

Janek Gwizdala Masterclass at ACM Guildford, March 2007

Part 1: Transcription

(all speech/audio transcribed by Tom Kenrick 2017)

[one key element of developing improvised music] is transcription, and how super important that is. Especially when you go and transcribe a piano solo, for instance, the right hand is burning – and it's maybe Chick Corea or Herbie Hancock or Phineas Newborn, but the left is also super important, and how all those melodies work within the context of the harmony that the piano player is playing, or the comping instrument for a soloist.

So yeah, if I'm listening to a Michael Brecker solo and transcribing it I'm also super conscious of what Joey Calderazzo might be doing behind him (audio)

The way he's voice leading and what kind of clusters he's playing.

You get some stuff that you don't really expect to hear on a bass. Herbie Hancock does this whole half step/whole step (audio)

Which is all just the V chord – just A7 going to D, but it's A/Bb – A7 sharp 9, you go up a half step (chord) whole step (chord) – all those notes are just in the symmetric diminished scale, but those are just chord shapes out of them and Herbie does that all the time, creating tension through a solo; behind a soloist or within his solo or just a chordal thing.

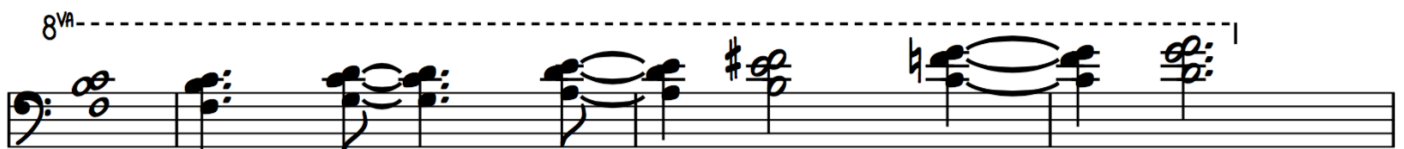
Which guitar players did you check out?

For chord stuff? There's a young guy in New York called Ben Monder who is amazing; Kurt Rosenwinkel is a great compier.

Allan Holdsworth has a great system of comping – creating chords from the parent scale – everything is coming from C major, basically, but making a ton of different voicings or cluster voicings:



That's just C major. Not the most conventional voicing; it's got the 4th in it, the major 7th and the root in the top:



If anyone has ever listened to Allan Holdsworth you'll recognise some of those voicings. It's cool if you've got the C string like I've got it tuned here because you can get in those half step relationships.

And also moving tonality within [a single chord]. There's no reason why only piano players should be able to move a single note within a chord and sustain some stuff on top – to create tension within a solo.

All that's doing is holding the root in the top and moving the chord around underneath, Adam Rodgers does that a lot – there's a guitar player in New York called Adam Rodgers who's pretty burning and does that a lot. I got that lick from Metheny, actually. Pat Metheny does that on the end of a trio record on blues in A and he's going (audio).

And it depends on what kind of comping as well; if you want some really in the pocket comping you might go and check out some [George] Benson:

'ON BROADWAY'

The musical notation is written in bass clef, 4/4 time, and the key signature has two flats (B-flat major). It consists of three staves. The first staff begins with a bass line and a chord. The second staff continues the bass line and features a chord with an 8va marking. The third staff continues the bass line and features a chord with an 8va marking.

And while you're checking out the comping for the Benson please check out the soloing because he's the baddest dude ever.

And if anybody feels, which everybody does in this room - teachers, students and definitely me more than anyone need to work on their time - we always need to work on our time, super important when you're playing bass lines or solos, and Benson if you're soloing is an incredible timekeeper:

So I got off on a little bit of a tangent but that's kind of a little bit how he plays - I've ripped off tons of his stuff.

We'll get into ripping people's stuff off later on because I think it's really important to do that; to get inside someone's playing so much that you figure out their thought process.

And if it's playing 8th notes on the E string... Get in there and imitate it to the point where you can only hear one instrument between the recording and you.

The best thing anyone ever said to me – a teacher of mine that I had back in Boston [Hal Crook] said “Imitate and then innovate”. So basically get it so far inside you that it's totally natural and you don't have to think about, you never have to think about it. Better still, forget about it; learn it, shed it really hard and forget about it. Then it's going to come out naturally some years down the line, maybe two weeks later, maybe three years later and it's going to be a natural extension of what you're doing.

Don't imitate something and then just stay with it, because there are too many Victor Wooten clones in the world and Marcus Miller clones and all the rest of it. If you want to have a voice on your instrument then it's super important to be thinking forwards, not to just get stuck.

If you're going towards some sort of solo – in whatever style it is - sitting there and practising scales isn't going to make it happen; a far more productive way of doing it is by transcription, by transcribing solos and writing things down and knowing that when you hear:



You start to hear these half step intervals and chord outlines:

The image shows two staves of music in bass clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The first staff contains a melodic line with half-step intervals: F3, Gb3, Ab3, Bb3, C4, D4, Eb4, F4. Chord symbols are placed above the notes: Fm7 above F3, Bb7 above Bb3, and EbΔ7 above Eb4. The second staff shows the corresponding chord outlines: Fm7 (F3, Ab3, Bb3, C4), Bb7 (Bb3, Db3, Eb3, F4), and EbΔ7 (Eb3, Gb3, Ab3, C4).

That's like a classic bebop-y ii-V-I cadence – I play it way too much.

The image shows a single staff of music in bass clef with a key signature of two flats. The melodic line is: F3, Gb3, Ab3, Bb3, C4, D4, Eb4, F4. Chord symbols are placed above the notes: Fm7 above F3, Bb7 above Bb3, and EbΔ7 above Eb4.

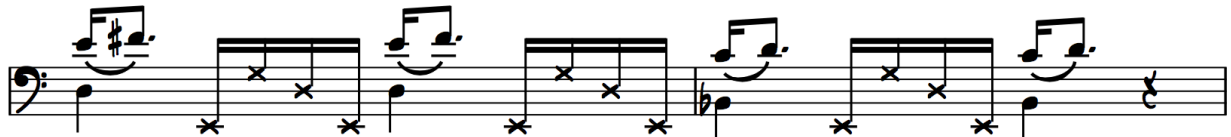
Well, I transcribed that and when I hear:

The image shows a single staff of music in bass clef with a key signature of two flats. The melodic line is: F3, Gb3, Ab3, Bb3. Chord symbols are placed above the notes: Fm7 above F3 and Fm7 above Bb3.

Immediately I know that's the 7, the 5, the 3 and the 1 of a minor 7 chord.

And by it writing it down and learning it really, really well inside your playing and then forgetting about it is probably a way more productive way than being conscious of “oh ok, gotta do interval recognition”.

It's going to help you a lot and it's become so much more natural in your playing. And when the chord change is:



You're going to hear that that went down a major 3rd.

I noticed I was on gigs in the very beginning of playing and I couldn't hear anything, you know? [Autumn Leaves] Whatever, very simple ii-V-I progression and I was like “what is that?”

But the more I transcribed and the more I outlined those changes and those intervals through transcription – because you're picking up vocabulary as just a random minor 7th interval, know what I mean?

I transcribed a lot of chord changes and stuff from classical music, which is a really good source of stuff that you don't normally get to play. As electric bass players and commercial musicians you don't often get to play in a symphony orchestra, if ever. So that can be another great source of inspiration.