The Creative Process of Ira Sullivan

Peter W. Brewer

University of Miami, pwbrewer@doclaylemusic.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations

Recommended Citation
https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations/238

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF IRA SULLIVAN

By

Peter W. Brewer

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

May 2009
A doctoral essay submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF IRA SULLIVAN

Peter W. Brewer

Approved:

Whitney F. Sidener, M.M.
Professor of Studio Music and Jazz

Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.
Dean of Graduate School

Donald Coffman, M.M.
Professor of Studio Music and Jazz

John Olah, M.M.
Professor of Instrumental Performance

Gary Keller, M.M.
Adjunct Associate Professor of
Studio Music and Jazz
Six Ira Sullivan performances were analyzed from studio and live recordings spanning the years 1962 to 1998. Sullivan plays different musical instruments on five of the six selections: trumpet, flute, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone (2 selections), and soprano saxophone. Musical facets considered include phrasing (length/placement), melodic contour, lyricism, harmonic phenomenon, and concept of sound. Common musical threads within Sullivan’s improvisations were expected to be found throughout all performances. A call and response dynamic across myriad musical fundamentals such as melody, harmony, and rhythm was found to be present and seems to form a basis for much of Ira Sullivan’s improvisations. This and other broad traits common to Sullivan’s improvisations are presented herein through analysis.
DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to Ira Sullivan. Thanks for all the great stories.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the members of his committee for their assistance and advice over the years: Gary Keller, Whit Sidener, Don Coffman, John Olah, and all University of Miami faculty with whom I have studied.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need for the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Related Literature</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sources for Selections</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Method</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Si-Si - 1962</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background and Performance Setting</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General Description of Performance</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis Overview</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phrase Placement</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Melodic Contour ................................................................. 18
Enclosures ........................................................................ 20
Harmonic Analysis .......................................................... 21
Ornamentation .................................................................. 26
Choice of Instrument ........................................................ 27
Artist’s Comments ............................................................. 27

3 PORTRAIT OF SAL LA ROSA - 1976 .................................. 29
Background and Performance Setting .............................. 29
General Description of Performance ............................... 30
Analysis Overview .......................................................... 30
Phrase / Rhythmic Analysis .............................................. 31
Motifs and Themes .......................................................... 36
Harmonic Analysis .......................................................... 39
Choice of Instrument ........................................................ 41
Artist’s Comments ............................................................. 42

SLIGHTLY ARCHED/SPRING CAN REALLY HANG YOU UP THE
MOST .................................................................................. 43
Background and Performance Setting .............................. 43
General Description of Performance ............................... 44
Analysis Overview .......................................................... 46
Use of Motif ....................................................................... 46
Phrase Length / Fragmentation .............................................. 50
Harmonic Analysis .............................................................. 53
Lyricism .............................................................................. 58
Concept of Sound ................................................................. 61
Artist’s Comments .............................................................. 62

5 AS TIME GOES BY - 1983 ....................................................... 64
Background and Performance Setting .................................. 64
General Description of Performance .................................... 65
Analysis Overview ............................................................. 66
Bebop Vocabulary .............................................................. 66
Blues Vocabulary .............................................................. 70
Rhythmic Variety ............................................................... 74
Lyricism .............................................................................. 77
Concept of Sound .............................................................. 79
Artist’s Comments .............................................................. 80

6 SPRINT – 1983 ................................................................. 82
Background and Performance Setting ............................... 82
General Description of Performance ................................. 82
Analysis Overview ............................................................. 83
Melodic Contour ............................................................... 84
Blues Influence ................................................................. 85
## LIST OF EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Si- Si – 1961, mm. 1-24.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Si- Si – 1961, mm. 35-60.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Si- Si – 1961, mm. 140-49.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Si- Si – 1961, mm. 105-9.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Si- Si – 1961, mm. 127-35.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Si- Si – 1961, mm. 49-52.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Si- Si – 1961, mm. 37-9.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Si- Si – 1961, mm. 150-4.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Si- Si – 1961, mm. 49-52.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Si- Si – 1961, mm. Tritone substitution</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Si- Si – 1961, mm. 78-84.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Si- Si – 1961, mm. 85-8.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Si- Si – 1961, mm. 90-6.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Si- Si – 1961, mm. 146-9.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Portrait of Sal La Rosa – 1976, mm. 83-107.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Portrait of Sal La Rosa – 1976, mm. 171-95.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Portrait of Sal La Rosa – 1976, mm. 57-72.</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Portrait of Sal La Rosa – 1976, Motifs as theme</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Portrait of Sal La Rosa – 1976, Harmonic Structure</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Slightly Arched/Spring – 1976, Drum pattern as motif</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
21 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 22-3.................................................. 47
22 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 39-43.................................................. 48
23 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 69-73.................................................. 48
24 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 80-9.................................................. 49
25 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 100-5.................................................. 49
26 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 264-72.................................................. 50
27 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 44-69 .................................................. 51
28 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 80-99.................................................. 52
29 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 280-304 ............................................. 53
30 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 54-61.................................................. 54
31 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 106-16............................................... 55
32 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 385-404 ............................................. 56
33 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 62-4.................................................. 57
34 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 264-73............................................... 58
35 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 193-98............................................... 59
36 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 199-205............................................. 60
37 *Slightly Arched/Spring* – 1976, mm. 206-11............................................... 61
38 *As Time Goes By* – 1983, mm. 45,60.......................................................... 67
39 *As Time Goes By* – 1983, mm. 10, 25.......................................................... 68
40 *As Time Goes By* – 1983, m. 9 ................................................................. 69
41 *As Time Goes By* – 1983, m. 105................................................................. 70
42 *As Time Goes By* – 1983, m. 55................................................................. 70
43 *As Time Goes By* – 1983, mm. 34-6.......................................................... 71
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Song Title – Year, Mm.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td><em>As Time Goes By</em> – 1983, mm. 119-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td><em>As Time Goes By</em> – 1983, mm. 21, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td><em>As Time Goes By</em> – 1983, Solo start and end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td><em>As Time Goes By</em> – 1983, mm. 108-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td><em>As Time Goes By</em> – 1983, mm. 40-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td><em>As Time Goes By</em> – 1983, mm. 60-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td><em>As Time Goes By</em> – 1983, mm. 102-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td><em>As Time Goes By</em> – 1983, mm. 2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td><em>As Time Goes By</em> – 1983, mm. 53-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td><em>Sprint</em> – 1983, mm. 71-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td><em>Sprint</em> – 1983, mm. 112-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td><em>Sprint</em> – 1983, mm. 163-6, 186-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td><em>Sprint</em> – 1983, mm. 167-70, 180-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td><em>Sprint</em> – 1983, mm. 97-103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td><em>Sprint</em> – 1983, mm. 25-6, 133-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td><em>Sprint</em> – 1983, mm. 79-91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td><em>Sprint</em> – 1983, mm. 102-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td><em>It Was A Very Good Year</em> – 1998, mm. 50-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td><em>It Was A Very Good Year</em> – 1998, mm. 56-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td><em>It Was A Very Good Year</em> – 1998, mm. 32-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td><em>It Was A Very Good Year</em> – 1998, mm. 132-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td><em>It Was A Very Good Year</em> – 1998, mm. 44-57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
66 *It Was A Very Good Year* – 1998, mm. 58-68………………………………. 101

67 *It Was A Very Good Year* – 1998, mm. 78-90………………………………. 102
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The art of improvisation is an important foundation for a larger American art form we call jazz. Although presently improvisation is generally related to such modern forms of music like jazz, some popular music, and some modern orchestral music, the history of music in Western civilizations (post-Greco-Roman civilizations) actually began with virtually all music improvised or performed from memory. Although there is a dearth of actual written historical accounts detailing how these performances occurred in ancient history, some limited written accounts were passed down, and when observed in today’s light, these accounts speak relevantly (in a general sense) to the actual techniques and goals described by modern artists. At the same time, the very general and religious nature of these ancient descriptions may actually obfuscate the nature of truly tangible methods and techniques of creating spontaneous music, since most early accounts were highly subjective descriptions, not explicit studies.

The most reliable extant evidence relates to the spontaneous improvisation of the jubilus, a melismatic flourish found on the last syllable of certain alleluias preserved in the early Christian liturgy. Clear references to this type of improvisation appear in the writings of the early Christian monks. Saint Augustine (354–430) described this jubilus as the musical outpouring of ‘a certain sense of joy without words … the expression of a mind poured forth in joy’. In its melismatic, virtuoso style it is not unlike the vocal
cadenza added centuries later at the cadence of a Baroque aria.¹ Many jazz artists would likely agree that the aforementioned “outpouring” is a good general description of what happens within the musician’s mind during these creative bursts. Many others would say that the description by Saint Augustine is just the tip of the iceberg, as it were, of the enormous range of mental processes and musical interactions that occur during musical improvisation.

These complicated processes and interactions are, of course, a means to an end: a personal artistic expression through musical improvisation. Those who truly master the skill of spontaneous musical improvisation on any instrument are relatively few after considering the number of people who are engaged in musical endeavors. Even rarer are individuals who have mastered the skill on multiple instruments. Ira Sullivan is one of those few who have demonstrated on countless occasions the ability to conjure beautiful creations spontaneously (generally in the jazz idiom) on many instruments. Sullivan creates music with great skill on trumpet, flugel horn, all saxophones (soprano, alto, tenor, etc.), all flutes, and a variety of other less traditional instruments and percussion. He has performed to critical acclaim with other legends such as Charlie Parker, Art Blakey, Roland Kirk, Red Rodney, Jaco Pastorious and J.R. Monterose, to name only a very few. Sullivan’s ability to consistently create improvisations of profound beauty in all styles on many instruments is a very rare gift, and seems to merit further investigation.

Need for the study

Since Ira Sullivan is currently an active performer with his band and many others in the Miami, Florida area, a unique opportunity exists to actually learn what approach(es) the artist uses to create his improvisations. Most of the literature that has been written about Ira Sullivan is in the form of liner notes in the many albums he has recorded, and there is little record of any serious study of his work. Many of these liner notes do include enlightened characterizations of the way Sullivan approaches music in general. The poignancy of some of these descriptions raises the question: has anyone ever tried to get inside (i.e. analyze) these creations? Joel Segal, highly respected owner of the sixty-year-old Jazz Showcase in Chicago (Sullivan’s hometown), says bluntly, “He’s a genius. He would pick up an axe and be fluent on it in a day. Ira’s name was magic [in Chicago]. There was no other musician as idolized as Ira, who played with Bird and Kenny Dorham and who knew all the greats, who had that kind of reputation.”

On another occasion, a Pittsburgh critic said, “Ira Sullivan has inspired scored of young musicians from his earlier Chicago days to his many years in Florida. Though virtually unknown to many jazz fans, he has developed into a sort of cult figure to those who did know him and admire him.”

Considering the lack of any in-depth examinations of Sullivan’s solos, a unique opportunity to cast a new light on what has seemed to be a mysterious process may be realized through Sullivan’s personal comments combined with detailed analysis of his improvisations.

---


Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to examine six Ira Sullivan performances on various instruments, in order to ascertain any consistent tendencies, characteristics, or applied methods to his creative technique. For each selection, comments by Sullivan himself describe his actual thinking process for the performance, or any facet he himself deems relevant. The intention is to examine performances with a wide range of contrasting styles on multiple instruments, so as to fully explore the similarities and differences of Sullivan’s artistic approach to improvisation. The selections for this study will be as follows: Si-Si (trumpet), Portrait of Sal La Rosa (flute), Slightly Arched/Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most (tenor sax), As Time Goes By (alto sax), Sprint (alto sax), It Was A Very Good Year (soprano sax). Transcriptions of the improvisations in the aforementioned selections will assist in understanding and visualizing his creative process.

The aforementioned selections are drawn from performances that occurred between the years 1962 (Si-Si) and 1998 (It Was A Very Good Year). This wide range of dates also allows for identification and analysis of any evolution or change of Sullivan’s style and approach over time, in addition to the previously stated goals. The earliest of the selections, Si-Si, is an established part of the American jazz repertory. Recorded on the 1962 album Bird Lives, Si-Si is a twelve-bar blues form and was selected for its potential to illuminate Sullivan’s approach (on trumpet) to the blues. Portrait of Sal La Rosa is from a 1976 recording and demonstrates Sullivan performing on flute over a fast quasi-samba rhythmic feel. Its non-swing rhythmic base is distinct from the other selections, and his performance on flute produces some very unique and interesting
harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic phenomena. *Slightly Arched/Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most* is from the same 1976 album as the previous selection. It begins as a free improvisation, both rhythmically and harmonically (beginning section of the tune), and segues to a rhythmically stable fast swing section that maintains its free harmonic base. This stands in complete contrast to the first selection (*Si-Si*). The next two selections for analysis are *As Time Goes By*, and *Sprint*, both from the 1983 album *Sprint*. These two selections feature Sullivan on alto saxophone and are, stylistically, polar opposites. *As Time Goes By* is the well-known jazz standard and romantic ballad written in 1931. Sullivan displays an overwhelming sensibility to tradition and pure melodic beauty meriting further analysis of this selection. In contrast, *Sprint* is a very fast swing selection with a very angular, hard-edged melody, and a freer harmonic approach and frenetic feel reminiscent of Ornette Coleman, the well-known avant-garde jazz alto saxophonist. These contrasting selections offer an opportunity to explore common threads that appear in all of Sullivan’s improvisations, regardless of style. The choice of these particular pieces also allows for the investigation of any elements of his improvisation unique to the contrasting styles. The final selection for analysis, *It Was A Very Good Year*, is from the 1998 album *After Hours, Volume 5* and is performed on soprano saxophone. This piece was selected in order to illuminate Sullivan’s tendencies on soprano saxophone.

Simply put, the compositions selected for this study are beautifully performed on multiple instruments at the highest level of musicianship and virtuosity. This essay intends to illuminate some of the reasons as to why and how Sullivan’s creations may be perceived as great works of art.
Related Literature

As previously stated, practically all of the written accounts about Ira Sullivan consist of liner notes, record reviews, and interviews. In none of this literature are his solos broken down and analyzed in detail through transcription. In many of these articles and liner notes, poignant observations are made regarding Sullivan’s creative technique and the aesthetic attributes of his playing. The great majority of these appraisals are gushing with praise. Michael Zwerin of the Village Voice wrote the following:

Ira is a kind of horizontal one-man band. No gimmicks either. Proficient on many horns, he is serious on them all. His trumpet sound is warm and misty on ballads. Faster, he crackles with technical fluency, strong chops and confidence all over the horn. On reeds, he takes in the history of jazz from Ben Webster and Lester Young to Charlie Parker, Zoot Sims, Coltrane, and on through Eric Dolphy and Archie Shepp. He has obviously listened to all of them, learned from all of them, but he has also firmly molded his influences together in what can only be called Ira Sullivan. He shows us that the future of jazz can be contemporary and free, but still responsible and with roots.4

These comments are typical of the record reviews of Sullivan’s recordings. Also typical is the fact that these comments exist almost exclusively in the form of album notes and record reviews but combined with listening to his music, they more than pique the curiosity of this observer.

On the other hand, a multitude of transcription books of the solos from all types of other musical artists, as well as a large quantity of books and dissertations related to the act of musical improvisation have been published. On the process of improvisation itself there exists a wide range of literature, and a variety of strategies have been applied to attempt to explain the process. Many texts consist of little more than the transcriptions themselves, while others do include detailed harmonic and phrase analyses. Many texts

devote much thought to the question of improvisation versus composition - where does one (composition) stop and the other begin? It would be safe to say that philosophical reflections on music outnumber the phenomenological reflections in most printed material, since many people are interested in explaining why certain artworks have value. The means (performance) to this end (the work of art) is of lesser importance. This study is concerned with the means and the route a creator takes in order to arrive at dramatic musical moments whereby the work of art results. I believe that through understanding the performance process (the means), a greater, more fulfilling understanding of the art can be captured.

This study resembles what may be referred to as a phenomenology study. Other studies contained in literary sources (monographs, methods texts) have employed this technique (none, of course, with regard to Sullivan) in the exploration of works of art of all genres. Roman Ingarden’s *Ontology of the Work of Art* purports to be a phenomenology of art works (music, paintings, architecture, and film), in which the aesthetic questions are of secondary importance to the realism of the performance. Phenomology is the attempt to bring phenomena to light and, on the basis of the phenomena themselves, to develop a logos – a structure or theory.\(^5\) While I would not call this a phenomenological study in the strict sense, I have endeavored to observe the phenomenon of creation during these chosen Sullivan pieces and, in combination with my analysis and explanation by the artist, attempted to identify the specific approaches utilized.

Research Questions

Upon completion of all analyses, a series of questions were used to discern any creative methodologies. The questions asked were as follows:

1) What facets of Sullivan’s performance remained consistent through time (between 1962-1998) and which facets may have evolved, or simply changed?

2) How does the instrument affect the creative approach?

3) Does the actual piece that is being performed affect which instrument is chosen for the presentation?

4) Is there a common thread of harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic approach to the selections included in the study?

5) How does Ira Sullivan himself describe his approach, both in general terms and specific to each selection?

The last question was addressed through direct conversations with Ira Sullivan.

Sources for selections

The selections mentioned earlier were taken from recordings made during various times and locations in Sullivan’s musical career. Si-Si is from the album Bird Lives and was recorded in Chicago in 1962. Portrait of Sal La Rosa and Slightly Arched/Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most are both from the album Ira Sullivan, the legendary 1976 Miami Horizon records release. As Time Goes By and Sprint are both from the 1983 album Sprint, recorded in New York City. It Was A Very Good Year is from the 1998 album After Hours and was recorded in Minneapolis. Sullivan was accompanied by
ensembles of various size and instrumentation that are detailed in the treatment of each selection.

Method

The primary tool that was used to analyze the music of Sullivan was transcription. For the purposes of this study, one may define transcription as the act of fixing in notated form music that is entirely or partly improvised, or for which no written score exists; also the resulting notated version itself.\(^6\) I personally executed the transcription using a Yamaha upright piano (or similar keyboard instrument), or flute, or saxophone. The basis for my choice of which instrument to use to transcribe depended largely on which was most readily available, since the transcription took place in different settings. This variation in settings did not affect the accuracy since computer software was used to allow accurate identification of pitch and rhythm. The software program Peak\(^{\text{TM}}\)LE 5.2 was implemented for these purposes. This program allows the slowing of musical passages without any discernable change in pitch, allowing for an accurate transcription when otherwise it would be very difficult to distinguish obscured sounds and notate them. The objective is to create an accurate notation of musical events.

For many selections, the transcription was rendered by simply listening to the selection at normal speed, imitating the pitches on an instrument (unless one possesses absolute pitch, which I do not), and notating the pitch and rhythm. When a passage presented itself as particularly difficult to discern (a densely packed group of rapidly

succeeding notes), the computer software was employed to slow the selection. To create the notation, the computer program Sibelius™ 5 was be used. As each note and its rhythm was identified, it was entered into the computer and a graphic representation in standard written musical form resulted. This allowed for an easy visual capture of the music so as to facilitate analysis.

The data analyses consisted of examination of melodic phenomena as they were related to the harmony being played in each song. The most relevant aspects of each performance were identified and presented through written example. After each piece was analyzed, broad trends, or lack thereof, that seem consistent throughout all of the musical selections were identified. Since the styles of the selections for this study vary widely, naturally each piece may possess unique elements. These unique aspects will be examined and compared. The research questions mentioned earlier were examined in light of the data analysis.

In addition to these more traditional tactics for musical analysis, Ira Sullivan himself will provide comments on each musical selection and the approach used for each performance. A very general question will first be addressed: What if any specific approach was employed during this performance? Beyond this question, Sullivan will be at liberty to comment on any specific characteristics that he believes are most relevant to the musical performance. Any conclusions drawn in this study have been subject to approval and agreement of Ira Sullivan himself, since a more authoritative source than the actual artist is not possible. This resulted in a truly illuminating methodology, since prioritizations of musical elements have been exposed through these
descriptions/explanations. This verbal input from Ira Sullivan has been transcribed and is included at the end of each chapter.

This study may prove to serve various functions. As a transcription source it may be used by instrumentalists as a technical study. Also, from a performance standpoint, the transcriptions may be used as a valuable source of vocabulary for other jazz artists. The melodic analyses may also serve as a study in phrase structure that may be applied in a student's own playing since Sullivan is known for his command of phrasing, which is an important element in his artistic process. The explanations by Sullivan will shed light on the processes at work inside the mind of a musician while creating at the highest level of artistic performance. This can provide deep insight into the musical priorities of Sullivan and serve to educate other musicians as to how they might organize their own thoughts during musical performances. Since most of the pre-existing literature is mere description of Sullivan’s music, this more detailed study may serve to lay the groundwork for even more extensive expositions of the music of this living legend.
Background and Performance Setting

Ira Sullivan’s version of Si-Si was released in 1962 on the Vee-Jay label under the title *Ira Sullivan and the Chicago Jazz Quintet – Bird Lives!*. The album was later re-issued on compact disc on the Koch Jazz label (KOC-CD-8553). The album was recorded live at the Bird House in Chicago on March 12, 1962, the anniversary of Charlie Parker’s death. This recording was billed as a Charlie Parker memorial concert, following a tradition established in many cities across America following Parker’s death on March 12, 1955. The recording of this live event was coordinated by Joe Segal, owner of the Jazz Showcase in Chicago. Accompanying Ira, who plays trumpet and flugelhorn on this session, is the Chicago Jazz Quintet, consisting of Nicky Hill on tenor, Jodie Christian on piano, Don Garrett on bass, and Dorel Anderson on drums.

*Si-Si* is a twelve-bar blues written and first recorded in 1951 by saxophonist Charlie Parker for the Savoy record label. It subsequently became a standard within the jazz idiom, and has been performed and recorded by many different artists. Upon its release, it helped codify the angular, highly syncopated, so-called Bebop style that emerged in the United States during the 1940s. By the time of this recording in 1962, Sullivan had long mastered the language of this genre of American folk music, now elevated to chamber music.
General Description of Performance

Sullivan’s interpretation of *Si-Si* is true to the memory to which it is dedicated in that the interpretation is typical to Bebop. His overall intention seems to be to play in a hard-swinging style, with the opportunity to lengthen solos in a way often impossible on studio recordings, where time limitations are often a priority. Each of the soloists takes at least ten choruses of improvisation.

The version of *Si-Si* examined in this essay is played at a faster tempo than original Charlie Parker version; 230 beats per minute versus around 186 beats per minute on the original. The solo order is Nicky Hill on tenor sax, followed by Jodie Christian on piano, Don Garrett on bass, and Ira Sullivan on cup-muted trumpet. After Sullivan’s solo he proceeds to trade fours with the tenor sax, followed by four bar trading between the drums, himself, and the tenor. The head out is played without repeat.

Analysis Overview

Investigation of the major musical phenomenon within Sullivan’s performance on *Si-Si* will include analysis of phrase length, phrase placement, melodic contour, use of melodic “enclosures”, harmonic phenomenon, ornamentation, and choice of instrument. Later in this essay, when other tunes of diverging styles are analyzed, relevant attributes different than these may better serve the goal of illuminating Sullivan’s method. Examination of these major musical facets will assist in later establishing any larger trends within the creative approach of Sullivan.
Phrase Length

Sullivan’s improvisation on Si-Si exhibits great variety in the phrase lengths. Since the blues is a rigid 12-bar structure, traditional blues phrasing generally employs three phrases per chorus, or one phrase per four bars. Sullivan’s also plays three phrases in most choruses, but their lengths vary greatly and cross bar-lines and the harmony, as is typical in Bebop performances.

Sullivan’s first two choruses, as seen in Example 1, contain three phrases of varying length in each chorus. The very first phrase of the first chorus spans from beat 3 in measure 2 to beat 2 of measure 3, a total of three beats. Phrase 2 and Phrase 3 span four and one-half bars each. Phrase 1 of chorus 2 also spans four and one-half bars. Phrase 2 of chorus 2 spans almost five full bars, and Phrase 3 of chorus 2 spans two bars and one-eighth beats. As the solo progresses, even more variety is introduced.

In Sullivan’s fifth and six choruses, the phrase lengths increase and the pre-established 3 phrases per choruses pattern is interrupted (see Example 2). The first phrase of chorus five actually begins in the last two bars of the preceding chorus and spans a total of seven and one-half bars. The next phrase is more fragmentary; under one bar long. The next phrase begins in bar 45 of the solo (middle of chorus 5) and continues until bar 56, a total of eleven bars. The concluding phrase of chorus six is 2 bars in length. In this example, there are a total of four phrases over the course of two choruses, the shortest under one bar in length and the longest eleven bars in length.

This mixture of phrase length exists throughout the solo. The majority of Sullivan’s 13 choruses contain 3 phrases within the chorus, though he creates great variety within that framework. The exceptions to this pattern follow the pattern
established in Example 2, where a two-chorus group contains a total of 4 phrases. This occurs, in addition to choruses 4 and 5, across choruses 7 through 8.

Example 1. *Si-Si* – 1962, First two choruses of solo.
Example 2. Si-Si – 1962, Chorus four and five of solo.

Chorus 12 and 13 contain a phrase whose length may be interpreted in two different ways. It could be argued that these two choruses, seen in Example 3, are phrased like those in Example 2, where a very long phrase starts in one chorus and continues through half of the next chorus. However, the very strong harmonic cadence, with
Sullivan landing on the root of the chord directly on beat 1 at the top of chorus 13 (m. 144), could be argued to be the beginning of a new phrase. Harmony (i.e. cadences) is also important in projecting these groupings to the listener.

Example 3. *Si-Si* – 1962, mm. 140-49.

**Phrase Placement**

Sullivan exhibits similar variety in the placement of his phrases within the twelve-bar form. This characteristic is also a large part of the vocabulary of Bebop. A more traditional interpretation would generally place each phrase consistently within one of the four-bar groups of the twelve-bar form: mm. 1-4, 5-8, and 9-12.

In the previous Example 1, the first phrase is indeed placed within the first four-bar group. However, phrases 2 and 3 of the chorus are not placed within the 2nd and 3rd four-bar groups respectively. Phrase 2 actually starts in measure 4 and crosses the bar-line to enter the second four-bar group (mm. 5-9 of the chorus). Phrase 3 actually
starts inside the second four-bar group (bar 8) and crosses the bar-line into the third four-bar group. Phrase 1 of Chorus 2 also starts within the last bar of the preceding chorus and crosses the bar-line into Chorus 2. Phrase 2 of Chorus 2 begins on the downbeat of bar 3 and crosses the bar-line into the second four-bar group of Chorus 2. This kind of across-the-bar phrase placement occurs in every single chorus of Sullivan’s solo and is essential in Sullivan’s ability to perpetuate interest in a lengthy solo over a predictable form.

Melodic Contour

Throughout this performance of Si-Si, Sullivan markedly varies the contour, or shape, of his improvised phrases. In the preceding Examples 2 and 3, one sees smoothly delivered lines in which voice-leading and connected ideas seem to be the primary concern. Whenever Sullivan plays a particularly long string of notes as he does in these examples, he employs frequent change of direction within the line. In addition to maintaining interest in the line, frequent change of direction enables the performer to lengthen the line and still play within a comfortable range on the instrument. The lines in Examples 2 and 3 span over a range of one and one-half octaves; A above the staff in measure 45 to bottom line Eb in measure 54. The line gently weaves as it falls gracefully from the high A at the beginning of the phrase, down to a lower range at the beginning of chorus five (measure 49). Sullivan then re-energizes the phrase by quickly navigating an ascending arpeggio, back to the higher register in measure 51 before gracefully falling to the low Eb at the conclusion of the phrase.

In other instances, Sullivan relies on a static idea based on one note, as can be seen in Example 4 (mm.105-9 of solo) and Example 5 (mm. 127-35).
In order to develop this motive of a repeated note, Sullivan masterfully combines the two ideas of stasis and linear movement to create a new theme. The beginning of chorus 10 consists of the static note repetition melded with a linear string of notes (Example 6).
**Enclosures**

Sullivan also makes frequent use of what may be termed “enclosures”. An enclosure occurs is when a chord tone is preceded, or enclosed, by neighbor tones from above and below. Enclosures are effective tools for achieving extension of the melodic line and placing notes on strong beats. This extension of the line serves to enhance and beautify the improvisation. Often, brief tension is created by using chromatic approach tones, while at other times notes from the scale diatonic to the key are used. In Example 7, beat 3 of each bar in the example is “enclosed”, either by chromatic or diatonic approach tones. It is interesting to note that in measure 38, a slightly different type of enclosure occurs since the note enclosing beat 3 from below is anticipated slightly and actually occurs on the upbeat of beat 1. One could even analyze bar 38 as containing a double-enclosure, as the notes on beat 1 actually enclose the notes on beat 2, in turn enclosing the C on beat 3.

Example 7. *Si-Si* – 1962, mm. 37-9, Enclosures.

Other enclosures can be found in measures 70-1, 75, 84-5, 121-22, and 145. The enclosures themselves demonstrate their melodic impact when they become the center of attention in the very last statement in the solo (Example 8 mm.150-54). In this example, beats 2 and 4 of each bar are enclosed, with the exception being beats 3 and 4 of bar 152,
where a simple half-step lower neighbor approach is used with the same rhythm as the motif. This slight variation breaks the pattern in a creative, perfectly placed moment. Again, it is his ability to deliver this type of variety, even within a single concept consisting of only a few measures, that creates an ever-interesting improvised solo.

Example 8. *Si-Si* – 1962, mm. 150-4.

As is the case with phrase lengths, Sullivan utilizes a wide range of musical tools to spin a highly creative, consistently interesting and logically developed solo. An artistic, coherent improvised solo of any type can prove difficult to construct. The mastery with which Sullivan wields the aforementioned melodic tools in *Si-Si* suggests an “effortless effort”, or a skill so highly developed so as to be second nature.

**Harmonic Analysis**

The harmonic accompaniment to the melody statement of this performance of *Si-Si* is a standard twelve-bar blues chord progression. There are many variations and permutations of this progression that occur in the performance during the improvisations,
but the melody statement uses a harmony consistent with the original Charlie Parker version. as follows (bar numbers above chord symbols):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>ii- V</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>vi - I7</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>iii-7 VI7</td>
<td>ii-7</td>
<td>V7</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>ii-7 V7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sullivan and the other soloists elect to navigate the harmony of Si-Si using myriad substitutions. This is typical of most Bebop style performances of the blues and the practice was well-established by the time of Sullivan’s performance. There are no two choruses during Ira’s solo to which identical harmonic progressions are applied by the entire group. As such the solo maintains coherence and forward motion. As was true with Sullivan’s melodic concept, the manner in which new combinations of harmonic ideas are created with pre-existing vocabulary creates the artistic result.

After the melody statement, Sullivan immediately begins an evolution from simpler to more complex harmonic ideas. In his first five choruses, Sullivan patiently adheres fairly close to the harmony suggested by the head. In chorus six (letter [ on transcription), an alternate harmony based on descending whole steps is played by the piano in the first three measures with a tri-tone substitution (B7 instead of F7) employed in bar four (Example 9). From this point in Sullivan’s solo, every chorus except the very last incorporates harmonies other than the original progression, though some choruses deviate only slightly. The use of these harmonic deviations may be considered part of standard Bebop language; yet a variety of creative combinations that creates interest.

One device utilized frequently by Sullivan is a semitone (half-step) harmonic “side-step” as seen in the second measures of choruses six (mm. 61-3), seven (mm. 73-5) and nine (mm. 97-8, Example 10). It can also be considered the tri-tone substitution for
the V chord, C7. This device is effective as an unexpected deviation and adds a sudden, brief brightness to the texture which is rapidly resolved back to the tonic of F. It also serves to add a harmonic “hump” to the first four bars which the soloist rides up, then back down, creating momentum for the change to the IV chord in the fifth bar.

Example 9. Si-Si – 1962, mm. 49-52.


Sullivan also borrows from another blues progression called a “Bird Blues”, named after and made famous by Charlie Parker in his 1951 composition “Blues For Alice”. This progression applies a more active harmonic rhythm over the same twelve-bar form. In the last seven measure of chorus seven, (mm. 78-84) Sullivan applies the harmony from a “Bird Blues”, which consists of the chromatic ii-V progressions as seen
in Example 11. Technically, the last two bars employ tri-tone substitutions in order to create the chromatic chord movement for the turnaround while the original “Bird Blues” utilized a iii - VI7 – ii - V7 turnaround, but this does not diminish the specific “Bird Blues” effect. This progression was an integral part of the Bebop language and is integral to the vocabulary of multitudes of jazz musicians.

Example 11. $S_{1-1}$ – 1962, “Bird-Blues” harmonic sequence, mm. 78-84.

It is interesting to note the piano accompaniment suggests some substitutions that differ from those used by Sullivan. In the transcription of $S_{1-1}$, the chord symbols represent what is being played by the piano. A very clear example of juxtaposed harmony is in the first four measures of chorus 8 (mm. 85-8). In Example 12, one can see (and hear on the recording) that the piano accompaniment moves through the cycle of fifths while Sullivan constantly implies F7 until the last two beats of measure 88, where he implies F7 altered with the use of the #5, #9 and b9 (altered chord-tones).

![Chord Chart]

However, except for the very brief moment where Sullivan plays an F♯ against the Gb7, there are no extreme dissonances created in the preceding example. Sullivan’s solo, a fairly inside Bebop line, actually fits well within the pianist’s more-complex accompaniment. The result of the juxtaposition is that on occasion Sullivan lands on a chord tone of the accompaniment and sometimes he lands on a color or altered tone. In this case, while both musicians are using different vocabulary, the origins of both musicians’ ideas are drawn from the same language. Their distinct ideas in this exact moment create a harmonic counterpoint that fits well within the parameters of the Bebop language and, in the end, complement each other.

The spontaneous nature of improvisation in which all members of the ensemble operate with a degree of freedom necessarily means that there will be moments in which an accompaniment may not be an exact fit to the solo. These moments are not to be evaluated in isolation, but rather in the larger context of the creative flow. Certain harmonic dissonances add flavor, excitement, and variety as the musicians react to the acoustic feedback of the moment to develop further ideas. Mastery of the management of these moments, as is displayed in Sullivan’s recording of *Si-Si*, requires highly developed “ears” (i.e. listening/reaction skills) and musicianship of the highest caliber.
Ornamentation

Sullivan’s use of ornamentation is worthy of a brief examination, since it is also a typical ingredient of the Bebop style. Liberal use of grace notes, turns, and note-bending can be seen throughout the transcription. As suggested by the term “ornamentation”, these devices achieve the intended purpose of decorating the solo line and adding flavor. In some instances the ornaments are actually an integral part of the melody and add a playfulness its basic shape and rhythm (Examples 13 and 14). Heavy use of this type of ornamentation can be heard in Sullivan’s recording of Si-Si. Many grace notes and turns can also spotted easily with even the most cursory glance at the transcription, a testament to their prevalence within Sullivan’s personal style.

Example 13. Si-Si – 1962, mm. 90-6.


Ornamentation is not exclusive to Bebop by any means, it is also prevalent in European music of the Baroque era and many types of folk music, but in Si-Si, Sullivan uses the tool in a manner that fits perfectly within this style. Other works to be examined
later in this essay will also exhibit his liberal use of ornamentation and establish it as an important tool in Sullivan’s musical toolbox, no matter the style.

Choice of Instrument

In this case, the choice of trumpet for this performance of *Si-Si* was not based on any profound contemplation. Though at the time of this recording Sullivan was proficient on trumpet and saxophone, he was accompanied by the Chicago jazz quintet in this performance, and they already had tenor saxophonist Nicky Hill. This fact was reinforced by the occasion for the concert, which was a memorial concert for Charlie Parker. The original recording was played by a two-horn front line of trumpet and saxophone, and in order to remain true to the spirit of the original recording, the same instrumentation was chosen.

Artist’s Comments

Ira Sullivan’s thoughts on *Si-Si* are as follows:

That was my Chicago band from around 1956, ’57, and this would have been some of the best players, of course… Chicago was replete with fine players of all [types]. We had seven or eight “first string” drummers of top quality. If you couldn’t get any of them, then you’d call the “second string” drummers. If you couldn’t get any of them, you could call the ”third string” drummers, who may not play the slickest 4’s or 8’s or solos, but man could they swing. ‘Time was of the essence’, you know? So we were fortunate [in Chicago].

This band was made up of Nicky Hill on tenor, Donald Garret on bass, Jodie Christian on piano, and either Dorel Anderson or Wilbur Campbell on drums, depending who could make it to rehearsal. We saw each other once every two to three weeks, usually if we had a gig or a session. Sometimes we just got together at the house to learn *Si-Si* or a tune like that and we did a lot of our own stuff [on it]. So that was the band at that time.

[For this performance], someone had bought a converted theater, it was on the second floor, on the near-north side of Chicago…near lots of clubs that are now famous because of comedians like Shelley Berman, Bob Newhart, Gabe
Kaplan, where they “cut their eye-teeth” at these clubs. So this was Rush Street.
The Playboy club was around there, the Tender Trap, the Cloister Inn, where people like Lenny Bruce used to appear.
So the Bird House was a converted theater. Someone had bought it when it went out of business and converted it to this club called the Bird House, a very nice club: big stage, good sound, nice dressing rooms. So this concert was a memorial to Charlie Parker, and I designed the [album] cover. That [brick] wall that I wrote “Bird Lives” on was the kind of wall I’d see on the south side of Chicago [all the time].
We got together and recorded [this performance] live, and of course, I had to have both my favorite drummers on there, that’s why Dorel on some of it and Wilbur’s on some of it. I hadn’t listened to Si-Si in a long time, and it sounded to me, when I listened to it, like it might have been Dorel on that one.
[One time, a piano player asked me to cue the bridge of a tune], he said, “Let me know where that is”, so I let him know. Then he said, “but I thought”. And I said, “Are you thinking while you’re playing?” Because to me, it’s always been a process of letting go of thought. The very idea of getting “free”, and creativity, and creating, is to not be tied down by any factors [that] influence you. Now when you’re young, of course, you’re copping licks and such, but I did that when I was six years old. My uncle, when I was 10, taught me to play Impressionistic music, so I guess that influence, and falling in love with classical music when I was 10 years old and hearing not just jazz, you know… Not being tied down to the swing beat and everything [only] jazz people had to say, you know, sort of expanded my horizons.
Chapter 3

PORTRAIT OF SAL LA ROSA - 1976

Background and Performance Setting

*Portrait of Sal La Rosa* is a Dolph Castellano composition from the album entitled simply *Ira Sullivan*, produced by John Snyder and released in 1976 on the Horizon label of A&M Records (SP 706). This recording was made on December 13, 1975, at Criteria Studios in Miami, Florida, and is the only known release of this particular composition. Sullivan is featured here on flute, and is accompanied by Jaco Pastorius on what was a new custom-made “baritone-bass” guitar, Joe Diorio on electric guitar, Steve Bagby on drums, and Don Alias on congas. During the guitar solo, Sullivan can also be heard playing the afuche, an African hand percussion instrument related to what is more commonly known as the cabasa. According to Sullivan, Joe Diorio studied art at Miami-Dade Community College in the early seventies with a teacher named Sal La Rosa, and it is for this teacher that the song is titled. Sullivan mentions this in his comments at the end of this chapter.

According to Sullivan and expounded upon later in his comments, the inclusion of Pastorius on bass and Alias on percussion was not originally planned on the session. All other pieces on this album except *Portrait of Sal La Rosa* were recorded as a quartet: Sullivan accompanied by guitar, piano, and drums. According to Sullivan, the configuration without bass was how these musicians had often performed around Miami in the years prior to this recording. They were already accustomed to creating extemporaneously with each other and had honed their group concept into a distinct sound. On this tune, however, Pastorius and Alias arrived at the studio very late at night.
as the session was winding down. Pastorius had recently been given an instrument, made by a fan, which resembled the acoustic, fat-bodied bass guitars used in Mexican mariachi bands. Pastorius insisted that Sullivan hear the instrument, sometimes called a baritone guitar, or baritone-bass guitar. It was then decided to record *Portrait of Sal La Rosa* with bass and percussion. This first performance was ultimately released on the album. Sullivan describes this session in his comments.

**General Description of Performance**

*Portrait of Sal La Rosa* contrasts markedly from the first selection analyzed in this essay. While *Si-Si* is a traditional Bebop swing tune, *Portrait* is a modal composition with long, static chords played over a fast samba. The overall feel is melodically loose but rhythmically tight as Sullivan blurs harmonic changes over the fast groove, and the song has a dreamlike quality as the flute plays lyrical passages over the aggressive accompaniment. It begins with a rubato introduction with flute and bass, then directly into improvisation by Sullivan over the fast samba groove as the guitar joins the drums in accompaniment. According to Sullivan there was no written melody, just harmony. Sullivan’s solo is followed by that of D’Orio on guitar, then Sullivan re-enters and improvises more until the tune dissolves into a soft ending, consistently maintaining the intense rhythmic drive regardless of dynamic level.

**Analysis Overview**

Due to the very different style of *Portrait of Sal La Rosa* as compared to *Si-Si*, some musical characteristics that are present in *Si-Si* may be less relevant to Sullivan’s
musical approach in *Portrait*. In his comments pertaining to *Portrait of Sal La Rosa*, Sullivan mentions lyricism as having utmost priority. A melodic phrase analysis is therefore important, as it was in *Si-Si*, to the investigation of lyrical objectives and results. The rhythmic components contained within the phrases are also very important in this piece, and for that reason phrasing and its rhythmic attributes will be addressed simultaneously. Other facets in *Portrait* to be considered are his use of motifs, harmonic phenomenon and choice of instrument.

**Phrase / Rhythmic Analysis**

Examination of Sullivan’s improvised solo on *Portrait* reveals a very interesting rhythmic thread running throughout the solo. This common thread relates to two distinct rhythmic techniques that Sullivan applies to his melodic lines once the samba groove is established. The first technique may be called “blurred rhythm”. The second may be called “concise rhythm”. The “blurred” phrase sections consist of melodic material that floats across measure lines and projects little rhythmic pulse. The “concise” phrase sections consist of melodic material that locks strongly into the rhythmic patterns played by the bass and drums and projects a strong pulse. Sullivan constantly alternates from “blurred” to “concise”. The trend is established immediately at the beginning of the song and can be seen in the transcription. Sullivan begins his solo with notes placed exactly within the time through measure 34, where a more nebulous time feel is projected by Sullivan is played in measures 34-44. Sullivan then returns to more exact note placement, again projecting a strong temporal pulse. This change from one rhythmic idea to the
other, then back again, continues and takes on a call-and-response dynamic. Sullivan answers his own phrases of loose time with one phrase of “tight”, or explicit time.

A breakdown of Sullivan’s solo into “blurred” and “concise” phrases is represented below in Table 1. There are a few instances where certain measure may be considered transitional and are indicated as such, but the general trend incorporates clearly identifiable, fairly sudden moments of change from “blurred” to “concise” and back again.

Table 1. Portrait of Sal La Rosa – 1976, Rhythmic scheme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure numbers</th>
<th>Applied rhythmic concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-3</td>
<td>concise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-8</td>
<td>still concise, yet a bit looser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-35</td>
<td>concise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-54</td>
<td>blurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-61</td>
<td>concise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62-3</td>
<td>slight blur over measure line, returns to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>concise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64-85</td>
<td>concise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86-103</td>
<td>blurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104-111</td>
<td>concise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112-118 (beat 2)</td>
<td>blurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118 (beat 3)-129(beat 3)</td>
<td>concise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129 (beat 4)-134</td>
<td>blurred</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further application of this technique can be seen in Example 15. One can clearly hear (and see in the transcription) the string of cleanly delineated (concise) eighth notes spanning measures 83 through the first two beats of measure 86. Sullivan then enters a period of blurred time that lasts through measure 104; bar lines are less relevant to the melodic material as the line floats across them and notes are placed loosely within the
groove. The end of the blurred section is also clear as Sullivan returns to a clean string of eight notes placed solidly inside the samba groove.

The second section of Sullivan’s improvised solo, after the guitar solo, is a bit different but remains consistent in that the two rhythmic approaches are applied. The distinctions, however, are more ambiguous as more phrases exhibit a mixture between the two approaches. Particularly interesting is the first 25 measures of section two of Sullivan’s solo in which this mixture is observable. Sullivan enters cleanly on the downbeat of measure 173, then plays loosely until precisely hitting the downbeat of measure 180 (Example 16). Immediately, Sullivan loosens the feel, then again hits the downbeat of measure 188 precisely.

In effect, what Sullivan is doing is signaling the beginning of each eight measure section with a firm rhythmic marker, which coincides with each change in harmony. In between these demarcations, Sullivan stretches and manipulates the time just a bit so as to loosen the feel. He does not completely blur the time during these “bridges” between phrases, he simply lightens his pulse by a small amount. Though subtle, it is within this subtlety that the artistry lies. The subtle undulations of rhythmic concept are quite difficult to execute in a coherent manner. These variations in the rhythmic feel avoid monotony of texture because the rhythmic counterpoint is constantly morphing. The end result is a kind of musical inertia and a solo that never fails to maintain forward momentum.

**Motifs and Themes**

Sullivan frequently establishes a call-and-response dynamic with himself through his use of motifs (also known as motives). These short melodic ideas are developed via the establishment of the idea (call) and its answer (response). A motif can be defined as a short musical idea, melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, or any combination of these three. A motif may be of any size, and is most commonly regarded as the shortest subdivision of a theme or phrase that still maintains its identity as an idea. The development of a motif into a longer theme provides a great source of melodic material for Sullivan, as can be observed in Example 18. Motif I (as indicated in Example 17) may be considered to be both a melodic and rhythmic motif. The rhythm in measure 57 spans almost a full six measures and meanders in a rising melodic direction. It’s answer begins in measure 66 and continues until measure 71. The response, beginning in measure 67, is based on the same rhythm but the line descends. The rising rhythmic line of the call is connected, or bridged, to the response with a long, sustained high note. This technique develops the simple rhythmic and melodic motif stated in the first few measures of the example into a larger theme that covers almost sixteen measures. The result is a phrase structure in which musical non sequiturs are practically nonexistent.

---

Example 17. Portrait of Sal La Rosa – 1976, mm. 57-72.

On another occasion, Sullivan repeats specific material from an established motif in a manner that is not enveloped in a call-and-response dynamic, but rather briefly appears and re-appears over large section of the solo (Example 19). In this case, the motif can be more accurately described as a device for creating coherence through repeated reference to a unifying theme. A theme can be defined as the musical material on which part or all of a work is based, usually having a recognizable melody and sometimes perceivable as a complete musical expression in itself, independent of the work to which it belongs.\(^8\) One easily identifiable recurring motif which becomes a larger theme in Sullivan’s solo is first established in measures 83-5 as seen in Example 19. The motif is varied and repeated at the end of measure 125, then again in measure 204.


While the material following the fist two beats of each variation of Motif II is a bit different in each example, the rhythm and the general shape of the line are very similar. Each version follows a similar construction: an angular musical line followed by a long string of smooth linear movement covering multiple measures. This motif appears at three places during the solo, two times in the first section and once in the second section. Each recurrence is fairly brief, and while thematic sounding, Motif II does not dominate the majority of the solo. That does not diminish the value of Motif II as an important unifying device, however, since each version is varied and provides continuity without being redundant. Its placement in sections that are widely separated by contrasting material assists in tying together the larger sections.
Harmonic Analysis

*Portrait of Sal La Rosa* may be considered a modal composition since its structure is based on sustained chords that are not resolved in the standard “ii-V”, or dominant to tonic, manner as is common in traditional jazz standards like Si-Si. A quick glance at the transcription reveals the sustained, mostly eight measure phrases, many of which are Lydian in quality, with priority given not to dominant-to-tonic activity but to the textures solicited through the unique, broad, static, sound of each chord and the interaction of the musicians. The harmonic rhythm quickens in pace near the end of the form of the tune throughout this interpretation, creating impetus for the launch into the next chorus.

Pastorius plays very active bass patterns throughout, and Alias’s congas fit well within the groove to add an additional, intensely active layer.

The nature of the harmony in *Portrait* is responsible for much of the “dreamy” nature of the performance. Dissonances between the flute of Sullivan and the harmonic accompaniment of Pastorius and Diorio create very colorful and intense sonorities. From the very first measure the mood is set as Pastorius plays an aggressive, sustained E7 altered chord (C₇ on top) on bass and Sullivan enters with an equally aggressive high F#, or natural ninth, and ends his first rubato statement in measure four on C#, the ⁹₁₃.

The tension the C# creates, while effectively creating a very intense sonority, also foreshadows the next sustained chord played by Pastorius, a G Lydian chord. Sullivan proceeds to improvise freely over the G Lydian and subsequent F Lydian chords before he and Pastorius return to the E7 altered chord, over which Sullivan plays F₇, the b9.

Like a knot suddenly becoming untangled, the harmony stabilizes as Pastorius plays pure open fifths based on E₉ (E B E) on the bass as Sullivan plays a loud high E. This
harmonic stasis remains through the establishment of the fast tempo and well into the first eight measure of Sullivan’s solo before harmonic motion is resumed. Refer to Appendix B, the transcription of *Portrait* to observe this sequence of musical events.

Sullivan and Pastorius effectively create an introduction that serves to ratchet up harmonic tension until its sudden release into the tempo. The long period of stasis after the rubato introduction acts as an interlude before the resumption of harmonic motion in the bass as Sullivan begins improvising. This post-introduction vamp and has the added benefit of offering repose after the very intense rubato introduction.

In order to understand how Sullivan and the ensemble develop the tune, Example 20 displays the 48-measure harmonic form of *Portrait of Sal La Rosa* as performed. It should be noted that this form and harmonic scheme is not immediately apparent as the groove begins. In fact, it is not until the second chorus of Sullivan’s improvisation that the form and harmony become clear.


No. of measures: 8 8 8 8 4 4 8
|| C Lydian | F Lydian | Bb Lydian | AΔ9 | Am | Ab7+11 | G sus ||

As the harmony moves out of the period of stasis (the vamp after the rubato introduction) and the groove is established, Pastorius plays fairly free harmony for the majority of the first chorus. The harmony solidifies at measure 56 (letter D on transcription), where Diorio enters and begins accompanying the solo. The top of the form after Sullivan’s first chorus is marked by the first clear C Lydian chord at measure
71 (letter $\text{F}$ in transcription). Sullivan’s solo entrance at letter $\text{A}$ up until letter $\text{D}$ might best be characterized as a group improvisation in preparation for the formal structure. Since it is the beginning of the improvisation, the group approached the section freely and worked their way from a more freely framed improvisation to a slightly more rigid structure: an approximately 48 measure form. It is interesting to note that the first chorus (letter $\text{A}$ up to letter $\text{F}$) actually last 52 measures, further evidence that the first chorus is approached freely until the entrance of the guitar. After letter $\text{F}$, the tune adheres more closely to the 48-measure form (Example 19), but seems to maintain its free approach throughout since there are variations in the exact number of measures from chorus to chorus.

While the harmonic scheme becomes fairly clear, there is always a free component to the accompaniment and solos. Occasionally a chord change will be delayed, anticipated, or substituted. In the first chorus of the second section of Sullivan’s solo, for example, the band plays E major instead of the usual A major in measure 95, and the phrase is actually only 3 measures long. Again, it would seem that the harmonic structure serves as a guide that may be freely altered as the musicians improvise. Sullivan’s comments will explain the approach used on this modal composition.

**Choice of Instrument**

Sullivan’s comments address the circumstances under which Sullivan learned flute. Sullivan mentions specifically Eric Dolphy’s recording of *Glad To Be Unhappy.*
Artist’s Comments

Sullivan describes the title of Portrait other aspects of this session in the following comments:

This song was dedicated to Joe Diorio’s art teacher. Joe was studying art at Miami-Dade Community College, and I didn’t even know Joe could paint, but he said, “Yeah, I’m getting interested in painting.” .. Much like Tony Bennet, you know, Miles Davis, they got into this and became quite good. Anyway, Sal La Rosa was [Joe’s] teacher, and Sal asked us to come over to his class at Miami-Dade College, so the two of us went over there and set up. La Rosa wanted the students to get free. We weren’t posing for them. He wanted them to paint to the music. What did the music make them think of creating? That was the idea. So that was Sal. We did this probably at least a year or two before we came up with this [tune].

[When] we recorded it, the studio, they asked us to go [into] the studio to record...[though] I wanted to record live at the [Unitarian] church. They asked us to go to Criteria studios, which I was very familiar with. Mack Emmerman, a good friend, and I had recorded there for a long time with different people I knew down here [in Miami]. We’d go in there about one or two o’clock in the morning after a gig, and he’d set us up to record stuff.

We went in that night, we recorded, and started around 9 o’clock. Next thing we knew, it was four in the morning, which for us was not unusual. All of a sudden, the doorbell rings, and in comes Jaco Pastorius, and Don Alias. And Jaco comes in the door and I [asked him about what looked like a Mariachi guitar]. He had this huge guitar. Not an electric, fender bass, but a fat bodied, mariachi-looking guitar. He said, “Man, it’s my new bass. I just had it custom designed.” He said, “I’m ready to play”. So we set it up and played Portrait of Sal La Rosa, because we hadn’t played that. And it was really quite an experience, quite wonderful.

9 Sullivan, interview.
Chapter 4

SLIGHTLY ARCHED / SPRING CAN REALLY HANG YOU UP THE MOST - 1976

Background and Performance Setting

This selection is a medley of two songs and is from the same 1976 Horizon/A&M album as Potrait of Sal La Rosa. The recording took place on February 2, 1976, at Criteria Studios in Miami. Ira Sullivan chooses tenor saxophone for this performance, and he is joined by Joe Diorio on electric guitar, Tony Castellano on piano, and Steve Bagby on drums. There is no bass on this particular song. As mentioned in the treatment of Potrait of Sal La Rosa, Sullivan had been performing frequently in Miami in this formation without bass. The first section, Slightly Arched, is a spontaneous composition original to the five musicians in the ensemble, and all were credited as co-composers. It is a free improvisation at a fast tempo, which eventually segues into the second, contrasting section of the piece, the ballad Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most, written by Thomas J. Wolf, Jr. The lyrics to the melody were written by Frances Landesman, and both Wolf and Landesman are credited in the published album liner information.

This piece was intended as a tribute to Archie Shepp, the tenor saxophonist who inspired Sullivan to this free approach on tenor saxophone. Sullivan states in his comments that this performance of Slightly Arched / Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most was approached as a completely free piece. It was originally to be entitled only Slightly Arched. Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most was completely unplanned and unfolded spontaneously out of the free improvisation of Slightly Arched.
General Description of Performance

Since there are many sections to this piece, a general diagram of the form is presented in Table 2. Corresponding rehearsal letters from the transcription are included.

Table 2. Slightly Arched / Spring – 1976, Form.

- Drum intro / fast 4/4 tempo established

A – Sullivan enters; free

B – free piano solo

C – free guitar solo

D – Sullivan re-enters; more free solo

E – Sullivan out; rhythm section group improvisation

F – Sullivan re-enters with melody of Spring; rubato

G – Bridge of rubato chorus

H – last A of rubato Spring

I – ¾ time established; intro to Spring

J – Spring; top of form in ¾ time; loose harmony

N – return to rubato Spring

Q – return to fast free improvisation

R – rubato to end of piece.
The performance begins with drums alone. The time is established immediately, though heavy use of syncopation blurs the delineation of measures. Sullivan then enters and plays an extended solo with only drum accompaniment. As he has done in every piece studied so far in this essay, Sullivan plays multiple solo sections. After his first section of improvisation, he hands off to the piano player who proceeds to improvise with only drum accompaniment. Near the end of the piano solo, the guitar enters and the piano hands the solo to Diorio, who also solos with only drum accompaniment. Sullivan re-enters following the guitar solo and plays another extended section of free improvisation with the accompaniment of the full rhythm section. Sullivan then drops out and allows the rhythm section to improvise together for a short time, during which the fast tempo disintegrates into a fully free moment before Sullivan enters with the Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most.

The entire first chorus of this tune is played rubato except the bridge, on which Sullivan briefly implies the ¾ waltz before returning to full rubato for the last A section. Sullivan then sets up a waltz with an 8 measure introduction in 3/4, after which the rhythm section enters and one chorus of the tune is played in a waltz loosely according to form. Neither the form nor the harmony are exact during the waltz, keeping within the free spirit of the performance. Sullivan mixes the original melody with fully improvised material throughout the tune. Sullivan then leads the band into another section of rubato, which adheres to the harmony of the last eight measures of Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most. At this point, following a fermata on the VI chord (A7) in the key for Spring (Concert C major), yet another free section is started at the same fast tempo as the beginning. The group improvises freely, and again, the time and harmony dissolve until
Sullivan clearly cues another VI chord (A7), again in the key of *Spring* (C major). From here, tonality is resumed and a conclusion, loosely based on the last 8 measures of *Spring*, played in rubato fashion, concludes the piece.

**Analysis Overview**

Characteristics within “Slightly Arched / Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most” that will be examined are use of motifs, phrase length / fragmentation, lyricism, harmonic phenomenon (particularly use of atonality), and concept of sound. Within these facets more common threads of Sullivan’s creative approach can be established.

**Use of Motif**

During *Slightly Arched*, the very first long section of Sullivan’s improvisation, Sullivan plays accompanied by only drums. In such a scenario, use and development of motifs can serve a very effective role as a source for cohesive melodic material. While many of the motifs Sullivan employs are short, they nonetheless provide unity to the solo and serve as a means to maintaining connection between creative ideas.

Most interesting is Sullivan’s very first entrance, where the very first motif used is actually introduced by the drums. In those moments just prior to Sullivan’s entrance, Bagby plays what is approximately half-note roll on the snare (with brushes), followed by a hit on the bass drum. As seen in Example 20, Sullivan plays the saxophone equivalent of this figure, as the longer notes of 2-beats duration imitate the snare rolls and the lower, shorter notes imitate the bass drum or lower tom hits. This motif is stated once in measures 3-5, then Sullivan pauses briefly before re-stating it in measures 8-9. Sullivan
uses this motif as the launching point for the solo as he moves directly from the motif to the next idea, which is a long string of eighth notes. This seems to serve as the motivating idea for the beginning of Sullivan’s solo.


Sullivan soon establishes a second motif (Motif 2) in measures 22-3 (Example 21). This brief statement stands alone, however, and is not elaborated upon until measure 39, where the motif is expanded into a four measure phrase (Example 22). Sullivan returns to the motif and develops it further in measures 69-73 (Example 23).

At other times in the saxophone solo, Sullivan uses short motifs more “locally”.

In these instances, a motif is stated, then quickly answered in a call-and-response pattern. In Example 24, the last response to the initial motif is used as a departure point for the next idea, a long string of eighth notes. While the rhythm and notes are not identical between each statement of the motif, they are connected via the range in which they are played, common tones, and by the fact that each statement begins strongly on the downbeat of 1. In Example 25, Sullivan plays a motif, then immediately answers it. This motif is isolated and stands more as a pure call-and-response since it is preceded and proceeded by rests and the neighboring melodic material is not specifically related.
Later, as Sullivan is transitioning into *Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most*, he plays a motif that actually foreshadows the melody to come and can be seen in Example 26. This example shows yet another way in which Sullivan manages motifs with a variety of outcomes.

**Phrase Length / Fragmentation**

Sullivan frequently mixes very short phrases with very long phrases in this performance. Some of the phrases are so short and detached as to be fragmentary in nature. In Example 27, a series of fragments, none longer than 6 beats, divides a phrase of 4 measures and one beat and a lengthy phrase of almost 11 measures. The fragments in Example 27 stand as individual musical thoughts and are not necessarily related to a specific motif.

In Example 28, Sullivan again precedes a very long phrase of 11 measures with a series of very short phrases. These short phrases, however, are based on a motif and therefore not necessarily fragments since they are related to a previous or subsequent musical thought. Their utility in creating contrast in phrasing, nonetheless, is effective.
The combination of short and long phrases persists as Sullivan enters *Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most*. Neither the freedom of *Slightly Arched* nor the more fixed structure of *Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most* effects this variety greatly.

Example 29 demonstrates how this mixture continues into the waltz section.

Harmonic Analysis

Mixture of atonality with tonality is a major part of the *Slightly Arched* free sections of this performance. The general framework of *Slightly Arched* may be described...
as atonal since there is no dominate tonal center. However, Sullivan injects moments of tonality throughout the improvisation by playing lines that imply progressions related to a specific key. This gives the listener certain tonal anchors during which the ear experiences a brief moment of repose. Effective tension to release is created via this technique and it pervades the entire performance.

No tonal centers are clearly implied in *Slightly Arched* until an eight-measure phrase beginning in measure 54. Suddenly, Sullivan plays a progression typical to Bebop in the key of G that itself modulates to the key of C (Example 30).

Example 30. *Slightly Arched* – 1976, mm. 54-61.
Example 31 displays a particularly interesting mixture of atonality and various
tonalites. Sullivan moves from a four measure phrase of atonality to another “ii-V” type
Bebop progression in the key of F for approximately 3 measures. He then modulates to
the key of C major and plays another progression diatonic to that key.


The free improvisation after the waltz section containing *Spring Can Really Hang*
*You Up the Most* continues to exhibit these points of sonority via injection of Bebop
progressions. In Example 32, Sullivan implies two different key centers (D major, F
major) over a span of six measures using Bebop vocabulary. The tonality then becomes more ambiguous as it devolves into full atonality.

At other times Sullivan seems to utilize a different type of progression to contrast with the atonal sound. In Example 33 he plays a portion of the cycle of fifths, which may simply have melodic intent or could suggest either the cycle itself or a descending chromatic progression if tri-tone substitution is considered. This progression serves the same purpose as the previous examples as it contributes to the mixture of widely varying sonorities.


On another occasion in which there is no harmonic accompaniment to Sullivan’s saxophone, tonal harmony is implied not to break periods of atonality, but rather as an introduction to the waltz. During the 8-measure introduction to *Spring*, Sullivan plays unaccompanied except for a few snare hits in the drums, yet there seems to be harmony implied based on his note choice. The function here seems to be to establish a tonality in
which the tune, with harmonic accompaniment, will be played. Sullivan implies one chord per measure. The implied root movement is as follows:

A | D | F | Eb | D | Eb | D | Eb || D (Example 34).

Example 34. Slightly Arched – 1976, mm. 264-73.

Lyricism

Lyricism may be defined as an intense personal quality expressive of feeling or emotion, most often related to art.¹⁰ Sullivan mentions in his comments the importance of this concept to his music, and in his performance on Slightly Arched / Spring Can Really

---

Hang You Up the Most, moments of great lyricism contribute greatly to the projection of intense emotion.

The most plentiful examples of lyricism in this performance lie in the rubato sections of Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most. Sullivan plays the melody with a romantic interpretation containing dramatic pauses, heavy ornamentation, and dense improvised flurries of notes in between the small phrases of the melody. The very first presentation of the melody of Spring can be described as intensely lyrical. Sullivan sweeps into the opening line and utilizes dramatic pauses and heavy ornamentation of the melody before settling into a more subdued rubato (Example 35). This is all played over a loud, sustained, atonal rhythm section “rumble” as they wind down their free group improvisation.

Example 35. Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most – 1976, mm.193-98.

Example 36 shows very dense passages in between each brief melody phrase that function as ornaments of expression. These flourishes are rooted in the tradition of call-
and-response, and the pattern continues through the rubato sections, as Sullivan briefly states a portion of the melody, the responds to it with an intensely lyrical improvised melodic line.

Example 37 shows a continuation of this approach. The relatively short embellishment in measure 210 demonstrates Sullivan’s variety within these interjections as well.


![Musical notation]

Concept of Sound

Sullivan’s sound and style during *Slightly Arched* generally exhibits many of the same attributes as the playing of Archie Shepp, to whom this piece is dedicated. Sullivan plays with a similarly full-bodied sound as Shepp, and frequently employs devices such as growl tone and wide vibrato to add intensity or special effect to segments of his
performance. Sullivan also plays in the low register using sub-tone for many of the passages, and only blows with a full tone in the low register for particularly loud and intense effects. Many of the lines during the free improvisation are presented with the same looseness and softness of articulation, making them sound very smooth in nature. This articulation is different from the type used in Bebop, where a tight, clean articulation is generally used to create a harder sound. Instead of articulation, Sullivan also employs use of heavy accents to emphasize certain notes within the longer lines and define the metric pulse.

During the *Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most*, however, Sullivan adopts a more traditional jazz tenor sound that is not unlike Illinois Jacquet, whom Sullivan personally mentions as an influence in his comments. Jacquet actually replaced Lester Young in the Count Basie big band, but played mostly alto until then. Jacquet played in a similar, light-toned style as Young during those Basie years. Sullivan’s sound becomes similarly lighter, the articulations slightly more pronounced during *Spring*, which may be related to his effusive praise of Jacquet’s solo on *How High the Moon*. Sullivan mentions this Jacquet solo specifically as having been the catalyst for Sullivan’s increased interest in the tenor saxophone.

**Artist’s Comments**

Sullivan explains his approach to this *Slightly Arched/Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most*:

Now this was on the same session as [*Portrait of Sal La Rosa*]. Again, we were trying to get that feeling. In the studio, we often had to stop so the engineer could change tapes, etc. We were used to playing at the Unitarian church, and sometimes our sets would last for an hour and twenty-five minutes. The name [of
the tune] came after. And we would just start off playing, and maybe Tony would put his hand on the piano, or Joe would play a chord, and boom, that’s what started it. There was nothing pre-conceived. We would say, “Let’s just play.”

Then we started playing, and I don’t know what inspired me, in the middle of it all, play, “(sings melody)”, which are the first three notes of Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most. Joe’s still playing [free], if you hear the recording. Like I said, there was nothing pre-conceived. That’s the way our music evolved, and that’s the way it happened. As you can see it’s certainly not in the Bebop tradition, like Portrait of Sal La Rosa.

So Tony was the piano player. We never rehearsed, we never saw each other unless we had a gig together. But Friday night was out concert night at the [Unitarian church]. And the way we approached this… what you hear, is the way we played.

Then when I listened to [the tune], and we were choosing titles, I remembered one of the tenor players who had attracted me was Archie Shepp. So I decided to dedicate it to Archie. I wasn’t thinking of Archie when I was playing, I just played what I played. After I heard it, I thought Slightly Arched might be a nice title, because it was reminiscent of where he was coming from. And he’s also a free player.

We hadn’t been working with a bass player to keep it free, because we had wonderful bass players, we were just trying to get that free feeling. We had all the time we needed with Bagby.11

11 Sullivan, interview.
Chapter 5

AS TIME GOES BY - 1983

Background and Performance Setting

The ballad *As Time Goes By* was written by Herman Hupfield and first recorded by crooner Rudy Vallee in 1931. The song was actually written for the Broadway musical *Everybody’s Welcome*, and was generally forgotten to the public until it was made famous by its inclusion in the 1942 motion picture *Casablanca*. It wasn’t until the widespread fame of the movie that the song also became very popular and a standard among jazz musicians. It has been recorded by dozens of artists and performed by thousands more.

Ira Sullivan recorded *As Time Goes* in New York City on the album *Sprint*, released in 1983. The actual recording, produced by Mike Berniker, was made on November 4, 1982, during a live concert at a club called the Jazz Forum. The album was a collaboration of Ira Sullivan and Red Rodney, and its full title upon release was *Red Rodney and Ira Sullivan Quintet – Sprint*. The instrumentation for this recording is Ira Sullivan on alto saxophone, Red Rodney on flugelhorn, Gary Dial on piano, Jay Anderson on bass, and Jeff Hirschfield on drums. It interesting to note that the rhythm section musicians were considerably younger than the headliners, and this fact is addressed by Sullivan and Rodney in the album’s liner notes along with an anecdote as to what inspired this particular recording. The co-authors of these notes are listed on the album simply as “Red and Ira”. The notes read as follows:
One of the clubs we play at is called “Ricks”, located in Chicago at the Holiday Inn, Lakeshore. The club itself is a recreation of Rick’s Café Americain from the movie! In the foyer stands a mannequin which is a life-size replica of Humphrey Bogart. The mannequin looks so real that upon entering the club on opening night Red said, “hello” to it. Ira was inspired by the setting to play the background theme from the famous movie. Our youthful rhythm section scrambled to learn it since they were born long after World War II, when this wonderful song became famous. But they learned it quickly and the result is our current interpretation.\(^\text{12}\)

**General Description of Performance**

The overall mood on this performance is a mixture of Bebop, specifically the style of Charlie Parker, and the blues. It is played in the key of Bb major as a jazz ballad and entire band heavily incorporates blues inflections during the performance. Sullivan begins playing the first eight bars of the melody rubato, with heavy use of dense flourishes between melody phrases. Red Rodney picks up the second A section of the song, again played rubato. Sullivan takes over on the bridge of the song and plays 8 more bars of melody. For the first 4 measures of the last A section, Rodney plays the melody as Sullivan plays dense fills behind him. The two then play in unison for two bars before Sullivan plays a long flourish to set up a fermata on the VI chord (G7). Tempo starts as Sullivan plays aggressively down the blues scale as an introduction to the top of the form. The most recognized form of the “blues scale” is 1, b3, 4, b5, $\sharp5$, b7. When played in the key of the root of the song the blues scale creates effective tension by imparting a dominant seventh #9 quality.\(^\text{13}\)

The solo section consists of traded sections between Sullivan and Rodney. Sullivan takes the first eight measures and plays a very soulful, blues influenced solo that


incorporates much classic Bebop vocabulary reminiscent of Charlie Parker. Rodney then takes the next eight measures of solo before Sullivan returns to solo on the bridge. For the last eight bars, Rodney and Sullivan improvise together in a climax of the horn solo section before handing the solo off to the pianist at the top of the second chorus, where a double time feel begins. The piano plays the first two A sections (16 bars) of improvised solo before the horns re-enter on the bridge, still in double-time feel. Upon their re-entry, Rodney takes the melody behind which Sullivan plays continuous strings of double-time improvisation behind the trumpet. For the final A section, Sullivan and Rodney play in loose unison until the final four bars of the form, which are rubato.

Analysis Overview

Musical attributes to be examined in As Time Goes By are Bebop vocabulary, treatment of diminished chord, blues inflection, lyricism, rhythmic variety, and concept of sound.

Bebop Vocabulary

Sullivan states in his comments that Charlie Parker was a major influence in the way Sullivan himself approached this song. The vocabulary Sullivan seems to draw from is rooted in traditional Bebop. This becomes clear upon listening as Sullivan models melodic and stylistic ideas after Charlie Parker’s style of playing, and even musically quotes Parker directly on more than one occasion. Just like any skilled speaker, Sullivan generates interesting, melodic ideas in great variety within the pre-existing language.
Example 38 displays two ideas that spring directly from the vocabulary of Charlie Parker. These particular shapes, or motifs, can be heard in many different Parker recordings and became oft quoted after Parker’s rise to relative renown. The motif in measure 60 is actually a quote from Stravinsky’s *Petrushka*. Sullivan mentions Stravinsky and other classical composers in his comments, as well.

Example 38. *As Time Goes By* – 1983, mm. 45, 60.

Sullivan’s vocabulary also includes figures that are based on what may be called a “Bebop scale”, a term coined to codify the chromatic passing tone(s) typically used by Bebop musicians in order to play dense, horizontal melodies that maintain harmonic clarity. This interspersing of non-scale tones on the upbeats with chord/scale tones on the downbeats can be a very effective method of ornamenting a relatively drab diatonic melody. Sullivan employs the dominant based Bebop scale most pervasively in this performance, exploiting the passing tone between the root and b7th scale degrees. Two
very clear examples of the F dominant Bebop scale can be seen in Example 39. The figure appears in measures 10 and 25. Both lines were played over F7(sus4).


Sullivan derives vocabulary from the diminished sound as well. Sullivan basically ornaments the notes of the diminished chords so as to project the diminished sound. Sullivan devises very creative ways to create these sounds in a natural, not systematic, way by combining diverse ideas unpredictably.

Example 40 shows a very interesting combination in which diminished is implied, then less clear, then implied again within one line. Just when it seems as if Sullivan may play a systematic figure, for example, simply running up the diminished scale, he deviates from the predictable and takes an unpredictable turn. He runs up a portion of the diminished scale, then seems to imply the 5th or 7th modes of C harmonic minor before resolving the line in measure 10. This was not uncommon to Bebop as these mode of
harmonic minor contains the b9 of the dominant chord, which strongly implies diminished. The two modes are interchangeable because they share the tri-tone. The piano player actually plays a Db7 chord seen in Example 42, but Sullivan’s line implies a more traditional iii–VI (Dø – G7b9) or simply VI (G7b9) because of the predominant diminished sound. Sullivan also seems to imply the ii chord in measure 10. Although the piano player plays F7sus, he does not play the chord on beat one, leaving Sullivan alone to imply harmony. In essence, Sullivan is playing a line containing the diminished chord and filling in notes around the chord-tones as ornamentation. This may explain why this particular line sounds strongly diminished while containing various notes not native to the diminished scale.

Example 40. *As Time Goes By* – 1983, m. 9.

When orthodoxy serves, however, Sullivan seems to effortlessly wield it. There are several fully diminished chords in *As Time Goes By*, and Sullivan does indeed outline the diminished chord when improvising over these chords. In measure 105, Sullivan plays a double time line that stays within the E diminished scale except for a few quick passing tones (Example 41).

Sullivan also plays ideas based on the augmented triad (1, 3, #5) over the G7 chord in measure 55 to create yet another harmonic sound (Example 42). Again, to Bebop
musicians, this was a common approach to dominant chords and creates a distinctly colorful sound.

Example 41. *As Time Goes By* – 1983, m. 105.

![Example 41](image1)

Example 42. *As Time Goes By* – 1983, m. 55.

![Example 42](image2)

**Blues Vocabulary**

Sullivan’s interpretation of *As Time Goes By* is also substantially rooted in the blues. Like Charlie Parker, the blues forms part of the core of Sullivan’s style, perhaps even the foundation for it. The simplicity of the blues is a major source of vocabulary that could even be the foundation underpinning the more harmonically complex Bebop style. Sullivan mentions in his comments that while he listened to blues players when he was young, he was not thinking of any particular blues musician when drawing on this vocabulary. In this case, the blues inflections are indeed similar in delivery to those played by other Bebop musicians, who themselves were incorporating vocabulary of
older, traditional blues musicians. The ideas create an additional effect of added emotion and expressivity through tension/release.

Sullivan uses the blues scale to great effect in several places within this version of *As Time Goes By*. The power of this sound to express emotion is put to full use after the rubato beginning as Sullivan sets up the tempo to the song beginning at measure 34 (Example 43).

Example 43. *As Time Goes By* – 1983, mm. 34-6.

Sullivan chooses another important moment toward the end of the piece to play the blues scale to create a dramatic emotional effect, though this occurrence may have been pre-arranged. As seen in Example 44, Sullivan aggressively descends the Bb blues scale as the group nears the end of the song. Red Rodney joins in and plays the line in unison with Sullivan, except for last 3 notes, where they split into harmonized parts.

The blues influence can also be heard in Sullivan’s use of bent notes, short fragments of the blues scale, and “blue notes” (b3, b5, and b7). Simple blues inflection may be any note that is bent, or de-tuned (Example 45). Such blues inflections create effective tension and have a recognizable sound due to their long-established presence in American popular and folk music.
Some of Sullivan’s entire phrases are flavored by blues inflection and blue notes. These lines would likely be very familiar language to any listener of traditional blues. The importance of this tradition to Sullivan’s improvisation can be seen in two very important musical moments: the beginning and ending of his solo. In both places, Sullivan plays very traditional blues “licks”, or phrases. Example 46 shows the beginning and ending of Sullivan’s solo.
Example 46. As Time Goes By – 1983, Solo start and ending.

This type of blues vocabulary is also clear before the very last A section of the song. In this case, both the note choice and the rhythm Sullivan plays are strongly reminiscent of traditional blues figures. The rhythm in measure 108 has a riff-like quality common in the blues due to its repetition and syncopation. The note choice (fragments of the blues scale) and rhythm in measure 109 are also very typical to blues figures (Example 47).
Rhythmic Variety

Sullivan’s interpretation of *As Time Goes By* contains a wide array of rhythmic combinations, as have all the pieces observed so far in this essay. One highly developed rhythmic technique that Sullivan applies to this improvisation is the alternating of double time syncopation projecting a strong pulse with long groups of notes that float across beats and bar lines. In other words, Sullivan combines exact rhythmic placement with looser note placement much like he did in *Portrait of Sal La Rosa*. This creates an effective rhythmic tension/release, as the improvisation floats across beats, lands firmly on a strong beat in a release of temporal uncertainty, then repeats the cycle. The slow tempo of a ballad affords the soloist an opportunity to manipulate the time in this manner, though to actually execute the machinations on saxophone with great fluency is a highly developed skill. Example 48 illustrates this manipulation of the rhythm and how Sullivan alternates rhythmic approaches from measure to measure. The same alternating rhythmic technique is used later in the song in measures 60 through 66 (Example 49).
During the first four bars of the bridge of the head out (mm. 102-5), Sullivan plays extended straight double-time lines with a strong pulse and minimal syncopation. This type of “change-running” technique, in which the chords are outlined through double-time and quadruple-time mostly scalar lines, is also commonly used in many Bebop ballads and was typical to many Charlie Parker ballad performances. These
straight double-time figures add another contrasting rhythmic variation to the mix, in addition to serving as lyrical ornamentations of the simple melody. Example 50 shows these dense textures created by Sullivan.

Example 50. As Time Goes By – 1983, mm. 102-5.

Lyricism

Sullivan’s performance on this ballad also contains moments of great lyric expressivity. One can refer back to most examples presented so far in this essay and
observe moments of intricately crafted, lyric passages. In some passages, there are examples of what are tantamount to “sheets of sound”, a term coined in the late 1950s to describe long, dense strings of notes that saxophonist John Coltrane was playing at the time. These elaborate passages are played by Sullivan in both the rubato section and the section in tempo.

Sullivan plays a dramatic, expressive flourish very soon after his first entrance (measure 2), and this sets the tone for many similarly expressive, emotional figures to come (Example 51).

Example 51. *As Time Goes By* – 1983, mm. 2-3.

This sort of expression is taken to its most intense level on the bridge of the section played in tempo. In a display of extravagant expressive turbulence, Sullivan sweeps into the bridge, plays a brief moment of simpler rhythm as a brief repose, then builds the intensity with a lyrical, odd-grouping of notes that accelerate into an extremely dense “sheet” of notes. In Example 52, this emotional peak can be observed. Measure 57 is split into two lines because the quantity of notes renders it illegible if forced onto a single line.
Concept of Sound

Sullivan describes his concept of sound in his comments in this section. While Charlie Parker was the model, Sullivan maintains his very individual style during this
interpretation. His sound on this recording has the body of Charlie Parker’s with slightly more edge, or buzz in the sound that is distinctly Sullivan. Sullivan plays at all dynamic ranges with great control and this consistency demonstrates Sullivan has no doubt as to what he wants his sound to project.

**Artist’s Comments**

*As Time Goes By* was one of our calmer moments, it’s just straight-ahead, sort of a precursor to the later *Sprint.* [The way we played the melody], one time Red Rodney said, “Ira, you’re going to rubato me to death.” I explained to him, just because we play in New York and the places we do, that doesn’t mean everybody out there’s a jazz aficionado. You’re always getting new people to come out and hear jazz, so when they hear a melody, no matter what they hear during your solo, if they can hear you play the melody, to them, that’s what separates a bad musician from a good musician. If you can touch their heart, [that’s important].

In Chicago, at the Café American, as you walked in, it looked like *Casablanca,* and here’s this perfectly carved statue of Humphrey Bogart, with the white dinner jacket, black pants, standing there, and every night they’d put a cigarette between his fingers. At first, you’d look at it and think, “There’s Humphrey”.

Red finally told [us], he says, “You know, fellas, Bird just used to give me the area code: ‘Red G7, C7’” He’d call that the area code. It puts you in the area, you know? Because you know, every piano player I played with… they all sounded different to me, which is great, because each one would open my ears to a different thing.

But I had some fellow alto players [in Chicago]. One was Billy Cannon, other cats around Chicago that played alto … Bunky Green was growing up with us at that time. But then, I started to become fascinated with that sound that Bird got, and I said ‘How the hell does he do that?’ I wanted to get that beauty of sound, that’s all I was thinking about. That fullness of sound. Whoever you talk about, James Clay, Bunky Green, Eric Dolphy, Charles Lloyd…they all played alto, and everybody was trying to play in that Bird vein, all the alto players around Chicago… and they did it, but it wasn’t the same thing. I wanted to see, what was that purity of sound. So that’s what got me deep into the alto.

On blues influence:

Well, if you go back to when I was 6,7,8 years old, then I was copying Buck Clayton solos, Charlie Shavers, you know.. I didn’t have those kind of chops yet…Basie blues, stuff like that…Artie Shaw and the Gramercy Five, that’s
who Shavers was with. Roy Eldridge, you know, I heard those cats with Coleman Hawkins...that quintet they had.… Dexter Gordon.…

\(^{14}\) Sullivan, interview.
Chapter 6
SPRINT – 1983

Background and Performance Setting

_Sprint_ is the title track from the same 1983 album that contains the previously analyzed _As Time Goes By_. Alto saxophone is Sullivan’s choice of instrument for _Sprint_.

The performance setting is described in the liner notes as follows:

Our third Garry Dial original of this date incorporates the freer forms of improvisation. It begins with a spirited drum solo by Jeff Hirschfield and features him throughout showing his great versatility and musical style of playing. This rendition also shows the wide progression Red has made in his efforts to embrace some of the newer forms in jazz. Long being touted as one of the original “Be-Boppers,” Red Shows that one can indeed teach “an old dog new tricks.” Ira would like to dedicate this Track to Ornette Coleman, who happened to arrive at the Jazz Forum while this tune was being recorded. Ornette’s comment was, “It was strange to walk in and hear myself.”

The bulk of the preceding comments pertain to how novel it was for Red Rodney to play in this free style, yet suggest Sullivan was expected to feel as comfortable within this vein of music as any. Sullivan had long established himself as ready, eager, and fully capable of playing any style, anywhere, anytime, and the comments made by one of the pioneers of free-form jazz, Ornette Coleman, seem to validate Sullivan’s approach to this performance. _Slightly Arched_, analyzed in Chapter 3 of this essay, was recorded in 1976 and Sullivan’s concept of free playing was long-established even before that date.

General Description of Performance

As stated in the liner notes, _Sprint_ has a large free-jazz component. This performance is so diametrically opposed stylistically to _As Time Goes By_ that the fact the

---

Ira Sullivan and Red Rodney. Album notes for _Sprint_.

82
two songs are presented back-to-back on the same recording can seem astounding. While
*Sprint* does have a definite melody and harmony, the sections of improvisation are played
freely. The ensemble plays the tutti melody, then Sullivan launches directly into his
whirlwind of a solo over a very fast swing groove (half note = 200 beats per minute) and
a relentless walking bass line. He re-states a portion of the melody to pass the solo to
Rodney, then Rodney proceeds to solo over the same fast swing groove. Following the
trumpet solo, the band begins to play a section in half-time over which Sullivan and
Rodney improvise together. They then play the melody in half-time. The band plays once
through the half-time melody, return to the original fast swing, and the drums solo before
the head out is played. None of the sections seems rigidly configured in terms of length
except for the melody statements. The general form of *Sprint* is (with corresponding
rehearsal letters of transcription): 1 drums and bass on introduction, A melody, B alto
solo, C trumpet solo, D half-time section/group improvisation, E half-time melody-
based interlude, F return to fast swing, G piano solo, H half-time melody-based
interlude, I return to double time to set up drum solo, J free drum solo, head out. The
song ends on a fermata with Sullivan playing an altissimo concert D and Rodney playing
one octave below over a pedal tone that slowly moves between D and Eb concert in the
bass.

**Analysis Overview**

Musical attributes to be considered in *Sprint* are melodic contour, blues influence,
harmonic approach, rhythmic variety, and concept of sound.
Melodic Contour

Sullivan’s improvisation exhibits great variety in the contour of his improvised lines. Sullivan occasionally plays phrases with heavy use of linear chromaticism in combination with larger intervallic leaps or arpeggios. For the purposes of this study, we may define linear chromaticism as the incorporation of the chromatic scale for extended periods, not a harmonic concept that may be employed by Impressionist composers, for example. The tempo is very fast and Sullivan uses a very smooth articulation that makes even the leaps sound “smoothed over”.

The very first phrase of Sullivan’s solo exhibits this mix of arpeggios, step-wise movement, and chromaticism (Example 53). The notes in this phrase are played with very little articulation so that they run together very smoothly.


Example 54 shows a phrase Sullivan plays later in his solo in which he begins with more angular motion, then settles into a mix of chromatic, step-wise, and arpeggio-
based motion. This diverse, unpredictable mix of melodic shapes is present in the great majority of phrases in Sullivan’s solo.


Blues Influence

Sullivan’s performance on *Sprint*, while played very free, also incorporates overt references to the blues. During the half-time section in the middle of the piece, Sullivan
and Rodney improvise simultaneously. Sullivan’s very first statement in this section, played at a loud volume, descends the Bb blues scale. Sullivan also ends this section of improvisation by playing the Bb blues scale. Both the beginning and end of Sullivan’s half-time improvisation are shown in Example 55.

Example 55. *Sprint* – 1983, mm. 163-6, 186-8.

Sandwiched between these two uses of the blues scale are improvised figures that exhibit heavy use of blues inflection. One characteristic that may be attributed directly to the blues is the use of a “crying” sound. This stylistic device is used by many blues singers, and jazz instrumentalists have long imitated these sounds and inflections. One way Sullivan achieves this sound is through exaggerated “scoops”, or note-bending from below followed by a group of descending chromatic notes. Another way which Sullivan creates this sound is alternating long, slow “falls” from high notes approached with these “scoops”. Example 56 shows both of these techniques, each in a different part of the half-time section.
Harmonic Approach

A lead sheet for *Sprint* was obtained from the composer, Garry Dial, in order to ascertain any harmonic scheme, which was not readily identifiable to me upon listening. It was discovered that only eight measures of the melody have any corresponding harmony. The harmonic scheme is notated in the transcription and is a mixture of slash-chords and major triads. The root movement and melody could suggest B diminished due to the preponderance of notes diatonic to that scale. All melody notes are not exclusively from B diminished, however.

While the melody has limited indicated harmony, the solos are improvised with complete harmonic freedom, as Sullivan mentioned in his comments at the end of this chapter. Sullivan improvises with only bass and drum accompaniment and without seeming to imply tonality for the great majority of his solo. There are, however, brief occasions where Sullivan plays particular set of notes that might suggest tonality. Example 57 shows an instance where identifiable arpeggios are played in some measures,
but in the larger scheme, the melodic shape is actually what seems musically most important. The overall melodic objective seems to be a descending chromatic motif (except for the whole-step between the indicating arrows in measures 102-3), indicated by the arrows in the example, and not an implied harmony. One could argue that the first two beats of measure 97 outline Eb7, and the following arpeggio outlines Ab7 and lasts a full eight beats until the appearance of the F♯ on beat four of measure 99. In context, however, any implication of Ab7, over a bass-line that is highly chromatic, seems to be less important than the greater melodic objective.

Example 57. *Sprint* – 1983, mm. 97-103.

In measures 133-42, Sullivan again plays a group of notes that may seem to suggest a tonality based on F. The reason for this sound could be that this improvised figure is based on measures 25-6 of the melody, which contain the root movement of Bb, Ab, G, F. During the improvisation, the bass player plays a highly chromatic bass line which sounds atonal while Sullivan seems to draw on notes from the melody and re-
arrange them. Also, the shape of Sullivan’s improvised line seems to refer to the melody. Example 58 shows the melody and the improvised line together for comparison.

Example 58. *Sprint* – 1983, mm. 25-6, 133-42.

**Rhythmic Variety**

Sullivan’s improvisation consists of long, dense strings of notes, many containing various odd rhythmic groupings, alternated with simpler rhythms or rests. Similar characteristics are found in the other pieces included in this essay. A natural wave of rhythmic motion, or tension/release, is created as measures containing the dense, extremely fast notes give way to moments of rhythmic repose by either rests or a simpler rhythms. The opening phrase of Sullivan’s solo serves as a good example of a long string of notes which grows in intensity until a rest occurs, releasing the rhythmic tension (refer to earlier Example 53). In measures 78-94, Sullivan starts on a sustained note, then launches into a long string of eighth notes, triplets, and glissandos (very dense,
large group of notes) that create great excitement. This tension is effectively released with a simpler, though syncopated rhythm in measures 86-9. Sullivan begins to wind up the tension again by continuing the phrase with another long, dense string of notes that contains sixteenth notes and uneven groups. This tension is released by a rest in measure 94. Example 59 shows this section of improvisation.


There are occasions when a very free, frantic sounding melodic line is couched between two long sustained tones. The great rhythmic unpredictability again contributes
to the overall rhythmic “undulations” within his improvisation. Example 60 shows a complex, frantic-sounding phrase surrounded by sustained tones.

Example 60. *Sprint* – 1983, mm. 102-10.

**Concept of Sound**

One need only listen to a few seconds of this performance to notice a polar opposite stylistic approach on *Sprint* than on *As Time Goes By*. Sullivan’s sound is powerful, has edge, and he plays with very little articulation throughout the improvisation. Sullivan’s sound in *As Time Goes By* was powerful as well, but it was not overtly aggressive and edgy. Sullivan mentions in his comments that he was not thinking of Ornette Coleman specifically during this performance. Nonetheless, long, legato lines interrupted by sharp rhythms can be heard in Coleman’s recordings, including the album Sullivan mentions by name, *Something Else*. Sullivan’s concept of legato articulation does differ from Coleman’s a bit, however. While Sullivan plays very legato lines on *Sprint*, there is still a bit more separation between notes than in some Coleman recordings, where tonguing of notes was almost non-existent.
Sullivan’s concept of pitch is at times reminiscent of Ornette Coleman, but is not quite so committed to playing “in the cracks” as Coleman’s. Playing “in the cracks” may be described as playing between the fixed pitches of the tempered scale that are normally used in western music. Essentially, it is a slight de-tuning of notes. Measure 133 begins a series of notes where Sullivan manipulates the pitch in a playful manner that seems more like affectation, almost blues inflection, rather than playing “in the cracks” (previous Example 39). Sullivan does vary the pitch on other occasions such that it may be heard to rest between pitches, but he generally does so in a context so that they may be heard more easily as quick manipulations, not an overall de-tuning of most notes suggesting “in the cracks” playing as his concept.

**Artist’s Comments**

*Sprint* is a Garry Dial composition, and Garry was the pianist with [Red Rodney’s] band 3 years before I went with Red, then spent another six years with him. Then when I came on the band, Garry was happy because I was more into the kind of compositions he was writing… very free. He said he wouldn’t have ever written anything like that for Red. Red was still more into Bebop. When they interviewed him on the radio he said, “Ira got me out of my comfort zone”. Remember, this was the 80’s, eight years after *Slightly Arched*. The only time I had to play Bebop again was when I went back to Chicago. Joe Seigel, you know, he’s a real Charlie Parker [fan], though he’s had some others. He’d had Roy Haynes, you know, but he wasn’t that into the Avant Garde, but he’s not prejudiced against anything modern. He always brought me back and I’d finish Charlie Parker month. It’s the month of August, and we’d have James Moody for a week, Charles McPherson, Kenny Garett, and then I’d close out the festival. I spoke with Red and told him I didn’t want to re-create the Bebop era. He had a piano player that liked to write original compositions, he had other guys writing charts for him, so he finally [came around to my way]. If we got too free, you know, sometime we’d just improvise something on the spot, because these guys liked that too. They were from that generation. Red would split, and come back the next tune, because we had all our stuff with him, too, written out. We had out charts.

By the time we did *Sprint*, we had been together for three or four years. The years we were together in the 80’s, some people said Red never sounded that
strong. He doesn’t sound like he was a stranger to *Sprint*. He really played it great.  

16 Sullivan, interview.
Chapter 7

IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR - 1998

Background and Performance Setting

*It was a Very Good Year* was composed by Ervin Drake in 1961. It was first recorded by the Kingston Trio in that year. The song gained great popularity with the Frank Sinatra recording, which earned Sinatra a Grammy for Best Male Vocal Performance in 1966. The Ira Sullivan version of “It was a Very Good Year” was recorded on the album *Ira Sullivan: After Hours Volume 5*, which was produced by Ben Sidran and released in 2000 on the Go Jazz label. This live performance was recorded at the Artist’s Quarter, a jazz club located in the twin cities of Minneapolis / St. Paul, Minnesota in June of 1998, and features Sullivan on soprano saxophone accompanied by Billy Peterson on bass, Kenny Horst on drums, and Bill Carrothers on piano. This recording is actually an “after hours” recording, as the title of the album suggests, and was recorded starting around 2 A.M. after the earlier music sets of the evening had concluded. These sessions were a frequent occurrence at the Artist’s Quarter, and various groups were recorded there over the years in the less formal “after hours” setting.

General Description of Performance

*It was a Very Good Year* was originally a melancholy ballad in 4/4 time with a simple A - B structure. The original A section is 14 bars long and is the verse of the song. The original B section is 4 bars long, has no corresponding lyrics, and functions as an interlude between verses. Sullivan begins the tune utilizing the B section as a rubato introduction, but after the 4 measures of the intro, the rest of the tune is played at a
medium-up tempo (M.M. half note = 125). In Sullivan’s version, the A sections are 28 bars and the B sections are 8 bars in length. The total number of bars is doubled and the harmony extended accordingly so that it can be performed at a faster tempo without allowing the form to pass so quickly.

After the rhythm section vamp that establishes the tempo, Sullivan plays the melody, takes a solo of 3 choruses, then passes the solo to the pianist. Following the piano solo, Sullivan re-enters improvising over the B section, proceeds to improvise another chorus, then plays the B section melody as a cue to a half-time rhythm section vamp that gradually breaks up, loses the time, and becomes free before settling on an A pedal tone to cue the head out. The head out returns to the rubato style of the introduction and is played true to the original form of the song: A (14 bars) – B (4 bars).

**Analysis Overview**

Sullivan’s performance on *It Was A Very Good Year* exhibits many of the same traits as the previous pieces analyzed in this essay. Aside from the fact that this is the only piece considered in this essay on which Sullivan plays soprano saxophone, *It Was A Very Good Year* is the only piece included in this essay in which Sullivan improvises over a slow tonal harmonic rhythm within a traditional swing groove. Musical characteristics to be examined, in addition to this harmonic arrangement, include Sullivan’s use of enclosures, melodic contour, rhythmic variety, and concept of sound.
Harmonic Analysis

*It Was A Very Good Year* has a relatively slow harmonic rhythm over a moderately fast tempo, the only completely tonal piece with this characteristic included in this essay. All chords are four measures in length except at 2 different moments in the form. There is an A7 at the end of the interlude, or B section of the song, that serves as a cadence back to Dm at the top of each chorus. There is also a two measure Dm chord in bars 10 and 11 of the form in each chorus. While not a cadential device, the Dm serves as a pivot chord between Eb∆ and F∆ (relative major). The eight-measure chords are all stable in quality, either major or minor. The sonorities float between Dorian and Ionian modes, with the A7 between choruses acting as the harmonic turnaround, pulling strongly to the Dm at the top of the form.

Sullivan plays within the traditional harmonic structure for the majority of his improvisation on *It Was A Very Good Year*. On occasion, Sullivan creates effective harmonic tension and release in his improvisation by alternating lines that adhere to the original harmony with lines that step outside that harmony. The non-diatonic notes in these cases function not as passing tones, but instead create very strong, temporary dissonances that contribute to an overall call-and-response dynamic. Example 61 shows an improvised line by Sullivan that adheres to the harmony as played by the pianist (and the original composition) for the first two beats of measure 50. Sullivan then creates dramatic dissonance by playing Eb♯ over Eb∆7 on the downbeats of 3 and 4 of measure 50, creating tension that is released on the downbeat of measure 52, where Sullivan plays the root, Eb, on the downbeat of 1. He then plays a line up to a sustained C♯, again creating strong dissonance over the Eb∆7 chord. He continues to play a flurry of notes
that combine notes from inside and outside of the Eb major scale. The effect is one of active tension that is released upon the resolution of the next harmonic change, Dm in measure 54.

Example 61. *It Was A Very Good Year* – 1998, mm. 50-4.

While Sullivan incorporates notes that are non-diatonic to the chord on many occasions in this solo, these notes are generally used as passing tones that create brief bursts of tension within a long line. This gives the lines an exotic sound, but does not necessarily suggest an extended alternate tonality. In measures 56 and 57, Sullivan incorporates many notes from outside the FΔ chord, yet the notes pass quickly enough that the line is very colorful without completely abandoning the FΔ sound (Example 62). This portion of the line containing non-diatonic notes is surrounded by strong chord tones at the beginning and ending of the phrase. A very exciting, natural, non-mechanical sound is created trough this technique.
Enclosures

Sullivan incorporates enclosures in *It Was A Very Good Year* to great effect as a tool for placing notes on particular beats and extending a melodic line. This is not unlike the technique used most notably in *Si-Si* (Example 63).

Example 63. *It Was A Very Good Year* – 1998, mm. 32-3.

Sullivan expands the application of this idea through multiple measures. The frequent change of direction, in addition to extending the line, gives it a weaving quality that maintains directional unpredictability. Sullivan even overlaps enclosures at one point, and on occasion the enclosures seem not used to place chord tones on beats, but to delay resolution or create dissonance by placing a dissonant note on a strong beat.

Example 64 displays use of enclosure through multiple consecutive measures, including
overlapping enclosures and enclosures that create dissonance (m. 134) and delayed resolution (m. 135). More examples occur in measures 46, 47, and 50 and can be observed in the transcription.

Example 64. *It Was A Very Good Year* – 1998, mm. 132-5.

![Musical notation showing overlapping enclosures and enclosures that create dissonance and delayed resolution.]

**Melodic Contour**

Most of Sullivan’s phrases in this performance are linear and long in contour. He combines these long, smooth lines with occasional runs up arpeggios or other shapes that incorporate larger interval leaps. This technique, as we have seen in other pieces examined in this essay, affords the Sullivan the option of continuing the line without returning back in the direction from where he just came. He can quickly change registers and continues the line in a comfortable range on the instrument while at the same time combining diverse shapes.
The very first phrase of Sullivan’s solo is 14 measures in length. The largest leap within this phrase is a perfect fifth. Otherwise, Sullivan mixes whole-step and half-step linear movement with leaps of major and minor thirds. The exceptions are measures 49 and 56. Example 65 shows this long first phrase.

Example 65. *It Was A Very Good Year* – 1998, mm. 44-57.

Sullivan’s second phrase is even more linear in shape. The largest leap is a major 3rd and the phrase covers over ten measures (Example 66). Throughout the course of his improvisation, the largest intervallic leap is a major 6th in measure 145. Aside from that instance, no other leap larger than a perfect 5th occurs in Sullivan’s improvisation.
Rhythmic Variety

Sullivan treats rhythm in a similar fashion as the other pieces examined in this essay. Great variety of rhythm is used with a trend towards alternating periods nebulous note placement with periods of exact note placement, creating a rhythmic tension/release. We can refer back to Example 65 to observe Sullivan projecting a strong rhythmic pulse by placing the notes accurately within the swing groove and playing with little syncopation until the end of measure 50. At his point, Sullivan plays a syncopated rhythm, then begins to play denser groups of notes in measure 52, gradually working his way toward a dissolution of strongly projected time until beat 3 at the end of the phrase in measure 57.

Later in his solo, Sullivan plays another long phrase in which sections notes placed exactly within the time are alternated with periods of looser placement and less
explicit rhythmic pulse. This rhythmic scheme can be seen in Example 67. Again, this rhythmic variation is very effective for creating tension/release.

Example 67. *It Was A Very Good Year* – 1998, mm. 78-90.
Concept of Sound

One of the few comments Sullivan made with regard to *It Was A Very Good Year* was how pleased he was with the resulting sound that engineer Steve Wiese captured from the soprano saxophone. Sullivan mentions that he played mostly saxophone and trumpet for most of the session, but a crystal clear soprano sound is produced by Sullivan on this recording. He mentions no artist in particular as an influence on soprano, though many of the tenor saxophonists he mentions in other portions of his comments (John Coltrane, Illinois Jacquet, Archie Shepp) did also play soprano and were likely heard by Sullivan. Sullivan’s sound is very personal, however, and has a wispy, light element included in a very full sound that gives it an almost ringing quality. Sullivan’s soprano sound may be said to favor the qualities of a straight oboe. His interpretation on *Very Good Year* with a modern approach to use of vibrato gives a melancholy quality to the sound. Vibrato is used sparingly, and when it is heard, it is slow and narrow.

Artist’s Comments

Sullivan had comments most notably that he was very fond of how his soprano sound was captured on this session. He also exposes his penchant for younger players who seemed to have “different” ideas. Sullivan described the session and more as follows:

The only reason I wanted to [include this tune] was the sound the engineer got on my soprano. People who know my albums know I play a little trumpet, a little flute, you know, because that’s what I’m billed as; a multi-instrumentalist. And I get bored easy (laughs). I hear different things. If I hear a bossa nova, suddenly I want my alto flute.

And this engineer (Steve Weise), recorded me live at this club I’d go and play at once a year. Every time I’d go to Chicago, I’d finish there and drive up to Minnesota. The guy that managed the club was a drummer, Kenny Horst. And
most drummers who manage clubs, they’re good at running the club and fair on
drums. But Kenny was really a devoted musician, as you’ll hear on that
[recording], he sounds good. Billy Petersen was one of 25 Petersen’s, the musical
family. Billy was one of the best bass players I played with, Billy Carrothers was
on piano.

So I’d go to Chicago each year, then I’d call Kenny Horst. So I’d go up to
play a weekend at a place they called “The Artist’s Quarters”. It was a club with
booths, and a stage off to the side, and that’s where we played. So I’d ask Kenny
who’s playing, and Bill Carrothers couldn’t make it, so Dave Hazeltine came in
and that was wonderful. Then, after about two, three years, Kenny said, “Dave is
branching out, going to New York and can’t play with us.”

So I said, “Well you got other piano players.” He said, “Yeah. I know you
like to play a lot of tunes. I got this one guy who knows a lot of tunes. He’s about
48 years old, and you’d like him.”
And I said, “Well, that’s fine.”
He says, “but there’s also this kid that’s been coming in.”
I said, “What do you mean, kid?”
He said, “He doesn’t know a lot of tunes, but he’s different.”
I said, “Get him!” When he said that, “different”, I said, “Aha!”

17 Sullivan, interview.
Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS

Melody

Throughout all the performances examined in this essay, Sullivan displays a mastery of melody and all manner of its expressive facets. The recordings examined in this essay may be said to show the following major melodic attributes in common: lyricism, variety of phrase length, variety of phrase placement, variety of melodic contour, and variety of stylistic concept, since the selections are stylistically wide-ranging.

Sullivan’s lyricism seems rooted in the deep emotion of Mahler, Stravisnsky, Charlie Parker, and the many musicians he mentions in his comments as having had influence. The wide range of melodic ideas in Si-Si, the sweeping flute figures of Portrait of Sal La Rosa, the intense, the frenetic, free solo combined with the expressive rubato figures in Slightly Arched/Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most, the ultra-dense Bebop note-flourishes reminiscent of Charlie Parker on As Time Goes By, and the free, expressive figures of Sprint all seem to display this priority to expressive melody when Sullivan performs.

Sullivan also consistently mixes short and long phrases and places these phrases in a great variety of locations within any given measure. This strategy is a logical approach to avoiding monotony and is not unlike a strategy any great speaker who must operate within the parameters of a given language would use. Such highly skilled speakers/musicians, when presented with such parameters in which to work, still
manage to sound interesting and highly creative, especially when speaking extemporaneously, as is the case with jazz improvisation. Within the style of each piece, Sullivan employs appropriate melodic vocabulary while creating very fresh, interesting sounds due to the imaginative combinations of phrase lengths and where they are placed.

The contour of Sullivan’s melodies is equally varied and conducive to his lyricism. The shapes of his improvisations run the gamut from highly angular (flute lines in *Portrait of Sal*) to exceedingly smooth and connected (dense note-groups of *As Time Goes By*). The instrument on which he performs has little effect on this characteristic, as all pieces in this essay exhibit this variety in melodic contour.

**Rhythm**

True to the “variety of everything”, the rhythmic range of ideas employed by Sullivan is consistently diverse. As with his treatment of melody, the varied combinations of short and long ideas seem important. In general, Sullivan travels back and forth between periods of improvisation incorporating syncopation or melodic fragments played in unpredictable rhythms to longer strings of eighth notes with less syncopation and smoother sound. This sounds rather simple in concept, but executing the passages such that they sound natural and consistently interesting is difficult for most musicians. What can be seen through the analyses in this essay is Sullivan’s constant evolution of ideas created through relatively simple manipulations such as alternating long (eighth-note lines) and short (syncopation, fragments) attributes within an improvised phrase.
Harmony

The common harmonic thread that runs through all Sullivan solos considered in this essay is the perfect adaptation of Sullivan’s harmonic concept with the style of each piece. He navigates the Bebop of Si-Si and As Time Goes By with deference and vocabulary drawn directly from Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, complete with chord substitutions, Bebop riffs, and blues inflection. On the free improvisations of Slightly Arched and Sprint Sullivan dives in with the enthusiasm of a musician who is wholly confident in the world of free jazz and is capable of creating interesting musical ideas within this unconstrained environment. In Portrait and It Was A Very Good Year, Sullivan improvises with equal command of the modal harmonic structure without regard to instrument. Sullivan’s playing seems to consistently project a joy and enthusiasm that seem necessary to embrace such a stylistically diverse manner of playing jazz.

Call and Response

Call and response, one of the most important and integral musical components in jazz music, serves a significant role in Ira Sullivan’s improvisations. The dynamic exists in all of the aforementioned facets in these conclusions: melody, rhythm, and harmony. With regard to melody, Sullivan may play short phrase, then answer it with a short phrase. He may just as well answer short phrase with long, and vice versa. Sullivan consistently varies the way this dynamic is achieved. Sullivan also consistently answers a portion of melody with a lyric flourish, creating the call and response dynamic via lyricism. The same may be said for the rhythmic call and response dynamic, where a specific rhythm is answered by a similar counterpart. On other occasions, the rhythms
may be dissimilar, but couched in a call and response dynamic as one acts as a contrasting answer to the call. Harmonically, this phenomenon exists as Sullivan frequently answers a line which outlines the chords of a given progression with a line that steps outside the tonality that might be expected. Again, the approach seems to include a “variety of everything”. The deep integration of call and response within most major musical components of improvisatory jazz music is perhaps the most important observation included in this essay. This call and response dynamic could possibly serve as an independent topic for future study.

**Final Considerations**

In his comments, Sullivan speaks of learning to play trumpet at 3 years of age, saxophone at 9, playing “free” with his uncle who played Ragtime at 10, and of a lifelong process of absorption of almost every musical idea with which he came in contact. This knowledge was received without prejudice, as Sullivan states that he loves and seeks out all kinds of music. This unbiased approach to receiving new musical input manifests itself in the extreme variety of musical sounds in every Sullivan performance included in this essay. It may also explain why Sullivan seems to play any jazz style with the proficiency of a true performing artist, whether it be on trumpet, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, or flute. It is hoped that these analyses may serve to illuminate at least some of the tools that master improviser Ira Sullivan utilizes consistently. The transcriptions themselves may serve as a source for jazz vocabulary from which future musicians can learn and grow.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Segal, Joe. Liner notes from the Ira Sullivan recording *Bird Lives!* Ira Sullivan, trumpet and flugelhorn; Nicky Hill, tenor saxophone, Jodie Christian, piano; Don Garret, bass; Dorel Anderson or Wilbur Campbell, drums. Koch Jazz KOC-CD-8553. CD recording.


Sidran, Ben. Liner notes from the Ira Sullivan recording *After Hours, Vol 5.* Ira Sullivan, saxophones; Billy Peterson, bass; Kenny Horst, drums; Bill Carrothers, piano. Go Jazz Records 6052 2, 2000.


DISCOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

SI-SI
Stepwise sequences/ Enclosures in mm. 37-9
Delay resolution to beat 3.
Whole-Step Harmonic Sequence ............................................. Intense Gravitas to IV(b97)

Delayed Resolution.............................................

Tri-Tone Substitution for V (C7)

116
APPENDIX B

PORTRAIT OF SAL LA ROSA
PORTRAIT OF SAL LA ROSA

RUBATO

Flute

EAL

FLYD

7

G

9

E5

11

E5

16

\( \text{Bass and Drums set up tempo...} \)
Loosely...

moving line in guitar.....

bass extremely active.....
APPENDIX C

SLIGHTLY ARCHED/SPRING CAN REALLY HANG YOU UP THE MOST
IRA SULLIVAN ON SLIGHTLY ARCHED /

Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most

j = 155

1. **TENOR SAXOPHONE**
   - Intro
   - Drums in time...
   - Piano

2. Tenor Sax.
   - Piano/Gtr.

3. Tenor Sax.
   - Piano/Gtr.

4. Tenor Sax.
   - Piano/Gtr.
FAST TIME IMPLIED BRIEFLY / METER AMBIGUOUS AS AT BEGINNING
APPENDIX D

AS TIME GOES BY
172
“Below is a break-down of bar 57 - the 4/4 bar is broken into two 2/4 bars so that all notes fit legibly on page.”
APPENDIX E

SPRINT
OPEN DRUM SOLO FREE - THEN 2 BARS FAST SWING TO D.S.  

D.S. AL CODA

TEMPO 1 DRUMS SET UP TIME

D.S. AL CODA

LOOOLEY

SLOWLY
APPENDIX F

IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR
IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR
MELODY - RUBATO

LEGATO......

HALF TIME RHYTHM SECTION VAMP
Time dispenses over approximately 27 bars to rubato head out

(LAST X)