"You Tube" / Webinar Script:

"Fulfilling Improvisation Music Standards for Larger Ensemble Classes"

- Intro: Any prior experience improvising? Have you (Do you) play(ed) in a Jazz Ensemble now or before?

Goal: At the end of this session the participants will comfortably perform/improvise along with professional musicians in a pre- recorded song, and sounding GOOD!!

- Set up iPad or electric keyboards so you <u>CANNOT</u> make a mistake. How? **Cheat!**
- Participants only have to do two things: 1.) Follow rule #1 (which I will explain later) & 2.) Come up with interesting and different sounding rhythms for your improvised solos.

- **Demonstrate** what I mean by **creating "interesting rhythms".**

Model (using no music) "pulse" rhythms on an iPad keyboard. Analysis: Boring. Let's play faster.

Model straight "down-beat /up-beat" rhythms on same keyboard. Analysis: Still Boring.

Conclusion: To create interesting rhythms for an improvisation melody, they have to sound <u>different</u>.

- **"Have you ever heard the word 'syncopation'?"** "What does that mean?"

Playing some notes on the down beat /up-beat, and playing others "in between the cracks".

Exercises to Review: **"Same vrs. Different"**

1.) Clap exactly what I clap. Note: Model a variety of syncopated rhythms.
2.) Ask each participant to make up and clap three (different) syncopated rhythms on their own (no help). Move on when you have confirmed comprehension of creating and clapping syncopated rhythms.
3.) Review exercise #1 by clapping three different "interesting" rhythms and have participants "echo" clap. "However, this time I will clap a rhythm and you will **echo a syncopated rhythm that is DIFFERENT** from the one I just clapped. Note: If one or more "crashes" (echoes me exactly the same) use this analogy: "You have a one in a billion chance that you will echo the same rhythm as I and be incorrect. There are 999,999,999 chances in a billion you will be correct and play a different rhythm."
4.) Once clapping different rhythms has been mastered, the participants will take turns clapping after me, using a "4 X 4" format. Remember, the participants must respond clapping a different rhythm than I, <u>**AND**</u> , cannot not repeat a rhythm a participant (including themselves) used earlier. Your rhythms must always sound different from everyone else's.

- **"Next, copy what I do...kind of".** I will tap on a table (or other hard surface) a series of syncopated rhythms. As I am doing this, I am moving my "tapping" finger from side to side, modeling Rule #1 before I even explain what that rule is to the participants. Will the participants recognize the two dimensional task I just performed? AND, can they model it back to me, focusing on combining the two concepts, while performing rhythms that are syncopated and not repeated.

- Introduce and explain Improvisation Rule #1 "The Motion of Notes": Starting on any key, you can play one key (or pitch) to the right, one key to the left, or, stay on the same key as you create an interesting improvisation melody, rhythmically.

"Let me show you how this 'cheating thing' works when we improvise".
Pre- Set Up the iPad or Electric Keyboards: Set up the "Garage Band" and "Google Classroom" apps on each of the student's iPad.
        Show participants how to get too "My Songs" (in "Garage Band") and then to the "Instrument Selection Screen".
        Scroll until you find the "Keyboard" page, with a picture of a short piano keyboard. Click on it.
Setting up a specific song or project for improvisation:
        Select an opening song from my "pentatonic" examples list.
        Go to "Settings" (the "wrench") and model how to set up the correct "key".
        Locate the "Scale" button, in the center "tool bar" (on the right side) and tap on it.
        In the window that appears, scroll down until you find the appropriate "Scale Format" for our first improvisation project. We will be starting out with a "Major Pentatonic" or "Minor Pentatonic" format. I will tell you which one.

The "Pentatonic Scale": Remember our earlier example, where we had to play syncopated rhythms while following our "Motion of the Notes" rule (Rule #1)? This time we will practice Rule #1 using Garage Band's "gray" keyboard, set at the pentatonic (5 grey keys per octave) format.
        Note: Use "Big Board" or have each participant play (one at a time) on their iPad's improvising with "Garage Band's" sound set to "mute", or volume off. The other participants and I will watch the performing student's improvisation for any "Rule #1" violations and point them out to the performer who is taking their turn.

Further Reinforcement: Now let us go back to our "4X4" exercise, this time playing along with a song and our volume on. Always apply Rule #1 when moving around on your keyboard and do not repeat any of the teacher's or other participant's earlier rhythms.   Mix your rhythms up and NEVER be predictable!

The "Blues" Scale: Now we are going to add one key or note to our scale format. The note we are adding is called the "blues" note and it will change our scale format to either the major "blues" or minor "blues" scale format.
-Using Google Classroom: Give the students the "Google Classroom" code: ***myl1mf***. Be sure you have signed into "Google" before you join the class using the pass code above. Tell the participants the name of our next improvisation song and ask them to scroll down (the song titles are in alphabetical order) the classroom until they find it. In that song's "assignment box", see if the participants can locate the "key" and possible "scale formats" listed for that particular song?
- Set up improvisation for song #2 by changing the key (if needed) and scale format. Remember how we did it last time? You will notice that you now have six gray keys per octave, instead of just five.

Using Your Ear: I'm going to improvise a short melody (without the "resource audio") and I want to see if (by listening) you can identify which one is the new "key" we are adding? You are listening for a note that sounds different than the others, or perhaps a bit "out of place". If they cannot identify the "blues"

note from that, play a second short improvisation melody this time playing along with our new target song.

Note: When you play the "blues" note (in context of soloing with a song in the "blues" format) you will notice that the unique sound now seems to make sense.

- If the participants did recognize which new key was the "blues" note, have them take turns soloing along with the resource audio. The participant(s) NOT playing should show a "thumbs up" every time they hear the soloing student play the "blues" pitch.

- Discuss the "special effect" quality created by the sound of the "blues" note when added to the pentatonic format. Why or how does this unique sound occur?

Access to "Jammin' with the Pros": You can now use this "Creative Commons for Improvisation" Google Classroom to practice improvising any time you want. You can select any song presented in this classroom, look up its key and the different possible scale formats that will potentially sound good, then select and set up the format you want to play in, and **start Jammin'!**

Note: I will need to show you later how to open up a "Google Classroom" audio file in your "Google Drive" in order to eventually send the song to your "Garage Band's" audio library. From there (using the "Audio Recorder" in the Instrument selection window), you can open up the "Loops" icon, then "drag and drop" the audio file onto a vacant audio track to create a new "Garage Band" project.

- Moving up to Major Scales, Minor Scales, and Modes (the 7 "gray key" per octave format options): Select our next song for improvisation that will use all seven gray keys in a full scale or mode. The participants will locate our next new song in their "Google Classroom" and should now posses the knowledge and skill to locate, and then set up, the correct "key" and "scale format". Never play at the very beginning of a song's introduction, wait for me to cue you in.   I will then continue to cue new soloists each time we are going to "flip" performers.

-Transitioning from the "Garage Band" gray keyboard to a traditional "black and white key" electric or acoustic piano: We will now compare the major or minor "gray" keyboard to its "black and white" key counterpart. In a sense, we will "reverse rolls" and now play ONLY on the black and white keys, NEVER! on the gray ones.

Note: I should select an example that is a little more on the "complex" side to model, using a good mixture of black and white keys that need to be played. Then, change songs for the participants to perform with, using only a black key "Bb" with a gray key "B" natural. In other words, for the participants, I initially want to "keep it simple".

- Model how to set up an "Overlay Keyboard Map": Be sure to leave the very bottom of your iPad's screen exposed, so that you can line up the "vertical lines" of your "overlay map" exactly with the corresponding "vertical lines" of the keyboard on your iPad screen.

- "No Skipping" Review: Practice the "No Skipping" rule using your black and white key "overlay map" which is now placed correctly on top of the black and white keyboard on your iPad screen. Initially, review your new way of improvising without sound, but remember, NEVER skip over a black or white key and ALWAYS skip over the gray ones.

Suggestion: Have one participant go up the "overlay" map (bottom to top) and then cue the next participant to play from top to bottom. I will check to be sure each is only playing on his or her

black and white keyboard keys. Participants should continue to strive to create interesting rhythms by using "syncopation" and not repeating any pervious rhythms used.

- It's All About the Ear: At this level the teacher should begin alternating between major and minor "tonalities" when selecting songs to improvise with. In the same way our participants tried to determine which key we added to move up to the "blues" scale format, they should now actively (using their ears) determine whether we are improvising in a basic major or minor key.

- Introduction to the "all in one" color coded keyboard map: We have thrown a lot at you in a short amount of time. Let's quickly review what we have done so far, using a very efficient "tool" called the "all in one" color coded "overlay" keyboard map. We will begin once again with the "pentatonic" scale format. Rather than using a "gray key" keyboard, we will be using the traditional "black and white key" piano keyboard along with our color coded "overlay" map. We will now use the original white and black key colors to identify the <u>basic pentatonic scale</u> on each of our "all in one" maps.

      - Select a new song from the "Creative Commons" classroom. Have the students look it up and find the "key" it is in. **Note:** While you are using a traditional piano screen in "Garage Band" (along with the "all in one" overlay map) you will no longer need to identify the scale format prior to playing your solo. As you will see later, this will give you a lot more choice and flexibility when you are soloing. **Also:** Be sure the song chosen for our next improvisation is in a "rock" style. You will see why later.

      - Have the participants take turns jammin' a capella (or without the target song). Ask the participant(s) not performing to listen to the soloist and decide if what that student improvised, "sounded" like the pentatonic scale?

      - Next, play along with the selected audio file (in a "rock" style) and have both students improvise solos, taking turns on my cue.

- Movin' Back "Up the Ladder": Add the "blues" note to our next song's improvisation by simply adding the keys colored "blue" on our color coded "overlay" map. That means the soloist can now play all of the white, black, **AND blue keys** as they improvise in the "blues" scale format.

      - Have one of the participants play a short improvisation, asking the other student(s), **"Did it sound like the 'blues' scale"?** Again, we are not just reviewing the different scale formats we have learned so far, but we also want to see if the soloists can identify the different formats, strictly by their "sound".

- Teacher's Choice: We can continue our "mini-curriculum" for improvisation by going two possible directions. We can add the "Scale Patterns for Improvisation Practice" or not. The choice here is, do we want to incorporate a study of two basic "jazz" styles by comparing "rock" vrs. "swing", or, just remain reinforcing our different scale formats, this time using our "all in one" color coded keyboard "overlay" maps. In this script I will continue to discuss adding the "Scale Patterns for Practice" component (written in "red" lettering), but you can easily skip over those sections if there are time constraints to consider.

- 2nd Option: If you are going to go on and continue with the mini-curriculum to include the participant's primary wind or string instrument, you could hold off using the "Scale Patterns for Practice" exercises until then.

- The **"Scale Patterns for Improvisation Practice":** Going back to the previous song we improvised with (the one in a rock style), locate the "pentatonic" scale pattern (exercise #1) that is in the same key as that song was. **Note:** In almost all cases, it might be helpful to **SING** the exercises first, in order to help the participants out with the correct stylistic interpretation.   **Be Sure** in a "rock" style the **eighth notes are always even** (or smooth sounding) and normally not accented.

- Singing on the syllable "Doo", I will model the rhythm and stylistic interpretation in exercise #1 and have the others join in when ready. If it sounds correct, repeat the exercise, this time singing **AND** playing exercise #1 on their iPad's keyboard.

- Next, play the same song and cue in the participants once you feel they have the tempo "locked in". Everyone will play (in unison) exercise #1 during the introduction. When the "main body" of the song begins, I will point to one student who will begin improvising a solo, as the others "drop out". Each time I point to a different participant, that student will initiate his or her solo and the previous soloist will stop playing theirs.

- The next "target" song we select should be in a "blues" or "swing" style.
- Introduction to "Swing" Style Interpretation: Below are three ways I have used to teach the vocalization of a "blues" or "swing" style.

a.) "Gold, sham-rock, and lep-re-chaun"
b.) "Shoe, tie-my, and tri-pl-et"
c.) "Doo, doo-ba, and doo-ba-da"

- Locate the "scale pattern" exercises in the same key as our next song and practice <u>SINGING</u> the second exercise pattern, in a "swing" style. Note: Experiment with the three "vocalization" patterns above, or come up with one of your own. Work with the participants on pitch accuracy, <u>especially</u> going in and out from the "blues" note.

- Improvise with your next selected song and see how close your student soloists can come to an accurate "blues" or "swing" style. <u>Remember:</u> You are now playing all **black, white, <u>AND</u> blue keys** on your "all in one" overlay map.

- Introduction to the *"DANGER NOTES":* Finally, we will return to the major and minor scales along with "modes" (which are normally Dorian). When improvising in **<u>ANY</u>** scale format the "pentatonic" scale (the "white and black keys") will <u>ALWAYS</u> sound good. When the "blues" notes are added, the blue keys will sound good with any songs in a "blues" or "swing" style, as well as <u>SOME</u> "rock" style songs. The participants have to use their own ears, and decide for themselves if the utilization of the blues scale format sounds, or does not sound good. If it does not sound good, DON'T PLAY THE BLUE KEYS!

- The **"Danger Notes"** are the <u>red keys</u> on your "color coded" overlay maps. In the major and minor scale formats, there are two of them per octave. There is one of three possibilities that will occur when you use *"Danger Notes":*

a.) Both *"Danger Notes"* will sound good.
b.) Both *"Danger Notes"* will sound bad.
or   c.) One will sound good and the other will sound bad.

- There are "degrees of "bad". Some, not so bad (consonant *"Danger Notes"*), and some, that sound <u>REALLY BAD</u>! (dissonant *"Danger Notes"*). If they sound really bad, <u>DO NOT PLAY THEM</u>!

- Each soloist must make up his or her mind (through experimentation) about which *"Danger Notes"* in that scale format sound appropriate and which do not.

- Play one (or more) examples having one participant improvise a brief solo and the other(s) identify whether the *"Danger Notes"* that were just played, fit into the "a", "b", or "c" category above.

- At one point have all of the participants take turns soloing. At the end of each solo, have that performer decide which "red" note category the solo he or she just played fits into. **IF** category "c" is chosen, can that performer identify (on the his or her keyboard) which red note(s) used sounded good, and which did not?

- **Follow Up Question:** In the latter case, did the "red" note(s) that were played sound "kind of bad", or **"REALLY BAD"?**

- **The Secret to _NEVER_ playing a wrong note when improvising:** Even if a soloist plays a wrong (or "not sounding so good") note, he or she can easily correct the problem and move on with their solo. When soloing, if a note sounds "out of place", simply play the next appropriate key above or below the "dissonant" one. This technique musician's refer to as using either "accented passing tones" or "grace" notes.

- **Rule #2:** When you improvise a solo in the "major" or "minor" scale format, when you add the "red" keys, **DROP!** the "blue" ones. For now, we will not be playing the red and blue keys in the same improvisation solo.

Review: In the "major" and "minor scale formats, we will now be playing the black keys, white keys, and *sometimes* the red keys. If a song's scale format is listed as a "mode" (or has an option of being played in the Dorian format), **ALL** keys will sound good, or I would not have listed it. In many cases I will design the "overlay" map for the Dorian mode to use only feature the black and white keys. Just remember to **ALWAYS SKIP OVER** the gray colored keys.

- **Major and minor scale improvisation can be in either a "swing" or a "rock" style.** Initially, I will designate which style we will use when I tell the participants the name of our "next" target song. As our participants gain more experience, they will eventually be able to identify which style should be used on their own, just by listening to the new recording they will be playing with.

- Optional: Continue to use the "Scale Patterns for Practice" sheet as a warm up to solidify the correct style and become more accurate with the performance of each style as you improvise.

- **Cumulative Scale Format Improvisation:** Select a new target song for improvisation. Play it for the participants as they set up the correct key and scale format in "Garage Band". Ask your students; "Does this song sound like we would improvise in a "swing" or "rock" style?

- Why? or How can you tell?

- What is the "key" listed for that song on its assignment page in "Google Classroom"?

- **Remember:** Using the "all in one" map we will not need to pre-determine or set the "scale format" in "Garage Band". The **"Scale" button** will simply remain in the **"Off" position**, always giving you a traditional "white and black key" keyboard on your iPad screen.

- Use the **"Scale Patterns for Practice"** sheet and play exercise #1 (the pentatonic scale) in the jazz style you chose earlier. Play the same pattern again, this time along with the target song. Be sure all participants are playing the "warm up" exercise at the same tempo as the "resource" audio file.

- **Let's Do It!:** As I re-play the introduction to our improvisation song, the participants will listen carefully to get the correct tempo and style in their head. When I cue them in (sometime during the

introduction), all participants will play (in unison) the correct "scale pattern" and musical style for that song. After the introduction, I will point to one student to be our first soloist. On my cue, that participant will begin his or her improvisation solo, and all other participants will "cut off" or stop playing. At the appropriate time I will point to a second soloist, and on my cue, the second soloist will begin to improvise and the original soloist will stop. As the song continues, I will cue in new soloists (at the beginning of new musical "phrases") as the most recent soloist ends his or her improvisation.

- **"Bump it up a Notch":** After selecting and setting up the next song, have all performers enter (on my cue) during the introduction, playing the appropriate unison warm up. After the introduction, I will cue in the first soloist, who will play (on a traditional piano keyboard) his or her solo in a "pentatonic" format. In other words, he or she will play only on the black and white keys on his or her "overlay" map. When the second soloist enters (on my cue) he or she will improvise using the "blues" scale format (adding the blue keys). As we change formats, everyone should be listening to see if they can hear the sound differences as we change. When the third soloist is cued, he or she will now play in the correct major or minor scale format (now adding the "red" keys that sound appropriate). If I get to a fourth soloist, "all bets are off" and he or she can **choose any format** available on that "Google Classroom's" assignment page. The fourth soloist (and any additional improvisers) even has the option of **switching back and forth** between formats **while soloing**, if they wish.

       - After the song is finished, discuss the solos just played (or if possible, play back a recording you made) and critique each other's performance.

                - Did all the notes played, fit and sound good with our song?
                - Did the rhythms we played sound interesting and of a "syncopated" nature?
                - Did we notice any soloists "repeating" rhythms, either played by themselves, or other soloist?
                - In general, did we do a good job, and avoid "messing up" the professional musicians which we were soloing with?

       - Improvise along with another song or two (following the same procedures as above) until all participants feel comfortable improvising along with the other professional musicians on any given recording.

Continuations:

1.) - **Advanced Study of the "blues" Note:** Use the major blues and minor blues "overlay" map comparison sheet to recognize where the two different "blues" keys are located on a 6 "gray key" keyboard. Initially practice using the appropriate keyboard "overlay" map, then later practice on just the "gray" keyboard set to a "blues" scale format in order to practice going back and forth from the pentatonic to the "blues" scale.

2.) We also might talk about **"over using"** the "blues" note and negating its **"FX" effectiveness** when soloing. Now might be the time to introduce **"Legal Skipping"** to your students along with "controlled experimentation" of its use. Use the exercise and skills you derived in the above study to come to a "tasteful" balance of the use, and "non-use", of the "blues" note. <u>ALWAYS</u> be "unpredictable", but <u>NEVER</u> be boring.

- **Applying what we have learned about improvisation to our wind and string instruments:** Here is where the "Scale Patterns for Practice" might come in real "handy". These warm ups will not only

review the correct choice of style and how to accurately perform it, but will also create a degree of "muscle memory" regarding which notes can be played in order to incorporate the correct "scale format" we have chosen. Let us review the steps and procedures used when we initially expanded our use of the "all in one" color coded keyboard "overlay' map.

   - Note: We will use the instrumental **"Scale Patterns" sheet** itself to help us **identify which notes we can play** for any particular "key" and "scale format". Also, we will incorporate a color code system similar to the one used with the "all in one" keyboard map. Blue indicating the correct "blues" note in any given pattern (if used) and red for the two *"Danger Notes"* we might experiment with while soloing.

- Start once again with the "pentatonic" scale format: - Select a new song from the "Creative Commons" Google Classroom and have the participants look up the "key" that it is in and which "scale formats" we can use for our solo. Locate the correct pentatonic "Scale Pattern" by finding the correct "key" and whether we will be using a "major", "minor", or "modal" tonality.

   - **Note:** Participants may **ONLY play** the **notes used in exercise #1**, but can continue up or down more than one octave if they wish to. I will designate whether the new song will be in a "rock" or "swing" style and then have the participants review that style playing the first exercise of the correct "Scale Pattern". Start out alternating "brief" solos (without the audio file) to confirm the correct stylistic interpretation, and then finalize the improvising set up for our next targeted song.

   - Once again, all participants will play the "Scale Pattern" warm up during the song's introduction (when cued to come in) and on my next cue, only one soloist will continue his or her improvisation as the other(s) "cut out". As the song continues, soloists will alternate improvising as I cue them in.

- Adding the "blues" Note: Repeat the same steps as before (after selecting a new song), but this time we will play "Scale Pattern" warm up, **exercise #2**. You will notice that the new note added in this pattern is highlighted in "blue". What do you think **THAT** might mean? The blue labeling allows you to easily identify which of our notes is the "blues" note for that exercise, and (if we have **already covered "Legal Skipping")** will also allow you to make the **effort not to "over-use"** its "special effect".

- Putting It All Together: The first five pentatonic notes in any "scale format" are black, and the last two scale notes we add are highlighted in "red". These, of course, are our *"Danger Notes"*.

   - As before, the participants will have to experiment with the two new "red" notes, to decide if they sound good or bad when played in this song. Also, if the red notes (when played) sound "out of place", do they sound "a little off" or REALLY BAD! You will also begin to notice that as the chords (or harmonics) in a song changes, the "red" note(s) that initially sounded "REALLY BAD", now might sound rather pleasant. You will eventually begin to hear these chord changes as you continue to improvise with different songs and will then know when you can or cannot play one (or both) of your available *"Danger Notes"*.

   - Also as before, while you are improvising you will be able to shift back and forth between the notes in exercise number's 1, 2, & 3, just as you were able to switch "scale formats" within a solo, as you were using the "all in one" keyboard "overlay" map.

   - Finally (as before), if a note does not sound good, ***DON'T PLAY IT!!!!!!!***