

PLAY IT BY EAR

by

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I am self taught on the piano. I play by ear and cannot read piano scores. So, in my teens, it was I-IV-V; then, I-ii-V-I; then I-III- VI-II-V-I; then major & minor pentatonic, then 8 and 12 bar bluesand there I stayed for quite a while (i.e. the next 20 years or so).

Then, reluctantly, it was learning to play in some other keys than C and G, Am and Dm. A bit later, in my late 40's and 50's, there began an almighty struggle to try to understand what the hell b & # 5ths, 1 1ths and 1 3ths were all about.

And if that wasn't enough, along came 'modes' with their pretentious Greek names. That was where I became stuck and apathetic. Eventually, and somewhat grudgingly, I went to Long and McQuade to consult some jazz theory books. They didn't help much. I mean what was the point? Ray Charles didn't use modes. However one day, I had a nightmarish 'aha' moment as I came to the appalling realization that in addition to the cognitive challenges of # and b5ths, in order to grapple with those pesky modes, my brain was being asked to create numerous new neural pathways, and my fingers were being challenged to adapt to all kinds of new fine motor skills, and... goldarnit ...I was going to have to learn how to play in 12 major and 12 minor keys and learn at least 3 positions of at least 12 basic chords in all of those 24 keys. I mean ...really!!

Years and buckets of sweat later, at the sexy age of 74, I wish to report that I'm finally just about there! Maybe by the age of 80, I'll be able to play 'Girl From Ipanema' in Ab!