

**A Jazz-centered Transcultural Approach to Improvisational Studies:  
An Overview for Music Educators at the Middle School, High School, and University  
Levels**

by

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation work in memory of my late mother, Betty Gill, and my late grandmother, Dorothy Collins, and to my father, Kenneth O. Gill, second mother, Pauline, siblings: Dale, Tennille, and Brett, and most importantly, my wife, Leslie T. H. Gill. Their undying love and constant support are why I have been steadfast in pursuing and attaining the highest pinnacle in my education.

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## **Abstract**

The intent of this treatise is to provide an overview of tools, musical concepts, scales, tonalities, pedagogical perspectives and/or schools of thought that can be used to develop improvisation skills through a transcultural lens by way of: American jazz, music of the African diaspora, the European figured bass system, and Northern Indian classical music. Ideally, secondary students, music education majors, jazz studies majors, and orchestral students in college and universities will be better equipped with tools for improvisation by utilizing a transcultural framework. Furthermore, community music schools and private lesson instructors could be inspired to implement different improvisation techniques into their daily pedagogical routines through the information and sources cited. The main obstacle may be the long-standing traditions of the academy that continue to trickle down to the secondary (i.e., middle school and high school) band, orchestral, vocal, and kindergarten through fifth grade general music classrooms. Pushback and resistance are almost certain as American music education has been and is centered in the European musical and theoretical constructs. Even so, with the following questions in mind, I will explore the necessary concepts that I believe will help achieve a contemporary music education paradigm. What are the historical and theoretical frameworks of these four epistemologies? How can these concepts be implemented to improve and overhaul the current music education model? What are the ramifications of implementing this updated improvisational frontier in music education? How will it create a more culturally rich musical environment in K-12 music classrooms and beyond? Who are some of the prominent



improvisation pedagogues and what are the leading schools of thought in the field? Through research and the implementation of these concepts in academic settings, it has been determined that diverse epistemologies do indeed create a more culturally rich music environment within kindergarten through twelfth grade classrooms and the academy. At this treatise's conclusion, the reader will have a broader understanding of improvisation from a transcultural perspective. In this documental overview, the overall distribution of the research presented will not be an equal twenty-five percentage for each of the four culture's improvisational frameworks, but a comparable extent; jazz will be at the center and the foundational lens through which I ultimately traverse.

## **Chapter 1 The Epistemological Approaches of Musical Improvisation: A Transcultural Perspective**

Before we delve into some of the different epistemological approaches within improvised music and how they can be incorporated to inform an overview for music educators at the middle and high school levels, as well as college and university level, we must first identify the constructs that will be discussed in this treatise. The blues, pentatonic, and diatonic improvisatory foundations will be first as they are the foundational center of the Black American musical paradigm. Black American music, including genres beginning with field hollers, work songs, and blues, to present-day hip-hop, trap music, and pop music is saturated with elements of improvisation. The intersectionality of these art forms is created through the creolization of cultures that has and is taking effect in the Americas; new frontiers in improvisation and composition are constantly being created through the exploration and intersecting of these several musical constructs and beyond. Nevertheless, this section of the paper will focus solely on pedagogical tools and concepts that can be used to teach and understand the improvisational frameworks of blues and jazz. It will include supporting elements of European theoretical concepts and notation necessary for coherence. I will provide numerous examples of scales, tonalities, chords, and harmonic structures as they can be beneficial in secondary education and the academy. Even more, I will include some of my own contemplations and positions of why these tools are necessary from a didactic, spiritual, and conscious-based outlook.

The second improvisational frontier will be that of the African diaspora. The study of the entire continent is challenging due to the vast number of cultural identities and varied approaches

to instrumental construction, music, and improvisation. For these reasons, I will provide a brief overview of instrument families and specific instruments invented and constructed by enslaved African people brought to the Americas: the tambourine, banjo, and drums. These instruments have played a significant role in the progression of Black American music. I will make necessary connections of how these can and should be used to enhance curriculums throughout secondary music education and beyond.

The European music as it relates to the improvisational paradigm known as figured/thorough bass will be explored as European musical practices and have long been the standard for music education at the elementary, middle, high school, as well as college and university levels. This musical paradigm translates easiest and is most relatable to the infrastructure of music education in the United States; formal training generally begins with the study and exploration of music from the Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Impressionistic periods. Although improvisation seems to have become an afterthought in European musical training, I believe that the benefits of exploring how the reimplementation of improvisational structures into performance-based studies could help bring forth a new type of music school, perhaps the music school of the future. Specifically, it is important to ascertain how the figured bass, also known as the thoroughbass practice, was used during the Baroque period. This could provide a foundation for the reimplementation of this practice within European music studies, while providing context to how it may have contributed to and intersects with American jazz improvisational practices and other cultural forms. Understanding how composers like: Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel used these techniques and chords symbols through Roman numerals to convey a framework for improvisation will help

us further understand how to translate and propose a method of implementation and a path forward for improvisational studies in this musical overview.

Lastly, I will explore Northern Indian classical music, a Hindustani traditional framework that I have found to be unique yet in some ways parallel to that of the American jazz tradition. Hindustani music is heavily improvisation-based using the systems of raga (i.e., melody) and tala (i.e., the rhythm or rhythm cycle). I will discuss its instrumentation, meter, and improvisational structure. This will allow a context that provides a path forward to how it can be beneficial if implemented in music classrooms, specifically focusing on the improvisation aspects.

Each of the four improvisational epistemologies that I have set forth can be combined to introduce an intersecting approach to improvisation-based pedagogy and studies. This transcultural approach can facilitate the establishment of a new standard in music education. The purpose of restructuring music education curriculums is not to discard the old, yet bring a fresh perspective to classrooms, community music schools, and the academy. This type of improvisation-centered music curriculum is useful in sustaining an ever-changing musical landscape where diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the center. However, the curriculum is not dependent on the longevity of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. While exploring improvisation through American jazz, portions of African music, European figured bass, and Northern Indian classical music, I will keep the following questions in mind: What are the historical and theoretical frameworks of these four epistemologies? How can these concepts be implemented to improve and overhaul the current music education model? What are the ramifications of implementing this updated improvisational frontier in music education? How will it create a more culturally rich musical environment in secondary music classrooms and beyond? Who are some of the leading improvisation pedagogues and schools of thought in each

field? With these questions in mind, I will work to figure out how a transculturally imparted improvisation-centered music curriculum can be realized.

### **1.1. Scales and Tonality as an Improvisatory Foundation and Their Use in the Classroom**

The history and styles of Black American music are vast and continuing to evolve into different forms of musical expressions. They are all interwoven because their basic forms and structures are all derived from the blues.<sup>1</sup> Preceding the blues in an American historical context (i.e., before the Emancipation Proclamation), are the field hollers, work songs, and shouts used by enslaved Black people of the Americas. There can be little doubt these song forms informed the early music of New Orleans, the blues of the Mississippi Delta, as well as present-day styles of Black American music. Even more, I would be remiss if I did not mention the effect that creolization has had in the Americas; African, European, and Native American cultures became intertwined and birthed the American musical traditions that we still practice today. Even so, the blues tradition is a Black American experience channeled through music but is enjoyed and performed by many. Traces of the blues can be found in most all Black America music: jazz, gospel, country, rock & roll, rhythm & blues, funk, hip-hop, house, techno, trap, etc. Blues is integral to any of these styles of music because it adds a spiritual aspect to any music that it intersects with. In most any improvisation-based music, we must understand that it is not merely a form or music scale, but a way of expressing oneself emotionally through music. Depending on the practitioner, the blues can be virtuosic and/or soulful, but is most always improvisatory. Humanity is made whole in the blues and through that lens it tells a story. For this reason, Black

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<sup>1</sup> Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999),

American musical art forms and those of the diaspora are generally rooted in feel and emotion. Conversely, this does not exclude the facet of intellectualism and conscious-based acumen that a practitioner must acquire to execute quality musicianship. Much like European classical music, blues has become art music, especially within jazz and other contemporary musical styles.

The blues can be present in the compositional framework of a piece through the utilization of its minor pentatonic and blues tonal sound which helps to accentuate the spiritual effect within the melodic and harmonic structures. Students learning to navigate and improvise within a blues syntax is an essential step to understanding and connecting with the historic and foundational component of improvisation within a jazz context. In a school setting, students can learn how to guide the listeners ear using basic improvised lines, phrases, and the use of space; how to paint a picture or convey moods of exultant, despondent, constant, relaxed, etc. can be developed in learners. However, they need tools that can help them realize these aspects of improvisatory tradition and learning the necessary scales will help with this. A visual example of a minor pentatonic and blues scale (i.e., a necessary tool) in notated form can be seen below.

Figure 1.1 Example of the C minor pentatonic scale ascending and descending (i.e., scale degrees 1, b3, 4, 5, b7, octave, octave repeated, b7, 5, 4, b3, 1).



Figure 1.2 Example of the C blues scale ascending and descending (i.e., scale degrees 1, b3, 4, #4, 5, b7, octave, octave repeated, b7, 5, 4, b3, 1).



My perspective and feelings about the blues go back into my childhood. In middle and high school, I began my journey into the exploration of improvisation. Nothing groundbreaking was happening then, but the foundation was being laid. By that time, my father had introduced me to recordings of the Jazz Crusaders, I was experimenting with various sounds on my trombone, and I was obtaining advice here and there from musicians in and around Detroit. I was so intrigued by music, especially with improvisation that listening was the first thing I did before school, and the last thing I did before bed. Going even further back into my childhood, me and my siblings were attending various churches with my grandmother. Absorbing the sounds of those churches at such a young age, although I did not know what it was, imparted an appreciation for a blues feel. I later realized that I was listening to gospel music with heavy blues inflections. The singers seemed to bend a lot of notes, and from what I remember the forms were analogous to that of a sixteen-bar blues. A strong foundation, exposure, and understanding of this mode of music and the spiritual space that it stimulates is critical to grasping a good feel in jazz and any other Black American music for that matter.

From a historical and practitioners' perspective, these written notations of the scales hold little to no value as early blues performers did not read music. However, in today's world of academia, especially in the early stages of learning jazz and contemporary improvisation, these are standard tools. Some pedagogues believe that teaching students how to improvise using the blues scale or minor pentatonic scale is problematic because they become enamored with it as if it is the blues and use it in their improvisation as just a boring ascending and descending scale. Although this may be true in some cases, it can and is an effective way to understand how to utilize important notes like the "blue note" and the flat seventh dominant sound. When paired

with learning 12 bar blues form, 16 bar blues form, blues with no form, and chord arpeggiation—we begin to see students ascertain a solid foundation and creativity within the blues: a vital step into jazz improvisation.

Assuming a student has already learned and comprehends the diatonic major scales, these, like other scales should be learned in all twelve keys. This is important because in improvised music one must be prepared to access and use these tools instantaneously. The visual representation of a major scale which includes solfeggio syllables used for aural skills, pitch recognition, and singing are displayed below.

Figure 1.3 Example of the C major with Solfego syllables (i.e., scale degrees 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, octave, octave repeated, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1).



Using this example as a point of reference, all scales should be practiced ascending and descending around the circle of fifths and in various patterns and intervals (i.e., arpeggios, thirds, fourths, etc.). The objective is to internalize all the possibilities within the major scale so that they become part of one's musical lexicon and a natural way of speaking musically in an improvisational setting.



Figure 1.4 Example of the diatonic modes, including note alterations.



Each of the seven modes above represents a different possibility and they exist within all keys. Each of the seven Ionian scale degrees are the root of another mode. The Ionian scale represents the first scale degree, Dorian the second, Phrygian the third, Lydian the fourth, Mixolydian the fifth, Aeolian the sixth, and Locrian the seventh. For example, modes two (ii) with the addition of a seventh (ii7), five-seven with a lowered seventh (V7), and one (I) with an added seventh (I7) are most useful in jazz improvisation as they represent the most common chord progression in jazz (i.e., ii, V7, I); a minor seventh chord progressing to a dominant seventh chord then resolving to a major seventh chord. This chord progression is the key framework for most jazz standards as it helps guide the ear of the improviser and listener. When these scale modes and arpeggios are applied to any given composition for the purpose of improvisation and a musician plays within each modes structure as they progress, it can be referred to as “playing the changes.” For example, lead sheet symbols are used in place of

Roman numerals chord symbols; (e.g., ii, V7, I) in the key of C major are the same as jazz chord symbols (e.g., D-7, G7, CΔ7).

Figure 1.5 Example of the diatonic lead-sheet symbols and Roman numerals.<sup>2</sup>

Lead-sheet symbols							
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	B°	
C:	I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
Roman numerals (require key designation)							

For the sake of clarity, I should also acknowledge that jazz musicians use various symbols to identify their intensions for various chords. For instance, a major chord consisting of at least three notes from the major scale would be root (scale degree one), third (scale degree three), and fifth (scale degree five). In most cases, a seventh-scale degree is added making a seventh chord. The C major chord is notated as CM, CΔ or Cmaj, but with an added seventh it is CM7, CΔ7 or Cmaj7. In the key of C major the notes are C, E, G, and B. What makes this a major chord is the distance/intervals from C to E, E to G, and G to B. Notes C to E is an interval of a major third (four semitones), notes E to G is an interval distance of a minor third (three semitones), and notes G to B is an interval of a major third (four semitones). This major third, minor third, major third formula is the framework of major seventh chords. The previous symbols and interval/semitones apply to all major scales. In Edward Sarath’s book, *Music Theory Through Improvisation: A New Approach to Musicianship Training*, he points out that

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, Robert. “Music Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Classroom.” Accessed February 22, 2024. <https://musictheory.pugetsound.edu/mt21c/DiatonicChordsInMajor.html>

“Contemporary chord symbols as used in jazz and popular music consist of a letter name followed by the quality of the chord: in the case of major triads, the letter name itself will suffice.”<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, the minor scale functions much like the major scale in that it also has seven scale degrees. The C natural minor chord is notated as Cm, C- or Cmin, but with an added seventh it is Cm7, C-7 or Cmin7. In the key of C minor the notes are C, Eb, G, and Bb. What makes this a minor chord is the distance or intervals from C to Eb, E to G, and G to Bb. Notes C to Eb is an interval of a minor third (three semitones), notes Eb to G is an interval distance of a major third (four semitones), and notes G to Bb is an interval of a minor third (three semitones). It is also important to recognize that there are three forms of the minor scale: natural minor, harmonic minor, and melodic minor. The natural minor is much like the major scale because it is relatively the same as the major scale, hence the term, “relative minor.” For example, the relative minor of C major is A minor, beginning on note A, with the root or starting note a minor third below the note C or major sixth above. Beginning on A, the natural minor scale consists of notes A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and A (octave). Yet, the harmonic minor scale consists of the same notes with a raised seventh scale degree (G#) ascending and descending. While the melodic minor scale has a raised sixth and seventh ascending (F# and G#), descending the sixth and seventh scale degrees are lowered when descending back to their natural state (F and G).

Figure 1.6 Example of the C natural minor scale.



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<sup>3</sup> Edward Sarath, *Music Theory Through Improvisation: A New Approach to musicianship Training* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 90.

Figure 1.7 Example of the C harmonic minor scale.



Figure 1.8 Example of the C melodic minor scale.



Much like the major scale, each of these seven notes represents a different mode and should be internalized as such. They are in the same modes as the major scale but begin with a different root starting point. One of the most important concepts to understand is that there are only seven notes, twelve with the addition of flats (b) and sharps (#), and twelve key signatures. Consequently, once a major scale is paired with its specific number of flats, sharps, or lack thereof and internalized, learning to improvise in each key becomes the same as using the mode formulas in *Figure 1.4: Example of diatonic modes*. The fundamental purpose of scales and chords is to aid understanding of harmonic structures while utilizing that understanding in improvisational practice to construct melodic lines or melodies. In Dr. Hugo Riemann's *Harmony Simplified, or the Theory of the Tonal Functions of Chords* originally published in 1898, he states:<sup>4</sup>

The history of music teaches us that simultaneous melodic progression in several parts was practiced and more and more perfected for centuries before the idea of harmony in the modern sense (chord) was even conceived. Thus *harmony*, in so far as it may be defined as composition in several parts (polyphony), takes root in *melody*.

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<sup>4</sup> Hugo Riemann, *Harmony Simplified, or the Theory of the Tonal Functions of Chords* (Koropi: Alpha Editions, 2019), 1.

Our primary purpose for using these tools is important to remember because the goal is to become knowledgeable of these theoretical frameworks, as well as be able to apply that knowledge in our improvisation. When providing instruction and fostering jazz improvisation or any style of improvisation, the understanding and use of major scales and seventh chords are integral to the development of a solid fundamental foundation for young improvisers. Once the pupil can navigate the basic technical facility of their instrument(s) playing at least some major scales, these improvisational studies can begin to be implemented. Young musicians at the middle and high school levels can benefit from indulging in the exploration of the diatonic modes that stem from the major and minor tonalities.

A close cousin of the major scale is the major pentatonic scale. This scale is a mainstay in Japanese and Chinese music, as well as Northern Indian classical music and is said to have originated in China.<sup>5</sup> The major pentatonic scales consist of five-tones making it different from that of the seven-tone major scale. Major scales consist of 1 (root), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, but the major pentatonic utilizes the 1 (root), 2, 3, 5, and 6. A modern example of this scale can be found in the opening guitar line of the song *My Girl*, co-written by Smokey Robinson and Ronnie White for the Motown group *The Temptations*. That classic major pentatonic line is one of the single most recognizable lines in music history.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Flauta Nativa,” The Origin of the Pentatonic Scala – Part 1, accessed February 23, 2024, <https://www.flautanativa.com/en/a-origem-da-escala-pentatonica-parte-1/>

<sup>6</sup> “Youtube,” My Girl, accessed February 23, 2024, <https://youtu.be/y3KJ7d2qBoA?si=REWU61nFVWNf8EcX>

Figure 1.9 Example of the major pentatonic scale.



Another useful scale is the whole tone scale. This scale consists of six tones, each of which are a whole step apart (i.e., two semitones). This being the case, there are only two whole tones scales as they repeat over and over depending on their initial starting pitch. For example, pitches C, D, E, F#, G#, and A# and C#, D#, F, G, A, and B.

Figure 1.10 Example of the whole tone scale beginning with the note C.



A notable use of this scale in modern music can be found in the song *Superstar* written by Bonnie Bramlett, Jim Doris, and Leon Russell and made famous by Luther Vandross.<sup>7</sup>

Another useful timbre device is the octatonic scale, also known as the diminished scale. This scale is symmetrical because the intervals repeat in patterns. It consists of a whole-half step diminished pattern (i.e., two semitones followed by one semitone) and a half-whole step diminished pattern (i.e., one semitone followed by two semitones) ascending and descending the scale. Subsequently, this suggests only three possible diminished scales using either the whole-half step approach or half-whole step.

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<sup>7</sup> “Youtube,” *Superstar*, Accessed February 23, 2024, <https://youtu.be/1xoQej06OEq?si=ezR4TIWbJ0tBYJ73>

Figure 1.11 Example of the whole-step half-step octatonic scale, also known as the diminished scale.



Figure 1.12 Example of the half-step whole-step octatonic scale, also known as the diminished scale.



Another critical scale no matter the style of music, is the chromatic scale. It encompasses all notes or pitches possible and can be applied liberally in jazz improvisation, and any other form of music for that matter. It is particularly effective when used as an approach in improvisational practice and composition; both technically one in the same.

Figure 1.13 Example of the chromatic scale.



The bebop dominant scale is important because it lends itself to dominant seventh chords and minor two chords progressing to five seventh chords, especially when played a fourth above the chords root while descending. For instance, an F bebop dominant scale descending over a Cm7 chord progressing to a F7 chord or a C bebop dominant scale descending over a Gm7 chord progressing to a C7 chord. A popular use of the bebop dominant scale can be found in George Gershwin's *Strike Up the Band*.<sup>8</sup> For the sake of musical depth, I will include Barry Harris' sixth diminished scale as well.<sup>9</sup> This scale can be used descending over a major seventh chord and is basically a major scale, but with a flattened sixth scale degree in addition to the regular sixth scale degree. For example, the notes C, B, A, Ab, G, F, E, D, and octave C played over a CΔ7.

Figure 1.14 Example of the bebop dominant scale.



Figure 1.15 Example of the Barry Harris sixth diminished scale.



The tonalities referenced in this section are the building blocks of modern jazz improvisation and can be applied to other styles of music as well. Scales not mentioned here

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<sup>8</sup> George Gershwin, "Strike Up the Band," accessed March 14, 2024, [https://youtu.be/10pY4omgWHs?si=u0UwLgO22rXhVH0\\_](https://youtu.be/10pY4omgWHs?si=u0UwLgO22rXhVH0_)

<sup>9</sup> "Youtube," Barry Plays 6<sup>th</sup> Diminished Scale, Accessed February 27, 2024, <https://youtu.be/G1siDXQ92Nw?si=QQ962AR0J5u7kFhi>



could add value to one's improvisational lexicon, but these are a suitable foundation and point of departure for improvisation at the secondary level and in the academy.

## 1.2. The Pedagogical Jazz Lens: The Application of Scales and Arpeggios

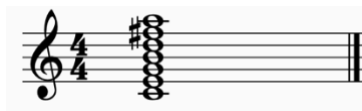
The foundation of various scale tonalities is an important framework from which to teach improvisation at any level, middle and high school, as well as at the university level.

Nevertheless, learning how to apply these sounds during improvisation is just as important.

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show the structure of the minor pentatonic and the blues scale. How might these best be implemented into improvisation? The best uses for either scale is when applied over a minor seventh chord in the Dorian or Aeolian modes of a major scale (e.g., Dm7 or Am7 in the key of C major).

Major scales can work well on major chords, but sound best in the Lydian mode when a raised fourth scale degree is used instead of Ionian mode. This is because a major seventh chord can include the edition of scale degree 2, 4, and 6. In chord form that is 1 (root), 3, 5, 7, 9, #11, and 13 creating a more sonorous sound than the standard major seventh chord.

Figure 1.16 Example of a major thirteen chord with a #11.



The natural minor scale as indicated in figure 1.6, would work if played over a minor seventh chord, but only in the Dorian mode where the sixth scale degree is raised a half step or semitone and the Aeolian mode where it is in natural minor. The harmonic minor scale as

indicated in figure 1.7 is more appropriate when played over a minor-major seventh chord (i.e., Dm $\Delta$ 7 or Am $\Delta$ 7). It can also function over a basic minor seventh chord as a passing tone or if a dissonant effect is desired. Whereas the melodic minor scale, known to some as an altered scale can be useful when applied to dominant chords because it creates harmonic tension; in this case, the scale should begin on the seventh scale degree.

Figure 1.17 Example of a minor seventh chord, minor-major seventh chord, and dominant chord.

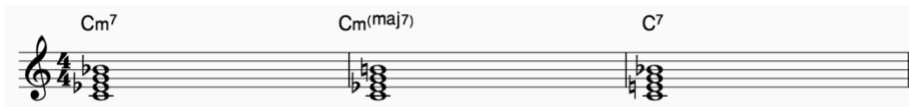
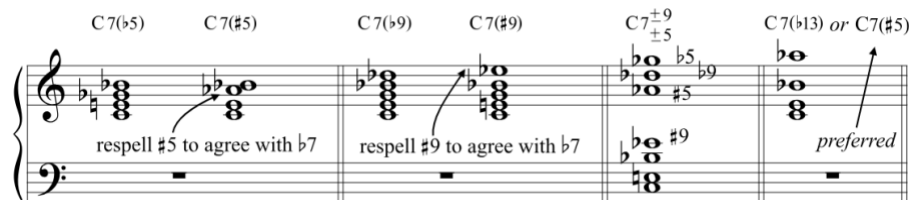


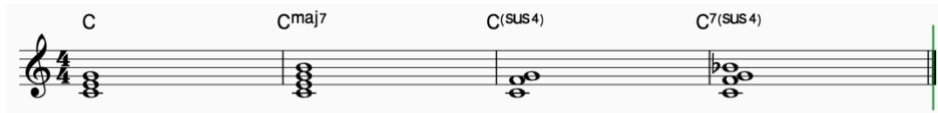
Figure 1.18 Example of altered dominant seventh chords.<sup>10</sup>



Major pentatonic scales have a couple of basic applications and possibly more, but for the sake of consistency I will mention two. Much like the major scale, the major pentatonic fits with the major chord (i.e., root, third, and fifth) and major seventh chord (i.e., root, third, fifth, and seventh). Given there are no scale alterations, it is a close to a perfect fit; it also works with suspended chords and dominant suspended chords.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Hutchinson, "Music Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Classroom," Accessed February 22, 2024. <https://musictheory.pugetsound.edu/mt21c/AlteredDominantSeventhChords.html>

Figure 1.19 Example of major chord, major seventh chord, suspended chord, and dominant suspended chord (major pentatonic scales work with these chord qualities).



Another compelling improvisational choice are whole tone scales. They present a distinctive sound quality and work well when paired with augmented triads and augmented dominant seventh chords (i.e., chords with a raised fifth). Though, it is important to be sure to use the one of the two whole tones scales that pairs with the proper chord.

Figure 1.20 Example of an augmented triad, augmented seventh chord, and augmented dominant seventh chords.



Like the whole tone scale, the octatonic scale or diminished scale is symmetrical, but consists of three scale possibilities and two modes (i.e., half-whole step and whole-half step). These scales have a few applications as they have eight notes or tones. *Learning Jazz Standards* states that there are three ways to think of diminished scales:

1. Combine two minor tetrachords a tritone apart (a tetrachord is a 4-note scale, and a minor tetrachord is basically the first four notes of the Dorian minor mode, so for example, combine the first four notes of a C- scale with the first four notes of an F#- scale) to get an eight-note diminished scale.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>“Learning Jazz Standards,” The Right Way to Use the Diminished Scale, accessed February 24, 2024, <https://www.learnjazzstandards.com/blog/learning-jazz/jazz-theory/right-way-use-diminished-scale/>

Figure 1.21 Example of how to construct a whole-half diminished scale.



2. Play alternating half-steps and whole steps. Whether you start with a whole step, or a half step will determine which of the two scales you are playing.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 1.22 Example of octatonic or diminished scale symmetry.



3. Combine two fully diminished seventh chords a whole step apart. For example, combine C(dim)7 and D(dim)7. These diminished chords a whole step apart offer chord players a great way to harmonize diminished scale ideas.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 1.23 Example of octatonic or diminished chord-scale relation.



Figure 1.24 Example of both modes of the octatonic/diminished scales.



<sup>12</sup> Learning Jazz Standards, “The Right Way to Use the Diminished Scale.” <https://www.learnjazzstandards.com/blog/learning-jazz/jazz-theory/right-way-use-diminished-scale/>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. <https://www.learnjazzstandards.com/blog/learning-jazz/jazz-theory/right-way-use-diminished-scale/>

### 1.3. The Element of Rhythm: Swing, Groove, and Meter

The tradition of jazz is characterized by three main elements: improvisation, syncopation, and swing. Some would say it is not jazz without these three components. However, through the lens of traditional jazz, the swing era, bebop, and hard bop the idea that these three main elements define jazz, is true. During these periods, it was about swing in terms of an approach to how notes were played by the entire ensemble, as well as the way the drummer conducted the band through cymbal patterns, or even the shuffle. There are many shining examples of swinging, with none being more prolific than the Count Basie Orchestra.<sup>14</sup> Knowing where this rhythmic element originated will help us better understanding how it contributes to the feel and of a tune. The diagram below shows a rhythmic structure like those of African rhythmic structures. It is in 6/8, like the traditional songs found in Black American churches. When played it gives side to side swaying feel that swings and has a syncopation. This pattern also serves as an example of how the influence of West African music took hold in Black American musical culture, especially the concept of swing in jazz.

Figure 1.25 Example of 6/8 African rhythmic pattern (origin of the swing).



This is important because it provides a template for how pedagogues can justify the concept of swing and teach students how to swing, especially at the elementary, middle, and high school

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<sup>14</sup> “Youtube,” Blues in Hoss Flat, Accessed February 27, 2024, <https://youtu.be/JjlfL1ZJoB8?si=qoH5qTujzVjHP5FW>

levels. In general music classrooms teachers often use the *American Orff-Schulwerk Associations* method to teach concepts of rhythm through what are commonly known as Orff instruments: Djembe drums, xylophones, shakers, and numerous other small and rhythm instruments. The implementation of these instruments in the classroom allows students to learn rhythmic continuity, steady beat, experimentation, self-expression, and improvisation. Their official website presents it as, “A Teaching Model for Optimal Learning” and goes on to state the following:<sup>15</sup>

In Orff Schulwerk classrooms, children begin with what they do instinctively: play! Imitation, experimentation, and personal expression occur naturally as students become confident, life-long musicians and creative problem solvers. The Orff approach to teaching is a model for optimal learning in 21st Century classrooms.

The concept of groove is can be associated to most styles of music, however there are cases when groove is not the intent or is difficult to decipher. Groove-based music pervaded most of the Black diaspora (i.e., the content of Africa, Caribbean, as well as South and North America). In a jazz syntax groove is almost always present because it is ingrained in the feel: swing, Latin, funk, New Orleans, etc.

In terms of jazz, meter is commonly arranged in 4/4 (simple quadruple), 3/4 (simple triple), and 6/8 (compound duple) time signatures. Most jazz standards are written in 4/4 or 3/4. However, odd meter (i.e., 5/8, 7/8, 9/8, etc.) is becoming increasingly more popular in the landscape of contemporary improvisation and music. This is important as it allows the landscape of jazz to expand to new horizons.

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<sup>15</sup> “The American Orff-Schulwerk Association,” The Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman Approach to Building Musicianship, Accessed February 27, 2024. <https://aosa.org/about/what-is-orff-schulwerk/>.

The shape of lines in jazz and contemporary improvisation is of the utmost importance as well because it creates a standard of musicality within improvised music. Phrases and motifs help to create fluidity that makes sense to listeners and the practitioner. Generally, the lines and shapes are a way of “playing the changes” or making a musical statement, also known as “saying something” and this garners respect from other musicians. Various ascending and descending scales patterns with rhythmic continuity can be applied to chord changes or the lack thereof to produce melodic contour. A good example of this type of musical shape can be heard in the language (i.e., lines and phrases) of bebop saxophonist, Charlie Parker. For example, in his classic recording of composer John Klenner’s piece *Just Friends* with strings, Parker’s initial alto saxophone statement is a beautiful line that exemplifies the concept of creating lines and shapes.<sup>16</sup> The best way for improvising musicians to achieve this level of fluidity is through transcribing and embodying (i.e., taking from the recordings of the forefathers) jazz and any style of music for that matter. Although not all musicians are avid supporters of transcription as a way of learning to improvise, it is without doubt that all improvising musicians learn and use things from music that they have heard and internalized. Ideally, a musician should learn solos from the recordings verbatim on their instrument and then write them out. This allows for understanding the musical mind of the musician being transcribed. For instance, during my undergraduate days I was into Miles Davis and transcribed his solo on the Sonny Rollins tune *Oleo* and others. I concluded that Miles was keen on “playing the changes” with a comparable acumen to that of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker.

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<sup>16</sup> “Youtube,” *Just Friends*, Accessed March 30, 2024, <https://youtu.be/frdAzwUD-pA?si=p3Bipzy1uUolQPpP>

Figure 1.26: Example of Charlie Parker’s solo introduction on *Just Friends*.



#### 1.4. Schools of Jazz Pedagogy: Pedagogues, Methods, and Organizations

In 1953, jazz musician George Russell wrote a book entitled, *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*. This book has become an integral part of jazz and improvisational pedagogy. It presents more advanced improvisational approaches for advanced practitioners and pedagogues for tonal gravity and organization. One of the major purposes of Russell’s book is expressed in the introduction where it states, “The chord and its parent scale are an inseparable entity—the reciprocal sound of one another.”<sup>17</sup> It goes on to state, “[t]he root of a chord is its MODAL TONIC within the parent scale. The actual sound of the chord is *that mode of the parent scale which begins on the chord’s modal tonic*.”<sup>18</sup> For instance, if the chord is an Eb7, then its Lydian Tonic is Db. The parent scale is Db Lydian: Db, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb, and C. Furthermore, Eb is the second mode of Db Lydian; Eb7 is Eb mixolydian. Some of the possible parent scales are Db Lydian, Db Lydian b7, and Db auxiliary diminished blues.

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<sup>17</sup> George Russell, *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* (New York: Concept Publishing Co., 1953), 20.

<sup>18</sup> George Russell, *The Lydian Chromatic Concept*, 20.



Figure 1.27 Examples of Lydian Parent Scales.



Another notable school in the pedagogical lineage of jazz are the teachings of Lennie Tristano. Tristano is said to have been one of the first teachers of jazz improvisation with a career spanning more than thirty years.<sup>19</sup> According to the book, *Lennie Tristano: His Life in Music*, “By the early 1960s Tristano had a large number of students, [four or five hundred a year,] according to him, and in 1973 he had more students than he could handle and kept a waiting list.” Although his pedagogy consisted of a variety of strategies for students, one of the most profound is this:

[You have to be influenced by all great jazz musicians, no matter what instrument they play, because the essence of jazz is feeling, it’s not really the notes, it’s the feeling behind.] Accordingly, he taught students to connect the aural training based on feeling with an ability to play the instrument, so that they could play what they were hearing, and hear what they were playing.<sup>20</sup>

An important organization in the instructive landscape of improvised music is the *Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM)*, created by members of the *Art Ensemble of Chicago*, that fosters experimentalism in sound and art. They personify the philosophy of that institution and are great representations of its purpose. Thus, I must explore the *Art Ensemble* and the *AACM* in more detail to fully explain their aesthetic, political activism,

<sup>19</sup> Eunmi Shim, *Lennie Tristano: His Life in Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 123.

<sup>20</sup> Eunmi Shim. *Lennie Tristano*, 123-124.

and contribution to experimental improvised music. In George Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*, he writes the following:

“Since its founding on the virtually all-black South Side of Chicago in 1965, the African American musicians’ collective known as the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) had played an unusually prominent role in the development of American Experimental Music. Over more than forty years of work, the composite output of AACM members has explored a wide range of methodologies, processes, and media. AACM musicians developed new and influential ideas about timbre, sound, collectivity, extended technique and instrumentation, performance practice, intermedia, the relationship of improvisation to composition, form, scores, computer music technologies, invented acoustic instruments, installations, and kinetic sculptures.”<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning, the institution rarely explored the relationship between the new Chicago music (experimental music), radical politics, and the issues of race that were fuming during the 1960s. Instead, they focused on what Lewis calls an “art-for-art’s sake philosophy.”<sup>22</sup> However, given the racial and political climate of the United States during those years, that focus was contradictory to what many musicians were doing at the time.

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<sup>21</sup> George Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), ix.

<sup>22</sup> Lewis, *A Power Stronger*, 163.

## Chapter 2 African Lineage and Influence

To understand the lineage and influence of African music, I will first explain the prior historical aspects that have impacted the trajectory of the music. The transatlantic slave trade bridges the gap between Western African traditions and the New World. The institution of slavery is not unique to the history of the United States. It has long been used on the African continent against conquered tribes, as well as in other parts of the world. In Amiri Baraka's *Blues People*, he quotes Melvin Herskovits, stating that, "Slavery [had] existed in the entire region [of West Africa], and in at least one of its kingdoms, Dahomey, a kind of plantation system was founded under which an absentee ownership, with the ruler as principal, demanded the utmost return from estates, and thus created conditions of labor resembling the regime the slaves were to encounter in the New World."<sup>23</sup> While there is some truth to his statement, there is reason to believe that his description is a bit poorly worded. He makes light of the inhuman system by saying "[I]t was happening in Africa first; it was not new to them; they were prepared for it." Baraka counters this argument by writing, "But to be brought to a country, a culture, a society, that was, and is, in terms of purely philosophical correlatives, the complete antithesis of one's own version of man's life in earth—that is the cruelest aspect of this particular enslavement."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (Edinburgh: Payback Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Baraka, *Blues People*, 1.

Even more, “[T]he African who was unfortunate enough to find himself on some fast clipper ship to the New World was not even accorded membership in the human race.”<sup>25</sup>

With the enslaved African people came a unique artistic culture which was unique and different from what the Europeans brought to the New World. Then, and even now, the music of African cultures was not considered a separate entity; it was a part of everyday life, intertwined into the tapestry of political and social structures. One of the most significant contributions brought to the New World by enslaved people, and the world at large, is rhythm. The rhythmic structures of Western Africa are what has given birth to a great deal of the musical traditions that we know in contemporary music today, as well as overall cultural influence. However, that fact does not negate the overwhelming veracity of European musical and cultural influences.

In Jeff Pressings article, *Black Atlantic Rhythm: Its Computational and Transcultural Foundations*, he states that “Black Atlantic rhythmic diaspora is founded on the idea of groove or feel, which forms a kinetic framework for reliable prediction of events and time pattern communication, its power cemented by repetition and engendered by movement.”<sup>26</sup> This is important because groove and feel are the core of black music. If you ask one hundred Black people (non-musicians) what they like most about the music they listen to, I estimate that at least ninety percent would say the beat (groove and feel) and/or the bassline. This proves Pressing’s assertion that groove, and feel are the framework of black music in the United States and across the world. The effect of this repetitive, irresistible nature often found in black music causes the urge to sing, dance, and move.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Pressing, Jeff, “Black Atlantic Rhythm: Its Computational and Transcultural Foundations,” *Music Perception* 19, no. 3 (2002): 285.

## **2.1. Instrumentation**

In this section, I will identify instrumentation using the classification system used in African cultures and the rest of the world instead of the traditional four families (e.g., strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion). The five world categories are as follows: idiophones, membranophones, chordophones, aerophones, and most recently added, electrophones. Idiophones are classified as instruments which vibrate to produce sound. The sound is produced by striking, shaking, or scraping the instrument (e.g., percussive instruments). Membranophones are like idiophones in that the vibration from being struck produces sound. However, they differ from idiophones because of their stretched membrane or animal skin (e.g., drums). The next two families are the chordophones (e.g., balafon, banjo, lute, etc.) and the aerophones (e.g., woodwinds, brass, and other wind instruments). Last are the electrophones, consisting of all instruments that require electricity to function. The world categories are important in that they identify and are more suitable for instruments outside of the European classification structure; they more accurately describe the instruments of African and eastern cultures.

## **2.2. Improvised Music in the African Diaspora**

The concept of improvisation in African music is common, yet difficult to fully grasp because of the vastness of the continent, its cultures, and its ethnicities. Given that there are so many avenues to explore, I reached out to my University of Michigan Ethnomusicology Professor, Charles Lwanga and he had this to say about improvisation in African music.



This rhythmic structure creates a continuous pattern of momentum that propels different forms of improvisation, dance, and music. I would be remiss if I did not also mention the important contributions of the Habanera rhythm and the 2/3 and 3/2 clavé rhythms heavily present in Caribbean music, but descendants of African rhythms.

### Chapter 3 European Figured Bass

European music has long been the standard and foundation of theoretical practice in Europe, the Americas, Asia, and other parts of the world. When thinking about improvisation with a jazz sensibility, we often think of “playing the changes.” In today’s American musical landscape improvisation is generally thought to be only associated with jazz. However, historically Baroque musicians such as Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel used an improvisational technique called the figured bass or thorough bass as a catalyst for improvisation. This musical paradigm was of a highly intellectual nature and required a technical facility of the highest order. Although the concept is like that of jazz chord progressions, the symbolism is different. In University of Michigan Professor Edward Sarath’s book, *Music Theory Through Improvisation*, he talks about the basic principles surrounding the system of thorough bass stating the following.

Figured bass nomenclature involves three basic components: a bass line; a set of figures designated by Arabic numerals, which indicate what notes are to sound atop each bass note; and a key signature that indicates the quality of the interval between the bass and the upper note (e.g. whether the fourth a bass note F is B or Bb). These components indicate precisely what chord is to sound at a given time and its inversion and may be thought in terms of vertical and horizontal information. Vertical information has to do with the intervals atop each bass note that are specified by the figures; horizontal information comes from the key signature.<sup>28</sup>

Given this information, it can be determined that the figured bass is a given bass note with a set of provided Arabic numerals. Beneath the bass note are generally two vertical Arabic numerals that determine the inversion the improviser should approach the triad, or seventh chord with.

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<sup>28</sup> Edward W. Sarath, *Music Theory Through Improvisation: A New Approach to Musicianship Training* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 201-202.



Triads will only have two vertical Arabic numerals and seventh chords could have one, two, or three vertical Arabic numerals beneath the figure bass notes.

Figure 3.1 Examples of figured bass triads and inversions.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 3.1 illustrates figured bass triads and inversions in the bass clef. It shows three rows, each representing a different inversion of a triad. Each row includes a 'Complete figuration' (with two vertical Arabic numerals), a 'Short-hand' (with one vertical Arabic numeral), and a 'yields:' section showing the resulting chord symbol and its contemporary equivalent.

- Root position:** Complete figuration: 5 3; Short-hand: (no figuration needed for triads); yields: F (contemporary chord symbol).
- First inversion:** Complete figuration: 6 3; Short-hand: 6; yields: F/A.
- Second inversion:** Complete figuration: 6 4; Short-hand: 6 (no short hand); yields: F/C.

Figure 3.2 Examples of figured bass seventh chords and inversions.<sup>30</sup>

Figure 3.2 illustrates figured bass seventh chords and inversions in the bass clef. It shows two rows of examples. The first row shows Fmaj7 in root position, first inversion, and Fmaj7/A. The second row shows Fmaj7/C, Fmaj7/E, and Fmin7(♭5). Each example includes a 'yields:' section showing the resulting chord symbol and its contemporary equivalent.

- Root position:** yields: Fmaj7.
- First inversion:** yields: Fmaj7/A.
- Second inversion:** yields: Fmaj7/C.
- Third inversion:** yields: Fmaj7/E.
- EXAMPLE 12.3:** yields: Fmaj7, Fmin7, Fmin7(♭5).

Putting this theoretical knowledge into a modern-day context, improvisation could be reimplemented into European musical practices at the university level and in community music schools. It would be a huge change in philosophy and way to create a more diverse approach to music and improvisational studies. Using contemporary chord symbols and the figured bass

<sup>29</sup> Sarath, *Music Theory Through Improvisation*, 202.

<sup>30</sup> Ibib, 203.

system could allow musicians to work as improvising musicians across boundary lines and rekindle improvisation in classic traditions of European music.

## Chapter 4 The Nine Concepts of Northern Indian Classical Music and Improvisation

Indian classical music consists of music from the northern region of India, Hindustani music, and the southern region, Carnatic music. In this section, our focus will be the northern region of India. Northern Indian classical music consists of nine concepts: drone, raga, rasa, sargam, swara, tabla, tala, tanpura, and thoot. The drone is a series of four pitches played continuously in the background of a piece, usually by a tanpura.<sup>31</sup> Second is raga, melody with a complex pitch set, phrases, pitches, and movements.<sup>32</sup> Number three is rasa, mood, or emotion.<sup>33</sup> Sargam is the notation system used (i.e., Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni) which is the equivalent of the western Solfeggio system (i.e., Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Ti).<sup>34</sup> The fifth concept is swara, the notes or pitches. Sixth is the tabla consisting of two drums, the left hand for the smaller more high-pitched drum and the right hand for the bigger lower pitched drum.<sup>35</sup> Number seven is tala,

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<sup>31</sup> Natalie Sarrazin, *Indian Music for the Classroom* (Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 30.

<sup>32</sup> Natalie Sarrazin, *Indian Music for the Classroom*, 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

the rhythm or rhythm cycle.<sup>36</sup> The eighth concept is the tanpura, a four-stringed instrument that plays the drone. The ninth and final concept is the basic scales, known as the *thaat*.<sup>37</sup> I should add that there are numerous other complexities within the paradigm of Northern Indian classical music, but these concepts are the foundational structures that improvisation is able to develop in this music.

#### **4.1. Raga, Tala, and Improvisation**

In Northern Indian classical music, there are thousands of ragas, many of them hundreds of years old. In Indian culture, creating new ragas is not popular, they typically stick to the traditional ragas; they are constantly working to maintain and improve the tradition. Most professionals only perfect a small number of ragas during their lifetime.<sup>38</sup> The structure is scale, mode, and melody all at once. They use from five to seven pitches with some being altered (i.e., raised or lowered). Dots are used above the sargam syllables to indicate notes in the upper octave and below the syllables to indicate in the lower octave.

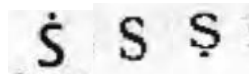
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<sup>36</sup> *Ibib*, 30.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibib*, 30.

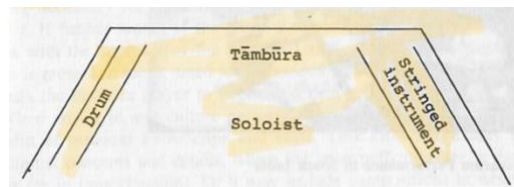
<sup>38</sup> *Ibib*, 38.

Figure 4.1 Examples of dotted syllables indicating high, middle, and low Sa.



Improvisation in Northern Indian classical music is achieved within ragas through pitches, motives, stresses, and ornaments (i.e., slides, glides, trills, and bends known as microtones). This is homogeneous to Black American music, especially the blues in that its purpose is to create a performance that causes a spiritual and/or emotional result within the listener.<sup>39</sup> This is typically achieved using the tabla drums, tāmbūra, some type of stringed instrument, and a solo instrument; other instrument combinations are possible.

Figure 4.2 Example of Indian classical ensemble setup.



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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 38.

Figure 4.3 Chart of accompaniment instruments for voice, relatively recent solo instruments, and traditional solo instruments.

<i>Melody Instruments</i>			
	TRADITIONALLY ACCOMPANIMENT FOR VOICE	RELATIVELY RECENTLY SOLO	TRADITIONALLY SOLO
Stringed	Vīṇā (Karnatak) Bīn (Hindustānī)	Vīṇā Bīn	Sītār (H) Sarod (H)
Wind	Violin (K) Sārāṅī (H) Flute (H and K)	Violin (H and K) Sārāṅī (H)	Flute (H and K) Shehnai (H) Nagasvaram (K)

Another aspect is the rhythmic structure which is known as tala (i.e., rhythmic cycle). Improvisation can be difficult as the meters and tempo can be quite complex and the music mostly continuous and challenging. Unlike traditional jazz, straight ahead jazz, music of the African diaspora, and European styles, music and improvisation usually takes place within the following six popular meter structures.

Figure 4.4 Example of six most tala rhythmic structures.

*Six Popular Talas*

- Teentalā*: 16-beat cycle divided 4 + 4 + 4 + 4

+	2	0	3
dha	dhin dha	dha dha tin tin	ta ta dhin dhin dha
(clap)	(clap)	(wave)	(clap)
- Keherwā*: 8-beat cycle divided 4 + 4

+	0
dha ge	na ti na ka dhi na
(clap)	(wave)

- 3, *Dadra*: 6-beat cycle divided 3 + 3  
+            0  
dhin dhin na dha tun na
- 4, *Rupak*: 7-beat cycle divided 3 + 2 + 2 (note that sam and khali are on the same beat in this cycle, so the sam receives a wave instead of an extra heavy clap)  
0            2            3  
tin tin na dhin na dhin na
- 5, *Jhaptal*: 10-beat cycle divided 2 + 3 + 2 + 3  
+            2            0            3  
dhin na dhin dhin na ti na dhin dhin na
- 6, *Ektal*: 12-beat cycle divided 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2: In the five tala cycles above, the theka syllables each receive a full beat. In the case of ektala, *dhage* functions like a pair of eighth notes, and *terikita* functions like four sixteenth notes.  
+            0            2            0            3            4  
dhin dhin dhage terikita tun na kat ta dhage terikita dhin dhage

Teentala consists of a sixteen-beat cycle and is the most common of these meters' structures. Nevertheless, the use of any of these meters can be difficult and an effective way to work on improvisation and timing. Incorporating these types of meter cycles into the landscape of jazz could give credence to new possibilities within contemporary improvised music while offering a path towards diversity in music.

There are and have been musicians and composers that have intersected types of Indian music with jazz, European music, as well as other forms. Ravi Shankar, one of the foremost musicians and composers of Northern Indian classical music is a stellar example of someone that was able to intersect his native music with other cultural styles of music like jazz. Even more, his daughter's vocalist and musician, Norah Jones and musician and vocalist, Anoushka Shankar's musical endeavors are both good examples of the Indian musical paradigm intersecting with jazz and other cultural styles of music and improvisation.





## **Conclusion**

It is important to remember that no one approach is the principal way; diverse epistemological approaches to improvisation studies can lead to new ways of student engagement and thinking. For example, in middle and high school music education, the old ways of engaging student musicians through the basic ensembles of sitting and reading music structures in an ensemble are often not enough. I have found that students want to be more creative. Instrumental music programs have fallen behind in fostering student creativity; they are stuck in a construct that was put in place a long time ago when technology was not as advanced and digitalized music did not exist. Some public schools and community music schools are offering electronic music production and DJing classes and allowing students to be creative without teaching traditional music concepts. However, contrary to recent philosophies, students still desire to play instruments, but their creativity through improvisation is what is often missing. This allows them to become a part of the music instead of only repeating the musical ideas and concepts of others. Even more, taking a transcultural approach to music education through improvisation makes for a more comprehensive, interesting, and creative process in music education. The educational process becomes not only diverse, but also more interesting. The issue at hand is creating a balance between or being okay with the cultural portions of improvisation in which students are being fed from the selected cultures. Let me be clear, the overview that I have set forth here has jazz as the foundational mode of teaching and fostering improvisational studies, but it makes for a more transculturally diverse perspective in which

students can decide their own path forward and be enriched by other styles of music. Even so, some might argue that transculturation is akin to colonialism as there is usually a dominant culture. In the case of this overview of transcultural approaches this is true, American jazz is the dominant paradigm in my model, but may not be if taught in a similar format in Africa, India, or another cultural. Nevertheless, a multicultural/transcultural approach can bring forth a more conscious-based improvisational studies model for middle and high school education, as well as those in colleges and universities.

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SCHOOL OF  
**MUSIC, THEATRE & DANCE**  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

FIRST DISSERTATIONAL RECITAL

**Kenneth Gill, Trombone**

*Saturday, December 9, 2023*  
*Moore Building, McIntosh Theatre*  
*3:00 PM*

**Rhythm-A-Ning**  
*arr. Kenneth Gill*

Thelonious Monk  
(1917-1982)

**Stablemates**  
*arr. Kenneth Gill*

Benny Golson  
(b. 1929)

**Wheel Within a Wheel**  
*arr. Bobby Watson*

Bobby Watson  
(b. 1953)

**Cultural Intersections**  
*arr. & comp. Kenneth Gill*

Kenneth Gill  
(b. 1979)

**Sweetness**  
*arr. Kenneth Gill*

Curtis Fuller  
(1932-2021)

**Whoopin' Blues**

Traditional

***University of Michigan Jazz Trombone Ensemble***

Dennis Wilson - Director  
Kenneth Gill - trombone  
Nick Oclassen - trombone  
Tommy Hodgeman - trombone  
Stephen Paul - trombone  
Brady Smith - trombone  
Will Rechner - trombone  
Sofia Klein - trombone  
Alex Roswell - trombone  
Ryan Linke - Bass trombone  
Chris Tam - Bass trombone  
Liam Charron - piano  
Ben Wood - bass  
Casey Cheatham - drums

***Small Ensemble***

Kenneth Gill - trombone  
John Douglas - trumpet  
Alexander Lahti-Thiam - alto saxophone  
Jeff Ponders - tenor saxophone  
Gabe Condon - guitar  
Brendon Davis - piano  
Ben Wood - bass  
Stephen Oduro - drums

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Musical Arts  
Horace A. Rackham School of Graduate Studies

**DISSERTATION COMMITTEE**

Professor Andrew Bishop, *chair*  
Professor Dennis Wilson  
Professor Edward Sarath  
Professor Charles Lwanga  
Professor Justus Mukolu Anumonwo



SCHOOL OF  
**MUSIC, THEATRE & DANCE**  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

SECOND DISSERTATIONAL RECITAL

**Kenneth Gill, Trombone**

*Sunday, March 10, 2024  
Moore Building, McIntosh Theatre  
7:30 PM*

**Young Rabbits** (1966)  
*arr. Kenneth Gill*

Wayne Henderson  
(1939–2014)

**Lumpkin Street** (2023)

Kenneth Gill  
(b. 1979)

**We Shall See** (2024)

Kenneth Gill  
(b. 1979)

**Channeling the Blues** (2024)

Kenneth Gill  
(b. 1979)

**My Family** (2019)

Kenneth Gill  
(b. 1979)

**The Good News for Big Band** (2024)

Kenneth Gill  
(b. 1979)



Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
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DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Professor Andrew Bishop, *chair*  
Dr. Justus Mukolu Anumonwo, *cognate*  
Professor Dennis Wilson  
Professor Edward Sarath  
Professor Charles Lwanga

Personnel

1<sup>st</sup> alto - Houston Patton  
2<sup>nd</sup> alto - Alexander Lahti-Thiam  
1<sup>st</sup> Tenor - Jeff Ponders  
2<sup>nd</sup> Tenor - Jehoon Seo  
Bari sax - Bo Chenoweth

1<sup>st</sup> trumpet - Gavin Ard  
2<sup>nd</sup> trumpet - John Douglas  
3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet - Allen Dennard  
4<sup>th</sup> trumpet - Adam Solomon

1<sup>st</sup> trombone - Nick Oclassen  
2<sup>nd</sup> trombone - Tommy Hodgman  
3<sup>rd</sup> trombone - Will Rechner  
Bass trombone - Ryan Linke

Guitar - Gabe Condon  
Piano - Demetrius Nabors  
Upright Bass - Noah Jackson  
Drums - Nate Winn

Stage Manager - Shudane Hendricks  
Recording & Videography - Sly Pup Production, LLC

## Program Notes

### Young Rabbits

The story of the *Jazz Crusaders* began in Houston, Texas in 1954 when high school friends Joe Sample (pianist), Wilton Felder (tenor saxophonist), and Stix Hooper (drummer) organized an ensemble. Soon after, Wayne Henderson (trombonist), Hubert Laws (Flute), and Henry Wilson (bassist) joined them to complete the *Jazz Crusaders* group. Around 1960, Sample, Felder, Hooper, and Henderson relocated to Los Angeles, California and added Larry Carlton (guitar) to the group, while the bass spot was constantly changing. By 1961, they had begun recording their debut album on the Pacific Jazz Records Label entitled, *Lookin' Ahead*. It was on this album that trombonist, composer, and producer Wayne Henderson's *Young Rabbits* composition first debuted.

The *Jazz Crusaders* and their music holds a significant place in Kenneth Gill's musical ideology because Wayne Henderson, along with the rest of the group were among the first jazz musicians that his father, a former trombonist, introduced him to. During his middle school years when he first began playing the trombone, he would listen to recordings of the *Jazz Crusaders/Crusaders* every morning at 6:00am before school; the sound of Henderson never got old. That being the case, Kenneth felt it was only fitting he finished his formal education the way he began. Consequently, Henderson's composition, *Young Rabbits* was chosen to begin the recital.

### Lumpkin Street

*Lumpkin Street* is in a neighborhood on Detroit's east side where Kenneth Gill's late grandfather, grandmother, uncles, aunts, and mother once resided; this composition was written in memory of his late grandmother, Dorthy Collins. *Lumpkin Street* was filled with Black residents that moved north from the south during the Great Migration. The neighborhood had truck vendors that drove by on weekends selling fresh fruits, vegetables, and juices. Ice cream trucks rode up and down the street multiple times a day each summer playing ragtime classics like Scott Joplin's, *The Entertainer*. A penny-candy store stood right across the street from the Collins' family home where they hosted a weekly fish fry every Friday. It was a different time; everybody knew everybody, and resources were gladly shared among neighbors. The best of southern hospitality and culture was brought to their new homes up north.

In this composition, Kenneth Gill sets a harmonic and melodic tonality hoping to capture the easy-going nature and warmth of the people and neighborhood. The mood of the piece is nostalgic; he shares a musical snapshot of a familiar, safe, and loving place that contributed to the vast topography of Detroit's history.

## **We Shall See**

Exhibiting a different layer of performance and composition, Kenneth Gill ventures into the unknown with *We Shall See*. This composition originates with a completely impromptu canvas. Soon thereafter, a set meter of 5/8 emerges followed by 4/4; both become the piece's metrical structure. This performance amalgamates contemporary improvisation with modern composition.

## **Channeling the Blues**

The blues can present itself in many different musical moods: joyfulness, sensuality, heartache, and sorrow, to name a few. Blues is the backbone of Black American music; it is an essential ingredient needed to make the emotional connection vital in truly soulful music. In this composition entitled, *We Play the Blues*, Kenneth Gill opens with an unaccompanied, improvised statement through the blues; depending on his mood at that time, he will venture into a conscious-based emotional blues aesthetic. Next, he and the ensemble cross into a traditional blues harmonic structure.

## **My Family**

Kenneth Gill's father played an integral role in his introduction to and involvement in music. His father was a trombonist during his elementary and secondary school years, and he often told stories about playing music around the city of Detroit with his friends while in high school. Those stories made an enormous impression on Kenneth who decided to follow in his father's footsteps. That being the case, he composed *My Family* as an ode to his father, Kenneth O. Gill, and the rest of his family. His intent was to capture a more contemporary essence, one that would be pleasing to his family, especially his father.

## **The Good News**

This composition was originally written in 2012 and released in 2019 on Kenneth Gill's debut album also entitled, *The Good News*. Given the structural organization and tonality within the piece, he decided to arrange and expand it for a larger ensemble. This piece was written with the intent to convey thankfulness and gratitude for all blessings, while sharing optimism, love, and light with all who have an ear to hear and receive.