



Welcome

This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of alto saxophonist, George Robert (1960-2016). George was a fantastic player and I hope to share some insights into his playing.

The material in this newsletter draws from my recent presentation at the Jazz Education Network conference this year in Louisville. The response to my presentation was quite favorable, so I'm looking forward to sharing my thoughts in the newsletter.

George Robert Biography

Born in 1960 in Geneva, Switzerland, George Robert was internationally recognized as one of the leading alto saxophonists in Jazz. He studied with Joe Viola at the Berklee College of Music, earning a BA, followed by studies with Bob Mintzer at the Manhattan School of Music, earning a MA in Jazz Performance. In 2008, he earned the title of Officer in the Order of Arts & Letters of the French Republic, a rare award for jazz musicians. George had a long career, performing and recording with such luminaries as Clark Terry, Phil Woods, Kenny Barron, Tom Harrell, the Metropole Orchestra, Bobby Shew, Billy Hart, Rufus Reid, and Bob Mintzer, among others. A songbook published by Advance Music, "The Music of George Robert", features 47 of his compositions. For more information including a complete biography and discography, consult George Robert's official website : www.georgerobert.com

Introduction to George Robert's Improvisational Style

George Robert's improvisational style is steeped in the bebop and postbop traditions with the music of Charlie Parker and Phil Woods playing a significant role in his approach to soloing. My JEN presentation drew from 25 transcriptions of George's solos spanning a wide range of compositions ranging from the blues, to jazz standards, to Brazilian standards, to original compositions. The presentation focused on a number of elements of George's improvisational style. The elements include such topics as approach notes, bebop scales, implied chord substitutions, quotes. In several instances, the presentation traced the development of elements from components in the styles of predecessors such as Parker and Woods, while showing how those components are integrated into a personal style and vocabulary that is uniquely George Robert's.

Improvisation Elements

Bebop Scales:

As a player steeped in the bebop tradition, George incorporates bebop scales at numerous points in his solos:

EXAMPLE 1. FROM "LIKE SOMEONE IN LOVE"
C7

EXAMPLE 2. FROM "SOFTLY"
Am7

EXAMPLE 3. FROM "STARLEMATES"
Ab7 G7 F#7

EXAMPLE 4. FROM "DENTER"
A#7 D7(b9) Gm

The image displays four musical examples of bebop scales in treble clef. Example 1 is in C major with a C7 chord. Example 2 is in A minor with an Am7 chord. Example 3 is in A-flat major with chords Ab7, G7, and F#7. Example 4 is in A minor with chords A#7, D7(b9), and Gm. Each example shows a sequence of notes with accidentals and stems, representing a specific bebop scale.

Blues Material:

George adeptly incorporates blues scales and expressions, even in non-blues tunes:

EXAMPLE 5. FROM 'I REMEMBER YOU'

EXAMPLE 6. FROM 'I REMEMBER YOU'

The image shows two musical examples in treble clef. Example 5 is a blues scale starting on D, with chords D, Am7, D7, G, Gm7, and C7. Example 6 is a blues scale starting on E, with chords Em7, A7, and D. Both examples feature triplet rhythms and chromatic alterations.

Expressive devices:

George uses several expressive effects often using false fingerings, overtones, etc. Some of these effects are similar to ones used by his friend and mentor, Phil Woods:

EXAMPLE 7. FROM 'SOFTLY'

EXAMPLE 8. FROM 'STALEMATES'

EXAMPLE 9. FROM 'THE SNAPPER'

EXAMPLE 10. FROM 'EASY TO LOVE'

The image shows four musical examples in treble clef. Example 7 features a tremolo from Bb to G. Example 8 features false fingering and a tremolo from Bb to G. Example 9 features approach notes with side D. Example 10 features a low Bb overtone and approach notes.

Approach Notes:

George makes extensive use of approach notes to target chord tones. There are numerous examples in the transcribed solos, with the following only being a representative sampling. These approach notes allow the melodic line to be extended, add interesting chromaticism, and can either anticipate or delay

harmonic resolutions. One approach note combination that he particularly favors is shown in Example 11 in which he targets a middle C with a lower neighbor and two upper neighbors. The use of the side D fingering provides a distinctive sound to this particular approach note combination which appears in multiple places across many solos:

EXAMPLE 11. FROM 'STARLEMATES'

EXAMPLE 12. FROM 'STARLEMATES'

EXAMPLE 13. FROM 'STARLEMATES'

EXAMPLE 14. FROM 'THE SONG IS YOU'

EXAMPLE 15. FROM 'LIKE SOMEONE IN LOVE'

EXAMPLE 16. FROM 'DENTEN'

EXAMPLE 17. FROM 'EAST OF THE SUN'

EXAMPLE 18. FROM 'EAST OF THE SUN'

Multipurpose Phrase:

There is a another phrase that appears multiple times throughout the transcribed solos. What makes it interesting is that although it appears in several places, the harmonic function of the notes varies in different

contexts. It is this mix of a familiar phrase appearing in new surroundings that adds an element of surprise. In its basic form, the phrase appears over minor 7th chords as shown in Example 19 with scale degrees indicated below the staff:



Examples 20 and 21 show a similar phrase, but used over major chords:



Example 22 shows an interesting use of the phrase starting with its basic form over a minor 7th chord and then transposed up a minor 2nd to function as a tritone substitution:



Until Next Time ...

I hope you enjoyed this issue of the Scooby-Sax Newsletter and that it gives you plenty of material to practice. Your comments and questions are always welcome. Send me an email at scooby@scooby-sax.com to let me know what you thought of this issue, suggestions for future issues, etc.

I would also appreciate it if you could forward this email to others that may be interested, share it on Facebook, etc.

Sincerely,

Jeff Rzepiela

www.scooby-sax.com