

Brevity Is The Soul Of Wit: A Study of One-Chorus Jazz Solos

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Early jazz recordings had a time limitation imposed on them due to the recording technology of the time (i.e. 78 RPM records). Given this restriction, improvisers often were allotted only one chorus for their solos. While the advent of the long-playing records and the later adoption of compact discs allowed improvisers to extend their solos to greater lengths, there exists a myriad of examples of one-chorus solos in the post-78 era.

This presentation will examine several one-chorus solos starting with Louis Armstrong and including other notable soloists as Lester Young, Charlie Parker, and Bud Powell among others. An analysis of each solo will highlight the architecture of the solo and the resulting choices required of the soloist to construct their musical statement within the confines of the single chorus. The presentation will conclude with an analysis of two one-chorus solos from the last recording of Phil Woods. Earlier in his career, Woods was noted for his technique and ability to create extended solos, often at fast tempos. In his final recording however, he distilled his solos down to essential elements, creating well-crafted miniatures. These two solos illustrate Dizzy Gillespie's comment that it took his whole life to know what notes *not* to play.

In addition to the analysis of form and architecture, the pedagogical aspects of the solos will be discussed. For example, a single chorus represents a more manageable amount of material for a student to memorize compared to an extended solo. Additionally, a single chorus is more easily learned in all 12 keys. This concentration on a smaller quantity of material allows the student to gain an in-depth understanding of the solo.