This was one of those sessions where nothing had been planned prior to coming into the studio. Walter Page and Jo Jones were messing around and on comes Freddy Green, Count Basie, and then Lester comes in. They just decide to do these things. These were strictly off-the-cuff performances and rate today as monstrous classics.  

Oscar Treadwell

The jazz vehicle chosen for observation and analysis is *Lester Leaps In*, recorded in 1939 by Count Basie and the Kansas City Seven. Lester Young is the featured soloist. *Lester Leaps In* is considered a classic performance for Young and Basie with a more-than-able contribution by Buck Clayton on trumpet. The inspirational interplay of Basie’s piano accompaniment is almost the equal of Young’s inventive brilliance.

In jazz, musicians record an improvised performance based on the same arrangement several times. They must critically decide which take is the one that will appear on the final released album. The alternate takes are analogous to sketches in design. *Lester Leaps In* was recorded in two live improvised takes. The recordings are quite different in character, especially in the solos, even though the underlying structure remains constant. In the master take, Lester Young’s solo represents a spontaneity that is ordered and structural. There is a quality of balance, a unity of parts, and a clarity of concept lying beneath the surface of an invigorated texture of notes. The other musicians’ solos and collective improvisations respond to Lester’s efforts. By comparison the alternate take seems unbalanced, disjointed and somewhat sluggish.

*Lester Leaps In* consists of an introduction and six choruses (see arrangement chart on page 3). The four melodic sections within each chorus are arranged in a standard AABA sequence. The A-melody is repeated twice, followed by a bridge (or transition) B-melody, with a return to the A-melody. Each melodic section is eight measures in length. A measure consists of four beats, therefore a single section has thirty-two beats. The first half of the A-melody is the vehicle (Gillespie’s definition). It functions as the big idea or generator for the entire piece. The four-bar introduction and first chorus support this vehicle, setting up enhanced themes and complex interrelationships. The vehicle acts as a datum from which comparisons are drawn. Improvisational solos build upon these structures as variations on themes throughout the subsequent choruses.

Each team begins with a written (with graphical support) of one chorus chosen from the six chorus master-take jazz vehicle. Use the attached Chorus Analysis Format:

1. Download mp3’s and graphical representations of *Lester Leaps In* (the entire song and individual mp3’s for each chorus) from Professor Neiman’s web site.
2. The first step in the process is to repeatedly listen to the music. Each team must become familiar with the entire song, then on the first parts, and then on the chosen chorus.
3. The analysis must also consider events four measures before and after each chorus.
4. Distill key musical structures and elements within each chorus. Discover underlying structures by looking for any event in the chorus that can be quantified or described in terms of relationships, numbers, ratios, positions, locations and zones.
5. By repeated listening and observing, students discover and recognize subtle relationships and references.
6. A strict technical analysis of the music is unnecessary because we are looking at the exercise as architects, not musicologists. As a guide, use the attached reference material for the analysis when describing the structural events of the vehicle.
7. For the report of your observations, outline the following items for each chorus: general notes; 4 measures prior; section A1; section A2; section B; section A3; 4 measures after.
Lester leaps in  

Chorus analysis format

General Notes:

Four Measures prior:

Section A1: instrumentation (no. of measures)

Section A2: instrumentation (no. of measures)

Section B: instrumentation (no. of measures)

Section A3: instrumentation (no. of measures)

Four Measures after:
**Lester Leaps In** arrangement chart

**INTRODUCTION**
- 4
  - piano solo
  - bass / drums

**CHORUS 1**
- vehicle: A1, A2, B, A3
- stated rhythm section

**CHORUS 2**
- stated rhythm section

**CHORUS 3**
- stated rhythm section

**CHORUS 4**
- stated rhythm section

**CHORUS 5**
- stated rhythm section

**CHORUS 6**
- stated rhythm section

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**Vehicle type:** standard (an original melody, but borrows its chord progress from the standard *I Got Rhythm*)

**Formal structure:** AABA (each section is 8 measures or bars long); length of selection: 4 + 192 measures.

_Lester Leaps In (master take)_
Count Basie's Kansas City Seven

Count Basie (piano)
Buck Clayton (trumpet)
Dickie Wells (trombone)
Lester Young (tenor sax)
Freddy Green (guitar)
Walter Page (bass)
Jo Jones (drums)
Early jazz players...were reluctant to have their improvisations recorded (or their arrangements) during the first years of recording, as they recognized the opportunity for other players to re-hear and carefully copy anything they had on record and feared the ensuing competition for work and fame, once their secrets were known and assimilated. History shows that their concern was not without cause, as imitators have often crowded or displaced their stylistic idols by way of their race, business acumen, production talents, or simply their easy, local availability. Musically, though, imitators learn, rather than steal, from those to whom they listen (and they generally listen to many players on records, not one). The record makes it possible to re-hear any spontaneous creation endlessly, if desired, even to the point of transcription to musical notation, analysis, and total absorption. Individuality is inescapable, so that no two players sound exactly alike, regardless of any effort made to that end. Improvised music often needs re-hearing by the audience, to increase the level of their appreciation.
**Lester Leaps In**

**Accent:** greater stress given to one musical tone than to its neighbors; the principle of regularly reoccurring stresses which serve to distribute a succession of pulses into measures.

**Balance:** relative audibility of individual performers within a group, achieved primarily by adjusting the volume levels of individuals until each part can be heard in proper proportion with all other players.

**Beat:** the regular pulses underlying most music; it is the lowest unit of meter.

**Break:** a point in an arrangement in which all instruments (including the rhythm section) suddenly cease to play for two, or four measures while the soloist continues to play alone, then the accompaniment resumes after the break.

**Bridge:** a contrasting section of a tune, usually a “B” section in structural terms, and generally occurring only once within one complete chorus. It is also called the channel or release.

**Cadence:** the beat, time or measure of rhythmic motion or activity.

**Chord:** a combination of tones that blend harmoniously when sounded together.

**Chorus:** the refrain of a popular song; usually repeated over and over by different members of the ensemble; one complete playing of the tune with all of its sections.

**Contrapuntal:** of or relating to counterpoint; polyphonic.

**Double-time:** the interpretation of a tempo at twice its given speed, usually by doubling the note density.

**Dynamics:** relative and graduating volume or intensity levels.

**Ensemble:** concerted music of two or more parts.

**Flat:** a musical note or tone one-half step lower than a specific note or tone.

**Harmony:** tuneful sound; the structure of music with respect to the composition and progression of chords.

**Implied beat:** a consistent beat that is felt and understood, but not played in the consistent manner of time-keeping rhythmic figures.

**Improvisation:** to compose and perform simultaneously without any past preparation of a text that accompanies the song.

**Intervals:** measured distance between different notes.

**Intonation:** an important aspect of tone; to play in tune, playing sharp or flat; the relative precision of pitch.

**Jam session:** performance of jazz musicians usually informal and often private.

**Leaps:** wide intervals

**Line:** a succession of musical notes especially considered in melodic phrases; any of the horizontal parallel strokes on a music staff on or between which notes are placed.

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**Guide for Listening**

1. You should begin by counting measures and measure groups while listening to the opening melody chorus of *Lester Leaps In*. Try to decipher the form in terms of pattern (AABA).

2. Continue counting and identifying segments of the tune during the improvisation, especially the beginning of a new chorus (Young as improviser plays more than one chorus in his solo, in choruses 2 and 3).

3. Sometimes you’ll hear the player improvise a phrase that begins before the end of one chorus and is completed in the early portion of the next chorus (a variation called overlapping). Other times you may be able to detect that the soloist is winding down or tapering to a close that can be closely pinpointed and anticipated if you’ve kept count of the measure groups. The next soloist will generally begin his solo at the crossroads between one chorus and another.

4. Hum the tune’s melody along with the improvised sections, keeping pace with the tempo, measures, and phrases. Some improvisers admit to inwardly hearing the melody while they are improvising, to aid them in keeping their place in the tune.

5. It is suggested that one listening be devoted to the unique and seemingly asymmetrical placed accents in the background rhythms that accompany the very sparse melody. Notice that those rhythms are suggested throughout the performance, in a more subtle manner, even behind the solos.

6. Listen again and follow the form of the tune, which is an AABA structure. If you have never heard the recording before, listen to it regularly for a while, in a more generally relaxed manner. In other words, get to know the record so that it can be heard internally, in the memory.

7. After checking the thirty-two measure length, the eight-measure subdivisions, and the AABA form, try singing the melody against all ensuing choruses after the melody chorus.

8. In counting a fast tempo such as this, it might be advisable to count in half-time, or in two long beats per measure. Jazz musicians learn to count or sense two, four, and eight-measure segments, rather than beats or single measures. Feeling the music in longer segments encourages the graceful flow of the improvised melodic phrases.

9. Look for dominant and subordinate instruments as voices; melody and harmony.

10. Notice the rhythm section (drums, bass, guitar, piano) vs. ensemble section (tenor saxophone, trumpet, trombone). The “star” instruments are tenor saxophone vs. piano. Trombone and bass always seem to play harmony. Trumpet is always secondary voice to tenor saxophone during ensemble parts. Guitar is very subtle in the background as is the pulse of the drums and bass.

11. Be aware of the following devices: partial quotes, descending or ascending sequences of notes, repetitious phrases or repeating sequences, and the B-section as bridge melody.
improvisation

What is Jazz?

Jazz is the comprehensive name for a variety of specific musical styles generally characterized by attempts at creative improvisation on a given theme (melodic or harmonic) over a foundation of complex, steadily flowing rhythms (melodic or percussive) and European harmonies. Jazz is essentially the Black interpretation of elements borrowed from other music. Although the various styles of jazz may on occasion overlap, a style is distinguished from other styles by a preponderance of those specific qualities peculiar to each style. Jazz is difficult to define because it has many meanings and interpretations, however, one can identify elements, characteristics, and peculiarities, but not a concrete, singular or all encompassing definition. There is no agreement on what exactly jazz is.

Improvisation is the essential and distinctive characteristic of jazz. It is the basis for judging the creative excellence of a given performance. Therefore, it is impossible to conceal the quality of an improvisation because you are judged on the spot. The quality depends on the performer’s depth of thought, which is a combination of emotion and intellect, and an immediacy of communication based on a delicate balance of imagination, inspiration, intuition, and experience.

Improvisation is to compose and perform simultaneously on the spur of the moment. Improvisation combines intellect with intuition. The intellect is for planning technical problems and the intuition is for developing the melodic form with originality. Emotion determines mood. The sense of pitch transforms heard or imagined pitches into letter names fingerings. Habit enables fingers to quickly find established pitch patterns. Free improvisation has to a degree certain controls and controlled improvisation has to a degree certain freedoms.

Improvisation in jazz is the act of creating new melodic patterns to fit a given harmonic foundation that has its own melody. The harmonic foundation remains fixed and the original melody is varied by the subtraction or addition of musical elements. The harmonic foundation keeps the musical character and outline of the original melody still recognizable or varied based solely on chord change with little reference to the original tune (traceable back to its originating idea).

What is the Best Improvisation?

a delicate balance of all qualities
organized pattern (unified structure, direction and purpose)
must contain the unexpected (surprise and spontaneity)
produces a feeling of excitement and exhilaration or relaxation and tension
not looking for easy solutions or quick formulas
creativity with technique and method of operation
imagination; inspiration; intuition; experience.
Sound: the tone quality, which can range from small to large, mellow to brilliant, or dull to lively. Nearly all jazz players can be identified by their sounds alone.

Staff: the horizontal lines with their spaces on which music is written (stave).

Standard tune: a tune, particularly those of the thirties and forties, which was once a very popular song and then becomes a perennially played tune.

Stop time: rhythm sections drop out on every other beat; a long series of breaks.

Syncopation: a temporary displacement of the regular metrical accent in music caused typically by stressing the weak beat.

Technique: the speed, evenness, and clarity of execution (finger dexterity, etc.)

Tempo: the pronounced rhythm that is the characteristic driving force of jazz; the speed or rate at which the beat passes.

Theme: melodic subject; harmonic progression; combinations.

Time: the ability to keep a steady tempo; the consistent accuracy and feeling of the pulse. All great players are perfect or near perfect in this respect.

Tonality: the relationship of the notes of the major scale gives a song a particular kind of sound and structure.

Tonal materials: the selected (there are often choices) chords, scales, and emphasized melody notes (in improvisation). The listener probably won’t know exactly what is being used, but he can notice a difference in the sound of the selected materials, especially in the case of pretty or effectively used melody notes.

Tones: vocal or musical sound; sound of a definite pitch and vibration.

Variations: melodies or melodic fragments (motives) that closely resemble a previously played phrase but are slightly different in some way.

Vehicle: a tune selected for improvisation.

The Tune (vehicle)

Virtually all jazz selections are based on some sort of tune or song (Gillespie’s vehicle). The design of the tune will be present during the improvised solos as well as during the playing of the melody (usually at the beginning and again at the end of the selection).

The word tune here refers chiefly to a melody with its accompanying chords. If there are words to the tune, they are likely to occur (if at all) during the playing of the melody. Furthermore, the words are seldom known or contemplated by the improvising soloists. A tune will also have rhythms, but like words, the rhythms will be more structured and apparent during the playing of the melody than during the improvisation on it. Although the melody is almost synonymous with the tune itself and therefore included with the accompanying chords as an important structural element of the tune, it is also true that even the melody will seldom be present during the improvisations.

Tunes have a melody, accompanying chords, rhythm, and word. The real identity of the tune, for most jazz players, is the sequence used in the accompanying chords, as the improvising soloist generally does not base his solo on the melody, rhythms, or words. The sequence of chords used to accompany the melody is generally referred to as the chord progression or the chord changes, or simply progression or changes. The chord progression to the tune is usually retained with exactness throughout the selection, even during the improvised solos, simply by repeating the entire progression (which will be the same length each time through as it was in accompanying one entire playing of the melody) over and over.

Improvisations also have melodies and rhythms, but except in rare instances the improvised melodies and rhythms won’t be symmetrically structured in terms of the sort of repetitions used during the playing of the tune’s melody.

The Chorus

One complete playing of the melody, or one complete playing of the chord progression, would be one chorus. The word chorus sometimes applied as a synonym for solo, which could be confusing because a solo may contain one or many choruses. The AABA form of chorus structure is extremely prevalent among jazz vehicles. The three segments labeled “A” for the purposes of analysis, use nearly the same melody and chord progression. The melody and chords are very different in the B-section, offering a contrast to the first two A-sections that makes it easier to repeat the A-section one more time after B. The contrasting section (B) is commonly called the bridge or the channel. Played through once, the AABA pattern would make up one chorus.
Lester Young

He replaced Coleman Hawkins. He was an antithesis to Hawkins. He had a lighter tone. His attitude was reflected in his tone, a very soft man, soft physically and soft in his attitudes to life. However he was a strong individual. He had an inner strength to go his separate way. He was searching for beauty. His soft solos are an example of his mental desires. His soft solos exemplified his feelings. He saw beauty in everything that he approached.

Oscar Treadwell, on Lester Young

Notes:
1 Recorded for Vocation, CBS Records from Epic LN 3107, New York, NY, November 5, 1939.
2 Oscar Treadwell, from his public radio program Jazz with OT on WGUC, Cincinnati, Ohio.
5 Coker, p. 9.
6 Coker, pp. 95-103.
7 Coker, pp. 98-100.

Biographical Notes

Billie Holiday called Lester Young the president of tenor saxophonists. Prez, as he was known, helped revolutionize the art of playing the saxophone and introduced an approach to improvisation that provided much of the basis for modern jazz solo work.

Lester Young was born on Aug. 27, 1909, in Woodville, Mississippi. The family soon moved to New Orleans, then to Minneapolis, where he went to school. He and his brother Lee, who became a noted drummer, got their basic music education from their father. Lester played in his father’s band as a drummer. Lester did not like the drum scene (dragging heavy equipment around) and switched to tenor saxophone.

At 18, Lester joined Art Bronson’s Bostonians. He later worked with a number of bands around Minneapolis. After a short stint with Count Basie in 1933, he joined Fletcher Henderson’s band for a few months as a replacement for Coleman Hawkins. The other players did not like Lester Young’s lighter tone so he eventually quit and went back to Basie.

By 1936 Lester Young was back with Basie, with whom he remained for four and a half years. During this period, Billie Holiday was Basie’s vocalist. Holiday and Young teamed up for several years to produce some of the most memorable jazz recordings ever made.

In 1940, Young was fired from Basie because he failed to show up for a Friday the 13th recording date due to his superstitions. After leaving Basie Young worked with bands in New York and California. Much of the West Coast “cool” jazz style was a product of his playing.

Oscar Treadwell (OT) once asked jazz promoter Norman Grantz if Lester was effeminate. Grantz said no, he is effete. The meaning of effete is: having lost character, vitality, or strength; marked by weakness or decadence; soft or delicate from or as if from a pampered existence. His approach to life was one that led him to appear as something other than what he was. He liked to gamble and was a loser at it. He also drank a lot; especially Gin due to the death of his friend Herschel Evans.

An unhappy year of military service in 1944 changed both his music and personality, though the quality of his work remained high. He had to go to the hospital for a small operation. On the form he naively answered the question, “have you ever taken drugs?” with Yes, marijuana. Later on he was arrested on trumped up charges. They planted evidence in his locker. He became a yardbird serving 15 months in jail. He was badly mistreated by the guards. He was married to a white woman before entering the army and had a picture of her by his footlocker. The authorities were flabbergasted by this discovery, allowing them even more reason to give him a hard time.

In 1945 he came out of jail a broken man. His drinking became monumental. While in jail, many young players were influenced by the mid-thirties Basie-Young records such as: Wardell Gray, Dexter Gordon, Zoot Simms, and Stan Getz. Hearing his own sound coming from other players should have been a tribute, but instead it was devastating to Lester Young. During his last years he was bothered by ill health and was often hospitalized. However, he continued playing to the end. He died on March 15, 1959, one day after returning from an engagement in Paris.