

Comparing Arrangements of the Same Tune: All of Me

To advance as a listener, it can be beneficial to listen and compare arrangements of the same composition. Since we already have a head start with the jazz standard “All of Me,” I thought it would be appropriate to use that piece. This supplement will focus on several very different recordings of “All of Me.” In one instance I will provide two recordings of the same arrangement at very different tempos so you can see how tempo changes the overall feel of a piece. I will not go very in depth on each version like the last supplements, but rather explain any big characteristics that jump out either for a particular arrangement specifically or when it is compared to others.

1) All of Me – Ella Fitzgerald, from “Ella Swings Gently with Nelson,” released in 1962.

<https://youtu.be/1JaJtNLhlfk>

“Nelson” in the title of the record refers to Nelson Riddle, who is one of the all-time arrangers and wrote the arrangements for this recording. Ella sings the melody chorus relatively close to the original from 0:00-0:52. This is good to use for reference of the correct melody and for use as a comparison to the other versions of the melody we will hear in later examples.

For the second chorus she elaborates on the melody considerably. Notice the use of the rhythm section “stop time” in the beginning. This is where the rhythm section plays the hits with the band and not time straight through. At 1:45 the key changes for the scat solo. At 1:57 she incorporates the classic cliché of the Sailor’s Hornpipe (probably most famous from the beginning of the Popeye theme – I’m showing my age...) that then matches up with the band that uses it in the arrangement. Here’s the link along with Popeye’s face:

<https://youtu.be/rgzjaol2Tss>

At 2:10 the arrangement incorporates a technique called hemiola, which essentially means that you group a repeating figure different than the time signature over the existing time signature. For example, if we are in 4/4, the grouping here is in 3/4. 2:23 starts a section where there is a portion of stop time again followed by full band time. This is particularly useful in having the band play a more interactive role vs. just plain accompaniment. Keep this hemiola in mind, you will hear it in the other versions!

2) All of Me – Duke Ellington “Jazz Party” Columbia Records 1959

<https://youtu.be/BWVmmrMhqlw>

I won’t spend much time explaining this because it was covered extensively in supplement 3. Since you are now familiar with the melody to “All of Me,” notice how this piece starts with the trombones. It sounds like a pickup measure where the alto starts at the beginning of the form, but the chromatic line is the pickup, and the trombones play the first three notes of the melody where they should be, and the alto solo actually starts on measure three of the form.

Trombones start the background figures for the second full chorus of the alto solo, referring us back to the intro. It takes all the way to 2:04 for the entire band to come in, and when they do, it is a very full loud Dixieland type of collective improv. Short and sweet, but gets the point across and is completely different than the Ella version.

3) All of Me – Billy Byers arrangement, slower tempo – Sinatra at the Sands (Live at the Sands)

<https://youtu.be/31oJ3NtfjM8>

This recording is an instrumental feature during the show that the Count Basie Orchestra did with Frank Sinatra. There are two recordings for this date, one instrumental and one featuring Frank Sinatra. It is one of the best big band recordings in history. I would highly recommend listening to it if you are interested in big band.

The big difference here is the tempo, however the introduction is only solo piano, who also has the melody. Here, the melody is played pretty straightforward as well. Check out the dynamics and how the audience reacts to the huge SMACK right at 0:43. It’s amazing how a piece of written music can have such an effect on people, especially when it’s only three notes! Three notes that are the first three of the melody. Sax backgrounds lead us to the classic shout chorus at 1:13. This is one of the best full ensemble sections of all time! Once again pay attention to how the accents stick out and how

the dynamics shape things. There is a lot of drastically loud to soft happening. The ending here also incorporates hemiola. Pay attention to the ending, because this is the traditional intro to this piece, which you will hear next.

4) All of Me – Billy Byers arrangement, faster tempo – Count Basic plays the hits of Frank Sinatra
https://youtu.be/JGNHg_vjXJU

Except for the intro, this is the exact same arrangement as #3. The main difference here is the tempo and how it changes the feel of the arrangement. The previous version was about 132 beats per minute, and this is 150 beats per minute. While the band could sink into the “2” and “4” at the slightly slower tempo, they don’t have as much of an inclination to do so in this version but it’s still very much there. Go back and forth a few times to the slow and fast version – it’s only 2:30, and see how each tempo makes you feel.

5) All of Me – Michael Abene, WDR Big Band – Djangology
<https://youtu.be/hzDkxOV9mU8>

Michael Abene is a modern arranger and was the resident arranger for the WDR Big Band in Cologne, Germany. This recording features a guitar solo and is much more modern yet written in a traditional way. You will notice that the intro is slightly more involved and is not quite as obvious relating to the melody as the other tracks. In some ways this version incorporates a lot of all of the versions discussed here into one: Solo melody features, sax and trombone backgrounds, stop time, the quarter note stop time from Thad Jones (next), the trumpet and sax soli line from Thad Jones, and the traditional melody based shout from Billy Byers, one could argue it’s all here.

The development really starts at 4:15 with the soli line, and it expands into a full band shout at 4:43. The melody is handed off between the sections with a fair amount of harmonic creativity that is not present in the original version of the tune. The ending at 5:30 departs from the melody, and notice that the very last note is a unison before the fall-off.

6) All of Me – Thad Jones
<https://youtu.be/fLB41hc8FSs>

This is probably the most harmonically advanced version and the most creative. Thad Jones originally wrote this for Count Basie, but it was too complicated for what the band needed at the time, so he performed it with his own band, the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra. Although the band is playing the melody at the beginning, the harmony associated with it is very dense. Notice the interludes by the sax section at 0:46. Trumpets are also in mutes here at 1:00.

There is a classic soli line with soprano and muted trumpet beginning at 1:17 with quarter note accompaniment in the trombones. This technique is reminiscent of another Thad Jones composition, “A-That’s Freedom.” Check it out below:

<https://youtu.be/XMijc2rahtM> – 1:28

The line gets more involved and brings the band in at 1:50 and it is more like the traditional shout chorus type line until the solo sendoff at 2:23. 4:02 starts the full band shout chorus, and at 4:19 the brass unison note is the same note as the melody at that point in the form. Also occurring here is, you guessed it, a hemiola figure! 4:35 is reflective of the Dixieland style that points us back to the ending of the Duke Ellington version.

Recap

Through six distinctly different recordings we can get a very different image and emotion from each while the subject matter is exactly the same: a 32 bar song called “All of Me.” There could be 100 more examples and 100 more feelings to get from them: A ballad, a latin tune, a very fast tune, and completely reharmonized version, a creatively orchestrated version, a version in a different time signature, and the list goes on. Often, the arrangers name is hidden from view, but it is the arranger that is responsible for how we feel, what we hear, and the journey we are taken on. As you progress as a musician, the more you can understand about each arrangement and how you fit into it will only increase how the piece comes off the stage. The best example here is the “A-That’s Freedom” section of Thad Jones’ version. If you know about “A-That’s Freedom,” then you will automatically play the figures in “All of Me” correctly when you hear it. It’s all about building knowledge and being able to refer back to what you have heard in the past. This can be on a huge level like remembering different recordings, or just remembering how the beginning of a piece went when you get to the end, in case there are similar figures. It all helps, no matter how detailed or not!