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SLASH: Call and Response Composition in Jazz Music

Miles Taylour Sweeny
Bard College, ms5169@bard.edu

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SLASH: Call and Response Composition in Jazz Music

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Arts
of Bard College

by
Miles T. Sweeny

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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SLASH: Call and Response Composition in Jazz Music

Biography

I, Miles Taylour Sweeny am a jazz musician whose primary instrument is guitar, hailing from the Mid-Hudson Valley in New York. I grew up playing metal, hardcore, rock and folk music with different bands in the North East between the ages of 12 and 16. At 16, I self recorded my first album *Exacursionaire*, an experimental folk album and from there stayed in the realm of folk music for another two self-produced albums, *the thinking being*; and *what a man and his acoustic guitar can get done together*. I graduated high-school and went to work. By the age of 22, I'd been a picture-framer, waiter, and stone mason among other things. At 23, I decided to return to college, still unsure somewhat, of what to pursue, as I had also been a visual artist, writer and had attended a few workshops at the New Film Academy. After taking early music courses at Bard College, I leaned heavily into music, and deep dived into music theory, composition, and improvisation. My focus since then has been treating my instrument as if it were a trade; knowing the in's and out's of it. While there is still an infinite amount of knowledge to be absorbed and learned in the field of music, I've grown years beyond where'd I had previously been, and much closer to a mastery of my instrument, thanks to the instruction of my professors at Bard.

Artist Statement

My first Senior Concert was a demonstration of traditional folk, blues and rock music using jazz techniques and music theory to amplify some fairly simple compositions. My main goal since beginning at Bard has been to examine how relevant the relationship between a resting harmony and a passing harmony is. Instead of remaining in a major or minor key and using the relative IV, there is actually a wide variety of tension harmonies one can use to express the same idea. This exploration has allowed me to continue my focus of composing and singing blues and folk music as a therapeutic and quite accessible art form, however it has also given me the tools to layer-in the intricacies that a deep study of musical theory provides. Much like a bebop blues compared to a traditional Delta blues,



SENIOR PROJECT OF MILES TAYLOUR SWEENEY
SENIOR CONCERT, APRIL 24, 2017
7PM

my first Senior Project was an attempt to take simple, accessible music down an unfamiliar route. When someone is listening to a folk song they can expect it to generally use three to four chords or harmonies. This first concert was an attempt to use three to four harmonies in unexpected ways, creating a style of music that is accessible but wholly new.

My second Senior Concert continues along the same path as the first in that it examines writing compositions using jazz techniques and music theory, only this time using the frame work of traditional and modern jazz forms. Instead of relying on folk, blues and rock as a framework, I arranged a woodwind section into an original contemporary jazz piece, then relied on a quartet jazz band for the rest of the show. My other compositions were Latin and Swing blues built around sus-chords, a traditional ballad form using ii, V, I Vi and a bridge built around two instruments “calling and responding,” a modal piece in the vein of John Coltrane, built around the diminished scale, and lastly I superimposed two traditional jazz standards - Autumn Leaves and Beautiful Love - over one another and put it to a Waltz. This Senior Concert was intended to not just be a demonstration of what I’d learned at Bard technically, but also what sort of music I will be examining and playing after my time at Bard ends. I wanted this concert to firmly live in the jazz world more so than my first, demonstrating technique and composition as well as improvisation. I

wanted to keep the band relatively small in order to suggest a small setting like that of a jazz club.

Work Description

The combination of my Senior Concerts have explored the accessibility to connect emotionally to a piece of music without it having to be overly simple. As in my first song, “Song For Leila,” each section remains harmonically in the same key, until the same harmonies move to a new key for a different section. The idea of this was to create a jazz tune for those who may not like or understand jazz. In other words, melody was at the forefront of these compositions. Movement, lyrics were all utilized in my first concert to allow for easier connection between the audience and band. My second concert removed singing and lyrics altogether and focused on the traditional idea of jazz; that of call and response and improvisation. Though the second half of my Senior Project moved farther away from general accessibility I still kept melody and movement at the forefront of my mind. Dancing, rhythm, harmony, and surprise were some of the techniques used to keep my audience engaged.

