The Musical Artistry of Bheki Mseleku

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Chapter 7 – Solo transcriptions

The transcriptions are intended as templates for study. They provide the graphic manuscript from which to view how the improvised line relates to or deviates from the harmonic structure of the tune. Notes are placed in the score where applicable to indicate relevant aspects highlighted in Chapter 6, including the use of scales, substitution, displacement, etc. The intention is not to give a scientific account of each phrase but rather draw attention to conceptual ideas, repeated use of devices, scales and/or patterns that inform the solo.

Solo on ‘Adored Value’ (*Beauty of Sunrise*)

Over the A sections, Mseleku mostly uses either the Bb minor pentatonic scale or the Bb blues scale as a source for improvisation. This speaks to the function of the chords being centred on the Bb minor tonality. Eb7 in bar 2 of the A sections is thus not seen as a dominant with a resolution to Ab-7, but rather as IV7, where the G natural functions more as the 6th of Bb-6. Similarly, Db7 in bar 4 of the A sections is also not an active dominant and hence GbMa7 in bar 5 functions more as bV1Ma7 in Bb-7 rather than as IMa7 in the key of Gb. Ab-7 is also never outlined and is rather seen as part of the harmonic generalisation of the Bb minor tonality with Gb functioning as bVI. F7 is the only functioning dominant in the A sections. This is reinforced by the repeated use of the diminished chord on the 3rd of F7 resolving to the 5th of Bb- (bars 14-15, 38-39, 46-47 and 54-55). Similar phrase conceptualisation is seen in the B section on C7 where it resolves to F-6 (bars 22-23). Repetition of phrase construction is seen at bars 35-37 and 51-53. Both phrases are similarly constructed using a Bb minor pentatonic scale.

Mseleku uses the 6th on the tonic (bars 23-24). This is a resolution chord functioning as I-6. The use of added upper notes on scales is seen in bar 14. The melodic line runs from 3-b9 with a 5th added above the b9, giving emphasis to the tension in its resolution. Use of added notes above the melodic line is also seen in bar 21 and bar 38.
Mseleku uses a mix of voicing techniques in his solo including rootless left-hand voicings with the 3rd or 7th as the lowest note, as well as root-based 1-7 or 1-3 voicings on occasion. Chords generally fall on the anticipations of the beat in the bar. In the bridge sections, he also uses full voicings shared between the left and right hands.

**First Chorus**

A1

Bb blues scale

A2

Bb min pentatonic scale
Solo on ‘Aja’ (*Beauty of Sunrise*)

In his solo, Mseleku replaces the II-7b5-V7b9 sequences in bars 1 and 2 of the head with regular II-7-V7 sequences. The construction of the lines is quite similar throughout the solo (see Fig. 6.29). For instance, bars 10-15 are very similar to bars 34-39 – only the latter is an octave higher. Sequential lines are seen on the II-V sequences in bars 21-22, 25-26 and 29-30. Here, Mseleku uses variations on a common property lick starting on the 11th degree of each II-7 chord. In bar 3 of each four-bar sequence, Mseleku articulates V7/IV either by targeting the b7th of the chord or using an augmented arpeggio built on the root of the dominant. Resolution to IVMa7 is also often on the 3rd. He also makes frequent use of the 3-b9 diminished line on the dominant in bar 2 of each sequence, resolving to the 3rd of the subsequent major. This is seen in bars 2-3, 13-14 and 38-39. Left-hand voicings are predominantly closed-position rootless structures with 3 or 7 at the bottom of the chord. Chords generally fall on the anticipations of beats 1 and 3. In the 5th chorus he also uses the typical root-based jazz voicings shared between the right hand and left hand (see Chapter 6, Fig. 6.5 in this volume).
Fourth Chorus

see bar 13-14 similar line

Fifth Chorus
Solo on ‘Angola’ (*Celebration*)

The flute and the piano trade choruses over the solo form as well as on the vamp at the end of the tune. The cyclical progressions and complex time signature changes that characterise the head are entirely absent in the solo and replaced by a twenty-six-bar solo form comprising more of a modal setting in the key. This is reinforced by the distribution of chords being extended over several bars providing space for scales to be
used as the source for melodic improvisation (see Chapter 6, p. 118). The opening line of Mseleku’s solo is entirely scalar in nature and is predominantly driven by the C Dorian scale (with the exception of the major 7th in bar 3 which suggests G7). The line covers C-7, A-7b5 and D7alt and follows an ascending scale pattern in groups of three, played in triplets. In the last four bars of the same chorus, the A melodic minor scale is used as the predominant source for the improvised line over the CMa7#5 with emphasis on the E and D triads in the line. In the second chorus, C7 is used as the primary source scale for the line construction from bars 36-44.

Mseleku also uses a mix of modal and bebop phrasing in his solo. At the beginning of the second piano chorus he uses a similar idea seen in the first chorus. Here, however, the line develops into phrasing more reflective of the kind seen in the bebop style, with more chromaticism engaging dominant function (G7). This kind of phrasing could be used over any of the related chords (C-7, F7 or A-7b5) and flows naturally into the subsequent D7alt chord. In the bebop language, the running of scales into each other constitutes a form of expressing harmonic movement. Here, the running of the F7 scale into the Ab7 scale expresses the movement from C-7 through A-7b5 to D7alt. The melodic line is thus driven by a relationship of scales a minor third apart while the harmony moves down a minor third from C-7 to A-7b5 and up a fourth to D7alt. The use of constant-structure four-note groups in the line creates a consistency in the phrasing similar to that seen in Tyner’s playing (see also Chapter 6, Fig. 6.19). Similarly, bars 63-64 constitute the movement from AbMa7 through G7alt, resolving to C-7 expressed as the scale of Bb7 running into Db7, and resolving to the 5th of C. Here, the Bb7 scale runs over the G7 chord and only changes to Db7 on the last beat of bar 64, giving more action to the dominant and its resolution. Further bebop-styled phrasing using a single scale source is seen in bar 72 in the fade section of the end of the tune. Here, typical phrasing seen over F7 is used to drive the line over C-7. Other bebop phrasing is seen in the ascending arpeggiated lines on G-7 in bars 10-13 and bars 36-37.

Mseleku targets tension notes on V7 (G7) to enhance the resolution of the dominant to tonic. In bar 22, the substitute (Db) provides a strong resolution to the subsequent tonic and in bars 50-51, b13 provides action to the resolution of the 3rd of the tonic. Other interesting aspects to his solo include the use of upper structure triads (bars 66-69 and a common property II-V7 lick on A7 in bar 16).91

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91 This is often referred to as a ‘contrapuntal expansion of static harmony’ (Coker 1989: 87).
First piano chorus

\[ C^7 \]

\[ A^7 \]

\[ D^7 \]

\[ G^7 \]

\[ C^7 \]

\[ A^7 \]
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F7 scale (bebop phrasing) ------

Ab7 Four-note group phrasing

G7 G dorian

E7♭♭ see bar 10 similar line construction C7 scale

A7♭♭ see bar 17 5 7
Solo on ‘Blues for Afrika’ (*Celebration*)

Mseleku plays ten choruses over the minor twelve-bar blues form. He adheres to the standard chord changes except in bars 9 and 10 of the form wherein he substitutes E-7b5-A7alt with a bar each of F-7-Bb7 followed by E-7-A7.

Mseleku’s solo constitutes a mix of modal and functional lines supported by a combination of fourths and rootless left-hand voicings. The solo is carefully paced with improvised melody alternating with choruses of mostly chordal playing. Concerted voicings combining left-hand rootless with upper structure closed-position voicings are seen in chordal sections (bars 25-28 and 61-63). The use of Dorian scale lines supported by voicings in fourths typifies the modal approach explored by players like McCoy Tyner. Chords are built in fourths following the Dorian scale and played mostly in anticipations of beats 1 and 3. Modal scales for the Dorian and Mixolydian are derived from the same parent scale and hence can be used over either chord. This is seen in bars 11-12 where the line targets the 6th degree of D minor in a way that could easily be interpreted as a line on G7. Mseleku’s improvised melodic lines also include chromatic enclosures that speak to typical bebop phrasing seen on dominant seventh scales. Similar line construction occurs frequently as part of Mseleku’s phrasing; for instance, the phrase spanning from bar 1 to bar 5 has a similar configuration to that found in bars 11-12 and 47-48. Sometimes the line is displaced by an eighth note and its placement in the bar is different, but the intervallic concept is the same. Other typical phrasing includes displacement of the melodic line (bars 36-40), additional harmonic movement implied in the line (bar 42) and use of common property patterns like the diminished-scale patterns based on triads seen in the ninth chorus.

Solo begins

![Solo begins](image)

First chorus D Dorian

![First chorus](image)

Modal voicings in 4ths

![Modal voicings in 4ths](image)
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G Dorian

D Dorian

E7

A7

see bars 5-6

A7

F-7

Bb7

E-7

A7

Open 5th followed by 4ths (Dorian)

Upper structure closed position

rootless 1.H voicings

4ths
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Third chorus

rootless LH voicings

passing step

Fourth chorus

Powell LH 1-7 voicing
Voicings in 4ths (Dorian)

Fifth chorus (chordal)

Voicings in 4ths (Dorian)

Voicings in 4ths (Dorian)

Sixth chorus (chordal)

rootless LH voicings
Solo on ‘Home at Last’ (*Home at Last*)

‘Home at Last’ includes four short solos of one chorus each, including the guitar, trumpet, saxophone and piano. The tune is largely constituted around the Db major tonality moving to Db7 in the B section. Trumpeter Feya Faku adheres to the modal context throughout his solo using only the Db major scale in the A sections and the Db Mixolydian in the B section as the source for his improvised line. By contrast, Mseleku engages the functionality of the harmony giving particular focus to the dominants at the points of resolution. Typical bebop styled phrasing is seen throughout his solo. This includes the use of pivoted arpeggios (bar 6), chromatic enclosures (bars 7, 8, 15, 25, 26 and 29), alterations (bar 7),
substitute harmonies like Bb7 (bar 11) and Eb7 (bars 12-13), as well as
typical arpeggiated lines over dominant 7th scales (bars 12-19).
Solo on ‘Mamelodi’ (*Home at Last*)

‘Mamelodi’ provides an opportunity to compare modal-styled playing with a more bebop-styled approach (see p. 119). Where Feya Faku keeps to the tonality of Ab major throughout his solo, Mseleku uses a combination of both modal and bebop approaches. Some lines are purely driven by a pentatonic scale (bars 5-6) with slight alterations that engage function of the harmony (bars 3-4), and others fully engage the harmonic movement in the line using typical bebop phrasing (bars 15-16).

Similarly constructed lines are seen in bars 15-16 and 19-20. Here, a continuous line conceptualised around an Eb7 scale running into C7 speaks to the movement of DbMa7 running into G-7b5 – C7b9. Similar lines are seen in tunes like ‘Melancholy in Cologne’ and ‘Aja’ where the same harmonic progression is used. Additional notes played above the melodic line are seen in bars 14-16.
Solo on ‘Melancholy in Cologne’ (*Star Seeding*)

The tempo of the tune facilitates typical double-time lines with the swing-eighth feel played in the sixteenth-note subdivision. Sequential lines based on repeated motifs appear several times in the solo. This gives structure and provides a sensibility to the solo that speaks to the cyclical nature of the tune. This is seen in bars 10-16 where the improvised line follows a similar contour through several sequences and bars 22-24 where the line comes off the 7th of each of the major 7 chords. Similarly constructed lines are seen in bars 18, 20 and 50 with lines often targeting the 3rd of the chord.

Extensive use of the whole-tone scale is seen throughout the solo as well as the augmented arpeggio on the root of the dominant. Other characteristic elements include the use of the four-note group 5-3-2-1 in the line (bars 28, 29 and 64) as well as additional upper notes in the melodic line (bar 19 and bars 60-63).
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Fifth chorus
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Sixth chorus

Whole Tone

E7

C7

F7

E7

A7

D7

Whole Tone

E7

A7

D7
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Seventh chorus

arp on 3 of G7

see bar 18 and 50

arp on 3 of E7
Solo on ‘Through the Years’ (Timelessness)

Mseleku’s solo is reminiscent of Thelonious Monk’s style brought about mostly by extended dominant sequences and the use of the whole-tone scale both of which Monk used extensively. The solo form is slightly different to the head and is notated in double time. Similar lines conceptualised around the diminished scale are seen over the dominant 7ths and the extended dominant sequences (see Chapter 3). Mseleku adds implied harmonic activity in his improvised line over the II-V progression in bars 8-9 and 20-21. He plays three similar configurations alternating between A-7 to D13b9 over bars 8-9 and replaces A-7 with A7 in bar 20. All the dominant sevenths use the same diminished scale tension structure of #11, 13 and b9, and function often as an upper structure triad built on the 13th of the dominant. Other symmetrical structures from the diminished scale are seen in bars 24-26. These are configured using two constant-structure symmetrical units a b5 apart and built on the root of each dominant in the sequence. The phrases are embellished with some added chromaticism. Mseleku uses a modal approach over bars 48-53 with the E minor pentatonic and E blues scales as the primary drivers of the improvised line. He also generally adheres to the melody when negotiating the metric modulation sections.
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G-6 arp.  B7#11
same interval structure b5 apart

Whole Tone

D-6 arp. (B-7b5)  F-6 arp. (E7alt)

see bar 8

E7 triad
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E minor pentatonic scale

E blues scale

enclosure

b3 pivoted arp
Solo on ‘Timelessness’ (*Timelessness*)

Mseleku plays two choruses through the form and uses a mix of conceptual approaches in his improvisation. This includes the use of three and four-note groups as well as pentatonic scales to drive the line. The left hand supports with a combination of open fifth, root-7 and rootless voicings. He generally sees the A sections as segments that focus on a tonic-dominant 7th sound resolving to IV in bar 5, similar to the blues. His phrasing reflects this attitude and is often focused on a modal approach with either a mutating motif based on three or four notes or pentatonic scales forming the focus of the line. Phrasing often targets the 3rd of chords I and IV (see bars 9, 13, 17, 21 and 25). Consistent construction and conceptualisation of the line are seen throughout the solo resulting in a fair amount of repetition. This is highlighted in the notated transcription.