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From Words to Grammar and Grammar to Speech: A Practical Analysis of Charlie Parker

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Annotated Bibliography

Today, there exists a respectable body of work analyzing the music and life of Charlie Parker. Parker left behind around 900 recordings, a prolific body of work. There remains a great deal of solos to be transcribed and studied although there is much research examining hundreds of Parker solo transcriptions and proffering pedagogy to be used by the student of jazz improvisation in order to learn how to improvise within the musical language of Charlie Parker. Scholars have not paid a great deal of attention to how to synthesize the various research and pedagogies into a methodical guide for the student of improvisation to internalize the language of Charlie Parker while make improvising within that language an automatic process. This article will offer a way to indeed synthesize these various approaches into a concise method for learning to improvise within the style of Parker. This method should be developed further, as this article aims to show a condensed model of the synthesized method which may act as a jumping off point for further research and realization of the method.

Dissertations and Theses

1.

Owens, Thomas. "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation Volume I." PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1974.
<https://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/charlie-parker-techniques-improvisation-volumes-i/docview/288504206/se-2?accountid=14608>.

The jazz researcher and musician Thomas Owen's seminal dissertation analyzing the motives most commonly found in Charlie Parker's solos. According to Owen's, there about 100 recurring common motives in Parker's playing. These motives can be found in a variety of melodic, harmonic and rhythmic permutations with various improvised melodic content connecting them according to Owens. Owens also uses Schenkerian analysis to identify larger melodic structures in Parker's music. These larger structures are not easily identified by the listener yet, according to Owens, add coherence to Parker's improvised melodies. These motives are important to understanding the basis for the improvisational language developed by Charlie Parker. In addition to writing the most comprehensive analysis of Charlie Parker to date in his dissertation, Owens has written extensive research about Parker in his book, *Bebop: The Music and Its Players*.

2.

----- "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation Volume II." PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1974. <https://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/charlie-parker-techniques-improvisation-volumes-i/docview/288504206/se-2?accountid=14608>.

Thomas Owens notes that there are 900 known recordings of Charlie Parker. His seminal dissertation presents 250 transcribed solos of Charlie Parker from among these 900 known recordings. The majority of these transcriptions can be found in Volume II of the dissertation. Many of these transcribed solos can be found in the *Complete Savoy and Dial Master Takes* CDs as well as the *Bird: Complete Charlie Parker on Verve* CDs. These transcriptions serve as a great reference for analyzing the language of Charlie Parker and organizing them into a clear pedagogy that can be studied and practiced by the student of jazz improvisation.

Interviews

3.

Reynolds, Bob. "Paul Desmond Interviews Charlie Parker." Interview by Paul Desmond and John McLellan. 1954. <https://bobreynoldsmusic.com/paul-desmond-charlie-parker/>.

Paul Desmond, an important alto saxophonist in the history of jazz most known for his recordings with the pianist Dave Brubeck, interviews Charlie Parker in 1954. Among the topics discussed are the development of Charlie Parker's virtuosic technique, Charlie Parker's mark on the history of jazz through his innovative style of playing, various musicians that Charlie Parker worked with, and Parker's plans of further study of classical music and composition in France. Parker emphasizes the importance of the study and the practice of music and recalls a period of three to four years in which he practiced 11 to 15 hours a day. Additionally, Parker explains that music can be defined as melody, harmony and rhythm. Parker also discusses his experience playing with various musicians that can be found on the *Complete Savoy and Dial Master Takes* CDs as well as the *Bird: Complete Charlie Parker on Verve* CDs. Charlie Parker's insights shed light on how to methodically analyze his playing in terms of melody, harmony and rhythm and the importance of organizing these facets of his playing into a structured practice routine for the student of jazz improvisation.

Music Scores

4.

Aebersold, Jamey and Ken Slone. *Charlie Parker Omnibook: For E Flat Instruments*. New York: Atlantic Music Corp., 1978.

Jamey Aebersold is an internationally renowned jazz educator famous for introducing the chord-scale system into jazz pedagogy. Aebersold developed a large series of jazz play-a-long recordings and has run summer jazz workshops around the world for over 50 years. The *Charlie Parker Omnibook: For E Flat Instruments* presents 60 transcribed Charlie Parker solos from the *Complete Savoy and Dial Master Takes* CDs as well as the *Bird: Complete Charlie Parker on Verve* CDs. These transcriptions have the accompanying harmonic structure written above the solos making it easy to analyze the harmonic function of Parker's melodies and improvised solos. Jamey Aebersold argues that the student

of jazz improvisation should learn these melodies and transpose them to 12 keys. These serves as a great entry point of this article into the conversation of how to approach learning the language of Charlie Parker. Aebersold's suggested method can serve as a jumping off point to understand how to internalize the vernacular of Charlie Parker's improvisatory style.

Scholarly Journal Articles

5.

Hermann, Richard. "Charlie Parker's Solo to 'Ornithology': Facets of Counterpoint, Analysis, and Pedagogy." *Perspectives of New Music* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 222-62.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25164564>.

Richard Herman, a composer for classical music ensembles, specializes in 20th and 21st century music and compositional practices. His credentials include holding a position as professor of theory and composition at the University of New Mexico and having earned a PhD from the Eastman Conservatory. Hermann proposes a new model of analysis that he coins the "tonally adjusted species model." In order to demonstrate this model, Hermann analyzes a transcription of Charlie Parker's solo on the tune "Ornithology." This analysis produces a "normalized surface" of the solo. "Normalized surface" means isolating only the important voice leading from the melodic lines of the solo at different levels of subdivision. These levels of subdivision being the first subdivision of the beat, the beat itself and the measure or phrase. According to Hermann, this normalization provides insight into the voice leading considerations of Charlie Parker in his improvised solos. Hermann asserts that this form of analysis reveals aspects of the music that the motivic analyses of Thomas Owens do not cover. This relates to this article by offering another lens through which one can understand the reasons and order that Parker connected his Motives. Thus, offering the improviser practical guidelines for how to connect these motives in real time with proper voice leading from motive to motive.

6.

Love, Stefan C. "'Possible Paths': Schemata of Phrasing and Melody in Charlie Parker's Blues." *Music Theory Online* 18 (September 2012). <https://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.du.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/possible-paths-schemata-phrasing-melody-charlie/docview/1433237265/se-2>.

Stefan Love discusses here how different choruses of a Charlie Parker solo, specifically over the blues form, can be classified within distinct schemata of phrasing. Out of a sample of 39 recorded performances by Charlie Parker on the blues form, Love identifies 5 major schemata of phrasing (the following refer to a division of the 12-bar blues form into various measure groupings): 4/4/4, 8/4, 4/8, 6/6 and through composed. According to Love, Parker found harmonic and melodic generalizations, or shortcuts, to play over the above phrasing schemata. Love references the work of Henry Martin and Thomas Owens in aiding him to choose a good sample of 39 blues solos by Charlie Parker to use for this

analysis. Analyzing Parker through this lens holds a great deal of relevance to understanding how to break down Parker's improvisations into smaller phrases according to the schemata. Stefan Love was an instructor at Eastman and Oberlin Conservatory as well as a lecturer in music at the University of Chicago. He publishes articles in leading peer reviewed journals such as *Music Theory Spectrum*, *Music Theory Online* and the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*. His research includes the analysis of jazz and his PhD dissertation was entitled "On Phrase Rhythm in Jazz."

7.

Martin, Henry. "Honeysuckle Rose': Voice Leading, Formula, and Motive." *Music Theory Online* 18 (2012). <https://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/charlie-parker-honeysuckle-rose-voice-leading/docview/1433234376/se-2>.

Henry Martin is a leading researcher of the music of Charlie Parker. A retired professor of composition, music theory and music history from Rutgers University in Newark, Martin has written two books about Charlie Parker. One exploring Parker's music through the lens of thematic improvisation and the other through the lens of Parker as a composer. In this article, Henry uses score study and music theory research essays of other Charlie Parker scholars to explore an early Charlie Parker solo transcription on the song "Honeysuckle Rose." Martin proffers the idea that Parker's improvisation is at once formulaic, motivic and based on "running changes" through voice leading structures. It is held by Henry that a synthesis of the above analytical methods grants the scholar the greatest understanding of Charlie Parker's solos because limiting the analysis technique to one method raises a number of unanswered questions. This being because not all of the melodic material from Parker's improvisations can be understood in the context of just one method of analysis. Martin engages the seminal dissertation of Thomas Owen and the extensive lists of Motives in Owen's research. It is the opinion of Henry Martin that Owen's work is not relevant to early Charlie Parker solos such as the solo on "Honeysuckle Rose" because the majority of Owen's work focuses on the later, more mature period of Parker. Martin also holds that an analysis of Parker's improvisation must extend beyond a purely motivic analysis. Martin's idea of a synthesis of analysis techniques lends itself to understanding a practical approach to learning the vocabulary of Charlie Parker, as it allows for more flexibility in interpreting the improvisations of Parker.

8.

Norgaard, Martin. "How Jazz Musicians Improvise: The Central Role of Auditory and Motor Patterns." *Music Perception* 31, no. 3 (February 2014): 271-87. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1525/mp.2014.31.3.271>.

Martin Norgaard explores the ways in which jazz musicians improvise by using simulations in computer programs as well as a computer guided analysis of 48 improvised solos by Charlie Parker. Martin is well qualified to investigate improvisation through this lens as he serves as an Associate Professor of Music Education at Georgia State University in Atlanta where he collaborates with faculty in neuroscience, mathematics and computer science to investigate cognitive processes in improvisation.

His research is well received and appears in a number of scholarly journals including the *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *Brain Connectivity*, and the *Music Educators Journal*. Norgaard found that the majority of notes in Parker's 48 solos start a 5 note pattern while about half of these patterns were identical in interval structure and rhythm. This leads Norgaard to see these findings to be consistent with Thomas Owen's observation of 100 common repeated motives used by Charlie Parker as worthy of study. Norgaard connects these findings to language learning processes which are also pattern-based processes, noting that as one becomes more familiar with music or language material the auditory and motor systems link up to execute the language or musical patterns. This supports the premise of this article's topic that Charlie Parker's solos can be broken down into smaller units of patterns that connect to each other to create larger musical phrases.

9.

-----, "Unlocking Your Potential as an Improviser." *American String Teacher* 66, no. 2 (May 2016): 26-29. SAGE Journals Premier 2022.

In this article, Martin Norgaard discusses ways in which to approach learning how to "let go" and improvise in music. As a doctoral student at the University of Northern Texas, Norgaard interviewed various expert jazz musicians, including the reputable bassist, Rufus Reid. Those interviewed described planning and evaluating improvisations as they unfolded in real time. The expert improvisers navigated how to resolve musical choices they did not like in real time while thinking ahead and making quick decisions to move forward in their improvisations, implying that each of these improvisers internalized rules for inserting ideas or patterns to the point of this being an automatic process. Norgaard analyzed 48 Charlie Parker solos and found that there were many repeated interval patterns. Upon generating new phrases based off of these patterns in a computer program, Norgaard found that the generated lines sound like they are within the style of Charlie Parker. This led Norgaard to propose a method for improvising melodies within a tonal center based off of Charlie Parker's common interval patterns as a means to learn how to improvise within the style of Parker in an automatic fashion. Using Norgaard's methods of practicing improvisation can be useful when understanding how to practically learn to use small phrases of Charlie Parker's melodies analyzed in this article and how to connect these small phrases in an automatic manner.

Secondary or Tertiary Monographs

10.

Haddix, Chuck. *Bird: The Life and Music of Charlie Parker*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

Chuck Haddix teaches Kansas City jazz history at the Kansas City Art Institute. Additionally, he directs the Marr Sound Archives of the University of Missouri-Kansas City Libraries and was a coauthor of the book *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop-A History*. His book about Charlie Parker is an extensive and detailed biography of the life of Charlie Parker in which new light is shed on topics such

as how Charlie Parker became a heroin addict at just age 16. Haddix draws upon previous biographies, detailed genealogies of Charlie Parker's family, interviews with relatives and childhood friends of Charlie Parker, and newspaper articles and interviews of Charlie Parker to create the narrative of Charlie Parker's life and music. This book gives context for Charlie Parker's personal life throughout the recording sessions in the *Complete Dial and Savoy Master Takes* CDs and *Bird: The Complete Charlie Parker on Verve* CDs. This provides insight into which solo transcriptions are best suited to examine in this article. Certain recordings represent a more mature and fully realized Charlie Parker as a musician or a more present and sober Charlie Parker. This information would not be discernable from just the recordings alone.

Sound and Video Recordings (physical format)

11.

Parker, Charlie, saxophonist. *Bird: The Complete Charlie Parker on Verve*. Recorded 1946-54. Verve Records 837 141-2, 1988. 10 CDs.

These recordings encapsulate the height of Charlie Parker's career and also his quick decline in playing ability and health that led to his death in March of 1955. It was during these years that Charlie Parker really became a star but his fame was short lived as his many prior years of drug addiction were affecting him adversely in all aspects of his life. Many of these recordings have been transcribed and can be found in Jamey Aebersold's *Charlie Parker Omnibook: For E Flat Instruments* and Thomas Owen's "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation Volume I and II" dissertation. These recordings serve as a vital source for this article.

12.

-----. Charlie Parker: *The Complete Savoy & Dial Master Takes*. Recorded 1944-48. Savoy Jazz SVY 17149, 2002. 3 CDs.

These recordings are chiefly those that were recorded under Charlie Parker's leadership from 1944 to 1948, during which time Charlie Parker resided in New York and for a time in Los Angeles. These are considered the recordings after Charlie Parker's early years in which he has his first burst of creative, genius output that made a mark on the vocabulary of jazz improvisation from that point in history and onwards. Many of these recordings have also been transcribed and can be found in Jamey Aebersold's *Charlie Parker Omnibook: For E Flat Instruments* and Thomas Owen's "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation Volume I and II" dissertation. Like the Verve recordings, these recordings also serve as an important source for this article.