

## Tristano as a Teacher

A lengthy quote on Lennie Tristano's teaching methods, taken from "Lennie Tristano: His Life in Music"

by Eunmi Shim

Teaching was one of Tristano's main activities throughout his life. He is often cited as one of the first to teach jazz improvisation, his teaching career spanned more than thirty years, and he invested much value and effort in that role. Significantly, teaching was how he made his living, enabling him to pursue his own musical interest without having to comply with the demands of the music industry, and thus providing him an alternative and uncompromising way of living as a jazz musician. Another function of his teaching was to foster generations of musicians. Some of them became his bandmates, most notably Konitz and Marsh from the first generation; these two played an integral part in forging the style of the 1949 Capitol recordings, which became the emblematic sound of the "Tristano school." By the early 1960s Tristano had a large number of students, "four or five hundred a year," according to him, and in 1973 he had more students than he could handle and kept a waiting list. In 1976 he refused to reveal the number of students, because he was afraid of having to pay income tax. These facts indicate that teaching provided him a major source of income.

Throughout his career Tristano became increasingly more occupied with teaching than with public performances or issuing records, which reflected his gradual withdrawal from the public scene. He stated in 1962, "I feel as seriously about teaching as I do about playing: it must be done with everything you have." In 1965 he indicated that his main activity was teaching, and then in 1977 he cited teaching as a moral duty, describing himself as more of a teacher than an artist.

Teaching was also something that he enjoyed greatly, as he expressed in 1969: "It's beautiful to assist people in developing the ability to create..." In Tristano's later years teaching was an important source of personal contact, perhaps fulfilling his emotional need to connect with students. Several students from the 1970s, most of whom were in their middle to late teens or early twenties at the time, indicated that Tristano was a paternal figure and that he reveled in associating with them on very informal terms, enabling them to establish instantaneous rapport with him. He was appreciative of such relationships with students probably because of the separation from his own children.

### **The Evolution and Principal Concepts of His Teaching**

Tristano's teaching career dates back to the early 1940s with the Axel Christensen School of Popular Music in Chicago. In 1962 he explained that it all began "because no one else there was trying to teach anything special besides reading and embouchure building. So musicians came to me... I didn't really know how to teach at the time, but students who wanted to learn taught me how to teach." Tristano taught privately in Chicago as well, then in New York after his move in 1946.

Underlying his teaching was the belief that "[t]he jazz musician's function" is "to feel." He also 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." Accordingly, he taught students to connect the aural training based on feeling with an ability to play the instrument, so that they could play what they were hearing, and hear what they were playing.

Often mentioned as an ultimate goal by many jazz musicians, this process involves transferring their aural conception onto the instrument immediately; it requires gaining full control of the

instrument, so that it would not restrain musicians from what they want to express. For example, Tristano recommended singing improvised solos along with records, which helped students internalize the feeling involved in them and assimilate the musical language and expression. He also devised exercises to combine students' ability to hear their melodies with proficiency on the instrument, ensuring an immediate transmission from the musical conception to its physical realization. Emphasizing hearing and feeling, he strived to eliminate a conscious thinking process while improvising. According to Victor Lesser, "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."

Tristano endeavored to present different elements of music in an integrated way, as exemplified by his emphasis on fundamentals and competence in basic musicianship, which remained an essential principle throughout his teaching career. He stated in 1962, "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." It was in this context that Tristano deplored the change in the tendency of students, stating, "I don't have a Warne Marsh now": "Nowadays musicians are interested in *chops*, technique, and vocabulary. But I don't teach that way. Now I have short-lived students... [T]hey 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." The primary means of teaching fundamentals comprised ear training, scales, rhythm, singing improvised solos with records, and keyboard harmony. Students worked on several exercises concurrently, which helped them gain a full control of parameters involved in improvisation through an organic development, and most of the exercises were required of all students regardless of their instrument, including drummers and singers.

Tristano also stressed the importance of discipline, consistency, and concentration. Marsh likened his study to classical musical training, remarking, "It's worthless to just give them ideas without giving them training": "[T]he 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 and pass that on to my students."

Known as a demanding teacher, Tristano required that students learn the material completely before progressing further. Some described him as a taskmaster who insisted on perfection. Sal Mosca recalled, "He pinned you down more": "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 the 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 the discipline was there as an integral part of it." For Timmy Cappello, Tristano's emphasis on discipline was a source of motivation: "[H]e was the only person that really cut right to it with me... He said, 'I think that you could be a great player. But you're not spending nearly enough time doing it... You just have to play a minimum of four hours a day. And you really should be playing more than that. And you might just as well give it up if you're not going to do that.'" Cappello continued: "And it really did change my life around in a couple of ways. I got kicked out of the apartment after that, but I really was devoted to it for those years that I studied with him."

There was also a moralistic element in Tristano's teaching. Many students believed that he embodied the principles of his teaching through his devotion to his music, emboldened by his

strong conviction and powerful personality. For example, especially during the later period of his teaching career, he discouraged students from becoming working musicians. In addition to his concern that "there just isn't much work," as he stated in 1969, Tristano stressed that commercial factors should not interfere with creative expression. Bill Chittin was one student who especially appreciated the advice: "He said, 'If you really want to get into your music, get a job. Because there's no gigs out there, the jazz scene is not happening. If you really want to do it in a deep way, you... make your money doing something else.'"

Over the course of thirty-some years Tristano's teaching evolved from a theoretical and compositional approach toward a generalized and intuitive one. During the earlier period of his teaching he taught elements of improvisation using modernistic concepts he learned from classical music, such as polytonality, polyrhythm, and structural effectiveness. According to Marsh, Tristano's "explanations were pure European theory." In his later teaching career Tristano presented the material in a more general fashion. Marsh explained: "A student who has any listening experience first gets an education in Louis, Pres and Bird — before any theory. From there, Lennie applies the basic ingredients — harmony, ear training, rhythm, the understanding of what goes into improvising without actually telling the student what to play. Lennie did make that mistake in the early years." Marsh then described the change in Tristano's teaching: "But now he leaves the conception itself to the individual player. In short, he teaches the essentials. As for exercises, for example, he used to make them up directly from the jazz material; now he has the students make up their own exercises under his supervision so that they learn to cover the whole horn." During the early years Tristano also gave assignments that required musical notation, even though he did not employ written music to teach. Later, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, he used number notation to denote pitch contents of various musical figures and chord structures. The number notation probably facilitated the process of transposition of the figures into different keys by bringing out intervallic relationships.

Tristano's long teaching career also involved a change of an emotional nature. Many students noted that in the 1970s he "mellowed out" or became "more accepting" of his students, in that he more readily expressed students' merits. Some older students said that he became lenient and lowered his standards, considering that he tended to be rather harsh and reserved in the earlier period. In the 1970s he also encouraged students to explore free playing, which was not a regular part of the lessons in the earlier period.

### **Nature of the Lesson**

Tristano liked to have interviews first with prospective students, in which he explained his approach to teaching and informed them that studying with him would require a great deal of work. To some this was a revealing experience of demystifying jazz improvisation, engaging them deeply in their studies. Lennie Azzarello recalled: "After he started telling me about the way you practice technique, the way you develop your left hand, the voicings in the left hand, the way you learn to sing, the way you learn how to improvise by learning the language of the greats, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Fats Navarro, Charlie Christian, it made so much sense to me." Azzarello continued: "I really felt at that point that it was something you could actually touch... I always wondered if it were just like a chosen few that had somehow received the gift. But with Lennie it was one of those things where he broke it down in a very logical order and in a progressive way... I worked like crazy. I was very much into him." Jon Faston, who was seventeen at the time, also became enthusiastic: "He really made a big impact from the very beginning. He told me on that first meeting... that he was interested in teaching me to be able to play really whatever I was hearing and feeling at that split-second moment, a concept of... total freedom of improvisation... I could barely believe that it was possible to really think about that kind of level

of improvisation." Easton further recalled: "He made it clear he was only interested in working with me, if I was interested in really aiming in that direction that he was charging out... finding your own creativity and self-expression and cultivation of it... It was a very intense experience that year... I was very deep into it, studying with Lennie."

Students recalled that the lessons covered several elements of music, reflecting Tristano's statement in 1951 that he would teach "five or six things at a time: harmony, ear training, composition, technique, etc." Tristano presented his teaching approach to Easton, a piano student, emphasizing the importance of integrating the elements for the purpose of spontaneous improvisation:

- 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, 5 against 4, 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 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.

### **Elements of Tristano's Teaching**

Lessons were normally brief, fifteen to twenty minutes in most cases. Many students who studied with Tristano after he moved out of Manhattan studio emphatically contrasted the short duration of the lessons to the long and strenuous process of transportation to his house in Queens. Although the basic content of his teaching remained fairly constant for most students throughout the years, there were specific assignments designed for particular instruments: piano voicings and fingerings for pianists, independence of the limbs for drummers, and coordination between breathing, fingering, and tonguing for saxophonists. The discussion of individual elements presented here is a synthesis of the information gathered from interviews with students. There are of course variations and discrepancies, which are due to the period and duration of study, or the individual circumstance of each student.

### **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.

### **Scales**

Tristano's teaching was largely based on diatonicism, in which learning the scales lays the foundation. Bill Russo, recalling that Tristano also discussed modes while in Chicago, the basic ones being Dorian, Phrygian, Aeolian, and Locrian, noted that Tristano was one of the first to

illustrate the relationship between chords and scales. Later, however, Tristano dropped the modes, because he felt they were not necessary, according to Liz Gorrill. Tristano concentrated on three diatonic scales, major, harmonic minor, and melodic minor, the last the so-called jazz melodic minor, which has the same ascending and descending form with raised sixth and seventh degrees. These scales provided the basic material for other exercises, including keyboard harmony, melodic fragments, and polyrhythm.

Scales and related exercises comprised the bulk of practicing for many students, which involved the three diatonic scale forms in every key. 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." Students referred to the grouping of notes as "group exercises," playing consecutive scale pitches in groups of two to seven notes, and, according to Woody Mann, it was a practice intended to help them improve in speed and articulation. The group exercises were especially important for saxophone students in coordinating breathing, tonguing, and fingering.

Ted Brown explained: "On the saxophone you got to get the air started, and the tongue has to be ready to release the reed, so the note starts, and the fingers have to be pushing down at the same time. And if any one of those things is a little bit late, then you can hear it; something sounds sloppy." Brown further remarked: "Lennie was always commenting on... the exercises of getting that coordination, so the thing came right together all the time. Lennie was very particular about making the thing clean as far as getting that coordination together." Then Brown 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 fingers ready, get the breath and everything ready, and then just pop those two." Brown 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 he had me go in every key from the very bottom up to the top of the horn."

In describing the same type of exercise, Jimmy Halperin emphasized the importance of hearing the notes before playing them: "You'll be doing groups of two, so you play the next two notes 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."

### **Keyboard Harmony**

Keyboard harmony consisted of diatonic chords built on each of the scale degrees, including triads, seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords in close and open positions and in different inversions. A triad, for example, can be in six different forms when each of the three positions (root position and two inversions) is combined with open and close positions. Called "chord work" by some, it exposed students to different qualities of the three-part harmony in triads and the four-part harmony in seventh chords, eventually progressing to the seven-part harmony in thirteenth chords. Students learned to play these in arpeggiation, starting on every scale degree within each of the three types of scales and in all twelve keys. The harmonic patterns were sometimes combined with group exercises, creating unusual shapes. For example, Jeff Brown worked on triads articulated in groups of five notes (example 1), which he had to play as fast as he

could and articulate well; he felt that this exercise opened up his ear to "what's possible of these sequences of notes, different groups."



EXAMPLE 1. Patterns derived from triads in C major articulated in groups of five notes.

Saxophone students played long tones using the chord tones, as a way of working on the production of tone and developing control over the full range of the instrument. Jimmy Halperin commented on the exercise, again emphasizing hearing the notes before playing them: "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." The significance of the exercises in keyboard harmony lies in familiarizing students with all types of chords in any key, enabling them to transpose them easily. This would facilitate the process of improvising on standard tunes.

### **Harmony**

During the early period of his teaching Tristano discussed various means of exploring harmonic resources, such as extension, chromatic alteration, and substitution. Russo remembered discussions of adding tones to chords, such as the sixth and the ninth to major chords and the ninth and the eleventh to dominant seventh chords, with chromatic alterations in the latter. As regards harmonic substitutions, Tristano taught the tritone substitution for dominant seventh chords, which has been widely used in jazz since the bebop era. Becker learned specific piano voicings for the cadential progression of ii7-V7-I with a tritone substitution, which rendered it ii7-bII7-I: "He'd show you that and explain what was going on, what each note was, and I was expected to know the same progression in every key." Tristano also used tritone substitutions to add secondary dominant seventh chords. Russo, referring to them as the chromatic dominant sevenths, explained how Tristano applied them to elaborate the rather static progression of "Just You, Just Me": "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, C7 for two beats... Gb7 for two beats, F minor for two beats, Cb7 for two beats, and then Bb7. The resulting progression is / Eb Db7 / C7 Gb7 / Fm7 Cb7 / Bb7." Without the interpolated tritone substitutions, the aforementioned four chords in the original harmonic sequence would last for four beats each. Significantly, Russo considered Tristano one of the first to teach the material. According to Crothers, Tristano distinguished between two types of harmonic devices. The first, harmonic substitution, is substituting a chord for another without altering its function, such as the tritone substitution; the second, altered harmony, refers to a process whereby the point of resolution is bypassed through the use of a chord different in function, creating a "superimposed form."

Concerning altered chords, Ziskind remembered learning about the dominant ninth chord with the augmented eleventh, or the so-called flat five, on top; the voicing for C7#11, for example, involved C, E, Bb, D, and F#. During his early years in New York, Tristano taught altered

harmonies by superimposing chords or tonalities. Referring to his line, "Marshmallow," Marsh illustrated the concept of polytonality or "tonalities *on top* of tonalities": "[I]t 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, which is the idea that you can make a pyramid of major seventh 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." This pyramid would include C, E, G, B, D, F#, A, and C#. Emphasizing that "Hindemith was doing it fifty years ago in classical music," Marsh further explained: "A seventh chord has got a major and a minor triad inside of it... [T]hey can both be used as tonal centers. In a ninth chord there are two seventh chords and then the augmented with 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." Marsh also remarked on its implication in a playing situation: "You're 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."

Polytonality thus functioned as a means of generating altered pitches, demonstrating Tristano's interest in the harmonic complexities of twentieth-century music. His trio recordings exhibit chord structures resulting from harmonic superimpositions, in which, as Bauer noted, Tristano was superimposing a different chord on top of his. Russo recalled that in the early 1950s Tristano expressed his aversion to "plain" chords, meaning chords without any extensions or alterations: "I played a piece of mine for him and he was very upset... I had used... an open fifth, which was very interesting to me, because I always assumed that his ear was far superior to mine... but in that particular instance he wasn't. He was very upset that I used a plain chord." Russo explained the reason: "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 chord of resolution. That's a good point." An example of a complicated chord that Tristano taught Russo is the so-called double-diminished chord, in which two diminished seventh chords are combined, as one is superimposed on another (example 2).



Example 2. A double-diminished chord.

Later, however, Tristano ceased to discuss altered harmonies or harmonic substitutions, perhaps because he wanted students to gain versatility in diatonic scales first, and then explore by themselves without preconceptions. Victor Lesser, who had learned polytonal substitutions from Marsh, used them in his lesson with Tristano, only to find that Tristano dismissed them as deliberate, and not spontaneous: "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,' and at the time I was amazed how did he know that I was thinking this different way while I was playing."

### Singing Improvised Solos

Learning improvised solos through listening to and singing along with records was one of the most fundamental aspects of Tristano's teaching. As a means of ear training and of transferring the feeling of the jazz improviser at an intuitive level, it enabled students to internalize the musical language and expression of major jazz solos, including phrasing and tone. This would become the basis of individual musical conceptions in allowing students to conceive their own melodies through developing their "own imagination," as Tristano put it. 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." Marsh also stressed that he had to sing the exercises before playing them on the instrument, recalling what Tristano told him: "A musician who can't use his voice!" Lennie used to say. "How can that be?" Richie Beirach, who was in high school at the time of his lessons, stated that Tristano criticized him rather harshly and advised him to sing the solos in order to learn 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.'" Significantly, Tristano gave priority to singing over playing on the instrument, as Beirach further recalled: "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."

Singing with records without the aid of written music was a demanding task, achieved through a high degree of concentration and repeated listening. Underlying the practice was Tristano's concept of "improvising feeling": "The intangibles of feeling, which have a high degree of importance in re-creating any jazz performance, unfortunately cannot be written into the 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." In particular, Tristano stressed the importance of being able to sing every note perfectly, especially during his early teaching career, while students from the later period, in general, were allowed to progress more quickly. According to Steve Silverman, "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." The learning process entailed much devotion to and immersion in music, as many students recalled the intensity of their experience. Victor Lesser reminisced: "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, which was rough, but I was so consumed with this work I was doing. I just remember doing the job and just spending those eight hours living a Warne Marsh solo."

Tristano recommended to some students to slow down the recording. With the help of a turntable or a cassette tape player with adjustable speed, the tempo was reduced usually by half, thus dropping the pitch to an octave below the actual recorded sound. Students stated that listening to the music at half speed helped them "really hear" what went on in the solo by way of "getting into the head" of the soloist. Lennie Azzarello, in particular, was under Tristano's close supervision during the process: "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." Larry Meyer had a



remarkably similar experience, whereby listening to the solo at half speed illuminated individual notes: "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."

As models for study Tristano recommended only a small number of selected jazz musicians, reflecting his view that jazz had developed through important improvisers. The main focus was on Lester Young and Charlie Parker, both of whom he considered true originals. Others included Charlie Christian, Billie Holiday, Roy Eldridge, Bud Powell, Fats Navarro, Konitz, Marsh, and Frank Sinatra. For some of these musicians Tristano prescribed a particular period from their recording careers, preferring, for example, Lester Young's early records from the late 1930s and early 1940s, when he recorded with Count Basie and Billie Holiday. The same guideline also applied to Powell and Konitz. In choosing the repertoire, Tristano guided his students by making suggestions, especially for the first example, but generally allowed them to make their own choices. Some students from the 1970s recalled working on a variety of recordings, including those outside jazz.

Charlie Parker's solos were Tristano's favorite assignments during the earlier period. Sal Mosca, describing himself as a slow learner, noted that it took him a year and a half to learn to sing his first solo, Parker's "Scraple from the Apple," and subsequently six months to learn to play it on the piano. Easton says that Tristano also concentrated on Lester Young, whom he considered a "complete musical original." According to Cappello, Tristano recommended listening to Young's alternate takes on the same tune to illustrate his point: "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." To Larry Meyer Tristano conveyed his admiration of coherence in Young's as well as Charlie Christian's solos, which he recommended as models to emulate: "He would say, 'Listen to Pres. He takes a perfect chorus. It's perfect, one chorus, and it's done. He said it all. Charlie Christian, one chorus, it's done. Let me see you do that.'" Tristano also encouraged drummers to learn to sing the solos. Chattin recalls singing Lester Young solos, but he did not have to "even know the song he was playing on, the chord changes." His case is notable because he had been told that he was tone-deaf and he thought that he could not sing, but Tristano gave him the confidence to overcome his preconception: "One of the great things he 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.'" Chattin added, "I still have the tape... in my car and I still sing with Lester Young solos because of Lennie."

Students also mentioned Roy Eldridge and Louis Armstrong, but in actuality few of them worked on Eldridge, and no one on Armstrong. Bob Wilber, who studied with Tristano in 1950, stated that Tristano "was a brilliant musician who was determined to do something different, but he had no interest in Louis Armstrong or in the past." Interestingly, in the 1960s Tristano added two musicians to his list, Diana Ross and Freddie Hubbard. In 1969 he expressed his enthusiasm for Ross in a provocative letter to *Down Beat*: "I think Diane Ross is the greatest jazz singer since Billie Holiday. Examples: *Keep an Eye*, *How Long Has That Evening Train Been Gone*, *Does Your Mama Know About Me*, *Will This Be the Day*." He explained: "The fact that I wrote that note to *Down Beat* is very unique; you have no idea how much so. And a lot of people think I'm a little out of it for saying what I did about Diana... I may talk about Bird, Pres and Bud, or mention Billie in a letter, but I haven't stopped listening. I still listen. And more than most people, I'd say."

Tristano considered Hubbard "one of the great musicians to come out of the 60s," but made a point of praising only the early recordings he made through the mid-1960s.

There were three steps involved. First, students had to learn the solo by ear and sing it along with the record during the lesson. The second step was singing it without the record, and the last was to play the solo on the instrument with or without the record, which was allowed only after the student learned it completely through singing. According to Crothers, the only required step was the first. Easton recalled that Tristano specifically guided him about when to proceed to the last step: "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." Tristano was aware of the danger of mechanically duplicating the music without understanding or feeling its essence. He told Azzarello, "Once your fingers forgot those notes, you have no recollection of what it was about" unless it is "really in your head." Ted Brown explained: "He was more interested in just people getting the concept of the solo... He talked about... not letting your fingers get into certain ruts 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."

To some students the final step was simply a by-product of singing. According to Cappello, the intensive process of learning the solo enabled him to "pretty much just pick it up and play it for the first time on your instrument." Students actually conceived of singing and playing as identical, as Lesser described the process of playing as "singing through the horn." In this context it was important to learn not only to phrase but also to breathe and feel like a saxophonist. Silverman recalled: "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 synonymy between myself and the horn player. And he also suggested that I stand when I was singing... so I could get the feeling of being a horn player, and to breathe like a horn player." Silverman added, "That had profound effects on me as a piano player, because... I felt as much as a horn player as I was a piano player."

Tristano himself considered singing with the records his major breakthrough in teaching, according to Crothers. Although singing or playing along with the records has become a common practice in jazz, the emphasis on perfection and total assimilation through singing without resorting to musical notation was an unusual aspect of Tristano's teaching. Joe Muranyi singled it out as "the closest one can get to teaching jazz" and "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 all 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."

### **Rhythm**

Tristano's teaching reflected his interest in rhythmic complexity, especially during the earlier period, cultivating students' ability to feel two or more different time signatures simultaneously. Polyrythm is a term generally denoting different rhythms performed simultaneously, as when superposing 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. There is a slight discrepancy among students about the specific terms Tristano used, such as polyrythm, cross rhythm, or counter rhythm, which may be partly due to the fact that they studied at different points in his career.

Exercises in cross rhythm involved tapping two different meters at the same time, such as 2 against 3, 2 against 5, 3 against 4, 3 against 5, and 4 against 5, progressing through several steps using different combinations of the limbs. Mosca learned how to tap the rhythms first with two hands or with two feet. He then used hands against feet, left hand and left foot against right hand and right foot, or right hand and left foot against left hand and right foot. Tristano later simplified the procedure so that the tapping involved only two hands, and eventually eliminated it altogether. For piano students the tapping exercises were transformed into playing scales with a different meter in each hand. They played the scales in parallel or contrary motion, sometimes using different fingerings in each hand in order to reinforce the cross-rhythmic pattern. For example, in playing 2 against 3 the hand in duple meter would employ only two fingers, the thumb and the index finger, while the other hand in triple meter would use the first three fingers, as shown in example 3. Don Edmonds felt that the fingerings facilitated the learning process: "I was playing 3/4 time in the left hand and 4/4 in the right hand without even realizing it." There were also simpler exercises, focusing on the basic subdivisions of the beat, such as one against two, one against three, and one against four. These rhythmic exercises not only helped the students learn cross rhythm but also enhanced the independence of each hand.

EXAMPLE 3. Cross rhythm of two against three in contrary motion

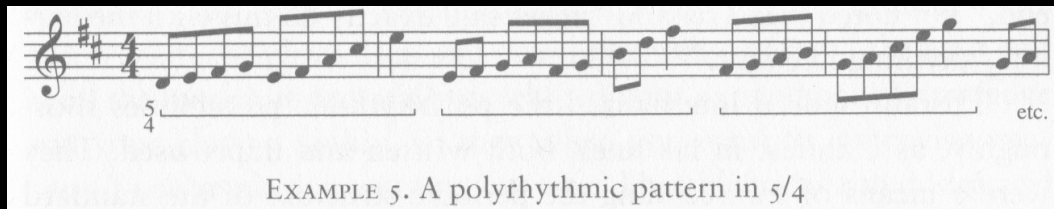
Tristano also created polyrhythm through inflection, which meant superimposing different metric patterns over 4/4 through accenting certain notes. For example, accents can be placed on every third note of a scale, creating phrases in 3/8 over 4/4 (example 4). The device can be used in combination with cross rhythm, intensifying the rhythmic complexity, for example, with the accent placed on the first and third notes, or the second note only, of quarter-note triplets against 4/4. The 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 it out sometimes." Inflection was particularly important for drummers.

EXAMPLE 4. Accents in 3/8 imposed on C major scale in 4/4

### **Polyrhythmic Figures**

Another area of polyrhythm involved manipulating odd-metered motives and superimposing them on the basic framework of 4/4. Students were to construct a melodic phrase in an asymmetric meter, for example, 3/8, 5/8, or 7/8, and to play it sequentially through the scales. The polyrhythmic effect came from the fact that the phrases, when played in succession, did not coincide with barlines, but rather ran across them in an unpredictable fashion. Students wrote out

these figures to see how they worked against the background of 4/4 and tried to incorporate them into their playing. According to Russo, Tristano discussed this aspect as early as his time in Chicago. Example 5 is an exercise in 5/4, a pattern on which Judy Tristano worked, diatonically running through the major scale.



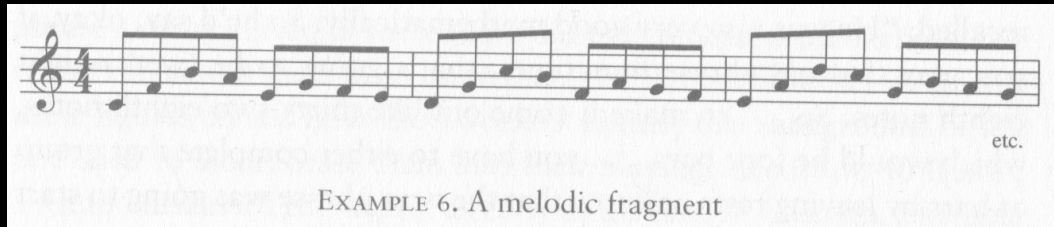
Ted Brown recalled that for the first lesson or two Tristano gave him a figure to "take up and down the scales through all the keys," and then encouraged him to create his own exercises. It took Brown months to go through all major and minor keys, "sometimes even seeing how that little pattern could fit on a certain set of chord changes": "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 certain alterations... If you're stretching the harmonies a bit... it would be consonant and then maybe dissonant for a couple of notes, and coming back." The result of the exercise was additive rhythm superimposed over 4/4. Brown further described the process of incorporating polyrhythmic motives: "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."

Interestingly, Brown noticed Tristano's ability to realize the asymmetric figures through visualization: "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 barlines and where the notes would fall on what beat of the bar." Brown further recalled: "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." Brown also remembered discussing with Tristano about "where a certain phrase would start in relation to one [the first beat] of the bar and where the phrase would end," but noted that Tristano "never said exactly do this with the barline, anything like that."

Tristano indeed internalized the polyrhythmic possibilities thoroughly, as manifest in his lines, both written and improvised. They were a means of transcending the periodic structure of the standard tunes, which was segmented into four- and eight-bar units, by superimposing a different metric and melodic structure on it. Marsh remarked on how to avoid the constraints of barlines, 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 metres on the four-four time." Marsh explained 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."

### Melodic Fragments

Tristano later stopped teaching polyrhythmic exercises and rather recommended melodic fragments, short melodic phrases played sequentially and diatonically in all twelve keys, starting on each scale degree. He left the rhythmic aspect to students, so they could design the metric structure, which was mostly in 4/4. As he did with polyrhythmic phrases, Tristano would provide a sample fragment and then encourage students to make up their own. Lesser remembered the fragment that Tristano gave him, shown in example 6 in C major.



The exercises not only helped students gain control over diatonic scales, but also exposed them to the concept of thematic development, as the sequential procedure taught them how to manipulate a musical idea through different keys and scales. 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."

### Structure of the Solo

With his classical background and knowledge of composition, Tristano employed a compositional approach to jazz improvisation during the early period of his teaching career. Russo remembered Tristano discussing developmental procedures using common devices in classical music: "He showed us how to take three notes and invert them, how to use them in retrograde, and so on... They were the standard motivic materials... imitation, retrograde-inversion, diminution, augmentation, adding materials, subtracting materials... It gave me a sense of composition and improvisation being similar, which very few people have." For example, Tristano encouraged students to write out a chorus in the fashion of an improvised solo, by which he enhanced their awareness of the structure. According to Russo, "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." Russo also recalled that a climax, according to Tristano, was "acquired through high notes, increase of volume, increase of rhythm, increase of density." Tristano continued teaching from the same approach during his early years in New York. He told Ted Brown, "Try to write something as though it was a chorus that you'd want to play if you could play the chorus"; Brown considered it 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 a climax and then that would end somehow. So it was an overall melodic concept."

According to Brown, introducing contrast toward the middle or later part of the tune, especially in the bridge, was another important aspect of constructing an improvised solo, which was to "build up some excitement and 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." After students learned to play the written solo on the instrument, they had to memorize it, which helped them assimilate the compositional approach into improvisation and, as a result, make a coherent statement in their solos. The process also enhanced students' sense of individuality.

This exercise assumed another importance in that some of the written solos became actual lines, new melodies built on preexisting harmonic sequences. According to 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." For Konitz the written lines implied a heightened intensity in soloing: "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]." He further explained: "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."

Although this process may seem similar to the practice of using an improvised melody as a fixed line, the difference is that Tristano's approach involved writing it with a structural consciousness. This exercise, however, is another element that he abandoned later.

### **Learning the Melody of the Tunes**

Tristano greatly emphasized thorough internalization of the melody of the standards. Regardless of the instrument, students were to play the melody slowly to the metronome without any harmonic accompaniment. Many students realized that this process enabled them to hear their own melodies, whereby the preexisting melody became a source of improvisation. According to Marsh, "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 a melody." Significantly, the single-line melody functions as the structural guidepost of the tune and the backbone of improvisation, as Sheila Jordan attested: "Lennie always taught me to learn the melody... Through Lennie's teaching and through listening and through Charlie Parker I learned that as long as I keep the melody of the tune in my head subconsciously, I never get lost." Easton explained how the melody conveyed the essence of the tune, with its harmonic and rhythmic elements embedded in it: "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." It is noteworthy that Tristano did not allow students to attempt improvising until they went through a rigorous training of learning the melodies in combination with other basic exercises. Only after internalizing those elements in an integrated way were they able to launch on the path to improvisation, as Woody Mann did after a whole year spent on learning the melodies at the slow tempo of 60 per quarter note on the metronome: "I said, '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."

Piano students had to play the melody in each hand separately. Mike Garson played the melodies with no accompaniment for two years, which drove him "absolutely up the wall": "I also had to play melodies... in the right hand without altering any melodies or improvising. Just play the melody straight with good feeling for a year, every week with a different song. And then the year later, every week a different song in the left hand, no improvising. The year after that I was allowed to change a note or two." To some students Tristano recommended playing the melody in different keys as a way of helping them develop the ear. He told 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," and to "take every tune you know, just pick one key and play everything." The emphasis on learning the melody as the source of improvisation reflects Tristano's horizontal conception of improvisation; he advocated bebop in terms of development of the single line and considered Lester Young's solos prime examples of the linear approach to improvisation. Improvising mainly on harmonies, in contrast, would result in solos dictated by vertical relationships, which can be uninteresting from a linear point of view.

### Piano Voicings

Tristano gave his piano students a large number of voicings, which were called the chord list, chord formations, or chord constructions, beginning with voicings for the left hand only, then progressing to the so-called two-handed chords. He would typically dictate them in numbers to indicate the pitch content. Lennie Metcalfe recalled: "He just walked up and down in the studio and he would reel off 135, 1356, 1357 and this was all in his mind, and you would quickly write down all these chords... [Y]ou would learn these and memorize them and when you went by next week, you had to play all of these."

The voicings encompassed various chord qualities of major seventh, minor seventh, minor seventh flat 5, minor sixth, diminished seventh, and dominant seventh chords. They comprised an exhausting number of combinations, constituting a wide variety of chordal structures. The dominant seventh chords are the most extensive in their number and variety, extended up to the thirteenth chords and containing a wide range of chromatic alterations, including the lowered second, raised second or lowered third, raised fourth, and raised fifth. Major seventh voicings also contained altered notes, mostly involving the raised fourth degree. The following examples illustrate only a small sample of left-hand voicings in different inversions for each of the chord types.

Tristano expected students to play them in every key and memorize them. Liz Gorrill played them in C first, and then learned by ear to play them in different keys, one key at a time. For Jon Easton the process involved aspects of visualization: "His idea of playing the chord was that you almost picture it in your mind, in a way the shape of your hand, so that your hand would form itself into the shape it needs to be in before it comes down on the chord. So when it comes down on the chord, it's just letting it drop. He used that language, 'Just let it drop onto the chord.'" Easton also remarked on the importance of relaxation: "Eventually when you're improvising, you're freed up to let your hand drop onto chords as you imagine them. And he was definitely deep into having your hand in a very loose state of relaxation as you were playing." Students learned to move the voicings by a certain interval and play them in succession. Azzarello explained: "It was a very, very long process. Because you went chromatic and then you went whole step and you went minor third... I probably went all the way up to the seventh." This exercise facilitated students' hand movement by familiarizing the fingers with different configurations, and exposed their ears to different sequences of chords.

After learning basic left-hand voicings, students were asked to make up a series of them as an accompaniment to the melody of a tune, which Tristano called the chord line or chord sequences. The term chord line illustrates Tristano's linear conception of chords in terms of voice leading in both the top and the bass, forming treble-bass counterpoint, as he dictated to Easton: "Put a chord line on a tune. The top note of each chord should form some kind of simple melodic line, and so should the bottom note if you can. Memorize it." Easton explained the melodic nature of the chord line: "[O]ne assignment... was to write... out a series of left-hand chord voicings for a tune where one chord follows the next in a melodic way... He was saying, 'If you can, try and hear not just the top note. Try and hear the bottom note and have the bottom notes make a melody also. Don't worry about the notes in between. Those will probably work it out for themselves.'" Easton added, "Everything in his mind really was melody. In his mind chords were essentially melodies of many notes moving around."

The next step involved combining the right-hand melody and the left-hand chord line, and then the right hand improvising over the same chordal accompaniment. It was an organic progress, through which Tristano guided students to improvisation. To Ed Pastorini it was a revealing experience: "First he just had me play the melody of standards... And then... he started to give me voicings... Then he would have me pick a standard each week... and I would pick out the chord voicings for the left hand... In the right hand I played the melody." Pastorini continued: "Then after about one year... I think it was 'She's Funny That Way,' and Lennie said, 'Do another chorus,' and that's when I first started to really feel that I was going to be able to discover this incredible mystery of improvisation, especially over changes. And that was a great breakthrough to me." Learning a large number of voicings in a wide variety of situations provided students with a comprehensive repertoire of voicings at their disposal. Tristano also encouraged students to personalize them by adding their own. Advanced students subsequently proceeded to two-handed voicings, chords played with both hands. They included both open and close positions and did not necessarily contain a larger number of notes than the left-hand voicings. Two-handed voicings, of course, could be played as part of improvised solos. According to Silverman, Tristano felt that "a complete piano player should be able to take whole choruses in block chords."

Learning the voicings also led to flexible hands. Since many of the left-hand chords spread over large intervals, sometimes involving all five fingers, they required extending the fingers considerably and putting them in unusual positions. Mosca eventually became able to reach a fifteenth, while he could barely reach an octave prior to his study with Tristano. Some students recalled that "Tristano had seemingly small but extremely flexible hands, which could expand to a phenomenal degree. He himself commented on flexibility: "[T]hat's what creates your span — the flexibility between your knuckles. Most people think it's from the end of the thumb to the end of the pinky. But it's what happens between the knuckles — how rigid the musculature is or how relaxed it is."

Tristano avoided teaching standard jazz piano voicings, which he considered nonspontaneous. He told Diamond that one of the reasons for learning the voicings was to enable the left hand to become spontaneous, as opposed to most players using the same types of voicings. What distinguishes his voicings from conventional ones is their density and low register. Many left-hand voicings have dense texture and produce thick clusters, especially when the chords employ all five fingers. The concentration on the lower range of the piano was probably due to its dark timbre, which he liked. With these aspects combined, the chords can produce a striking effect, expressive of emotional depth and complexity. However, when not used carefully, they can result in muddy sounds, largely avoided in the mainstream jazz practice.



## Technique

As a pianist Tristano realized how technical issues, such as touch, fingering, and articulation, could affect the most vital aspect of playing, expression of feeling. In 1956 he stated: "It's been hard learning how to play what I feel on the piano because the piano is a difficult instrument. There are fingering problems we all have. Other instrumentalists, for example, generally can make the same note with the same finger. With the piano, there are spatial problems." His remark suggests that each finger has a different degree of strength and quality due to the physiological structure of the hand. In order to eliminate unevenness or inconsistency in sound and touch, it would be necessary to gain control over each finger, so it can play with the same intensity and articulate every note equally well, thus fulfilling the ultimate purpose of expressing feeling. In this context the thumb poses a problem, as the classical piano technique normally avoids placing it on black keys. Tristano believed that would impede the improviser from spontaneously realizing aural conceptions on the instrument, and maintained that any finger should be ready to be used on any key, advocating "the technique which lends itself to improvising." He commented on the use of the thumb in the published transcription of "Scene and Variations": "One of the difficulties in performing this work is in the matter of improvising fingerings. Briefly, the clue lies in the fact that the player must develop the use of the thumb on the black keys."

To achieve his goal, Tristano devised a set of fingerings, isolating only two or three adjacent fingers at a time, such as 1-2, 1-2-3, 4-5, 3-4-5, 1-2-1-2-3, or 3-4-3-4-5. Students practiced each of the patterns in playing scales and, for some of them, improvising. Alan Broadbent pointed out the concentration involved in playing each note with equal intensity: "What I remember Lennie talking about was that it's a different technique. It's... 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." Broadbent continued: "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." According to Easton, the exercises enabled him to use any of the fingers on any key. They also helped students become unconstrained by familiar hand positions, so that they could avoid repetition of phrases that may fall habitually under the fingers. The ultimate purpose of the exercise was, as Lynn Anderson put it, to gain an ability to "prepare you to play what you hear at the time you hear it." Tristano was certainly able to hear the differences between fingerings while students worked on them, as Garson reminisced: "I'll never forget. One time I cheated in one of the lessons. I played the classical fingering instead of the 4-5, and he came flying over to the piano, he crashed into the piano, slapped my fingers. He knew that I was fooling him... so I didn't do that again." Tristano probably developed the fingerings after moving to New York, since in Chicago he recommended the Czerny exercises. Tristano indicated that a deep influence from Bud Powell in the late 1945 made him realize the importance of expressing feelings: "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 fingers have to reproduce not only sounds but feelings." Tristano also mentioned how the influence made him change his approach: "[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." Significantly, Powell's playing had an impact on his teaching as well as his playing: "I achieved it by not only spending a lot of time at the keyboard, but finding ways I could to make my fingers reproduce my deepest feelings. And this had a lot to do with my teaching, you see?" Tristano further explained: "The way Bud played the piano was never done before... The way Bud

articulates notes is absolutely completely personal. Every note sounds exactly the way he wanted it to sound... Bud gives every note his complete individual attention." Expressing his indebtedness to Powell, Tristano stated: "[T]his is what I've been working on as a teacher for 32 years... And without Bud's example I don't think I could really have arrived at what I've arrived at in my teaching... Because it simply meant that if you were really going to really portray your feelings, your fingers had to be able to duplicate what you heard and felt. Every note. Every note." Tristano also described the intense nature of the contact between the finger and the keyboard: "Fingers didn't just play notes... It meant, when you hit a note with a finger, you sank into that note, all the way to the bottom of the keyboard until it went pow! Right? You see, your finger stays with the key... Your finger sinks into those notes. This is what Bud got to me." Independence of the hands was another important aspect of Tristano's teaching. His 1945 recording of "What Is This Thing Called Love?" exhibits his ability in that respect, where his left hand improvised the line, normally a role played by the right hand. In order to help students develop equal versatility of both hands, he advised them to practice with each hand separately and slowly, especially when playing scales and melodies.

Tristano also focused on technical aspects with other instrumental students. For example, he recommended practicing articulation to guitar students in conjunction with group exercises, incorporating legato and staccato exercises as well as the use of downstrokes as related to Charlie Christian's timing, which he considered perfect, according to Meyer. To saxophone students such as Halperin he emphasized the importance of coordinating articulation and breathing, playing long tones, and mastering the lower register of the saxophone. As regards vibrato, Ted Brown recalled learning the modern style by emulating the musicians that Tristano recommended, such as Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, and most importantly, Lester Young. Brown also indicated that Tristano preferred "the straight sound without vibrato" in playing the lines. As can be heard on the 1949 recordings, the "straight sound," with which Konitz and Marsh played the intricate lines, helped them achieve the level of remarkable precision in both intonation and rhythm. To Marsh vibrato was an important aesthetic issue: "I became disenchanted with Duke's band when I realized that no two saxophone players in that section played with the same vibrato... I began hearing Lester Young, and really fell for his manner, on a quite conscious level."

### **Independence of the Limbs on the Drum Set**

Tristano applied the same thorough approach to drum students by starting at a very basic level and teaching them to use the limbs as four separate instruments. Most notably, he employed an unorthodox method of disregarding the rudiments and subjecting students to ear training and singing with the records. Tristano also emphasized slow learning, regardless of students' proficiency on the drum set, advising them to play whole notes in a slow tempo in each limb separately. Peter Scattaretico recalled: "He wanted everything real slow and real big. He wanted me to really feel it... It's more difficult to play slow than to play fast... So he started to give me exercises using whole notes between 40 and 60 on the metronome [per quarter note]... He chilled me out real quick." According to Bill Chattin, the idea was that "you get into that note... with your whole feeling," doing "everything very slowly with your full heart, mind, and soul." Another important component was learning the balance of the limbs by listening to the recordings of Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, Kenny Clarke, and Philly Joe Jones, and playing along with their records with just one limb at a time, as well as improvising with only whole notes. Scattaretico recalled that Tristano wanted him to "listen for balances of the limbs of those drummers, really dig into listening," and to "treat the four limbs as four separate instruments": "[W]e broke it down to the point where I was just playing with a record with just my left foot, the whole song, till the sound and the feel was there and the time was there. Then just my right hand

and then combination of my right hand and my left hand. Then we would improvise with whole notes.”

In the next step, called subdivisions or combinations, different rhythmic values were assigned to the limbs. When using all four limbs, Tristano assigned a different rhythmic value to each of them, whole, half, quarter, or eighth note, and derived twenty-four permutations. Table 7, an example by Scattaretico, shows six different combinations when the quarter note is in the bass drum; since the bass drum can play any of the four values, these six are multiplied by four, thus resulting in twenty-four permutations. In the exercises students used straight eighth notes rather than swung eighth notes. The same procedure of permutation was applied to rhythmic phrases; Scattaretico had to memorize a four-bar rhythm at first, and then an eight-bar rhythm, and play it as a unit in the combinations against the ride cymbal beat in the right hand. In Chattin's case the subdivision exercise incorporated soloing, as three of his limbs would play subdivisions while the fourth limb played a solo, at the same time varying the permutation in each measure.” Tristano also applied the concept of singing recorded solos to rhythmic exercises, involving a multistep process, as Scattaretico explained in reference to Charlie Christian's solo: "(1) you would sing the solo with the record, (2) sing it without the record, (3) then you would play the solo on the snare drum with the record. (4) Then you would play the solo; you would play time on ride cymbal, then you play the solo with your left hand. (5) And then you would play the solo between your left hand and your bass drum while you kept time." Scattaretico found the exercise beneficial, "because a guitarist's phrasing... is different than drums... [T]hings weren't always falling on the beat."

Bass drum	Snare drum	Hi-hat	Ride cymbal
quarter	whole	half	eighth
quarter	whole	eighth	half
quarter	half	whole	eighth
quarter	half	eighth	whole
quarter	eighth	whole	half
quarter	eighth	half	whole

Table 7. Permutations of four rhythmic values distributed among four limbs.

Polyrhythm was another important element, as Tristano encouraged students to superimpose different time signatures using mixed meters, cross rhythms, and inflections." For example, he asked Roger Mancuso to play "a lick in 3/8" over 4/4 and accent the first note of every other unit of the 3/8 lick on the bass drum. Mancuso also played cross rhythms of 3:4, 5:4, 7:4, 5:2, and 7:2 in combination with inflections, which he explained would combine multiple time feelings: "If I was playing 5:4, 4 with my right hand and then playing 5 with my left hand, and then I might inflect maybe every other beat of the 5, so that it becomes a completely different thing." Skip Scott worked on similar exercises. For example, in 2:3 there was "2 inflection on the 3, and 3 inflection on the 2" through accenting every other note in the triplets and every third note in the duple unit; he played these exercises with the ride cymbal pattern in his right hand and the hi-hat on the second and fourth beats. On top of the cross rhythm between two limbs, Scattaretico was asked to add another rhythmic layer played by a third limb: "If you would take a pattern... like sixteenth against eighth-note triplets, that would be a polyrhythm, and then with one of your other limbs he would have you imply another rhythm but in another time signature over that."

Drummers recalled that Tristano used the metronome during lessons to check whether students maintained the same tempo; he would turn it on at the beginning of a tune and turn it off, and then turn it back on at the end. Despite the polyrhythmic complexity, the rhythmic exercises were always in the framework of 4/4; Tristano never asked students to learn to play in any other meter, such as waltz time, or other groove, such as Latin or funk.

### **Time and the Metronome**

Tristano recommended that students practice with the metronome, which he believed represented the pure continuum of time, according to Meyer. Konitz explained how the metronome functioned in Tristano's music: "The metronome is a very unique tool. There is no way you're going to get more equal subdivisions, and he [Tristano] was very intent on subdividing accurately, because of all those very rhythmic permutations."

The metronome was a means of enhancing the awareness of the temporal aspect of music. Characteristically, "You gotta put every note right in there" was Tristano's favorite phrase, by which he stressed the importance of concentrating on each note in its relation to time, as well as playing it with conviction. Dave Frank recalled: "[W]hat Lennie taught me was the overriding concepts of time... [B]ig statements all the time, 'Put every note right in there'... and then he would hit the wall, 'You gotta put every note right in there, pow!' In particular, Tristano liked to use that expression in reference to Charlie Christian, whom he considered "the most swinging player ever," according to Meyer and who, he believed, played syncopated time perfectly, says Easton.

Tristano emphasized practicing slowly as a way to assimilate the material thoroughly, so that it would become second nature. It would eventually eliminate the thinking process, commented Mann, through "bypassing the brain to develop a relationship with the instrument," as Gorrill explained. "Slow" sometimes meant the slowest tempo possible on the metronome, and practicing at that tempo required an enormous degree of concentration. Stan Fortuna explained the effect of slow practicing: "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 I know all of a sudden... was I could just play as fast as I wanted to play." Fortuna also emphasized the profound impact of the experience: "It put the song so deep inside of me, it was incredible. I would just get lost playing with ecstatic sense, incredible creativity, and energy from that flow. That's what it was doing and he was really instructing me, leading me to be able to be led by the music... and the music is happening." Students gradually learned to play in faster tempos.

Tristano advised Cappello, "Don't play tempos you can't handle, and build it up gradually like you build a muscle." Reflecting his focus on comprehensiveness, Tristano encouraged some students to use the entire range of tempos available on the metronome, recommending they take everything up one notch at a time. Underlying Tristano's emphasis on slow practicing was the importance of learning the basics thoroughly. In principle, it was related to slowing down records to fully hear the impact of each note, and was also a means of preventing students from becoming compulsive; according to Pastorini, he believed most jazz musicians played compulsively.

### **Visualization and Practicing Away from the Instrument**

Practicing away from the instrument meant practicing in the head through visualizing the instrument or the music, which must have developed out of Tristano's experience of being visually impaired. It is fascinating how he had the keyboard "light up," as Ted Brown reported: "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." Brown continued: "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."

The exact process of visualization varied among students. Mosca had to learn how to see the piano keyboard or the score in his mind, while Anderson was told to visualize the chords and scales away from the piano, imagining her fingers playing them. Among saxophone students, Victor Lesser worked on visualizing the saxophone keys, while Ted Brown practiced silently on his instrument as well as away from it through visualization: "[Tristano] also stressed, know what the notes are and know what fingers you'd be pushing down at that point, and that was a tremendous help because you really got the thing embedded in your mind... 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." Tristano often stressed the connection between the senses, such as hearing, feeling, and seeing, which would enable students to experience the musical process as a whole. For example, he told Metcalfe to "practice away from the piano; see them, hear them, feel them." This approach conveyed the view that the integration and synchronicity of the senses would enhance the perception of music, thus cultivating intuition and spontaneity, aspects essential to the creative process of improvisation. As a means of making a connection between the inner self and the outer world, it ingrained the music deeply into students, helping them avoid the conscious thinking process, which Tristano considered detrimental to improvisation. He told Mann, "Visualize it. Hear it before you play... Don't play while you're thinking... Do all the work slow enough, get it natural, so you're not thinking." Mann recalled: "When I played a certain phrase he'd say, 'No, you didn't hear that'... and he was usually right. I had another agenda. I was trying to impress him, I was trying to play too fast... 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."

### **Relaxation and Posture**

Another important element in Tristano's teaching concerned relaxation of the body and posture, as he believed that any tension in the body would interfere with creative activity.<sup>74</sup> Piano students recalled that when he perceived tension in their hands while playing, he would suddenly lift them. Broadbent, age eighteen at the time, remarked on his first lesson: "[H]e took his hand and felt my spine and... straightened my back. And... he said, 'Just keep playing,' and he... went like that [picking up the hand] to feel my wrist. Of course my wrist stayed right there. It didn't move. So Lennie told me about posture, how important it is to breathe and relax when you play, which has taken a long time for me to learn." Tristano would also put his hands on the students' shoulders and tell them to relax. In addition, he objected to tapping the foot while playing on the grounds that it was a compulsive behavior that could come through in their playing. To singers Tristano recommended, as with Lynn Bongiorno, loosening exercises such as making circular motion with the hips, pressing on the muscles in the neck to release the tension, and screaming; and he made Dori Levine aware of the tension in her facial muscles and jaw, and told her to drop her shoulders, breathe with the entire body, and avoid compulsive vibrato. The elimination of tension concerned the whole body rather than only the parts directly involved in playing or singing.

**Playing Sessions** When Tristano had his Manhattan studio in the early 1950s, he provided a venue for students to play by holding jam sessions. Singer Sheila Jordan was there: "Lennie knew the need to get out and play together, the need to create music together... Here in New York we could... be sure that every weekend we had a place to play... And that's one of the most important things... having a place for his students to come and play and to try out their ideas, and maybe

fall on their face... and then he would pick you up." Jordan further recalled: "It was fabulous, because there was no drinking there, there was no drugs... And nobody talked except in between tunes when they'd take a break and you sat for five or six hours or... seven hours, and you listened or you joined in... I learned a lot at those sessions." The sessions continued for four years until 1955, according to Ted Brown, as discussed in chapter 3.