





CONTENTS

Tunes included in VOLUME 119 are:

<u>Song Title</u>	<u>Track #</u>	<u>Song Title</u>	<u>Track #</u>
1. Country Corn Flakes	1	7. Beatitudes	7
2. Karita	2	8. ETA	8
3. Lemoncello	3	9. Jewel	9
4. Love Remains	4	10. A Wheel Within A Wheel	10
5. Blues For Alto	5	11. Always A Friend	11
6. In Case You Missed It	6	12. Faith In Action	12
		--- Tuning Notes (Bb & A)	13

Introduction.....	ii
Discography.....	iv
Soloing by Jamey Aebersold.....	v

 CONCERT KEY SONGS & CHORD/SCALE PROGRESSIONS.....	1
 Bb INSTRUMENT SONGS & CHORD/SCALE PROGRESSIONS.....	23
 Eb INSTRUMENT SONGS & CHORD/SCALE PROGRESSIONS.....	45
 BASS CLEF INSTRUMENT SONGS & CHORD/SCALE PROGRESSIONS.....	67

Introduction to the Scale Syllabus.....	89
Scale Syllabus.....	90
Aebersold Play-A-Long Listing by Category.....	91

Any codas (♯) that appear will be played only once on the recording at the end of the last recorded chorus.

PLAY-A-LONG CD INFORMATION

STEREO SEPARATION: RIGHT CHANNEL=Piano & Drums; LEFT CHANNEL=Bass & Drums
TUNING NOTES: Concert Bb & A (A=440)

PERSONNEL ON PLAY-A-LONG RECORDING

EDWARD SIMON - Piano; ESSIE T. ESSIE - Bass; VICTOR LEWIS - Drums



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INTRODUCTION

Bobby Watson is one of the top alto saxophonists on the scene today. Known for his extraordinary ability to play swing, hard bop, and contemporary jazz, Watson has appeared at every major venue and jazz festival worldwide, and has recorded over 100 albums as leader, sideman, or guest artist. His style is at once soulful, virtuosic, and unique -- it doesn't take more than a bar or two to know you're listening to Bobby Watson. He is also one of the most gifted and prolific composers of his generation, having over 100 recorded compositions to his credit, 12 of which are included in this Play-A-Long set.

Watson grew up in Kansas City, studied formally at the University of Miami, and later moved to New York where he was to join Art Blakey's *Jazz Messengers* and serve as the group's musical director from 1977-81. Soon after, he formed *Horizon*, considered by many to be the preeminent contemporary hard bop quintet of the mid 1980s and '90s, and whose members have recently reassembled to record and tour today. He also led the *High Court of Swing* (a tribute band to the music of Johnny Hodges) and the Grammy nominated *Tailor-Made Big Band*, and was a founding member of the *29th Street Saxophone Quartet*, all performing and recording extensively.

Besides being an internationally acclaimed performer and composer, Watson is a renowned educator and enjoys working with up-and-coming young jazz artists. He is the first recipient of the *William D. and Mary Grant/Missouri Distinguished Professorship in Jazz Studies* and currently serves as Director of Jazz Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance. He is also the Artistic Director for the Thelonious Monk Institute's *Jazz in America* (www.jazzinamerica.org) Informance Program, annually presenting dozens of informational concerts and jazz workshops around the nation.

This Play-A-Long set offers a wide variety of tune types, tempos, and challenges. It's definitely not for beginners. Many young players can relate to the experience of having played with Aebersold Play-A-Longs that feature a very swinging but somewhat reserved rhythm section (that plays the written changes and clearly delineates the conventional forms) only to go to a jam session and feel confused by a very adventurous modern rhythm section playing atypical tune types. All the Aebersold Play-A-Longs have been designed to help developing musicians hone their craft, but this is one of the few that creates the sort of environment that players will encounter in many contemporary jazz situations in which the harmony and form stretch outside normal boundaries found on the page. Nothing can fully prepare a jazz student for this sort of situation other than to experience it multiple times; however, this play-along offers an excellent first step, helping to create a familiarity with this way of thinking and playing which is so popular with many of today's jazz musicians. Here you have the opportunity to get a taste of what it's like to play with the actual pianist, bassist, and drummer of *Horizon* (Edward Simon, Essiet Essiet, and Victor Lewis, respectively) who appear on many of the definitive recordings of the tunes in this set and are always stretching the envelope.

The set begins with **Country Corn Flakes** (*No Question About It* - Blue Note B1-90262), an up-tempo swing tune with a challenging chord progression plus a workout on sus chords (e.g., C-7/F = F7sus). Note the unusual form. Divided in eight-bar sections, the form is ABABCCDAB (a 72-bar chorus), with the C sections giving you time to collect your thoughts and catch your breath! (Note that the circled letters throughout the book do not correspond to the form, rather, they are rehearsal letters). As with all the play-alongs, I suggest that before attempting to play any tune that you listen to its definitive recording numerous times, getting the sound of the original in your head. By so doing, you will gain an intuitive approach to the tune, plus complicated forms will become second nature (i.e., you'll "hear" them).

Next is **Karita** (*Beatitudes* - Evidence 22178), a medium up-tempo Latin tune with a catchy head, interesting changes, and a great feel. Although the form appears conventional (AABA), be aware that the bridge is 12 bars long (easy to get lost if you're not paying attention). Also the bridge makes for a nice harmonic release, giving you the opportunity to play around with Ab for a while.

You really have to be on your toes for the next one, **Lemoncello**, as the blowing form doesn't correspond exactly to the form on the head which is AABBA (after the 16-bar intro). The form of the three blowing choruses that follow the head chorus are, respectively, AABBA, AAABBA, and AAAABBA. Note that there's an additional A section (rehearsal letter D) before the bridge (rehearsal letter E) on each subsequent chorus. When I asked Bobby what's up with that, he said that after *Horizon* had been playing a tune for a while, it would often morph into something new harmonically and even form-wise, everyone going with the natural flow of the moment. While on the original studio recording (*Horizon Reassembled* - Palmetto PM-2102) the band sticks to the AABBA form throughout, here you have the opportunity to get a glimpse of what it's like to play with *Horizon* live. The key is to listen, go where the rhythm section takes you. Also note that after the last blowing chorus, the introductory material is played for eight bars (not 16 as in the introduction), making for a nice eight-bar transitional interlude before you play the out-head. And finally, you gotta love that bass groove! (I could play it all day).

The set continues with the title track of what many consider a Watson masterpiece and one of jazz's most essential must-own albums, **Love Remains** (Red CD-123212). Built on a three-note motive, the melody is both

haunting and beautiful; it is supported by a warm, straight-eighth bolero groove and chord changes that bring you from melancholy to hopeful and back again. Note the minor vibe on the A sections (utilizing the G pedal) juxtaposed to the major harmony "opening up" the sound at the beginning of the B sections. And again, be aware of the form: ABABCDAB (a 64-bar chorus).

Blues for Alto from the same recording is next. While you don't have to worry about the form on this one, the key is somewhat unusual (most blues tunes are in Bb or F). This track provides a good workout in Ab, forcing you out of your Bb and F blues comfort zone and compelling you to try new ideas. The riff head only takes a minute to learn (the bottom part is the melody), and the rhythm section swings hard.

You're back to dealing with a complex form on the next tune, **In Case You Missed It** (Post-Motown Bop - Blue Note CDP 7951482). After the 16-bar intro, the form is AABCA with a 12-bar B section and a 14-bar C section, resulting in a 50-bar chorus. Again, listening to the original recording numerous times before attempting to play the tune will help solidify the form in your ear as the changes and form fit the head beautifully and seemingly naturally.

Beatitudes (Beatitudes - Evidence ECD 22178) is a medium up-tempo Latin tune featuring a repeated two-bar vamp for the A sections, changes with which you must deal for the B sections, and a 10-bar C section. After the 16-bar intro, the form is AABBC, a 42-bar chorus. Note that on the blowing choruses, the back-to-back B sections plus the first two bars of the C section are swung, totaling 18 bars of swing (which is then followed by the final eight bars that return to the Latin feel). When soloing, think of the bridge as 18 bars long: the "second eight" adds a two-bar extension, borrowing the first two bars of the C section. Unusual, but very cool.

From the same album is **ETA** (AKA "Estimated Time of Arrival"), Bobby's contrafact written over the changes of John Coltrane's "Lazy Bird" (Moments Notice - Blue Note CDP 7460952). Like Trane's original, the tempo and harmonic rhythm are swift (if you haven't already, make sure you listen to the original recording of this Coltrane classic and memorize it before learning "ETA," a good habit to get into before learning any contrafact). And if you think the Play-A-Long track is fast, check out the tempo on the original or, better yet, check out the version Bobby recorded with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers (Blakey's Beat - Concord CCD2-2234-2 or Straight Ahead - Concord Jazz CJ-168) in which they almost break the sound barrier!

You can relax a little on Watson's alluring ballad, **Jewel**, also from *Beatitudes*. Here the form is simply A. That's right, an eight-bar chorus. Needless to say, Bobby's compositions, like his playing, cover the full gamut - from complex and virtuosic to simple and sensitive. Next is his famous jazz waltz, **A Wheel within a Wheel** (Gumbo - Evidence 22078). When bass great Ron Carter taught at the Monk Institute last year, he selected this piece to use as his demonstration tune for his open master class, referring to it as a "perfect composition." Indeed, note the ingenious use of sequence and round. The modal A sections give the soloist plenty of room to stretch (and perhaps use these canonical devices) before proceeding to the changes-driven bridge. If you're practicing with another player (which I highly recommend), try a chorus or two of trading phrases, sequencing and overlapping them a la the tune. And finally, note that the form used for the solos (AABBA) is much simpler than that of the head, giving your mind and spirit more space to concentrate on creative music-making than keeping your place.

The penultimate tune of the set is **Always a Friend** (Quiet As Its Kept - Red 123282), a slow bossa with relatively easy-to-negotiate changes and a tempo to match. Again, be aware that the form is a bit unusual: ABAC with the B section being 12 bars long (resulting in a 36-bar chorus) and the C section beginning as another B but taking a clever twist. As are all of Watson's ballads, the melody is beautiful, fits the accompanying chord progression perfectly, and stays in your mind for days.

Faith in Action (Live and Learn - Palmetto PM 2083) makes for a most challenging and satisfying closer. Written in 3/4, the tune provides both a modal and swift-harmonic-rhythm vibe while putting you through the paces at a burning tempo. Try thinking in one (i.e., one beat per bar subdivided by three) and the going is a bit easier. Again, note that the form on the blowing section is different than the form on the head. This is not uncommon in Watson compositions as he often provides the soloist a smoother path for improvisation. Still, the form for soloing is more adventurous than that found in standard repertoire as the blowing form on this tune is ABCDEA with the D and E sections each being 12-bars long, making for a 56-bar chorus. Also interesting to note is that the harmony for the first four bars of the B section is the same as the last four of the A section, and that the first four bars of the C section is the same as the last four of the B section, overlapping the sections, cloaking the form, and resulting in seamless music.

Never satisfied to rest on his laurels, Watson continues to discover new directions, fusing jazz with all styles of world and popular music. His artistry continues to evolve and thrive as he continues to search for new horizons, affecting band mates, students, aficionados, and budding jazz fans along the way. Just where he'll land next is anybody's guess. But wherever it is, minds will be challenged and hearts warmed.

JB Dyas, PhD

VP for Education and Curriculum Development; Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz
July, 2007



1. Country Corn Flakes



PLAY 4 CHORUSES (♩ = 224)

Bobby Watson

Drums *mf*

(A) C-7/F Eb-7/Ab DbΔ G-7/C

Ab7 Db7 Bb7 Eb7 G-7/C D7¹¹₉

Eb-7 Ab7 G7+9 C7b9 F-7 Eb-7/Ab

DbΔ G-7/C

(B) C-7/F FA C-7/F

FA

(C) C-7/F Bb-7/Eb DbΔ C-7 Bb-7 AbΔ G-7 C7b9

C-7/F Bb-7/Eb DbΔ C-7 Bb-7 AbΔ G-7 C7b9 F-7

(D) C-7/F Eb-7/Ab DbΔ G-7/C Ab7 Db7

f *mp* *mf* *f* *mf*