

Notes on the Jim Mullen Transcription - Jeremy Platt

I've been a fan of Jim Mullen since his Telecaster years. Back in the day, I listened fairly obsessively to an old live recording of his. I liked the feel, the bluesiness and the warm vibrato on long notes. Since then I've been fortunate to play organ with Jim a few times and this has given me the opportunity to witness his magical properties at first hand and has really deepened my appreciation of his playing. The most recent of these occasions occurred at the Four on Six festival in June. When a video of Jim's solo on "When Sunny Gets Blue" materialised, I thought that the solo was a gem that crystallised the qualities inherent in Jim's playing. I decided to transcribe it. You can listen to the audio *here* and watch the video *here*.

I'd like to offer a brief commentary. I have not tried to notate any string bending (not that there is a great deal anyway!) or glissandi. The audio will clarify these aspects if you want to play along. Like all transcriptions there's an element of rhythmic approximation. There a couple of times when Jim seems to be implying a triplet feel but I felt that trying to accommodate this would make the transcription harder to read. Hopefully it all makes sense!

One interesting thing about Jim's playing is how much it is rooted in the American tradition, specifically that which was created by African Americans in the 20th century. While contemporary trends in European improvised music continue to evolve away from the source, Jim's music is full of the blues and the bop. You can hear the former in bar 100 (where interestingly, he plays a Bb blues lick over C7!) and the latter all over the solo, for example in bar 116 where he negotiates the C7 by transitioning through all three forms of the ninth. In addition, the intensity generating raised semitone in bar 86 is straight out of the Charlie Parker playbook!

One compelling reason for studying this solo is to see the continually developing relationship between melody and chords. Rather like Chet Baker, Jim delineates the chords by hitting key tones at important points in a way that would allow a listener to identify the song purely from the improvised melody. This is particularly interesting in the case of "When Sunny Gets Blue" which offers frequent tonal shifts for the improviser to negotiate. There's the fairly seismic movement in bar 3 of the head (bar 15 of the transcription) which Jim uses to brilliant effect throughout the solo... there's the movement into C in the first half of the bridge followed by the descent into Bb in the second half. Jim rides these waves on a surfboard of melodic invention!

Another feature worth remarking on and one of which all Jim Mullen aficionados will be aware, is the use of quotes from other tunes. We've all done it but we usually do it in obvious places. It's straightforward when the chords of the current tune and the quoted one are identical or very similar. You can play "Fly Me To The Moon" over "All The Things You Are" or vice versa and "Weaver Of Dreams" will fit nicely over "There Will Never Be Another You". Alternatively, just bang the opening phrase of "Summertime" over chord I of any minor key standard or

“Somewhere Over The Rainbow” over chord I of a major key counterpart! All this is too easy for Jim who prefers to put his quotations in places where they would not easily be expected to fit! To take two examples from the transcribed solo - in bar 17 the opening of “Bewitched Bothered And Bewildered” turns up. It would usually occur over I , bII dim, IIIm7, bIII dim, Ib, III7 (V7 in A minor) etc. Here, it happens over I 6/9, IV13, IIIIm7 and is perfect. Even the major 3rd against the G minor chord comes and goes so quickly it’s not a problem! Have a look at “Stranger In Paradise” in bar 141 and enjoy the way Jim chromatically modifies the end of the phrase to fit the Abm7 chord. Ingenious!

The whole beautifully constructed solo is full of this restless imagination and invention. It sounds composed but it's happening in the moment. I'm pretty sure that Jim doesn't quite hit his intended note at the end of bar 117 This is just more evidence that he's going for it all the time, every time he plays. It's the exact opposite of someone just running licks over the changes. It's Jim Mullen - not just one of the best guitar players in Britain but one of the great risk taking musicians of our time.