

bassically yours

Bill Lanphier



SOLOING OVER FAST JAZZ TEMPOS Simplify!

Just about every bass player must face this harsh reality: Some tempos are just too damn fast. Imagine playing a blazing straight-ahead jazz tune—the horn players and piano player have finished their solos and now it's your turn.

You look over at the drummer hoping he's ready to step in and take your solo—but he's not paying attention. In lieu of discreetly slithering off the stage, you reluctantly begin. Like the other soloists, you attempt to play streams of

eighth notes but, at this tempo, they are almost too fast for you to even hear, much less execute. Now, slithering off the stage is looking more and more like the best option.

But there's another route. Instead of playing a stream of eighth notes, you create a solo with slower—but still interesting—rhythmic groupings.

In his solo over the Miles Davis jazz standard, "Solar" (Brad Mehldau, "Art of the Trio 4," Warner Brothers 47463), Larry Grenadier, like other great bassists, proves that it's possible to play a creative solo without resorting to continuous flurries of rapid-fire notes. In fact, a solo that doesn't fall back on mere speed is often more listenable and accessible.

RHYTHMIC INTEREST

For any bassist, it's easy to fall into the trap of trying to play faster than you're capable, in as much as you've likely been hearing lots of speed in the solos leading up to yours. For the first three bars in this solo, Larry uses only half notes and quarters, hinting that he may plan to keep things more simple or sparse. He also establishes that although he may move to other patterns, he's still feeling the original 4/4 pulse as a basis for his solo. In response, drummer Jorge Rossy implies 4/4 instead of parroting the more adventurous patterns Larry gets into.

Throughout the solo, Larry makes extensive use of three rhythmic patterns: half-note triplets, repeated dotted

quarter notes, and quarter-note triplets. Half note triplets (sect. A, bars 4, 6 and 8) are Larry's first departure from straight half notes and quarters. Next, he moves into dotted-quarter patterns (sect. A, bar 9). In other words, rhythmic figures based on repeated groups of three eighth notes. Note that the duration of a dotted quarter is just slightly longer than a half-note triplet. A very subtle difference!

For rhythmic variety while still using the same dotted-quarter pattern, Larry starts this pattern not only on beat one (sect. 1, bar 9) but also on beat three (sect. B bar 1) and beat two (sect. E bar 6).

Quarter note triplets (throughout section C), allow Larry to play more notes per bar (six), but still not fall into straight eighths. Note how he creates rhythmic interest by sometimes tying his quarter-note triplets across the bar line (sect. C bar 6) and by leaving out the first quarter-note triplet of the bar (sect. D, bars 2, 7 and 10).

Being willing to simplify and do the obvious are other tools Larry uses effectively in his solo. Notice his use of four consecutive quarter notes (sect. E, bar 4). Without the rhythmic interest Larry has created up to that point, those four quarters might sound pretty stupid. As it is, however, they provide a refreshing rhythmic change of pace. Plus, they demonstrate again that Larry is still hearing the basic 4/4 pulse.

In that bar as well as others (sect. C, bars 11 and 12, plus section D, bar 1),

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Solar Bass Solo

Played by Larry Grenadier

$\text{♩} = 252$

A Cmin Gmin7 C7 FMaj7

Fmin7 Bb7 EbMaj7 Ebmin7 Ab7 DbMaj7 Dm7(b5) G7(b9)

B Cmin Gmin7 C7 FMaj7

Fmin7 Bb7 EbMaj7 Ebmin7 Ab7 DbMaj7 Dm7(b5) G7(b9)

C Cmin Gmin7 C7 FMaj7

Fmin7 Bb7 EbMaj7 Ebmin7 Ab7 DbMaj7 Dm7(b5) G7(b9)

D Cmin Gmin7 C7 FMaj7

Fmin7 Bb7 EbMaj7 Ebmin7 Ab7 DbMaj7 Dm7(b5) G7(b9)

E Cmin Gmin7 C7 FMaj7

Fmin7 Bb7 EbMaj7 Ebmin7 Ab7 DbMaj7 Dm7(b5) G7(b9)

Larry isn't afraid to play the chord root note on the down-beat of the bar. This is pretty simplistic and goes against conventional theory for jazz soloing. But, it provides an interesting contrast to the harmonically adventurous excursions Larry takes elsewhere in the solo. And, it allows the bass to take on the traditional role of a bass in a bass solo! What a concept!

OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST

A good soloist is aware not only of the basic chords, but chord substitutions he might use in their place. Check out how Larry's solo implies an

Ab13#11 chord (sect. C, bar 10) where the melody implies a straight Ab7 chord. At one spot where the original chord is a Dm7b5 (sect. E, bar 11), Larry creates a nice ascending line to hit an F# and imply a D7 chord. Also notice that here he whacks the open D string for a cool double stop on the upbeat of the fourth beat.

A solo that relies entirely on extended harmony, however, can get boring and Larry throws in nice blues licks (sect. D, bars 1-4) as well as bends (sect. C, bar 4) for contrast. A jazz player unfamiliar with the blues and blues guitarists can often sound kind of cold and

sterile, not to mention musically narrow-minded.

It's also nice for a bassist to know the melody of song, as Larry does. Often, the melody is less notey and more melodic than a typical solo and using melody quotes is a nice contrast. Yes, quoting one melody after another can sound contrived, but Larry does it with restraint and catches the listener by surprise by rhythmically twisting around the Solar melody. For example, he takes the notes from in the original melody and stretches them out by using them in a dotted quarter-note pattern (sect. E, bars 5-8).

Using the full range of the instrument is yet another means of adding interest without resorting to mere speed. During the ten-chorus solo (the first five shown here), Larry goes from low E up to the D above middle C—almost a three-octave span. This also demonstrates that, for excitement, you don't have to be always screaming away at the top of the instrument's range.

NOW, WAIL!

If some of the rhythmic patterns Larry uses in his solo may initially sound odd to you, don't despair. First, practice only one pattern at a

time and at a slower tempo. Repeat the pattern for an entire chorus and until you start to hear how it falls in relation to the basic 4/4 pulse. Setting up a music-minus-bass midi groove to practice with can be extremely helpful.

Eventually, you'll be able to seamlessly incorporate many concepts into your soloing without even thinking about them—just as Larry does and all great players do. Then, when you're called on to solo over a fast jazz tempo, you'll have plenty of less chops-oriented but still very interesting and musical concepts to rely on. Simplify and wail.

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