THE ORIGINS OF DAVID LIEBMAN'S APPROACH TO JAZZ IMPROVISATION

by

Matthew Vashlishan

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Thesis Committee:
Dr. David Demsey, Project Advisor
Professor Timothy Newman, Committee Member
Dr. John Link, Committee Member

Approved by the Committee on the Degree of Master of Music

Date___________________________

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the major influential components of saxophonist David Liebman's approach to improvisation. Throughout Liebman's extensive published material there fails to exist a document that links his style and harmonic concept to its origins. There are many instances where he reflects upon his experiences with various influences, but fails to link them together with his playing through musical analysis. This analysis consists of two major sections. The first is a review of existing literature to determine what musicians influence Liebman the most. The second is musical analysis of Liebman's stylistic and harmonic characteristics through notated examples from existing recordings. These examples are then compared to examples of his major influences. Some of the Coltrane recordings referred to by Liebman as being most inspirational, including "Coltrane Plays The Blues" as well as "Live at the Village Vanguard," reveal numerous similarities in stylistic and harmonic characteristics and will serve as the main source of information for the analysis.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

David Liebman is perhaps one of the most accomplished saxophonists of modern music. His work ranges from avant-garde jazz to classical music; from rock to Latin American folk songs. His unique sound and versatile way of playing has inspired many musicians, not always specific to the saxophone. Liebman is also a very prominent voice in the world of jazz education where he accurately and clearly describes his style, his past, his present life, and all areas in between.

David Liebman's improvisational style is one that falls under many categories. Looking at his work as a sideman, Liebman has performed with countless ensembles of all shapes, sizes and musical styles. To label his work only "jazz" would be misleading. While a large amount of his work does fall under the jazz genre, his unique style is one that has carried him across all musical borders and is one that is strong enough to validate his knowledge in any style. Despite his well-rounded career, this paper will focus entirely on his contributions to the jazz language.

Liebman is known for his work with Miles Davis and Elvin Jones, and is thought of as the next generation in the school of John Coltrane's playing along with players like Michael Brecker, Joe Lovano, and Steve Grossman. The "John Coltrane School" is a phrase commonly referred to among jazz musicians describing extensive study and reflection in one's playing of the music of tenor saxophonist John Coltrane. Nearly obsessed with Coltrane's harmonic language and strong playing style, these aforementioned saxophonists spent countless hours transcribing, listening to, and seeing

Coltrane live whenever possible. As a result, their playing has become the closest reference that modern-day jazz musicians have to John Coltrane in terms of live examples of what is possible on the saxophone. In an interview with Larry Fisher, Liebman says, "We were definitely a new generation and had absorbed Coltrane as much as anyone could up to that point. We were really the first guys who listened to Trane on record and tried to copy it. So in that way we represented the first post-Coltrane generation saxophonists." (Fisher, 1996, p 12)

Throughout all of Liebman's teaching and publications, the priceless lesson of how his musical personality came to be is something that has been left uncovered. While he speaks of his influences such as Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Steve Lacey, Joe Henderson and others, there is still little evidence as to *how* he learned from these figures musically. What specific aspects of John Coltrane's playing did he like the most? What exactly did he transcribe? What stylistic or harmonic devices does he play today that his influences were playing so many years ago? And what parts of these influences does he refer to when explaining his unique style?

It is important to see these connections for the sake of our own learning process. Looking at how a jazz icon like David Liebman learned from the recordings of the true masters may shed light on how one can properly absorb musical information and transform that information into a unique sound and approach to improvising. The act of examining Liebman's various stylistic and harmonic tendencies linked with that of John Coltrane's can shed light on what to look for when we ourselves are transcribing and emulating our major influences.

Saxophonist Michael Brecker once stated, "if you want to play like me don't transcribe me, transcribe the people that I transcribed." (Demsey, 1987) Using this quote as a catalyst, I will undertake the task of examining the influences of David Liebman (and show various musical relationships) particularly with John Coltrane, who had the biggest impact on Liebman as a young musician and his playing over the course of twenty years. This examination will be achieved through fragments of musical excerpts from Liebman's recordings and the recordings of the masters who influenced him.

Undertaking a project such as this requires a few different techniques that have become personally available. My personal relationship with David Liebman has grown over the course of nearly ten years, starting when I first saw him perform at a local restaurant with his group. Since then, our relationship (both personal and musical) has grown in many ways. As of recent, we have completed the book *How To Approach Standards Chromatically* (Jamey Aebersold, 2007), which is one of the books that will be used later to illustrate Liebman's harmonic technique through the analysis of many solos of his that I personally transcribed.

Through the careful study of Liebman's playing as well as the natural absorption of his personal and musical tendencies, I have become very familiar with his style of playing. Using this knowledge as well as the existing transcription books (both in and out of print of both Liebman and his influences) and my transcriptions of him, there is plenty of musically notated material to draw from.

The many interviews dealing with Liebman's life, growing and evolving as a musician and teaching techniques provide the necessary information to choose his main influences, which in almost all cases point to John Coltrane. Any other information

regarding influences, as well as a follow-up discussion, is provided through my personal interview with him.

When I first set out to research the origins of Liebman's harmonic (chromatic) approach to improvisation, I found that so much of the appealing sound was hidden in *how* he played his chromatic passages rather than simply what pitches he used. After realizing that this was one of the factors that have constantly drawn my appeal to his playing over the years, I found it necessary to analyze these features as well as his harmonic approach. The primary focus of this paper will be to realize the most important stylistic components to Liebman's improvisational style as well as the main ingredients to his harmonic approach, and show how these all directly relate to the improvisational style of Liebman's most important influence, John Coltrane.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

The literature available for my topic is quite thorough and extensive due to Dave Liebman's highly visible stature in the world of jazz education. To gain most of the knowledge of Liebman's background and influences, it is important to look at his published work as well as his published interviews. Liebman has several publications describing his method of playing and his opinions on teaching, the jazz life, and performing. This information is used to determine what gaps need to be filled, because throughout all of Liebman's work he fails to describe in *musical detail* how or where he acquired his knowledge. The sources used range from musical notation in terms of transcriptions, to CD interviews, DVD's and articles.

Articles

The Dave Liebman issue of *Jazz Player Magazine* contains another interview conducted by Dr. Louis A. Iozzi. There are particularly interesting topics covered such as Liebman's interest to rock and roll, and his first band gigs in the Catskill Mountains. (1999, p 19) A lot of Liebman's fundamental knowledge about playing the saxophone and general musicality is rooted in Joe Allard and Lennie Tristano respectively, which he talks about on page 21. In addition to the interviews presented in this volume, there is another transcribed solo of Liebman playing "On Green Dolphin Street" that can prove to be very useful for me in explaining his harmonic personality.

Much of the information in the articles and interviews is the same mainly because Liebman is very consistent in the product he delivers for the different magazines.

However, each interview naturally contains *slightly* different information. Examining many different interviews on the same subject allows for a much better understanding of Liebman's life.

The Fall 1992 issue of *The Saxophone Symposium* contains a great interview of Liebman conducted by Gunnar Mossblad, who is a saxophonist, educator, former student of Liebman's and director of the David Liebman Big Band. He discusses Liebman's musical path as well as certain musicians that he has encountered along the way. Pianist Richie Beirach makes an appearance early on in the article, while they continue to talk about Liebman's link to John Coltrane and the incredible importance of playing with Elvin Jones, among many other great musicians. In addition to musical influences, they also speak about non-musical influences, such as painters, writers, etc. They touch on the importance of Europe in the music and education. This article also includes a complete discography for Liebman, from 1967 through 1992.

The *Jazz Educators Journal* of March 1995 features David Liebman as well. This interview is conducted by Chris Collins and is titled *In Pursuit of Balance.* It is divided into sections: Background, The Saxophone, Improv, Composition, Balance, Impressions, The IASJ, and The Future. The IASJ and The Future are two sections that are unique to this interview, but not necessarily sections that are useful. The others, especially Improv, Background, and Impressions will prove to be very useful. Although these do not touch on concrete musical evidence, they will provide great ideas of where to look and what to look for in the recordings and transcriptions.

The Dave Liebman Issue of *Jazz Improv Magazine* (Nemeyer, 2001) is a great source to me for a number of reasons. First, the main interview of Liebman features him

talking about several experiences he had growing up, similar to the CD's and DVD's mentioned earlier. Topics covered range from professional playing to life issues, from teaching to his personal relationship with Miles Davis. This is probably one of the most extensive magazine interviews on Dave Liebman.

In addition to the great interview with Liebman, there is a transcribed solo of his on the jazz standard "Bye Bye Blackbird." This is important to compare this with the John Coltrane transcription of the same tune. The only issue with the transcriptions would be the bit of the Liebman solo that I looked at has some inaccuracies. This will not be an issue however, for only fragments are used as a guide to create transcriptions and musical analysis.

David Liebman On Education, The Saxophone & Related Jazz Topics: A Collection of Articles and Papers (Jamey Aebersold, 2003) and was written by David Liebman. This text is included to show a complete picture of Liebman's related publications and to complete the interviews, books and DVD's that come straight from Liebman as a primary source. Page 39 begins a series of excerpts from a Liebman interview with Curt Sipe that adds to the seemingly ever-growing stack of Liebman interviews.

Books

Before discussing the many CD's, DVD's and interviews found on David Liebman, the first piece of literature in the ever-growing stack of material is Liebman's book *Self-Portrait of a Jazz Artist: Musical Thoughts and Realities* that he completed in 1996 and was published by Advance Music. Probably the best source for anything

dealing with Liebman and his influences as well as his life in general, this book will cover everything and even contains a few interviews that are found in my magazine sources later in this chapter. There are six main chapters with a quite extensive nine-part appendix that contains interviews, a bibliography and complete discography current to 1996. The chapters cover his views on the artistic process, creating music, education, the basis of his art, and probably most useful for the sake of this project is his complete musical autobiography that can be drawn from almost exclusively for the description of Liebman's life.

To further support the argument and basis for this project altogether, this book is not and was not intended to be a sort of musical analysis of Liebman. Aside from the opening page where there is a photo of his handwritten manuscript to the *Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner*, there are no musical examples of his playing or anyone else's in this book. This is purely a work by him that describes his life and furthermore can be read by non-musicians as well.

The Lighthouse Omnibook is an excellent achievement by saxophonist Petter Wettre, who transcribed all of the Steve Grossman and David Liebman solos from the extremely important and influential Elvin Jones recording *Live At the Lighthouse* that was recorded in 1972. This recording/transcriptions feature Liebman at what some may argue his best display of his assimilation of the John Coltrane language. In the opening notes, Liebman states, "The Live at the Lighthouse date was one of the most exciting nights of my musical life." (Wettre, 2005) The book contains almost no text except for an adaptation of the original liner notes to the *Live At the Lighthouse* recording. Other than that there are only musical notated transcriptions and will prove to be an invaluable

source for me to look at some of Liebman's best playing. In addition to my other transcribed sources, it will contribute most of my harmonic information for Liebman.

Great Tenor Sax Solos is a transcription book compiled and edited by saxophonist Tim Price that contains a John Coltrane solo on the tune "Bye Bye Blackbird" from a live European tour in 1962. This solo displays some classic Coltrane that is NOT easy to notate! In addition to the transcriptions listed above, this will serve as a major source for harmonic information on John Coltrane. Upon interviewing Liebman about this Coltrane solo in particular he noted the extreme impact the last half of this solo had on his realization of harmonic superimposition. (Vashlishan, 2008)

Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction is a book by Ingrid Monson (1996) that covers interesting relationships about music mostly in terms of the rhythm section and its interaction with each other and with the soloist. Additionally to her analysis, there are interviews conducted by her of various musicians as well as very musically-based analysis. Chapter five, titled *Interaction, Feeling, and Musical Analysis* is the chapter that is probably most important, because it provides a model of how to analyze and write about music. This is not necessarily exclusive to chapter five, but this chapter contains an extremely well worked out analysis of a Jaki Byard performance with both text as well as musical notation, which is of course how I will be organizing my paper. An important note about this source is that the analysis does not deal directly with musical comparison but rather with the interaction between musicians. Nevertheless certain aspects of Monson's analysis can be used as a model for formatting musical analysis.

In addition to some of Monson's musical format, Ekkehard Jost's *Free Jazz* provides some insight into how to analyze jazz. The book as a whole does not deal directly with my topic, for it consists of analysis of many players that play free jazz. Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Don Cherry, and Sun Ra are a few examples. In particular, Jost analyzes three different themes from John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* by stacking each phrase on top of one another so the reader can clearly see similarities and differences. (Jost, 1975, p 33) Other techniques used by Jost include an interesting bracketing system where he points out interesting points of a musicians phrase by bracketing certain notes either above or below them to make them stand out to the reader. (p 135)

It is important to consider that musical knowledge is not always all that is required to play good quality creative music. There can be situations where the musical intuition comes first, and the theory learned comes second. In music that is based upon intense group interaction, there are most definitely mental states or requirements that dominate theoretical thought. To seek out how this plays a role in improvisation, the next source is the primary jazz text dealing with the mental state of playing music. Pianist Kenny Werner wrote *Effortless Mastery* in 1996 in an effort to get the musician to realize their inner potential rather than depending on musical knowledge or habits developed in the practice room. On page 87, Werner begins the chapter titled "There Are No Wrong Notes" which I can use when describing some of Liebman's musical tendencies, and to give reinforcement to some of the phrases he uses or ideas he presents in his interviews.

A very large-scale look at David Liebman and his influences (especially with Miles Davis) is Larry Fisher's interview *Miles Davis and David Liebman: Jazz*

Connections (1996) which is essentially a massive 200 page interview with David Liebman that covers nearly everything. They discuss his background and early influences, his most influential band members and influences in that department, and interaction with all of them. They go on to discuss the jazz lifestyle and what Liebman believes his place is in all of it along with a description of his life (teaching, traveling, etc.). The last quarter or so is devoted to Liebman talking about his experiences and relationships with Miles Davis. There is of course a great amount of influence from Miles Davis on the way that Liebman plays, performs, teaches, and lives. Information from this source can add aspects of Miles Davis' playing to the list of musical references to compare with Liebman.

A Chromatic Approach To Jazz Harmony and Melody is divided into two main parts. One consists of the text and examples that serve as the main general information regarding chromaticism. There are many relevant chapters such as tension and release, superimposition, diatonic vs. modal, pedal point, etc. One chapter in particular is titled 'Modal.' While Liebman gives a good general outline of what the modal setting is or could be, this section of the book really only lasts from pages 25-28 (Liebman, 1991) and mostly consists of superimposition techniques and notated examples for possibilities under these circumstances. The information presented in these pages serves as a very good cornerstone that explains one of the main topics of this paper. What this section lacks is exactly *how* one will use these techniques of superimposition in "the heat of the battle" so to speak. It will be up to me to examine Liebman's live and recorded playing to decipher exactly what superimpositions are important to him, when they are important,

and if certain harmonic techniques pop up in similar situations either based on the tune, energy level of performance, or rhythm section interaction.

The other section of the book is 'Miscellaneous Examples' of the material discussed in part one. Certain sections of part two are important as well, such as 'Playing Melodies, Pattern and Variational Techniques,' and especially the 'Line Compendium' and 'Voicing Compendium.' These two sections are a very good point of departure for musicians wishing to gain a bit of a 'jumpstart' into free or modal playing. The information presented here is literally 100 voicings and lines written with no definite harmonic intent. (Liebman, 1991, p 145, 163) All are different from one another, and can be interpreted many ways. This is very good, however there is not a definite explanation as to what they can be used for or how. Clearly what is needed is a concrete example taken from a live playing situation that is *explained* for the student. All of which does not happen here.

Other Media

Some of the gaps that are found in *A Chromatic Approach To Jazz Harmony and Melody* were filled when looking at *How To Approach Standards Chromatically.* While the title does not necessarily lend itself to modal and free playing, I must note that very much like Liebman's other projects, this does not fall short of being thorough and complete. The main focus of this book is to show through practical usage (by Liebman himself) all of the techniques and ideas presented in *A Chromatic Approach To Jazz Harmony and Melody.*

The book basically consists of a series of musical transcriptions of Liebman's solos as he is playing along with a Jamey Aebersold recording. The notated solos clearly show Liebman's thought process as he is constantly superimposing chord changes over the existing standard harmony. In the introduction pages, David Liebman describes each technique he is using, and on what standard he will be applying the technique. Each track is a different method of superimposition.

The main problem with this source is that it focuses on how he applies his method of playing to standard repertoire and harmony. This will serve a fine purpose especially when summarizing his various harmonic techniques, but will fall very short as a source that describes his style and nuance. In fact, the introduction to *How to Approach Standards Chromatically* states that his stylistic traits are specifically left out in order to more effectively show what he is playing harmonically. Not only are his stylistic characteristics omitted, their origins are not discussed.

Dave Liebman Interview: The Musical Roots is a recently completed CD audio interview that has not yet been published, but only put onto a CD format. This is a full hour of interview material where Liebman discusses all of his musical roots from Elvis Presley to John Coltrane. He goes in depth to his experiences as a teenager hearing jazz for the first time as well as many other useful stories about his life as a jazz musician. Obviously however for an audio interview, there cannot be a clear sense of musical relationship in terms of notation and analysis. This source serves a great purpose for simply gathering information about Liebman's musical influences.

Continuing with CD audio sources, *In Conversation With Lieb: Interviews with David Liebman* can be used as an additional source to the CD interview listed above.

This volume published by Jamey Aebersold Jazz is a two CD set of interviews with Liebman taken by Todd Preston, Eric Defade, and Mike Faisor. The CD is organized by tracks according to topic, and many of the subjects are necessarily applicable. Relevant topics include: John Coltrane, Lieb's Personal Evolution, Other musical and non-musical influences, and stages of the artistic process.

Some of the interviews are conducted with one of the three interviewers asking Liebman questions (based on the track subjects) and others are topics covered by Liebman talking by himself. As is the case with the previous interview, the knowledge one can gain from this source is limited in that there is no way for Liebman to show musical examples or talk about specific musical links to his evolution especially because of the wide range of audience that would listen to a mass produced CD such as this.

In addition to CD's, there are two DVD sources that are very useful. The first is a Jamey Aebersold DVD titled *David Liebman Teaches & Plays* that is a two-DVD set of a typical guest artist session at the Aebersold Jazz Camp. Throughout the two DVD's, Liebman covers his usual topics of saxophone playing and practicing, but also talks about his life and includes great stories about growing up, seeing the real masters play, and how he was inspired by them. Additionally, he plays several jazz standards with a live rhythm section that gives me another musical source for transcription and to further familiarize myself with Liebman's musical tendencies. I can definitely use musical examples from these performances (even two-bar fragments if necessary) to compare to other jazz masters. In particular, Liebman discusses various expressive techniques including portamento, which will be discussed in the analysis portion of this project.

The other DVD is titled *Dave Liebman Masterclass* which serves as another source in addition to the previously mentioned, reinforcing the information that the others present. Since Liebman is an incredibly articulate and enthusiastic speaker, there are always twists and information that may be left out or added. There is also a bonus track on this DVD of the Dave Liebman Group performing one of Liebman's original compositions *Brite Piece,* which once again gives another musical choice to pick from when analyzing Liebman's harmonic content.

The Scale Syllabus is a source that I will use in addition to the other musically based text that Liebman has published to gain more understanding about his harmonic palette. Published in the early 1990's, this collaboration with Jamey Aebersold is one of the first texts available by David Liebman and is designed for students of all ages. The main point of this book (with accompanying CD) is to familiarize the student with all the different types of scales and chords that are used in jazz improvisation. The examples consist of Liebman playing a scale, and then improvising over the accompanying/corresponding chord using ONLY the notes of that scale. There are about 26 different scales covered in this volume. I can use the examples where Liebman is improvising using the scale tones to gain insight into his vocabulary, and (like *How To Approach Standards Chromatically*) it is an excellent way to dilute Liebman's language and hear him improvising in a very controlled environment.

Chapter 3

David Liebman – Biographical Information

David Liebman was born in 1946 to a somewhat musical family in Brooklyn, New York. His mother played some piano and his father had a generous collection of recordings. (Liebman, 1996, p 62) His parents knew about music enough to encourage piano lessons when he was very young, and by twelve years old he began taking lessons on the saxophone. All lessons that Liebman was taking at these young ages were through a small local music store. Prior to attending college, Liebman kept himself busy with various music lessons that included piano, saxophone, flute and clarinet.

Through the end of high school and the beginning of college, Liebman performed club dates (background music for various social functions where the band is not the center of attention) with various bands including his first group, the Impromptu Quartet. Quickly growing tired of the many stylistic hats he had to wear to make people happy at these functions as well as the depressed feeling he had even though he made a paycheck, he followed his heart and led a split life so he could play only the music he wanted to play. He began college by majoring in music education, but quickly became humbled by the amount of classical music knowledge his peers had. He then switched his major to American History at NYU where he stayed and completed his degree. Throughout his studies he exhibited great ambition and focus by winning a writing award in his major. (Liebman, 1996, p 65)

Following college his home was located in downtown Manhattan amidst the "loft scene" around 19th street. His home was an open invitation for musicians of all kinds and

numbers to appear at any time to play together. The "loft scene" was typically a scenario where any number of musicians would play for an incredible amount of time without stopping. The collective jam session would continue for hours upon hours as different musicians came and went, as others slept and others ate and talked, only to continue playing when they wished. This was a great contribution to his development, as well as establishing important personal relationships. During these jam sessions he became friends with saxophonist Steve Grossman, as well as pianist Chick Corea (who lived in the same building as he did for a short time) among many others. Around this same time period he began to travel to Europe to meet and play with other musicians of different styles and cultures.

One of the founding members of the IASJ (International Association of Schools of Jazz) in 1987 as an established artist, Liebman was also active in creating various organizations in his earlier years as well. "Free Life Communication" was an organization that he and his fellow musicians began in the late 1960's that provided them with public concert venues and various sources of funding from New York State. (Liebman, 1996, p 67)

Various inspirations affected Liebman throughout his adolescent and late teenage years. Aside from his music teachers that he had at a younger age, there were three main teachers to whom Liebman attributes to his development as a saxophonist and musician in general in his *Self-Portrait of a Jazz Artist: Musical Thoughts and Realities* (Advance Music, 1996). Joe Allard was the teacher with whom Liebman spent his most formal study periods. Allard was a teacher at the Juilliard School (as well as veteran performer with Toscanini and the NBC Symphony on the Bell Telephone Hour) and was

responsible for providing Liebman with all of the necessary tools and information through which he could mold his musical voice. Liebman's book *Developing A Personal Saxophone Sound* illustrates many techniques and exercises that he learned through Joe Allard. Liebman said, "Most saxophonists went to Joe at one time or another, including many famous ones." (Liebman, 1996, p 66) Many saxophonists that are prevalent on the music scene today speak of either knowing about Allard's teaching methods or have experienced them first-hand. Some notable students of Allard's have been Michael Brecker, Pepper Adams, Bob Berg, Eddie Daniels, Pete Yellin, and Eric Dolphy (on bass clarinet).

Another teacher Liebman experienced in his early development was Lennie Tristano. A very innovative pianist, Tristano developed a very unique style and played with saxophonists Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh. Their style consisted of eighth note and triplet lines that ran across bar lines in unconventional ways. Often they composed new melodies over standard chord changes. Liebman describes Tristano as a teacher that "demanded fluency in basics and required his students to sing along with selected solos, play melodies and improvise on them without the benefit of chord changes and play scales with the metronome." He also says, "Lennie Tristano made me aware of the discipline and study required to become a jazz player." (Liebman, 1996, p 66) This was clearly a different approach than that of Joe Allard especially since Tristano was a pianist, not a horn player. The third and final side of Liebman's professional foundation was brought out by the likes of saxophonist Charles Lloyd who mentored Liebman rather than literally taught him. This relationship taught Liebman about the life involved with jazz and serves as a departure point for his professional career.

Even before Liebman started his career as a leader, he was involved in a large amount of work as a sideman with a number of notable groups. From the early 1970's he occasionally played saxes and flute in an early rock/fusion band called Ten Wheel Drive. When a band dispute led to the whole horn section to leave the band, he was quick to insist on forming an original group called Sawbuck.

These ensembles were electric and rock oriented, but quickly ended for Liebman when drummer Elvin Jones called to request that he play in his band. Bassist Gene Perla was currently playing in Elvin's band along with saxophonist Steve Grossman. When Perla notified Liebman to come down to a club late at night to audition for Elvin, he was quick to accept. Elvin was the drummer of the Classic John Coltrane Quartet in the 1960s that had so powerfully influenced Liebman. The acceptance into the group literally put him in the role of his idol (Coltrane) in collaboration with Elvin, and served to be Liebman's first big break in the jazz world. It was in fact in this band where Liebman found out what the jazz life would really be like.

The Elvin Jones recording *Genesis* was Liebman's first professional recording date. Later, the famous *Elvin Jones: Live At the Lighthouse* recording would become a favorite of many saxophonists and jazz musicians in general. In this recording both Liebman and Steve Grossman demonstrate the knowledge and vocabulary of a post-Coltrane generation and are among some of the first people to do so. This was one of Liebman's most important recordings of his career, and one that is listened to and studied by musicians everywhere as a primary source of Coltrane's pentatonic language.

The early 1970's brought many great things to the table for Liebman. While still performing with Elvin Jones, he also collaborated with friend, drummer Bob Moses to

create the *Open Sky Trio* and released two recordings that were the first of Liebman's as a leader. When describing the drumming of Bob Moses versus Elvin Jones, Liebman says that "with Elvin, the pulse was always being stated, whereas Moses played over and through the time more often than not. He affected the colors and shapes of my lines in a way that became a permanent part of my rhythmic approach." (Liebman, 1996, p 70) This is a wonderful explanation of how Liebman's style came to be since it is a style that few, if any, can emulate especially because of the rhythmic aspect.

Perhaps the greatest break of the 1970's and Liebman's entire career was his time spent playing in Miles Davis' band. This came about when Miles needed a substitute for Steve Grossman in his band and contacted Liebman through producer Teo Macero at a doctor's office in Brooklyn. The first recording he made with Miles was *On The Corner* (Fisher, 1996, p 14) and also played on *Get Up With It* as well as *Dark Magus* not to mention many live concerts around the world. (p. 16) While still finishing his time with Elvin, Liebman began playing with Miles at the Fillmore East. (p. 85) His time in Miles' band taught him invaluable skills about how to lead a band, be a horn player and survive in the business. For anyone that spent any time in the band, Liebman's association with Miles Davis launched his career into a new, higher world-wide level much like that of Dave Holland, Chick Corea, and Keith Jarrett who were also members of the band.

Liebman has explained that for him as well as many musicians that played in Miles' band is that once you play with Miles, there isn't anything left to do but go on your own. In the mid 1970's, that's exactly what Liebman did by forming his group *Lookout Farm*, as well as recording some duo work with pianist Richie Beirach. Through earlier contacts, Liebman formed the group the *Ellis-Liebman Band* with a former horn

player from the James Brown band. This group also encouraged Liebman to move to San Francisco where he thought a more funk-based music would flourish.

After his brief time spent on the West Coast, Liebman moved back to New York to tour with pianist Chick Corea. Liebman explains that it was one of his greatest experiences and "Even more beneficial was the chance to hear and play with a string quartet, which culminated in what I feel is one of my finest albums, *Dedications.*" (Liebman, 1996, p 75) More major groups that Liebman began was an electric group with John Scofield, Lookout Farm (that recorded for the ECM label among others and was #1 in the 1976 Downbeat International Critics' Poll for the category of Group Deserving of Wider Recognition) (Fisher, 1996, p 195) and probably one of his most well known groups *Quest* that he formed with Richie Beirach in 1981.

During the 1980's Liebman made many solo recordings, probably the most notable being *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner* that featured only Liebman playing soprano sax. To create this recording was an enormous task, especially because of the limited technology in a recording studio of the 1980's. Liebman wrote and arranged the entire album using extremely complex harmony and rhythm but recorded it only by himself, which meant that he needed to overdub everything. This recording must inspired partly by the Bill Evans *Conversations With Myself* recordings (which were among the first jazz overdubbing recordings). Liebman feels that "in a sense this is my most personal and deepest recording." (Liebman, 1996, p 77)

Never falling behind or letting up on his creative drive, Liebman put the 1990's as well as the 2000's to good use as well by forming a version of the current *Dave Liebman Group* using Vic Juris on guitar, Tony Marino on bass, Phil Markowitz on piano and

synthesizers and Jamey Haddad on drums and percussion. Aside from his current career as a performing jazz artist, Liebman keeps busy with numerous projects that involve writing, composing, producing, and especially jazz education. Currently on the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music Graduate Program, Liebman teaches a course in his Chromatic Concept with Phil Markowitz as well as traveling the world teaching jazz and giving various clinics on a countless number of topics. Liebman also holds his annual saxophone masterclass at East Stroudsburg University in Pennsylvania every summer, welcoming first-time and returning attendees from all points of the globe.

Chapter 4

Methodology and Procedures

Methodology

The analysis of David Liebman will consist of two major parts: First, Liebman will be analyzed in terms of his experiences and major influences, which will be largely qualitative. Then, the selected solos from major figures in Liebman's development will be analyzed in terms of their musical contributions, which will be largely quantitative and will deal with musical notation primarily.

Procedures

Information gathered regarding Liebman's most important influences will be taken from sources such as written interviews in various magazines as well as publications of Liebman's such as *Self Portrait of a Jazz Artist.* (1996) Other Liebman sources include DVD recordings of his seminars and clinics where he is directly verbalizing his influences. In addition to these sources, my personal interview with Liebman will serve as a summary or dominating source that will influence my decision on who I will consider to analyze against Liebman. My interview is particularly useful because unlike the other interviews I have found, Liebman cuts straight to the point and explains who he listened to and why he listened to them. This allows for focused listening to specific solos by John Coltrane and others avoiding generalities.

Once Liebman influences are established I will then seek out particular recordings of his influences and select tracks/solos to analyze based upon: Similar repertoire in

common with Liebman and his influences. This allows for a clear comparison based on sections of a tune or harmonic situation; Tunes that emphasize the aspects of Liebman's playing that I am trying to point out. (ex. Impressions = modal or Blues form); Important influential solos indicated by Liebman via personal interview.

The majority of the analysis will come from excerpts of John Coltrane's "Impressions" *(*from *Live at The Village Vanguard),* "Blues to You" *(*from *Coltrane Plays the Blues),* and other solos from the same time period. Liebman accented his interest in these particular solos when asked how Coltrane affected his playing.

Analysis will focus on two main aspects: style and harmony. One of the most important parts of Liebman's playing is *how* he plays, and I feel that is a necessary part of explaining his improvisational approach. This will all be covered in *Style.* The *Harmony* section will deal with certain harmonic devices that are described by Liebman in both his *A Chromatic Approach* (1991) as well as the recently completed companion book *How To Approach Standards Chromatically.* (1996) I plan to at least show and explain one solid example of each of the techniques Liebman describes.

The analysis will use methods used by Ekkehard Jost in *Free Jazz* as well as Liebman in his own books. In addition to these methods already set forth I will alter them slightly to come up with my own analysis methods that best describe what is going on between the improvisations of two musicians. Most of the musical analysis will consist of 1-4 measure excerpts of notated solos. It will take the form of one staff on top of the other in score format with arrows pointing the reader to specific parts of the line. For example, Ekkehard Jost's uses this technique to describe the similarities and

relationships between the different themes that take place in John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme.* (Jost, 1975, p 33)

Another technique introduced in Porter's *Free Jazz* is the use of brackets above parts of a phrase to show information that may lie hidden inside of a larger phrase. Porter uses this technique on several occasions throughout *Free Jazz* and uses it in several different ways. There are specific examples of this on pages 49 and 58 of *Free Jazz.*

It is important to remember that this is not a search for literal copied "licks;" the point of all jazz musicians is to assimilate a style and make if your own. Finding literal copied musical phrases would set a bad example for growing musicians and would be almost impossible given Liebman's style of learning and his specific point to NOT literally copy phrases. In certain instances however, there are small segments of phrases between Liebman and his influences that do match, and these will be indicated in the analysis. The main harmonic link between Liebman and his influences will be the harmony that the lines of the two players outline, not the similarity between the exact notes that each play.

Chapter 5

Analysis

As a primary voice in jazz improvisation among the most elite in the genre, David Liebman's harmonic palette is one of extreme harmonic color as well as infection, style and nuance. Along with Steve Grossman, Joe Lovano, Jerry Bergonzi, and until recently Michael Brecker, Liebman is one of the main pioneers in the assimilation and unique creative use of the "John Coltrane School" of playing. Through Liebman's extremely articulate nature he thoroughly explained his harmonic vocabulary in his book *A Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody* and with my help thoroughly demonstrated all of his harmonic improvisation techniques in *How To Approach Standards Chromatically.*

Analysis of Liebman's extremely complex playing style will begin with first taking a look at the subtle yet extremely important characteristics of his playing. These characteristics involve certain articulation, portamento, glissando, and vocalization techniques found in the playing of the masters he studied most. Secondly, examination of Liebman's harmonic vocabulary will deal with cross-referencing certain phrases with that of jazz masters that influenced him the most in various stages of his development.

Style

As most musicians know or come to realize by a certain point of their development is that the basis of a unique sound does not come merely from the notes that are played. To develop one's identifiable style requires much thought along the lines of

exactly *how* to play the notes. Considerations may include time feel, pitch bending, articulation, and the ability to apply an overall personality to what is played. Ask any younger musician to sight-read part of a John Coltrane solo and this point is clearly illustrated. The notes can all be present and played accurately, however the student will hardly sound anything like John Coltrane! This may even be true of students that have been laboriously studying a particular player. Despite the months of work, they still fail to sound like the emulated player. As for Liebman's extremely chromatic tendencies, pianist Kenny Werner said it best when he became known describing that "if dissonant notes are played and the player embraces them as consonant, *the listener will also hear them as consonant!*" (Werner, 1996, p 87) This is precisely how most of Liebman's vocabulary appeals to listeners.

To leave these attributes and influences of David Liebman's playing out of this analysis would be greatly counter-productive. While I will focus later on his chromatic approach, much of what makes his chromatic approach sound "valid" is the way he plays the chromatic passages. The use of chromatic tones in jazz improvisation (or any genre in fact) creates a certain amount of tension.

In Liebman's playing, these tension notes are often accompanied by a certain style in which he plays them. Most often they are played with a more aggressive or biting tone and sometimes these tones occur on the extreme ends of the saxophone's range. On some instances Liebman will combine chromatic lines with more inside lines that give him a greater combination of harmonic possibilities.

Overtones/False Fingerings

One of the most effective stylistic devices that Liebman uses is his facility of the saxophone's overtone series or what is more commonly referred to as false fingerings. False fingerings result in the same note sounding as a fundamental fingering yet the tone color is drastically changed. Harmonics in the overtone series of the lowest five notes on the saxophone (Bb through D) are easiest to use for this, however any note can be used and the same relationship of harmonics apply. Use of harmonics are notated by a solid note head indicating the sounding pitch, while an "x" note head indicates the fingered note pitch on the saxophone. Liebman demonstrates this best on repetitive lines like this one from his solo on "Mr. P.C." (8th chorus):

Fig. 1 – Liebman, "Mr. P.C." 8th Chorus

Here we can see the use of the note G indicated by an "x" used for the sounding note D, which would be the first note in the overtone series if a saxophonist fingers a G above the staff.

In addition to repetitive phrases, a more dramatic effect can be achieved by using the overtones or false fingerings in a melodic passage as demonstrated by Liebman here in his 7th chorus of "Mr. P.C." :

Fig. 2 – Liebman, "Mr. P.C." 7th chorus

In this example Liebman is using the first overtone of low C4/middle C (which is C5 in the middle of the staff an octave higher). In the third measure, he is using the same low C to play G an octave and a fifth higher.

David Liebman's most influential artist John Coltrane uses this technique in most of his solos. Among countless instances, his opening phrase to a 1962 solo of "Bye Bye Blackbird" uses this technique with the same overtone based on G:

Fig. 3 – Coltrane, "Bye Bye Blackbird"

Later in Coltrane's same solo, he uses almost the identical phrase that Liebman used in his "Mr. P.C." solo from above:

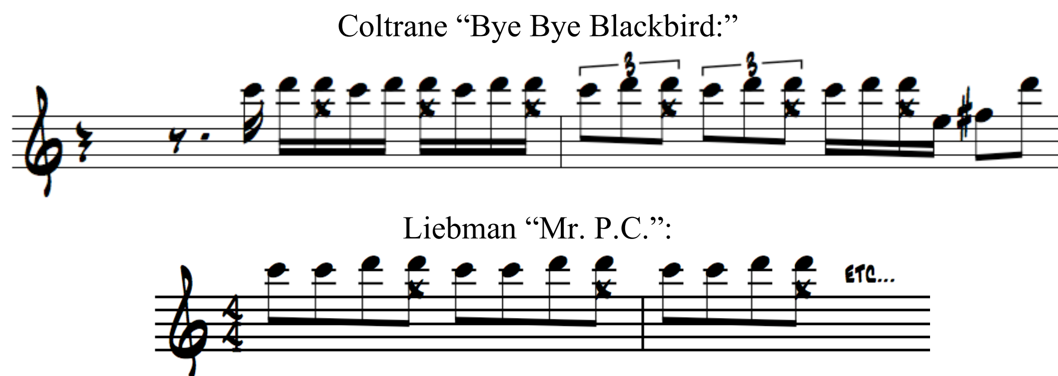

Fig. 4 – Coltrane/Liebman Comparison

By comparing the two examples above we can clearly see a nearly exact match of the technique used, not only in effect but in literal sounding pitches.

Vocalization

In many instances Liebman adds vocalization to his notes to build intensity or to climax a solo. In some cases this may be a slight coloration of the note(s) or in other

cases could be more voice that is heard than anything else. This is a very dramatic effect that is most clearly displayed using notes of the highest range of the saxophone ("palm keys" or altissimo). Vocalization can be sung using the same pitch played, the same pitch an octave lower, or a different pitch altogether. Each variation will produce slightly different results.

In a conversation with Liebman, he describes the use of vocalization in the upper and altissimo register as a way to separate the different registers of the saxophone. The very low register has a specific sound, especially when playing in the mid register and then suddenly drop to a series of low notes. The altissimo register can do the same if treated properly. Some saxophonists have dazzling technique in the upper register and can make it sound like any other register. Liebman decides to color the altissimo register with his voice so that the high notes take on a character of his/her own much like the low register. (Vashlishan, 2008)

We can see Liebman's use of this in many instances like this one taken from his solo on "Mr. P.C.":

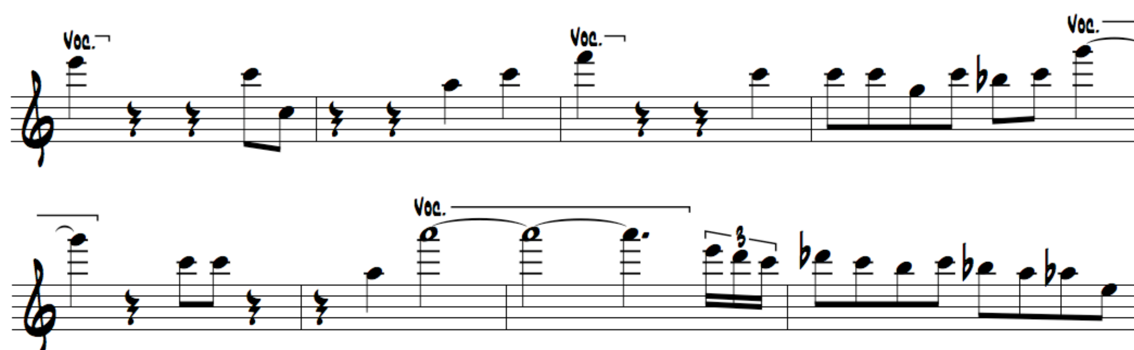

Fig. 5 – Liebman, "Mr. P.C."

Note how all of the vocalizations occur on high and/or altissimo (above normal saxophone range which is high F) notes.

Coltrane's use of vocalization also takes place around the same general range. This example is taken from the 25th chorus of Coltrane's solo on "Impressions" taken from the *Live At The Village Vanguard* 1961 recording. Here, he uses vocalization on altissimo notes B, A, and G. Liebman's solo from above uses vocalization on altissimo notes A, G, and F.

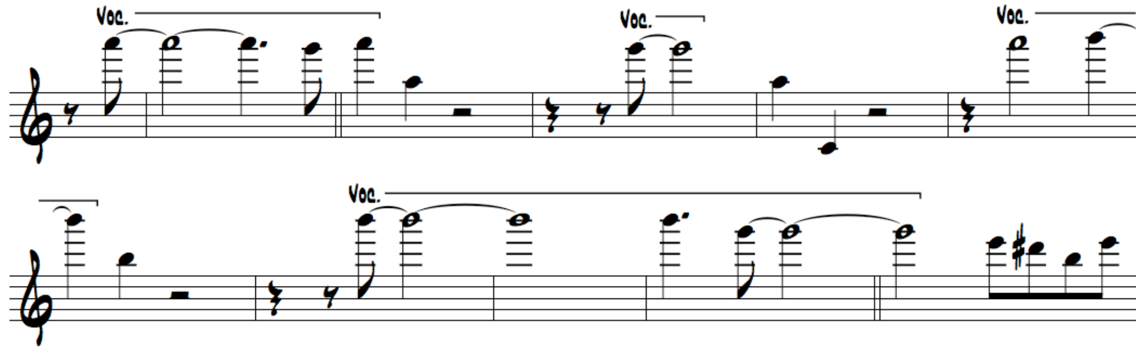

Fig. 6 – Coltrane, "Impressions" excerpt

Portamento/Glissando

In chapter seven of the DVD *David Liebman Teaches and Plays* that was filmed in 1995 at the Jamey Aebersold Jazz Camp Liebman describes that one expressive device in particular that he developed from John Coltrane was portamento. This is the musical term used to describe sliding from one note to the other instead of using excessive lip bending. This is commonly referred to as glissando, but when combined with the lip however, a surprisingly smooth sweep can be achieved that transforms the technique into a portamento. This is a very expressive technique that Liebman (and of course Coltrane) uses all of the time. In Liebman's second improvised chorus of "I Concentrate On You," he demonstrates this technique when moving from a high F down to C:

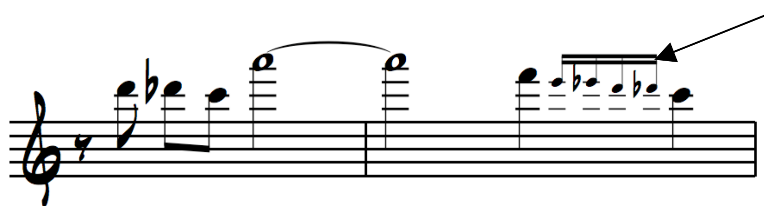

Fig. 7 – Liebman, "I Concentrate On You" (solo)

The sound of this example can only be achieved by the way it is notated, for simply dropping the lip would not give nearly the same result nor would it give the player a reasonable avenue to land on the C. There are other places however, where the lip could be used but the portamento gives the improviser a much clearer, easier, and more defined way of expression. In the same tune, Liebman demonstrates this best when he is interpreting the melody:

Fig. 8 – Liebman, "I Concentrate On You" (melody)

In John Coltrane's "Blues To You" solo on the recording *Coltrane Plays The Blues*, he demonstrates this technique as well. It is important to note that in most cases both Liebman and Coltrane use the portamento in the higher range of the saxophone, but not necessarily the altissimo register as stated before in the description of a vocalization. The following example is taken from Coltrane's solo at the beginning of his fourth blues chorus:

Fig. 9 – Coltrane, "Blues To You"

In the figure above Coltrane is using the portamento much like the Liebman in figure A7; moving from one note to the next that is at least a third away. This next example shows how Coltrane is using the portamento much like Liebman does in figure A8. This is taken from the same solo in the fifth chorus:

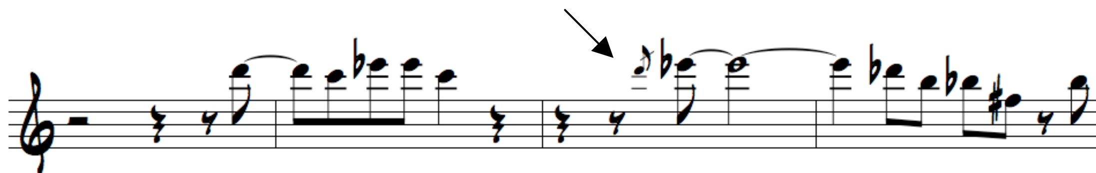

Fig. 10 – Coltrane, "Blues To You"

Themes and Repetition

The bridge between analysis of style and harmony will be an examination of the similarities between Liebman and Coltrane in terms of thematic development, especially during the beginning and climax of their solos. While this is not purely harmonic, it brings us a bit closer to Liebman's harmonic approach. There are numerous instances in Liebman's (as well as Coltrane's) playing where he uses a short phrase repeated a number of times. This will either happen in the beginning of a solo, at some point in a solo for a short period, or will occur as a repeating motif used throughout a solo. The next examples show the first measures of several different Liebman solos. Here we can see the simple melodic phrase present in the first chorus of Liebman's "Milestones" solo:

Fig. 11 – Liebman, "Milestones" excerpt

In the same solo, he presents another melodic phrase during his second chorus:

Fig. 12 – Liebman, "Milestones" excerpt #2

In the opening eight measures of Liebman's solo on "Mr. P.C.", he continues to use the same basic pentatonic language to form to compose his thematic phrase:

Fig. 13 – Liebman, "Mr. P.C." 1st chorus

In another solo nearly from nearly ten years earlier, Liebman composes his opening theme in the same pentatonic manner on the Donald Byrd composition "Fancy Free" taken from the Elvin Jones recording *Live At The Lighthouse*:

Fig. 14 – Liebman, "Fancy Free" 1st chorus

Finally, another solo by Liebman on *Caravan* shows us the same opening theme technique that was used in all of the examples shown above. The only difference here is that the notes change a bit more based on the harmony of the tune (which I have not included here purely to emphasize the similarities and simplicity of his lines).

Fig. 15 – Liebman, "Caravan" excerpt

Upon looking for musical sources to confirm my assumption that Liebman's melodic tendencies were derived from Coltrane, one does not have to look far to find plenty of material in Coltrane's "Impressions" solo.

Fig. 16 – Coltrane, "Impressions," *Live at The Village Vanguard 1961*

This being one example among many in this solo, Coltrane would often repeat small rhythmic phrases but change certain notes slightly. This portion above was taken from the "B" section of his 6th solo chorus.

<u>*Harmony*</u>

The complex harmonic vocabulary that David Liebman has developed is one that is admired by many. As mentioned in previous chapters, Liebman witnessed Coltrane's playing first-hand, absorbed his vocabulary and developed a career and unique sound based on what he learned. When referring to the Elvin Jones *Live At The Lighthouse* recording where Liebman and Steve Grossman documented their post-Coltrane influence

with Jones (who was Coltrane's primary drummer in the later half of his career), musicians have said:

> "This record is an example of the next generation of Coltrane fanatics..."
> – George Garzone, saxophonist

> "Referring to patterns that Trane had worked out, Steve and David's lines were so great." – Pat Labarbera, saxophonist

> "...Liebman and Grossman raised the bar for what could be accomplished on the saxophone after assimilating the musical language of John Coltrane..."
> – Chris Potter, saxophonist

(Wettre, 2005)

With these testimonials in mind, I set out to ask Liebman about his influences. I explained that I was aware of Coltrane and to answer my assumptions he agreed "yes, that's it." When I asked what other saxophone influences and suggested players like Sonny Rollins, Joe Henderson and others, he responded "yeah, I admired him as a saxophone player, but for the influence you're looking for it was [Col]Trane." (Vashlishan, 2008) He acknowledged trumpeter Miles Davis for his use of space, but not for anything that really dealt with harmony. According to Liebman "with Miles it was more about the *how* than the *what.*" In this quote, Liebman refers to Davis' exceptional time feel and sound, all set against his simple, sparse yet evocative harmonic language. Based on this interview with Liebman, I had no choice but to look to John Coltrane for the bulk of my harmonic reference.

David Liebman's Harmonic Concept

Pages 17 through 29 of Liebman's *A Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody* depict a great deal of harmonic tools that one can use to expand their harmonic palette. As Liebman states, "to convey the fullest array of human emotions the artist should have an entire panorama to choose from in his or her area with the minimum of limitations." (Liebman, 1991, p 171) And with this, an entire panorama he gave his readers. The following is a brief summary of the different harmonic devices he uses taken from *A Chromatic Approach...* as well as from *How To Approach Standards*, (2006) which I collaborated with Liebman to write. Accompanying each method is a solo excerpt from John Coltrane showing how all of Liebman's techniques were displayed in Coltrane's playing.

Upper Structures

This technique involves playing on the upper extensions of a chord using a chord-on-chord mindset. For example, playing "E7" over a Dmaj7 chord to expose the 9th, #11, and 13 of the Dmaj7 and is probably the simplest form of "chromatic" thinking. This is very apparent in Coltrane's "Impressions" solo mentioned previously. In this case, Coltrane plays clear melodic phrases in A7 and Bb7 tonalities over the E-7 and F-7 harmonies respectively to create the 11th and 13th sounds. Note the clear triads and strong resolutions to both A and Bb:

Fig. 17 – Coltrane, "Impressions" excerpt

Tritone Substitution

A more commonly known substitution in the jazz world, the tritone relationship utilizes the more colorful notes in a chord by playing over its closely related neighbor which happens to be a tritone away. For example when playing C7, F#7 (both chord and scale) may be substituted for an easier way of playing the 7th, #11, #5, #9, and b9. These colorful perhaps more "outside" notes are the regular notes to the F#7 scale. In most cases when Coltrane plays a bit more colorfully, he is drawing upon the tritone. Some great examples of this are scattered throughout "Blues To You" on the recording *Coltrane Plays the Blues.* This particular example is from his 2nd chorus:

Fig. 18 – Coltrane, "Blues To You" 2nd chorus

Coltrane Substitution

This is of course self explanatory to many musicians, and utilizes the progressions that Coltrane made famous on his *Giant Steps* recording and many others. The important feature about this technique is to use it on other tunes than "Giant Steps" or "Countdown" to create more harmonic interest. Coltrane developed his series of harmonic superimpositions by experimenting with key centers moving in thirds. His classic "Countdown" progression takes a simple D-7 G7 Cmaj7 progression and develops his sequence **D-7** Eb7 Abmaj7 B7 Emaj7 **G7 Cmaj7**, which still resolves to the same Cmaj7 chord and uses D-7 and G7 as strong anchor points. Liebman's progressions differ from Coltrane's in that instead of definite functional harmonic choices, Liebman chooses to experiment with similar root movements of thirds and fourths, which can be clearly seen in the example from "Countdown" shown above.

This example is from Liebman while using Coltrane substitutions on "Take the A-Train." Notice Liebman's clever use of common tones between superimpositions indicated by overlapping brackets:

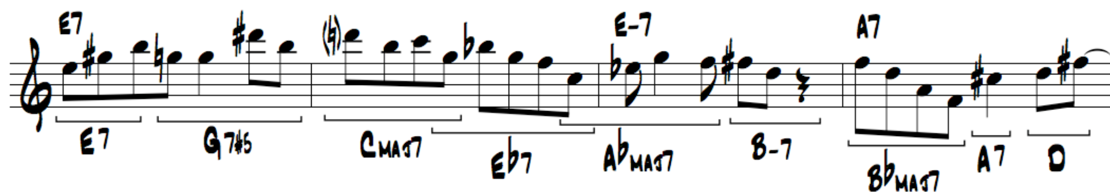

Fig. 19 – Liebman, "Take The "A" Train"

While this example is taken from Coltrane's "Blues To You" solo mentioned earlier using some of the very same progressions moving to C:

Fig. 20 – Coltrane, "Blues To You" 17th chorus

Side Slipping

This technique involves simply playing either a half step above or below the current chord change. If the progression reads C-7 F7, then a reasonable side slip would be to play either B-7 E7 or C#-7 F#7. The more important issue here as well as with the next technique discussed here is to be able to resolve the superimposed line back to where the original change resolves. This is very important for the sake of tension and release. Liebman states, "In any artistic process, tension and release are guiding factors. It is the yin-yang principle put to practice, implying opposites." (Liebman, 2003, p 37) This is a whole blues chorus from Coltrane's solo on "Chasin' The Trane" from the *Live At The Village Vanguard* 1961 recording during a particularly dissonant moment, however notice his resolution half way through (Cmaj7, measure 6) and at the end of the chorus to justify all of his side-slipping:

Fig. 21: Coltrane, "Chasin' The Trane"

An interesting example of how Liebman uses side-slipping is shown in this phrase to his solo to "Bye Bye Blackbird." Note how literally plays this ii-V progression up a half step.

Fig. 22: Liebman, "Bye Bye Blackbird"

Foreign Progression/Polytonality

This technique is very similar to side-slipping, but instead of moving only a half-step away from the original key any interval is used. Whether it is a minor 3rd, 5th, whole step, etc. this technique works best when the player resolves back to the original key. A good example would be to play F-7 Bb7 over the progression D-7 G7. By using this substitution in particular, the F-7 and Bb7 are covering certain upper extensions and colorful notes in the original D-7 G7 progression that the improviser may not come upon as easily when thinking of the original progression.

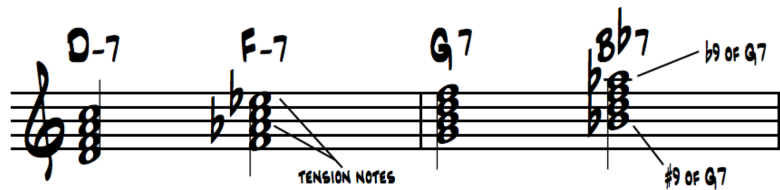

Fig. 23: Foreign Progression (Liebman, 1991, p 19)

The key to using this technique effectively is to experiment with different keys and determining which give the sound of the line more or less harmonic tension. While keys closer to the original may sound rather dissonant, others that are further away may sound more consonant. Liebman's constant emphasis on the importance of tension and release makes this one of his most effective harmonic tools.

Modal

The modal technique is rather simple yet gives interesting results. Modal compositions generally consist of either one or two chords, such as Miles Davis' "So What" or John Coltrane's "Impressions" (mentioned earlier). To prevent a rather stale sounding vocabulary on an improvisation of any length, one can develop their own set of arbitrary chord changes to play over. This is most interesting when examining Liebman's suggested changes on "Impressions" in *How To Approach Standards Chromatically* for some of his suggested changes match Coltrane's implied changes on his 1961 solo on "Impressions." Using five choruses of suggested chord changes to superimpose over "Impressions," Liebman proposes to use the following changes for the "A" (E-7) sections: B7, C7, F#7, A7, Eb7, Fmaj7 and D7 among others. For the "B" (F-7) sections he suggests Ebmaj7, Bb7, and G-7 among others (Liebman, 2006, p 105). Surprisingly, Coltrane displays all of these with the addition of Cmaj7(#11) in "Impressions" solo from the 1960's: (following page)

Fig. 24: Coltrane, "Impressions" 7th chorus

Same root/Different quality – Modal Mixture

This can best be described as simply changing the quality of the chord you are playing, but keeping the root. In the above diagram we can see this displayed as well as the modal superimpositions when looking at measures 11-13:

Fig. 25: Coltrane, "Impressions" 7th chorus excerpt

While the current chord at this point is E-7, Coltrane is choosing to alter the quality of the "-7" by changing it to b7(b9) and -7(b5) while still keeping the center of "E." This may

also be done the opposite way by changing the root but keeping the same quality, which happens in Figure 24 in measures 22 and 23. While this line may be interpreted a number of ways, it is entirely possible that Coltrane was thinking C-7 based on the melodic shape.

Fingering Tendencies

Many of the harmonic devices used by both Coltrane and Liebman are thought of in a very conscious manner and worked out; we know this through the publication of *A Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody* for Liebman and of the references to Coltrane's Giant Steps in Nicolas Slonimsky's Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns. However, there are some instances where the habit of finger memory takes control.

Fingering tendencies are common with any instrument when the player ends up playing a favorable phrase enough times to the point where it becomes type of "last resort" or in some cases the logical first choice when pressed for time at fast tempos. This is noticeable in both Liebman and Coltrane's playing, typically in faster situations. Regardless the harmony occurring at the time, both play the same sequence of notes descending from around A to F on the saxophone. This fragment of connected chromatic notes rarely happens in other registers. If it does, the frequency is much lower. Due to the positions of certain notes on the saxophone's fingerboard, the notes used in the following examples fall in the most comfortable mid-range of the instrument. The finger sequence required to execute these phrases is very comfortable and uses keys that are very close to the hand's natural position.

Here are a few examples from Coltrane's playing taken from various recordings of different time periods:

COLTRANE - BYE BYE BLACKBIRD

COLTRANE - BYE BYE BLACKBIRD

COLTRANE - IMPRESSIONS

COLTRANE - IMPRESSIONS

COLTRANE - IMPRESSIONS

COLTRANE - TAKE THE COLTRANE

Fig. 26: Coltrane, fingering tendencies

Notice the incredible similarity between Coltrane's fingering tendencies and Liebman's by examining these few examples from various time periods of Liebman's playing. Clearly one way to develop such common fingering habits in such a variety of situations would be by religiously practicing the solos and language of a particular player that usually played the same things in the same areas of the saxophone. The examples of Liebman from the Donald Byrd composition "Fancy Free" are from the *Live At The Lighthouse* recording in 1972, literally during the time period when Liebman and Steve

Grossman were incredibly absorbed in the language of John Coltrane. This is clearly reflected because examples of this fingering habit occur many times per tune:

LIEBMAN – FANCY FREE

LIEBMAN – FANCY FREE

LIEBMAN – FANCY FREE

LIEBMAN – I CONCENTRATE ON YOU

LIEBMAN – OLEO

Fig. 27: Liebman, fingering tendencies

In Jamey Aebersold's *Scale Syllabus* (1982) Liebman plays various examples using only notes from a particular scale corresponding to the chord that is played. On some occasions, he does not hold entirely true to the scale and says in the introductory notes that "I hardly used any chromatic passing tones, except in the fast versions I would occasionally use my G# between the notes G and A." (p. ii) This further proves that these examples in particular are fingering habits for Liebman based upon intensive study of Coltrane's lines.

Rhythm

One of Liebman's most refined, unique, and extensive improvisational techniques is his rhythmic approach. Unlike many improvising saxophonists, Liebman's rhythmic vocabulary does not consist mostly of eighth notes. Traditionally in jazz improvisation, long strings of eighth notes are used to convey a strong sense of both harmony and tempo. Liebman however, uses rhythm as a form of tension and release much like he describes in his various harmonic techniques. As mentioned earlier, Liebman attributes much of his rhythmic approach to drummer Bob Moses, a drummer who was his first real jazz partner and who he developed the "Free Life Communication" with. (Fisher, 1996, p 13)

Heavily influenced by free jazz, Moses played over the bar lines and across the top of the form. (Liebman, 1996, p 70) Playing with a drummer like Moses caused Liebman to naturally fit into this way of stretching and squeezing phrases that carries over to when he is playing with a drummer with a more direct and stated pulse. When his lines are combined with a more straight-ahead drummer, a very interesting elastic and fluid effect is achieved and has become a result that few saxophonists use as well as Liebman.

Contributing to Liebman's rhythmic approach was Miles Davis, his employer in the mid to late 1970's. Instead of showing Liebman a way to play notes in a rhythmic fashion, Miles showed him it was possible to use silence just as effectively (if not more) than when playing notes. Liebman has noted Miles' playing on "Gingerbread Boy" as being a particularly inspirational recording. (Vashlishan, 2008) Of course, Miles' playing became even more sparse and rhythmically oriented in the mid-late 1970s when Liebman held a spot in his band. This constant exposure undoubtedly influenced him permanently.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This project was greatly important as a thorough examination of the aspects of Liebman's playing that have particularly influenced me. My relationship with Liebman has grown for over ten years now, and throughout those years I have become very comfortable with and awestruck by certain techniques that he uses (not to mention his unbelievable technical ability on the saxophone). As stated in the introduction, my main course of action was originally to focus only upon his chromatic approach to improvisation, but quickly became engrossed in his stylistic traits, most of which I can hear in my playing from time to time.

The link to Coltrane almost exclusively came after the I began researching Liebman, and through personal discussions with him where we both decided what was most important to cover. Upon looking through and listening to the Coltrane recordings that are included here, it was surprising how easy it was to find references to nearly all of his techniques that he describes in his various publications. While other saxophonists of Coltrane's time may have used similar harmonic techniques, the most accentuated stylistic concepts that Liebman uses regularly are nearly all reflected in Coltrane's playing.

Analysis of Liebman's style resulted in finding the major expressive devices such as overtones, portamento, vocalization, themes and repetition and rhythm. The link between Coltrane and Liebman became apparent when studying similarities in their use of harmonics/overtones. Each used these very effectively to articulate notes and add

additional tone color to their improvised lines. Noticeable in almost all Coltrane solos, portamento was a great link between the two players. While this technique is evident in many saxophonists' playing, Liebman's reference to Coltrane is particularly obvious when listening to their recordings. Liebman even references Coltrane's use of portamento in his lecture at the Jamey Aebersold Jazz Camp (1995).

The techniques of vocalization and repetition, clearly both Coltrane influences, are abundant in several Liebman solos as well as countless Coltrane solos. The most important reference to these techniques occurred in Coltrane's "Impressions" solo from the 1960s recording *Live at the Village Vanguard* that was mentioned throughout the paper.

Harmonic analysis revealed many interesting conclusions. I decided to mostly refer to the same Village Vanguard solo of Coltrane's to draw my main points together. Using the harmonic devices set forth in *How To Approach Standards Chromatically* (Liebman, 2006) and *A Chromatic Approach To Jazz Harmony and Melody* (Liebman, 1991) I had a solid base of how Liebman explains his harmonic playing. Coltrane's Village Vanguard solo reflected these techniques in many different instances. "Upper Structures" in particular is interesting because most of Coltrane's solo is developed using the upper extensions of the minor 7th chord. For tri-tone and Coltrane substitutions I found it very useful to examine Coltrane's solo on "Blues To You" from the classic recording *Coltrane Plays The Blues* that Liebman also referred to as one of his most influential Coltrane solos. (Vashlishan, 2008) "Side Slipping" is apparent in many cases as well, for Coltrane is known for this and inspires many players to experiment with

playing "out," which is essentially the result of both "Side Slipping" as well as "Foreign Progressions."

Also in *How To Approach Standards Chromatically* (2006) Liebman lists many examples of how he superimposes his own chord progressions over a modal composition like "Impressions." I was very surprised to find instances in Coltrane's "Impressions" solo utilizing nearly all the superimpositions to which Liebman refers.

The harmonic technique that was most interesting to me after years of absorbing Liebman's language and style was "fingering tendencies," which I even notice in my own playing. After playing and transcribing extensive Liebman solos, I have noticed the same fingering tendencies described in this paper appear in my playing. This can possibly be attributed to the fact that there are many instances where Liebman uses the phrases shown here, much like Liebman played Coltrane's phrases where these tendencies are also abundant.

While my main point of this project is not to illustrate Liebman as a "clone" of Coltrane, I can see many ways that he exhibits superior learning skills from his youth and an incredible ability to use the traits and stylistic characteristics of a major jazz icon to develop his own unique style in the same way as other great saxophonists like Michael Brecker, Steve Grossman, Bob Berg among others.

Suggestions for Continued Research

While the information represented here depicts a clear framework describing David Liebman's approach to chord changes and certain modal/free settings, it is far from a complete examination of Liebman's entire approach as a musician. The techniques presented here were selected based upon my personal experiences and interests about

Liebman, as well as many important tools that I have gained as a musician from listening to and studying him. Many other projects can be generated from the extensive musical background that Liebman possesses (which I chose to omit to enable me to concentrate on more specific techniques). These include: the influence of later Coltrane and free jazz on both his compositional style as well as his improvisational style, his compositional style based on his extensive interest in the music of Bartok, Charles Ives, Debussy, Stockhausen, Ravel, Stravinsky along with many others, and the influence of pop music on his playing based on his interest of Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Elvis Presley, Joni Mitchell, and The Beatles. (Liebman, 1996, p 206)

Perhaps the most extravagant and interesting technique to me among these additional topics is Liebman's rhythmic approach. As described briefly in this paper, his approach to rhythm is one that differs from many other saxophonists in that he has developed a very elastic sense of time and rhythm. Although extremely hard to transcribe at times, possible analysis could include comparisons between Liebman and other saxophonists or musicians on other instruments, examination of his interpretations of melodies, and his use of space.

The knowledge I have gained from studying Liebman both harmonically and stylistically is incredibly valuable. Through this analysis I have gone deeper into the aspects of his playing that have attracted me the most over the past ten years. The more I learn about him as a musician, saxophonist, and person I can easily anticipate many more years of priceless enlightenment to come.

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The Opal Hearted Aboriginal, 1979 ENJA #3065

Tribute to John Coltrane, 1987 EPIC

Besame Mucho, 1993 Red Records #123260

Miles Away, 1994 Owl/Universal Music Jazz France #9824584

Return of the Tenor: Standards, 1996 Double-Time Records #109

John Coltrane

Live at The Village Vanguard, 1961 Impulse! #232

Coltrane Plays The Blues, 1962 Atlantic Records, 2004 Rhino #8122737532

Live European Tour 1962, 2001 Artistry/MPS #701

Duke Ellington and John Coltrane, Impulse! #166, Universal #9077