#### **DEEP BROWN**

#### A STYLE STUDY

OF

## JAZZ BASSIST RAY BROWN

by

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#### **Introduction**

Ray Brown's signature style and mastery of his instrument set him apart as a true individual jazz musician. Ray Brown's time, feel, sound, and his profound control of his chosen instrument are all things that come up in writings about the bassist. My earliest mentors in Jazz always referred to him when trying to teach me how to swing and drive a rhythm section.

#### **Brown's Timeline**

Ray Brown's career started out when he began playing gigs on the bass that he borrowed from his high school. After paying dues locally and graduating high school, he hit the road with various dance bands. He eventually found his way to New York City to try his luck in the jazz scene of the mid-forties. He quickly landed a gig with Dizzy Gillespie and then as the house bassist with the Jazz at the Philharmonic concerts. This brought him into contact with Ella Fitzgerald, who he would back up and eventually marry, manage, and amicicably divorce. Through JATP, he also met Oscar Peterson and they began playing as a duo. They would go on to play together for fifteen years in the Oscar Peterson trio. They recorded many records and travelled the world out-swinging big bands with their powerful trio. He also published an instructional book, and became very active in teaching.

After his tenure with Oscar Peterson, Ray moved to Los Angeles and his career path changed from lots of jazz work to commercial studio work like movie and television soundtracks. He spent less time on the road and also delved into the

business side of music, managing the Modern Jazz Quartet and Quincy Jones. He did a lot of work for Henry Mancini, got into composing, and taught classes at UCLA.

He recorded many albums as a leader and co-leader. Notably, he made a duo album with Duke Ellington and led his own trio. He also formed a band called The L.A. Four and they would play a blend of jazz, Brazilian, and classical music. The latter part of his career found him mostly playing with his own trio and teaching master classes.

#### **Deep Brown**

The main thing that stands out about Ray Brown is that he played the bass on a level that surpassed his instrument's traditional role as timekeeper and root-note player. He displayed a depth that is seen in his rhythmic sophistication, strong harmonic knowledge, and motivic development. In addition to his sound and timefeel, this depth is what defines Ray Brown as an important jazz bassist.

He was on such a deep musical level that he improvised bass lines the way that a master composer presents a motif and develops it, like a story unfolding over the course of a tune.

Brown was very comfortable, technically, on his instrument, and also with all manner of harmonic movement. There was a constant curiosity with Ray Brown.

When on tour in a new city, he could be found studying with, or just talking about the double bass with local symphony bassists (Lees.) Dizzy Gillespie said about the young Ray Brown that he was very inquisitive and always wanted to know about what Dizzy was doing, harmonically (Lees 19-20.) This pursuance of further development continued into his tenure with The Oscar Peterson Trio when Peterson

would ask Ray to play arrangements that were very challenging and he would push himself to get them right (Lees 19.) I feel that this curiosity and pursuance of new information is the main reason for his depth. It is a common characteristic in people of creative greatness. This paper is going to work from the inside out with the analysis, starting from the simplest rhythmic motifs, moving on to his note choices on a measure-by-measure basis, and then onto longer scalar and chromatic phrases.

#### **Rhythm Drops**

One of the things about Ray Brown's playing that is often mentioned when discussing what makes him so recognizable, is his aggressive sense of time. Namely, that he plays ahead of the beat, pushing the time. The use of rhythm drops in his bass lines helps to give the music a feeling of forward momentum. In "Ray Brown's Bass Method," there is a chapter on rhythm drops, where he introduces four different types of figures that can be used in walking bass lines. A rhythm drop is a rhythmic variation of the standard quarter note walking bass line. He says in the introduction: "my view is that "drops" should be played in holes, or used to give the rhythm section a boost." (Brown, p.63)

The first of the four is a figure with an eighth note followed by a dotted quarter note. In the book, he provides the following exercise:



In his own playing, he uses this particular rhythmic figure sparingly, likely because it puts an emphasis on the 'and' of the beat and would draw the listener's attention away from the harmonic movement by accenting the off-beat, which is not

always appropriate. He advises at the beginning of this chapter: "Above all, don't play 'drops' just anywhere." (Brown, 63) Brown primarily uses this particular figure at the end of a tune (example 1b), or in conjunction with a chromatic ascending line where a leap down is resolved by step up as in an appoggiatura (example 1c.)

Example 1b: "Things ain't what they used to be." Duke Ellington/Ray Brown "This one's for Blanton"



Example 1c: "Night Train" The Oscar Peterson Trio "Night Train"



This figure is also used in conjunction with chord anticipation when applied to beat four:

Example 1d: "F.S.R." The Ray Brown Trio "Bam Bam"



Or as a way to keep the rhythm section moving forward as on beat two of the second measure here:

Example 1e: "Stella by Starlight" The Ray Brown Trio "Walk on"



The next two rhythm drops are illustrated in the following excerpt from "Ray Brown's Bass Method." The triplet figure will be called rhythm drop #2 and the dotted-eighth sixteenth note figure, rhythm drop #3.

Example 2a: exercise from page 70 of "Ray Brown's Bass Method"



Brown employs rhythm drop #2 on any of the four beats in a measure. When the figure is descending, it consists mostly of chord tones and generally contains leaps:

Example 2b: "Stella by Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk on."



Example 2c: "Things Ain't what they used to be." Duke Ellington/Ray Brown "This one's for Blanton."



When the rhythm drop #2 is ascending, it tends to be more scalar or chromatic:

Example 2d: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival."



There are also instances, when playing in a 2-beat feel, that Brown heavily employs rhythm drop 2, but not in the ways given before. Here, he uses the last two notes in the triplet figure to include a drop in his lines.

Example 2e: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



Rhythm drop number 2 is the most common one that occurs and could be notated three different ways. It could be notated as two eighth notes or a triplet figure with the first two notes tied together. Here it will be notated as it is in 'The Bass Method.' A dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note.

Example 3a: "F.S.R." Ray Brown Trio "Bam Bam"



Many times, this particular drop involves open strings, as on the first beat of the second measure of this example:

Example 3b: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



Mostly, this is due to the fact that, technically, it makes sense. If a note is played on the G-string, it is fairly natural to use the D string in a rhythm drop because the plucking finger is in position to pull the D once the G has been pulled. In fact, most

of the instances of drops in these transcriptions, even if they involve stopped strings, typically go from a high string to a low string.

Example 3c: "Things Ain't What they used to be" Duke Ellington/Ray Brown "This One's For Blanton."



It goes without saying that jazz music is not a strict art form, and so it goes with the applications of these rhythm drops. Ray Brown definitely mixes and matches all of these drops in many different ways. He often will play drops consecutively and of the same type:

Example 4a: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



Example 4b: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



Other times, he mixes different rhythm drops together in a measure (example 4c) or over the course of a few measures (example 4d)

Example 4c: "Things Ain't What they used to be" Duke Ellington/Ray Brown "This One's For Blanton."



Example 4d: "Things Ain't What they used to be" Duke Ellington/Ray Brown "This One's For Blanton."



#### **Arpeggio Voicings**

It's necessary here to make a clarification on the use of an unorthodox use of the term 'Voicings.' This term is not typically used when referring to bass lines, but it is used here to describe the combination of notes, employed in a given measure, by a bass player in course of a line. In a standard swing feel, this will typically be a four-note combination, with or without the addition of a rhythm drop. Just like piano or guitar chord voicings, numbers will be used that correspond with the chord members to distinguish between the different voicings.

The most common voicing in Ray Brown's bass lines is the voicing 1-7-5-1.

This is a descending voicing beginning on an upper root and continuing down to each next lower chord tone.

Example 5a: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



This voicing can easily be played in any position without any shifting, so that's probably why it is so prevalent. Variations of this voicing occur on the last beat of the measure, either by octave displacement or rhythm drops, which function as non-harmonic tones, mostly. For instance, when a lower note is not available due to the

range of the bass, the last note is played in the same octave as the first note in the voicing.

Example 5b: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



Here is an example of an instance where the choice was made to play the note 'E' one octave below the normal voicing.

Example 5c: "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars (Corcovado)" Oscar Peterson Trio "We Get Requests"



Example 5d is an instance where the last note in the voicing was played an octave higher to facilitate a drop using the open strings 'G' and 'D.'

Example 5d: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



Ray's depth is expressed here in how he uses this simple chord voicing as a motif through a series of chords.

Example 5e: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



Example 5f: "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars (Corcovado)" Oscar Peterson Trio "We Get Requests"



The 1-3-5-1 voicing Brown employs is used primarily as an ascending pattern.

Example 6a: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



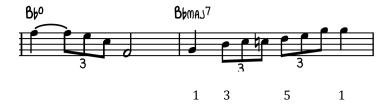
Displacing the outer two notes by octaves creates a much less linear sound. In the following example, the note 'G' is played open to facilitate a shift to a lower position.

Example 6b: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



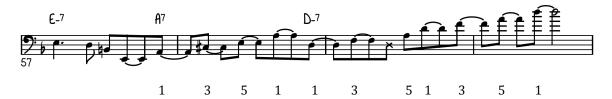
He uses drops with this voicing to move the music forward and also to create some tension in between the chord tones by including chromatic passing notes in the drops.

Example 6c: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



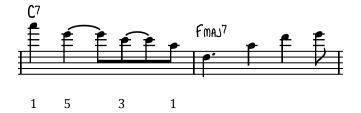
Displaying his concept of the entire musical picture, Brown applies this voicing to several measures in a row, even overlapping the last two voicings.

Example 6d: "Prelude Opus 28 No. 4/How Insensitive" L.A. Four "The L.A. Four Scores!"



In most occurrences of the 1-5-3-1 voicing, it is primarily a descending pattern.

Example 7a: "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars (Corcovado)" Oscar Peterson Trio "We Get Requests"



Other times, it does not necessarily ascend or descend, but remains in the same place, as the pattern ends on the same note on which it started.

Example 7b: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



The following example shows an instance where both of those variations of the voicing are played in a row with two different drops.

Example 7c: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



In "F.S.R.(for Sonny Rollins)" Ray plays the 1-5-3-1 pattern almost every single time an Eb7 chord appears for a whole measure, with one variation(example 7d) where he displaces the first note up an octave from the typical pattern(example 7e) he uses in the rest of the tune.

Example 7d: "F.S.R." Ray Brown Trio "Bam Bam"



Example 7e: "F.S.R." Ray Brown Trio "Bam Bam"



#### **Other common patterns**

The intention of the individual player aside, a bass line only needs to follow one simple guideline in order to strongly spell out the chord changes: Always play a chord tone on the strong harmonic beats of the measure, beat one and beat three.

This is the bare minimum and Ray Brown, of course, took the role a little bit deeper.

He played many different patterns (voicings) to outline chords that are a little more

linear and melodic than the arpeggios of the last section. In addition to chord tones, these patterns include scale notes and chromatic passing notes.

In music theory I, every music student learns, when learning about good melodies, that a leap (span an interval larger than a major 2<sup>nd</sup>) must always be resolved by step. Ray Brown often phrases his bass lines in this very fashion. Typically you will see an ascending scalar or chromatic pattern followed by a descending pattern containing leaps or more often than not, an arpeggiation of some sort. Also, you will find combinations of the scalar and chromatic patterns creating a longer, slower line that creates the effect of, not necessarily playing each chord change, but rather moving through a tonality and arriving at the next.

One very common ascending pattern that is found in much of this music is 1-2-3-5. Here the 1-7-5-1-arpeggio voicing follows it.

Example 8a: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



When scalar patterns are combined, they form longer lines that take the bass line slowly up the range of the bass. Here again, the stepwise motion is followed by leaps back down to the lower range of the bass.

Example 8b: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



The same concept can be seen descending, but this time with the leaps in between scalar patterns.

Example 8c: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



Scale patterns are an important part of any bass player's repertoire. Here is an occasion where Brown ascends the Bbmajor scale, managing to fit six of the seven notes in the measure.

Example 8d: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



Below is an example of a line that incorporates a scale pattern for the first two measures and then a stepwise pattern that ends in a chromatic note that leads to the root of the final measure.

Example 8e: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



#### **Harmonic Superimposition**

Many times when the chord changes are a ii-V7, Brown will often play a bass line, which outlines only the V chord throughout both chords. It was common practice among beloop musicians to do the same thing in their solo lines. This makes

perfect sense considering Brown spent some of his early formative years with Dizzy Gillespie, one of the originators of bebop. The outline of the D7 chord is spelled out clearly in this example,

Example 9a: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



and here is a longer example where the C7 chord is pretty clearly spelled out on the G-7 chord.

Example 9b: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



On other occasions, his bass lines will outline common cadences approaching upcoming chords, when those particular changes are not happening anywhere else in the music. He usually does this over the span of two beats. Here it takes place in measure 4 of the example. Chord tones of C7 are played on all four beats, clearly implying the V7 chord of F-7, which is the following chord.

Example 9c: "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars(Corcovado)" Oscar Peterson Trio "We Get Requests"



In this excerpt of "F.S.R." the chord progression I-VI-ii-V, is clearly outlined in the first measure.

Example 9d: "F.S.R." Ray Brown Trio "Bam Bam"



This is a common turnaround at the end of forms to bring it back to the beginning. The spot where he plays this is at the end of the form and that is exactly what is happening here as the example is at the end of the form. Over an Abmaj7 chord, he plays a 1-2-b3-3 pattern in F, implying the relative minor chord.

Example 9e: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



Ray Brown clearly not only has a very firm grasp on the existing harmony, but also the harmony that he has the power to imply by being on the bottom of all of the chords.

#### Two-Feel

Ray Brown could and would play just about anything over a two feel. He could play two half notes in a measure or play triplets on all four beats. His note choice on the two feel is mostly 1 and 5 from the chord of the given section. Here, he plays an extended version of the 1-5-3-1 voicing over two measures.

Example 10a: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



The half note is definitely the root of the "two feel." Usually, Brown will branch out from that gradually, starting with quarter note or quarter note triplet variations.

Example 10b: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



The following passage is a good example of how Brown often would build up his lines, in rhythm and in register. As the rhythm gets busier, he moves higher up the bass in register.

Example 10c: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



### **Phrasing**

The following example is eight measures from "How High The Moon." In contains almost every concept addressed so far. Measure one is an arpeggio voicing. Measure two is the extension of a V7 chord over the span of a whole ii-7 V7 sequence. Measure three is the resolution of the leaps in the arpeggio into a stepwise sequence that more or less repeats in the next two measure. The final three measures show the repetition of an arpeggio voicing through those measures.

Example 11a: "How High the Moon" Oscar Peterson Trio "Live at the Stratford Shakespearean festival."



#### .Double Stops, Triple Stops, and Tenths

In his bass method, Brown encourages students to practice the tenths exercises in his book because he did not "think bass players of today or the older days have done enough experimenting in this direction." (Brown, 33.) They can be played separately or double-stopped. One thing that stands out about Ray Brown, especially in a small group situation, is his willingness and enthusiasm for putting the bass into the spotlight. One of the ways he does this is to play double and triple stops and tenths, giving the bass more of a chordal instrument role.

One way that he incorporated tenths into his lines was to simply insert them into a repetitive bass line that has some sort of rhythmic ostinato like this line from "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars." He was already playing this rhythm and utilized the open D string and the tenth above it on the G-string to create this double-stopped sound.

Example: "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars(Corcovado)" Oscar Peterson Trio "We Get Requests"



The beginning of "Stella By Starlight" is a great example of how Brown would play tenths in a melody, accompanying his own rubato treatment this jazz standard.

Example: "Stella By Starlight" Ray Brown Trio "Walk On"



One very memorable use of double and triple stops in Ray Brown's discography, is the duo version of "Things Ain't What They Used to Be" with Duke Ellington from their album "This One's For Blanton." This is a simple blues in D, involving only the I, IV, and V chords. The basic concept of what he is doing here is playing an open string in combination with a tritone in the upper register of the bass, making the sound of the 7 chords, which is necessary to get the blues sound.

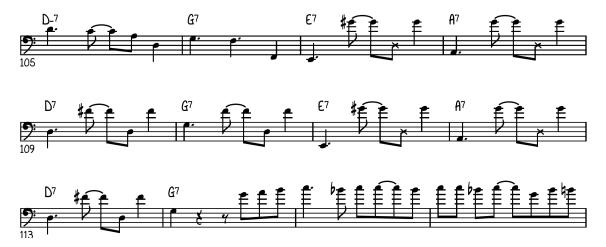
Example: "Things Ain't What they used to be" Duke Ellington/Ray Brown "This One's For Blanton."



Starting at the fifth measure, is what Ray Brown plays behind Ellington's solo.

Ray Brown also liked to employ this technique at the end of tunes on harmonic turnarounds, like in this excerpt:

Example: "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars(Corcovado)" Oscar Peterson Trio "We Get Requests"



#### **In Conclusion**

Ray Brown's bass playing style can be summed up as a composite of all of the things brought up in this paper. His method book gives some clues with the inclusion of the chapters on rhythm drops and tenths. Ray Brown was a man of extraordinary musical depth, in that he was meticulously detailed with his note choice, but clearly had the big picture in mind at the same time. He had a commitment to jazz music, to his instrument, and to aesthetic of the moment in which he was improvising. One needs not be a bass player to learn something from this jazz master.

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# F.S.R.(FOR SONNY ROLLINS)















# HOW HIGH THE MOON

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