

The Greenhouse Effect

A greenhouse traps heat or energy so something can grow, such as plants or flowers. The best greenhouse is one that reaches the right temperature and holds it there for the right amount of time.

A musical greenhouse traps musical energy of some kind. Typically you get that energy by building the intensity in a solo and holding it. That usually involves the rhythm section and soloist working together well. If you watch the music video of the Brecker Brothers in Barcelona, you'll see and hear Mike Stern (guitar) give a great example of a "greenhouse" solo in "Song for Barry." The solo lasts for several minutes and really builds in intensity, using some of the techniques outlined below.

Greenhouse elements in music keep the energy focused. Below are some examples of greenhouse elements – you can also combine them to create even more energy.

- *Flattened contours.* When you use a narrow contour with an interesting rhythm, you create space for confined energy.
- *Gradually ascending lines.* This builds melodic energy over time.
- *Repetition.* You can repeat an interesting idea for quite a while, or vary it slightly as you go.
- *Sequencing and development.* You can use simple development tools to build intensity gradually over time/
- *Riffing.* There are many ways to create, link, and develop riffs to build the greenhouse effect nicely.
- *Interlocking rhythms with the rhythm section.* This usually involves patterns of triplets or 16ths with interspersed rests. The soloist plays in the rhythm section gaps and vice versa.

Reverse Greenhouse

The greenhouse effect breaks down when 1) not enough energy is created in the first place, or 2) the energy leaks out from a hole somewhere.

The musical greenhouse can break down in similar ways, often when the soloist and rhythm section are not working together as well as they should. There are usually three reasons for this – the soloist, or rhythm section, or both ...

- 1) *Don't know how to build the energy.* This may be due to inexperience, or the current idea or tune may be complex enough that it's hard to build energy.
- 2) *Don't recognize the opportunity to build energy.* It's painful when the rhythm section fails to support the soloist's energy, or the soloist doesn't build on top of the rhythm section's energy.
- 3) *Let go of the energy too soon.* It's also painful to hear someone drop out of an idea that's on its way to creating some great energy.
- 4) *Hold on to the same kind of energy too long.* Even the best ideas wear out given enough (too much) time.