

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

**Tell Me a Story:  
A Multi-Model Analysis of Select Lester Young Solos**

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the Faculty of the School of Music  
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By

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## ABSTRACT

A long history exists between improvisational analysis models and the jazz improvisation they seek to examine and evaluate. Though often undertaken as a comparison among a varied group of soloists, this qualitative research study employs existing research on improvisational analysis models to examine and analyze select solo transcriptions of tenor saxophonist Lester Young. The purpose of this research is to determine not only the presence and applicability of existing improvisational analysis models to his improvisational work but also identify the multiple unique characteristics of his influential improvisational approach and illuminate those accessible strategies musicians may implement to improve their improvisational understanding and technique. The results of this study demonstrate the extent to which Young's improvisational approach reflects the characteristics of Chord-scale Base, Motivic Development, Formulaic Usage, and Midlevel improvisational analysis models. In an improvisational sense, results concerning chord-based motivic development and formulaic usage network could be far too general and thus less applicable when comparing Young's improvisational approach to the improvisers before, during, and after him. However, Midlevel analysis results provide a substantially more significant, more accurate perspective of Young's accomplishments, approach, and influence. An additional implication of this study serves to spotlight the accessibility of improvisation itself. A more precise understanding of the fundamental components of solo construction and performance would greatly benefit many musicians and music educators.

## Dedication

This project is dedicated to my wife Kim and my children Caitlin and Grayson, whose constant love, joy, encouragement, assistance, and at times gentle nudging to press on kept me writing day after day. It has been a long journey of sequestered days, vacations with scheduled research time, and retinal tears in both eyes that barely slowed our pursuit...and make no mistake about it...this has been OUR pursuit. However, it has now thankfully drawn to a close. We have many days to makeup, closets to declutter, attics to clean, and farmers' markets to attend. I am most certainly ready.

More than anything, I dedicate this project to God, who has never abandoned me spiritually nor abandoned the educational goal a young man had set so many years ago, yet resigned to the thought that both the time and opportunity had passed. That now older young man was not hurt or regretful, just content to accept that some roads must remain untraveled, and then God said, "You will not believe what I have in mind." Very Isaiah 55:8 of God, isn't it?

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

As an essential building block of jazz's uniquely American musical art form, improvisation invites exploration, experimentation, negotiation, inclusion, and conversation in an individual and collective context. Albert Murray gives an example:

And then here comes Ray Nance [scats]. He finishes the solo with the rhythm behind it. Look at all these devices being used! Each person comes in there, has so many bars, states his identity, and gets the heck out of the way, and moves along. All these characters. We've got Ray Nance, Lawrence Brown, we've got Tricky Sam, Ben Webster, and then we've got the out chorus. You've got swing, you've got individuality. Everything is in that three-minute piece. That's as pure as a diamond.<sup>1</sup>

Early and Monson also note that jazz improvisation "celebrates the heroic genius improviser, but, as musicians know, that brilliance often depends on the collective magic of the right band; individuals who compliment, anticipate, inspire and upset each other into a communal whole greater than the sum of its parts."<sup>2</sup>

Though fundamental components and practices of jazz improvisation are indeed common and consistent from one musician to the next, Whitehead reminds us that "Jazz musicians are praised for having individual styles, and any recognizable style relies on repetition: of pet licks, of certain improvisational strategies, or of ways of inflecting a note or shaping one's tone."<sup>3</sup> Investigating and analyzing a jazz musician's signature licks or improvisational strategies provides insight and awareness into that musician's unique voice, historical presence, perspective, process, approach, and experience. However, insight and awareness into the jazz

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Murray and Paul Devlin, *Murray Talks Music: Albert Murray on Jazz and Blues*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald Early and Ingrid Monson, "Why Jazz Still Matters," *Daedalus* 148, no. 2 (2019): 6.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Whitehead, *Why Jazz? A Concise Guide to Jazz*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

musician's specific attributes are only some of the discoveries to be made by examining improvisational strategies. Whether through examination of solo transcriptions or 'play-along' means, musicians seeking to improve their improvisational technique, harmonic understanding, melodic development, and overall improvisational construction greatly benefit from the analysis of other's spontaneous acts. Berlinger states, "Just as children learn to speak their native language by imitating older competent speakers, so young musicians learn to speak jazz by imitating seasoned improvisers. In part, this involves acquiring a complex vocabulary of conventional phrases and phrase components, which improvisers draw upon in formulating the melody of a jazz solo."<sup>4</sup>

Lester Young's influence on improvisation, musicians both past and present, and the jazz style as a whole cannot be understated, and yet his style was initially considered so radical that he received little encouragement from members of Fletcher Henderson's band.<sup>5</sup> Schoenberg described Young's contributions to jazz as "architectural perfection of a seemingly effortless nature."<sup>6</sup> It is in part that effortless nature that has drawn so many jazz musicians to Young's improvisational approach for years. Historically significant jazz musicians such as Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, Lee Konitz, and Dexter Gordon are just a few who point to Young as an unquestionable influence in their careers. Choosing an improvisational path different from that of contemporaries such as Coleman Hawkins, Young focused on the song's melody rather than its chord structure as the driving force behind improvisation. This horizontal approach gave Young's

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 95.

<sup>5</sup> Scott DeVeaux and Gary Giddins, *Jazz*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2009), 171.

<sup>6</sup> William A Pryor, "Forever Young! Lester Young, the Supremely Creative but Melancholy Genius," *IAJRC Journal* 47, no. 4 (2014): 12.



improvisational solos a readily accessible, lyrical quality. “Lester originated a way to play the tenor saxophone that was so relaxed, unhurried, and jazzy that a majority of tenor sax players have used him as their model.”<sup>7</sup> Nicknamed 'Pres' by Billie Holiday, Young's identity as President of the Tenor Saxophone was so firmly established during his career that even long after his death, the term is still his rightful title, representing the essence of his stature in the jazz world.<sup>8</sup> An analysis of Young's improvisation approach will identify not only the unique characteristics he employed during his career but also shed light on those accessible improvisational strategies jazz musicians of the past sought to adopt and jazz musicians in the present can employ to advance their improvisational capabilities.

### **Background of Topic**

Explaining improvisation can be challenging. Big Band leader Artie Shaw once said of improvisation, “You’re aiming at something that cannot be done, physically can’t be done. You’re trying to take an inarticulate thing and take notes and make them come out in a way that moves you.”<sup>9</sup> Author Kevin Whitehead viewed improvisation as a form of personal statement. “In a way, every improvisation is autobiographical: a portrait of what a player has listened to, what they’ve worked on technically (or haven’t), their tastes, maybe even the region they came from.” Jazz trumpeter Doc Cheatham struggled with an explanation as well. “I have no idea what I am going to do when I take a solo. That’s the thing that I don’t understand myself, and I’ve been asked about it so many times. When I play a solo, I never know any more about what

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<sup>7</sup> Pryor, “Forever Young!” 12.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Henry Daniels, *Lester Leaps In: The Life and Time of Lester “Pres” Young*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 110.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffery C. Ward and Ken Burns, *Jazz: A History of America’s Music*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 162.

I'm going to play than you do."<sup>10</sup> Even tenor saxophonist Young continually observed that improvisation should "tell a little story."<sup>11</sup> While an air of mystique often surrounds conversations concerning improvisation, it should be noted that improvisation is grounded in discoverable, applicable, and accessible theoretical and performance practices. Kenny confirms that improvisation, "as a form of spontaneous composition, cannot be easily separated from the theory that assists with its creation."<sup>12</sup> DeVeaux and Giddins attest to a balanced performance interrelation between the structured theories and practices of composition and improvisation.<sup>13</sup> Employing improvisational analysis models can, as Givan indicates, "substantially enrich understanding"<sup>14</sup> of improvisation as traditional and non-traditional compositional techniques, melodic development, motivic use, and other musical practices are identified and observed. Additionally, Frieler et al. note that improvisational analysis models can be further developed to include primary, sub, and sub-subcategories to examine, compare, and contrast all manner of detail and relationship within spontaneous acts.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Whitehead, *Why Jazz? A Concise Guide to Jazz*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Barry Kenny, "Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative (and Other Urban Myths): A Critical Overview of Jazz Analysis and its Relationship to Pedagogy," *Research Studies in Music Education* 13, (1999): 57.

<sup>13</sup> DeVeaux and Giddins, *Jazz*, 236.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Givan, "Swing Improvisation: A Schenkerian Perspective," *Theory and Practice* 35, (2010): 52.

<sup>15</sup> Klaus Frieler et al., "Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos: A New Approach to the Study of Improvisation," *Musicae Scientiae* 20, no. 2 (2016): 143.

## **Theoretical Framework**

To gain a more thorough understanding of improvisational analysis, identify the unique, accessible, and definitive characteristics of Young's improvisational approach, and clarify the improvisational act itself, this study will employ Chord-scale Base, Motivic Development, Formulaic Usage, and Midlevel improvisational analysis models to examine selected solo transcriptions of Young. Selected solo transcriptions will represent a cross-section of Young's career from the early influences of Frankie Trumbauer, Young's years with the Count Basie Orchestra, performances with friend Billie Holiday, and his post-Basie solo work. Existing research concerning improvisational history and practice, Young's artistry and influence, and the improvisational analysis models mentioned above, will be explored and relevant theories applied to the data derived from this study's application.

## **Problem Statement**

While existing literature concerning improvisational analysis models has often been applied to musical styles or groups of musicians, little is known about how those models define the improvisational characteristics of a single musician or how identifying those characteristics aids all musicians in an understanding of the improvisational act itself. The problem this study seeks to investigate is how these improvisational analysis models define and identify the improvisational approach of Lester Young.

Causal listeners and those unfamiliar with the differing practices of the jazz style, its composers, and musicians have often questioned the purpose, plan, and process of improvisation. The spontaneous creation of coherent musical dialogue in the context of a specific musical moment was and is frequently viewed as unnecessary, incomprehensible, or beyond the bounds of possibility for anyone other than the improvisers themselves. This unfamiliarity and unease

can be evidenced in Waade's report of questions concerning improvisation and students' responses, considering it unpleasant, negative, and scary and asking why they need to improvise.<sup>16</sup> Expanding this mystery to music in a larger context, Gould and Keaton argue that a musician's interpretive approach is but a "conceptual realization, and, by necessity, involves improvisation and thus all musical performances, no matter how meticulously interpreted and no matter how specific the inscribed score, require improvisation."<sup>17</sup> Jazz demands an intellectual give and take, a partnership between what is written and what is improvised. Suppose the purpose, plan, and process of improvisation are unfamiliar, misunderstood, or misinterpreted. In that case, the importance of improvisation as an essential element of the musician's unique voice and music-making is lost. As it relates specifically to jazz improvisation, Gould and Keaton speak to this misunderstanding and misinterpretation, noting that spontaneous moments of creation are often viewed as being "divorced from any pre-established musical entity as expressed in a score."<sup>18</sup> While a creative, spontaneous, improvisatory act may give the appearance of a musician disconnected from the larger work and navigating musical space only he or she can explore, purposeful strategies and conversations with fellow musicians are in place. Speaking further on the misunderstanding perceived in improvisatory acts, Lichtenstein explains:

I don't think that either the nature or significance of their formal characteristics has yet been adequately appreciated. They are often treated as though either they don't require or are indeed opaque to further understanding. Improvisatory acts can be dismissed under the heading of talent or even given a certain mystical veil, such as inspiration or creative intuition.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Roy Waade, "Why Do We Have to Improvise," *Musicworks: Journal of the Australian Council of Orff Schulwerk*, 20 (2015): 36.

<sup>17</sup> Carol S. Gould and Kenneth Keaton, "The Essential Role of Improvisation in Music Performance," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 2 (2000): 143.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>19</sup> David Lichtenstein, "The Rhetoric of Improvisation: Spontaneous Discourse in Jazz and Psychoanalysis," *American Imago* 50, no. 2 (1993): 227.

However, to the jazz improviser, nothing could be further from the truth. As previously stated, improvisation is an indispensable musical conversation and expression grounded in an understanding of what is, what is not, what will be, and what can be. Fadnes expounds:

I feel an acute awareness of the knowns and the unknowns (unthoughts) interacting within my psyche. I relish in the interplay between training and muscle contractions, breathing, embouchure, and finger movements, and notice I make a decision to *act* on my instrument motorized by the persistent interaction between conscious and unconscious, mindfully controlling some actions and still utterly surprised by others.<sup>20</sup>

The jazz improviser does not travel entirely unknown paths but instead explores means by which existing paths can be traveled anew. Lichtenstein clarifies:

Complete freedom is not at all the point of most jazz improvisation. The history of jazz is clear in that expressions tending toward complete formal freedom have always been placed within well-respected structures. To underestimate this dialectic is to miss what may be the really important sublimatory aspect of jazz: its successful joining of invention and order.<sup>21</sup>

As it relates to the connectivity of invention and order, Gould and Keaton concur "many improvised performances are carefully preconceived according to patterns and formulae known to be appropriate in a particular structure."<sup>22</sup> Examining the improvisatory approaches of jazz musicians highlights this connectivity and cooperation between invention and order, illustrates the musician's unique voice and musicality and provides understanding and instruction to jazz musicians seeking to improve improvisational skills.

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<sup>20</sup> Petter Frost Fadnes, *Jazz on the Line: Improvisation in Practice*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 1.

<sup>21</sup> Lichtenstein, "The Rhetoric of Improvisation," 29.

<sup>22</sup> Gould and Keaton, "The Essential Role," 146.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to employ existing improvisational analysis models to define and identify Young's improvisational approach, provide insight into improvisation's accessibility, and ultimately encourage musicians to employ similar strategies to improve improvisational techniques.

Porter notes that in the mid-1950s, several leading critics designated Young as one of the five most influential jazz musicians in history.<sup>23</sup> Young's improvisational approach changed the trajectory of improvisation and influenced tenor saxophonists for decades. With an improvisational approach as deeply rooted in and borrowed from the classically oriented styles of Jimmy Dorsey and Frankie Trumbauer as it was from the innovations of Louis Armstrong, Young's improvisational reputation, approach, influence, and accessibility continues to shape the improvisational offerings of not only tenor saxophonists but jazz instrumentalists of all kinds.

This study will employ Chord-scale base, Motivic Development, Formulaic Usage, and Midlevel improvisational analysis models to select solo transcriptions of Young's work to define and identify his improvisational approach. However, the Literature Review will include other analysis models such as Pitch Class Set, Syntactic, and Schenkerian for comparison and contrast and to guide future analysis projects.

### **Significance of the Study**

While improvisational analysis models have been employed in past research, the focal point has commonly been one of a comparative nature between a varied group of musicians, emphasizing a single improvisational analysis model or a combination of both. For instance,

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<sup>23</sup> Lewis Porter, "The Early Style of Lester Young," *The Black Perspective in Music* 9, no. 1 (1981): 3.

Benjamin Givan's research compared select solo transcriptions of alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges, trumpeter Roy Eldridge, vibraphonist Lionel Hampton, and others. However, it did so utilizing only the Schenkerian improvisational analysis model.<sup>24</sup> In like manner, Frieler et al. employed only a single improvisational analysis model. However, the Midlevel application examined only a single transcribed work of tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins.<sup>25</sup> Research employing multiple, independent, improvisational analysis models for single instrumentalists is far more limited. This limitation is particularly true of tenor saxophonist Young.

By using Chord-scale base, Motivic Development, Formulaic Usage, and Midlevel improvisational analysis models, greater insight and awareness into the accessibility, artistry, and defining characteristics of Young's improvisational approach will be discovered. The historical references of this study will also provide a panoramic view of Young's initial instruction, early experiences, developing musical mindset, affiliations, recordings, and influence on the jazz musicians of his day and beyond. As alto saxophonist Lee Konitz once remarked, "How many people he's influenced, how many lives! Because he is definitely the basis of everything that's happened."<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, by using the previously mentioned improvisational analysis models to examine selected solo transcriptions of Young's work, a much-needed light will shine on the improvisational act itself, clarifying its accessibility to both musician and listener. Berlinger describes it in this manner "the path to understanding is rarely clear-cut; it demands constant absorption, interpretation, and synthesis of bits of information obtained from different sources by

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<sup>24</sup> Givan, "Swing Improvisation," 25-55.

<sup>25</sup> Frieler et al., "Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos," 143-162.

<sup>26</sup> Porter, "The Early Style of Lester Young," 3.

various methods. Determining the appropriate methods invariably involves finding the benefits and limitations of each—often by trial and error.”<sup>27</sup> Examining a jazz musician's improvisational approach assists in illustrating vision and vocabulary. Johnson-Laird likens improvisation to a person's ability to speak a sequence of words to form a coherent statement and suggests that "the process is computable."<sup>28</sup> Musicians interested in improving their improvisational understanding and technique will have clear, visual evidence of chord, scale, formula, motivic, and structural practices that they themselves can employ in their own creative, spontaneous, improvisational acts. Furthermore, Williams indicates that "skills learned and practiced with improvisation have many benefits and can lead to increased musicianship and leadership skills."<sup>29</sup>

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Research Question One: What unique characteristics can be observed in Lester Young's improvisational approach?

Hypothesis One: Unique characteristics that can be observed in Young's improvisational approach include revisited signature passages, inside/outside harmonic progression adherence, and improvisational material derived from the work's original melody.

Pryor asserts, "Lester did not consciously decide to play differently—more delicately, economically, and with little vibrato. The total approach, style, technique, and timbre—the gestalt—was Lester's approach from day one."<sup>30</sup> Though Young explored new musical pathways,

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<sup>27</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> P. N. Johnson-Laird, "How Jazz Musicians Improvise," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 19, no. 3 (2002): 417.

<sup>29</sup> Sarin Williams, "Consider Getting the Blues," *The Choral Journal* 62, no. 4 (2021): 53.

<sup>30</sup> Pryor, "Forever Young!" 11.



his improvisational creativity was studied, intentional, and grounded in the known practices of his day. Young was keenly aware of the influential musicians that laid the improvisational groundwork before him and those who played at his side. Daniel quotes Young, "A good way to learn is jamming with records. Find somebody you like and play with his records."<sup>31</sup>

As it relates to the improvisational analysis models used in this study, Young's approach typifies many of the same characteristics they identify. For instance, his use of similar chromatic passages or favored licks connects his improvisational work to formulaic and motivic methodologies. Porter illustrates:

Most of Young's solos contain passages in which he takes a brief idea, uses it as a motive, then develops it. Frequently, he repeats the motive once or twice with little varying, then uses it to begin the next phrase by adding notes to it. These passages thus have an organic form in which one section grows from the preceding one and are particularly effective at the beginnings of solos.<sup>32</sup>

Young's use of arpeggiated figures that trace specific chord members of the written progression illustrates the chord-based methodologies so commonplace in his youth and throughout his career. Porter's observation of Young's treatment of harmony provides "considerable freedom in constructing his melodic lines, enabling him to concentrate on phrasing and lyricism."<sup>33</sup> highlights Midlevel methodologies.

Research Question Two: What accessible and applicable improvisational strategies can musicians draw from the examination of Lester Young's improvisation approach?

Hypothesis Two: Accessible and applicable improvisational strategies musicians can draw from the examination of Young's improvisational approach include chord-scale base

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<sup>31</sup> Douglas Henry Daniels, "North Side Jazz: Lester "Pres" Young in Minneapolis: The Formative Years," *Minnesota History* 59, no. 3 (2004): 102.

<sup>32</sup> Porter, "The Early Style of Lester Young," 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

melodic construction, cultivation of motivic and formulaic concepts, and broader perspective of the improvisational act as a single connected thought and conversation.

While Frieler et al. acknowledge, “All these approaches generate valuable knowledge about the processes and peculiarities of jazz improvisation,”<sup>34</sup> the processes and peculiarities are never independent of the spontaneous, creative moment. Young's improvisational approach illustrated an interweaving of process and peculiarity, showing, as Ward reasons, "understatement was compatible with swinging, that cool and hot could coexist, that a lope instead of a gallop might bring you first to the finish line."<sup>35</sup> Young's improvisational approach reflected not only the core components of analysis methodologies and existing music theory and performance practices but did so in such a way as to make them recognizable and accessible.

### **Core Concepts**

As core concepts of this study, Young's initial instruction, experiences, influences, developing mindset, and accomplishment as a significant, impactful jazz musician and storyteller provide a critical understanding of his improvisational methodologies. Additionally, the existing improvisational analysis models employed in this study serve as integral core concepts widening our comprehension and appreciation of both Young and the improvisational act.

#### **Initial Instruction, Experiences, and Influences**

Instructed by his father, Young began his musical career as a drummer with his brother Lee and sister Irma, as part of the Young Family Band playing tent shows in the Midwest and Southwest. Young grew quite proficient on several instruments but gravitated toward the

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<sup>34</sup> Frieler et al., “Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos,” 144.

<sup>35</sup> Ward and Burns, *Jazz: A History of America's Music*, 194.

saxophone through the influences of other instrumentalists. Daniels quotes Young, “Frankie Trumbauer and Jimmy Dorsey were battling for honors in those days.... Trumbauer was my idol.”<sup>36</sup> Daniels continues that according to Young, part of Trumbauer’s appeal was that he “always told a little story.”<sup>37</sup> When Young left the family’s band in his mid-teens, Coleman Hawkins was the reigning tenor saxophone voice in the jazz idiom.

### Influences, Developing Mindset, and Impact on Jazz

Though only a few years older than Young, Coleman Hawkins had elevated the tenor saxophone to prominence in the mid-1920s. Balliett explains, “Hawkins played with a ferocious, on-the-beat intensity, taking an often-misunderstood instrument and making it work right for the first time.”<sup>38</sup> While Young had great respect for Hawkins, he did not seek to emulate his style as others did but instead forged his own:

Young's way of improvising on a song differed from Hawkins's in almost every particular. Where Hawkins arpeggiated each chord in a harmonic progression, Young created melodic phrases that touched down on some chords and ignored others. And while Hawkins's phrases were tied to the beat, Young’s phrases sometimes disregarded the beat, creating an uninhibited counter-rhythm.<sup>39</sup>

Ward notes that Young was “shaping his distinctive approach to tenor saxophone before he’d ever heard Hawkins play.”<sup>40</sup> Initially considered quite radical, Young's improvisational approach would soon be imitated by black and white saxophonists from Dexter Gordon and

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<sup>36</sup> Daniels, “North Side Jazz,” 102.

<sup>37</sup> Daniels, *Lester Leaps In*, 110.

<sup>38</sup> Whitney Balliett, *American Musicians: 56 Portraits in Jazz*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 108.

<sup>39</sup> DeVeaux and Giddins, *Jazz*, 236.

<sup>40</sup> Ward and Burns, *Jazz: A History of America’s Music*, 48.

Illinois Jacquet to Stan Getz and Zoot Sims. Luckey states, “What they idolized in Lester Young was his light, pure tone, his melodic inventiveness, his more encompassing harmonies, his lag-along manner of phrasing, his relaxed style, his rhythmic inventiveness, and above all, his remarkable ability to swing.”<sup>41</sup>

### Tell Me a Story

An equally important component often separating Young’s improvisational approach from other saxophonists was his insistence on improvisational narrative. Reminiscent of what Young perceived in his idol Frankie Trumbauer, more was needed to execute an improvisational passage. It must tell a story. Marsalis, referencing this narrative, says of Young, “And there’s Lester Young holding his Old Testament saxophone on a ninety-degree angle with a learning porkpie hat echoing Ralph Waldo Emerson *Self-Reliance* talking about, ‘You got to play your own song if you want to join the throng baby.’”<sup>42</sup> Bjerstedt describes it in this manner. “Telling a story simply meant that it must have a logical structure, a beginning, middle, and conclusion, melodically and harmonically.”<sup>43</sup> Gordon defines it as audiation and “much like conversational language where a participant thinks ahead of what will be said before it is said.”<sup>44</sup> Delannoy provides additional evidence of Young’s focus on the narrative aspect of improvisation recounting his response to a flurry of notes played by Sonny Stitts, “Very cute, Lady Stitt, but

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<sup>41</sup> Robert August Luckey, “A Study of Lester Young and His Influence Upon His Contemporaries,” University of Pittsburg, 1981, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Wynton Marsalis, “Ballad of the American Arts,” Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts & Public Policy, Washington DC. March 30, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Sven Bjerstedt, “The Jazz Storyteller: Improvisers’ Perspectives on Music and Narrative,” *Jazz Research Journal* 9, no. 1 (2015): 40.

<sup>44</sup> Edwin E. Gordon, *Learning Sequences in Music: A Contemporary Music Learning Theory*, (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2018), 304.

sing me a little song instead.”<sup>45</sup> Young's adherence to this narrative art was his purposeful practice of the Kaycee motto, as stated again by Delannoy, "Express something with your saxophone; don't just display your virtuosity; tell a story and not a lie."<sup>46</sup> Porter sums up the importance and influence of Young in this manner:

There is much to learn from Young, particularly how to construct a flowing, well-ordered melodic line and how to build up a solo over several choruses. Young showed that one could express intense feelings with taste, maturity, and, at times, serenity—a far cry from the frenetic approach prevalent in his day. Studying Young gives us insights into all music, improvised or otherwise.<sup>47</sup>

### Improvisational Analysis Models

Kenny observes that, according to scholars, improvisational analysis models provide significant perspectives on the methodologies of improvisational acts as finished products or illustrations of mental, social, or philosophical processes.<sup>48</sup> A review of existing literature suggests that most analysis models are loosely termed by the improvisational practice they seek to examine.

### Chord-Scale Base Analysis

As Kenny explains, a Chord-scale Base analysis model examines the improvisational practice of solo construction in which specific categories of chords serve as the foundation over which certain categories of scales are played.<sup>49</sup> As an improvisational practice, chord-scale

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<sup>45</sup> Luc Delannoy, *Pres: The Story of Lester Young*, (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 190.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>47</sup> Porter, “The Early Style of Lester Young,” 20.

<sup>48</sup> Kenny, “Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative,” 59.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

methodology is a common approach. As referenced by Gould and Keaton, it represents one of the closest relationships between written music and the improvisational event.<sup>50</sup> Kenny, however, recognizes a significant shortcoming of chord-scale methodologies in that while they provide a generous sampling of notes to play, they offer little reason for playing any note or series of notes in particular.<sup>51</sup>

### **Formulaic Usage Analysis**

Potter characterizes Formulaic Usage analysis as an examination of the improvisational practice of solo construction “not in terms of notes of scales prompted by a certain chord, but in terms of complete melodic patterns or formulas which can fit a chord or series of chords.”<sup>52</sup> Kenny applied Formulaic Analysis in his examination of the improvisatory work of Bill Evans to identify the frequency of occurrence of melodic patterns, establishing a “hierarchy of Evan’s most commonly used formulas.”<sup>53</sup> Potter indicates the primary challenge facing formulaic analysis is the difficulty in determining exactly what constitutes a formula, questioning for instance, if it should be of a specific length or more noticeably unique when compared to other passages in the solo.<sup>54</sup> Determining parameters concerning the repetitiveness of rhythm, notes, intervals, or borrowed themes is of additional difficulty.

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<sup>50</sup> Gould and Keaton, “The Essential Role,” 145.

<sup>51</sup> Kenny, “Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative,” 59.

<sup>52</sup> Gary Potter, “Analyzing Improvised Jazz,” *College Music Symposium* 32, no. 1 (1999): 143.

<sup>53</sup> Barry Kenny, “Structure in Jazz Improvisation: A Formulaic Analysis of the Improvisations of Bill Evans,” *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* (1999): 163.

<sup>54</sup> Potter, “Analyzing Improvised Jazz,” 143.

## Motivic Development Analysis

Kenny, citing similarities to formulaic analysis, describes Motivic Development analysis as examining the improvisational practice of solo construction in which short, motivic material derived from the song's original melody is of prominent use.<sup>55</sup> Green suggests this prominent use is, in part, a fundamental function of the motivic material's contribution to the basic shape of an improvisatory act and the inherently improvisational musical composition itself.<sup>56</sup> Givan found motivic interaction in the dialogic improvisational exchanges between trumpeter Miles Davis, saxophonist Sonny Rollins, and pianist Tommy Flanagan in one of their collective studio recording from 1958.<sup>57</sup> Kenny observes similar shortcomings in this analytical approach that, like formulaic analysis, focuses on recognizing short, motivic phrases rather than the more critical and longer-range goals of the improvisational act.<sup>58</sup> However, this emphasis on the critical and longer-range goals of the improvisational act is not left unattended.

## Midlevel Analysis

Frieler et al. view Midlevel analysis as an examination of the improvisational practice of solo construction focusing on those playing ideas existing on the “middle level” between single note events and structural events such as chord progression.<sup>59</sup> This type of analysis can identify characteristics found through other analytical models but seeks a means by which they can be

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<sup>55</sup> Kenny, “Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative,” 61.

<sup>56</sup> Edward Green, “It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Grundgestalt!--Ellington from a Motivic Perspective,” *Jazz Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (2008): 216.

<sup>57</sup> Benjamin Givan, “Rethinking Interaction in Jazz Improvisation,” *Music Theory Online* 22, no. 3 (2016): 5.

<sup>58</sup> Kenny, “Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative,” 61.

<sup>59</sup> Frieler et al., “Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos,” 145.

separated to provide a clear perspective of their connectivity. For instance, what lies between the signature motivic passages, the expressivity, and the void of playing nothing?

Kenny reminds us that the primary criticism of all improvisational analysis models is that it is unlikely that jazz musicians internalize the improvisatory act to the extent suggested by these analytical models. It is equally unlikely that the same musicians are constrained by the parameters identified in these models.<sup>60</sup>

### **Methodology and Research Plan**

This qualitative study employed Chord-scale Base, Motivic Development, Formulaic Usage, and Midlevel improvisational analysis models to examine select solos of Lester Young, identifying characteristics, techniques, and structures unique not only to Young but the analysis models themselves.

The improvisational analysis models were chosen for their consistent and successful application within previous research and their capability to offer both a targeted and large-scale view of improvisational performance characteristics, structures, layers, harmonic progression, and improvisational intent.

The select improvisational solos were representative of three periods within Young's career to include: (1) his developing years to the latter 1930s, (2) his tenure with the Count Basie Orchestra to the early 1940s, considered the most prolific timeframe of his career, and (3) his solo work until his death in 1959. Transcriptions of all selected improvisational solos appear in this study, and each was examined through the four improvisation analysis models employed.

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<sup>60</sup> Kenny, "Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative," 69.



Analysis model characteristics present within these select improvisational solos will be identified and labeled below the examples. Further examination, discussion, comparison, and contrast of the characteristics will note Young's implementation, interpretation, augmentation, and repetitiveness within his improvisational approach. From this data, a roadmap of Young's improvisational methods and practices will be established, the accessibility of improvisation itself will be illuminated, and strategies explored to improve the improvisational understanding, abilities, and techniques of musicians, both young and old.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Analysis* is the detailed examination of elements and structures. However, it should be noted that implementation and practice of the various analysis models, and the data eventually derived from them, will differ by the demand of each improvisational analysis model.

*Anticipation* is an improvisational practice in which a performer introduces a musical passage referencing a chord change prior to its musical arrival.

*Appoggiatura* or *grace note* is a non-chord tone embellishment resolving to the principle or expected note.

*Arpeggio* or *arpeggiation* is a broken chord in which the notes of that chord are sounded individually and in succession. While this definition applies to the triad form of a chord containing only a root, third, and fifth, in this document, it will be reserved to define broken chord passages containing more intervals present in the chord structure.

*Audiation*, as explained by Gordon, is a process not unlike language itself, where the musician connects that which they hear or play not only to what has taken place in the past but what they predict might come next.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Gordon, *Learning Sequences in Music*, 3.

*Chord-Scale Analysis* describes an analytical process by which direct relationships between specific chords and specific scales can be identified in the improvisational acts of the musician.<sup>62</sup>

*Cutting or Head-cutting Session* describes an improvisational duel where musicians challenge one another by calling out favorite tunes, often in complicated keys, as a means of one-upmanship.

*Formulaic Usage Analysis* describes an analytical process by which specific melodic patterns or formulas fundamentally based upon a chord or series of chords and repeated through multiple individual performance moments can be identified in the improvisational acts of the musician.”<sup>63</sup>

*Fragment* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It describes a small, unexpressive set of tones that neither combine to form a clear contour-based succession nor a motivic/thematic figure.<sup>64</sup>

*Inside-Out Playing* describes a manner of improvisation in which the musician plays notes inside the chord structure or outside the chord structure.

*Interwoven line* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It describes a phrase consisting of two independent horizontal ascending or descending lines that are played in tone-wise alternation.<sup>65</sup>

*Isochronous* describes repetitive rhythmic figures occupying equal time.

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<sup>62</sup> Kenny, “Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative,” 59.

<sup>63</sup> Potter, “Analyzing Improvised Jazz,” 143.

<sup>64</sup> Frieler et al., “Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos,” 147.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 146.

*Kaycee*, as in *Kaycee motto* or *Kaycee men*, is a slang spelling used by researcher Luc Delannoy and refers to Kansas City.

*Lady* is not gender-specific in this study. Young's vocabulary often included words, phrases, or nicknames of his own making. As DeVaux and Giddins state, "He spoke a colorful, obscure slang of his own invention, some of which became a part of jazz dictions, including his nicknames for musicians."<sup>66</sup> Greeting friends or musicians as *Lady* and their last name was not an uncommon practice for Young.

*Lick* describes a formulaic or motivic pattern often repeated in multiple, individual improvisatory acts.

*Melodic figure* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It describes a musical idea not derived from the song's theme but rather one that embodies a song-like lyricism. Midlevel analysis further defines it as more like a Broadway work, pop song, folk tune, or operatic aria than a typical scat-like passage.<sup>67</sup>

*Midlevel Analysis* describes an analytical process by which the musical materials between the separate notes and the overall construction of the larger work can be identified in the improvisational acts of the musician.<sup>68</sup>

*Motivic Analysis* describes an analytical process by which short, motivic ideas, often borrowed from the larger work's melody, can be identified in the improvisational acts of the musician.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> DeVaux and Giddins, *Jazz*, 236.

<sup>67</sup> Frieler et al., "Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos," 147.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>69</sup> Kenny, "Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative," 59.

*Multi-pitch* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It denotes a difference between repetitive rhythmic figures featuring multiple notes and those featuring a single note.<sup>70</sup>

*Neighbor tone* describes a melodic practice in which the performer steps up or down from a harmonic note to a nonharmonic one, then returns to the original harmonic note.

*Oscillating* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It describes a lengthy and repetitive rhythmic figure that fluctuates between two notes.<sup>71</sup>

*Passing tone* describes a melodic practice in which the performer inserts a nonharmonic note as a transition between harmonic notes in a stepwise direction, upward or downward.

*Pet Licks* describes signature phrases that have become musical calling cards of a jazz artist and are frequently cited by the artist in improvisatory works.

*Quoting* describes an improvisatory practice in which the performer uses a melody or melodic fragment from another song.

*Rhythmic Figure* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It can manifest itself in many ways but always describes a musical idea whose rhythmical expression is its single most prominent feature.<sup>72</sup>

*Simple Line* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It describes a musical line that moves primarily in step-sized intervals and a single ascending or descending direction.<sup>73</sup>

*Single pitch* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It denotes a difference between repetitive rhythmic figures featuring a single note and those featuring multiple notes.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Frieler et al., "Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos," 147.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 147.

*Superimposition* describes an improvisatory practice in which the performer references a chord unrelated to the present harmony.

*Theme Figure* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It describes musical material taken from the song's theme.<sup>75</sup>

*Tick Line* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It describes a musical line with an orderly but concave and convex contour.<sup>76</sup>

*Transcription* refers to written-out solos used as the basis for all analysis models.

*Void* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It describes a moment in which the musician plays nothing for a lengthy period outside of what is expected for breathing or pauses that often follow the end of a phrase.<sup>77</sup>

*Wavy Line* is a classification within Midlevel analysis. It describes a rather lengthy musical passage that moves in both a concave and convex contour and in a rhythmically diverse and often abrupt fashion.<sup>78</sup>

### Summary

While it may appear as a spontaneous and creative act accessible to only a gifted few, improvisation is grounded in discoverable, applicable, and accessible theoretical and performance practices. To understand the improvisational artistry, approach, and influence of jazz musicians, it is necessary to analyze their work to discover their unique and definitive improvisational characteristics. Potter suggests using multiple analysis approaches over a

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<sup>75</sup> Frieler et al., "Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos," 147.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

spectrum of spontaneous acts to understand a jazz musician's improvisational artistry properly. "All focused approaches ought to be pursued, applied to many solos, and their result made available to interested listener-readers."<sup>79</sup> Collier attests to this historical interest and importance of improvisation in the jazz idiom "not knowing what was going to happen next had great appeal for young Americans escaping from the well-ordered life of the Victorians. The jazz solo seemed the embodiment of that idea."<sup>80</sup>

This study employs Chord-scale Base, Motivic Development, Formulaic Usage, and Midlevel improvisational analysis models. These improvisational analysis models were chosen due to the substantial amount of research dedicated to their definition, implementation, and application across multiple musical genres and periods. These improvisational analysis models were also chosen because they offer an outstanding cross-sectional view of multiple performance characteristics, from simple note-by-note structures and harmonic progression to more complex layered constructs and wide-angle, global perspectives of improvisational intent. Potter's suggestions are echoed by Kenny as well in that multiple means of theoretical analysis can focus on "improvisation as a finished product or assist to explain the philosophical, mental, and social processes underlying its creation."<sup>81</sup> These improvisation analysis models will be employed to examine selected solo transcriptions of Young's improvisational work and answer this project's research questions of what unique characteristics can be observed in Young's improvisational approach and what accessible and applicable improvisational strategies can musicians draw from the examination of Young's improvisation approach. The characteristics and data derived from

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<sup>79</sup> Potter, "Analyzing Improvised Jazz," 148.

<sup>80</sup> James Lincoln Collier, *Jazz the American Theme Song*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 47

<sup>81</sup> Kenny, "Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative," 59.

these analyses will highlight not only Young's artistry and approach but also illuminate the improvisatory act's practices, providing musicians with observable evidence and instruction to improve their improvisational skills and understanding. Fadnes describes it this way:

Describing improvisational performativity through multiple perspectives uncovers a multiplicity of conundrums spinning around an improviser's mind, but also how the implications of these conundrums are equally multiple when revealed as real-life music: including the audible and the tangible, the experimental and the commercial, the subjective and the collective, concrete objects, and fluid meanings, and the contours of improvisation as both the negotiator and negotiated between them all.<sup>82</sup>

For several reasons, Lester Young was chosen as the improvisational centerpiece for this study. First, while Young's improvisational work has occasionally been included in some group analyses of jazz artists, little analytical research exists that focuses singularly on his improvisational approach. Second, Young's impact on jazz, particularly improvisation, was almost immediate and easily identifiable, as Delannoy indicates. "Lester's progress was rapid and clearly noticeable to other band members, who looked on him with envy. He proved to his father that music was his domain and that no one, absolutely no one, would ever be able to challenge him."<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, thirdly, Young was chosen as the centerpiece because the depth and breadth of his historical importance, influential musical style, and accessibility are almost beyond compare. Porter explains. "Tenor saxophonist Lester Willis Young nicknamed 'Pres,' was a pioneering jazzman who exerted enormous influence upon his contemporaries. Young's influence has been attested to by thousands, both in words and in music."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Fadnes, *Jazz on the Line*, 2.

<sup>83</sup> Delannoy, *Pres: The Story of Lester Young*, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Porter, "The Early Style of Lester Young," 3.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

The improvisational act itself, the application of improvisational analysis models, and the specific improvisational approach of musicians across many periods and styles of music have been focal points of much literature. However, this literature has often limited its scope to the application of a single improvisational analysis model or musicians within a specified group. This literature review examines the literature on Lester Young, improvisational analysis models, and the improvisational act itself.

### Literature on Lester Young

“Because he is definitely the basis of everything that’s happened.”<sup>85</sup> Saxophonist Lee Konitz's quote in "Lester Leaps In: The Early Style of Lester Young" properly frames how fellow musicians, both during Young’s career and after, viewed his impact and influence on jazz music, improvisation, and their performance styles. The article examines the middle portion of Young’s career during his tenure with the Count Basie Orchestra from roughly 1936 to 1942. It begins by noting several general improvisational characteristics within the larger jazz community common in Young's improvisational work. The approaches include (1) repeated progressions within popular songs or original compositions, (2) vocalistic expressive techniques such as blue notes, honks, squeaks, vibrato, and glissandos, (3) individuality of tone and style, (4) syncopation as a rule rather than the exception, and (5) swung eighth-note pairs resembling the long/short rhythmic feel a quarter-note/eighth-note triplet, rather than the more traditional equal eighth-note feel.<sup>86</sup> From this foundation, Porter delves into Young's influences, repertory, and

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<sup>85</sup> Porter, “The Early Style of Lester Young,” 3.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 4.



musical arrangements, before beginning a series of analyses examining Young's structural and harmonic approach. The analyses illustrate Young's frequent use of formulas, contours, and patterns in his improvisational work across the breadth of his career. The analyses also illustrate Young's regular use of short, compositional ideas or motives that, while different from one solo to the next, show similarity in construction and application:

Most of Young's solos contain passages in which he takes a brief idea, uses it as a motive, then develops it. Frequently, he repeats the motive once or twice with little varying, then uses it to begin the next phrase by adding notes to it. These passages thus have an organic form in which one section grows from the preceding one and are particularly effective at the beginning of solos.<sup>87</sup>

Referencing the analysis and opinion of composer and theorists George Russell, Porter notes his distinction between jazz musicians who think "horizontally, concentrating on the forward motion of the melodic line and those who think vertically, articulating each individual chord as it passes by arpeggiating at least a few notes of each one."<sup>88</sup> Examining his analysis of Young's improvisational approach, Porter recognizes that while Young, like most jazz musicians, uses a mixture of horizontal and vertical thinking, Young's improvisational work leans heavily horizontal to maintain the forward motion of the song. "Even when Young used arpeggiated melodies, he frequently chose an arpeggio that would fit over several chords. This approach allowed him considerable freedom in construction his melodic lines, enabling him to concentrate on phrasing and lyricism."<sup>89</sup>

Pryor examines Young's career from start to finish but begins by discussing how the arts progress. He notes that it was seldom the audiences that demanded the multitude of distinctly

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<sup>87</sup> Porter, "The Early Style of Lester Young," 11.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

different voices that represent music and musicians across history. The artist alone was "driven by their own compelling needs and emotions."<sup>90</sup> Even Pryor's discussion of instrument maker Adolph Sax hints at a similar compelling drive to create the saxophone, an instrument featuring a "range comparable to the human voice and a variable timbre to make it effective at expressing emotion in a human-voice-like tone that can be ebullient or sad, thoughtful or blustery."<sup>91</sup> Pryor briefly chronicles Coleman Hawkins' dominance as a tenor saxophonist in early swing music before turning to a more detailed exploration of the contrasts between Young and Hawkins. Pryor recounts Young's work in Kansas City, his difficult time with the Fletcher Henderson Band, and his awful experience in the Army. Pryor's article closes with Young's stylistic bridge to Bebop, a list of emulators, and observations from critics and musicians such as saxophonist Ben Webster who once asked, "What planet did Lester Young come from?"<sup>92</sup>

While references to the entirety of Young's career are included, Daniels' work focuses on his early musical experiences prior to the Great Depression and his subsequent move to Kansas City. The article presents a history of Young's musical instruction by his father and Young's musical growth during his years with the family band that included his sister Irma and brother Lee. Daniels also traces the family's musical growth and travels from Mississippi through Louisiana and Oklahoma before settling in an area of Minneapolis known as the North Side. It is here that Daniels points to Young's first pivotal opportunity to grow beyond his family's experiences and begin his solo career. Performing with an area band, Young was asked to move from the alto sax he regularly played to the tenor sax to cover for a band member who frequently

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<sup>90</sup> Pryor, "Forever Young!" 11.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

failed to show up for gigs. Daniels acknowledges that this event profoundly influenced the development of Young's unique musical, sound, and voice. "His approach to tenor playing was essentially an alto approach.... Before he knew it, he was playing tenor, alto style."<sup>93</sup> The move to the North Side also provided many performance opportunities for Young because "the Twin Cities possessed night clubs, resorts, and enjoyed big touring shows and territorial bands from Kansas City."<sup>94</sup>

Balliet's *American Musicians: 56 Portraits in Jazz* begins, "Very little about the tenor saxophonist Lester Young was unoriginal."<sup>95</sup> The work examines many unique aspects concerning Young's persona, from his physical characteristics and fashion sense, to how he held his saxophone, phrased a melodic line, or invented a coded language friends needed time to learn before any real conversation could take place. Using observations and quotes from jazz musicians as well as Young's own words, Balliett recounts early experiences in the Young family band, the demarcation between the tradition laid down by Coleman Hawkins, and the new direction many musicians and listeners perceived Young to represent. Bassist Gene Ramey recalls:

Hawkins' solos buttonhole you; Young's seem to turn you away. His improvisations move with such logic and smoothness they lull the ear. He kept the original melodies in his head, but what came out was his dreams about them. His solos were fantasies—lyrical soft, liquid—on the tunes he was playing and probably on his own life as well. The humming quality of his solos was deceptive, for they were made up of quick runs, sudden held notes that slowed the beat, daring shifts in rhythmic emphasis, continuous motion, and lovely melodies."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Daniels, "North Side Jazz," 103.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>95</sup> Balliett, *American Musicians*, 234.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

“Lester Leaps In: The Life and Times of Lester ‘Pres’ Young” is both a comprehensive and exhaustive view of the countless moments in Young's personal life and musical journey from its 1909 beginning in Woodville, Mississippi, to its end, when jazz said goodbye to the pork pie hat in 1959. Daniels thoroughly documents Young's upbringing, exploring the inequality and unrest prevalent in Woodville. He also details how Young's father, Willis Handy "Professor" Young, provided an intense musical education with the purpose that his children become musicians and not work in someone's kitchen, carry someone's bags, be a porter, or shine someone's shoes.<sup>97</sup> The work details Young's touring years as a member of various territory bands, such as the Oklahoma City Blue Devils or Andy Kirk's Kansas City Band. Daniels also recounts Young's work with King Oliver and his eventual prolific partnership with the Count Basie Orchestra. Of particular interest in the work is Daniels' attention to Young's moralistic viewpoints of music and his place in it. Young believed "music was far more than mere music or light entertainment; rather, it was closely linked with life and one's very essence and sense of self-worth."<sup>98</sup> In keeping with the extensive nature of the work, Daniels shines a lengthy spotlight on Young's final few years of solo work with smaller ensembles and his connection to the jazz at the Philharmonic series and their European tours espousing music's international stature and Cold War importance.<sup>99</sup>

Young's earliest influences are discussed at length by Delanoy, and though often a point of contention and controversy for many during Young's lifetime and beyond, the impact that

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<sup>97</sup> Daniels, *Lester Leaps In*, 44.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

young white musicians such as Frankie Trumbauer, Lawrence Freeman, Bix Beiderbecke, and Jimmy Dorsey had on Young is, by his own words, undeniable:

I had to make a choice between Frankie Trumbauer and Jimmy Dorsey. I wasn't sure which direction I'd be taking, you know? I'd play one by Jimmy, then one by Trumbauer, and so on. At the time, I didn't know who Hawkins was, dig it? But I could plainly see there were other guys who were telling me stories I liked to hear. Finally, I found I liked Trumbauer best. He played the soprano saxophone. I have made an effort to produce the sound of a soprano sax on the tenor. That's why I sound like no one else.<sup>100</sup>

Delannoy provides an in-depth exploration of Young's musical experiences and career as he concentrates on the unique events and people that helped forge Young's persona. The author details the impact of Young's father, Willis, the importance of cities like Salina and Kansas City, Kansas, the stepping-stone of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils, the difficulties in the Fletcher Henderson's Band, and the joys of his years spent with the Count Basie Orchestra. It was with the Count Basie Orchestra that Young's impact and influence began taking great shape:

When the full Basie orchestra made recordings, it became more apparent how Lester's style and the aerial effects it created were cradled by Jo Jones' technique. Jones' use of cymbals to mark the beat (instead of the bass drum as before) created a lightness that had not existed until then in the rhythm section and which was itself driven by the style of Lester Young.<sup>101</sup>

Luckey covers many of the same events, history, and experiences as existing works but includes several detailed, albeit primarily narrative analyses of Young's improvisational work and that of others. Though Luckey does not employ the improvisational analysis models of this work, the author identifies several practices and techniques found in the improvisational work of Young and others. Luckey also identifies unique aspects of Young's improvisational approach:

Where Hawkins thought harmonically, Young thought melodically. Compared to Hawkins, Young had a much smaller sound and used considerably less vibrato. His playing was more restrained—noticeably cooler—than that of Hawkins, and Young

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<sup>100</sup> Delannoy, *Pres: The Story of Lester Young*, 22.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

possessed a very strong feeling for the blues. He typically lagged behind the beat instead of playing right on it as his predecessors had done, and he utilized silence at unexpected places in his phrases, which tended to emphasize his lag-behind concept. Where Hawkins had made the tenor saxophone a powerful yet respected instrument, Lester Young made the tenor a more expressive, lyrical instrument.<sup>102</sup>

Driggs and Haddix also commit considerable time to the impact, influences, comparisons, and contrasts of Young's style and that of his predecessor Coleman Hawkins. They reference a late-night cutting session where participants would call out favorite tunes, often in uncomfortable keys, to challenge one another in improvisational one-upmanship. Basie recalls:

Somebody kept asking him (Hawkins) to play, so he finally went across the street to the hotel, and when he came back in with his horn, I was sitting at a table with John Kirby and some friends, and John thought that something was unusual. Because that was something that Hawk didn't do in those days. Nobody had ever seen Hawk bring his horn in somewhere to get into a jam session.<sup>103</sup>

Hawkins may have thought the late-night challenge would end quickly; after all, he had to get on the road the following day for an evening gig in St. Louis with the Henderson band. However, after having dispatched most of the saxophonists on stage, it was now early in the morning, and Young remained:

Hawk was cutting everybody out. Until Pres got him. He tore Hawk apart. He tore Hawk up so bad he missed a date in St. Louis. Hawk was still trying to get him a twelve o'clock the next day. Seemed like the longer Pres played, the longer the head-cutting session went on, the better Pres got. He played more creative things. The adage in Kansas City was ... *say something on your horn*, not just show off your versatility and ability to execute. *Tell us a story, and don't let it be a lie*. Let it *mean* something if it's only one note.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Luckey, "A Study of Lester Young and His Influence Upon His Contemporaries," 99.

<sup>103</sup> Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix, *Kansas City jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop—A History*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006): 126.

<sup>104</sup> Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 127.

In the eyes of most of the musicians in attendance that late night and early morning, Young dethroned Hawkins as king of the tenor saxophone and solidified not only his status as Pres (President) of the saxophone but also the status of every Kansas City saxophonist in the area.

Ward and Burns provide a comprehensive look at jazz, its place, events, and musicians along the timeline of history and the contributions, impact, and influence it has had on society and culture. They suggest Young was fiercely competitive from the beginning and could play for hours. Young says, "I can play a hundred choruses and play different for every chorus."<sup>105</sup> In considerable contrast to the standard most tenor men utilized at that time, Young played space and understatement as easily as he did the jump blues rhythms of the clubs, theaters, and dance halls. "He left absolutely no reed player and few young players of any instrument unstirred by the wild, exciting, original flights of his imagination."<sup>106</sup> Albert Murray, American literary and music critic, novelist, essayist, and biographer, figures prominently in this text, and Burns' PBS broadcast drawn in part from this work. Murray's analyses comprise observations on a host of jazz artists and events. However, those particularly applicable to Young include comments on the Count Basie Orchestra, the Kansas City Jazz scene, and Young. Murray states, "Like a combat veteran, Young's got a sporty limp because he's been through something. People know you had to pay a price for that. Lester Young's music made me feel that he's paid the price, but he's more elegant as a result."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ward and Burns, *Jazz: A History of America's Music*, 193.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

DeVeaux and Giddins also extensively explore the history of jazz and its musicians. The book discusses Young's impact and influence on other saxophonists such as Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, Dexter Gordon, and Illinois Jacquet. As it relates to the distinct, unique characteristics of his playing style and influence of the Count Basie's Orchestra, DeVeaux and Giddins state:

In that atmosphere, Young created a free-floating style, wheeling and diving like a gull, banking with low, funky riffs that pleased dancers and listeners alike. Stan Getz, one of the countless young musicians who began by imitating Young, called his style of playing the Lestorian Mode: a fount of ideas expressing new freedom in jazz. More than any other musician, Young introduced the idea of "cool" in musical style and personal effect.<sup>108</sup>

### Summary

This literature review confirms Young's impact and influence as a significant figure in jazz history and an extraordinarily gifted and powerful improviser. While Young's improvisational approach was initially shaped by some of the most recognizable jazz artists that preceded him, his primary focus was always to build his unique improvisational voice. Furthermore, it should be noted that in a time of great racial hatred and unrest, Young's significance to jazz musicians and audiences, both black and white, provides iron-clad testimony as to his unquestionable relevance to this project and in general as a jazz artist and improviser in whose study musicians would profoundly benefit.

### Literature on Improvisational Analysis Models

While "Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos: A New Approach to the Study of Improvisation" does not address Young's improvisational work per se, its analysis of Sonny Rollins' improvisational work on "Blue Seven" does lay out an easily recognizable framework from which application to Young's improvisational approach can be made. Midlevel analysis

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<sup>108</sup> DeVeaux and Giddins, *Jazz*, 236.



explores the use of Midlevel units (MLUs) between the single notes of an improvising musician's playing and the larger structures that the improviser eventually builds. Though only briefly referencing the eighteen subcategories and forty-one sub-subcategories, Frieler et al. identify, define, and discuss nine primary categories of MLUs; *line*, *lick*, *melody*, *rhythm*, *theme*, *quote*, *fragment*, *expressive*, and *void*.<sup>109</sup> Using a relatively brief twenty-seven measure section of Rollins' work on "Blue Seven," the authors identify the occurrence of thirteen separate and distinctive MLUs ranging from a simple *fragment* to the more complex *line wavy descending* pattern.<sup>110</sup> After discussing the implication and relationship of the identified MLUs to each other and the work, the authors acknowledge that deviations from the standard meanings of these categories cannot be ruled out. Frieler, et al., therefore, suggest that when Midlevel analysis is undertaken, a strategy that adopts a conservative attitude in Midlevel analysis should be used. When in doubt, choose the least specific category as the identifier.<sup>111</sup>

Hargreaves follows a formulaic analysis approach focusing on idea generation and its three parameters: strategy-generated ideas, audiation-generated ideas, and motor-generated ideas. Regarding jazz, strategy-generated ideas are found in verbal classroom instruction or the numerous instructional books on improvisation. Strategy-generated ideas are likely the most common components of improvisation because they are conscious and can be triggered externally.<sup>112</sup> Audiation-generated ideas are subconscious in nature and the result of concentrated listening and intentional practice that creates a depository of licks, scales, patterns, and ideas in

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<sup>109</sup> Frieler et al., "Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos," 146-47.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>112</sup> Wendy Hargreaves, "Generating Ideas in Jazz Improvisation: Where Theory Meets Practice," *International Journal of Music Education* 30, no. 4 (2012): 363

the musician's mental storehouse. Hargreaves continues, "Evidence suggests the repetitive listening required by this activity embeds ideas in the inner ear."<sup>113</sup> Lastly, motor-generated ideas result from often ingrained or eventually ingrained motor patterns that show far less strategic purpose and are also subconscious. Hargreaves also notes that motor-generated ideas favor instrumental improvisers over vocal improvisers. Instrumentalists can visually and kinesthetically isolate specific notes, keys, frets, buttons, and the individual finger or muscle groups necessary to bring about musical ideas. Vocalists, on the other hand, have no such access. "Singing uses the same muscle groups for all pitches (with changes occurring only for registers), and movement of intrinsic laryngeal muscles is not visible."<sup>114</sup> Hargreaves' work offers no specific application to Young's improvisational approach and only a general discussion and application to jazz improvisation. However, the examination of idea generation, the identification of its parameters, and the application of those parameters in improvisational practice within this work establishes a solid foundation upon which the same examination, identification, and application can be employed to study Young's improvisational approach.

To support his contention that no actual separation exists between improvised ideas and wholly composed works, Green uses the music of Duke Ellington to examine motivic practices. Borrowing a German term coined by Arnold Schoenberg, the author builds a foundational tenet that whether one notes consciously or unconsciously, a composer or improviser is constantly creating and constructing from a basic motif or core musical statement called a *Grundgestalt*. Ellington's own words provide additional support:

It is my firm belief that there has never been anybody who has blown even two bars worth listening to who didn't have some idea about what he was going to play before he

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<sup>113</sup> Hargreaves, "Generating Ideas in Jazz Improvisation," 363

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

started.... Improvisation really consists of picking out a device here and connecting it with a device there, changing the rhythm here and pausing there; there has to be some thought preceding each phrase; otherwise, it is meaningless.<sup>115</sup>

Schoenberg saw Grundgestalt as a “motivic idea with enough inherent musical power to animate an entire composition.”<sup>116</sup> Green observes this motivic Grundgestalt in a multitude of musical illustrations. He notes it in Ellington's most talented jazz improvisers and Duke’s compositions. Green identifies it in "reversed figures, semitonal shakes, turns, and other devices, noting that motivic composition depends on one's ability to perceive opposites—unity and diversity, change and sameness--together."<sup>117</sup>

In "Analyzing Improvised Jazz," Potter applies multiple improvisational analysis models across diverse jazz improvisers. The author discusses the long history of Chord-scale base approaches, recognizing that identifying the chordal foundation of a measure or entire work almost immediately ties it to useable pitch material. This vertical perspective is also found at the heart of Pitch Class set structures. In Formulaic and Motivic approaches, Potter remarks, "Jazz writers have long pointed out that most players reuse musical ideas from solo to solo, to one extent or another."<sup>118</sup> The musical gestures of scale-wise motion, melodic leaps, and arpeggiated chords found in Reductive approaches can also be observed in Midlevel analysis models. Syntactic approaches, which seek to draw parallels between music and language, hint at the commonplace improvisational practices of pitch bending, growling, or quoting other musical sources. This parallel bolsters the statement, "Just as one must know a language to understand a

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<sup>115</sup> Green, “It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Grundgestalt!” 216.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>118</sup> Potter, “Analyzing Improvised Jazz,” 143.

speech in that language; one must learn the jazz language to fully understand jazz improvisation."<sup>119</sup> The improvisers that form the core analysis study of Potter's work are John Coltrane, Thelonius Monk, and Cannonball Adderley. The transcriptions presented by the author are analyzed, and characteristics consistent with the analysis model are identified, labeled, and discussed. The overall purpose of Potter's article is to present an overview of several methods for analysis of improvisation, to introduce analytical formats and synthesize aspects of these methods, and to apply that format to solos to demonstrate and acquaint readers with the improvisational act.<sup>120</sup> While Young's improvisational work is not presented, the comprehensive nature of the article is of profound benefit to the work of this project.

Similarly, Kenny employs several improvisational analysis models across a diverse group of jazz improvisers. However, one of the defining characteristics of this article is its intentional decision and willingness to caution readers and pose challenging questions about the applicability, practicality, and effectiveness of improvisational analysis models. The author does not seek to dismantle or negate the analysis models, only to properly frame their strengths and weaknesses. Because the fundamental characteristics and application of these analytical approaches have been presented and discussed earlier in this literature review, the presentation and discussion of Kenny's research will concentrate on his cautions. The author warns that Chord-Scale base approaches can provide too many note options for the improviser unfamiliar with tonal system relationships. In Formulaic and Motivic approaches, Kenny reminds us that improvisers can become "reliant on a repertory of formulas and motives which, when strung

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<sup>119</sup> Potter, "Analyzing Improvised Jazz," 148.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 143.

together, form angular melodies that fail to interact with improvising in any meaningful way."<sup>121</sup>

These approaches also tend to emphasize shorter, melodic perspectives without equal consideration to the larger structure of the improvisational moment. Pitch Class Set approaches benefit Free and Modal Jazz but are more challenging to identify and apply in tonal jazz settings. Conversely, Schekerian approaches are more applicable to tonal settings or written compositions and problematic for Free and Modal jazz, which often features a de-emphasis on harmonic direction. To all analysis models, Kenny asserts two criticisms:

First, it is unlikely that jazz musicians internalize the creative process to the degree suggested by these models. Second, it is also unlikely that they are solely constrained by the parameters identified by Western analysis. Musicians are, instead, open to many conflicting or contributing influences that provide stimuli for further creation. As a collective sonic canvas, these competing voices lend perspective to individual voices.<sup>122</sup>

Kenny applauds the availability of instruction and instructional materials. However, he cautions that these theoretical models may be so fundamentally different from the jazz tradition that they risk detrimental effects in educational settings. Saxophonist Lou Donaldson explains:

All players are sounding alike today. They're all working out of Oliver Nelson's book. They lay mechanical sequences of changes that will fit anything. When they get to a chord change, they skate through it. They work out clusters of notes, whole-tone patterns, and things to get through it ... they don't have a feeling for tonal centers in music anymore, or they just improvise on the harmony in ways that have nothing to do with the song.<sup>123</sup>

Kenny closes with a reminder that historically significant jazz musicians had limited contact with modern-day theoretical models and emphasizes a need for long-range dialogue to transcend the limitations of artificial theoretical models.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Kenny, "Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative," 60.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

Givan notes that while Schenker's theory has been applied to several musical styles, including post-war jazz idioms such as Bebop, few studies have focused on Swing Music.<sup>125</sup> However, while Givan presents a coherent analysis of several solos by various musicians in the Swing Era, including a single application to Young's improvisational work on the jazz chart "Oh, Lady Be Good," he also recognizes the inherent challenges of Schenkerian analysis and music of the Swing Era:

Swing-era jazz solos should only be considered tonal in the colloquial sense of employing a diatonic hierarchically organized scale and functional triadic harmonies; there is currently no reason to assume they typically are tonal in the more profound Schenkerian sense of expressing a background-level contrapuntal unfolding of the tonic chord from a primary tone.<sup>126</sup>

While Larson's primary focal point is Schenkerian analysis, the three questions he poses are applicable to all analysis models in many ways. Chord-scale base, Formulaic Usage, Motivic Development, and Midlevel analysis models, though applied in this project to improvisation in general and Lester Young's approach more specifically, have histories more closely tied to the analysis of composed works. The author's first question bears this in mind. "Is it appropriate to apply to improvised music a method of analysis developed for the study of composed music?"<sup>127</sup>

Larson questions the distinction:

Does improvised music differ fundamentally from composed music in that composed music has structure because it is "worked out?" Currently available "alternate takes" of jazz performances, which show improvisers working out their solos in successive takes, "composing" them if you will, should help to dispel any notion that a sharp line divides improvisation and composition.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Givan, "Swing Improvisation," 25.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Larson, *Analyzing Jazz*, 4.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 5.

Larson's second question addresses features of jazz harmony such as ninths, elevenths, and thirteenthths that are seemingly less a part of the music historically analyzed by the models above, or Schenker for that matter. Can these analysis models account for the chords and the dissonances jazz creates? The author indicates they can and confirms the historical existence and use of these dissonant chord types:

In classical music, one can find pitches whose functions may seem difficult to explain in conventional terms. They may be embellished before they resolve. They may remain unresolved until or after a change in harmony, or they may not be explicitly resolved in their own register. Although these notes may receive greater emphasis and be treated more freely in jazz than in classical music, their basic meaning remains the same; they derive their meaning from more stable pitches at deeper structural levels.<sup>129</sup>

Larson's third question addresses whether improvising musicians purposefully intend to create and implement the simple or complex ideas and structures shown in any analysis model. Bill Evans indicates he does. "I always have, in anything that I play, an absolutely basic structure in mind. Now, I can work around that differently or between the string structural points differently, but I find the most fundamental structure, and then I work from there."<sup>130</sup>

### Summary

Knowledge of the devices, practices, and methods of generating and implementing improvisational ideas is indispensable to musicians entering into their first study of jazz improvisation and those seeking to advance their skills. Whether it be the simple outlining of chords within the harmonic context of a measure or building larger frameworks that include motivic materials or melodic quotes, recognizing and identifying those practices are integral to successful improvisation. This literature review affirms the applicability of Chord-Scale Base,

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<sup>129</sup> Larson, *Analyzing Jazz*, 4.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 410

Formulaic Usage, Motivic Development, and Midlevel analysis models to identify improvisational devices and illustrate their implementation in the improvisational work of not only Young but others as well

#### Literature on the Improvisational Act

“Jazz is not just, ‘Well, man, this is what I feel like playing.’ It’s a very structured thing that comes down from a tradition and requires a lot of thought and study—Wynton Marsalis.”<sup>131</sup> Berlinger’s *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* is a comprehensive study in the process, vocabulary, practice, and structure of jazz improvisation. The author advises young instrumentalists to follow a multi-step plan to begin and advance their improvisational goals. His first suggestion, build a jazz repertory. “The repertories that students acquire from recordings enable them to perform jazz at a fundamental level and to prove themselves worthy of the assistance of experienced musicians who teach them through painstaking demonstrations.”<sup>132</sup> Young attested to this practice himself, citing all the jazz records that accompanied him on his travels and his early career choice to sound like Frankie Trumbauer and his C-melody saxophone. “I tried to get the sound of a C-melody on a tenor.”<sup>133</sup> Berlinger also suggests that young instrumentalists compare differing versions of the same songs within their new repertories. The author advocates that young instrumentalists must understand the basic building blocks under which their solos take place. “Learners must also master the chord progression of each piece as a fundamental guideline because of its roles in suggesting tonal material for the

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<sup>131</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 63.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>133</sup> Porter, “The Early Style of Lester Young,” 5.



melody's treatment and in shaping invention to its harmonic-rhythmic scheme."<sup>134</sup> An understanding of basic harmonic progression opens the door to understanding the malleability of form and the musician's freedom to operate outside the limitations previously established in a work. "Artists make decisions about certain harmonic features during private sessions and rehearsal, fixing them as part of the formal musical arrangements. They determine other features immediately before music events or while actually performing."<sup>135</sup> With an understanding of the malleability of form comes an introduction to what Berlinger describes as jazz as ear music. The ability to think and conceptualize jazz in different ways. The ability to put aside thinking on fundamental aspects so that more essential ideas and concepts can be considered. The author illustrates:

Once improvisers fix in their memories the features of a piece's road map, they need no longer mark their changing positions within the piece's form by consciously imaging chord symbols. Instead, they can instantaneously gauge their progress by the band's collage of sound and the relative positions of the sound on their instruments. This frees their full attention for the precise details of their parts as they move confidently, creatively, and in tempo through the piece's harmonic course.<sup>136</sup>

By examining the organizational aspects of improvisation, Fadnes answers the questions of what improvisers do, why they do it, and how they go about the task. The author also explores the "motivations behind, the structures around, and the form facilitations of what is referred to as improvised music."<sup>137</sup> As Fadnes begins his article, a fascinating connection between what is often perceived as a lack of structure and method associated with improvisation and Philippe Petit's dangerous 1974 tightrope walk between the two towers of the then World Trade Center

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<sup>134</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 63.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>137</sup> Fadnes, *Jazz on the Line: Improvisation in Practice*, 2.

appears to take shape. Understandably considered a lawless act, Petit was seen by many as an outlaw engaged in a senseless endeavor without reason or practical thought. However, Petit's own words belie this notion. "Lawlessness doesn't mean lack of method: in fact, the outlaw I became needed method all the more."<sup>138</sup> Fadnes echoes the presence of method and preparation in improvisation as well, though its mysterious nature may still abound. "Within jazz, whether conscious, unconscious, suppressed, or media-driven, we see both historic and contemporary trends toward maintaining the illusionary, mythical glow of improvisation. Mediating it more as a magic trick than a clear-cut performance technique."<sup>139</sup> The acknowledgment of improvisation as a discoverable technique is central to Fadnes' additional explorations of how jazz musicians think, converse, negotiate, and develop improvisational architecture creating musical thought, ideas, directions, expression, and idioms.<sup>140</sup> With this architecture in hand, Fadnes returns to his original illustration saying, "Improvisation becomes both a determinist, idiomatic technique as well as a libertarian, non-idiomatic ideal in which the *jazzaerialist* is walking a demanding tightrope."<sup>141</sup>

While Hargreaves' work in formulaic analysis and generated ideas have been previously cited in this literature review, her research is also applicable in this discussion of the improvisational act. "When it comes to generating musical ideas, first, different sources can be utilized and, second, the selection of a source is contextual."<sup>142</sup> Recalling an instrumentalist's

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<sup>138</sup> Fadnes, *Jazz on the Line: Improvisation in Practice* 4.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>142</sup> Hargreaves, "Generating Ideas in Jazz Improvisation," 354.

experience of choosing different idea-generating approaches in separate improvisational events, the author questions what the different sources were, why the source selection changed between the events and does source selection changes as improvisational skills develop.<sup>143</sup> Hargreaves examines two existing research works concerning improvisational thinking and learning from both a theoretical and sociological perspective to answer these questions. "A comparison of the two provides a unique and pragmatic link between knowing and doing that yields key concepts."<sup>144</sup>

Johnson-Laird presents an authoritative defense of improvisational creativity as a computable activity. The article begins with the five-component NONCE definition stating creativity is **N**ovel for the individual, **O**ptionally novel for society, **N**ondeterministic, **C**riteria or constraint dependent, and based on **E**xisting elements.<sup>145</sup> The author then explores elements of three accompanying algorithms of creativity and their roles in improvisational creativity. The neo-Darwinian algorithm is analogous to an evolutionary process in improvisation.

In this sort of algorithm, there are two stages in creativity: a generative one in which ideas are formed by an entirely arbitrary process working on existing elements, and then an evaluative state that uses criteria to filter out just those results that are viable. Whatever survives, which may be little or nothing, can serve as the input to the generative stage again.<sup>146</sup>

The second algorithm presented is neo-Lamarckian and proposes that if an individual has "mastered a set of criteria that suffice to guarantee the viability of the results, then the generative stage will yield a small number of possibilities, all of which meet the constraints of the genre."<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Hargreaves, "Generating Ideas in Jazz Improvisation," 354.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>145</sup> P. N. Johnson-Laird, "How Jazz Musicians Improvise," 419-420.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 421.

The third and final algorithm presented is a compromise between the two and suggests that any “initial generation of possibilities under the guidance of some criteria leaves something to be desired, and so the individual applied further criteria to evaluate the results.”<sup>148</sup>

Gould and Keaton present an expanded view of improvisation, including jazz and classical music traditions. The authors begin by seeking to correct the erroneous perception that “Western musicians generally distinguish jazz from classical performances in part by observing that the former are improvised, while the latter are prepared and interpreted.”<sup>149</sup> With references to several primarily classical works and the observations of other researchers, Gould and Keaton establish an undeniable link between improvisation and its use in jazz and classical styles. The authors also establish standard improvisational practices consistent with the analysis models employed in this study:

A player may return to familiar patterns or formulas with the chord progression of a song on which she or he improvises. Even within such a progression, certain modulatory patterns might invite common treatments of improvised phrases or patterns. These patterns reinforce the logic of the musical structure. Improvisation has a logic all its own, and the process arises from the rules of the genre.<sup>150</sup>

The rules of the genre often appear in the form of a score whose existence, though far more common in classical music styles, remains integral to jazz improvisation as well. Gould and Keaton explain. “Jazz performances are also based on a musical score (be it only in the memory of the performer), which may include a melody, form, and harmonic progression that form the basis for any improvisatory performance.”<sup>151</sup> The authors also observe that while a

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<sup>148</sup> P. N. Johnson-Laird, “How Jazz Musicians Improvise,” 419-421.

<sup>149</sup> Gould and Keaton, “The Essential Role,” 143.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

musical score in classical and jazz styles "contains information on pitch, relative duration, and often some indication of relative dynamics, articulation, and an outline of phrase structure, it cannot express innumerable details of musical realization."<sup>152</sup> That is the task of the musicians.

Like Gould and Keaton, Early and Monson echo the recognition that improvisation has a history going back to Western classical composers like Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart, who were outstanding improvisers in their own rights. The authors acknowledge the inherent structure of improvisation as well. "Jazz is known for being improvised and touted for the freedom it permits its players, but jazz in its heyday was largely composed and tightly arranged."<sup>153</sup> However, Early and Monson pose an interesting question, "Why did so-called free music generated on the spot by the player become more highly valued by jazz players and audiences than notated music that, by its very nature, is presumed to have a greater range of expressiveness?" The authors restate a common single-word theme, freedom. Whether it be the freedom of thought, of expression, or of the individual human being, jazz as a musical style and improvisation itself have throughout their histories been associated with liberation, autonomy, and self-determination, while also serving as a voice for unity, resilience, and parity that remains as steadfast today as it did in the beginning:

Jazz improvisation remains a compelling metaphor for interrelationship, group creativity, and freedom that is both aesthetic and social. Improvisation transforms, one-ups, reinterprets, and synthesizes evolving human experience and its sonic signatures regardless of their classical, popular, or cultural origins. The most innovative popular musicians are returning to its acoustic power.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Gould and Keaton, "The Essential Role," 143.

<sup>153</sup> Early and Monson, "Why Jazz Still Matters," 7.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Bjerstedt begins by quoting jazz pianist Randy Weston. "I come to be a storyteller; I'm not a jazz musician. I'm really a storyteller through music."<sup>155</sup> Both jazz and improvisation are storytelling methods in many ways as old as jazz itself. The previously referenced work of Early and Monson, which placed freedom as a centerpiece of jazz and improvisation, represents musical illustrations of stories experienced by humankind. Even Young made the importance of storytelling indispensable to his improvisational approach. The author's interviews corroborate the continuing presence and importance of storytelling. In almost every instance, the interviewees specifically use the words storyteller, storytelling, or a derivative term as they describe their own improvisational work or voice their observations regarding the works of jazz greats like Miles Davis and Red Mitchell. Bjerstedt and the interviewees also attest to the uniqueness of individual soloists. "If the same story is told by ten different persons, that story will be different every time. That is to say, the one who tells it can give it an expression which is just his own. The great storytellers, you know....it must be that it comes with a kind of sincerity and naturalness."<sup>156</sup>

Clark also voices the importance and influence of improvisatory storytelling and identity, "That's what making jazz is for those who perform it, and what saying something requires: contributing substantially to the highly disciplined, intensely collaborative project of ensemble improvisation."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Bjerstedt, "The Jazz Storyteller," 37.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>157</sup> Gregory Clark, *Civic Jazz: American Music and Kenneth Burke on the Art of Getting Along*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015): 18.

Waugh seeks a partnership between improvisation and transcription, advising any student of improvisation to exercise both mind and ears by writing down (transcribing) the solo work of other musicians. The author writes:

I recommend starting with something simple at first. Isolate and study a melody within the solo that particularly moves you. This may be the only part of the solo that you transcribe. The main benefit that I have found from transcribing solos is that it allows me to cover a lot of ground in my practice whilst focusing on one thing. Not only is the act of transcribing great for ear training, but by being mindful of the fundamentals, you can obtain a deeper understanding of how the material is structured.<sup>158</sup>

Sarath establishes a workable definition of improvisation by contrasting it with the execution processes common in composed music. The author's definition is not built on any past erroneous depictions of an undisciplined, free-for-all but rather on improvisation at the moment of creation:

Whereas composition occurs in a series of discontinuous episodes that can span days, weeks, or months in the completion of a work, improvisation occurs in a single, continuous creative episode. Whereas composers usually work alone, improvisation—which can certainly happen in solitude—often occurs collectively. Whereas compositions are created at times and places that are different from when they are presented to audiences, improvisation involves simultaneous creation and performance.<sup>159</sup>

Sarath, like other researchers, acknowledges the European roots of improvisation. However, in recognizing the more common collective environment in which jazz improvisation takes place, the author draws attention to a connective tissue bringing both musicians and audiences together in the single conversation of that musical moment.

The creative voice in jazz and improvisation is a centerpiece in *Murray Talks Music: Albert Murray on Jazz and the Blues*. Devlin's book is a compilation of Murray's unpublished

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<sup>158</sup> John Waugh, *Jazz Improvisation Basic Training for All Treble Clef Readers*, (London, England: Brown Dog Books, 2020): 196.

<sup>159</sup> Edward W. Sarath, *Improvisation, Creativity, and Consciousness: Jazz as Integral Template for Music, Education, and Society*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013): 40.

interviews, observations, and essays on jazz music, its history, musicians, practice, culture, and significance. Concerning the importance of jazz and improvisation, Murray states:

This music represents life in the United States in our time. It is also a product of American society. It provides us a picture of the fundamental conditions of life in America. In this music, you will not find the "happy endings" of Hollywood films, or the artificial sentiments displayed in best-selling novels. You will only find simple feelings, deeply real, such as sadness, melancholy (the blues), despair, or exuberant happiness, which is nothing more than a reaction against this despair. In a word, you have the portrait of the standard life of the average American.<sup>160</sup>

### Summary

While the improvisational act can be challenging and complex, it is an achievable skill. It is a structured, accessible act built on fundamental ideas such as key, scale, and harmonic progression. This literature review reinforces the understanding that improvisation has a long history outside of jazz itself, represents the individual as much as it might the musical moment, and reminds musicians that it includes the same accessible approaches they use to interpret music from a written score.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the literature on Lester Young, improvisational analysis models, and the improvisational act itself. It is clear from the research reviewed that Young was one of the most impactful jazz musicians of his era and that his improvisational approach changed countless musicians' improvisational direction and mindset. It is also clear from the research reviewed that the four improvisational analysis models provide a clear framework from which to identify and examine musical devices, formulas, motives, and other improvisational structures. However, the review of those four analysis models demonstrated how little application had been made to Young's improvisational work, other than

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<sup>160</sup> Murray and Devlin, *Murray Talks Music*, 152-53.



an occasional grouping with other musicians. This field of inquiry is critical because by identifying Young's accessible improvisational approach and its characteristics, musicians can then build their own improvisational strategies and implement them in performance and practice.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This qualitative study employed Chord-Scale Base, Motivic Development, Formulaic Usage, Midlevel, and Schenkerian improvisational analysis models to examine selected solos of Lester Young. These improvisational analysis models identified characteristics and techniques unique to Young's improvisational approach. They also highlighted accessible improvisational strategies aiding in developing personal improvisational abilities for jazz musicians at all skill levels.

### The Selection of Improvisational Analysis Models

Potter suggests that while analysis of improvised jazz is still in its infancy, "analytical approaches have begun to illuminate music, while other yet undiscovered analytic techniques will undoubtedly contribute to our understanding."<sup>161</sup> The Chord-Scale Base, Formulaic Usage, Motivic Development, and Midlevel improvisational analysis models used in this project are applied like existing research. Each improvisational analysis model identifies unique targeted and larger-scale perspectives in improvisational performance.

Chord-Scale Base analysis will examine select solos of Lester Young to identify one of the most fundamental components of improvisational performance. Kenny explains, "There exists in most forms of tonal jazz a direct relationship between improvised melody and some overarching structure, the most common of these being harmonic cycle or chord changes."<sup>162</sup> This fundamental understanding and recognition of the relationship between a musical work's key, scale, and chord structure are often among the first concepts musicians new to jazz

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<sup>161</sup> Potter, "Analyzing Improvised Jazz," 160.

<sup>162</sup> Kenny, "Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative," 59.

improvisation learn. As it relates to Young's use of this fundamental chord-based component, when musicians become more capable of recognizing and identifying his use of chords as a building block to an improvisational approach, their comfort and confidence within the fundamental concepts of keys, scales, and chord structures will grow and lead to greater understanding and implementation of other improvisational strategies that function outside the primary chord structure.

Formulaic Usage analysis will examine and identify a second level of improvisational performance as an outgrowth of Chord-Scale Base observation. Potter reports, "Many solos seem to be constructed not in terms of notes or scales prompted by a certain chord, but in terms of complete melodic patterns or formulas which can fit a chord or series of chords."<sup>163</sup> The early recognition and study of patterns and formulas within Young's improvisational approach will assist musicians of all levels in building a catalog of personal, signature pet licks from which they can draw to improve their improvisational artistry.

Motive Development analysis will examine and identify a third level of improvisational performance as an outgrowth of Formulaic Usage observation. While formulaic patterns are generally constructed to fit chords or chord sequences and any song that employs the same, Porter indicates motives are "short ideas used compositionally, perhaps developed and varied, which cannot be transferred at random from one song to another."<sup>164</sup> Young's improvisational approach often utilized the melody of a song as the cornerstone of motivic development.

Midlevel analysis will examine and identify the more introspective aspects, processes, and connective tissues in an improvisational performance. Noting other analysis models are often

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<sup>163</sup> Potter, "Analyzing Improvised Jazz," 143.

<sup>164</sup> Porter, "The Early Style of Lester Young," 11.

limited in their ability to adequately report the reflective capabilities musicians engage in during an improvisational performance, Frieler et al. describe a methodology taking structural "aspects into account and, at the same time, describing and quantizing improvisational strategies in a concise and compact way."<sup>165</sup> Because Midlevel analysis identifies strategies within these musical structures, chord-scale base connections, formulaic usage, and motivic development will indeed be found. However, the purposeful use of those strategies separates them from identification in other analysis models. Young attests to this purposeful strategy, "I try not to be a repeater pencil."<sup>166</sup>

The characteristics identified by these improvisational analysis models are labeled and listed below the excerpts analyzed. Additional discussion, comparison, and contrast of these characteristics note Young's implementation, interpretation, augmentation, and repetitiveness within his improvisational approach. From this data, a roadmap of Young's improvisational methods and practices was established, the accessibility of improvisation itself illuminated, and strategies explored to improve the improvisational understanding, abilities, and techniques of young and old musicians.

### **The Selection of Lester Young Transcriptions**

The improvisational solos selected for this project represent three periods within Young's career. The developing years beginning with his departure from the family band to the latter 1930s, will be represented by "A Sailboat in the Moonlight." This song, written in 1937 by Carmen Lombardo and John Jacob Loeb, was recorded in 1937 by Young and his dear friend,

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<sup>165</sup> Frieler et al., "Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos," 145.

<sup>166</sup> Porter, "The Early Style of Lester Young," 11.

one of the finest vocalists of the time, Billie Holiday. Two selections will represent young's tenure with the Count Basie Orchestra to the early 1940s, "I Never Knew," written by Gus Kahn in 1925 and recorded by Young in 1943, and "These Foolish Things Remind Me of You," written in 1936 but recorded by Young in 1944. Young's solo years until his death in 1959 will be represented by "Blue Lester," written and recorded by Young in 1948. Examining Young's improvisation approach across his career provides an opportunity, as described by Porter, to view Young's own legacy with an increased ability to appreciate and feel the beauty and profundity therein.<sup>167</sup>

### **Presentation of Transcriptions and Discussion Within the Document**

Transcriptions of the four selected improvisational works and the melodic lines of the selections under which they are played will appear in this document. While including melodic line transcriptions will serve the general purpose of contextualizing the relationship between the melody and the improvisational approach employed in each song, they will also be central to one of the improvisational analysis models. For ease of association and understanding, these melodic line transcriptions will not be presented in their original concert keys but rather transposed to match the key of Lester Young's improvisational works.

Each of the four improvisational transcriptions will be divided and presented in two excerpts. Using eight shorter excerpts will provide greater visual clarity, ease identification, and aid the discussion of characteristics in Young's improvisational style and the improvisational analysis models.

Each excerpt will be examined through the lens of the selected improvisational analysis models and unique characteristics boxed and lettered for identification. Discussion of boxed and

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<sup>167</sup> Porter, "The Early Style of Lester Young," 11.

lettered characteristics will follow the transcription image excerpts. All excerpts will undergo examination by a single improvisational analysis model before repeating the process with another improvisational analysis model. The excerpts will undergo five separate examinations utilizing the selected improvisational analysis models.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Chord-Scale Base Analysis

#### “A Sailboat in the Moonlight” Excerpt 1

Figure 4.1

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "A Sailboat in the Moonlight". Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The systems are annotated with chords: A and D above the first system; C#9 and F# above the second system; B and E7 above the third system; and A and D above the fourth system. Red boxes labeled A, B, C, and D highlight specific improvisation patterns: A (measures 1-2), B (measures 3-4), C (measures 5-6), and D (measures 7-8).

**A:** Young plays an ascending chord arpeggiation hinting at a 7<sup>th</sup>, with Gs bookending the tonic. The arpeggiated A chord in measure two steps downward to support the chord change to D.

**B:** Young omits root but outlines remaining notes in triplet figures.

**C:** Young outlines the F#, A#, C#, and E chord in ascending arpeggiated fashion.

**D:** Young outlines the A chord, then a similar pattern in support of the chord change to D.

“A Sailboat in the Moonlight”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.2

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "A Sailboat in the Moonlight" Excerpt 2. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4.

- System 1:** The Melody line is marked with a  $C\#9$  chord. The Improvisation line features a boxed-in ascending eighth-note arpeggiated pattern labeled **A**.
- System 2:** The Melody line is marked with  $F\#m$  and  $C\#9$  chords. The Improvisation line features a boxed-in descending eighth-note arpeggiated pattern labeled **B**.
- System 3:** The Melody line is marked with a  $B7$  chord. The Improvisation line features a boxed-in pattern labeled **C** that emphasizes the 7th and 5th of the  $B7$  chord.
- System 4:** The Melody line is marked with  $E7$ ,  $D$ ,  $E\#7$ , and  $E7\#5$  chords. The Improvisation line features a boxed-in descending eighth-note arpeggiated pattern labeled **D** that outlines the  $E7\#5$  chord.

**A:** Young continues similarly to that found in his excerpt one solo by playing an ascending chord-scale arpeggiated figure outlining the  $C\#9$  chord. He omits the  $C\#$  root and changes the rhythms from a triplet figure to an eighth-note one.

**B:** Young outlines the  $F\#$  minor chord in a descending arpeggiated pattern.

**C:** Young plays sparingly, emphasizing only the 7<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of the  $B7$  chord.

**D:** Young outlines the  $E7\#5$  chord in a descending arpeggiated pattern.



“I Never Knew”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.3

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "I Never Knew" Excerpt 1. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. Chord changes are indicated above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Chords are Bb6, Eb6, and Eb7. Improvisation sections A and B are highlighted with red boxes.
- System 2:** Chords are Bb6 and Eb6. Improvisation sections C and D are highlighted with red boxes.
- System 3:** Chords are BbF, Gm, Dbdim7, and F7/C.
- System 4:** Chords are Bb6, Gm, Cm7, and F7. Improvisation section E is highlighted with a red box.

**A:** Young begins an ascending pattern of the Bb scale, starting with F and moving upward to an A neighbor tone before descending to the tonic of Bb.

**B:** Young references the Eb chord with the G-F neighbor tone figure before lowering the third one-half step to Gb to support the Emb7 chord change.

**C:** Young references the V-I relationship of the Bb6 chord voicing only the F and Bb.

**D:** Young references the Ebm6 chord again but utilizes only the third and fifth chord tones.

**E:** Young outlines the G, Bb, and D, Gm chord in an ascending triad.

“I Never Knew”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.4

The musical score consists of six systems, each with a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb) and the time signature is 4/4. Chord changes are indicated above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Chords: Dm, A7. Improvisation A (boxed) is a descending scale starting on the third of Dm (F) and moving down to the root (D) and fifth (A). Improvisation B (boxed) is an ascending triad: A, C#, E, G.
- System 2:** Chords: Dm6, A7. Improvisation C (boxed) uses the third (F) and fifth (A) of Dm6.
- System 3:** Chords: Dm6, A7. Improvisation D (boxed) uses the fifth (A) and tonic (D) of Dm6. Improvisation E (boxed) uses the A, E, and G of A7.
- System 4:** Chords: Dm6, A/C#, Cm. Improvisation F (boxed) is a descending triad: G, Eb, C.

**A:** Young uses a descending scale passage beginning on the third of the Dm triad before using the passing tone E to proceed to the root and fifth chord tone.

**B:** Young spells out the A, C#, E, and G or the A7 chord in an ascending triad.

**C:** Young references the Dm6 once again but uses only the third and fifth chord tones.

**D:** Young references the Dm6 but uses only the fifth and tonic chord tones.

**E:** Young does not use C#; however, the A, E natural, and G of A7 are frequently used.

**F:** Young spells out the G, Eb, and C of the C chord in a descending triad.

“These Foolish Things Remind Me of You”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.5

The figure displays a musical score for the first excerpt of "These Foolish Things Remind Me of You". It consists of four systems, each with a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. Chord changes are indicated above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Chords: Fmaj9, Dm, Gm9, C7b5. Improvisation section A is marked in the second measure of the Dm chord.
- System 2:** Chords: Fmaj7, Dm, G9, Gb13. Improvisation sections B, C, and D are marked in the first, second, and third measures respectively.
- System 3:** Chords: Cm7/F, F7, Bbmaj9, Am7, D. Improvisation section E is marked in the first measure.
- System 4:** Chords: G13, C7, G9. Improvisation sections F and G are marked in the first and third measures respectively.

Excerpts one and two of “These Foolish Things Remind Me of You” differ from the other excerpts used in this document in that Young solos twice over the same melodic line. The only alteration to the original melody line occurs in the last two measures of each excerpt.

**A:** Young spells the D, A, F, and D of the Dm chord in a descending pattern.

**B:** Young begins a second Dm chord descending passage on the third before a short sequential pattern of G, E, F, and D, placing him at the chord's root for the ascending triad F, A, and D.

**C:** Young references the G9 chord with the root, ninth, though played as a second, and the fifth.

**D:** Though not playing the root, Young references the Gb13 with Db and Eb chord tones.

**E:** Young spells out the fifth and third of the Cm triad G and Eb before using a grace note D to step down to the root of C.

**F:** Though not playing the root, Young references the G13 with an octave drop of the thirteenth itself before ascending through an F, B natural, E, F, A, B natural, and E arpeggiation accounting for the third, seventh, ninth, and thirteenth chord tones.

**G:** Young references the Gb9 chord with a descending arpeggiation featuring the Db fifth, Ab ninth, played as a second again, and the Gb root.

“These Foolish Things Remind Me of You”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.6

The musical score for Figure 4.6 consists of four systems, each with a 'Melody' line and an 'Improv' line. The key signature has one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system has a 'Melody Line' and 'Improvisation' line. The second system has 'Melody' and 'Improv' lines. The third system has 'Melody' and 'Improv' lines. The fourth system has 'Melody' and 'Improv' lines. Chords are indicated above the melody lines. Improvisation patterns are highlighted with red boxes and labeled A through H.

System 1: Melody Line (Chords: Fmaj9, Dm, Gm9, C7#5); Improvisation (Patterns A and B).

System 2: Melody (Chords: Fmaj7, Dm, G9, G13); Improv (Patterns C, D, and E).

System 3: Melody (Chords: Cm7F, F7, Bbmaj9, Am7, D); Improv (Pattern F).

System 4: Melody (Chords: G7, C7, Fmaj7, E7sus); Improv (Patterns G and H).

In this second repeat of the melody line, Young begins his solo far more simply before returning to more energetic rhythmic patterns.

**A:** As previously stated, Young begins in a much more restrained fashion playing only the fifth, seventh, and ninth of the F9 chord before finishing this measure on the third and tonic of the Dm chord that follows.

**B:** Young begins the second measure with an eighth note and triplet pattern beginning on A, descending through the seventh, fifth, and third chord tones of the Gm11 chord. The Bb landing spot is a shared tone between the Gm9 and C7#5 that follows.

**C:** Young plays an ascending pattern spelling out the Fmaj7 chord from A to F.

**D:** Young plays the root, fifth, seventh, and ninth of the G9 chord.

**E:** Though the rhythm features a thirty-second triplet figure, Young references the Gb9 in a fashion similar to the first excerpt with a descending arpeggiation containing the root, fifth, and ninth chord tones.

**F:** Young references the Cm7 chord with the root, third, and seventh chord tones.

**G:** Young plays a descending Fmaj7 chord.

**H:** Young plays an ascending E7 chord.

“Blue Lester”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.7

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "Blue Lester". Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. Chord changes are indicated above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Chords are Gm, Gm/F, E7, and D7. Improvisation patterns A and B are highlighted in red boxes. Pattern A is an ascending eighth-note pattern over Gm. Pattern B is a descending eighth-note pattern over D7.
- System 2:** Chords are Gm, Gm/F, E7, and D7. Improvisation pattern C is highlighted in a red box, featuring a descending eighth-note pattern with triplets over Gm.
- System 3:** Chords are G, G/B, C6, and C#dim7. Improvisation patterns D and E are highlighted in red boxes. Pattern D is an ascending and descending eighth-note pattern over G. Pattern E is a descending eighth-note pattern over C6.
- System 4:** Chords are G6 and D7. This system shows the final two measures of the excerpt.

- A: Young outlines the Gm chord playing the root, third and fifth in an ascending pattern.
- B: Though not playing the root of the D7, Young plays the third, fifth, and seventh chord tones.
- C: Utilizing a similar pattern found in the first excerpt, Young outlines the Gm chord with an overall descending pattern of eighth notes and triplets that include the root, third, fifth, and seventh tones of the Gm chord.
- D: Young uses an ascending and descending pattern of eighth notes to outline the root, third, and fifth tones of the G chord
- E: Young plays a descending pattern beginning on the root, including the third, fifth, and sixth of the C6 chord. The third and fifth are familiar chord tones of C6 and C#dim7.

“Blue Lester”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.8

The musical score for "Blue Lester" Excerpt 2 is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Chord symbols are placed above the staff lines.

- System 1:** Chords are C6, C#dim7, G/D, and G7. The Improvisation line contains two boxes: Box A (measures 1-2) and Box B (measures 3-4).
- System 2:** Chords are C6, C#dim7, G/D, and G7. The Improvisation line contains one box: Box C (measures 3-4).
- System 3:** Chords are C6, C#dim7, G/D, and E7. The Improvisation line contains no boxes.
- System 4:** Chords are A7 and D7. The Improvisation line contains two boxes: Box D (measures 1-2) and Box E (measures 3-4).

**A:** Though not playing the roots for the C6 or C#dim 7, Young uses triplet figures and eighth note passages to include the third, fifth, sixth, and seventh chord tones.

**B:** Young plays ascending and descending triplet patterns, including the root and third of the G and G7 chords.

**C:** Similarly, Young plays the root, third, and fifth chord tones of the G chord.

**D:** Young plays a descending eighth note pattern of the third, fifth, and seventh of the A7 chord.

**E:** In an ascending eighth note pattern, Young references the root, third, fifth, and seventh tones of the D7 chord.



### Additional Chord-Scale Base Observations

Young's use of the fundamental chord-scale building blocks of improvisation can easily be identified. Young's simple yet repeated use of chord roots, thirds, and fifths in fundamental triadic patterns, arpeggiations, and scale passages utilizing passing and neighbor tone figures undergirds his improvisational approach and illustrates the significance to which Waugh attests. "Triad pairs provide a structured approach to targeting specific chord tones and scale degrees, generating harmonically colorful ideas."<sup>168</sup> Waugh further argues that these basic concepts help to "underscore the relationships between scale degrees and allows for the creation of delicate lines, beautiful dissonances, and definitive harmonic identities."<sup>169</sup> Sarath concurs that simple, root-based harmonic improvisational approaches, whether in diatonic or non-diatonic contexts, enable a basic fluency with harmonic structures and functions, enhancing engagement with more advanced structures.<sup>170</sup> A solid understanding of simple, fundamental structures enables Young's improvisational exploration. Porter explains that any improviser with the basic knowledge of predetermined materials like key, scale, or chord progression will more competently "compose a coherent musical statement spontaneously."<sup>171</sup> This understanding is as easily applied to improvisational work with others as well.

In "A Sailboat in the Moonlight," Young's improvisational work intentionally takes a back seat to Billie Holiday as she sings the final chorus and tag of Excerpt 2. Young's improvisational approach complements this duet providing sparse but straightforward outlines of

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<sup>168</sup> Waugh, *Jazz Improvisation Basic Training for All Treble Clef Readers*, 137.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>170</sup> Ed Sarath, *Music Theory Through Improvisation a New Approach to Musicianship Training*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 96.

<sup>171</sup> Porter, "Lester Leaps In," 11.

the chord structure as Holiday sings, only to favor more rhythmically active, echo-like passages at the end of her phrases. While this somewhat conversational give and take is not specific to his improvisational approach, it illustrates Schober and Spiro's contention that "When musicians play together, they predict, perceive, and react to what their partners do."<sup>172</sup> Holiday praised Young for his "singular ability to fill up the windows when backing her, underplaying while she sang and bringing his sound to the fore when she stopped."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Michael F. Schober and Neta Spiro, Jazz Improvisers' Shared Understanding: A Case Study," *Front Psychol* 808, no. 5 (2014): 1.

<sup>173</sup> Daniels, *Lester Leaps In*, 218.

### Chord-Scale Base Application

The following exercise represents eight measures of a simple blues-like progression. It was composed employing the Chord-Scale Base characteristics observed in Young's approach and gives the reader an opportunity to explore the improvisatory process. The exercise features Young's practices of triadic movement and third related arpeggiations. The reader is asked to create their own unique, improvised composition applying the practices observed in Young's excerpts and the example provided.

Figure 4.9

The figure displays four systems of musical notation, each consisting of an 'Example' staff and an 'Application' staff. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 4/4. The systems are as follows:

- System 1:** The 'Example' staff shows a melodic line starting on B-flat, moving up stepwise to G, then down to E-flat, and finally to D. The 'Application' staff is empty. Chords B $\flat$ 7 and E $\flat$ 7 are indicated above the staff.
- System 2:** The 'Example' staff shows a melodic line starting on B-flat, moving up stepwise to G, then down to E-flat, and finally to D. The 'Application' staff is empty. Chord B $\flat$ 7 is indicated above the staff.
- System 3:** The 'Example' staff shows a melodic line starting on B-flat, moving up stepwise to G, then down to E-flat, and finally to D. The 'Application' staff is empty. Chords E $\flat$ 7 and E $\flat$ dim7 are indicated above the staff.
- System 4:** The 'Example' staff shows a melodic line starting on B-flat, moving up stepwise to G, then down to E-flat, and finally to D. The 'Application' staff is empty. Chords B $\flat$ F and G7 are indicated above the staff.

## Formulaic Usage Analysis

### “A Sailboat in the Moonlight”

#### Excerpt 1

Figure 4.10

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "A Sailboat in the Moonlight". Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The systems are labeled with letters A through H, indicating specific formulaic patterns used in the improvisation.

- System 1:** Melody line starts with a whole note chord labeled 'A'. The Improvisation line contains three boxed patterns: 'A' (a root-position triad), 'B' (a four-note ascending/descending neighbor tone figure), and 'C' (a root-position triad).
- System 2:** Melody line starts with a whole note chord labeled 'C#'. The Improvisation line contains two boxed patterns: 'D' (a four-note ascending/descending neighbor tone figure) and 'E' (a four-note ascending/descending neighbor tone figure).
- System 3:** Melody line starts with a whole note chord labeled 'B'. The Improvisation line contains one boxed pattern: 'F' (a four-note ascending/descending neighbor tone figure).
- System 4:** Melody line starts with a whole note chord labeled 'A'. The Improvisation line contains two boxed patterns: 'G' (a root-position triad) and 'H' (a root-position triad).

**A:** As has been observed in all other excerpts, Young’s use of root-position triadic chords or third related arpeggiations is a signature practice in his improvisational approach. They not only serve to support the harmonic structure of the work but create identifiable pet licks.

**B:** Once again, this four-note ascending/descending neighbor tone figure is one of Young’s pet-licks and will be observed in several excerpts that follow.

**C:** Young repeats the A chord in root position with only a slight variation in rhythm.

**D:** Another of Young's signature practices, especially as it relates to triadic or arpeggiated chord spelling, is to utilize triplet figures. Square B illustrated this use as well.

**E:** Young plays the F# chord in an ascending triadic pattern from its root.

**F:** Though Young alters the rhythmic aspect, he none the less replicates the contour found in Square B with a neighbor tone figure that steps downward.

**G:** Young repeats the A chord in root position again with another slight variation in rhythm.

**H:** Except for the final eighth note in this four-note pattern, the tonic and fifth of the D chord is preceded by the fifth of the A mirroring an identical passage in the third measure.

“A Sailboat in the Moonlight”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.11

The figure displays four systems of musical notation, each consisting of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The systems are labeled with chords: C#9, F#m, C#9, F#m, B7, and E7, D, E#7, E7#9. Three specific arpeggiated figures are highlighted with red boxes and labeled A, B, and C. Figure A is in the Improvisation line of the first system, Figure B is in the Improvisation line of the second system, and Figure C is in the Improvisation line of the third system. Each figure shows a sequence of notes that outline a chord in a specific arpeggiated pattern.

**A:** Consistent with the first excerpt, Young outlines the C#9 chord beginning with the third, then progressing to the fifth, seventh, and root at the octave in third related ascending arpeggiation.

**B:** In a similar manner, Young outlines the F#m chord beginning with its root, then descending two octaves in a third related arpeggiation through the fifth, third, and root of the chord.

**C:** This eighth note figure of three, graced, repeated notes with an upward or downward melodic contour is used frequently by Young and observed again in some of the excerpts that follow. Note that Young makes regular use of grace notes to introduce or accompany arpeggiated figures and triadic patterns. They appear in the fourth, sixth and eighth measures of this excerpt and though not previously indicated, appeared in the first and sixth measure of the first excerpt as well. Young’s use of grace notes will be seen again in many of the excerpts that follow.

“I Never Knew”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.12

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the song "I Never Knew". Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. Chord changes are indicated above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Chords are Bb6, Ebm6, and Ebm7. Box A highlights a quarter-note improvisation pattern in the first measure.
- System 2:** Chords are Bb6 and Ebm6. Box B highlights a quarter-note improvisation pattern in the second measure.
- System 3:** Chords are BbF, Gm, Dbdim7, and F7/C. Box C highlights a quarter-note improvisation pattern in the first measure.
- System 4:** Chords are Bb6, Gm, Cm7, and F7. Box D highlights a quarter-note improvisation pattern in the first measure.

**A:** Young replicates this pattern an octave lower in the fifth measure (Box C)

**B:** Though it cannot be observed in this shorter excerpt, Young utilizes this quarter, eighth-note pattern frequently over the Ebm6 chord as his solo continues. At times, he repeats it as seen here and others inverts it playing downward from the Gb to the Eb before returning to the Gb.

**C:** As previously state, a replicated pattern from the first measure (Box A)

**D:** Young plays the Gm triad in root position.

“I Never Knew”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.13

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "I Never Knew" Excerpt 2. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor). The time signature is 4/4.

- System 1:** Melody line has notes G4, A4, Bb4, A4, G4. Improvisation line has notes G4, A4, Bb4, A4, G4. Chords are Dm (measures 1-2) and A7 (measures 3-4). Improvisation figures A and B are boxed in red.
- System 2:** Melody line has notes G4, A4, Bb4, A4, G4. Improvisation line has notes G4, A4, Bb4, A4, G4. Chords are Dm6 (measures 1-2) and A7 (measures 3-4). Improvisation figure C is boxed in red.
- System 3:** Melody line has notes G4, A4, Bb4, A4, G4. Improvisation line has notes G4, A4, Bb4, A4, G4. Chords are Dm6 (measures 1-2) and A7 (measures 3-4). Improvisation figures B and B are boxed in red.
- System 4:** Melody line has notes G4, A4, Bb4, A4, G4. Improvisation line has notes G4, A4, Bb4, A4, G4. Chords are Dm6 (measures 1-2), A/C# (measure 3), and Cm (measure 4). Improvisation figure B is boxed in red.

**A:** In a descending eighth note figure, Young outlines a Dm chord beginning on the third with a passing tone to the tonic and fifth. He creates an ascending figure in the following measure once again emphasizing the root, third, and fifth relationship but this time of the A chord.

**B:** Young repeats this four-note figure of a triplet and eighth note in both the sixth and eighth measures. It begins each time with a neighbor tone triplet figure G, A, and G before descending in accordance with the chord structure to either an E natural or Eb. Note that Young's repeated eighth note triplet in this excerpt is very similar to the sixteenth note triplet found in Excerpt 1, "A Sailboat in the Moonlight" and though the keys of each selection differ, the occurrence of this G, A, G triplet presents no harmonic challenges to their use.



**C:** Young plays this rhythmic figure sequentially moving it up by step each time through the third, fourth, and fifth measures. Predominantly built on a third relationship between the first and second notes, Young only makes a slight change in the last interval statement moving the relationship to a fourth.

“These Foolish Things Remind Me of You”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.14

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with a Melody line and an Improvisation line. Chord changes are indicated above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Chords: Fmaj9, Dm, Gm9, C7#5. Improvisation patterns A and B are highlighted.
- System 2:** Chords: Fmaj7, Dm, G9, Gb13. Improvisation patterns C and D are highlighted.
- System 3:** Chords: Cm7/F, F7, Bbmaj9, Am7, D. Improvisation patterns E and F are highlighted.
- System 4:** Chords: G13, C7, G9. Improvisation patterns G and H are highlighted.

**A:** Triadic downward pattern of the Dm chord

**B:** Ascending scale-wise passage beginning on a chord tone of the Gm9, resolving on a chord tone of the C7#5 that follows. This pattern will be repeated in measure five as well.

**C:** Young begins with a descending arpeggiated anticipation of the Dm chord before its actual beat two arrival, then finishes the measure with an ascending root built Dm chord.

**D:** Fifth, ninth, and thirteenth of Gb13 chord referenced.

**E:** Root, third, and fifth of the Cm7 chord referenced in rhythmic pattern reminiscent of that played in the previous measure.

**F:** As in measure two, an ascending scale-wise passage beginning on a chord tone of the F7, resolving on a chord tone of the Bbmaj9 that follows in the next measure.

**G:** Ascending arpeggiation emphasizing the G13 chord that then descends in the next measure now emphasizing the C7 chord.

**H:** Descending arpeggiation of the Gb9 chord.

“These Foolish Things Remind Me of You”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.15

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with a Melody line and an Improvisation line. Chord progressions are indicated above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Chords: Fmaj9, Dm, Gm9, C7b5. Improvisation figure **A** is highlighted in a box.
- System 2:** Chords: Fmaj7, Dm, G9, G13. Improvisation figures **B**, **C**, and **D** are highlighted in boxes.
- System 3:** Chords: Cm7/F, F7, Bbmaj9, Am7, D. Improvisation figure **E** is highlighted in a box.
- System 4:** Chords: G7, C7, Fmaj7, E7sus. Improvisation figures **F** and **G** are highlighted in boxes.

**A:** Young once again uses the formulaic practice of utilizing chord tones specific to those that support the harmonic progression of the measure. He begins outlining the fifth, seventh, and ninth of the Fmaj9, finishes the measure with the third and root of the Dm chord then repeating the practice in measure two spelling out, in descending order the ninth, seventh, fifth, and third of the Gm9.

**B:** Young plays the third, fifth, seventh, and tonic of the Fmaj7 chord.

**C:** Young references the G9 chord.

**D:** Young has used this triplet figure with step down in several of the improvisational excerpts.

**E:** Chromatic scale to the tonic of the Am chord.

**F:** Young plays on the root, third, and fifth of the Fmaj7 chord.

**G:** Young outlines the root, third, fifth, and seventh of the E7sus chord. The F gives the chord the appearance of an F9.

“Blue Lester”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.16

The musical score for "Blue Lester" Excerpt 1 is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. Chords are indicated above the staves.

- System 1:** Chords are Gm, Gm/F, Eb7, and D7. Improvisation section A is boxed in red.
- System 2:** Chords are Gm, Gm/F, Eb7, and D7. Improvisation sections C and C' are boxed in red.
- System 3:** Chords are G, G/B, C6, and C#dim7. Improvisation sections D and E are boxed in red.
- System 4:** Chords are G6 and D7. Improvisation section F is boxed in red.

A: Young plays the root, third, and fifth of the Gm chord.

B: Young references the D7.

C: Signature triplet figure landing on a lower note of longer duration.

D: Young plays the root, third, fifth, and seventh of the G7 chord.

E: Young plays the root, seventh, sixth, fifth, and third of C6, then the fifth and third of C#dim7.

F: Signature repeated figure featuring three eighth notes landing on an eighth note above.

“Blue Lester”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.17

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "Blue Lester" Excerpt 2. Each system consists of a Melody staff and an Improvisation (Improv) staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Chord symbols are placed above the melody staves: C6, C#dim7, G/D, G7, G/D, E7, A7, and D7. Five specific improvisation figures are highlighted with red boxes and labeled A through E:

- A:** Triplet figures on beats one and four of measure one and beat four of measure four.
- B:** An anticipation of the C6 chord in measure three.
- C:** A reference to the G triad.
- D:** A descending chromatic passage.
- E:** A reference to the A7 chord.

**A:** Matching signature triplet figures on beats one and four of measure one and beat four of measure four.

**B:** Young plays an anticipation of the C6 chord that follows in measure three.

**C:** Young references the G triad.

**D:** Descending chromatic passage.

**E:** Young references the A7 chord.

### **Additional Formulaic Usage Observations**

Young has three practices he references quite often not only in these excerpts but in his improvisational approach in general. The formulaic triplet figure that lands on a note of longer value is found in Excerpt 1 of “A Sailboat in the Moonlight” four times in Excerpt 2 of “I Never Knew,” twice in Excerpt 1 of “Blue Lester” and three times in Excerpt 2 of “Blue Lester.” One could even argue that while the four eighth note pattern beginning just off beat one in measure two of “A Sailboat in the Moonlight” Excerpt 2 is not a triplet, it still shows the same familiar contour.

The appoggiatura fronted figure of three repeated eighth notes followed by a rising or falling interval is also a signature practice of Young found in both Excerpt 2 of “A Sailboat in the Moonlight” and Excerpt 1 of “Blue Lester.” Furthermore, it should also be noted that Young uses appoggiatura figures in all but one of the excerpts illustrated in this document.



### Formulaic Usage Application

The following exercise represents eight measures of a simple blues-like progression. It was composed employing the Formulaic Usage characteristics observed in Young's approach and gives the reader an opportunity to explore the improvisatory process. The exercise features Young's practices of signature licks and ascending or descending passages. The reader is asked to create their own unique, improvised composition applying the practices observed in Young's excerpts and the example provided.

Figure 4.18

Figure 4.18 displays four musical examples, each consisting of an 'Example' staff and an 'Application' staff, illustrating blues-like progressions. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats).

- Example 1:** The 'Example' staff shows a progression from B $\flat$ 7 to E7. The 'Application' staff is empty.
- Example 2:** The 'Example' staff shows a progression from B $\flat$ 7. The 'Application' staff is empty.
- Example 3:** The 'Example' staff shows a progression from E7 to Edim7. The 'Application' staff is empty.
- Example 4:** The 'Example' staff shows a progression from B $\flat$ F to G7. The 'Application' staff is empty.

## Motivic Development Analysis

### “A Sailboat in the Moonlight”

#### Excerpt 1

Figure 4.19

The musical score for "A Sailboat in the Moonlight" Excerpt 1 is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system shows the initial motif 'A' in the improvisation line, which is a triad of A, C#, and E. The second system shows motif 'B' in the improvisation line, which is an appoggiatura figure. The third system shows motif 'C' in the improvisation line, which is a neighbor tone and passing tone figure. The fourth system shows motifs 'D' and 'E' in the improvisation line, which are further developments of the initial motif. The melody line in each system shows the corresponding melodic line, with some notes marked with a 'j' for a grace note. The improvisation line in each system shows the corresponding improvisation, with some notes marked with a 'j' for a grace note. The motifs are labeled with letters A through G in red boxes.

A. On beats one and two Young plays the triad A, C#, and E. This simple motivic idea featuring the chord's root, third, and fifth will then be developed into an exploration of other third related groupings that include additional chord tones as well. Beats one and two rhythmically mirror the third and fourth beats of the work's melodic line but melodically moves in contrary motion. The third and fourth beats employ a neighbor tone and passing tone figure then follow the downward directional motion of the melodic line.

B. Appoggiatura type figure that will be developed at a different pitch placement.

- C. Young expands the triad motive to spell out remaining notes of the C#9 chord save the root.
- D. Young returns to another triadic spelling, yet this time of an F# Major chord before ending the measure with an eighth note figure in contrary motion to the work's melodic line.
- E. Young revisits a neighbor tone figure a step above the first with a slight alteration in the rhythmic pattern.
- F. Young returns to the root, third, and fifth spelling of the A chord.
- G. Appoggiatura type figure in contrary motion to the first and at a different pitch placement.

“A Sailboat in the Moonlight”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.20

The figure displays four systems of musical notation, each consisting of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The systems are labeled with chords above the melody lines: C#9, F#m, C#9, F#m, B7, E7, D, E#7, and E7#5.

- System 1:** Melody Line and Improvisation. A box labeled 'A' highlights a three-note figure in the improvisation line on beats 1 and 2.
- System 2:** Melody and Improv. A box labeled 'B' highlights a four-note figure in the improvisation line on beats 1 and 2.
- System 3:** Melody and Improv. A box labeled 'C' highlights a six-note figure in the improvisation line on beats 1 and 2.
- System 4:** Melody and Improv. A box labeled 'D' highlights a four-note figure in the improvisation line on beats 1 and 2.

As referenced in previous analyses of this excerpt, Young plays far more sparingly as Holiday returns singing the final chorus and tag of the work.

A: Young plays a three-note figure that serves as an inverted contour of the three-note figure sung by Holiday on beats one and two of the first measure.

B: Young’s outlining of the F#m chord sounds as if it’s the natural extension of the melodic line preceding it in the previous measure. In some ways, it represents an answer to Holiday’s melodic question.

C: In this formulaic passage also referenced in Excerpt 2 of “Blue Lester” Young, as he did in measure four above, answers Holiday’s melodic question from the previous measure. However, this signature lick can also be viewed as somewhat of a rhythmically displaced figure, as the grace noted eighths give a sense of the quarter note triplet sung by Holiday in the fifth measure.

D: Young answers Holiday once again, with an inverted contour of an E7#5 chord.

“I Never Knew”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.21

The musical score for "I Never Knew" Excerpt 1 is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. Chord changes are indicated above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Melody line has chords Bb6, Eb6, and Em7. Improvisation line shows four measures with figures A and B. Figure A is a four-note motif on beats 1 and 2 of the first measure. Figure B is a descending four-note motif on beats 1 and 2 of the second measure.
- System 2:** Melody line has chords Bb6 and Eb6. Improvisation line shows a dotted quarter and eighth note motif (Figure C) on beats 1 and 2 of the first measure.
- System 3:** Melody line has chords Bb6, Gm, Dbdim7, and F7/C. Improvisation line shows a four-note motif (Figure D) on beats 1 and 2 of the first measure, which is an octave lower than Figure A.
- System 4:** Melody line has chords Bb6, Gm, Cm7, and F7. Improvisation line shows a four-note motif on beats 1 and 2 of the first measure, which is an octave lower than Figure A.

A: Young plays a four-note motivic figure containing neighbor tone movement on beats one and two of the first measure. Young alters this four-note motivic figure and neighbor tone movement on beats one and two of the second measure.

B: Young follows the four-note motivic figure mentioned above with a descending figure that serves as a logical conclusion to the initial four-note idea.

C: This dotted quarter and eighth note motivic figure is a diminution of the first two notes of the melodic line beginning in the first measure. The figure will be referenced again in Excerpt 2.

D: The four-note motivic figure with neighbor tone movement featured on beats one and two of the first measure is replicated an octave lower.

“I Never Knew”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.22

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "I Never Knew" Excerpt 2. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 4/4. Chord changes are indicated above the melody lines: Dm, A7, Dm6, and A/C#.

- System 1:** Melody line starts with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. Improvisation line features a boxed motif labeled 'A' (a dotted quarter, eighth note figure) and a boxed motif labeled 'B' (an eighth note triplet followed by a single eighth note).
- System 2:** Melody line continues. Improvisation line features a boxed motif labeled 'C' (a dotted quarter, eighth note figure) and another boxed motif labeled 'C'.
- System 3:** Melody line continues. Improvisation line features a boxed motif labeled 'C' and two boxed motifs labeled 'B'.
- System 4:** Melody line continues with a long note. Improvisation line features a boxed motif labeled 'B'.

A: Young plays an eighth note motivic figure that while rhythmically displaced from the melodic line under which it appears is also somewhat of a diminution and inversion of it as well.

B: This eighth note triplet and single eighth note motivic figure is played four times. In three of its appearances, the triplet lands on an eighth note within the chord itself. However, the idea is altered between measures six and seven as the triplet lands on a note within the chord from the previous measure but now resolves to a note within the new Dm6 chord.

C: The dotted quarter, eighth note motive is referenced once again from its initial appearance in Excerpt 1. It played three more times in a slightly altered sequential manner.

“These Foolish Things Remind Me of You”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.23

The musical score for "These Foolish Things Remind Me of You" Excerpt 1 is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. Chord symbols are placed above the melody lines. Improvisation patterns are enclosed in boxes and labeled with letters A, B, and C.

- System 1:** Chords: Fmaj9, Dm, Gm9, C7b5. Improvisation patterns: A (under Fmaj9), B (under Dm), B (under Gm9).
- System 2:** Chords: Fmaj7, Dm, G9, Gb13. Improvisation patterns: A (under Fmaj7), A (under Dm), A (under G9), A (under Gb13).
- System 3:** Chords: Cm7/F, F7, Bbmaj9, Am7, D. Improvisation patterns: A (under Cm7/F), B (under F7), C (under Bbmaj9), C (under Am7).
- System 4:** Chords: G13, C7, G9. Improvisation patterns: A (under G13), C (under C7), A (under G9), A (under G9), B (under G9).

The primary motivic device Young uses in this excerpt is a grouping of four sixteenth notes. The grouping falls into one of three categories.

A: Arpeggiated spellings supporting the chordal structure of the beat and/or measure.

B: Scale-like passages incorporating passing tones and chromaticism.

C: Passages incorporating appoggiatura and escape tone figures



“These Foolish Things Remind Me of You”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.24

The musical score for Excerpt 2 is presented in four systems, each with a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The chords for each system are as follows:

- System 1: Fmaj9, Dm, Gm9, C7b5
- System 2: Fmaj7, Dm, G9, G13
- System 3: Cm7/F, F7, Bbmaj9, Am7, D
- System 4: G7, C7, Fmaj7, E7sus

Annotations A and B are placed in red boxes within the Improvisation lines:

- Annotation A:** A box containing a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, Bb4) in the first system, and a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, Bb4) followed by a single thirty-second note triplet (G4, A4, Bb4) in the second, third, and fourth systems.
- Annotation B:** A box containing a sixteenth-note motif (G4, A4, Bb4, G4, A4, Bb4) in the second, third, and fourth systems.

A: The five eighth note triplet figures and single thirty-second note triplet figure are diminutions of the quarter note triplets found in the melodic line.

B: The sixteenth-note motivic ideas appear once again in this excerpt but are not featured as prominently as they were in Excerpt 1.

“Blue Lester”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.25

The figure displays a musical score for "Blue Lester" Excerpt 1, consisting of four systems. Each system contains a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Chord symbols are placed above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Chords: Gm, Gm/F, Eb7, D7. Improvisation figure A is boxed in the second measure.
- System 2:** Chords: Gm, Gm/F, Eb7, D7. Improvisation figures B and C are boxed in measures 2, 3, and 4 respectively.
- System 3:** Chords: G, G/B, C6, Cdim7. Improvisation figure A is boxed in the first measure.
- System 4:** Chords: G6, D7. Improvisation figures D and C are boxed in measures 1 and 2 respectively.

A: Young plays an ascending eighth-note figure that mimics the contour of the melodic line.

B: As observed in previous excerpts, the use of a triplet figure followed by a longer landing note is a common motivic practice in Young’s improvisational development.

C: The dotted quarter, eighth note figure in measure four and rhythmically altered quarter note, eighth note figure in measure eight reference the same figure found in the melody of measures one and six. Young alters the initial pitch and intervallic movement as well.

D: Young returns to a rhythmically displaced signature lick.

“Blue Lester”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.26

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "Blue Lester". Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system includes a "Melody Line" and an "Improvisation" line. The improvisation line features two boxed triplets labeled 'A' and a boxed phrase labeled 'B'. The second system also has a "Melody" and "Improv" line, with a boxed triplet labeled 'A' in the improvisation line. The third system includes a "Melody" and "Improv" line, with a boxed phrase labeled 'C' in the improvisation line. The fourth system includes a "Melody" and "Improv" line, with a boxed phrase labeled 'D' in the improvisation line. Chord symbols (C6, C#dim7, G/D, G7, E7, D7, A7) are placed above the melody lines. The improvisation lines are marked with a 'j' for triplet and a 'j' for a longer note.

A: Young employs a signature lick triplet figure and longer landing note in this excerpt. It must be noted however that rather than altering the pitch or intervallic movement of the melodic line, Young simply quotes it verbatim, as can be seen in the melody line of measure four.

B: Beginning and ending on the same note as that of the melodic line of measures one and two, Young mimics its contour, albeit with rhythmic alterations.

C: Young again mimics the rhythm and contour of melodic line.

D: Young's three-note figure is a retrograde version of the melodic line above it.

### **Additional Motivic Development Observations**

Kenny indicates deriving motivic material from an original melody serves to “function as both an improvising method and a means of creating stylistic unity.”<sup>174</sup> However, Young’s motivic material and the development that follows seldom finds its roots in the basic motivic practices of repetition, sequence, inversion, or retrograde of a song’s melody. Young’s motivic material and development is often built on his own practices of chord tone voicings, revisited signature licks, contrary motion contours, and as observed in his duet with Billie Holiday on “A Sailboat in the Moonlight” question/answer techniques. And yet, as Gould and Keaton point out, all improvisers must none the less, “respect both the limits of the genre and of the musical logic itself; otherwise, their performances lose intelligibility and become simply haphazard sequences of sound.”<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Kenny, “Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative,” 61.

<sup>175</sup> Gould and Keaton, “The Essential Role,” 146.

### Motivic Development Application

The following exercise represents eight measures of a simple blues-like progression. It was composed employing the Motivic Development characteristics observed in Young's approach and gives the reader an opportunity to explore the improvisatory process. The exercise features Young's practices of stepwise motion and ornamentation. The reader is asked to create their own unique, improvised composition applying the practices observed in Young's excerpts and the example provided.

Figure 4.27

The figure displays four systems of musical notation, each consisting of an 'Example' staff and an 'Application' staff. The key signature is two flats (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The 'Example' staves show melodic lines with various ornaments and slurs, while the 'Application' staves are empty. Chord symbols are placed above the staves: Bb7, Eb7, Eb7, Edim7, BbF, and G7.

**System 1:** Example staff shows a melodic line starting on Bb4, moving to C5, then a series of eighth notes: D5, Eb5, E5, F5, G5, A5, Bb5. Application staff is empty. Chord symbols: Bb7, Eb7.

**System 2:** Example staff shows a melodic line starting on Bb4, moving to C5, then a series of eighth notes: D5, Eb5, E5, F5, G5, A5, Bb5. Application staff is empty. Chord symbol: Bb7.

**System 3:** Example staff shows a melodic line starting on Bb4, moving to C5, then a series of eighth notes: D5, Eb5, E5, F5, G5, A5, Bb5. Application staff is empty. Chord symbols: Eb7, Edim7.

**System 4:** Example staff shows a melodic line starting on Bb4, moving to C5, then a series of eighth notes: D5, Eb5, E5, F5, G5, A5, Bb5. Application staff is empty. Chord symbols: BbF, G7.

## Midlevel Analysis

### “A Sailboat in the Moonlight”

#### Excerpt 1

Figure 4.28

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "A Sailboat in the Moonlight". Each system consists of a "Melody" staff and an "Improvisation" staff. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The systems are labeled with letters A through E, indicating specific improvisational figures. System 1: Melody starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. Improvisation features a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) and a larger intervallic leap from G4 to C5. System 2: Melody has a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. Improvisation features a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) and a larger intervallic leap from G4 to C5. System 3: Melody has a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. Improvisation features a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) and a larger intervallic leap from G4 to C5. System 4: Melody has a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. Improvisation features a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) and a larger intervallic leap from G4 to C5.

Midlevel Analysis employs less common and familiar classifications to identify aspects of improvisational events. Readers are encouraged to return to the definition section of this project document to reacquaint themselves with the terminology used in this analysis section.

**A:** [Lick] Young plays a figure, that seeks to distinguish itself from the melody it undergirds. The appoggiatura, triplet figure, and larger intervallic usage as the passage opens and closes, creates pitch and rhythmic diversity.

**B:** [Multi-pitch, Isochronous Rhythmic Figure] Rhythm is the most notable feature of this measure. Allowing the melody to provide the root of *C#*, Young plays all remaining pitches of the *C#9* chord at equal and regular intervals.

**C:** [Fragment] Young plays a very short passage that shows little expressiveness, relationship, or connection to the melodic line.

**D:** [Tick Line] Young's linear series of notes for the most part proceeds in stepwise intervals and remains rhythmically uniform throughout. Its ascending and descending contour pattern differs it from a simple line that generally moves in a single direction.

**E:** [Melodic Figure] Young's passage isn't derived from the original melodic lone of the excerpt, but it does show a song-like lyricism.

“A Sailboat in the Moonlight”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.29

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piece "A Sailboat in the Moonlight" Excerpt 2. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation (Improv) line. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The systems are labeled with chords above the melody lines: C#9, F#m, C#9, F#m, B7, and E7, D, E#7, E7#9. The Improvisation lines contain four highlighted sections: A (a few notes), B (a short passage), C (a whole rest), and D (an oscillating rhythmic figure with repeated accents and eighth notes).

**A:** [Fragment] As he did in the previous excerpt, Young plays few notes against Holiday’s melodic line.

**B:** [Lick] Young plays short passages referencing the chordal foundations of the measure.

**C:** [Void] Young plays nothing giving the remainder of the measure to Holiday alone.

**D:** [Oscillating Rhythmic Figure] As with a similar figure found in Excerpt 1, the unmistakable feature of this measure is the repeated acciaccatura and eighth note rhythm.



“I Never Knew”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.30

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4.

- System 1:** Melody line starts with a half note B-flat, followed by quarter notes G, F, E, D. Improvisation line has two boxed sections: 'A' (measures 1-4) and 'B' (measures 5-8). Chords above are Bb6, Eb6, and Em7.
- System 2:** Melody line starts with a half note B-flat, followed by quarter notes G, F, E, D. Improvisation line has two boxed sections: 'C' (measures 1-4) and 'C' (measures 5-8). Chords above are Bb6 and Eb6.
- System 3:** Melody line starts with a half note B-flat, followed by quarter notes G, F, E, D. Improvisation line has two boxed sections: 'A' (measures 1-4) and 'D' (measures 5-8). Chords above are BbF, Gm, Dbdim7, and F7/C.
- System 4:** Melody line starts with a half note B-flat, followed by quarter notes G, F, E, D. Improvisation line has one boxed section: 'E' (measures 1-8). Chords above are Bb6, Gm, Cm7, and F7.

**A:** [Tick Line] In measure one Young plays an ascending and descending asymmetrical passage. He begins measure five in a similar manner an octave below.

**B:** [Oscillating Rhythmic Figure]

**C:** [Theme Figure] Young plays a rhythmically altered passage replicating the first two notes of the melodic line in measure one. He follows that statement with a variation one-half step above.

**D:** [Void]

**E:** [Lick] Young references the primary chord structures of measures seven and eight.

“I Never Knew”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.31

The musical score for "I Never Knew" Excerpt 2 is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The first system shows a melody line with notes G4, A4, B4, and C5, and an improvisation line with notes G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, and G3. The second system shows a melody line with notes G4, A4, B4, and C5, and an improvisation line with notes G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, and G3. The third system shows a melody line with notes G4, A4, B4, and C5, and an improvisation line with notes G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, and G3. Chord symbols are provided above the melody lines: Dm, A7, Dm6, A7, Dm6, A/C#, and Cm.

A: [Simple Line] Young plays a predominantly stepwise line in a single downward direction.

B: [Lick/Multi-pitch Isochronous Rhythmic Figure] Young begins measure two with one of his signature lick approaches triadically outlining notes within the chordal context of the measure before finishing with a four-note rhythmic figure that outlines the chord as well. In the eighth measure Young reverses the phrase leading with the rhythmic figure and closing with a lick.

C: [Basic Multi-pitch Isochronous Rhythmic Figure] Though Young's use of a tie between the eighths and dotted quarters of the third and fifth measures obscures the repetitiveness somewhat, these three measures are strongly built on a dotted quarter/eighth note configuration.

D: [Tick Line/Multi-pitch Isochronous Rhythmic Figure] Once again Young combines two Multi-Level Analysis characteristics in a single phrase. While the structure both ascends and descends in primarily a stepwise manner, that contour is complimented by a repeating triplet figure.

“These Foolish Things Remind Me of You”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.32

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the song "These Foolish Things Remind Me of You". Each system consists of a Melody line and an Improvisation line. Chord changes are indicated above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Chords: Fmaj9, Dm, Gm9, C7b5. Improvisation passages A, B, and C are boxed in the Improvisation line.
- System 2:** Chords: Fmaj7, Dm, G9, Gb13. Improvisation passages A, A, and A are boxed in the Improvisation line.
- System 3:** Chords: Cm7/F, F7, Bbmaj9, Am7, D. Improvisation passages A, B, and D are boxed in the Improvisation line.
- System 4:** Chords: G13, C7, G9. Improvisation passages A and A are boxed in the Improvisation line.

A: [Lick] Young’s improvisational work on both excerpts of “These Foolish Things Remind Me of You” illustrates multiple examples of this Midlevel analysis characteristic. Young’s passages whether in single or multiple contours primarily feature notes within the chordal context of their respective measures. Even though the shorter figures found in measure four could be viewed as fragments, their direct connection to the G9 and Gb13 chords anchors their status as licks.

B: [Simple Line] Young plays a stepwise, ascending figure in measures two and five.

C: [Simple Chromatic Line] Young plays a stepwise, chromatic, ascending figure.

D: [Interwoven Line] Young plays two independent, descending lines in tone-wise alteration.

“These Foolish Things Remind Me of You”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.33

The figure displays a musical score for the piece "These Foolish Things Remind Me of You" (Excerpt 2). It consists of four systems, each with a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various chords and six specific improvisation figures labeled A through F.

- System 1:** Chords: Fmaj9, Dm, Gm9, C7b5. Improvisation figure A is a lick/multi-pitch rhythmic figure.
- System 2:** Chords: Fmaj7, Dm, G9, G13. Improvisation figure B is a wavy line.
- System 3:** Chords: Cm7/F, F7, Bbmaj9, Am7, D. Improvisation figures C and D are present.
- System 4:** Chords: G7, C7, Fmaj7, E7sus. Improvisation figures E and F are present.

A: [Lick/Multi-pitch Rhythmic Figure] As observed in other excerpts, Young combines his signature lick approach outline chord tones with a brief, identifiable rhythmic alteration.

B: [Wavy Line] Young plays a lengthy phrase that abruptly changes directional contour and features varied rhythmic emphasis.

C: [Directional Lick/Interwoven Line] Young’s chord tone centered phrase moves primarily downward from G to F yet also includes an interwoven sixteenth-note figure.

D: [Simple Chromatic Line]

E: [Single Pitch Rhythmic Figure] Young plays back-to-back triplets on a single note.

F: [Lick/Tick Line] Young plays a figure that primarily outlines the chordal context of the measure. However, both the ascending and descending contour of the line and its stepwise motion hints at a second classification.

“Blue Lester”  
Excerpt 1

Figure 4.34

The figure displays a musical score for the first excerpt of "Blue Lester". It consists of four systems, each with a Melody line and an Improvisation line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Chords are indicated above the melody lines.

- System 1:** Chords: Gm, Gm/F, E7, D7. Improvisation A is a lick in the second measure of the E7 chord.
- System 2:** Chords: Gm, Gm/F, E7, D7. Improvisation C is a multi-pitch isochronous rhythmic figure in the second measure of the Gm/F chord. Improvisation D is a theme figure in the second measure of the D7 chord.
- System 3:** Chords: G, G/B, C6, C#dim7. Improvisation E is a simple descending line in the second measure of the G/B chord.
- System 4:** Chords: G6, D7. Improvisation F is a single pitch rhythmic figure in the first measure of the G6 chord.

A: [Lick] Young outlines chord tones.

B: [Partial Interwoven Line]

C: [Multi-pitch Isochronous Rhythmic Figure] Repeated sixteenth-note triplet, eighth note figure.

D: [Theme Figure] Dotted quarter, eighth note figure found in the melodic line.

E: [Simple Descending Line] Young plays a descending stepwise passage from G to G.

F: [Single Pitch Rhythmic Figure] Young only varies the repetition slightly.

“Blue Lester”  
Excerpt 2

Figure 4.35

The figure displays a musical score for "Blue Lester" Excerpt 2, consisting of four systems of music. Each system includes a Melody line and an Improvisation line, with chord symbols indicated above the staff.

- System 1:** Chords: C6, C6dim7, G/D, G7. The Improvisation line features a red box labeled 'A' containing a sixteenth-note triplet.
- System 2:** Chords: C6, C6dim7, G/D, G7. The Improvisation line has a red box labeled 'B' containing a sixteenth-note triplet.
- System 3:** Chords: C6, C6dim7, G/D, E7. The Improvisation line has two red boxes: 'C' (a chromatic descending line) and 'D' (a sixteenth-note triplet).
- System 4:** Chords: A7, D7. The Improvisation line has two red boxes: 'E' (a chromatic descending line) and 'F' (a sixteenth-note triplet).

A: [Lick/Wavy Line/Theme/Isochronous Rhythmic Figure] Young’s passage exhibits several characteristics. Its reliance on fundamental chord tones suggests a single classification as lick. However, the length and abrupt changes in directional contour suggest wavy line. A thematic classification exists because Young has foreshadowed the melodic line of the fourth measure. Lastly, Multi-pitch Isochronous Rhythmic Figures are present in both a sixteenth triplet, eight note and the simpler eight note triplet combinations.

B: [Theme Figure] Young restates the thematic material.

C: [Simple Chromatic Descending Line]



D: [Theme Figure] Though not found in the melodic line of this excerpt, Young returns to thematic material from Excerpt 1.

E: [Lick] Young plays a descending arpeggio of tones within the A7 chord.

F: [Lick} Young plays an ascending arpeggio of tones withing the D7 chord.

### Additional Midlevel Observations

At first blush, one might make the observation that because the development of Midlevel analysis models began long after Young's death in 1959, their purpose and focus had no bearing on his influences and improvisational approach. However, that's true only as a matter of time, terminology, and perspective. Young's use of easily identifiable, signature pet-licks was a mainstay long before any analysis model sought to identify them as such. His interweaving of thematic material, directional contour, or quotes from existing works was as common a practice for him as it was for any jazz artist. When an analysis model classifies a passage as repetitive it simply mirrors Young in his own parlance saying, "Have another helping."<sup>176</sup> Potter recognizes the many different approaches among analysis models yet encourages all be pursued and applied to many solos, so that their results can be made available to interested musician and listeners.<sup>177</sup> Midlevel analysis is, as Frieler et al. states, "A complimentary methodology that takes structural aspects into account and, at the same time, describes and quantizes improvisational strategies in a concise and compact way."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Balliett, *American Musicians*, 234.

<sup>177</sup> Potter, "Analyzing Improvised Jazz," 143.

<sup>178</sup> Frieler et al., "Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos," 144.

### Midlevel Application

The following exercise represents eight measures of a simple blues-like progression. It was composed employing the Midlevel characteristics observed in Young's approach and gives the reader an opportunity to explore the improvisatory process. The exercise features Young's practices of interwoven lines and multi-pitch rhythmic figures. The reader is asked to create their own unique, improvised composition applying the practices observed in Young's excerpts and the example provided.

Figure 4.36

Figure 4.36 consists of four systems of musical notation, each with an 'Example' (Ex) and an 'Application' (Ap) part. The key signature is two flats (Bb and Eb) and the time signature is 4/4.

- System 1:**
  - Example:** Two measures. Measure 1: Bb7 chord, notes G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. Measure 2: Eb7 chord, notes Eb4, E4, F4, G4.
  - Application:** Two empty staves with rests.
- System 2:**
  - Example:** Two measures. Measure 1: Bb7 chord, notes G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. Measure 2: Eb7 chord, notes Eb4, E4, F4, G4.
  - Application:** Two empty staves with rests.
- System 3:**
  - Example:** Two measures. Measure 1: Eb7 chord, notes Eb4, E4, F4, G4. Measure 2: Edim7 chord, notes Eb4, E4, F4, G4.
  - Application:** Two empty staves with rests.
- System 4:**
  - Example:** Two measures. Measure 1: Bb7 chord, notes G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. Measure 2: G7 chord, notes G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5.
  - Application:** Two empty staves with rests.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Introduction

Lester Young was one of the most gifted and influential tenor saxophonists of his era, and his impact on improvisational approaches continues today. Young is also one of the most accessible improvisers for musicians at all levels of capability, regardless of the instrument they play. This project utilized four improvisation analysis models selected for their consistent and successful application in previous research and transcription excerpts to represent Young's improvisational career's early, middle, and late periods. This research project sought to identify the unique characteristics representative of Lester Young's improvisational approach and, through that identification, unveil usable strategies that musicians could draw upon and apply to their improvisational practices and performance.

### Summary

"But when Pres appeared, we all started listening to him alone. Pres had an entirely new sound, one that we seemed to be waiting for."<sup>179</sup> Porter's quote from tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon accurately sums up Young's impact and influence on the great jazz musicians of the era in which Young lived and those that would follow. Balliett also confirms this impact and influence but contends his significance was even more remarkable given the racial strife, barriers, and tensions throughout his career. "When Young died in 1959, he had become the model for countless saxophonists, black and white."<sup>180</sup> DeVeaux and Giddins concur:

Many musicians who went on to pioneer modern jazz worshipped Young, learning his solos, and imitating his look. White saxophonists (like Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, and Al Cohn) focused on his lyricism and feathery timbre in the upper register. Black

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<sup>179</sup> Porter, "Lester Leaps In," 3.

<sup>180</sup> Balliett, *American Musicians*, 234.

saxophonists (like Dexter Gordon, Wardell Gray, and Illinois Jacquet) preferred his blues riffs and darker timbre in the middle and lower register.<sup>181</sup>

The standard established by Coleman Hawkins served to measure most tenor saxophonists of the day, but Young had no interest in following that path. Young sought his voice, musical style, fashion, and distinctive language. As Ward and Burns observe, "In an art form built in large part on individualism, no one was more individual than he."<sup>182</sup>

The vertical perspective referenced by Potter and so prominent in Chord-Scale Base analysis can be seen in Young's improvisational support of the harmonic progression of the melodic line, the underlying chord structures within each measure, and the use of arpeggiated and triadic chord spellings. This adherence to the fundamental harmonic foundations of a work gives Young's improvisational approach the forward motion intimated by Porter.

Young's regular use of signature licks and repeated melodic patterns throughout multiple solo opportunities bears witness to the necessary frequency both Kenny and Potter identify as integral to Formulaic Usage analysis. Hargreaves attests to this frequency of generated ideas, stating they can be conscious choices or, as is often the case in motor-generated ideas, an unconscious act in which the musicians find they are "playing finger patterns because the fingers give it to you."<sup>183</sup>

The short phrases, repetitive passages, and sequential movement from which Young then builds his more significant musical ideas are fundamental to Motivic Development analysis. Green considers the use of motivic concepts such as passing and neighbor tones figures or retrograde passages essential to the assembly of larger organizational musical structures.

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<sup>181</sup> DeVeaux and Giddins, *Jazz*, 236.

<sup>182</sup> Ward and Burns, *Jazz: A History of America's Music*, 194.

<sup>183</sup> Hargreaves, "Generating Ideas in Jazz Improvisation, 362.

While the terminology is decidedly modern, Young's practice of using melodic material and isochronous rhythmic figures, likely better known in his time as aping the melody or simply repeating a rhythmic lick, embodies Midlevel analysis. Frieler et al. view this analysis model as "suitable for enhancing and communicating an understanding of the structural composition of jazz solos, particularly for non-jazz listeners."<sup>184</sup>

### **Significance**

Jazz as a musical style and improvisation as a significant component of jazz represents a freedom of voice and idea that is truly global in scale. While jazz and jazz improvisation can be considered American by birth, it is more universal than often imagined, spanning time and distance. Early and Monson clarify:

Its roots are African and European, classical, and popular, dance music, and art music. It has been called both cool and hot, earthy, and avant-garde, intellectual and primitive. It has been influenced by Latin American and Afro-Cuban music, by Middle Eastern, Indian, and other forms of Asian music, by African music, and by varieties of religious music, including gospel and the Protestant hymnal. It also has roots in the American popular song (which makes up a good deal of its repertoire), the blues, hokum, and circus music, marching band music, and popular dance music.<sup>185</sup>

For musicians stepping into improvisation for the first time or those seeking to advance their capabilities, removing the mystery of improvisation, and revealing it as both a learnable and accessible skill is paramount. Improvisational analysis models such as those used in this project serve to isolate and identify the many improvisational devices used by jazz musicians.

Potter provides an example indicating chord-focused analytical tools that "attempt to relate melody to the underlying harmony have proven useful to improvisation students and is still

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<sup>184</sup> Frieler et al., "Midlevel Analysis of Monophonic Jazz Solos," 160.

<sup>185</sup> Early and Monson, "Why Jazz Still Matters," 7.

important in jazz education.”<sup>186</sup> Speaking of the devices discovered through formula-focused analytical tools, Kenny, quoting Aebersold, reveals that even the greatest of improvisers often build their improvisational ideas on a basic premise:

The idea of learning a pattern and when to play it should not be thought of as uncreative. Because it is impossible to create new meaningful ideas continuously, improvisers sometimes resort to playing ideas or patterns that have been practiced and mentally logged on beforehand. Each player eventually builds a vocabulary that is uniquely their own. Listening to jazz masters highlights certain calling cards or trademarks associated with that player and their style. These calling cards are their musical personality.<sup>187</sup>

The improvisational devices discovered through all analytical tools derive from a primary source, the work itself. A triadic chord spelling, phrase, fragment, motive, or signature lick may appear completely spontaneous. However, in one way or another, the improviser is borrowing from a vocabulary of practiced, memorized, and structured elements. Gould and Keaton explain. “The performance realization is based on a preexisting entity: the form and harmonic progression that identifies the piece. The player may remain very close to that framework or may stray, but he or she will never leave it to the extent that the identification is lost.”<sup>188</sup>

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this project begin with an acknowledgment that while the selected solo transcriptions were representative of Young’s early, middle, and late career, they represent only a small sampling compared to his extensive work. The selected solo transcriptions may have also represented too easy or too difficult an analytical challenge compared to Young’s other solo works. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that the available library of existing solo

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<sup>186</sup> Potter, “Analyzing Improvised Jazz,” 143.

<sup>187</sup> Kenny, “Jazz Analysis as Cultural Imperative,” 59.

<sup>188</sup> Gould and Keaton, “The Essential Role,” 146.

transcriptions for Young, or most jazz musicians, is also relatively small. The lack of transcription access means the same works are viewed, analyzed, and discussed repeatedly, or the analyzing individual must undertake the process of transcribing before any analysis can begin.

The second limitation of this project is in the analysis models themselves. By their own admission, researchers speak to the subjectivity of analysis. Is an identified musical idea formulaic, or is it motivic? Can it be both? Does that clarify its presence or create confusion? As referenced earlier in this project, it is preferential to identify a musical idea by the least specific option when in doubt but is formulaic least specific or motivic. Can different analyzers arrive at different conclusions? An additional limitation in this area is the learning curve associated with each analytical model. The practical analysis of improvisational work is only possible if the process and practice of the analysis model are understood.

A final limitation is not in itself a function of this project but how others interpret and apply the findings. As has been previously referenced in this project, it can be far too easy for improvising musicians to see discovered devices as usable ideas without ever recognizing they exist as part of a larger whole. In the same way that a thesaurus provides several word options, the context of the writing is the final arbiter of a word's applicability. Improvisations built without recognizing context will sound disconnected, directionless, and incomplete.

### **Implications**

The selected transcriptions analyzed in this project reveal that Young's improvisational approach regularly relies on fundamental triadic and third-related arpeggiations of chords and provides a solid foundation upon which initial instruction and understanding can begin. The recognition that improvisational ideas can begin with a simple outline of a chord from its root



through its third, fifth, and so on highlights the significance of both teaching chord spellings and the musician's need to recall those spellings from memory. Proficiency in the aural recognition of chord tones and chord progressions takes many years to master. However, the basic knowledge of what three notes constitute a given triad or what notes are its seventh, ninth, or other chord tones is a skill that can be acquired in a much shorter period. Additionally, when one pairs chord tone recognition with an understanding of the symbols used to identify chords in jazz charts, the chord tones become easily identifiable by their root, third, and fifths. While more difficult chord symbols exist and may confuse for a time, educators can remind students that a seemingly complicated Dm7b5 chord, sometimes printed as D<sup>o</sup>7, still contains a root, third, and fifth but also possesses an added seventh. With an understanding of basic chord spelling in hand, the musician can then discover the necessary modifications this example would require to account for the half-diminished status of the chord and its spelling D, F, Ab, and C. The recognition of the third, fifth, and seventh tones of a chord inherently introduce musicians to the second, fourth, and sixth chord tones that fall in between and reinforces the scale work musicians began in their earliest studies. As a result, chord tones outside the root triad become readily identifiable. Thus, a C2 chord includes a root, third, and fifth, or C, E, and G, and a second, or D.

Young's improvisational approach using formulaic ideas and signature licks throughout many of the selected transcriptions analyzed in this project also supplies ample evidence and support for repeating musical figures and borrowing from other sources. Educators and student musicians need not think of improvisation as the creation of something from nothing. Young's use of motivic figures, recurring triplet passages, and themes borrowed directly from the melodic line confirm that existing materials build improvisational ideas. Educators should encourage musicians to experiment and explore the development of personal signature licks and phrases

that are enjoyable to the musician or fall comfortably under their fingers for instance. Signature ideas should also be practiced in multiple keys to provide musicians with a catalog of bedrock materials from which larger improvisational structures can expand and mature. It is similarly true when borrowing from the melody line or quoting other sources. As Young illustrated, musicians can incorporate segments of melodic material borrowed directly from the songs they improvise or quote material from other sources as stated initially or altered by augmentation, retrograde, inversion, or other means. Educators should also encourage musicians to integrate this approach into their daily practice. Understanding the purpose, contour, and direction of a work's melody is as fundamental to improvisatory creativity as is the recognition of keys, scales, and chords.

Lastly, this project's dependence on selected transcriptions of Young's improvisational work spotlights the need for additional availability in this area and its relevance as a valuable skill for educators and musicians. Listening to melodic and improvisational ideas with the intent of transcribing their pitch, rhythm, articulation, and other musical aspects provides invaluable guidance and instruction.

Through transcribing, visual representation and concepts—visually recognized patterns, notational concepts, and visually memorized chord structures—gradually give way to the experience of music as sound. By transcribing exemplary improvisations and simple composition performed by great players, we more easily understand the shaping of a musical phrase, and we develop the ability to shape phrases in our own playing.<sup>189</sup>

### **Recommendations**

This research project utilized Chord-Scale Base, Formulaic Usage, Motivic Development, and Midlevel improvisation analysis models to examine select solo transcriptions of saxophonist Lester Young. Future research should utilize the same analysis models but apply them to a more extensive sampling of Young's improvisational work. The application could take a similar

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<sup>189</sup> Bob Hinz, "Transcribing for Greater Musicality." *Music Educators Journal* 82, no. 1 (1995): 26.

perspective to this project, viewing Young's work throughout his career or focusing on any portion of it. Additionally, an examination could utilize the same solo transcriptions viewed through other analysis models such as Pitch Class Set, Shenkerian, Syntactic, or other generative models.

Future projects should apply select improvisational analysis models to solo transcriptions of the same song from different jazz artists. The results would provide a framework highlighting the artists' signature licks, improvisational approaches, similarities, differences, and contextual identities based on jazz style or various instruments.

### **Summary**

Improvisation is a centerpiece of jazz, and Lester Young was one of the most impactful, influential, and recognizable instrumentalists in the history of the style. While the individualism of his fashion sense and distinctive language separated him from other musicians of the era, his improvisational approach moved a nation of musicians away from the big and bold tone of Coleman Hawkins to the lighter, lyrical style of his storytelling.

Young's approach was and is accessible, built on identifiable devices found in Chord-Scale Base, Formulaic Usage, Motivic Development, and Midlevel analysis models. Musicians of all abilities can benefit from the recognition of these devices, Young's application and use of the devices, and the knowledge that those devices prove improvisation a learnable skill and not a mysterious, mythical ability only a few enjoy.

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