

MR PC

TOMMY FLANAGAN SOLO

This is a transcription of the nine-chorus solo that pianist Tommy Flanagan takes on John Coltrane's minor blues *Mr PC*. You'll find it on the classic Atlantic album, *Giant Steps*. If you don't already own this CD, you really should.

I've posted this solo because someone recently asked me for advice on bebop playing over minor blues changes. I first transcribed it years ago and developed a bit of an obsession with it at the time. I can honestly say that studying this solo really unlocked the minor blues sound for me. I hope you'll find it useful.

Tommy, faced with the unenviable task of following Trane, turns in a solo that burns with a constant quiet fire. He starts off simple and clear and draws the listener in. This solo is an absolute textbook example of bebop playing over minor blues changes: elegant, melodic, rhythmically inventive, cleanly articulated, beautifully phrased. And it swings like the clappers.

NOTES

This solo gets an incredible amount of mileage out of simple triads – in particular, Tommy hangs most of his lines over the two tonic chords, Cm and Fm, around the first five notes of the respective scales. He treats these chords strictly as tonic minors, emphasising the 6th – in the penultimate bar of chorus 2, for instance – (or very occasionally, the major 7th), rather than the Dorian minor 7th. Note also the bebop enclosures and approaches throughout.

He plays the changes pretty straight, occasionally adding (D7b9) G7b9 in bar two (choruses 2, 5, 6 and 7). In all but the first two choruses, he explicitly uses a C7b9 in bar 4, to lead more smoothly into the upcoming Fm chord – even when it's not there in the solo line it's in the comping. There's usually a turnaround in the final bar (D7b9 G7b9 or Ab7 G7b9) as well.

In bar 9, he usually clearly outlines Ab7 (often just a 1-2-3-5 figure, but occasionally implying Ab7b9), rather than D half-diminished, which is the other option at this pivot point in minor blues form. The moral of the tale is that when you're playing tritone subs (like the Ab7 here), you can play very simply, *because the substitution is already hip...*

The shape he uses for the rapid triplet runs in choruses 3 and 8 is derived from the rootless voicing for Ab7, a spread that matches the C minor blues scale. This produces very satisfying runs in C minor. *This is a principle worth extracting so you can use the equivalent shape in other keys.* But don't get bogged down with these little pieces of flash, there's much more valuable stuff in the rest of the solo. Either approximate them or rest for those bits, and come back and work on them later.

I've taken a logical guess at some of the notes that are "ghosted" (marked x).

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.

Listen to the recording and play along with it to get the nuances down. You could also do a lot worse than transposing it into the other commonly played minor blues keys, F minor and Bb minor. Eb minor sometimes comes in handy too...

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

Jason Lyon
London
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Tommy Flanagan Solo

Giant Steps

Transc. Jason Lyon

Mr PC

Cm

Fm

Ab7

G7

Cm

Handwritten musical score consisting of ten staves. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks such as '+' and 'x'. Trills are indicated by 'tr' above notes. Triplet markings '3' are placed over groups of notes. The score is written in a single system across ten staves.

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A handwritten musical score for guitar, consisting of six staves. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second staff features a bass clef and includes a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff continues with complex rhythmic patterns and triplets. The fourth staff shows a change in key signature to two flats and includes a sharp sign. The fifth staff contains a mix of rhythmic patterns and accidentals. The sixth staff is a single line with a few notes and a final double bar line. The handwriting is clear and legible.