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# **After The Melody: Paul Bley and Jazz Piano After Ornette Coleman**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the improvisations of jazz pianist Paul Bley, asking the questions:

In Paul Bley's improvisations, what constitutes the melodic vocabulary, in what ways is that vocabulary organized, and to what extent does it reflect the 'jazz language'? Further, in what ways does Bley create coherence and continuity in his solos?

To propose answers to these problems, a selection of Bley's improvised solos were transcribed and examined using techniques described in the methodology section. These techniques attempt to consider both the *process* and the *product* of the activity of improvisation.

This research revealed that Bley's approach utilised several techniques pioneered by jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman as well as melodic, harmonic and rhythmic devices common in the jazz idiom. Continuity and coherence were found in the sample, and this was largely attributable to the ways Bley created thematic unity by using recognisable motifs repeatedly in a variety of (often contrasting) contexts.

In addition to the transcriptions, these findings are supported by extracts from interviews with Paul Bley conducted by the author and included in the appendices.

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## **After The Melody: Paul Bley and Jazz Piano After Ornette Coleman**

### **Introduction**

Born in Canada in 1932, Paul Bley began his musical studies at an early age, attending both the McGill and Quebec Conservatories. He moved to New York in 1950 to study composition at Juilliard School of Music and pursue his burgeoning career as a jazz pianist. After gigging, recording and finally graduating in New York he found his way to California where he formed a quartet. In 1958, while leading his band at the Hillcrest Club in Los Angeles with Charlie Haden, Billy Higgins and Dave Pike, Bley heard Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry play when they sat in with the group. His response was to fire Pike (vibraphone) and hire Coleman and Cherry. As a consequence of this decision, the Hillcrest Club engagement became “the beginning of avant-garde jazz in America” (Gioia, 1992, p 331). Bley was hugely influenced by his exposure to Coleman’s unique approach to jazz improvisation, and it was this approach that predicated much of the music Bley subsequently made. He went on to perform and record with many other notable musicians, including Charles Mingus, Don Ellis, Albert Ayler and John Gilmore. In 1961 he worked in a trio led by Jimmy Giuffre, with Steve Swallow on bass. Giuffre’s music, based on a contrapuntal conception and concerned primarily with the horizontal (linear) aspects of the music (to the extent that vertical considerations were at best secondary), also proved significant in Bley’s burgeoning career. During 1962 – 1963, Bley spent twelve months in the band of saxophonist Sonny Rollins. Although it is almost certain Bley learned many lessons during his tenure with Rollins, his style was well formed by the time of that engagement and his mature work could reasonably be said to have begun around that time.

This paper examines examples of the music that Paul Bley has recorded from around that time onward, and considers the questions:

*In Paul Bley’s improvisations, what constitutes the melodic vocabulary, in what ways is that vocabulary organized and to what extent does it reflect the ‘jazz language’? Further, in what ways does Bley create coherence and continuity in his solos?*

While it is difficult to trace ‘influence’ in an individual musician’s style, parallels will be drawn between Bley’s mature style and that of the musician that seems to have been most

significant in his development; Ornette Coleman. To do this, consideration will be given to the aspects of Bley's playing that reflect the influence of Ornette Coleman, and examples of the most cogent aspects of any identifiable influence will be documented.

As a pianist, Bley belongs to a tradition of performance altogether different to that of Ornette Coleman, a saxophonist. This not only has implications for how their respective recordings actually *sound* (they sound very different), but also determines many of the sources each draws upon when playing. The honks, squeals and glissando effects that are ubiquitous in Coleman's playing are not available to pianists, just as polyphony or the playing of chords is not possible on a saxophone (beyond a few multi-phonic effects that can approximate some chord sounds). In addition, there are distinct stylistic differences between these musicians; Coleman's recordings are often scattered and frenetic and can feel 'emotionally charged', while Bley's recordings are generally spare and often feel more tranquil and 'considered'. While it would be of great interest to examine the ways in which their respective recordings reflect the nature and limitations of the instruments on which each performs, or to consider the different aesthetic values that predicate their individual styles, this paper focuses instead on the musical materials that are common to both players. This is because it is in this area that the greatest similarities between their improvisations are evident. Questions regarding the similarities and differences between these musicians that focus on instrument-based critiques, or investigations into the stylistic/aesthetic distinctions between their respective recordings are beyond the scope of the present study.

Some definitions are in order at this point. 'Melodic vocabulary' is taken to mean the organization of the pitch and rhythmic content of the improvised lines. At times this will focus on the specific pitches contained in a phrase, and at times on the contour or formulaic origins of a phrase. The 'jazz language' refers to the pitch content, rhythmic organisation, phrasing, and articulation of melodies that find their origins in the playing of key performers in the jazz tradition. These artists will be referred to directly in the text along with examples of their art as it is relevant to Bley's music. It is not claimed that these artists specifically were the ones from whom Bley drew his inspiration, but rather that their music is representative of the milieu in which Bley is a practitioner.

## Methodology

In choosing a methodology for the examination of Paul Bley's music, it is necessary to identify its principle components.

Commentators agree that the music Bley makes can be categorised as jazz, and Bley himself is unequivocal in describing it as such.<sup>1</sup> He states, "All along I have accepted or discarded things on one critique – their validity as jazz" (Heckman, 1965). He is quick also to acknowledge the centrality of improvisation to that conception:

I could play by ear all the written music and improvised music I had heard, but I had not yet attempted to improvise at the piano. [Having to improvise whilst singing text at my] Bar Mitzvah freed me by giving me permission to create spontaneous music in front of an audience. To this day I still sing while I play the piano. (Bley, Lee, 1999, p 16)

Though a comprehensive definition of jazz is as contentious as it is elusive, most writers acknowledge the importance of improvisation to jazz and would generally defend its inclusion in any definition of the term. Gunther Schuller (1989) noted that, "Improvisation, if it is not absolutely essential to jazz, is considered to be the heart and soul of jazz by most jazz musicians and authorities" (p 865). The *New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1986) notes that, "swing and improvisation are essential to several styles [of jazz]" and the *New Encyclopedia Britannica* (1993) observes that jazz is "often improvisational".

Improvisation is defined in the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* (Kernfeld, 2000) as being "the spontaneous creation of music as it is performed". Gunther Schuller (1989) describes improvisation as, "A manner of playing extemporaneously, i.e. without the benefit of written music... It is equatable [sic] with composition on the spur of the moment" (p 865). However, improvisation is generally considered to be distinct from composition. Ed Sarath (1996) described composition as being "the discontinuous process of creation and iteration (usually

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<sup>1</sup> Bley has claimed that to find out what to play, it is necessary to first identify everything that had been played before, and then to do something different. This approach is evidence of a 'modernist' aesthetic, and differs from the approach of many in the jazz 'tradition' (bebop or hard bop musicians, for example) who prefer to elaborate on the conventions of established styles. Bley however, has tempered his own modernist tendencies with a desire to remain faithful to the 'jazz tradition' and so has created a kind of dialectic with his music. "Could you go to a place that had relevance to the history of jazz? You could always sit and rumble around on an instrument but would it mean something to a perspective based on, say, [New Orleans trumpeter] King Oliver" (Smith, 1979). Further, Bley said, "I'm trying to preserve the jazz element in quite random material...I'm trying to find out what the jazz element is" (Lyons, 1986, p 164).

through notation) of musical ideas” and improvisation as “the spontaneous creation and performance of musical ideas in a real-time format” (p 3).

These definitions mark improvisation and composition as different activities, or at least distinguish the former as a kind of ‘instant composition’, which offers no opportunity for editing or refinement of the music after the fact. While it is possible to store and retrieve a record of an improvisation by means of an audio recording or possibly a graphical (notated) representation, the improvisation itself occurs only once and in ‘real-time’. A composition on the other hand, resides for all time within its score. When we speak about analysis of an improvisation then, are we discussing the event itself and considering the *process* of the music making, or are we considering a recording or transcription we possess, a *product* of that event?

This distinction is important because our decision to consider process, product or both, has implications for the paradigm adopted for analysis of the music.<sup>2</sup> If we consider a transcription of an improvised solo to be a composition in its own right (i.e. improvisation as product), we may employ any of a number of analytical approaches used in the study of Western art music. Such approaches are favored by many writers including Schuller, Larson, Williams and Hodier. These writers use (but are not limited to) thematic analysis of motifs and their development (Schuller, 1958), Schenkerian analysis (Larson, 1988), Pitch-class set analysis (Block, 1993, Pressing, 1983) and techniques based on the Implication/Realisation theories of Meyer and Narmour (Williams, 1982). All of these approaches may be described as being ‘reductive’ in nature.

Writers concerned with the process of improvisation generally adopt methods that consider formulae found in music (Kernfeld, 1983, Smith, 1982), or linguistic models (Sudnow, 1978). These types of analysis are often referred to as ‘processual’.<sup>3</sup>

## **Reductive Models**

Thematic analysis, such as that used by Schuller (1958) in his paper *Sonny Rollins and Thematic Improvising*, is a common approach. Schuller maintains that thematic approaches to improvisation, with their systematic variation and/or manipulation of melodic material (drawn either from the tune or from the improviser’s imagination), are aesthetically superior to other approaches. He does not, however, identify or explain the ‘systematic’ aspect of these variations.

<sup>2</sup> For a more thorough discussion of these issues and a survey of the various models available for the analysis of improvised jazz solos see: Brownell, J. “Analytical Models Of Jazz Improvisation,” *Jazzforschung / Jazz Research* Vol 25, 1994: pp 9-29

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘processual’ is drawn from Charles Keil’s work, particularly his paper “Motion and Feeling through Music”, *Music Grooves*. University of Chicago Press, 1994

While he identifies development, he does not provide insight into what predicated such development or, more importantly, to what end it is employed.

The use of Schenkerian analysis has also become more common in recent years and some interesting insights have become apparent with regard to both linear progressions and structural levels of organisation in jazz performance. While this approach has its detractors,<sup>4</sup> Steve Larson (1998) makes a strong case for its validity in *Schenkerian Analysis of Modern Jazz: Questions About Method*. He does note, however, that: “some of the music of ‘post-modern jazz’ strays far enough from tonic-dominant tonality to make the application of Schenkerian analysis untenable” (p 218). As will quickly become clear in the examination of Bley’s music, the hegemony of tonic-dominant tonality is usurped, often within the first measures of his solos, and the relationships that might predicate the application of Schenkerian principles in analysis of his music are often heavily disguised or are simply not present.<sup>5</sup>

These reductive models, which treat the transcription as the object of analysis, are attractive because they align agreeably with the western conception of ‘the music residing in the score’.<sup>6</sup> Such an approach allows the analyst to identify the development of themes, single out aspects of the music that generate coherence and discuss the composer’s choice of material; in short, it allows them to compare the construction of improvised solos with that of well-crafted compositions from the Western art music tradition. While this can be revealing, it does shift the focus away from the very ephemeral nature of the performance itself and onto the notated record of that performance, so that what emerges is:

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<sup>4</sup> Keil, 1994, op cit. Also see; Smith, Gregory. Homer, Gregory and Bill Evans? The Theory of Formulaic Composition in the context of Jazz Piano Improvisation, Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 1982

<sup>5</sup> Several other reductive models may offer insights into the organization of Bley’s music: Pitch Class Set Analysis and the use of Implication/Realisation theories. Pitch-class set analysis is a tool used in the study of post-tonal music, notably that of Schoenberg and his disciples. In recent years Jeff Pressing (1983) and Steven Block (1993) have used it in the examination of post-tonal jazz music. These approaches have proved useful in gaining a deeper understanding of the music of John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor, among others.

Implication/Realisation theories have been employed by Kent Williams (1982) in his analysis of bebop ‘heads’ (pre-composed melodies). Contending that musical gestures contain the seeds for their continuation, Williams observes that musical phrases have implications, the realization of which may or may not be fulfilled. For example, a phrase that begins with scale-wise motion in a given direction could be said to imply continued motion in the same direction and manner to point of stability. Sometimes a listener’s expectation (of a realization) will be fulfilled only after a delay. While this approach is reductive rather than processual in terms of the way it considers the improviser, it does give consideration to the process of listening (and by extension, music-making).

Although they are of great interest, the use of these analytical models is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> This is somewhat at odds with performance traditions that rely upon improvisation, some of which are of course present among western music traditions. Pierre Boulez, when asked if the music resided in the score or in the master tape, replied ‘the score’. Frank Zappa, a composer who predominantly worked out his compositions in the context of live performances with improvising ensembles, declared that the music resided in the master tape. (Watson, 1996, p 545) Both of these positions reify what constitutes ‘music’; it is possible that ‘music’ in fact resides elsewhere, although such a discussion is beyond the scope of this present study.

...a fixation on the object of analysis rather than on the process from which it springs. Since, as Eric Dolphy once remarked, once a note has been played “it’s gone out into the air”, the object in the analysis of improvisation is itself a phantom, and rather than analysing music, what ends up being analysed is the frozen record of a process. (Brownell, 1994, p 15)

## Processual Models

While processual models do emphasise the act of improvising, they are not without their own set of problems. These models of analysis for jazz improvisation largely fall into one of two categories, formulaic and linguistic.

The first large study of jazz improvisation to employ a formulaic model was Thomas Owen’s examination of a large number of Charlie Parker’s improvised solos (Owens, 1974). From these solos he identified and catalogued more than 100 melodic formulae according to their pitch content, concluding that Parker’s improvisations were comprised of a ‘stringing together’ of these melodic cells. Missing from his work however, is a clear and consistent framework for the classification of the melodic fragments (formulae) identified and an explanation of exactly how this ‘stringing together’ process occurs. Gregory Smith (1982) presents a more developed formulaic model. In *Homer, Gregory and Bill Evans? The Theory of Formulaic Composition in the context of Jazz Piano Improvisation*, Smith categorises formulae according to their type of motion rather than their pitch sets. These formulae are limited to a few basic shapes that he distinguishes by focusing on the principles that determine the make-up of each of these patterns. The predicated principles are partly musical (harmonic considerations, arpeggios, and so forth) and partly physical (hand position at the piano, ease of particular movements). These formulae are then ranked according to their similarity to one another. While this produces a more sophisticated approach for identifying the formulae and greater sense is made of their ‘stringing together’, this approach is not completely satisfying, largely because it tacitly reduces the performer to the role of automaton blindly spinning out musical lines with no allowance for musical taste and discretion.

Other types of processual analysis draw on the parallels between language and music. While ‘deep structure’, ‘well-formedness’ and transformational rules<sup>7</sup> seem to operate in both music and language, John Brownell (1994) candidly points out that “drawing any conclusions

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<sup>7</sup> In language, transformational rules determine acceptable parameters for manipulation of parts of speech within well-formed sentences.

about music from a linguistic point of view is a mug's game." Gary Potter, in a similar paper, adds "a successful application of linguistic techniques to jazz analysis has, to my knowledge, yet to be made" (Potter, 1990, p 68). While some areas of research are profitably explored using these models, particularly in the area of analyzing musical processes for the purpose of writing improvising algorithms<sup>8</sup> (Pressing, 1988), they are beyond the scope of this paper.

## Towards a Synthesis

Generally, writers have assumed an either/or position with regard to reductive or processual models for analysis.<sup>9</sup> Philip Alperson (1984) however, makes a strong case for the dual nature of improvisation as both process and product. He appeals against the bias for using conventional analytical concepts (for composed music) in critiquing improvised music when he suggests that:

...critical standards for musical improvisation should derive, not from what has been composed or from what has been performed, but rather from what has been proven to be possible within the demands and constraints of improvisatory musical activity, the creation of a musical work as it is being performed. (Alperson, 1984, p 27)

Ed Sarath (1996) further advances the idea of improvisation's dual nature in his paper *A New Look At Improvisation*. Although he focuses primarily on the differences between composition and improvisation, his findings have a bearing on the choice of analytical models for the study of improvised music. Using Narmour and Meyer's Implication/Realisation theory, Kramer's concepts of temporal non-linearity and Clifton's ideas about phenomenology, Sarath proposes that the essential difference between composition and improvisation is the way the two activities vary with regard to time. Composition occurs discontinuously, is focused on creation of a product, and is an activity characterised by 'expanding temporality'. He explains:

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<sup>8</sup> Algorithms are mechanical iterative processes used for solving problems. Computer programmes are understandably populous with them, and it is among computer programmers that improvising algorithms are of greatest interest.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Gushee's analysis of Lester Young's solo on *Shoe Shine Boy* (Gushee, 1991) Paul Rinzler's analysis of McCoy Tyner solos (Rinzler, 1983) and Gary Potter's analysis of Cannonball Alderley's solo on *Straight, No Chaser* (Potter, 1990) are several notable exceptions of which the author is aware.

The composer may enter and freely traverse the past-present-future continuum of a work, assuming the vantage point of the future to review and possibly alter the past, or that of the past to view and rework the future. (Sarah, 1996, p 5)

Temporality for the composer then, has both “cumulative and reversible” qualities (Sarah, 1996, p 6), thus affording opportunity to introduce relationships between events within a piece that create large-scale symmetries and overall “logic”. It is these symmetries that are of great interest to music scholars.

In Sarah’s view the position of the improviser is somewhat different. He or she operates in a moment-to-moment manner, existing only in an eternal present, with an unchangeable past and an unknown future. Each moment leads to the next; decisions about what to play are made with regard only to the present (or ‘just past’) moment, not to an aggregate of all past moments (i.e. each event is the result only of its immediate predecessor). Sarah describes this temporality as “inner-directed”, and then goes on to identify a third temporal directionality that combines characteristics of both composition and improvisation, labeling it ‘Retensive-protensive’.

Retensive-protensive, or RP, conception involves the projection of awareness in past and future directions, thus sharing some similarity to the expanding conception of the composer, and yet it occurs in the same continuous framework as does improvisation. RP conception may therefore be invoked as a subordinate [to inner-directed] temporality by improvisers, manifesting itself when past ideas are recalled and developed, or when future-directed strategies are implemented. (Sarah, 1996, p 6)

Sarah explains that the more focused on the moment an improviser is, the more ‘inner-directed’ they become, and the more heightened their awareness. This, he contends, equates to a greater capacity for RP conception. It is clear therefore, that ‘compositional’ devices (e.g. thematic development) are likely to occur in improvisations where the soloist has capacity for, and utilizes, an RP conception.

To understand more fully Paul Bley’s musical world, and in particular his improvisational aesthetic, it is necessary to consider both the process of improvisation and its product. While the preceding discussion has suggested that this is generally the case, it is particularly so with the music of Paul Bley, precisely because he treats his improvisations as both.<sup>10</sup> By focusing on the

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<sup>10</sup> In conversation, Bley uses the terms ‘composition’ and ‘improvisation’ inter-changeably when discussing his own, spontaneously created music.

processual nature of his music we can identify the formulaic approach he sometimes employs and also gain an insight into the strong moment-by-moment connections that occur during his solos. Bley himself acknowledges the importance of process in the performances of jazz musicians:

The jazz world likes mistakes because you can hear the process and you can hear the musicians correcting. In the classical world there is a willingness to rehearse pieces until they are perfect. How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice! That's not the way you get a jazz reputation. The more daring you are as an improviser, the more engaged the listener is. So it's a different aesthetic. The whole idea of getting it right the first time is a 'jazz aesthetic'.<sup>11</sup>

Bley's improvisations may be regarded as *product* because he brings his extensive compositional training to bear as he performs these 'spontaneous compositions'. Some of the unifying features that are essentially 'compositional' in nature – most notably thematic development in the form of 'motivic chain association' – are evidence of this.

The analytical tools chosen for this paper reflect the dual nature of Bley's music. Examination of thematic development, a reductive technique, is used as well as a study of the formulaic construction of his solos and their relation to the ease of particular hand movements, a processual approach.

For clarity the solos examined in this paper are played over 'standard' tunes, with recognisable melodies and chord progressions. Two tunes were chosen, *Long Ago And Far Away*<sup>12</sup> and *All The Things You Are*<sup>13</sup>, and three performances of each were transcribed and analysed. The performances were drawn from a thirty-year period and are found on several of Bley's commercially available recordings made between 1963 and 1993.<sup>14</sup> While there is evidence of development in Bley's playing over that time, the similarities between his approaches in 1963, 1985 and 1993 are striking, so the solos presented here are to some extent representative.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Composed by Jerome Kern, copyright 1944, T B Hams Co.

<sup>13</sup> Composed by Jerome Kern, copyright 1939, T B Hams Co.

<sup>14</sup> Extracts from extensive discussions with Bley about the nature of improvisation and the content of the recordings considered during this project provide some enlightening insights and are found in Appendix 1.

<sup>15</sup> 'Representative', in the case of Paul Bley, is something of an oxymoron, though there are aspects of his musical style that single him out from other jazz pianists. *The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD* (Cook, Morton. 2000) states: "There is probably no other pianist currently active with a stylistic signature as distinctively inscribed as Paul Bley's – which is ironic, for he is a tireless experimenter with an inbuilt resistance to stopping long in any one place" The solos presented in these transcriptions are representative in as much as they reveal the way he introduces sudden harmonic shifts, utilises a subtly varied pulse and plays strongly melodic lines. They are not representative of his

Bley is particularly faithful to the essential metrical framework of the two pieces presented here (32 bars and 36 bars respectively). Consistent with his apprenticeship under Ornette Coleman however, Bley adopts a fairly free approach to these pieces. He often pays little regard to the accepted chord changes of the tunes and instead allows his melodic line to determine its own path through the performances. In addition, Bley often disregards the melody of the tunes and begins with his own, new melody. In conversation he has noted:

My feeling these days is that if you can tell what song we are playing, we are not doing our job properly, even if you are a pianist sitting beside my left hand and are listening to a piece you have played for years. If at the end of the performance they say, "What was that piece?", then you have succeeded in really re-working the piece. You don't want to play every section as it was written; you are trying to change as much as possible. It's re-composition, essentially.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1963 recordings the melody is performed so those transcriptions begin at the point where the piano solo starts. Transcriptions of later performances, where Bley disregards the melody, begin from the start of the tune.

Transcription and analysis of recordings Bley made prior to his experiences with Ornette Coleman reveal an altogether different pianist, one rooted in the conventions of 'bebop' style jazz and playing improvised lines consonant with or complimentary to the chord progressions.<sup>17</sup> For this reason the sample for this paper begins after 1958. Paul Bley's solos from that time onwards exhibit a number of traits found in Ornette Coleman's improvisations, so it is useful to begin by considering Coleman's melodic conception.

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electronic music, his more contrapuntal work, his extensive solo catalogue and his completely freely improvised music. Those areas do however exhibit the three traits mentioned above.

<sup>16</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed examination of this earlier style, see the author's paper: "Paul Bley: Building On the Innovations Of Ornette Coleman" (Meehan, 2001).

## Ornette Coleman

Ornette Coleman's arrival on the jazz scene, and particularly his tenure at The Five Spot<sup>18</sup> in 1959, was surrounded by controversy. Reactions ranged from adulation to disgust, and musicians as well as critics joined the debate. Criticism of Coleman sprang largely from his rejection of pre-determined harmonic frameworks as a formative element in jazz performance and the basis for improvisation.<sup>19</sup> In addition, an apparently lack-lustre technique and the use of tones outside of the equally tempered scale added fuel to his detractors' accusations. Roy Eldridge stated: "He's putting everybody on. They start with a nice lead-off figure, but then they go off into outer space. They disregard the chords and they play odd numbers of bars. I can't follow them" (Hentoff, 1961, p 218). For his devotees however, Coleman's music heralded a new approach to jazz performance and the solution to a long-standing impasse in the evolution of jazz. Bley explained:

You see, Ornette solved, in a single swoop, a problem that had been accumulating for ten years... There was nothing left to play on songs...[they] had been worn out as a basis to play on. So what Ornette did was to say that after the tune is over you only have to play on one of the centres of the tune... And by ignoring the deadlines at the end of the chorus lines, it opened up the player to be able to breathe when he wanted, to think what he wanted to think, and to pay as little or as much attention to the chord progression as he chose. (Klee and Smith, 1974, p 13)

Coleman's approach to improvisation during the late 1950s exhibited several traits that were later to become defining characteristics. These signature features are found on his first two recordings for Contemporary, his early recordings for Atlantic, and were in evidence when Bley played with him in 1958 (documented on *The Fabulous Paul Bley Quintet*, America AM 6120). The first, and perhaps most the significant of these distinguishing features is the predominantly modal orientation (to the point of 'nursery rhyme' simplicity) of his playing, with the important caveat that the tonal-center of the improvisations shifted at the improviser's will. This contravened the 'rule' of jazz improvising that declared that the harmony of the tune should determine the direction of the solos. It also forced Bley to reconsider his hypothesis regarding the possible origin of ideas leading to a new direction for jazz:

<sup>18</sup> Renowned jazz club in New York City.

<sup>19</sup> For a more complete explanation of these ideas, and a fuller description of Coleman's music, see the chapter on Ornette Coleman in Ekkehard Jost's (1974) survey and analysis of free jazz, *Free Jazz*.

We really thought that composition would point the way, because our jazz experience – regardless of how any of us felt about the song form – had taught us that the direction of the improvisation is described by the nature of the written material. Suddenly it was clear that the improvisation could be directed not by the nature of the composition, but by the nature of what the *premise* is to improvise on. (Bley, Lee, 1999, p 67)

Coleman's solos exhibited great melodic impetus, but the most startling feature was the way in which that impetus determined shifts in tonality. Jost identified a new type of motivic improvisation in Coleman's playing which he described as 'motivic chain association'<sup>20</sup> (Jost, 1974, p 50). With this term Jost described the way in which Coleman developed themes during his solos that were independent of the melody of the piece (and any chord progression) and allowed their continuing evolution to direct his solos. Coleman's solo on *Chronology*<sup>21</sup> (Musical Examples, page 46) reveals this type of playing. In this example, melodic cells that lead from one to the next are bracketed to demonstrate this characteristic. While motivic development had been evident in the playing of Sonny Rollins<sup>22</sup> some years earlier, Coleman was the first to allow the motifs forming the improvised melodic line to stray from the chord progression of the tune and shape the *harmonic* structure of the material.

Charlie Haden described this approach as "...a constant modulation that was taken from the direction of the composition, and from the direction inside the musician, and from listening to each other" (Litweiler, 1992, p 148), although Jimmy Garrison's explanation is perhaps more helpful:

I really had to study his theory, which is too long to go into here: but an integral part of it is that you take a note like C: C can be the tonic of C; it can be the major third of Ab; it can be the fifth of F; it can be the ninth of Bb. Knowing that any note can be part of a whole spectrum of notes, you train yourself to think in that manner and as a result you come up with melodies you didn't know existed. (Wilson, 1999, p 39)

With the introduction of this technique, Coleman signalled one of his major innovations; the primacy of melodic continuity over adherence to pre-determined harmonic structures. This melodic conception of sequentially associated motifs and ideas can be identified throughout both

<sup>20</sup> This idea, advanced by Jost (1974) provides one of the clearest explanations of what makes Coleman's music so melodic, coherent and attractive.

<sup>21</sup> Coleman, Ornette. Beauty Is A Rare Thing. New York, Atlantic Recording Corporation R2 71410, 1959 - 1961

<sup>22</sup> See Schuller (1958) and Watson (2001)

Coleman and Bley's solos, creating such a similarity between their work that critic Stanley Crouch observed, "...Paul Bley is to Ornette Coleman what Bud Powell was to Charlie Parker." (*[Crouch]* quoted in Davis, 2000)

## **Paul Bley**

### **Harmonic mobility**

Ornette Coleman had articulated his desire to move away from fixed chord changes and toward a spontaneously and collectively determined music in 1958. In the liner notes to his first album, *Something Else* (Contemporary, 1958, COP 024 (C3551)) he reported to Nat Hentoff, "...I would prefer it if musicians would play my tunes with different changes as they take a new chorus so there'd be all the more variety in the performance"<sup>23</sup> (Hentoff, 1958). Paul Bley has himself further elaborated upon this point, noting:

The idea is that you are going from point 'A' to point 'B', and it's totally up to you what you want to do in that interval, so long as you leave point 'A' and you arrive at point 'B'. I call that 'harmonic improvising'. Improvising doesn't need to be confined to melodic and rhythmic improvising, why not include harmonic improvising? And if an idea occurs in an improvising context, it shouldn't happen again, it should only happen at that one point. That way it keeps its freshness and its surprise. You haven't reharmonised the piece, you have just improvised a harmonic innovation in a piece. That keeps it in the spirit of improvisation.<sup>24</sup>

This music, above all, celebrates the supremacy of the melodic line over the harmony. In *Stopping Time*, Bley confessed to "...never having been a lover of chords – I always thought that a chord was a vertical melody played simultaneously – if a chord couldn't be stripped down and each note made to line up to make a meaningful melody, it wasn't a good chord..." (Bley, Lee, 1999, p 71). This perhaps reveals why he was so willing to embrace Coleman's approach and allow the improvised line such a defining role in his music.

This approach to improvising is perhaps the single most striking feature of Paul Bley's solos. Listeners accustomed to hearing more conventionally resolved harmonies in jazz performance are confused and sometimes shocked by the divergence that exists in this music between the harmonic progression (chord changes) and the improvised line. Henry Martin (1996) has observed that, "Bop tunes will usually maintain harmonic and formal clarity in order to

<sup>23</sup> Bley's approach differs from that of Ornette Coleman in that Coleman generally makes "... no attempt to follow [the] form in the improvisation" (Porter, 1995), whereas Bley closely adheres to the metrical framework of the tunes he uses as the basis for his improvisations. On this point he is emphatic, stating, "If you hummed the melody of the song over the entire performance you would be at the right point of the song at all times. That's the bottom line..." (Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001)

<sup>24</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001.

provide a solid large-scale basis for improvisation" (p 13), yet it is this very formative element that Bley (and Coleman before him) abandoned in their' improvising. This type of playing, where the new melodies shift in and out of a number of clearly discernable keys without settling into bitonality or polytonality (music simultaneously in two or more keys) could be described as 'pantonal'.<sup>25</sup> In Bley's solos this pantonality assumes several forms. Bley sometimes begins lines that are consonant with the changes, continuing to play in that tonality while the changes move on through their progression. For example, see *Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), measures 135 – 139, where Bley plays a long phrase (heard as a blues gesture) in F that remains in that tonality even after the chords have moved to a new tonal centre ( $A^b$ ). A second approach he uses is to play a phrase in a completely unrelated tonality. A very clear example of this is found in *All The Things You Are* (1963), Figure 1, where a long phrase in D major is superimposed over essentially unrelated chords.

Pantonal phrase: *All The Things You Are* (1963), measures 77 - 84

D Major

D Major

Figure 1

There are many other, similar examples of this technique throughout the sample, and these are clearly evident in the transcriptions.

A third approach Bley uses is to play lines that anticipate approaching chords, beginning those lines 'outside' of the chord changes. An example of this approach is found in *Long Ago And Far Away* (1963) in measure 44, where Bley anticipates an impending  $A^b$  tonality.

<sup>25</sup> Pantonality is a term coined by Rudolph Réti in, *Tonality, Atonality, Pantonal*, London, England, Barrie and Rockliff, 1958. First evident in the music of Wagner and Debussy, this notion of 'movable tonics' has been applied to the music of Bartók, Stravinsky and Hindemith among others in the twentieth century.

## Motivic Improvisation

Examination of the transcriptions reveals many instances of melodic motifs adjacent to identical, similar or related melodic cells. These concatenations, examples of motivic chain association, are present in a variety of forms and provide valuable insights into understanding Bley's music. Categorized by Michael Cogswell (1995) in his paper discussing Ornette Coleman, they are listed in Figure 2. MCA refers to 'motivic chain association'.

Melodic Device	Description
MCA pitch	adjacent motifs containing similar pitch material (including transposition of ideas)
MCA contour	adjacent motifs with similar melodic contours
MCA rhythm	adjacent motifs with similar rhythmic content
MCA variation: initial	two adjacent phrases begin in a similar manner but then diverge
MCA variation: terminal	adjacent phrases begin differently but converge to end in a similar manner
Repetition	adjacent motifs that are identical
Step Progression	fragmented melodic line is contained within a longer phrase

Figure 2

The categories MCA Pitch, Contour and Rhythm are not mutually exclusive; clearly chains that share pitch content will also have the same contour. In many cases the chains are identified as being combinations of these two categories.

Step Progressions are examples of audible, if sometimes fragmented melodic lines contained within longer melodic phrases. Generally these embedded lines follow a scale upwards or downwards and the pitches are emphasized by their placement in the local melodic contour or by being accented. Figure 3 is an example of a step progression in the playing of Cannonball Adderley during his solo on *Groovy Samba*.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Figure 4 shows a step progression from Paul Bley's solo on *All The Things You Are* (1993). Pitches that make up the embedded line are linked with slurs.

<sup>26</sup> From Cannonball Adderley's *Cannonball's Bossa Nova* (Riverside, 1963). This example is drawn from Cogswell (1995).

Step Progression in Cannonball Adderley's solo on *Groovy Samba* (1963), measures 89-96

The musical score consists of three staves of music. The top staff starts with Emi, followed by F<sup>7</sup>, A<sup>7</sup>, and Emi<sup>7</sup>. The middle staff starts with A<sup>7</sup>, Emi<sup>7</sup>, and B<sup>7b9</sup>. The bottom staff starts with Emi<sup>7</sup>. Measures are separated by vertical bar lines, and each measure is connected by a horizontal line above it. The score is in common time.

Figure 3

Step Progression in *All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 35 - 51.

The musical score consists of six staves of music. The top staff starts with A<sup>b</sup>, followed by Fmin<sup>7</sup> and B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>. The second staff starts with A<sup>b</sup>, D<sup>b</sup>, Dmin<sup>7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, and C. The third staff starts with Cmin<sup>7</sup>, followed by Fmin<sup>7</sup> and B<sup>b</sup>7. The fourth staff starts with E<sup>b</sup>, followed by A<sup>b</sup>, Amin<sup>7</sup>, and D<sup>7</sup>. The fifth staff starts with E<sup>b</sup> and is labeled "lay back". Measures are separated by vertical bar lines, and each measure is connected by a horizontal line above it. The score is in common time.

Figure 4

All of the devices listed in figure 2 are used repeatedly throughout the sample, and create melodic cohesion throughout the solos. The aesthetic imperatives that are in play with each performance determine the degree to which particular devices are used. For example, in the mid-1980s Bley had only recently returned to playing standards<sup>27</sup> and the novelty of that return, coupled with the more ‘romantic’ tenor found in his approach at that time, meant that overall the solos from that time were less chromatic and more tonally resolved than those recorded twenty years earlier or ten years later. A contrasting approach is evident in the earlier solos (from the early 1960s) when Bley was a recent adherent to the free jazz movement and chromatic content was present to a greater degree. The transcriptions reveal the different melodic devices in use, and by following the scores (in which the various techniques have been identified) whilst listening to the recordings it is clear how these devices seamlessly flow into one another. Analysis of Ornette Coleman’s improvised solos has led researchers to comment on a similar continuity, one observing that, “almost without exception, every motive is related to the preceding as well as to the succeeding motive” (Cogswell, 1995, p 115). The same can certainly be said of these solos by Paul Bley and it is melodic continuity that distinguished his improvised performances from those of many others at the ‘freer’ end of the jazz spectrum. To a very large extent the coherence of these solos is attributable to the way chains of related melodic material form a more or less continuous thread through each performance. Considering the degree to which Bley played ideas tonally ‘at odds’ with the chord changes, such melodic coherence is surprising. For example, in the 1963 recording of *All The Things You Are*, 58 of the 108 measures transcribed are dissonant with the chord progression; in the 1993 recording of *Long Ago And Far Away*, 86 of the 242 measures transcribed are dissonant with the changes.

Clearly each chain of associated motifs flows together to create melodic continuity. In addition, Bley would frequently segue smoothly from one chain of ideas to the next, using melodic elision to do so. Very clear examples are found throughout all of the solos and obvious instances are listed in Figure 5.

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<sup>27</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001. This claim is substantiated by examination of his recordings over the course of his career. During the 1960s he predominantly played free music and compositions by Carla Bley and Annette Peacock, whilst during the 1970s similar music was explored but often using electronic instruments. The 1980s and 1990s have seen the inclusion of more of the standard jazz repertoire in his concerts and recordings along with the material he had investigated during the previous twenty years.

<b>Song</b>	<b>Melodic elision (measures in which evident)</b>
<i>All The Things You Are</i> (1963)	12-13, 25-27, 34-35, 37-39, 44-45, 53-55, 65-68, 100-102
<i>All The Things You Are</i> (1985)	12-16, 30-31, 51-53, 91-93
<i>All The Things You Are</i> (1993)	34-35, 42-45, 51-54, 115-118, 124-125, 128-130, 144-145, 151-154
<i>Long Ago And Far Away</i> (1963)	4-5, 19-21, 27-29, 44-45, 47-48
<i>Long Ago And Far Away</i> (1985)	30-34, 87-90, 134-136
<i>Long Ago And Far Away</i> (1993)	22-24, 30-33, 69-70, 88-90, 105-107, 111-113, 125-129, 148-149, 174-177, 206-208, 225-227, 230-232

Figure 5

A particularly musical example of such melodic elision is found at the beginning of Bley's solo on the 1963 recording of *All The Things You Are*, where his first phrase duplicates and then develops the phrase Coleman Hawkins had played to end his own solo. This kind of 'communication' between the musicians is common in Bley's work, and reflects both his musicianship and the communal values<sup>28</sup> in his art:

There's no need to bring your own set of inspiration to the bandstand if you are playing with geniuses. It's already going to be inspired, you just have to listen. To be able to pick on somebody else's idea, and further elaborate it is an added finesse. If I play what the other musicians played, and add to it, continuing the ideas, that's an extra skill. I am not just bringing my own particular universe to [a] recording, I am taking [a] universe and adding to it, instructing it. I can play [their] ideas, and squeeze them together more, or stretch them out more. I can continue the process.<sup>29</sup>

Other examples of this melodic elision utilise: the continued use of a scale (*All The Things You Are* (1963), measures 12-14: C blues being the unifying tonality/scale), a shared note to end one phrase and begin the next (*All The Things You Are* (1985), measures 91-92), using a repeated intervallic idea (*All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 31-35), development of a repeated figure into a sufficiently altered form to be considered a new motif (*All The Things You Are*

<sup>28</sup> Another outstanding example of Bley's musicianship operating as a concomitant to musical communication within the ensemble is found in the first measures of *All The Things You Are* 1985, when Jesper Lundgaard (bassist) mistakenly plays a measure of 3/4, an error Bley immediately accommodates in his improvised phrase without any loss of coherence.

<sup>29</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001

(1993), measures 43-45), repetition of a rhythmic figure (*All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 124-125 and 128-130), strong harmonic movement into a new area (*All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 144-145: E<sup>b</sup>7<sup>b</sup>9 to approach Fmin7 as vi of A<sup>b</sup>), repetition of a melodic cell (*Long Ago And Far Away* (1985), measures 134-135).

In most cases the melodic chains indicated employ very similar rhythms and so the transcriptions refer primarily to the pitch or contour relationships. In a few cases the MCA rhythm category is referenced in conjunction with pitch or contour constructions. In those cases the pitch or contour is somewhat ambiguous, and the rhythmic similarities (or differences) between the fragments contribute to the unity of the passage. A good example of rhythm contributing to unity between adjacent passages is found in the 1993 version of *All The Things You Are*. Between measures 125 and 128 Bley plays four rhythmically identical figures consecutively, but the melodic fragment is reversed (retrograde) part way through the phrase. This creates a discontinuous melodic contour but does not compromise the unity of the phrase. Rhythm is also used to great dramatic effect when phrases with similar pitch and rhythmic content are displaced with respect to the beat, for example, in measures 49 – 55 of *Long Ago And Far Away* (1985). In *All The Things You Are* (1993), displacement combined with variance of the pulse is used to such good effect in the concluding measures (204 – 212) that three very similar cells become (superficially, at least) almost unrecognisable whilst still conveying a sense of thematic unity.

Rhythmic variance was also used to introduce subtle differences between similar motives. During *All The Things You Are* (1993) Bley elaborated a motive throughout the first 16 bars, returning to it after the bridge (measure 25), but subjecting it to rhythmic augmentation at that point. In the opening passages the chromatic phrase occupied four beats on average; it was then stretched to fill approximately six beats when reiterated during measures 25 – 33. Rhythmic diminution of motives is also evident in these solos, notably in *All The Things You Are* (1985) between measures 45-49, where the triplet quarter-note phrase becomes a sixteenth-note phrase.

Step Progressions, the embedded melodies discussed above, appear a number of times throughout the sample, most commonly moving in a scalar manner. The whole-tone scale forms the template of the step progression in measures 37 – 40 of *All The Things You Are* (1963), while diatonic compliance with the major scale (E<sup>b</sup>) is the organizing principle of the step progression in measures 1 – 16 of *All The Things You Are* (1993). Some of the embedded progressions hover in a local and harmonically ambiguous area, for example, the step progression in *Long Ago And Far Away* (1963) measures 21 – 28; some are organized chromatically, such as the one in *Long*

*Ago And Far Away* (1963) measures 27 – 33. One progression of particular interest is that found during *All The Things You Are* (1963) in measures 55 – 60, where the entire line is a sequence of principally triadic structures whose roots move through a modified E mixolydian scale. The harmonically disorienting effect of the major, minor and suspended triads is offset by the tonality implied by the root progression – E mixolydian – the scale generated by the chord that would normally appear at the end of the bridge (measure 59).

## **Freedom within the jazz ensemble**

The harmonic mobility Bley was employing, along with the rhythmic freedom and nuance he brought to the music (by playing well behind the beat, or pushing and pulling the phrases in the time, for example) required the bassists and drummers he worked with to engage in the same kind of musical dialogue that Coleman's ensemble had pioneered the previous decade.

As the soloist now determined the harmonic and rhythmic direction of a piece, it became imperative that the other musicians hear that new (and evolving) direction and respond to it. It became necessary for bassists (and any other players who accompanied harmonically) to follow the direction of the soloist, responding to their lead. That response could be to accommodate or contrast a harmonic change implied by the soloists, or to initiate a new harmonic direction of their own. The point of the music-making had become interaction among the players and a collective responsibility for the direction of the performance. This was a move away from the primacy of the soloist, a stylistic trait of bebop and post-bebop jazz. As a consequence, bassists (and any chordal instrument players) had to engage with the music rather more actively than they had previously.<sup>30</sup>

This change necessarily liberated these instruments from their more traditionally accepted roles and allowed the introduction of great variety in the accompaniment they provided. This emancipation of the traditional hierarchies in the jazz ensemble can be heard to good effect on the recordings considered in this study, where Bley, bassists Peacock, Lundgaard and Anderson, and drummers Motian, Higgins and Nussbaum weave in and around one another's lines, troubling the underlying pulse of the tunes and generally exhibiting a very robust harmonic conception. The debt to Coleman is clear, and the group interplay of these recordings is strongly reminiscent of Coleman's quartet recordings for the Atlantic label.<sup>31</sup>

Although this approach to melodic improvising and interaction within the jazz ensemble was an advance on previous models, the pitch material both Bley and Coleman used to create

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<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to compare the early recordings of Bley considered in this paper with those pianist Bill Evans made the same year with the same rhythm section. Evan's *Trio 64* (New York, Verve, 1963. Gary Peacock and Paul Motian accompany Evans) reveals a pianist somewhat at odds with his freewheeling rhythm section, and performing with notable conservatism both rhythmically and harmonically. The writers of *The Penguin Guide To Jazz on CD* observed: "It's hard listening to *Footloose* [Bley, Paul. New York, Savoy, 1962. Steve Swallow and Pete LaRoca accompany Bley] after nearly twenty years, to understand why there was so very much excitement about Bill Evans when Bley was producing far more interesting and challenging piano trio music, sometimes only a couple of blocks away" (Cook, Morton, 1992, p 120).

<sup>31</sup> Between 1959 and 1961 Ornette Coleman recorded nine albums for the Atlantic label, often using Don Cherry on trumpet, Charlie Haden on bass and either Billy Higgins or Ed Blackwell on drums. These quartet recordings represent a 'high-water mark' among 'free jazz' recordings.

their phrases was quite conservative and closely related to the melodic language of jazz at the time.

## Continuity with the jazz tradition

Despite Bley's move away from the dominant paradigm of jazz improvisation, a move that correlates to Ornette Coleman's radical advances, he, like Coleman, did not abandon the jazz vocabulary. Both musicians play phrases that are clearly located within the jazz tradition, employing blues phrases, harmonic devices common to jazz (flatted 5<sup>ths</sup> and flatted 3<sup>rds</sup> against dominant chords, common substitutions), and phrasing/articulation consistent with that of the Louis Armstrong - Lester Young - Charlie Parker continuum.<sup>32</sup> Bley's playing exhibited continued use of many of the devices common among jazz musicians that he had employed during the 1950s prior to his exposure to Coleman. Examples of blues phrases, bebop lines, sequences, enclosure phrases, chord spelling and common substitutions can be found to varying degrees throughout these solos. Their collective effect is to help the music retain its 'jazz identity', and coupled with Bley's secure swing feel and phrasing, they locate this music very firmly in the jazz tradition. Bley himself has said "...we were actively trying to figure out what we could play that would take us into new territory, yet still make us feel like jazz musicians...these were the criteria, all based on a traditional jazz aesthetic" (Bley, Lee, 1999, p 87). Consequently, the chains of associated ideas played by both Bley and Coleman often resemble the lines played by jazz musicians working closer to the tradition.

The table below (Figure 6) identifies clear examples of the melodic devices Bley used that are common to jazz.

Tune	Blues phrases	Bebop phrases	Enclosures	Chord spelling*
All The Things You Are (1963)	5-6,50,85	10,18,20,48-49,86	10-11,32,35,52	9,53,61,96
All The Things You Are (1985)	30,38,65-66,68	11-12,27-28,53-55	27,30,66	10,11,18,60,105
All The Things You Are (1993)	27,101,104,153-6	57-9,158-9,178-9	4,6,11,12,104	105,115-6,156,177
Long Ago And Far Away (1963)	30-31,36		1,3-4,9,11,58	30,40,48,56
Long Ago And Far Away (1985)	105,118-120	93-5,111-2,134-5	94,109,133,135	7,93,107,142
Long Ago And Far Away (1993)	24-5,45-8,68,91	25-9,41-5,63,71-6	38,43,45,62,71	51,131,186,213

Figure 6

The numbers represent the measure in which the device in question appears.

\* Chord spelling diatonic to the changes

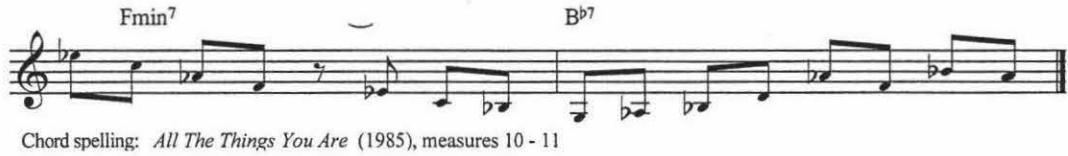
Improvised jazz solos, up until the late 1950s, were comprised mainly of chord spelling and scalar passages. Over time these lines had become increasingly coloured by chromatic content, and diatonic chord spelling was supplemented by the inclusion of chromatically altered

<sup>32</sup> Tenor saxophone player James Clay noted that Ornette Coleman could sound exactly like Charlie Parker (Litweiler, 1992, p 54). Paul Bley toured with both Lester Young and Charlie Parker, and when asked, in 1955, to identify his main musical influence, replied "Louis Armstrong" (Fulford, 1955/1994).

extensions (flatted 9<sup>ths</sup>, raised 11<sup>ths</sup> and so forth). Prior to the 1940s, flatted 5<sup>ths</sup> and the ‘blues’ 3<sup>rd</sup> (or raised 9<sup>ths</sup>) were used predominantly as embellishments, and were quickly resolved to tones within the diatonic scale, but after the innovations of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie during the 1940s those ‘altered’ tones were emphasised and assumed a functional role in the music. Simple diatonic passages that include chord spelling and scale-like lines are very common in the sample examined, and Figure 7 and Figure 8 show examples of each. These are compared with a passage from a Paul Desmond solo that includes similar diatonic playing.

The musical score consists of two parts. The top part shows a single melodic line with various chords labeled above the staff: F, Gmin<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>, F, Ami<sup>7</sup>, D<sup>7</sup>, and Gma<sup>7</sup>. The bottom part shows another melodic line with chords labeled below the staff: Gmin<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>, F, Gmin<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>, D<sup>7</sup>, F#mi<sup>7</sup>, B<sup>7</sup>, Cmin<sup>7</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>, B<sup>b</sup>, E<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7+</sup>, Fmi<sup>7</sup>, B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>, E<sup>b7</sup>, F, B<sup>b</sup>mi<sup>7</sup>, and E<sup>b7</sup>. Both parts include measure numbers 3 and 4 above the staff.

Figure 7



**Figure 8**

Bley also regularly employed blues phrases, and his fondness for both the sound of the blues and the blues form itself is evident from his earliest recordings.<sup>33</sup> In this sample, blues fragments appear frequently, and an excellent example, shown in Figure 9, is from *Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), measures 95 – 97. This phrase would sound equally appropriate in a Charlie Parker or Lester Young blues improvisation. It is compared with a Charlie Parker phrase.

**Figure 9**

Bley also made use of the whole-tone scale, another staple of the jazz vocabulary. Amongst jazz improvisers the champion of this hexatonic scale was Thelonious Monk, and he made frequent use of it both in his compositions and his improvised solos. Improvisers generally employ this sound against augmented triads and augmented seventh chords, but Bley was a little more catholic in his choice of contexts for the scale. The example shown (Figure 10) is drawn from *All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 60 – 63. It is compared with a similar phrase of Thelonious Monk, drawn from a solo on his tune *Evidence*. Other examples of the whole tone scale in Bley's playing can be found in *All The Things You Are* (1963), measures 37 – 38, and *All The Things You Are* (1985), measures 61 – 64.

<sup>33</sup> The blues also plays a significant role in the music Ornette Coleman has made, and his affinity for both the form and the feeling of the blues led avant-garde saxophonist Archie Shepp to describe him as “the blues man.” His use of the blues tradition is explored in Lewis Porter’s paper *The “Blues Connotation” in Ornette Coleman’s Music – And Some General Thoughts On The Relation Of Blues to Jazz* (1995).

The figure consists of two musical staves. The top staff is labeled "Paul Bley: *All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 60 - 63". It shows a melody with several eighth-note groups, some of which are enclosed by vertical lines, indicating upper and lower neighbour tones. The bottom staff is labeled "Thelonious Monk: *Evidence* (1948), Blue Note CDP 830363". It also shows a melody with similar eighth-note groups and enclosure markings.

The figure consists of two musical staves. The top staff is labeled "Paul Bley: *All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 60 - 63". It shows a melody with several eighth-note groups, some of which are enclosed by vertical lines, indicating upper and lower neighbour tones. The bottom staff is labeled "Thelonious Monk: *Evidence* (1948), Blue Note CDP 830363". It also shows a melody with similar eighth-note groups and enclosure markings.

**Figure 10**

Enclosure phrases, sometimes referred to as the use of ‘upper and lower neighbour tones’ have been a part of the jazz argot since Louis Armstrong began recording. Many jazz improvisers have used this type of melodic embellishment during the past seventy years. One of the performers most proficient in their use was hard bop trumpeter Clifford Brown. Bley’s use of an enclosure phrase in Figure 11 is typical of his use of this particular melodic embellishment. It is compared with a similar phrase performed by Clifford Brown.

The figure consists of two musical staves. The top staff is labeled "Paul Bley: *Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), measures 45 - 48". It shows a melody with eighth-note groups and enclosure markings. The bottom staff is labeled "Clifford Brown: *Confirmation* (1954), measures 21 - 23". It shows a similar melody with eighth-note groups and enclosure markings, including a bracket labeled '3' over a group of notes.

**Figure 11**

Bley’s use of ‘altered dominant’ sounds, such as  $\flat 9^{\text{th}}$  tones against dominant seventh chords, or the super locrian scale<sup>34</sup> for more dissonant effect, also reveal his jazz heritage. In many places the use of chromatic passing tones gives his lines a jazz flavour, and in places the super locrian scale is used in its entirety. Figure 12, from *All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 89 – 91 is a clear example of this.

<sup>34</sup> The super locrian scale has been commonly used in jazz performance since the early 1940s, and is generally played against dominant chords resolving to their tonic chord (i.e. G7 to C major). It is the seventh mode of the melodic minor ascending scale; C super locrian is enharmonically equivalent to Db melodic minor ascending. It is also known as the ‘diminished whole-tone scale’, the ‘altered scale’ and in some circles as the ‘Pomeranian scale’.



Super Locrian phrase: *All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 89 - 91

Figure 12

Bley also makes regular use of the diminished scale, both to create a diminished tonic sound, and to suggest an ‘altered’ dominant (flattened 9<sup>th</sup>) tonality. These passages were often brief, comprising four or five tones, but in places, such as in Figure 13, they extended over a number of measures.

Diminished phrase: *All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 122 - 128

Figure 13

Considering Bley’s determination to make music that was part of the jazz tradition, it is not surprising that he puts many of these devices together to create lines that sound entirely consistent with the style of jazz he played during his formative years. These lines infuse Bley’s solos with a character redolent of bebop and hard bop jazz playing. Figure 14 shows a line from *Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), measures 70 – 75. This phrase includes; arpeggios, scalar lines, enclosures and ‘bluesy’ acciaciaturas, and clearly belongs within the jazz idiom.

Jazz phrase: *Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), measures 70 - 75

Figure 14

Clearly Bley’s choice of pitch material was largely located within the ‘jazz tradition’ and by drawing upon the conventions established by Louis Armstrong, Lester Young, Charlie Parker

and Dizzy Gillespie he created music strongly reminiscent of their styles. The way he utilised that material relative to the harmonic framework of the tunes marked his improvising as distinct from those earlier styles. This melodic concept, drawing on ideas that were related to Ornette Coleman's shift away from the hegemony of fixed harmony and tonality<sup>35</sup> heralded Bley's move beyond tonal music.

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<sup>35</sup> Cogswell (1995) commented that, "Although his motivic vocabulary comes directly from the vocabulary of swing, bebop, and rhythm & blues, Coleman strings these traditional motives together into novel metrical and melodic patterns. His innovation lies not in the creation of a new vocabulary, but in his redefinition of musical grammar and syntax" (p 109).

## Beyond tonal music

An important idea found in Coleman's music is that of 'erasure phrases'. Bley described these as being, "...where there were some phrases that were tonal and well-tempered, and some phrases that were deliberately not tonal and well-tempered" (Bley, Lee, 1999, p 67). Examples of these passages are found in many of Coleman's solos, and the performances of *Focus on Sanity*<sup>36</sup> and *Bird Food*<sup>37</sup> contain excellent examples. Bley elaborated upon this idea:

An 'erasure phrase' is meant to do nothing else except erase from your memory what you just heard...clean the blackboard, so to speak, before you write the next music. It's not there to tell you anything; it is there to make you forget. It's there to cleanse the palette.<sup>38</sup>

As a pianist, it was not possible for Bley to reproduce Coleman's erasure phrases, employing as they did 'unequal' temperament and micro-tonality<sup>39</sup>, yet he still managed to produce their *effect* in his solos from the early 1960s onwards. During *All The Things You Are* (1963) Bley repeatedly follows passages that are largely tonal with phrases of densely packed notes that do not register any particular tonal centre, phrases that are more like 'sound gestures' than coherent melodies. These lines obscure the tonality and sometimes unsettle the 'time' and so have an effect on the listener much like that created by Coleman when he played his non-tempered erasure phrases. Similar examples are found in *All The Things You Are* (1993), measures 133 – 141, *Long Ago And Far Away* (1985), measures 127 – 103 and in the same tune from 1993 in measures 101 – 105, 173 – 174, 188 – 203, and 221 – 223.

Bley claimed that to find out what to play, it was necessary to first identify everything that had been played before, and then to do something different.<sup>40</sup> This rigorously modernist aesthetic manifested even within his solos. Often, after playing an idea, he would stop, play an erasure phrase to 'erase the memory' of what had just been played, then move on to the next idea. These phrases were intended to confuse the listeners' sense of tonality and were effective to that end for several reasons. First, all such passages were played quickly and this serves to intensify their disorienting affect. Second, the subdivisions in use almost always varied subtly over the course of

<sup>36</sup> Coleman, Ornette. *Beauty Is A Rare Thing*. New York, Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1959 - 1961

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Bley has said, "[Coleman] could play A440, A444 or A436 or any A you wanted. Unfortunately I didn't have the flexibility that he had when it came to hitting A" (Smith, 1979, p 4). Perhaps this limitation of the acoustic piano was one of the reasons Bley was drawn to electronic music and synthesisers.

<sup>40</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001.

the phrase, and while they appear in the score as triplets or sixteenth notes, they often ‘fall between the cracks’ of these subdivisions. Bley observed:

[Jazz playing is about] being able to go from any of the ways to play time at any moment to a different way, informing each part of the music with something different, opposite. You need to be able to have that kind of control. I should, hopefully, be able to play so slowly that listeners are sure that I am not even playing time, when in fact I am playing an exaggerated form of ‘behind the time.’ I could also play an exaggerated form of ‘ahead of the time’ or right on the time. I can change that in a phrase: the first part of the phrase could be this aesthetic, followed by the second part of the phrase, which is another aesthetic.<sup>41</sup>

Third, erasure phrases also frequently contain pantonal (and at times atonal<sup>42</sup>) material. The effect of these various tonalities being juxtaposed in such a short period of time is harmonically disorienting and enhances the climate of uncertainty these passages generate. Figure 15, drawn from *All The Things You Are* (1963), measures 50 – 53, shows an erasure phrase moving through a variety of tonal centers largely at odds with the changes of the tune. In performance the effect is startling; it creates a sharp demarcation between the phrases that precede it and those that follow. Although this device was drawn from Ornette Coleman’s music rather than from twentieth century concert music<sup>43</sup>, it is not the only idea Bley utilizes from Coleman’s approach that has corollaries in Western art music of the last century.

Erasure phrase: *All The Things You Are* (1963), measures 50 - 53.

Figure 15

<sup>41</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001

<sup>42</sup> Atonal in this case refers to passages that have no fixed tonal centre, but that are not necessarily ‘serial’ in nature. In fact, there do not appear to be any strictly ‘serial’ passages in the music under consideration.

<sup>43</sup> It could be said these ideas are related to Bartók’s use of polymodal chromaticism and the atonal music of the Viennese school.

## Non-equivalence of pitch classes

Cogswell (1995) identifies alternation of register as an effective tool in Ornette Coleman's solos, concluding that its use: "displays an inspired balance between continuity and contrast" (p 134). While this is certainly the case, in Bley's performances such movements across registers also denote non-equivalence of pitch classes.

If you are sitting at a keyboard, you find a universe below middle C and a universe above middle C, and as Ornette [Coleman] said, they should have picked eighty-eight different names for the notes on the piano, because they are not really related. The fact that they give them the same names gives you a false way of viewing them. They are sound sources that are unlike each other; every note is different from every other note.<sup>44</sup>

A good example of this is found in *Long Ago And Far Away* (1985) in measures 65 – 72. Here Bley uses a simple octave motif that develops to become a minor 9<sup>th</sup> interval followed by a major 7<sup>th</sup>. The contrast between the lower note and the higher, and the greater weight it confers upon the music is arresting. Further, if the passage were re-written with the closest possible intervals (minor seconds) the phrase would lose its dramatic effect. (It is possible that Bley was in fact making a reference to the motif he played throughout his second chorus; the motif comprised of a repeated interval of a tone (measures 32 – 36), but was transposed and changed to a repeated semitone interval in measure 41 to accommodate the new register and tonal centre. Nevertheless, the passage suggests that pitch classes are not always considered equivalent in Bley's music.) Similar examples appear in *Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), measures 32 – 43 and compared with measure 37, and in a number of recordings not part of the sample considered here.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001

<sup>45</sup> Roger Dean's (1992) study of improvised music discusses the chords Bley plays, and contrasts his use of clusters with the motivic use of widely spaced intervals, noting that they, "...create a harmonic openness beyond the simpler implications of the pitches themselves when reduced to the closest spacing" (p 110). Dean identifies this as an awareness of "a lack of total equivalence of pitch sets" (p 110) and relates it to some of the timbral devices Bley uses.

## Thematic Unity

Paul Bley views improvisation and composition as the same activity. To him, a jazz musician is a ‘composer in real-time’ and he rejects the more traditional model of composers, noting:

This whole ethos of composers locking themselves up to produce a masterpiece is an old model, a pre-recording model. It’s not the model for the present. Nobody comes to your house and composes for you to make music.<sup>46</sup>

In light of this view, and considering Bley’s training in composition at Juilliard in the 1950s, it is not surprising to find techniques commonly employed by composers in the classical arena present in Bley’s improvised music. A notable example is in the area of thematic development and recapitulation. Just as these devices are effective in unifying scored compositions, they serve to create threads of thematic unity throughout Bley’s performances. While Smith (1982) regards with suspicion the possibility that this kind of thematic unity can be routinely, spontaneously improvised, other writers are more comfortable with the idea. Gunther Schuller’s advocacy of this view was declared in his paper *Sonny Rollins and Thematic Improvisation* (1958). Henry Martin’s (1996) study of Charlie Parker’s improvisations also uses this type of analysis and Jeff Pressing (1988) defends its use with his set-theory representation of improvisation, stating that, “Decision making in the [next moment] may in principle extend well back before [the present moment], depending upon the degree of pre-selection used by the performer, and will also extend slightly into the future...” (p 153). Whatever the arguments, however, there do appear to be a number of clear examples of thematic development and unity in Paul Bley’s improvisations. In some cases the themes developed are melodic in nature, but timbral and rhythmic ideas are also developed in this manner during his solos.

Clear examples of melodic material being developed are found throughout these solos, and it is particularly noticeable where motivic chain association is in play. Almost all of the examples of motivic chain association identified above are examples of local thematic development and as discussed, these lend the improvisations coherence and a ‘story-telling’ quality. In places, a single motif is developed over extended periods, creating considerable coherence. For example, during *All The Things You Are* (1993), a single motif is reworked and

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<sup>46</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001

developed over most of the first 36 measures. More rare, but of great interest, are the instances where Bley revisits a motif that has been developed earlier in a performance. In *All The Things You Are* (1963), Bley plays a small melodic cell in measure 62 that is repeated and developed until measure 66. After a short break, the motif reappears in measure 69 before the flow of the improvisation moves elsewhere. During the last few measures of the solo however, the motif makes a striking reappearance, subtly altered and transposed down a third. The effect of reintroducing this motif to end the solo creates a sense of closure and completeness that allows the music to settle at that point in the performance. A similar example is found in *All The Things You Are* (1985) where a four note descending motif is developed during the opening 8 measures of the performance. An almost identical motif (transposed and rhythmically altered, but using essentially similar pitch material) is introduced between measures 45 and 52, and in measures 89 – 91 another, related four-note descending motif is played before Bley ends the performance. In this final chain, the motifs are rhythmically identical to the phrase played in measures 48 – 51 but are organised chromatically.

A clear example of a timbral/rhythmic idea being re-introduced and thereby creating unity between several passages is found in *All The Things You Are* (1993) during measures 161 – 168 and 205 – 212. In these places Bley plays a passage that alternates single tones and groups of thirds. These cells are then rhythmically displaced (measures 162 – 164 and measures 206 – 208) before being resolved.

These instances of thematic recurrence are examples of compositional thinking during improvised performance, a hallmark of Bley's music.

Along with this kind of thematic elaboration, another device Bley employs and one he shares with Sonny Rollins, is the use of fragments of the melody to re-orient the solo to the song form. This enhances the melodic contour of the solos and increases their coherence. Examples of passages that refer to the melody of the tune are marked on the transcriptions, and occur in all but one of the performances. Taken together, these various approaches lend great variety and interest to Bley's improvisations.

## Processual Considerations

In *Homer, Gregory and Bill Evans? The Theory of Formulaic Composition in the context of Jazz Piano Improvisation* Gregory Smith (1982) observed that certain movements that fell naturally ‘under the hand’ recurred frequently in Bill Evans’ improvised performances and further, that Evans often shaped his lines in a manner that economised hand movement. Musicians are quick to acknowledge the primacy of the ‘motor memory’ of the hand during the act of improvising,<sup>47</sup> and commentators have used it as an explanation for certain aspects of improvisation. Gunther Schuller (2000) has opined that Ornette Coleman “plays as much ‘from his fingers’ as by ear” (p 230) and Jeff Pressing (1988) has offered a survey of the ideas and literature discussing motor memory in, *Improvisation: methods and models*. Paul Bley himself has consciously fostered the act of improvising without the conscious intervention of the intellect, allowing his hands to determine their passage across the keys. “The hand has its own desires... and they have a certain destiny that they feel as hands, leaving the brain aside.”<sup>48</sup> While it is far from clear that the hand can in fact operate in a manner entirely independent of the brain (and in the case of music-making, the ear), it is reasonable to concede that certain movements become familiar to the hands and that with familiarity these movements are more likely to be employed during improvisation than movements with which the hand is less familiar, or that are awkward or difficult to execute. While it would be revealing to study Paul Bley’s improvisations in the manner and to the depth that Gregory Smith investigated Bill Evans’ music, it is well beyond the scope of the present study. There are however, some very clear examples of what appear to be the ‘desires of the hand’ being allowed to influence the flow of the melodic line in Paul Bley’s playing. These examples warrant consideration, and reveal deeper patterns in his art.

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<sup>47</sup> David Sudnow’s essay *Ways Of The Hand* (1978) reveals a musician coming to terms with the primacy of the physiognomy and mechanical predilections of the hand in his development as a jazz musician. Sudnow makes a number of apposite observations that relate his experiences of this phenomenon: “...the fingers were...going places I could not find myself able to see I had specifically taken them” (p 84).

<sup>48</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001. Extracts from these conversations relevant to this idea are found in Appendix 1.



Figure 16

The transcriptions reveal a number of small melodic cells or formulae that Bley plays repeatedly over the course of several solos, two of which will be examined here. The first, found in Figure 16, is a common lick among jazz musicians, and can be found in solos by Clifford Brown and Charlie Parker, among many others.<sup>49</sup> In the transcriptions considered here, Bley plays this phrase with either C or F as the tonic (those using F as a tonic are marked with 'T' to distinguish them as having been transposed).<sup>50</sup> The fingering is (probably) identical in either key: 3123 or 3121 (depending on what follows), where 1 is the thumb of the right hand. The harmonic context of the motif varies. It occurs diatonically against F, C7 and Bb chords and, in slightly more chromatic settings, against the A<sup>b</sup> and Emin7 chords. Against the A<sup>b</sup> chord, the phrase is surprising only because of the presence of the A natural. This note passes quickly enough to be accommodated by the ear as a chromatic approach note to the Bb however; other than that the line is diatonic to the chord changes. Against the Emin7 chord, the line is quite chromatic but, if

<sup>49</sup> This phrase has appeared in tunes; for example in "Boplicity", by Miles Davis, 4 measures from the end. It is also present in Figure 3 of this paper, performed by Cannonball Adderley.

<sup>50</sup> Two other instances where this phrase is played in the sample are noteworthy. During *All The Things You Are* (1963), measures 84-84, Bley plays this phrase with D as the tonic, superimposing it over an Eb/Ab tonality. The strongly melodic nature of the phrase, played in a half-step/tritone relationship to the chord changes, creates up a strongly bi-tonal effect. During *Long Ago And Far Away* (1963), measure 50, Bley also uses this phrase. Tonally this example is reasonably diatonic, set against Amin7 – D7, but the passage is phrased in triplets, and the new rhythm casts the melodic cell in quite a different light.

chromatic but, if A7 were substituted for the Emin7 (V7 in place of ii7 [in the key of D], a common substitution), the line becomes diatonic to A ‘super locrian’ scale, a very suitable choice in jazz performance after 1945. When Bley includes this phrase, what is of great interest is the way he modifies its context, displaying a wide variety of ways both ‘into’ and ‘out of’ the motif. The lower two staves of figure 16 show how this fragment can be viewed as being embedded in a longer phrase. Musicians with a more formulaic, cliché-driven approach generally play longer passages that repeat phrases verbatim. Charlie Parker, for example, would often play short passages (about 8 – 12 eighth notes, though sometimes longer) that repeated note for note a phrase that had appeared in that or other performances. Bley however, seldom plays more than 4 or 5 notes in common with another passage before directing the line elsewhere. Bley’s determination to surprise the listener is clearly operating even at this very local level, not just in the broader gestures of the music. All of the phrases in the sample that use this melodic cell are shown in Figure 17.

A second melodic cell that appears frequently is shown in Figure 18. This small ‘bluesy’ fragment is a very common jazz cliché. Again, Bley finds a wide variety of ways ‘into’, and ‘out of’ the melodic cell, and he plays it in a variety of harmonic contexts. Generally the phrase is played in F major, and so creates a strong reference to the tonal centre. In one of the examples it is played against an E<sup>b</sup> chord, creating a Lydian sound. In the final (transposed) example, the motif, in F, is superimposed over a G<sup>b</sup> chord creating a very chromatic, dissonant effect. This passage appears to be part of an ‘erasure phrase’ however, and in this light Bley’s choice of pitch material is unsurprising. Once again, these passages are remarkable for their diversity. Even at this very local level Bley’s improvisations only briefly conform to formulae before the solos are directed along new lines.

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), 235 A<sup>b</sup>

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), 180 C<sup>7</sup>

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), 218 - T C<sup>7</sup>

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), 219 B<sup>b</sup>

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), 27 B<sup>b</sup>

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), 75 A<sup>b</sup>

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1985), 94 C<sup>7</sup>

*All The Things You Are* (1993), 89 - T Emi<sup>7</sup> (A<sup>7</sup>alt)

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1985), 119 F

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1985), 112 C<sup>7</sup>

Figure 17

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1985), 119 F

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1985), 112 C<sup>7</sup>

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), 96 F

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), 181 F

*Long Ago And Far Away* (1993), 218 - T C<sup>7</sup>

*All The Things You Are* (1985), 54 - T E<sup>b</sup>

*All The Things You Are* (1963), 23 - T G<sup>b</sup>

Figure 18

Sudnow (1978) would probably consider the diversity of contexts Bley finds for these melodic cells a reflection of the ‘hand’s desires’ (see footnote 40). With cognisance to Bley’s considerable experience as an improviser, experience that could be equated with ‘practice’, this idea corresponds to the view posited by Pressing (1988). Observing that it may seem reasonable to claim that, “Practice leads to apparently resource free automatic productions for consistent

processing but does not reduce (attentional) resources needed for a varied processing task” (p 140<sup>51</sup>), he adds this important qualifier:

...part of the result of extensive practice of improvisation is an abstraction to greater and greater generality of motor and musical controls to the point where highly variable , often novel, *specific* results can be produced based on the automatic use of *general*, highly flexible and tuneable motor programmes. (Pressing 1988, p 140)

The words “automatic use of” suggests that ‘the hand’ does in fact make these many and varied choices, creating interest and variety even at very local levels. While this argument is persuasive, especially considering how little time the mind has to make decisions during the flow of an improvised performance, Sarath’s (1996) arguments for intellectual involvement and decision-making remain compelling. Using Sarath’s ideas, and considering the frequency with which Bley appears to be making decisions about what to play, (a consideration supported by his claim that “everything is deliberate”<sup>52</sup>) it is reasonable to conclude that Bley’s conception is strongly ‘inner directed’ and this would suggest that the potential of a Retensive-Protensive (RP) temporality is great. The presence of melodic devices normally associated with composition (such as motivic development and thematic unity) further support the claim that Bley employs an RP temporality when improvising. Whatever the reasons for such variability at local levels with essentially similar pitch material (and there are other theoretical explanations for the use of formulaic elements not discussed here), Bley does play passages that lie well under the hand, often repeating hand shapes in the formation of his lines.<sup>53</sup> Further examples of common hand shapes being repeated over a passage occur in numerous passages throughout the sample, and are clearly identifiable in the instances documented in the Figure 19.

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<sup>51</sup> Quoting Schneider and Fisk (1983)

<sup>52</sup> Conversations with Paul Bley, 2001.

<sup>53</sup> Whether this is directed by the ‘desires of the hand’, or by the mind making choices (that may consider motor efficiency,) is something of a ‘chicken or egg’ debate, and is beyond the scope of this inquiry.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Measures in which ‘hand shapes’ are present</b>
<i>All The Things You Are</i> (1963)	27 – 31
<i>All The Things You Are</i> (1985)	48 – 51, 56 – 59, 89 – 91
<i>All The Things You Are</i> (1993)	45 – 50, 61 – 70, 161 – 168
<i>Long Ago And Far Away</i> (1963)	21 – 26
<i>Long Ago And Far Away</i> (1985)	65 – 70, 81 – 87, 97 – 104
<i>Long Ago And Far Away</i> (1993)	81 – 88, 113 – 119, 227 – 230

Figure 19

Other places where ease or efficiency of hand movement may be a formative element in the construction of the improvised line include; use of chromatically descending passages, frequent inclusion of scalar patterns employing diminished scales, and some instances of chord spelling.<sup>54</sup>

While it is difficult to draw any general conclusions from this data, it can be said with some confidence that Bley does regularly employ motifs that fall under the hands easily. In light of this, and considering that this trend is observable over a sample drawn from a long time frame, it is clear that any further work examining Bley’s improvisations would need to consider the process that gives rise to those performances, as well as the music produced by them.

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<sup>54</sup> Two other interesting examples of a ‘conditioned response’ are found in the sample under consideration. Bley plays a ‘standard’ introduction to *All The Things You Are* in both the 1985 and 1993 recordings, and plays a brief, presumably ‘worked out’ 4 bar tag at the end of *Long Ago And Far Away* (1963) and 1993. While these passages are treated very loosely, it is unclear what they signify. While it is possible that they reflect a ‘falling back into old habits’, they may also represent a ‘parodic repetition’ of a standard ideas. Such musical irony would be unsurprising given the humour and intelligence of Bley’s music.

## Conclusion

After his exposure to Ornette Coleman, Paul Bley abandoned the dominant paradigm of the time, which mandated that improvised lines sprang from the functional harmony of the tune. Instead he looked to Coleman's example as a means of generating melodic material for his solos. Generally, Bley's solos are characterized by a mixture of passages that observe the harmonic framework of the tune, passages that are consistent only with their own harmonic and melodic verities and passages of indeterminate tonality.

Several characteristics of Coleman's music are reproduced in these lines. Firstly, they stray from the chord progression of the tune, although at times they relocate themselves within those changes.

Second, the 'flow', evidenced by the way ideas throughout the solos follow on from one another reflect the motivic chain association that Ekkehard Jost (1974) identified in Coleman's music. More than a succession of phrases that may or may or not coincide with the chord changes, Bley's solos are coherent musical statements by virtue of the sure way in which he develops melodic ideas and motifs in a logical, 'story-telling' manner, and moves artfully from one set of ideas to the next.

Third, Bley employed erasure phrases to 'cleanse the palette' between distinct musical passages, as well as playing lines that suggested the non-equivalence of pitch classes in his music.

Finally, by employing a more democratic conception with regard to the roles of the instruments within the piano trio, an approach that mirrored Coleman's concept of ensemble jazz performance, he freed the instruments from their defined responsibilities in the context of the trio.

By embracing a freer harmonic concept, harmony became a by-product of Bley's improvised melodic lines (and not vice versa as was the case in many earlier jazz styles). Though his lines retained essential elements of the jazz language, they were filtered through his understanding of the advances made by Ornette Coleman. As a consequence, familiar materials appeared in unfamiliar contexts.

When consideration is given to the processual aspects of Bley's music, there is evidence that the use of formulae and 'stock' motifs were a formative element in his improvising style, and that motor memory may well have played a significant role alongside conscious decision making in his performances.

Although there have been subtle changes in Bley's approach to improvising since his first jazz recordings after working with Ornette Coleman, the essential elements of his style have been

present from that time. By building upon the ideas of Coleman, Bley pioneered a new approach to jazz piano that still holds promise forty years after it was first advanced.

Bley has the wonderful ability to allow his music to move where it will. The effect is one of total freshness, of music that has never been heard before and never will be heard again.  
(Balleras, 1985)

## Musical Examples: Transcriptions

Gunther Schuller has said that “notated musical examples are of course no substitute for the music itself”, and that in jazz music, “the written score is both impossible and – if scores existed – irrelevant” (Schuller, 1968, p x). These comments (and the issues discussed in the methodology section above) notwithstanding, for this study of Paul Bley’s music transcriptions of his improvised performances have been made. While transcriptions are an extremely useful tool in studying the pitch material in jazz piano performances, they are of questionable value in monitoring rhythms in the idiom. Traditional notation is too limited to reflect the complexity of what is played in this genre (or any genre in which the *performance*, rather than the *score*, is considered the final artefact) and at best we can produce a very rough sketch of the rhythms employed by the improvising musicians. In places where the feel is markedly ‘ahead of’ or ‘behind the beat’ a note appears above the stave to that effect. It is strongly recommended that these transcriptions be studied along with the recordings that accompany the text. In addition to the Bley performances in this collection, part of Ornette Coleman’s improvised solo has been included to illustrate points made in the text. All care has been taken to ensure that the scores are as accurate as possible. Generally the tonality of the passages has been marked beneath the stave, but in places where Bley’s lines are consonant with the chord changes tonality has *not* been specified. In places where Bley plays notes from a tonality other than the changes, but a tonality that is unsurprising in a jazz context (i.e. D super locrian against an Amin7 chord and the subsequent D7 chord) this is usually noted in brackets.

## Solos

Ornette Coleman:	<i>Chronology</i> (extract)	1959	47
Paul Bley:	<i>All The Things You Are</i>	1963	48
	<i>All The Things You Are</i>	1985	53
	<i>All The Things You Are</i>	1993	57
	<i>Long Ago And Far Away</i>	1963	65
	<i>Long Ago And Far Away</i>	1985	68
	<i>Long Ago And Far Away</i>	1993	73

# Chronology

Ornette Coleman solo: From 4 minutes 20 sec.

MCA Contour

MCA Contour

This phrase elides smoothly to the next

MCA Contour

This phrase is altered (through inversion) to segue to the next

MCA Contour

MCA Pitch (initial variation)

The musical score consists of six staves of music for a single melodic line. The music is in common time and uses a treble clef. The first two staves are connected by a bracket labeled 'MCA Contour'. The third staff begins with a bracket labeled 'This phrase elides smoothly to the next'. The fourth staff is connected by a bracket labeled 'MCA Contour'. The fifth staff begins with a bracket labeled 'This phrase is altered (through inversion) to segue to the next'. The sixth staff is connected by a bracket labeled 'MCA Contour'. The seventh staff is connected by a bracket labeled 'MCA Pitch (initial variation)'.

# All The Things You Are: 1963

MCA Pitch / Contour

1 Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

5 D<sup>b</sup> Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C Bb blues tonality E lydian

8 Cmin<sup>7</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> E lydian

11 B<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> C major E jazz minor

14 Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G Amin<sup>7</sup> E jazz minor Db major

18 D<sup>7</sup> G F#min<sup>7</sup> E jazz minor

22 B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7+</sup> Erasure phrase

Chromatic

E lydian

C major

E jazz minor

MCA Contour

E jazz minor

25 Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

Step Progression

29 D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> Bdim<sup>7</sup>

MCA Contour

Step Progression

33 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

Gb diminished

2 37 Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

MCA Pitch

Whole tone scale

Step Progression

41 D<sup>b</sup> Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C

MCA Contour

MCA Contour

45 Cmin<sup>7</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>

A lydian augmented (like)

49 A<sup>b</sup> Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G

Ereasure qualities

C Blues

E major / lydian

-----Erasure qualities-----

52 Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G  
B major Bb major B major

56 F#min<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup>  
A Ab Gb Ab Asus B A

59 E<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7+</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup>  
Ab Gb (-F?) E D C

62 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>

66 D<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> Bdim<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>

70 E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> [3] Fmin<sup>7</sup>

74 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>  
D major

MCA Pitch / Contour

MCA Repetition

MCA Pitch

MCA Pitch (initial variation)

78 Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C Cmin<sup>7</sup>

----- D major -----

82 Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

----- 1 -----

86 Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G Amin<sup>7</sup>

----- E major -----

----- Eb -----

----- D+ -----

90 D<sup>7</sup> G Erasure phrase

----- 1 -----

93 F<sup>#min7</sup> B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>7</sup> Whole tone scale

----- 1 -----

96 C<sup>7+</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>bmin7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup>

----- Whole tone -----

----- C major -----

100 A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>bmin7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> MCA Contour

----- MCA Contour -----

----- Eb diminished -----

----- Eb lydian -----

104 Bdim<sup>7</sup>      B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>      E<sup>b</sup>7

105

106

107 A<sup>b</sup>      [4] Fmin<sup>7</sup>

108

# All The Things You Are: 1985

MCA Pitch / Contour

Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup>

(retrograde)  
A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C  
(G7 altered)

Cmin<sup>7</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup>

E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G

Amin<sup>7</sup> Melody D<sup>7</sup> G

F#min<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7+</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup>

B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>

MCA Pitch/ Contour

Melody

53

MCA Pitch / Contour

30 D<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> Bdim<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>

Db7 Step Progression

MCA Contour

34 E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> 2. Fmin<sup>7</sup>

MCA Contour

38 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>

Erasure-like qualities

42 Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C

(G7 altered) C minor

MCA Contour / Pitch

45 Cmin<sup>7</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>7

(diminution)

48 E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup>

51 G Amin<sup>7</sup>

(D7 altered)

The musical score consists of six staves of music, each with a different key signature and time signature. Annotations are placed above the staves to explain specific musical techniques or progressions. Staff 1 (measures 30-33) shows a step progression from D<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> to B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>, with labels for 'MCA Pitch / Contour' and 'Step Progression'. Staff 2 (measures 34-37) shows a contour from E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> to Fmin<sup>7</sup>, with a '2.' label indicating a continuation. Staff 3 (measures 38-41) shows a contour from B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> to D<sup>b</sup>. Staff 4 (measures 42-45) shows a progression from Dmin<sup>7</sup> to C, with labels for 'Erasure-like qualities' and 'C minor'. Staff 5 (measures 48-51) shows a progression from E<sup>b</sup> to D<sup>7</sup>, with a '(diminution)' label. Staff 6 (measures 51-54) shows a progression from G to Amin<sup>7</sup>, with a '(D7 altered)' label.

54 D<sup>7</sup> G

57 F#min<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>7</sup>

MCA Pitch / Contour

60 C<sup>7+</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>7

Ab whole tone

64 A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup>

MCA Pitch (from 37)

68 Bdim<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>7

71 A<sup>b</sup>

3. Fmin<sup>7</sup>

(passing b3rds)

74 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C

MCA Contour

MCA Contour

80 Cmin<sup>7</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> Eb

85 A<sup>b</sup> Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G

89 Amin<sup>7</sup>

91 G F#min<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup>

95 C<sup>7+</sup> E<sup>7</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>bmin7</sup>

D<sup>b</sup>

99 E<sup>b7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>bmin7</sup>

103 Cmin<sup>7</sup> Bdim<sup>7</sup> B<sup>bmin7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup>

MCA Rhythm

melody

Melody

# All The Things You Are: 1993

MCA Pitch / Contour

1 Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

Chromatic

5 D<sup>b</sup> Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C Cmin<sup>7</sup>

Chromatic

MCA Pitch / Contour

10 Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup> E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> lay back Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> lay back

Chromatic

Melody

15 G Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G lay back

Melody

21 F#min<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7+</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>

MCA Pitch / Repetition

26 E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup>

Chromatic

30 Bdim<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

Chromatic

MCA Contour

37 [2] Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>

MCA Contour

42 Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C Cmin<sup>7</sup> lay back Fmin<sup>7</sup>

MCA Contour

47 B<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup> lay back A<sup>b</sup> Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G

MCA Pitch - initial variation

52 Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G

MCA Contour

57 F#min<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>+

MCA Contour

61 Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>

MCA Contour

66 D<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> Bdim<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>

MCA Contour

70 E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup>  
B+ Ab C+ D+ E+ F+ 3

74 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>  
E+ Eb+ D+ Db+ Fmin

MCA Pitch / Contour

78 Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C Cmin<sup>7</sup> 3 3 3  
C Blues 4

MCA Pitch / Contour

82 Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup> E<sup>b</sup>  
C Blues Chromatic

MCA Pitch / Contour

85 A<sup>b</sup> Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G  
Chromatic

88 Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G  
(D7 altered)

92 F#min<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup>  
C diminished

MCA Contour

95 E<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7+</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>  
A major

99 E<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>  
Db7 (blues)

103 Cmin<sup>7</sup> Bdim<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>  
chromatic C Blues

106 E<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup>

109 [4] Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>

114 Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C MCA Contour Cmin<sup>7</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup>

119 B<sup>b</sup>7 rush E<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup> Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup>  
(Bb7b9) (D7 altered)

123 G Amin<sup>7</sup>  
C diminished

MCA Contour / Rhythm  
126 D<sup>7</sup> G F#min<sup>7</sup>  
C diminished

B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7+</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup>  
C diminished

134 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> Erasure qualities A<sup>b</sup>  
C major C diminished

D<sup>b</sup> Erasure qualities Cmin<sup>7</sup>  
C major C diminished

140 Bdim<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>  
Chromatic B diminished

A<sup>b</sup> [5] Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>  
( Eb7b9 )

MCA Pitch (initial variation)

147 E<sup>b</sup> *lay back* A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C  
-----  
Ab major

MCA Contour / Rhythm

152 Cmin<sup>7</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup>  
-----  
Ab lydian

156 E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup>  
-----  
Ab lydian ----- C diminished

159 G Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G  
-----  
G blues ----- G minor ----- Gb major

MCA Contour / Rhythm

164 F#min<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>7</sup>  
-----  
Gb jazz minor ----- E major ----- Eb major

168 C<sup>7+</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup>  
-----  
D major ----- C diminished ----- Chromatic

172 A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> min<sup>7</sup>

175 Bdim<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> lay back  
 Chromatic

178 A<sup>b</sup> Fmin<sup>7</sup> [6]

182 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> MCA Contour / Rhythm

186 Dmin<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C Cmin<sup>7</sup>

190 Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup> E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> C diminished

194 Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G C diminished G blues

197 Amin<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G MCA Pitch / Contour

F major Gb major

The musical score consists of six staves of music for piano. Staff 1 (measures 175-177) shows a chromatic line with Bdim7 and Bbmin7 chords, followed by a 'lay back' section. Staff 2 (measure 178) shows an Aflat chord followed by a Fmin7 chord with a measure number 6 above it. Staff 3 (measure 182) shows a Bflatmin7 chord with a 'MCA Contour / Rhythm' instruction above. Staff 4 (measures 186-187) shows a Dmin7 chord followed by a G7 chord and a C chord. Staff 5 (measure 190) shows an Fmin7 chord followed by Bflat, Eflat, and Ab chords, with a 'C diminished' instruction below. Staff 6 (measure 194) shows an Amin7 chord followed by D7 and G chords, with 'C diminished' and 'G blues' instructions below. Staff 7 (measure 197) shows an Amin7 chord followed by D7 and G chords, with 'F major' and 'Gb major' instructions below. The score includes various performance markings such as slurs, grace notes, and dynamic changes.

201 F<sup>#</sup>min<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7+</sup>  
 ----- G major ----- Ab major -----

MCA Contour

205 Fmin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

209 D<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup>

Bdim<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> et cetera  
 212

# Long Ago And Far Away: 1963

MCA Pitch (initial variation)

F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

B major

5 1 F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

B major

MCA Pitch (initial variation)

9 F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

F diminished F jazz minor

13 A<sup>b</sup> Fmi<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>mi<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

C diminished

17 Cma<sup>7</sup> Ami<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

B diminished Chromatic

21 F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

MCA Pitch

25 F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

29 Cmi<sup>7</sup> F B♭ma<sup>7</sup> B♭mi<sup>7</sup> E♭ MCA Pitch

33 Ami<sup>7</sup> A♭dim<sup>7</sup> Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F C<sup>7</sup> MCA Pitch (terminal variation)  
B major

37 [2] F lay back Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> MCA Contour

41 F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F D<sup>7</sup> Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> Ab

45 A♭ B♭mi<sup>7</sup> E♭ A♭ G<sup>7</sup> MCA Contour  
---( G7)---

49 Cma<sup>7</sup> Ami<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> Tonal phrase  
Erasure qualities

53 F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Melody

58 Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> Cmi<sup>7</sup>

Melody

62 F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>ma<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>mi<sup>7</sup> Eb<sup>7</sup> Ami<sup>7</sup> Ab<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup>

66 Gmi<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F C<sup>7</sup> F

# Long Ago And Far Away: 1985

Melody

F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

6 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup>

11 A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C F Amin<sup>7</sup>

15 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

19 F C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> F

24 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup>

29 F A<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F [2] F

Performance instructions include: 8vb (octave below middle C), 8vb (octave below middle C), 3, Melody, and a bracketed section starting at measure 29.

MCA Pitch

34 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> 3 C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> F

MCA Pitch

40 C<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

MCA Pitch

45 C Amin<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

MCA Pitch

50 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

(Repetition)

55 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> F

59 B<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> F A<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

MCA Pitch (initial variation)

63 F (8<sup>va</sup>) [3] F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

68 Gmin<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

Uncertain tonality (Ab)

73 A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>7</sup> 3 3 (Ab)

MCA Contour

77 C Amin<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

MCA Pitch / Repetition

81 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> lay back C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

D major

85 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

D major

89 Cmin<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> F A<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup>

(C7b9)

94 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F 4 F

(C7b9)

MCA Repetition

98 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

104 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

108 G<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> Amin<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> F diminished (G7b9)

MCA Contour

112 C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

116 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F C<sup>7</sup> F F blues

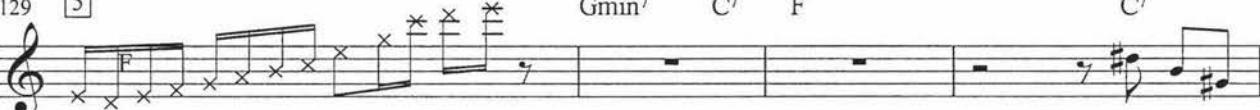
MCA Pitch / Contour

123 B<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> F A<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

-----Erasure phrase-----

127 F  
  
 -----F major----- | -----Uncertain tonality-----

-----Erasure phrase-----

129 [5] Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F C<sup>7</sup>  
  
 -----Uncertain tonality----- | -----

133 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F  
  
 -----B major----- | -----Ab major-----

MCA Contour -----

136 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>7  
  
 -----Ab major-----

139 A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C  
  
 -----

142 Amin<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>  


# Long Ago And Far Away: 1993

1. F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

MCA Pitch / Contour

6 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> rush slightly

10 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C Amin<sup>7</sup>

15 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

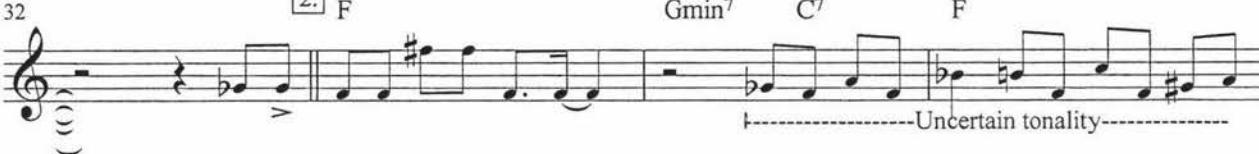
MCA Pitch / Contour

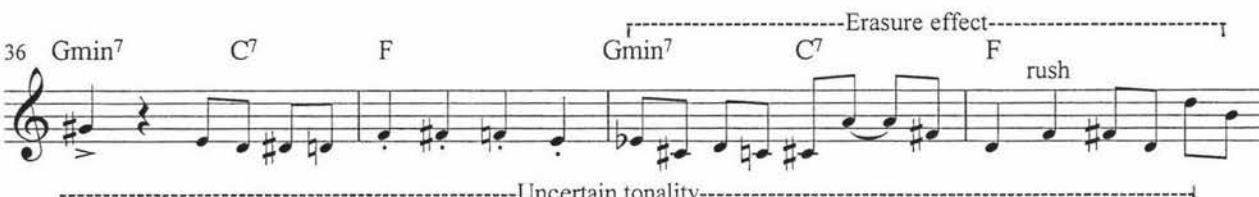
20 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

24 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>

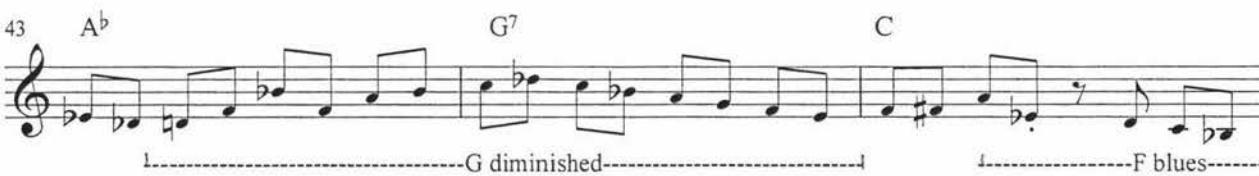
28 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>7 F A<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

MCA Pitch / Contour

32                    2. F                              Gmin<sup>7</sup>      C<sup>7</sup>      F  


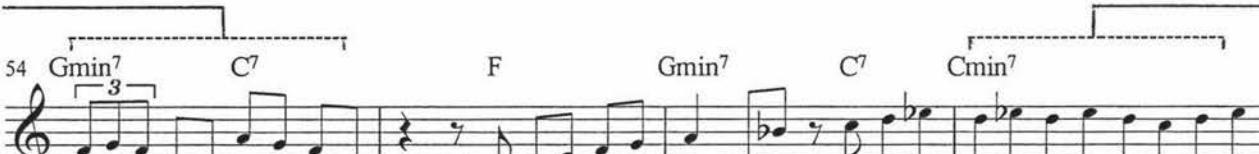
36    Gmin<sup>7</sup>      C<sup>7</sup>      F                      Gmin<sup>7</sup>      C<sup>7</sup>      F                      Erasure effect  


36    Gmin<sup>7</sup>      C<sup>7</sup>      A<sup>b</sup>                      B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>      E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup>  


43    A<sup>b</sup>                      G<sup>7</sup>                      C  


46    Amin<sup>7</sup>      Gmin<sup>7</sup>      C<sup>7</sup>      F                      Melody  


50    Melody      Gmin<sup>7</sup>      C<sup>7</sup>      F      Gmin<sup>7</sup>      C<sup>7</sup>      F      MCA Contour  


54    Gmin<sup>7</sup>      C<sup>7</sup>      F      Gmin<sup>7</sup>      C<sup>7</sup>      Cmin<sup>7</sup>  


MCA Contour

58 F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> 3

MCA Contour

61 F A<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

3.

65 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

F Blues

69 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F 3 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

F blues-----

73 A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup><sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

Bb major----- Db major-----

77 C Amin<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup>

B major----- E major----- F major----- E major-----

MCA Pitch

80 C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

E major----- --(?)--

MCA Pitch

84 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

MCA Pitch (variation)

88 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup>

92 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>7 F A<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>  
 -----G diminished----- -----F major----- -----Gb major-----

95 F 3 3 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>  
 (F blues)

4. F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

99 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>  
 -----harmonic ambiguity created by clusters-----

103 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup>  
 -----harmonic ambiguity created by clusters----- F major--

106 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C  
 -----Bb major----- G diminished----- Gb major-----

110 Amin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>  
Gb lydian E major

113 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>  
MCA Contour

117 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>  
F minor

121 Cmin<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup>  
(F7b9)

125 F A<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

5. 129 F C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>  
MCA Pitch (initial variation)

133 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>  
F blues gesture but uncertain tonality

137 A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

F blues B / B lydian

141 C Amin<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup>

C7 altered G diminished

144 C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

G diminished Chromatic

148 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

Chromatic

152 C<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup>

Erasure phrase

155 B<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup>

Erasure phrase

Bb jazz minor

158 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F

Erasure phrase

161 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

MCA Rhythm / Timbre (initial variation)

165 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

Step Progression - mainly in F major

169 A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup> min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup> C<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

Step Progression - mainly in F major

Erasure phrase

172 G<sup>7</sup> C Gmin<sup>7</sup>

MCA Pitch (initial variation) \*

176 C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

Chromatic

179 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

C blues (C7b9)

183 F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup>

\* Motif from measures 128 - 133

187 B<sup>b</sup>

Erasure phrase

Bb jazz minor A lydian augmented Chromatic E major Chromatic

190 Gmin<sup>7</sup>

Erasure phrase

G jazz minor A major Chromatic D major

7. 193 F

Erasure phrase

D major B major

196 Gmin<sup>7</sup>

Erasure phrase

G jazz minor A minor G jazz minor Eb jazz minor

199 F

Erasure phrase

E major G minor Uncertain tonality

202 B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup>

Erasure phrase

Uncertain tonality (C7b9) F minor

206 Amin<sup>7</sup>

F minor

210 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F  
 -----F minor----- -----E major----- -----C7 altered-----

214 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> Cmin<sup>7</sup>  
 -----C diminished----- -----E major----- -----F minor-----

218 F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup>  
 -----Bb minor----- MCA Contour

221 F A<sup>b</sup>dim<sup>7</sup> Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F  
 -----C diminished----- Chromatic ----- Db lydian augmented ----- Erasure phrase

224 8. F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F  
 -----C minor / F dominant----- C blues ----- F minor-----

228 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F  
 -----F minor----- F# diminished ----- C minor ----- E lydian ----- Ab major ----- MCA Pitch / Contour

232 Gmin<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>min<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup>  
 -----Ab major----- G major ----- A major ----- E<sup>b7</sup>

235 A<sup>b</sup>

Bb jazz minor----- G diminished----- A major-----

238 Amin<sup>7</sup>

A major----- Gmin<sup>7</sup>-----

240 C<sup>7</sup>

F-----

F blues-----

## **Appendix 1: Interviews with Paul Bley**

The following transcriptions are part of a series of interviews conducted with Paul Bley between January and May 2001. The full transcriptions run to nearly 30 000 words from 6 hours of discussions. In the interests of brevity, only extracts germane to the recordings examined in this paper are included, along with Bley's comments regarding 'the desires of the hand'. Bley listened to the recording of each performance (**bolded**) before responding to the questions.

### **Paul Bley With Gary Peacock: Long Ago And Far Away [1963]**

Terrible piano, huh? I did this recording myself, and sold it to Manfred Eicher of ECM for one of his early records. But in fact this was just done at a recording studio in New York, and it had none of the finesse of Manfred's productions. So even though it's an ECM record, don't hold that against Manfred.

*Do you like the performance?*

I love the performance. I've liked everything I've made after 1960. I hate everything I made pre-1960. So there was that margin, which fell at the point of the final performances with Ornette. There are a variety of techniques in here. I don't play melodies anymore, so you would be hard pressed to tell the name of this song if I were to play it now, even if I didn't change the solo. In terms of analysis, you are dealing with an AABA song form, eight bars each. So there are three similar curves, and the curve of the bridge, which is unlike the other three. You are playing basically in F for three of the sections, and how the particular song was written originally to go around the key of F, its journey through and around the tonic of F was particular to that composer, but there is no end of ways to go around it. When you are playing a piece of music in jazz there is no need to play the same set of chord changes for the second A as you did for the first A. It's good to re-invent the way you get around the piece, although keeping true to the original form, which is the tonic, F in this case, and the four eight bar sections. You wouldn't want to play those sections the same way all the time. When somebody re-harmonizes a tune, like Bill Evans for example, unfortunately, having done that, he was stuck with that re-harmonization forever. The aesthetic of the improviser is to compose a new way to get around the changes for the first part, then find another way for the second part and so on. So it's good to attack the form, and give the player more and more license. Another question that a performance poses is 'how

are your eighth notes'. A criticism of jazz players is that they use series of eighth notes called 'bebop' that go on forever. Well, there are a lot of ways to group notes rhythmically other than an open set of eighth notes. You could play a bunch of fast notes squeezed together and then a long silence, then one long note. Variety is essential. The human being stays awake if you keep throwing surprises at it. The moment you are predictable, that's the moment they tune out, so a player must always examine what they do in terms of predictability. If you play fast, you need to play slow, if you play things squeezed together you need to play some things widely spaced. If you are going to play long notes that don't change pitch, you will want something that changes pitch quickly. If the intervallic relationships you use are close by each other, within an octave or two, then you will want to make them wider. You need to always ask yourself, "What am I not doing while I am doing this? What hasn't happened while I have been doing this?" The next question is, "When will I get to what it is that I am not doing." Infinite variety keeps the listener off-guard. They will stay engaged. If you keep changing the listener will stay with you as long as you want. But the moment you play the second piece again, as the sixth piece say, they have to decide if the baby-sitter needs attention, or parking meter, and so forth, because the concert is over as far as they are concerned: they've heard that piece, just under a different name with a slightly different melody earlier. That applies to performing, and even greater innovation is required when you make a record. You have to make a record that is not already recorded in the history of music. So while you are playing you have to be thinking, "Has this been recorded previously?" or even worse, "Did I play this before?" All this while you are being inspired and not using your brain!

*On this recording you were working with Gary Peacock and Paul Motian, and of particular note is the amount of listening occurring between the musicians, and the very democratic nature of the performance. Do you lead one another, or were you taking 'leadership' during the piano solo? How does it work?*

We attack each other. We attack the premise of how we individually would normally proceed. For instance, I attack the idea of drum solos. When you study the drums you learn all this garbage, paradiddles and what have you, all of these things that are not musical that happen to be drum technique. They are useful in wartime, but when you are a drummer in this trio then you are playing with ideas all around you, and it becomes incumbent upon you to play ideas. Beethoven's fifth started with an idea. It was only two notes, but the idea was vivid enough to span the ages. Music is just like speaking. There is language and there are ideas. If we talked for a long time and I didn't get anything and you didn't get anything then we were just talking language. If you came

away with even one idea that was useful to you then the exchange was about ideas. Between ideas it's good to leave silence: that's the frame to the photo. So we attack each other in terms of ideas. If someone is going to interrupt another player to play something, it better be as good an idea as the one they interrupted. The whole idea of playing a solo, which is fun in itself, is a question of, "who has the most to say at the moment." It's not because it's a point in the piece where it's 'solo time'. That implies that that part of the music is the most important part for that player, and the other parts are not as important. Guiffre destroyed those boundaries: in pure counterpoint everyone is equal. An analogy is six people sitting down to have dinner. Two of them are younger and are a little intimidated by the flow of the conversation of their elders. In good counterpoint, if the younger people did not contribute equally to the flow of the conversation, the elders would cease speaking until they did. It is not the fault of the people who don't participate in the counterpoint, it's the fault of the people who are not giving them room to enter. In music, the audience is imperative in this situation, because the audience judges the performance by its worst piece, and judges the ensemble by its worst player. So if you are up there being brilliant, and somebody on your stage is not being brilliant it's your fault, because the audience judges your performance by the worst performance on the stage. They don't give you the benefit of any doubt. So on the stage, the priority is making the weakest player stronger.

*During this version of 'Long Ago And Far Away' you made a number of references to the melody during your solo. Could you comment on that?*

At that time, and this is one of the very earliest ECM recordings, we did play melodies. My feeling these days is that if you can tell what song we are playing, we are not doing our job properly, even if you are a pianist sitting beside my left hand and are listening to a piece you have played for years. If at the end of the performance you say, "What was that piece?" then we have succeeded in really re-working the piece. I don't want to play every section as it was written: I am trying to change as much as possible. It's re-composition, essentially.

I gave up playing popular songs when I got to free jazz, and used to confine my concerts to just free music. One day I got a report from my agent saying, "you know, they flew you all the way to Vienna and you only played thirty minutes." I said, "I hadn't realized it was only thirty minutes, but the band before me had played ninety minutes when they were only supposed to play sixty, so I just filled in the extra thirty". That didn't sit well with everybody, flying me across the ocean for thirty minutes. So the next night I was playing in a club in Europe and I decided to have a crack at bringing back some of the material I used to play, some songs, as I used to know just about every song that was ever written. You see the only thing you have to remember about popular

songs was how they differed from each other. So I had a giant repertoire to draw from, especially if I wasn't going to play the melodies, and the report the next day was that Bley had played a two and one half hour set, instead of the thirty minutes he played a couple of nights before. I realized that I could bring this repertoire back and play these songs and extend the repertoire for performance. I could play one free piece, one standard, one free, one standard, and so on. They enhanced each other because they were two different disciplines. The listener doesn't care what discipline or technique you are using, that's not really a concern for them. Their only concern is whether they are engaged. So putting standards back into the repertoire was an interesting solution.

### **My Standard: Long Ago And Far Away [1985]**

*In this performance there were about sixteen bars of recognizable melody before you moved elsewhere.*

Well, we played through the chords of the song. We paid dutiful respect to the shape of the song, in that we may have suspended things over the shape, but they would always resolve back to the shape of that song. If you hummed the melody of the song over the entire performance you would be at the right point of the song at all times. That's the bottom line: we didn't just get into free improvising after playing the melody of the song. That is a technique that you can use, and Prince Lasha, a peer of Ornette's in the 1950s, called that 'melodic improvising', where he would just play a few bars of a written melody, and then break into a long free section before returning to next few bars of the melody, picking up from where he left off. There might be twelve minutes between fragments of melody! That never appealed to me but it was certainly another approach to the deconstruction of the music.

*On the Steeplechase label you have often recorded standard tunes, and you seem to always be faithful to the structure of those tunes, thirty-two bars or what have you.*

For the sake of the bassist, who may want to play that song, since I called it in the first place.

*There are a number of recognizable 'jazz' techniques on this recording: chord spelling, arpeggios, and enclosure phrases. There are also passages where you superimposed new tonalities over the existing changes, but that were very diatonic, modal and in Db, for example. There were also blues phrases and passages that seemed to have no fixed tonality and unsettled rhythms.*

There are certain skills that I was able to bring to the playing of standards after having worked with Ornette. Don Cherry, as a virtuoso trumpet player, had the ability to play faster than the time and slower than the time. Before that there were people who always played slower than the

tempo, or right on the tempo or faster than the tempo, but almost nobody before Don could do any of the three at any time they wanted to. So to be able to play ahead of the piece and then wait, or play way behind the piece and then catch up, this elasticity really spells out most of what I do rhythmically. It is a skill that I developed, though with some effort. In the past rhythmic playing was very straightforward. At the time of Django Reinhardt rhythm sections played exactly on the beat, so the guitar players played the time, almost the way you would write it. It was on the beat and bass players would play on the beat. In swing music, a little later, the bass player would play behind the time: that was an innovation at that time. Later still, the idea was to play ahead of the time: bebop was always ahead, the snare drum and ‘kicks’ of the left hand were always goading the music forward. So there were periods that emphasized the various ways of conceptually thinking of time. The idea of deciding before you played a phrase whether you wanted this phrase to be faster than, slower than, or right at the speed of the piece was a wonderful and liberating thing to add to what it was that you were doing. This is just a rhythmic consideration: it’s not harmonic. There was still a lot to do with standards if you could bring these disciplines into play. The work with Rollins was wonderful in this way because Rollins could really chew up a standard, to the point where Coleman Hawkins couldn’t tell what to do, even on a tune he had recorded twelve times twenty-five years earlier! He had to turn to me, and say, “Paul, please help me out. When it’s my turn to play will you please nod me in. I can’t tell when the chorus’ are over.” When Coleman Hawkins can’t tell when the chorus is over there is really something going on! Rollins only did that at key times. Talk about holding back. He held back with me for eleven months after the initial audition at Birdland. He played badly for eleven months until the next record date, when I expected him to play equally badly, and that was the next note of real music he played after his performance when he enticed me into the band. He saved it up for a whole year and then on the record date played better than he had ever played before, or since actually. It completely mystified Coleman Hawkins, but I was ready for him. I had worked on a few inter-personal techniques, and so I knew when the record date really was, and I wasn’t preparing for a cancelled record date. He cancelled the date four times in a row to throw everybody off their’ best performance. In those days the bandleader was the enemy. ‘Co-operative’ was not in the lexicon.

*Did that make for better music?*

I think so. Competitiveness really works well because they’re throwing the kitchen sink at you and you’re throwing the kitchen sink at them, and ‘may the best man win.’ It’s just wonderful. It’s cutting edge and you are really awake when it’s like that.

### Sonny Meets Hawk: All The Things You Are [1963]

Coleman Hawkins was wonderful. He got going for a couple of choruses. He was always interested in newer players and encouraged all the newer players in New York even though he was the top dog. It was very generous of him. The thing that strikes me is the freshness of the idea of elongation. The mystery, in my playing, was how I always came back to the right place in the tune. The phrases prior to that return were so stretched out that ‘only his Doctor knew for sure’. Then I would hit the right chord right on the beat where it belonged, and you’d think, “Well, how did he get back to that point?” The idea was stretching that ‘rubber band’ so far that even though you were following the changes and at the same time following a parallel universe [of the improvised line], they were so closely related that I could skip from one to the other at any given second and do it with authority. It was that elasticity that astounded the New York players when this was recorded. Prior to that time, that elasticity was considered a conceit of sorts, but on the stage of these accepted masters, it became clear that they were also using these techniques, it just hadn’t been done by pianists because usually when a pianist takes a solo in a band that includes a saxophonist or a trumpet player, its time to go outside and have a smoke because nothing is going to happen of interest. You could say the same of bassists prior to this time, with a few notable exceptions. The rule of thumb was, this is the time to leave the premises, and come back when the real action happened. That was something I never agreed with personally! [laughter] Piano and bass solos weren’t considered that ambitious. So that was fun, hearing the elasticity work so well. Of course, I didn’t play the song at all. Not only was I ‘elastically’ away from the song, I never really bounced back, and when I did for a moment, it would be startling. “Oh! He knew where he was!” I always knew where I was, that’s what gives that kind of elasticity meaning. You are pulling [from] a center that exists, although it’s not always recognizable in the elasticity of the moment. So not only can the lines be faster or slower than the tempo, they can be drawn so that they are neither faster nor slower than the tempo. It just exists above and over an existing harmonic discipline which can be very severe and very strict.

*There is a harmonic elasticity in this solo as well.*

Yes. The idea is that you are going from point ‘A’ to point ‘B’, and its totally up to you what you want to do in that interval, so long as you leave point ‘A’ and you arrive at point ‘B’. I call that ‘harmonic improvising’. Improvising doesn’t need to be confined to melodic and rhythmic improvising, why not include harmonic improvising? And if an idea occurs in an improvising

context, it shouldn't happen again, it should only happen at that one point, that way it keeps its freshness and its surprise. You haven't reharmonised the piece, you have just improvised a harmonic innovation in a piece. That keeps it in the spirit of improvisation.

*When you moved to new tonal centres, were there functional harmonic considerations that moved you there, or were you thinking about these chords as abstract sounds or new harmonic 'places' that you could go to?*

It's really a question of how strictly you want to adhere to the discipline of the written song. You can decide that in advance. You can decide that, "This song suggests to me this key change at this point, because it's built into the written song, so I will respect *that* change at that time, but nothing else."

*During your solo you played some ideas that were related to some of the ideas that Coleman Hawkins had played just prior to your solo; you had obviously been listening to his solo. Was that something that you were consciously doing only at that time, or something that you have continued to do?*

There's no need to bring your own set of inspiration to the bandstand if you are playing with geniuses. It's already going to be inspired, you just have to listen. To be able to pick-up on somebody else's idea, and further elaborate it is an added finesse. If I play what the other musicians played, and add to it, continuing the ideas, that's an extra skill. I am not just bringing my own particular universe to your recording, I am taking your universe and adding to it, instructing it. I am saying, "You were only this flexible. I can take what you did and make it even more flexible. I can play your ideas, and squeeze them together more, or stretch them out more. I can continue the process. I can instruct and inform you as a player." Remember, a white musician in a black musical world had to be able to instruct the other players, who were already geniuses. You had to play better than them to be allowed on the bandstand. If you didn't play as well as them you could get a job as accompanist if you were black, but if you were white it wasn't just a question of playing as well as them, you had to be able to inform them. Sonny came in just after my solo and erased everybody because he loved confrontation. With the fur flying between Hawk and myself, Sonny came in and said, "Oh yeah? You guys won't even know what room you are in when I get through." Luckily, Hawk didn't have to follow that solo. Talk about deconstruction. I love Sonny Rollins, which is why I chose him over Miles. I tell that story about that night in Birdland, when the call had gone out in New York. The hiring process in New York City at that time, which was 1961, didn't involve someone calling you up on the phone and saying, "Would you like this job?" The word was sent out through the grapevine that you were invited to come to

a performance that was already extant, and you could sit in on the performance and somebody else would sit in and the leaders would choose who would play with whom. So on Monday night at Birdland it was the Sonny Rollins Quartet and the Miles Davis Quintet. I thought, out of respect to Sonny, that he needed companionship in this ‘deconstruction of standards’ period, because he had just failed the test of playing totally free music in the band he had with Don Cherry, and he later went back to standards with Jim Hall, and that was too simple, so I was the third player in that situation. I thought it would be useful to explore this area because free jazz had over-taken standards, before standards had contributed all that they could. We went from simple standard playing to totally free playing without doing standards that had some harmonic freedom in terms of their construction. So this was an opportunity to play in a situation with masters who played standards as well as anybody on the planet and further de-construct them, which would keep them alive for another decade or two. On the other hand you had Miles on the bandstand with Herbie. Either one of us could have done either job, and both of us had already toyed with the idea of playing with these people. Herbie would have done a beautiful job with Rollins, and did do so later, but not in a way that was very challenging to Rollins; he did a traditional job in the recording studio with Rollins. By picking Sonny I realize that I had short-circuited my career because it turned out that anybody who had played with Miles immediately had the stamp of approval of that decade, if not two or three decades later. A stamp of approval is a dangerous thing however, because it validates what you are already doing and you never want to have that happen in music; you always want what you are doing to be threatened so that you have to keep moving. For me it was very productive playing with Sonny, and it turned out that it was very productive for Herbie to play with Miles. It was a happy choice, and it amazes me to this day that Herbie gave me the choice as to who I would like to play with. That was unbelievably gracious and totally unknown in the world of Rollins and his cutthroat, competitive, prize-fighting style.

*There are places in this solo where you play lines reminiscent of tone rows. Do you think you may have used some rows in this solo?*

That’s an, ‘after the fact’, consideration. When improvising you play things you hear because you like the way they are going to sound, and whether they are a row or not is really irrelevant. In analyzing in terms of rows we peaked at the turn of the century. They were a means of freeing people from the dominance of triadic playing. That freedom hasn’t appeared in the jazz world; just turn on a jazz performance and you’ll hear nothing but triads. *Wagner-over-all-of-us!*

*Is the sound of tone rows something that you like, and include in your playing?*

Well, I like to destroy triadic harmony. You could call that ‘row-playing’, but it’s certainly not strict row playing; I don’t write them out in advance. Atonality and tonality are the flipside of each other, one informs the other. If you are going to make something very beautiful you can’t keep doing it because at a certain point it becomes saccharine, so you have to play something ugly after you have played something beautiful, so that beautiful still sounds beautiful when it re-enters. There is no unlimited duration for something; you are always playing something off another thing, perhaps its opposite. It goes back to the idea of, “What am I doing now, and when will I stop doing it and do its opposite?” The number of ‘opposites’ you have control of is ‘your bag’.

*Anything you would like to add regarding this recording?*

The difficulty was not playing with them [Rollins and Hawkins], the difficulty was staying alive in the social context in which they functioned. If your bandleader was against you socially and was always threatening your existence by challenging your security, you had to learn how to cope with that and predict in advance their moves in order to limit their effectiveness. All of this was before you got on the stage. I learned such great lessons on inter-personal relationships from these giants - Mingus, Rollins, Monk - from the way they dealt socially. It was very informative. Nothing was ever fixed, there was nothing you could be sure of, there was no behavior pattern to be expected, and that was always reflected in the music. That is what kept it so challenging and so provocative.

*A final note on that recording: I have heard that Pat Metheny was quite influenced by your solo on this track.*

Yes. I would say across the whole New York City school of jazz it was widely spoken of as being important in terms of raising the bar for what was expected from an improvised performance on a standard.

#### **My Standard: All The Things You Are [1985]**

What I got from the performance, as opposed to the earlier version [with Sonny Rollins], was that there was a lyrical romanticism that existed for a few moments here and there that superceded any lyricism or romanticism that was on the earlier performance. That bloomed a decade later as a serious, exaggerated romanticism that exists now as a parameter that I may use in a piece. In the early recordings I could be sour for the entire performance, but now I can mix equal quantities of very sweet and very sour playing and create even more dramatic contrasts. One thing that I have worked on was to be able to do what I was doing longer, so although I

touch on different things in the earlier performances, rhythms that interested me, and so forth, but also in terms of emotion, the later performances allowed me the license to be banal.

*Does that require a particular focus or is that a conceptual issue?*

It's just a question maturing over time. You allow yourself more and more liberties. I include material now that I would have rejected earlier as not being appropriate. If you accept the idea that the listener is just weighing the difference between one thing and another, and if you are able to play them equally for longer, then you have more of a balancing act that you can do. In other words I'm saying, "Listen to this, this is intellectual," and then I am saying, "Listen to this, it's just supposed to move you emotionally." By being able to do that for equal durations I have more control, more command of what it is about.

*Your playing has certainly become more beautiful over the years. Do you think that blossomed in the 1990s?*

Well, once you master a certain set of skills, rhythmic skills, elongation and so forth, you don't have to keep making that point. The question becomes, "What other points are you going to make? What other skills are you going to acquire and utilize equally with the other things you are doing?" Romanticism was something that I had left out as a color in my performances. 'How romantic?' was the next question. I found that I could get very romantic and satisfy emotional needs. The final judge of a live performer is, "Can they make the audience cry?" So the joke in Italy is, "Is it a three hanky concert or a five hanky concert?" In some cases, when you play in Lubiana for example, the audience needs to cry because they have relatives in the war and that is just a short train ride away. When they assemble in a hall and you are playing for them, making them cry is very therapeutic. You are giving them a license to cry, it's a concert. That's the point of that performance in that place. If you are looking for the reason, "Why do you play?" Well, different reasons for each room and each date on the calendar.

*Much has been made of the political impulse of free jazz in the 1960s. Some writers have claimed that much free jazz, particularly that made by African Americans, was a politically motivated cry for freedom. Was that the 'point of' or 'the reason for' that music?*

Very much so. Some of the black leaders had to divorce their white wives because it was politically unacceptable in the 1960s to not marry into your own race. The black people had been cursed in that they were unable to produce leaders who survived. The idea that you have to have a religious person as your leader because they are the only ones protected from assassination is self-defeating. In the case of Martin Luther King or Malcolm X that still wasn't sufficient. The 1960s were all about that, and protests about that. Music was also very protest oriented.

*Was that political impulse an important part of the Jazz Composers Guild in New York?*

Well, it was certainly surrounded by very active political people. I remember having meetings with the Guild that started around ten or eleven at night and at five in the morning Cecil or Sun Ra would still be raving. They could do that easily, and for good reason. Us non-blacks were really observers to the process. To create a leader you have to go to amateurs, someone who is incompetent because they have never had the helm of the ship is now going to be in front, and they are going to be cannon fodder. They have to stumble along and you have to promote within the group, which is why all the sympathetic non-blacks were excluded from the group, not because they weren't helpful or they weren't useful at the time but because it was necessary to promote from within. Now we have a black middle-class that can speak very well about its concerns and communicate to non-blacks their humanity, which is what art is really about.

### **The Desires Of The Hand**

*The use of wide intervals is a characteristic of your music, and they create a harmonic openness that implies more than those pitches would if reduced to the closest possible spacing. Is this non-equivalence of the pitch-classes a product of your studies in composition?*

No, they are related to my studies in physiology. The hand has its own desires, and that was very much an influence on designing a style for accompaniment for free music. The hands rest on the right and left side of you at rest, and they have a certain destiny that they feel as hands, leaving the brain aside. And the wide intervals are where they sound the best, especially in the bass register. When you go below middle C, intervals less than a fifth become very muddy so one tends to write in fifths (or sometimes fourths) or wider intervals. If you carry that one step further then melody can also be conceived in wide intervals, which gives you a different take on melodic construction. This is in opposition to the scale-like intervals that are often used. That approach comes with practicing music by practicing scales. A scale is a very ugly thing and it's a very bad discipline to be letting your ear hear bad music in the name of technique. So you have to attack the word technique. This is one of the reasons that you don't want to work on technique. The other reason is that it is not a question of *how* to play something, or a question of technique, but a question of *what* to play, because you are a composer in real time. The *how* will follow the *what*. If you decide what to play and what aesthetics to use in your choices then the *how* will follow. There is a basic advantage in not being able to play well, in that if your music is very simple then you are less likely to play bad notes. The more notes you play the more likely you are to play a lot of bad ones. By limiting your choices you improve the result of the music. I went

through a period in my life when rather than trying to make my music sound better I started eliminating things that didn't sound good and everyone said that I had made a great improvement, but what I had done was just house cleaning.

*You mentioned that 'the desires of the hand' were useful in accompanying free music.*

I reached a crisis somewhere in the mid-1970s and needed to find a new way to play. Jazz had gone from triads to fourths with Coltrane and McCoy Tyner, with the harmony built on fourths. I realized that this was elementary, because if you were to use that as the *modus operandi* the next thing to come would be harmony using fifths, then sixths and sevenths. It seemed really absurd. Guiffre's idea about harmony was that there was no harmony; there was only simultaneous melody. The joke I like to tell is that you have only twelve notes to use, and eleven of them sound good in any combination, so what's your problem? The hands present an interesting idea. Being a pianist I have tried to find a playing style and an accompanying style for the left hand, and the real question is what is the function of the left hand. We know what it has been in jazz; it was stride piano, swing bass, then in bebop it was sort of snare drum accents, as if you were a bebop drummer. There was less and less use of the left hand and it began to be less and less important as jazz became more modern. Not having any role models to draw upon – Cecil Taylor used both hands but Cecil was really a vibraphonist, and his biggest influence was on drummers – but somebody who considered themselves a pianist in a pianistic way, my question was, "What's the function of the left hand in free music?" Rather than fabricate an answer or compose an answer, since there were no precedents I decided to let my left hand give me the answer. So I began playing the first piece of every concert as a solo for left hand. Now the first thing you think of is to duplicate everything you would normally do with the right hand, and that's difficult to do because you don't really play with two hands in Bebop music, you play with one hand and accompaniment, so that didn't seem like a good idea. Rather than stretch the left hand to duplicate the right hand, I said, "well, in electronic music to duplicate the right hand you just push a button and it gives you an octave divider, and its not really that useful. Creating an 'acoustic octave divider' didn't seem like the right way to go. I knew a lot of things that were not productive, so rather than try and invent my way out of the situation I would just let the left hand do what it felt comfortable doing, which is the opposite of the classical technique where you force the left hand into right hand patterns. You are equally virtuosic and you belabour it until it produces tendonitis. I have found a solution to the problem of tendonitis: never practice. Practice means forcing the hand to do something it doesn't want to do, learning some music by a show-off virtuoso who is doing un-pianistic things with the left hand and writing it out and giving it to

people to destroy themselves with. So I now had a new relationship with my left hand. I was going to let the audience pay for my learning, by stumbling through some pieces for left hand that I was making up on the spot. In the beginning, as could be expected, the pieces were very modest. They just did what they wanted to do, even in a clumsy way, but I have been doing it now for twenty or thirty years, and after even six months I became facile, certainly there was improvement, which I was very pleased with, but was not working towards. I only did the things that I could do, as opposed to the things that I couldn't do, and that's a very revolutionary idea to have about an instrument. Strangely enough, after about a year or two, the left hand began rewarding me for my compassion, and low and behold I began stringing two or three things that I could do together. My earliest work was inventing ostinatos, so I would be playing an ostinato, breaking from the ostinato then returning to it, fashioning solo pieces for left hand that way. Without any ability on my part to predict what the outcome of this pursuit would be, I began to develop a technique for the left hand. I didn't work anything out; the hand just became more and more friendly to the idea of doing what the hand wanted to do. Now giving up your creativeness to a part of your body is a strange thing to do, but I noticed that if you do something well and in a natural way, audiences think you have acquired a technique by practicing. In fact I could only play what I could play, something that my hand wanted to play. If I came up with a mental idea that was appealing, 'wouldn't it be nice if I could do that', that was the opposite way to work. By being nice to my left hand it never became a worry to me, and I never had a problem with tendonitis. I am at a point now where I can sit down and duplicate the right hand. That's easy. Finding suitable things to do in a register that gets muddy as you get deeper [is more challenging]. Now I had not yet applied this to right hand. If you are sitting at a keyboard, you find a universe below middle C and a universe above middle C, and as Ornette said, they should have picked eighty-eight different names for the notes on the piano, because they are not really related. The fact that they give them the same names gives you a false way of viewing them. They are sound sources that are unlike each other; every note is different from every other note. I haven't yet worked on the right hand with this approach because I have been blessed with a right hand technique from playing the piano all of these years. The left hand has been a lot of fun, and it poses the question of whether or not I need to work with a bassist or not. I have done some work with Paul Motian's band and he used to have bands without bassists. In those situations you have a three-legged chair when you remove one player, so immediately the left hand is there to support the rest of the music because there is nothing else in that register. The piano doesn't need any help. It has so much personality, you don't need a violinist or bass player or drummer with a

piano; the piano can do all of those things. The reason we have had all of these other instruments is because the music has been designed to minimize the range of the piano in use to play jazz. Pianos in jazz mainly use an octave or two either side of middle C. If you chained your two hands together, that would allow sufficient use of the piano for most jazz contexts. Over time pianists have tried to extend that. Free music was very helpful because once you took away the need to play steady time, the preset instrumental groups were destroyed. You didn't need 'piano, bass and drums', or the 'thirteen piece big band' or any other standard set-ups, and when that happened, it opened up the palette.

## **Appendix 2: Selected Discography**

### **Paul Bley**

*The Fabulous Paul Bley Quintet.* America AM 6120. [1958]

*Paul Bley With Gary Peacock.* ECM 1003. [1963]

*Closer.* ESP 1021-2. [1965]

*Open, To Love.* ECM 78118-21023-2. [1972]

*My Standard.* Steeplechase SCCD 31214. [1985]

*If We May.* Steeplechase SCCD31344. [1993]

*Notes On Ornette.* Steeplechase SCCD31437. [1998]

### **Ornette Coleman**

*Coleman Classics Vol. 1.* IAI 37.38.52. [1958]

*Beauty Is A Rare Thing.* Rhino/Atlantic Jazz Gallery R2 71410 [1959 - 1961]

### **Sonny Rollins**

*Sonny Meets Hawk.* RCA Victor LSP2712. [1963]

### **Jimmy Giuffre**

*1961.* ECM 1438/39. [1961]

### **Don Ellis**

*Out Of Nowhere.* Candid CCD 79032. [1961]

## Glossary

Formula: a melodic cell or motif

Implication/Realisation theory: Ideas advanced by Eugene Narmour and Leonard Meyer which examine how the experience of listening to a piece of music creates expectations that are related to the unfolding of the piece's melodic structure.

Jazz language: pitch content, ryhythmic organization, phrasing and articulation of melodies that have their origins in the playing of key performers in the jazz tradition.

Melodic vocabulary: the organization of pitch and rhythmic material in improvised lines.

Pitch class: A letter name given to notes on the piano that are duplicated at intervals of an octave (i.e. A, Bb, B, B, Db, etc) is an example of pitch class. All 'A's on the piano, for example, can be said to belong to the pitch class 'A'. The relationship between these 'A's, separated by octaves, is called 'equivalence'.

Processual models: models that give priority to the process that gives rise to a particular outcome, in the case of this study, the process or act of improvising. Such models are complex as they must consider many variables, but do provide a 'holistic' view of the phenomenon, and represent a move away from positivist views of music.

Reductive models: analytical models that consider the product of an act or process, with little or no cognizance given to the act or process itself.

Retensive-protensive (RP): The projection of one's awareness in both past and the future directions. This idea has its origins in Edmund Husserl's (1964) conception of the phenomenology of time, and is a central idea in Ed Sarath's (1996) paper "A New Look At Improvisation".

Schenkerian analysis: Analytical model formulated by Heinrich Schenker that postulated that (masterly) musical works were essentially projections of the tonic triad. These projections involved the transformation of the triad into a fundamental structure, the *Ursatz*, and the 'composing out' of that structure, or *Auskomponierung*, by means of various prolongation techniques. To analysts of jazz music, the fundamental line (*Urlinie*) which descends in a linear manner to the root of the tonic and describes the *Ursatz* is of particular interest, and is analogous to a 'guide tone' line.

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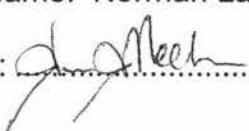
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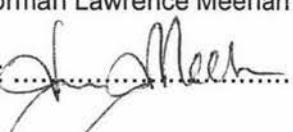
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