FILLER NOTES

Sometimes a single well-placed note within a jazz solo can be all that is needed to express everything at that particular moment, anything else would seem superfluous. Miles Davis was the true master of this way of playing. It might seem easy, but in fact it is the most difficult thing to do and there is no way that it can be taught, except by trial and error and experience and by listening to players like Miles.

In contrast, there are times when lots of notes are required. For example, in building up to a climax in an up-tempo number where the sheer drive of the solo line is as important as the notes themselves. We've all had that sinking feeling of having to play a solo after someone else has played a "storm". The audience expects a lot of excitement and resorting to nothing but a series of single notes at such times would seem trite, and almost an admission that you can't keep up.

This is where what-I-call "filler notes" is useful. I would define these as notes which are unimportant in themselves but which help to keep up the rhythmic drive of the solo. Accented notes are interspersed with them and these are the important keynotes of the phrase you are playing. The filler notes are much quieter in volume than the accented ones.

Filler notes can be based on the scale, for example:



In this case the notes all conform to E harmonic minor scale but apart from the accented notes do not add anything in a melodic sense.

Arpeggios can be used instead of runs, thus:



Runs and arpeggios which have filler role may also come *above* the accented notes. Both are illustrated below:



Instead of changing each time, the filler notes may remain the same:



A particular run or pattern may also be repeated in place if a single filler note:



These techniques can also be used to pad out a slow moving tune where you do not wish to change any of the notes but to emphasise them.