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The Shape(s) of Jazz To Come.
Jazz Studies, interpretation,
theory and education Research Project

Ricardo Pinheiro, PhD.

Abstract

Jazz Studies: interpretation, theory and education is a research project developed at Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa, Polytechnic University of Lisbon, that involved the collaboration between the Jazz and Composition Departments. The focus of the project coordinated by Ricardo Pinheiro (with the collaboration of Carlos Caires and Carlos Marecos) was to rethink artistic research outputs in the field of jazz studies, questioning the hegemony of the current musicological paradigm (Cook, 2014; Pinheiro and Caires 2019; Pinheiro, Caires and Neto 2024), and to explore the broad academic, scientific and artistic scope that this field can provide.

Keywords: Jazz, Musicology, Theory, Performance, Pedagogy, Sociology, Culture, History

Introduction

Jazz has played a culturally determinant role throughout the 20th and 21st centuries (Levine 1989; Gabbard 2003). Its reach goes far beyond the world of music and the United States, a country where it developed from the beginning of the 20th century (Levine 1997; Nicholson 2005, Whyton 2012). In fact, it has been the target of the most varied representations not only of sound but also in the fields of cinema, photography, literature, language, clothing, and graphic art, among many others. In Portugal and abroad, it is a fundamental prism in the search for new interpretations of the past, the present and the future (Pinheiro 2011, 2015, 2023; DeVeaux 1991; Berliner 1994; Monson 1996).

In Portugal, in the last decade and a half, there has been a quick proliferation of higher education programs, schools, festivals, concerts, jam sessions, publications, phonographic editions, websites, blogs, and even jazz radio programs. It is, therefore, essential to study how jazz has accompanied the transformations in our country and the world in many ways since it operates not only as a reflection of the societies in which it occurs but also as an agent actively involved in its transformation (Pinheiro 2015).

The hybrid and dialogical nature of jazz, easily adaptable to the most varied aesthetic, social and cultural contexts, has served as a privileged model for contemporary culture, being one of the main examples of the cross-cultural dialogue and disciplinary interaction that globalized society requires today (Reimann 2013; Pinheiro 2012; Jackson 1998, Nicholson 2005). It is then essential to develop the interdisciplinary study of jazz in Portugal and abroad as a consequence of its process of dissemination and globalization. Jazz research and its expressions presuppose contact with a whole range of materials and speeches, namely performative, historical, theoretical, musical, pedagogical, literary, discographic and bibliographical.

With the aim of deepening the discussion around artistic research and possible research outputs, a concern that culminated in Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa's research project *Performance and Context*^[1] and the latter book *Música Performance e Contexto: Criação e Investigação Científica* (2024), this project's main objective is to examine jazz in its theoretical, performative, pedagogical, social, and historical aspects, in the light of the current musicological and performative paradigms. These strands are not hermetically closed. Quite the opposite. As they are strictly linked, the objective will be to carry out multidisciplinary research and comprehensive investigation within the universe of Jazz Studies. For this purpose, this project started in 2020 with the contribution of Portuguese and foreign researchers, musicians and pedagogues. It promoted the establishment of partnerships with national and international institutions related to jazz.

Aims and Outcomes

Besides presenting new outputs, this research project aims to study jazz from broad and multidisciplinary approaches, using as a fundamental component the combination of the knowledge and skills of national and international researchers, pedagogues, musicians and students (associated with different study cycles).

The development of the project involved the organization and audio/video recording of a set of artistic, scientific and pedagogical activities in the field of jazz studies, namely:

- Masterclasses / Workshops on Jazz Performance and Improvisation;
- Conferences / Lectures on Jazz Studies;
- Concerts / Recitals / Performances with foreign and national artists and educators;
- Host an exhibition on the history of the Festival Cascais Jazz;
- Publish the recorded materials on the CESEM^[2] / IPL-ESML research site;
- Present the results at the International Association of Schools of Jazz Meeting in July 2020 [event postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic].

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[sobre o projecto](#) | [about this project](#)

Figure 1: Frontpage of the project “Jazz Studies: interpretation, theory and education” project

On the website built to host the project's outputs^[3], one can find works by researchers, educators, and musicians such as Beatriz Nunes, Alberto Roque, Vasco Pimentel, Eric Ineke, Felipe Sales, Sara Serpa and Benny Lackner.

Beatriz Nunes investigates the impact of gender on the pedagogical dynamics of jazz to understand how gender is an important element in students' experiences of confidence and anxiety in relation to learning jazz improvisation. The research is based on the model proposed by Erin Wehr-Flowers in “Differences between Male and Female Students' confidence, anxiety and attitude toward learning jazz improvisation” (2006). Ninety-six self-completion

questionnaires were carried out in three middle schools in Portugal by 48 jazz students, 32 male and 16 female. The results show that female students tend to identify more with experiences of low self-efficacy, greater anxiety and less confidence in relation to learning jazz improvisation. In order to understand these results, the project suggests a critical view of gender and jazz through the contextualization of historical narratives and pedagogical practices.

Alberto Roque, taking as a starting point the work *Think of Jazz* by Jesus Santandreu, performed by the Wind Orchestra of the Lisbon School of Music in its thematic program Jazzy Winds IV, demonstrates the importance of rhythmic relationships in the work and how they can be approached from the conductor's performative perspective. The author presents brief reflections on the problems associated with the performance of jazz language by classical musicians and addresses interpretative issues as a challenge for the conductor in a close relationship with the score of a work.

Vasco Pimentel approaches the concept of rhythmic illusion as applied to composition and improvisation in the context of jazz and improvised music. In general terms, Pimentel defines rhythmic illusion as the false perception of the pulse, metric, tempo or any other rhythmic component of a piece by the listener. This research is divided into two parts: a brief framing of the concept of rhythmic illusion, a detailed analysis of 3 compositions created for this project, and the applicability of rhythmic illusion mechanisms contained therein. The research process included analyzing literature on rhythm in music and the history of jazz, as well as listening to jazz records in which the concept of rhythmic illusion is developed. As a result of the research, original compositions for piano, double bass and drums have emerged, through which Pimentel explored new rhythmic approaches, not only in a compositional context but also in performance and improvisation situations.

Eric Ineke conducted a conference at Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa on November 5th, 2019, in which he discussed and shared material on the impact of drummer Mel Lewis (1929-1990) in the context of the history of jazz. According to Prof. Ineke: "his contribution to the music was the fact that he was able to create a small combo feel within the context of a big band. There was always interaction between the soloists and the rhythm section, like a small combo, which was not common before in big bands like Count Basie, Woody Herman and Duke Ellington."

Felipe Sales adapts traditional Brazilian folk melodies as the springboard to composing original music for large jazz ensemble. The original lullaby melody from Brazilian folk repertoire is the unifying element that brings the development of *Lullaby #4* and its form together, from the first introduction of a fragment to the climax, where it is finally played in its entirety. This project analyzes some of the compositional elements that were used in this piece, such as modal harmonies, pan-diatonic voicing textures, polychords, polyrhythmic structures, metric modulations, jazz, pop, and Latin rhythmic influences, as well as odd meter treatments of traditional rhythms, cross-sectional and layered orchestrations, while also discussing featuring two improvised solos by members of the ensemble. The different elements of *Lullaby #4* are analyzed as they happen in real-time in order to match the video performance and illustrate the piece's organic development. Specific performance and conducting elements are also addressed as part of the overall performance outcome, and also as influencers of that outcome.

Sara Serpa (voice), Ingrid Laubrock (saxophone) and Erik Friedlander (cello) conducted a masterclass at Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa on October 17th, 2019, and discussed the creative process behind the performance of voice, cello and saxophone trio. The masterclass focused on playing a selection of original compositions with an emphasis on developing musical interaction. The three musicians also discussed the sources of inspiration that frame the trio's compositional and improvisational processes.

Pianist Benny Lackner conducted a workshop at Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa on October 24th, 2019, in which he discussed and applied the concepts of composition, solo development, rhythmic clarity, polyrhythms, harmonic approaches, melodic lines, influences, interaction, and listening in the context of improvisation. The workshop focused on playing a selection of original songs and standards with an emphasis on developing improvisational skills using polyrhythmic ideas and harmonic and melodic approaches that Lackner has worked on. Listening to other musicians and finding the balance between giving others enough room and having a strong presence without being overbearing was also one of the main topics of the workshop. Benny Lackner also discussed his influences and showed a few examples of what inspired him to write certain compositions.

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^[1] <https://perf.esml.ipl.pt>

^[2] Centro de Estudos de Sociologia e Estética Musical, Pólo do IPL (Centre for the Study of Sociology and Musical Aesthetics, IPL Branch) - <https://research.esml.ipl.pt>

^[3] <https://research.esml.ipl.pt/projectos/ejazzite>