

“Sick Leo”

Music by Jérôme Sabbagh

From the Album North, released in 2004 on Fresh Sound New Talent

Instrumentation: Tenor Saxophone: Jérôme Sabbagh
Electric Guitar: Ben Monder
Acoustic Bass: Joe Martin
Drums: Ted Poor

Form: ABBA. Each section is 8 bars long. The B sections features a slight modification of the first 4 bars of the A section in the harmonic progression; otherwise the harmonic progression for each section is the same. Bass movement is mostly moving in 4ths or chromatically descending. Solos take place over the entire 32 bar progression. Tenor saxophone solos first, taking 2 choruses, guitar solo then follows with two choruses. Melody taken in its entirety after guitar solo, repeats the last 4 bars with fadeout.

Melody: Entirely diatonic to F minor (Aeolian mode), mostly based off of the F minor pentatonic scale, giving the piece a bluesy quality. In addition to the melody being heavily influenced by the blues, the slower tempo and 6/8 time signature allow the song to easily be categorized as a jazz-influenced gospel piece.

Equipment: Guitar: Ibanez AS-50
Amplifier: Stereo setup pairing a Music Man and a '68
Fender Princeton Reverb, modified by Harry Kolbe
Effects: Boss delay, Rat distortion, Ernie Ball volume pedal
Strings: D'Addario .13s with an unwound G (.20)
Picks: D'Andrea Pro Plec 1.5mm extra heavy teardrop

Accompaniment: Monder uses the unorthodox approach of palm muting the chords behind the melody. Monder switches between playing the melody in unison with the saxophone and providing rhythmic and harmonic support. As the saxophone solo progresses, Monder switches to open, sustained voicings and arpeggiated passages to vary the texture. At the end of each 8 bar phrase, Monder often provide a fill. These fills are often 6ths or melodies leading to chord tones in the lower register of the guitar.

For voicings, Monder uses a great deal of triads and drop 2 voicings. However, he keeps these choices interesting by utilizing these voicings as upper structure substitutes. For Bb7 and Eb7, Monder often plays D-7b5 and E-7b5 voicings. On the GbMaj7 Monder sometimes plays a Db triad, bringing out the 5th, 7th, and 9th colors. Getting the most out of this harmonic substitution, Monder utilizes these concepts in his single note solo as well. Notice how almost every chord moves smoothly to the next.

Solo: Once again, Monder demonstrates an extreme amount of focus regarding the development of his solo. He begins his solo with distortion, adding a new sound yet to be heard by the listener in this song. Monder takes his time, altering a single F minor pentatonic lick through a number of variations, then develops an idea using the melodic interval of a 6th. Monder refers to the melody, then begins developing an idea based off of

this, the entire time using space effectively and not wasting a single note. By the beginning of his 2nd chorus, Monder begins playing the entire register of the guitar, sweep picking and shredding, yet still in a way that is conscious of the solo's structure (there is a clear melodic line outlined with the beginning and ending of his long runs). He reaches the piece's highest note in measure 138, slows down the rhythm of his notes and starts a new idea that eventually ends with the low F on the 6th string. At this point, Monder introduces chords into his solo, maintaining a high Bb on the top of his voicings that helps the solo build in intensity and ends with Monder playing the melody an octave higher than the saxophone. Monder keeps his distortion on for the head out, a decision that helps keep a high level of intensity.

Musical Development: Ben Monder is a master of musical development. Throughout the entire song, Monder is constantly developing musical ideas and concepts in an effort to help move the piece forward. Below is a sample from an interview Ben took part of in 2006:

Interviewer: Okay, let me put it this way: do you think thematically in your playing?

Monder: Yeah. I do. I think it was instilled in me a long time ago by a teacher I had named Irwin Stahl, who I probably don't mention nearly enough, but people don't really ask me, either. He loved really thematic improvisers; he didn't tolerate waste or notes that didn't mean anything. Notes played just for effect, or to impress. He came out of a classical background. So having that influence at an early age, and also being interested in classical music and enjoying listening to a thought process unfold over time—all contributed to that aspect.

My favorite improvisers to listen to are the ones who explore new territory in a logical way, where something unfolds and is surprising and inevitable at the same time. Jim Hall was a big influence for me. And Wayne Shorter has improvised like that as well.

(From All About Jazz: <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=20477>)

As explained in the interview, Monder's development of ideas is deliberate. Here are some different looks at how Monder, as a sideman, helps push the song forward.

Accompaniment: heavy-palm muting -> light-palm muting -> open voicings -> arpeggiated voicings

Solos: distorted guitar, single notes, lots of space -> more 8th notes, developing ideas -> shredding style, lots of notes, full register of guitar -> chord voicings

Overall Song -> clean, quiet guitar -> larger voicings, more rhythmic -> distorted solo with space -> distorted solo -> lots of notes -> distorted solo with chords -> head out, melody octave higher and distorted