

# Improv Inside Out



*A method for mindful melody-making*

*By Tyler Thomas*

# Three Caveats

- 1) I will not tell you anything about *music* that you don't already know,  
but I might help you *reframe* the knowledge you already possess
- 2) This is *not* a replacement for traditional improvisation pedagogy,  
but it might complement what you're already doing
- 3) It *is* the result of personal reflection on my own musical cognition,  
and my work with high school and college students

# Tier 1: Orientation to the Tonic

Building an expressive relationship to each note

Play each note, one at a time, over tonic drone

*“What does that sound like to you?”*

*“What does it make you think of?”*

*“How does it make you feel?”*

## Tier 2: Short Stories

Builds on expressive associations

*“Tell me a three-note story about \_\_\_\_\_.”*

*“What adjectives would you use to describe that story?”*

*“Can you make it more [adjective] by changing your [rhythms/dynamics/articulations/timbre]?”*

## Tier 3: Motion, Tension, and Release

Extending tension

*“Add a note before the tension to increase the tension.”*

*“Add a note after the tension to delay the release.”*

[Enclosures, bebop scales, secondary dominant function]

## Tier 4: Touring the Neighborhood

Choose any series of roots

*“There are  $X$  places in this neighborhood.”*

*“Tell me a story that describes each place in this neighborhood.”*

## Tier 5: Planning Your Story

Mapping expressive intent to a given harmonic progression

Integrates concepts from all tiers

*“This story already has a setting, but it needs characters and actions.”*

*“My story will be about \_\_\_\_\_. First, I want to sound [adjective], and then [adjective].”*

# Modeling the Method: There Will Never Be Another You

Tier 1: Orientation to the Tonic

Tier 2: Short Stories

Tier 3: Motion, Tension, and Release

Tier 4: Touring the Neighborhood

Tier 5: Planning Your Story



# Modeling the Method: There Will Never Be Another You

The image displays a musical score for the song "There Will Never Be Another You" in E-flat major, 3/4 time. The score is divided into four systems, each with a key signature of two flats and a common time signature of 3/4. The lyrics are written below the notes, and specific notes are circled in red. Above the staff, colored boxes indicate the mood and chord for each measure. The lyrics are: "THERE MAY BE MAN - Y OTH - ER NIGHTS LIKE THIS, AND I'LL BE STAND - ING HERE WITH SOME - ONE NEW. THERE WILL BE OTH - ER SONGS TO SING, AN - OTH - ER FALL, AN - OTH - ER SPRING, BUT THERE WILL NEV - ER BE AN - OTH - ER YOU. THERE".

**System 1:** Chords: E $\flat$ 7 NONCHALANT, D $\flat$ 7(b9), G7 PAINED. Lyrics: THERE MAY BE MAN - Y OTH - ER NIGHTS LIKE THIS, AND

**System 2:** Chords: C-7, B $\flat$ -7 RESOLVED, E $\flat$ 7. Lyrics: I'LL BE STAND - ING HERE WITH SOME - ONE NEW. THERE

**System 3:** Chords: A $\flat$ 7, D $\flat$ 7 SASSY, E $\flat$ 7 COOL, C-7. Lyrics: WILL BE OTH - ER SONGS TO SING, AN - OTH - ER FALL, AN - OTH - ER SPRING, BUT

**System 4:** Chords: F7 HOPEFUL, F-7 SURE, B $\flat$ 7. Lyrics: THERE WILL NEV - ER BE AN - OTH - ER YOU. THERE