

# Tutorial 4A: Soundscapes



Welcome! In this tutorial you'll learn how to:

1. Use soundscapes in your improvisation
2. Use and control density in your solos
3. Use and control intensity in your solos
4. Use conservative improvisation when needed

Enjoy the learning!

Other Tutorials

- 4B: Double-time & Half-Time
- 4D: More Development
- 4F: Chord Substitutions
- 4G: Variations on ii-V-I's
- 4J: Group Interaction

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- ▶ Getting the “big picture” in your solos is very important. You can control the overall effects of your improvisations by tuning in to density and intensity, with an eye towards the “soundscape” of how your melody plays out.

## Part 1 – Soundscapes

### A) What is a soundscape?



\*A “soundscape” is like a visual map or landscape of your music. When you balance high and low, fast and slow, heavy and light, and rough and smooth in your music, you can create patterns of sound that are much more than just notes filling space. Your sound patterns can flow together to create a vivid musical landscape.

\*Artists pick up brushes or other tools and create with them. As an improviser you choose melodic and rhythmic tools and essentially “paint with sound.” With this sound-painting approach, you can concentrate on beauty, variety and meaningful direction in your solo, so it adds up to a work of art.

\*As you use your musical tools of improvisation, work to create beautiful soundscapes. That raises the goal from simply surviving chord changes to creating a work of art.

\*So, what makes an interesting landscape? In painting or photography a beautiful landscape is easy to appreciate. In music, a soundscape can be beautiful but hard to describe in words.

\*Here are some common elements in landscapes and soundscapes:

<u>Landscapes (Art)</u>	<u>Soundscapes (Music)</u>
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Angular lines, contours	Intervals and contours
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Smooth & rough surfaces	Smooth/rough expression; legato/staccato articulations
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Hard vs. soft objects	Loud and soft dynamics
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Dense or empty texture	More notes or fewer notes
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\*So how do you create an interesting soundscape? First, you must make sure your *individual shapes* are interesting and under control. These shapes fit together to form an overall shape of the solo, which is the soundscape.

\*Weak shapes will never produce a strong soundscape, but strong shapes can fit together and build a whole that’s greater than the individual parts.

\*Two keys to building strong soundscapes are how you handle *density* and *intensity*.

### A) What is musical density?

\**Density* refers to how much sound you use in a solo, contrasted with the amount of silence. There are two basic types: density of notes and density of phrases.

## Part 2 – Using & Controlling Density

High density of notes is playing more notes per second (using faster rhythms). High density of phrases means playing longer phrases in a solo with shorter pauses.

High density, note or phrase, can be more energizing in a solo but also places more demands on the listener.

When you use high density, be sure your ideas are supporting the density level well, with clean execution. Don't overdo it, or it will be boring.

Low density, note or phrase, can be more relaxing. The listener has more time and energy to analyze your ideas, so make sure that low-density playing is strong in color, development, and rhythm. Otherwise, it will end up boring everyone.

### B) How do I balance sound and silence?



\*The first step to balancing sound and silence is realizing that *there is actually music going on during the silence*. When you pause in your solo, the rhythm section continues on with sound.

\*Even if everyone stops, the listener will likely re-hear the music during that silence. Silence is vital – it gives

everyone a chance to replay and absorb the musical ideas that just occurred.

Here are several ways to change the density of your solo by balancing sound and silence:

- *Beginning and ending each shape distinctly*. This helps you establish clear boundaries between ideas so you can start measuring degrees of sound and silence. Even when the silences are small, it's important that you place them just where you want them.

- *Varying the lengths of shapes and phrases*. This is a good way to increase or decrease the density in a solo.

\*Work on creating short phrases and ideas that are still interesting; then your longer phrases will take on new meanings.

- *Varying the number of notes per second*. By changing your rhythms from long to quick you can vary the *immediate* density in your solo. You can combine immediate density and overall density (described above) to balance the sound and silence in your solo.

- ▶ **TRY IT – Basic:** Choose an easy tune from *300 Standards*. Play a solo with clean beginnings and phrases and low density of notes. **Medium:** Gradually increase the density of notes or of phrases in the solo. **Challenge:** Increase the density of notes and phrases.

## (Part 2 – Using & Controlling Density)

### C) How do unusual rhythmic approaches fit in?

\*One of the keys to beauty in improvisation is a healthy amount of rhythmic variety.

\*One aspect of variety is how you handle the tune. For example, the typical way to improvise in a fast swing tune is to play a lot of eighth-notes. While you can still play interesting solos that way (John Coltrane's Giant Steps solo worked well), you might miss the wealth of variety in other approaches.

\*Below are common tune styles and the most common approaches players take in soloing on those tunes. Also described are some unusual approaches that can add variety to your solos.

*Ballads* Common: Slow quarters and 8ths, long notes, mostly soft

Unusual: Double-time & triple-time, triplet ties

*Latin* Common: Legato quarters, even 8ths

Unusual: Triplets, offbeat ties, groups of 5 or 7

*Slow swing* Common: 8ths, many downbeat accents

Unusual: Double-time and triple-time, rhythmic variations

*Med. swing* Common: 8ths w/ simple syncopations

Unusual: Double-time, triplet variations

*Up swing* Common: Lots of eighth-notes

Unusual: Quarter-notes, offbeat ties, consecutive dotted quarters, offbeat half-notes

- **TRY IT** – Choose a ballad from *300 Standards*. Use the chart above for ideas in rhythmic variety. Then choose a latin, slow swing, or medium swing tune. Then choose an up-tempo latin or swing tune.

## Part 3 – Using & Controlling Intensity

### A) What is musical intensity?

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\*Intensity is the process of turning up the heat in a solo to build to a high point. Here are some guidelines on understanding and using intensity effectively:

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\*Don't confuse intensity with interest. Suspense, subtlety, and economy can build interest in a solo even without typical intensity. The main goal is interest, not just intensity.

- Be careful with higher, faster, and louder. These elements can build intensity in a solo but can also kill the interest in a solo if you overdo them.

- Be ready to pounce on intensity at the right time.

\*It's frustrating for the listener when a great opportunity presents itself and you leave it hanging without building some intensity.

\*To use intensity effectively in your solos, you need to recognize the intensity levels and how they are unfolding. Don't over-analyze; as you listen to what you're playing, just feel whether the music is low, medium, or high in intensity.

\*Remember to use three-way musical vision: past, present and future helps you to see high and low points, dense and open parts (like the musical terrains). This helps you balance density and intensity as well.

### **B)** How do I build intensity in solos?

\*While intensity should often rise and fall by small amounts in your solo, occasionally you'll want to build the intensity to a higher level. This can be triggered by your own solo ideas or by something the group plays.

\*Remember: When the time is right to build, you'll sense it, and you must be ready to play your ideas quickly and effectively. Otherwise, it's an opportunity missed.

\*Still, even the most interesting ideas can actually cause the solo to *lose* intensity if they are poorly executed.

\*That is why SHAPE is so important in building solos that are creative but under control.

\*Below are some basic ways to build intensity in solos. You can also combine them for even more intensity.

- Repetition. If a motif is interesting enough, repeat it several times.

- Development. Vary a motif slightly over repetitions.

- Louder dynamics. Go suddenly loud, or crescendo.

- Riffs. Use short, repeated patterns that are dense & quick (see *Riffing* in Tutorial 4D).

- High range. Gradually develop an idea and make it climb in range. Or, sustain an idea in a high range.

## (Part 3 – Using & Controlling Intensity)

- Held note. You can hold out a high note for intensity; you can also add expression, alternate fingerings, or a trill to it.
- Accelerating. You can move from slower to faster rhythms.
- Burning & wiggling (see *Using Rubato*, Tutorial 5D).
- Special effects (see Chapter 4C: *Special Effects*).
- Harmonic intensity or “outside” playing

► **TRY IT** – Repeat an interesting idea several times; vary it slightly after several repetitions. Then build intensity by gradually making it louder, higher, or both. Practice Pages

### B) How do I lower intensity in solos?

\*After reaching high intensity in your solo, you usually lower the intensity gradually. But you can also lower intensity suddenly, or occasionally lower the intensity where there was no high intensity before, as long as your group lowers the intensity with you.

Below are some basic ways to lower the intensity in solos. You can also combine them for less intensity.

- Longer rests – use unpredictable entrances
- Less density – use care with selecting each note
- Lower range – keep the melody line flowing
- Slower rhythms – keep them interesting
- Softer dynamics – balance with the group
- Longer notes with expression

\*Be sure to lower intensity wisely. Don’t suddenly pull the plug on intensity that is building nicely, and don’t overdo high intensity or it will become boring and rob you of the ability to create future intensity.

► **TRY IT** – Play a dense idea for two bars; develop it by inserting longer rests or playing fewer notes. Then use a lower range and softer dynamics. Then use slower rhythms and long notes with expression. Practice Pages

### C) What are some examples of intensity in solos?

Below are selected places in BRIDJJ transcribed solos where intensity is built or lowered. The solos are in Chapters 2L, 3N, and 4K.

## (Part 3 – Using & Controlling Intensity)

### 1) Bass solo, “Precious Caboose” (Chapter 2L)

- Hi: Motif in m57-58 is developed in m59-60; upper range of bass is used.
- Lo: m61-64 lowers the intensity: the range gradually goes down, and the density decreases.

### 2) Trumpet solo, “Precious Caboose” (Ch. 2L)

- Lo: m1-14 is mellow to match the delicate background.
- Hi: m15-18 builds range; at the high point the rhythm repeats downbeats.
- Lo: m18-24 transfers energy to the low range; double-time 16th-note passages are divided by longer rests.
- Hi: m37-41 repeats F# and G for 4 bars, with rhythmic variations and alternate fingerings, then resolves to G#.
- Both: m47 wiggle starts energy; m48 rest stops the energy; m49 jump-starts with double-time.
- Hi: m53-57 builds range, then holds a high note with alternate fingerings before ending on highest note.

### 3) Trumpet solo, “Deja Blue” (Ch. 3N)

- Hi: m1-9 gradually increases density; m6-9 gradually increases range.
- Lo: m9-12 lowers range and intensity.

- Hi: Hi: m30-35 builds intensity (similar to m53-57 in “Precious Caboose” solo).

### 4) Trumpet solo, “Where’s Waldis?” (Ch. 3N)

- Lo: m45-50 lowers range to the bottom limit of the trumpet.
- Lo: m57-64 gradually lowers intensity
- Hi: m51-52 builds range after a rest; m53-56 repeats Bb and A many times.

### 5) Flugelhorn solo, “I Think I’ll Keep Her” (Ch. 4K)

- Lo: m5-6 has low intensity with long, low notes.
- Lo: m31 lowers intensity with a dotted half-note.
- Hi: m57-61 builds intensity with long, high notes.
- Hi: m45 uses consecutive offbeats to add energy.
- Hi: m51-54 accelerates rhythms in a riff, more intense.
- Hi: m71-72 uses rough expression.
- Hi: Overall: many color tones, non-harmonic tones, and “outside” passages.

### 6) Guitar solo, “Beat the Rats” (Ch. 4K)

- Both: m1-26 is lower in density but uses high range and varied rhythms for interest.
- Hi: m27 to the end increases the density.

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- Hi: m45 uses consecutive offbeats to add energy.
- Hi: m51-54 accelerates rhythms in a riff, more intense.
- Hi: m71-72 uses rough expression.
- Hi: Overall: many color tones, non-harmonic tones, and “outside” passages.

## Part 4 – Conservative Improvisation

Some situations (casuals, recording sessions for light jazz, etc.) call for more conservative improvisation. Here are some soundscape elements to focus on:

- Light density
- Lower intensity
- Careful and subtle expression
- Little or no use of non-harmonic tones or complicated rhythms



### A) What about recording sessions?

\*In recording sessions with light improv, you may want to plan out where the solo peaks, and where

give and take is necessary with other instruments. In some cases, accuracy is as important (or more important) than coming up with fresh ideas. And once in a while, you might as well just write something out instead of improvising. But when you need to improvise something meaningful in a limited space, SHAPE becomes more important than ever.

### B) What about casuals?

- Keep solos short: two choruses for faster tunes, one or two for medium tunes, and one or one-half for ballads.
- Keep most tunes short – not everyone needs to solo on every tune. Exception – when the crowd is really getting into a high-energy tune, go ahead and stretch things out.
- Keep the mood of the piece intact. Your solo shouldn't draw attention to itself; instead, it should flow with the rest of the song.
- Develop solo ideas simply and carefully. There may be a lot of jazz newcomers at the gig who might be annoyed at complicated solos, but who would be intrigued by thoughtful solo development.
- Concentrate on group textures and interactions during each song (see Tutorial 4J: *Group Interaction*).

That's all for Tutorial 4A - there's no quiz.