

# ECLYPSO

## TOMMY FLANAGAN SOLO

This is a transcription of the two-chorus solo that pianist Tommy Flanagan takes on his own composition *Eclipse*. You'll find it on the classic album *The Cats* (with John Coltrane, Kenny Burrell and Idrees Sulieman).

The head is played as calypso on the A sections, swing in the bridge. For the solos, the band stays in swing feel.

This solo makes a good study for a number of reasons. First, the harmony is very simple – as is fitting for a calypso tune (cf Sonny Rollins' *St Thomas*). The A section is just II-V-I-VIs and III-VI-II-Vs in Eb, the bridge is a II-V-I in Ab (the IV of the key), followed by a II-V in Bb (the V of the key), a II-V back in Eb and a C7 chord to lead smoothly back into the first chord of the A section. So it's a good place to look for ideas over common harmonic movement.

Second, at the start of the second A, Tommy moves into double time and stays there for a full sixteen bars. By transcribing an extended double-time passage, we can put it under the microscope and examine how it's constructed.

A word about transcribing double-time passages and fast ornaments. Often the rhythms aren't played very cleanly – at fast tempos, this is often more an expression of individual players' swing feel. Also, at this speed, even the best players slip up from time to time. This means sometimes your exact transcription of a double-time passage will contain a note that is clearly against the harmony (but don't forget the possibility of harmonic substitutions). My advice in these situations is to simplify/correct rhythmic and harmonic blips – look for the idea the player is suggesting at the time and transcribe the intention, rather than the exact performance. Also, if the solo contains a particularly complex rhythmic figure or dragged time, don't get bogged down trying to notate it exactly – write down a rough approximation. The important thing is hearing, feeling and playing it right.

Third (a related point), the solo is very diverse rhythmically. Barry Harris has said that triplets are where it's at, what's hip – he makes the interesting point that English is spoken in triplets – “go to the store”, etc. Tommy artfully combines eighth notes, sixteenth notes and triplet configurations of both throughout this solo. There are some neat syncopations too.

### NOTES

Tommy's strong bebop influences are on display throughout. The rhythmic sense is clearly influenced by Parker, as is a lot of the harmonic content of the lines.

The extended double-time passage extends across the break into the B section – a very effective way of dovetailing the seam, as it were. It is constructed from diatonic runs and pentatonic fragments in the home key, arpeggios (both diatonic and diminished), and bebop chromatic approaches and encircling figures. You can't really play this stuff up to speed until it's well and truly “in your hands”, so I'd advise practising the second A and first B at half-speed to begin with.

Look at the resolutions to EbM at the end of the second A section and AbM at the start of the first B section. This is a very idiomatic major-chord resolving figure that appears in a lot of Parker compositions and solos. Notice how Tommy uses it in different parts of the bar. It's well worth extracting this figure and taking round the keys. Think of it like this: fifth, scale tone/chromatic up to root, scale tone/chromatic down to third, then down the major pentatonic to the fifth below.

What about the descending augmented arpeggio in bars 5 and 6, first B section? Look at what's going on harmonically at this point. Ignore the Cm7 and just focus on the F7 (the F7 chord is structurally what's important here, its companion II chord is just fleshing things out). What we have here is a dominant chord on the II of the home key. There are a couple of useful things to remember about this particular chord. First, it tends to be followed by a minor 7<sup>th</sup> on the same root (setting up a II-V-I). This motion appears all over the place – *Take The A Train*, *Exactly Like You*, *Girl from Ipanema* – and it happens in this tune too. Second, a Lydian Dominant always sounds good in this context (*A Train* even uses this principle in the melody). The G augmented arpeggio Tommy plays here consists of the 9<sup>th</sup>, #11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of F7 – which is about the most economical way possible of clearly outlining a Lydian Dominant.

If you like this lick, learn it over other dominant chords and look for this harmonic motion in other tunes.

It's worthwhile spending some time looking at and thinking about the final two bars of the first B section, to appreciate how Tommy "comes down" from the double-time back into eighth notes.

The final A section, first chorus, kicks off with a deliberate quote (another common bebop device) of *Jeepers Creepers*. Quoting can be great fun, but if you want it to be more than just a little prank, you should strive to integrate it into your solo, just as Tommy does here. Echoes of *Jeepers Creepers* continue to appear, both melodically and rhythmically, throughout the rest of the solo.

(Tommy is fond of quotes – elsewhere on this album he works in a deliberate reference to Chopin's *Fantaisie Impromptu*. Tatum did a lot of this. Double-time passages are good places for classical quotes because they tend to be played in straight, unswung sixteenths. Don't forget that a lot of the musicians of this era, especially piano players, had killer classical chops...)

Note also, that by extending the quote into the next A, Tommy does another "dovetailing" manoeuvre – this time across choruses. The effect is strengthened by the use of the same figure in thirds at the end of both As.

The 4:3 notation at the start of the second chorus is an approximation of the rhythm – the sense is one of evenly dragging the time through into the next bar. You have to hear the original to really get this down.

The final A is made to sound final by the use of octave "bell" figures on the root of the key. This is a useful principle to extract and build into your own soloing. "Bells" are usually played on the root or the fifth of the key.

The LH comping is bebop vintage, rather than rootless style. Tommy mostly uses octave-seventh shells on the dominant chords and sixth chords on the tonics.

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Best of luck, and feel free to e-mail me with any queries or comments at [jlyon@opus28.co.uk](mailto:jlyon@opus28.co.uk).

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2nd Chorus

**A** Fm7 Bb7 EbΔ C7 Fm7 Bb7 Gm7 C7

Fm7 Bb7 EbΔ C7 Fm7 Bb7 Gm7 C7

**A** Fm7 Bb7 EbΔ C7 Fm7 Bb7 Gm7 C7

Fm7 Bb7 Gm7 C7 Fm7 Bb7 EbΔ

**B** Bbm7 Eb7 AbΔ

Cm7 F7 Fm7 Bb7 C7

**A** Fm7 Bb7 EbΔ C7 Fm7 Bb7 Gm7 C7

Fm7 Bb7 Gm7 C7 Fm7 Bb7 EbΔ