DO YOU LIKE YOUR PLAYING?
ARE YOU STRUGGLING TO FIND YOUR VOICE?**

If you are, keep reading. I promise this is not going to be a painful read. You will get through it quickly and you're gonna learn a thing or two.

Have you ever listened to Eddie Van Halen? How about John Coltrane? Have you heard Pat Metheny? Vinnie Colaiuta? Oscar Peterson? Dizzy? These are some of the greats that influence us all. We listen to them and aspire to be just like them. I've transcribed pretty much everyone I just named, yet I still don't sound like Pat Metheny. I still can't rip like Trane.

SO HOW CAN I STACK UP AGAINST SOMEONE THAT CAN?

This is the age-old question for budding musicians. I may not have an answer for that question, but I do have a solution to the problem.

The problem is this... "What is my differentiator in comparison to all of the other musicians out there?". Everyone who is proficient on their instrument can play fast and they can make the changes. Every other player can tear rhythm changes apart. You realize this when you step onto your first jam session in the real world, and someone calls *Anthropology* at 250 BPM. So what is going to make you stand out?

Every player I mentioned in the first paragraph has objectively taken their instrument to some of the furthest reaches that the instrument has ever gone. You are NOT Metheny. You are NOT Dizzy. You are NOT Coltrane.

You are YOU!

But how do you develop your voice? What does it even mean to have a voice?

If I'm gonna be frank, I have had many music teachers in my life that completely neglected to help me out in this matter. They would just teach me language. At a point, I could speak fine. What I couldn't do was make poetry.

I'm going to say that again if you didn't hear me.

**ANYONE CAN LEARN HOW TO SPEAK. NOT EVERYONE CAN LEARN HOW TO
SPEAK LIKE A POET.**

So how do you make poetry? When it's your time to shine, how do you resist the urge to blow and try to impress? I have one word that you may have not heard in the context of improvisation...

COMPOSITION!!!!

This collection of papers is going to discuss how to use compositional phrasing in your improvisation. Yesterday, I listened to Julian Lage's 2019 album *Love Hurts*. Julian figured out something very important. He figured out how to say as much as possible in as little words as possible. This is something that I personally struggle with and work on daily. He is in the next wave of jazz guitarists after the Methenys, Holdsworths and McLaughlins. They all built upon people like Joe Pass, Barney Kessel and Tal Farlow. They stood on the shoulders of giants and rose to the occasion, taking the instrument to astronomical places. Where does it go from there?

Also – I'm sorry if you're reading this and you're not a guitar player. I am, so I'm using the people I look up to as an example. Just replace the names with the new and old greats on your own instrument.

But back to the question at hand: where can we take the instrument now? Julian Lage is saying just as much as his predecessors, but he plays so much less. Each note is carefully tended to. His lines always have meaning. Just as much meaning as Metheny's lines... but Lage used less words to do it.

Why did I just say this to you? You're probably thinking "yeah yeah yeah... less is more... I get it". Less can be more. Less can also be less. That's not the point of the previous few paragraphs. I wrote that to say that your musical differentiator doesn't have to require ripping lines. An old professor of mine named Tyrone Chase told me a story that goes a little something like this.

"When I was young (probably like 18-21 range), I was invited to a party at George Benson's house. I started to jam, and I played one of his solos. That got his attention. He was listening to me play."

I jumped in with a question like "were you nervous while he was listening to you?" and his answer was one of the wisest sets of words that I have ever heard.

He said, "Nah man... I realized that everything I would play, he's heard before. I got all my vocabulary from him. Nothing I play is gonna impress him so I might as well just play".

This answer changed my life. It was 2 seconds of my professor's time, but it completely changed my approach to my instrumental creativity. I study Pat Metheny (if you couldn't tell by me constantly bringing him up). If he listened to me play, he wouldn't see any originality. He would see a cheap knock off of himself. And if that is the case, then who am I trying to impress? That was the moment when I was hit with the crisis of *How do I develop my own voice when I've been learning the languages of other poets?* This is what led me to understand the importance of compositional phrasing and melodic development.

YOUR VOICE IS JUST YOUR METHOD OF IMPROVISATIONAL COMPOSITION!

That is what your voice is and that is how your voice is different than everyone else's. Everyone composes different. Bebop lines are a dime a dozen. A beautiful melody, however, is unique to you and only you.