

Swing Ballads

Ballads have long been recognized by musicians as one of the most difficult idioms to perform and teach. Playing a ballad requires a high level of maturity, musicianship and variety of interpretive skills. Players must be able to use stylistic inflections, vibrato, and rhythmic interpretation to interpret the melody in the same way a vocalist would. I wrote quite a bit about these melodic interpretive techniques in the March/April 2008 issue of *Saxophone Journal* and I encourage readers to go back and take a look at that back issue if a refresher is needed. All of the techniques discussed in that article will be demonstrated on each of the melodies on this CD masterclass and should be practiced with the play-along tracks provided.

The other focus of this masterclass is to propose some approaches to improvising melodically over ballads. Soloing over ballads is tough! As I created this masterclass I've come to appreciate that ballad soloing can be a fantastic laboratory to explore virtually every type of improvisational concept. But for the scope of this CD, I will limit my suggestions to a few simple techniques that help improvisers create rich melodic solos. My favorite ballads have always been the beautiful recordings of the 1940's by players like Lester Young, Ben Webster, and Coleman Hawkins. I love that on many of their recordings they successfully blur the line so that you can't tell where the melody ends and the solo begins. The best solos in this idiom are the ones that sneak up on you and are without a clear delineation between melodic interpretation and improvisation. The techniques in this masterclass are designed to help you create some solos where the "melody/improvisation" lines are equally blurry.

APPROACH ONE

USING MELODIC EMBELLISHMENTS FOR SOLOS

I have had hundreds of encounters with students over the years where, despite having an excellent command of their instrument, a high level of technical proficiency, and solid understanding of harmony, they say "I don't know what to play" at the beginning of a solo. The simple fact is, that for many young



By Brian Kane

players, the endless possibilities and choices that improvisation presents are overwhelming. These players need to limit their improvisational choices in order to begin a solo tastefully. The limitations that I will mention not only help ensure improvisers begin, but can also be a great pacing tool for more advanced improvisers. Nobody wants to hear a ballad solo that begins by sounding aggressive and busy. The following techniques can help a soloist begin melodically by manipulating and restating a melody.

- Use the lyrics to alter the rhythmic phrasing of the melody. If you're not sure what this means, read the first sentence again and accent every other word, the whole sentence will sound quite different. Restating the melody with a different pentameter is a great way to start a solo.
- Focus on adding style inflections like scoops, glissando's, falls and turns and any of the dozens of other possibilities to embellish and disguise the melody.

Add passing tones and chromatic approaches to the existing melody to enhance and disguise it.

Most importantly at this point, if you wouldn't sing it, don't play it.

I encourage students to begin their ballad solos using these types of techniques. I think it encourages awareness of pacing and intensity and successfully blends the end of the melody with the beginning of a solo. I used this technique over the first eight measures of the solo in *Newborn* and an example solo transcription has been provided as part of the masterclass.

APPROACH 2

CREATING NEW MELODIC IMPROVISATION

Each of the ballads that I wrote for this masterclass has a relatively simple chord progression. I will not waste any space writing about any particular harmonic analysis or chord scale uses for these songs. Suffice to say, it's important to be aware of the harmonic choices available within the changes and to play notes that work. Here are some simple melodic approaches to playing over chord progressions.

- Use the rhythmic pentameter of the lyrics to create new melodies. There are countless rhythmic variations to the pentameter of any sentence and the same is true for lyrics of any song. Using the lyrics as a rhythmic guide can help soloists create taste-

ful sensitive solos while they navigate the chord changes. Examples of this melodic technique are given on the example solo transcriptions to *Forget Me Not* and *Fleeting Glimpse*. This is hands-down my favorite approach to playing ballad solos that blur the line between melody and improvisation.

- Use Improvisational Motifs. Motivic playing is probably the most comprehensive melodic tool to use when improvising over a ballad. I focus primarily on using rhythmic motifs over these demonstration solos. A rhythmic motif occurs when musicians repeat the rhythm of a previously improvised melodic phrase. To demonstrate the motifs, I play the same or similar rhythms several times in a row while changing notes. It would be equally correct to go back and restate the same rhythmic motif at different points in a solo. On the recording, I use rhythmic motifs quite a bit. If you'd like to hear some examples of this technique, listen to track 8 on the CD for an explanation.

A NOTE ABOUT LYRICS

Lyrics play an extremely important melodic and compositional part of every jazz standard, particularly ballads. Lyrics can dictate phrasing, melodic emphasis, style inflection and dynamics. But unfortunately, it's common that players fail to take the time

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Saxophone Journal Masterclass By Brian Kane

Track Title

- 1.....Introduction
- 2.....*Forget Me Not* (solo explanation and example)
- 3.....*Forget Me Not* (full performance)
- 4.....*Forget Me Not* (play-along track)
- 5.....*Newborn* (solo explanation and example)
- 6.....*Newborn* (full performance)
- 7.....*Newborn* (play-along track)
- 8.....*Fleeting Glimpse* (solo explanation and example)
- 9.....*Fleeting Glimpse* (full performance)
- 10.....*Fleeting Glimpse* (play-along track)

HOW TO GET Eb ALTO SAXOPHONE PARTS ONLINE

The Eb sheet music for Brian Kane's *Swing Ballads* masterclass is available online as a free PDF download at www.dornpub.com/download.html (scroll down to Sept/Oct 2010 Sax Journal) and click on appropriate link.

to learn the lyrics to the songs they are playing. It's a shame to ignore the lessons that lyrics can teach us. The saxophone is capable of incredible vocal nuance, probably second only to the human voice and lyrics can help players explore melody with their own inner voices while improvising. The bottom line is, when you take the time to learn the lyrics, your interpretation and solos will be better as a result.

I hope you have as much fun playing these ballads as I did writing and recording them. I hope you have fun blurring the line between melody and improvisation in this beautiful idiom.

THE MUSICIANS

Saxophone

Brian Kane is a busy musician, educator and the director of Jazz Path Publishing. He has written dozens of articles on music education that have been published by the IAJE national journal, Music Teacher Magazine International, Choral Director Magazine, Jazz Ed Magazine and Saxophone Journal. He is the author of the books *Constructing Melodic Jazz Improvisation Series*, the *Jazz Style and Technique Series*, *Creative Jazz Sight Reading*, and the vocal technique book *Singing Tongue Twisters A-Z* and the popular free podcast *Exploring Jazz Improvisation*. Brian can be reached at www.jazzpath.com.

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Track 2

Forget Me Not
(solo explanation & example)

Brian Kane

First Chorus

Eb part

GMaj7 C#min7 F#7 GMaj7

Where you are. Is -n't where I

Dmin7 G7 CMaj7 Cmin7 F7

am. I will for - get you not. As we grow old a - part.

Bmin7 E7 Amin7 D+7

You are in my heart.

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Track 3 (full performance)
Track 4 (play-along track)

Forget Me Not

(play-along)

E_b part

Brian Kane

GMaj7 C#-7 F#7 GMaj7 Dmin7 G7

Where you are. Is - n't where I am. I will for -
Years roll past Quick - ly sea - sons change Fun - ny how

CMaj7 Cmin7 F7 Bmin7 E7 Amin7 D+7

get you not. As we grow old a - part. You are in my heart.
choic - es lead So far from where we start

Dmin7 G7 CMaj7 F#min7 B7

Yet I for - get you not. Don't think a - bout the road not ta - ken.

EMaj7 F#min7 B7 EMaj 7 Emin7 A7

We should let sleep - ing dogs lie. The grass is not al - ways green - er

DMaj7 Amin7 D7 GMaj7

Ask me no ques - tions and I'll tell you no lies. Think of

C#-7 F#7 GMaj7 Dmin7 G7 CMaj7

me May - be now and then Please for - get me not.

Cmin7 F7 Bmin7 E7 Amin7 D+7 GMaj7

Though we'll re - main a - part You will re - main in my heart.

Amin7 D7

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Newborn

(solo explanation & example)

E♭ part

Brian Kane



Track 5

Intro 3

GMaj7 E7 Amin7 E+7

The first time our eyes met My con - fi - dence was shak - en

F7 E7 A7 Amin7 Amin7/G

My fear was hard to con - ceal. When I held you in my arms I

F#min7b5 B7b9 Emin7 A7 Bbmin7 Eb7 Amin7 D7

knew I'd been mis - tak - en My heart ³ my love you man - aged to steal. I've

GMaj7 E7 Amin7 E+7 F7 E7

watched you grow up fast the time it has flown I won - der what is in store.

A7 Amin7 F7 F7/E♭ Bmin7 E7

You'll al - ways be my girl and ev - ery day I live I

E♭7 D7 G6

know I'll love you more.

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Track 6 (full performance)
Track 7 (play-along track)

Newborn

(play-along)

E_b part

Brian Kane

Melodic Embellishment

GMaj7 E7 Amin7 E+7 F7 E7

A7 Amin7 Amin7/G F#min7b5 B7b9

Emin7 A7 Bbmin7 Eb7 Amin7 D7 GMaj7 E7

Rhythmic Motif

Amin7 E+7 F7 E7 A7

Bmin7 F7 F7/Eb Bmin7 E7 Eb7 D7

GMaj

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Track 9 (full performance)
Track 10 (play-along track)

Fleeting Glimpse

(play-along)

Brian Kane

E♭ part

Dmin7 G7 CMaj7 Dmin7

I caught a fleet - ing glimpse of you out of the cor - ner of my eye.

D#7 C/E Dmin7 G7 C°7 CMaj7

When I tried to look a - gain No trace of you could I find

CMaj7 Dmin7 G7 CMaj7 Dmin7

Loves poss - i - bil - i - ties were shown In that mo - ment our eyes met.

D#7 C/E Dmin7 EMaj7

Now I'm stand - ing in the rain wish - ing that I could for - get.

F Emin7 A7b9 Dmin7 G7

If I could go back to that mo - ment past Catch your eye, not get

CMaj7 F#-7b5 B7b9 Emin7 A7 D7

out - run. But if we could re - live our spec - ial mo - ments how would we ev - er know we

G7 Dmin7 G7 CMaj7 Dmin7

had one? Now I'm stand - ing in the rain Look - ing for mean - ing to con - stitue

D#7 C/E Dmin7 G7 EMaj7

But the thing I'll never know is in that mo - ment you

Bb7 B7 CMaj9 CMaj9

saw me too.