Transcription

From *Fundamentals of Jazz Improvisation: What Everybody Thinks You Already Know*

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Suggestions for Transcribing

Finding a Solo to Transcribe

1. Reference the Who’s Who list for player, instrument, and style period.
2. See the Top 100 Jazz Standards list for tune choices.
3. Utilize iTunes or eMusic:
   a. Search by performer and choose among their tune list.
   b. Search by tune and select according to performer.
4. Take advantage of the McKay Library holdings through their search engine by tune or performer.
5. Ask an expert for advice.
6. Obtain a lead sheet from a fake book such as Sher Music’s The New Real Book, vols. 1, 2, or 3.
7. Try to find a solo that is at a medium tempo, stays within a reasonable range, and is a single chorus of AABA (32 bars) or two choruses of blues (24 bars). More or less depends on your skill level and instructor approval.
8. First transcriptions should be of the student’s primary instrument.

Beginning Level

The procedure for transcribing depends on your level of experience. If this is your first try, do the following:

1. Select a solo that is simple and not too long (Swing Era works well but be careful of dated style).
2. Find a lead sheet for the tune. Transcribing a standard would be preferable.
3. Listen to the head several times to become familiar with the form.
4. Listen to the solo and follow the form, meter, and chord changes.
5. Learn to sing then play the solo (memorize).
6. Dictate the rhythms (see below).
7. Fill-in the notes.
8. Use a transcribing program if the notes move too quickly.

Advanced Level

If this will not be your first transcription, a more advanced method should be used.

1. Select a solo that is more extensive than your last transcription.
2. Listen to the solo several times.
3. Learn to sing and play the solo (memorize).
4. Practice playing the solo while keeping the harmonic structure in mind.
5. Play the solo with a recorded accompaniment or with the solo line removed (Transcribe can do this with more recent recordings).
6. Dictate the solo, rhythms first, as best as possible without reference to your instrument or the recording; dictate from memory.
7. Practice the spots that were difficult to notate (shows weak spots in your learning).
8. Complete the notation with reference.
9. Indicate all articulations, inflections, and dynamics (see below).
10. Analyze the solo and catalog patterns that you may choose to internalize (see below).

Suggestions for Transcribing Rhythms

1. Tap Beat Markers into your Transcribe (or other program) file.
2. Dictate notes that fall on beats with visual and aural cues.
3. Determine how many notes fall between two beats.
4. Determine the distribution: 2 notes (straight or swung 1/8th notes), 3 even notes (triplet), three uneven notes (1/8 + two 1/16ths), consider rests.
5. Utilize your knowledge of Rhythm Blocks (Beat Markers on 1 and 3 or all 4 beats); consider double time interpretation of Rhythm Blocks.

Transcribing Chords

1. Listen to the head and determine meter and form.
2. Write out the melody.
3. Transcribe the bass line.
4. Identify obvious places where chords change.
5. Identify prominent pitches.
6. Make logical assumptions concerning the chord progression.
7. Identify thirds as major or minor by playing them on the piano with the recording.
8. Identify sevenths as major, minor, or diminished in the same manner.

Transcribing Articulations

1. Become familiar with standard jazz articulation notation (refer to the section on Rhythm Vocabulary).
2. Select a phrase or motif.
3. Record yourself playing the motif.
4. Compare with original and make an assessment.
5. Make changes and repeat the process until you sound like the recording.
6. Write down what you did, articulation-wise, to sound like the original.

Analysis

1. First transcriptions should be complete solos in order to study solo form and development:
2. Solo structure:
   a. How does the solo begin?
   b. Where does it climax?
   c. How does it end?
3. Rhythm:
   a. Consider the space between phrases.
   b. Rhythmic tendencies (triplets, turns, etc.).
   c. Use of rhythmic complexity/simplicity to shape the solo or enhance structural points.
5. Memorable patterns or concepts:
   a. Same pattern more than once (signifies something the soloist may have practiced).
   b. Tone spectrum, collection of notes consistently used over a chord type, scale re-ordered.
   c. Consistent concepts: bebop scale fragments, chromatic principles, etc.
6. Devices: mute, range, dynamics, special effects, etc.

Other Transcription Ideas

It’s not always necessary to transcribe whole solos to continue learning about jazz improvisation.

1. Fragments
2. Vocal/melodic interpretation
3. Interesting harmonies, catalog color ideas
4. Whole tune, all parts: piano, bass, drum, etc.
5. Other instruments: study of jazz as a genre as opposed to ones specific instrument
Transcribing Chords: Form and Meter
Transcribing Chords: Melody
Transcribing Chords: Bass Line
Transcribing Chords: Points of Chord Change
Transcribing Chords: Prominent Pitches
Transcribing Chords: Logical Assumptions
Transcribing Chords: 3rd and 7th