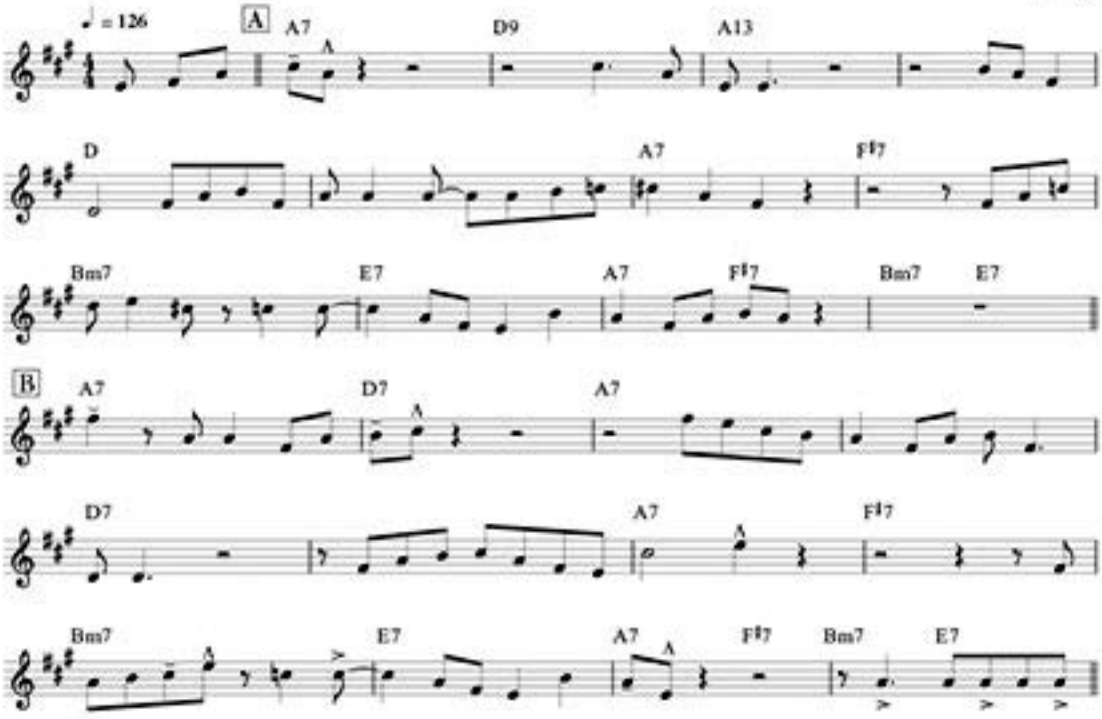
Building a Solo

Idea # 37

Every good solo tells a story. It should have a beginning, build interest toward a climax, and then wind its way back down to the conclusion. The following five-chorus blues solo demonstrates these points. The solo begins in a relaxed manner in the low to middle range of the sax. Starting at an easy volume and with short phrases gives you plenty room to build. Each chorus gets a little busier and more harmonically complex while the notes steadily climb up the horn, reaching a climax in the first two measures of the last chorus.

The solo begins mainly with chord tones, establishing a major tonality. As it progresses, more of the ♭3 and ♭5 blues notes come into play, and the phrases lengthen, giving the listener the sense of digging in. After the solo climaxes, it winds back down using some inventive chord substitutions.

It's important before you begin your solo to have in mind how many choruses you're going to take, so you can pace yourself accordingly. Always try for a strong opening statement. This will get you on solid footing and give you something to build on.

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