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This document investigates the improvisational style of Johnny Hodges based on improvised solos selected from a broad swath of his recording career. Hodges is widely considered one of the foundational voices of the alto saxophone, and yet there are no comprehensive studies of his style. This study includes the analysis of four solos recorded between 1928 and 1962 which have been divided into the categories of blues, swing, and ballads, and his harmonic, rhythmic, and affective tendencies will be discussed. Hodges' harmonic approach regularly balanced diatonicism with the accentuation of locally significant non-diatonic tones, and his improvisations frequently relied on ornamentation of the melody. He demonstrated considerable rhythmic fluidity in terms of swing, polyrhythmic, and double time feel. The most individually identifiable quality of his style was his frequent and often exaggerated use of affectations, such as scoops, sighs, and glissandi. The resulting body of research highlights the identifiable characteristics of Hodges' style, and it provides both musical and historical contributions to the scholarship.

JOHNNY HODGES: AN ANALYSIS AND STUDY OF HIS IMPROVISATIONAL STYLE  
THROUGH SELECTED TRANSCRIPTIONS

by

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Approved by

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

**Purpose**

This study provides an overview of the musical characteristics of saxophonist Johnny Hodges by presenting relevant biographical information, transcriptions of recorded improvisations, and a discussion of the key features of his playing. From a historical perspective, this study places Hodges as a leading saxophonist of the swing era and precursor to bebop, and from a musical perspective helps to illuminate the style of a foundational alto saxophonist.

**Need for Study**

Cornelius “Johnny” Hodges (1907-1970) is known first and foremost as an alto saxophonist and featured soloist with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. During a musical career spanning more than 40 years Hodges was widely regarded as one of the foundational voices of the alto saxophone and he had a profound influence on the saxophonists of subsequent generations. Hodges recorded or shared the stage with a Who’s Who of jazz legends, including Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Sydney Bechet, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Benny Goodman, Charlie Parker, John

Coltrane, and many, many others. Prominent saxophonists who list Hodges as an important or primary influence include (among others) Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Sonny Stitt, Jimmy Heath, Julian “Cannonball” Adderley, Oliver Nelson, and Phil Woods.

Considering this impressive, virtually unparalleled list of professional accolades, little has been written about his playing in the academic sphere. Prior to the 2019 publication of the first biography of Hodges, Con Chapman’s “Rabbit’s Blues,” the primary sources of information about him and his life came in the form of liner notes to his records, personal accounts from other musicians, and at least two audio interviews (though he is incredibly taciturn in each). A handful of transcription collections have included an entry from Hodges, but none with him as the primary artist, and to date he has not been the primary subject of a doctoral dissertation.

### **Scope and Limitations**

In this dissertation I will provide an overview of the essential aspects of Hodges’ playing style through the analysis and discussion of four carefully selected and transcribed solos from three genres: blues, swing, and ballads. Over a recording career spanning 42 years and many hundreds of recording sessions Hodges is documented playing in many different genres and sub-genres, but the vast majority of his recordings (especially those for which he is best known) fall into these three categories.

Any attempt to choose representative solos from Hodges’ immense recording catalogue entails a significant degree of subjectivity. The stated genres of blues, swing, and ballads are impossible to concisely define and contain a significant amount of

overlap. However, while evaluating many hundreds of Johnny Hodges recordings the number of pieces that *do not* fit comfortably into one or more of these categories is limited, and few if any of those are pieces for which Hodges is particularly well known. In an attempt to remove some degree of subjectivity I made my selections while adhering to the following 4 guidelines:

1. Limited scope: I limited the number of solos to four. I was initially going to limit myself to three, one for each genre, but after consideration I added a second Blues solo in order to allow direct discussion of stylistic evolution.
2. Recording date: While Hodges' playing did not change so drastically over the course of his career that it can be divided into distinct eras, I did choose solos from his early, middle, and later years.
3. The Quality of the performance: I chose solos which I felt best exemplified his playing in the given genres and in which Hodges is playing his best.
4. Notoriety: I chose from song selections for which he is particularly well known, either because they were or are revered, or because he recorded and performed them frequently throughout his career.

### **Solos and Transcriptions**

In the genre of blues, I chose two solos: "The Mooche" (1928) and "Jeep's Blues" (1962). In addition to granting greater perspective than a single solo, the 34-year distance between these recordings allows for some discussion of the relative evolution of Hodges' playing over time. "The Mooche" is one of Ellington's "jungle" style pieces, performed



at 120 bpm, over which Hodges solos in both concert E flat minor and major. “Jeep’s Blues” is a Hodges-composed slow blues (84 bpm) in concert F major.

For swing I have chosen the 1941 maiden recording of the Duke Ellington’s “In A Mellotone” which has become a jazz standard. At 130 bpm this piece is the fastest of the four selected. Hodges’ employs extensive double-time feel and considerable technical virtuosity.

Finally, for ballads I have chosen a 1952 recording of Duke Ellington’s “I Got It Bad (And That Ain’t Good).” This recording shows Hodges at this most emotive, and contains a broad range of his affective tools (vibrato, scoops, sighs, dynamics, etc.) to great effect.

### **Limitations of Transcriptions**

Transcriptions of jazz solos are inherently limited because it is impossible in musical notation to represent aural experiences with perfect clarity. Factors such as swung 8<sup>th</sup> notes, pitch and timbre variation, and vibrato are particularly difficult to capture in notation, and are consequently rarely addressed in detail. The limitations of notation are such that when attempts are made to more accurately notate swing rhythms, for instance, such as through double and triple dotting of 8<sup>th</sup> notes, the result is generally an increased obfuscation of the aural phenomena, rather than a greater elucidation thereof. The same is true of accents, articulations, affectations, and other factors. Consequently, solo transcriptions contain a considerable degree of subjectivity.

I have attempted to address this problem first and foremost by embedding hyperlinks to the specific solos in the footnotes of each chapter. In order to have a true

appreciation and understanding of the solos discussed in this paper it is essential that the reader listen to these recordings, preferably with many repetitions. Hodges' solos themselves are the only true and thorough repository of his style, and the only way to truly comprehend his style is through careful listening.

Solo transcriptions are nevertheless a valuable resource in an analytical study of a musician's playing. They allow us to consider and discuss harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic choices while conveying a certain, if limited, amount of information about affectations. In regard to affectations, I have attempted to err on the side of clarity and simplicity.

I have included accents and articulations only when they stand out from the general texture of the solo. In accordance with jazz writing conventions, I have not included slur markings unless a given slur stands out from the general texture of the solo. Swung 8<sup>th</sup> notes are notated either as simple 8<sup>th</sup> notes or as triplets depending on the style of accompaniment, the preceding and foregoing phrase, and other factors. While swung 8ths are frequently played with a triplet subdivision, I have only notated in triplets when a phrase is overwhelmingly triplet oriented. The juxtaposition of the two notations does not necessarily imply a considerable difference in swing feel.

Two stylistic factors which require more specific attention are scoops and vibrato. Both are extremely individual and pervasive factors of Hodges' personal style and it was tempting to try to notate them more specifically. It was ultimately determined that any attempt to more specifically portray the depth or duration of a scoop would fall far short of actually displaying the sound, and likely be more distracting than clarifying. I

determined therefore to add scoop markings to all notes which Hodges clearly and intentionally scooped.

In the case of vibrato there is a precedent in modern notation of applying wavy lines of varying amplitudes above a note to represent the relative amount of vibrato. However, Hodges adds vibrato to many notes and with such subtle variations in speed and amplitude that any careful portrayal in notation would take up more space on the page than the notes themselves, and still fall short of truly conveying the affect. I have therefore chosen to use the symbol of a mordent to represent any considerable use of vibrato.

Without question, the best understanding of the arguments of this paper and Hodges' style in general will be gained through the simultaneous use of both the transcriptions and recording.

## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHY

Cornelius “Johnny” Hodges was born July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1907, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to John H. and Katie Swan Hodges.<sup>1</sup> He was raised in Boston in the same neighborhood as his childhood friend and fellow member of Duke Ellington’s band, baritone saxophonist Harry Carney. Hodges came from a musical family, and his first musical education came in the form of piano lessons from his mother, but his initial desire was to play the drums. He said that he “beat up all the pots and pans in the kitchen” and that his lessons from his mother didn’t amount to much.<sup>2</sup>

Hodges received very little formal musical education. His first saxophone was a soprano given to him by his mother, and what instruction he did have came primarily from friends and neighbors who also played. He was nevertheless, by all accounts, a *wunderkind* and by his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday was playing rent parties and concerts in and around Boston.<sup>3</sup> In a 1955 interview with Willis Conover Hodges said that his earliest inspirations were Sidney Bechet and Louis Armstrong. He said of the duo, “They used to

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<sup>1</sup> Con Chapmen, *Rabbit’s Blues* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 15.

make records together years ago...and I used to compare them-put 'em both together, see? Then put my little ideas in between.”<sup>4</sup>

Hodges stated that he made his first trip to New York City in 1924, and that he was soon making the trip every few weeks, staying for a long weekend.<sup>5</sup> He would play in jam sessions at places such as Small's, Mexico's, and Capital Palace. Hodge's played with a virtual who's who of jazz luminaries and began to attract attention, ultimately leading to more stable and better paying gigs.<sup>6</sup> According to Con Chapman it is impossible to determine exactly when Hodges made the permanent move to New York, but by the summer of 1925 he was sharing an apartment on 135<sup>th</sup> Street with clarinetist and saxophonist Cecil Scott, at which time he would've been either 17 or 18.<sup>7</sup>

One important early inflection point for Hodges' career came in his first few years in New York when he was approached by Sidney Bechet to join his band. Playing with Bechet meant greatly increased public exposure, but it was also very important for Hodges musically. Bechet treated Hodges as an understudy, preparing him to take over

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<sup>4</sup> Johnny Hodges, interview by Willis Conover, audio recording, February 1955; (<https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc701827/m1/>; accessed November 19, 2020), University of North Texas Libraries, UNT Digital Library, <https://digital.library.unt.edu/>; crediting UNT Music Library.

<sup>5</sup> Don Demichael, "Double Play: Carney to Hodges to Ellington," *Downbeat*, June 7, 1962, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Chapman, 32-33.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

his role in the band when he inevitably moved on.<sup>8</sup> Hodges joined the band playing primarily alto and clarinet, but by the end was also playing soprano duets with Bechet.<sup>9</sup>

In 1926 Hodges left the band to join the Chick Webb Orchestra, which was the last steady gig Hodges would have before eventually joining Duke Ellington's band. According to trumpeter Rex Stewart, Hodges and Webb became very close.<sup>10</sup> While playing with Webb the band began its famous residency at the Savoy Ballroom, and though the band received significant notoriety, members frequently left in order to take better or more consistent paying jobs with other bands, in particular those run by Duke Ellington.<sup>11</sup> Ellington made at least two unsuccessful attempts to lure Hodges away from Webb, but Hodges was reluctant to join.<sup>12</sup> According to clarinetist Barney Bigard, this was at least in part due to the fact that Duke's band was a "reading band" and Hodges was never a comfortable reader of music. Bigard said, "Johnny Hodges couldn't read so well at the time. Johnny could blow like hell though. He was a natural musician."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bechet had a reputation for leaving bands and club engagements without notice. In 1925 he abruptly left for Europe, leaving Willie "the Lion" Smith in charge of the band, and Hodges was promoted to first soprano.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>10</sup> Rex Stewart, *Boy Meets Horn*, ed. Claire P. Gordon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 208-209.

<sup>11</sup> Chapmen, 39.

<sup>12</sup> According to Ellington, it was Chick Webb that recommended Hodges for a spot in his band. Duke recalled, "Chick came to me and said he thought Johnny would be better in our band where he would have more freedom of expression." Ellington in: Duke Ellington, *Music is My Mistress* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1973), 118.

<sup>13</sup> Barney Bigard, *With Louis and the Duke*, ed. Barry Martyn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 53.

Despite his reservations, his friends (including Webb) pressured him to take the job with Ellington. Hodges said, “Everybody was trying to talk me into taking it.”<sup>14</sup> He eventually agreed, and in November of 1928 joined Ellington’s band. With the exception of a 4-year stint leading his own bands from 1951-55, Hodges would play with Ellington for the rest of his life.

Hodges’ first gig as a member of the band was at the Cotton Club, and his first of many tours began on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. His first recording was made in New York City on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1928 under Duke’s leadership with a band called “The Washingtonians.” On that date, Hodges played a soprano solo on “Yellow Dog Blues”, and alto solos on two takes of “Tishomingo Blues.” His solo on “Yellow Dog Blues” sounds somewhat timid, but the tone and delivery for which he would become so famous are already apparent on “Tishomingo Blues.”<sup>15</sup> By the end of 1928 Hodges participated in 12 more recording sessions with various Ellington ensembles.

In the following years Hodges played countless dates, tours, and recording sessions with Ellington. He still performed and recorded with many other musicians and led his own groups, including recordings with Earl Hines, Billy Strayhorn, Teddy Wilson, Lionel Hampton, Billie Holiday, and many others.<sup>16</sup> In 1929 the Ellington band performed twice a week on national broadcasts from the Cotton Club for CBS,

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<sup>14</sup> DeMichael, 20.

<sup>15</sup> The Washingtonians, *Yellow Dog Blues* and *Tishomingo Blues*, recorded in NYC for Brunswick, June 25, 1928.

<sup>16</sup> Chapman, 67.

broadening the band's renown drastically, as well as Hodges' individually as a featured soloist.<sup>17</sup> Hodges' first recording as a leader took place on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1937, and featured mostly members of Ellington's bands (including Ellington himself).<sup>18</sup> He recorded 4 tracks, each featuring a vocalist and at least an 8-bar solo from Hodges on alto sax.

On January 16, 1938, Hodges was featured in one of jazz's most famous and historic concerts. Benny Goodman and his band headlined the first concert of swing music at Carnegie Hall with an integrated band to an integrated audience. In addition to his outstanding band Goodman featured a number of members of both the Ellington and Count Basie bands, including Johnny Hodges, Cootie Williams, Harry Carney, Lester Young, Count Basie, Freddie Green, and others. Hodges' solo of three choruses on "Honeysuckle Rose" (beginning at 5'12") is one of his finest on record to this date and received enthusiastic applause. While Hodges is not named on the original album, Benny Goodman later praised him, saying, "I know that our 1938 concert in Carnegie Hall would have lost a lot if we didn't have the cooperation of fellows like Johnny Hodges, who is the greatest man on alto sax I ever heard."<sup>19</sup>

Hodges' fame continued to spread throughout the 1930s, and as the above quote from Benny Goodman clearly attests, he was very highly regarded as an alto saxophonist in the upper echelons of jazz. His primary competition at the time was Benny Carter,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>18</sup> Johnny Hodges and His Orchestra, *Foolin' Myself* (2 takes), *A Sailboat In The Moonlight* (2 Takes), *You'll Never Go To Heaven* (2 takes), and *Peckin'* (3 takes), recorded in NYC for Master/Variety, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1937.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Chapman, 59.



whom Hodges greatly admired.<sup>20</sup> Thanks to performances like that at Carnegie Hall, national radio broadcasts, and increasingly popular recordings, by the end of the 1930s Hodges had cemented himself as the leading alto saxophonist of the time. In 1940 the *Downbeat* Readers Poll chose Hodges as the top alto saxophonist, and he would continue to win that title for 10 consecutive years.

During the 1930s Hodges was predominantly featured on blues and medium tempo swing tunes, but beginning in approximately 1940 and increasingly over time, Hodges was featured on ballads. Beginning with recordings such as “Warm Valley” (recorded with the Duke Ellington orchestra in November of 1940) one can hear the kind of inflections (scoops, glissandi, rubato, etc.) for which he would become so famous.<sup>21</sup> With the exit of Ben Webster from the band in 1943 Hodges was solidified as the primary ballad soloist in the band, and he would retain that position for the rest of his tenure. Mercer Ellington recalled that after Webster’s departure Hodges was, “more or less completely in charge of ballads...He began to be featured after intermission at concerts, traditionally the prima donna spot in bands. The format normally featured one man per number, but it got so Johnny would always play three or four—whatever the audience demanded.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Chapmen, 46.

<sup>21</sup> “Warm Valley” take 3, by Duke Ellington and His Famous Orchestra. Victor: 26796-A.

<sup>22</sup> Mercer Ellington with Stanley Dance, *Duke Ellington in Person: An Intimate Memoir* (New York, NY: Da Capo, 1979), 112.

Hodges' rising fame sometimes led to a strained relationship with Ellington. He frequently complained that he was not receiving the personal notoriety (and money) that he deserved, because he was primarily seen as a member of the Duke's band, rather than an independent artist. According to Duke's son Mercer, Hodges also sometimes sold the rights to his own compositions to Duke for \$100-\$200, who then recorded them under his own name and turned them into hits. Hodges would try to renegotiate their previous deal for more money, but Duke would refuse.<sup>23</sup> As a result of instances like these, Hodges and three of his bandmates (Ben Webster, Juan Tizol, and Ray Nance) approached Woody Herman in 1944 about the possibility of recording together. The result was 4 tracks of the Herman band featuring Hodges, Nance, and Tizol.<sup>24</sup> The ultimate consequence Hodges' frustrations with Duke was that Hodges left the band for 4 years from 1951-1955.

Another reason for Hodges initially leaving the band may have been to search for more consistent work. In the late 1940s big bands became less popular and less profitable. Big bands were still very popular during WWII, but many bands suffered from a loss of personnel, and few were able to make enough money to support 20 or more musicians. Many bands began to tour with reduced instrumentation. Jazz listeners also began to shift allegiance to the new, less danceable style of bebop. This shift was also coincident with the ascendance of alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, who took Johnny Hodges' spot as the preeminent player of the instrument. Though Hodges showed admiration for Parker, he never let it alter his approach to playing, which stayed relatively

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 70.

consistent throughout his career. In 1964 Hodges said, “I’ve just seemed to stay at one particular style for a good many years—and haven’t changed...Other people probably went along with this style and came back. But I still stayed where I was. That’s where I’m at. I’m still here. Too late for me to change now.”<sup>25</sup>

When Hodges finally decided to leave Ellington in 1951, he was encouraged and financially aided by music producer Norman Ganz, who asked Hodges to put a band together under his own name. The band was composed of other present and former Ellington associates, such as Sonny Greer, Lawrence Brown, and Al Sears. Granz justified his aid to Hodges by saying he felt that Hodges had been “kept down” in his subsidiary role to Ellington, and that he wanted to hear Hodges “outside of the Ellington context.”<sup>26</sup> Over the next 4 years Hodges led bands which included many different players but most had prior associations with Ellington. The tenor chair changed frequently, including Al Sears, Ben Webster, and toward the end of 1943-44, a young up-and-coming John Coltrane. While Hodges’ bands were successful, Hodges himself was never a charismatic performer, and lacked Ellington’s organization. The strains of being a leader eventually took their toll, and in August of 1955 he returned to Ellington.<sup>27</sup>

Hodges’ return came at a low point in Ellington’s career. The band was no longer headlining shows and didn’t have nearly the number of gigs they once had. However, the

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Chapman, 101.

<sup>26</sup> Stanley Dance. Liner notes to *The Complete Johnny Hodges Sessions 1951-1955*. Mosaic Records MR6-126, 1989.

<sup>27</sup> Chapman, 124.

band (and Ellington himself) went through a renaissance after a now famous performance of *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue* at the 1956 Newport Jazz festival. The band's popularity returned along with renewed creativity from Ellington as a composer, and in the following years Ellington would say, "I was born in 1956 at the Newport Festival."<sup>28</sup>

The return to prominence of the Ellington band also elevated Hodges to renewed prominence and in the last half of the 1950s recorded a number of his best albums, including: *The Big Sound: Johnny Hodges and the Ellington Men* (1957), *Johnny Hodges and His Strings Play the Prettiest Gershwin* (1958), *Back to Back: Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges Play the Blues* (1959), *Side by Side: Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges Plus Others* (1960), and many others. He also continued to perform and record as a side man and leader outside of the Ellington band. In 1961 Norman Granz organized a two-week tour of Europe for Hodges. One of the concerts was recorded and issued under the title *Johnny Hodges at the Sportpalast, Berlin*.

Hodges began to show signs of ill-health when he suffered from swollen glands while on tour in South America in September of 1968, and later suffered a heart seizure that caused him to leave the band for two months in 1969. He died of heart failure on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1970, while on a trip to the dentist.<sup>29</sup> Ellington delivered a eulogy at the funeral in which he said of Hodges, "... (A) tone so beautiful it sometimes brought tears to the eyes... Because of this great loss, our band will never sound the same. I am glad and

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<sup>28</sup> Derek Jewell. *Duke: A Portrait of Duke Ellington* (New York: Norton, 1977), 87.

<sup>29</sup> Chapman, 163.

thankful that I had the privilege of presenting Johnny Hodges for forty years, night after night. I imagine I have been much envied...”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ellington, 119.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BLUES

As a native of Boston, Massachusetts, Johnny Hodges did not grow up around many practitioners of the musical genre now known as “blues.”<sup>31</sup> He learned the style through consistent devotion and careful study of New Orleanian musicians like Sydney Bechet and Louis Armstrong, as discussed in the previous chapter. He assimilated the style well enough that by the time of his earliest recordings with Ellington he was repeatedly featured on Blues selections such as “Yellow Dog Blues,” “Tishomingo Blues,” and “The Mooche.”<sup>32</sup> Hodges had a particular aptitude for coming up with blues riffs, both for compositions and in improvised solos. After hearing Hodges come up with a particularly catchy riff on the spot for a recording session, Duke Ellington remarked, “He has a million of ‘em.”<sup>33</sup> Jazz historian Albert Murray said that Hodges, “functioned in effect as Ellington’s instrumental extension of Bessie Smith,”<sup>34</sup> and James P. Johnson

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<sup>31</sup> While the term “blues” can be applied to a number of genres, forms, and stylistic affections, for the purposes of classifying and choosing subjects in this paper I am referring to the 12-bar structure

<sup>32</sup> Between his first recording with Ellington on June 25, 1928 and the end of that year, Hodges was featured as a soloist on 22 pieces, and 9 of those are blues-based, 4 of which are recordings of “The Mooche.”

<sup>33</sup> Stanley Dance, in the liner notes to *Giants of Jazz: Johnny Hodges*. Time-Life Records: TL-J19, 1981, pg. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Chapman, 155. Bessie Smith (1894-1937) was the most popular blues singer of the 1920s and 1930s.

reflected a similar sentiment when he said, “Old Duke’s main blues singer was always old Johnny Hodges on that alto...”<sup>35</sup>

Hodges’ status as a blues master was also well appreciated by the following generation of bebop musicians. Though 12-bar blues was a ubiquitous format during the bebop era (as it remains in jazz to this day), musicians began to make distinctions between different sub-genres in the blues. Dizzy Gillespie said, for instance, “I’m not what you call a ‘blues’ player. I’d love to, I feel it, but I’m not.... Mine ain’t the real blues...come in and bend a note around the corner.” He is saying this in reference to the stylistic factors of traditional blues playing, rather than simply the 12-bar form of the blues. He went on to say, “Johnny Hodges is a blues player, quiet as it’s kept...He could moan a while. Moaning—all that goes with the blues.”<sup>36</sup>

I chose to study two blues solos in this chapter. While Hodges’ style may not have evolved so markedly over the course of his career that it can be divided into distinct eras, by studying and comparing two solos from opposite ends of his recording career I was able to draw some conclusions about which stylistic traits evolved and which remained intact.

### **The Mooche**

“The Mooche” is a Duke Ellington and Irving Mills song composed in 1928.<sup>37</sup> It was composed in Ellington’s “Jungle Style” and the first recording of occurred on Oct. 1,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Chapman, 152.

<sup>37</sup> This recording can be heard on youtube.com: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEOsgFIeqpg>

1928. Hodges is featured on alto, and this is his third session with Ellington. Over the course of the rest of that month “The Mooche” was recorded 5 different times, under 4 different band names and configurations (though all were led by Ellington), with Hodges soloing on every one.<sup>38</sup> The version discussed in this paper is the final of these, recorded on Oct. 30, 1928 for Victor Records.<sup>39</sup>

“The Mooche” is played in C Minor and has an AAB form. This arrangement of “The Mooch” begins with a 4-measure intro, after which high reeds enter and play an 8-bar phrase which is repeated, after which the reeds descend an octave and continue with a less active melody, still in c minor. At this point the arrangement modulates to the relative major of Eb and the brass take over with a theme played over the 12 bar (major) blues, followed by a modulation to Eb minor blues and a solo in the low register of the clarinet by Barney Bigard.

The following chorus is also in Eb minor blues and involves a call and response of two-bar phrases between trumpeter Arthur Whetsel and Johnny Hodges on alto. For ease of analysis and discussion, the transcription of both instruments is given in the alto saxophone’s transposed key of C minor.

Whetsel plays first, and his solo is entirely composed of the blues scale.<sup>40</sup> He enters on the 5<sup>th</sup> scale degree (G) and oscillates between 5 and #4 (F sharp) before

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<sup>38</sup> The bands names were: “Duke Ellington & His Famous Orchestra”, “Duke Ellington & His Cotton Club Orchestra”, “The Whopee Makers”, and simply “Duke Ellington.”

<sup>39</sup> Victor 47799-2.

<sup>40</sup> The blues scale consists of scale degrees 1, b3, 4, #4, 5, and b7.



descending through the minor triad from E flat to C. Hodges' answer also begins on the 5<sup>th</sup> and is colored by grace notes from the neighboring #4. It is clear that he is responding conversationally to Whetsel by completing an antecedent-consequent phrase (Example 1). After a series of inflected 5ths, Hodges descends through tonic and the flatted-7<sup>th</sup> to the 5th below.

Example 1: Measures 1-4 of Whetsel and Hodges, from "The Mooche."

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Example 1. The first system shows measures 1-4 for Arthur Whetsel (TPT) and Johnny Hodges (ALTO). Whetsel's part (top staff) begins with a whole note rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note E4. In measure 2, he plays a quarter note D4 with a grace note C4, followed by a quarter note C4. In measure 3, he plays a quarter note B3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note G3. In measure 4, he plays a quarter note F3, a quarter note E3, and a quarter note D3. Hodges' part (bottom staff) is silent in measures 1-4. The second system shows measures 1-4 for Whetsel and Hodges. Whetsel's part (top staff) begins with a whole note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note D4. In measure 2, he plays a quarter note C4, a quarter note B3, and a quarter note A3. In measure 3, he plays a quarter note G3, a quarter note F3, and a quarter note E3. In measure 4, he plays a quarter note D3, a quarter note C3, and a quarter note B2. Hodges' part (bottom staff) begins with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note D4. In measure 2, he plays a quarter note C4, a quarter note B3, and a quarter note A3. In measure 3, he plays a quarter note G3, a quarter note F3, and a quarter note E3. In measure 4, he plays a quarter note D3, a quarter note C3, and a quarter note B2.

Hodges' rhythms are heavily inflected, and it is not possible to clearly portray them in standard notation. When written, his entrance is best represented by quintuplet quarter notes (example 1, measure 4). However, the overall feel of this phrase more closely resembles that of quarter note triplets, which adds a strong feel of a 3 against 2 polyrhythm.

Whetsel responds with the same polyrhythmic feel in his second phrase, which enters on beat 3 of the fifth measure. As in his first phrase, he begins on the 5<sup>th</sup> and

oscillates with the #4. Though he is playing 8<sup>th</sup> note triplets, Whetsel's accents on every other 8<sup>th</sup> note triplet imply the same quarter note triplet feel as that of Hodges' previous phrase. He then lands in measure 6 on an F, which is now the tonic of the iv chord of F minor. He proceeds with a series of syncopated G flats before finishing his phrase descending from E flat to C. One might be tempted to analyze the G flats of this phrase as flat nines over the chord of F minor, but Whetsel is clearly alluding to the C blues scale rather than extended harmonies (Example 2).

Example 2: Measures 4-9 of Whetsel and Hodges, from "The Mooche."

The image displays a musical score for two saxophones, Whetsel 1 and Hodges 2, across six measures. The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 4, 5, and 6. Whetsel 1 begins in measure 4 with a quarter rest, then plays a series of eighth-note triplets in measures 5 and 6, ending on a half note F. Hodges 2 plays a five-note eighth-note triplet in measure 4, followed by a quarter note triplet in measure 5, and a quarter rest in measure 6. The second system covers measures 7, 8, and 9. Whetsel 1 plays a quarter note E-flat in measure 7, a quarter note G-flat in measure 8, and eighth-note triplets in measure 9. Hodges 2 plays a quarter note E-flat in measure 7, followed by quarter notes G-flat, A-flat, B-flat, and C in measures 8 and 9. Chord symbols 'F-' and 'C-' are placed above the staves in measures 6 and 8, respectively.

Hodges' response anticipates the end of Whetsel's phrase, entering on beat 4 of measure 7 near the top of the saxophone's range on an E flat. In contrast to Whetsel's heavily syncopated preceding phrase, Hodges' response feels much more downbeat

oriented, with agogic accents on beats 1 and 3 of measures 8 and 9.<sup>41</sup> While these accents are on what are traditionally weak beats in jazz (1 and 3), nothing about the phrase feels out of place or “square” in any way.

Hodges’ note choices are interesting here in that they do not adhere to any individual scalar approach. Throughout his career he relied heavily on the pentatonic scale<sup>42</sup>, and this phrase begins as a major pentatonic scale with the substitution of a minor 3<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>43</sup> but the addition of an E natural on beat 4 of measure 8 and a B flat in measure 9 (example 2, measures 8 and 9 respectively) eliminate pentatonic as a possibility, as well as Dorian, Mixolydian, or any other common mode we might expect Hodges to employ over a simple C minor chord. The E natural is the only note that is potentially objectionable, but perhaps due to the sparse accompaniment it isn’t jarring to the ears. If anything, it adds a pleasant harmonic variety. Just as in the first exchange, Whetsel begins on the 5<sup>th</sup> and ends on tonic, and each of Hodges’ answering phrases end on the lower 5<sup>th</sup>.

Whetsel’s third and final phrase is almost identical to the second. The only difference is that the lower neighbor of his entrance on the 5<sup>th</sup> scale degree is now the natural 4, an F natural, rather than an F sharp (example 3, measure 9).

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<sup>41</sup> While agogic accents are usually defined as an emphasis by virtue of being longer in duration, beats 1 and 3 of measure 8 carry the rhythmic implication of downbeat quarter notes with neighbor tone ornaments.

<sup>42</sup> Here referring to the major pentatonic scale, consisting of scale degrees 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6.

<sup>43</sup> In this case, C, D, Eb, G, and A, or 1,2,b3,5 and 6.

Example 3: Measures 8-13 of Whetsel and Hodges, from “The Mooche.”

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with two staves: WHETSEL 1 (top) and HODGES 2 (bottom).  
 System 1 (Measures 8-9): The key signature is C- (one flat). Measure 8 shows Whetsel 1 with a whole rest and Hodges 2 with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 9 shows Whetsel 1 with a triplet of eighth notes and Hodges 2 with a triplet of eighth notes.  
 System 2 (Measures 10-11): The key signature changes to G7. Measure 10 shows Whetsel 1 with a triplet of eighth notes and Hodges 2 with a whole rest. Measure 11 shows Whetsel 1 with a triplet of eighth notes and Hodges 2 with a whole rest.  
 System 3 (Measures 12-13): The key signature changes to C- (one flat). Measure 12 shows Whetsel 1 with a whole rest and Hodges 2 with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 13 shows Whetsel 1 with a whole rest and Hodges 2 with a triplet of eighth notes. The text "HODGES CONTINUES SOLO..." is written above the staff in measure 13.

Hodges’ final response consists of two identical, assertive descending lines, from G to C (example 3, measure 12). Taken together they imply a dotted quarter note polyrhythm, as well as a double time feel. In Hodges’ first phrase he implied a quarter note triplet polyrhythm, in his second phrase he played with a clear triplet-swing feel and accents on beats 1 and 3, and in his third phrase Hodges suddenly inserts a new flavor of dotted-quarter polyrhythm and double time. This is the first example of the breadth of

Johnny Hodges' rhythmic variety, and the fluidity with which he was capable of moving between them.

In the next chorus the piece modulates from concert E flat minor to the parallel major of E flat major (C major for the alto), and Hodges takes the entire chorus by himself. Now in major, Hodges' first phrase remains completely within the C pentatonic scale (example 4, measures 12-14).

Example 4: Measures 12-22, Hodges' solo chorus, from "The Mooche."

The musical score for Example 4, measures 12-22, from "The Mooche," is presented in four staves of music. The first staff (measures 12-15) is in C6 and features a melodic line with triplets and slurs. The second staff (measures 16-18) is in F6 and continues the melodic line. The third staff (measures 19-21) is in C6 and G7, showing a modulation. The fourth staff (measures 22) is in C6 and concludes the phrase. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, triplets, and dynamic markings.

The accompaniment to this point has remained relatively plain. During the trading chorus the bass plays almost exclusively roots and fifths and a banjo plays quarter notes whose quality is difficult to hear on the recording.<sup>44</sup> Beginning with the second chorus (Hodges' solo chorus), Duke Ellington begins to add sparse accompaniment on the piano. In the first two bars of the chorus (example 4, measures 13 and 14) he plays a C6 chord, but in the next bar he (Ellington) clearly plays a C7. This is one bar earlier than expected in a blues, but Hodges also alters his note choices with the substitution of a flat 7<sup>th</sup>-B flat from the natural 6<sup>th</sup> of the previous phrase (example 4, measures 15 and 16). He ends this phrase with a triplet descent of over an octave from the alto's high D to a middle B flat, clearly preparing the move to the IV chord on F in measure 17.

Hodges approaches the IV chord with a quarter note triplet figure (ex. 4 measure 16) reminiscent of his initial response to Whetsel (example 1, measure 4). His note choices over the F6 chord are incredibly sparse, using only F, G, and C, or scale degrees 1, 2, and 5 (relative to a new tonic of F). It is almost as if instead of moving his tonic to F, Hodges is instead treating it as a C<sub>sus4</sub> triad (C, F, and G). This is a convincing analysis once Hodges "resolves" the suspended F to an E on the downbeat of the return to C in measure 19.<sup>45</sup>

In measure 20 Hodges ascends to an E flat, the minor 3<sup>rd</sup> of the C6 chord being played in the rhythm section. As with Whetsel's G flat over F minor discussed above, this

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<sup>44</sup> The banjo's chords sound minor, but it is difficult to hear whether or not they include a 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> This is also an anticipation of Hodges' approach to the IV chord in blues solos throughout his career, in which instead of moving from a I chord to a IV chord, Hodges regularly treats the IV chord as a i minor.

E flat is a blues inflection rather than a harmonic alteration of the underlying chord. The same is true with the B flat he plays in measure 21 when the accompaniment moves to the V chord on G. Hodges bends or “scoops” into to each of these notes. This is the technique which Dizzy Gillespie referred to as “moaning” in the quote above.

In measure 22, the accompaniment remains on V, but Hodges retains the E flat. He is clearly playing C minor (example 4, measure 22), rather than the G7 of the accompaniment. It may also be the case that Hodges is implying a IV chord (F7, which would be common in bar 10 or a C blues), and treating it like i minor, as discussed in the preceding footnote, and which will be discussed in greater detail below. With the exception of an F on beat 3 in measure 23, Hodges returns to C pentatonic for the final phrase of his solo. Regardless of which harmonic interpretation one favors for measures 20-21, Hodges’ use of blues inflected notes in these measures is an extension of his overall diatonic approach to blues soloing. While they are not diatonic to the key, they are blues affectations of the overall key rather than the local chord changes.

Hodges’ rhythmic approach to his solo chorus is much more consistent and reserved than in the preceding chorus with Whetsel. With the exception of the quarter note triplets from measure 16, the feel is predominantly that of triplets and triplet swing. Hodges also articulates almost every note, even when playing a long string of triplets (such as beats 3 and 4 of measure 15), and when adhering to the triplet swing feel he consistently plays the downbeats short (as in measure 23). This is perhaps the only factor of his playing on “The Mooche” that sounds in any way dated. Over the course of the

next decade legato 8<sup>th</sup> notes became increasingly common in jazz, and Hodges' style would adjust accordingly.

### **Jeep's Blues**

“Jeep's Blues,” originally titled “Johnny's Blues,” was co-written by Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges and first recorded on March 28, 1938.<sup>46</sup> The title became a popular hit for Hodges. Jazz journalist and record producer Helen Oakley said, “When he made those things, Jeeps Blues, and all those titles which you must know as Johnny Hodges hits, Harlem rang with them...you could go forty blocks up Harlem and never stop hearing Johnny Hodges.”<sup>47</sup> It also became part of the Ellington band's standard repertoire and remained so even after Hodges' death, and in the eulogy Duke gave at his funeral he named a number of Hodges' solo features, and the first song he named was “Jeep's Blues.”<sup>48</sup> The version which will be discussed in this paper comes from a 1962 recording titled *Johnny Hodges with Billy Strayhorn and the Orchestra*, and was arranged by Strayhorn.<sup>49</sup><sup>50</sup><sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Vocallion: 793-1.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Chapman, 75.

<sup>48</sup> Ellington, 119.

<sup>49</sup> Johnny Hodges, “Jeep's Blues,” track 6 on *Johnny Hodges with Billy Strayhorn and the Orchestra*, Verve, 1962, LP.

<sup>50</sup> For comparison's sake, this was recorded 33 years after the recording of “The Mooche” and roughly 8 years prior to Hodges' death in 1970.

<sup>51</sup> This recording can be heard on youtube.com: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2JHdqK-d0>



“Jeep’s Blues” is a 12-bar blues in F concert (D for the alto), and the melody occupies only the first 4 measures of the form, after which the soloist takes over beginning on the IV chord. The melody is played at the beginning of most choruses. In this recording the melody enters after a 4-measure intro.

Example 5: “Jeep’s Blues” melody.



Following the first statement of the melody Hodges solos over the completion of the form. His first four measures demonstrate two points which were made earlier. The first is that Hodges relies heavily on the use of the pentatonic scale, and the second is that he frequently treats the IV chord as a minor i.

Example 6: Measures 9-12, Hodges solo entrance, from “Jeep’s Blues.”



Hodges' use of pentatonic is clear in measures 11-12, with only a G on beat 3 of measure 12 not conforming.<sup>52</sup> What may not be as clear is that he is also using the pentatonic scale in measures 9 and 10. Hodges implies minor i retaining the notes of the D pentatonic but flattening the third scale degree.<sup>53</sup> The resulting scale is composed of scale degrees 1, 2, b3, 5, and 6, and appears in Vincent Persichetti's *Twentieth-Century Harmony* under the name "Kumoi."<sup>54</sup> However, there is no evidence that Hodges thought of his note in such an academic manor, and I believe that he came to these note choices, rather, as a result of melodic and motivic development. For the purposes of this paper I will refer to this scale as "pentatonic flat 3." This is not the much more common and blues related "minor pentatonic" scale, which consists of scale degrees 1, b3, 4, 5, and b7.

When analyzing those measures (9 and 10) in the context of G7 the notes appear to comply (with the exception of the passing tone A flat and appoggiatura E sharp in measure 10) to G mixolydian, which is the most likely scalar choice. However, careful listening and analysis imply that Hodges is treating this chord as a minor i (D minor). His note choices in measures 9 and 10 fit more comfortably into the D pentatonic flat 3 scale. This analysis is supported in measure 10 by the descending leap from D to A. If Hodges were outlining a G dominant chord, a leap from D to B (scale degrees 5 to 3) would make more sense and solidify G as tonic in our ears, but his leaping of D to A sounds much more like 1 to 5.

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<sup>52</sup> In this case, D pentatonic: D, E, F#, A, and B.

<sup>53</sup> Resulting in a scale of: D, E, F, A, and B.

<sup>54</sup> Vincent Persichetti, *Twentieth Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* (New York: Norton, 1961), 50.

Hodges then descends chromatically to G and holds for an entire beat before leaping to E sharp on the up beat of beat 4 to create an enclosure which resolves to F sharp on the down beat of measure 11. This is strongly reminiscent of how he treated the IV chord in his solo chorus on “The Mooche” (ex. 4, measures 17-18). In measure 17 we observed that Hodges was treating the F chord like a Csus4, using the notes C, F, and G, which he then resolved to an E natural on the downbeat of measure 18. In this excerpt from “Jeep’s Blues” Hodges treats the IV chord of G7 as a Dsus4 when he leaps from D to A, and then moves to G, (scale degrees 1, 5, 4 respectively) of Dsus4, which he then resolves to F sharp.

Further (and even more concrete) evidence that Hodges approaches the IV chord of a blues as a minor i is found in his next chorus. The band enters with a statement of the melody with pick-ups to measure 17, and Hodges replies over the underlying G7 with a motive created solely from the notes of a D minor triad.

Example 7: Measures 20-22, from “Jeep’s Blues.”



The remainder of the chorus is comprised again almost exclusively of notes from the D pentatonic scale.

Example 8: Measures 23-28, from “Jeep’s Blues.”

The image shows two staves of musical notation in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff, labeled '23', contains measures 23 and 24. Measure 23 has a  $D^6$  chord above it and features a triplet of eighth notes (F#, A, C) followed by a quarter note (D). Measure 24 has an  $E^{MIN7}$  chord above it and features a triplet of eighth notes (G, B, D) followed by a quarter note (E). The second staff, labeled '26', contains measures 26, 27, and 28. Measure 26 has an  $A^7$  chord above it and features a quarter note (A) followed by a quarter note (C). Measure 27 has a  $D^6$  chord above it and features a triplet of eighth notes (F#, A, C) followed by a quarter note (D). Measure 28 has a  $D^6$  chord above it and features a triplet of eighth notes (F#, A, C) followed by a quarter note (D). The notation includes various articulations such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.

When Hodges gets to the ii-V progression in measures 25-26 we might expect him to deviate from the pentatonic framework and to lean towards accentuating the V chord of  $A^7$ , but he instead plays only the notes of the tonic triad. What is impressive about this phrase is that it still conveys a sense of moving to the dominant, and of resolving to tonic in measure 27. Hodges accomplishes this by rising to the 5<sup>th</sup> scale degree in measures 25-26, and then descending to the 5<sup>th</sup> below in measure 26, before moving to tonic in measure 27. The aural experience is that of hearing the 5 above and the 5 below (reminiscent of a cadential 6/4 in common practice harmony), followed by a “resolution” to tonic, in spite of the lack of the expected leading tones of either C sharp or G.

The short following motive from beat 3 of measure 27 through beat 2 of 28 is similar to what he will use to end each of his remaining choruses. The chromatic ascent from 4-#4-5 mirrors the walk up that is played in the bass, and it brings up another peculiarity of Hodges’ blues language. In spite of the incredible accolades Hodges

received for his blues playing, he makes comparatively little use of the blues scale. The ascending chromatic motive of measure 27 contains the 4-#4-5 of the blues scale, but Hodges does not play these notes with any blues inflection because they are inspired by the bass line. At no point in either of these solos does Hodges use the #4/b5 as a blues inflected note, instead favoring the flatted 3<sup>rd</sup>, natural 3<sup>rd</sup>, and flatted 7<sup>th</sup>. And one cannot argue that this is due to lack of exposure to the blues scale, since we saw in the first solo that Arthur Whetsel's solo was completely constructed from the blues scale and relied heavily on the #4/b5.<sup>55</sup>

The band does not reprise the melody at the top of the third chorus and Hodges is allowed for the first time to play over the first four measures of the form, beginning in measure 29.

Example 9: Measures 29-33, from "Jeep's Blues."

<sup>55</sup> There are definitely exceptions to this observation. In a 1962 video of the Ellington band playing "Things Ain't What They Used To Be" (a Db blues) Hodges second chorus uses the #4 concert G as a repeated focal point. However, this is certainly the exception rather than the rule.

The third chorus begins with more use of pentatonic, and for the first time we see the harmonic implications of Hodges' use of the scale and why he deviates when he does. In the swing era, the I chord of the blues was usually treated as a I6, rather than I7 which became more common in the bebop era and beyond. The effect of this is that the I chord sounds much more stable as a I6 than if it includes a flatted 7<sup>th</sup>, in which case it begins to sound more like a V7/IV than any sort of tonic chord. For the first three measures of the form Hodges' almost invariably plays pentatonic because it fits so clearly over a I6. Only in the fourth measure of the form does the chord usually change to a I7, creating the instability and harmonic motion that leads our ears toward the coming IV chord.<sup>56</sup> This is the case in example 9, measure 32, and Hodges descends from the previous measure's high B to land squarely on the flatted 7<sup>th</sup> (C) on beat 1 of measure (32), making it clear that he is cognizant of the change and using the change of chord quality to create harmonic tension propelling his solo forward.

This is identical to what he did in his solo chorus of "The Mooche" 33 years earlier (Example 4). Though it was remarked that Ellington moved to C7 one bar earlier than expected (ex. 4, measure 15) and that Hodges also incorporated a flatted 7<sup>th</sup> B flat in that measure, he proceeds through a triplet descent to land on Bb (also the flatted 7<sup>th</sup>) on the downbeat of measure 16, which is also the fourth bar of that form.

Hodges completes this chorus with similar material to what was seen in previous phrases, and the band returns with the melody to start the 4<sup>th</sup> chorus. Hodges' solo on the

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<sup>56</sup> This is why it was a surprise that Ellington played a C7 in example 4, measure 15 above, which was the third, rather than fourth bar of the form.

fourth chorus is also composed of similar material with the exception of his entrance with a seamless octave ascent from alto's middle D to high D. This ascent is half glissando/half scoop and is an example of Hodges' unique ability to bend pitches on the saxophone. While other saxophonists are perhaps capable of this, few if any were better and certainly no other saxophonist is more strongly associated with the technique, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

The fifth and final chorus of "Jeep's Blues" begins once again with the band playing the melody, and Hodges' solo entrance in measure 57 is the first time in either of these solos in which he clearly plays the IV chord as a IV rather than minor i.

Example 10: Measure 57-64, from “Jeep’s Blues.”

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It consists of four staves of music. The first staff (measures 57-59) is labeled 'HODGES SOLO' and features a G7 chord. The second staff (measures 60-62) features EMIN7 and A7 chords. The third staff (measures 63-64) features D6 and D7 chords, with 'H.T.' (Harmonics) indicated at the end. The fourth staff (measure 64) features a D9 chord and ends with the instruction 'FADE TO INAUDIBLE...'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and triplets.

While he plays over this G7 differently than he has in previous choruses, there is one overriding melodic motive which ties them together, and that is the way that he resolves back to D. He repeatedly resolves from the G to F sharp, which is from scale degree 4-3 of the key. This is what we would expect to see from V7-I in this key (A7-D), with the flatted 7<sup>th</sup> of A7 (G) resolving to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of D (F sharp). In example 6 measure 10 above, it was observed that Hodges landed and paused on G, before enclosing F sharp with an appoggiatura on E sharp. Hodges accomplishes the same aural resolution in the



final chorus by ascending to and holding G in measure 57, and then ascending to and holding F sharp in measure 59. This hearing is reinforced by the symmetry granted these notes by both landing on beat 2 of their respective measures and the weight they are given by being held for 2 full beats.

Example 11: Measures 57-59, from “Jeep’s Blues.”



Hodges finishes the chorus with blues-inflected flatted 3rds rather than adhering to the Emin7-A7 of measures 61-62. This is strongly reminiscent of bars 9 and 10 from the solo chorus of “The Mooche” (example 4, measures 20-21). He lands squarely on tonic on the downbeat of 63 at which point the band pauses, prior to 4 relatively brief fermatas. Hodges outlines a classic b7-6-b6 chromatic descent before fading out on a cadenza over a D9.

As has been noted, there are many similarities between “The Mooche” and “Jeep’s Blues” in spite of their being recorded at roughly the bookends of his recording career (1928 and 1962 respectively). The use of the pentatonic scale and its alteration to pentatonic flat 3, treating the IV chord as minor i or a Isus4 and resolving from scale degree 4-3 from bars 6-7 of the form, a clear delineation between the I6 chord and I7 to

the point of specifically landing on the flatted 7<sup>th</sup> in the fourth bar of the blues form, and the apparent avoidance of the explicit use of the blues scale (in particular the #4/b5).

One apparent difference between the two recordings is in regard to articulation. While both his solo chorus on “The Mooche” and the entirety of “Jeep’s Blues” primarily employ a triple subdivision, I remarked that in “The Mooche” Hodges had a tendency to play the downbeats of swung 8<sup>th</sup> notes short (example 4, measure 23). Hodges’ (and most of his bandmates) played in a style typified by heavy articulation and the frequent use of staccato on mid- and up-tempo solos until at least the mid-1930s when he began to incorporate more legato 8<sup>th</sup> notes.<sup>57</sup> By the time of “Jeep’s Blues” the staccato articulation is largely gone and Hodges appears to favor longer, more legato downbeats, as can be heard in example 9, measures 29-33 and beyond.

In a 1964 interview with Stanley Dance quoted above, Hodges expresses the belief that he maintained the same style throughout his career, and this would seem to be supported by an analysis of these two solos, at least in relation to his playing of the blues. While there were subtle changes in his delivery, increased technique skills, and the benefits of experience, Hodges was using many of the same scalar, harmonic, and motivic devices in 1961 that he used in 1928. Far from being a drawback of his playing, this is evidence of his ability to continuously find new ways to keep the blues interesting. Objectively, the blues is a simple form, but Hodges possessed the creativity to come up

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<sup>57</sup> A good early example of Hodges’ using legato articulation is “Showboat Shuffle” from 1935, recorded for ARC/Brunswick: 17407-1.

with endless new and entertaining ideas over the form. As Duke said, “He’s got a million of ‘em.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Dance, 19.

## CHAPTER IV

### SWING: IN A MELLOTONE

Johnny Hodges was a member of both the Chick Webb and Duke Ellington Orchestras. Each of these bands had a considerable impact on our modern conception of “swing” music, both in terms of style and repertoire. While the term “swing” can be applied to an exceptionally broad range of music and musicians, for the purposes of this chapter I am referring to swing specifically as that which was popular in the United States during the 1930s and 40s and which was predominantly used for dancing.

Many of the hits of the swing era became commonplace jam session tunes and eventually standard pieces of a jazz musicians’ repertoire. Every jazz musician spends a significant amount of time learning, practicing, and playing jazz standards, and few standards are more widely performed and recorded than Duke Ellington’s 1939 composition “In A Mellotone.”<sup>59</sup> In addition to Ellington, the piece has been recorded by Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Ben Webster, Oscar Peterson, Sonny Stitt, and countless others.

The version discussed in this chapter was recorded in Chicago on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1940 and is Duke’s original recording of the piece.<sup>60</sup> As such it was certainly not yet a

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<sup>59</sup> This piece is now more commonly known as “In a Mellow Tone,” but in the early recordings the titled is spelled “In A Mellotone.”

<sup>60</sup> This recording can be heard on youtube.com: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ht\\_Pb955E8s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ht_Pb955E8s)

standard, but “In A Mellotone” is a contrafact<sup>61</sup> of an older standard tune by Art Hickman and Harry Williams titled “Rose Room,” which Johnny Hodges recorded numerous times, including with Duke Ellington in 1932, and on a live broadcast New Hampshire on August 17 and 19, 1940, just a few weeks prior to the recording of “In A Mellotone.” As discussed in a previous chapter on blues, Johnny Hodges’ early work was primarily in small groups and bands that played head arrangements,<sup>62</sup> and he had undoubtedly memorized many hundreds of songs, standards and otherwise. His familiarity with “Rose Room” meant that when recording “In A Mellotone” for the first time Hodges would’ve been completely comfortable with the form and chord changes.

### **In A Mellotone**

“In A Mellotone” is traditionally played in A flat major (F for the alto saxophone) and is 32 measures long with an A-A’ form. This recording begins with an 8-bar rhythm section intro and bass solo.<sup>63</sup> The first statement of the melody is played by unison saxophones with brass accompaniment, and the second chorus is a trumpet solo accompanied by very active saxophone backgrounds. The third chorus begins with four measures of an orchestra send off before Hodges enters and plays the remaining 28

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<sup>61</sup> A contrafact is a musical composition built using the chord progression of a pre-existing song, but with a new melody and arrangement.

<sup>62</sup> A head arrangement is a roughly outlined arrangement played from memory and often learned by ear.

<sup>63</sup> The bass solo is played by Jimmy Blanton, who had joined Ellington’s band the previous autumn. Hodges heard Blanton playing at a jam session in St. Louis and was so impressed that he went to retrieve Ellington from his hotel to hear the young phenom, and when the band left town, Blanton left with them. (Chapman, 89)

measures of the form, concluding with some call and response between Hodges and the orchestra to end the recording.

Hodges' playing on this recording is technically stunning, and undoubtedly had a hand in turning this contrafact into the standard it has become. He is remembered so well for his playing on ballads, but prior to the time that his recordings of "Passion Flower," "Sophisticated Lady," and "I Got It Bad And That Ain't Good" made him "the most romantic saxophone in the business"<sup>64</sup> he possessed truly impressive technical control of the instrument.<sup>65</sup>

Hodges begins his solo with a pickup to the second phrase of the form, on a Cmin7 which begins a ii-V-I to the IV, Bb (again, "Mellotone" is in F for the alto and this transcription is in the alto's key).

Example 12: Measures 1-4, from "In A Mellotone."

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 161.

<sup>65</sup> It is interesting to note that Hodges' first great ballad feature was probably "Warm Valley" which was originally recorded October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1940, just over a month after the recording of "In A Mellotone."

Hodges enters with a languid scoop to G, before moving through a line of tenuto tongued triplets which descend to low F and then make the octave leap to middle F before landing on D, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Bb, and eventually finishing the phrase on G, the 6<sup>th</sup> of Bb. He then plays a short answering phrase which carefully avoids the tonic while primarily outlining a Bb6 chord. Like most players of the swing era, Hodges favors the major 6 chord quality for major-type chords (scale degrees 1, 3, 5, and 6). This is the harmonic cause of his predilection for the pentatonic scale, and stands in some contrast to the emphasis of the major 7 chord quality and scale degree which was used with increased regularity over major-type chords in the bebop era and beyond.

The only note that stands out as odd in this passage is the D flat played over an F7 as the second triplet in measure 2. Hodges doesn't emphasize this note, but neither does he avoid it, and it appears to be a deliberate choice. It seems most likely that he is superimposing an augmented chord (F7+5) over F7, which was a common choice among other prominent swing musicians, in particular Hodges' major influences Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet.

Hodges plays the next 16 bars with an assertive double time feel. He makes frequent leaps of as wide as an octave, displaying considerable agility.

Example 13: Measures 5-8, from “In A Mellotone.”

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'DOUBLE TIME FEEL' and contains measures 5 and 6. Measure 5 is marked with a  $B^b$  chord symbol. Measure 6 is marked with a  $B^{\circ 7}$  chord symbol. The bottom staff is labeled '(STRAIGHT)' and contains measures 7 and 8. Measure 7 is marked with an  $F^{MAJ7}$  chord symbol. Measure 8 is marked with a  $D^7$  chord symbol. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks such as accents and slurs.

Measures 5-8 could be analyzed via their respective chord changes, and in 5-7 Hodges does seem to keep coming back to F and D which are chord tones for each of the chord changes  $B^b$  and  $B^{dim.7}$ , but they are also the root and 6<sup>th</sup> of the destination F chord. We cannot know if Hodges was hearing these pitches as diatonic to the home key or as common tones between each of the chords. This establishes a potential dichotomy between diatonicism and adherence to local chord changes which will persist throughout his solo.

Hodges elevates the intensity again in the next with two unrelenting phrases.



Example 14: Measures 9-12, from “In A Mellotone.”

The image shows two staves of musical notation in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first staff, labeled '9' at the beginning, is marked with a G7 chord above the first measure. It contains four measures of music, each starting with an accent (>) over the first note. The notes in these measures are: G4, A4, B4, A4; G4, F4, E4, D4; G4, F4, E4, D4; and G4, F4, E4, D4. The second staff, labeled '11' at the beginning, is marked with a C7 chord above the first measure and a D7 chord above the fourth measure. It contains four measures of music. The notes in these measures are: G4, A4, B4, A4; G4, F4, E4, D4; G4, F4, E4, D4; and G4, F4, E4, D4.

The phrase beginning in measure 9 is constructed of two juxtaposed 16<sup>th</sup> note fragments which require difficult descending leaps of major 6ths across the saxophone’s registral break. In regard to the discussion of diatonicism, Hodges prominently displays the non-diatonic tone of B natural, the major third of the local G7 chord (V7/V in F), so he is clearly aware of and emphasizing the local chord. However, he also slightly destabilizes our sense of G7 by finishing the phrase with the descending tones F, D, A, F, the root, 6<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and root of the diatonic key respectively. Of course, these could also be analyzed (or heard) as the 7<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> of G7, but to my ears the final note (F) does not project the tension of a flatted 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the note F is prevalent throughout the passage. The peak notes of the previously mentioned diatonic fragments are: E, F, E, F. So, F could be (and is) the flatted 7<sup>th</sup> of G7 *or* (and?) the tonic of the home key. In the case of these peak notes it’s simple for them to be analyzed as a succession of leading

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<sup>66</sup> A perfect example of a flatted 7<sup>th</sup> which carries the requisite tension of a dominant chord was discussed in the previous chapter. See example 9, measure 32.

tones to tonic in F major, but Hodges' B natural as the second note of the phrase keeps our ears aware of the local chords. He really seems to be having it both ways, and with great effect.

Hodges plays measures 11-12 as a stop time break and his tempo is impeccable, but it is easy to lose track of the beat before he clearly (re)establishes it on beat 3 of measure 12. The cause for potential confusion lies in his lack of articulation and accents. A bebop player would tongue and accent at any number of predictable points in this phrase, but Hodges plays legato throughout and with hardly any accents. This is not the case with the entire solo, just this particular solo break. For instance, the preceding phrase included strong accents on the peak note downbeats, just as we might expect from a bebop player. It is not however easy to tell whether he is tonguing those notes or if they are being accented naturally by virtue of the ascending leap (which creates a natural accent on saxophones) or if Hodges is air accenting them.

The notes of measures 11-12 also allow for multiple analyses. If we analyze the beginning of measure 11 through the lens of C7 we might see the first 7 notes as favoring (in descending order) the root, 7<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> of that chord, but if we add the last 16<sup>th</sup> note of beat 2, then the preceding 4 notes (beginning with the A natural on the "e" of beat 1) appear like a large enclosure of F. This continues into the first two beats of measure 12, which seem to revolve around E, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of C7 and leading tone, but the D sharp and E of beat 1 could just as easily appear to be double leading tones to F.

Measure 13 begins the second half of the form. The first phrase has the chord changes G7-C7-F, of V7/V-V7-I in the home key of F.

Example 15: Measures 13-16, from “In A Mellotone.”

The image shows two staves of musical notation in treble clef, representing measures 13 through 16. The first staff (measures 13-14) is in the key of B-flat major. Measure 13 is marked with a G7 chord. Measure 14 is marked with a C7 chord. The melody in measure 14 features a triplet of eighth notes (B-flat, A, G) on beat 3, which is an enclosure leading to an E natural on beat 4. The second staff (measures 15-16) is in the key of F major. Measure 15 is marked with an FMAJ7 chord. The melody in measure 15 features a triplet of eighth notes (F, G, A) on beat 3, which is an enclosure leading to a D natural on beat 4. The melody in measure 16 features a triplet of eighth notes (F, G, A) on beat 3, which is an enclosure leading to a D natural on beat 4. The notation includes various articulations such as accents (>) and slurs.

Once again it is clear that Hodges is aware of the local chord changes. Measure 13 strictly conforms to G7, and when the chord changes to C7 the only B that appears has returned to flat and there is a pretty clear enclosure to an E natural on beat 3 of measure 14, setting up the arrival at the home key in measure 15. Once there, Hodges tonicizes F nicely in 15-16 and as expected the F pentatonic pitch collection is used and the line ascends twice to the major 6<sup>th</sup> of D. However, as in the foregoing analysis, the note F remains prevalent throughout the G7 and C7 chords. It is heard repeatedly and is the peak of the motive being played. None of this is surprising for a chord progression resolving in F, but when considered in the context of the entire solo it is clear that Hodges never strays too far from the overall tonic of the piece.

His articulation in this passage is once again very smooth and only the notes with accents are clearly tongued.

Measures 17-22 are a repeat of the chord changes heard at the outset of the solo (the second 4-bar phrase of the A section), and are a ii-V-I in the key of B flat (IV). The

only alteration to the tonal pitch collection of F is the addition of an E flat, and we hear Hodges inject E flats into his phrases, clearly leading our ears toward the new local key.

Example 16: Measures 17-20, from “In A Mellotone.”

Once again Hodges’ agility is impressive. For three successive beats from measure 17 beat 3 to measure 18 beat 1 he makes the uncomfortable leap of diatonic (in B flat) 7ths, seemingly with ease. In direct contrast to the preceding eight measures his articulations are incredibly active. He tongues almost every note in 17-18, including re-articulating the repeated 16ths and the leaps. He also manages to include two scoops to F, in both measures 18 and 19. In measure 19 Hodges ghosts the off-beat F lower neighbors to G, and it sounds as if he may slightly half-tongue them as well, which definitely sounds to my ears to be a harbinger of a tonguing style that will become much more prevalent in the bebop era.

Unsurprisingly, the balance of local chord changes with the overall tonic continues in this passage. The E flat is a clear indicator of the momentary tonicization of the key of B flat, and the repeated use of the notes F and D can easily be heard as the 5<sup>th</sup>

and 3<sup>rd</sup> of that key. However, as has now been repeatedly pointed out, they are Hodges' primary tones in the key of F as well, and if he were hearing the key of B flat at this moment, we might expect him to actually play a few, and yet B flats are completely absent from this phrase.

Hodges' leaves the double time feel for the final eight measures of his solo. This is at least partly due to the increased activity of the orchestra, which enters into a call and response with him until the end.

Example 17: Measures 21-28, from "In A Mellotone."

The musical score for Example 17, measures 21-28, from "In A Mellotone," is presented in four staves of music. The key signature is one flat (Bb). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and triplets. The key signatures for the staves are: Staff 1: B<sup>b</sup>7 and B<sup>o</sup>7; Staff 2: FMAJ<sup>7</sup> and D<sup>7</sup>; Staff 3: G<sup>7</sup> and C<sup>7</sup>; Staff 4: F<sup>b</sup> and F<sup>b</sup>. The measure numbers 21, 23, 25, and 27 are indicated at the beginning of each staff.

Hodges' note choices are more clearly dominated by the key in this section than any of the preceding phrases. He adds big scoops into F at the beginning of the first two phrases, and lands on alternating, blues-inflected flatted 3rds and 7ths in every other measure. Hodges is a master of the tasteful inclusion of blues-inflected material in major-type songs.

As this analysis has demonstrated, Hodges manages to balance the accentuation of local chord changes with diatonicism throughout this solo. When considered irrespective of his playing, this seems like a non-committal approach that is likely to be unsatisfying to the listener, while in practice it is anything but. He is clearly able to portray any of these chord changes with clarity and virtuosity, but without ever sounding like he is "just running the changes," which was a charge frequently leveled at bebop musicians. By leaning on diatonicism Hodges' solos convey a sense of being rooted in and inspired by the song and in particular its melody, rather than being flights of harmonic exploration.

I believe that this is a byproduct of the fact that Hodges learned songs by ear, and that he eschewed the written versions. Additionally, by all accounts he was largely self-taught, playing by ear from the very beginning. It stands to reason (borne out by personal experience) that when learning a song by ear one first learns the melody, and when improvising one is first and foremost aware of the key, only thereafter becoming aware of the sections of a song which deviate from the key. The primary fallacy associated with this approach is that it should result in playing that is somehow harmonically simplistic, but there is sufficient inventiveness in this one solo to dispel such a concern. Rather, I would propose that learning by ear naturally imposes a different set of improvisational

inspirations and priorities directed by one's ears and imagination rather than (or in addition to) the intellectual apprehension of the harmony. The "improvisational inspirations" in question are specifically those mentioned above, the melody and the overall key, with local deviations taking a space of lesser importance.

In addition to questions of harmony and note choices, Hodges' use of articulation on "In A Mellotone" clearly places him as a precursor to bebop and contains traces of the articulation styles common to the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. This solo has traces of Hodges' early predisposition to tonguing every note, such as in his opening triplets in measures 1-2. His long legato lines in measures 11-12 would sound out of place if played by Charlie Parker, but not because of the note choices. To the contrary, with different articulations they would fit perfectly into the bebop idiom. And finally, the legato half-tonguing and ghosted notes in measure 19 presage the articulations of soloists like Charlie Parker and section players like Marshal Royal of the Count Basie Orchestra. The amount of variation in articulation styles in this one solo is impressive, and it is reminiscent of how fluidly Hodges was able to alter his time feel in the first chorus of "The Mooche," discussed in chapter I. He clearly had command of many different modes of delivery and was able to call on them at a moment's notice.

CHAPTER V  
BALLADS: I GOT IT BAD

From the early 1930s onward Hodges was increasingly featured on ballads. He is probably best remembered today for his delivery of ballad melodies and the scoops, sighs, and other affectations which he performed with such ease and control. Though he recorded on countless ballads and down-tempo tunes previously in his career, with the departure from the Ellington band of tenor saxophonist Ben Webster in 1943, Hodges became the primary ballad soloist, and from that point on his features were heavily weighted toward ballads. He is particularly remembered for “Warm Valley,” “Day Dream,” “Prelude To A Kiss,” “Passion Flower,” “Sophisticated Lady,” “Isfahan,” and “I Got It Bad (And That Ain’t Good),” but this is certainly a cursory list.

Hodges’ ballad playing is frequently compared to singing. Stanley Dance once said of Hodges, “He sings all kinds of songs. He sings slow and sad songs, and he sings pretty and perky songs. His lyric gift is such that whatever he sings has beauty, grace and warmth.”<sup>67</sup> This opinion of Hodges was also held by singers. When asked what he thought of Hodges, singer Tony Bennet replied, “The best singer in the world—what

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<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Chapman, 139.



else?”<sup>68</sup> When Bing Crosby heard Hodges perform “I Got It Bad (and That Ain’t Good)” he reportedly exclaimed, “Holy Toledo! That must be the best saxophone solo ever played!”<sup>69</sup> In this chapter I am going to discuss a recording of “I Got It Bad” which Hodges made in San Francisco in 1952 during his break from the Ellington band.

### **I Got It Bad**

“I Got It Bad” was composed by Duke Ellington and lyricist Paul Webster in 1941. It was first performed by singer Ivie Anderson in the music revue *Jump For Joy* and included a brief introductory solo by Hodges. The piece has a 32 measure AABA form and is usually performed in concert B flat (G for alto saxophone). Hodges recorded this song numerous times, and with considerable variation. While he has a signature take on the melody, he sometimes performed the piece as a medium tempo walking ballad (as did Anderson in the original), or contrastingly as a slow ballad.

This recording is one of the latter, and I chose it because here Hodges is in his most embellished and romantic style.<sup>70</sup> After one time through the melody Hodges returns to the bridge and finishes with a final A section, resulting in a form of AABABA, which is relatively standard for a ballad performance. Hodges never truly leaves the melody, so I’ve included two staves, the top being the standard melody and chord changes, and the bottom is my transcription of what is played by Hodges. More than in

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> This recording can be heard on youtube.com:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSX1zcvTKBc>

any of the previous transcriptions, this performance defies musical script, so my attempts to describe his playing will of necessity rely considerably on prose.

After a four-bar piano intro, Hodges enters with the melody and one of the most arresting scoops of his career.

Example 18: Measures 5-9, from “I Got It Bad.”

After an initial scoop into middle C sharp, Hodges soars from middle D to high E and the scoop is nearly seamless. There is a slightly audible initial glissando as soon as he begins the transition between the notes, but his pitch seems to center and stabilize on C sharp, approximately a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> below his target pitch. He doesn't actually reach E until the downbeat of measure 6 at which point he decrescendos while dropping to middle F sharp and then begins an ascent to B. One particularly interesting moment is found on

beats 3 and 4 of measure 6 where he plays a quarter note triplet which initially sounds like a chromatic passage. However, the first note of the triplet is clearly an A natural and there are therefore not enough half steps for the three approach notes to B. Hodges' second note is a scooped A sharp that never quite reaches pitch, and the third note is a scooped B that likewise remains significantly flat. Only on the down beat of measure 7 does Hodges actually arrive at the intended pitch of B, through which he crescendos with his characteristically broad and rapid vibrato. After the down beat of beat 3 he reverses his scoop and a sigh or fall (created with his embouchure rather than fingers), landing on middle B, and then beat 4 beginning the ascent back to high B, which is the final note of the melody. Rather than finishing the phrase on B, he descends chromatically from G flat to E, which he approaches with two grace notes.

His tone at the beginning of the passage is robust and broad, but beginning with the decrescendo in measure 6 it becomes incredibly delicate (though always stable and clear). The foregoing all appears within a single phrase which contains myriad slight variations in timbre, volume, affectation and articulation, and is a microcosm of the depth and breadth of Hodges' affective capabilities.

One heavily individual aspect of his style that has not yet been discussed in any detail is vibrato. Hodges' vibrato was far more broad and rapid than other prominent alto saxophonists. It is safe to say that this is a legacy of his admiration for Sydney Bechet, who employed a vibrato so rapid and broad on soprano saxophone that the notes he played sometimes cracked. Hodges does not have nearly that level of intensity in his

vibrato, but the amplitude is not far off.<sup>71</sup> His version of Bechet's vibrato is slightly more controlled and reserved, but still very present in his sound. His vibrato also varies greatly in speed and intensity, sometimes broad and intense (as in the downbeat of measure 6) and sometimes narrower and softer (as in the end of measure 8). When Hodges decrescendos to silence his vibrato briefly continues with air but no tone.

Hodges enters the high B of the following phrase in measure 9 with a deep scoop, but after arriving at the pitch he scoops back down a quartertone and returns to B. The remainder of the phrase adheres relatively close to the melody. Hodges' brief flourish in measure 12 is the closest he comes to a ii-V pattern. It descends from G, the flatted 7<sup>th</sup> of Amin7, to G an octave lower before enclosing F sharp in a resolution to D7, the dominant of the key.

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<sup>71</sup> Hodges is able to play with the same amplitude as Bechet but without cracking notes at least partially because he is playing an alto saxophone with a larger mouthpiece tip opening, which allows for a larger bending of pitches.

Example 19: Measures 9-12, from “I’ve Got It Bad.”

2 A MIN7 B7 E7 A7 D7

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

mf

3

3

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

G<sup>b</sup> E MIN7 A MIN7 D7

11

3

mp

STRAIGHT

The following 8 measures are a repetition of the A section and Hodges restates the melody with some variations. In measure 19 he prepares a transition to the bridge with a substantial flourish of 32<sup>nd</sup> notes.

Example 20: Measures 19-20, from “I Got It Bad.”

G<sup>b</sup> G7

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

19

20

mp

The bridge of “I Got It Bad” moves initially to C major (IV) in measure 21, and in measure 20 the tonic chord of G6 becomes G7 (V7/IV). Hodges clearly accentuates the flatted 7<sup>th</sup> of F natural in his phrase, and in spite of the speed of the notes manages to remain clear and delicate with just a modicum of added intensity.

For the bridge Hodges lowers the melody an octave relative to where he played the A section. He plays a quarter note pick up (seen in example 20, measure 20) before continuing in measure 21.

Example 21: Measures 21-24, from “I Got It Bad.”

The musical score for Example 21 is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 21 and 22. The second system contains measures 23 and 24. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The time signature is 4/4. The score is for two saxophones, labeled 'A. Sx. 1' and 'A. Sx. 2'. In measure 21, the chord is CMAJ7. In measure 23, the chord is Cmin6. In measure 24, the chord is F7. The melody in A. Sx. 1 is a simple line of quarter notes. The accompaniment in A. Sx. 2 features eighth-note patterns with triplets and accents. A dynamic marking of 'mf' is present at the end of measure 22.

Hodges uses the bridge as an opportunity to decrease the tension of the tune, which he accomplishes by dropping everything an octave and lowering his dynamic level. However, the range between low G and middle D is generally one of the thinnest

and weakest on the saxophone and would be a likely drawback for a lesser saxophonist, but Hodges draws a beautiful sound and full character from the notes in this passage.

The standard melody of the bridge is beautiful, but rather simple. Nevertheless, Hodges manages to add a great deal of character to the phrase with the addition of carefully tongued legato notes, chromatic passing tones, and a slight scoop into the peak note of D. In his second phrase beginning with a pick up to measure 23, he adds a scoop to every note from G to D, and a long sigh from high G to the final note of the phrase on A. There is an affectation of almost every note, which typifies Hodges' style and makes it stand out in stark contrast to later saxophonists.

He also maintains interest and forward motion through sudden dynamic shifts. For instance, the first four bars of the bridge are played piano, and the second phrase is slightly louder. In the entrance to the third phrase his accent and powerful vibrato on the B in measure 24 is almost jarring in its intensity, but by the end of the next phrase he has returned to piano (example 22, measure 26). Much of the emotional power in Hodges' playing of ballads comes from these dynamic contrasts. For many saxophonists the need to be heard over the ensemble leads to generally too-loud dynamics, drastically decreasing the potential for musical emoting. Hodges doesn't shy away from playing extremely soft, forcing his ensemble to come down to him. His soft playing forces the listener to pay close attention and conveys a sense of candor and vulnerability, but also allows his louder moments to communicate considerable pathos.

Ex. 22, Measures 25-28, from “I’ve Got It Bad.”

The image shows a musical score for two saxophones (A. Sax. 1 and A. Sax. 2) in 4/4 time, measures 25-28. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 25-28, with chords GMAJ7, F7, BMIN7, and E7. The second system covers measures 27-28, with chords AMIN7 and D7. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks like accents and slurs.

After finishing the bridge Hodges returns to the final A section of the melody.

This arrangement extends to include one more bridge and A section before Hodges finishes with a brief and reserved cadenza which descends from the major 7 of middle F sharp eventually to the major 6 of low E.



Example 23: Measures 49-52, from “I Got It Bad.”

The image shows a musical score for two saxophones (A. Sx. 1 and A. Sx. 2) in G major. The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 49 and 50. In measure 49, A. Sx. 1 plays a simple melody of quarter notes (G4, A4, B4, C5), while A. Sx. 2 plays a more complex line with slurs and a triplet of eighth notes. In measure 50, A. Sx. 1 plays a descending line of quarter notes (B4, A4, G4, F4), and A. Sx. 2 plays a descending line of eighth notes with slurs. The second system covers measures 51 and 52. In measure 51, A. Sx. 1 plays a descending line of quarter notes (E4, D4, C4, B3), and A. Sx. 2 plays a descending line of eighth notes with slurs. In measure 52, A. Sx. 1 plays a single half note (G3), and A. Sx. 2 plays a single half note (G3). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. Chord symbols are placed above the staves: Amin7 above measure 49, and B7, E7, A7, and D7 above measures 50 and 51. A G6 chord symbol is placed above measure 52. The measure numbers 49 and 51 are written in the left margin.

In spite of the soaring scoops, brief rapid passages, and the fact that much of what Hodges does here is very impressive, one does not get the sense that he is showing off. His playing is exceedingly romantic, but it also comes across as fundamentally honest. I think this is largely aided by his use of such soft dynamics. Somehow, playing softly gives credence to the emotions conveyed in his affectations which might otherwise come across as melodramatic. Hodges' personal interpretation of the melody is conveyed by a unique shaping of every note. Ellington's original composition is almost exclusively quarter notes, but Hodges transforms this simple song into a sublime rhapsody without ever removing the listener's primary attention from the melody.

With the exception of short flourishes at the end of phrases, this solo is entirely based on interpretation of the melody, never shifting into a chord-based improvisation. This is consistent with the vast majority of the ballad recordings from throughout his career (as well as a significant amount of the rest of his work). As observed in the previous chapter, Hodges clearly possesses the ability to improvise in a harmonic framework, but his musical priorities seem to be the accentuation and embellishment of the song. This stands out in contrast to the following generations of improvisers who treat the chord changes of the song as providing greater interest than the melody.<sup>72</sup>

The amount of affectation Hodges employs may be the single greatest difference between him and later saxophonists. Charlie Parker is (arguably) the only alto saxophonist who received greater acclaim than Hodges, and his style included far fewer affectations, instead focusing more on harmony and speed of delivery. Parker's delivery was drier, and his tone and vibrato were generally narrower. He also catered primarily to listening audiences rather than dancers. The causes and effect of the shift from the swing era to the bebop era is well beyond the scope of this paper, but Parker's style was so overwhelmingly influential (and divergent from Hodges') that relatively few alto saxophonists post-1950 show significant signs of being Hodges' disciples. This in spite of the fact that alto players of the 1950s and 60s almost ubiquitously list their primary influences on the instrument as Benny Carter, Johnny Hodges, and Charlie Parker.

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<sup>72</sup> I say this impartially rather than to disparage or negatively critique later musicians, though the argument between whether a musician should focus on the melody vs. the chord changes has been continued from least Hodges' time to the present day.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Examination of these transcriptions has revealed numerous identifiable stylistic traits in Hodges' playing. Throughout his career and in pieces of differing genres Hodges' harmonic approach is characterized by a careful balance between diatonicism and local harmonies, typified by the accentuation of locally significant non-diatonic pitches inside of lines anchored by essential diatonic pitches, notably the tonic and major 6<sup>th</sup>. This is strongly reinforced by his predilection for the pentatonic scale (as opposed to Ionian/Aeolian). When Hodges employed chromaticism, it was primarily through the use of the blues-inflected flatted 3<sup>rd</sup> and flatted 7<sup>th</sup>.

His rhythmic approach was widely varied, regularly employing rapid oscillations between rubato, triple and duple divisions, single and double time feel(s), and various polyrhythmic subdivisions. His swing feel varied from nearly straight 8ths to heavy swing. While his swing feel was frequently determined by the present accompaniment, he also employed shifting swing feels reflective of his rhythmic superimpositions over static accompaniment.

Hodges' blues playing remained harmonically and melodically consistent over the course of his career. He made frequent use of the pentatonic scale over the I chord, only accentuating the I7 when preparing the move to IV. He then, however, regularly treated

the IV chord as a minor i, altering the pentatonic scale by flattening the 3<sup>rd</sup>, resulting in a scale I have referred to as “pentatonic flat three.” In comparison to many of his contemporaries Hodges made relatively little overt use of the blues scale, especially eschewing the #4/b5.

Hodges possessed considerable technical skill which was primarily on display in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The double time sections of his solo from “In A Mellotone” include long and rhythmically accurate legato passages, clear and strongly accented target tones, and frequent leaps of as much as an octave, all delivered with precision.

Hodges’ balladry is typified by frequent and exaggerated use of emotive affectations, such as vibrato, scoops, sighs, and special articulations. The vast majority of his ballad improvisations consist of ornamentation of the melody, and only rarely does he depart with harmony-based improvisation.

While his style remained relatively consistent over the course of his career, one clear area of evolution is his use of articulations. In his early recordings and up to the mid-1930s Hodges frequently played short and heavy downbeats which border on staccato. Beginning in the mid-30s and increasing with time his downbeats are legato. However, this was a trend that can be heard in jazz as a whole and is a sign of Hodges reflecting the evolution of the genre itself rather than a uniquely personal change.

With the exception of his personal tone (which is unique for most if not all saxophonists) the most identifiable trait of Hodges’ playing is certainly his use of affectations. His personal style is determined much more by *how* he played the notes

rather than which notes he played. While none of his affectations are unique to him, he generally employed them more often and in a more exaggerated manner than other saxophonists, and he did so with incredible style and grace, never coming across as gauche or melodramatic.

This primarily affected style is likely the cause for the paucity of academic writings on Hodges. It is much easier to qualify the playing of a musician whose focus is on harmonic structure, pattern-based improvisation, chord substitutions, etc. While these characteristics are present in Hodges' playing to a degree, his focus seems much more to be on accentuating the song through melodic manipulations, ornamentation, and affectation. When his solo isn't directly alluding to the melody, his note choices often defy clear harmonic explanation because they are the product of a dualistic approach balancing diatonicism with local harmonies. Regardless of what causes the reluctance of academic writers to choose Hodges as a subject, his prominence and wide-spread influence warrant greater study, and this document serves as a starting point for further research.

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## APPENDIX A.

### LESS COMMON SYMBOLS FOUND IN THE TRANSCRIPTIONS



The mordent is used throughout to signify vibrato

**H.T.**

H.T. stands for “Half tongue”, which is a technique in which a saxophonist muffles their tone by applying their tongue lightly to the reed without stopping airflow or tone production. Hodges uses this technique in measure 63 of “Jeep’s Blues”

**S**

S stands for “side,” indicating the use of an alternate fingering for a given note. In measure 15 of “In A Mellotone” Hodges’ uses the palm D key for middle D

APPENDIX B.  
TRANSCRIPTIONS



During the first chorus of Hodges' solo on "The Mooche" he traded phrases with Trumpeter Arthur Whetsel. This is a transcription of their interaction. For ease of analysis, Whetsel's notes are transposed to the alto key of C minor.

# ARTHUR WHETSEL (TPT) AND JOHNNY HODGES (ALTO)

## TRADING PHRASES ON "THE MOOCHE"

DUKE ELLINGTON  
TRANSCRIBED AARON HILL

C-

ARTHUR WHETSEL (TPT) 1

Musical notation for Arthur Whetsel (TPT) 1 and Johnny Hodges (ALTO) 2. The key signature is C minor (C-), and the time signature is 4/4. Whetsel's part (top staff) begins with a rest, followed by a quarter note G, a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. This is followed by a triplet of eighth notes: G, A, B. The second measure contains a dotted quarter note G with a wavy line above it, followed by a half note A. The third measure contains a triplet of eighth notes: G, A, B, followed by a quarter note G, a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. Hodges' part (bottom staff) consists of rests in all three measures.

WHETSEL 1

HODGES 2

Musical notation for Whetsel 1 and Hodges 2. Whetsel's part (top staff) begins with a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. This is followed by a quarter rest, then a triplet of eighth notes: G, A, B, and another triplet of eighth notes: G, A, B. Hodges' part (bottom staff) begins with a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. This is followed by a quarter note C, a quarter note D, and a quarter note E. The second measure contains a quarter note F, a quarter note G, and a quarter note A. The third measure contains a quarter note B, a quarter note C, and a quarter note D. There are accents (>) over the notes in the second and third measures of both parts.

WHETSEL 1

HODGES 2

Musical notation for Whetsel 1 and Hodges 2. The key signature is F minor (F-), and the time signature is 4/4. Whetsel's part (top staff) begins with a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. This is followed by a quarter note C, a quarter note D, and a quarter note E. The second measure contains a quarter note F, a quarter note G, and a quarter note A. The third measure contains a quarter note B, a quarter note C, and a quarter note D. The fourth measure contains a quarter note E, a quarter note F, and a quarter note G. There are accents (>) over the notes in the first and second measures. Hodges' part (bottom staff) consists of rests in all four measures.

C-

WHETSEL 1

HODGES 2

G7

WHETSEL 1

HODGES 2

HODGES CONTINUES SOLO...

WHETSEL 1

HODGES 2

RECORDED OCT. 30, 1928

VICTOR: 47799-2

# JOHNNY HODGES ALTO SAXOPHONE SOLO ON "THE MOOCHE"

DUKE ELLINGTON

TRANSCRIBED BY AARON HILL

C-

F-

G C-

C<sup>6</sup>

C<sup>7</sup>

F<sup>6</sup>

5

9

13

15

17

70

2

C<sup>6</sup>

19

G<sup>7</sup>

21

C<sup>6</sup>

23

ALBUM: "JOHNNY HODGES WITH  
BILLY STRAYHORN AND THE ORCHESTRA"

RECORDED DECEMBER, 1961

VERVE - V 8452

# JOHNNY HODGES ALTO SOLO ON "JEEP'S BLUES"

ELLINGTON AND HODGES  
ARR. STRAYHORN  
TRANSCRIBED BY AARON HILL

$\text{♩} = 82$  **3** BAND SOLO

**G<sup>7</sup>** HODGES SOLO

**D<sup>6</sup>**

**E<sup>MIN</sup>7** **A<sup>7</sup>**

**D<sup>6</sup>** **G<sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>6</sup>** (BAND SOLO RETURNS...) ETC.

**G<sup>7</sup>** HODGES SOLO

2 **D<sup>6</sup>** **E<sup>MIN</sup>7**

23

**A<sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>6</sup>** **G<sup>7</sup>** **G<sup>#o</sup>7** **D<sup>6</sup>**

26

**D<sup>6</sup>** **C<sup>#MIN</sup>7(b5)** **F<sup>#7</sup>**

29

**B<sup>MIN</sup>7** **D<sup>7</sup>** **G<sup>7</sup>**

31

**D<sup>6</sup>**

34

**E<sup>MIN</sup>7**

36

**A<sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>6</sup>** **G<sup>7</sup>** **G<sup>#o</sup>7**

38

**D<sup>6</sup>** **(BAND SOLI RETURNS...)** **3**

40

44 **HODGES SOLO** **G<sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>6</sup>** 3

48 **E<sub>MIN</sub><sup>7</sup>** **A<sup>7</sup>**

51 **D<sup>6</sup>** **G<sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>6</sup>** (BAND SOLI RETURNS...) ETC. 4

57 **HODGES SOLO** **G<sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>6</sup>**

60 **E<sub>MIN</sub><sup>7</sup>** **A<sup>7</sup>**

63 **D<sup>6</sup>** **D<sup>7</sup>** H.T. H.T.

64 **D<sup>9</sup>** FADE TO INAUDIBLE...

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS FAMOUS ORCHESTRA,  
CHICAGO STUDIO A, SEPTEMBER 5, 1940  
VICTOR: 26788-A

# JOHNNY HODGES SOLO ON "IN A MELLOTONE"

DUKE ELLINGTON  
TRANSCRIBED BY AARON HILL

**Staff 1:** Tempo: ♩ = 130. Chords: C<sup>MIN</sup>7, F<sup>7</sup>. Performance markings: accents, slurs, triplets (3).

**Staff 2:** Chord: B<sup>b</sup>MAJ<sup>7</sup>. Performance markings: accents, slurs, triplets (3).

**Staff 3:** Chords: B<sup>b</sup>, B<sup>o</sup>7. Performance markings: accents, slurs, triplets (3). Instruction: DOUBLE TIME FEEL.

**Staff 4:** Chords: FMAJ<sup>7</sup>, D<sup>7</sup>. Performance markings: accents, slurs, triplets (3), asterisks (\*). Instruction: (STRAIGHT).

**Staff 5:** Chord: G<sup>7</sup>. Performance markings: accents, slurs, triplets (3).

**Staff 6:** Chords: C<sup>7</sup>, D<sup>7</sup>. Performance markings: accents, slurs, triplets (3).

Measure numbers: 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 75.



13 **G<sup>7</sup>** **C<sup>7</sup>**

15 **F<sup>MAJ7</sup>**

17 **C<sup>MIN7</sup>** **F<sup>7</sup>**

19 **B<sup>b</sup>MAJ7** **B<sup>b</sup>7**

21 **B<sup>b</sup>7** **B<sup>o</sup>7**

END DOUBLE TIME FEEL

23 **F<sup>MAJ7</sup>** **D<sup>7</sup>**

25 **G<sup>7</sup>** **C<sup>7</sup>**

27 **F<sup>b</sup>** **F<sup>b</sup>**

RECORDED IN SAN FRANCISCO, 7/17/1952

THE TOP STAFF OF EACH STANZA IS THE  
STANDARD MELODY, AND THE SECOND STAFF  
IS WHAT IS PLAYED BY HODGES.

# JOHNNY HODGES SOLO ON "I GOT IT BAD AND THAT AIN'T GOOD"

DUKE ELLINGTON

TRANSCRIBED BY AARON HILL

SOLO PIANO INTRO

ALTO SAX 1

ALTO SAX 2

$\text{♩} = 60$   $GMAJ^7$   $EMIN^7$

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

$f$

$1/4$  FLAT

3

$A^7$

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

$p$

3

$p$

2 **A<sub>MIN</sub><sup>7</sup>** **B<sup>7</sup>** **E<sup>7</sup>** **A<sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>7</sup>**

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

*mf*

**G<sup>6</sup>** **E<sub>MIN</sub><sup>7</sup>** **A<sub>MIN</sub><sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>7</sup>**

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

*mp*

(STRAIGHT)

**G<sub>MAJ</sub><sup>7</sup>** **E<sub>MIN</sub><sup>7</sup>**

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

*f*

**A<sup>7</sup>**

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

*mp*

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

17

*mf*

3

**A<sub>MIN</sub><sup>7</sup>** **B<sup>7</sup>** **E<sup>7</sup>** **A<sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>7</sup>** **3**

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

19

*mp*

**G<sup>b</sup>** **G<sup>7</sup>**

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

21

**C<sub>MAJ</sub><sup>7</sup>**

*mf*

3

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

23

**C<sub>MIN</sub><sup>b</sup>** **F<sup>7</sup>**

3

4 **GMAJ<sup>7</sup>** **F<sup>7</sup>** **BMIN<sup>7</sup>** **E<sup>7</sup>**

A. Sx. 1  
25

A. Sx. 2

**AMIN<sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>7</sup>**

A. Sx. 1  
27

A. Sx. 2

**GMAJ<sup>7</sup>** **EMIN<sup>7</sup>**

A. Sx. 1  
29

A. Sx. 2

*f* *mf*

**A<sup>7</sup>**

A. Sx. 1  
31

A. Sx. 2

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

Amin<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup> E<sup>7</sup> A<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> 5

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

G<sup>b</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

CMAJ<sup>7</sup>

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

Cmin<sup>b</sup> F<sup>7</sup>

6 **GMAJ<sup>7</sup>** **F<sup>7</sup>** **BMIN<sup>7</sup>** **E<sup>7</sup>**

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

*mp* *p*

**AMIN<sup>7</sup>** **D<sup>7</sup>**

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

**GMAJ<sup>7</sup>** **EMIN<sup>7</sup>**

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

*f*

**A<sup>7</sup>**

A. SX. 1

A. SX. 2

*mf*