

Brevity Is The Soul Of Wit: A Study Of One-Chorus Jazz Solos

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Introduction

Early jazz recordings had a time limitation imposed on them due to the recording technology of the time (i.e. 78 RPM records). Given this restriction, improvisers often were allotted only one chorus for their solos. While the advent of the long-playing records and the later adoption of compact discs allowed improvisers to extend their solos to greater lengths, there exists a myriad of examples of one-chorus solos in the post-78 era.

This presentation includes 17 one-chorus solos including notable soloists such as Lester Young, Charlie Parker, and Bud Powell among others. A supplemental booklet contains transcriptions of all 17 solos and an iTunes playlist is provided to listen to the solos. The presentation includes analyses of selected solos including two one-chorus solos from the last recording of Phil Woods. Earlier in his career, Woods was noted for his technique and ability to create extended solos, often at fast tempos. In his final recording however, he distilled his solos down to essential elements, creating well-crafted miniatures.

Finally, the pedagogical aspects of the solos will be discussed. For example, a single chorus represents a more manageable amount of material for a student to memorize compared to an extended solo. Additionally, a single chorus is more easily learned in all 12 keys. This concentration on a smaller quantity of material allows the student to gain an in-depth understanding of the solo.

Solo List

ARTIST	SONG TITLE
GENE AMMONS	FOUR
RONNIE CUBER	A FOGGY DAY
LOU DONALDSON	TAHITI
VINCENT HERRING	LOVE WALKED IN
HAROLD LAND	JOY SPRING - MASTER TAKE
	JOY SPRING - ALTERNATE TAKE
JACKIE McLEAN	FOUR
	CONFIRMATION
FATS NAVARRO	WAIL
LENNIE NIEHAUS	STAR EYES
CHARLIE PARKER	MOOSE THE MOOCHE
SONNY ROLLINS	ON A SLOW BOAT TO CHINA
SONNY STITT	CHABOOTIE
	SONNY SIDE
LESTER YOUNG	DB BLUES
PHIL WOODS	I REMEMBER YOU
	HUMPTY DUMPTY HEART

Historical Context

- The influence of early recording media:
 - “From the 1920s through the 1940s, jazz had to make its point in about three minutes – the length of 78-rpm record” – (*Why Jazz Happened*, Myers, 2012)
- The LP (long-playing) phonograph was introduced by Columbia Records in 1948
- The influence of the big bands:
 - “But [Charlie] Parker, even in live performance, seldom played more than two or three choruses. It was almost certainly a result of his formative experience in big bands, where solo length was strictly rationed to fit arrangements. To make ideas count, the finest big band musicians became remarkably focused in their solos, a trait Parker inherited.” (*The Essential Jazz Records, Vol. 2: Modernism to postmodernism*, Harrison, et. al., 1999)
 - “On the bandstand, Parker disciplined his furious talent. “More than four choruses,” he told a young Milt Jackson,” and you’re just practicing.” (*Jazz*, Ken Burns)

MOOSE THE MOOCHE (TAKE 1) (E-VERSION)

CHARLIE PARKER SOLO

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Artistic Motivations

- “It’s taken me all my life to learn what *not* to play” – Dizzy Gillespie
- “The older musicians seem to have found something. It takes all of us all our lives to learn the most important things are simple. Dizzy Gillespie is a good example; the older he gets, the less he plays. And J.J. Johnson is the same way. When you get a little older, you find out, well, you have fooled around with all the complexities and demonstrated you know how to play, so now you can concentrate on just playing music” – Cannonball Adderley
- “When we’re young, we want to fill the air with notes. But it’s more impressive to play one note that means something. Now, I want to slow down. That’s the art” – Phil Woods

I REMEMBER YOU (E-VERSION)

PHIL WOODS SOLO

HUMPTY DUMPTY HEART (E-VERSION)

PHIL WOODS SOLO

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Pedagogical Aspects

- A masterful blues chorus crafted by Sonny Stitt (on baritone).
 - Easily memorized in 12 keys
- An elegantly organized Fats Navarro solo on Rhythm changes in Eb. Thomas Owens (*Bebop*, 1995) states:
 - “[The bridge] contains a liberal sprinkling of Parker figures ... The nearly continuous flow of eighth notes garnished with occasional accents between the beats is also a Parker trait”
 - “The effective repetitions ... which connects by chromatic descent the thirteenth and augmented eleventh of three different chords is a Navarro touch”
 - “Among his best solos...”

CHABOOTIE

SONNY STITT SOLO

More Information

For more information about Jeff Rzepiela, visit his website containing over 75 solo transcriptions and several big band arrangements:

www.scooby-sax.com