

Herbie Hancock's solo on "Freedom Jazz Dance" transcribed by Peter Bouffard

From Miles Smiles, Columbia/Legacy, 1998 CK 65682

Recorded on October 24, 1966

Solo begins at 4:52

Davis Davis, (tp); Wayne Shorter, (ts); Herbie Hancock, (p); Ron Carter, (b); Tony Williams, (d).

First, I have chosen to use a key signature of three flats, not because the solo is in Eb major, but rather to avoid excessive accidentals and confusion, especially in the left hand chords. Although the overall tonality is rooted firmly in Bb, for at least the first half of the solo, I hear an implied vacillation between the pitches of E flat and E natural at irregular intervals, reflecting a type of Spanish Phrygian character. This tonal quality is strengthened by the double bass's repeated B flats (strengthened even further by the bass drum pitched at Bb!) juxtaposed with intermittent low E naturals. Thus, the basic chord/scale pitch material can be thought of as being derived largely from either a Bb half-whole symmetrical diminished scale or an Eb Spanish Phrygian scale, or more likely, a combination of both. The G flats in mm. 33-34 stand out as diverging from this scheme, but can be related to a standard Eb Phrygian scale. Although, with the phrase ending on F natural, it is difficult to reconcile this inference. To be sure, this vamp style departs significantly from the earlier bebop tradition. From mm. 37-53, Hancock derives much of his melodic material from the original melody—playing the fourths literally (m. 37 and 53) in addition to applying transpositions (m. 38), retrograde (mm. 39 and 45), and various motivic fragmentation. Hancock ends his solo with a coherent melodic sequence (mm. 60-63).

In terms of phrasing, the entire performance is pervaded with an incessant focus on beat four. I was initially confused when listening to Hancock's isolated solo, thinking that the initial chordal stab occurred on beat one, causing me to notate the entire ensuing solo one beat late! Furthermore, there is some inconsistency in the performance as to the location of beat one. Following Shorter's solo, Davis initiates a short, literal melodic interlude, but at odds with the previously established barline. (Indeed, the rhythm section is forced to be flexible with the barline from the very beginning where Davis abandons his first attempt at the melody.) The nature of Williams's snip-snip-snip-snip on the hi-hat, the rock-like interpretation but with the accent on beat four, remains disorienting for me. Hancock's lines still convey a certain bebop articulation even though there is very little typically bebop-like formulaic figuration. His longer eighth-note lines are characterized by accented up-beats (implied slurring into the downbeats), accenting higher notes of a phrase, and "ghosting" lower notes. His literal execution of the Bb symmetrical diminished scale in measure 17 helps make the entire phrase (mm. 16-18) sound very "bebopish," even within the modernist, freer atmosphere. Measures 26-29 also reflect conventional phrasing and articulation. Interestingly, Hancock ends his solo after 64 measures, precisely at the point where another 32-bar chorus might begin. Perhaps 32-bar formal boundaries were inescapably ingrained in him.