

Rob's Piano Room - Module 12 - PDF

Repetition vs Variety

Main points

The idea of repetition vs. variety is a very important concept in creating your improvisations

Too much repetition can create the danger of monotony or predictability, making your music less interesting

No or little repetition has the danger of creating a haphazard, completely unpredictable feeling, which can also make your music less interesting

A compromise is to use repetition to create an expectation, then use variation, or new material, to subvert these expectations, and create interest

A certain amount of repetition of material allows the listener to follow the composer's (or improviser's) train of thought.

(We are dealing here with short term repetition to develop your ideas, not the repetitions of whole phrases or sections, which are of course common)

There are many ways of incorporating repetition in to your improvisations including direct repetition of an idea

repetition of an idea with a modification, such as expanding or contracting

moving the idea up or down in pitch

changing the end of the repeated idea

repeating the rhythm of idea with different notes

A common 'rule' is that an idea should not be repeated exactly more than twice without modification

A sequence is the repetition of an idea, usually at least 3 times, moving consecutively up or down in pitch stepwise.

(It should be noted that if you have a way of breaking any of the above tendencies that makes sense to you and you feel keeps your music interesting, you should go for it! These 'rules' are meant for guidance only)

A repeated idea can often be made to sound different because of other changes in the music, such as changes in the harmony, a change of register, or a change of accompaniment style.

Exercises

Find or create a short melodic idea

Play then repeat the idea, then repeat a third time making some kind of change

Play, then expand or contract the idea (by keeping the same general shape but changing the notes, especially the outer notes, so the overall pitch range of the idea is larger or smaller

Try the above with a simple left hand accompaniment, even just solid chords

Notice if any of your modifications require a change of harmony

Or, change your harmony, and modify your idea to fit the new chord

Play your idea, then play something using the same rhythm, but different notes - think of what shape you might use upon repetition

There are endless possibilities, just keep experimenting! Listen to your favourite music with this in mind for more ideas.