

Clifford Brown's solo on "The Blues Walk" transcribed by Peter Bouffard

From Clifford Brown and Max Roach, EmArcy Records, 1955 PolyGram Inc., 814 645-2
Recorded on February 5, 1955

Clifford Brown - Trumpet
Harold Land - Tenor Sax
Richie Powell - Piano
George Morrow - Bass
Max Roach - Drums

One could describe Clifford Brown's solo as pure spontaneous logic. His lines reflect an uncanny coherence in terms of voice leading and motivic development. While his alternate take of the same performance on February 5, 1955 reveals that his lines are not completely unpremeditated, his solo reflects a unique style, sound, phrasing, and melodic imagination. The solo exudes a confidence and vitality which helps maintain a constant forward drive—particularly in his use of detached articulations, as in measures 7, 29, and elsewhere. This textbook solo makes use of double chromatic voice leading (mm. 2, 5, 11, 35, and elsewhere), indirect resolutions (mm. 3, 13, 35, and elsewhere); melodic sequences (mm. 4 and 37-38); and literal blues figuration (mm. 20-23, 39-45, 55-59, and 75-84). Excluding the blues passages, nearly every new chord is approached by step. A particularly poignant exception is the delayed resolution in measure 13. His solo manages to reflect the chord changes precisely with very little actual arpeggiation. Exceptions of interest are the arpeggiated triads in mm. 7, 71, and 73 and his use of the EbM7-A7 arpeggios in the penultimate measure reflecting a sort of superimposed cadence of IV-#iv dim7 (or V7/iii), à la rhythm changes. His use of motivic development gives the solo a coherence and unity. The two eighth-notes at the beginning of measure 15, the typically onomatopoeic "bebop" figure, is developed throughout the ensuing choruses with blues lines interspersed between the development to release tension.

Curiously, the rhythm section plays a relatively insignificant role in the development of the solo in terms of spontaneous interaction. To be sure, the preplanned three against four rhythmic ostinato in the fourth and fifth choruses adds a sense of tension, climax, and release. But as a whole, Brown is left to his own devices to develop his solo. Even Max Roach's response to the solo seems uncharacteristically restrained. And Richie Powell's contribution is almost nil.¹ Perhaps the relatively sterile environment of the recording studio played a role. One could contrast the rhythm section here with earlier live recordings of Clifford with Horace Silver and Art Blakey where the spontaneous interaction, the rhythmic and harmonic prodding and cajoling, contributes greatly to the hard bop aesthetic.

¹As the piano part is difficult to hear, in some cases, after exhaustive listening, I have made assumptions as to the "exact" harmonies. Furthermore, in some cases Powell plays only the third and seventh of a chord but I have given the chord a full name with an assigned root (e.g., in measure 9, the chord could be Ab7 or D7 as Powell only plays the two notes Gb (F#) and C harmonically).