

Sax Solos Over Jazz Standards

I would like to introduce *Sax Solos Over Jazz Standards*, my new book and play-along CD that was recently released by Jamey Aebersold's Jazz Books. In it, I present sophisticated and balanced melodic statements based on standard changes that can serve as models for practice and study. While these solos are carefully "composed," each is designed to evoke the spirit of an improvised performance.

At the core of any investigation into the art of improvised music is the process of listening to and transcribing the work of past and present masters. These performances fully define the idiom and, for the astute listener, can point the way for future exploration and development.

To be able to execute the dexterous phrases associated with so many jazz performances, solid technical skills are required. Most players have spent a great deal of time practicing exercises and scale studies; a flashy lick or seemingly impossible run that goes by in an instant is most likely the result of many hours of practice and experimentation.

Technical prowess, however, is just a first step. Accomplished players must have a firm grasp of the intervallic relationships that make up the vocabulary and language of jazz combined with a thorough understanding of harmony and form. The development of melodic ideas in any improvised statement is directly related to the length and arrangement of individual phrases within a composition as well as the overall form.

Finally, technique, theory, language skills and experience must all come together for any artist to create a cohesive musical statement. Intervals and short melodic phrases must be arranged in a thoughtful and hopefully inspired manner to create a complete musical idea.

In the refined jazz "etudes" found in *Sax Solos Over Jazz Standards*, all of these elements come into play. In like manner, many facets of post-bop and contemporary playing styles are addressed, including the use of pentatonic scales, various types of chromaticism, the development of motivic ideas and even "outside" sensibilities.

To fully understand the intricacies of each piece, it is important that the reader be cognizant of the harmonies, chord-scale relationships and forms being used. What scale or mode is being indicated by the melodic line? Do certain structures point to alternate harmonic possibilities? How are different types of chromaticism employed? Sometimes the answers to these questions are obvious. However, a purposefully nebulous relationship between melodic ideas and a harmonic progression can also be a source of

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

excitement for both the performer and listener.

Throughout the various pieces found in this book, I attempted to balance these kinds of choices to create variety and interest. I also tried to incorporate well-established bits of vocabulary and language. These include often-used chromatic passages, classic arpeggios of certain harmonic structures as well as the use of altered pitches to create familiar melodic phrases. Pacing and the formulation of organic phrases were also considered. And, with each solo, I tried to tell a story.

From a technical perspective, this music is designed to challenge. Created originally for

the tenor saxophone, the intervallic leaps and lengths of phrases require solid mechanical skills and musicianship. All are written in common keys for the standards on which they are based. While a few altissimo notes are required for tenor and soprano saxophones, the E-flat transpositions fit neatly into the written range of alto and baritone. (Both B-flat and E-flat parts are included in the book.)

For each of the 12 pieces, there are two tracks on the accompanying play-along CD. The first track includes me playing the written solo on tenor with the rhythm section, then a quick fade-out. The subsequent track features the same

rhythm section accompaniment in its entirety for individual practice and experimentation.

Several excerpts from *Sax Solos Over Jazz Standards* demonstrate some of these ideas (all examples here are in B-flat). Example 1 contains the first eight bars of “Brown Out” (based on the changes to “Stella By Starlight”). The flowing melodic line clearly indicates the choice of chord scales and establishes a measured, organic sense of phrasing. Notice the one chromatic passing tone in bar 4 and the arpeggios in bars 5 and 7 that outline upper structures of each chord. These types of melodic and rhythmic sensibilities, firmly based in a post-bop style, underlie much of the entire text.

Example 2 is the bridge of “Silver Lining” (“In Your Own Sweet Way”). I composed this solo as a medium-swing exercise that focuses, in part, on double-time figures. Here you can see an interesting ascending motivic sequence in bars 59–61, followed by descending shapes in the chromatic ii–V sequence in bars 63–64. Notice also the use of a pentatonic scale pattern for the Emaj7 chord in bar 58.

“Totally Golden” is based on John Coltrane’s “Impressions.” Example 3 is the second “A” section of the form leading into the bridge. To echo

the quality of Trane’s early ’60s style, this piece is constructed predominantly from various pentatonic scales derived from the two modes that make up the original progression. Check out the simple, dramatic effect achieved with the introduction of the C-sharp in bar 12. The seemingly “outside” notes in bar 16 appear startling at first but are merely an anticipation of the change of key at the bridge.

In the first eight bars of the second chorus of “Yellow Dawn” (Example 4), you can see several types of chromaticism and phrases that allude to chord scales outside the written progression. The G-sharps in bars 34 and 37 are used as both lower chromatic neighbor tones and approach notes. A descending sequence in bars 37–39 creates the feeling of a downward spiral. The most unconventional notes in this passage are the E-flats in bars 38–39. Resultant melodic structures seem to indicate the momentary use of an E-flat whole-tone scale that



leads the listener away from the original tonality, then back again.

It is my hope that *Sax Solos Over Jazz Standards* will be especially useful to advancing players who are seeking solid material to digest. Hopefully readers will enjoy what’s here and find material for personal study and practical application. Educators take note: These etudes can also function as challenging audition pieces for local, regional

and state competitions.

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SAXOPHONIST TONY DAGRADI IS AN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED JAZZ PERFORMER, COMPOSER, AUTHOR AND EDUCATOR. FOR MORE THAN THREE DECADES HE HAS MADE HIS HOME IN NEW ORLEANS, PERFORMING ON TENOR AND SOPRANO SAX WITH MANY OF THE CRESCENT CITY’S MOST CELEBRATED ARTISTS. DAGRADI IS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS WORK WITH ASTRAL PROJECT, A QUINTET MADE UP OF TOP NEW ORLEANS PLAYERS DEDICATED TO PLAYING CUTTING-EDGE IMPROVISATIONAL MUSIC. SINCE 1990, DAGRADI HAS BEEN A PROFESSOR OF SAXOPHONE AND JAZZ STUDIES AT LOYOLA UNIVERSITY IN NEW ORLEANS. SAX SOLOS OVER JAZZ STANDARDS IS AVAILABLE ONLINE AT JAZZBOOKS.COM.