

# The Improvisational Style of George Robert

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## Introduction

Born in 1960 in Geneva, Switzerland, George Robert is internationally recognized as one of the leading alto saxophonists in Jazz today. Having studied at the Berklee College of Music and Manhattan School of music, Robert has had a long career working with such luminaries as Clark Terry, Phil Woods, Kenny Barron, and Tom Harell.

Robert's improvisational style is steeped in the bebop and postbop traditions with the music of Charlie Parker and Phil Woods playing a significant role in his approach to soloing. This presentation will draw from 25 transcriptions from our upcoming publication of Robert solos spanning a wide range of compositions ranging from the blues, to jazz standards, to Brazilian standards, to original compositions. The presentation will focus on a number of elements of Robert's improvisational style. The elements will include such topics as approach notes, bebop scales, implied chord substitutions, quotes. In several instances, the presentation will trace the development of elements from components in the styles of predecessors such as Parker and Woods, while showing how those components are integrated into a personal style and vocabulary that is uniquely George Robert's.

## Solo List

ALBUM TITLE	SONG TITLES
CAPE VERDE	Cape Verde, Softly, Sail Away
YOUNGBLOODS	Easy To Love, I Remember You, Stabilemates
METROPOLE	East of the Sun, Like Someone in Love, The Song Is You, Old Folks
INSPIRATION	East of the Sun, Dexter
SOUL EYES	Cannonization
WINGSPAN	Wingspan, Free Spirit, The Mountain, Tomorrow
LIVE IN SWITZERLAND	Terrestris
LONELY EYES	Quest for Peace, Visions of Gaudi
ESTATE	How Insensitive
NEW LIFE	Cannonball
LIVE AT THE Q4	The Snapper, Samba de Gumz
VOYAGE	Sandu

## Improvisation Materials

### Bebop Scales:

As a player steeped in the bebop tradition, Robert incorporates bebop scales at numerous points in his solos:

EXAMPLE 1. FROM 'LIKE SOMEONE IN LOVE' (C7)  
 EXAMPLE 2. FROM 'SOFTLY' (Am7)  
 EXAMPLE 3. FROM 'STABLEMATES' (Ab7, G7, F#7)  
 EXAMPLE 4. FROM 'DENTES' (Ab7, D7(b9), Gm)

### Blues Material:

Robert adeptly incorporates blues scales and expressions, even in non-blues tunes:

EXAMPLE 5. FROM 'I REMEMBER YOU' (D, Am7, D7, G, Gm7, C7)  
 EXAMPLE 6. FROM 'I REMEMBER YOU' (Em7, A7, D)

### Expressive devices

Robert uses several expressive effects often using false fingerings, overtones, etc. Some of these effects are similar to ones used by his friend and mentor, Phil Woods:

EXAMPLE 7. FROM 'SOFTLY' (TREMOLLO FROM Bb TO G)  
 EXAMPLE 8. FROM 'STABLEMATES' (FALSE FINGERING, TREMOLLO FROM Bb TO G)  
 EXAMPLE 9. FROM 'THE SNAPPER' (ADD SIDE D)  
 EXAMPLE 10. FROM 'EASY TO LOVE' (LOW Bb OVERTONE)

## Improvisation Materials

### Approach Notes:

Robert makes extensive use of approach notes to target chord tones. There are numerous examples in the transcribed solos, with the following only being a representative sampling. These approach notes allow the melodic line to be extended, add interesting chromaticism, and can either anticipate or delay harmonic resolutions. One approach note combination that Robert particularly favors is shown in Example 11 in which he targets a middle C with a lower neighbor and two upper neighbors. The use of the side D fingering provides a distinctive sound to this particular approach note combination which appears in multiple places across many solos.:

EXAMPLE 11. FROM 'STABLEMATES' (Cm7, F7)  
 EXAMPLE 12. FROM 'STABLEMATES' (Bb)  
 EXAMPLE 13. FROM 'STABLEMATES' (Bb7, Eb)  
 EXAMPLE 14. FROM 'THE SONG IS YOU' (Gm7, C7)

EXAMPLE 15. FROM 'LIKE SOMEONE IN LOVE' (Gm7, C7, F)  
 EXAMPLE 16. FROM 'DENTES' (E7(b9), Eb)  
 EXAMPLE 17. FROM 'EAST OF THE SUN' (Fm7)  
 EXAMPLE 18. FROM 'EAST OF THE SUN' (Fm7)

## Improvisation Materials

### Multipurpose Phrase:

There is another phrase that appears multiple times throughout the transcribed solos. What makes it interesting is that although it appears in several places, the harmonic function of the notes varies in different contexts. It is this mix of a familiar phrase appearing in new surroundings that adds an element of surprise. In its basic form, the phrase appears over minor 7th chords as shown in Example 19 with scale degrees indicated below the staff:

EXAMPLE 19 (Dm7)  
 1 2 3 4 5 7 4 7 5 3 1

Examples 20 and 21 show a similar phrase, but used over major chords:

EXAMPLE 20. FROM 'STABLEMATES' (Bb)  
 EXAMPLE 21. FROM 'STABLEMATES' (Eb)  
 1 2 3 5 7 9 6 9 7 5 3  
 3 5 2 5 3 1

Example 22 shows an interesting use of the phrase starting with its basic form over a minor 7th chord and then transposed up a minor 2nd to function as a tritone substitution:

EXAMPLE 22. FROM 'I REMEMBER YOU' (Gm7, E7, Eb7, A7)  
 1 2 3 5 7 4 7 5 3 1 Eb7: 3 5 2 5 3 1 5 3

## More Information

For more information about George Robert including his discography and performance calendar, visit:

[www.georgerobert.com](http://www.georgerobert.com)

For more information about Jeff Rzepiela, visit his website containing over 75 solo transcriptions and several big band arrangements:

[www.scooby-sax.com](http://www.scooby-sax.com)