

Sonny Rollins tune. You mentioned that you had already worked out a fairly elaborate contrapuntal line to go with the melody. But then at one point you noticed a simple fanfare idea that had been going on in your head, and you just threw out the intricate counterpoint and the fanfare became one of the main ideas of the arrangement.

B.H. Yeah, I had devised some really clever counterpoint to the melody. I was imagining the chord progression going along as I was writing it, but imagining the chord progression was generating this other thing in my head. (Sings the fanfare motive from *St. Thomas*.) I finally realized that, and tossed out all that other stuff I had written. I always thought of that as a big triumph; that I was able to recognize what was happening and that I had the nerve to throw out my hard work. (Laughs.)

B.D. Yeah, what a revelation. I think Stravinsky said something to the effect that, if you want to be a writer it's important to write something every day, even if what is written ends up in the wastebasket. It's all part of the process.

B.H. Uh huh.

B.D. I guess it's just like practicing an instrument. Someone who's really on their game in relation to practicing an instrument feels the difference after missing just a day or two.

B.H. Yeah, I sure do. If I go for a couple of weeks and then sit down to write, it's like I'd never done it before. How do you do this? (Laughs.)

B.D. That experience with *St. Thomas* had a lot to do with the simple act of paying attention. I try to remind my students and myself that one of the most important life skills is learning to pay attention. And paying attention is the easiest thing in the world to do, except that I usually forget to do it. But when I do remember, I'm often amazed at what I become aware of. It can be really valuable.

B.H. Well, if you did it all the time you'd probably be insufferable.

Both (Laugh.)

The Influence of Blues Elements

B.D. One of the things I've noticed in most of your writing, whether it's original compositions or arrangements, is that there is some emphasis of blues elements, not necessarily the blues form, but the attitude or melodic aspect of the blues.

B.H. Uh huh.

B.D. Has that always played a significant role in what you've done as a writer?

B.H. Yeah, it's a part of what I think jazz is: that melodic aspect or, at least, that slant. Incidentally, before I forget, I listened carefully to Peggy Lee's blue notes, and they always seemed a little sharp. It gives them a little salty tinge. And I wondered if you had listened enough to authentic blues guys to have ever noticed that?

B.D. Oh, yeah.

B.H. Because, instead of an Eb⁴⁶ it's just a little bit above that Eb.

B.D. Sure. In fact, I think that one of the reasons why early jazz piano players came up with the idea of hitting an Eb and an E natural at the same time was to suggest the note in between. The real blue note, which is somewhere between the minor and major third, doesn't exist on the piano. (Laughs.)

B.H. Yeah.

B.D. There are some theories that, in the pre-jazz blues and early Afro-American folk music forms, subconscious adjustments were being made between African melodic traditions and the hymns and folk songs of the white European tradition. Some of the African melodies were pentatonic, but not with the exact tuning of the European equal temperament system that divided the octave into twelve equal half steps. I believe there were also African scales of seven notes that had different microtonal divisions than the seven-note scales or modes of European music.

It's my understanding, from some reading I did quite a few years ago, that the melodic languages of most Africans who were here as slaves contained no intervals as small as the European half step. Of course, some of the most common melodic resolutions heard in European and white North American music use half steps: 4–3 or 7–8 in major keys, for example. Some ethnomusicologists have suggested that so-called "blue notes" may have developed, at least in part, as Afro-Americans assimilated some of the European melodies, while singing or playing these stepwise resolutions in a manner that was influenced by the slightly larger intervals of their own folk melodies. Eventually, singing with this attitude was done in contexts where the accompaniment used instruments such as the guitar or piano, tuned in relation to the European system. This mixture of African and European elements eventually led to a feeling or tonality that was completely distinct from the European major and minor, which eventually became known as blues music.

B.H. Uh huh.

B.D. Certainly, some of the early jazz singers, like Robert Johnson, and even early Chicago blues singers, like Howlin' Wolf or Sonny Boy Williamson, sang blue notes that were between the minor and major third, or between the lowered and perfect fifth, or between the minor and major seventh. Real blue notes have a definite edge to them, somewhere in between the half steps of European equal temperament.

B.H. Yeah. I listened very closely one day, as I was thinking about it. It sounds like she [Peggy] has heard Billie [Holiday] for sure. She did one little thing that sounded exactly like something that Billie would do in the pitch of these blue notes.

B.D. Yeah. And sometimes the blues effect can be even more stark in simpler harmonic contexts. One example I think of a lot is toward the end of the middle section of Duke's *Concerto for Cootie*, the romantic theme in Db that's played with the open horn. Just

46 in the key of C

after the climactic point, before the familiar *Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me* material comes back, the orchestra gets to a plain old D \flat triad with the fifth in the bass. When Cootie plays the minor third on top, it's as bluesy as anything you can imagine.

B.H. Yeah.

B.D. I think there's a tendency, in music that's harmonically complex, to associate blue notes with altered notes in chromatic harmonies when, actually, they have much more to do with the overall key of the music. So in the key of B \flat , for example, the melody going from B \flat to D \flat or from F to A \flat sounds great, even if it doesn't fit the chord that's underneath in the accompaniment. There's a great example in your music that I discovered, checking out the counter lines in your arrangement of *Stella by Starlight* from the *Contemporary Concepts* record for Kenton. The first half of the theme has these amazing contrapuntal lines that gradually come out of the B \flat pedal tone, which lasts for the first eight bars. When you get to the halfway point, and the harmony moves from an altered G7 chord to Cm11, the counter line emphasizes D \flat resolving to C, B \flat and F (Sings the line).

B.H. Yeah.

B.D. I can't tell you how many jazz theorists I've encountered, who say that a minor ninth on a minor chord is a wrong note. (Laughs.)

B.H. I remember when I first came across that. I played it on the piano and I thought, "Boy, that really sounds weird." But I did it anyway, because I had definite proof that it worked. That is, I would do it as a player.

B.D. Exactly!

B.H. And I'm still alive.

Both (Laugh.)

B.H. Nobody's come to collect me yet. So, I came upon a lot of those things as a player. I know it's permissible because I've played it. I was thinking that very thing as you were talking.

B.D. Yeah. I even thought, when I realized what was going on, "Wow! Here's D \flat on a C minor chord. But it sounds great. I wonder what would happen if I played D natural, the "right" note?" Nothin' happened.

Both (Laugh.)

B.H. Yeah, that's interesting.

More About Working Methods

B.D. Do you ever have instances where, during numerous sittings, you actually write a piece through from beginning to end, or do you usually start with whatever idea comes first and work on whatever part of the piece seems to come out at the moment?

B.H. Aside from commercial things, like those overdubbing things I was talking about