

**Analysis of Mark Turner's recorded solo on 26-2 from the album *Mark Turner*  
Transcription and Analysis by Andrew Frankhouse  
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*Note: The pitches referred to in this analysis are from the transposed version of the transcription of the solo and "line matrix" available at [www.andrewfrankhouse.com](http://www.andrewfrankhouse.com).*

For years I found myself totally mystified by tenor giant Mark Turner. Mystified by his incredibly fluid rhythmic feel, his ability to slide almost unnoticed in and out of the changes, and his ridiculous, yet somehow never "showy", use of the extreme altissimo register. Turner, like his great influence Warne Marsh, is simultaneously understated, extremely virtuosic, and always thoroughly modern. This transcription of his work on the difficult Coltrane composition 26-2 (a reworking of Bird's *Confirmation*) demonstrates each of these unique facets of Turner's improvisational voice.

### **Rhythm**

The best way to describe Turner's rhythmic approach in this solo is "flexible". The whole first chorus of the solo seems to slide back and forth, in and out of time. The first several phrases (mm. 3-16) are delivered very loosely. The syncopated quarter and dotted-quarter notes in mm. 9-15 are very legato, rather than accented (as is usual jazz protocol). Going on, the lazy quarter and half-note triplets in mm 20-26 are treated similarly. As a result, Turner seems to "float" above the soft rhythm section groove underneath.

The feel tightens up a bit with the arrival of quarter notes at the top of the second chorus (mm. 33-34), only to be muddled again by the tuplet figures in mm. 37-39. Once Turner moves to eighth-notes in mm. 40, his lines take on much more clarity, at least until pianist Edward Simon's syncopated comping stirs things up in mm. 50-56. Beginning around mm. 61, Brian Blade's time-keeping becomes more articulated, and the groove begins to surface. Turners weaves long, winding eighth-note lines, occasionally interrupted by syncopations, which seem impossibly even in terms of timbre, articulation, and dynamics (mm. 61-81).

A burst of sixteenth-notes at mm. 83 gives a view of things to come, while mm. 88-91 looks back to earlier ambiguities. At mm. 100-108, clarity gives way to complex phrases of syncopated triplet and sixteenth-note values. A hybrid of some previous rhythmic ideas appears at mm. 116-119. The rhythms have slowed some (syncopated quarters eighths), but unlike mm. 9-15, they fit perfectly within the groove. Turner finishes the solo with three oddly phrased ascending eighth-note scale runs.

### **Pitch Material**

Coltrane's three-tonic system tunes (*Giant Steps*, 26-2, *Countdown*, *Moment's Notice*, etc.) are daunting for soloists – their unconventional progressions, rapid tempos, and dense harmonic rhythm can feel very restrictive. Trane's own classic solo on *Giant Steps* is full of digital patterns, scalar runs, and licks which were clearly worked out well ahead of the recording session. Turner's approach is a great contrast in this regard, and this is due in large part to his use of harmonic anticipation, extension, substitution, and prominent use of non-chord tones.

The first phrase of the solo (mm. 3-6) is entirely in C-major, and states rather prominently a D-natural over a Bmaj7, and a B-natural over an Abmaj7. In mm. 12, Turner resolves G7 to Cmaj7 two beats

early and does the same in mm. 14, resolving to Bmaj7 two beats early. In mm. 17, he jumps to F#-7 one beat early (over G7), and then truncates his phrase before the final harmonic resolution to Cmaj7. That Cmaj7 (mm. 20) is then extended over the F-7 in mm. 21. This quarter-note triplet figure continues, conflicting somewhat with the changes, until a rhythmic and harmonic resolution in mm. 23. At the top of the second chorus, Turner implies a G-pedal over Gmaj7, Bb7, and Ebmaj7 before resolving to F#7 (mm. 33-35).

Turner's solo also makes extensive use of essentially free substitution of tonality. In some cases, Turner implies the major mode over a minor chord, or vice-versa (mm. 3, 6, 48, 51, 65). Other examples of substitutions include: C-minor over B7 (mm. 38), C-minor over Gmaj7 (mm. 41), C7 over F#7 (tritone sub, mm. 42), B-major and B-minor over F-7 and Bb7 (mm. 53-54), A-minor and G-minor over Gmaj7 (mm. 64-65), Emaj7 over Ebmaj7 (mm. 78), A-minor and Bb-major over Gmaj7 (mm. 105), C-major over B (mm. 111). Turner also makes use of some Tristano-esque hybrid scales at the end of his solo. One implies Eb-major and B (mm. 126-126), the other implies C-major and G-major.

Turner also makes some interesting phrasing decisions, particularly around resolution of the various 3-tonic progressions. Several times during the solo he concludes a phrase by clearly outlining a resolution to a tonic chord before the end of the harmonic sequence. These occur in mm. 15 (resolution to Bmaj7), mm. 19 (resolution to Emaj7), mm. 46 (resolution to Ebmaj7), and mm. 55 (resolution to Emaj7). In addition, he truncates a phrase in mm. 50 by anticipating the arrival of Bmaj7. Also, in mm. 85-86, Turner plays a descending Bb dominant-bebop scale, beginning from the root on an off-beat. This goes against the conventional use of bebop scales, which are designed to place the chord tones on the beat and passing tones on off-beats.

In addition to the above materials, Turner makes use of a significant amount of conventional jazz vocabulary like chromatic approaches, upper-structures/extensions, the "bebop lick" (1, 7, b7, 9, 6, 5), and altered dominants. His grasp of Coltrane's difficult harmony is apparent, and his ability to slide between conventional and more modern harmonic approaches is buttressed by his astounding instrumental facility, unique phrasing, and understated style. Turner certainly stands among the greats, and this solo is an excellent snapshot at this modernist's expansion on the developments of his predecessors.