

Summary of the Transcription Process

Anyone who has studied with me privately or in a master class situation, whether advanced or not are aware of my feelings about transcribing solos. My DVD on the subject, *The Improviser's Guide To Transcription* (Caris Music Services), provides a step by step analysis of the how and why of this process. In my opinion, it is the most efficient and productive technique for learning to improvise in the jazz tradition, or in any tradition for that matter. It is the closest one can come to the age old master apprenticeship system which existed for centuries as the accepted method for learning the arts and crafts. In a contemporary sense, transcribing a master is the next best thing to having an accomplished improviser in front of a student as a model to copy and inspire. Another positive aspect of this process is that one's progress can be measured without the aid of an institution or system. Transcription is an unbeatable tool as a means to an end. The end being artistic creation, musical freedom and hopefully, a recognizable style of playing. Knowing what came before is the only way to realize what there is left to do. Imitation as a stage of learning is timeless and inevitable.

This mode of thought holds especially true in jazz because outside of the specific notes and rhythms, the intangible essence of this music cannot be notated exactly. This includes but is not limited to the subtleties of rhythmic feel and how the artist interprets the beat as well as the use of expressive nuance in one's sound, aspects of which are usually lumped under the word "phrasing." In transcribing, a musician is forced to hear and duplicate everything-even the intangibles. Finally, with the notes written out on paper, it becomes possible to analyze the thought process of the improviser. This can help the student initiate his or her own ideas and inspire one to go further in their own research.

In summary, transcription involves three basic areas of our musical faculties:

1. Notation through saturated listening to the selected solo, the student internalizes (by singing at first) the notes and undertakes the painstaking, necessary craft of notating the rhythms and pitches of the solo.
2. Playing - with repeated instrumental practice, the solo is exactly imitated in every way, including dynamics, articulation, nuance, time feel, tone coloring and of course, the rhythms and pitches.
3. Analysis - using the classic methods of theme and variation study, motivic analysis and form structure concepts, etc., the student deduces to the best of his ability the thought processes represented in the work. By isolating passages and phrases, learning them in different keys and tempos, creating variations and using them in other comparable harmonic situations, the student begins to transform the transcription process from imitation to creation.

Specific Tools For Practicing Transcriptions

Playing and duplicating the solo

1. Use half speed for practicing synchronization with the original as well as for study of nuance and expressive techniques used. For symbols used in the transcriptions, refer to the "Definition of Symbols".
2. Eventually, try to play the solo along with the original at regular speed.
3. After playing with the original, play without using a metronome, with an accompanist, or a play-along of the same track to check how well you know it. You can even make your own play-along on a cassette.
4. Play the solo in different keys and tempos.
5. Use the solo as a point of departure to improvise on your own within the chord progression. Stay close to the style and feel of the original but initiate your own thoughts.

Creating your own ideas

1. Extract a line, pattern, motif and transpose it to other keys and tempos.
2. Categorizing, transposing and composing original lines. Put all the lines that are from the same progression or chord change type on one page. This is to see the similarities and differences when a soloist encounters a specific chord or progression. With the help of an experienced musician choose the "best" lines using criteria of choice of notes, rhythmic interest and overall shape. See "John Coltrane's I-VI-ii-V Sequences..." as well as "Coltrane ii-V Lines – Blue Train."
 - A. Transpose it to other keys and play/memorize it at different tempos. Put the line into a tune at the same harmonic place.
 - B. Place it at the top of a page and write variations using typical theme and variation techniques (augmentation, diminution, syncopation, sequence change, displacement both melodically and rhythmically, neighboring tones, etc.). Do these "new lines" in other keys and at other tempos. Try to place them in other contexts where the same progression appears. See "ii-V Variations – Shorter and Longer."
3. Use a graph of the solo written out horizontally with all the same bars lined up vertically from the top of the page down. In this manner, you can see what was played on each chorus in a particular bar. By skipping around between choruses, you can create new and unique combinations from what the soloist did. See "Transcription Graph."

Example A #1-6 - This represents Charlie Parkers first 4 bars from his original solo on

confirmation (6 choruses).

Example B - These are possible lines made up of a bar of different choruses with original bars interjected by the student.

Example B #1 - Bar 1 from Charlie Parkers (Birds) chorus. Bar 2 is taken from bar 2 of Bird's 3rd chorus (B.C.3 = Bird Chorus 3). Bar 3 is also taken from Bird's 3rd chorus, while the 4th bar is an original idea from the student.

Example B #2 - This time there are no original ideas from the student, but bars 1 and 2 are taken from Bird's 5th chorus, and bars 3 and 4 are taken from Bird's 4th chorus.

Example B #3 - Here bars 1 and 3 are taken from Bird's 4th chorus, while bars 2 and 4 are original ideas from the student.

Example B #4 - Bar 1 is taken from Bird's 2nd chorus and bar 4 is taken from Bird's 5th chorus. Bars 2 and 3 are original ideas from the student.

4. Compose an original solo.

By the time you are done with all of the above, not only will everything be naturally memorized, but the process of internalizing will have begun. This means that what you practice today find its way into your playing without having to think about it in the near future. Depending upon the material, its difficulty and your ability to absorb the information, this process can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months, but you can be sure that eventually it will occur if you have done the work.

Definitions of Notation Symbols

1. (Tenuto) Legato Tongue



Hold full value.

2. Heavy Accent



Hold full value.

3. Heavy accent with tenuto



Hold full value with tenuto.

4. Short Gliss Up



Slide into note from below using a combination of lip and fingers (usually one to three half steps) (known also as portamento).

5. Scoop



Indicated note is lipped up from below.

6. Fall off



Lower the pitch at end of note by primarily using lip.

7. Ghosted note



Definite pitch. Substantially softer than notes before and after.

8. Staccato



Short – not heavy.

9. Heavy accent



Hold less than full value.

10. Heavy accent with staccato



Short as possible

11. Short gliss down



Slide away from note using a combination of lip and fingers (usually one to three half steps).

12. Pitch bend



Pitch manipulation using lip after note begins.

13. Fall up



Raise pitch at end of note primarily using lip.

14. Ghosted (phantom or swallowed) note



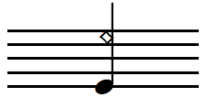
Indefinite pitch: played extremely soft.

15. Split note



Produce the indicated note one octave lower.

16. Diamond note



Sing diamond note while playing indicated note.

17. Turn



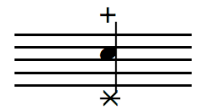
An ornament consisting of a group of four or five notes that turn around the indicated note.

18. Vibrato



When indicated is used as an expressive device. In solos where vibrato is used as a constant, especially in slower tunes, it is not specifically indicated.

19. Harmonic overtone



Finger "x" note and sound indicated pitch.

20. Grace note



A note printed in small type to indicate that its time value is not counted in the rhythm of the bar and must be subtracted from that of an adjacent note.

21. Vocalization



The note indicated is played while an indefinite pitch is sung.

22. Ahead----

Rhythms are rushed (played ahead of the beat).

23. Behind----

Rhythms are dragged (played behind the beat).

24. Growl----

Hum with voice.

25. Pedal----

Stationary root center for indicated measures.

26. Squeeze----

Sudden cut off air stream.

27. tr.

Triadic voicing.


John Coltrane's I-VI-ii-V Sequences on "Oleo"

1st two bars

The image displays nine lines of musical notation for the first two bars of John Coltrane's "Oleo". Each line is numbered 1 through 9 on the left. The notation is in treble clef with a 7/4 time signature. The notes are written in a way that illustrates the I-VI-ii-V chord sequence. Above each line, the corresponding chords are labeled: CΔ7, A7, D-7, G7, and CΔ7. Line 3 includes triplet markings over the first two measures. Line 6 shows a D-7 chord with a flat on the second degree (D-7b9) in the second measure. The notes in each line represent different voicings and melodic lines for the same chord sequence.

Coltrane ii-V lines - Blue Train

1 

2 

3 

4 

5 

ii-V Variations - Shorter

ORIGINAL

Musical staff showing the original ii-V progression in G major. Chords: B-7, E7, AΔ7. The melody consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, followed by a quarter rest.

SEQUENCE CHANGE

Musical staff showing a sequence change variation. Chords: B-7, E7, AΔ7. The melody is identical to the original.

NEIGHBORING TONES

Musical staff showing neighboring tones variation. Chords: B-7, E7, AΔ7. The melody is identical to the original, but the final note G5 is replaced by a quarter rest.

RHYTHMIC DISPLACEMENT

Musical staff showing rhythmic displacement variation. Chords: B-7, E7, AΔ7. The melody is identical to the original, but the first note G4 is a quarter note later than in the original.

SYNCOPIATION

Musical staff showing syncopation variation. Chords: B-7, E7, AΔ7. The melody is identical to the original, but the first note G4 is a quarter note later than in the original.

SYNCOPIATION

Musical staff showing syncopation variation. Chords: B-7, E7, AΔ7. The melody is identical to the original, but the first note G4 is a quarter note later than in the original.

VARIED RHYTHMS

Musical staff showing varied rhythms variation. Chords: B-7, E7, AΔ7. The melody is identical to the original, but the notes are grouped into triplets.

VARIED RHYTHMS

Musical staff showing varied rhythms variation. Chords: B-7, E7, AΔ7. The melody is identical to the original, but the notes are grouped into triplets.

NEIGHBORING TONES

Musical staff showing neighboring tones variation. Chords: B-7, E7, AΔ7. The melody is identical to the original, but the final note G5 is replaced by a quarter rest.

TRANSPOSED

Musical staff showing the transposed version of the ii-V progression in C major. Chords: C-7, F7, BbΔ7. The melody consists of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, followed by a quarter rest.

ii-V Variations - Longer

ORIGINAL

Chords: C#-7, F#7, B

NEIGHBORING TONES

Chords: C#-7, F#7, B

ORIGINAL

Chords: Bb-7, Eb7, Ab

SEQUENCE CHANGE

Chords: Bb-7, Eb7, Ab

ORIGINAL

Chords: Eb-7, Ab7, Db

VARIATION:
1 BEAT LATER

Chords: Eb-7, Ab7, Db

VARIATION:
1/2 BEAT EARLIER

Chords: Eb-7, Ab7, Db

ORIGINAL

Chords: F-7, Bb7, Eb

SEQUENCE CHANGE

Chords: F-7, Bb7, Eb

SEQUENCE CHANGE

Chords: F-7, Bb7, Eb

Transcription Graph - Confirmation

Example A

Charlie Parkers 1st 4 bars of each chorus (6 Choruses)

Example A shows six staves of music, each representing a different line of transcription. The chords are: F, Eø7, A7, D-7, G7, C-7, and F7. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, slurs, and fingerings (e.g., 3, 6, 5).

Example B - Rearranged Lines

These are possible lines made up of bars from different Bird choruses with original bars interjected by the student.

(1st 4 bars of 4 choruses)

Example B shows four staves of music, each representing a different line of transcription. The chords are: F, Eø7, A7, D-7, G7, C-7, and F7. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, slurs, and fingerings (e.g., 3, 6). Labels like "bird chorus 1", "B.C. 3", "original", and "B.C. 5" are used to identify the source of each bar.

Suggested Solos (from the 60s-late 50s)

Adderley, Cannonball – Milestones - Miles Davis - Milestones

Coleman, George - Autumn Leaves - Miles In Europe/Stella - M.Davis - My Funny Valentine

Coltrane - Softly/So What/ Oleo/Blue Trane/Impressions(any one)/Resolution

Corea, Chick - Matrix

Davis, Miles - Bye Bye Blackbird/So What/Freddie Freeloader

Hancock, Herbie - Autumn Leaves (Miles in Europe)

Mobley, Hank - Pfrancing(Someday My Prince Will Come-Miles)/No Blues(Miles Live at Carnegie Hall)

Powell, Bud – Cherokee - Genius of Bud Powell

Rollins, Sonny - It Could Happen To You (Sound of Sonny)/Sonny Moon For Two(Night at the Village Vanguard)/Surrey With the Fringe On the Top (Newk's Time)/Tenor Madness

Shorter, Wayne - Speak No Evil/ 81 (ESP-Miles Davis)

Stitt, Sonny - No Greater Love - Boss Tenors/Eternal Triangle (same name recording)

Tristano, Lennie - Line Up/East 32nd St

Tyner, McCoy - Night and Day(Inner Urge-Joe Henderson)/ Passion Dance(The Real McCoy)/Speak Low (Inception-McCoy T)/Pursuance(Love Supreme)