

# DOWN BEAT

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## WOODSHED

### TRANSCRIPTION

# Joe Farrell's Soprano Sax Solo On Stevie Wonder's 'Too High'

by Don Glanden

**J**oe Farrell's soprano sax solo on the Stevie Wonder tune "Too High," from Farrell's album *Penny Arcade* (CTI; out of print), is a wonderful study of an improviser confronted with the challenge of developing a solo based on one chord change. Farrell, who died in 1986 at age 48, was a master of the modal style. As keyboardist Herbie Hancock lays down a funky A-7 vamp throughout, Farrell weaves in and out of the A minor tonality using pentatonic scales, bebop vocabulary and extensive motivic repetition. The solo is presented here in concert key.

After opening the solo with an A minor pentatonic line, Farrell plays an idea beginning on the third beat of bar 4 that is repeated on the fourth beat of bar 5 and finally repeated and extended beginning on the first beat of bar 7. This displacement and repetition makes a strong opening statement. The three-note figure in bar 10 hints at the many three-note figures to be found throughout the solo. Bars 16-19, 31-34 and 52-53 all demonstrate some variation of a three-note grouping. An effective use of a four-note figure from the G pentatonic scale can be found in measures 54 through 57.

Perhaps the most interesting areas of the solo occur when Farrell explores bitonality by superimposing melodic material from harmonies other than A minor. Notice the F blues scale beginning on beat 3 of bar 35 moving to the E $\flat$  blues scale in bar 37 and back inside the A blues scale in bar 38. An E7 is outlined in bars 45-47, creating the tension of dominant harmony (played by the soloist) and tonic harmony (played by the rhythm section) sounding at the same time. A beautiful outside line occurs in bars 65-67 as the implied harmonies move from B minor to C minor to B $\flat$  minor and finally back to A minor in bar



Joe Farrell

68. From bar 68 to the end, Farrell stays close to the A-7 harmony using either the blues or dorian scales. The solo comes to a very definite ending as the tonic note is sounded on beat 1 in measures 78, 80, 82 and 83.

Other musicians on *Penny Arcade*, one of several CTI titles from Farrell in the 1970s, include Steve Gadd, Herb Bushler, Joe Beck and Don Alias. **DB**

**Don Glanden** teaches piano and improvisation at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pa. His compact disc *Sudden Life* is available through Encounter Records, P.O. Box 8132, Philadelphia PA 19101. He recently performed with saxophonist Ernie Watts and will appear in concert Nov. 2 with trumpeter Donald Byrd at Delaware State University.

$\text{♩} = 200$   
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