The Jazz Commandments

Jazz Style & Articulation Clinic

How To Get Your Band To Swing

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All Eighth Notes Are Not Created Equal!

To Swing It You Gotta Hear It!

PREAMBLE TO THE COMMANDMENTS

You Have to Verbalize, In Order to Stylize Authentically

I. Syllables

"Doo" is used for long sounds that occur on downbeats. The articulation symbol used is (-).*

"Day" or "Dah" is used for accented long sounds on either downbeats or upbeats. (>)

"Va", "da", or "ba" is typically used on unaccented upbeats. (No symbol is used)

"Daht" is used for accented short sounds whether on downbeats or upbeats. (^)

"Dit" is used for unaccented short notes. (.)

"Dn" is used for notes that are ghost or swallowed. These notes are often designated by an "x" on the staff in place of the note head or a note head in parentheses.

"Dow" is used for notes that are followed by a fall (descending glissando to an undefined ending pitch). (\)

"Dwee" is used for notes that are preceded by a scoop, which is a slide into a note. (/)

"Doo-dle-da" is used to articulate eighth note triplets.

"Dool-ya" is used for turns and flips. They are usually represented by this symbol. ()

*Keep in mind that the articulation symbols are not always used in the sheet music. Also note that accented short notes use a different syllable than unaccented short notes and are, as a result, played slightly longer, or as one would say in the jazz vernacular "fat" or "phat." The notes are still short, but they have more weight and length.

II. Articulation

Example 1



Example 2

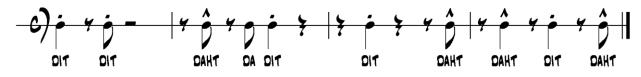




III. Commandments

1. Unless specifically marked otherwise, any quarter note or eighth note followed by a rest is played (sung) short.

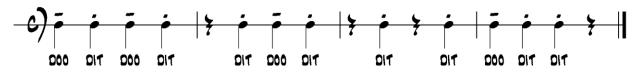
Example 4



2. Quarter notes that occur on the downbeats of beats 1 or 3 are usually played long.

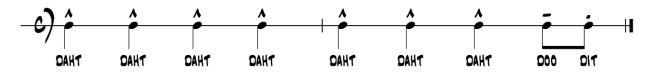
3. Quarter notes that occur on the downbeats of 2 or 4 are usually played short.

Example 5

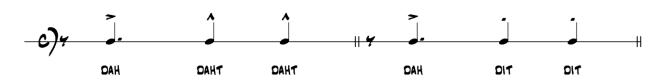


Exception: More than four quarter notes in a row.

Example 6



Exception: Johnny Carson Theme Rule

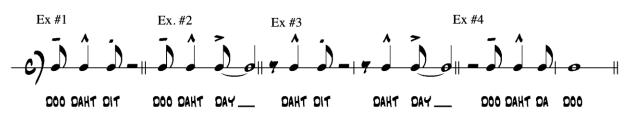


4. When the rhythmic pattern of two eighth notes followed by a rest starts on a downbeat, it is almost always articulated with the syllables doo-dit.



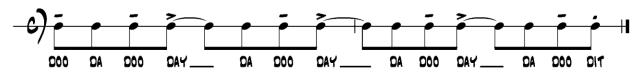
5. A quarter note (or the equivalent thereof) that occurs on an upbeat between two eighth notes (or rests) is played short.

Example 9

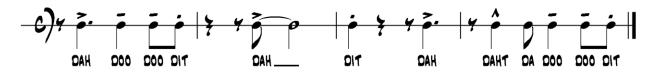


Exception: When the upbeat quarter note equivalent occurs as a part of a sequence of eighth notes and is tied across the bar line or the imaginary mid point of the measure, it is played long.

Example 10

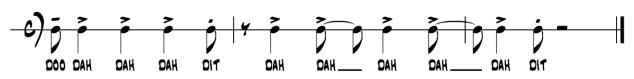


6. Upbeat entrances after a rest, especially those that are a dotted quarter note length or longer, should be "anticipated with an accent" (AWA).



7. A succession (3 or more) of quarter notes (or equivalent) on consecutive upbeats is usually played long and accented.

Example 12



8. In a line of eighth notes, accent the highest note and any wide leap changes of direction. Ghost (swallow) the lowest note and notes that occur on the weakest upbeats (2 and 4).

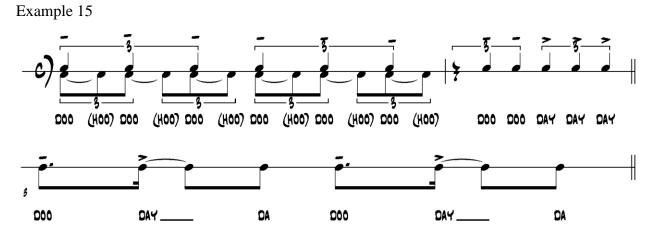
Example 13



9. The eighth note triplet rhythm is usually articulated by slurring the first two and tonguing the last one.



10. All notes of a quarter note triplet should be played long unless otherwise indicated.

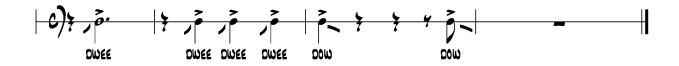


11. Two sixteenth notes followed by a rest are articulated with the syllables "Spit-It" or Did-It."

Example 16



12A. The syllable "Dwee" is used for notes that are preceded by a scoop. 12B. The syllable "Dow" is used for falls.



13. The syllable "dool-ya" is used for turns or flips, which are comparable to an embellishment much like the mordent in classical music.

A combination of upper and lower neighbor tones is used to execute this articulation.

Example 18



14. When a single occurrence of the rhythmic figure dotted eighth-sixteenth is used to indicate swing eighth notes, the dotted eighth note is usually played short with an accent.

Example 19



The inversion of this figure is articulated in the following manner with the dotted eighth note played long:



15. In general, dynamics follow the shape of the melodic line. If the line ascends, crescendo. If the line descends, get softer.

Notes that are longer than 2 beats in duration must have dynamic change. Long notes that enter on an upbeat are usually executed with a sforzando followed by a crescendo.



And the Jazz Gods Said,

Follow these commandments, And you shall swing your buns off!