Exploration of the structural elements that make up the conventional classic jazz language, the differences between Cliché and Language, and how soloists can create unconventional solos by creatively reimagining the classic language and bringing in new elements.

I am inspired as an improvising jazz artist to create music that reflects and is informed by a deep understanding of the traditions of the past yet is individual to me. Playing solos that speak in my voice, looking simultaneously to the past and to the future, is my goal. In order to achieve this I feel that it is imperative to be able not only to play lines that I hear which are connected to the tradition of the classic jazz improvisors, but to understand these lines as being constructed from a group of structural elements that are available to be altered and reconstructed. Only when I know how the classic language is created do I have the freedom to depart from it consciously and naturally. Like language, improvised jazz melodies have a grammar and a vocabulary with which we create meaning. Musical "grammar" generates coherence as we use and bring together both conventional and unconventional musical elements in our "vocabulary".

The rich tradition of jazz improvisation offers us the opportunity to analyze and define the classic language that is still a living part of our music today while also seeing how players since the 1960's have updated this language and added many new elements to it. The more updates and new elements that are added, the more unconventional the improvisations become. Artistic, creative control of this process allows us to play consciously in the classic style or to depart from it, and this control can only come from a deep understanding of both the "grammar" and the "vocabulary" that jazz improvisors have developed. Those soloists who have chosen to find a different path are the focus of my inquiry - what do they do differently, where do the materials come from, and how can we practice in order to integrate and make intuitive these new and alternative sounds?

I will define both the conventional diatonic jazz vocabulary and aspects of the evolving unconventional vocabulary through the analysis of selected soloists. The conventional language is a derivative of the styles of saxophonists **Charlie Parker** and **Sonny Stitt**, pianists **Hank Jones** and **Wynton Kelly**, trumpet players **Clifford Brown** and **Freddie Hubbard**, and guitarist **Wes Montgomery**. Soloists that have chosen to diverge from this

core language to create unconventional material with depth and creativity include saxophonists **Wayne Shorter**, **Chris Potter** and **Bob Berg**, trumpet player **Kenny Wheeler**, pianists **Keith Jarrett**, **Renee Rosnes** and **Joey Calderazzo**, and guitarist **Mike Moreno**, among many others.

The language of the unconventional solos that I have chosen represents a movement towards new approaches and sounds that still retains much of the classic language but has much more intervallic variation and melodic development. These solos were played over both diatonic standards and modal compositions and reveal a clear group of new ideas. Elements that remain from the conventional language can be found in all of the categories of the definitions I will detail - the rhythmic approach, the length of phrases, the intervallic content and the source scales of the melodic lines. In each of these categories there can also be found much that is new, and this is what I will focus on in my practical presentation tomorrow.

Diatonic music has the following characteristics:

Harmonic movement: Resolution through the 3rd and 7th with root movements around the circle of 5ths that move from tonic chords through dominants, resolving back to tonics, creating key centers and a key-based flow in symmetric groups of 4 and 8 bar phrases.

Melodic content: The key of the melody and the key of the harmony are the same, except for patterns that use common tones from other keys to support the melody, as in John Coltrane's composition "Moment's Notice" or the Rogers & Hart song "Lover".

The conventional, classic solos over diatonic music in my analysis share some or all of the following characteristics:

Rhythmic content: Primarily 1/8th notes with syncopation and triplet figuration

Phrase lengths: Phrases between 1 and 16 bars long, beginning and ending anywhere within the measure.

Intervallic content: Scale fragments and 3rd based chord arpeggios, large intervals to create leaps in a contrary pitch direction, diatonic and chromatic enclosures and chromatic passing and neighbor tones. Since most examples of scale usage are fragments not comprising the full 7 or 8 tones I analyzed only for the parent scales, not the modes.

- Scales: Major Scale, Harmonic Minor Scale, Chromatic Scale and Diminished Scale

- Intervals: 3rds & 4ths found in arpeggios; 6ths and larger intervals used to alter direction

- Arpeggios: Major 7, Dominant 7, Minor 7; Half-diminished 7 most often found as an extension of a Dominant 7 from the 3rd to the 9th; Fully diminished 7th chords either as passing sounds or from the 3rd to the b9th of Dominant 7th chords

Riffs, Licks and Clichés: The use of short phrases that are found often enough in other solos to constitute a Cliché, or a phrase found in that particular player's solos often enough to be considered one of his Licks (a short language block oft-repeated). A Riff can be defined as a short, blues-oriented phrase with a strong rhythmic character.

To support my definition of conventional jazz language I have analyzed selected excerpts from improvised solos of the above-mentioned artists, cataloguing the use and repetition of similar basic elements. The shared elements that are seen to be regularly used as "building blocks" are in most cases the same or highly similar across the group of soloists. While each instrument - sax, trumpet, piano, or guitar - has a group of instrument-specific musical elements that are common to each solo, there is an over-arching universality among all solos. The basic jazz language, as I define it here, does not therefore arise from the unique characteristics of each instrument but is common to all instruments.

The solos I used in this analysis are:

1. **Charlie Parker** "Ko-Ko", 1947
2. **Sonny Stitt** "Walkin'", 1962
3. **Clifford Brown** "Confirmation" 1954
4. **Freddie Hubbard** "Caravan" 1964
5. **Wes Montgomery** "Ecaroh" 1959
6. **Hank Jones** "Relaxin' at Camarillo" 1956
7. **Wynton Kelly** "On Green Dolphin Street" 1959

Even though some of the classic solos I've analyzed were recorded over 70 years ago, this language has been continuously played since that time by jazz artists throughout the world. There are new sounds that have come into the mainstream since the mid-20th century, but this basic

approach to improvising on each chord or harmonic area across multiple choruses has not significantly changed. There are modern harmonic elements that replace or update older ones, but the essence of the lineage remains. To show this point I have also analyzed a few solos I consider to be mainstream from the last 10 to 15 years of recordings.

The solos I used in this historical comparison are:

1. **Eric Alexander** "On the Marc" 2005
2. **Steve Davis** "Imagination" 2009
3. **Peter Bernstein** "Lady Bird" 2009

To highlight the strength of this conventional language I would further like to look at **George Coleman's** solo on the modal composition "Maiden Voyage". The majority of his solo is made up of the same materials as the above solos, even though the harmony no longer resolves diatonically. Coleman essentially approaches each chord as either a dominant or a minor chord, using bebop scales and arpeggios in much the same way that he did when playing over diatonic tunes. He does, however, also point the way forward with his use of diatonic 4ths and several diatonic 3 note structures, in the opening and closing phrases of the solo.

A clear and complete definition of the *conventional* jazz language for the purposes of this paper allows us to further define anything that does NOT fall within the bounds of the definition to therefore be *unconventional*. In other words, simply NOT using the same elements that were used to develop the classic jazz language is the first step towards improvising in a way that is free, to a degree, of reliance upon that classic language. If we choose to play over standards and jazz classics, do not want to play abstractly outside of the bounds of the diatonic harmony but also do not want to "just play bebop lines", the ideas I will present as a way to re-conceive improvising melodic lines are essential.

I believe that the most authentic and musically valid improvising occurs when the soloist is NOT thinking, but creating in a **State of Flow** that allows access to resources and technical skills on a subconscious level. I also believe that these older musicians whom I have chosen as exemplars of a classic style were not thinking, not consciously putting scale fragments, arpeggios, chromatic passing and neighbor tones and enclosures together to

create their solos, but were simply playing what they heard. So how do we get out of this sort of double jeopardy, of not wanting to be thinking of strategies and the musical elements of our solo, playing what we hear and still managing to play melodies that lie outside of the classic jazz language? I see the solution to this seeming paradox as starting with how and what we practice as well as consciously pursuing a re-training of our ears to add variety and depth to the creative source of our imagination, which begins with what we listen to.

I stated earlier that not using the same elements found in the classic jazz language in the same way is the first step towards finding a new sound, but just avoiding a group of musical choices is a very incomplete strategy, so I'd like to add to this strategy by defining the materials and approaches that I have found in solos that do differ significantly from the classic approach. The overarching theme that I am working on, and which I presented here in 2018, I call "Linear Tonality", but that concept is a wide-ranging strategy that includes a high level of melodic chromaticism. What I am presenting today is an interim step I do not consider go be Linear Tonality; the strategy for *unconventional improvising* is NOT to follow the line anywhere it might go, but to develop melodic ideas WITHIN the harmonic context that no longer closely resemble the classic language but still have depth, clarity and drama.

The basic elements of music that I identified as central to creating the classic, conventional jazz language are the same for all styles of melodic creation - **groupings of intervals, scale fragments, rhythmic phrases, metric placement,** and use of **chromaticism**. What I propose is the use of different structures, fragments and metric placement as a way of creating new sounds. Jazz is a language, a tradition, and a culture, and, like language, is in a constant state of evolution. Remaining connected to the tradition while broadening the options available to play new sounds is my goal.

Many of the new materials listed below come directly from analysis of solos over modal, rather than diatonic material, but one can always approach diatonic tunes with a modal strategy, which I will explain in greater depth a bit later. In my study of available transcriptions of saxophonists, pianists, guitarists and trumpet players I have found some

excellent examples of materials that significantly change the language of the improvisation - the use of unaltered **major pentatonic scales**, the use of **upper structure major triads**, **large diatonic intervals**, and **common tones** between related and unrelated chords that were not used in the classic style. Soloists use this material to varying degrees within their improvisations, developing a range of conventional versus unconventional aspects as a part of their creative process.

When we understand the wide range of contexts in which the above structures can be employed to create interesting musical results the potential for change in our playing becomes very clear. The vast majority of harmonic sounds in jazz come from just 6 scale families - major, melodic minor, harmonic minor, diminished, harmonic major, and augmented, including occasionally the whole tone scale and various synthetic scales created to fit a particular role in a composition. This small group of parent scales can be found in basically 99% of all jazz compositions, and, because the structural elements of intervals, scalar passages, triads and arpeggios are found all of the parent scales, we can discover ways to create melodies in all harmonic contexts that do not leave the boundaries of the chord/ scale yet are not derivative of the Classic Jazz Language. I found many of these structures in my study of recordings, but some I discovered on my own, inspired by my teachers Gary Campbell, Ron Miller and David Liebman and their books and recordings.

Rhythmic structures, like intervalic choices, are easily altered and the updates integrated into one's language, making phrases that would otherwise be relatively conventional or even cliché in their original expression new, fresh, interesting and intriguing. Altering the metric placement (displacement) of any idea will always create a fresh perspective, and this phrasing tool can strongly alter our perception of a phrase or motive, even if the metric shift is only an 1/8 note anticipated or delayed.

In addition to the musical structures described above that we weave together to create melodies when we improvise, one of the most important constituents of developing an approach to soloing that goes beyond the conventional is the regular and musically appropriate use of Melodic Development Techniques. Most of the bebop-oriented phrasing played since

the 1940's, as seen in the accompanying solo excerpts, utilizes very little internal repetition of either intervallic or rhythmic structures, and very few of the other Melodic Development Techniques I've found and listed. The opportunities for greater rhythmic and expressive variation that these techniques create are everywhere to be found.

Solo excerpts revealing new strategies, new materials and new phrasing choices:

A. Diatonic, key-based compositions, standards, hardbop tunes, blues

1. **Wayne Shorter** "Witch Hunt": pentatonic scale from b3 on Cm7/1 on Eb7, common tones, melodic development
2. **Wayne Shorter** "Tom Thumb": pentatonic scales from b3 on B7/1 on D7, common tones, metric displacement and melodic development7
3. **Chris Potter** "The Source": triads from 1, 2, b7 and b2, pentatonic scale from 1, diatonic 5ths, melodic development
4. **Mike Moreno** "Out of Nowhere": diatonic 4ths, 5ths & 7ths, melodic development
5. **Bob Berg** "Autumn Leaves": diatonic 4ths & 3rds, melodic development
6. **Andy Middleton** "Scooter": diatonic 4ths and 5ths, melodic development

B. Modal, non-diatonic compositions

1. **Kenny Wheeler** "Smatter": pentatonic scale from 2; diatonic intervals of 4th and 5th; pentatonic scale from b5
2. **Kenny Kirkland** "Phryzzinian Man": pentatonic scales from 2, "quasi-pentatonic" structure, Altered scale in diatonic 3rds, Dorian mode diatonic 4ths and 5ths
3. **Keith Jarrett** "Questar": pentatonic scale from b7; diatonic triads and major triad pairs
4. **Joey Calderazzo** "Slings and Arrows": diatonic triads, altered pentatonic scale, intervallic shapes, melodic development and metric displacement
5. **Renee Rosnes** "Terra Infirma": diatonic triads, diatonic 4ths
6. **Andy Middleton** "Night Sounds": diatonic triads, diatonic 4ths & 5ths

Speaking a common language, at least in part, is what all improvisors within a shared stylistic reference do. Repeating "note-for-note" phrases that were played by others is, on the other hand, empty cliché, and, as in spoken language, is inauthentic and uninspired. Understanding how our language is created will guide players away from cliché and towards the

creative use of common linguistic elements, regardless of the conventional or unconventional approach to improvising. A definition of Cliché I found that has relevance to jazz improvising is: *"Something, most often a phrase or expression, that is overused or used outside its original context, so that its original impact and meaning are lost."* A cliché can therefore be seen to be simply a repetition of the phrases of earlier artists, or the unoriginal or uninspired use of "theoretical material" as the content of a solo. In either case there is, in my opinion, very little authentic creation in the moment, but rather a solo built from unoriginal phrases or abstractly theoretical elements.

Knowing how the classic language is formulated generates the freedom to depart from it. Since authentic improvising occurs in a state of flow we can learn to hear and play outside of the boundaries of this style in that flow state by practicing the materials presented above and consciously re-training our ears to add variety and depth to the creative sources of our imagination.