

As a young student of jazz improvisation, I found myself curious as to not only what "the cat's" were playing, but also what or how they were thinking about what they were playing. I knew of this distinction from my own experience, noticing that what I had thought about playing would often be quite different than what I actually played, relying most often on techniques and patterns I knew best.

So as I transcribed solos, I realized that what I was searching for was a deeper understanding of a player's thought process, rather than just the arbitrary way a particular solo was constructed. I tried to see the patterns through repetition within each harmonic mode. Through this recognition of "tendencies," I constructed exercises based on what I thought a player was thinking given a particular type of chord.

This process enabled me to practice my own jazz piano exercises for technique and facility, (similar to Hanon or Czerny in the classical world) ingraining in my mind the standard jazz vocabulary, while absorbing the nuances and thought processes of my favorite players, ultimately allowing me to sound very much like them when I improvised.

Jazz improvisation is habitual in nature much like conversational language. Developing melodic improvisational "habits" through the practice of these exercises, allows me to devote more of my intellect and musical mind (at the time of improvising) to the subtleties of playing (such as phrasing and phrase construction, rhythm, swinging, execution, and being in sync with the rest of the band).

Throughout my career as a jazz pianist and educator, I've learned and forgotten thousands of great solos, but I will always remember and continue to practice the exercises constructed from those solos.

-- David Hazeltine

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Introduction

The transcription process can be used as a means to an end. The use of transcriptions to assimilate a jazz artist's style is an essential component to the development of a jazz musician. However, the assimilation, use, and overall understanding of the transcribed material as it relates to one's own improvisation is where the true benefit lies. Jazz pianist David Hazeltine authored a method for creating etudes from transcriptions that analyze how an artist thinks while improvising. In Hazeltine's words, "I wanted to get beyond copying artists, and try to get inside their thought process."¹

Hazeltine published two articles in *Piano Stylist and Jazz Workshop*, titled "Assimilating a Pianist's Style," (Parts 1 and 2) that analyze and identify the different elements involved in assimilating a pianist's style.² Both articles are out of print and very difficult to find. In the articles, Hazeltine addresses principles that are involved in assimilating another artist's style, and he briefly describes creating etudes based on transcriptions. Hazeltine's method can be applied to all instruments. In this book, I will review information from Hazeltine's two *Workshop* articles and further develop his method of creating etudes.

Two common problems can arise when a musician attempts to use transcribed material while he improvises. The musician may have difficulty integrating the transcribed material into his own solo, or, as he develops proficiency using material from transcribed solos, he may rely too heavily on large portions of transcribed material and thus not improvise at all.

A common example of the second problem happens when a musician memorizes a "lick" that articulates a chord progression and then reproduces the entire "lick" during the course of a solo.³ Some people will see this as "memorizing complete sentences, and looking for the appropriate place to insert them into a conversation."⁴ A musician who simply quotes as part of his solo demonstrates his ability to reproduce the lick, but does not really improvise. However, if the musician divides the "lick" or sentence into a "series of connected smaller units," the problems of using material from a solo and trying to reproduce a lick in the course of improvising will be solved.⁵ Each problem will be addressed in more detail in the following two chapters.

I studied with Hazeltine regularly for more than two years while I lived in New York City and continue to apply his teachings and method in my practice. One of the first assignments he gave me was his Barry Harris etude (Ex. 1, which will be presented at the end of the introduction). His intention with the etude was to give me a better idea

¹ David Hazeltine, email message to author. February, 2, 2010.

² David Hazeltine "Assimilating Another Pianist's Style," pt.1, *The Piano Stylist and Jazz Workshop*. (October-November): 20-21; pt. 2, (December): 24-25,30.

³ Hazeltine, "Assimilating," pt.1, 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*

of articulation and swing. Although I came to many conclusions about the Harris etude retrospectively, I learned many of the basic principles that would guide me when I started to create my own etudes. The etudes I created are found in Part II of this book and have been approved by Hazeltine. In addition to presenting etudes, I will also demonstrate elements that make an exercise unsuccessful.

The definition of "etude" in this book varies from the traditional definition.⁶ Hazeltine's process results in a unique etude based on the style of a particular jazz musician. An etude can be created when the student has learned at least six to seven solos by one artist. Material from these solos will be used to create an etude. Hazeltine's etudes do not take the place of playing solos that the student learned and utilized in the creation process. The etude is to be practiced in conjunction with transcriptions. This means that the student's practice session should begin by playing an etude, and proceed by playing the transcriptions upon which the etude is based. A Hazeltine etude is intended to isolate, group, and amplify specific features of an artist's playing. The extraction and isolation of similar material can provide the musician with a better understanding of how to use the material learned from transcribing. The musician will understand the material more deeply because the material is broken down into smaller and more usable units. Hazeltine's method captures the essence of an artist's style and encompasses the pertinent aspects of an artist's improvisation. Simply stated, the etude should sound not like the artist playing one specific solo that he recorded but rather like a representative sample of his recorded works.

According to Hazeltine in an email response on February 2, 2010, successful etudes created using this method are "precise and concise" enough to:

- 1) enthusiastically practice regularly at length without feeling time is being wasted.
- 2) have 8 bars of music yield 8-16 different ideas/motives/shapes that will be, as a result of practice, easily accessible when actually improvising.
- 3) sound exactly like the musician it is based on.
- 4) Swing and have the melodic integrity of a tune.

Hazeltine's method is most applicable to solos from the bebop and post-bop era.

It is ineffective for a musician to practice an etude he did not create. The greatest benefit is achieved by going through Hazeltine's process of etude creation for the following three reasons. 1) The musician who read the etude would not have learned the solos that were used to create the etude. 2) Skipping the transcription process would negate most of the benefit found when focusing on stylistic aspects that are the essence of the artist. 3) Finally, etudes created using this method are unique to each author. If two people were to create an etude based on the same artist, each etude would be different, because each musician would be drawn to different solos within an

⁶ Etude Study. Comp. intended as a basis for the improvement of the performer's technique. In pf. mus. the term is especially applied to a short piece restricted to the exploitation of one kind of passage. See "Étude." *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev. Ed. Michael Kennedy. *Oxford Music Online*. 18 Feb. 2010 <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e3513>>.

artist's recorded works. Even if each musician chose to write an etude from the same solos of an artist, each would choose to use different material within each solo. Even if some of the material chosen was the same, it would most likely be grouped and connected in a different order.

This is similar to asking two people to give an account of a book they just read. They would most likely highlight the main points; however, the manner in which each person gave his account would be different. Their syntax (sentence organization), articulation, and pronunciation would differ. Based on their own personal experiences, they would be inclined to highlight details that appealed to them. I do acknowledge that elements such as connection and even device choice (which will be discussed in more detail) could be similar or identical between two musicians' etudes. If each etude were created successfully, they would both embody similar musical tendencies of an artist. Hazeltine's etudes are created based on a musician's perception of an artist. The overall perception will undoubtedly differ between musicians and produce two unique results. In terms of creating etudes, differing perspectives will produce individual results.

The benefits of using Hazeltine's method yield noticeable results in one's improvising. A musician who has produced etudes from multiple artists will have learned six or seven solos for each artist and will have a good understanding of each artist's stylistic tendencies. Furthermore, he will have a greater perspective on how to use material from solos in particular passages when improvising. If the necessary steps are followed to create etudes for multiple artists, the musician's musical palette and thought process will broaden. Applying Hazeltine's method to multiple artists provides the opportunity for the musician to pick and choose from different approaches learned in each etude that will result in creating something unique and stylistically informed. The work involved in learning solos and creating etudes heavily influences a musician's playing and eventually starts to become part of the basic fundamental material he uses to improvise. The various material practiced in etudes gives the musician a better chance to employ idiomatic "sentences" that are stylistically authentic when improvising. The following chapter addresses the role of transcription in jazz history, offers practical advice for the transcriber, and outlines the benefits of the process.

According to Hazeltine, a successful etude contains 8-16 different musical devices every 8 measures. If the musician is diligent in his practice, the devices he uses in his etude will become easily accessible when he improvises. The musician's etude captures the essence of the artist on whom it is based. His etudes should swing and incorporate the melodic integrity of a tune. If the musician creates an etude with the above-listed guidelines in mind, he can practice his etude without feeling like he is wasting time on an exercise that does not directly benefit his playing.

The following steps create part of an etude in a simplified manner. Once the basic fundamentals are established, each step will be explained in more detail. This practice etude will be created from the first page of Sonny Clark's solos on "Some Clark Bars" and "Blues Blue." Transcriptions of Sonny Clark solos can be found beginning on page 49.

There are three primary types of etudes that one should create for each artist. They are dominant, minor, and major etudes. Each is built in the same manner. I will begin by creating a dominant etude.

1) Start by isolating dominant material into 3-5 note groups. The grouping should contain no altered material (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4

Ex. 4 illustrates five musical examples (A, B, C, D, E) showing note groupings on a treble clef staff in C major. Each example consists of a single measure of music with a common time signature (C) and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes are grouped into 3-5 note groups, and the examples show different ways to isolate dominant material without altered notes.

- A. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. Grouping: C4, D4, E4.
- B. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. Grouping: C4, D4, E4, F4.
- C. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. Grouping: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4.
- D. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. Grouping: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4.
- E. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. Grouping: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4.

Identification

Before each of the steps are elaborated on, it is important to address how to interpret transcribed material. Although the physical notation of transcribed solos is important and helpful when creating etudes, it is imperative that each solo be memorized. To quote Hazeltine:

Assimilation is a multi-layered process. Critical analysis enables intellectual comprehension, but memorization and repetition become the creative unconscious you will draw upon for improvisation. You should play the solo by memory along with the record and without it.²⁹

Once a solo is memorized, and then notated, it is necessary to group the "melodic ideas within solos." When grouping material, it is very important to correctly identify exactly what chord the artist is actually playing. In some cases, musicians may be inclined to compare the improvised passage in the solo they are transcribing to the harmony presented in a "fake book." But in many cases, a soloist will play one chord over a series of related chords. See example 5.

Ex. 5

The image shows two staves of musical notation in treble clef. The top staff is a melodic line with six measures. Above the staff, the chords are labeled: B^bΔ, G-7, C-7, F⁷, D-7, and G⁷. The bottom staff shows the same melodic line but with a different chord progression: B^bΔ, F⁷, and B^bΔ. A large, faint watermark of a stylized 'A' is overlaid on the entire page.

The soloist is really thinking,

The musician should proceed with caution when comparing an artist's solo to a lead sheet from a fakebook. In many instances fake books contain charts that are inaccurate. In other cases the soloist might improvise using different chord changes from those chord changes suggested in the melody. Sonny Clark's solo on "Junka" (Ex. 6a) illustrates this. The melody in measure four of the tune clearly articulates a minor ii7(b5) V7(#9) progression (Ex. 6b). Clark's solo over this same measure favors a traditional and unaltered ii-V progression (Ex. 6c).

²⁹ Hazeltine, "Assimilating," pt.1, 20.

transcriber thinks about the line length in terms of the number of beats before the line changes direction, he will gain insight into an artist's thought process. In some cases, a delayed resolution is part of an artist's style. The way he connects scales and devices in terms of pitch rhythm is at the core of what defines him stylistically. It is very helpful to consult a notated solo to help visualize this. Example 17 illustrates how a line vacillates over the course of two measures.

Ex. 17

The image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of two measures. The first measure contains the notes F4, G4, A4, Bb4, and C5. The second measure contains the notes Bb4, A4, G4, F4, and E4. Above the staff, there are several annotations: 'F7' above the first note, '2' above the first two notes, '1' above the third note, '1' above the fourth note, '1/2' above the fifth note, '2' above the first two notes of the second measure, '1' above the third note, and '1' above the fourth note. Arrows point from these annotations to the corresponding notes or groups of notes.

mm. 4-5 Phineas Newborn Dominant Exercise.

Hazeltine identifies eight different configurations of four-note devices (Ex. 18). Shapes do not have any intervallic or harmonic implications. Under this umbrella, there are many devices that have the same shape, but differ sonically (Ex. 19).

Ex. 18

The image shows two musical staves, each with a four-note device. The first staff shows a four-note ascending line (quarter notes) with an arrow above it pointing from the first note to the fourth. The second staff shows a four-note device with a slur above it covering all four notes, and an arrow above the slur pointing from the first note to the fourth.

A Practical Approach To
Jazz
Improvisation

The David Hazeltine Method
(Creating Jazz Etudes Based On Transcription)
by Ben Markley

"David Hazeltine is for sure the brightest star on the jazz piano horizon. His style has a deep-seated commitment to jazz history while communicating a wealth of 'today's' ideas..." - Cedar Walton

"I've been waiting for this book for a long time! David Hazeltine is not only one of the greatest jazz pianists in the world, but also one of the most gifted teachers and conceptualizers of our music. As a long time musical associate and friend, I've witnessed David develop, refine and demonstrate this original and stunningly effective system over the years, and his work has profoundly influenced my own practice and teaching. Ben Markley has done a great job in presenting David's concepts in a thorough, yet easy to understand form. I recommend this book to any player on any instrument who is interested in achieving real mastery in jazz improvisation!" - Brian Lynch

"David Hazeltine is one of the greatest jazz pianists in the world right now and one of my personal favorites. Through Ben Markley's analysis of Mr. Hazeltine's teaching method we get one of the clearest and most comprehensive ways to take apart the complexities of how to play changes I have seen in a music book to date. These are detailed but very down to earth ways to wrap your mind around the realities of how harmony works. It's not a book of licks but a way to see what the licks are made of and organize your thoughts so you can make your own licks and get on with the task of finding your own voice. Once you've gone through this book you will be speaking the language of jazz." - Mike LeDonne

"It's been my privilege to play and teach along side David Hazeltine in a variety of settings over the past twenty years, primarily in the NY-based sextet, One For All. David's dynamic concept, while fully embracing the rich jazz-piano tradition, is always fresh and 'in-the-moment'. His new book will undoubtedly excite and challenge any serious, aspiring jazz musicians." - Steve Davis

"David Hazeltine is, quite simply, one of the finest musicians I've had the chance to perform with in my two-plus decades as a professional musician. His approach to the piano and his body of work, both on the bandstand and on the multitude of recordings that he has been a part of, place him in a position that is nearly peerless among musicians of his generation, and on a level that truly ranks him, to my ears, among the historical greats of his instrument. Dave is a complete player--flawless technique and execution of ideas, brilliant and daring harmonic awareness, sense of melody, feeling of time and swing, comping, etc., make him a true joy to perform with and to listen to.

"Over the years, I've asked Dave to show me some of his harmonic and melodic concepts. Most times, he'll present me with a portion of one of his etudes that he's come up with. I've found them all to be tremendously informative. They are crafted in a way that makes the concepts contained in each exercise very organic, and readily accessible to me in my own improvisations. Dave's meticulous study of the master's of his instrument has yielded a treasure trove of information. His etudes are designed to maximize the internalization of particular styles and modern Jazz language in general.

"I'm confident that this book will provide countless hours-- years even--of enjoyment and learning to all who take the time to look into the mind and the learning process of this brilliant musician." - Eric Alexander

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