

David Liebman Transcriptions

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Introduction by David Liebman

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.

Book Format by David Liebman

Standards were chosen for obvious reasons. The reader has something familiar to relate to because (s)he has heard the song or something similar before. The clarity of an improvisation is most apparent when it is in the context of known material. There is also the inescapable bowing to the legacy from which we all come. A jazz musician somewhere along the line must confront the standard repertoire and attempt to put his or her mark on it. (By "standards," I refer to both well known jazz tunes and the American song form repertoire).

I have arranged these standards in such a way so I wouldn't play too many clichés coming from players I have studied. (As far as my own clichés, that's another story!!) It has always seemed clear to me that there are enough classic versions of such "chestnuts" as Green Dolphin Street or Caravan, and I would be better served to go in a different direction. In order to facilitate this objective, the tools used include reharmonization, insertion of vamp passages and of course many interpretive devices. A summary of each area follows :

1. Reharmonization : This well known technique is amply described in many books. It involves changing the harmonic progression in any number of ways : root movement, chord quality, extensions, substitutions, etc. Being a child of the modern harmonic era, at times I may use unusual root progressions, complex chords and heavy dissonances. There may be even some change of the original melody in order to accommodate the new progression.
2. Vamps : I will try to extract or insert an original vamp or ostinato from the tune's harmonic progression as a vehicle for balancing the chord progression. The value of vamps are that they accommodate longer melodic and rhythmic thoughts because one is thinking in larger groups of bar lengths rather than constantly having to modify the line as modulations occur during prescribed harmonic movement. In other words, the musicians can "open up", which for contemporary improvisers is something we have been saturated with since the 1960s in jazz, pop and world music.
3. Melodic devices : These techniques consist mostly of rhythmic variations away from the written melody by devices such as augmentation (longer values), diminution (shorter), syncopation, expressive techniques and at times, ornamentation of the given pitches by use of trills, tremolos, gruppettos, grace notes and turns.
4. Meter change : Although none of the arrangements in this collection exemplify this technique, it consists of changing the meter from the usual 4/4 or 3/4 to an odd time signature such as 5/4 or 7/4. This presents real challenges to an improviser because lines resolve at places other than the usual cadence points.

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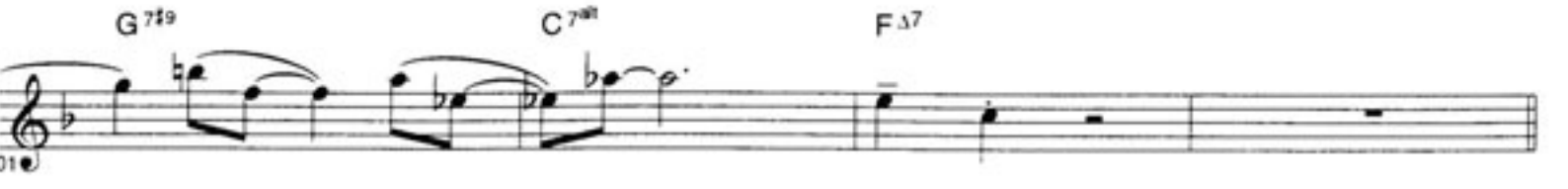
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I Concentrate On You

CD Track #1

SOLO

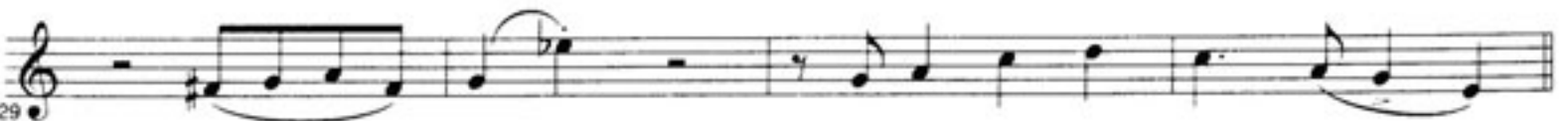


Oleo

CD Track #3

SOLO

A



* C pedal throughout all **A** sections

Mr. P.C.

CD Track #4

Another prerequisite for jazz musicians is the minor blues form. Here it is the famous John Coltrane melody written for bassist Paul Chambers in C minor. Like the normal major dominant blues, the improviser is free to substitute alternate changes as desired over the basic I-IV-V progression.

This was of the most special events of my career as it was a celebration of twenty years since Coltrane died and was part of an important Japanese festival called Live Under The Sky, which was also celebrating its tenth anniversary. Besides having the thrill to play opposite one of my major influences, Wayne Shorter, it was great to be with Richie and some old friends, Jack DeJohnette and Eddie Gomez. This is quite a rhythm section for what was in essence a high-class jam session, with no rehearsal at all. Wayne was awesome! And the audience of 20,000 cheered when we began playing - only in Japan!

This is one of the most burning solos I have recorded for a very simple reason. I had suffered a bad accident one month prior to the date and was immobilized for several weeks. This was in fact the first time I had blown in a month. My excitement is palpable as I play almost all eighth notes lines, stay quite on top of the time, lose a few beats (notice the 214 bar and how everyone goes with me), and even include some repetitive riff-like melodies on a few occasions during the solo. Like the preceding Oleo solo, having Richie comping allowed me to play very chromatically employing a lot of close interval "snakey" lines which often circle between the pitches D and A, most notably during the last four bars of the form. Saxophonically speaking, there is an extensive use of overtones (from the harmonic series fingering) and other false fingerings reminiscent of Coltrane.

Tribute to John Coltrane-1987-EPIC (also available on DVD)
Richie Beirach-piano; Jack DeJohnette-drums; Eddie Gomez-bass

13. Dm7

17. Gm7 Dm7

21. Bb7 A7#9 Dm7

25. 2 Dm7

29. Gm7 Dm7