

Sir Roland Hanna's Piano Solo On 'Love For Sale'

by Don Glanden

Don Glanden teaches composition and piano at Temple University in Philadelphia. His recent compact disc release, *Sudden Life*, is available through Encounter Records, P.O. Box 8132, Philadelphia, PA 19101. He is currently working on a video documentary about Clifford Brown. Glanden has studied privately with Sir Roland Hanna.

■ n speaking of his approach to playing, pianist Roland Hanna once said, "Today, technique doesn't mean 12 hours of practice, building speed, or even just learning the notes as they appear on the written page. For me it now involves structure, efficient harmony, and understanding voice-leading so well that there are no wasted notes. It means building lines with logic and developing an idea to the extent that no one can mistake its intent."

Hanna's "Love For Sale" solo is a good example of his approach. A mastery of the bebop vocabulary is evident throughout the solo, but what makes it special is the compositional balance it achieves. Note the following points of interest:

Hanna has the tendency to stay with his ideas and develop them longer than many improvisers.

Notice that the 16 bars of letter B consist of two ideas. The first idea is a question-and-answer rhythmic figure alternating two-note and three-note groupings in measures 17 through 24. The second idea consists of a descending diatonic sequence beginning in measure 25 and continuing to the B-flat minor chord in measure 31. The 16 bars of letter D consist of just one idea. Octave E-flats occur on the second beat of measure 49 and are held for four-and-a-half beats before an ascending stepwise motion begins an octave lower using dotted quarter notes. The idea is repeated in measure 53 but this time begins on the first beat of the measure. The idea repeats once more with a slight variation in measure 57.

Rather than bringing the solo to a climactic conclusion with fast runs, Hanna achieves his purpose by increasing note values to dotted quarter notes beginning in measure 50 and sets up a tension-building polyrhythm. To make matters more interesting, notice that the dotted-quarter idea is hinted at four bars earlier in measures 45 and 46. Note values are increased to whole notes in measures 61 and 62 before the final climactic chord is struck in measure 63. The D-flat melody note in the final chord is the highest note of the solo, showing an effective use of range.

Notice the sense of breathing in Hanna's phrasing. The rests that occur in measures 8, 10, 12, 35, 37, and 39 serve as good visual indicators of his practice of making his lines really "sing" on the piano.

Another aspect of Hanna's style is the variety of ways in which he plays the eighth-note subdivision. He might play swing eighths, straight eighths, or other subdivisions depending on the context. The eighth notes in measures 17 through 23 have a straight-eighth feel, while those in measures 25 through 31 have a swing-eighth feel.

I suggest picking up this recording—which features Hanna, bassist George Mraz, drummer Mel Lewis, and is led by violinist Stephane Grappelli—from Grappelli's 1973 album *Parisian Thoroughfare* (Black Lion 760132). If you follow the transcription with the recording, I think you'll agree that Hanna's solo makes a wonderfully complete statement in just one chorus, and his highly personal and compositional approach is evident in this improvisation.



Sir Roland Hanna

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