E♭ Instruments

14 Blues & Funk Etudes

BOB MINTZER

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction . . . 3
1. Shuffle de-Funk . . . 5
2. Blues Shuffle . . . 8
3. Easy Groove . . . 12
4. Simply Stated . . . 16
5. Blues With A Bridge . . . 19
6. Slammin' . . . 25
7. Church Song . . . 28
8. BeBop Special . . . 32
9. Relaxed . . . 36
10. Blues For Days . . . 38
11. See Forever . . . 44
12. Lyrical . . . 48
13. Weirdo-Funk . . . 52
14. Rhythm Check . . . 54

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Special thanks to Jack Bullock, Larry Clark, and Dave Olsen at Warner Bros. Publications,
to Jim Russ and Will for their impeccable musicianship and dedication, to Michael Brorby and Chuck Loeb for
their beautiful engineering, to my family, Carla and Paul, and to all the funksters out there
who played the music which inspired this book.

Editor: Larry Clark

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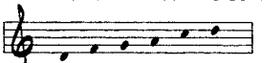
I. SHUFFLE DE - FUNK

The first piece is written in a shuffle-funk style in which the 16th notes are played with a swing inflection ( ). I heard this melody in my head one day while flying cross-country. The melody itself implies a strong groove and stands up pretty well without rhythm section accompaniment. The form of the tune is AABAC. Letter {B} is a third section which precedes the solo section {C}. The solo form consists of two A sections, and one C Section.

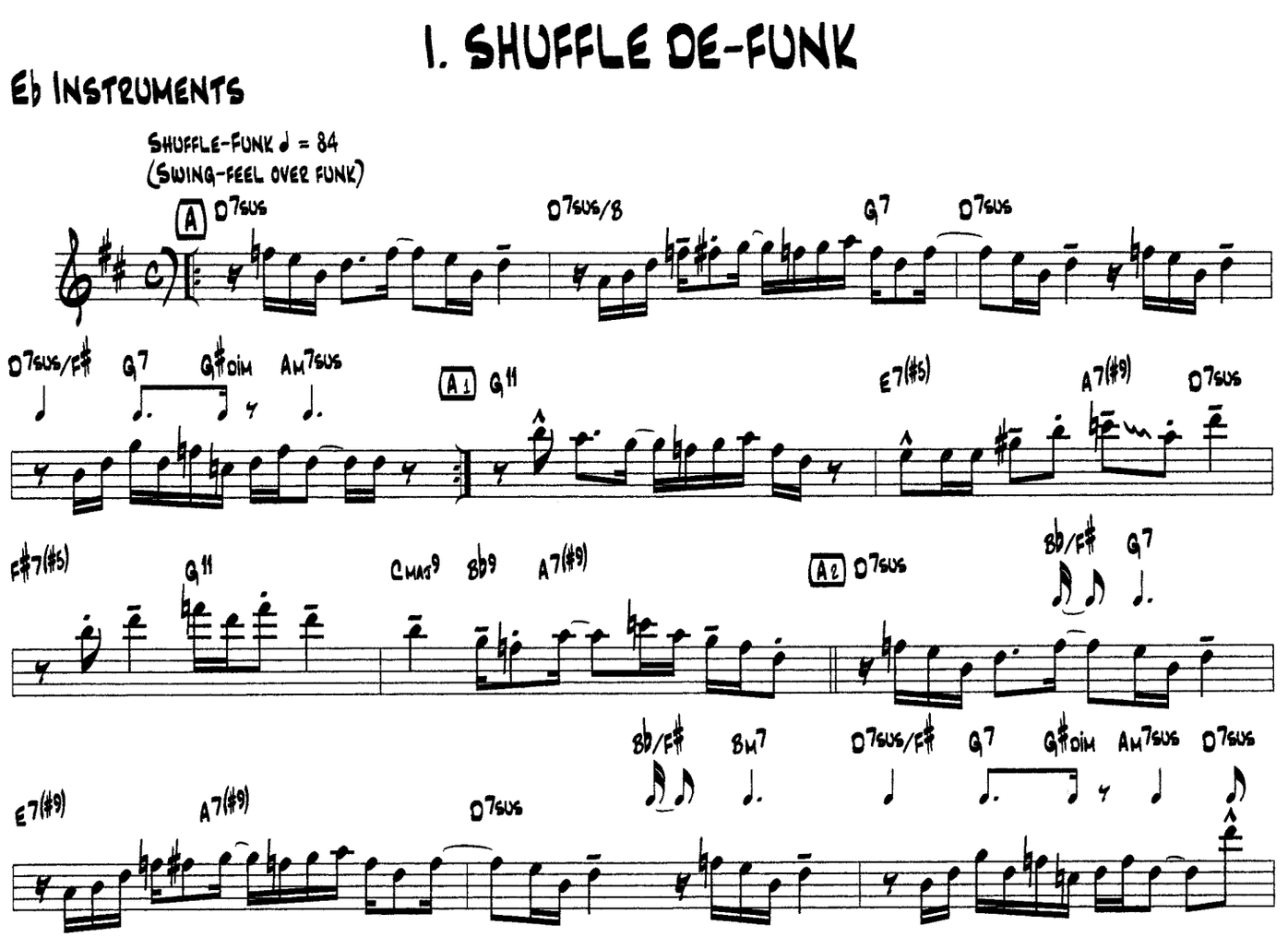
Solo length on this one is fairly short, so you have to get in there, say something meaningful, and get out gracefully and quickly. The melody returns at {F}. A solo needn't be long to say what needs to be said. Frequently I am called upon to play an eight or 16 bar solo on a record. This etude deals with playing that short, concise solo.

The overall harmonic setting of this etude is in the D7sus zone. Blues-related melodies and pentatonic melodies work well throughout. In fact, the D pentatonic scale  can be played over all the changes in the piece. I use both the major 3rd and minor 3rd in many of the melodies here.

Ex. or

The solo begins at letter {C}. You will notice that the first 8 bars of the solo are quite sparse. I do this for two reasons. The first is so that the solo has a place to go and can become more intense through adding notes or other intensity-related devices. The second reason is so the soloist can establish a relationship with the rhythm section. By leaving space in the early part of your solo, you invite the piano, bass, drum, and guitar to join in your conversation. There is nothing worse than trying to talk to someone who never stops talking, and doesn't listen to what you have to say. Letter {E} uses a device which creates some intensity in a subtle way. I wrote several short notes over a three bar duration using a three note motif (B, D, F) which creates this angular and rhythmically intense moment. In the fourth bar the line smoothes out by going back to legato 16th notes.

Not a particularly flashy solo, but one which fits with the tune, has a nice groove, and says what needs to be said. Sometimes a few words can say a lot. Use the blowing section on the end to try some of your own ideas.



III. EASY GROOVE

This etude is adapted from one of my big band charts. It is a simple funk tune with a sparse and simple melody. The thing that will make this melody work is what we call "attitude". This is dealt with through musical inflection such as bending notes, using vibrato, grace notes, and dynamics. Check out the recording to see how I do it and then find some of your own ideas.

The tune is AABA. The solo begins at {D}. The first eight bars is somewhat sparse and serves as an intro or opening to the solo. The next eight bars are a little busier. Letter {E} goes into this double-time feel, which I felt would be appropriate as a contrast to the very 8th note oriented head. It does a nice thing to the groove as well. The seventh bar of {E} uses a diminished pattern that I frequently use in my improvising. This pattern is quite colorful because it utilizes the ♯9, ♯11, and ♭9 of the chord.

The 15th bar of {E} uses a line which incorporates two triads and is good for a dominant 7 suspended sound. In this case, I use a D triad and a C triad to go over a D11 chord. The basic pattern is:

The idea is to then make this pattern into something more melodic and a bit less predictable. I think I have done that.

Letter {F} has a re-occurring rhythm which uses a pentatonic scale. This repeating pentatonic pattern creates some intensity and gives this chorus a distinct personality which differs from the preceding and following passages.

This solo is short and to the point, and almost seems like part of the tune. This is a good thing to strive for in playing solos. Head-solo-head should sound like one through-composed piece.

Letter {G} is a short interlude which brings us back to the theme.