

*“Music For a While,” After a While: Digital Reconstruction,  
Musical Analysis, and Authorial Intent in the Age of the CD Reissue*  
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As recording technology has made its journey from the wax cylinder and the LP record to the compact disc and the personal computer, musicians and scholars have gained access to a wealth of material never before available. Since the introduction of the CD reissue, record companies have sought to entice buyers by appending bonus material to the end of the original LP track list; often, this material can be judged to have been rightly left out of the original LP albums, but in other instances, the additional tracks can lead to fascinating new discoveries. The latter is most certainly the case with Paul Desmond’s 1973 album *Skylark* and its 1997 CD reissue by Columbia. However, I will also demonstrate, through historical and musical analyses of the old and new evidence available, that the CD reissue is incomplete, and fails to realize the actual intent of the artist.

“I’ve become an arch-conservative,” Paul Desmond was quoted as saying in 1966.<sup>1</sup> Though once considered a part of the avant garde due to his involvement with groups experimenting with polytonality and unusual time signatures,<sup>2</sup> the saxophonist adhered to his own highly lyrical conception of jazz for his entire career. Desmond’s distinctive tone—believed by writer Gene Lees to have been inspired by Lester Young’s clarinet playing<sup>3</sup>—did naturally mature during the thirty years that elapsed between his recorded debut in 1947 (with Dave Brubeck) to his 1977 swansong (with Art Garfunkel), but the cool-toned, melodic ideal for which he strove was always unmistakably present.

Following sixteen years of constant touring and recording as part of the Dave Brubeck Quartet (1951–1967), and having also cut several records with guitarist Jim Hall during that time, Desmond began recording less frequently. Each of his four albums as a leader from 1968 to 1973—all of which were made in collaboration with arranger

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Feather, *The Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Sixties* (New York: Horizon Press, 1966) 107.

<sup>2</sup> Fred M. Hall, *It’s About Time: The Dave Brubeck Story* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1996) 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

Don Sebesky—would, in spite of his self-described arch-conservative stylistic consistency, showcase him in new and different settings.

*Skylark* was recorded for CTI records in late 1973, and includes among its tracks “Music For a While,” the subject of this paper. The album represents Desmond’s last “unconventional” effort in several respects: it featured a larger group than the quartets with which Desmond most often played, the members of this *Skylark* group were of very different musical temperaments than Desmond’s, and the album’s repertoire reached well outside of the standard jazz canon.

The musicians assembled by producer Creed Taylor and arranger Don Sebesky for this album were guitarists Gabor Szabo (who receives featured billing on the album’s front cover) and Gene Bertoncini, pianist Bob James, bassist Ron Carter, and drummer Jack DeJohnette, with percussionist Ralph MacDonald and cellist George Ricci also making brief appearances.<sup>4</sup> It is at times an odd mixture: the musicians (especially Szabo and DeJohnette) play with post-Fusion ideas entirely foreign to Desmond’s 1950s West Coast pedigree, and the Fender Rhodes piano of Bob James unmistakably rings of the early 1970s.

The original LP issue of this album featured a modern reimagining of Henry Purcell’s “Music For a While,” an aria originally composed in 1692 for a staging of *Oedipus*.<sup>5</sup> (Producer Creed Taylor and arranger Don Sebesky were fond of assigning classical repertoire to their jazz artists, particularly after keyboardist Eumir Deodato enjoyed great commercial success with his 1972 jazz-funk rendition of “Also Sprach Zarathustra.”) When reissued on CD in 1997, the bonus tracks appended to the original LP program include what is billed as an alternate version of “Music For a While.”

Though the two tracks are nearly identical, several significant differences stand out when one compares the master take and the putative alternate version. The first divergence one might notice is that while the original features an obbligato line performed by George Ricci on cello, the same line is given to Gabor Szabo’s electric

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas Payne. *CTI Records*. <http://www.dougpayne.com/cti.htm> (accessed January 21, 2026).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Charteris, “Newly Discovered Sources of Music by Henry Purcell,” *Music & Letters*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (Feb. 1994), 16-32.

guitar in the alternate take. As the track continues, we eventually find that it showcases a different solo by Desmond, and finally that a *rubato* bass solo by Ron Carter, present on the issued take, is omitted entirely from the alternate take. None of this seems unusual on the surface, but upon closer aural inspection, a few oddities become apparent, particularly during Desmond's solo.

The originally issued take presents a very fine improvisation, showcasing what seems to be spontaneous, almost conversational interaction between Desmond's alto saxophone and Bob James's electric piano. (Listeners at the time would expect such dialogue, as contrapuntal interplay was a major feature of Desmond's musical rapport with frequent partner Dave Brubeck.) The Desmond solo on the alternate version is different, yet the rhythm section's performance is in fact the very same recording as the master take, note for note, in every instrument. This leads to the likely conclusion that one or more of Desmond's solos—at least the master and the alternate—were recorded as overdubs and then superimposed upon a backing track laid down by James, Carter, and DeJohnette (a backing track possibly recorded without any soloist present at all).

Given that many musicians and listeners regard the interaction between soloist and rhythm section as central to the very ethos of jazz music, we cannot take this overdubbing situation lightly or assume that it was standard operating procedure for Taylor and/or Sebesky—and indeed, there is abundant evidence to the contrary.<sup>6</sup> Rather, it seems likely that the rhythm section, “master take” solo, and “alternate take” solo were recorded separately because they were originally intended to have *all* been heard simultaneously.

The practice of overdubbing multiple solos is not without precedent in Desmond's oeuvre. As early as 1962, Desmond added a second alto saxophone line to simultaneous improvisations by himself and Gerry Mulligan on “The Way You Look

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<sup>6</sup> Several other CD reissues of Taylor productions with Sebesky orchestrations include, as bonus tracks, quartet versions of issued master takes, revealing that the Taylor/Sebesky *modus operandi* was to record the featured artist with the rhythm section, adding orchestral instruments after the fact but respecting the *in situ* musical dialogue between soloist and rhythm players. One such example is the 1969 Desmond album *From The Hot Afternoon*, featuring the same production team and several of the same musicians as the album at hand.

Tonight,”<sup>7</sup> and in 1970, he brilliantly interwove three solos together in a surprisingly effective version of Paul Simon’s “Feelin’ Groovy,” arranged and produced by Don Sebesky.<sup>8</sup> Given that *Skylark* was the next Desmond/Sebesky collaboration, it is reasonable to speculate that their experiments in multitracked extemporaneous counterpoint were not over.

A musical analysis of the two solos bears out my contention that they were intended to be heard together. Full transcriptions of both the master and alternate takes of Desmond’s solos are included as an appendix to this paper, and four key moments that illustrate the contrapuntal compatibility of the solos are discussed below.<sup>9</sup>

(Example 1)

Example 1 shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Master' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Alt. take'. The music is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The Master staff has notes with slurs and triplets, and the Alt. take staff has notes with slurs and triplets. Chord symbols are placed above the Master staff: Eb, Ab, Db7, C7, Fm7, G7, C7, F7, Bb7.

In mm. 16–21 of the solo section (approximately 3:06 on the CD tracks), Desmond’s alternate solo is uncannily considerate of the master take. While he spins out a bluesy line on the upper voice in mm. 17–19, he seems to be playing an overtly accompanimental role in the lower voice, outlining the VI7-V7-i harmony and imposing a cadential 3-2-1 descent in at the very bottom of the saxophone’s range. The fact that the upper voice outlines a 5-1 resolution suggests something of Schenkerian *bassbrechung* and *ürlinie*-descent relationship turned upside-down, although I do not

<sup>7</sup> Paul Desmond and Gerry Mulligan, *Two of a Mind*, RCA, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Desmond, *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, A&M, 1970.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Desmond, *Skylark*, CTI, 1973 LP (upper staff); Paul Desmond, *Skylark*, Columbia, 1997 CD (lower staff).

suggest that Desmond was necessarily doing so intentionally. What does seem too pervasive to be unintentional, however, is each solo leaving space for the other, and, conversely, filling in the spaces left by its counterpart. In the example above, it is clear that the second solo is accompanying the first in mm. 17–19; then, when the first solo holds a G for three beats in m. 20, the second solo steps in to outline the II7-V7 harmony of that measure, leading us into the contrary-motion counterpoint of measure 21. The solo continues:

(Example 2)

Example 2 shows two musical staves: "Master" and "Alt. take". The "Master" staff begins at measure 22 with a treble clef and a key signature of three flats. Above the staff are the chords Eb, Ab, and Db7(#9). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over a group of notes). The "Alt. take" staff starts at measure 23 and continues through measure 24. It features a similar melodic pattern to the "Master" take but with some alterations. A note in measure 24 is marked with a double bar line and a dot, indicating a fermata. Below the "Alt. take" staff, the text "(guitar & cello tremolo)" is written.

Here, at 3:19, the alternate solo clearly uses the material in the master take solo as a point of departure. “Alternate” Desmond takes the second half of “Master” m. 23, repeats it with one altered note in the first half of m. 24, and then proceeds to craft swaggering variations on the motive for the following two measures. While it is possible that the same idea would occur to Desmond twice, the “echo” effect here is unlikely to be coincidental.

(Example 3)

Example 3 shows two musical staves: "Master" and "Alt. take". The "Master" staff begins at measure 31 with a treble clef and a key signature of three flats. Above the staff are the chords Fm7, G7, C7, F7, Bb7, Eb, and Ab. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes, with some rests. The "Alt. take" staff starts at measure 31 and continues through measure 34. It features a similar melodic pattern to the "Master" take but with some alterations. Below the "Alt. take" staff, the text "(strings tacet; double-time feel)" is written.

In mm. 31-34 (3:39-3:47) of the solos, the call-and-response relationship is made even more explicit. As the rhythm section imposes a double-time feel, Desmond responds by creating a dialogue with himself, singing out ascending arpeggiated triads in the master take and answering them with descending figures in the alternate take. The sequence created in both solos are non-literal (they constitute “tonal answers” rather than a “real answers,” to borrow terms from fugue analysis), but the gestural give-and-take remains clear.

(Example 4)

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Master' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Alt. take'. Both staves begin at measure 41, indicated by a '41' above the first measure. Above the first measure of the Master staff is the chord symbol 'D<sup>b</sup>7(♯9)'. The Master staff shows an ascending arpeggiated triad starting on the second beat of measure 41. The Alt. take staff shows a descending figure starting on the second beat of measure 41. Below the Alt. take staff, centered under measures 41 and 42, is the text '(guitar & cello tremolo)'. The notation includes stems, beams, and accents over notes.

As the solo nears its conclusion, the two solos begin to compete more and cooperate less, which may be one reason why only one was used on the eventual release of the *Skylark* LP. In m. 41 (3:59), the dialogue between the accented high notes promises another moment of sublime counterpoint between Desmond and himself, but in m. 42, both the rhythms and intervals are increasingly at odds with one another. The E<sub>b</sub> against D<sub>b</sub> (m. 42, beats 2 and 3) and the F against E<sub>b</sub> (beat 4), while not *wrong*, also do not sound particularly right, especially in light of the slightly staggered attacks in beats 3 and 4. Considering how well-constructed the rest of this double solo is, it is surprising to see Desmond step on his own toes as he does here; however, the fact that these two almost identical figures happen at the exact same point in each solo lends further credibility to my assertion that at the very least Desmond was listening to one solo while recording the other.

Issues of authorial intent are largely superfluous in discussions of CD bonus tracks since the authorial intent was presumably that the alternate takes should never

be released. It can be assumed that Paul Desmond, who died of lung cancer in 1977,<sup>10</sup> did not foresee the advent of the technology that would allow for 70 minutes of audio to fit on a single 4.75-inch disc, and that he did not suspect that listeners in the 21st century would still be buying, listening to, and studying recordings he made in 1973. The idea of discarded tracks being made available to the public was not one that presented itself in his lifetime, so his own intent can never be definitively known.

Such questions aside, when studio artifacts such as the alternate version of “Music For a While” *do* see the light of day, it is our prerogative as informed listeners to ask that the reissuing entities at least present those artifacts to us in the context in which they were intended. As we have seen here, a combination of musical and historical research leads to the conclusion that the solo in the so-called alternate take of “Music For a While” is not an alternate at all, but in fact one piece of a larger musical puzzle. While it was not used on *Skylark* as originally released, it is available to us now, and it should be evaluated not as an independent entity but as half of a dialogue—variously an accompanist and an interlocutor—along with the issued master take. Authorial intent has been ignored in the process of making this additional material available to us at all (as is necessarily the case with a deceased artist), but it need not be ignored in the contextual presentation of that material, especially when faced with evidence such as that which I have detailed in this paper. It is to be hoped, then, that if Columbia should reissue this music again, in whatever format technology allows, they will include not only the disparate elements of “Music For a While,” but the completed composite recording as well.

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<sup>10</sup> Hall, 96.

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# Appendix: Solo Transcriptions

Henry Purcell, arr. Don Sebesky  
as recorded by Paul Desmond (1973)  
transcribed by William Kenlon

(2:31)

Alto Sax (Master)

Alto Sax (Alt.)

Rhodes & guitar

Rhodes w/vibrato tremolo

cymbals ad lib

F m/C guitar strum

sim.

Detailed description: This system contains five staves. The top two staves are for Alto Sax (Master) and Alto Sax (Alt.), both showing rests. The third staff is for Rhodes & guitar, with notes and rests. The fourth staff is for Rhodes w/vibrato tremolo, showing chordal textures. The fifth staff is for cymbals ad lib, with rhythmic notation. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is common time (C).

solo changes:

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

F m7/E $\flat$

F m/C

D $\flat$ maj7

D $\phi$ 7

D $\flat$ maj7

D $\phi$ 7

F m7/E $\flat$

sim.

Detailed description: This system contains five staves. The first two staves are for Alto Sax 1 (A.S. 1) and Alto Sax 2 (A.S. 2), both showing rests until measure 6, then a melodic line. The third staff is for Rhodes & guitar, with notes and rests. The fourth and fifth staves are for Rhodes w/vibrato tremolo, showing chordal textures. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). Measure numbers 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 are indicated above the staves.

12 Fm7/Eb Bbm7 G7 C7

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

Detailed description: This system contains measures 12 through 15. The key signature has three flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The tempo is 120. The music features two vocal lines, A.S. 1 and A.S. 2, and a piano accompaniment. The piano part is mostly rests in these measures. Chords are indicated above the staff: Fm7/Eb (measures 12-13), Bbm7 (measure 14), G7 (measures 12-15), and C7 (measures 14-15). The vocal lines consist of eighth and quarter notes, with several triplet markings.

(3:00)

16 Fm7 G7 C7 F7 Bb7

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

drums: time

Rhodes comps (non. vib)

Detailed description: This system contains measures 16 through 19. The key signature remains three flats. The tempo is 120. The music features two vocal lines, A.S. 1 and A.S. 2, and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes drums (time) and Rhodes comp (non. vib). Chords are indicated above the staff: Fm7 (measures 16-17), G7 (measures 16-17), C7 (measures 18-19), F7 (measures 18-19), and Bb7 (measures 18-19). The vocal lines continue with eighth and quarter notes, including triplet markings.

20 Eb Ab Db7 C7

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

bass walks

Detailed description: This system contains measures 20 through 23. The key signature remains three flats. The tempo is 120. The music features two vocal lines, A.S. 1 and A.S. 2, and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes bass walks. Chords are indicated above the staff: Eb (measures 20-21), Ab (measures 20-21), Db7 (measures 22-23), and C7 (measures 22-23). The vocal lines continue with eighth and quarter notes, including triplet markings.

23 Fm7 G7 C7 F7 Bb7 Eb Ab

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

(3:22)  
Db7(#9)

27

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

cello & guitar tremolo

sim.

31 C7

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

sim.

(3:39)

F m7

G7

C7

F7

Bb7

35

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

(strings tacet)

(8vb)

double-time feel

Eb

Ab

Db7

C7

38

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

41

F m7

G 7(#9)

C7

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

(etc.)

(3:59)  
F7 B $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$  A $\flat$  D $\flat$ 7(#9)

43

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

guitar & cello tremolo

tremolo

C7

47

A.S. 1

A.S. 2

(4:14)  
F

51

A.S. 1

A.S. 2