

# Lennie Tristano's teaching method, followed with a guitar

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### Introduction

To be honest, before I came to the Conservatory I haven't heard anything about Lennie Tristano, his music and his way of teaching. In the third year, Hans Mantel, my jazz-history teacher started a lesson with playing the recording of Warne Marsh – Marshmellows. He didn't say anything before that, therefore I had no idea to who and what were we going to listen to.

I clearly remember what happened in my head at that moment. The song started with an intro of 8 bars of drums with brushes, very up-tempo, very much straight ahead. Then the melody started with two saxophones, and it totally blew me away. I haven't experienced anything like that before, so free. The flawless melody, going everywhere up and down, but somehow with a great structure totally took all of my attention. After a few bars, it was clear that the chords are from Cherokee.

After the song finished, Hans explained a little about it. He explained that Warne Marsh wrote the song. Warne played the tenor saxophone, Lee Konitz the alto. They were both students of Lennie Tristano and they played and practiced a lot together. The song is a result of the teaching method of Lennie Tristano. That was the first time I heard Lennie's name and music. Since Hans introduced Lennie Tristano, he put on the song: Line up, by Lennie. There is a rhythm section (drums and bass) and piano. The whole song is a linear improvisation over „All of me“. This is how I met this music.

The effortless and easy feel behind the songs had a very big effect on me. I got very much interested in the style and I started to listen to it a lot. I was feeling a lot of knowledge and very hard work behind the music, and that attracted me even more. In the beginning of the fourth year I decided to get into this music myself and start to study music following the method of Tristano, from the beginning.

I started reading some books (for me the most complex is the book of Eummi Shim: Lennie Tristano – his life in music, I based my thesis on that book, because it has a very clear structure about his teaching) and interviews with his students. There are also some nice documentaries on YouTube on this subject.

*(For example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pvk0U3FTWzQ>;  
Lennie Tristano - Manhattan Studio 1 & 2 (doc.) [1983].)*

Tristano was always very honest about music, therefore I want to say, that I started studying his music 3 months ago. Some of his students were studying with him for more than 10 years (Sal Mosca 14 years for example), so I am very much in the beginning. Still the reason I chose this as the topic of my thesis is, because I see it as a plan for the coming years, how and what kind of material I want to practice. My goal is not to become a master of this style but I find it very important to study it deeply. Just for the knowledge of music, my instrument, songs, the spontaneous, improvised feeling.

In the end Lennie was aiming for the ability to play whatever you hear at the moment. All the exercises were serving this purpose, to achieve freedom in music.

### **In this thesis I write:**

- A very short biography of Tristano, only the most relevant happenings that had a big impact on his teaching and playing.
- I mainly focus on his teaching method, how he guided his students and a little bit about his behavior towards his students.
- Since I am a guitar player, I also explain how I would play certain exercises on the guitar.
- I introduce Lee Konitz's „10 step method“ how to improvise on a tune, using the melody as the source of ideas, since it's very much connected to this topic. I personally believe that it can definitely help you to achieve the final goal of Lennie, to be able to play what you hear at that moment.

## **Biography**

Leonard Joseph Tristano was born in Chicago on March 19, 1919. According to his reminiscence; he was already playing at the age of two or three. Barry Ulanov reported: „Since his fourth year, he'd been able to sit down at the piano and work out simple tunes“.<sup>1</sup>

He was born with weak eyesight and by the age of 9 as a result of the Spanish flu he was completely blind.

Lennie attended to a class for handicapped children in Chicago. How he remembered: „The place does one of two things to a student – either it makes an idiot out of him, or a person. I was lucky enough to fall into the second group.“<sup>2</sup> Tristano was studying piano, clarinet, saxophone and cello, leading his own band, engaging in team sports.

Between 1934 and June 1938 his coursework consisted of: English, algebra, Latin, science, geometry, ancient history, U.S. history and civilization, biology and gym lessons. He followed piano, cello and orchestra during these four years also. (He also tuned pianos in school).

Bill Boaz, a fellow student of him remembered that they were listening together to jazz, for example Louise Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, Earl Hines, and Lester Young.

From 1938 till 1943 he was a student of the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago. In June 1941 he graduated with a bachelor's degree of music in performance. He stayed for another two years to take graduate courses.

His teacher from Illinois School for the Blind warned the school „to pay particular attention to this boy, because he's going to do everything faster than you're used to.“<sup>3</sup>

Tristano mostly received A-s and B-s. He took various classes in music: piano, counterpoint, keyboard harmony and ear training. Also pedagogy, analysis and form, harmony review, music history, composition, piano normal, and orchestration.

He studied Bach, Beethoven, Weber, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt, Debussy, and Chopin.

He also studied English composition, introduction to psychology, educational psychology, aesthetics and criticism, principles and methods for instructive education, social psychology, secondary education and logic.

Tristano found the conservatory really easy, he remarked: „You know, they were giving me exercises on theory and harmony that were supposed to take a week to finish and I was knocking them out in half an hour.“<sup>4</sup>

Lennie moved to New York City in 1946.

## Influences

I collected Tristano's main influences according to him. That's true that Rodolfo Neves wrote it in his thesis already, but I find this an essential part of Tristano's musical development, including teaching material.

Tristano was „more influenced by horn players“<sup>5</sup>, especially Charlie Parker and Lester Young. Among trumpetists Roy Eldridge and Fats Navarro.

Among piano players Earl Hines, Bud Powell, Teddy Wilson and Art Tatum.

Others said also Billy Holiday and Frank Sinatra. Later he added Freddie Hubbard and Diana Ross to his list.

The reason why Lester Young and Charlie Parker were the two biggest influences on Tristano's development, because he considered them as true originals.

### **Horn Players:**

**„Lester Young** was one of Tristano's favorite. He „was a great genius.“<sup>6</sup>

Tristano distinguished between feeling and emotion:

„For my purposes emotion is a specific thing: happiness, sadness, etc. When I listen to the Old Count Basie Band with Pres, it is impossible to extract the particular emotion, but in a feeling level it is deep and profoundly intense. Feeling is practically basic to jazz“.<sup>7</sup>

For him Lester was a complete musical original and his music had the perfect balance between feeling and the structural logic of his lines.

The cooler sound of Lester (in comparison to his contemporaries), the kind of vibrato at the end of the lines, articulation, the legato feel for the musical line, and the rhythmical concept were essential in his style, serving as basis for the so called "Tristano School".

He considered Lester's solos prime examples of the linear approach to improvisation taken a step further with Parker.<sup>7</sup>

### **Charlie Parker:**

Tristano considered Parker as a true original. He first met Parker in 1947 and felt strong empathy with him. Parker also had a caring personality, as Lennie remembered: „Bird was sitting on the side listening. So he very casually walked up to the piano.... He told me how much he enjoyed my music and while he's doing that, he kind of puts his arm around me, and we're walking off the stand together. So he's doing both things. He's telling me how much he enjoyed my music, but he's making sure I'm not gonna break my neck, either.“<sup>8</sup> This was the first time they met.

Parker's free feel in his music, playing over the bar lines with strong bebop lines, strong rhythm, and bebop-phrasing made him one of the most important „teaching material“ for Tristano's method.

“Number one, Bird was a musical genius. Whether he had been born in China or Czechoslovakia or Russia or the United States, whether he had been white, black, whatever colour, he would have been a great musical genius.... In the second place, the intelligence, the brilliance that you could sense from Bird, you can hear it in the way he puts his material together.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Roy Eldridge:**

As Tristano said: my first electrifying musical experience..... Eldridge profoundly influenced my musical development.“<sup>10</sup>

Roy was a leading trumpet player in the forties. He used advanced harmonic substitutions, including triton substitutions.

### **Fats Navarro:**

A pioneer of bebop and jazz improvisation in the forties.

## **Guitarists:**

**Charlie Christian:** „the most swinging player ever“<sup>11</sup>. He had a very strong feeling to syncopation. Tristano was also amazed by the coherence of his solos: „it's perfect, one chorus and it's done“.<sup>12</sup>

## **Pianists:**

**Art Tatum** was a determinative figure in the history of jazz-piano. Tristano studied his style very deeply in the forties: „As a pianist in 1944, I had reached the point where I could rifle off anything of Tatum's – and with scandalous efficiency.“<sup>13</sup>

Sal Mosca said: „Sammy Demaro, a pianist, heard him in Chicago. He was walking along the street, and he heard Art Tatum playing and ran back downstairs to hear him, and it was Lennie.“<sup>14</sup>

That's a clear feedback how much Tatum influenced Tristano's development. He could play and sound almost identical as Art Tatum. Then as his wife, Judy said, when they first met, Lennie was quitting playing like Art Tatum.

Lennie gained very precise technique and fingering, and also an advanced level of harmonic knowledge, through digging deeply into Art Tatum.

**Bud Powell:** Judy Tristano remembered that Lennie was very critical with all musicians but he also expressed his appreciation towards some other musicians. Bud was Lennie's absolute contemporary favorite.

„The way Bud played the piano was never done before.... The way Bud articulates notes is absolutely completely personal. Every note sounds the way he wanted it to sound.... Bud gives every note his complete individual attention.“<sup>15</sup>

„I played opposite to Bud a lot. It began to get into my own feeling and my own approach to the keyboard, which is to say that you not only transmit what you hear but what you feel on the most profound level, which means your fingers have to reproduce not only sounds but feelings.“<sup>16</sup>

### Lennie Tristano as a teacher

Lennie was often cited as one of the first to teach jazz improvisation. For Lennie, teaching took a very important role in his life. There are multiple reasons, why: it was a moral duty for Lennie to teach; in 1977 he described himself as more of a teacher than an artist.<sup>17</sup>

In 1969 he expressed himself this way: „It's beautiful to assist people in developing the ability to create.“<sup>18</sup>

Lennie made his living by teaching, because he didn't want the music industry to influence his own way of playing and music.

Teaching became so important for Lennie that he performed less and less. He had reached a point where he couldn't handle any more students, so he had to keep a waiting list. He had four-five hundred a year, but he never revealed the number of his students, because he was afraid of having to pay income tax.

## The Concept

In the beginning Tristano didn't know how to teach, he said: „students who wanted to learn taught me how to teach.“<sup>19</sup>

The jazz musician's function is to feel. He stated: „You have to be influenced by all great musicians, no matter what instrument they play, because the essence of jazz is feeling, it's not really the notes, it's the feeling behind.“<sup>20</sup>

The major goal was to be able to play immediately what you were hearing. This requires gaining full control of the instrument. Therefore all the technical issues couldn't hold the musician back from the musical idea they wanted to play at the particular moment. In order to develop the understanding for the so-called „feel“ he was talking about, the students had to sing improvised solos, with the records. I will explain the reason of it later.

Victor Lesser said that: „Lennie's thing had a lot to do with playing very intuitively and basically just developing your ears to the point where you could hear a lot of great lines in your head and developing your chops to the point where whatever music was in your head would just flow out of your instrument.“<sup>21</sup>

Tristano endeavored to teach all the different elements of music in one package, and this remained as a main idea behind his teaching concept. In 1962 he said: „I'm not interested in teaching parts, only the whole. The whole is greater than the parts.... Bird was certainly greater than all his licks. That's why the imitators are not great. They're only doing the parts.“<sup>22</sup> „Nowadays musicians are interested in chops, technique, and vocabulary. But I don't teach that way. Now I have short-lived students... They are short-lived because they want particular things. They don't want the whole.... I teach from the conceptual point of view – according to the individual, of course.“<sup>23</sup>

The major elements of his teaching were: ear training, scales, rhythm, singing improvised solos with records, and keyboard harmony. The students worked on many exercises at the same time, which helped them gaining a full control of parameters involved in improvisation through and organic development, and most of the exercises had to be done by all the students, regardless what their instrument was.

Lennie emphasized the importance of discipline, consistency, and concentration. The basic studies were very similar to classical music. Warne Marsh remembered: „The student teaches himself, that's the point, the teacher is the guide. So the classic studies in music, the rudiments of harmony, of meter and of rhythm can be taught pretty much as they are in classical music.... And I feel that I've had one of the best educations available through Lennie – and essentially all I do is turn around at pass that on to my students.“<sup>24</sup>

Lennie was a demanding teacher. He required that the students learn the material completely before they would move on. Some described him as a task maker who insisted on perfection. Sal Mosca recalled: „if he gave you some scales to work on – like the major scales – he wouldn't do anything until you learned them. Or if he gave you some chords to work on... he would hear them in all keys and he wouldn't move until you played them. He was thorough but not to the point where he was a strict disciplinarian... Yet he was there as an integral part of it.“<sup>25</sup>



There was a moralistic element in Tristano's teaching. Many students thought that he embodied the principles of his teaching through his devotion to his music. As an example, especially from the later period of his teaching career he discouraged students from becoming working musicians. „There's just isn't much work“. <sup>26</sup> „if you really want to do it in a deep way, you... make your money doing something else.“<sup>27</sup>

### Nature of the lesson

On the first lesson Lennie explained his student his approach to teaching and studying with him requires a lot of work and preparation. Lennie Azzarello said that after his talk with Tristano, jazz became something that he could touch, a demystifying experience.

The lessons were quite short, fifteen, twenty minutes.

Lennie was really strict sometimes, for example if the student made a mistake, he sent the student home to practice more, because the exercise was not fully prepared.

Tristano presented his teaching towards Jon Easton, a piano student, that they are gonna work on several elements at the same time:

- **Ear training:** learning to hear and identify everything from an interval through the triads, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th chords in all the open and closed inversions.

- **Keyboard harmony:** being able to play all the above in every major and minor key.

- **Harmony:** being able to put all this material together, so it makes musical logical sense.

- **Singing with records:** learning to sing with the solos of all the great jazz improvisers. This develops ability to improvise because knowing all the great improvisers helps you develop your own imagination.

- **Rhythm:** learning to feel and understand all the subdivisions plus 2 against 3, 3 against 4, 4 against 5, etc.

- **Technique:** we use the classical technique plus the technique, which lends itself to improvising (all those fingerings).

First approach to improvising is developing a melodic line in the right hand with a chord accompaniment in the left hand.

- **Beginning:** present all aspects of music at the same time so that they are integrated together, as opposed to the conservatory where it's all scattered. The combination of all aspects will make it possible to improvise them spontaneously.

- **Learning standards:** in order to get into improvising you have to learn tunes.“<sup>28</sup>

- **Composing lines:** on different standards, using the techniques of ear-training, harmony, keyboard-harmony. Later these lines became the melodies of certain tunes.

## The Elements

The basic information was the same for all the students, but he still made the lesson more specific to the particular instrument. For example the fingerings and voicings for piano players, breathing, fingerings and tonguing for saxophone players, independence for drummers, etc. Since I am a guitarist, I am going to give some remarks to the exercises I mention later, about the way I practice his material.

### Ear training:

At first, students were asked to identify the intervals that Tristano played on the piano, and then they progressed to the triads, seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords of all qualities and in all inversions. Some had to sing the intervals. These chords formed the basis of keyboard harmony exercises.<sup>29</sup>

### Scales:

Tristano's teaching was largely based on diatonicism, in which learning the scales laid the foundation. Bill Russo, recalling that Tristano was one of the first to illustrate the relationship between chords and scales.

Later Lennie dropped the modes. According to Liz Gorrill he didn't find it necessary after a while. Tristano concentrated on three diatonic scales, major harmonic minor and melodic minor.

These scales provided the basic material for the other exercises, including keyboard harmony, melodic fragments, and polyrhythm. The scales all the endless exercises had to be known in all twelve keys.

Howard Becker described his enormous efforts put in different ways of practicing scales: „I played the scales in two hands... in octaves, in thirds, in sixths, in tenths, and then played them... in groups of two, like da-da, da-da, da-da, or in three, da-da-da... or in four, five, six, seven and in all twelve keys, major and minor. You can imagine it took forever.... I made the neighbors completely crazy. ... Well, you can imagine listening to what, six hours of scales.“<sup>30</sup>

Grouping of notes covered playing consecutive scale pitches in groups of two to seven notes. The purpose of these exercises is to increase speed and articulation. The book of Shim: Lennie Tristano – his life in music, says that on page 130, that the group exercises were especially important for saxophone students in coordinating breathing, tonguing, and fingering.<sup>31</sup>

I don't necessary agree with this statement, because in my opinion, it's also an essential part of studying any instrument. For guitarists, synchronizing the left and right hand, the direction of the picking, position, fingerings, the articulation, vibratos, or more in general, for the process of creating a good and fluent sound, these exercises are indispensable. But as Ted Brown, a saxophone student of Lennie described the exercises: „Instead of playing up and down the whole scale, just play groups of two notes at a time... and know which two notes you're going to play next and get your finger ready, get the breath and everything ready, and then just pop those two.“

Ted added: „ When you're going to hit 'em, you hit 'em, and just nail 'em, and for

doing that, those small groups really helped a lot. And had me go in every key from the very bottom up to the top of the horn."<sup>32</sup>

Jimmy Halperin also emphasized the importance of hearing the notes before you play them. „You'll be doing groups of two, so you play the next two note of the scale as fast as you can. And then you'll pause and you'll hear the next two notes in your head, and then you play them.“ Significantly, Tristano also stressed playing scales very slowly and with feeling. According to Easton: „The main thing he was looking for, was to hear how deeply you were getting all your feelings into each note of the scale, even when playing a simple scale, he was listening for how much of your feeling you could get into it. ‚How into‘ that was the phrase he used: ‚How into it you were.“<sup>33</sup>

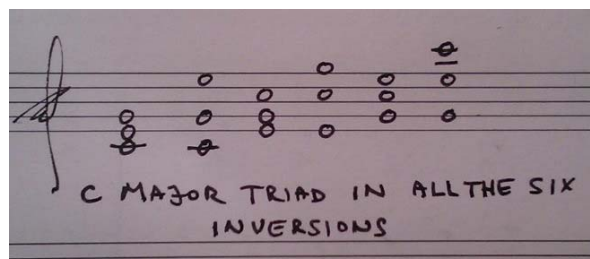
On the guitar I play all the scales from the E string, starting with the first, second and fourth fingers. Then from the A string, first, second and fourth fingers. With these fingerings you cover the whole neck. I definitely use alternate picking, so always down and up, because the individual notes are just as important as the song or lick, And in order to have all the separate notes on the same level of articulation, volume, sound, I need to use alternate picking. I tried also the so-called „sweep picking“, for 3-4 years, I used it, but I realized that it didn't work for me. I gained some speed, but the individual articulation of the notes was not clear anymore. As a whole it sounded great, very fusion sound, but if I need to describe it, then there were some strong notes (especially when picking downwards) and there were some filling notes. That's why it's not a suitable technique in my opinion for Tristano's style.

If your hands are not well synchronized, then the lines are gonna become sloppy. You need to start playing these exercises at a very slow tempo (50 bpm) and before every note you have to know, how you're gonna make the next note sound. So you prepare your right hand with the right direction of the picking and the left hand, proper fingers.

The specific keys are not really important on the guitar, since the neck and the fret board gives a very symmetrical system. That's true that some keys sound great on the guitar, because of the open strings, but I would call that an extra feature. In general, transposing is not difficult on the guitar.

#### Keyboard harmony:

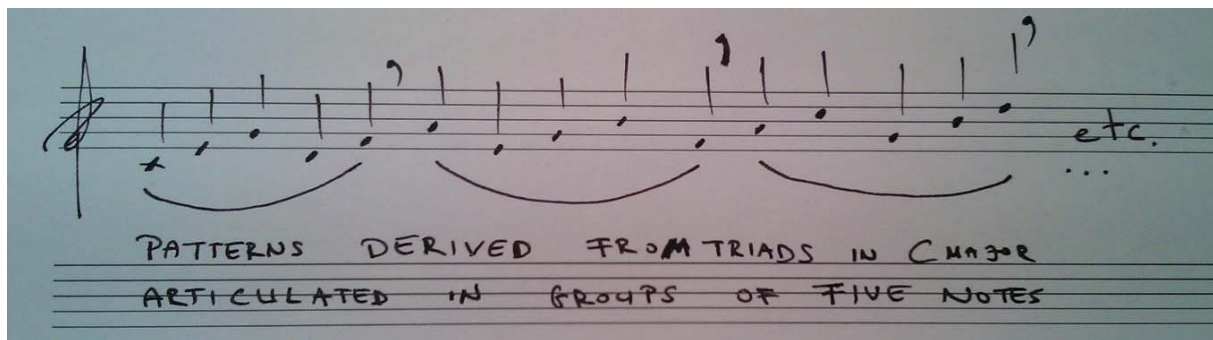
Students had to play the chords diatonically built on each degree of the scale. Triads, seventh, ninth, eleventh, thirteenth chords in all closed and open inversions. A triad can be played in six inversions: 1-3-5, 1-5-3, 3-1-5, 3-5-1, 5-1-3, 5-3-1. This you had to develop till thirteenth chords, built on the degrees of all three scales.



The harmonic patterns were also combined with some rhythmic exercises, group exercises. This helps you develop your rhythmic imagination.

Just a simple example:

| C E G D F | A E G B F | A C G B D | A C E B D | F C . . . . and then group it in 4/4 .



Saxophone students used these exercises to practice long notes, to work on the production of the tone and developing control over the full range of the instrument. Jimmy Halperin commented that it's very important to hear the next note first in your head, and then play it. „You play the first lowest note... really lay into it, really lots of gusto, and hold it.... And then I would hit the next note of the chord, like the third... and hold that as long as I can. And each time before I hit the note, I have to hear it in my head. And so I would do all... chords like that.“ Halperin stressed the strenuous nature of the exercise: „ When I was doing the elevenths, it would take me a freaking hour to do... all seven chords in the key.... So you start on the root or whatever note is the lowest... then you'll go up through the natural range of the instrument.... Then you go down to the lowest note... You get the whole instrument under your fingers.“ <sup>34</sup>

On the guitar, I think this is a very useful exercise. The guitar is not an easy instrument to visualize, because of the tuning of it. It's tuned in fourths, but there is a major third that breaks the whole symmetry. ( E-A-D-G-B-E ) We have two possibilities to play exactly the same note. (For example: we have a C on the A string, third fret, but we can play the exactly the same C on the E string in the eighth fret. The tone is gonna be a little different, but it's the same frequency.) Therefore with an exercise like this, you can visualize and cover the possibilities, but it of course will take a huge amount of time.

Here a lot of „jumps“ (change of position) are included. If I am moving up the exercise, I always try to jump with my first finger, because then the rest of my fingers can be immediately in position. When I am playing down the exercise, I always try to jump with my fourth finger, because then the other three fingers are gonna be in position. At least this works for me.

On the guitar we cannot increase the volume of the note after the so-called „attack“. So after we picked the note, it's not possible to make it louder. Therefore it's very difficult to have a nice sustain of a note. It only depends on our fingers. You have to be in total control, to avoid unnecessary „buzzes“ and to avoid some notes of stopping earlier. That's why I think this exercise is extremely useful, because we have to visualize the neck and we can work on creating, forming a warm, long sustained note. Of course we have to start at a very slow tempo to be hundred percent conscious about the guitar neck.

## Harmony:

In the early period of Tristano's teaching it was an essential part to discuss and explore harmonies. It consisted of extension, chromatic alteration, substitution and polytonality.

By extending chords, he meant adding all the coloring notes to major chords, eleventh to dominant seventh chords. Depending on the context you had to chromatically alter the coloring notes.

Substituting has two parts, substituting and keeping the function of the chord, or using a chord in a different function which bypasses the point of resolution, creating a „superimposed form“<sup>35</sup>

The triton substitution is used a lot since the bebop period. It's the following: II min7 – bII 7 – I.

„He'd show you that and explain what was going on, what each note was, and I was expected to know the same progressions in every key.“<sup>36</sup>

Tristano also used triton substitutions to add secondary dominant seventh chords. How Russo said: „In a piece like „Just you just me“ with Eb – C7 – Fm7 – Bb7, I – VI7 - II7 – V7, he showed me how each of those chords could be preceded by a dominant seventh a half step above... Eb for two beats, Db7 for two beats, Cb7 for two beats... Gb7 for two beats, F minor for two beats, Cb7 for two beats and then Bb7“. This means that we approach every chord with a triton substitution. (Dominant seventh chords half step up). 4/4 Eb Db7 | C7 Gb7 | Fm7 Cb7 | Bb7 |. According to Russo, Lennie was one of the first to teach this material.

*Polytonality:* a great example of polytonality is Marshmellows, the melody composed by Warne Marsh over the changes of Cherokee. „Tonality on top of tonalities.“ „It is... one that we worked on for lessons, as a means of applying the theory that we were learning.... The basic ones [in polytonality] are expanded tonic chords moving upwards in fifths. So, C Major plus G Major seven, plus D Major seven, gives you some notes that are quite different in the second octave.“<sup>37</sup>

It would give C, E, G, B, D, F#, A, and C#. „Hindemith was doing it fifty years ago in classical music.“ Warne Marsh explained more: „A seventh chord has got a major and a minor triad inside of it.... They can both be used as tonal centers. In a ninth chord there are two seventh chords and then the augmented 11th major sound which is just looking at the notes C Major plus G major seventh. They overlap... and there is the theory right there, the polytonal use of two major seventh chords.“ „You are in two keys.... So the freedom it allows is that the horn player can play not only on the basic chord, but he can play on top of it. He can play another tonality.“<sup>38</sup>

Tristano also expressed his aversion to „plain“ chords. He meant chords without alterations or extension. Russo gave an explanation: „He thought you shouldn't use triads, you should dress up chords as much as you could, and especially dominant seventh type chords.... To be using major chords or minor chords with added sixths or ninths and then to use plain dominant sevenths, which were supposed to be the propulsive chord, was ridiculous because it... was not as strong as the chords of resolution. That's a good point.“<sup>39</sup>

Lennie in his later period of teaching didn't discuss altered harmonies or substitutions, maybe because he wanted students first to gain versatility in diatonic scales, and then explore by themselves without preconceptions. Victor Lesser studied the polytonal substitutions from Warne Marsh, and later he used the material on the lesson

with Lennie: „One week in my lesson with Lennie I played a solo... [in] this different way of using these new chords. And he picked up on it right away. He said to me: ‚Well, it sounds like you’re using your brain‘, at that time I was amazed how did he know that I was thinking this different way while I was playing.“<sup>40</sup>

### Singing Improvised Solos:

This was one of the most important elements in Tristano’s teaching method. These solos contained the language for jazz, the phrasing, the rhythmic elements, timing, and the most important, the feel, behind the notes. It also requires a very high level of concentration, and a lot of ear training. This way the students could develop their musical imagination. Warne Marsh explained the importance of singing and its close relationship with playing: „The more I improvise, the closer it comes to singing. I try to play as if I were singing. Lennie said he could sing every note he had ever played.“<sup>41</sup>

Warne Marsh had to be able to sing all the exercises before he could play them on the instrument. Tristano said to him: „A musician who can’t use his voice!‘ Lennie used to say. ‚How can that be?‘“<sup>42</sup>

Richie Beirach, who was in his high-school years at that time, said that Tristano harshly criticized him and advised him to sing the solos in order to build a language and the basic concepts in the tradition of jazz improvisation: „I couldn’t really play jazz. I was playing all these scales and funny rhythms.... The first lesson... was twenty minutes.... I tried to play something. He stopped me after like one minute. He said: ‚you’re not playing jazz, your time is terrible, you’re not playing anything resembling lines. You have no idea of the vocabulary.‘ He said: ‚You have good energy.‘ [...] He said: ‚you have to learn these solos. You have to sing the Billie Holiday solo, and the Frank Sinatra solo, and the Lester Young solo.‘ And I didn’t want to sing solos. He wouldn’t even let me get near the piano.“<sup>43</sup>

Of course, you couldn’t use written music for studying the solos, that’s why it took a high level of concentration and listening to the solos over and over.

„The intangibles of feeling, which have a high degree of importance in re-creating any jazz performance, unfortunately cannot be written into music. Thus a perfectly correct performance as far as duplication of the notes is concerned, might have little emotional meaning in terms of the original conception of the jazz musician-writer.“<sup>44</sup>

In the early period of Lennie’s teaching, he was very strict with students, that they could sing every note perfectly. That of course took more time, to be so precise. Later students were allowed to go faster. Steve Silverman remembered: „He emphasized with me that... the ideal was to get to the point where you could hear nothing but the rhythm section. So if I had to spend seven or eight months on a chorus, he would pick up at any given lesson that I was off on one note or one piece of phrasing, and I would just stay with that until I had it absolutely perfect.“<sup>45</sup>

This learning process entailed great devotion and immersion, and it gave a deep experience to many students. „As Victor Lesser said: ‚I was doing a lot of Warne Marsh solos.... I just remember being so deep into it.... For a couple of years I worked as a maintenance man at this big office building. I was working midnight to eight, I just remember doing the job and just spending those eight hours living a Warne Marsh solo.“<sup>46</sup>



A lot of students also had to slow the recording down, to half of the tempo. In those days you had a turntable or a cassette tape player, with adjustable speed, so you could reduce the tempo to half time. Therefore also the sound got an octave lower. Listening to the records at half speed really helped the students to hear what was going on in the solo. You could in a way get into the soloist's head, and see how the solo was building up, and developing. Lennie Azzarelli's experience: „The 16 [i.e., half speed] was like... a microscopic light shining on the object. It just opened. I was able to hear what was going on... as to how they're approaching the harmonies.... [Tristano] also said, ‚Don't bring it up to 33 [normal speed] until you really feel comfortable.' ... I believe a lot of times he would say when to go to 33.“<sup>47</sup> Lerry Meyer reported a very similar experience about slowing down the solos: „He had me sing the Bird solos at half speed and it maintained the full effect of the melodic continuity of the line... Charlie Parker, shining like a diamond the whole way at 16.... Every note, every phrase, every beat is still there, because that's how articulate it is.“<sup>48</sup>

Tristano had selected a couple of great jazz musicians for singing and studying their solos. Some are also the musicians that inspired him. The main focus was on Lester Young and Charlie Parker. As I wrote it before, he considered them as true originals. Then some other students add Charlie Christian, Billie Holiday, Roy Eldridge, Bud Powell, Fats Navarro, Lee Konitz, Warne Marsh, and Frank Sinatra.<sup>49</sup>

Tristano chose some particular period of the mentioned people's career. As an example, he wanted students to study Lester's earlier records, when he played with Billie Holiday, Count Basie. Lennie let the students choose the solos they wanted to study, but of course he gave his suggestions, and the first solo was his choice.

During Tristano's early period, he worked a lot with Charlie Parker's solos. Of course in the earlier days it was more difficult to study solos, those people didn't have any portable music players, loop stations, slow-down programs, so the process took much longer normally. For me, if I realize that the whole solo is too long to memorize it in "one", I cut it into parts. I loop let's say 1 or 2 choruses (depending on the context of the lines and phrases) and I don't need to touch any buttons again until I have those choruses in my head and I can sing them. My computer plays it over and over. I find it really handy. But of course on the other hand people could say that I don't need to focus that much this way. Well, there is a great chance that most people get too comfortable, and they don't put that much effort in paying attention to the solo, because they know that in a couple of seconds it plays again. But I realized that focus and concentration is really one of the most important elements of studying music (or apparently whatever we do, we have to do it with all of our focus... it doesn't only apply to music). Therefore I use the modern technology to make my study faster but not more comfortable. So when I am studying to sing a solo, I am concentrating with all my energy on the music, till the point I can sing the chosen part. And when I can do that, I might take ten-fifteen minutes break and then get into the next one or two choruses. And of course if I know that I have one week to study a solo, then I first listen very carefully to the solo, so I have a general picture of it. I know where the difficult parts are gonna come, where are the more melodic parts that are easier for me to memorize. Then I have a general idea of the solo as a whole. So now I can make a schedule how I am going to study to sing the solo. For example I study every day a chorus... Anyway, my point is that it takes some time, especially when you want to go really deep into the solo. How Sal Mosca said, that he didn't consider himself a quick learner, it took him one and a half year to be able to sing his first solo, which was from Charlie Parker, 'Scrapple from the Apple'. Then another six

months to be able to play it on the piano.<sup>50</sup> Easton said that Lennie also focused a lot on Lester Young, whom he considered a „complete musical original“. Cappello said that Lennie also recommended to listen to Lester's alternate takes, on the same tunes. „He said: ‚listen to Pres. Listen to how each way he does it differently. You'll find some elements that he liked, but he never relied on them.‘.... I think he really wanted to stress Pres more than anything.... So I was just like mopping up all these different alternate takes and ... pretty much every week I would go in with a new solo and just sing it.“<sup>51</sup> Lennie expressed to Larry Meyer his admiration of coherence in Lester Young's and Charlie Christian's solos: „He would say, ‚Listen to Pres. He takes a perfect chorus. It's one chorus and it's done. He said it all. Charlie Christian, one chorus and it's done. Let me see you do that.‘“<sup>52</sup> Drummers also needed to sing solos. Chattin recalled that he also had to sing Lester Young's solos, but he didn't need to know the particular tune or the chord changes. Why the case of Chattin is outstanding as a drummer, because he had been told that he was tone- deaf, and he thought that he cannot sing. Tristano helped him out of this matter: „One of the great things he [Lennie] did for me was saying, ‚You're not tone-deaf. You just don't know how to reproduce what you hear. Nobody's tone-deaf. There is no such thing. If you hear low and high, then you're not tone deaf. It's just a matter of learning how to mimic that sound in your own voice.‘ [...] I still have the tape... in my car and I still sing with Lester Young solo because of Lennie.“<sup>53</sup>

Learning a solo included three steps. First the students had to be able to learn the solo by ear. Then they had to sing it with the record on the lesson. The next step was to sing the solo without the record. And when the students could do these steps perfectly, then they could start to learn the solo on their instrument. According to Easton: „After singing with Lester Young solos... he would say, ‚Right now try to sing this without [the record], just sing it alone.‘ And then after you could do that to his satisfaction.... and only then did he think it was a good idea to try and play it on your instrument.“<sup>54</sup>

Lennie really wanted to avoid clichés. He knew that it's very easy to just follow your fingers, without being conscious about the notes. He really wanted to avoid playing only by motoric movements, just because you have it in your fingers. That is the reason why he didn't let students to play the solos earlier with their instrument, because he was afraid that the students will not be aware of the notes and the lines, only their fingers are going to reproduce the solo without thinking and hearing the notes. Lennie told Azzarello: „Once your fingers forgot those notes, you have no recollection of what it was about“ unless it is „really in your head.“ As Ted Brown was explaining: „He was more interested in just people getting the concept of the solo.... He talked about... not letting your fingers get into certain runs of things that you've practiced or picked up on records... in order to keep it as fresh and spontaneous as you can and not fall into clichés.“<sup>55</sup>

To some students to learn the solos on the instrument didn't take a lot of time, because according to Cappello: the very intensive process of learning to sing the solo enabled him to „pretty much just pick it up and play it for the first time on your instrument.“ I also have very similar experiences about this matter. A lot of times it happens that while you are singing the solo, some phrases become clear how to play them on the instrument. I get a sort of picture in my head how the phrase would look like on the neck of the guitar, and when you grab the instrument, it comes out right away. I believe that you can develop this ability to a very high level until you can visualize the weirdest, most unexpected melodies also on your instrument. In the end this was the goal of Lennie Tristano, to be able to play on your instrument whatever you hear at the moment.



To get the feel and the timing of the soloist, you really need to slow down the recording to half time and literally breath together with the soloist. For example it happened to me that I was studying Billie Holiday – When you're smiling. (The version where Lester plays a solo.) Billie Holiday has a very unpredictable timing. She sings very very free and over the bar lines, but somehow still very much in the tempo. There was a point in the second verse in the lyrics where I was constantly rushing. I played it over and over, I listened very carefully, I recorded myself and it still didn't work, I still couldn't catch exactly the right moment of starting the note together with Billie Holiday. But all of the sudden, when I slowed it down, I realized, that I breathe on totally different places then Billie. So I checked the places when she takes a breath, I copied that and my timing was exactly like Billie's. And then I was thinking about it a lot, how come that such a little nuance can change the entire timing of a phrase. I realized that since I am a guitar-player, I never experienced the problem of breathing in music, it's possible to play a continuous line over many choruses, because I don't need to stop to breathe. (This is a general problem of guitar-players.) Therefore I didn't pay attention to Billie's breathing because I was not aware of that. But at a slower tempo it became immediately clear, that breathing is part of music. You can't talk either for a long time, you have to stop every once in a while to take a breath. And that makes music alive. Since that moment I'm working on being conscious about breathing on my instrument. What also helps a lot when I study a saxophone solo, I feel like being a saxophonist. I try to imitate that with my playing. I am trying to use these elements, what Silverman studied from Lennie: „His emphasis was not only on opening up my ear, but getting me to breathe and to feel the way that the horn player was breathing and feeling, so that there was an absolute synonymity between myself and the horn player. And he also suggested that I stand when I was singing... so I could get the feeling if being a horn player, and to breathe like a horn player. [...] That had profound effects on me as a piano player, because... I felt like as much as a horn player as I was a piano player.“<sup>56</sup>

Singing the solos was a major breakthrough in Tristano's teaching career. These days it has become a very common practice in studying jazz, but for Tristano's lesson you couldn't use any notation of the solos. So you had to pick it up by ear. The intention behind was not to copy it, but to build it in our system and use the idea or the structure of it so you are able to reproduce something on your own that sounds in that style. You were developing the language basically. I can prove this thought with Joe Muranyi's reminiscence: „the most important pedagogical technique he had“: „When working with records it was reality.... We were not to use this as a part of trick and rattle it off on the horn or to copy, but to get an idea of the playing and what it's about.... Of course it seemed like an obvious thing, but to do it to that extent, to apply his intensity to it, to sing and play along the record was a great technique.“<sup>57</sup>

## Rhythm:

We can hear it in Lennie's music that rhythm has a very important role. The lines, going over the bar lines, all kinds of groupings, cross rhythms. Lennie was trying to teach the students to be able to feel two or more different time signatures simultaneously. He had different exercises to develop it. From the basics like one against two, one against three, one against four, one against five, one against six, one against seven. You had to be able to tap it with your hands and legs. (Later only hands.) Then of course he taught polyrhythm. „Polyrhythm is a term generally denoting different

rhythms performed simultaneously, as when superimposing phrases in odd meters, such as 5/4 or 7/8, over 4/4. It includes cross rhythm in which a different rhythmic organization is superimposed over the basic one, but both occupying the same duration, for example quarter-note triplets against two quarter notes in 4/4 meter.<sup>58</sup> With cross rhythm, the exercises in the beginning were a bit more difficult than the later period of Lennie's teaching. You had to be able to tap two different meters at the same time. For example: two against three, two against five, three against four, three against five, and four against five. You could divide it many ways between your limbs.<sup>59</sup> Mosca learned how to tap the rhythms first with two hands and then with two feet.<sup>60</sup> Then he had to use hands against the feet, like left hand and foot against the right hand and foot, or left hand and right foot against right hand and left foot. Later Tristano made these exercises simpler, students only needed to tap with their hands.

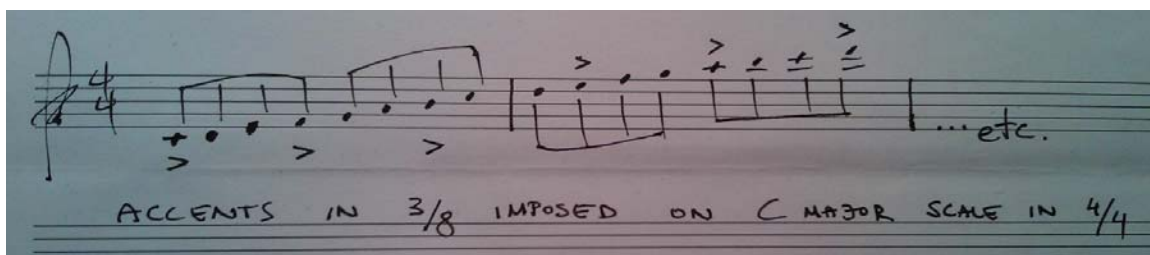
For piano students, these tapping exercises were a bit more complexed. Piano students had to combine the rhythms with the scales, in two hands. You could play the scales in contrary or parallel motion. There was a tool, that could help the students play the different cross rhythms, and that was the fingering. Let's say the exercise is playing two against three. We are playing the major scale. Two is in the right hand, and we are moving up the scale, three is in the left hand and we are moving down the scale. The fingering for the right hand is thumb and index finger. For the left hand is thumb, index finger and middle finger. Don Edmonds felt that the fingerings facilitated the learning process: „I was playing  $\frac{3}{4}$  time in the left hand and 4/4 in the right hand without even realizing it.“<sup>61</sup> These exercises really helped students to make their hands independent.



On the guitar this is a little bit trickier, but it's possible. Right now I couldn't really integrate this material into my playing, because at this state it's enough to try to play one great melody. Two would be awesome but it takes some time to develop that feature, that thinking, because that's not very common on the guitar in jazz. But the idea is already great to play two separate lines in a kind of cross rhythm that it arrives at the one (or somewhere else) at the same time! Just for the sake of curiosity, I tried it to get a picture what would it take to really get into it. First of all, I would only start with the right hand. I would divide the certain cross rhythm between my fingers, in all kind of possibilities. Let's say, just as an example. Two against three, I put the two in the thumb and the three in the other fingers, one by one, so thumb-index-, thumb-middle-, thumb-ring-, thumb-little-finger. Then I would change the thumb to the index finger, and do all the possibilities, following this system. Then I would add a simple finger exercise, like, G-string 5th position, ||: 1-2-3 :||, these are the threes, and D-string 5th position ||: 1-2 :||

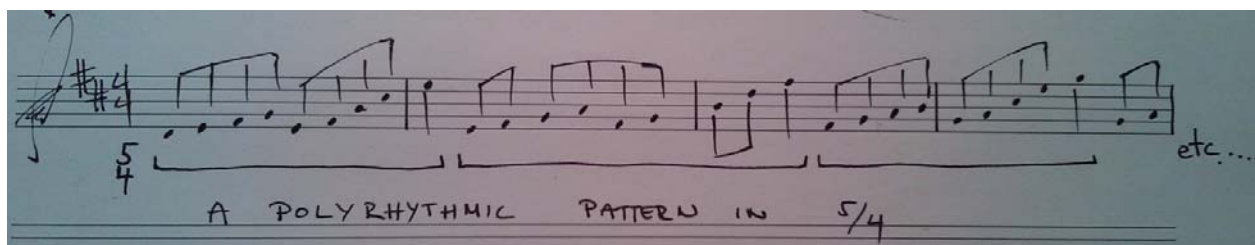
and these are twos. I start with the 1st finger. We know that the ones are always coming together. Then I would do the same with three against four, both in parallel and contrary motion. The next step would be to apply this to a scale, both in parallel and contrary motion. Then I most probably would compose some lines over a II-V-I chord progression and try to play them in a real situation, then hopefully I will have some material in my head where I can just make up my own spontaneous lines at the moment.

Back to Tristano, he created another type of polyrhythm, through inflection, so by accenting certain notes, you're gonna superimpose different metric patterns. As an example, if we put the accent on every third note of the scale, then we are creating 3/8 phrases over 4/4. You can really make these exercises complex and difficult by going step by step. Let's combine the accents with cross rhythm. So we are in 4/4. Let's use three against four. The threes are the scale, fours are the metronome, and we accent every 3th note of the scale. Then we can change, the metronome is going in the speed of the threes, and the scale is on the fours, and then accent every third note. For me that's a bit more difficult. The next step would be that we improve the exercise melody-wise. These exercises helped Ted Brown internalize rhythmic flexibility: "The whole point was to become so familiar with it that you don't have to think about it.... But in the beginning you had to work it out or write out it out sometimes."<sup>62</sup> Drummer had to focus on these exercises more than other instrumentalists.



#### Mixed meters:

That means that we are not only gonna use the scale, but we'll make certain smaller melodic fragments. These figures can go over the bar lines, so the phrase is in 5/4 and we play it over 4/4. These phrases had to be played through the scale, diatonically. If we play these phrases correctly then the phrase didn't coincide with the bar lines, but it arched above it, in a rather unpredictable order. (The one of the phrase and of the measure come together again after 20 bars.)



Students wrote these exercises out, to see the order they created against the background of 4/4. On one of the first lessons of Ted Brown with Lennie, he got the exercise to "take up and down all the scales through all the keys", and then asked him to figure out his own exercises. It took months for Ted Brown to go through all the major

and minor keys, “Sometimes even seeing how that little pattern could fit on a certain set of chord changes”<sup>63</sup>: I remember doing something on ‘I’ll remember April’ for a long stretch... a 7/8 figure.... He was showing me how to play it against a real tune, like a certain section of a tune. He said that might go good here, because... there’d be consonant and then maybe dissonant for a couple of notes, and coming back.” Ted Brown explained further: “I might just write out one or two or three phrases... to see how they would repeat, because they were usually odd-time figures like groups of threes or fives or sevens or combinations of threes and twos.... Mainly you just write it down to remember it, and then just have to work it out in all the keys without writing it down. He just wanted you to do it on the instrument and not try to read it”<sup>64</sup> Ted Brown noticed that Tristano had a very good ability to visualize all the asymmetric figures, and follow it mathematically, which notes are going to fall on the beat and which aren’t. “Just the fact that he was blind, he had to become organized just to survive and also on the keyboard he could visualize that. And he could also visualize the bar lines and where the notes would fall on what beat of the bar. [...] He was also very good mathematically. So he’d say, okay, if you play that 7/8 phrase four times, that’s going to be twenty-eight, eighth notes. So ... to make it come out like thirty-two eighth notes, which would be four bars.... You have to either complete that group of bars by leaving rests or know that the next phrase was going to start ahead of time into the next segment.”<sup>65</sup>

The polyrhythmic figures were very essential in Lennie’s playing. Also in the composed lines, composed melodies, and in the improvised solos we can hear a lot of superimposed meters over 4/4.

Warne Marsh said about avoiding constraints of bar lines, that is “to go around” them. “When I improvise, there is nothing visual in my head. In the back of my mind, I have a sketch of the song I’m playing, and I also hold on to its mood and feeling.... My mind works ahead a bar or two, although I don’t think in terms of bars. From the first, Tristano taught us to go around the bar lines and to impose other meters on the four-four time”<sup>66</sup>. Marsh said further: “To a certain extent the length of a phrase is controlled by instinctive knowledge. So when I begin a phrase I don’t have the least notion where it will end.... I want to structure everything in terms of polyphony and polyrhythms – the kind of counterpoint that we did with Lennie Tristano thirty years ago and that has been done all too rarely since.”<sup>67</sup>

### Melodic Fragments:

Later Tristano didn’t teach anymore the polyrhythmic exercises to the students, he started to focus on teaching melodic fragments. These were short melodic phrases moved diatonically and sequentially, in all twelve keys. So you could play one phrase chromatically through all the keys, or you could play one phrase and diatonically move through the certain scale through all the degrees. And then you can move it to all the keys.

This is a very complex exercise; you are working on a lot of details at the same time. You are gaining control over the whole instrument, because you move the melodic fragment chromatically and diatonically in all keys, which should cover the instrument... you are also working on the concept of developing a musical idea, by playing the idea on the different degrees. You can play the same idea in a different scale also. (For example the harmonic minor and the melodic minor, or the moll-dur scale.) So in the end you

have endless possibilities with creating new and new melodies and moving them through all the scales, degrees, and tonalities. Now, in this state of mind that I have, I just think it's impossible to do all of them. But I believe that by doing it a lot and creating always-new exercises, it will come out spontaneously while improvising, and we'll be able to bring the idea through the song and as far as possible. Meyer, a guitar student, explained that "it really expanded you in a very musical fashion": "As you work those phrases up and down the neck and in all the keys and in all the modes, it just really developed your ear and your knowledge and your playing ability. So then when you want to improvise perhaps if you're playing an idea, you would be able to take that idea and modulate it into another place on the neck or another key or another chord."<sup>68</sup>



#### Structure of the solo:

As I wrote it earlier in the short biography of Lennie, he had a big classical background and knowledge. Therefore Lennie's 'earlier' approach towards jazz improvisation was affected by classical music.

Lennie encouraged students to write out a chorus, that sounds like an improvisation. So what notes, lines they would've wanted to hear on stage, when they don't have the time to fix the wrong notes. This enhanced the awareness of the structure of the chorus of the song. "Lennie would ask me to write out an improvised solo, if you forgive the oxymoronic aspect of it, and I would write such a solo and I would play it for him, and he would say, 'Well, that's good but you can use more rests here and there. Well, you're getting to your climax or emotional peak too soon or too late,' and that was a very interesting process to composition and improvisation."<sup>69</sup>

For Tristano climax meant: "acquired through high notes, increase of volume, increase of rhythm increase of density."<sup>70</sup>

Ted Brown remembered, that Lennie told him: "Try to write something as though it was a chorus that you'd want to play if you could play the chorus"<sup>71</sup> Ted Brown thought about it as a way of "developing a concept of a good jazz solo": "He also tried to get the idea across that it's like actually telling a short story. Even though it's one thirty-two-bar tune, there should be a good beginning and a good middle section which is like the bridge, and then towards the last eight [measures] you would come to some sort of climax and then that would end somehow. So it was an overall melodic concept."<sup>72</sup>

Ted Brown also talked about the places in the chorus, where the solo should introduce a change. The middle or later part of the tune, especially the bridge is an important place to build up some tension, interest: "[Tristano] would say, this is a good place to make a change... a good place to open up the melodic line maybe to make it more vertical.... It might have been a fairly horizontal shape up to that point.... You might



try stretching out with the melodic line by taking more leaps up to the top of the horn and down to the bottom.... Just very general suggestions toward the shape of the line.”<sup>73</sup> Students had to play the written solo by heart and with this compositional approach towards jazz improvisation they were supposed to understand and create stronger coherent statements in the solos.<sup>74</sup>

I wrote above among the “elements” that students had to compose new melodies. Those written solos became a lot of times the new melodies of some songs. Ted Brown: “That’s usually how they happened.... I know I went through that and so did Lee and Warne, because... Lennie had the three of us doing that on a regular basis.... 99 percent of them ended up in the trash bin, but a few of them were good enough to try to work out as a group.”<sup>75</sup>

Writing out lines resulted a higher level of intensity in soloing of Lee Konitz. “To write an ideal solo and to play something similar was very difficult. But that was a goal to aspire to. Playing ‘All The Things You Are’ with the theme, the level might be here [gesturing a point] for the band to start. Playing a written theme, the level might start here [gesturing a higher point]. [...] By definition, to play all those notes, intensity goes up, so you have to start soloing at this level instead of down here. Very frequently we played the line and then the solo would start here [a lower point], so it would be a comedown.”<sup>76</sup> In general, about writing the solos down, the focus was on the structure. But later he also abandoned this exercise.

### Learning the Melody of the Tunes:

Tristano stressed a profound, deep knowledge of the melody of the standards. Regardless of the instrument of the student, everybody had to play the melody in a slow tempo with the metronome, without harmonic accompaniment. A lot of students realized that this process helped them to be more creative coming up with their own melodies, where the original melody became the source of the improvisation. Warne Marsh teaches his students following this method: “One of the first things I expect them [students] to be able to do is to present a melody in a convincing manner. The next step is learning to improvise on that melody, and it becomes necessary to get into the other notes –the harmony- but it all proceeds from the melody.”<sup>77</sup>

Easton was explaining that the harmonic and rhythmic elements of the melody convey the essence of the tune: “Play a melody. That meant learn a melody to a standard tune and just really get deep into it.... The deeper you get into the melody... the freer your improvisation becomes.... The idea is that the melody and the harmony, and the rhythm, it all becomes so much just a second-nature part of you that you don’t ever have to think about it.”<sup>78</sup>

Lennie didn’t let his students to improvise before they practiced through a very severe training of studying the melodies and combining them with other simple exercises. Woody Mann spent a whole year only studying the melodies at 60 bpm (quarter notes) he asked Lennie: “ ‘Lennie, when am I going to start improvising?’ He said, ‘Some day’, so he really kept putting it off.... [Later] he said, ‘Okay, now improvise’, I said, ‘How?’ ‘Just improvise.’ It wasn’t about connecting scales and modes... so I started improvising. It was great. I had played... and sung along, I knew Bird solos, I had ideas in my head.”<sup>79</sup>

Lennie gave the exercise to some students, to play the melody in different keys, in order to develop their ears and hearing. He said to Harvey Diamond: “Just take a melody,

just drop your hand, close your eyes, just play from there and let your ear guide you from interval to interval, [...] take every tune you know, just pick one key and play everything.”<sup>80</sup> The large focus on the melody proves that Tristano had a very linear conception of improvising. He always used the solos of Lester Young as prime examples to show the horizontal approach. If we are soloing only over the changes, that becomes very vertical and that can be very uninteresting for a ‘linear thinker.’

#### 10 step method by Lee Konitz:

Here is a perfect example how to use the original melody of the tune, a source of ideas for improvisation:

“The goal of having to unfold a completely new melody on the spot and appraise it as you go the closer you look at it, can be frightening! So I think that first and foremost you have to adhere to the song for a much, much longer period of time. You have to find out the meaning of embellishment before going on to try to create new melodies. I believe that the security of the song itself can relieve much of the anxiety of jumping into the unknown.

I suggest the kinds of compositional devices that are available: a trill, a passing tone, an appoggiatura that can bridge one melody note to another. The point is, you're still playing the melody, but you're doing something to it now. And there are many levels of this process before you get anywhere near creating new melody material.”<sup>81</sup>

ALTO KEY

ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE

(1ST GRADIENT) (10 GRADIENT 8 BAR SECTIONS)

(2nd Gr.)

(3rd)

(4th)

(5th)

(6th) (STILL USING MELODY TARGETS BUT DISPLACING FOR NEW MELODIES)

(7th) MORE NEW MELODIES

(8th) STILL A SUBTLE REFERENCE TO THE ORIGINAL SONG

(9th) TOTALLY NEW THEME

(10th) PURE AN ACT OF INSPIRATION

db



## Technique:

A few important words about technique: for Lennie, technique was one step between the instrument and his feelings, his mind.

For Lennie technique didn't only mean the finger exercises. It also involved concentration, awareness of the sound, timing, volume, intensity, and being 'practical' with the fingerings and not perfect according to the classical technique. I could prove the truth of this statement with Alan Broadbent's words: "What I remember Lennie talking about was that it's a different technique. Its ... the technique of concentration-exact placement of the note on the metronome, and intention of sound, of having the sound.... and each one with the same intensity... each one full and rich. [...] A classical musician might not normally put his thumb on a black note.... A jazz musician is hearing this phrase and he doesn't have the time to think about that. His thumb... is there, it's got to be used. So it's a technique of having your fingers available at all times. For the music."<sup>82</sup>

The whole aim behind technique was to "prepare you to play what you hear at the time you hear it."

Bud Powell more and more influenced also the technique of Lennie from the 1940s. As he said: "I played opposite Bud a lot. It began to get into my own feeling and my own approach to the keyboard, which is to say that you not only transmit what you hear but what you feel on the most profound level. Which means, your finger have to reproduce not only sounds but feelings."<sup>83</sup> Lennie's approach also changed: "[B]efore I heard Bud I could sock a few notes in there because I already made some records and I was into a lot of things. But Bud gave me an idea. I got it from just listening to him. You could make your fingers reproduce *exactly* what you felt if you really worked at it, which Bud did... by spending practically all his life at the keyboard."<sup>84</sup>

## Time and Metronome:

Lee Konitz remembered: "The metronome is a very unique tool. There is no way you're gonna get more equal subdivisions, and he [Tristano] was very intent on subdividing accurately, because of all those very rhythmic permutations."<sup>85</sup>

In Lennie's way of teaching metronome was very important, and especially to practice in the slowest possible tempos. He wanted students to be able to "handle" the songs in the right tempo according to their development. Then you could really get deep and thorough in the exercise or a tune, but that required an enormous level of concentration. Stan Fortuna gave a little explanation for the reason to practice slow: "You actually worked on getting slower and slower.... It took me a long time to get through a song like that playing quarter notes on the bass. But what that did though, boy, once I got through it, it opened up the world I never practiced playing fast. The next thing all of the sudden... was I could just play as fast as I wanted to play."<sup>86</sup>

## Visualization and Practicing Away from the Instrument:

The other important step between the instrument and the mind and feelings: visualizing. This means we are practicing away from the instrument. We either visualize

the instrument or the music. Ted Brown reminisced about Lennie: “He used to tell me that ... practicing the scales, especially very slowly ... after he does that for ten or fifteen minutes ... the whole keyboard would light up. That was, he could really grasp where the thing was and not have to stumble around. [...] He used to ... also do silent practicing himself on a keyboard that made no sounds, especially when he lived in Flushing in an apartment ... which means you really gotta know what notes you’re playing, because you can’t hear anything.”<sup>87</sup>

Students reported different ways of visualizing. Sal Mosca needed to see the keyboard of the piano or the score in his head. Anderson had to imagine the chords and the scales away from the piano, visualizing his fingers playing them. Among saxophone player it was also different; Victor Lesser had to visualize the saxophone keys, Ted Brown needed to practice silently on his instrument and also away from it, only in the mind. Brown said: “... So when it came to time to play it after doing that ... it’s like you’ve been practicing it for a year, like you really know it.”<sup>88</sup>

Mann remembered: “It wasn’t just about hearing notes. Then I realized with Lennie, after a while, it was about just playing. You could play slow, you could play out ... as long as it was honest.”<sup>89</sup>

#### Relaxation and Posture:

Lennie believed that any tension in the body would interfere with creative activity.<sup>89</sup> Lennie recommended some loosening, relaxing exercises just as making circular motion with the hips, pressing on the muscles, drop the shoulders, take deep breaths with the entire body.

#### Playing sessions:

Tristano was also hosting a session in his Manhattan studio, in the beginning of the 1950s. A singer, Sheila Jordan recalled: “having a place for his students to come and play and to try out their ideas, and maybe fall on their face ... and the he would pick you up. [...] it was fabulous, because there was no drinking there, there was no drugs .... And nobody talked except in between tunes ...”<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

As it happened to many students before, I also became more and more enthusiastic about the subject while I was working on it; and writing the thesis really widened the boarder of my thoughts of music. By getting closer to the last pages Lennie started to become my good friend. ☺

With all the exercises mentioned above, I experience it as a never-ending subject. It is definitely going to take some years to really get deep into this material. Not even mentioning how far Warne Marsh developed it. Again, I only write about the basic idea of this direction of music, after that it would be necessary to make a research on Warne Marsh's music, because he was the only one who really carried on the style. But most of the "jazz giants" had some kind of connection with Lennie. Charlie Parker played with him in the 40s, Bill Evans was his student and substituted Lennie also... even the rock guitarist Joe Satriani took lessons from Lennie. I saw a video of Robert Glasper playing fragments from Lennie's solo called "Line Up" on his concert. In the end he had a big effect on jazz music, since he was the first one to teach jazz, with a clear structure, method.

I need to mention that on purpose I didn't write any mean or negative stories about Lennie and his relationship with his students. He was also a human, with mistakes, but within these couple of pages I didn't find it wise to destroy the momentum of the train of thought.

I wish I could've written also about his linear improvisations: Line Up and East 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, but I am going to use Line Up for my thesis presentation, definitely.

I hope this thesis also inspired You to check deeper the subject and made you feel like listening to some of the recordings they made. Also the documentaries and books I mentioned could help you to get more detailed information.

## Quotes:

- 1: Barry Ulanov: Master in the Making Metronome, August 1949.
- 2: Shim: Lennie Tristano, his life in music. pg 7.
- 3: Ulanov: Master in the Making, 32. F.G. Meyers from the Illinois School for the Blind wrote a recommendation letter for Tristano, dated Sept. 5. 1938
- 4: Ron Offen, „Lennie Tristano“, Literary Times, July-August 1964
- 5: Gudrun Endress, „Lennie Tristano Talks to Gudrun Endress“ *Jazz Monthly*, February 1966, pg.25.
- 6: Tristano, interview by Irv Schenkler, August 31, 1973; WKCR-FM, New York.
- 7: Rodolfo's thesis
- 8: Ibid. Tristano reminisced about the same incident in Robert Reisner, Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker (New York: Bonanza Books. 1962)
- 9: Tristano, Interview by Schenkler
- 10: McKinney, pg 12.
- 11: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“, pg. 156
- 12: Ibid, pg 152
- 13: Ulanov: Master in the Making 33.
- 14: Gitler, Jazz Masters 230.
- 15: Tristano, interview by Jon Easton, ca. 1976.
- 16: Ibid
- 17: Rossana Buono, „Visita Lennie Tristano“, musica Jazz, January 1978.
- 18: Surpin, „Lennie Tristano: Feeling is basic“ 30.
- 19: Coss, „Lennie Tristano Speaks Out“ 21.
- 20: Endress, „Tristano Talks“, 22.
- 21: Victor Lesser, Tristano's student
- 22: Coss, „Lennie Tristano Speaks Out“ 21.
- 23: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 125.
- 24: Baggenaes, „Warne Marsh Interview“, 3. and 5. Marsh stated that he studied for four years with Tristano, and intermittently for three years after that“ (Alun Morgan. Warne Marsh“, *Jazz Monthly*, June 1961, 7).
- 25: Gitler, Jazz Masters 241.
- 26: Surpin, „Lennie Tristano: Feeling is basic“ 30.
- 27: Marsh closely followed Tristano's tenet throughout his career (Chamberlain, An Unsung Cat, 3). This stance shows a change from the view he held in Chicago according to Becker, which valued the importance of experiencing the full gamut of professional musical life.
- 28: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 128.
- 29: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 129.
- 30: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 129.
- 31: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 130.
- 32: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 130.
- 33: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 130.
- 34: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 131.
- 35: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 132.
- 36: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 132.
- 37: Ronzello, „Marsh: A conversation with Robert Ronzello“ 16.
- 38: Ibid 17.
- 39: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 133.
- 40: Jay Bergman experienced a similar reaction from Tristano: „He didn't want you to learn a lot of chord changes and extended harmonies, all that stuff that he does. He'd rather have you play a scale and play two notes right.“ Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 134.

- 41: Balliett, „Jazz: A True Improviser,” 117.
- 42: Balliett, „Jazz: A True Improviser,” 117.
- 43: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 135.
- 44: Tristano, Foreword, dated December 1958, in his *Jazz Lines* (Albertson, NY William H. Bauer, 1995).
- 45: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 135.
- 46: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 135.
- 47: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 136.
- 48: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 136.
- 49: According to Liebman Tristano recommended particular recordings by Sinatra, those with the big band accompaniment arranged by Nelson Riddle.
- 50: Mosca attributed the slow process to being self-conscious about singing.
- 51: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 136.
- 52: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 137.
- 53: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 137.
- 54: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 138.
- 55: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 138.
- 56: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 138.
- 57: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 139.
- 58: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 139.
- 59: Tapping different meters at the same time was also taught by Jim Chapin in *Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer* (New York: Jim Chapin, 1948), and in Paul Hindemith’s *Elementary Training for Musicians* (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1946).
- 60: Tristano gave Tom Runyan specific instructions to learn to tap 2 against 3: “In the left hand you’re doing quarter notes. In the right hand you’re doing eighth note triplets. And then after you do that with the right hand you do tap only in the first, third, fifth of those six triplets, and that gives you 3 against 2 in the other hand.” (Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 283.)
- 61: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 139.
- 62: Brown noted that Tristano’s sense of time was basically 4/4, with other feelings imposed through polyrhythm. (Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 140. and 283.)
- 63: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 141.
- 64: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 141.
- 65: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 142.
- 66: Balliett, “Jazz: A True Improviser”, 117.
- 67: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 142.
- 68: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 143.
- 69: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 143.
- 70: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 143.
- 71: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 143.
- 72: Ted Brown mentioned that this practice made him gain a thorough knowledge of the harmonic structure of the tunes. Konitz and Phil Woods also worked on this aspect during studies in the late 1940s. (Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 283.)
- 73: The element of contrast would reflect the change of the harmony in the bridge, i.e., the penultimate phrase of the four-phrase structure of many jazz standards. (Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 283.)
- 74: Ted Brown explained: “So eventually you began to write and hear things that you could really play on the instrument.... [I]t made you think more originally instead of trying to play like somebody else.” (Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 283.)
- 75: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 144.
- 76: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 144.
- 77: Davis, “Warne Marsh’s Inner Melody,” 27.
- 78: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 145.
- 79: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 145.
- 80: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music” 146.
- 81: [http://melmartin.com/html\\_pages/Interviews/konitz.html](http://melmartin.com/html_pages/Interviews/konitz.html) (including the pictures)

- 82: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“
- 83: Tristano, Interview by Easton
- 84: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 152.
- 85: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 155.
- 86: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 156.
- 87: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 157.
- 88: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 157.
- 89: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 158.
- 90: Shim: „Lennie Tristano – His life in music“ 158.