

Richard Philbin

Intro *to* Transcription



SAXOPHONE

About the Course

In this course, Richard Philbin guides you through the essential practice of transcription: learning iconic jazz solos by ear to absorb the phrasing, rhythm, articulation, and nuance that written notation often misses.

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If you have any corrections, comments, or critiques relating to this workbook, please send them to marek@tonebase.co. We strive to deliver the highest quality enrichment experience.

Thank you!

What Is Transcription?

Definition

Transcription is the focused imitation and analysis of recorded Jazz performances. It involves listening deeply, learning by ear, and capturing the sound and feel of classic solos.

Why it matters

- Jazz evolved alongside recording technology.
- Unlike classical music, jazz has primary sources in the form of recordings.
- Recordings are the most authentic documents of how jazz is meant to sound.



Key idea

In Jazz, *how* notes are played is more important than *which* notes are played. The expressive elements are subtle and cannot be fully captured with notation. Learning directly from recordings is essential.

Why Theory Is Not Enough

- Chord scales and theory provide the foundation.
- Inflections, articulation, and expressive effects can be taught, but only transcription shows how they are actually used.
- Listening and imitation are like learning a language by ear, not just through grammar.

Analogy: *Playing from theory alone is like learning vocabulary without understanding how native speakers use it.*

Benefits of Transcription

- Develops critical listening skills.
- Builds awareness of jazz phrasing, rhythm, harmony, and nuance.
- Deepens musical memory and vocabulary.
- Increases musical enjoyment and understanding.
- Honors and respects the work of the masters.

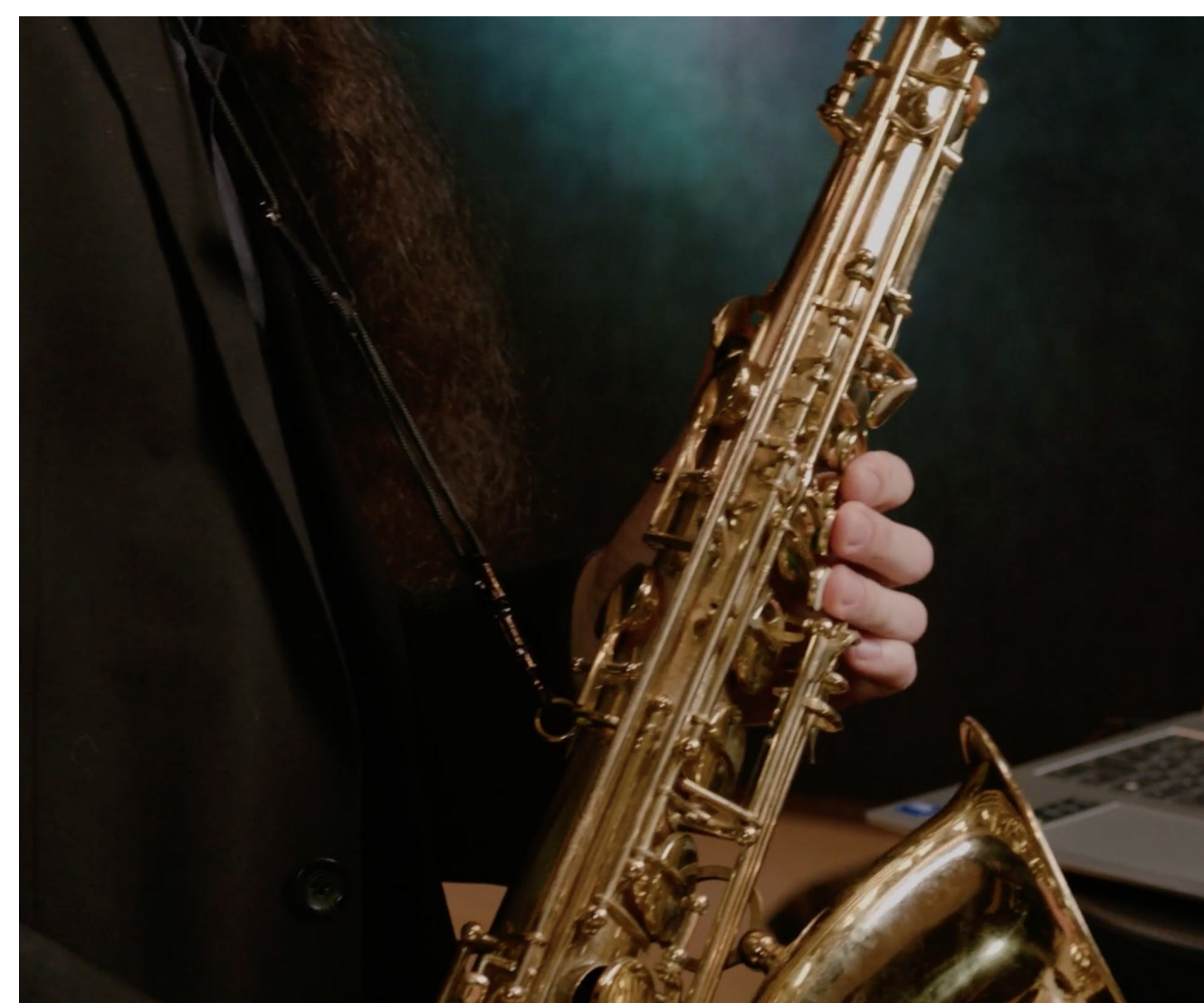
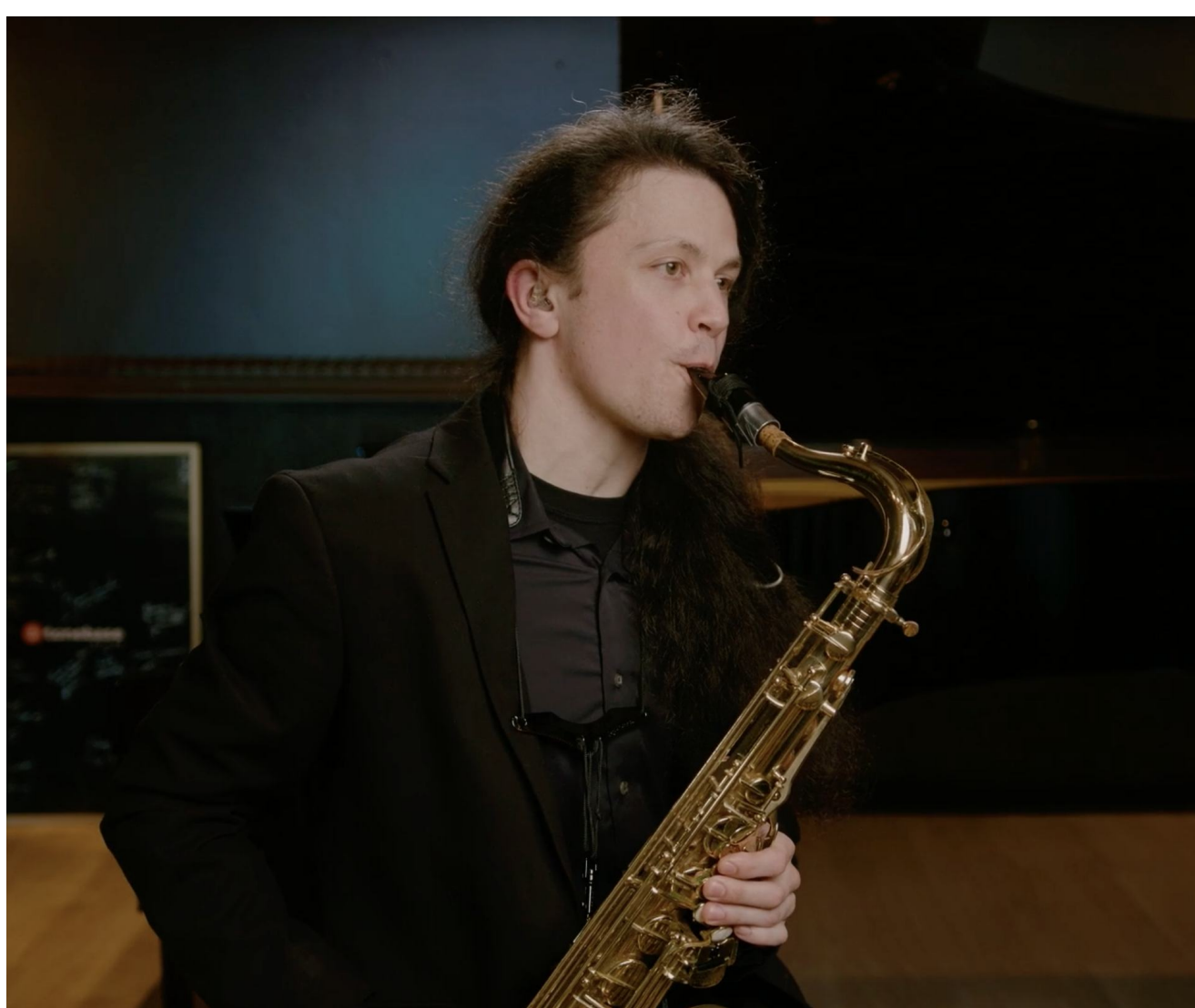
Reflection prompt: *Think of a solo that moved you.*
What did you like about it?
What elements might you learn from transcribing it?

In Jazz, how notes are played is more important than which notes are played. The expressive elements are subtle and cannot be fully captured with notation. Learning directly from recordings is essential.

Start small, build consistency

- Choose music that is challenging but achievable.
- Improvement comes through small, consistent gains over time.
- Each phrase learned makes the next one easier.

***Tip:** Do not underestimate your potential. It may take you an hour to get through eight bars today. Keep going. It gets easier with practice.*



Choosing Your First Transcription

Start with Blues

- Blues form is foundational to Jazz.
- Helps reinforce your sense of key and function.
- Full of essential inflections and phrasing that define the Jazz sound.

Why Blues works best for beginners

- Teaches you to recognize phrasing within harmonic structure.
- Easier to identify how players are shaping the sound.
- Most modern jazz vocabulary is an extension of blues language.

Three Levels of Transcription

Level 1: Jam Along or Imitate

- Listen to a recording multiple times.
- Try singing along with key phrases.
- Learn to mimic shapes, timing, and inflections.
- Play along on your horn:
 - ◦ Try different scales until you find the key.
 - ◦ Respond to the soloist, mimic lines and phrasing.

Goal: *Participate in the musical conversation, even without learning exact notes.*

Level 2: Spot transcription

- Choose one phrase that captures the sound of Jazz.
- Learn that phrase exactly, including pitch, rhythm, articulation, and inflection.
- Try to play it as close to the original as possible.
- Use this process to build awareness of expressive detail.

Level 3: Full solo transcription

- Start from the beginning and learn one phrase at a time.
- Always review from the beginning so you build fluency.
- Keep refining until you can play the full solo with expression, not just accuracy.

Should You Write It Down?

Writing your transcription down is optional. Consider writing it if:

- you want to analyze the phrasing or harmony on paper;
- you are preparing a solo for teaching or sharing;
- or you find visual memory helps support your ear training.

If you are focused on sound and feel, it is also fine to memorize by ear only.

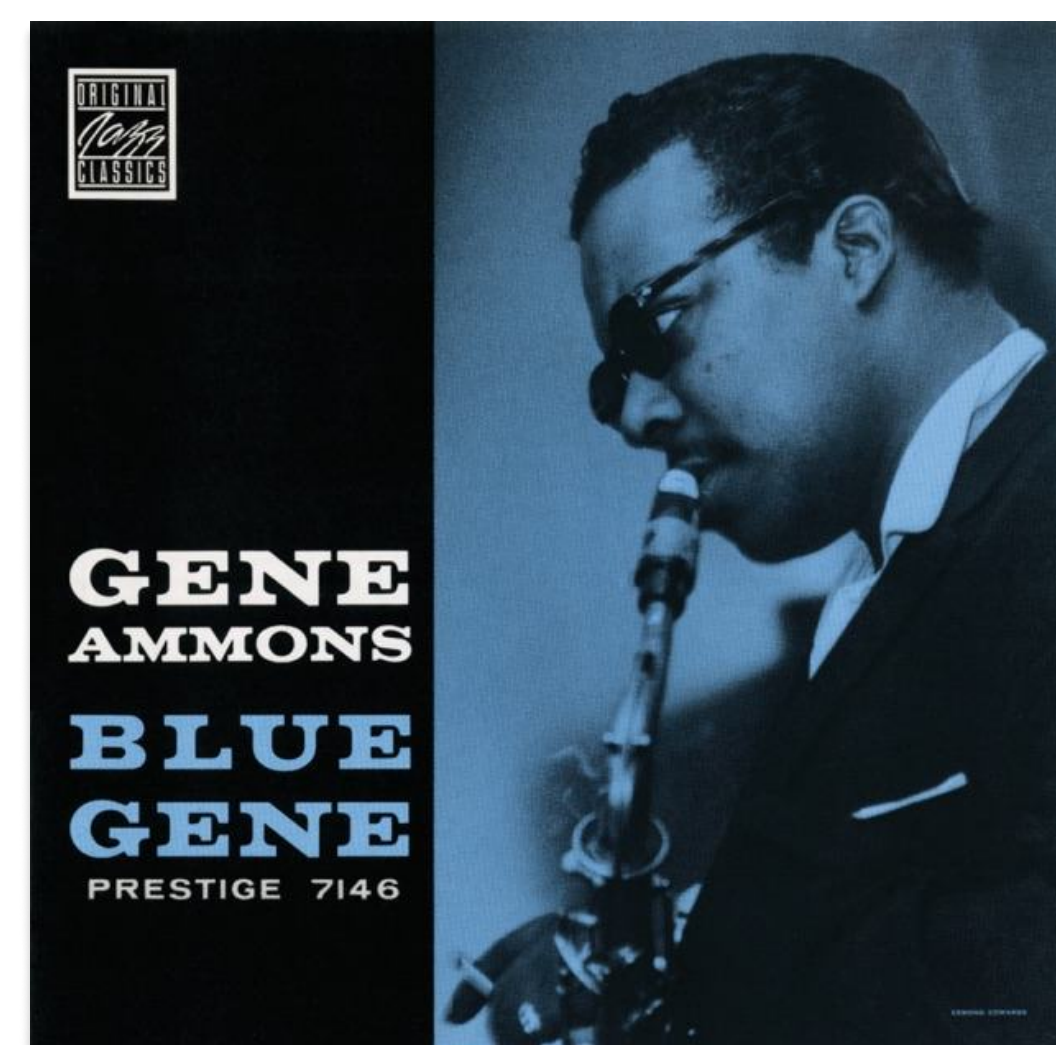
Tips to Make Transcription Easier

- Learn all major, minor, and blues scales.
- Study common jazz progressions (II-V-I, blues form, rhythm changes).
- Learn the tune before transcribing a solo over it.
 - ◦ If needed, use a fake book as a reference.
- Transpose your transcriptions to other keys:
 - ◦ Helps solidify functional understanding.
 - ◦ Builds flexibility.

Recommended Recordings

Start with one of these tracks for your first transcription project. These solos are rich in vocabulary and accessible in structure:

- Gene Ammons, “The One Before This” (Boss Tenors)
- Gene Ammons, “Blue Greens and Beans” (Blue Gene)
- Gene Ammons, “King Size” (Funky)
- Pepper Adams, “Blue Greens and Beans” (Blue Gene)



- Charlie Parker, “KC Blues”
- Charlie Parker, “Chi-Chi”
- Charlie Parker, “Now’s the Time”
- Jackie McLean, “Not Really the Blues” (Jammin’ with Gene)



Practice Log

Track title: _____

Soloist: _____

Level: ☐ Jam Along ☐ Spot Phrase ☐ Full Solo

Transcribed phrase:

What I learned:

Next steps: