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DEFINITORY CHARACTERISTICS OF PIANISTIC EXPRESSION IN THE CONTEMPORARY JAZZ

FLORIN BĂLAN¹

SUMMARY. The general fundamental approach of improvisation, of the creative moment in jazz leads succinctly to the question of whether this phenomenon is a product or a process. The jazz perception as a product assumes that the recordings accompanied by the related transcripts represent that product (final) which is used for analytical purposes by taking harmonical-melodical characteristics. It is important to remember the aspect by which these transcripts do not fully express the essence of improvised thinking and elaboration but are only a starting point in identifying key characteristic features. The possibility of representing a replica of the artistic act produced on stage, however, is not a real one. Visualizing the improvisation process as a practical way of creative performance is therefore an essential aspect of the artistic act. This should be considered together with the product, especially when synthesizing models or indicators that define the personal style of the instrumentalist. Previously, some iazz critics defined the vision of the two modes as an inseparable dichotomy. which is the basis of multi-dimensional analytical possibilities. Beginning in the '60s, jazz is marked in the expression and elaboration of pianistics by Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Bill Evans and later by Keith Jarrett. They implement a variety of contemporary jazz elements, melodical-harmonic expressions that will be taken over and will obviously lead to a new evolutionary stage.

Keywords: jazz, pianistic improvisation, spontaneity, creativity, harmonic knowledge, contemporary

1. The influence of Herbie Hancock

The usual harmonic bonding II-V, or II-V-I in jazz, has been repeatedly analyzed. Pianist Herbie Hancock (E.g. 1), however, elaborates this procedure using agreements with added sounds, distribution up to 13th, harmonic making



¹ Transilvania University of Brasov (Faculty of Music), E-mail: florin.balan@unitbv.ro

use of transient agreements on adjacent steps and tritonic substitutions in measure 2. In measure 3, the reduced B flat agreement containing additional high 7th degree (note A natural) and 9th degree (note C) has a strong impact creating harmonic tension, with immediate resolution to tonic (although connoted in context as B flat 6/9), with classical, stable structure, 1st fundamental, 3rd and 5th degree, again with added sounds.

In the related improvisatorical expression (measure 3) there are outlined elements of the diminished scale, built successively upward on the ton-semitone pattern (B flat, C, D flat, E flat, F flat, G flat, A flat).

E.g. 1



Herbie Hancock II-V-I workout cycle

The same process we encounter during the improvisation moment (E.g. 2) of Michel Petrucciani in the song Home² minutes 6.57 (G# diminished) and 7.24 (C# diminished), respectively, the structure of the steps in improvisation in accordance with the harmonic support.

E.g. 2



Improvisatoric harmonic similarity in the expression of Michel Petrucciani

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvluuKVwY 8 accesat la data de 25.08.2020.

1.1 Treating the melodic minor by Herbie Hancock

A new element due to the ingenuity of Herbie Hancock (E.g. 3) is the treatment of the minor melodic scale as improvisatory support in different harmonic contexts. In the example in the first two measures, two melodic minor scales are found, which are the foundation of improvised lines, harmonically supported by tensioned structures (D minor11/5 flat, or G altered).

For the first chord agreement, the locrian mode is used starting from tonic, note D (D, E, F, G, A flat, B flat, C), and, nothing other than the same melodic F minor in another structural expression, and for the altered ground G alt. (G, B flat, C flat, E flat) followed immediately by the substitution of the fundamental by 7th degree (septime) so F, B flat, C flat, E flat), the appearance of the A flat melodic minor scale (in the expression of G, A flat, B flat, C flat, D flat, E natural, F natural, G) representing the above mentioned range in succession starting from the note G, therefore the 7th degree of the range.

E.g. 3



Turnarround II-V (alterated) - I, on melodic minor scale

In measures 54 and 55 of the improvisation on the *Brazilian Like* track (E.g. 4), Michel Petrucciani builds the melodic line (identical) against the background of the melodic minor and the bebop-style patterns 7 and 8.

E.g. 4



Brazilian Like improvizatoric line

2. The influence of Chick Corea

The famous Chick Corea, in turn, brings into his creation new elements such as pentatonic interpretation, in ascending, descending progression, preserving the harmonic (static) structure. In example no. 5 there is the pentatonic f major scale (F, G, A, C, D), harmonically supported by agreements with added sounds (2nd, 6th,9th degree), and, with specific voice distributions structured on quarts and seconds, which contribute to increasing tension and tonal widening of the improvised frame. Also relevant is the modal, lidian improvisatory tentation, due to the consecutive appearance of the A natural, the increased quart of the agreement on the 1st degree of the scale.

E.g. 5



New harmonic and melodic elements in the improvised context

Michel Petrucciani during playing the Jean Philippe Herbien (E.g. 6), in the second improvisation cycle, exploits pentatonic scales in a combined form with the blues style tinge, thus with the 3th degree, the 4th and the and VIIth degree (depending on the tonal center), mobile configuration.



Derived form of pentatonia

2.1 Chick Corea and the semitone chromatization

Another interpretative process, typical of Chick Corea (E.g. 7), taken over by jazz instrumentalists, consists of double transitive chromatization at semitone, both melodic line and harmonic background (side-slipping riff)³. A bitonality that still preserves, paradoxically, the tonic.

For this procedure, modal (lower structure), elliptical of 3th and 5th degree agreements, elaborated from overlapping quarts, are used, agreements which take over the harmonic structural completion of the right hand (upper structure) (to be remembered here the song So What, the jazz masterpiece of the great trumpet player and composer Miles Davis).

E.g. 7



Ascending chromatization on the next step with return to tonic

³ Liebman David, *A Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody*, Advanced Music, Schott Music GmbH&Co.Mainz, 1991, pp. 35-37.

FI ORIN BĂI AN

Oscar Peterson in the introduction of Perdido (E.g. 8) uses the mentioned procedure, in double descending chromatic motion (E-E flat and E flat-D), with intermediate agreement in authentic relationship (D minor 7 to G 7/9 flat). The latter is considered as a transient tonal center (contrary to the tonality stipulated at the beginning of the work), subsequently the immediate exposure of the theme having as a major tonal center the scale of B flat.

The desired effect, achieved by melodic-chromatic coloring, gives that moment of suspense, followed by that immediate relaxation, by direct return or intermediate steps (chords), to the initial tonal center.

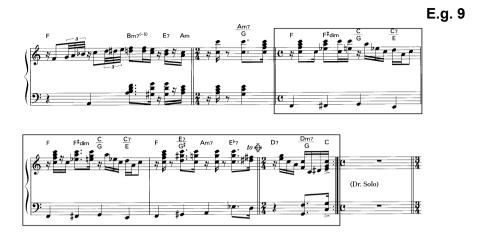
E.g. 8

PERDIDO By Juan Tizol



Improvisatory construction, chromatic structuring

Michel Camilo (Dominican Republic), another virtuoso contemporary instrumentalist, in the solo of Caravan (E.g. 9) develops the chromatic cycle by using 4 consecutive trisons (F, Fa# diminished C as 6/4 distribution and Do7 as 6 distribution), with tritonic substitution at the end (A minor7 to E flat 7).



Extended harmonic foundation

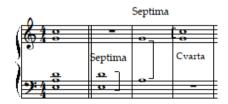
For a broad analytical deepening of the tritonic structure of the left hand, encountered in the harmonic (and implicitly rhythmic) structuring of contemporary jazz, a concise clarification of the general notion is required.

The chords by the sound material of which they are composed can be diatonic or chromatic. Also, after the auditory sensation of "understanding" or "misunderstanding" that it creates can be consonant or dissonant.

Harmonic evolution has led to the creation of new agreements, which are not based on the principle of overlapping of 3ths, but by overlaps of 4ths, 5ths, or even 2ths,7ths and 9ths. In modern harmony, new chords structures arise from enrichment with musical scales (tonality, modes), different from traditional ones.

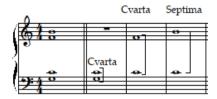
Analyzing their structure, the constructive ways of contemporary jazz harmonic expression for most previously exemplified pianists, are crystallized (E.g. 9/10) two categories, often used and composed as follows:

E.g. 10 E A D G C.



Small 7th (2) and perfect 4th (stable structure)

GCFB.



Perfect 4th (2) and a large 7th (unstable, slightly dissonant structure)

Michel Petrucciani in the first improvisation cycle of the song Home (E.g. 11) on the Trio disc in Tokyo (starting with minute 4.07), in measures 5-7, implements the procedure, as follows, without returning to the tonic, but with continuous harmonic extension (barking).

E.g. 11



Chromatization derivative possibility

2.2.1 Melodic patterns in progression

Another specific element of the thinking, the inventiveness of Chick Corea⁴, consists in the repetitive implementation of the patterns on the right hand, using different steps as a starting point (E.g. 12). At the interval of the ascending 4th, while the left hand has a contrary, descending, regressive movement.

E.g. 12



Progressive improvisatorical riff

184

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp.67-69.

Michel Petrucciani, in the solo of Looking Up, (E.g. 13/14) builds the improvisation line, through melodic patterns in descending, ascending progression, having different tonal fundamentals.



Improvisatory patterns

E.g. 14

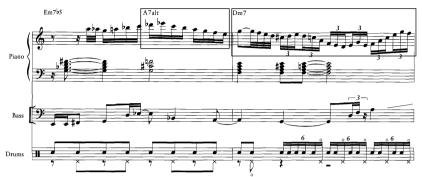


Successive pentatonic improvisation

Consecrated pianist Bill Evans⁵, in the solo of the song Alfie, by Burt Bacharach, implements the elements encountered in the expression of Chick Corea (of course, as in most of the other instrumentalists mentioned above), with a small addition, or an evolved, expanded form. Following the overall score (E.g. 15), it is found that the harmonic foundation, through the altered agreements (A), especially the bass line (through the related constitutive harmonic elements) in its turn in a continuous movement, and the use of other steps instead of tonics on hard times, all this gives an extended improvisatory tonal ambience, that dynamic, progressive, but still stable sound.

⁵ Long Jack, *Bill Evans's Essential New Folio Jazz Piano*, Wise Publications, London, New York, Sydney, Copenhagen, Paris, 1996, p. 4.

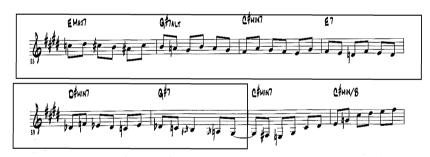
E.g. 15



Patterns with harmonic extension

These inflections are supported for emphasis by rhythmic coloring, the implementation of exceptional subdivisions of sextuplets, being cataloged as hemiola (ternary division in a binary rhythm/meter). Michel Petrucciani, in the solo of the song Rachid, (E.g. 16) recorded on the CD Conference de Presse, in measures 15-19, highlights this modern jazz rhetorical modality.

E.g. 16



Improvisatory patterns

2.3 Pentatonic scale in improvisatory organization

Another specific element, treated by Chick Corea⁶, is to combine the use of the pentatonic scale, consistent with the tritonic substitution, or supported by another harmonic support, compared to the base range.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 89-91.

In example 17 apart from the progression II-V-I, the tritonic substitution between the two hands is observed in measures 3 and 4 by improvisation on the pentatonic E flat scale, with harmonic support of the A chord (alterated). Thus, we encounter atypical elements such as the small third (note C natural), the small 5th (note E flat), the small 7th (note natural G), enlarged 9th (in enharmonic expression note B flat) or small 13th (note F natural). In measure 5, a new improvisation moment appears with the structure of the E pentatonic scale, with support on the chord D 6/9/11#.

E.g. 17



Combination of tritonic substitution with pentatonia

In the solo of his own song Looking Up (E.g. 18), Michel Petrucciani prepares in advance that moment of tritonic substitution (G#7/D7) by simple, preparatory application of successive pentatonic, by semitone harmonization, with return (G#7-A7-G#7).

E.g. 18



Improvisatory gradation, pentathons, substitution pentathons

2.4 Patterns consisting of steps (reductions) of the scale reduced in progression

From the arsenal of Chick Corea's ingenuity, we must also mention the repetitive patterns, structured on the narrowed range, successively resumed in progression, at fixed distances (intervals). In example 19, there are these patterns of the B flat diminished scale, resumed (enharmonic) in small 3ths descendants (C, A, G flat, E flat), both to the right as well as on the left hand (fundamental G, E, D flat), representation by modal chords, consisting of overlapping 4ths, or bipolar chords.



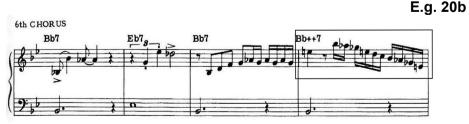
Modal patterns in downward motion

Analyzing Thelonius Monk's improvisation (E.g. 20a) in the play Ba-lue Bolivar Ba-Lues-Are (E.g. 20b), at the end of 5th cycle and the beginning of the 6th, we encounter another element, close to the structuring of the reduced scale (range pentatonic), namely the scale formed successively, only from tones (whole-ton scales).



BA-LUE (Monk Book)

Structure of the scale consisting only of tones



Structure of the range consisting only of tones

The same procedure we met at pianist Oscar Peterson (E.g. 21) in the solo of Round Midnight, at the beginning of the 2nd improvisation cycle, by expressing the structure of the range consisting only of large 2ths, starting from the C note, sustained harmonically tensioned, through the E pentachord with the diminished 5th, small 7th (note D) and added note, the 6th (note C), chord notated as E7/6/5 flat.

E.g. 21



Whole-ton expression with dense harmonic configuration

2.5 Pentatonic reductions of the diminished scale

After elaborating the consolidated patterns on the reduced range elements, in the next step of the synthesis, new reductions or pentatonics of the range are reached. These specific elements often applied in the musical expression of Chick Corea, create a broad, unmistakable personal sound, which leads to a creative musical consolidation of the great instrumentalist, the, unanimously recognized and accepted by the interpreters of keyboard instruments (and not only).

In example 22, it is interesting to analyze the dynamism, created by the opposite movement of the two hands: the left hand in downward motion of the chordal structure in 3ths intervals, while the right hand, the, it highlights ascending pentatonic structures, successive ones, (marked by accolade), on the notes A flat, B, D, then, again, the note A flat at the upper octave.



The pentatonic from the diminished scale

Michel Petrucciani⁷, in the solo of the song Rachid, (E.g. 23) recorded on the CD Conference de Presse, in measures 25-29, highlights this modern jazz rhetorical modality.

E.g. 23



Contemporary improvisatory expression

3. Keith Jarett cadences, passages

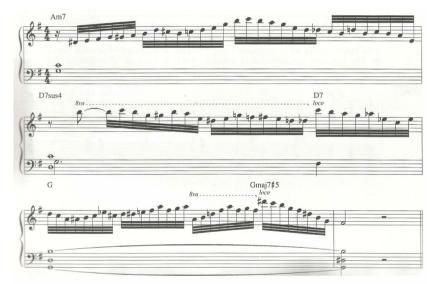
Most of the cadences highlighted in the expression of another pianist, which in turn influenced contemporary jazz expression, namely Keith Jarett, are synthesized from the context and explosive improvisational spontaneity of the bebop style instrumentalists.

⁷ Armand Reynaud and Jeremy Brunn, *Michel Petrucciani The Book-Transcriptions*, Edition Henry Lemoine HL, Beaumarchais Paris, 2008, p. 67.

It is worth noting that in the cadential expression, at the end of each measure, a return is outlined, for a consolidation of harmonic support, after which an interpretative variety is used, made up of added sounds and moving steps, necessary to achieve a melodic-stylistic coloring.

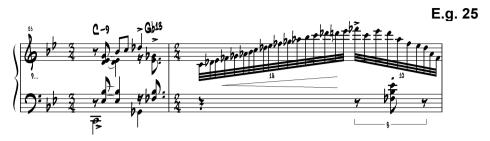
Example 24 of the song Meaning of the Blues, highlights these peculiarities, so at the end of measure 1 (time 4), there is a consolidation of the harmonic support to A minor 7, in addition, to the 2nd bar, a politony is observed at the end, so a return rendered by tritonic substitution (the dominant triad of the 5th degree in authentic relationship, G sus4/Dminor 7 and arpeggio at increased 4th interval, A flat E flat,C,E flat), and at the end of measure 3 a cadential expression of the G 7#/5# chord.

E.g. 24



Cadential variety, contemporary improvisatory language

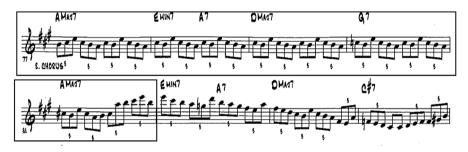
This process of melodic cadence, which implies a high degree of virtuosity, is also encountered in the improvisational expression of Oscar Peterson, in the 1973 Chicago Blues song The Trio. In example 25, an ascending cadence of the C diminished scale is observed, framed in a tonal ambitus of two and a half octaves (C1/ F flat 3), and, supported by a bipolar modal agreement, the F flat/ E flat notes, representing enharmonic the 6th degree (the 7th degree alterated at descendant half step), respective the 13th (or 6th degree over) of the G flat 13 chord.



Passage of improvisatory virtuosity

Michel Petrucciani, in his turn, elaborates in the song Looking Up (E.g. 26), a manner of his own, which is important to the large-scale cadences, namely those static virtuosity patterns, the variable elements being here, only successive harmonic chains. Thus, a slightly adjusted ostinati figure is born, harmonically supported on different degrees within the mother tonality (Ist, 5th, 4th, 7th natural, 3th).

E.g. 26



Stylistic way of expression contrary to cadence

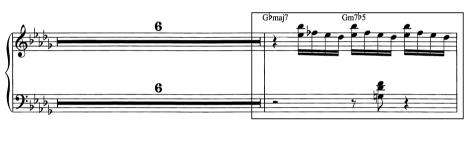
Paradoxically, however, these ostinati formulas are also found in Oscar Peterson's interpretation, which denotes that the new elements in general, they are immediately taken over and implemented in the baggage of knowledge, of the improvised expression modalities. The solo of It's On, outlines this aspect by examples 27a, harmonic support rendered by V-I progressions (A flat minor 7/D flat7), followed by tritonic substitution (D flat7/ G minor 7/5-) and in example 27b, with chromatization support and semitone return, the same procedure previously mentioned by side-stepping (G flat maj 7, G diminished—G flat minor 6), solved to double dominant C minor 7, to F 7/9-, and finally (possibly) to B flat minor.

E.g. 27a



Repetitive formulas, amplification of the musical discourse cumulation, harmonic hypostases

E.g. 27b





Repetitive formulas that amplify the cumulation of the musical discourse, harmonic hypostases

4.Bill Evans interpretive stylistics

Many American jazz critics consider Bill Evans⁸ to be a promoter of the practical instrumentalist of the 'piano-bar" style. The interpretive manner structured less by the rhythmic pulsation, mainly the harmonic and improvisatory

⁸ Reilly Jack, *The Harmony of Bill Evans*, Unchrom Ltd., Brooklyn, N.Y., 1992, p.3.

aspect being those that are exposed to the superlative. A refined, special, and calm thought of artistic expression, rich in elements and harmonic chains, surprise", non-usual, which denotes the moment of exceptional spontaneous creativity. The accuracy and ease of natural use of reharmonization procedures of a work reveals the innovative spirit of the performer, which is why the vast majority of his repertoire consists of jazz standards and not the modern repertoire. His influence, his contributions regarding the evolution of jazz are of particular relevance, a fairly high percentage of the elements of the interpretative expression of the current generation being due to his vision and pianistic expression.

The fact is that we must forget about the critics because jazz is essentially a harmonic, melodic and spontaneous rhythmic creation, with Bill Evans being an elite representative of the phenomenon.

Harmonic genius and phrasing, adept at the romantic-impressionist mixes of the tune, pianist Bill Evans recognizes the improvisational potential in Debussy's work. It is distinguished by the finesse of the touch, formed in the study of academic music, warm, cantabile, refined tone. In contrast to Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans treats improvisation as a color element, which is why his piano style is more delicate, non-percussive, with jazz legato.

Bill Evans is primarily an innovator of the harmonic concept in jazz and a perfect improviser in that he enriches the harmonic jazz structure using intense polychords, specific elements inspired by the stylistics of musical impressionism.

Alongside Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, McCoy Tyner, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Bill Evans is one of the leading modern pianists.

Bill Evans is like the previously mentioned bebop practitioners, an analytical, deeply intellectualized nature, which gently highlights the importance of musical thinking, stating in interviews that: "if you try to teach jazz, a, you will have to extract those principles from music that are not related to style, and this is extremely difficult: If you execute several structures at the same time, you will have to, your whole approach will be undefined. You will not know what to keep and what to take away! Know exactly what you are doing and why you are interpreting more economically, but with a clearer vision. It's much better to spend 30 hours on one theme than to interpret 30 themes in one hour.

Bill Evans is an integral master of improvisation and in the manner of plated agreements, who approaches, like Bud Powell, this advanced manner of spontaneous musical construction. The multitude of unprecedented subtleties of chromatic harmony, elaborated in a poetic manner, accredits the "romantic expression of the avant-garde" attributed to its interpretative style.

Example 28 of the final solo for Waltz for Debbie⁹ reflects the complex harmonic improvisatory style practiced by Bill Evans:

E.g. 28





Improvisatory structuring through the use of plated agreements

Final conclusion

Contemporary jazz can be considered the value equivalent of great contemporary music, which is often reflected in sometimes bizarre experiments, little or almost not at all agreed by the general public. As regards everyday musical life and concerted possibilities, it must finally be acknowledged that, despite the undeniable value of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or Ludwig van Beethoven, he said, it also requires a contemporary reporting, dictated by (a part of) the public today.

Unlike classical music, in which the performer is strictly related to the score, not being able to modify, or implement new elements in the writing dating back several hundred years, when it comes to jazz, the performer enjoys the freedom of creative expression, the material being processed not having the obligation of an exclusively jazz origin, but it can be borrowed from a pop music hit, it can be a classic theme or even a folk inspiration.

⁹ Long Jack, Bill Evans, The essential new folio reflects the unique talent of an innovative and extraordinary gifted musician, fourteen classics edited &transcribed by Jack Long Jazz Piano, Wise Publication, London, New York, Sydney, Copenhagen, Madrid, 1996, p. 54.

FI ORIN BĂI AN

The theory, the belief by which European western music, by diversity, by harmonic and melodic coloration would be superior to universal music (in general), it could work at the time of exclusion from the discussion of the jazz phenomenon.

The styles, evolution, development and forms that jazz has clothed over the years are the essential elements of analysis, discussion, of the musical phenomenon. References, only strictly musical (abstaining from historical, philosophical, social, or religious aspects), give a completely new, clear, and clear picture, undoubtedly, this element of creation and spontaneity which is also found in the universal musical creation.

Treating improvisation/composition in general, as a musical work of art due to a professional instrumentalist/composer, (un)fixed, in most cases, especially in the sphere of European musical culture, by writing, notation is defining.

Improvisation is the result of a complex process of corroborating some psychic elements (intuition, inspiration), of musical sensitivity (talent), with technical artisanal data provided by the art and science of music, such as melodic inventiveness, rhythmic, harmony, counterpoint, leadership and distribution of voices, dynamics, form, instrumentation, orchestration.

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