

## Piano [pianoforte].

A keyboard instrument distinguished by the fact that its strings are struck by rebounding hammers. From the end of the 18th century it has been the principal domestic keyboard instrument in Europe and the USA. The modern piano has a range of a little over seven octaves, from  $A^1$  to  $c^8$ ; the player can sound a large number of notes simultaneously and vary their loudness by changing the force with which the keys are struck. The present article covers the history and use of the piano in jazz.

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### 1. Development of early jazz piano.

The piano, both as a solo instrument and in ensembles of various sizes, was important in the development of early jazz. During the first two decades of the 20th century (before the arrival of radio and television) piano playing was a major form of domestic entertainment. Player pianos, which reproduced performances mechanically from punched paper rolls, served to disseminate [Ragtime](#) (the immediate predecessor of jazz) to a wide public, and during the same period pianists in New Orleans, as well as those in other southern cities, developed the playing and harmonization of the [Blues](#).

The piano was the major performance medium for ragtime, the percussive nature of the instrument being perfect for the clipped syncopations of the music; in addition it was possible for the piano to imitate an entire group. While the player's left hand kept strict time, alternating pedal notes with chords in the "oompah" manner of the marching band, the right hand played syncopated "raggy" figures, often derived from chordal hand positions, in the treble. The general left-hand approach, with its repeated leap from bass note to chord, formed the basis of the later jazz style known as stride (see §2 below). Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag* was one of the best known and most typical examples of the characteristics of ragtime piano ([ex.1](#)).

**Ex.1** From Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag*, as recorded on a piano roll in 1916; transcr. L. Koch

In the development from ragtime to jazz the major transforming element was an increased sense of freedom, in which the left hand gradually took on more linear aspects – walking 10ths and octaves

and melodic runs – as well as a greater feeling of movement. At the same time the right hand was liberated from a literal reading of composed ragtime melodies by several distinct innovations: a growing use of swinging eighth-notes; a freer approach to rhythm by playing ahead of or behind the beat set up by the left hand; and a more liberal treatment of the melody in a tendency towards paraphrase and a gradual increase in other, freer, procedures of improvisation. Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag* played as composed (as on the piano roll made in 1916 from which ex.1 was transcribed) compares strikingly with the recording made by Jelly Roll Morton for the Library of Congress (1938, Cir. [USA] 22), which was a conscious attempt to re-create the innovations of early jazz performers (ex.2). Not only does Morton illustrate some of the points already mentioned, he also injects a true jazz rhythmic feeling into his playing with four beats to the bar, completely obliterating the stiff, march-like rhythms of ragtime.

Ex.2 From Jelly Roll Morton's version of *Maple Leaf Rag* (1938, Circle [USA] 22); transcr. L. Koch

An investigation of Morton's solo piano recordings from 1923–4 reveals many elements of early jazz piano techniques, some of them within the fashion for using the piano in “orchestral imitation.” Among these was the “Spanish tinge,” an early instance of Latin jazz, in which the left hand created a tango-influenced rhythm within the basic stride style; good examples may be heard on *New Orleans Joys* (1923, Gen. 5486) and *Mamanita* (1924, Gen. 5632).

The early jazz piano style was developed to its full potential by Earl Hines, who displayed great originality both as an unaccompanied soloist and as a band pianist. His solo on *Save it, pretty mama* (1928, OK 8657), with Louis Armstrong's Savoy Ballroom Five, illustrates, in the left hand, strings of walking 10ths, a suspension of the stride rhythm at climactic points, and a melodic use of eighth-notes; and, in the right, virtuoso 16th-notes runs and arpeggios which genuinely further his musical ideas rather than being solely decorative. The overall performance gives a sense of unbridled swing coupled with stark originality.

In ensembles, however, the early jazz pianist changed roles to suit the varying needs of the group. The percussive nature of the piano made it an ideal accompanying instrument, along with the banjo and drums, for wind and brass players, but the pianist could be freer than the other instrumentalists in the rhythm section and add embellishments to the ensemble sound. Because of its ability to maintain a strongly rhythmic bass line, the piano was sometimes employed as a solo instrument to provide contrast to the group sound; it was also occasionally used in a lone capacity to accompany an improvised solo. Lil Hardin provides a good example of the latter in her own composition *Sweet Lovin' Man* (1923, OK 4906), recorded with King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, in which she alone accompanies Johnny Dodds's blues improvisations, using tasteful ornamental figures; during the rest of the piece, however, she plays in a strict ensemble style, even being charged with keeping a firm bass. Along the same lines, but with stronger emphasis on musical interchange and on the piano and pianistic techniques, is *Weather Bird* (1928, OK 41454), the classic duet between Earl Hines and Louis Armstrong. While maintaining a relentless drive, Hines varies his approaches to accompaniment. In general Hines and other early pianists adopted such devices as dividing the stride bass pattern between the hands, playing four chords to a bar, and adding right-hand embellishments over a stride left hand. Hines's performance on *Weather Bird* also gives ample

evidence of his “trumpet” style, in which he played octaves instead of full chords in the right hand; his octave attack was sharp, like that of a brass instrument, and he used tremolos on long notes to simulate vibrato and/or a breath crescendo.

A similar variety of approaches to accompaniment and to solo playing within an ensemble may be heard on almost any of the recordings made by Morton with his Red Hot Peppers for Victor between 15 September 1926 and 11 June 1928. *Cannonball Blues* (1926, Vic. 20431) offers some excellent examples of his use of embellishment, such as the passages in double-time over each phrase-ending of a low guitar solo; he also plays a beautiful piano solo, using treble notes only, over the sustained chords of the brass and wind instruments.

## 2. The stride school and Art Tatum.

The style most directly associated with ragtime, and which grew out of it by way of the so-called East Coast ragtimers, was that of the Harlem stride piano school, which had its origins around the time of World War I. Its main practitioners were Luckey Roberts, Willie “the Lion” Smith, and James P. Johnson. When playing as soloists, Count Basie and Duke Ellington were also formidable exponents of stride. The distinctive “stride bass” ([ex.3](#)), adapted from left-hand patterns of ragtime, represents only one of the increased virtuoso demands of the style, which in general called for fast tempos, a full use of the piano’s range, and a wide array of pianistic devices – some from the classical repertory in which many of the Harlem pianists were trained. While the pieces performed by the stride pianists were fully composed (Johnson’s *Carolina Shout* (1921, OK 4495) is perhaps the most famous early example), they were nevertheless seen as a basis for improvisation. Paul Machlin’s analysis of the music of Johnson’s pupil, Fats Waller, discusses at length the latter’s improvisational approach, notably in an examination of different takes of some of his solo recordings made in 1929.

Ex.3 A typical stride bass



The culmination of stride piano is probably the work of Art Tatum, where dazzling ornamental runs and arpeggios and a sophisticated harmonic vocabulary are fused to the basic style. The approaches that influenced Tatum, and the growth of the stride style, may be heard in such recordings as Hines’s *Save it, pretty mama*, Waller’s *Numb Fumblin’* (1929, Vic. 38508), and Johnson’s *You’ve got to be modernistic* (1930, Bruns. 4762). Later, Tatum’s prodigious technique, use of advanced harmonies, and sympathy for popular-song material resulted in some refinement of the style, but his individual approach was a direct development of stride. His recordings set a standard for solo jazz piano in terms of virtuosity: *Tiger Rag* (1940, Decca 18051), in particular, demonstrates both his debt to the true stride style and his personal refinement of it.

## 3. Swing and boogie-woogie.

Generally speaking, the solo piano style became more refined during the swing period. In order for players to deal with the faster tempos they made more use of single bass notes and simple chords (sometimes merely broken 10ths or seventh chords used in an “oompah” fashion), thus lightening the left-hand part; walking 10ths remained an important device for connecting chord progressions. The right-hand part was treated in a similar fashion, so that it often carried only single notes. Teddy Wilson’s recording of *Between the devil and the deep blue sea* (1937, Bruns. 8025) exemplifies these qualities ([ex.4](#)).

**Ex.4** From the fourth chorus of Teddy Wilson: *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (1937, Bruns. 8025); transcr. H. Martin (Martin, 1986)

$\text{♩} = c190$

The musical score consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system is in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = c190$ . The right hand has a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The left hand has a bass line with chords and eighth notes. Chords are labeled  $F^7$ ,  $(GM^7)$ ,  $B^b$ , and  $B^bMI$ . The second system continues the piece with chords  $F/A$ ,  $C^7$ , and  $F (GMi, G^\#^\circ)$ .

Wilson carried his lightness of touch into his group playing, as may be heard on *China Boy* (1936, Vic. 25333) and many other titles he recorded between 1935 and 1938 as a member of Benny Goodman's small groups.

Perhaps the varied approaches to the use of the piano as an ensemble instrument in the swing period are best illustrated by the four tunes with which Count Basie began his recording career in 1936. *Shoe Shine Boy* (Voc. 3441) has an introduction of pure stride piano and passages of "oompah" comping; the embellished accompaniment to the melody instruments on *Evenin'* (also Voc. 3441) is light and swinging; on *Boogie Woogie* (Voc. 3459) Basie comps in a rhythmically free manner behind the soloists, placing isolated chords in the manner echoed later by bop pianists; and *Lady Be Good* (also Voc. 3459) offers an example of a spare solo introduction in the right hand and quietly jabbed random left-hand chords (there are also moments when Basie's four-beat accompaniment of Lester Young's solo resembles the playing of a guitar). Basie employed the same techniques when playing in larger ensembles, and his recordings of the late 1930s provide good examples of band piano.

There was an important exception to the move towards refinement, however, in the resurgence during the late 1930s and early 1940s of the more earthy blues style known as [Boogie-woogie](#), which had developed in the 1920s and is typified by Pine Top Smith's *Pine Top's Boogie Woogie* (1928, Voc. 1245). Its reappearance resulted in a renewed interest in the work of such pianists as Pete Johnson, Meade "Lux" Lewis, and Jimmy Yancey. Boogie-woogie is characterized by a repetitive pounding bass pattern, usually in eighth-notes, on a simple 12-bar blues progression, and examples of widely used patterns are shown in [ex.5](#). Johnson's *Lone Star Blues* (1939, first issued on *Riverside History of Classic Jazz*, 1924–39, Riv. 114; [ex.5a](#)) shows a typical walking line with a rocking motion; this type of bass generally became more even as the tempo of the piece increased. Memphis Slim's pattern on *44 Blues* (from the album *The Real Boogie Woogie*, 1959, FW 3524; [ex.5b](#)) is also common, either in straight eighth-notes or in the more rocking fashion created by triplets. The term "honky-tonk" became associated with the figure (and its variants) in Lewis's *Honky Tonk Train Blues* (1927, Para. 12896; [ex.5c](#)); Bill Doggett's rhythm-and-blues hit *Honky Tonk* (1956, King 4950) gained its name from this type of accompaniment. Yancey's bass line in *Yancey Stomp* (1939, Vic. 26589; [ex.5d](#)) is an interesting pattern sometimes referred to as "the fives," and is best played keeping the eighth-notes slightly uneven (a tenuto mark has been used in the transcription to indicate this). The final example, from Johnson's *Let 'em jump* (1939, Solo Art

12005; ex.5e), shows the honky-tonk pattern with an even subdivision of the beat (usually played at a faster tempo than the figures in ex.5a–d). The blues improvisations played in the right hand above these ostinatos could contain riff-like passages in the high treble, tremolos, single-line melodies, and punctuated chords. Often interesting cross-rhythms were created. Lewis contributes a characteristic “bluesy” flavor to *Honky Tonk Train Blues* by striking adjacent pitches to produce the effect of blue notes and makes deliberate use of dissonance.

Ex.5 Typical left-hand boogie patterns



#### 4. The transition to bop.

The 1940s was a decade in which jazz pianists began to liberate the left hand from the tyranny of timekeeping. This was at first a subtle movement, but later, with the advent of bop, it became more blatant. On *Fly Right (Epistrophy)* (1942, first issued on *Jazz Odyssey*, iii: *The Sound of Harlem*, Col. C3L33), recorded with Cootie Williams’s big band, Kenny Kersey plays the first half of his solo in a “swing stride” style, after the manner of Teddy Wilson; at the bridge, however, he strikes a low pedal note, breaks the stride, and proceeds in a more “modern” fashion, with no steady left-hand pulse. There are short passages of block chords and unison playing with a single note in each hand, as well as angular uses of rhythm.

Examples of another technique of the period – comping – may be heard on recordings made by Kersey and Thelonious Monk in jam sessions in 1941. Kersey’s approach seems to be governed by the harmony of the piece; on *Kerouac (Exactly Like You)* and *Stardust* (on the album *The Harlem Jazz Scene*, 1941, Eso. 4), both with Dizzy Gillespie, he freely plays two-handed chord voicings at times. Monk, however, shows a greater concern with rhythm: on *Swing to Bop (Topsy)* (on the album *Jazz Immortal*, 1941, Eso. 1), with Charlie Christian, he jabs chords in between, and sometimes with, Kenny Clarke’s drum kicks.

The new concepts of harmony and rhythm that were developed by these musicians during informal jam sessions in the early 1940s were the main elements that transformed the jazz piano style. Because of a dispute between the musicians’ union and the recording industry, however, no commercial recordings were made between August 1942 and late 1943, and an important formative year in the development of bop remains undocumented.

Two pieces recorded by Stan Kenton’s orchestra just after the ban was lifted in 1943 illustrate the influence of this group on the development of jazz piano, particularly with regard to chord voicing for comping and in the use of orchestral imitation. *Artistry in Rhythm* (first issued as *Production on Theme*) and *Eager Beaver* (both Cap. 159) have melodies that are derived from a right-hand distribution of a chord – just as were many ragtime melodies. In these examples, however, the right-hand structures emphasize higher partials of chords: sixths, sevenths, and ninths (exx.6a and b). It would appear that Kenton worked these voicings out at the piano and then transferred them to the

format of the big band. His orchestra's early popularity (despite, or because of, controversy) ensured that his music was heard throughout the USA, and many pianists began to transfer his voicings back to the keyboard.

**Ex.6**

(a) Opening of Stan Kenton: *Artistry in Rhythm* (first issued as *Production on Theme*, 1943, Cap. 159); transcr. L. Koch

\* = basic chord from which melody is derived

(b) Opening of Kenton: *Eager Beaver* (1943, Cap. 159); transcr. L. Koch

\* = basic chord from which melody is derived

A comparison between [ex.6b](#) and [ex.1](#) shows how both compositions are pianistically related: Joplin's melody is derived from the position of the chord of  $A\flat$ , with C as the pivotal note; Kenton's has its origins in the right-hand part of a two-handed band voicing of an  $A\flat$  major seventh chord, where the major seventh (G) is the pivot. (Morton's jazz version of Joplin's piece ([ex.2](#)) also contains the major seventh.)

Both Kenton's works illustrate (at the end of the *a* section) the distinct chromaticism often apparent in band voicing which helped shape the melody. Further examples of influential features are the chord voicings in the bridge of the opening theme of *Eager Beaver*, where each phrase ends on a diminished fifth (later a bop trademark), and the rubato statement of the melody by the piano in *Artistry in Rhythm*.

Jazz musicians whose major instrument is other than the piano have always used the keyboard as a self-teaching tool, to formulate interesting voicings and to understand harmonic principles for the creation of solos on their main instrument. (As early as 1927 Bix Beiderbecke was using his piano composition *In a Mist* (*Bixology*) (1927, OK 40916) to explore impressionistic seventh chords (incorporating diminished fifths) combined with a bluesy stride style.) During the 1940s, when harmony was the basis of so many new concepts in jazz, an ability to play the piano at a fairly basic level was almost a prerequisite for any instrumentalist. An example of a figure better known for his work on another instrument is Milt Jackson, whose piano accompaniments with the Bopset led by Howard McGhee and Fats Navarro may be heard on *The Skunk/Booperation* (1948, BN 558); Jackson's style also gives an insight into the rhythmic nature of comping.

Similarly, two pianists who could more correctly be defined as composers used the piano in an experimental fashion and were highly influential in the area of chord voicing. The works of

Thelonious Monk and Tadd Dameron, like those of Kenton, were often built directly from piano voicings of new chord sequences. In addition, the melodies in [exx.7a](#) and [b](#) are derived from the principle of voice leading: in Monk's *'Round Midnight*, for example, the seventh of one chord resolves onto the third of the next – A (7th of B $\flat$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>) to A $\flat$  (7th of B $\flat$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>); A $\flat$  (7th of B $\flat$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>) to G (3rd of E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>). Monk's approach to the piano – a jagged use of seconds, sevenths, and other dissonant intervals and much feeling of space – is a study in itself. When playing unaccompanied he often employed a disjointed stride style, and his pieces usually involved unpredictable rhythmic displacement.

Ex.7 Melodies derived from voice leading  
(a) From Thelonious Monk's *'Round Midnight*

Slow ballad

(E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>) (E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>)

B $\flat$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> → B $\flat$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> →

The musical notation shows a piano accompaniment for a slow ballad. The key signature has two flats (B $\flat$  and E $\flat$ ). The melody is written in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. Above the staff, the chords B $\flat$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> and B $\flat$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> are indicated with arrows showing the resolution of the seventh of one chord to the third of the next. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line.

(b) From Tadd Dameron's *If you could see me now*

Slow ballad

G $\flat$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> F $\sharp$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> B $\flat$

The musical notation shows a piano accompaniment for a slow ballad. The key signature has two flats (B $\flat$  and E $\flat$ ). The melody is written in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. Above the staff, the chords G $\flat$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>, F $\sharp$ M $\flat$ I $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>, and B $\flat$  are indicated. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line.

Indeed, rhythm was also a strong factor in the development of bop piano, and much stylistic modification arose through the changing function of the rhythm section. With the coming of amplification, the guitar began to be used as a solo instrument, and its new-found power often upset the delicate balance of the section. The recordings issued on the album *The Harlem Jazz Scene* also illustrate this aspect: the new rhythmic feel and the accents played by Monk may be heard quite well during Christian's solos, but are obliterated when the latter strums an accompaniment. A performance by Tiny Grimes of Charlie Parker's *Red Cross* (1944, Savoy 532) is also instructive: the guitarist is effective when doubling the melody with Parker, taking a solo, or playing background licks, but he impedes the rhythm when he strums squarely on all four beats. The pianist, Clyde Hart, had already mastered the new comping style and sounds comfortable; his solo, however, is still of the swing type. On a further recording by the same group, *Tiny's Tempo* (1944, Savoy 526), Grimes strums a four-beat rhythm almost throughout, and Hart, unsure where to place his chords so as not to cause conflict, plays in the high treble register after the manner of Count Basie.

A comparison of this last performance with one made by Gillespie and Parker only eight months later – Gillespie's *Salt Peanuts* (1945, Guild 1003) – shows in the later recording the complete transition of the jazz piano style and the new role of the instrument in the rhythm section. There is no guitar, and the pianist, Al Haig, provides perfect examples of pure bop comping, complete with extended chord voicings jabbed in a rhythmically free manner during gaps in the melodic lines. Haig's improvised solo is also pure bop: his right hand plays running figures in imitation of Gillespie and Parker, and his left performs the comping function exactly as in his role as accompanist, but with spare chords or intervals (often only a root and a 7th) so as not to limit his choice of notes in the melodic line.

Pure bop piano reached its apotheosis in the work of Bud Powell. The statement of the theme in his trio performance of *All God's Chillun Got Rhythm* (1949, Mer./Clef 11046) provides excellent examples of bop chord voicings. His linear right-hand improvisation shows supreme creativity and technique, and his left hand also exhibits a number of interesting devices: ostinato octave leaps on the dominant against tonic harmony; spare intervals such as 10ths and 7ths; and occasional single notes in the bass moving in half-notes (mostly when the chord progression follows a succession of fifths). Powell's hammer-like approach to the piano lent great drive to his performances, and such solos as that on Parker's *Ornithology* (1950; on the album *Charlie Parker in Historical Recordings*, i, 1948, 1950, Le Jazz Cool 101) had a great influence on other bop pianists.

In his solo work Powell treated the instrument in a similar fashion, simply allowing the feeling of a rhythm section to be implied. In *Hallucinations* (1951) on the album *Bud Powell Moods* (1950–51, Clef 610) ([ex.8](#)) he derives his melody from successive hand positions of ninth chords played alternately up and down in an arpeggiated manner, while his left hand shows the use of spare intervals and single notes.

**Ex.8** From the second improvised chorus of Bud Powell: *Hallucinations*, (1951), from the album *Bud Powell Moods* (1950–51, Clef 610); transcr. L. Feather (Feather, 1957)

Even as many bop pianists were relieving the emphasis on the left hand and lightening the instrument's role in the rhythm section, an alternative approach was being developed by Erroll Garner. Garner sometimes created the effect of continuous strumming in his left hand, articulated by occasional accents in the lower register, thus recalling the impression of a swing rhythm section. His right-hand playing, with its use of treble chords and/or octaves, also drew on earlier styles, but Garner's harmonic vocabulary was close to that of bop musicians. His playing is most effective when unaccompanied, though it is also successful in trios and in solos within an ensemble. On the slowest take of Parker's *Cool Blues* (1947, Dial 1015), for instance, Garner plays a full chorus before the closing theme in this manner; in all other solos in the piece, however, he adopts a blend of swing and bop elements. Garner's mature style is well represented by the album *Concert by the Sea* (1955, Col. CL883).

Certain elements of swing era big-band music were also transformed and carried over into bop piano. One of these was the "locked hands" block-chord style, which derived from the voicing of big-band saxophone sections. The pianist harmonized each note of the melody with a four-note chord in the right hand, while the left hand doubled the melody an octave lower (*see* [Harmony \(i\), §1\(iv\)](#)). Phil Moore is credited with developing this style as early as 1939 and Milt Buckner made

use of it in Lionel Hampton's band during the early 1940s. Lennie Tristano, on *Blue Boy (Fine and Dandy)* (1947, Key. 681), shows a strong understanding of its potential, using block chords when comping, in solo passages, and in simultaneous improvisation with the guitarist Billy Bauer. But the true popularizer of the technique was George Shearing ([ex.9](#)); Shearing added vibraphone to the upper melody line of the piano and guitar to the lower, creating a distinctive ensemble sound that brought him much commercial success.

**Ex.9** Beginning of the bridge section in the first chorus of George Shearing:  
*Bop, Look, and Listen* (1949, MGM 10426); transcr. L. Koch

♩ = 100

Bbm7 (9) Eb7 (9) A#7 (9) Am7 D(13) D7 D7

etc.

basic progression: Bbm7 Eb7 Am7 D7

The nature of the locked hands style generates nonharmonic tones in every voice, producing in effect “passing chords” and “neighbor chords” within the basic progression. Although very effective in a group setting, this approach was generally not satisfactory in solo playing unless it was interspersed with other styles; the lack of steady rhythm and bass roots was too difficult to overcome by implication. Furthermore, the use of such a block-chord texture can tend to become monotonous. Shearing usually played his improvisations in a single-line manner and reserved the locked hands style mainly for melody statements, which created a balanced performance.

Later pianists who made exemplary use of block chords in improvisation include Dick Hyman (for example, Charlie Parker's *Hot House* (1952) on the album *New Bird*, ii, 1951–4, Phoenix 12); Lennie Tristano (*Ghost of a Chance*, on *Lennie Tristano*, 1955, Atl. 1224); Bill Evans (ii) (*Green Dolphin Street* (1959) on *Peace Piece and other Pieces*, 1959, 1962, Mlst. 47024); and Oscar Peterson (*Give me the simple life*, on *Tracks*, 1970, MPS 15306).

## 5. After 1950: the acoustic piano.

During the 1950s a number of pianists expanded the block-chord style by adopting a two-handed full-chord approach, imitating more closely the orchestral sound of a big-band brass section. The effect created also bore some resemblance to the voicings (though not, of course, the rhythms) used in Afro-Cuban jazz in the late 1940s. An early use of expanded block chords may be heard played by Red Garland with the Miles Davis Quintet on *Bye Bye Blackbird* (on the album *'Round about Midnight*, 1955–6, Col. CL949).

Another approach, which derived, more or less, from the Latin style, was that of playing a single-note melody simultaneously in both hands, one or more octaves apart. An example may be heard on *Barbados* (on the album *Here is Phineas*, 1956, Atl. 1235), recorded by Phineas Newborn, and many instances of the technique used in improvisation are performed by Eddie Costa on Clark Terry's *The Jazz Version of All American* (1962, Mdsv. 26).

The basic bop piano style received a healthy injection of the blues during the 1950s through the funky work of Horace Silver. By his witty use of short bluesy licks (usually involving a simple two-note chord with the addition of sliding grace notes to give the effect of blue notes), Silver restored

some of the earthiness which the bop musicians had deliberately destroyed. His approach is well represented by *Doodlin'* (on the album *Horace Silver and the Jazz Messengers*, 1954, BN 5058) ([ex.10](#)) and *The Preacher* (on *Horace Silver and the Jazz Messengers*, 1955, BN 5062).

**Ex.10** Bars 10–11 of the first improvised chorus of Horace Silver: *Doodlin'*, from the album *Horace Silver and the Jazz Messengers* (1954, BN 5058); transcr. L. Koch

(left hand tacet)

An interesting comparison can be made by examining the work of John Lewis in the early 1950s (for example, any of his recordings with the Modern Jazz Quartet between 1952 and 1957) and that of Wynton Kelly at the beginning of the next decade (in particular his recordings with Miles Davis in 1961). Both pianists follow in the footsteps of Bud Powell, but Lewis's spare style was strongly influenced by the cool-jazz movement, while Kelly's more funky approach exhibits the use of expanded block chords and a number of impressionistic touches.

The impressionistic aspect of jazz piano was unveiled in the late 1950s by Bill Evans (ii), who used in his left hand rootless voicings which implied chord roots (sometimes a choice of several); an effect of unabated tension was created by the progression of ambiguous chords that never seemed to resolve ([ex.11](#)). This method resulted in a new sound for the pianist and gave much freedom of choice to the double bass player. In *Blue in Green* (on the album *Portrait in Jazz*, 1959, Riv. 1162), when he reaches a climactic point in his solo, Evans makes use of this type of voicing in rhythm with his right-hand ideas; this produces the same feeling as the older block-chord technique, but, since the left-hand voicing does not move with the melody, gives a more hammer-like effect. For comping within an ensemble, the rootless voicings could be used in the left hand while the right hand played contrasting chords, sometimes setting up dual harmonic implications; they could also be transferred to the right hand so that the left could provide a bass line. For a solo performance, however, this style is usually best when modified with the addition of some bass notes and an injection of rhythmic vitality, and/or melded with earlier jazz styles, as in Evans's performance in *Alone* (1969, Verve 68792).

**Ex.11** From Bill Evans (ii): *Blue in Green*, on the album *Portrait in Jazz* (1959, Riv. 1162); transcr. L. Koch

Other pianists also began using rootless voicings in a more blues-based manner, sometimes employing fuller chords. With the advent of modal and free jazz at the end of the 1950s, the left hand soon became preoccupied with voicings in fourths in order to accommodate the nonharmonic nature of the music. In the modal style pianists often played improvisatory patterns in the right hand against the fourths, using the pentatonic or other modal scales, or, particularly when comping, added to the structure by playing block chords; the same approach was used in freer performances,

but more random tonalities were employed. Another technique of modal jazz was to derive a melodic improvisation from the position of fourths in the right hand (just as the bop pianists had done with right-hand chord voicings – see [ex.8](#)).

In the 1960s pianists had to adjust to nonharmonic thinking. Before that time, most melodies (both composed and improvised) were harmonically derived. The best examples as to how this adjustment was achieved may be found in the work of McCoy Tyner, a pianist of equivalent standing in a more modern era to that of Bud Powell in the bop period. Tyner's recorded performances are infused with an underlying blues feeling and jazz vitality whatever approach he chooses to take – bop, modal, or freer style. On *Village Blues* (on the album *Coltrane Jazz*, 1959–60, Atl. 1354), an early recording with Coltrane, he shows a bluesy type of voicing used by Evans, in which chords seem to be built from the elements of mixolydian scales; at several points in his improvisations on *Blue Monk* ([ex.12a](#)) (on his own LP *Nights of Ballads and Blues*, 1963, Imp. 39) he combines this type of voicing (in which chords derive from a C mixolydian scale – C–D–E–F–G–A–B $\flat$ ) with chords voiced in fourths. On *Tunji* (on the album *Coltrane*, 1962, Imp. 21) Tyner accompanies Coltrane with one open chord in a repeated pattern ([ex.12b](#)), but for his solo he reverts to the blues form, using rootless structures in seventh-chord mixolydian voicings ([ex.12c](#)). *The night has a thousand eyes* (on his own LP *Song for my Lady*, 1972, Mlst. 9044) gives (in the right hand) countless examples of phrases derived from pentatonic scales ([ex.12d](#)), while the album *Expansions* (1968, BN 84338) includes a modern approach to ballad form; Tyner exhibits a surprisingly gentle though crystal clear touch on *I thought I'd let you know* and engages in a “free” exchange with the drummer on *Smitty's Place*.

**Ex.12** Some elements of McCoy Tyner's style: (a) and (d) transcr. P. Rinzler (Rinzler, 1983); (b) and (c) transcr. L. Koch

(a)

(b)

(c) B<sup>(13)</sup><sub>7</sub> (no root)

(d)

Other pianists departed more radically from the bop style, applying such free-jazz techniques as “gesture-derived” figures (i.e., passages originating through a physical gesture), tone clusters, atonal motivic development, and unusual attacks (with the palm or fist, etc.), and ignoring a steady rhythmic pulse. Lennie Tristano experimented with atonal music, mostly in a linear fashion, in the late 1940s (notably on *Intuition*, 1949, Cap. 1224), but the most exemplary musician in this style is Cecil Taylor, who began recording in 1956. *Enter Evening* (on the album *Unit Structures*, 1966, BN 84237) ([ex.13](#)) shows the use of gesture-derived figures, fourths, and a final tone cluster.

**Ex.13** "Gesture-derived" figures from Cecil Taylor: *Enter Evening* on the album *Unit Structures* (1966, BN 84237); transcr. H. Martin (Martin, 1986)



In the 1970s free-jazz procedures were ingeniously fused with diatonic harmonies and a lyrical approach to the piano in the work of Keith Jarrett, as may be heard on his album *Eyes of the Heart* (1976, ECM 1150), while the synthesis of "modern" and bop techniques that evolved in the 1980s is exemplified by the playing of Michel Petrucciani, notably on the album *Pianism* (1985, BN 85124).

A healthy eclecticism may be seen most clearly in the evolution of the piano as a solo instrument. In the hands of a technician such as Oscar Peterson, a variety of styles and approaches are evident on a single album (*Tracks*, 1970, MPS 15306). The development from the 1950s of a single-note walking bass or rock ostinato in the left hand to imitate a bass player gave new scope to the solo pianist. Dave McKenna adopted a "rolling" approach to a walking bass on his album *Dancing in the Dark and other Music of Arthur Schwartz* (1985, Conc. 292), while on *Have you Met Miss Jones* (on the LP *Music for Perla*, 1974, Ste. 1021) Tete Montoliu exhibits a driving use of the technique at a fast tempo. Roland Hanna's album *Sir Elf* (1973, Choice 1003) shows various left-hand formulas, including some derived from Erroll Garner's personal style, a humorous stride after Thelonious Monk, and a rock-influenced line. A good example of a pianist assimilating new techniques into an older jazz style in a creative manner is Earl Hines (*Hines Does Hoagy*, c1973, Audiophile 113), and a masterful approach to the piano as a lone accompanying instrument is demonstrated by Jimmie Rowles in his duets with Stan Getz on the album *The Peacocks* (1977, Col. JC34873). A fine overview may be gained from the album *A Jazz Piano Anthology* (Col. KG32355), on which the featured pianists range from Eubie Blake to Cecil Taylor (details of dates and supporting players may be found in a review by Dan Morgenstern in *Down Beat*, xli/1, 1974).

But perhaps the best medium for hearing any jazz pianist's work is the trio of piano, double bass, and drums, and most players since the 1940s have recorded in that format at some time during their careers. The early trios, however, often used guitar instead of drums: the strummed rhythm was lighter and softer, and the guitar could also add melodic relief to the basic sound. The trios of Nat "King" Cole and Art Tatum were exemplary.

As for the future, jazz pianists will probably continue to develop a command of *all* styles and draw from them, as well as from classical techniques, for their inspiration. Dave Brubeck, who used this type of approach in the past, created a body of work that, while not always even in quality, was spontaneously conceived and cliché-free. In an earthier sense, the same broad conception is found in the work of Mary Lou Williams – for example, on her album *A Keyboard History* (1955, Jzt. 1206). From the mid-1960s Jaki Byard began to gain recognition for his pan-stylistic approach to the instrument, and in later decades this sort of eclecticism has become the norm.

## 6. After 1950: the electric and electronic piano.

With the advent of electronically amplified instruments, many musicians felt that the volume of the acoustic piano was not adequate. (More practically, there was a need for a portable instrument which could be taken to venues that had either no piano or, more commonly, a piano that was out of tune and ill cared for.) As early as 1940 Earl Hines recorded two titles, *Body and Soul/Child of a Disordered Brain* (Bb 10642), on the Storytone piano, which relied on vacuum tubes and sounded like a fuzz-toned harpsichord. Hines also took the instrument on tour until its unwieldiness (it weighed one and a half tons) became overwhelming.

The earliest electric piano used to any extent in jazz, however, was developed in 1954 by Benjamin F. Miessner (whose early patent was also responsible for the manufacture of the Storytone) and marketed by Wurlitzer. Miessner's instrument was based on struck tuned reeds of steel, with individual electronic pickups for amplification affixed near each reed. Many musicians used this piano for practical purposes (it weighed only about 75 pounds), but most were disgruntled because of the touch and sound. A pianist's touch is a mark of individuality, and one which the use of an electric or electronic instrument, where the sound is not generated purely by the striking power of the player, threatened to obliterate. The later models of Miessner's piano, however, made with a plastic case, were more touch sensitive than the metal prototype. Some pianists, such as Joe Zawinul, found the tone of the instrument extremely pleasing: he played it when touring with Ray Charles in 1959 and again in the 1960s, as a member of Cannonball Adderley's group. Sun Ra recorded with it on *Medicine for a Nightmare* and *A Call for all Demons* (on the album *Angels and Demons at Play*, 1955–7, Saturn 407).

The electric piano that eventually found favor in the eyes of jazz musicians was that designed by Harold Rhodes and Leo Fender (who invented the electric bass guitar) and manufactured from 1965. It has lengths of tunable thin steel wire which are struck by rubber hammers; the wire forms one tine of a structure resembling a tuning-fork, the other tine of which is a longer, flat "tone bar" tuned to reinforce and sustain the vibrations of the wire. The sound of the Fender-Rhodes piano is more bell-like than that of the acoustic piano, and certain voicings tend to blur more than others. Pianists therefore had to revise their approach to playing when using the instrument (Bill Evans, for instance, never found it very satisfactory), and it took well over a decade of experimentation before musicians ascertained that the Fender-Rhodes piano was an instrument in its own right and not just a replacement for the acoustic piano.

The Fender-Rhodes piano was very effective in jazz-rock groups during the 1970s, when triadic voicings were formulated and pianists began to use it in a guitar-like manner. Herbie Hancock, who at the urging of Miles Davis played it on *Miles in the Sky* (1968, Col. CS9628), went on to employ the instrument to great artistic and commercial success on his album *Headhunters* (1973, Col. KC32731). Zawinul may be heard playing a creative solo on *American Tango* on Weather Report's album *Mysterious Traveler* (c1974, Col. KC32494).

The perfect union of artist and instrument, however, and one which has set the standard for performance on the Fender-Rhodes piano, is probably that demonstrated by Chick Corea. Whether it is the balance between volume setting and finger force, the regulation of volume, or his general sensitivity to the instrument that allows penetration of Corea's personality remains unknown, but nevertheless he plays with true expression. His long, clean right-hand lines (often derived from pentatonic scales) ring out over clipped figures comped in the left hand; he gives the impression that each note is being treated to a different level of force. Surprisingly, Corea (who, like Hancock, was introduced to the Fender-Rhodes piano by Davis) claims that at first he disliked the feel of the instrument, and he had many adjustments to make to it. The fruits of these adjustments may readily be heard on the album *Light as a Feather* (1972, Pol. 5525), recorded with his band Return to

Forever, which shows a highly effective use of the piano in a jazz context. Corea's solo on the title track is particularly well suited to the instrument; there is a passage in *Five Hundred Miles High* where he plays a repeated note with rapid changes of fingering, the execution of which shows his intuitive knowledge of its capabilities; and his use of rubato in the introduction to *Spain* demonstrates its lyrical quality.

Many musicians have found problems with the electric piano when using it for comping to back acoustic instruments, and have had to take account of different soloists when making volume adjustments. Bob James, for example, almost buries Paul Desmond with his accompaniment on *Autumn Leaves* and *Tangerine* on Chet Baker's album *She Was Too Good to Me* (1975, CTI 6050); moreover, the instrument seems constantly to intrude on Desmond's ideas – although it sounds effective behind Baker's solos. Corea achieves a perfect balance, however, in his accompaniment of Stan Getz on the title track of the latter's LP *Captain Marvel* (1972, Col. KC32706).

Later advances in the development of electric and electronic technology have resulted in the manufacture of new instruments, as makers aspire to produce the equivalent of the acoustic piano. One of the first of these was the Yamaha CP70, an electric grand piano that sounds much like an acoustic instrument with pickups attached to it, and which was admired by many jazz pianists for its touch and sound. With the emergence of such instruments in the 1980s, the Fender-Rhodes fell completely out of the picture. A decade later, in the 1990s, the quality of these instruments continued to improve. Nonetheless, in an intimate setting, where one can hear timbre clearly, the electronic piano remains no match for a good acoustic instrument, and it is inconceivable that anyone would choose to use one for a studio recording (though – a different matter altogether – some fusion pianists use acoustic instruments with a synthesizer attached to create new timbral effects). The distinction holds in live performance as well: even though an electronic piano is far more convenient to transport and to keep in tune, nearly any jazz musician would prefer to use a venue's acoustic instrument, amplified through a public address system, rather than an electronic one.

The use of the piano in jazz is explored deeply in the multi-media CD-ROM *Dick Hyman's Century of Jazz Piano*, recorded by Hyman and created by J. Simpson (New Orleans, 1999).

For further illustrations *see* Basie, count; Evans, bill (ii) ; Herman, woody, fig. 1a ; Jazz (i), fig.8 ; Jones, fig.1a ; Monk, thelonious; Shearing, george; Sullivan, joe; and Taylor, billy (ii) .

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