

Transcription Exercises

by Michael Lake



Transcribing is one of the most important tools you have at your disposal to become good at improvisation. Playing the solos of masters puts you in their shoes and lets you experience the flow of a good solo and the note choices they made.

Coordinating the physical and mental act of hearing the notes and phrases, and then writing them down or memorizing them on your instrument creates millions of new connections in your brain. It also lays the groundwork for you to more easily find the “right” notes and put them into musically satisfying phrases as you improvise more easily over chord changes.



The question that this lesson answers is, how do you get the solo on paper and then best use it to get results? If you don't read music or prefer to simply memorize a solo straight from the recording, you can still get much of the benefit from modeling great solos.

Many musicians prefer writing down the music so that they can see the note choices and how they fit into the harmony. Most people learn visually so it helps them to see how the notes and phrases fit together with the chords. It also facilitates analysis for learning.

As has been said and written throughout this course, however, music is an aural art form, so your eyes and ears are only a means to an end. The end is to memorize the phrases or the complete solo as you want

your way off the written music. Only then will the improvisational magic of the masters make its way into your musical subconscious.

This last point deserves some emphasis. You transcribe solos not to play them on a performance. That wouldn't be true improvisation. You transcribe in order to program the mental and physical experience of improvisational excellence into that part of your brain that you rely on to inspire your unique musical expression. You're not literally reproducing learned solos. You're building your musical mind and instrumental technique to work together to spontaneously produce meaningful music.

How to use these exercises

Ten solos are included in this ebook for you to transcribe. They vary in length, complexity, and instrument. They are ordered somewhat by complexity so if the first four-bar alto sax phrase is too easy, you should be able to find one further down that challenges you. If none of them challenge you, then you are free to transcribe any of the thousands of great solos out in the world worth modeling.

But if you're new to transcribing or have always struggled a bit with it, then transcribing these solos will help you. This collection has a specific purpose. Most of them are short two to four bar phrases provided to give you some initial success at transcribing without having to tackle an entire recorded solo. Baby steps. After transcribing the shorter phrases, you should then work on the last three of 10 and 16 bar solo segments.

Try to hear and then transcribe phrases rather than single notes one at a time. If one at a time is the most you can do at the moment, go ahead and take them down that way, but realize your goal is to increasing the number of notes you can hear then write at a time.

One way of increasing the notes you can hear and write at a time is to first sing the phrase. Try that with the Bossa alto sax four-bar phrase. Listen to it a few times, singing with the line until you have it. Only after being able to sing the line with and without the music, attempt to write it down. Do this a few notes at a time with each solo.



The Audio Files

Each exercise in the book is associated with an audio file within Dropbox.

Simply click or tap the icon associated with the file to bring it up in a Dropbox audio player window. The audio files stream from Dropbox. Play the files in your browser by tapping play, stop, pause and repeat. Download each file as you wish from Dropbox.



The audio track icon plays the audio file associated with each exercise.



Transcription exercises for solos

Tap to play the audio file



1. Bossa alto sax 4 bar phrase



2. Dixieland trumpet 2 bar phrase



3. Bossa Electric piano 4 bar phrase



4. Freddie Green swing trumpet 2 bar phrase



5. Jazz Rock electric guitar 4 bar phrase



6. Bebop alto sax 4 bar phrase



7. Soft jazz tenor sax 4 bar phrase



8. Bossa electric guitar 10 bar phrase



9. Swing tenor 16 bar phrase



10. Smooth jazz trombone 16 bar phrase