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### JAZZ STANDARDS OF A BALLAD CHARACTER

**Abstract:** In order to improvise, jazz musicians use small form themes often taken from musicals and movies. They are mostly interested in harmonic improvements of the ballads, fitting them into the jazz language. Due to extraordinary individual recordings, some of these ballads have become known as 'standards' with contributions by performers such as Hawkins, Coltrane, Gillespie, Davis and Powell, and are now commonly performed from memory.

**Key words:** jazz, 'standard', ballad, composer, improviser, form, harmony, changes, tritone, cadence

Improvisation is a vital element in the language of jazz, which as a form exhibits characteristic aesthetics and stylistic features. An improviser or arranger uses composed AA or AABA 32 bar themes as a formal basis only, and alters the tonal set up more or less in accord with established jazz aesthetics. It is expected that an improviser will tell his own story through his personal style. This personal version must fit the jazz rules, which are necessary for organization in improvised music. A jazz improviser is in the spotlight because composers of popular themes are, in most cases, not from the jazz world. The final decision regarding the character with which to imbue a theme lies with the performer, independent of the composer's original intentions.

So-called 'standards' are those themes played most often, which are memorized by all performers in order to facilitate live performance with different bands without prior rehearsal. These 'standards' were often composed for movies and musicals during the '20s, '30s, and '40s. A certain theme, even if it is mediocre, usually becomes a 'standard' after an outstanding recording by a highly-regarded jazz musician. Typical examples are the recordings of Louis Armstrong (1901-1970) made in the '30s. 'Standards' in jazz survived through ensuing generations, having been adapted according to the tastes of different generations without losing their intrinsic identity. On the other hand, jazz musicians have often developed the content of 'standards' themselves, learning them from each other without consulting the composer's original work.

In the case of ballads, contemporary jazz musicians are interested mainly in improving harmony on the level of full thirteen chords, i.e., modes, and are not as interested in the melody, which is connected to the lyrics rhythmically. In all cases, a new duration of the same note within the melody is an unwritten performing rule. It is quite possible that a certain theme in jazz, although originally a ballad, can be

performed with a different character or in a different tempo, and vice versa - that a performer may convert a certain theme to a ballad, contrary to the original sub-genre.

Jazz language reached the utmost limits of tonality in the mid '60s and today it continues to be a reproductive classic only. There have been innovative efforts by individuals recently, but they have generally not been accepted in inner circles. Yet, jazz musicians respect ballads that possess such a strong character that they are impossible to improve upon through alteration. One such ballad, published in 1930, is Johnny Green's (1908-1989) 'standard', *Body and Soul*, in AABA form. Green was MGM's music director at the time and had received several Academy Awards in his career. *Body and Soul* had been written for the musical *Three's a Crowd* and became a 'standard' after a 1939 recording by Coleman Hawkins (1904-1969), particularly as a favorite of saxophone players. Hawkins introduced a tritone substitution, i.e., dominant bII7 chord, for the related V7 chord. The third and seventh of both V7 and bII7 chords, in a tempered system, make the same tritone interval that may be resolved into the root and third of any of the two tonic chords that are three full steps apart. This represents a simple jazz explanation compared to a classical one, which ignores the tempered system. Tritone substitution has remained a common part of jazz harmony since mid 40s (Example 1).

The last generally accepted innovation in the evolution of this ballad was made in 1960 by tenor saxophonist John Coltrane (1926-1967). He even changed part of the melody due to the alteration in harmony (Example 2).

Coltrane is the father of the so called 'Coltrane Changes' which were used in part B. Instead of a typical I - II - V - I turnaround, Coltrane applied a V7 – Imaj7 sequence, which starts after the initial tonic chord and moves in a descending motion, three times, by a major third leap until it returns to the tonic. This enables the improvised melody to be carried on through the three major keys with a single breath (Example 3).

In 1936 composer Vernon Duke (1903-1969) wrote for "The Ziegfeld Follies of 36" the ballad *I Can't Get Started* in 32-bar AABA form. This tune later became a favorite for trumpet players. Commonly accepted jazz improvements followed after the 1945 recording by Dizzy Gillespie (1917-1993). The outstanding melody line was originally based on the repetition of the banal turnaround I - VI - II - V7. Gillespie rejected original changes in the third and fourth bar by introducing a chromatically descending sequence of IIm7 – V7 which ends as bII7-Imaj7. Due to this alteration he had to shorten the duration of longer notes in the melody (Example 4).

Later, in the seventh and eighth bars, a new turnaround - C: III Ab: V7 – I – IV C: I - appears. This type of turnaround was probably applied in jazz originally by pianist and arranger Tadd Dameron (1917-1965; Example 5).

Richard Rodgers (1902-1979) was a popular composer with a large number of jazz standards. His ballad *My Funny Valentine* has been recorded in the jazz style many times. The first thing that comes to one's mind is the evolution of this tune in the recordings by trumpeter Miles Davis (1926-1991) between

1956 and 1964. This ballad has 36 bars due to an inner extension in the last A of the AABA form. The minor melody in A is not particularly interesting from the jazz musician's point of view. In order to achieve a bigger contrast between A and B, changes in part B are modified, as are the last two bars of part A that lead to part B. Contrary to the previous examples, Davis insisted on modal treatment of these changes in B, which other jazz musicians adopted accordingly (Example 6, 7).

The famous 32 bar ballad *Over the Rainbow* in the AABA form was composed in 1939 for the movie 'The Wizard of Oz'. The composer Harold Arlen (1905-1986) won the Academy Award for music in the same year. The harmonic foundation in the jazz version of this theme was set by pianist Bud Powell (1924-1966) in 1953. Instead of a I maj7 tonic chord Powell began the theme with a #IV half diminished chord. In the second bar before the I maj7 chord of the subdominant key Powell introduces not only the bII7 chord as a tritone substitution for V7, but bVIIm7 – bII7 to replace the usual IIIm7 – V7 movement, creating a surprise for the listener and at the same time an amusing challenge for improvisers (Example 8).

Jazz musicians compose themes of a ballad character as well. Many of these ballads have become 'standards', vocalists adding their own lyrics. Pianist Thelonious Monk (1920–1982) composed one of musicians' favorite ballads "*'Round about Midnight*" in 32 bar AABA form in 1944. This tune was composed as an instrumental number but lyrics added at a later stage subverted the composer's original intention. The standard coda, which no composer ever wrote, but which has been copied from Dizzy Gillespie's *I Can't Get Started* intro, serves as an illustrative example of mutual jazz language (Example 9).

In this brief discussion of ballad treatment in jazz it should be pointed out that at least one ballad is usually obligatory in a concert program or on a record. The ballad chosen is likely to be a kind of signature piece for individual soloists. Another typical inclusion in a concert program is the 'medley' of several different ballads, one after another, connected by modulations with a constant tempo maintained by the rhythm section. It is a vehicle for displaying the musical prowess of several members of the performing ensemble within one number. It should finally be added that the good interpretation of ballads develops gradually with the maturation of one's musical personality, supported by the wisdom, patience and relaxation that young musicians often lack.

Translated by the author

## Summary

A head theme framework for a jazz improviser is a simple AA or AABA song form. In many cases a composer of the particular theme is not a jazz musician himself and a jazz performer tends to introduce stylistic modifications which sometimes threaten to change the original character. Thanks to the extraordinary individual recordings some themes had become 'standards' which later kept evolving through the generations until the mid sixties. A ballad is an obligatory part of every jazz concert and jazz

record. In the case of ballads a jazz musician is interested mainly in harmonic improvements fitting the rules of jazz language, rather than melody itself connected to the lyrics. Johnny Green's ballad 'Body And Soul' became the tenor saxophone standard as a result of Coleman Hawkins' recording from 1939 in which Hawkins had introduced for the first time a tritone substitution for a dominant chord. John Coltrane completed harmonic changes of this ballad in 1960 involving his 'Coltrane Changes' By introducing the row of four descending II – V7 chords Dizzy Gillespie refreshed a single key harmonic stereotype in trumpet ballad 'I Can't Get Started' in 1945. Richard Rodgers' ballad 'My Funny Valentine' has been a subject of evolution in several Miles Davis' recordings from 1956 until 1964 when he at the end insisted upon modal treatment of one part of this song. Bud Powell has set the harmonic background for Harold Arlen's Academy Award ballad 'Over The Rainbow' beginning the song with #IV half diminished chord instead of I maj7, and with II – V7 tritone substitution in the second bar. Jazz musicians have been composing mainly instrumental ballads and vocalists would be adding on lyrics with the risk of lowering the artistic quality, as has happened to the Thelonious Monk's 'Round About Midnight'. A good interpretation of a ballad in jazz is gradually reached with maturing of one's musical personality.

Example 1

1 E<sup>b</sup>m B<sup>b</sup>7 2 E<sup>b</sup>m7 A<sup>b</sup>7 3 D<sup>b</sup>maj7 G<sup>b</sup>7

E<sup>b</sup>m D7#5 E<sup>b</sup>m7 D7 D<sup>b</sup>maj7 E<sup>b</sup>m7

Example 2

4 Fm7 E° 5 E<sup>b</sup>m7 E<sup>b</sup>m7/D<sup>b</sup>

Fm7 E m7 A7 E<sup>b</sup>m7 E<sup>b</sup>m7/D<sup>b</sup>

Example 3

19 F<sup>#</sup>m7 B<sup>b</sup>7 E m7 A7 20 D

Dmaj7 F7 B<sup>b</sup>maj7 D<sup>b</sup>7 G<sup>b</sup>maj7 A7 Dmaj7

Example 4

1 Cmaj7 Am7 2 Dm7 G7 3 E7 Am 4 D7#11 G7

Cmaj7 Am7 Dm7 G7 Bm7 E7 Bbm7 Eb7

Am7 D7 Abm7 Db7

Example 5

7 Cmaj7 Bb7#11 8 Dm7 G7

Cmaj7 Ebmaj7 Abmaj7 Dbmaj

Example 6

17 Ebmaj7 Fm7 18 Gm7 Fm7 19 Ebmaj7 Fm7 20 Gm7 Fm7 21 Ebmaj7 G7

Ebmaj7/Bb Fm7/Bb Am7b5 Abm7 Ebmaj7/Bb Fm7/Bb Am7b5 Abm7 Ebmaj7 Dm7b5 G7

Example 7

14 F m7 15 F m7<sup>b</sup>5 16 B<sup>b</sup>7

A m D7 G m7 C7 B7<sup>#</sup>11 B<sup>b</sup>7

Example 8

1 E<sup>b</sup>maj7 C m7 G m7 2 E<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup>maj7 D7 3 G m7 C7 4

A7<sup>b</sup>5 A<sup>b</sup>7 G m7 F m7 E m7 A<sup>#</sup>11 A<sup>b</sup>m A m7<sup>b</sup>5 D7 G m7 C7

Example 9

A m7<sup>#</sup>9 D7<sup>#</sup>9 G m7<sup>b</sup>5 C7<sup>#</sup>9 F m7<sup>b</sup>5 B<sup>b</sup>7<sup>#</sup>9