

# **Jazz Melody Performance: An Examination of Autumn Leaves**

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## **Purpose:**

Many standards from the great American songbook are written in an on-the-beat manner with little to no syncopation in the melody. Jazz artists who have adapted these songs for their own use improvise or arrange their own syncopations and other rhythmic alterations to make for a more compelling jazz performance of the standard. Many young students of jazz will use lead sheets to learn these standards and begin playing them without any change to the written melody rhythm. Often these students will be told to syncopate or “jazz up” the melody.

My presentation today will look to give more concrete ideas and tools to students so they can conceptualize how to play standards convincingly. These ideas will come from an examination of three different jazz trombonists playing “Autumn Leaves.” I will analyze how Frank Rosolino, Jiggs Whigham, and Slide Hampton adapted the standard to their jazz performance.

## **The Lead Sheet:**

In order to compare and analyze the three separate performances, I needed a template from which to begin my comparisons. I searched Norlin Library for the oldest sheet music to “Autumn Leaves” I could find. The version I found is a ballad in E minor with a 16-bar form. Each of the jazz performances are medium to up tempo, in G minor, have a 32-bar form, and are played down the octave, so I transposed the melody and chord changes and doubled the harmonic rhythm and actual rhythms to the sheet music to come up with the lead sheet.

## **Procedure:**

The melody notes from the lead sheet are shown in the first staff, and my transcription of the trombonists’ performance are in the second staff. The melody notes from the lead sheet are highlighted in various colors where they occur in the players’ staves. Blue corresponds to a delayed melody note, red notes anticipate the lead sheet’s placement, and green notes are placed the same as the lead sheet. Notes that aren’t highlighted are either prolongations of the melody notes or are added notes, melodies, or embellishments. Yellow highlighted chord changes differ from the lead sheet music by more than alterations or extensions.

## **Frank Rosolino**

Frank Rosolino was born in Detroit in 1926 and will be remembered as “one of the most technically adroit trombonists of the bop era.” In addition to leading his own groups, he worked extensively as a sideman with Gene Krupa, Stan Kenton, Terry Gibbs, Conte Candoli, Benny Carter, Supersax, and Quincy Jones. His version of “Autumn Leaves” was recorded in the Netherlands in 1973 with the Louis Van Dyke Trio and was included in Conrad Herwig and Jamey Aebersold’s release of the compilation album *Fond Memories of Frank Rosolino*.

Rosolino’s rendition is the quickest version of the three, straying the most from the song’s ballad roots. Nearly every delay or anticipation used by Rosolino is by an 8<sup>th</sup> note value:

# Autumn Leaves

Kosma, Joseph

5 9 13 17 21 25 29

Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 Gm/Bb

Am7(b5) D7 Gm

Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 Gm/Bb

Am7(b5) D7 Gm

D7 Gm

F7 Bb

Am7(b5) D7(b9) Gm

C/E Cm/Eb D7 Gm Cm Gm

Detailed description: This is a bass clef musical score for the piece 'Autumn Leaves' by Joseph Kosma. The music is in 4/4 time and the key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is divided into eight systems, each starting with a measure number (5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 29). Chord labels are placed above the notes: Cm7, F7, Bbmaj7, Gm/Bb, Am7(b5), D7, Gm, C/E, Cm/Eb, and D7(b9). The notes are primarily quarter and eighth notes, with some slurs and ties. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the eighth system.

# Autumn Leaves

Frank Rosolino

Kosma, Joseph

♩ = 245

Musical notation for the first system of 'Autumn Leaves'. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 245. The notation shows a bass line with notes and rests. Chords are indicated above the staff: Cm7, F7, and Bbmaj7. Two rhythmic patterns are highlighted: 'Rhythm A' (a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note) and 'Rhythm B' (a quarter note followed by an eighth note).

Musical notation for the second system of 'Autumn Leaves'. The notation continues with notes and rests. Chords indicated are Gm/Bb, Am7(65), D7, and Gm. Rhythmic patterns 'Rhythm B' and 'Rhythm A' are highlighted. The system ends with a fermata over the final note.

Musical notation for the third system of 'Autumn Leaves'. The notation continues with notes and rests. Chords indicated are Cm7, F7, Bbmaj7, Gm/Bb, and Gm. Rhythmic patterns 'Rhythm B' and 'Rhythm A' are highlighted. The system ends with a fermata over the final note.

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Autumn Leaves

Musical notation for the fourth system of 'Autumn Leaves'. The notation continues with notes and rests. Chords indicated are D7, Am7(65), D7, Gm, and Cm. Rhythmic patterns 'Rhythm C' (a quarter note followed by a quarter note) and 'Rhythm A' are highlighted.

Musical notation for the fifth system of 'Autumn Leaves'. The notation continues with notes and rests. Chords indicated are F7, Cm7, F7, Bbmaj7, and Ebmaj7. Rhythmic patterns 'Rhythm C' and 'Rhythm A' are highlighted. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3'.

Musical notation for the sixth system of 'Autumn Leaves'. The notation continues with notes and rests. Chords indicated are Am7(65), D7(69), Gm, Cm7, and C/E Cm/Bb. Rhythmic patterns 'Rhythm A' and 'Rhythm C' are highlighted. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3'.

Musical notation for the seventh system of 'Autumn Leaves'. The notation continues with notes and rests. Chords indicated are D7, Gm, Cm, Gm, and Cm7. Rhythmic patterns 'Rhythm A' and 'Rhythm C' are highlighted. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3'.

he is mostly adding syncopation to the melody. For the syncopations to work, he has incorporated green on-the-beat notes in every phrase. The downbeats give the syncopations context. If he exclusively used upbeats, it would lose the effect of the syncopations and sound overly quirky.

Rosolino uses these syncopations to develop his own rhythmic motives in his melody performance of the first two A sections. I have labeled Rosolino's first four notes as "Rhythm A" and the first four of the next phrase as "Rhythm B." After his initial "A" then "B," he does two iterations of "B" that change just one note from the initial "Rhythm B." The first (m. 4) elongates the penultimate note and the second (m. 6) prolongs the second note. He starts the next A section with "Rhythm A" (m. 8-9). He then reverts to "Rhythm B" by changing the second note (m. 10) and then using the same alteration he did in m. 4 in m. 12. He closes the second A section with "Rhythm A" again. While the first 8 measures follow an ABBB rhythmic pattern, the second A uses an ABBA pattern. Rosolino uses "Rhythm A" to delineate the beginning and ending of his A sections. Each version of "Rhythm A" is identical except for the length of the final note, and each "Rhythm B" changes one note. By using similar but not identical rhythms, Rosolino simultaneously gives the melody statement both rhythmic cohesion and variety. In terms of pitch, Rosolino stayed very close to the original melody: only one pitch in the first 16 bars is not in the original melody, the G# in m. 14.

For the B section, Rosolino introduces "Rhythm C." He uses the same pick up for each iteration but adds a motive derived from m. 17 leap downwards and upwards. The original melody does not develop this motive with each phrase, but Rosolino adds it to his own performance.

To start the C section, Rosolino returns to "Rhythm A" (m. 25). In m. 27 he begins to stray from the melody and branches out into soloistic playing, effectively starting his solo early. One reason to abandon the melody at the end is to avoid the conclusion to the previous melodic material. The written melody to "Autumn Leaves" comes to a very clear end. Since this is the melody leading into his solo and not the out head, Rosolino forgoes wrapping up the melody and chooses to propel the energy forward with new material.

## **Jiggs Whigham**

Jiggs Whigham was born in Cleveland in 1943. He has spent most of his career in Europe and has played with the Glenn Miller Orchestra, Stan Kenton, Maynard Ferguson, Johnny Richards, Larry Elgart, Kurt Edelhagen's orchestra, Louie Bellson and the BBC Big Band, and Lee Konitz. His version of "Autumn Leaves" was recorded in Cleveland with his trio featuring Decebal Badila on bass and Florian Weber on piano. It was released in 2015 on the album *Live at Nighttown: 'Not So Standards.'*

Whigham follows the title of his "Not So Standard" album by having a much freer interpretation of "Autumn Leaves" than Frank Rosolino. While Rosolino followed the melody closely until the last few measures, Whigham begins very clearly with the original melody for the first six measures before abandoning it. His statement of the melody in the first A section develops a rhythmic motive starting with the pickup measure. The rhythmic repetition is altered by having the first pickup note in m. 2 be a dotted quarter instead of an eighth note, and by having the final note in m. 3 be a quarter note instead of a whole note. The third iteration (m. 4-

# Autumn Leaves

## Jiggs Whigham

Joseph Kosma

*Jiggs Whigham*

$\text{♩} = 95$

Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7

Cm7 F7(B9)

Bbmaj7

J.W.

Gm/Bb Am7(♭5) D7 rit. Gm

Ebmaj7 Am7(♭5) D7(B9) Gm6

J.W.

8 Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7

*rubato* Cm7 F7 > Bbmaj7 G-

J.W.

12 Gm/Bb Am7(♭5) D7 Gm

Ebmaj7 Am7(♭5) D7(♭5) Gm6

17 D7 Gm

Am7(♭5) D7 Gm

J.W.

21 F7 Bb

Cm7 F7(b9)(♭5) Bbmaj7 Ebmaj7

J.W.

25 Am7(♭5) D7(♭9) Gm

Am7(♭5) D7 Gm F#7 F7 E7

J.W.

29 C/E Cm/Eb D7 Gm Cm Gm

Am7(♭5) D7(b9)(♭5) Gm Cm7

5) of the rhythmic motive combines the first two by having a dotted quarter pickup note and a whole note to end the passage. The last iteration upends expectations by not including the last note, perhaps cueing the rest of the trio into the brief rubato.

Once the trio resumes time, Whigham does not continue with the original melody, but invents his own melody over the chord changes for most of the rest of the head. Despite the overall abandonment of the melody, he still checks in to the melody at formal junctures, starting the B section and ending the C section with the melody, though both the melody is rhythmically displaced.

### **Slide Hampton**

Born in 1932, Slide Hampton was a harmonic innovator among jazz trombonists, composers, and arrangers. He performed with Lionel Hampton, Maynard Ferguson, Art Blakey, the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, Max Roach, Dizzy Gillespie, Woody Herman, Dexter Gordon, and Art Farmer. This recording of “Autumn Leaves” comes from his 1962 octet album *Two Sides of Slide Hampton*.

Hampton’s version is more heavily arranged than the previous two. One major difference is how he plays four A sections before continuing to the B. Like the other two performances, Hampton begins very strictly with the melody, and even repeats the same “Rhythm A” as Frank Rosolino in mm. 2, 4, and 8. Starting in m. 10, he begins to approximate the melody more. To begin the two inserted A sections, he abandons the melody for his own improvisation, and changes the harmony while usually maintaining the original bass notes. At the end of his fourth A section he returns to the melody.

The B section shows Hampton developing another rhythmic idea. I labeled one rhythmic motive consisting of a “short short short long” pattern as X, another pattern of “short short long” as Y, and finally “long short short short long” as Z. Y can be seen as a truncation of X, and Z contains both X and the retrograde of Y within itself. I used the “short long” classifications since he alters the exact note lengths and placements but maintains those general shapes.

He begins the C section by balancing the most upbeat oriented pickups in m. 40 with the most on-the-beat oriented passage in mm. 41-2. In mm. 41-44 Hampton takes an undeveloped motive from the melody of the descending triad and develops it in his performance. He does this without adding notes outside of the melody by shifting the original G natural pickup to the final phrase to be the end of the preceding phrase (m. 44). Hampton also avoids resolving the melody to the tonic until halfway through his first break measure. This delay propels the music forward to his solo in a similar way to Rosolino’s abandonment of the melody.

### **Comparison**

Table #1 shows where each player placed the notes relative to the lead sheet. The table shows the overall tendency to abandon (Rosolino) or heavily alter (the other two) the melody by the very end. Each note of the last few bars is only played by Slide or Whigham, and all are displaced by a beat or more except for the downbeat of m. 27. There are two notes that nobody plays: beat 2 of measures 18 and 20 (perhaps because both omitted notes repeat the previous note).

# Autumn Leaves

Slide Hampton

Joseph Kosma

2

Autumn Leaves

Slide Hampton

(♩ = 140)

Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7

S.H.

Gm/Bb Am7(b5) D7 Gm  
Ebmaj7 Am7(b5) D7 Gm6

S.H.

Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 Bb7(b9) Gm/Bb

*straight*

S.H.

Am7(b5) D7 Gm  
D7(b9) Gm9(maj7)

S.H.

Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 Gm/Bb  
Cm7 F7(b9) A/Bb

S.H.

Am7(b5) D7 Gm  
Am7(b5) D7(b9) D#7/G

S.H.

Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 Gm/Bb  
Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 E7(b9) Bb7(b9)

S.H.

Am7(b5) D7 Gm  
Am7(b5) D7(b9) Gm9(maj7)



Autumn Leaves

S.H.

17 Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 Gm/Bb

17 Cm7 F7(9) A/Bb

17 Cm7 F7(9) A/Bb

17 Cm7 F7(9) A/Bb

S.H.

21 Am7(b5) D7 Gm

21 Am7(b5) D7 Gm

21 Am7(b5) D7(9) D#G

21 Am7(b5) D7(9) D#G

S.H.

25 Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 Gm/Bb

25 Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 Gm/Bb

25 Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 E7(49) Eb7(49)

25 Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 E7(49) Eb7(49)

S.H.

29 Am7(b5) D7 Gm

29 Am7(b5) D7 Gm

29 Am7(b5) D7(9) Gm0(maj7)

29 Am7(b5) D7(9) Gm0(maj7)

Autumn Leaves

S.H.

33 D7 Gm

33 D7 Gm

33 Am7(b5) D7(49) Gm

33 Am7(b5) D7(49) Gm

S.H.

37 F7 Bb

37 F7 Bb

37 Cm7 F7(49) low back Bbmaj7 Ebmaj7

37 Cm7 F7(49) low back Bbmaj7 Ebmaj7

S.H.

41 Am7(b5) D7(9) Gm

41 Am7(b5) D7(9) Gm

41 Am7(b5) D7(9) Gm7 Fm7 Bb7

41 Am7(b5) D7(9) Gm7 Fm7 Bb7

S.H.

45 C/E Cm/Eb D7 Gm Cm Gm

45 C/E Cm/Eb D7 Gm Cm Gm

45 Ebmaj7 D7(49) Gm Ebmaj7

45 Ebmaj7 D7(49) Gm Ebmaj7





the performances as none of them utilize the E natural in m. 29. This shows that the harmony in m. 29 is either unique to that arrangement or is an original harmony that these jazz musicians abandoned.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Original	Cm7	F7	Bbmaj7	Gm/Bb	Am7(b5)	D7	Gm	Gm	Cm7	F7	Bbmaj7	Gm/Bb	Am7(b5)	D7	Gm	Gm
Rosolino				Ebmaj7							E7alt	Ebmaj7				
Slide				Ebmaj7							Bb Bb7	Ebmaj7				
Whigham				Ebmaj7							Bb Gm	Ebmaj7				
(Slide 2)			A/Bb	A/Bb			Db/G	Db/G			Bb E7	Eb7				

  

Measure	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
Original	D7	D7	Gm	Gm	F7	F7	Bb	Bb	Am7(b5)	D7(b9)	Gm	Gm	C/E Cm/Eb	D7	Gm Cm	Gm
Rosolino	Am7(b5)				Cm7			Ebmaj7				C7	Am7(b5)		Gm	
Slide	Am7(b5)				Cm7			Ebmaj7				Fm7 Bb7	Ebmaj7		Gm	
Whigham	Am7(b5)				Cm7			Ebmaj7			Gm F#7	F7 E7	Am7(b5)		Gm	

Table 4

### “Mode” Performance

I created a combination of the three performances by taking the mode of each note and chord. In other words, if at least two of the three players played the note in a certain metric placement I used that placement. When each player had a different placement but one of them matched the lead sheet, I used the placement that agreed with the lead sheet. When the lead sheet and all three placements differed, I took the average of the three player’s placement.

The “Mode” performance mostly lines up with the lead sheet – 39 of the 68 notes have the same placement. Listening to the “Mode” was for the most part okay: it was still more on the beat than most jazz performances, but the syncopations it added weren’t bad. The syncopations don’t share the same motivic unity as the real performances, and the mode gets less convincing the more all three abandoned the melody (m. 27 on). The lack of consistency in repetition and development of the “Mode” arrangement makes for a less consistent performance. This illustrates how “Jazzing” up the melody of a standard doesn’t equate to adding random syncopations. These rhythmic differences from the lead sheet are most effective when utilizing repetition and variation to develop rhythmic motives. The combination of similarity and difference simultaneously courts and challenges the listener’s ear.

### Summary of Techniques Used:

- Syncopation (used in motivic manner)
- Rhythmic Displacement
- Abandoning or omitting parts of melody (often returning at formal junctures)
- Developing a melodic motive
- Arranging through reharmonization or form manipulation

I put some of these techniques into practice in an arrangement of “All the Things You Are” to see how these techniques can be applied to another standard.

# Autumn Leaves

"Mode"

Kosma, Joseph

Lead Sheet

Chords: Cm7, F7, Bbmaj7, Gm/Bb

L.S.

Chords: Am7(b5), D7, Gm, Gm

Chords: Cm7, F7, Bbmaj7, Ebmaj7

L.S.

Chords: Cm7, F7, Bbmaj7, Gm/Bb

Chords: Cm7, F7, Bbmaj7, Gm/Bb

L.S.

Chords: Am7(b5), D7, Gm

Chords: Am7(b5), D7, Gm

2

Autumn Leaves

L.S.

Chords: D7, Gm, Gm

Chords: D7, Gm, Gm

L.S.

Chords: Am7(b5), D7(b9), Gm

Chords: Cm7, F7, Bbmaj7, Ebmaj7

L.S.

Chords: Am7(b5), D7(b9), Gm

Chords: Am7(b5), D7(b9), Gm

L.S.

Chords: C/E, Cm/Eb, D7, Gm, Cm, Gm

Chords: Am7(b5), D7(b9), Gm

# All the Things You Are

Jerome Kern  
B/W

Lead Sheet

Performance

F m7 B m7 E b7 A b m a j 7

Rhythm "L"

D m a j 7 G 7 C m a j 7

L.S. Perf.

5 5

D m a j 7 G 7 C m a j 7

Rhythm "L"

Rhythm "M"

Rhythm "M"

L.S. Perf.

9 9

C m 7 F m 7 B b 7 E b m a j 7

A b m a j 7 A m 7 D 7 G m a j 7

Rhythm "M"

Rhythm "M"

L.S. Perf.

13 13

A b m a j 7 A m 7 D 7 G m a j 7

Rhythm "L"

Rhythm "L"

2

## All the Things You Are

L.S. Perf.

17 17

A m 7 D 7 G m a j 7

Rhythm "N"

Rhythm "N"

L.S. Perf.

21 21

F m 7 B 7 E m a j 7 C 7 (f 5)

Rhythm "L"

Rhythm "L"

L.S. Perf.

25 25

F m 7 B b m 7 E b 7 A b m a j 7

Rhythm "O"

Rhythm "O"

L.S. Perf.

29 29

D m a j 7 D m m 7 C m 7 B o 7

Rhythm "P"

Rhythm "P"

L.S. Perf.

33 33

B b m 7 E b 7 A b m a j 7 G m 7 (b 5) C 7 (b 9)

Rhythm "L"

Rhythm "L"