

CONTENTS

PREFACE	vii
FOREWORD BY JAMEY AEBERSOLD	ix
FOREWORD BY DAVID BAKER	xi
1 HOW TO LISTEN TO JAZZ	1
2 FORMAL STRUCTURES IN JAZZ	7
3 THE RHYTHM SECTION	19

4		
THE IMPROVISED SOLO		41
5		
THE IMPROVISERS' HALL OF FAME		71
A		
CHRONOLOGY OF JAZZ GREATS		133
B		
AN OVERVIEW OF JAZZ HISTORY BY PERIODS		135
C		
GLOSSARY		137

PREFACE

This book was written in the belief that jazz music, when approached with understanding and an absence of prejudice, appeals to virtually anyone and everyone. Reaching an understanding of the music, though, can be difficult for the average listener. A number of fine books written to aid the growing jazz musician are often too technical in language and approach to serve the reader who simply wants to know what is transpiring in the average jazz performance. Other books that are directed to the jazz listener fail to give the reader understanding of the music. A chronological approach to jazz history doesn't quite work. The reader ends up with a "who's who" knowledge of jazz, laced with a lot of unnecessary facts and a gross absence of information that would enable the reader to perceive jazz performances in the same manner as the performers themselves.

This, then, is not a book about the great bands of Count Basie and Duke Ellington, nor about the commercial successes of the Benny Goodman or Stan Kenton bands or the

Dave Brubeck Quartet. Nor is it a book about great singers, such as Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, and Sarah Vaughn, although all those performers have contributed considerably to the field. The real crux of the matter lies in achieving an understanding of improvisation, the creative source for *all* jazz. The main thrust of this book is, then, to help the reader understand the objectives and accomplishments of the best of the jazz improvisers with a bare minimum of technical language.

As the *Smithsonian Collection of Jazz*, edited and annotated by Martin Williams is, in my estimation, by far the best collection of jazz recordings ever assembled, I have referred the reader to selections from that collection whenever possible. The *Smithsonian Collection* includes a choice of LPs, Cassettes or CDs and an excellent guide to using the collection, written by Martin Williams, along with many explanatory notes about the music. The package may be ordered from Smithsonian.

Appendices are provided in this book to help the reader retain a clear focus on names, dates, and terms. Appendix A is a chronology of players, Appendix B is a condensed overview of jazz history, and Appendix C is a glossary of terms used in the book.

It is my sincerest hope that every reader will come to understand and feel the universal appeal of jazz music and that this book will bring the listener closer, in spirit, to the attitudes, conceptions, and expressions of the extraordinary musicians discussed in these pages.

FOREWORD

BY

JAMEY AEBERSOLD

Jerry Coker has been a leader in jazz education since he wrote *Improvising Jazz* in 1964. Since that time many people have written on the subject, but not all have the authority that he possesses. Jerry is a talented performer, composer, teacher, and lecturer, and his books are a projection of his beautiful personality.

Listening to Jazz fills a need for all those students and teachers who long for a text which will guide the listener as well as the performer to a closer understanding of what it means to improvise with music in today's jazz idiom. I find this book to be most helpful in that it allows the reader access to thoughts previously unrecorded in print. Jazz styles have often been difficult to verbalize, but I have found this book to be extremely concise and direct.

Contrary to public opinion of years past, you *can* become more knowledgeable by reading, talking, and discussing jazz music in order to gain insight into the performers' impro-

2

FORMAL STRUCTURES IN JAZZ

THE VEHICLE

Virtually all jazz selections are based on some sort of tune or song. Whether a well-known standard or a recently composed original, it is a tune nonetheless. The design of the tune will be present during the improvised solos as well as during the playing of the melody (usually at the beginning and again at the end of the selection). The word *tune* here refers chiefly to a melody with its accompanying chords. If there are words to the tune, they are likely to occur (if at all) during the playing of the melody. Furthermore, the words are seldom known or contemplated by the improvising soloists. An exception to the rule was tenor saxophonist Lester Young, included with the suggested listening of Chapter 1 ("Lester Leaps In"). Young was once quoted as saying that he didn't like to improvise on a tune to which he didn't know the words. He went on to say that he heard the words in his mind as he improvised. There is evidence to suggest that the cur-

rent generation of jazz musicians considers the words and subject matter of the tune more than did their predecessors, but such practice is still rare.

A tune will also have rhythms, but like words the rhythms will be more structured and apparent during the playing of the melody than during the improvisation on it. Again, contemporary jazz tunes are more likely to use repetitive rhythmic patterns as an important aspect of the tune, even during the improvisations. Herbie Hancock's "Maiden Voyage"¹ is a good example of a jazz performance in which the rhythmic feeling of the melody chorus is strongly suggested throughout the selection. The majority of jazz selections still tend to be without the structured rhythms of the melody section, once the improvisation begins.

Although the melody is almost synonymous with the tune itself and therefore included with the accompanying chords as an important structural element of the tune, it is also true that even the melody will seldom be present during the improvisations. The earliest jazz players based their improvisations on the melody, and once again, contemporary players are apparently giving more thought to retaining at least portions of the melody in their improvisations; but the great majority of jazz performances won't include such practice. It should be pointed out here that improvisations also have melodies and rhythms, but except in rare instances the improvised melodies and rhythms won't be symmetrically structured in terms of the sort of repetitions used during the playing of the tune's melody.

To sum up, tunes have a melody, accompanying chords, rhythm, and words. The real identity of the tune, for most jazz players anyway, is the sequence used in the accompanying chords, as the improvising soloist generally does not base his solo on the melody, rhythms, or words. We can, however, take note of the fact that contemporary players are beginning to explore those areas.

¹"Maiden Voyage," Herbie Hancock, Blue Note 84195.

commit an error. His fingers might momentarily be uncoordinated, causing an unintended, incorrect pitch. His ear might fail him in a more spontaneous moment of attempting to play a phrase by ear. He could misread a chord symbol in his haste, or his eyes (if he's reading the chords) can accidentally skip or repeat a line of music on the page. If he's not reading the chords, he could forget a chord of the sequence, or lose his place with respect to the form of the tune, as in arriving at the bridge (middle) section of the tune at the wrong time. If he's a brass player, his lip may fail him. Students of jazz who have transcribed improvised solos find that, in addition to wrong notes, they are likely to discover phrases which are uneven, rhythmically. It would be an understatement to say that the good jazz improviser has to be resourceful with respect to transforming errors into successful phrases. One common method is to quickly slide from a erroneous pitch into a correct one nearby. Or he might even repeat the error and its correction on some other note within the key, reinforcing the illusion of deliberation. If the error causes the player to experience several "false starts" on a phrase, perhaps because he's become finger-tied trying to execute it, the choppy rhythmic effect created by the false starts can give the solo an intensified and unique rhythmic feeling, if the player deliberately continues to repeat the accident. Another way to salvage a bad note is to sustain and/or repeat the note, using it as a springboard to what is commonly referred to as *playing outside*, which simply means deliberately playing in contrast to the given chords. Believe it or not, there are musical justifications for doing this, for example, the tension created by side-slipping. So, as a final ingredient to improvised melody, we must consider the accidents and their resourceful solutions. Nearly all improvising players are accident-prone, even the great ones (who partially make errors because they are especially spontaneous, courageous, and creative, taking more innovative chances). Some players consistently play perfect solos because some or all of the solo is a contrivance, worked up before the perfor-

mance. I personally prefer to listen to players who are not that insecure, as I prefer creativity and spontaneity to perfection. Sometimes, though rarely, a player comes along who is both innovative and consistently flawless, as in the case of Charles Parker.

SUGGESTED LISTENING

Player/Group	Title/Album	Recording Data	Listening Objective
Coltrane Hubbard	"Giant Steps" "Mr. Clean"	Atlantic SD-1311 CTI 6007	harm. rhy., patterns modal, side-slipping
Davis Hancock Coltrane	"Nefertiti" "Maiden Voyage" "A Love Supreme"	Col. CS 9594 Impulse A-77	contemporary harm. rhy., modal thematic, side-slipping
Gillespie	"Things To Come"	Rondellette A-11	contract w/swing era
Davis	"So What"	SC	modal
Rollins	"Blue 7"	SC	blues, thematic
Smith	"St. Louis Blues"	SC	blues
Smith	"Lost Your Head Blues"	SC	blues
Mingus	"Haitian Fight Song"	SC	be-bop blues in minor
Parker	"Parker's Mood"	SC	blues
Armstrong	"Potato Head Blues"	SC	blues
Armstrong	"West End Blues"	SC	blues
Bechet	"Blue Horizon"	SC	blues
Hancock	"Dolphin Dance"		contemporary
Shorter	"Witch Hunt"		contemp.-modal combined
Shorter	"Chaos"		free-form
Fischer	"Free Too Long"	Pacific PJ-52	free-form
Henderson	"Mind Over Matter"	Milestone M 9034	free-form

recorded). The list also does not include supportive players, such as bandleaders, lead trumpet players, arrangers, or rhythm-section functionaries. Many of the impressive young players have been omitted, awaiting further development and/or the test of time. Not every player on the list is a genius, though some probably are, but they are innovative enough to influence large numbers of improvisers. If our "Hall Of Fame" included only six artists, they would be Louis Armstrong, Lester Young, Charles Parker, Miles Davis, Coleman Hawkins, and John Coltrane. If the "Hall" could accommodate twelve, then the additional six players would be Sonny Rollins, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Clifford Brown, Herbie Hancock, and Chick Corea.

Although the list was made without regard to the instruments played, five of the twelve are saxophonists. Saxophone has been a popular instrument in jazz, but more importantly, it is an easy instrument to learn, easy to control, and it is capable of the kind of expression, phrasing, and tone quality heard in the human voice. After all, if the instrumentalist is relatively free of problems relating to the playing of the instrument, then his thoughts can more often be directed toward the content of the solo.

CRITERIA FOR APPRECIATION

There are three basic approaches to serious listening: *criticism*, by very carefully scrutinizing the performance, taking special notice of all weaknesses and errors, and determining whether or not there is something left to enjoy; *evaluation*, in which the listener places a relative value of each aspect of the performance and is interested in both the sum total of its worth and, on a sliding scale, the value of each of its parts or aspects; and *appreciation*, in which the listener takes special notice of the strengths of the performance, even

in small details, and is less concerned with flaws, either ignoring or tolerating them. All three approaches are careful, perceptive, and objective, but there are mild differences of attitude, with respect to hearing positively and negatively, so that the approach taken should agree with level and function of the listening. A judge at a music festival needs the first approach (that function requiring a high level of training and experience) because the performing groups are generally strong and well-matched, and the performances are short and in rapid succession. He doesn't have time to write down everything he hears, but he has to mention the unusual qualities of each group, both to help him to remember each band amid many and to help him with his final decisions of comparison. The judge is more concerned with taking off points for imperfections than in adding points for good qualities, though he will also consider the other two approaches to listening from time to time.

The budding jazz musician needs the second approach (evaluation) in order to maintain efficiency in his listening. He needs to hear a lot of music. As some of the pieces need repeated listenings, he needs to be aware of exactly why he's listening to it (to absorb its strengths more efficiently). He can't afford the time to listen repeatedly to weaker performances.

The reader probably needs the third approach, appreciation. Both the judge and the budding jazz musician have already learned to enjoy the music and have dedicated their lives to it, whereas the reader may be less convinced by, and dedicated to, listening to jazz. Hence, the listening attitude needs to be positive, at least for a while, especially to work at raising the levels of appreciation and patient tolerance.

Here is a list of criteria for appreciating jazz improvisers:

Sound: the tone quality, which can range from small to large, mellow to brilliant, or dull to lively. Nearly all jazz players can be identified by their sounds alone.