

## Transcribing Improvised Jazz Solos

### What?

- A transcription of an improvised jazz solo is a memorized or notated re-creation of a solo from an audio or video recording.
- We aim to understand and re-create the pitches, rhythms, articulations, and embellishments that give the solo structure, and use this information to inform our own study.

### Why?

- Transcribing takes away the “mystery” of jazz improvisation when you are able to listen to something, write it down/memorize it, and learn to play it.
- Learn how great jazz improvisers played on your instrument, and also how that may be similar or different to how other instruments are utilized when improvising.
- Clearly see and understand the use of rhythm and how the pitches being utilized fit within the chord.
- Learn material that you can utilize in your own improvised solos.
- Learn common song forms (12 Bar Blues, AABA, etc.) and how soloists and rhythm sections cue the various parts of the form.
- Learn how to structure and pace an improvised solo.
- Learn how to communicate with a rhythm section.

### How?

- First, select a solo that is not too complicated to begin with. The more you transcribe, the easier it becomes to transcribe a Charlie Parker or Dizzy Gillespie solo, but starting with a Miles Davis solo from *Kind of Blue* is a great place to start.
- Listen to the song many times and see if you can identify the song structure through the melody and improvisations, and then try to follow the form throughout the song.
  - Then, I like to count how many choruses of improvisation the solo I am transcribing is.
- Listen to the improvisation you want to transcribe until you internalize the improvisation and can sing along with the recording.
- At first it may be difficult to transcribe the rhythms and pitches at the same time. I recommend starting by writing down all of the rhythms of the solo.
- After the rhythms are all notated, go back and listen to the recording and fill in the pitches with the use of an instrument; your instrument, piano, etc.
- Then go back and identify the articulations and embellishments that are present and add those to your transcription.
- Lastly, learn to play the improvised solo on your instrument and play along with the recording, trying to emulate the musician and improvisation you have transcribed.

### To Notate or Memorize?

- My answer is yes. Some believe solos should be memorized straight from the recording during the transcription process, and others believe in writing all of the music out on staff paper. I believe there are a lot of positives to both sides, and both can and should be employed during your studies.
- I often find transcriptions I have notated that I forgot about, and they make for great practice and study material.