

"Pitter Pat: composer's analysis"
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Pitter Pat, as most pieces do, went through series of changes and revisions right up until it was performed for the first time, including the last-minute addition of the guitar solo as the introduction. The piece started with a catchy bass line alternating between a C and Bb tonality (which actually does not appear in its original form anywhere in the piece) and the rest was added later. While the form is a simple AABA, there is interest in the several versions of the original bass line figures, the rhythmically angular melody and the changing background figures.

FORM

The form of the tune is AABA, with the A sections being in a half time funk-shuffle groove in alternating bars of 4/4 and 3/4. Drums play time in these sections and the bass and comping instruments play written figures. The B sections are in 4/4 straight ahead swing where bass walks changes and drums play time. Piano and guitar improvise comping figures on the changes. The chart is arranged in seven sections: a guitar solo, the primary melody statement, a trumpet solo, the shout section, a drum solo, a return to the melody statement and the coda.

There are a few minor deviations from the form. The guitar solo on the front of the chart uses the four bar C/Bb minor vamp that occurs in the A sections as the basis for the solo. Letter C also uses a version of the vamp that serves as a transition between the guitar solo and the melody. The transition gives the listener a chance to decompress from the intensity of the guitar solo as well as introduce the groove that will occur under the melody.

A four bar vamp is also used a transition between the end of the melody and the beginning of the trumpet solo. Letter P also adds 8 bars of vamp between the solo and the beginning of the shout section. In this case the vamp sets up the new groove used for the shout section and drum solo, so it is a little different from the other two.

The drum solo adds 8 bars of solo on the 4/4 to 3/4 vamp to the end of the form. The final derivation from the form is the coda, which essentially uses just the second half of the vamp (the Bb minor). This was done to give the feel of a tag ending as well as to differentiate between the coda and the transition to the trumpet solo. Bari, bass and bass bone often have a transitional figure at the end of the B sections that foreshadows the return of the 4/4 to 3/4 groove.

GROOVE

The piece features two different grooves: a half-time funk shuffle and a straight ahead swing with a bop sensibility. The half-time funk shuffle happens in the A sections of the piece and the straight ahead swing on the B sections. The 4/4 to 3/4 alternation presents some interesting challenges in regards to the groove. Both the 4/4 and 3/4 should be felt in two, with the 4/4 felt in half notes and the 3/4 in dotted quarters. I found that in performance, most groups tended to rush the two feel on the 3/4 bars.

Keeping the time in the 3/4 bars consistent helped solidify the funk groove. The transition to and from the swing sections also presented some challenges in that bands tended to play the last bar of the bridge in 3/4 due to the bass/bari sax figure that foreshadowed the return to the half-time funk shuffle groove.

HARMONY

The changes for the piece are relatively simple. The A sections alternate two bars of C minor followed by two bars of Bb minor (one 4/4 and one 3/4 bar of each). The bridge features a series of non-functional dominant 7th chords with a minor ii-V in D minor which “resolves” to an F7#11.

BASS LINES

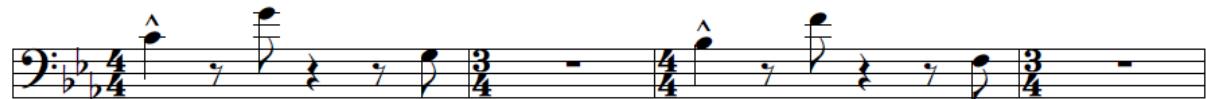
The bass line variations are one of the most interesting features of the chart. They provide interest and variety throughout the piece and change to fit the situation in which they are used. In the first versions of the tune, this was the bass line:



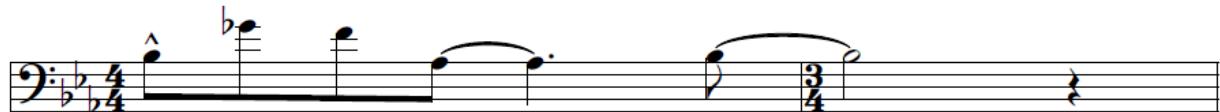
While I did like the bass line above, I found it far too busy in combination with the rhythmically angular melody. In addition, it was a bit of an assault on the ear over the course of a 7-8 minute chart. Once I decided the piece needed to have some variation and that the bass line was the place to do it, I came up with the idea of writing a new bass line for each primary section of the chart. The first change to the bass line was to vastly simplify the original bass line for use with the melody (this is bass line #2 in the analysis diagrams):



The second change was to simplify the line even further to give the trumpet soloist some space and to give the listener somewhat of a break from a very repetitive line. Bass line #2 returns for the second half of the trumpet solo to give some energy and excitement to the soloist’s second chorus. The simplified bass line results in the following (this is bass line #3 in the analysis diagrams):



The next change was to eliminate the first half of the pattern at the coda to give the impression of a tag ending and to distinguish the coda from the transition to the trumpet solo.



Finally, the last variation added was the bass line behind the guitar solo. Even though this bass line is labelled as “bass line #1” in the analysis diagrams, it was actually the last to be written as the guitar solo was something of a last-minute addition to the piece as I was casting about for ideas for the introduction. My original idea was to do some layering in the rhythm section, but that didn’t seem very interesting. The guitar solo added that interest, while setting the tone for the rest of the piece. Since the idea was to have the guitar solo build gradually from the beginning, I felt the bass line needed to be a bit more complex, resulting in the figure that’s closest to the original bass line:



COMPING FIGURES

There are two written comping figures for piano and guitar. The first trades notes with the bass line as seen in the excerpt below:

The second comping figure appears at the coda and is somewhat simpler than the first figure. It stays on the Bb minor chord rather than alternating C and Bb. Secondly, there are only three notes in the figure rather than four, simplifying things in the rhythm section toward the end of the piece.



MELODY

The melody is what I like to call “rhythmically angular”. Parts of the melody (especially returning to the 4/4 bar from the 3/4) are downbeat oriented. Other parts of the melody obscure the 4/4 to 3/4 metric

progression. On the A sections, the melody is played by alto 1 and 2 and trumpets 1 and 2 with accompanying chord pads in the trombones. Tenors, low trumpets and bone 1 join in with a counter line on the second A statement. The B section main melody moves to tenor 1 and 2 with trombone 1 and 2. Alto 1 and 2 and trumpet 1 and 2 provide a countermelody. The B section melody is be-bop inspired and serves as a contrast to the A sections.

SOLOS

There are three solos in this piece: guitar, trumpet and drums. Much of the guitar solo has already been discussed at length, especially the function of the rhythm section underneath the soloist. The horns enter in the 5th repeat of the vamp, beginning with bari doubling bass. The 6th repeat of the vamp adds punches in the saxes, followed by a contrasting set of punches in the brass for the 7th and 8th repeats of the vamp. The 8th and final repeat of the vamp ends with a 3/4 bar of complete silence after a unison line in the trumpets.

The trumpet solo is two choruses of the changes. In the first chorus, the rhythm section plays loosely to give the soloist space. The bass figure rests completely during the 3/4 bar and drums play sparsely. The piano and guitar play the same chord pads that were played by the bones behind the melody, which sustain through the 3/4 bar. The second chorus returns the bass and drums to the same groove as the melody. Piano and guitar improvise comping figures rather than playing a written figure here. Horn backgrounds also enter on the second chorus of the trumpet solo with bones 1 and 2 playing a version of bass line #1 on the first A section. Saxes add to this in the second A with punches like the ones under the guitar solo. The bridge features a call and response of sorts between a small group of horns (alto and tenor 1, trumpet 1 and bone 1). The last A is the same as the second A with the addition of a melodic trumpet line.

The drum solo happens over the second half of the form (the shout section is the first half of the form plus 8 bars of vamp). In reality, I think of the drum solo as the second half of the shout section, but the diagrams have them labeled as two separate entities. In the first 8 of the drum solo (the bridge) two groups of horns (altos 1 and 2, and trumpets vs. tenors 1 and 2, bari and bones) trade figures as the drums play both sets of figures as well as fill the holes in between. Bass, piano and guitar are tacet until the DS.

The second 8 of the drum solo (the last A) features a call and response between the horns and drums. All horns are now playing unison figures approximately every two bars. I say approximately as the figure moves to different parts of the 4/4 bar each time, giving the drummer some rhythmically interesting material to play with. The solo ends with 8 bars of vamp, which decrescendos to the DS al Coda.

SHOUT SECTION

The shout section can be viewed in two ways. One being the section from letter P to the beginning of the drum solo (making the drum solo a distinct section). The other is to view the shout section as letter P to the DS al Coda (the end of the drum solo). This is how I view the shout section. However, as the drum solo has already been discussed in depth, this section will be devoted to the section from letter P to the drum solo.

The shout section begins with an 8 bar vamp featuring a new bass line (bass line #3) for four bars, and adding punches in the trumpets for the second four. Piano and guitar are tacet until the DS al Coda.

After the 8 bar vamp begins the next statement of the form. The first A adds a trombone melody to what was just described and the second A adds a saxophone melody.

CODA

As mentioned earlier, the coda stays on the Bb minor and does not alternate with the C minor. This was done partially to give the effect of a tag ending, but also to distinguish the coda from the transition to the trumpet solo, which does alternate between the two chords. The coda begins with the same held chord that is used to transition to the trumpet solo. The chord is held for two bars followed by two bars of rhythm section, giving the impression that the chart will fade to the end. However, the opposite actually happens. The bari and bass bone join the bass in the 5th bar and tenors and trombones alternate short two-bar phrases with altos and trumpets which also overlap as the coda progresses. Nine bars from the end of the piece, another layer is added in block chords in the 2nd alto and trumpet 3 and 4. Dynamically, the coda builds to the end, but rhythmically, there is a retard which begins six bars from the end of the piece. The last two bars feature a melodic line in most of the horns leading to the fermata. The last chord is cued in tenor 1, bari, low bones, bass and drums, giving a very dramatic finish to the piece.