

More on Jazz Transcriptions

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Last year I took advantage of your captivity as a CC® reader to gripe about the paucity of jazz transcriptions.¹ Since I am particularly interested in the role of saxophone in modern jazz, my protest really concerned the unavailability of saxophone transcriptions.

In case you have forgotten the gist of my argument, I pointed out that jazz, America's greatest contribution to music, is nearly without *written* documentation. Thanks to the invention of the phonograph, we do have "aural" documentation. However, these recordings are terribly inconvenient for use in research. Imagine using recorded versions of journal articles whenever you wanted to do research.

The educational value of the written version in music is significant. Of course, a written transcription of jazz or classical music cannot completely and faithfully reproduce what you can hear and feel in a sound recording. Nevertheless, the written version contributes immensely to a fuller understanding of a piece in conjunction with a recording.

Contrary to general belief, the saxophone was not the product of the jazz or marching band eras. The saxophone was invented by a Belgian, Adolph Sax, the son of a famous clarinet maker. The first written composition for saxophone, *Hymne Sacré*, was written by Hector Berlioz, and was later performed in

1844, in Paris. Berlioz himself conducted. Ironically, the written music has been irretrievably lost.

The horror of lost musical transcriptions is a typical occurrence with jazz compositions. Indeed, many publishers have disorganized piles of original sheet music, recorded or otherwise, rotting in warehouses. It seems as though music publishers are unaware, or indifferent, to the transcription problem. They even seem reluctant to highlight or publicize the older jazz classics. Recently, I was browsing through the *piano* music section of the Pacific Coast Music Shop in San Francisco when I came across the "chart" for Paul Desmond's "Take Five."² This record is an all-time jazz classic, having sold more than one million copies, when it came out fifteen years ago. It was emblazoned with Dave Brubeck's name since it was in fact the sheet music for the piano score. As I came to the last page, Desmond's classic saxophone solo appeared--like an afterthought. It wasn't even mentioned on the cover.

Unlike the jazz student, the student of classical saxophone is blessed with a large repertoire of written music. Professor J.M. Londeix, a French saxophonist who teaches at both the University of Dijon and the University of Michigan, has compiled an annotated *repertory of pieces and educational literature covering 125 years of saxophone music.*³

GIANT STEPS

John Coltrane
Tenor Solo

From Atlantic LP1311

The image displays a tenor saxophone solo for the piece "Giant Steps" by John Coltrane. The score is written on ten staves, each consisting of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The music is in 9/8 time and features a complex key signature with frequent chromatic shifts. The solo is marked with various dynamics and articulations, including accents, slurs, and breath marks. There are three numbered first endings (1), (2), and (3) indicated throughout the piece. The notation includes a variety of note values, rests, and complex rhythmic patterns characteristic of Coltrane's style.

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Although Londeix states that he excludes jazz compositions from his work, he does include George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" and "Summer Time" from *Porgy & Bess*. I was amused to note the inclusion of Jimmy Dorsey's composition "Oodles of Noodles." Incidentally, Desmond's "Take Five" is also included.

I can well understand the frustration Londeix must have felt in preparing this bibliography. Apparently, he couldn't resist including Earl Hagen's "Harlem Nocturne." I found the saxophone score by chance the same day I discovered Desmond's "Take Five." CC readers who frequent Burlesque theaters may remember this classic work as standard accompaniment for strip-tease artists.

There is also an entry for Coleman Hawkins, but instead of mentioning his many classics, it turns out to be a "warm-up book," published by Music Corp. of America. Publishers are always anxious to attach famous names to work books. This is like putting athletes' names on cereal boxes.

Hawkins is described, by Londeix, as the greatest tenor sax player in jazz, "the uncontested leader of the instrument until the advent ('apparition') of Lester Young."

In the forties, there was a series of original Coleman Hawkins' arrangements published.⁴ I was fortunate enough to buy one of these recently for sixty cents. This score and all the others in the series are now out of print. The series contained "I Cover the Waterfront," "As Time Goes By," "Embraceable You," "Night and Day," "The Man I Love," "When Day Is Done," and "Body and Soul."

Although "jazz" is not supposed to be included in Londeix's book, he goes well beyond the fine line which usually distinguishes jazz from other music. For instance, the American composers

Robert MacBride and George McKay are included. MacBride, a professor, composer, clarinetist, and saxophonist, is cited for his compositions "on American themes with jazz material." McKay is the composer of pieces with such titles as *American Panorama* and *American Street Scenes*. In their compositions, McKay and MacBride may incorporate the jazz themes heard throughout America in order to musically construct an idea which exists in their mind's eye. But their complete compositions are not usually considered jazz.

McKay and MacBride could perhaps be compared to Dvorak or Copeland in the classical music sphere. In Dvorak's *New World Symphony*, various themes evoke the image of a young, pioneering America, and yet, the totality of this music is considered something greater than a mere medley of western tunes. With Copeland's *El Salon Mexico*, one hears familiar Mexican rhythms, but the entire piece is more like a comment on, or a tourist's introduction to, popular Mexican music. Copeland composed various jazz-oriented pieces, and it is interesting to note his comment that jazz was "an easy way to be American in musical terms."⁵ Copeland is saying that a composer can "borrow" musical terms for purposes of identification, such as his borrowing of Mexican music, Dvorak's use of early American melodies, or MacBride's or McKay's use of jazz tunes.

I've made a point of going through the entire Londeix list because I had promised earlier that I would publish a list of whatever jazz transcriptions I was able to locate. I did not intend that to include jazz piano transcriptions. If you are a jazz pianist you have been blessed with the availability of great quantities of transcribed arrangements including Brubeck, Tatum, Peterson, and many others.

It seems that the method of teaching piano is generally different from that of teaching saxophone. A jazz piano teacher would consider it important to learn to play Art Tatum note for note. André Previn has said he studied Tatum that way. But apparently, saxophone teachers expect you to memorize from sound recordings. How else would you do it anyhow?

Recently, the President of the New England Conservatory, Gunther Schuller, was interviewed in *Downbeat* and said, "I'd rather deal with authentic material from the past as an educational instrument. If you can play Duke Ellington's 'Cottontail,' that's like playing the *Eroica* of Beethoven--it's a real experience. You can learn by playing it because it's great music."⁶ Playing either "Cottontail" or *Eroica* is an achievement in itself, regardless of method, but of course, the method of playing by ear is imposed on saxophone instruction by a lack of transcriptions.

In discussing the availability of written jazz, one must distinguish between several forms of sheet music and transcriptions. And, to add to the confusion, there are some in-betweens. For example, you can easily purchase the sheet music for "Body and Soul." This will give you, note by note, the melodic line. It will also provide a standard piano accompaniment. Since standard sheet music is intended primarily for piano accompanied vocalists, it is, of necessity, written for key of C instruments. Thus, if one simply wishes to play a solo on the melody for "Body and Soul," on any instrument, it will suffice to obtain the standard sheet music. Only a trained ear would realize, if you are using an E^b alto saxophone, that you are not playing the tune in its standard key. Actually, when you play a C on any E^b instrument, you are playing the E^b of a properly tuned piano. Similarly, if you are playing a B^b tenor

saxophone, C would be the B^b of the piano. For the piano and saxophone to be in tune, one instrumentalist must transpose. Since the sheet music is written for the piano, it is the saxophone player who usually transposes.

Thus, whenever the saxophonist sees an E^b note on the chart, he must play a C, if he wishes to play together with the pianist. Similarly, when he sees a C, he must play an A. Indeed, when tuning up the sax the standard procedure is to tune to a concert B^b, making the saxophone tuning pitch a fingered G. The saxophonist will then have to move his mouthpiece up or down until he is in tune. Unfortunately, most amateurs and even many professional saxophone players cannot transpose automatically. This is not as essential to their training as it is for other instrumentalists, such as French horn players.

So, if you possess the sheet music for "Body and Soul" you can play the melody, and even accompany the piano player and vocalist if you know how to transpose. In the past twenty years or so, with the growth of guitar popularity, sheet music also contains the chord symbols and thereby the so-called "chord changes." Every jazz musician is supposed to learn how to finger all chords with speed and proficiency. What actually happens is that they learn certain very popular chords and chord progressions. The same occurs with saxophonists. You can drive any sax player up the wall by selecting the rarely used keys.

With this information--melody and chord structure--one should be able to improvise. However, important as this is, it has little to do with the objective of playing original improvisations by jazz masters. So the one-half million tunes that can be found in sheet music libraries are useless for this purpose. Well, almost useless. There is a vast array of jazz melodies which are, in fact, original compositions. They are not

merely improvisations of popular or classical tunes. The American alto sax genius, Charles Christopher Parker, Jr., known to the world as "Bird," composed "Ornithology," "Groovin High," and "Bloomdido," among others. If available, the basic sheet music for these tunes would be valuable in introducing musicians to melodies that were never intended for vocalists to sing. Among other reasons, this is why there has long been, and continues to be, a thriving, private market in the jazz world called "fake books." I have several in my possession, all of which are anonymous. One is simply titled *Bb Modern Jazz*. It contains the music for 200 jazz compositions unknown to most laymen. Some of them were obtained from scores written down by musicians--somewhere, somehow. Others were probably taken off recordings, or written down as the musicians played them in jam sessions. Someday, we will be grateful that these jazz fake books were created in defiance of copyright law over the objections of publishers who refused to meet the need.

Other fake books are used by professional musicians who need an abbreviated version of the original sheet music in order to satisfy requests. Thus, the musicians at social receptions are able to "fake it" when asked to play that old familiar tune. In recent times, publishers have recognized the difficulty of stopping these "pirated" books so they have come out with "legitimate" fake books. In these, the original composers or publishers have granted permission to "abstract" the original music in a particular form--usually, without lyrics. Music publishers today are usually preoccupied with performance rights. Greater attention is paid to policing, through ASCAP and other organizations, the unauthorized performance of copyrighted compositions. Until photocopying of original material became

prevalent, and the issue grew controversial, publishers maintained a low profile. The National Music Publishers Association will be pleased if the new copyright law reduces piracy of sheet music.

With all of my pessimistic talk about lost transcriptions, indifferent publishers, and fake books, what can I say about jazz transcriptions being published today? In the great morass of music that is published (over \$200,000,000 each year in the U.S. alone) there are a small number of transcriptions. The most important single source of jazz transcriptions is *Downbeat* magazine. Recently, they sponsored the publication of *Jazz Styles and Analysis*. The first volume is for trombone,⁷ the second volume for alto sax.⁸ *JS&A* for sax or trombone costs \$12.50, and contains over 100 transcriptions. Every well-known artist, and many lesser-known, is represented.

JS&A begins with Cannonball Adderley's version of "The Way You Look Tonight" and runs the gamut to Phil Woods playing "Honeysuckle Rose" and "Stompin at the Savoy." By using reduced print, much has been packed into less than 100 pages of musical text--two standard sheets to a page. Lee Konitz's version of "I'll Remember You," written by Johnny Mercer, is six sheets long and is a transcription from the Verve Album 8399 "Motion" made in 1961.

By comparison with the *200 Omnibus of Jazz*,⁹ edited by Leonard Feather, the *JS&A* collection is a giant. When I ordered Feather's work, I was misled into believing it was a collection of transcriptions. It is, in fact, a legitimate fake book, taken from records released primarily by Prestige Music Co. While it contains numerous beautiful tunes, it is an aimless collection of jazz melodies. It certainly does not contain many of what one would call jazz classics. For many of

the artists listed, the names of their most famous recordings or compositions are absent. Charlie Parker, among others, isn't even included. By no stretch of the imagination are these "200 of the world's greatest jazz themes." However, you get your money's worth since it includes such selections as Herbie Mann's "Tel Aviv" and John Coltrane's "Straight Street."

Speaking of Coltrane, there is an important source of unpublished transcriptions. Every recording ever made by John Coltrane has been transcribed most professionally by Andrew White of Washington, D.C. Mr. White is proficient on alto, tenor, soprano, English horn, oboe, piano and electric bass, the last of which he has played for Stevie Wonder and The Fifth Dimension. During the past 20 years, he has taken the time to document the work of Coltrane in the way it should be done for every major jazz artist. An illustration of White's work is shown.¹⁰ I'll be glad to

put any CC reader in touch with him.

Recently, one record company announced a new series of records in which transcriptions are provided. At first I thought that perhaps the idea which I had previously expressed was beginning to catch on--that of releasing records with their transcripts. I was disappointed to discover that this announcement proved to be a half-truth. Out of seven tunes in David Liebman's record, *Sweet Hands*, only a small part of one tune is transcribed, and it is printed on the cover. The record company has apparently decided that this is a gimmick to help boost record sales. They fail to realize the necessity for full transcription. Jazz needs professionally-produced, definitive transcriptions so that all of those who wish to study the variety of recorded jazz can do so with less pain. Someday, that fact will be realized by some enterprising music publisher.

1. Garfield E. "Jazz Transcriptions Will Blow Your Mind." *Current Contents*® No. 50, 15 December 1975, p. 5-7.
2. Desmond P. "Take Five." Derry Music Co., 240 Stockton Street, San Francisco, Calif.
3. Londeix J M. *125 Ans de Musique Pour Saxophone*. Paris: Alphonse Leduc et Cie, 1971, 398 pp.
4. *Coleman Hawkins Series of Saxophone Solos*. New York: Harms, Inc., 1945.
5. Copeland A. As cited on *Bernstein Conducts Copeland*. Columbia Records, MS 6355, 1962.
6. Schuller G. As quoted in Palmer R. "Gunther Schuller: 'On The American Musical Melting Pot'" *Downbeat* 43:12-5, 38. 12 February 1976.
7. Baker D. *Jazz Styles & Analysis: Trombone*. Chicago: Downbeat Music Workshop Publications, 1975.
8. Miedema H. *Jazz Styles & Analysis: Alto Sax*. Chicago: Downbeat Music Workshop Publications, 1975.
9. Feather L. *200 Omnibus of Jazz*. Hansen House No. 15, 1974.
10. Coltrane J. "Giant Steps." Atlantic Recording #1311. Transcribed by A.N. White, 1973.