

EVIDENCE FOR MASTERY OF STYLE: BEYOND THE SUBJECTIVE

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Abstract

There are occasions when artists and students need information based on objective rather than merely subjective claims and anecdotes. Scott Hamilton, a living artist (jazz tenor saxophonist), has been praised by critics, artists, and pedagogues for his extraordinary mastery of the bygone swing era style. Hamilton has been heralded as a “master,” deemed “the real thing,” and called an outright “reincarnation” and helped spearhead an era-defining movement with aimed to return to pre-John Coltrane and pre-Charlie Parker eras. Not only an iconoclast, Hamilton’s recordings are among the best jazz recordings of all time and draws praises of the current leaders of jazz saxophone performance regardless of their own style. Hamilton, though aware of the styles that lie outside the genre of the swing era style, has purposefully avoided incorporating any of those “newer” characteristics.

My research moves beyond the subjective and into the objective via standard analytical practices within the field of jazz research and pedagogy. Split-second note choices over cadential points within the improvisations of Hamilton are investigated and compared to the improvisations of exemplary tenor saxophonists from the actual swing era and eras that followed up until, and overlapping, Hamilton’s career. The same formal areas were investigated and compared and contrasted to the improvisations of non-swing era tenor saxophone improvisations of influential/change-of-era masters that followed the swing era. It also critically examines Hamilton’s improvisations for evidence and mastery of characteristics he holds in common with the improvisations from the swing era.

Keywords

Jazz pedagogy, Jazz theory, Jazz improvisation, Swing era, Jazz saxophone pedagogy

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