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WOODSHED

TRANSCRIPTION

Improvising A Vocal Solo On 'Beauty And The Beast'

by Janice Borla

Wayne Shorter's composition "Beauty And The Beast," which I recorded on the new CD *Lunar Octave* (DMP), leaves the vocal soloist faced with the challenge of negotiating a complicated harmonic chord progression within

an aggressive rhythmic setting. This particular recording also illustrates the use of non-bebop vocal sounds for contemporary improvisation.

My 24-bar solo follows the AAB structure of the head, minus the four-bar vamp that extends the first A section in Shorter's original recording. In the first section, a succession of relaxed 16th-note figures establishes the prevailing rhythmic style of the solo, suggested at the outset of the piece by 16th-note figures in the melody itself. Melodic movement is predominantly scalar, punctuated by arpeggiations of the Dm7 and Bbm7 chords in bars 3-5. The voice remains within a comfortable middle range (A-C). At bars 7-8, the solo settles on a single note, F, which functions first as the major seventh of G^b, evolves into the fifth of the B^b13 chord, and is sustained long enough to be heard as the augmented fifth of A7(#9) before resolving to E.

The rhythmic articulation of the repeated F through the chords builds momentum into the solo's next section, preparing the way for an increase in melodic and rhythmic activity and a general heightening of energy. At bars 9-10, a three-note melodic pattern, C-B^b-A, is rhythmically displaced with successive repetitions through the II-V progression in D minor, each time emphasizing the "color notes" of the chords: in D minor, $\text{b}7\text{-b}6\text{-5}$; in the Em(^b5) chord, $\text{b}6\text{-b}5\text{-4}$; and in the A7 altered chord, $\#9\text{-b}9\text{-8}$. This phrase sets up a sweeping descent through the next four measures (bars 11-14) from the ninth of D minor, using arpeggiations of the Dm7 and Cm7 chords and then shifting to more stepwise movement through the B^b dorian and A^b dorian modes to end on the low E^b.

This is followed by another flurry of rhythmic activity: at bars 15-16 a four-note melodic pattern, D^b-E^b-F-B^b, is displaced over a repeated three-16th-note rhythmic pattern, causing the melodic pattern to be reconfigured with each repetition. Once

again, the repetitions carry the pattern through the chord changes, first functioning in G^bmaj9 as 5-6-7-3 and then as $\#5\text{-b}7\text{-8-4}$ in the F7 altered chord.

A stepwise ascent through E dorian and descent through D dorian in bars 17-18 precedes the climax of the solo, a slow octave gliss starting on the first beat of bar 19 up to a high B^b at the end of that bar and sustained through the first two beats of bar 20. Following that burst of energy, the solo concludes as the voice trails back downward through the 9th of B^b at bar 21 down an octave to a nearly inaudible low B^b.

Since this is a vocal solo, it is pertinent to address the phonyms (i.e. vocal sounds) used to articulate the melody. Traditional swing-style and/or bebop vocalizations commonly associated with scat singing do not suit the rhythmic and articulation style of this contemporary tune. Instead, I combined "connective consonants" like, Y, H, N, L and V with a wide range of vowel and timbral variations.

For instance, by using N with a variety of vowel sounds—AH, AY, A, AW, EE, O—I could keep the notes very connected and create forward momentum while infusing my vocal timbre with a vaguely nasal, non-Western quality (bars 1-2, bars 7-8). The use of N and NG sounds as connectives between phonyms like DO, BO, BA, and VO at bars 15-16 allowed for energetic articulation of the 16th-note patterns while maintaining that same connectedness and timbral quality. Phonyms beginning with H and Y—HAH-YAH, HAY-YAH, HAI-YOO, etc.—heightened airflow and energy levels for the 16th-note displacement at bars 9-11 and 18-20.

The effective use of phonyms is not governed by conscious decisions made during a vocal solo performance. Rather, they are used instinctively to express the melodic, rhythmic, articulation and timbral ideas that occur during improvisation, influenced by the vocalist's listening, study, practice and experimentation. **DB**

Janice Borla, who serves on the faculty of North Central College in Naperville, Ill., founded the annual Janice Borla Vocal Jazz Camp in 1989. A DMP recording artist, she currently leads her own quintet and takes an active role in jazz education.



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