

Transcription Process

I first started transcribing when I was a sophomore in high school. For our jazz band class, we had a project due at the end of the year: a term paper on our favorite jazz musician or a transcribed solo of our favorite jazz musician. I chose the option that allowed me to play my horn. In 2009, with my iPod Shuffle, I painfully barrel my way through three choruses of “Trane’s Slow Blues” off of *Lush Life*. John Coltrane played tenor on the recording -- I learned the solo on alto.

For a number of reasons, I had a frustrating experience, but through this process, I was able to fight my way through my first transcription. I played it for our class, and I so proud. I had a piece of the great John Coltrane in my pocket. I still love that solo.

As time went on, I got more guidance on how to go about transcribing solos. I was never one early-on to get into transcribing super fast Bird changes or shredder Brecker patterns--I wanted to find was good eighth-note lines that I could understand and use.

My first major win was getting the app the “Amazing Slow Downer” (ASD). At the time, it was free, but now it costs around \$15.00, but is well worth the money. Now, you can slow down YouTube, as well -- the same concept, but for free.

The second breakthrough was looking through Dave Liebman’s materials on transcription. Here are some steps that I’ve found helpful from his recommendations:

1. Be able to sing the whole solo along with the recording.
2. Use half-speed to start learning the notes on your horn.
3. Work through the whole solo on your horn, progressing to faster speeds.
4. Write down the solo AFTER you have learned the whole excerpt.
5. Compare your transcription to others online to see if you can find discrepancies.

Here are five solos that have great eighth-note lines. Check them out on my website:

1. “Along Together” - Steve Lacy (soprano)
2. “Autumn Leaves” - Paul Desmond (alto)
3. “What is This Thing Called Love” - Cannonball Adderley (alto)
4. “My Shining Hour” - John Coltrane (tenor)
5. “Cheese Cake” - Dexter Gordon (tenor)
6. “All the Things You Are” - Gerry Mulligan (bari)

Start with four bars a day. Make a point to have transcription in your practice routine!