

Bebop and Blues From Bird To Barron

Comparative Analysis

By Don Glanden

Is bebop a fixed language or a growing, changing vernacular expression? One musician I know calls bebop 'music of the future.' In many ways I agree with that statement. However, jazz musicians are always faced with the challenge of speaking a language of the time in which they live. Although the language is rooted in tradition, part of its greatness is its ability to absorb each generation's additions, permutations, superimpositions, and increasing complexity, and still retain its identity and rhythmic vitality. So what has changed about the bebop language in fifty years? To help answer that questions, I've transcribed two solos. The first solo is "Billie's Bounce", recorded on November 26, 1945 by Charlie Parker, bebop's founding father. The second solo is "Take the Coltrane", recorded in February of 1994 by Kenny Barron, one of today's greatest pianists and a "keeper of the flame."

In Parker's solo, many of the melodic devices associated with bebop are easily found. Arpeggiated chord outlines, which clearly define the harmony appear in bars 9 (Gmi7), 16 (F7), 17 (Bb7), 21 (Gmi7), 22 (C7b9), 32 (D7), 35 (C7b9), 45 (Gmi7), and 47 (F7). The common Parker practice of converting seven note scales into eight note scales through a strategically placed passing tone can be found in bar 25. Notice the Gb passing tone at the end of the bar, which

connects the line to the F in bar 26. (The bebop dominant scale with its major 7th passing tone, as taught in many jazz theory books today, was just one of many passing tone possibilities used by Bird as this example illustrates.) The use of chromatic approach tones, or enclosure figures in which a chord tone is approached from a half step above and below can be found in bar 46 as F moves to Eb and then resolves to E the third of C7. The sound of the blues remained integral to Parker's concept. He shows this through the use of the blues scale in bars 13, 15, 37, and 41. An increasing use of chromaticism is demonstrated most clearly in bar 21. The use of scale fragments from closely related chord scale combinations can be found in bar 5 (Bb7 / Mixolydian), bar 22 (C7 / Mixolydian), and bar 34 (C7 / Mixolydian). Rhythmically this solo is typical bebop with the flow of hard swinging "on the beat" eighth notes, double-time sixteenth note runs, and triplet figures.

Kenny Barron's solo retains many of the characteristic elements of the earlier period. The crisp "on top of the beat" hard-swinging stream of eighth notes remain, as do the chord outlines, chromaticism, enclosure figures, and blues references, however, much is different. The tonal concept is thoroughly modern. Reharmonization and the superimposition of melodic material against the implied simple root movement of the

melody occurs throughout the solo. Notice the following examples of superimposition and reharmonization: E major in bar 4. G7 to C7 in bar 9, F7 to Bb7 in bar 10. B major in bar 13, E major to A major in bar 14. G7 in bar 21, C7 in bar 22, E major in bars 24 and 25. F major in bar 27. Chord scale combinations are also expanded to include the altered scale on the F7 tonic chord in bars 1, 2, 39, and 40, and the whole tone scale, which is the basis for the beautiful line in bars 17 and 18.

Listening to the two solos while following the transcriptions makes clear how they are linked stylistically and also how the language has expanded and developed. It reveals the profound beauty of Charlie Parker's musical statement and shows how a great contemporary player maintains a link to the tradition without being limited by an historical style. It certainly highlights two very personal approaches to bebop...music of the future.

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