7 Jazz improvisation

INGRID MONSON

The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of the principal musical resources used in jazz improvisation as well as an approach to listening to jazz from the 'bottom up' – a way of hearing that will stress the interactive interplay between the soloist and the accompaniment. The melodic vocabulary of the improvising jazz soloist, which is what generally first catches the new listener's attention, must always be seen as emerging in a complex dialogue between the soloist and the rhythm section, and between the preexisting musical knowledge of the band members and what they collectively discover in the process of improvisation.

Among the many musical characteristics associated with jazz are improvisation, syncopation, swing, blues feeling, call-and-response organisation and harmonic complexity. Improvisation and swing are often considered to be the most important elements of jazz, although defining them has proved elusive. Improvisation has been described as the spontaneous creation of music in performance,[1] but the sense of improvisation as elaborating upon something previously known is sometimes lost in this definition. Swing has generally been defined as forward propulsion through time resulting from the interplay between a fixed underlying pulse and the unevenly articulated subdivisions of that pulse which must ultimately be shaped into convincing phrases.[2] The improviser does this in call-and-response with a rhythm section (generally piano or guitar, bass and drums) – an ensemble within an ensemble whose function is both to keep time and interact with the soloist.

Rhythm sections define time feels or grooves of various types – two-beat, swing, Latin, ballad, jazz waltz – through a combination of distinctive bass lines, drum patterns and 'comping' (i.e., accompanying) styles. The musical resources just mentioned (from improvisation to swing to call-and-response) are deployed over a wide variety of time feels, some of which serve to distinguish the various historical styles of jazz improvisation such as New Orleans, swing, bebop, cool, hard bop, mainstream, free jazz and neo-classical. Recognising the various rhythmic feels in jazz as well as the typical melodic and harmonic gestures made by the improvising soloist is an important part of finding one's way around this remarkable music.

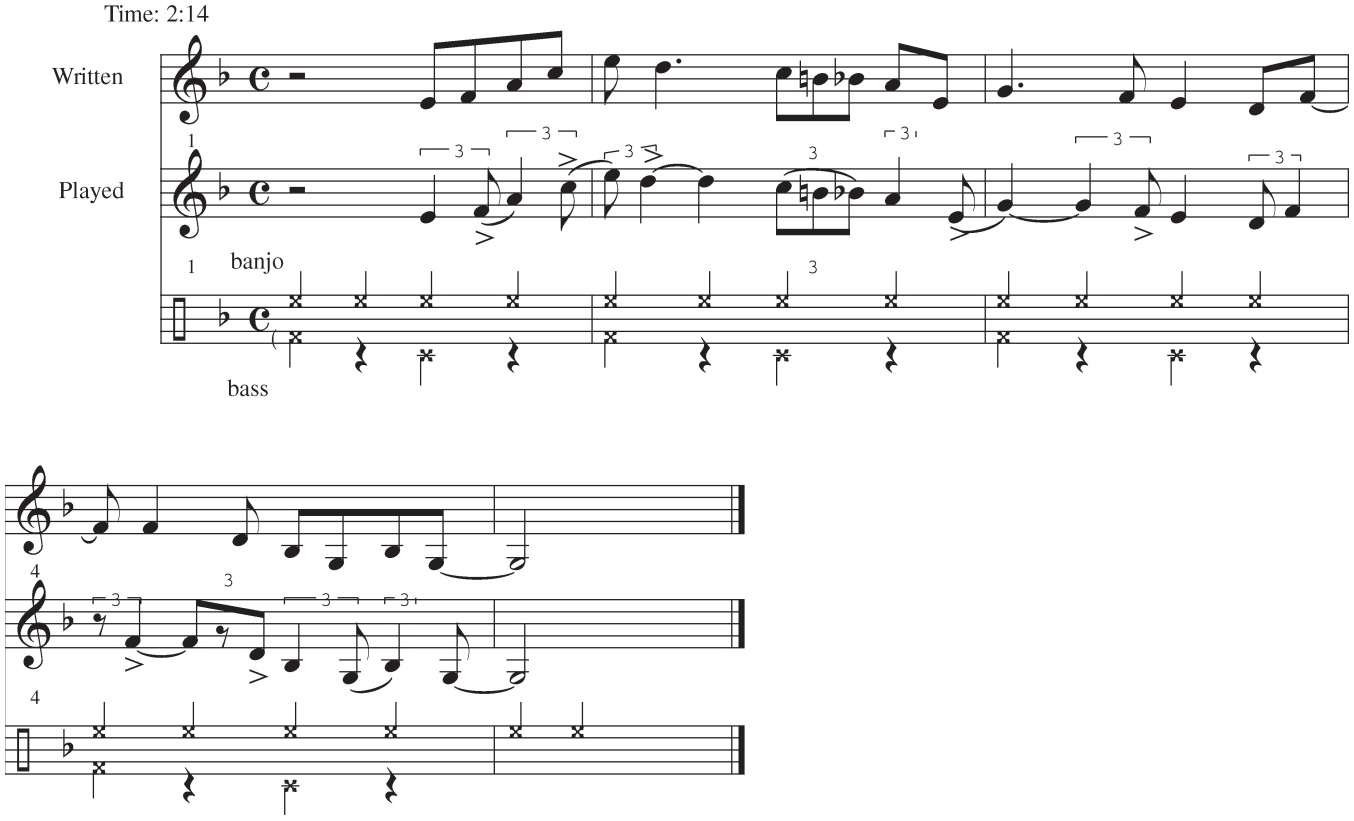
We will begin with some examples from early jazz and work our way through several others drawn from the rich variety of jazz styles in the twentieth century. The reader is encouraged to listen to the recordings cited (all of which are commercially available), locating the particular passages discussed by the timings indicated. I have tried to meet the needs of many types of listener by including some musical notation for the musically experienced, as well as general listening guidelines that require no technical expertise. Later we will consider how the basic elements of jazz improvisation have been used to articulate a variety of musical aesthetics – the value of which continues to be hotly debated among musicians and jazz *aficionado*s today.

Swinging melody

Early jazz musicians learned repertory primarily by ear, internalising both the melody and its phrasing and articulation in one process. New Orleans brass bands and string bands embellished familiar tunes by paraphrasing and syncopating the melodies. New Orleans ensembles passed the melody from instrument to instrument, creating continuous textures of collective improvisation. By the early 1920s, the cornet had become the preferred melody instrument, while the clarinet improvised countermelodies, and the trombone and rhythm section (guitar, bass and drums, or banjo, tuba and drums) provided the rhythmic foundation against which the melodies were phrased. At first, solo improvisation took place during 'breaks' – two-bar units in which the rhythm section temporarily dropped out. Later, as the improvisational tradition expanded, gifted soloists – most notably Louis Armstrong – provided the model for lengthier and more varied improvisation that went beyond ornamenting and paraphrasing a known melody by relying increasingly on the underlying harmony as the basis of improvisation. The distinctive off-beat phrasing of a swung melody, which derives its push-and-pull effect from a weaving in and out of the underlying pulse of the rhythm section, had by this time become a distinctive element of the jazz sound.

A phrase from Armstrong's solo on 'Big Butter and Egg Man' illustrates this melodic style. The first staff of Ex. 7.1 provides a transcription of Armstrong's solo phrase in a style of notation from which a jazz instrumentalist might perform. The second staff provides a more literal rendition of the actual phrasing and articulation, illustrating several important features of melodic style. First, Armstrong subdivides the crotchet pulse into something closer to three units than two. Second, he often provides an accent on the final quaver of the beat, which propels the phrase forwards (bar 1, 2:14).

Ex. 7.1 Louis Armstrong, 'Big Butter and Egg Man', *Hot Fives & Sevens*, Chicago: 16 November 1926 (Columbia CK 44253). Staff 1: Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 104, reproduced by permission of the publisher. Staff 2 and 3: edited by Ingrid Monson

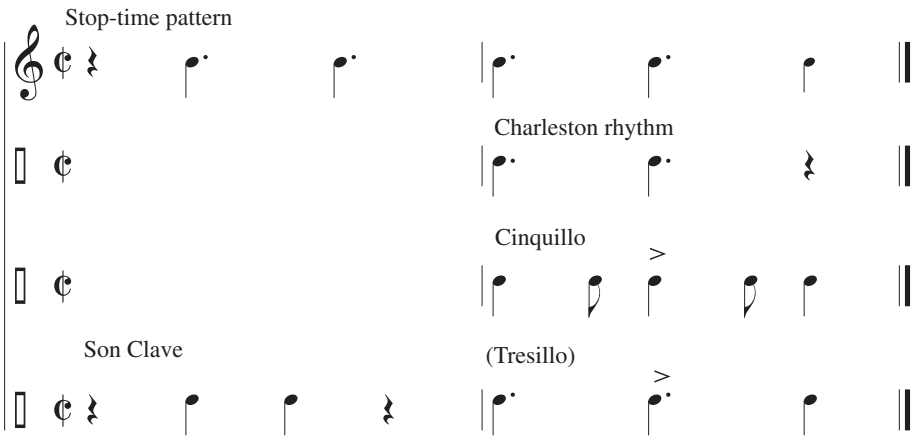


Third, the accent is reinforced by Armstrong's articulation: slurring from the accented final triplet to the first note of the following beat. These elements are all aspects of the so-called 'swung' quaver. Fourth, Armstrong's phrasing pulls against the regular pulse of the banjo by accenting in between the four-square pattern. Although there is no bass line at this point in the recording (recordings of his Hot Five ensemble did not include a bass instrument), a two-beat feel is implied – and is actually played on trombone at the opening of the piece. The hallmark of the two-beat feel is a bass line on beats one and three of 4/4 metre.

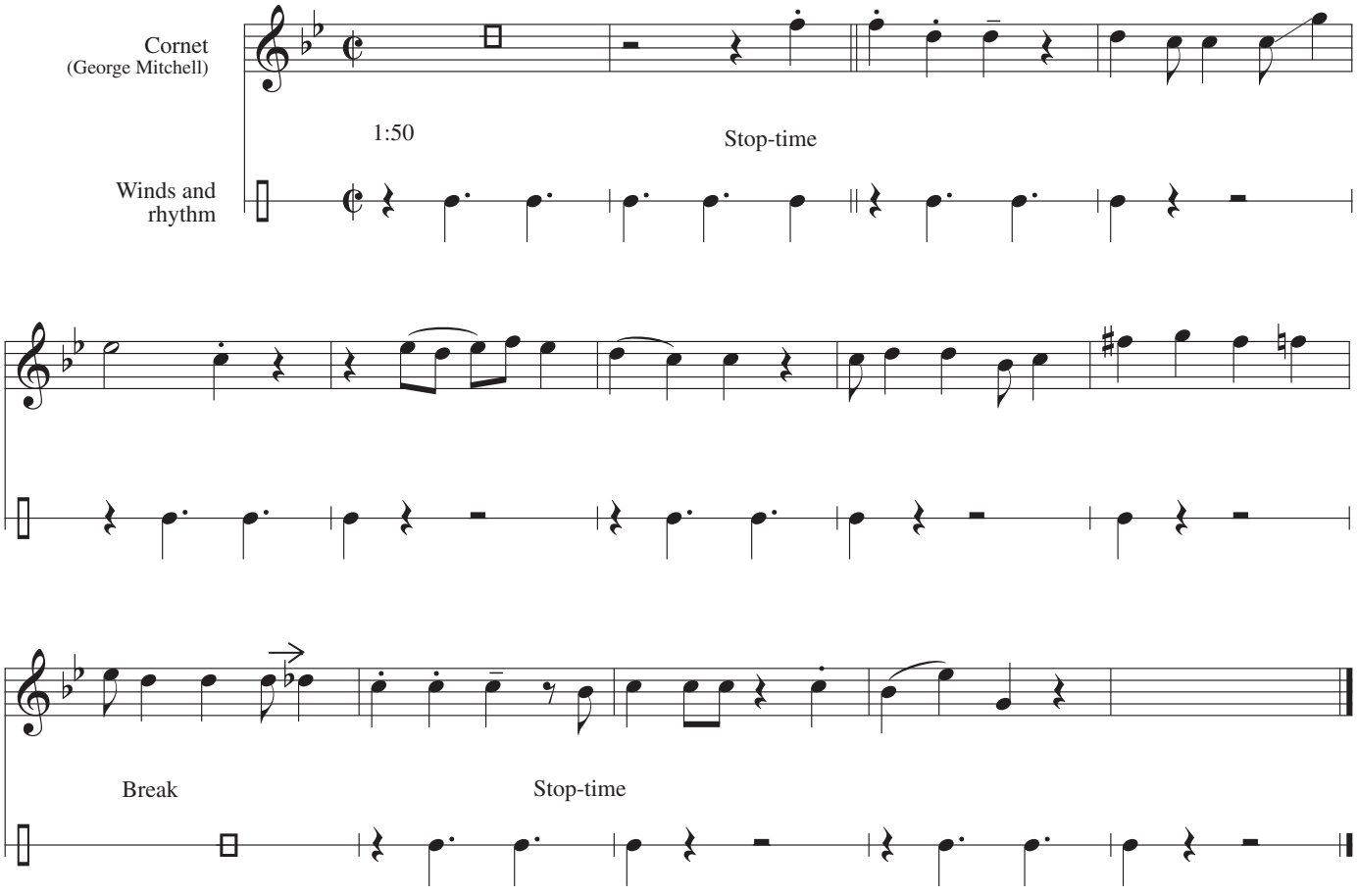
Breaks and stop-time

Melodic improvisation, characterised by the swung quaver, typically takes place in dialogue with a more regularly repeating background played by the rhythm section. Jelly Roll Morton's 'Black Bottom Stomp' provides a classic illustration of the devices used by early jazz rhythm sections to provide contrast and excitement. Key to the excitement in the rhythm section is a two-bar break pattern that Morton uses to lead from one solo to the next (first heard at 1:32). This pattern is based on the Charleston rhythm, which is itself related to the Spanish *cinquillo* rhythm and the Cuban *son clave* (also known as the *tresillo*): see Ex. 7.2. As Christopher Washburne has noted, the 'Latin tinge' that Morton mentioned in his recollections of music in New Orleans at the turn of the twentieth century runs deeper than is generally acknowledged in the jazz literature. In 'Black Bottom Stomp', the break pattern (later called a 'riff') is used as a stop-time accompaniment to

Ex. 7.2 Jelly Roll Morton, 'Black Bottom Stomp', Chicago, 15 September 1926



Ex. 7.3 Jelly Roll Morton, 'Black Bottom Stomp', *The Pearls*, Chicago, 15 September 1926: RCA 6588-2-RB



George Mitchell's cornet solo: see Ex. 7.3 (1:50–2:09). In stop-time, the rhythm section temporarily abandons continuous time-keeping, leaving open space for the soloist. The band punctuates the texture with either regular accents (a crotchet every two bars, for example) or a rhythmic figure as is the case here. In 'Black Bottom Stomp' the band returns to continuous time-keeping after Mitchell's solo. Bassist John Lindsay shifts temporarily from a two-beat to a four-beat bass line (double-time), intensifying the level of excitement even further (2:12–2:28). Early jazz ensembles made effective use of all these musical resources – breaks, stop-time and two-beat feels occasionally double-timed – to provide the foundation over which soloists such as Armstrong developed their distinctive melodic styles.

While Armstrong and other early jazz soloists developed an impressive melodic language, other musicians began learning favourite passages from phonograph recordings. In 1927, Melrose published in New York a book of transcribed Armstrong breaks (*125 Jazz Breaks for Hot Trumpet*) which was perhaps the first jazz publication with a pedagogical intent. Since they are presented without a rhythmic or harmonic context, they leave out much that is important, yet illustrate the constant interplay in jazz between aural and literate approaches to music. Ideas improvised in performance are learned by ear from recordings by other musicians and sometimes written down. Composers and arrangers may use some of these ideas as a basis for written arrangements that then serve as frameworks for other solos. Improvisers often take these fragments of melodies, practise them in several keys and use them as resources in the development of their own improvisational language.

The eternal cycle

These activities are all part of what Paul Berliner has called the 'eternal cycle' between newly created ideas and pre-composition in improvisation.[3] As Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz* (1994) has emphasised, it is best to think of jazz improvisation as a gradually acquired skill that consists of many different phases of learning. The first thing that an improviser must learn is a repertory of tunes that will serve as vehicles for improvisation. Next the student must learn to embellish melodies convincingly and master the melodic and harmonic language of jazz improvisation. Finally the improviser must learn to improvise in an ensemble setting and develop the ability to respond appropriately to the musical flow within the band. These different aspects of improvisational learning are ongoing aspects of the improviser's relationship to the music.

'Take the "A" Train', Billy Strayhorn
Recommended listening: *Duke Ellington: The Blanton-Webster Band*. RCA 5659-2-RB. r 15 February 1941

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
A	C6	C6	D7b5	D7b5	Dm7	G7	C6	Dm7-G7
A	C6	C6	D7b5	D7b5	Dm7	G7	C6	Dm7-G7
B	Fmaj7	Fmaj7	Fmaj7	Fmaj7	D7	D7	Dm7	G7
A	C6	C6	D7b5	D7b5	Dm7	G7	C6	(Dm7-G7)

Fig. 7.1

Forms and feels

The repertory of early jazz included ragtime pieces, hymns, blues, marches, waltzes and other popular genres. In later styles, Tin Pan Alley tunes (most commonly in AABA song form) and the 12-bar blues become the most typical forms over which improvisation took place. Although there are styles of jazz improvisation that abandon these forms of fixed length, a budding jazz musician generally starts by learning a repertory of tunes and their chord progressions (Berliner 1994, 63–94). The tune or song defines the length of the improvisational cycle and the basic chord progression ('changes') that organise the improvising.

Figs 7.1 and 7.2 provide diagrams of two of the most common forms used in jazz. Thirty-two-bar song form (AABA) comprises four 8-bar phrases, and the 12-bar blues three 4-bar phrases. To help you hear the AABA form, try singing along with the melody on Duke Ellington's 1941 recording of 'Take the "A" Train'. When the saxophones repeat their opening melody, they have reached the 'second A' of the 32-bar form (0:17). The B section or 'bridge' is marked by the beginning of a new melodic phrase (0:28). When the opening melody returns, the band has reached the 'third A' of the AABA form (0:39). If you were to count in four (1-2-3-4, 2-2-3-4, 3-2-3-4, and so on) from the beginning of the melody, taking the bass line as your pulse, you would notice that each section of the form is eight bars in length. Once through the 32-bar form is called a 'chorus' and this is the unit used to describe the length of a solo. Here Ray Nance takes a one-chorus solo (0:51–1:35), that is, he plays once through the AABA form. Musicians learn to recognise the chord progression and phrase structure underlying the particular song they are playing, and hence learn to hear where they are in the form without having to count each bar individually.

The bass line heard on 'Take the "A" Train' is a 'walking bass', easily identifiable by the fact that a bass note is played on every beat of the 4/4 metre. The bassist shapes these notes into ascending and descending lines that

'McSplivens', Dexter Gordon
Recommended listening: Dexter Gordon, *A Swinging' Affair*, Blue Note CDP 7 84133 2, r 29 August 1962.

1	2	3	4	**5**	6	7	8	**9**	10	11	12
Bb7	Eb7	Bb7	Bb7	**Eb7**	Eb7	Bb7 alternate:	Bb7 dm7 G7	**F7** **cm7**	Eb7 F7	Bb7 dm7 G7	F7 cm7 F7

Fig. 7.2

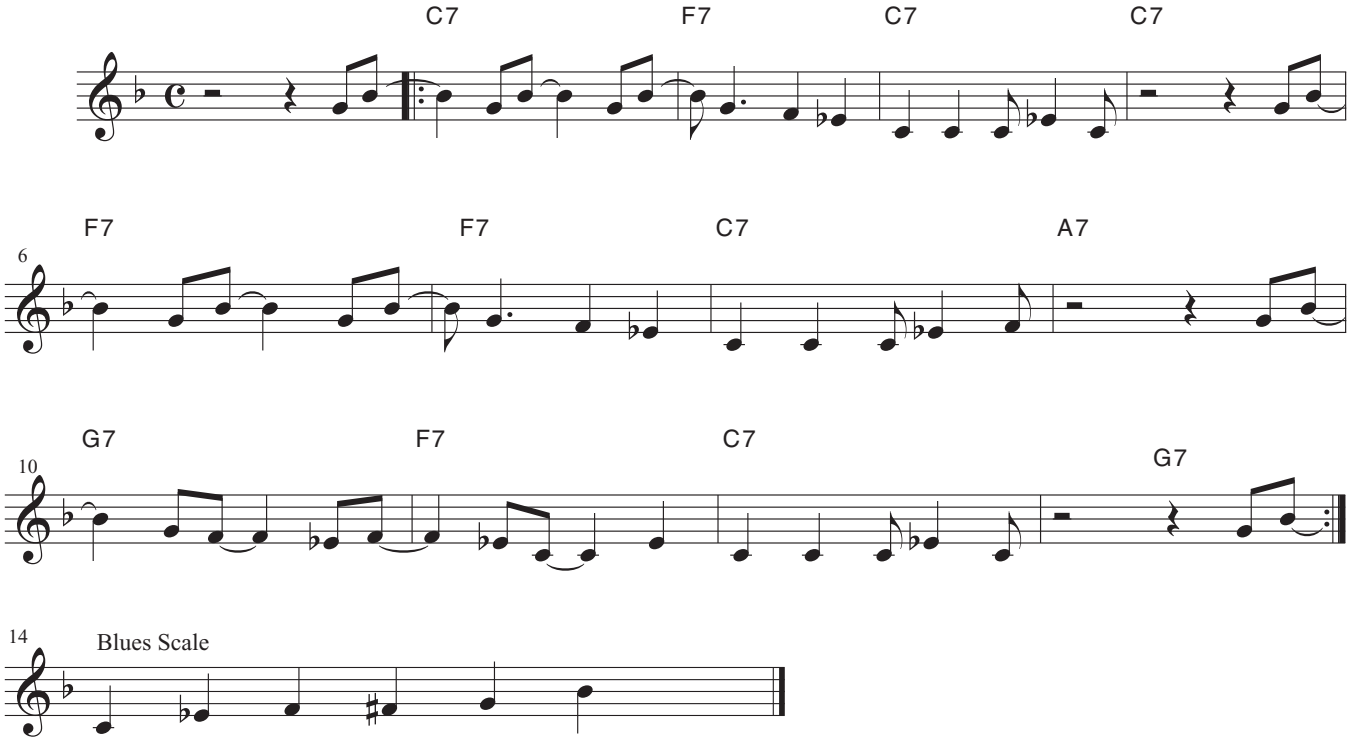
move smoothly from chord to chord. The bass line plus the rhythmic figure played by the drummer on the closed hi-hat cymbal (♩♫♩♫, with the quavers swung) serve to define the basic 'time feel' or 'groove' of the piece, which in this case is swing.

Dexter Gordon's 'McSplivens' illustrates the 12-bar blues form. Fig. 7.2 provides a diagram of the chord progression of 'McSplivens', which is a typical blues progression found in hundreds of jazz compositions. Unlike 32-bar song form, the blues is associated with a specific chord progression crucial to its identity. Although musicians frequently embellish this progression with a wide variety of alternative chords (one example is included in Fig. 7.2), the three 4-bar phrases of the form almost always move from tonic (in bar 1) to subdominant (in bar 5) and dominant or alternative (in bar 9). Both 'Take the "A" Train' and 'McSplivens' make use of swing time – note the walking bass line and the rhythmic pattern on the ride cymbal (♩♫♩♫). This is the so-called 'ride-cymbal rhythm' that is characteristic of a swing feel. Other commonly used feels in jazz include shuffle, 'in 2', jazz waltz, 6/8, 12/8, samba and various 'straight quaver' feels including Latin, rock and funk.[4]

Melodic styles and harmony

The concept of the blues in jazz has several dimensions, including form, chord progression, melodic style and emotional feeling. Indeed, the melodic style of the blues is perhaps its most immediately recognisable characteristic. Gordon's 'McSplivens' provides an excellent example of blues melody. The entire 'head' (i.e. the melody of the composition) and many of Gordon's solo passages are drawn from the blues scale (Ex. 7.4), which is an expressive resource that all musicians must master. Notice Gordon's great timbral expressiveness as he bends, shapes and phrases the pitches of the blues scale into meaningful music. Use of the blues scale is not restricted to the blues form; indeed, melodies derived from the blues scale are often

Ex. 7.4



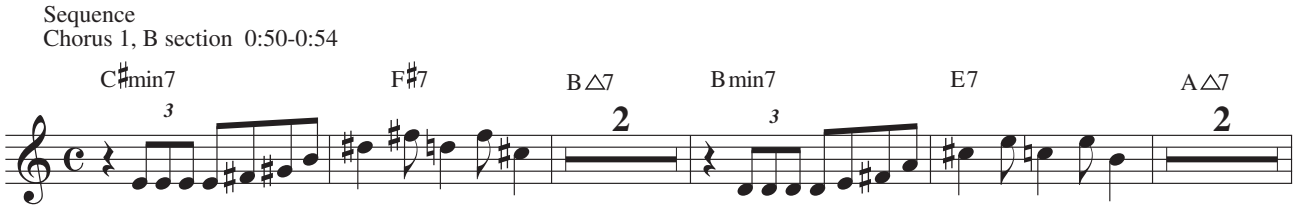
heard at particularly expressive moments in a wide variety of jazz compositions.

Since the 1960s, jazz pedagogy has been dominated by the chord–scale approach to jazz harmony. Improvisers learn to associate scales with particular chords, which then guide their note choices while improvising. George Russell, whose *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* (1959) generated much discussion among musicians of the 1950s and early 1960s (see Chapter 10), pioneered the concept of associating scales of various degrees of consonance and dissonance with particular chords. He based his musical philosophy and harmonic practice on the idea that the Lydian mode best expresses the harmony of the major triad. Since then, a chord–scale approach that takes the major mode as the best expression of the harmony of a major triad has been popularised by several instruction books including those by John Mehegan, David Baker and Mark Levine. Musicians now typically learn up to 21 scales and their associations with particular chords in the jazz harmonic vocabulary. In the 1940s, however, musicians focused on arpeggiating chords and playing the major, minor, Mixolydian and blues scales (see, for example, Eldridge 1946). Bebop added the diminished and whole-tone scales, both symmetrical in structure, to the commonly used tonal resources of jazz. Throughout the history of the music there has been a constant interplay between the disciplined study of music theory and the process of improvisation itself as a way of discovering new harmonic approaches.

Licks, sequences and interaction

Although scales and arpeggios are the building blocks of jazz's improvisational language, it is ultimately the melodic ideas invented by individual artists that make the music memorable. From a pragmatic point of view, the improviser is continually called upon to make musical decisions as he or she negotiates complicated harmonic progressions, often with dizzying speed and virtuosity. The melodic and harmonic solutions invented by the towering figures in jazz history – such as Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and John Coltrane – have often been parsed into 'licks' that have been widely practised by subsequent jazz musicians. Since chord progressions often proceed with some regular structure (for example descending by step or ascending by perfect fourth) it is not surprising that melodic sequences moving in similar patterns have been a prominent feature of jazz melodic practice. Such licks are a crucial musical resource from which musicians build convincing solos and thematic continuity.

Ex. 7.5



Parker's famous solo on 'Ko Ko' makes use of a distinctive sequence at the beginning of the first bridge (Ex. 7.5). The ascending arpeggio followed by a chromatic descent, beginning first on the pitch E and four bars later on D, is used to negotiate the tricky stepwise key changes in the bridge. Parker's idea expresses the so-called 'ii–V–I' progression, which is ubiquitous in jazz improvisation. There are countless ways to 'make the changes' with sequences, scales and thematic ideas that fit the harmonic context, but it would be a mistake to think of jazz improvisation as simply a matter of assembling short melodic licks into longer lines. Great improvisers such as Parker or Coltrane combine a facility with short melodic sequences and a keen ear for the tonal possibilities of larger stretches of music.

Another way to think of this is to envision an ascending or descending stepwise line of relatively long durations (crotchets or quavers) that the player keeps in mind while negotiating a long sequence of chord changes. The improviser may hear such underlying voice-leading as a scaffold on which many different kinds of patterns, scalar passages and phrases might be used. The swing of the rhythm section and the voice-leading of the bass and chordal instrument may play crucial roles in helping the improviser find harmonically and rhythmically satisfying ways to meet the demands of a particular tune. The improviser is constantly making choices about how to proceed, monitoring the dictates of the inner ear as well as the musical direction of the accompaniment. The improviser's choices may include making a musical quotation or allusion to a well-known tune or solo, which listeners familiar with the tradition may recognise with a smile. Ultimately it is the musicality of longer sections of music and the performer's ability to interact effectively with a band that distinguish the most admired improvisers.[5]

Aesthetics

The practice of jazz improvisation is indelibly shaped by the history of African-American musical aesthetics. The basic rhythm section/soloist configuration of the jazz ensemble, the call-and-response principles of musical phrasing and collective process, as well as the timbral variety expected of the jazz soloist, were all pioneered in African-American genres such as the ring shout, blues, congregational singing, gospel music, ragtime and jazz. Olly Wilson calls this basic approach to musical organisation the 'heterogeneous sound ideal', adding that African-American and many other African diasporic musics have a marked preference for timbral

contrast, dense overlapping textures, the use of fixed and variable rhythmic groupings and a vocal communicative ideal (see Wilson 1992 in Wright and Floyd). 'Riffing' (i.e., repetition of short melodic or rhythmic figures) has been a particularly important resource in the expression of this aesthetic ideal.

Most cultural commentators have generally emphasised the secular heritage of jazz aesthetics with special emphasis on the blues as a musical process and cultural attitude. LeRoi Jones's *Blues People* and Albert Murray's *Stomping the Blues* both acknowledge the constant interplay between the secular and sacred in African-American music, but view the secular as the most liberating. More recently the sacred heritage of African-American musics has been stressed, as in Samuel Floyd's use of the ring shout as the interpretive lens through which to view the heritage of African-American musical genres (see Jones [Baraka] 1963, Murray, and Floyd 1995).

Whether sacred or secular, African-American musics in the twentieth century developed in constant counterpoint with a modernist aesthetic. Indeed the most widely acknowledged heroes of jazz – Armstrong, Ellington, Parker, Monk, Davis and Coltrane – were all pioneers in synthesising that blend of African-American heritage and modernism that is fundamental to jazz aesthetics and key to its appeal beyond the confines of any ethnic boundary. From very early in the history of the music, jazz was a musical form that mediated across the racial divide in a segregated United States, attracting generations of non-African-American youth to the freedom of improvisation and cultural sensibility whose emotional depth and intelligence it was difficult to deny. The mainstreaming of many aspects of the 'heterogeneous sound ideal' was a central component of twentieth-century American popular music.

The intersection of modernist aesthetic values (including virtuosity, abstraction, originality and the concept of the genius) with the African-American heterogeneous sound ideal has given rise to many different stylistic varieties in jazz. The musical elements we have already covered are widely accepted as components of most approaches to jazz, but it is important to understand that there have been sharp aesthetic divisions and debates that have taken place throughout the history of the music. Among the musical dimensions over which critics divide are the issues of virtuosity, repetition, harmony, rhythmic feel, form and timbre. A positive evaluation of virtuosity and harmonic complexity has made virtuosic musicians such as Parker, Coltrane and Lennie Tristano favourites of musical modernists from both jazz and classical-music backgrounds. Many *aficionado*s of classical music have had more difficulty accepting the riff-based approach of musicians

such as Basie and Monk, whose artistic practice has seemed to argue that 'less is more'.

Riffing

Basie's 'Sent for You Yesterday' and Monk's 'Bag's Groove' provide two illustrations of the musical variety that can be achieved through means of the riff. There are four main ways in which riffs have been used in jazz improvisation: as melodies, in call-and-response, as continuous ostinato figures, and in layers. Eddie Durham's arrangement of 'Sent for You Yesterday' (a blues form) makes use of them all.[6] Fig. 7.3 illustrates the various uses of riffs in the arrangement. During the first chorus the melody is a riff played by the ensemble in call-and-response, with improvised fills from Earle Warren on alto saxophone. The second chorus reverses the order, with the improvised calls emanating from Basie's piano and the brass section answering with a riff. The third chorus features a solo by Herschel Evans on tenor saxophone, accompanied by a continuous riff figure (no space for an answer between repetitions) that adds an extra ostinato layer to the accompaniment. The final shout choruses of the arrangement illustrate the way in which different uses of the riff can be combined in layers. Chorus seven features the brass and reed sections trading riffs in call-and-response. The saxophone riff becomes a continuous ostinato layer in chorus eight, as the brass continues its riff in call-and-response with Jo Jones's solo drum fills.[7]

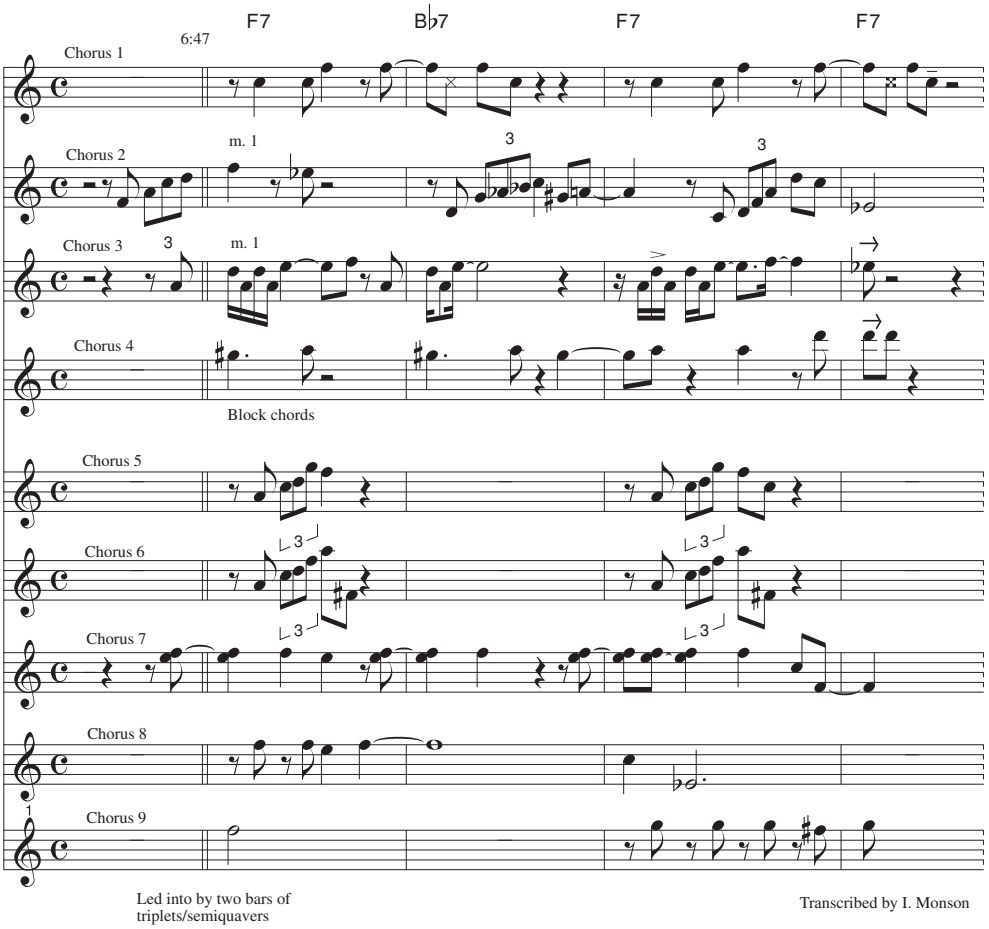
It is important to realise that riffs, unlike licks or patterns, serve to emphasise pitches shared between chords. Riffs generally serve to bridge across two or more harmonic changes rather than to emphasise the differences between them. As George Russell might put it, riffing takes a horizontal approach to harmony, as opposed to a vertical emphasis on expressing each

Intro.	Chorus 1 (0:11)	Chorus 2 (0:28)	Chorus 3 (0:43)
8 bars	12 bars	12 bars	12 bars
	Call and Response x 3	Call and Response x 3	Tenor sax solo
	Ensemble riff melody/Alto sax answer improvised	Piano call improvised / brass riff response	Continuous brass riff

Chorus 7 (2:04)	Chorus 8 (2:23)
12 bars	12 bars
Shout chorus, Call and Response x 3	Shout chorus, Call and Response x 3
Brass riff call/ Reed riff answer	Brass riff call/ drum solo answer Reed riff becomes continous riff layer

Fig. 7.3

Ex. 7.6



individual chord change.[8] As such, riffs often serve both to sustain a tonal area shared by more than one chord change and bring the rhythmic and interactive dimensions of a phrase to the foreground.

Monk's solo on 'Bag's Groove' illustrates the importance of the riff as a developmental resource in jazz melody.[9] In virtually every chorus Monk begins with a riff that serves as a basis for variation throughout the remainder of the chorus (Ex. 7.6). The first three choruses begin with riff figures that emphasise progressively smaller note values: crotchets and quavers in chorus two, triplet quavers in chorus two, and semiquavers in chorus three (6:47–7:42).[10] The fourth chorus presents a riff in block voicings, while the fifth and sixth choruses thematically develop a single riff. Monk's solo leaves a great deal of space in the musical texture, illustrating that it is possible to say a great deal with very few notes.

Stylistic diversity

In the late 1950s and early 1960s jazz musicians expanded the boundaries of the music in many ways: borrowing rhythmic feels from African-Caribbean and African music, exploring modal approaches to improvisation, experimenting with open-ended improvisational forms (moving away from chorus structures), developing harmonic voicings capable of expressing more than one chord, using non-duple metres, introducing non-western instruments and timbres into the music and exploring avant-garde means of expression. Charles Mingus's 'Pithecanthropus Erectus' (1956) provides an early example of an open-ended form which accommodated solos of variable length. A two-bar 'vamp' (an ostinato alternating between two chords) repeats for the duration of the solo, which is at the player's discretion. In this piece Mingus moves freely from 4/4 to 6/4 metre and back, and encourages the band to interject collective cries and shrieks at climactic points of the solo.

Bill Evans and McCoy Tyner developed piano voicings that have become essential knowledge for the modern jazz pianist. Evans developed the now ubiquitous rootless left-hand voicings, and Tyner demonstrated the tonal possibilities of voicings built on the interval of the fourth.[11] Tyner often used these voicings to construct the hypnotic vamps so central to his work with Coltrane. Open-ended improvisational structures and the simpler harmonic progressions of modal tunes (which often preserved chorus structures) tended to free the rhythm section to interact more intensely with the soloist. The recordings of the John Coltrane quartet and the Miles Davis quintet of the early to mid-1960s provide the best examples of this emerging aesthetic.[12]

Free jazz

A major aesthetic controversy erupted in the jazz world in early 1960 when alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman emerged on the New York scene. Coleman's dissonant harmonic style and abandonment of chorus structures and fixed harmonic changes as means of organising improvisational flow was claimed by some as *The Shape of Jazz to Come* (the title of Coleman's first album after his arrival in New York, recorded in 1959), by others as the destruction of jazz, and by some championed as a music of social critique. Over the next seven years an aesthetic community of jazz musicians, committed to what was variously termed 'free jazz', the 'New Thing' or 'avant-garde' jazz, emerged in New York. Among them were Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Albert

Ayler, Archie Shepp, Sun Ra and Coltrane. Coltrane's turn towards free jazz gave considerable prestige to the burgeoning free-jazz movement. The new approach also fostered the creation of collective musical organisations such as Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (1965) and later St Louis's Black Artists Group (1968).

Among the greatest champions of free jazz as a political music was playwright, poet and critic LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) whose *Blues People* (1963) viewed free jazz as the logical outcome of the black musician's centuries of struggle with racism in America. For many free-jazz artists, however, the political dimension of free-jazz expression was a by-product of its spiritual implications. For Ayler, Coltrane and Sun Ra, spiritual communion through avant-garde expression was a primary motivation for their expressive choices. Ayler's work drew heavily upon the African-American gospel and folk traditions, turning familiar hymn melodies into abstract wails and pleas of deep emotional intensity. Both Coltrane and Sun Ra were drawn to non-western modes of spirituality. Both men were widely read in spiritual traditions from locations as far-ranging as Africa, India, China and the Middle East. Sun Ra's aesthetic appealed to both ancient Egypt and outer space as metaphors for liberation and spiritual depth. Critics of free jazz failed to see 'progress' in the atonality and indefinite time feels of the music. They viewed the avant-garde as a decline, brought on by young musicians who 'didn't do their homework' or pay their dues in the tradition.

Fusion

Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew* (1969) augured a new direction for jazz in the 1970s, one that embraced rather than rejected popular musical styles. Widely heralded for its creative synthesis of jazz improvisation and rhythm-and-blues, *Bitches Brew* embraced electrified rock time feels, as well as many of the post-production techniques of popular music, including overdubbing and looping. Davis was particularly inspired by guitarist Jimi Hendrix, who was able to reach a broad audience with his creative guitar pyrotechnics. Later, Davis's fusion interests turned towards soul and funk in an effort to reach a younger African-American audience. His albums, *A Tribute to Jack Johnson* (1970) and *On the Corner* (1972), illustrate this trend. Several other bands, offering various mixes of jazz, rock, soul, rhythm-and-blues and non-western musics, emerged in the 1970s – including most prominently Weather Report, John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra, Herbie Hancock's Headhunters and Chick Corea's Return to Forever.

Lincoln Center

By the early 1980s, many young jazz musicians found greater inspiration in the 'golden' age of modern jazz (*c*. 1945–65) than in much of the contemporary offerings of fusion and avant-garde. Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis made no secret of his disappointment in jazz of the early 1980s, passionately advocating a return to basic jazz values (e.g., making the changes and swinging) through studying the classic recordings of such masters as Art Blakey, Davis, Coltrane, Monk and Ellington. Marsalis's outspoken criticism of the jazz avant-garde and Davis's most recent fusion efforts polarised older jazz listeners who cast Marsalis as an aesthetic conservative and latter-day 'Mouldy Fig'. Marsalis nevertheless inspired and nurtured a group of young musicians who later became known as the Young Lions, among them trumpeters Roy Hargrove and Terence Blanchard, drummer Jeff 'Tain' Watts, bassist Christian McBride, and pianists Marcus Roberts and Cyrus Chestnut. Marsalis's prominent success in both jazz and classical music made him the ideal figure to actualise a longstanding dream: that some day jazz be treated as equal in stature to classical music, and accorded an institutional home. In 1988 the Jazz at Lincoln Center programme, dedicated to advancing jazz through performance, education and preservation, was launched with Marsalis as its artistic director. Marsalis organised the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, and in the 1990s Lincoln Center offered a highly acclaimed series of jazz concerts and educational events, often devoted to the repertory of particular jazz figures such as Ellington.

Critics of the Lincoln Center have often decried the narrowness of Marsalis's programming decisions, objecting to his neglect of the avant-garde in jazz, his failure to commission more adventurous jazz compositions and his tendency to feature his own works over those of others. This 'left-wing' of critical opinion, which aims to retain the tradition of social criticism and musical experimentation in jazz, has found a leader in clarinettist Don Byron. Byron's more eclectic jazz series at the Brooklyn Academy of Music has been viewed as an alternative to the Lincoln Center.

As always the key elements of improvisation, syncopation, swing, blues feeling, call-and-response organisation and harmonic complexity are invoked to justify and defend one aesthetic perspective over another. Two of the key musical issues serving to divide different aesthetic constituencies are the rhythmic feel (groove) and the use of electronic instruments. To many critics of Davis's post-fusion music, his use of rock and funk grooves, synthesisers and electric guitars are sins that cannot be forgiven. These feels and instruments, for many jazz *aficionado*s, mark the music as more commercial than either the avant-garde or Lincoln Center. Musicians in the early years of the twenty-first century are now debating the admissibility

of hip-hop feels into the family of acceptable grooves over which jazz improvisation can take place. Musicians as diverse as Steve Coleman, Kenny Garret, Cassandra Wilson and Don Byron have been exploring the boundary between jazz and hip-hop with interesting results. Despite the differences in aesthetic emphasis in various styles of jazz, the dialogue between the heterogeneous sound ideal and (post)modernism promises to continue unabated into the future.