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So, you want to learn the jazz ballad, Misty? Excellent! You've come to the right place. This article will explain everything you need to know to understand, memorize, and play Misty. In this Misty jazz tutorial, you'll learn— A brief history of the jazz standard Misty Why it's an important part of the jazz repertoire Best practices you need to follow to learn the melody and chord changes of Misty Essential tips for practicing improvisation over the Misty chords Be sure to use the table of contents to get right to the harmonic analysis. This article will have plenty of information about this cherished ballad, but if you want a more in-depth and comprehensive breakdown of Misty and many other tunes, then you need to check out the Learn Jazz Standards Inner Circle. When you join the Inner Circle, you'll get access to the complete study of Misty and complete study of Misty and master your instrument, then the Learn Jazz Standards Inner Circle is the place to be. Improve in 30 days or less. Join the Inner Circle. Table of Contents image source: Wikimedia Commons Misty was composed by jazz pianist Erroll Garner in 1954. Garner's original instrumental recording appeared on his album Contrasts and quickly became a hit. The instrumental version of Misty stole the hearts of many with its unique blend of romanticism and musical sophistication. Eventually, it crossed over into the pop world and the American Songbook library. The first vocal version was performed by Johnny Burke. Since then, Misty has been performed and recorded by countless vocalists, including Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, and Frank Sinatra. image source: Wikimedia Commons Look at mel'm as helpless as a kitten up a treeAnd I feel like I'm clingin' to the cloudI can't understandI get misty just holding your hand Walk my wayAnd a thousand violins begin to playOr it might be the sound of your helloThat music I hearI get misty the moment you're near Can't you see that you're leading me on? And it's just what I want you to doDon't you notice how hopelessly I'm lost? That's why I'm following you On my ownWould I wander through this wonderland alone? Never knowing my right foot from my leftMy hat from my gloveI'm too misty and too much in loveToo misty and too much in love Lyrics by Johnny Burke image source: Wikimedia Commons You might be wondering, "Why is 'Misty' so important in the jazz repertoire?" There are several reasons why this tune is an essential jazz standard that you need to know. Firstly, Misty is a jam session regular and a tune that most working jazz musicians will know. If you know this tune, you can bet everyone else on the stage does, too. You can always rely on it if you need to call a tune or are playing with jazz musicians you've never played with before. Secondly, the song is a classic example of a 32-bar AABA ballad. Misty uses chord progressions found in many jazz tunes, and it has interesting chord substitutions and harmonic techniques built into the song. This gives jazz piano and guitar players much to do when comping. Thirdly, Misty has been interpreted by so many jazz musicians over the decades that it offers a vast resource for learning and inspiration. You can listen to countless recordings, each with its unique interpretation, and learn so much about the jazz language and expression. Whether you're just starting your jazz journey or looking to get serious about learning jazz, exploring "Misty" will undoubtedly enrich your musical experience and help prepare you to learn more challenging tunes. image source: Wikimedia Commons The jazz ballad is a slower, more emotive style of jazz that is deceptively difficult to master. Ballads present a different kind of technical challenge. The slower tempo might seem easier initially, but it requires much control and precision. You need to sustain long notes, maintain a good time feel, and make every note hit just the right way. It's a test of your technical skills but in a different way than fast, complex pieces. Ballads are the heart of jazz's emotional expression. Their slower tempos and often rich lyrics allow for deep emotional connection. When you learn to play a ballad, you're not just learning notes and chords—you're learning how to convey emotion through your instrument. Also, slower tunes open up new possibilities for improvisation. The slow pace gives you more space to stretch out and explore different melodic ideas, rhythmic variations, and expressive techniques. So, with that out of the way, let's dive into how you should practice learning the Misty chords! image source: Wikimedia Commons One question that often crops up among jazz students is, "Why can't I just read the melody from sheet music?" Think of it like this. Would you learn to read using your ears? No, because reading is a visual form of communication. Jazz is an aural art form, so you must rely on your ears? No, because reading is a visual form of communication. Jazz is an aural art form, so you must rely on your ears? No, because reading is a visual form of communication. dive deeper into the music, grasping not just the notes but every slip, rise, fall, articulation, and blue note that makes the tune come alive. Learning by ear also develops your musical intuition. It fine-tunes your sense of pitch, rhythm, phrasing, and articulation—skills that are essential for any jazz musician. This enhances your musicality and ability to communicate with other musicians in a jam session or gig. While sheet music is a helpful tool, effective jazz playing requires a deep connection to the music. This connection gets diminished when you are trying to read a lead sheet. So, when learning jazz standards like Misty, you must get off the page. Your ears are your greatest asset. image source: Wikimedia Commons Once you've familiarized yourself with the melody of "Misty," the next step is to play through and learn the song's rich chord progression. "Misty" follows a classic 32-bar AABA structure with a unique harmonic language that is both beautiful and instructive. We'll discuss Misty's chords by name (Eb) and Roman numerals (I) for our analysis. If you don't know how Roman numeral chords work, you'll want to check out this post about analyzing a tune using Roman numerals. It will make memorizing chord progressions so much easier. Let's have a look at the A section begins on an Eb, modulating to Ab major with a ii-V-I. Though this Ab chord is the IV chord in the key of Eb, we can also consider this a new key. This is called tonicization. But why? Well, we got to Ab by playing a Bb-7 and an Eb7, which are not diatonic chords in the key of Eb (that's how we know it's a new key and not just the IV chord). In the fourth bar, we change keys again by playing an ii-V-I to Gb, which is Ab-7 and Db7, but we never resolve to Gb. Instead, we move back to an Eb for the next four bars. This Db7 is important! We call this a backdoor dominant, and you can find this chord substitution replaces the V7 chord, which in Eb would be a Bb7. Check out this article to learn more about backdoor dominants. Bars five through eight stay (mostly) in the key of Eb major and contain two variations of the I-vi-ii-V progression. You'll see the I-vi-ii-V progression all over jazz tunes. The only difference between these two variations is in the vi chord. In bar five, it is a diatonic vi chord. However, the second time around, it is a VI7 chord. This dominant VI chord makes the pull to F minor stronger. The I-VI-ii-V only happens in the first ending. During the repeat of the A section, the second four bars of the B section have more harmonic juice than the first four. In fact, there are several ways to play it, which isn't all that strange for older jazz songs. It's another reason you should listen to more than one version. In the simplest chord arrangement, you have a ii-V to the iii chord, which leads to a iii-VI-ii-V progression that takes you back to the final A section. Check out this article to learn more about the ii-V-I progressions, as well as this article to learn more about the ii-V-I progression. Now that we understand the melody and harmony, it's time to blow over the changes. Let's explore best practices for improvising over Misty. It's best practice to play through tunes in a systematic, goal-oriented way to internalize its harmonic movement and intentionally select the notes you hear, not the ones your fingers remember. There are three main avenues for systematically practicing improv over a song: Playing scales over the changes Playing arpeggios over the changes Playing guide tones and target notes over the changes This thorough approach to practicing improv will guarantee you hear the following section, we'll review how to tackle these three practicing methods, using the first eight bars of Misty as an example. Set a metronome to play on beats 2 and 4. Doing so might be challenging at slower tempos, but the rewards are worth it. If you can't get through it, setting the metronome to all four beats is fine. If 2 and 4 become too easy, set it to 2 or 4. Be sure to focus on time feel and how your notes sound: Once you feel comfortable with these scales, try altering the scales on dominant chords to reflect various chord extensions. The b9 on the Eb7 in bar two sounds particularly good here. For more scale ideas, check out our post on the 16 most important jazz scales you need to know. Whether you play a chordal instrument like guitar or piano or a monophonic one like trumpet or saxophone, you need to practice arpeggios over the changes. This will help you hear the chord tones more clearly and add a different sound to your jazz solos. Try playing this arpeggio exercise with a metronome on 2 and 4, just like the scales. Be sure to focus on time feel and how your notes sound: Check out this in-depth article for more on arpeggios and how to practice them. When you have to think about target notes for each chord, it forces you to engage with the basic harmonic elements of the tune. Playing scales over the fifth to convey the harmonic essence of the progression. That's why practicing guide tones is essential. It connects you with the core elements of each chord. The guide tones you should focus on are the 3rds and 7ths. Like with the other exercises, try this with a metronome on beats 2 and 4. Be sure to focus on time feel and how your notes sound: If you want to internalize Misty's melody, check out many versions beyond the Johnny Mathis or Erroll Garner recordings. There are so many excellent arrangements of the song, but definitely check out the following versions. The original instrumental version of the song is by the composer. Garner's expressive piano playing and unique sense of timing set the benchmark for every "Misty" performance that followed. Check out this article to learn more about Erroll Garner and other famous jazz pianists. This smooth and heartfelt vocal recording of the song, with Johnny Burke's lyrics, brought "Misty" into the realm of popular music and remains a classic interpretation. Ella's stunning vocal agility and emotional depth gave Misty a fresh coat of paint, making this a standout performance in her vast repertoire. Check out this article to learn more about Ella and other jazz legends. Sarah Vaughan is known for her rich, luxuriant voice, and her version of Misty with its classic Frank orchestration. Check out this article to learn about other Frank Sinatra songs. In this live recording from the famous album Smokin' at the Half Note, jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery perfectly translates the melody's lyricism on the guitar. Check out this article to learn more about Wes Montgomery perfectly translates the melody's lyricism on the guitar. tune's romantic appeal. Check out this article to learn more about Stan Getz and other jazz saxophonists. This live recording of the song showcases Terry's playful, conversational trumpet-playing style. Also, check out this article to learn more about Clark Terry and other jazz trumpet players. Known for his comedy and novelty songs, Stevens took Misty in a different direction with his country/bluegrass-inspired version of the song, which became a hit in its own right. If you want more of these deep dives into jazz standards like Misty, check out the Learn Jazz Standards Inner Circle. When you join, you'll have access to complete, in-depth analyses, exercises, scale maps, guide tone charts, and other invaluable resources to help you become the best jazz player you can be. Improve in 30 days or less. Join the Inner Circle. 24h_logged-in":{"imgUrl":","title":"Welcome Offer:","subtitle":"Welcome Offer: NOW", "prompts": {"title": {"en": "Welcome Offer: ", "es": "Oferta de Bienvenida: ", "pt": ", "pt Ultimate Guitar Pro+"},"buttonText":{"en":"TRY NOW","es":"PRUÉBALO AHORA","pt":"EXPERIMENTE AGORA"}}},"24h_logged-out":{"imgUrl":","title":"Welcome Offer:","subtitle":"Welcome Offer:","subtitle":"Welcome Offer:","es":"Oferta de Bienvenida:","pt":"Oferta de Boas-Vindas:"},"subtitle":{"en":"%percentage% de DESCUENTO en la suscripción anual de Ultimate Guitar Pro+","pt":"%percentage% de DESCONTO na assinatura anual do Ultimate Guitar Pro+"},"buttonText":{"en":"TRY NOW", "es": "PRUÉBALO AHORA", "pt": "EXPERIMENTE AGORA" } } }, "default": "ititle": "welcome Offer", "subtitle": "Welcome Offer: ", "es": "Oferta de Bienvenida: ", "pt": "Oferta de Boas-Vindas: "}, "subtitle": "wercentage% OFF on annual membership of UG Pro+", "buttonText": "TRY NOW", "prompts": "title": "welcome Offer", "subtitle": 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{"precision":2,"min":20,"max":50,"increment":0.5}],"dynamicLoad":true,"disableAdx":false,"isGDPRAvailable":true,"isShowOnTap":false,"adsTargeting":{"song":"Misty","artist":"Ella Fitzgerald", "tab subtype":""}, "isRegistered":0, "emailHash": "e3b0c44298fc1c149afbf4c8996fb92427ae41e4649b934ca495991b7852b855", "hasConsentCookie": false, "slots":[]}} > Jazz ballad turned into a crossover hit by the attentions of Johnny Mathis and Clint Eastwood Composed by Erroll Garner Year 1954 Length 32 bars Time 4/4 Look at me, I'm as helpless as a kitten up a tree; And I feel like I'm clingin' to a cloud I can't understand I get misty, just holding your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand Walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand of your hand walk my way And a thousand violins begin to play Or it might be the sound of your hand of your hand of your hand walk my way And a thousand violins begin to your h notice how hopelessly I'm lost That's why I'm following you On my own Would I wander through this wonderland alone Never knowing my right foot from my left My hat from my glove I'm too misty, and too much in love If you want to learn Misty chords to the jazz standard Misty then you've come to the right place! Ok, so as promised I charted out the chords for the jazz piano video lesson I made on reharmonizing Misty. If you haven't seen the video check it out here: Misty reharmonization lesson. Thanks to Bill Evans and Oscar Peterson for their inspiration in building these Misty Chords for the 21st century. Original Misty Chords (with melody) Here is the chord chart for the reharmonized chords. As you can see there is a lot of inner voice motion, delayed resolution, tritone substitutions, and some other voodoo stuff. Make sure you watch the performance and lesson on these new Misty chords below. The traditional misty chords are as follows: Ebmaj7 - Bbm7 Eb7 - Abmaj7 - Abmaj7 - Abmaj7 - Abmaj7 - Fm7 Bb7 - Fm That's the A section of the song. Now, in the next section I'm going to show you some much cooler Misty Chords. You'll get much more people taking notice if you play these chords below. Reharmonized Misty Chords In the very beginning I'm harmonizing the 1st part of the melody with a dominant 7th sus going to a dominant 7th. Most people just play the first 2 notes as pickup notes. I wanted too add some interesting sounding jazz harmony into the mix. The first traditional chord of Misty is usually just a basic Ebmaj7. To create some forward motion I'm harmonizing it in the very beginning with an Eb diminished 7th chord. Then, I finally resolve to the Ebmaj7 chord. This diminished resolving to major is a jazz theory technique I learned from Bill Evans. I'm also using a tritone substitution in the last line. This is a fundamental jazz chord technique that essentially takes a dominant chord 6 half steps higher. It's a beautiful sound. Hope you all enjoy the reharmonization video and the 2 different Misty chord charts. Let me know if there are other tunes or jazz lessons you guys would like me to dive into? Update: I just did a whole reharmonization lesson on the chord changes to Here's That Rainy Day. Check it out! You can also immediately access over 22 hours of tunes, chords, and reharmonization secrets in my training program right here.

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