

TRANSCRIPTION

Eric Dolphy's Solo On 'God Bless The Child'

by David C. Gross

Eric Dolphy recorded an a cappella version of Billie Holiday and Arthur Herzog's "God Bless The Child" on Sept. 8, 1961. Released on *In Europe, Vol. 1* (Prestige) as well as on *The Complete Prestige Recordings* box set, Dolphy's solo is both melodic and rhythmically challenging.

Three different rhythmic and melodic combinations excerpted here show how Dolphy's solo becomes a departure for study. Each example is followed by an exercise based on what Dolphy played. The examples are written in bass clef (a 6-string bass has approximately the same range as a bass clarinet), but they can be applied for any instrument.

Insert #1 is taken directly from Dolphy's solo. It is a two-measure introduction to the song that uses a motif that repeats throughout the piece alternating between

an E \flat major and E \flat minor chord.

Insert #2 takes those first four bars and puts them into a format that a player can use to expand improvisatory ability. One of the most fascinating occurrences in music is the ability of a half step to create a new sound. Using the motif from insert #1, the exercise consists of a two-bar phrase starting in E \flat major, moving to E \flat minor with the G changing to G \flat . The E \flat minor changes to a B \flat major (E \flat to D and G \flat to F), which then moves to a C# major by changing the D to a C#.

Insert #3 is an interesting pattern taken from bars 35-38 of Dolphy's solo. This section comprises the melody from the last bar of the bridge using the chords F-7 \flat 5 and B \flat 7. You can take this pattern and insert it into any other ii-V progression. In



Eric Dolphy

many cases when bass players walk a ii-V progression with two beats per chord, they will go from the root to the b5 of the ii chord into the root of the V chord. This example presents bass players with a clever method for handling ii-V progressions.

In insert #4, if you take the pattern from insert #3 up an octave and descend chromatically, you have an interesting variation on the ii-V progression. This chromatic exercise also helps you play in every key. Rhythmically, the 16th-note triplet motif is a great dexterity exercise. You can then break it up into groups of four and two and accent different notes within the pattern.

Insert #5 comes from measure 63 of Dolphy's solo and showcases his use of 16th and 32nd notes on the E \flat minor arpeggio. These are not standard rhythmic patterns but they're played very fast.

Insert #6 is similar to insert #5 except the triplet figure at the end of the measure has been deleted to make the pattern conducive for practicing.

One of the easiest ways to increase your melodic arsenal is to use a variety of rhythmic ideas with simple melodic phrases. In insert #6, you can reverse the 16th notes with the 32nd notes by making the first two notes the 32nds and the third note the 16th note. You can even play a rhythmic division of a 32nd note, 16th note and 32nd note.

Ultimately, you can use these patterns and exercises both rhythmically and intervallically to expand your vocabulary rather than lean on old clichés. **DB**

Six-string bassist **David C. Gross** is the author of six bass books, including *The Harmonic Colours For Bass*. A session bassist and instructor, he is an adjunct professor at State University of New York (SUNY) Purchase and head of Theorcolus Records. His first solo record is scheduled for a September release. E-mail David at 144music@spiral.net or <http://www.geocities.com/sunsetstrip/venue/7773>.



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