Transcription and Analysis of Selected Trombone Solos from J. J. Johnson's 1964 Recording Proof Positive

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TRANSCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF SELECTED TROMBONE SOLOS FROM
J. J. JOHNSON’S 1964 RECORDING PROOF POSITIVE

By
Rodney Allen Lancaster

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

December 2009
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

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Transcription and Analysis of Selected Trombone Solos
from J. J. Johnson’s 1964 Recording Proof Positive

(December 2009)

Abstract of a doctoral essay at the University of Miami.

Doctoral essay supervised by Professor Dante Luciani.
No. of pages in text. (116)

The purposes of the essay are to transcribe and analyze selected solos from the 1964 J. J. Johnson recording, Proof Positive as well as to increase the amount of analytical literature on J. J. Johnson presently obtainable for study by jazz trombonists. J. J. Johnson will further be affirmed as a jazz musician worthy of doctoral level study. Selected solos from the 1964 J. J. Johnson recording Proof Positive will be transcribed and analyzed in depth using a method of analysis incorporating improvisational devices identified by the author. A brief biography of J. J. Johnson is presented along with a review of jazz trombone history in order to provide perspective. A review of related literature will be provided as well. The study will be limited to those solos that meet a selection criterion. The specific solos that were selected met the standard of containing a substantial number of Johnson’s characteristic improvisational devices. Melody, harmony, rhythm, and stylistic inflection within each solo are discussed in detail and musical examples from the improvisations are cited to provide emphasis. The 1964 J. J. Johnson recording, Proof Positive was chosen for transcription and analysis due to its historical significance as a seminal recording and for the fact that only “Stella by Starlight” has been published. The remaining trombone solos have not yet been readily made available for study.
DEDICATION

This doctoral essay is dedicated to my son, Bobby Lancaster. You are a constant source of inspiration to me.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first must thank my parents, Robert and Dorothy Lancaster for their unwavering support of all aspects of my creative life over the years. Thanks also to Aya Makino Lancaster and Bobby Lancaster for their loving encouragement day in and out.

Thank you to Whit Sidener and Dante Luciani, for encouraging me to pursue the Doctor of Musical Arts degree and providing their ongoing support.

Thank you to the members of my committee, for all of their time and efforts. Special thanks to Dr. Rachel Lebon for her confidence in me and my writing.

To David Baker for the time he spent with me talking about his dear friend, J. J. Johnson. I am grateful.

I would also like to thank all of the great musicians whom I had the chance to play with and conduct while in residence at the University of Miami. Thanks to the wonderful University of Miami faculty as well. Special thanks to Don Coffman, whom I greatly admire for his bass playing and knowledge of jazz history; Doug Bickel, who taught me to simplify my style by asking me to transcribe myself; Dante Luciani, who is simply one of the finest jazz trombonists.

I would like to thank my past teachers for sharing their knowledge with me. They include: Pat Keller, Rodger Cody, Bernard Schneider, Don Jacoby, Neil Slater, Jim Riggs, Vern Kagerice, John Osborne, Jack Gale, John Mosca, John Marcellus, David Waters, Jeff Thomas, David Taylor, Charles Campbell, and Dante Luciani.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The trombone has often been unfairly characterized as being a clumsy or awkward musical instrument delegated to playing idiomatic slides, smears or comical growls.\(^1\) Over the course of time this caricature of the slide trombone would change due to the experimentation done by Johnson’s predecessors, especially the trombonists studied in the introduction to jazz trombone history. As each decade passed, trombonists learned from one another’s successes and failures by listening to recordings, live performances and at times by performing with other trombone artists. And as the technique of the instrument increased, trombonists became progressively less intimidated by the slide. This succession of trombonists was not exactly linear as more than a few were contemporaneous and therefore overlapping in their timeline of development. By 1964, it could be argued that J. J. Johnson was at or near the top of this evolutionary hierarchy.\(^2\) It was in studying Johnson’s discography that the author noticed a significant change in Johnson’s recording habits. That is to say that after the recording sessions resulting in the album *Proof Positive*,\(^3\) Johnson did not record another solo small group album for fifteen years. It is the author’s opinion that these facts deem the album *Proof Positive* worthy of a close examination.


\(^{2}\) David Baker, conversation with author.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this essay is to (1) transcribe and analyze selected solos from *Proof Positive*, (2) add to the scant amount of analytical literature on J. J. Johnson, (3) create an addition to the small quantity of material presently obtainable for study by jazz trombonists, (4) further affirm the importance of J. J. Johnson as a musician worthy of study in the scope of the jazz cannon.

J. J. Johnson was chosen for this study due to his importance to the jazz trombone. Virtually every modern trombonist is indebted to him. He is considered by most critics, musicians and jazz buffs to be the colossus of the modern jazz trombone. In the process of expanding the scope of jazz trombone, he has been responsible for such innovations as:

1. Releasing the trombone from the tyranny of the overtone series.
2. Freeing the instrument from the restrictions of tradition, i.e., trills, triadic playing, smears, slides, growls, and other devices that through his efforts have become dramatic effects instead of the meat of the solo.
3. Putting the instrument technically on par with the trumpet and saxophones.
4. Evolving a sound that has subsequently become the standard sound for the modern trombonist (essentially a straight sound with the vibrato reserved for the purposes of expression).
5. Restructuring the harmonic vocabulary of the trombone to be consistent with the demands of modern music.

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5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.
Distinguished jazz professor David Baker also had the following to say in the foreword to Leisenring and Butler’s book of Johnson’s transcribed solos:

J. J. Johnson is the pre-eminent trombonist of modern jazz. His influence is pervasive. Virtually every contemporary trombonist, jazz or otherwise, has been affected by the innovations attributed to J. J. Johnson. Technical feats that were inconceivable prior to Johnson are now commonplace, and the attitude that the trombone is capable of doing anything that saxophones and trumpets can do is generally taken for granted. As with Charlie Parker and the saxophone, Johnson’s sound has become one of the standards by which trombone sound is measured. His complete command of the instrument from top to bottom, his pioneering efforts to adapt the language of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie for the trombone, his marvelous musicality and his unfailing good taste all support the claim for J. J. as the most important trombonist of the Charlie Parker and post Charlie Parker eras.7

According to musician and jazz critic Leonard Feather:

J. J. Johnson, it seems to me, was the first trombonist to take the instrument beyond its specialized resources, to play not as a trombonist thinking in terms of the seven slide positions, but as an inspired soloist whose medium happened to be the trombone. Maturity, which means having the facility for expressing anything you want to say but also knowing when not to say too much, made J. J. Johnson the original trombone idol of modern jazz.8

J. J. Johnson also was chosen as the subject of this essay due to his particular playing style in comparison with other trombone virtuosi. Johnson plays in a very succinct way. His musical ideas are expressed in a clear and concise manner without wasted or frivolous notes lacking in musical significance or phrases undeserving of serious consideration. In the author’s opinion, this makes Johnson’s style more appealing

8 Leonard Feather, Liner Notes from J. J. Johnson, Proof Positive, Impulse Records A-68, 1964, LP.
to study. His solos are particularly stimulating musically and technically challenging as well, yet still accessible to the less experienced trombone student. The 1964 J. J. Johnson recording, *Proof Positive* was chosen for its historical significance. It is a seminal recording due to the fact that afterward Johnson did not record another solo album for fifteen years. There is a lack of access to the trombone solos from *Proof Positive*. Only Johnson’s improvised solo from “Stella by Starlight” has been published. The others have not been transcribed, published or otherwise made readily available for study. It could be argued that Johnson’s trombone playing on *Proof Positive* would eventually become the standard sound for the modern jazz trombonist. It was a sound with the maturity to express the modern jazz ideas that he conceived unencumbered by the idiomatic trappings that weighed down his predecessors.

**Need for the Study**

The first degree in jazz was conferred in 1947 by the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. By 1983, only fifty-three institutions had begun granting a degree in jazz studies. That year fourteen institutions offered a master’s degree with a minor in jazz studies and only two institutions offered a specific major in jazz studies at the master’s level. Given that jazz has only recently been developed as a course of study at the university level and even later at the graduate level, there is an inadequate amount of scholarly study in the area. More specifically, there is a lack of jazz trombone study. This study is not only needed to contribute to the body of knowledge in this area, but also

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to satisfy the need for more in-depth study of J. J. Johnson’s style than is currently available in existing academic papers or other published works. A secondary objective of the essay is to provide a description of the improvisational devices that J. J. Johnson employs and how they are used in order to enable students and other musicians to more easily comprehend his style.

**Method**

The purpose of this paper is to analyze in-depth the selected recorded jazz improvisations of trombonist J. J. Johnson on *Proof Positive*. The transcription analyses are intended to provide evidence for a description of Johnson’s style. With so few published trombone transcription materials available, this text can become a detailed transcription reference for the modern jazz trombonist. The transcriptions include melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and stylistic explanations as well as discussions as related to the noted devices commonly found in Johnson’s improvisations.

**Transcription Procedure**

Given that there is no formal process considered indispensable in regard to the transcription process, in order to undertake a project such as this, one must study published transcriptions, academic and otherwise, observe the techniques or methods used and follow them accordingly. The recent transcription based D.M.A. essays done by Rudnick, Gene Smith, Pitchford and Leibinger have been supportive in helping the author to formulate his own personal transcription method. The author has also drawn to
a certain degree upon his thirty plus years of experience in studying jazz, not excluding
the transcription of solos.

The transcriptions in this essay have first been put on paper by hand by isolating
each note or a few notes at time. Each note is heard as an interval from the previous one
and simultaneously as a degree of the corresponding chord progression. Part of the
transcription process is discerning whether the notes of a particular phrase belong to an
already familiar scale or pattern. The transcriptions are based on the layouts and
structures of the transcription books mentioned in the literature review, and include:
chord progressions, articulations, and stylistic marks. The solos were recorded to a
cassette tape player for the actual transcribing process due to the cassette’s quick rewind
function. The rewind was used often for multiple playbacks. The resulting transcriptions
were subsequently transferred to a digital means using the music notation software,
Finale. In order to insure their accuracy, they have been proofread by Dante Luciani,
distinguished trombonist and educator.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Review of Literature related to this paper includes historical textbooks, dissertations, encyclopedia articles, biographies, and pedagogy books.

David Baker’s *Jazz Styles and Analysis: Trombone* (1973) was the first book that the author consulted on jazz trombone style. This text examines the styles of many jazz trombone pioneers by way of transcription analysis. The various analyses were quite informative but cursory in detail. This text was a good starting point for the author’s research on the playing style of J. J. Johnson.\(^\text{10}\)

*Miles: The Autobiography* was a useful reference in regard to understanding the professional as well as personal relationship between Johnson and Miles Davis. Johnson is mentioned on twenty three pages throughout the autobiography documenting their friendship and intersecting careers.\(^\text{11}\)

Niels Lan Doky’s text entitled *Jazz Transcription: Developing Jazz Improvisation Skills Through Solo Transcription and Analysis*. (1992) was quite a useful resource in providing a method for transcribing, techniques for analyzing, and suggestions for notation.\(^\text{12}\)

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\(^\text{10}\) Baker.


Professor Dan Hearle’s book entitled, *Scales for Jazz Improvisation* was used to identify scales used by J. J. Johnson. In this paper, the author will use Hearle’s names for certain scalar choices versus names used elsewhere. They are generally accepted by jazz professionals with the only exception being his term, “superlocrian.” The term “superlocrian” is used to represent a scale spelling out an altered dominant seventh chord. Other jazz texts or methods sometimes call this scale, “altered dominant” or diminished whole tone.” The author prefers the term “superlocrian” for the following reason: The superlocrian scale begins on the seventh degree of the ascending melodic minor scale. This is simple to remember because the locrian scale starts on the seventh degree of the Ionian scale.\(^{13}\)

*American Musicians II: Seventy – One Portraits in Jazz* by Whitney Balliett contained an interview and biographical information that was valuable in researching historical trombonist Vic Dickenson.\(^{14}\)

*The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz* was consulted during the research of historic jazz musicians. The short biographies within contain only small amounts of information yet still were helpful in researching the lesser known historic jazz trombonists.\(^{15}\) Ted Gioia’s *The History of Jazz* was also a helpful resource for the

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\(^{13}\) Dan Haerle, *Scales for Jazz Improvisation* (Lebanon, IN: 1975).


author’s research on jazz trombone history.\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz} was a useful fact checking resource.\textsuperscript{17}

Richard Sudhalter’s book, \textit{Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contribution to Jazz, 1915-1945} was consulted in reference to the introduction to jazz trombone history. It was particularly helpful when researching Miff Mole and Jack Teagarden.\textsuperscript{18}

Gunther Schuller’s text, \textit{The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz} 1930 – 1945 was an important reference for the author’s research on jazz trombone history. Schuller examines many aspects of the swing era including the styles of many important players of the era.\textsuperscript{19}

In researching the history of the jazz trombone, \textit{Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History} by Robert Walser was consulted.\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Jazz Masters of New Orleans} by Martin Williams was helpful in understanding Kid Ory’s stature amongst musicians from New Orleans.\textsuperscript{21} Gunther Schuller’s \textit{Early Jazz} was useful in researching early jazz trombonists Kid Ory, Jimmy Harrison and Jack Teagarden.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Gioia. \\
\textsuperscript{19} Gunther Schuller, \textit{The Swing Era, the Development of Jazz} 1930-1945 (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 1989). \\
\textsuperscript{15} Martin Williams, \textit{Jazz Masters of New Orleans} (New York: The Magmillan Company, 1967). \\
\end{flushright}
Without a doubt the most informative dissertation was by Louis G. Bourgois. “Jazz trombonist J. J. Johnson: A comprehensive discography and study of the early evolution of his style.”23 The research presented in this dissertation after collaboration with Joshua Berrett was published by Scarecrow Press as The Musical World of J. J. Johnson.24 This text was consulted numerous times during the writing of this paper. It was helpful in understanding Fred Beckett’s influence on Johnson and its comprehensive discography was extremely useful in visualizing a kind of career arc for Johnson. It was while reading the discography within this book that the author first noticed the timeline of Johnson’s solo career and that he did not record a solo record for fifteen years after recording Proof Positive.

Isadore Rudnick, essay, “A Stylistic Analysis of Melody, Harmony, Rhythm and Sound Quality in Selected Improvised Solos of Slide Hampton”25 was helpful to the author during the writing of this paper. Observing Rudnick’s transcription style and how he interpreted the transcription method prescribed by Niels Lan Doky were particularly useful.

David Lambert’s essay, “A comparison of three divergent jazz trombone styles from 1953: Jack Teagarden, J. J. Johnson, and Frank Rosolino” was consulted also for the purpose of viewing his transcription style, in particular, the way he notated stylistic


inflections. Timothy Pitchford’s essay, “The Improvisation of Hal Crook” was also insightful due to its similar subject matter. The dissertation by Mark Gerard Sheridan-Rabideau, “The Incorporation of Jazz Pedagogy in the Traditional Trombone Studio” and Louis Fischer’s doctoral thesis, “A comparison of jazz studies curricula in master's programs in the United States” were both helpful in conceiving the idea for this essay particularly in accessing the need for such a paper.

*J. J. Johnson Transcribed Solos*, edited by Tom Senff was useful primarily for its foreword by David Baker. Baker spoke of Johnson’s “pervasive influence.” This source contains thirteen transcribed solos by J. J. Johnson but there is no analysis and no commentary on Johnson’s style. The author found the solos to be lacking in inflection and articulation indications. The *Music of Randy Brecker* by Mike Davidson also was consulted in order to view the way Brecker’s inflections were notated.

Scott Whitfield’s *The J. J. Johnson Collection* was consulted as it contains twenty four transcribed J. J. Johnson solos. The solos are meticulously notated with

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29 Fischer.


phrase and articulation indications. The book contains biographical information and a selected discography that relates to the solos that were transcribed. There was neither analysis nor any comments on his playing style.

**Solo Selection Process**

The solos in this study were selected using the following criterion: presence of a substantial number of the improvisational devices identified by the author as having been used by J. J. Johnson. Based upon this criterion, the study was limited to an in-depth analysis of three improvisations from the album *Proof Positive.*
CHAPTER 3
AN INTRODUCTION TO JAZZ TROMBONE HISTORY

It is the author’s opinion that in order to fully grasp the importance of J. J. Johnson, a cursory review of jazz trombone history is needed. Trombonists were selected for this study because of their impact on the history of the jazz trombone. This does not necessarily imply that the musician had a direct influence upon J. J. Johnson. However, if the musician did indeed have a particularly direct influence on Johnson, that influence will be explained. The order of jazz trombonists examined is only approximately chronological. This is important to bear that in mind as more than a few of the trombonists studied here were contemporaneous. Since it is beyond the scope of this paper to touch upon every jazz trombonist who had some impact on jazz history, those jazz trombonists deemed by the author to be the most key and influential players leading up to J. J. Johnson are discussed.

Throughout the history and evolution of jazz, trombonists have influenced subsequent trombonists who follow them with their new developments in technique, approaches to harmony, ways of phrasing a melody, and rhythmic concepts. This evolutionary line of development can be traced back to New Orleans trombonist, Kid Ory.

Key to the trombone’s development was its role in early jazz. The trombonist’s musical role in the bands of early jazz was far different than that of trombonists today. At the time, the trombone was seen to have severe limitations in regard to its technique in comparison with instruments such as the trumpet or clarinet. The trombone was delegated to outlining chords by playing portamento musical lines similar to that of a tuba
or bass but in a smearing manner. As the trumpet could play the highest and the loudest, it took on the role of being a melody instrument. The clarinet occasionally played the melody as well but more often because of its dexterity wove an obbligato line. The early trombonist with technical limitations had to find a comfortable place in the musical counterpoint. It took quite some time for the trombone to be considered a melody instrument. The way of playing that early players adopted was best personified by Kid Ory (1886 – 1973) and became what was called “tailgate” trombone. “Tailgate” was a style of trombone playing that originated from the trombonist’s need to sit on the tailgate of a wagon in order to accommodate the length of the trombone slide. It is for the same humorous reason that the trombones lead parades; they need to be in front because of the length of the slide and for fear of striking someone in front of them. The tailgate style of trombone playing is one that combines the playing of counter melodies and bass notes.33

As said, the most well known of the tailgate trombonists was Kid Ory. He was of Creole background, born in Louisiana in 1886; he began his career around 1910 in New Orleans. He is credited with defining the "tailgate" style used in early jazz. It is also said that he had the strongest "gutbucket" sound that anyone had ever produced on the trombone. His style was large and rough. His tone became the epitome of what a trombonist should sound like during this era. Ory attacked his notes percussively and often used glissandos, growls, and smears. His solos were simple melodically and harmonically. Sometimes they consisted of just a few repeated notes but Ory played with

a raw, energetic quality that made him one of the most respected musicians when it came
to contests between the bands in New Orleans. The difference between Ory and his
contemporaries was that he played with a more daring style, with unexpected turns and
humorous sounds.\textsuperscript{34} He actually was not considered the most technically adept of the
New Orleans trombonist but was the most expressive. He certainly was the most often
recorded.\textsuperscript{35} Ory participated in one of the first instrumental jazz records ever recorded in
1922 in Los Angeles. The titles were “Ory’s Creole Trombone” and “Society Blues.”
Ory is well known for being the composer of the Dixieland standard “Muskrat Ramble,”
which he recorded with Louis Armstrong in 1926. Louis Armstrong was also in the band
when Ory joined King Oliver’s band in Chicago. Ory's association with Armstrong
would later give him clout through his having played on Louis Armstrong's classic
recordings with the Hot Five and Hot Seven. It was on these early recordings with King
Oliver that Ory began one of the first attempts to expand the technique of the trombone
by adapting melodic material borrowed from Louis Armstrong.\textsuperscript{36} Through 1925 to
1932, Ory played with other jazz greats such as Dave Peyton, Jelly Roll Morton, and Ma
Rainey.

Trummy Young had this to say of Kid Ory:

Ory is a great Dixieland player and many guys who play in that
style could learn a lot from him because he has the timing for it and he

\textsuperscript{34} Gioia, 75.
\textsuperscript{35} Williams, 206.
\textsuperscript{36} Williams, 105.
knows the tunes…Dixieland trombone is punch. It’s got to come on out and it’s got to build. I don’t think anyone really knows it outside of Ory.  

The next trombonist studied here is Benny Morton. Born in 1907 in New York City, Morton got his first exposure to music in the Jenkins’s Orphanage Band. His first professional job was in 1923 when he worked with Clarence Holiday. Morton went with Fletcher Henderson in 1926 where he collaborated with Jimmy Harrison. Morton played for Don Redman for six years and with Count Basie three years in addition to performing with Henderson. In the 1940’s Morton had his own band but was also employed by Teddy Wilson and Ed Hall. Morton worked as a pit musician for many Broadway musicals as well when he was not playing jazz. Morton was considered a very good soloist. When he was active, he enjoyed using chromatic passing tones, notes that did not fit in the diatonic scale. He had a legato style, employed a “terminal” vibrato, and was technically adroit. Morton's phrases were usually sparse; he liked using fewer notes to say more. The 1938 Benny Morton solo “Shorty George” from the album, The Best of Count Basie is very representative of his mature style. In this solo, Morton plays with a good swing feel and great time. His fondness for non harmonic tones is evident. He at


38 Baker, 54.


41 Ibid., 275.
times would play a high Gb in the key of F that sounded like a sideslip up a half step. His use of vibrato is minimal and his phrasing sounds modern by 1938 standards.

Another trombonist who played both in the early jazz style and the swing style was Jimmy Harrison. Harrison (1900-1931) gained early performing experience playing with duos and trios in carnival bands and various unusual combinations that helped him to develop his technique. He played legato melodic ideas in the high register as a trumpet player might very much in the style of Louis Armstrong.\(^{42}\) Two trombonists who were likely influenced by Harrison were Dickie Wells and Benny Morton. Both trombonists played with Harrison in Fletcher Henderson's group. Under the influence of players such as Teagarden and Harrison, trombone soloists were holding their use of idiomatic devices to more of a minimum, playing fewer glissandos. This appeared to be a more trumpet oriented approach to improvising. They enjoyed playing in the high range like the trumpet rather than in the trombone’s more cumbersome low range. Harrison and Teagarden were the first trombonists to play fast; performing quick tempi as well as rapidly within phrases.\(^{43}\) This was likely due to their love of Louis Armstrong’s musicianship.

Dickie Wells (1907-1985) was a Swing Era trombonist who had an impact upon J. J. Johnson. Wells was a noted soloist with the Fletcher Henderson in the early 1930’s that made the classic recordings “King Porter Stomp,” “Honey Suckle Rose,” and “Yeah Man!” Wells also recorded with British bandleader, Spike Hughes in 1933. Hughes’s


band was orchestral and often compared to Duke Ellington in style. The recording contains representative work by Wells.\footnote{44 Schuller, \textit{The Swing Era}, 623.} Wells worked with Count Basie in the late 1930’s and performed on some of the most influential musical pieces from the period including a piece named for him called, “Dickey’s Dream.”\footnote{45 Ibid., 249.} Also included among the seminal pieces of the era that Wells participated on was the classic “Lester Leaps In” recorded by a small Count Basie group that also included Buck Clayton, Lester Young and the rhythm section. While with Basie, Wells was also known for his masterful obbligato behind singers such as Jimmy Rushing.\footnote{46 Ibid., 255.} Later in the Swing Era, Wells recorded with the Teddy Hill band. This band came out of Harlem and apparently had a loyal following at the Savoy Ballroom. Wells played a remarkable solo on “A Study in Brown.” On this album was twenty year old Dizzy Gillespie performing his first recorded solo appearance. It was Teddy Hill’s final album.\footnote{47 Ibid., 423.}

J. J. Johnson had this to say of Dickie Wells:

\begin{quote}
I held Dickie Wells in very high esteem. Dickie Wells was a unique trombonist in that less is more. Simple is good. His playing, in his approach to jazz improvisation, was the personification of less is more and simple is good. With just a few choice notes he could say volumes. It was just his unique way of playing those few choice notes that was uniquely Dickie Wells, and his persona would come through in those few choice notes. It was nothing virtuoso about his performance, ever. Always a few well-chosen notes played with his particular unique way of playing those few notes – with a little blues tinge, something earthy about the way he played that was wonderful.\footnote{48} \end{quote}
Vic Dickenson (1906 – 1984) was considered an asset to any session on which he appeared. Influenced by Louis Armstrong and Dickie Wells, Dickenson’s style was without waste, lyrical and uniquely funny.

By his own admission, Dickenson played in an unorthodox manner:

I don’t lip correctly. You’re supposed to put the mouthpiece over your face skin, but I put it on my lip skin, over the inside part of my lip. That’s the way I learned, and because of it sometimes my chops wear out, and I can’t play the high notes Dickie Wells and Trummy Young do.49

He started out in the 1920s and '30s playing in the Midwest. Dickenson performed with Blanche Calloway50 from 1933 to 1936 and, Benny Carter in 1939 before playing with Count Basie in 1940. Dickenson went back with Carter again in 1941. Dickenson later joined the Eddie Heywood sextet (1943-1946) that also featured noted trumpet artist Doc Cheatham. The sextet had a hit with the Cole Porter song, "Begin the Beguine."

Dickenson also played and recorded with Sidney Bechet. Dickenson afterward continued his career as a freelance jazz soloist who performed on the West Coast, Boston, and New York, appearing on numerous recordings. In the 1960s, Dickenson co-led the Saints and Sinners, toured with George Wein's Newport All-Stars, and worked regularly with Wild

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50 Blanche Calloway was the older sister of Cab Calloway.
Bill Davison and Eddie Condon. During 1968-1970, he was in a quintet with Bobby Hackett and in the 1970’s, he sometimes played with the World's Greatest Jazz Band.\(^{51}\)

Miff Mole is the next musician in this historical line of important trombonists. Mole was born in Roosevelt, NY in 1898 and passed on in New York, NY in 1961. He is normally considered one of the best of the later tailgate trombonists but there are elements one can identify as being quite modern. He had a predilection for the playing of more angular lines. Prior to the late 1920’s, most trombonists played mostly in a triadic and pentatonic fashion. Through research the author came to the conclusion that Mole was a link between the tailgate trombonists and more modern trombonists. That is to say, Mole was the last in the line of tailgate trombonists before Jack Teagarden exploded onto the jazz scene. It has been said that Mole was an influence upon Teagarden. Probably the element that was influential upon Teagarden was lyricism. The New Orleans tradition did little to develop the trombone’s possibilities as a solo instrument\(^{52}\). Mole was one of the first trombonists to exploit the trombone’s melodic potential. The New Orleans tradition did little to develop the trombone’s possibilities as a solo instrument.\(^{53}\) Mole’s recorded work during the late 1920’s shows how the trombone can stand out front and be regarded seriously as a solo voice. No longer did the trombone need to be allocated a submissive musical role. Mole was successful in fashioning a more pensive

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\(^{52}\) Gioia, 83.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 83.
style than was common among the more coarse Chicago players. Mole also can be credited for spearheading a “white” approach to early “hot” trombone playing. According to Sudhalter:

It’s always been assumed that the early hot trombone tradition was carried forward exclusively by the black soloists—Charlie Green, Jimmy Harrison, Claude Jones, Benny Morton, J.C. Higginbotham—with only marginal white contribution until the arrival of Jack Teagarden in the late ’20s. This is an oversimplification: running parallel to the black trombone line, and frequently intersecting it, was what can be identified as a white approach, pioneered by Mole.

After Miff Mole, Jack Teagarden should be examined. Jack Teagarden (1905-1964) was a master of the instrument who influenced the next generation of trombonists as well as continuing to inspire even the most modern of players with his great sense of time, way of paraphrasing a melody, and beautifully singing tone. Jack Teagarden came from a musical family in Texas and began playing the trombone at age ten. After working in local theaters for many years, he started playing with Peck Kelly's group, Peck's Bad Boys, from 1921 to 1922. Teagarden played for five more years in Texas before touring to New York with a group called the Doc Ross Jazz Bandits. The band broke up almost immediately since they could not find any work, but Teagarden had almost no trouble obtaining jobs with groups run by Wingy Manone, Willard Robinson, Elizabeth Brice, Billy Lustig, and Tommy Gott. In 1928, Teagarden began working with

54 Ibid., 82.
55 Sudhalter, 102.
56 Sudhalter, 793.
Ben Pollack, with whom he recorded until 1933. From 1933 to 1938, Teagarden worked with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. He left Whiteman to lead his own groups and record several albums. In 1947, Teagarden teamed up with Louis Armstrong. "The pair forged one of the great partnerships in jazz."\(^{57}\) The group recorded almost ten albums that are each noted for the incredible rapport between Armstrong and Teagarden.\(^{58}\) Teagarden left Armstrong in 1951 to lead his own groups again on tours of Europe in 1957 and Asia in 1958 to 1959.

Teagarden developed a smooth and technical style of playing that surpassed any jazz trombonist before him. His tone was lighter and his attacks smoother. Teagarden moved away from the tailgate style, with its slides and growls, and developed a style which was much more like a trumpet style. He possessed a fluidity that many other trombonists tried to imitate. Teagarden's technique had an enormous influence on trombonists after him. Tommy Dorsey, who was to become one of the most popular trombonists of the swing era, so respected Teagarden's playing that he refused to play a solo while Teagarden was in the same room.\(^{59}\)

Teagarden, like most swing era horn players, made use of a vibrato similar to terminal vibrato except that he began the vibrato sooner and held it for the duration of the note. He eventually stopped this practice.\(^{60}\) He frequently employed rhythmic figures

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\(^{57}\) Gioia, 175.

\(^{58}\) Gioia, 182.

\(^{59}\) Gioia, 183.

\(^{60}\) Collier, 136.
that disregarded the beat, a device probably derived from Louis Armstrong. He also was perhaps the first jazz trombonist to play softly into a microphone, a technique that was later personified by modern jazz trombonists such as Carl Fontana and Bill Watrous. He sometimes began an improvised solo with a quote of the melody, which became a point of departure. Teagarden’s solo style was very lyrical, or vocal in quality. He was after all a great singer as well. His solos had a bluesy sound and from the way he used glissandos it is obvious that Dixieland jazz had an influence on him, but one could hear that he had progressed way beyond tailgate. Teagarden showed an affinity for the blues that most white players of his generation could not match. By 1929, his blues solos related more to the vocal work of Bessie Smith than to that of any trombonist who had come before.

Jack Teagarden’s arrival on the scene in New York made quite an impact:

Miff, with characteristic lack of competitiveness, had even sent the newcomer in as a “sub” on a Roger Wolfe Kahn date in March of 1928. Teagarden’s chorus on “She’s a Great, Great Girl,” generally considered his recording debut, created a sensation when it was issued—and did much to fix the Texan in the minds of potential employers for whom, before this, the “hot” trombone men of choice were Mole and Tommy Dorsey.

With the appearance of Teagarden and others on the scene, Miff Mole was no longer considered a leader. Sudhalter explains:

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61 Collier, 136.
62 Carr, Fairweather, & Priestley, 489.
63 Gioia, 83.
64 Sudhalter, 125.
By the end of the 1920’s, with Teagarden and Jimmy Harrison in place, Joe “Tricky Sam” Nanton working his plunger with Ellington, and J.C. Higginbotham shouting and hollering exuberant choruses with Luis Russell’s band at the Saratoga Club, the trombone picture had changed drastically, Miff’s way, though still widely admired, was but one of several.\textsuperscript{65}

In addition to being a well respected trombonist, Teagarden was also a prominent singer. His singing style was in many ways similar to his trombone solos. During his day, Teagarden was perhaps the only white male singer respected in the jazz idiom.\textsuperscript{66}

Teagarden showed that this affinity for vocal lines unified his work on trombone and as a singer. Although he was capable of virtuosic displays, Teagarden was most at home crafting a carefree, behind the beat style. Especially when he was singing, the lazy, “after hours” quality to his delivery incorporating elements of song, patter, and idle conversation proved endearing to audiences, especially in the context of a jazz world that was only just discovering the potential of understatement.\textsuperscript{67}

Another pivotal person who made an impact on the trombone’s history was Bill Harris. He was born in Philadelphia, in 1916 and passed on in Hallandale, FL in 1973. During the 1930’s, he performed mainly in Philadelphia. He began his early professional career by playing a week on Gene Krupa’s big band in 1938 and later toured briefly with Ray McKinley. In 1934 through 1944, he became well known while part of the Benny Goodman Orchestra. It was in 1944 that he played on the soundtrack of the movie, “Sweet and Low Down.” He is best known though for his work with Woody Herman. He joined the Woody Herman Orchestra and became a member of the first Herd in 1944, the same year as Flip Phillips. Harris was also a member of Woody Herman’s “Second

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 125.

\textsuperscript{66} Gioia, 84.

\textsuperscript{67} Gioia, 84.
Herd” from 1948 to 1950. He also performed with the Woody Herman Orchestra sporadically from 1956 to 1959. In addition, Harris co-led a number of bands along the way most notably with Charlie Ventura in 1947, with Chubby Jackson in 1953, and was a star with *Jazz at the Philharmonic* from 1950 to 1954. In the later part of the 1950’s Harris co-led a band with Flip Phillips. It was actually this band that made up the core of the Benny Goodman band in 1959.

Trummy Young (1912 – 1986) emerged during the swing era. He worked exclusively as a sideman but did have a hit song in 1938 when he was with the popular Jimmy Lunceford Orchestra. Trummy played and sang on Lunceford’s version of “Margie.” Although Trummy Young was considered a big asset to the Earl Hines Orchestra from 1933 to 1937, he became a major influence in jazz trombone while with Lunceford from 1937 to 1943. Trummy Young was a swing era trombonists but could adapt readily to bebop when featured on “Jazz at the Philharmonic” and in a 1945 Clyde Hart jam session with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Given this revelation, it was a surprise when Young joined Louis Armstrong in 1952. Trummy Young simplified his style cooperating well due to his admiration for Armstrong. Their 1954 recording of “St. Louis Blues” is notable. Young went into semiretirement in 1964 emerging only to play special engagements and jazz parties.68

J. J. Johnson had this to say of Trummy Young:

> I was particularly attracted to, and influenced by, in the early years, Trummy Young. There was something…that was very unique, very distinctive….I’ll never forget a recording he made, with Lunceford, I

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believe, on “My Gal Sal,” where he took a four-bar break. This four-bar break was so outstanding that for a long time—I never heard it in person…only on the record—I thought it was a trumpet playing. I was amazed when someone said: “That’s not a trumpet JJ, that’s Trummy Young playing that break.” He was playing so high on the horn, he was playing in the trumpet register…so clear and so articulate. That’s what tricked me. He played with a great sense of humor. You could just hear the warmth and humor in his playing… he was a beautiful person to know. To know Trummy was to love Trummy.⁶⁹

The least well known trombonist but the person who was the most influential on J. J. Johnson’s early development was Fred Beckett. (1917-1946) Beckett was the lead trombonist and featured soloist for Harlan Leonard and His Rockets in 1939 when Johnson first heard him. Beckett had outstanding technique and an innovative linear approach to jazz improvisation. Johnson was able to internalize Beckett’s linear style which was said to be similar to that of Lester Young’s.⁷⁰ Gunther Schuller made this point regarding Beckett’s pioneering approach:

A more original soloist in the band was Beckett, who in the 1930’s had already evolved a certain linear fluency which presages the kind of bop-ish lines trumpeters and trombonists were to develop into a distinct style some years later.⁷¹

Beckett achieved this feat by emulating his most immediate predecessors. He had the dexterity of Trummy Young and elegant tone derivative of Jack Jenney as well as a high


⁷⁰ Bourgois, 43.

⁷¹ Schuller, The Swing Era, 792.
register second to none of the leading trombonists of the day. Unfortunately Beckett’s career was cut short by tuberculosis at the age of twenty nine. Johnson describes the impression that Beckett made:

There was a wonderful trombonist who never really made a mark except, you might say, in a cultist kind of a way. Some of us knew about him, but he never made what they call the big time. His name was Fred Beckett. He was a brilliant trombonist. He played with a band that was a Midwest – they called them territory bands in that they mostly played in small venues and in situations in the Midwest. They never went to the West Coast, they never went to New York or what not, so they called them territory bands. This band, Harlan Leonard and His Rockets, was one of those Midwest territory bands, and Fred Beckett was the lead trombone player with the Harlan Leonard Rockets. They did make a couple of recordings, one of which I remember in particular, where Fred Beckett took this phenomenal trombone solo that had either a two or four bar break in it.

Early in its history, the trombone in comparison with other wind instruments was slow to develop as a solo instrument. It took an extremely long time for the trombone to progress beyond a very obvious or specific New Orleans tailgate role. Playing jazz solos on the trombone was a daunting undertaking early in the twentieth century. It could be argued that the trombone more so than other instruments had to undergo an evolutionary process. Its future possibilities and potential as a solo jazz instrument were impossible to imagine. However, the trombone had always a crucial role in jazz since its beginning. These trombonists rose above the many problems put forth by playing the trombone and by being jazz musicians. They were leaders within their respective eras who without

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72 Ibid, 792.


74 J. J. Johnson, interview by Baker.
having a lot of educational material at their disposal, made a lot of great jazz music with
dignity and verve.
J. J. Johnson, born James Louis Johnson, is considered by many to have been the finest jazz trombonist of all time. He was able to apply innovations pioneered by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie to the more awkward trombone, playing with such speed and with such deceptive ease that at one time some reviewers and others argued that it must be that he was playing a valve instrument rather than a slide trombone. A reviewer once remarked that Johnson played with the clarity of Bud Powell.\(^75\)

Johnson’s formal education ended with his high school graduation in 1941. That same year, just out of high school, Johnson began his professional career by filling in with the Clarence Love Orchestra in his hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana. The experience was short-lived but was positive enough to have influenced him in his decision to travel with the Snookum Russell territory band the following year against his parents’ wishes.\(^76\) During the eight months with Russell, Fats Navarro was in the trumpet section. This fact is significant as Navarro eventually was a great influence on Johnson with his tremendous bebop vocabulary.\(^77\)

In October of 1942, Johnson auditioned for Benny Carter when his orchestra traveled through Indianapolis. Carter was sufficiently impressed with Johnson enough to hire him to join the band when it continued its Midwest tour. Because the World War II draft stole away a number of Benny Carter’s players, Johnson was given the opportunity.

\(^{75}\) J. J. Johnson, interview by Baker.

\(^{76}\) Bourgeois, 4.

\(^{77}\) J. J. Johnson, interview by Baker.
It was on the Armed Forces Radio Service with the Carter Orchestra that Johnson first recorded but was allowed no solo space however. On October 25, 1943, the Carter Orchestra recorded an album on Capital records containing Johnson’s first recorded solo on "Love for Sale." In his solo, Johnson does not truly improvise but stays close to the melody. It was while with Benny Carter on July 2, 1944 that Johnson was invited to appear at the Embassy Theater as part of Norman Granz’s recording project, *Jazz at the Philharmonic*. Johnson continued touring with the Benny Carter Orchestra until March of 1945 when he joined the Count Basie Orchestra. Johnson did not consider his time with Count Basie to be very prolific. During his time with Basie he recorded three solos: “The King,” “Rambo,” and “Stay Cool.” Johnson’s recording of “The King” made quite a positive impact and was highly praised by reviewers. It was this recording that when heard caused the controversy over whether Johnson was using a valve or slide trombone. Johnson was unaffected by such comments. His concern was less with playing fast than with playing unambiguously, with clarity and logic. Johnson attributes this to his study of the solos by Lester Young:

> It started someplace, it went someplace, and it ended someplace; and all of the places that it started and went were wonderful and articulate and it's like speech. It's like semantics, if you will. I think we'll all agree: jazz as practiced by the pros is a question of jazz semantics. It's like words -- placing, using, and choosing the right words to go with other words. The same thing is true in jazz. There is a thing to say in jazz, and there's a thing that's the wrong thing to say in jazz. I always defer back to Lester Young – studying and analyzing his solos with a clinical, analytical ear and discovering the logic of his approach to linear improvisation. There was such a wonderful logic there. If anything, when I was in the early stages of trying to be a jazz soloist, it really was not a preoccupation

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78 Berrett and Bourgois, 383.
with fast, fast, fast and trying to play like a saxophone or anything like that. The preoccupation was to try to make sense and try to put logic into my lines, if they were lines. That was the preoccupation, to make a statement that was clear, articulate and with logic. Not with speed.79

The format of the big band being so limiting, Johnson became more attracted to sitting in with various groups on 52nd Street after Basie’s band had arrived in New York City. A contract to record for Savoy records resulted in a recording session on June 26, 1946 was the start of Johnson distinguishing himself as an improviser who could play with the characteristics of a bebop soloist. It was not only his facile technique that distinguished him but his understanding the rhythmic and harmonic elements of bebop. Johnson also was able to record longer solos on this recording: 64 measures on three takes of “Jay Jay,” 32 measure solos on “Jay Bird” on three takes, “Mad Bebop”, and “Coppin’ the Bop.” Johnson left Basie shortly thereafter to pursue various opportunities on 52nd Street. Johnson developed an association with Dizzy Gillespie who was very encouraging:

During a break between sets, I took the time to work on some sounds that I had heard from Dizzy, Parker, and Monk. Gillespie passed by and said, “I’ve always know that a trombone could be played different, that somebody’d catch on one of these days. Man, you’re elected.”80

Public acclaim came next with Esquire magazine voting Johnson “New Star for 1946.” This was Johnson’s first major award. Illinois Jacquet hired Johnson in 1947 to work with his small band. Johnson had mixed feelings about Jacquet’s group as it was in

79 J. J. Johnson, interview by Baker.
80 Bourgeois, 11.
essence a black swing band. However the job did provide steady employment through the beginning of 1949.

On December 17, 1947, Johnson made his only recording with the Charlie Parker Sextet. The producer, Ross Russell encouraged Parker to add a trombone to the recording date. Recorded on this record for Dial was “Drifting on a Reed”, “Quasimodo”, “Charlie’s Wig”, “Bongo Bop”, “Crazeology”, and “How Deep is the Ocean.” This recording served to propel Johnson forward musically and professionally. Very impressive it was to have successfully adapted to such a situation.81

His own recordings from the era included such sidemen as Bud Powell and a young Sonny Rollins. Johnson also recorded with the Metronome All-Stars in late 1948 and the Miles Davis Nonet in 1950. The early fifties however, were difficult for Johnson. This was due to a decline in studio work and in the clubs together with problems maintaining his cabaret card. To support his family, Johnson worked outside of music, as a blueprint inspector for two years between 1952 and 1954. Johnson did continue to work as a trombonist occasionally during this time performing with Miles Davis in 1953 and later with his own group for Blue Note.

Early in 1954, Johnson was recruited by French pianist, Henri Renaud, to record for French Vogue. He recorded several albums, one of which was selected to receive the highest honor from the French Jazz Academy for best record of 1954.

1954 was also the year he and fellow trombonist Kai Winding formed the “J. J. Johnson/Kai Winding Quintet.” Teddy Reig conceived the idea for the group, known as

81 Gioia, 228.
“Jay and Kai” and quite popular during its two years. Kai Winding was not the first choice for the duet however. Benny Green was originally asked to join Johnson but at the time was experiencing success with a recording he had done called *Blow Your Horn*. So the concept did not have a lot of appeal for him.\(^{82}\)

In 1955, Johnson won the *Downbeat* poll for the first time. From 1955 forward, Johnson enjoyed a balance between maintaining a career as a jazz trombonist and composing and arranging. He began to compose more ambitious works starting with 1956’s "Poem for Brass" and including “El Camino Real” and in 1961, a suite in six movements featuring Dizzy Gillespie called “Perceptions.” In 1957, as part of Norman Granz’s Jazz at the Philharmonic, Johnson was teamed with saxophonist Stan Getz for what became a very well received recording: *Stan Getz and J. J. Johnson at the Opera House*. Johnson’s ballad “Lament” became a jazz standard. Johnson worked again with Miles Davis, during part of 1961-62, led some small groups of his own, and by the late 1960’s was kept busy writing television and film scores. Johnson was so eminent in the jazz world that he continued winning in *Downbeat* polls in the 1970’s even though he was not maintaining an active performing schedule. However, starting with a Japanese tour in 1977, J. J. gradually returned to a busy performance schedule, leading a quintet in the 1980s that often featured saxophonist Ralph Moore.\(^{83}\)

Up to this point the author has abstained from reporting on the personal life of J. J. Johnson choosing to focus specifically on the musician’s playing style and musical

\(^{82}\) J. J. Johnson, interview with Baker.

\(^{83}\) Berrett and Bourgois, 59.
career and achievements. In this paragraph, an exception will be made. In the first paperback edition of *The Musical World of J. J. Johnson*, 2002, an epilogue was added with new information regarding Johnson’s final days that this author finds relevant to include. J. J. Johnson took his own life February 4, 2001. Because he had been so reclusive in his final years, rumors started circulating immediately about the reason for the suicide. The darkest of these suggested that Johnson was upset that he received no mention in the recent Ken Burns documentary series *Jazz: A History of America’s Music*. According to David Baker, the documentary was not regarded seriously enough for offense to have been taken.\(^8^4\) However, the actual reason for the suicide was the overwhelming pain caused by an extended illness. In the spring of 1999, Johnson had been diagnosed with prostate cancer. His treatment produced varied results causing episodes of pain that registered “11 on a pain scale of 1 – 10.” His health continued to decline steadily until finally Johnson learned that his doctors had recommended around the clock nursing care.\(^8^5\) David Baker believes Johnson’s suicide was to avoid being a burden to anyone.\(^8^6\)

Near the end of his life, J. J. Johnson was still working in his studio learning to use new technology for composing and arranging while also completing a trombone method for the Hal Leonard Corporation. The publishers were sufficiently impressed with the book to ask for permission to publish a treble clef as well as the bass-clef edition

\(^{8^4}\) David Baker, conversation with author.

\(^{8^5}\) Berrett and Bourgois, 234.

\(^{8^6}\) David Baker, conversation with author.
in order to fill a void for educational material playable by all levels on all instruments.

Also interesting is that Johnson in his devotion to linear and melodic thinking, dedicated his musical will and testament to the memory of Fred Beckett.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 234.
CHAPTER 5
IDIOMATIC DEVICES

Like all jazz trombonists up until this point in history, Johnson used idiomatic devices.\footnote{In more recent history, from approximately 1980, there are jazz trombonists who prefer to use no discernable idiomatic devices.} Idiomatic devices were second nature to players of the slide trombone but in Johnson’s case these devices were employed only sparingly to add interest and variety. In other words, they were not overdone and were used in juxtaposition with staccato and tenuto as just another way to vary the approach to attacking a note. Idiomatic techniques specific to the trombone were not overly exploited. Johnson’s improvisations were not driven by these idiomatic devices as much as those of trombonists who came before him. The author’s research for this essay found that as the history of the jazz trombone progressed, the less idiomatic devices became the focal point of a jazz trombonist’s improvisation. This became noticeable during the course of researching the review of jazz trombone history. When jazz music was in its infancy, the slide trombone actually surpassed the valve trombone in popularity for its ability to sound a portamento.\footnote{Barry Kernfeld, (ed.) \textit{The New Grove Dictionary Of Jazz Second Edition} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 648.} Trombonists collectively, after several decades of development on the instrument, became less intimidated by the slide and as a result gradually relied less upon idiomatic techniques. Progressively, phrases that would have seemed impossible to play by an early pioneer on the instrument became feasible. As the technique of the trombone expanded or increased, there was less need for more obvious grunts, slide glissando and growls. That is to say that as the trombone modernized, more melodic options became
available. J. J. Johnson, being at the top of the evolutionary ladder at the time of *Proof Positive*, only lightly peppered his improvisations with idiomatic devices.

**Scoop**

The scoop is performed by attacking the note strongly, approximately one half step below the target note. The slide is then pulled in until the desired pitch is sounded. Johnson tended to perform the scoop quickly enough that there was never a doubt regarding the pitch of the target note. Throughout these transcriptions a scoop is denoted by an ascending line before the targeted note.

**Fall off**

One should think of this effect as the opposite of a scoop. Physically, it is performed in a similar manner as the scoop; the target note is first sounded and while maintaining a steady stream of air; the slide is pushed out approximately a half step. The fall off can be as long as desired but in the case of Johnson, falls were normally a half step in pitch and quite quick in duration. Throughout these transcriptions a fall off is denoted by a descending line after the targeted note.

**Attack**

Johnson employed a very direct attack as well. It was likely a choice made to add variety or to contrast from the scoop or fall off. It also could have been to showcase his wall of sound in the upper register.
Vibrato

Johnson did not use any type of vibrato. He generally held his tone very steadily. It could be characterized as plaintive and contemplative; but at times it sounded passionate or argumentative.
“Stella by Starlight” was written by Victor Young and was featured in *The Uninvited*, a 1944 Paramount Pictures film. Its form is thirty two measures in length, and in this version preceded by an eight measure introduction that features Johnson accompanied by drums alone. Its form follows the structure of $A^1 B C A^2$. Each section is eight measures in length. Stylistically, “Stella by Starlight” is performed as a medium swing. Although this popular song became a jazz standard, Johnson recorded it only on *Proof Positive*. Johnson was accompanied on this recording session by Harold Mabern on piano, Arthur Harper on bass and Frank Gant on drums.

During the course of his improvisation, Johnson performs in a cup mute. He does not make use of slide vibrato but instead chooses to express himself by varying his articulation using at times a very direct attack and at other times scoops up into a note from below.

Johnson’s introduction accompanied by drums is followed by a solo break of two measures. In the solo break Johnson uses the Lydian flat seven scale on the V7 chord and references the melody on beats 3 and 4 of measure 40. This is when we first see Johnson employ the improvisational device, reference to the melody.

Johnson begins his solo using the same note lengths for the first few measures, using the melody as anchor points. (Compare the melody in Example 6.2 with Johnson’s improvisation in Example 6.3) The notes of the melody are played in a different order and the rhythm is varied in the first few measures. This reference to the melody gives the solo a very strong start melodically. The notes of the melody sound very pleasant and diatonic to the listener leaving room for much more harmonic adventure as the solo progresses.

Example 6.2: “Stella by Starlight,” melody mm. 9 – 16.

The Eb and Db in measure 44 are anticipatory pickup notes. Because of the Db, one can presume that Johnson is anticipating the harmony in bar 45. Using pickup notes in such a manner gives the improvisation a feeling of forward motion or momentum because the upcoming harmony of the pickup notes has yet to be sounded. The ear does not mind nor can discern any harmonic clash. (Example 6.4) Johnson shows a fondness for the upper extensions of a chord’s harmony. In measures 43 and 44; measures 45 and 46 when the harmony has a ii V7 function, Johnson favors playing the 9th scale degree over the ii chord and the natural 13th over the V7 chord.

Example 6.4: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 44 – 45. (Example 4)

![Example 6.4: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 44 – 45.](image)

Johnson rounds out this first phrase using the idiomatic devices: scoop and fall off. (Example 6.5)

Example 6.5: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 47.

![Example 6.5: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 47.](image)

The Eb at the end of measure 47 is heard as a delayed resolution as Johnson waits until the final eighth note of the measure to play the melody note. The previous Bb is also heard as a delayed melody note.
Important to notice next is Johnson’s use of space in measure 48 and the beginning of 49. (Example 6.6) It is a not often applauded but important device employed by Johnson. As a way of not overwhelming the listener with either rapid successions of notes or overly sophisticated explorations, his use of space seems to allow the improvisation to breathe just as a person telling a story might pause to reflect on what was just said allowing the listener to do the same. Johnson’s next entrance comes as a surprise to the ear. (Example 6.6) It is attacked solidly and directly which is in contrast with the last three notes of the previous phrase; the scoops and fall offs being indirect attacks. The high Bb has a very strong sound for reasons in addition to its being struck so firmly. It is the 5th of the key and also an octave and a 5th from the last note sounded as well as being a whole step above the melody. The next three notes belong to the melody but delayed by two beats in relationship to the position of the notes in the actual melody. The phrase is ended with a diminution of the melody as well. (Compare Example 6.6 with notes of melody in Example 6.7)

Example 6.6: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 48 – 51.
Example 6.7: “Stella by Starlight,” melody, mm. 41 – 43.

The next phrase begins with another example of the anticipatory pickup. In this case, the G and A natural clearly do not belong to the sounding chord. The D in measure 52 sets up the offbeat rhythmic variation before going back to a steady stream of eighth notes grouped together in pairs. The relationship between Bb in measure 53 and A in measure 54 constitutes what is referred to as a “conversational connection” in this essay. (Example 8) In this case, although there is space between the notes, the A appears to be a continuance of his musical idea. But later in the transcription we will see much more space between these logical connections. During the space one still hears the last note sounded so that the subsequent note seems a logical continuation of musical thought. The A is attacked on the downbeat of measure 54. This is also a rhythmic variation not heard since the beginning of the chorus. Until this point, Johnson has avoided starting a phrase or passage on beat one. Also, in measure 55 Johnson uses the Bb bebop scale over the D half diminished chord. (Example 6.8) It sounds harmonious because it is superimposed over a similar key area. The Bb bebop scale is a dominant scale that sounds like it wants to go to Eb. Likewise, the parent scale for D half diminished is the third mode of Eb major. Thus, the Ab in measure 55 sounds like the 7th of Bb is actually the b9th of the G7 in measure 56.
Example 6.8: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 52 – 56.

In the later part of measure 56, Johnson uses octave displacement beginning another
bebop scale with the same relationship to the sounding chord a 4th higher starting on G
and resolving in an identical manner.

Example 6.9: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 56 – 58.

The abovementioned G in measure 56 also begins a phrase containing a most
sophisticated and particularly fascinating sequence that descends by half steps. (Example
6.10) The sequence contains a rotation. This is when a chord tone is approached both
from below and from above. In measure 57, the chord tone Db is the target chord tone.
It is approached from below by the third triplet note of the first beat and the last triplet
note of the forth beat. It is approached from above by the Eb; second triplet note within
the first beat and the second triplet note of the forth beat. This sequence is repeated and
transposed down a half step with each repeat. The rhythm is varied only slightly. It is
intriguing that the descending sequence fits the harmony perfectly although with each
repeat the notes in the figure serve a different individual function for the sounding chord change. The notes of the sequence are symmetrical in that the approach from below each time is by half step and the approach from above is by whole step. In measure 57, the half step approach from below is the root of the chord C; approaching Db, the flatted ninth degree. The Eb is the sharp ninth degree enharmonically approaching from above. The D# is spelled as an Eb for the convenience of the musician reading the music because it is more practical to default to a flatted note in a situation such as this. In measure 59, the B natural approaches the 5th of the chord by half step. The 6th scale degree D approaches from above by whole step. In measure 60, the beginning of the sequence is an anticipatory pickup to the next chord. The Bb approaches the B natural from a half step below and the Db tonic note approaches from a whole step above. The target note B natural on the first beat of measure 62 ends the sequence. After the rest, Johnson resolves to the Bb playing a very simple “down-home” melodic idea that begins with an anticipatory pickup. This very simple idea along with the obvious resolution to the I chord also relieves the tension built up by the chromatically descending sequence.

(Example 6.10) The phrase beginning in measure 64 also contains references to the melody. The Eb on beat 4 of measure 64 resolving to the D on beat 1 of measure 65 for example.
Example 6.10: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 57 – 64.

The D to Eb eighth notes on beat one of measure 65 are displaced melody notes in diminution as well. In measure 65 and 66, the quarter notes on C have a “stop and go” effect. (Example 11) The A natural at the end of measure 66 and the C eighth note before beat two are considered a rotation around the Bb, beat 2 of measure 67. There is a conversational connection from the last heard Bb to the B natural over the four and a half beats of space with the B being an anticipation of the harmony of the F half diminished chord.

Example 6.11: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 65 – 68.

The short note on beat 4 of measure 69 is the only short note of that phrase reminding the listener of the numerous “stop and go” short notes in the previous phrase. In measures 71 and 72, Johnson once again uses the down-home motive in a similar fashion to the way it
was played in measure 62 and 63. The difference of course is the “stop and go” feel of the staccato notes. It is the author’s opinion that Johnson uses such a motive as a way to give musical relief to the listener after performing a sophisticated phrase or harmony. In the case of the descending chromatic sequence, this is definitely true. In the case of measures 69 through 72, the relief comes from having played the notes from the locrian scale. Although not particularly adventurous, the locrian scale being a default choice for a half diminished chord, the chord has enough tones in common with the Db7 #11 to make such a decision. As a matter of fact, if one were thinking of locrian with a raised 2nd over the F half diminished chord it would be the exact same scale as one used over a Db7 with a raised 11th. Compare measures 69 and 70 with 61 and 62. (Examples 6.12 and 6.13)


Example 6.13: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 61 – 64.

Octave displacement starts the second chorus with the high C directly attacked and followed by a “stop and go” pattern descending by minor thirds spelling a diminished chord. The bottom note of the resulting triad creates tension with a flatted ninth degree on a strong beat. The rhythm in measure 74 is one Johnson has used before in measure
66 on beats 3 and 4 going into measure 67 on beats 1 and 2. It is the author’s opinion that it is a fallacy that great jazz musicians do not repeat themselves. On the contrary, repeating material that has been previously heard gives cohesion to an improvised solo. This is true for rhythmic as well as melodic material. Contrasting with the \( C \) struck directly, on the next entrance, Johnson scoops into a high \( B_b \). He moves chromatically down to \( Ab \) as if playing the bebop scale. In measure 76, the notes appear to be part of an inverted \( F \) minor ninth arpeggio. This gives the \( B_b7 \) chord in that measure a suspended sound. The phrase leads directly into a descending “stop and go” sequence using notes from the \( E_b \) mixolydian scale. Imbedded within the sequence is a “stop and go” pattern that gives the phrase an innocent child like quality possible intended to be humorous.

Example 6.14: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 73 – 76.


The pickup to and the figure in measure 81 is typical bebop vocabulary material with the phrase ending with the \( F \) and \( E_b \) as a reference to the melody. This aspect of Johnson’s style that stems from the Parker/Gillespie school of bebop playing
demonstrates the accentuation of the highest pitch in an ascending figure within a phrase.\footnote{Bourgois, 78.} (Example 6.16)

Example 6.16: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 81.

Measure 82 demonstrates Johnson’s ability to choose the most colorful tones of a chord; the fourth of the A half diminished (D) resolving to the third (C) and then the sharp ninth (F) and flatted ninth (Eb) on the D7 of measure 82. Also the “stop and go” rhythm in measure 82 is characteristic of Johnson’s taking control of the time feel by interrupting the rhythmic flow of the melodic line. The C to Bb in measure 83 is also a diminution of the melody. (Example 6.17)

Example 6.17: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 82 - 83.

After the anticipatory pickup eighth notes in measure 84, Johnson uses the Ionian scale on the Bb major seventh with the major seventh sounding on strong beats one and two. This is the first time Johnson has emphasized the major seventh in such a way thus
far in his improvisation. It is also necessary to notice the rhythm again in measure 85. Since Johnson’s quarter notes are most often played staccato, the slurred eighth notes that precede them increase the syncopated effect.\(^9^1\) In measure 86, Johnson uses the given rhythm for the third time in this solo. This syncopated rhythm is displaced starting on beat three in measure 74. In measure 74 it begins on beat one as in measure 86. The chromatic line on beat four of 86 going into measure 87 resolves in the same manner as in measure 56 but with an immediate octave displaced G on the upbeat of beat one.


In measure 87, (Example 6.18) Johnson refers to the melody and continues with this melody reference into measure 89 with the Ab. In measure 89 the G is a melody note but Johnson again chooses the sharpened ninth (Eb enharmonically) and flatted ninth (Db) in measure 90. (Example 6.19)


\(^9^1\) Bourgois, 78.
Example 6.19: continued.

The two eighths on beat four of measure 88 start a melodic germ that continues through measure 95 with a slight variation inserted in 92 that Johnson again inserts into measure 95. In measure 96 – 99, Johnson restates material from measures 64 – 67 with a subtle variation in that he does not use a rotation. (Example 6.20)


In measures 101 – 102, because of the alternately accented Abs, for six beats there is a hemiola feel. On the third and fourth beats of measure 94, the Ab to G is sus4 to the third anticipatory pickup to the Eb major seventh chord. In the penultimate measure, Johnson plays the tonic swinging back and forth to the sixth scale degree in a manner similar to way Jack Teagarden might approach a tonic chord with a sixth degree prominent in the harmony. (Example 6.21)
Example 6.21: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 100 – 102.

In the final measure, Johnson references the melody similarly to the way he began his improvisation. (Example 6.22)

“Lullaby of Jazzland” is a 32 measure song in C minor with the form AABA. Composed by Manny Albam, who was a very active jazz composer and arranger in the late 1950’s and 1960’s, “Lullaby of Jazzland” did not rise in popularity to the echelon of being called a jazz standard but was recorded by four jazz artists on the Impulse jazz record label in the 1960’s. More recently, it was recorded by New York jazz trombonist Joel Hellény on his CD entitled: 
*Lip Service* released in 1997. “Lullaby of Jazzland” was recorded at a different recording session than “Stella by Starlight” and “Minor Blues.” At this recording session, Johnson was accompanied by McCoy Tyner on piano, Toots Thielemans on guitar, Richard Davis on bass, and Elvin Jones on drums. The amount of time between this recording session and the other is unknown.

Johnson begins his improvisation on the fifth degree of C minor and descending down the minor pentatonic scale. The repeated short notes serve a “stop and go” fashion similarly to “stop and go” that we saw in the “Stella by Starlight” improvisation. The use of repeated notes in this manner serves to build intensity as well as to take incisive control of the time feel. In measure 34, melodically it appears that Johnson is playing the minor third and root of C minor but in actuality he is playing the sus4 on beat one going to the second degree of the Bbmin7 chord. The listener in this case hears harmonic generalization. There is a conversational connection between the Cs in measure 35 and on beat one of measure 36. In measure 36, Johnson uses C minor pentatonic holding out the F slightly.

The four note diatonic saw-tooth pattern in measure 38 leads into a bebop scale based on Bb that is superimposed over G7 harmony. The last Ab that would have been the dominant 7th of Bb is heard as the flatted 9th degree of G7. Johnson used this same technique in “Stella by Starlight.” The G in measure 40 is an example of his use of octave displacement.


The triplet figure beginning with D is an extended rotation around the final Eb.

Example 7.3: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 41 – 42.
In measures 43 and 44, Johnson stays close to the diatonic key center descending to the fifth via the G locrian scale. This is unremarkable but sets up melodic material to be expanded upon in the next phrase.

Example 7.4: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 43 – 44.

Notice that from the Eb in measure 46, Johnson is repeating and expanding upon melodic material used in measures 43 and 44. The final Eb in measure 47 gives the listener a feeling of resolution just before the B section of the form or bridge of the song.


Johnson plays over the first four measures of the bridge a very fluid melodic line that is as simple diatonically as it is flowing. It seem a stark contrast to the more jerky rhythmic figures heard until this point. Johnson varies the articulation of each of the highest notes in this phrase. The first is struck directly and the second, the high Bb, is played with a scoop.
Example 7.6: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 49 – 52.

In the remaining four measures of the bridge, Johnson plays a sequence containing a hemiola pattern. Although the line is rhythmically interesting and angular sounding, Johnson stays true to the song’s chord structure with the highest note, the 7th of the chord resolving to the highest note of the resolution of the sequence. (Example 7.7) The lowest notes resolve to the roots of their respective chords.

Example 7.7: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 53 – 55.

Continuing into the final A section of the form, Johnson maintains the sequence interval of a 7th but transposes the sequence up a fourth. He anticipates the Cmin7 harmony in measure 56 giving the harmony a suspended sound and does not alter the notes of the sequence as the harmony changes through measure 58. This sequence builds a lot of intensity during the course of the entire sequence from measure 53 to 58.
Example 7.8: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 56 – 58.


In measures 59 and 60, Johnson relieves built up tension with the B♭ bebop scale superimposed over G7. The Ab’s and G’s played over the Fmin7 harmony anticipate the G7 chord on the later part of the measure sounding like the flatted ninth to the root proceeding to the seventh then to the flatted thirteenth. In measure 61, the V to I in both the harmony and melody is an extremely strong choice to make. The strength is in its simplicity and feeling of resolution in contrast with the jagged angular tense phrases previously played.

Johnson’s choices in measures 62 and 63 are interesting for two reasons. The rhythm that he chooses is the same rhythm that he played twice in his “Stella by Starlight” solo. In
measure 62 he plays the rhythm and in measure 63 he repeats the rhythm displacing it by one beat. The repeat of the rhythm actually begins at the four beat of measure 62 so in essence they overlap.

Example 7.10: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 62 – 64.

Johnson begins his second chorus with a short rhythmic germ that he plays three times at the beginning of the A section. It starts with a displaced octave high D, the ninth degree resolving to the root. The germ pattern continues on beat one the next two measures maintaining the interval of a ninth resolving to the root of the sounding chord.


Measure 68 appears to be a rhythmic variation on the C minor pentatonic scale used in measures 33 and 34. Johnson varied the material by displacing the rhythm and grouping the notes in eighth note pairs. The D and F on the fourth beat of measure 68 form a
rotation around the third of the C minor chord. The second is now added to the
pentatonic scale changing the sound of the scale to Dorian or natural minor.

Example 7.12: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 68 – 70.


In the center of this short melody Johnson plays a rotation around Eb. (Example 7.14)


Johnson plays the original melodic germ down an octave before starting another germ
pattern with the same rhythm but different in that it ascends by a fifth.
In measure 73, Johnson starts the answer to the melodic germ that began in measure 65. It is in retrospect that we are able to see the antecedent consequent relationship. This melodic answer also starts at the beginning of the A section of the form and is played three times but its intrinsic interval is a fifth. In the third repetition (measure 75) the fifth interval is delayed until the downbeat of measure 76 as an appoggiatura of a sixth appears in its place.

Example 7.16: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 73 – 76.

In measure 76, Johnson plays a variation of melodic material that he played in measure 44. (Example 7.17 and 7.18)
Example 7.17: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 76.

Example 7.18: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 44.

In measure 77, Johnson uses melodic material from C minor pentatonic with a rotation around Eb inserted into the saw tooth pattern in measure 78. In measure 79, the second A section of the form is ended with a melodic germ containing a turn.


The germ is repeated up a fourth. (Example 7.20)
Example 7.20: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 81 – 84.

The interval is adjusted to accommodate the Ab7 harmony in measures 85 and 86. The thirteenth of the chord is alternated with the seventh. In measure 87, the flatted thirteenth are played alternately.


The beginning of the new sequence on the upbeat of two in measure 89 appears to be a reference to the melody. It is the first time Johnson emphasizes the major seventh on a minor chord. It seems to be the first time he has made the scale choice of ascending melodic minor on the i chord. As in the melody, there is a rotation around the C within the sequence in measure 89. The target note is on beat four. The subsequent variation contains a rotation around Eb on the third beat and the third variation contains a rotation around Ab on beat two. The fourth variation is a rotation around F on beat one. This
particular rotation is unique in its intrinsic shape. It approaches from a whole step above and a whole step below. This is to avoid the clash that an E natural would cause. There is not an E natural anywhere else in the improvisation. The final rotation is around the D on beat four of measure 92. These rotations have been placed around the tonal center of their respective measures. The exception is the final rotation which is around the fifth degree of the G7 chord in measure 92. The position of the target notes within their measures are: four, three, two, one, and four. This gave the rhythm a hemiola feel.


The solo is given cohesion by ending with material similar to the beginning of the solo. Compare the “stop and go” pattern in measure 94 and 95 to measures 34 and 35.

Example 7.23: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 93 – 96.
In his “Minor Blues” improvisation, Johnson seems to integrate stylistic throwbacks to black swing style as well as modern bebop innovations. Johnson was accompanied on this recording session by Harold Mabern on piano, Arthur Harper on bass and Frank Gant on drums.

After playing twice through the melody, Johnson appears to begin improvising two measures before the third blues form. It is slightly nebulous as to when the improvisation begins because there is no solo break. Johnson sets in motion his departure by holding the last note of the melody interrupted only very quickly on beat four of the last two measures of the form by hitting an Eb and just as quickly sliding back to the C, continuing to hold the note. Johnson holds the C into the beginning of the blues form. Just as with the subsequent use of space, Johnson shows no sense of urgency. The feel is very relaxed. His tone is very straight and deliberate with no inflection or vibrato.

Example 8.1: “Minor Blues,” mm. 23 – 24.

After the space, in measure 26, Johnson uses the fourth scale degree to give the line a suspended sound before again bouncing off of the Eb as done previously in measures 23 and 24. (Compare Example 8.2 with Example 8.1) One can now see that the repeated Eb to C is a small melodic germ.
Example 8.2: “Minor Blues,” mm. 25 – 27.

An Ab triad is superimposed over harmony in measure 28. (Example 48) The same minor third interval is again used as in measure 27. Johnson again uses the suspended sound of the fourth scale degree by playing the Ab on beat one of measure 29. But instead of playing a minor third after the suspended note, he plays a scale step below continuing with the minor third interval on the upbeat of three of measure 29. Johnson ascends stepwise alternating long and short notes as he ascends diatonically up the Bb Aeolian scale. The author prefers to view the three eighth notes in measure 29 as pickup notes to measure 30. (Example 46) The Ab triad superimposed over Ebmin7, in this case anticipated one measure early, demonstrates Fred Beckett’s early influence upon Johnson. \(^{92}\) The superimposition generates the 11\(^{th}\) and the 13\(^{th}\) of the chord.

Example 8.3: “Minor Blues,” mm. 28 – 30.

Johnson expands upon the minor third germ but instead of holding the C out he divides it up into quarters.

\(^{92}\) Bourgois, 44.
Example 8.4: “Minor Blues,” mm. 31 – 32.

Next Johnson plays for the first time the 123 digital pattern. He will expand upon this idea throughout the rest of the improvisation. (Example 48)

Example 8.5: “Minor Blues,” mm. 31 – 33.

Johnson plays a blues idea common to all jazz musicians. It is also a variation on the melody. The last four notes of the idea contain a pentatonic germ using the scale degrees 134 that Johnson also will exploit throughout the rest of the improvisation. (Example 51)

Example 8.6: “Minor Blues,” mm. 34 – 35.

Johnson repeats twice the 134 pentatonic shaped idea before holding the suspended fourth scale degree.
Example 8.7: “Minor Blues,” mm. 36 – 39.

Four chromatic notes descend to the suspended fourth scale degree on beat one of measure 41.

Example 8.8: “Minor Blues,” mm. 40 – 44.

In measure 44, Johnson plays a rotation around the Bb going into the 123 digital pattern followed by the seventh of the Gb9 chord. The seventh of the Gb9 chord sounds like a blues note in the key of Bb. He repeats the pattern and resolves the E natural to the Eb. The displaced octave low Db on the upbeat of two in measure 47 is a resolution from the low Eb in the previous measure. It is the author’s opinion that these notes have been extracted from the melody.
Example 8.9: “Minor Blues,” mm. 44 – 46.

The triplet figure in measure 48 is composed of notes from the Bb ascending harmonic minor scale with an added raised eleventh. The melody in measure 49 through 51 is a quote from the 1950 popular song, “Lullaby of Birdland,” whose melody by George Shearing, is derived from the same scale.

Example 8.10: “Minor Blues,” mm. 48 – 51.

The G natural pickup to the Bb minor arpeggio figure gives the phrase a Dorian flavor. The note played in a staccato manner sound clipped short and by playing them this way Johnson is able to take assertive control over the time feel; the subsequent triplets on beats 2 and 3 of measure 53 are played in a declamatory manner as well setting up the triplet feel in measures 53 through 56.
Example 8.11: “Minor Blues,” mm. 51 – 53.

Johnson shows his ability to maintain rhythmic interest through the use of a repetitive figure. The interest is chiefly in the rhythm that Johnson is using versus the harmony; the harmony is diatonic. Measure 53 starts with an interval of a 5th that is developed and transposed outlining an Ab triad. The Ab is displaced by an octave and resolved to the 3rd of the Eb chord. The accidentals in measures 55 and 56 do provide additional color however. The A natural comes from the ascending melodic minor scale; the E natural is derivative of the “Lullaby of Birdland” quote previously used.

Example 8.12: “Minor Blues,” mm. 53 – 56.

The chromatic line beginning on beat three of measure 56 appears to be a displaced augmentation of material from measure 40. Johnson lands solidly on an Ab on beat one
of measure 57. This apparently is no coincidence as there is an Ab in the melody at this point in the form of the song. Also Johnson could be substituting a C half diminished chord for the Gb9. If this is the case, he could be using Ab bebop scale over C half diminished. This formula has been identified several times before. The phrase concludes with the 123 digital pattern.


Johnson uses the high tessitura of his upper range to maintain intensity while using notes from the blues scale. Notice the use of simple minor starting on the upbeat of beat one. It is interesting at this point to note that Johnson maintains interest by alternating between playing blues based harmonic material, black band riffs or in a bebop style.

Example 8.14: “Minor Blues,” mm. 61 – 64.
In measure 64, Johnson plays a rhythmic variation of a chromatic idea previously used in measure 40.

Example 8.15: “Minor Blues,” mm. 64 – 66.

Measures 66 and 67 contain a triplet blues idea common to all jazz and blues musicians. In measure 68 and 69, Johnson restates similar material to measures 32 and 33 except for favoring the melody note in measure 69.

Example 8.16: “Minor Blues,” mm. 66 – 69.

Johnson plays a rhythmic variation of the melody. (Example 8.17)
Example 8.17: “Minor Blues,” mm. 70 – 71.

Use of double-time begins. The chords are moving in the same harmonic rhythm as before. The melodic material comes from the Bb harmonic minor scale with an added raised eleventh. The A natural appears to be a leading tone to the 123 germ. The Eb and C form a rotation around the Db. This causes a saw tooth shape within the second beat. Johnson repeats material from measures 73 and 74 almost verbatim in measures 75 and 76. The last beat of measure 76 contains a rotation around F. A technique that Johnson employed to increase his facility during double-time excursions was to take advantage of his knowledge of the harmonic series. The melodic line is planned in a way that uses only the first three slide positions.

Example 8.18: “Minor Blues,” mm. 73 – 76.
As the lines in the previous four measures ascend, the following four contain descending lines.

Example 8.19: “Minor Blues,” mm. 77 – 78.

Johnson uses octave displacement descending the Bb Dorian scale. He alternates short notes with tenuto in order to control the rhythmic flow.

Example 8.20: “Minor Blues,” mm. 79 – 80.

The dotted eighth to sixteenth rhythm preserves the double time feel. This could be viewed as Johnson playing in a “stop and go” manner in double time. (Example 63)

Johnson plays what had become one of his signature ideas in measure 82, the third of the dominant chord arpeggiating up to the sharpened ninth followed by the flatted ninth. Again he used a rotation at the end of the measure around F.
Example 8.21: “Minor Blues,” mm. 81 – 82.

Johnson follows with similar double time material with an added pickup sixteenth note to each germ after the first. The bebop line in measure 84 seems to have come directly from Charlie Parker or Miles Davis’ vocabulary as he recorded with both respectively in 1947 and 1950.93


The double time feel continues in measure 85 with a new melodic germ consisting of a dotted eighth on the fifth degree of Bb minor with a flatted fifth (enharmonically) sixteenth. The non-melodic, heavily syncopated riff style evident here sounds like a reference to his days in the black band tradition. Johnson varies the rhythm in measure 86 and also displaces the new rhythm and the returns to the original germ on beat three

93 Charlie Parker Sextet (December 17, 1947) and Miles Davis Nonet (March 9, 1950).
before spelling out a Bb minor triad on beat four. The new motive on beat four will be used extensively later in the improvisation. This germ will be called the 531 motive.

Example 8.23: “Minor Blues,” mm. 85 – 86.

[Music notation image]

Johnson continues with the germ originally used in measure 85 and in measure 88 plays very diatonically but with rhythmic interest. His scale choice is what the author calls simple minor. In the case of simple minor, only notes Bb, C, Db, Eb, or F are used. There is not enough information to be able to conclude whether he is thinking of a particular minor scale.


[Music notation image]

The germ is simply transposed down a whole step and follows with playing in an inventive and syncopated manner on Eb Dorian in measure 90.
Example 8.25: “Minor Blues,” mm. 89 – 90.

The germ is played in its original key once again and in the following measure the offbeat syncopation pattern is repeated.

Example 8.26: “Minor Blues,” mm. 91 – 92.

The germ is transposed to fit the Gb9 chord and Johnson repeats the bebop line previously used.

Example 8.27: “Minor Blues,” mm. 93 – 94.

In measure 96 Johnson begins the development of the melodic germ, 531 motive.

(Example 8.28)
Example 8.28: “Minor Blues,” mm. 95 – 96.

Development of the 531 motive continues alternating with syncopation and the playing of the motive directly on strong beats.

Example 8.29: “Minor Blues,” mm. 97 – 98.

Development of the 531 motive continues in measure 99 and in measure 100. The last three notes appear to be a variation of the 123 motive is played in reverse.

Example 8.30: “Minor Blues,” mm. 99 – 100.
Johnson plays another syncopated Ab triad pattern over the Eb minor chord. In measure 102,


This heavily syncopated passage contains rotations around particular targets notes. In measure 105, Johnson descends by whole step from the C indicating use of the Lydian scale then chromatically to the Gb on beat one of measure 106. The Gb is the flatted ninth of the F7 chord. (Example 8.32)

Example 8.32: “Minor Blues,” mm. 103 – 106.

Johnson repeats the bebop line in order to resolve tension and to get back to the tonic.
Example 8.33: “Minor Blues,” mm. 103 – 106.

After the brief rest, Johnson continues playing in the high register repeating the V to I interval of a fourth (F to Bb) and plays the 123 germ at the top of the form. The figure in measure 107 through 108 constitutes what I have described as “conversational connection.”

Example 8.34: “Minor Blues,” mm. 108 – 112.

Example 8.35: “Minor Blues,” mm. 112 – 115.
Example 8.35: continued.

\[ Bb_{\text{MIN7}} \]

In measure 117, Johnson develops further the chromatic idea from measure 40. The rhythm and articulation is varied. On the third beat of measure 117, it appears Johnson is using Ab bebop scale over the subdominant Gb9 chord. In measure 118, Johnson falls into a familiar bebop pattern; the vocabulary obviously borrowed from Charlie Parker.

Example 8.36: “Minor Blues,” mm. 117 – 118.

Johnson plays simple minor descending from the 5\textsuperscript{th} resolving to what would be the root of the i chord on beat one of measure 120, its deceptive resolution however, is to the third of the Gb9 chord. Johnson plays the flatted ninth on the strong beat three. It is from there that one can notice that he has played F Phrygian. The parent key of F Phrygian is Db major which is the relative of Bb minor. (Example 8.37)
Example 8.37: “Minor Blues,” mm. 119 – 121.
CHAPTER 9
PRIMARY INFLUENCES

It is interesting to note that J. J. Johnson credited two musicians as his primary influences. Those musicians were trombonist Fred Beckett and saxophonist Lester Young. Johnson spoke to Leonard Feather about Young’s influence: “Lester was the forerunner of progressive jazz. My thing, maybe more than any other jazz musicians at that time, was the linear approach, and Lester epitomized that.” The fact that one of Johnson’s primary influences was not a trombonist speaks volumes. Johnson was a Lester Young fanatic who along with his other high school friends knew all of his solos. His first attempt at playing music was on the baritone saxophone, which he chose in order to approximate as closely as possible his idol’s tenor saxophone tone. It was a frustrating experience due the instrument’s poor condition so Johnson chose the other instrument that the school had available, the trombone. With this in mind, one could argue that Johnson as a young trombonist was actually a saxophonist in a trombonist’s body. He must have developed his playing style without the self-limiting beliefs of a struggling trombonist. Cannonball Adderley’s comments support this theory as he once said that one could play Johnson style on any horn and that Johnson is an exceptional

94 J. J. Johnson, interview with Baker.
95 Ibid., 7.
soloist who happens to play the trombone without being tied to the instrument. Gunther Schuller had the following to say in regard to Lester Young’s far reaching influence:

Lester also qualifies as one of the great individual soloists, the theme with which this chapter is concerned. And in terms of a revolutionizing and lasting effect on several further generations of jazz players, it is an incontrovertible fact that Lester was the most influential artist after Armstrong and before Charlie Parker. What eluded Coleman Hawkins despite his life-long heroic strivings, namely, domination of the saxophone world, virtually fell into Lester’s lap. And before his life was a little more than half over, he had not only spawned a whole school of followers but created a completely new aesthetic of jazz—for all instruments, not just the tenor saxophone. The essence of his heritage is that he proposed a totally new alternative to the language, grammar, and vocabulary of jazz, one that broke away from the prevailing Armstrong tradition and did so incisively, unequivocally--and unapologetically.

It could be argued that Johnson had an agenda of musical goals to accomplish that he did not allow to be burdened by the arduous task of overcoming slide technique. The trombonist who had the greatest influence upon Johnson was Fred Beckett, who Johnson described as a trombonist who played unlike any trombonist that he had heard. Johnson made these comments about Beckett:

Beckett was the first trombonist I ever heard play in manner other than the usual sliding, slurring, lip trilling, or gutbucket style. He had tremendous facilities for improvisation; in general, Beckett’s playing made a lasting impression upon me.

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97 Berrett and Bourgois, 75.
99 J. J. Johnson as quoted by Leonard Feather in the liner notes to Savoy SJL-2232.
These comments about Beckett were not only revealing in regard to Johnson’s feelings about the past and current state of the trombone but also foreshadowed his intention to revolutionize the way the trombone is played within the context of jazz music.
CHAPTER 10
COMMENTS ON THE IMPROVISATIONAL TECHNIQUES

Johnson’s succinct playing style was rooted in a method that the author has termed improvisational techniques. Several of these techniques served to develop the melodic line. Other techniques were related to rhythm or specifically to the trombone:

**Antecedent and Consequent melodic relationships.**

The author’s analyses found that Johnson was able to maintain and often stimulate interest by making a musical statement in such a way that made the listener sometimes unknowingly await an answer. At times it was only after hearing the answer that one realized that a question had been asked.

**Sequence and Repetition**

It was often Johnson’s use of previously used material that generated the greatest amount of interest. It is the author’s belief that this is counterintuitive to one of the tenets of improvising: One should be creative by composing original material extemporaneously. Johnson sometimes developed a short idea by repeating it verbatim. Or development occurred by presenting the musical thought in shorter or longer rhythmic values or in a key a fourth away suggesting the cycle of fifths.
**Rhythmic devices**

It is the synergy of the improvisational devices that make Johnson a great jazz improviser. An important component in this synergy was rhythm. A rhythmic device that Johnson often employed was the shifting of the bar line. This is the delaying or anticipating of the harmonic or rhythmic progress (especially the former) so that the melodic idea in question is seemingly occurring in the wrong place. It is a deliberate and temporary distortion or the meter or bar structure. An example of this practice is the anticipatory pick up. This was a characteristic of Lester Young’s style throughout his career. \(^{100}\) Hemiola was also used by Johnson to good effect. Simply stated, he sometimes superimposed one time feel over a contrasting time signature. Johnson also created a rhythmic technique to overcome the difficulty of playing bebop on the slide trombone. Bourgois described it as follows:

Johnson’s facile technique and effective rhythmic constructions enabled him to circumvent this natural limitation of the instrument. The eighth-note was the basic rhythmic unit in his style, but, groupings of more than sixteen of them (eight beats) rarely occur. Instead, smaller groups of eighth-notes, usually four to sixteen, are interspersed with rests or notes of longer value. This technique of interrupting the rhythmic flow of the melodic line is characteristic of Johnson’s style throughout his career. \(^{101}\)

In this essay the technique is referred to as “stop and go.” His choice to develop this technique exploited the peculiarities of the trombone. Rather than viewing himself as

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\(^{100}\) Schuller, *The Swing Era*, 234.

\(^{101}\) Bourgois, 76.
being limited by his chosen instrument, he created a style that encompassed economy of
movement and made use of the trombone’s upper harmonic series.

**Pervasive rhythm**

Even after listening to *Proof Positive* repeatedly, it was only after studying the
transcriptions that the author noticed that Johnson had a tendency to repeat a particular
rhythm from time to time. In a few cases the rhythm was used in conjunction with other
devices and in some cases the rhythm actually overlapped with itself. The rhythm falls
under the category of “stop and go” and had the effect of taking an assertive control of
the time feel. Alternating tenuto with short notes in this way was Johnson’s method for
managing the rhythmic motion of a phrase.

Below the author identified each case of its use:


In this example, the rhythm begins on beat 3 of measure 66.

Example 10.2: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 74.
In example 10.3, the rhythm begins on beat 1 of measure 86 but rather than ending on a quarter note as in the other examples, Johnson segues directly to a bebop scale.

Example 10.3: “Stella by Starlight,” mm. 86 – 87.

In example 10.4, the rhythm begins on beat 1 of measure 62 then overlaps and repeats beginning on beat 4 of measure 62.

Example 10.4: “Lullaby of Jazzland,” mm. 62.

Example 10.5: “Minor Blues,” mm. 28 – 29.

In example 10.6, the rhythm begins on beat 3 of measure 41.

Example 10.6: “Minor Blues,” mm. 41 – 42.
The following example of the rhythm (beginning on beat 4 of measure 108) is displaced by one beat. This displacement makes it all but unrecognizable by ear.

Example 10.7: “Minor Blues,” mm. 109.

Melody

Johnson made use of melody as part of his improvisations. Sometimes the notes of the melody were played in a different order or in a rhythmic variation such as diminution or augmentation. Use of the melody gave cohesion to his improvisations. Johnson used a quote to good effect in Minor Blues. It could have been used for the sake of humor. Or perhaps because Johnson heard that the quote was based on the same harmonic setting as the one he presently faced. Another melodic device that Johnson seemed fond of was rotation. A rotation is a way of approaching a chord tone from above as well as below. This was more often by a half step below and a scale step from above. Within the “Stella by Starlight” solo, the author identified within a sequence of rotations a possible example of fretted playing. If one were to view the trombone slide as having frets like a guitar, one could envision playing a melodic germ down a half step by moving down a fret. The concept of “fretted playing” was first acknowledged by David Baker. It
is not known if Johnson was actually employing the concept but according to David Baker, Johnson was certainly aware of it and it is possible that he could have been using the technique. Octave displacement was also used by Johnson. This surprising shift to a different register (often higher) was at times done to increase the tessitura in order to increase musical intensity. At other times the displacement is derived from knowing or hearing a particular piano voicing and emphasizing its more colorful extensions. Johnson often played chromatically down to the flatted ninth of a chord and then immediately played a displaced root that was a major seventh higher. This decision was generated by his knowing or hearing the colorful piano voicing with the flatted ninth in the middle range of the piano and the root in the upper octave. Likewise, it was common for Johnson to play chromatically down to the 7th of a chord and immediately play a displaced natural 13th a major seventh higher.

Scale choices

Johnson’s scale choices were generated by the underlying harmony depending on the given song’s harmonic structure. Most interesting among his choices: The bebop scale. In this scale, a chromatic step was added to the mixolydian scale between the root and the seventh degree in order to align metric accents. The use of this scale is not particularly interesting in itself as it can be counted among the many tools at the disposal of all bebop musicians. Interesting though was how Johnson used it on a half diminished subdominant as a way to approach a minor key area. In such cases, the bebop scale was superimposed over a similar key area. In his “Stella by Starlight” solo, the Bb bebop scale was used (superimposed over D half diminished) as a dominant scale that sounded
like it should resolve to Eb. The parent scale for D half diminished is the 7th mode of Eb Ionian. With the bebop scale used in this instance, the upper extensions of the G7 such as the seventh, sharp 9th and flatted ninth degrees are emphasized. The Ab that sounds like the 7th of Bb is actually the b9th of G7 etc.

Johnson’s approach to a minor key was at times very simple. He at times used just a few notes of the minor scale: the root, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th. He played this simple minor scale in his Minor Blues improvisation. When using this scale, one cannot discern which flavor of minor Johnson is thinking. At others times it was indeed clear which mode Johnson was using. Johnson made limited use of the Blues scale even in his “Minor Blues” improvisation. He more often borrowed notes from the minor pentatonic to create melodic germs that could be repeated and developed.

Johnson’s original melodies created in his improvisations had a tendency to be angular and jagged. Jagged melodies were characterized as “saw tooth” in this essay. They slowed the rhythmic motion and were often used along with “stop and go” figures.

The author’s analyses identified a device that gave Johnson’s improvisation cohesion and contributed to the organization of his overall melodic sense.

“Conversational Connection” is the logical continuation of musical thought. Johnson seemed to connect notes within his improvisation in a uniquely melodic way. He played with a logical continuation of musical thought by using the same note, or ascending or descending by step. During a rest of several beats, the last note sounded seemed to ring in the listener’s ear. The subsequent note was the most logical continuation or

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102 If one were to draw straight lines between the notes, “connect the dots,” it would resemble the teeth of a carpenter’s saw.
development of what had been played before. One can see that the use of this improvisational technique gave Johnson melodic lines with seamless linear continuity, melodic strength and coherence. It could be argued that this feature of Johnson’s improvisations is derivative of Lester Young who also played in a very linear style. Within the melodic content of Young’s solos, intervallic movement tended to move in a stepwise manner or in small intervals. Seconds and thirds were prevalent in Young’s style while large intervals and leaps were less common. This linear fluency left ample room for occasional dramatic wide leaps for the sake of generating excitement.\(^{103}\) The author believes this to be the rationale for Johnson’s use of octave displacement as well.

**Final Statement**

It is the author’s opinion that the improvisations from Johnson’s album, *Proof Positive* embody a riff-oriented style of swing that originated with his black swing band period, as well as a Charlie Parker bebop melodic style. Because Johnson continued to develop from the time he began playing in black swing bands through his experimentation with bebop, both styles permeated his playing at the time of the recording sessions for *Proof Positive*. The in-depth analyses from J. J. Johnson’s album, *Proof Positive* ought to be a welcome contribution to the academic study of jazz trombone. The transcription and analysis of these solos continue to support the erudite study and research of J. J. Johnson by students and educators. This essay will hopefully

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\(^{103}\) Schuller, *The Swing Era*, 233.
serve as a source for jazz trombonists wanting to learn more about J. J. Johnson’s trombone style in the mid sixties, particularly on the album, *Proof Positive*. 
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Improvisational Devices Defined

**Angularity**
The use of uncommonly wide intervals in improvisation, very pronounced in players like John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Theolonious Monk, Woody Shaw, Benny Wallace, etc…

**Antecedent – Consequent melodic relationships**
A pair of musical statements that complement one another in rhythmic symmetry and harmonic balance. 104

**Articulation**
A direct attack, scoop, fall off. The various ways to strike a note lend variety depending on the immediate need.

**Augmentation**
The presentation of a musical thought in longer rhythmic values.

**Bebop Scale**
In this scale, a chromatic step is added to the mixolydian scale between the root and the seventh degree in order to align metric accents.

**Bebop scale over a ii half diminished to V7 progression in a minor key area**
In this case, the bebop scale is superimposed over a similar key area – For example: The Bb bebop scale is a dominant scale that sounds like it wants to go to Eb. The parent scale for D half diminished is the 7th mode of Eb Ionian. When the bebop scale is used in this instance, the upper extensions of the G7 such as the seventh, sharp 9th and flatted ninth degrees are emphasized. The Ab that sounds like the 7th of Bb is actually the b9th of G7 etc.

**Black Swing Style**
This is a style of jazz playing that arose from the black bands early in the swing era. One improvising in this style would perform more repeated rhythmic figures than long melodic lines.

**Blues Scale**
Though specifically developed for use in the conventional twelve bar blues, some players will use only sporadically in the blues (plus the fact that some blues progressions are less than entirely traditional), and players will frequently use the blues scale in a non-blues tune. It is one of the scales frequently chosen for harmonic generalization.

Conversational Connection\textsuperscript{105}
Logical continuation of musical thought. Johnson seems to connect notes within his improvisation in a uniquely melodic way. He plays with a logical continuation of musical thought by using the same note, or ascending or descending by step. During a rest of several beats, the last note sounded seems to ring in the listener’s mind. The following note is the most logical continuation or development of what was played before. One can see that the use of this improvisational technique gives him melodic lines with seamless continuity and melodic strength.

Digital Patterns
Small (usually 3 to 5 notes) and well organized note groups.

Diminution
The presentation of a musical thought in shorter rhythmic values.

“Down-home”
This term refers to a musical phrases that is particularly unpretentious, simple, and wholesome sounding. It is reminiscent of the blues but does not necessarily contain notes of the blues scale.

Fretted Playing
A particularly notable example of this appears in measure 57 through 61 of Johnson’s “Stella by Starlight” solo. This descending motive creates a great deal of tension both rhythmically and harmonically. The motive descending by half steps can be played by the same slide combination by simply moving the slide down in a way similar to how a guitarist might play a descending motive. When exercising this fretted method of playing, a trombonist thinks of slide positions as a guitarist considers his frets. A musical idea can be transposed down a half step by simply moving down a fret.

Harmonic Generalization
This is the practice of lumping together several chords (especially closely related chords, such as ii V I) with one scale. The major scale and the blues scale are most commonly used for this purpose, but scales like harmonic minor and diminished can be expected as well, along with still other possibilities.

Hemiola
The definition of hemiola in this paper is only loosely adhered to; when a contrasting time feel is superimposed over another.

\textsuperscript{105} The author first heard of this technique while studying Jazz Style and Analysis with James Riggs at the University of North Texas.
**Melodic germ**
A short repeated motive. A germ can be only a few notes in duration. The author also sometimes uses the term to describe short rhythmic patterns.

**Octave displacement**
Surprising shift to a different register. This is at times related to the use of tessitura in order to increase or decrease musical intensity.

**Pentatonic Scales (structure: 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 of a major scale)**
Most commonly found in modal and blues tunes, but also found with less frequently in other situations. Uncommonly long phrases are often generated by then use of a single pentatonic scale. Sideslips are often based on pentatonics.

**Pervasive rhythm**
The author identified a rhythm that Johnson often used that is not easily identifiable until analyzing the transcriptions. The rhythm was not only often used but sometimes overlaps with itself.

**Quotes**
Melodic fragments of other tunes or solos, woven into an improvisation, sometimes as a humorous touch, sometimes simply because the improviser hears that the quote is based on the same harmonic setting as wheat he presently faces. In a few instances, players have used quotes to be programmatic or to make a socio-political comment.

**Repetition**
Development by use of repetition of a short melodic idea.

**Rotation**
Approaching a chord tone from above and below. Although there are exceptions this is most often by a half step below and a scale step from above.

**“Saw tooth”**
A jagged musical line. This is the opposite of a smooth, flowing melodic line. Saw tooth shaped jagged lines are sometimes used with the “stop and go” effect. They slow down the rhythmic motion.

**Sequence**
The repetition of a short musical phrase at another pitch

**Shifting of the bar line**
This is the delaying or anticipating of the harmonic or rhythm progress (especially the former) so that it is occurring (seemingly) in the wrong place. It is a deliberate (usually) and temporary distortion or the meter and/or bar structure.
Sideslip
Musically true to the dictionary definition, the musician slips harmonically to one side, either chromatically up or down (more often up) in order to create tension.

Simple minor
In the case of Bb simple minor, only notes Bb, C, Db, Eb, or F are used. There is not enough information to be able to conclude whether he is thinking of a particular minor scale.

“Stop and Go”
Sometimes used to circumvent the natural limitations of the trombone. The eighth note was the basic rhythmic unit in this style. Smaller groups of eighth notes are interspersed with rests or notes of longer values. A technique of interrupting the rhythmic flow of the melodic line is characteristic of Johnson’s style throughout his career. Johnson sometimes used this technique to control the rhythmic motion of a phrase.

Terminal vibrato
“The terminal vibrato was frequently used on longer notes, which started relatively ‘straight’ and gradually ‘loosened up’ to end in a wide vibrato.”

Use of melody
Notes of the melody used as part of the improvisation. Sometimes the notes of the melody are played in a different order or in a rhythmic variation such as diminution or augmentation.

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106 Similarly Gioia used the expression “stop and start” to describe the jagged, sinuous way that Woody Shaw phrased. 320.

107 Bourgois, 76.

108 Collier, 105.
APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF “STELLA BY STARLIGHT,” “LULLABY OF JAZZLAND,”
AND “MINOR BLUES”
Stella By Starlight

transcribed by Rodney Lancaster

by Victor Young
LULLABY OF JAZZLAND

Composed by Manny Album

J. J. Johnson Solo

Transcribed by Rodney Lancaster