

Bill Evans' Piano Solo On 'Falling Grace'

by Don Glanden

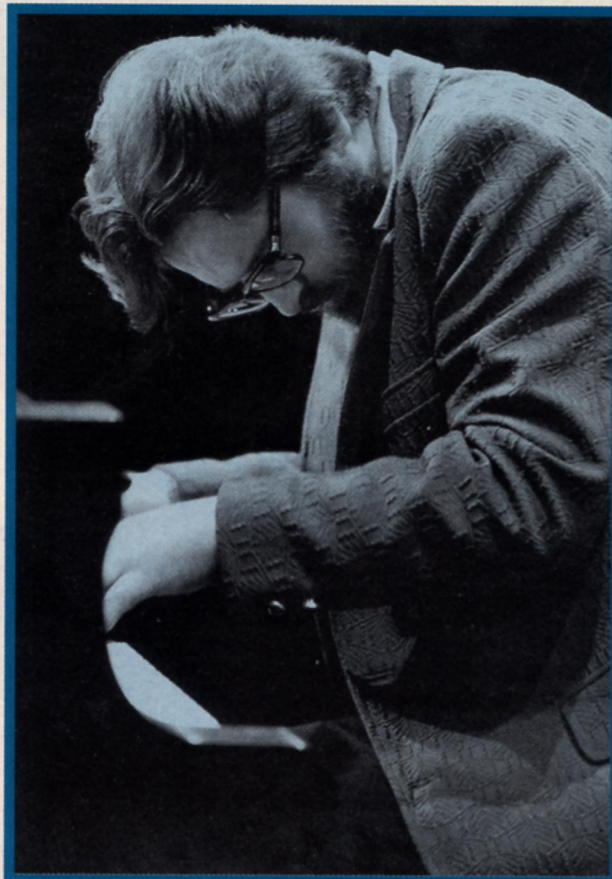
Bill Evans once told Down Beat that "if you play too many things at one time, your whole approach will be vague. You won't know what to leave in and what to take out. Know very clearly what you're doing and why. Play much less, but be very clear about it." The pianist's principles of clarity, directness and unmistakable intent are apparent in his solo on Steve Swallow's "Falling Grace," recorded in 1974 on the album *Intuition* (Fantasy/OJC).

The song's 24 bars divide logically into one 14-bar section and one 10-bar section, although the cyclical nature of the harmonic movement makes the piece sound seamless. Constantly shifting tonal centers add to the tune's overall complexity. The piano solo is preceded by Eddie Gomez's bass solo, behind which the piano is heard stating the melody for three choruses, firmly establishing the form and melodic line.

Evans' solo is an excellent example of clear and simple harmonic playing over a complex structure. Evans outlines basic triads, seventh and ninth chords throughout the solo (bars 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 33-35, 41). The extensive use of arpeggiated chord tones makes the harmonic movement unmistakable.

Evans also employs chord-scale relationships that are direct and obvious. In measure 16, the C# diminished scale is played intact on C#dim7 followed by a descending Bb major scale over a Bbmaj7 chord in bar 17. Other examples include the dominant diminished scale over C7 in measure 8, the Eb major scale fragment over Ebmaj7 in bar 30, the fifth mode harmonic minor scale fragment over D7 in bar 30, the dominant diminished scale over C7 in measure 32 and the dominant diminished scale over A7 in bar 44.

Repetition of melodic material is used



Bill Evans

effectively in measures 18-20, 39-40 and 45-46. The melodic line from bars 9 and 10 is used in measures 33 and 34, although it is slightly altered to resolve to the B7 on the first beat of bar 35 (instead of stretching the F#-7b5 phrasing across the bar line in measure 11). The use of repetition and variation gives the solo a strong sense of compositional balance.

Evans' mastery of the bebop vocabulary is also evident throughout. Note the half-step approach tones or enclosure figures in bars 9-10, 21-22, 30, 33-34 and 35-36, where chord tones are approached from a half step above and below. The melodic combination of flat 9 and sharp 9 alterations played on dominant seventh chords is used effectively in measures 8, 32, 44 and 46.

DB

Don Glanden teaches piano and theory at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, which was recently chosen as one of two colleges in the United States to represent the Bill Evans Institute. Glanden's recordings include *Sudden Life* (Encounter Records) and *Only Believe* (Cadence).

A $A\flat\text{maj}^7$

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

B $A\flat\text{maj}^7$

25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48