

Jazz Ensemble – Spring 2020
Supplement Material #1
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Kissing Bug – Comparison and Listening Analysis
Part 1: Composed by Billy Strayhorn (Sherill & Stewart)
Part 2: Arranged by Bill Holman

This analysis will be presented in two parts – 1) a listening analysis of the original composition by Billy Strayhorn performed by Duke Ellington in 1945, and then 2) a listening analysis and comparison of Bill Holman's arrangement of the same tune, recorded in 1958.

This is a listening analysis, meaning I am not using a score – these are things I am noticing about the piece by listening and examining it in my head and using my memory to compare events that came before in the piece, etc. Remember, the more you can dictate or point out, the more you can hear and therefore the more you can execute when you are playing! There are no doubt many things that I am not touching on here, but see how in depth you can listen and see what you can pick out for yourself.

PART 1

Billy Strayhorn, who wrote many arrangements and compositions for Duke Ellington, originally composed the Kissing Bug along with Rex Stewart and Joya Sherrill. Strayhorn and Ellington often collaborated, but in my opinion Strayhorn was the real compositional force behind many of Duke Ellington's successful projects, especially later on in the bands career. Centered in NYC, Ellington and Strayhorn became two of the most well known names in big band jazz and were responsible for changing the sound and style of big band forever. They introduced complex harmony and compositional techniques, and their music was well beyond their time. Bill Holman was the next generation of big band - a west coast version of Ellington. He too changed the sound of big band writing, and led bands based in Los Angeles. He is still alive today at age 92!

The first recording of Kissing Bug by Duke Ellington's band was in 1945. You can listen to it complete with the original lyrics here:

<https://youtu.be/FQto95hel4c>

Listen at least once through without reading anything below. Take in the experience for what it is. If you look up several recordings, the first thing to notice is that many chop off the piano introduction. Live performances feature a several bar piano intro that leads in to the trombone introduction. This is important later when listening to the Bill Holman version, which includes a piano introduction. I will discuss this in depth later, but the form of the Strayhorn version is:

Small Intro – Larger Intro – AABA – AABA – Ending

0:05 – Dynamics in the trombone section! The same phrase both loud and soft as a section.

0:10 – Melody instruments are saxophones in the mid to lower register.

0:09–0:17 – The trombone accompaniment is unusual on the downbeats of 1 and 3. This works because the trumpet accompaniment is more on the up-beats.

0:18 – Short notes up to this point, the longer trumpet notes stand out on the “&’s” and end on a strong downbeat (beat 4). Foreshadowing to the very end!

0:25 – the accompaniment phrase ends once again with the trombones on beats 1, 2 and 3 with the trumpets completing the phrase on the “&” of 3.

0:26 – Just like the long trumpet backgrounds on the &’s described above, the saxes do the same thing in a mirrored version. The trumpets went up, now the saxes go down. Also here, the brass set up what is called a pyramid – we do this in our charts sometimes. Each instrument plays their individual part of a sequence that layers on top of one another to create a chord.

0:31 – The sequence is balanced by the entire band coming together to make the final statement in rhythmic unison, which is a send-off for the entrance of the vocals. (0:31-0:32)

0:26-0:35 – This tune is written in 8 measure phrases. This portion is a 4-measure extension that is not part of the actual piece if you were to look at the melody written out on staff paper. Since we have not yet heard the entire form of the melody, everything we have heard thus far is functioning as an introduction. Bonus, listen to the baritone sax, the only one that has something different from the rest of the band.

0:35-1:41 – The vocalist sings the entire melody over the correct form. The form in 4/4 time is AABA (8-8-8-8 measures). This means that the first, second, and fourth 8-measure portion will sound the same. The third 8-measure portion is called the bridge, and will be noticeably different harmonically and melodically. Listen and count each measure to make sure you can hear the different.

Listen to this portion (**0:35-1:41**) several times, there’s a lot going on.

First 8 measures: Each section, saxes, trumpets, and trombones, have different background roles. Some are very hard to hear because the vocals are very present. The saxes are playing soft long “pads.” This means they are covering the harmonic content by playing chords. The rhythm is not important, so they play long notes at a low volume so they don’t get in the way of the other elements. The trumpets are in unison measures 2 and 4 (then they stop, this is important because the “4&” discussed later has more impact if you don’t hear trumpets for a few measures). Their melodic content comes from a mirror version of the melody. Using a major scale, the melody is centered on pitches 2, 3, 5 and 4. The background in the trumpets uses pitches 2, 3, 5 and 6 (going up for the last note instead of down like the melody). The trombones are nearly inaudible mixed in to the guitar range and likely in mutes, but towards the end of the phrase you can hear them playing on all the up beats, providing the final rhythmic element to the backgrounds. Saxes are harmonic, trumpets are melodic, and trombones are rhythmic. Finally to punctuate the first 8 bar phrase the trumpets come back and are joined by the entire band with a fortissimo “4&!”

Second 8 measures: This is likely written as a repeat with a first and second ending. The backgrounds are the same, and you can hear the rhythmic

trombones a little better this time. Instead of the big “4&” we got before, there are a few 8th notes that lead us into the different harmony that occurs for the bridge.

Third 8 measures: Business as usual with the saxes playing the harmonic pads, but listen to the trombones and how their rhythm cuts the sax notes off, emphasizing the cutoff. The lead in at 1:08 is very similar to the phrase at 1:17, but orchestrated completely different and with an extra pickup. Listen to the top melody note in the saxes at 1:08 and then the same top melody note in the trumpets at 1:17. This is one way composers can get different emotions out of similar content.

Fourth 8 measures: At 1:25 the trombones play a very similar “4&” to the one we had at the end of the first 8 measures, but this one serves to send us to the last 8 measures of the form, which is once again identical to the first two 8 measure phrases. This time it ends completely and the piano sends us onward using the same rhythm using in the very first 2 seconds of the piece, but played in a different range.

1:42-2:47 - Solos and Last 8 measures of the melody. This section follows one complete pass through the form described above (8-8-8-8). It is very disguised, because there are band send-offs and interludes for each solo. However, if you count along 8 measures at a time, you will hear the same AABA form you hear in section 0:35-1:41. Try to compare both of these sections in their entirety first by counting along and see if you can notice the resemblance regardless of the events taking place. Now for the play by play:

First 8 measures: This is split into two 4-bar segments. The first is the band send-off to introduce the tenor solo, and the second is for the tenor to play along with the band, melodically reflecting what the band has already stated in the first 4. All together, the melodic content of these 8 measures comes directly from the introduction of the entire piece! Go back and listen to the trombones at the VERY beginning, it's the same stuff. Back to 1:42, listen how the tenor alone plays the same melody in the second 4 measures that that band played in the first 4 measures.

Second 8 measures: This is where the tenor solo actually starts, but keep in mind it is NOT the beginning of the form like it sounds like it is. This is a good place to notice the rhythm section. The feel is VERY downbeat oriented. This is an old school thing. The bass, drums, and guitar are all playing quarter notes. When we get to the Bill Holman version, the rhythm section feel will be completely different and will focus much more on up beats, as will the rhythmic elements in the arrangement itself. Backgrounds come in during the second 4 measures of the tenor solo, reflecting the second 4 measures of the first 8 measure solo send off (1:50), which is punctuation for the tenor solo, but also a send-off into the clarinet solo that occurs on the bridge.

Third 8 measures: The clarinet solo occurs in the first 4 measures with trombone pad like backgrounds. The saxes are not used for pads this time because the clarinet will blend in with the saxes – they are both reed instruments. Therefore the brass instruments will provide contrast in color and range. Trombones are tenor voices, and the clarinet is a soprano voice. The second 4

measures here are what can be considered a final full band “shout chorus” before the vocals come back in with the last 8 of the melody. Listen to the massive dense chord at 2:23 exactly. This is important because it is the one element that Bill Holman includes verbatim from this composition in his arrangement. The brass is playing the melody here, and you can compare it with the vocalist singing it at 1:16-1:24.

Fourth 8 measures: The vocalist comes back to sing the final 8 measures of the melody, just like the first time.

Ending 2:48-end: The ending begins once again with that same dense chord used in the end of the bridge moments ago, and this is likely why Bill Holman uses it as a focal point in his arrangement. Unison saxes play a variant of the melody under the brass chords (one that we have not heard yet! One could go so far as to say it is in reference to the final melodic phrase of the bridge Bb-G-Eb-C but I feel that’s a stretch!), and the three voiced brass notes set up the last phrase of the vocals “Kissing Bug” which is three syllables. Over the last saxophone chord that hits on beat 4 (like the background downbeat figures of the trombones and trumpets on “4” way back at the beginning), the bass ends the tune by playing three notes to mimic the three syllables in “Kissing Bug” sang just before.

LYRICS:

You say that I’m the one you love,
You swear by every star above,
And then you kiss
Another miss,
You’re nothin’ but a kissing bug!

You promised that you’d take my hand
And lead me to the preacher man,
But now I find, It’s just a line,
You’re nothin’ but a Kissing Bug!

You couldn’t
You wouldn’t
Be true if you tried!
I told you,
Won’t scold you,
Cuz I love you much,
You old such and such!

But I’m gonna buy some bugaboo,
And that’ll put an end to you!
And then I hope I’ll never ever
Love another Kissing Bug!