

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF EVERY PRACTICE SESSION!



## Staying True To The Tune

By Gunnar Mossblad

Playing improvised solos, that relate to the melodic and rhythmic content of a tune, is often neglected by young (and sometimes even mature) improvisers. Far too often, improvisers burn through the changes of a tune relying on their comfortable patterns and flashy licks with little if any regard for the original melodic and rhythmic material of the tune. Granted, a good improvised solo will reflect the main guide tones of the melody, but true melodic development often takes a back seat to the harmonic progression of a tune, and rhythmic development is often ignored. With so many scales, chords and progressions to learn, young soloists are usually just happy "making the changes," and neglect practicing standard compositional techniques to learn tunes which lend credibility to their improvisations.

### DEVELOPING MELODIES

The reputation of many of the greatest jazz artists

has been established through their ability to develop melodies in their improvisation. Sonny Rollins is a good example of this. After several years of performing and recording for established jazz artists like Miles Davis and Max Roach, Sonny had earned an excellent reputation as a soloist, but had not established his own personal style of soloing. It was not until his release of *Saxophone Colossus* (prestige P-7326) in 1956 that he made a definitive statement of his jazz style through melodic development. This recording was reviewed extensively by many critics and specifically cited Sonny's melodic development.

### COMPOSITIONALLY CREDIBLE

Gunther Schuller for the first issue of the *Jazz Journal* wrote a particularly noteworthy analysis. In it, Schuller credited Rollins with improvisations that were compositionally credible. Concentrating on Rollins' solo on his original *Blue Seven*, Schuller called

his solo, "an example of real variation technique... based not only on a harmonic sequence, but on a melodic idea as well." He further credits Rollins with adding "conclusively to the scope of jazz improvisation the idea of developing and varying a main theme, and not just a secondary motive or phrase which the player happens to hit upon in the course of his improvisation, and which in itself, is related to the 'head' of

the composition.

So, what makes all those Bb or F blues sound different, and what about all those 'rhythm' tunes that use the same or very similar harmony? The answer of course is the melody. The melody provides a rhythmic pacing and color to a tune that is unique. The uniqueness of the melody should also be reflected in the improvised solos. Therefore, exercises using standard

**EXAMPLE 1A) -- ORIGINAL PHRASE 1 OF FREEDOM JAZZ DANCE**



**EX. 1B) -- DIMINUTION APPLIED TO PHRASE 1 OF FREEDOM JAZZ DANCE**



**EX. 1C) -- AUGMENTATION APPLIED TO PHRASE 1 OF FREEDOM JAZZ DANCE**



**EX. 1D) -- AUGMENTATION IN A PROPORTION OF 1:3 APPLIED TO THE PHRASE 1 OF FREEDOM JAZZ DANCE**



**EX. 1E) -- FREE RHYTHMIC DISPLACEMENT APPLIED TO PHRASE 1 OF FREEDOM JAZZ DANCE**



**EX. 1F) -- FREE RHYTHMIC DISPLACEMENT APPLIED TO PHRASE 1 OF FREEDOM JAZZ DANCE**



compositional techniques for Melodic development should be an integral part of an improviser's practice routine (see *Learning Tunes, How and Why, Jazz Player*, Dec/Jan 2000 issue).

### MELODIC DEVELOPMENT DEMONSTRATED

*Freedom Jazz Dance*, written by Eddie Harris is a good tune to demonstrate some of ways melodic development may be practiced. The simple one-chord harmony (Bb7) throughout the 16-bar song form, and the intervallically interesting melody allow the examples below to be clear and concise. The same developmental techniques can be applied to any melody individually or in combination.

In the interest of space, most of the musical examples have been limited to the first phrase or main motif of *Freedom Jazz Dance*. The same compositional devices can be applied to phrases and even the entire melody of a tune. As these developmental techniques become more familiar to the improviser longer, more complex lines will naturally develop.

### RHYTHMIC DEVELOPMENT

After the original melody has been memorized and can be comfortably played at the proper tempo, it can be practiced with different rhythmic values. The melody can be played using rhythmic displacement or through standard compositional techniques like

diminution and augmentation. For those that may not be familiar with these terms, diminution literally means to play the melody as  $\frac{1}{2}$  the value. In other words, a quarter note in the original version is equal to an eighth note and so forth. The literal version of melodic augmentation is the opposite. A quarter note would equal a half note, etc. Modified versions of diminution and augmentation use proportional changes in the value of the rhythms, like 1:3 or 1:4 or even a mixture of different proportions. Still other exercises can freely use rhythmic displacement and syncopation (see Example 1a-f). The same exercises may be applied to the inversion, retrograde and retrograde-inversion.

EXAMPLE 2) --ONE POSSIBLE OCTAVE DISPLACEMENT APPLIED TO PHRASE 1 OF FREEDOM JAZZ DANCE



-- RESULTING UPPER MELODY



-- RESULTING LOWER MELODY



EXAMPLE 3) --ORIGINAL REOCCURRING 'SAW-TOOTHED' MOTIF IN MEASURE #2, FREEDOM JAZZ DANCE



-- VARIATION IN MEASURE #5



-- VARIATION IN MEASURE #10



Melodies, made up of interesting or unique rhythmic values can serve as developmental material for an improvised solo. Re-occurring rhythmic themes may be used with various melodic material to create many interesting and pertinent improvisational material. Interesting rhythmic values can be used with all the devices presented in this article. All of these rhythmic applications can be applied to the inversion, retrograde and retrograde-inversion.

### MELODIC DISPLACEMENT

Displacing one or more of the notes of the melodic line by an octave, is one of the easiest ways to begin developing a melody. While this essentially separates the melody into two or more lines, the original theme is still felt by the listener. Attention should be paid to the voice leading or guide tones of the resulting lines (see Example 2). A perfect example of this is J.S. Bach's *Cello Suites*.

### MOTIVIC FRAGMENTS

The use of fragments of the melody or small motifs that are characteristic of the melody can produce a wealth of compositional material. A single motive can be sequenced, rhythmically displaced and repeated, inverted, harmonically side-stepped or numerous other applications. In *Freedom Jazz Dance*, there is a reoccurring "saw-toothed" shape to the melody often comprised of intervals of 4ths and 5ths. This is an identifying feature of the tune, and occurs at the end of Phrase 1, the middle of phrase 2, and in measure 2 of phrase 3. This motif can be used a variety of ways to create a very cohesive solo (see example 3).

### SEQUENCING

Sequencing is the repetition of a motive at a different pitch. Motives are often sequenced chromatically in major and minor 2nds and thirds, fourths, and even tritones. Sixths and 7ths are sequenced less often. A sequence can be an exact transposition to another key or diatonic, making chromatic adjustments that retain the same key center. Sequences that return to the original key while maintaining the

intervallic relationship between the motives are called symmetrical or cyclical sequences (see Example 4).

### INVERTING AND MIRRORING THE MELODY

A standard technique for developing the melody is to play an inversion, retrograde, or retrograde-inversion of the original melody. These standard compositional tools can be easily defined. By changing each ascending interval to the equivalent descending interval and vice versa, the resulting melody is called an inversion of the original melody. It is like turning the melody upside. A retrograde of a melody is simply the melody backwards starting with the last note and ending with the first note, the way the melody would look if you held it in front of a mirror and read it. A retrograde-inversion is as the name implies an inversion of the retrograde. All of these developments of the original can be used in combination with any other techniques shown below. The intervallic relationship of the first phrase of *Freedom Jazz Dance* is shown in Example 5. Literal inversions, retrogrades and retrograde-inversions are not always ideal for the harmony in this case a Bb7, and should be transposed (see Example 6). There are often several transpositions that will work. Some of them will be more dissonant and some less. What is acceptable or preferred is up to the soloist...and of course the audience.

### Example 5

Intervallic relationships of the melody to *Freedom Jazz Dance*

#### Phrase 1

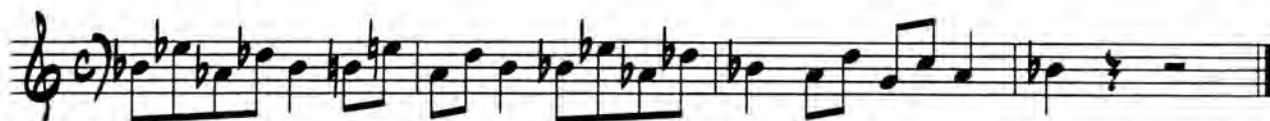
P4<sup>+</sup> - P4<sup>+</sup> - M3<sup>-</sup> - P5<sup>+</sup> - P4<sup>+</sup> - m3<sup>-</sup> - M3<sup>-</sup> - P4<sup>+</sup> - M2<sup>-</sup> - P5<sup>+</sup> - P4<sup>+</sup> - P5<sup>+</sup> - P4<sup>+</sup> - m3<sup>-</sup>

(Numeric relationship to the harmony 5-1-4-6-2-5-3-1-5-4-1-4-7-b3-1)

### INTERVALLIC DEVELOPMENT

Numerous interesting lines can be written and practiced by using the intervallic formula of the melody without regard to the specific direction of the interval. Starting on any note, use the formula (in this

EXAMPLE 4) -- ORIGINAL MOTIFF SEQUENCED IN MINOR SECONDS ASCENDING AND DESCENDING



-- ORIGINAL MOTIFF SEQUENCED AS AN EXACT TRANSPOSITION IN MINOR 3DS





case the intervals of phrase one of *Freedom Jazz Dance* described in Example 5), write note-heads following the intervallic formula. Remember that the interval is important but the direction of the interval is your choice. An original melody that starts by going down a P4 followed by a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> down may go the opposite direction (P4-up and minor 3<sup>rd</sup> up), or not (see Example 7). In the following examples, the intervallic formula is used four times. Pages of manuscript could be filled with notes following this intervallic formula.

When you have written enough note-heads, play through the notes experimenting with different rhythms and phrases that will work harmonically and metrically with, in this case, *Freedom Jazz Dance* (see

Example 8a-b). Octave displacement as well as any other developmental devices may be applied to the material. In Example 8a, I have tried to use the Rhythmic feel and pacing of the original tune. This exercise produces a wealth of interesting and original melodic material that is pertinent to the original melody.

The techniques presented here are of course only a few of the possible ways that a soloist can stay true the melody they are playing (check out *Introducing Approach Notes*, *Jazz Player*, August/September 2000 issue). In fact, as a soloist becomes more accomplished the developmental devices used to structure a solo will become more defined and contribute to defining that person's unique jazz voice. Have Fun and be creative! §

**EXAMPLE 6) -- ORIGINAL PHRASE 1 OF FREEDOM JAZZ DANCE**



**EX. 6B) -- LITERAL INVERSION OF PHRASE 1**



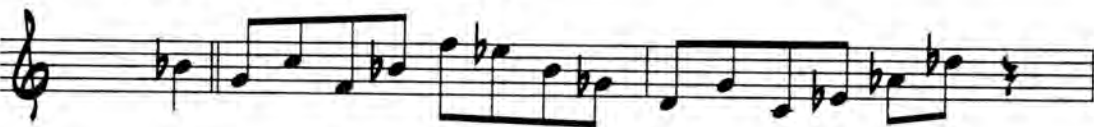
**EX. 6C) -- 1 POSSIBLE INTERVALLIC ADJUSTMENT (DOWN A MAJOR 2ND)**



**EX 6D) -- LITERAL RETROGRADE OF PHRASE 1**



**EX. 6E) -- LITERAL RETROGRADE-INVERSION OF PHRASE 1**



**EX. 6F) -- 1 POSSIBLE ADJUSTMENT (DOWN A MAJOR SECOND)**



EXAMPLE 7 -- RAW MELODIC MATERIAL USING INTERVALLIC FORMULA OF THE FIRST PHRASE OF *FREEDOM JAZZ DANCE*



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