

Deborah Henson-Conant's
Lead Sheet Bootcamp

Rules of the Game

3rd DRAFT

201117 - 12:35 AM

The goal of this method of playing is to be able to **engage in spontaneous** playing using a simple game plan and a blueprint – your Lead Sheet - and to be able to do this by yourself or with others.

It's not about **crafting brilliant arrangements**. It's about learning how to take part **fluently in the conversation of music**, without concern for perfect musical 'grammar' or having a huge musical 'vocabulary.' It's about the *fluency of imperfection* at the heart of human connection.

To do that you need to focus on the *framework* of the piece, not on the series of notes, and that means the biggest thing you need to do is learn to let go and learn *leave things out* while still *following* the piece. When your brain is moving with the piece, regardless of how many notes you're actually playing, then you have a mental/emotional framework of the piece. Once you have that framework, you're playing the *music* and you can start filling it in with notes at your level of ability – and that's a lifetime of adventure.

We will be building the scaffolding of each lead sheet, and you'll be filling it in *at your level of technical ability*. That means Fledgling players will learn to glory in the power of simplicity – and advanced players will learn how and where to add the bells and whistles they've spent their life developing. Both these versions – and all the variations in between – *are equally beautiful*.

#1: Orient Yourself: What Field are We Playing On?

- Simply LOOK at the music – not as notes, but as a simple road map. How many measures are there on each line? How many in the whole piece? Are there *sections* within the piece? Are they easy to see? Don't be afraid to mark up the music to make the different sections more obvious.
- What's the **meter & key signature**? Put your harp in that key signature.
- Where are the basic phrases? (Mark them in)
- Is there a pickup? Remember, the 'tune' starts on the downbeat

STEP #2: What Harmonic Universe are we In?

- **What's the Harmonic FAMILY of that key signature?**
 - What's the first and last chord of the piece? Does that tell you anything?
 - What chords do you see on the page that are NOT in that family?
 - Are they in another family?
 - Is it just the relative major or minor (which has the same key signature) or are we in another key signature?
 - Have we GONE to that family or are those just in for a quick visit?
 - Is there a whole SET of chords together that are in a different family? (if so, you may have modulated)

Watch out: In more complex charts there may be 'borrowing' or 'adding' (like adding a b9 or b5 to a dominant chord)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
MAJOR KEYS							
MAJ keys	I	ii	iii	IV	V V7	vi	vii° vii m7 (b5)
C Maj	C	Dm	Em	F	G G7 Gsus	Am	B° Bm7(b5)
F Maj	F	Gm	Am	Bb	C C7 Csus	Dm	E° Em7(b5)
G Maj	G	Am	Bm	C	D D7 Dsus	Em	F#° F#m7(b5)
MINOR KEYS							
Min Keys	i	ii° ii m7(b5)	III	iv	v *V *V7	VI	VII
A min	Am	B° Bm7(b5)	C	Dm	Em *E *E7	F	G
D min	Dmin	Em° Em7(b5)	F	Gm	Am *A *A7	Bb	C
E min	Em	F# F#m7(b5)	G	Am	Bm *B *B7	C	D

STEP #4: Take time to Cut The Piece Down To Size.

Many (maybe even 'most') lead sheets have *too many chords*. Often these 'extra' chords are based on a specific arrangement (like, the 'original' arrangement), but they don't represent the true *functional harmonic blueprint of the tune*. If it *looks* like there are too many chords - there probably are. It's not likely that more than 2 chords a measure are truly 'functional'

STEP #3: Time To Put Your Hands On The Strings

The biggest challenge and the most powerful move you'll make is to *leave things out* so that you can move with the *music* and not with the *notes*.

- Start by just looking at the BIG LETTER and the melody
- Look at the chords, but don't try to fully understand every single chord. Just look at where they are. Are there too many (more than 2 a measure is usually too many). You can always add more harmonic changes in, but it's best to start with the simplest version of the harmony.

Trust your Instrument, the Melody, the Big Letters & the Downbeat.

- **Your Instrument** sounds beautiful even when played very simply. Let it sing.
- **The Melody is beautiful all on its own** when played with confidence & musicality.
- **The Big Letter moves the harmony** – the big letter and the melody together create a beautiful framework of the tune which is often PLENTY beautiful.
- **The Downbeat keeps you moving with the music.** You can often simply play the big letter as a bass note on the downbeat of each measure – or sometimes every other measure – and it can be *plenty* of Left Hand, especially if you're using 6ths in your RH to create a sense of harmony.

Framework the Tune

- Play just big letters with LEFT Hand with thumb and then with 4th finger
- Play just first note of each measure with RH thumb
- Play both big letter & first beat of each measure with both hands

Fill it in vertically

Still playing **just the first note of each measure**:

- Play 'accompaniment' down from the top of the melody notes
- Play 'accompaniment' up from the bottom of all big letters

AttEnd to the End!

Many tunes get more complex harmonically as they reach the final cadence - in the last 4-8 bars of the tune. So look at the *end* of the tune and play it through a few times slowly to cut out any unnecessary chords, and to get familiar with it.

Then play it slowly

APPLY THE 5-PART ARRANGEMENT FORM

- **Use the intro to get comfortable** with the harmonic environment, with yourself and your instrument physical - and with any rhythm you're playing in.
- **Play the melody** with CLARITY
- **Improvise** on the harmonic framework of the tune ... or on a more simplified harmonic framework called a "vamp"

WHEN IMPROVISING "on the tune"

Until you're really comfortable improvising melodically, try following this pattern for the first 3 'choruses' of improv. Try to always keep the rhythm strong, as if someone else had to follow you and keep in rhythm by the way you're playing.

1. Outline the chords (play arpeggios)
2. Play (and embellish) the Fenceposts:
 - The Harmonic Fenceposts (the Big Letters)
 - The Melodic Fenceposts (the first note of each measure)

To Reharmonize or expand the harmony:

- **To EXPAND** chords -- build up in 3rds to a 7th and 9th - learn some shapes you like. My favorite is: Octave in base, and 9357 (or, as I thought, as a kid: 2357) in my right hand
- **To ALTER** chords - focus on the DOMINANT chord. Try flattening the 9th or 5th, or sharpening the 9th or 5th
- **To SUBSTITUTE:** Try a chord a 3rd below (or sometimes a 3rd above) the chord that's written

DRILLS

Rhythmic & LH Patterns

- Go thru the piece with a LH Pattern - playing it on the Big Letters
- Waltz - Tango - Bossa

Chord Progressions

- ii-V-I-vi - and then in relative minor adding the raised 7th

TRICKS

V7 IN A MINOR KEY – how to avoid changing a pedal/lever. When you're playing in a minor key, you'll always have to raise the 3rd of the dominant chord – OR, you can 'suspend' the 3rd and play 1-4-5 instead of 1-3-5 (or 1-4-5-7 instead of 1-3-5-7). In the key of Amin that would be playing: E7 as E-A-B-D instead of E-G#-B-D

Creating a Sus or Sus4 chord: These two terms are basically synonymous – it means that you 'suspend' the 3rd of the chord and make it a 4th, eg: play G-C-D-F instead of G-B-D-F.

BUT a more beautiful version of a sus chord can often be created by playing the dominant root in your left hand and playing the chord that's a whole step below it in your right hand. Eg: Play G octave in your LH and F Major chord in your RH. This is sometimes written like this: F/G.

Another variation is to play a Dminor chord over G. Either F/G or Dm/G will 'sound' like a Gsus. A Gsus is a variation on the Dominant 7 ("V7") chord.

NOTE: THIS IS STILL AN EARLY DRAFT OF THIS "RULES OF THE GAME"