

Jazz Ensemble Spring 2020
Supplement #3
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Using Melody for Primary Improvisational Content

The three main challenges when learning to improvise is trying to figure out exactly “what” to play, “where” to play it, and “how” to play it. Talk of scales and arpeggios might make the “what” seem slightly less difficult (each chord has **one** scale that corresponds to it, that’s it!), but there is still the “when” and even “how” that must be addressed. Often times discussing the harmonic content does not cover rhythm, placement, phrasing and other parameters. Simply playing scales and arpeggios, while using the correct notes, can sound completely wrong if placed an 8th note or a beat off of where they should be.

One of the easiest ways to improvise effectively is to use the melody of the song. Start by simply playing the melody exactly as written, and then work towards a completely original solo by embellishing the melody. Each time you solo through a chorus, try to embellish the melody more and more until you barely recognize it and the solo is completely original. This accomplishes note choices, arrival points, phrasing, and overall takes the guesswork out of the main components of solo creation because the melody is doing all of those things for you.

There are several solos that illustrate this, however one of the best I’ve ever seen is by Johnny Hodges with Duke Ellington on the standard tune All of Me. This recording is from 1959, and again shows us what a great period the late 1950s were for jazz. This particular arrangement is very straight forward, the trombones set up the melody by playing the first measure, and Hodges takes it from there. The attached transcriptions are in the ALTO SAX key – these are the exact notes that Hodges plays on his instrument. The chord changes are transposed as well to match. So keep in mind everything you see is for alto sax, but the notes and relationships hold true no matter what.

All of Me – Duke Ellington “Jazz Party” Columbia Records 1959 **<https://youtu.be/BWVmmrMhqlw>**

You have:

- 1) The original melody for alto sax on one page with the corresponding notes for each chord as whole notes
- 2) Johnny Hodges solo (two full choruses) on two pages
- 3) The 4 page landscape layout of Hodges’ solo overtop of the melody
- 4) My notated score of the solo and melody pointing out key areas

As always with this stuff, listen a few times at the least. Here is the plan:

- Listen 1: Just listen to the track in its entirety, don’t think about anything and just listen to how it comes off.
- Listen 2: Follow the melody sheet
- Listen 3: Follow just Hodges’ solo
- Listen 4+: Follow the score and see where the notes and/or rhythms line up with one another.

Note about harmony: Very often he sticks to simple scales and arpeggios. Look at measure two (A7 chord) – excluding the C natural, he outlines 5, 3, 1, 5, 7 of the chord. The C isn’t really there, it’s a smear into the C#. Look at measure 18 (F chord) – although seemingly difficult with all the triplets, look at each downbeat starting on beat 2: 1, 5, 3, 5, 3, 1, 5 of the F major chord. The connecting material is either from the F major scale or the chromatic scale, depending how far he has to go to get to a downbeat. Also in measure 18 – although displaced by an octave, the notes that he uses on the downbeats (F, C, A) are the SAME notes that occur in the melody at that point. This is exactly how you can use the melody to create a seemingly intricate solo.

I will resist the urge to go through this explaining measure-by-measure, but you can draw many conclusions yourself based on the notated pages here. There is some pretty genius stuff. Even if you just think about this technique in the tunes we play, it could really help your improvising.

E \flat ALTO SAX

ALL OF ME

ORIGINAL MELODY WITH HARMONY

GERALD MARKS
SEYMOUR SIMONS
1951

The musical score is written for E \flat Alto Saxophone in 4/4 time. It consists of eight staves of music, each with a measure number and a key signature change. The key signature changes from one sharp (F#) to two sharps (F# and C#) at measure 21, and then to two flats (B \flat and E \flat) at measure 25. The score includes various chords and melodic lines with triplets.

Chords and measures shown:

- Staff 1: Measure 1 (F Δ 7), Measure 2 (A7)
- Staff 2: Measure 5 (D7), Measure 6 (G-)
- Staff 3: Measure 9 (A7), Measure 10 (D-)
- Staff 4: Measure 13 (G7), Measure 14 (G-7), Measure 15 (C7)
- Staff 5: Measure 17 (F Δ 7), Measure 18 (A7)
- Staff 6: Measure 21 (D7), Measure 22 (G-)
- Staff 7: Measure 25 (B \flat 7), Measure 26 (B \circ 7), Measure 27 (F/C), Measure 28 (A-), Measure 29 (D7)
- Staff 8: Measure 29 (G-7), Measure 30 (C7), Measure 31 (F Δ 7), Measure 32 (C7)

JOHNNY HODGES' SOLO ON:

ALL OF ME

DUKE ELLINGTON 'JAZZ PARTY' COLUMBIA RECORDS 1959

TRANSCRIBED BY:
MATT VASHLISHAN

E♭ ALTO SAX

ENG./TRN CUE... 1 F♯7 SOLO: A7

D7 G-

A7 D-

G7 G-7 C7

F♯7 A7

D7 G-

B♭7 B°7 F/C A- D7

G-7 C7 F♯7 C7

sfz

2 F#7 ENS. FIGURES BEGIN...

34 **f** **mp**

38 **mp** **FIGURES ENO**

42 **p** **mp**

46 **mf**

F#7 ENS. FIGURES BEGIN...

50 **ff** **mp**

54 **mf** **f** **FULL ENSEMBLE ENDING**

58 **ff**

62 **f**

KEY TO SYMBOLS

- = BEND BETWEEN TIED NOTES
- = BEND UP TO NOTE
- = FALL OFF NOTE
- = FALSE FINGERING

E♭ ALTO SAX SOLO
ORIGINAL MELODY IN E♭

JOHNNY HODGES' SOLO ON:
ALL OF ME

DUKE ELLINGTON "JAZZ PARTY" COLUMBIA RECORDS 1959

TRANSCRIBED BY:
MATT VASHLISHAN

ENS./TBN CUE... **F**7 SOLO: **A**7

ORIGINAL MELODY:

D7 **G**-

A7 **D**-

G7 **G**-7 **C**7

18

F#7 A7

22

D7 G-

26

Bb7 Bb7 F/C A- D7

30

G-7 C7 F#7 C7

2 F#7 ENS. FIGURES BEGIN... A7

34

D7 G- FIGURES END

38

A7 D-

42

G7 G-7 C7

46

50

F#7

ENS. FIGURES BEGIN...

A7

54

D7

G-

FULL ENSEMBLE ENDING

58

Bb7

Bb7

F/C

D7

62

G-7

C7

C7

F

C7

F (ENS.)

E♭ ALTO SAX SOLO
ORIGINAL MELODY IN E♭

JOHNNY HODGES' SOLO ON:

ALL OF ME

DUKE ELLINGTON 'JAZZ PARTY' COLUMBIA RECORDS 1959

TRANSCRIBED BY:
MATT VASHLISHAN

ENS./TBN CUE... **F**7 SOLO: **A**7

ORIGINAL MELODY:

D7 **G**-

A7 **D**-

G7 **G**-7 **C**7

18

F#7 A7

mf

22

D7 G-

mf

26

Bb7 Bb7 F/C A- D7

mf

30

G-7 C7 F#7 C7

mf

Departs from melody more

2 F#7 ENS. FIGURES BEGIN... A7

34

D7 G- FIGURES END

38

A7 D-

42

G7 G-7 C7

46

50

F#7

ENS. FIGURES BEGIN...

A7

54

D7

G-

FULL ENSEMBLE ENDING

58

Bb7

Bb7

F/C

D7

62

G-7

C7

C7

F

C7

F (ENS.)

extension