4. Blueprints

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Chapter 4 – Blueprints

The typical progressions and structured forms found in the jazz repertoire appear frequently in Mseleku’s compositions. Particularly prevalent is his use of the II-V and II-V-I progressions as well as common forms like the blues or binary forms like AABA or AAB. These standard formats and progressions are used over and again to drive the compositions of many of the great jazz composers. Tunes like Clifford Brown’s ‘Joy Spring’ or John Coltrane’s ‘Moment’s Notice’ all explore II-V and II-V-I formulas extensively.\(^59\) Several of Mseleku’s compositions are entirely constructed around these musical ‘blueprints’. Good examples are ‘Blues for Afrika’, ‘Mamelodi’, ‘Adored Value’ and ‘Timelessness’. The relationship between melody, harmony and form in these compositions achieves a particular sensibility that speaks directly to the American jazz style and reinforces Mseleku’s relationship with this heritage.

‘Mamelodi’ (*Home at Last*)

‘Mamelodi’ is formulated on a thirty-two-bar AABB form. The tune consists of two sixteen-bar sections with an eight-bar introduction. Apart from the introduction, it is entirely constructed on a four-bar minor key progression similar to that found in tunes like Clifford Brown’s ‘Daahoud’\(^60\) or the jazz standard ‘Autumn Leaves’ (Fig. 4.1).\(^61\)

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\(^{59}\) II-V-I formulas are also often found in the bridge sections of tunes. For instance, in ‘Five Brothers’, the bridge comprises II-V-I sequences descending by half steps. In Kenny Barron’s ‘Voyage’, the II-V-I sequences ascend by half steps. In the bridge of the classic standard ‘Have You Met Miss Jones’, the II-V-I sequences are built on an augmented axis.

\(^{60}\) Sher (2008: 83)

\(^{61}\) Sher (1988: 12)
Although a predominant triplet feel exists in the piano introduction, the overall rhythmic pulse of the tune is swing; hence, for notation it is written in 4/4 with the triplets written out. Fig. 4.2. shows the first four bars of the introduction. The Phrygian mode is clearly established with characteristic chords bII and bVII- resolving to I minor.62

62 Characteristic chords (those containing the characteristic note) establish the modal flavour. Resolution from a characteristic chord to I is a modal cadence (Ulanowsky 1988).
The melody of ‘Mamelodi’ consists of two four-bar repeated melodic statements. Slight variations in bar 6 and 8 of the A section and bar 7 of the B section make for a thirty-two-bar form (Fig. 4.3). Each melodic phrase in the A section begins on tension 9 with the last phrase in each four-bar segment beginning on #9. The melody is mostly diatonic with the exception of bar 4 where tensions #9, b9 and 13 on the G7 make an upper structure E triad on the 13th degree and #9, #11 and b9 an upper structure Gb triad built on the b5 of C7. These tensions are consistent with the diminished scale and the consequent triadic relationship between upper structure triads on G7 and C7 is a whole step (E and Gb). Although absent in the melody, Mseleku can also be heard playing an augmented 5th on Ab7 as it moves to Db in bar 2 of the four-bar sequence.
The rhythm section supports a predominantly triplet-driven melody with an accompanying swing feel played in 2. The ride cymbal generally adheres to the swing pattern throughout and emphasis of the triplet feel is expressed in the comping of the snare drum (Fig. 4.4). This feel is similar to those found in tunes like Horace Silver's ‘Silver's Serenade’.63
More emphasis is given to the triplet in the piano especially toward the end of the second head, just before the trumpet solo and in the solos (Fig. 4.5).

Fig. 4.4
‘Mamelodi’ score – A section

Fig. 4.5
‘Mamelodi’ score – B section
‘Adored Value’ (*Beauty of Sunrise*)

‘Adored Value’ is a classic medium-up tempo swing tune constructed on a thirty-two-bar AABA form. The tune is made up of a repeated eight-bar A section and a sixteen-bar B section. The chord progression found in the A section is the same as that of ‘Mamelodi’. Here, it is in the key of Bb minor and the chords are distributed across eight bars as opposed to four. The B section is structured entirely on II-V-I progressions in either four-bar or two-bar units shifting through five different key centres: Eb minor, F minor, Gb Major, A Major and Db Major. The melody in the A section is mostly derived from the Bb minor pentatonic scale, with the addition of the major 7th and 9th in bar 7.

![Fig. 4.6](image_url)

*Analysis of ‘Adored Value’*
‘Timelessness’ (*Timelessness*)

‘Timelessness’ is structured on an AABA form. Each section is sixteen bars in length, constituting a sixty-four-bar form in total. The A sections are based on a repeated eight-bar chord sequence focusing on the movement from the tonic (in bar 1) to the subdominant (in bar 5). The B section is based entirely on II-V and II-V-I progressions.

The introduction consists of ascending and descending constant-structure major chords, each voiced as an open 5th and 3rd. The tonic note (C) is held in the melody, creating different melodic tensions with each chord.

The A section follows the same brief; however, the chords descend by a whole step in the first four bars, resolving to F in bar 5. The progression follows the contour of a descending C Locrian scale with passing chords EMa7 and D7. I and IV are diatonic to the key and all the other chords (excluding the passing chords) are modal interchange chords – BbMa7 (bVIIMa7) from the Mixolydian mode, AbMa7 (bVIMA7) from the Aeolian or Phrygian mode, EbMa7 (bIIIMA7) from the Aeolian mode, GbMa7 (bVIMA7) from the Locrian mode and DbMa7 (bIIIMA7) from the Locrian or Phrygian mode.

The first melodic phrase (bars 1-4) is conceptualised around constant-structure Ma7#11 voicings, outlining 1-3-#11-7 of each chord. The second melodic phrase (bars 9-12) is structured around fourths outlining 7-3-6-9.
of each chord. Bars 5-8 of the progression remain the same throughout the introduction and the A sections.

Fig. 4.8
Melodic conceptualisation of ‘Timelessness’

Bars 1-4 of the A section

Fig. 4.9
A section of ‘Timelessness’
The B section is constructed entirely of II-V and II-V-I progressions (Fig. 4.10). These can be analysed as moving through three key centres based on a Phrygian turnaround in C Major (C-Eb-Ab-Db). The melodic line targets tensions 13 and 11 over the II-7 chords in the first eight bars. The second phrase holds the root note in the lead creating tensions over the chords similar to the introduction.

**Fig. 4.10**

Analysis of the B section of ‘Timelessness’

In the solo section, chords are simplified for improvisation. Passing chords fall away in the A sections with the constant-structure major 7 chords descending purely along the contour of C Locrian. The suspended chords in the bridge are also simplified, becoming II-V and II-V-I progressions (Fig. 4.11).
Fig. 4.11
‘Timelessness’ – solo chords
The drum solo at the end of the tune is underpinned by the same sequence found in the introduction. Variations in the voicings appear with triads built on the root and a whole step above the root – the latter inviting a Lydian quality (Fig. 4.12).

Fig. 4.12
‘Timelessness’ – chord variations over drum solo

‘Blues for Afrika’ (Celebration)

Blues is central to the jazz style with typical formats like the twelve-bar form being one of the most commonly used. Both major and minor twelve-bar forms abound in the repertoire of the great players, including classics like Coltrane’s ‘Bessie’s Blues’ or ‘Equinox’. The basic harmonic structure is always honoured; that is, an expectation that the harmony will progress from I to IV in the 5th bar and return to I in bar 7 with some kind of resolution in bars 9-12. Reharmonisations of this common form are extensive and form a large part of the evolution of the music.
‘Blues for Afrika’ is formulated on a twelve-bar blues in D minor. Like Coltrane’s ‘Moment’s Notice’, the opening bars are constructed on a variation of the 3:2 clave rhythmic pattern. The head of the tune engages extended dominant reharmonisations, creating interesting tensions against the mostly diatonic melody (Fig. 4.13). Solos occur over a standard minor blues progression except in bars 9 and 10 of the form wherein Mseleku substitutes E-7b5-A7alt with a bar each of F-7-Bb7 followed by E-7-A7. (Fig. 4.14).