

Stella by Starlight

Solo lesson & Analysis

Employing triads

(upper-structure and pairs).



By Tony Greaves

Transcription by ???

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Initial Thoughts...

Somebody recently sent me a transcription of my solo over “Stella by Starlight” from the intro video to my first triad pair’s video in 2012. I don’t know who actually made the transcription but I was happy to revisit it. If anyone knows who did this transcription, please have him or her contact me and I will credit them accordingly.

Revisiting an older solo like this can be a bit painful but it usually yields some good things. In some ways, hearing the solo renders me somewhat unrecognizable to myself. Assessing it now, I can see that I was in a stage of development in which I was interested in the most radical chord super-impositions and substitutions imaginable. Even the most casual listener can pick up on the fact that I am using pentatonic super-impositions and upper-structure triads all over the place. Like many young men, I was definitely trying to “get my shit in” during the 1-minute or less intros I would create for my instructional videos. Ironically, I’m actually going through a much more conservative period of jazz study currently.

Still, there are things about this solo that surprise me. Admittedly, I was still in my infancy in respect to developing my triad pair theory. However, I noticed that I did have fluency in the sense that I could get in and out of a set of basic triad pairs while crossing a barline. I also noticed that I had really internalized some of the very “horn-orientated” pentatonic patterns often utilized by modern players. All in all, I think the solo represents a decent early effort on my part but I know that I will eventually take down the video and relegate it to the dustbin of my own Youtube history.

Hopefully, some of you will get something out checking out this analysis. If anyone actually spends the time to learn it, I would love to see a play through video. At the very least, I hope somebody gets at least one idea from this solo and it becomes the spark that helps them codify their own improvisational language. Regardless, thanks for showing an interest in this work and supporting my efforts.-Tone

Analysis

Measures 1-4:

On the first measure, I work around the shape of a rootless Db+ triad as a chromatic chord leading into the D+ triad over the E-7b5. This line leads into a C# dim. triad over the A7b9 preceded by one chromatic below. The C-7 line in measure 3 is a simple “hornistic” minor pentatonic line that lands hard on a b9. Please note: to describe this as “Phrygian” would be inaccurate because it lacks the fundamental structure of that scale, which I would never choose to play consciously. Our first triad pairs appear in Measure 4: Eb Maj./F Maj. F7. Coltrane utilized this pair frequently but the contour of this line reflects modern influence. One should also pick up on the fact that I return to the Eb Maj. in the line as it crosses the barline.

Measures 5-8:

The most outside triad that I utilize in this solo occurs in measure 6: E Maj./F# Maj. Over Bb7. This pair generates a lot of tension: #11, b7, b9/b13, R, #9.

Measures 9-12:

Measure 6 reflects a similar idea to the opening of the solo. On the A7, I utilize a full F#+ triad over A7. This generates tensions: 13, b9, and 11. On measure 11, I link together a set of F Maj./G Maj. triads by one chromatic over the D-7. This is a very “inside” sound that generates: b3, 5, b7/11, 6, R. The line continues on into measure 12 without breaking, employing an Eb Maj./Db Maj. set over Eb7.

Measures 13-16:

Measure 14 starts with a typical G Melodic Minor mode (Locrian #2?) before evolving into a Bb+ or Bb Maj.7#5 arpeggio over A7. The full arpeggio generates: b9, 11, 13, R, giving it a pretty inside sound. I learned this style of line from transcribing Keith Jarrett some years ago. Incidentally, does anyone ever play the Locrian mode over -7b5 chords??? As you can see, the line leads into another arpeggio in measure 15. This time, we see a second inversion of an A dim. triad over D7, which generates: b9, 5, and b7 on top of the chord. In measure 16, I utilize an Eb- triad over the D7, which gives us b9, 3, and b13.

Measures 17-20:

Measure 17 starts on the #11 before leading into an F dim. triad. The line continues the flow through 3 consecutive minor pentatonic scales: F minor, G minor, and D

min. before resolving by way of a G minor Blues scale. This line is clearly influenced by saxophone giant, Jerry Bergonzi.

Measures 21-24:

Measure 21 actually employs what is technically referred to as an Ab Dominant Bebop #11 scale starting from the 3rd degree. I don't really think in those terms anymore but I did spend some time with the so-called "Bebop scales."

Measures 29-32:

Measure 29 employs an Eb-7 arpeggio, which acts as an upper-structure over C-7b5. The line then descends by way of a Db scale before landing on the G, the 9th degree of F7. Measure 32 features a super-imposed ii-7 V7 (C-7 F7) over the Bb Maj.7 before landing on Bb on the E-7b5.