

Broadening the Artistic Palette of (Composing) Performers in Jazz

My tonight performance serves to illustrate the artistic result of my doctoral study *Beyond Borders* (2017). My research question was: “How can advanced compositional and improvisational techniques be applied in contemporary jazz, in order to help (composing) improvisers to extend their musical practices beyond functional harmony and beyond the conventional chord-scale approach?”

The goal of this research project was to demonstrate how jazz practitioners could employ elements from twentieth century compositional techniques introduced by Olivier Messiaen and Peter Schat as an alternative to the excessive focus on functional harmony and the chord-scale approach (applying the right scale to the chord) in jazz education. The emphasis in my study is on how to play “outside the chords” in order to create an intended harmonic vagueness.

After comparative analyses of, and experiments with advanced improvisational strategies in publications and recordings by leading jazz educators Liebman (2013), Bergonzi (2000), Garzone (2009), Weiskopf (2009), and O’Gallagher (2013), I concluded that their strategies are largely related to serial music. Accordingly, I highlighted the twelve-tone music related *Tone Clock* by Peter Schat (1993) and the symmetry of the “modes de transposition limitée” (MoLT) by Olivier Messiaen (1956) as highly appropriate models for jazz improvisers, both allowing a limited body of rules to be transferred into an unlimited number of melodic improvisational patterns. I analysed their models in the practices of expert jazz artists, and transformed them into “generative compendia”, melodic patterns that served as building blocks in my compositions, vehicles for jazz improvisations meant to express the sonic qualities of the actual melodic patterns.

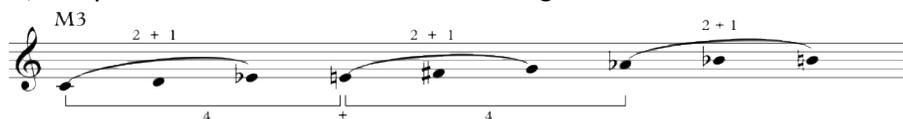
I concluded that elements of the *Tone Clock* and Messiaen’s MoLT can be fruitfully connected to more traditional jazz languages. The combinations of trichords extracted from the *Tone Clock* have the potential to serve as useful “sidewalks” to step outside and come back inside the chords, while Messiaen’s MoLT contain intriguing possibilities to “mislead” expected harmonic structures.

During my performance tonight, I will translate these conclusions into music. I will take off with the jazz standard “Autumn Leaves” (J.Kosma) staying “inside” its harmonic structure by improvising only with the scales that are traditionally connected to the chords.

In the second piece, I will highlight the application of the fifth hour of Schat’s *Tone Clock* (1993), a collection of a dozen twelve-tone scales, each of them constructed with transpositions of a single trichord containing intervals between a minor second and a perfect fourth. In my piece. In my composition “*Les Mésanges*” I use combinations of trichord 1+5 (a minor second followed by a perfect fourth, or vice versa) both in the composed part and in the improvisation.



In the third piece, “A Crow Calling”, I apply one of Messiaen’s “modes de transposition limitée” (1956), a collection of seven characteristic modes containing between six and ten pitches. My composition is based on M3, a nine-tone mode with an intriguing hybrid tonal colour. Both in the written and in the improvised part, I respect Messiaen’s idea of “never leaving the notes of the mode”.



Next, I return to the canon of jazz standards by playing “Caravan” (Tizol/Ellington0, improvising again with trichord 1+5 and M3 in different transpositions, but now as “superimpositions” on the original chords. Thus, the effects of harmonic tension and release in my improvisation become more intense and, depending of the listening experience of my audience, more surprising.

To conclude my performance, I will improvise again on “Autumn Leaves”. This time I start improvising “outside the chords” and slowly return to the most inside part of the piece, the original melody.

Why Birds Always Sing (Dick de Graaf)

https://youtu.be/LH8_Rej9gBs

Dick de Graaf. 2017. *Beyond Borders: Broadening the Artistic Palette of (Composing) Improvisers in Jazz*. [doctoral dissertation] ACPA, Leiden University

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/354613/377339>

foto Dick de Graaf: Martynas Aleksa (Vilnius Conference DIP September 2018)



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Please write here your biography (150 words)

Dutch saxophonist Dick de Graaf is a versatile (composing) performer who feels at ease in traditional jazz as well as in cross-over projects, as is evident from his collaborations with legendary artists such as Chet Baker, Benny Golson, Billy Hart, the Malinese kora player Toumani Diabaté and the Turkish guitar virtuoso Erkan Ogur.

Dick's interest in connecting jazz and classical music resulted in numerous projects, such as *Schubert Impressions for Jazz Quintet* (2003), and his jazz arrangements of Bach's music on the CD *To B Or Not To B* (2013).

November 2017 he obtained a PhD degree at Leiden University (ACPA) with his online dissertation about developing jazz languages using twentieth century compositional techniques. On his most recent CD *BIRD BUZZ* (2017) he steps ahead, using elements from the musical legacy of classical composers Bartók, Messiaen and Peter Schat to create fresh music in the domain of contemporary jazz.