



Artistic Research Report

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1 Abstract

The following report documents a research project that aims to incorporate improvisation in classical piano recitals in an effective way, as a manner of refreshing such an old-fashioned format. In order to make it possible, the process started by mapping the field, developing basic skills in improvising interludes between written pieces and reading literature on improvisation as a concept. Regarding the need for a larger amount of technical and artistic resources, a more intensive study on piano extended techniques applied to improvisation and free improvisation was carried out, finishing the project with a focus on analysing the own aesthetics and working on proportion (time management).

The artistic results are satisfactory, fulfilling the initial goals. Thus, the improvised interludes work sufficiently on their own and in relation to the written pieces surrounding them, thanks to the development of an efficient system that allows the improviser to adapt them to various contexts, according to their artistic needs. As a result, they are capable of adding artistic value to the content of a regular programme, potentially changing the perception of the listener and enhancing their engagement to the musical act.

Such outcomes can serve as an inspiration to other musicians in order to start their own process, getting as close and incorporating as many elements of this one as they wish, with the intention of achieving a similar artistic development as the one derived from this research project.

2 Introduction

2.1 Motivation and goal

First of all, I have been doing musical improvisation since I was very young, almost from the very first moment I started learning music; in fact, I started doing it even before I knew the word “improvisation” or its meaning. For me, it was just the most natural way of expressing myself musically, blending all the musical inputs I had from TV and my father’s old cassettes - 2 of my biggest passions in life at that time - and having more fun than playing the simple little pieces I was able to play by then.

In some sense, nothing has changed until now, since I still improvise before, during and after my daily practice and it still serves as a contrasting activity which allows me to develop my creative side as a musician, opposed to the repetitive tasks involved in learning any technical skill or practising a difficult passage.

However, this hardly ever makes part of my public appearances even if I convincingly think that it is a very powerful resource on stage due to its unpredictability and imaginativeness. In fact, this idea connects with the other main motivation I have for carrying out this research, which is my deep concern about the current staging of piano solo recitals both as a performer and a listener.

I consider that the conventional format is no longer appealing for a wide range of audiences, because there is no communication between the performer and the listener, as if there was a very thin wall between them that the musicians (who hold the position of power in this context) don’t want or dare to break. As a result, the performances are usually not engaging for a regular audience, which cannot use the technical aspects of music making in order to feel connected to the musical act, as professional musicians can do.

Therefore, I think it is our responsibility to make music more accessible to the people, so that the musical ecosystem of our society doesn’t collapse, and I want to take my personal action on it by means of making improvisation an essential element of my solo appearances in the most organic, efficient and useful way possible, which I intend to find during the upcoming research process.

2.2 Contextualization

Few months before starting this research I moved out from Barcelona after living there for 4 years, a remarkable period in which I could get to know and learn from many musicians that develop their artistry there. This is important for this contextualization because among those musicians there were also some great improvisers with different profiles and interests that shared with me some worries about the health of classical music live performances.

In fact, some of them were already carrying out some projects that inspired me for different reasons to conceive this research, as Marco Mezquida (jazz pianist) and Juan de la Rubia (organ virtuoso and improviser)¹, who brought into Palau de la Música a 1-hour long improvisation concert on well-known melodies by Bach with live visual arts, earning an unprecedented success. I was in the audience and the thrill I experienced together with the rest of the listeners had nothing to do with a regular recital from a first-class pianist, as well as the deafening ovation they got at the end.

Saying this I don't mean that the traditional setting hasn't any interest anymore, but I am sure that such a big difference in the reaction of an audience that is used to attending regular concerts must mean something. Therefore, that initial shock and the reflection that followed plays a fundamental role in both the design and the contextualization of my research.

However, this phenomenon is not limited to that particular environment, so we can find other examples in very well-known artists like the American jazz pianist Brad Mehldau², who has recently performed (and then released the live recording as an album) some Preludes and Fugues by J.S. Bach and improvised after each one of them making a sort of interlude towards the next one, or the Spanish classical pianist Josep Colom³, who did something similar with Chopin Études, op. 10.

That said, I would like to emphasise that these references are just a way of mapping the field and giving certain guidelines to the reader in order to place the domain of my research, therefore they are not necessarily an aesthetic inspiration. On the contrary, I want to use this background as a starting point to find my own way to integrate improvisation according to my particular concept and style.

2.3 Research question

How can I incorporate improvisation into my live performances creating transitions between compositions, while using extended techniques and scores for time management?

¹ Mezquida, Marco & Juan de la Rubia, *Bach and forward*. [“Bach and forward” - Juan de la Rubia & Marco Mezquida](#), accessed on: 3/10/2022

² Mehldau, Brad. *After Bach (Live at Philharmonie de Paris), Part 5*. [Brad Mehldau - After Bach \(Live at Philharmonie de Paris\), Part 5 - YouTube](#), accessed on 3/10/2022

³ Colom, Josep. *Chopin: Études, op. 10*. [Josep Colom - Chopin: Études, Op. 10 - YouTube](#), accessed on: 3/10/2022

2.4 Specific audiences and readers addressed

This project is aimed at a very broad audience, because it implicitly tries to make some music and certain stage formats more appealing to the vast majority of people. However, in terms of reading I would say that it is specially addressed to performers or eventually any professional musician, since the core of the project is based on quite technical topics and the outcomes included in this report are relevant for them, since they can apply them to some extent to their own practice.

3 Research Process

3.1 First research cycle

3.1.1 Overview of first research cycle

As a starting point for my research I will focus on improvising interludes between the Mozart Sonata and the Rachmaninov piece I used for my Reference Recording #1, because such a specific framework is very helpful for taking the first steps towards a solid bunch of outcomes without getting lost in the complexity of the topic.

Therefore, I will start the process with a theoretical approach and then I will bring all the ideas together into a practical experimentation, in which I will design different paths for transitioning between both pieces based on the conclusions of the desk research and I will try them out. Having completed these two stages, I will add a third layer in which I will reflect on the implications of each one of them and try to select the best options for me, explaining my reasons as a first step towards the materialisation of my own vision regarding improvisation within piano recitals. The following step will be the intervention phase, in which I apply all the previous theory to my playing by means of self-critical practice, that will be recurrent during all the process.

Finally, I will record a new take of the Reference Recording #1 scenario in order to see the evolution in the artistic result and set the goal for the following research cycle in relation to the feedback received from this new video.

3.1.2 Reference recording

I have selected 2 pieces from my classical repertoire and I have glued them with a short improvised piece, which aims to make a transition between them in terms of character and style while applying my own musical resources.

[01 AR Reference recording 01 \(David Vaamonde López\)](#)

In this recording you can listen to the last bars of the 3rd movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in D Major (KV 576), followed by an improvised interlude which connects with the first bars of the Moment musical in B minor op.16, no.3 by Sergei Rachmaninov, lasting 3 minutes and 20 seconds all together. It was performed and recorded on 13th October 2021 in a piano solo format by David Vaamonde López.

I chose to start my research with these pieces because they are part of my current repertoire, they are contrasting in style and character and both of them are music that I love. Consequently, it is very likely that I would play them if I had to do a concert tomorrow, which makes them totally convenient for this reference recording.

3.1.3 Feedback and reflection

Firstly, I want to analyse the result myself taking into account that the original intention when recording the video was to connect both pieces stylistically (in other words, to make a smooth transition between them). That said, the main idea I can bring up is the fact that the Mozart style elements vanish too early, leading to this half impressionist-half jazzy mood very soon, while the gradual approach to the emotional depth and dramatic lyricism of Rachmaninov is managed better (which is a good thing, indeed).

There is also an important thing to point out regarding the middle section of the interlude, which is the lack of unity on the displayed material. There are different ideas and resources that belong to a certain stylistic context but they don't build a solid musical discourse, so they just seem to coexist and go each one after the previous one.

Besides, after sharing my Reference Recording with some experts and knowing their opinion about it, I summarised their thoughts in a list of focal points that I display just below in the form of questions, since they shared their ideas with me in this way. In addition, I specify who pointed out each one of the topics in order to associate them directly with the complete feedback included in Appendix 2.

- Which is the goal/objective of this kind of improvised pieces and, consequently, which is the best approach to them in stylistic terms? (**Carles Marigó, Bart van de Roer, Federico Mosquera**)
- How can this clear goal lead to a better management of the construction of a musical discourse and of the timing in relation to audience reception and memory? (**Carmen Kleykens**)
- May the incorporation of alternative musical resources within a classical music context (such as timbral exploration and references to other genres) enhance the effectiveness of my improvisations? (**Carles Marigó, Carmen Kleykens**)
- What implications has the election of the written pieces played at the concert when dialoguing with different types of improvised pieces, taking into account the necessity of a narrative arc or another binding element in order to put everything together in a coherent way? (**Carmen Kleykens, Carles Marigó**)
- What can I learn from digging deeper into classical improvisation and contemporary forms of improvisation (non-idiomatic, jazz, non-western, etc.) in order to apply the acquired knowledge in my artistic practice? (**Federico Mosquera**)

The main conclusions that I can extract from recording and reviewing this video and its external feedback concern directly the approach to improvising the interludes; that is, I realised that the main debate is about the goal of the improvisation rather than its sound materialisation (which is also crucial, of course). Therefore, I am also thinking about different possibilities for this subject (stylistic connection, extreme contrast, capture mood of the moment, etc.) which I would like to test in order to figure out which are the best guidelines to develop the improvisation both stylistically and structurally.

3.1.4 Data collection & data analysis

This phase is divided into 3 different parts. Firstly, I consulted many articles, essays and videos related to the topic and reviewed some of them (media research) in order to gain insight on the meaning of improvisation and find my purpose when improvising, then I carried out an interview with the flutist, composer and improviser Ned McGowan to complete my theoretical background and discuss with him some issues related to the previous step and finally, I carried out a practical experimentation to find the sonic elements that connect better to the previously developed theoretical frame and draw some conclusions.

As a result, here is a report of the process, in which I included the most relevant information regarding the 3 different lines of action and the final conclusions that I will bring into the next stage.

3.1.4.1 Media research

- Brown, L.B. "Improvisation" In: *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 59-69.

This article makes an overview of the improvisation phenomenon from different perspectives, aiming to give a broad and complete definition of the concept. Therefore, it addresses many issues concerning the topic of improvisation (artistic quality within impro, considerations about spontaneous creation, boundaries between impro and performance, "work-performance" concept, etc.) but it would be too long to explain them all in this report, even if all of them are relevant for my research.

That is why I decided to focus only on 2 topics that I would like to highlight. The first one is the summary of the main features that all the existing theories about improvisation share, which are the influence of intentionality, the presence of elements of risk and creativity as re-elaboration of pre-existing structures in real time in order to build a coherent musical discourse from them.

These 3 ideas are crucial for me in order to frame the identity of my improvisations and strengthen their impact on the audience, as well as conceptualise a sort of guidelines for bearing in mind during the creative process.

Besides, there is a huge debate that this article addresses which is the relation between improvisation and composition. Firstly, Brown explains 2 paradigms: impro as composition (the only difference between them is how both processes occur in terms of time) and impro versus composition (considering improvisation more fundamental in musicianship than composition and distinguishing them as prospective and retrospective models or ways of making music)

Afterwards, he continues discussing the ontology of improvisation from these 2 opposite perspectives and the idea that a work of art must be worked out and conceived during a period of time before being considered as that (then improvisation wouldn't have that consideration) or at least revisited (then remains unclear because it is possible to record an improvisation and listen to it again, but maybe it

is not an improvisation anymore...). However, it seems very interesting to me that improvisation is previously considered as a legitimate art form when comparing it with composition.

To sum up, Brown doesn't give a clear conclusion regarding this fundamental issue and declares that it is an unfinished task for the music philosophy, but I must say that I have reached a solid position after reading and reflecting upon all the ideas gathered in this text.

For me, improvisation and composition are independent and equally valuable art forms that reach a similar artistic result (a particular organisation of sound) using different methods and highlighting different aspects of the creative process involved. Therefore, they are not 2 variants of the same category but they are not opposed in a hierarchical relation neither (improvisation as composition in real time, composition as written improvisation) even if improvisation is often involved in composition as a technique and not as an artistic practice in itself, showing that intentionality certainly plays a crucial role in this discussion.

- Moore, R. "The Decline of Improvisation in Western Art Music: An Interpretation of Change." In: *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 61-84 (June, 1992).

This paper focuses on finding an answer to the phenomenon described in its title through the influence of social changes from the late 18th Century until the present, since at that period improvisation was as relevant in Western music as in many other traditions in which improvisation plays a central role.

The first idea that Moore points out is the relevance of the cultural environment and the stylistic knowledge for performers and listeners in order to take part in an improvisation-based musical act, since for him improvisation can be defined as a event-based musical act which derives from long-standing structures shared by a group of people and the individual interpretations of them.

In other words, it is a way of making music in which a deep understanding of certain codes is needed, there is no notation and the goal is the free expression of the artist within a defined aesthetic. Therefore, we could say that he conceives improvisation as improvisation on style, which makes sense when talking about a totally Western Classical environment.

At this point is when social changes get into the discourse, because in the late 18th Century Classical music was associated with the court, but this changed in the following decades with the arisal of the middle class and the bourgeois. These new social groups felt attracted to this music as a way of integrating in the high class and enhanced the dependence on notation that is still present today in Western music (in the court it wasn't necessary to be precise and exhaustive in notation since everyone knew the codes already).

As time continues to go forward, the relationship with the original forms and the communal sense within this tradition decreases more and more and by the end of the century improvisation is completely out of the game. Instead, the musical world in Western societies is already splitted into art and popular music as a result of the mutual influence that the cultural manifestations of the former aristocracy and the more recent working class exert on each other.

Talking now about the 20th Century, Moore criticises the approach of the avant-garde composers, since it doesn't care about the importance of communication in music and its emotional power, and this attacks directly the possibility of survival for improvisation as a result of the divorce between new composers and audience. Besides, he declares that experimentalism is negative for improvisation, since it is an oral tradition and needs the preservation of certain codes. On the other hand, he also criticises historicity, because it goes against the innovation and spontaneity involved in improvisation and shows a reverential attitude towards the works of the past, referred to as "tyranny of tradition".

Finally, he concludes that it is necessary to bring in the experiences of modern life in order to reactivate the role of improvisation in Western musical world, resulting in an aggregate from present and past in which every musician finds his own expression, enhancing the engagement between the performer and the music he plays.

After the detailed summary of this essay (deleting some of this information the argument of the author would be incomplete) I would like to comment on some aspects that I find especially relevant. It is evident that this discourse derives from 2 specific premises: the unavoidable connection between improvisation and style or tradition and a sociological approach to aesthetics relying on social classes. Therefore, I might not agree completely with his vision since I have a broader idea of what improvisation can be and I don't dare to affirm so firmly that music "belongs" to a certain group in society.

At the same time, his diagnose of the implications of improvisation within the musical act and its relationship with the agents that take part of it, as well as the explanation of how they evolved during the last centuries resonate me very much, so I will take into account his conclusions in my practical application of this research, even if I would be more cautious when taking a stance on certain topics.

- Levin, Robert. *Improvising Mozart*. [Robert Levin: Improvising Mozart - YouTube](#), accessed on: 1/10/2022 (47:00 - 1:00:00)

This fragment of a lecture in Cambridge University the pianist and improviser Robert Levin talks about the relationship between Mozart (but also his contemporaries) and improvisation through the "improvised" preludes he wrote for his sister Nannerl due to her inability to improvise on stage.

Some striking features of this music are its function as modulating interludes in order to avoid disturbing the sensibility of the audience with sudden key changes between written pieces but also its non-metrical nature (hard to imagine in the late 18th Century, for me at least).

Besides, Levin comments on the textural layout of the improvisations, which follow CPE Bach's advice ("the best way is to lay on a bass line and then add upper figures"), and explains that Mozart's improvisation were told to be the only worthy at his time to be listened to as music, due to his "clear architectural sense, rhythmical fluidity and flexibility of discourse", according to him.

I consider the previous information very interesting for my own research not only because of its intrinsic value, but also due to the connection it has with the written music I perform and the fact that it is a strong precedent in the past. Therefore, I think that applying some of these principles in my practice will generate an invisible association with the Western Classical tradition which will automatically supply my artistry with coherence and meaning, which is basically what I am looking for with this project.

- Marigó, Carles and Alonso Mudarra. “Obertura” and “Fantasía”, in *Ibéricos*. With Carles Marigó (piano). [Obertura \(Marigó\) & Fantasía \(Alonso Mudarra\) - YouTube](#), accessed on: 1/10/2022.

This is a paradigmatic practical case of which I intend to do while using my own musical resources. In this footage, Carles Marigó improvises an introduction to a Fantasy by a Spanish Renaissance composer. It is true that the Fantasy genre has an improvisational nature which helps in order to melt and join both musical items, but what really strikes me is the perfect balance between the stylistic contrast and the connections driven through other parameters such as texture or character.

As a result, it is easy to guess that he is elaborating his own musical discourse in the beginning, which creates a big expectation in the audience and serves as a superb preparation for getting them into the written music that is yet to come, but then there is a sort of magical moment where the joint between the 2 materials is completely blurry and the transition feels so natural as if both elements were always supposed to be together.

Of course, this is a very subjective and superficial analysis, but I think that it is still useful to include these inputs since they are an inspiration for my practice and push me to develop a more objective approach to the act of improvisation on stage.

3.1.4.2 Ned McGowan's interview

Ned McGowan is an American flutist, composer and improviser and also my research coach. Therefore, his artistry is closely related to my topic and I consider it very worthy to include here his personal experience and his own vision about improvisation. I decided to give it the form of a non-structured talk, letting the conversation flow, so now I will do a report of the main ideas that Ned expressed during our meeting. In any case, the audio recording of the whole interview is available in Appendix 4.3.

Firstly, he talked about his first steps in improvisation, which took place in a jazz environment while playing 4 nights per week in a restaurant during a summer. There he could try a lot of new ideas and resources out in a low-risk scenario and squeeze the possibilities of the same tunes over and over again, but also he got used to improvising in front of other people, which he considers crucial. Besides, he loves to improvise in classical concerts (he usually plays his own music and contemporary repertoire) as a means of contrast and a way to give the concert what it needs in that precise moment.

That is because in written music each piece belongs to a certain world determined by the composer's style and the score in which it fits perfectly, having its own speed for the unfolding of ideas and complexity. However, in improvisation there are no chains or limits; it is only the musician, the space and the audience. As a result, every musical decision is only determined by the situation; it becomes an intimate moment with the listener instead of the exhibition of a certain structural construction. Despite the previous facts, Ned prefers composition because of his preference for the aesthetics of structure.

Afterwards, the conversation turned into a kind of coaching session about the project itself, but then we also discussed some remarkable ideas that go beyond the practicalities of my research. For example, the relevance that the conception of sound in relation to space and the minimal approach to material has for him or the positive effects of getting inspiration from literature in order to establish a narrative and a structural arc in improvisations.

Besides, we talked about the importance of vocabulary development, which is a never-ending process but always gives a sense of identity and generates invisible unifying threads, and we established as the best quality criteria for improvisation if the performer likes the sound result or not, since a good or wrong discourse can be a dangerous trap in this context.

Finally, he shared with me his insight on the eternal debate of the boundaries between composition and improvisation, stating that improvisation is composition in real time for him, so it is desirable to think about structure in a compositional way while improvising and use this as an element of risk through a gradual increase of complexity until reaching the edge.

3.1.4.3 Parametric experiment

From the main ideas discussed in the 2 previous epigraphs, I designed a parametric experiment in which I can incorporate certain important concepts into practice in an objective way, so that I can analyse later which ones work or not and why. Therefore, I established 3 parameters (mood/character, style, and structure) with 2 values for each one of them, resulting in 8 different combinations. I tried them all out no matter how illogical some combinations may seem, in such a way that I didn't refuse any possibility in advance due to my frame of thinking or prejudices.

- **TABLE OF PARAMETERS AND VALUES**

MOOD/CHARACTER	STYLE	STRUCTURE
Connecting	Timbrical experimentation	From simple to complex
Contrasting	Melody-based language	From A to B going somewhere else in between

- **TABLE OF PERMUTATIONS**

1	Connecting mood	Timbrical experimentation	From simple to complex
2	Connecting mood	Timbrical experimentation	From A to B going somewhere else in between
3	Connecting mood	Melody-based language	From simple to complex
4	Connecting mood	Melody-based language	From A to B going somewhere else in between
5	Contrasting mood	Timbrical experimentation	From simple to complex
6	Contrasting mood	Timbrical experimentation	From A to B going somewhere else in between
7	Contrasting mood	Melody-based language	From simple to complex
8	Contrasting mood	Melody-based language	From A to B going somewhere else in between

Afterwards, I worked on all the permutations, recorded an example of each one of them and wrote down some specific comments with my thoughts while playing and listening back. All this material can be found in Appendix 7.1.

Once I have examined the details of every tested possibility, I will try to draw some conclusions of the experiment that summarise the big amount of knowledge acquired in the process. It is hard to choose just one of the permutations, because all of them have their pros and cons and it makes no sense to judge them completely from specific takes in which many other factors intervene. Said that, I think it is still possible to make some more general statements to guide the next steps of this cycle.

First of all, it has been already discussed that I felt usually more comfortable with the contrasting mood, so I will take it as a preferable choice, even if all the decisions taken now are subject to the feeling of the moment, when everything can change completely according to my particular mood, the space, the environment, etc.

Secondly, both timbral and melodic approaches proved to work properly in different scenarios, so it makes no sense to try to discard one of them. However, I think it is interesting to reflect on the different difficulties I notated for them in each permutation. Regarding the timbral experimentation, the main idea is that I am still quite short in resources to use on the spot safely, so there is an open field for development there that I definitely want to explore in depth.

In the melodic domain, I see a development style-wise in comparison with the start of the process, approaching it in a freer and diverse way; but it is curious to observe how well some subtle references to a specific genre work when made in the right moment. This occurs because, as I said in the media research, shared codes with the audience are very beneficial in order to connect with them in an improvisational environment. Besides, these references can also allude to certain connotations that those sources have and enhance the message or idea lying behind the musical discourse of the interlude.

Therefore, I think it would be interesting to dig deeper on the different possibilities of this balance between more genuine melodic ideas and other material more related to the codes of a certain style, even considering the possibility of letting them permeate and influence each other getting the best of both worlds.

The structural parameter was one of my biggest worries from the beginning and I think I will make a firm choice on it, sticking to the “simple to the complex” concept. Throughout the different combinations I had several difficulties with the other model because I didn’t manage to convey the idea of a clear form through it, but also because it didn’t work very well with some of the permutations.

On the other hand, the simple to complex model has some very interesting features, such as the intuitiveness for both audience and performer in order to understand the development of the form and the possibility of combining it with a minimalistic approach to material which I appreciate from an aesthetic perspective. As a result, I will use this as a guideline for my improvised interludes for now, even if, as in the other parameters there is not any single fixed law, just flexible borders that help me to manage the vast abyss of total freedom.

Finally, there is a very important parameter that I deliberately decided to leave out of the experiment and even from the research for now: the length or time duration. In the very beginning, I considered the possibility of establishing 2 values for it (more and less than a minute, respectively) but I

later rejected this option because I wasn't sure about its relevance for this moment of the process and I thought that it would be hard to handle from a technical point of view in a precise way.

However, I wanted to include a little reflection on it before closing this chapter, since it also made part of the research in the internal dimension of it. I don't have an answer for its role yet, but I think that having questions about it is a good starting point and more than enough for now. It seems evident that it is crucial for the listener's reception, but that is such a complex and intricate topic that I prefer to treat it through its impact in other parameters, like structure of melodic development.

As a result, I came up with this quite stable 3'-approx. duration that allows me to build up a solid arc for a short piece but also protects me from getting lost in my own ideas for too long. Nevertheless, I am aware that this may change later when observing the research topic in a more general way, so I leave it as a research path for the future.

3.1.5 Interventions / practical application

This part of the process consisted basically in preparing my Reference Recording #2 according to the conclusions of the parametric experimentation, since that was already a mixture of data collection and practical application. Therefore, I worked deeply into a contrasting and "simple to complex" model with 2 variants: timbral experimentation and melody-based language. I keep them quite well differentiated for now and they appear as that in the final recording, but in the future it is very likely that they come together into an intermediate version with different balances depending on the specific take and the needs of the musical discourse.

Besides, I tried during this process not to be so analytical as in the Parametric experimentation, looking for spontaneity and pushing a little bit more my limits as an improviser. Now that I have some guidelines to hold on, I think it is beneficial to take this opportunity to enhance my skills and take more risks even if they lead temporarily to a less polished result, but really on the edge at the same time. However, this doesn't mean that I am no longer critical with my artistry, it just implies a slight change in the focus of my practice in comparison with the previous steps.

What I can highlight from this intervention phase is that, even working on it for some weeks, I felt that it was too little time to absorb and handle all the information and acquired knowledge during the data collection. To be honest, I think that the break that comes after the writing of this report will be very beneficial in order to integrate all the development achieved in small pieces during the last months into my mind and body. Therefore, I consider that this intervention phase is not the ending of nothing, but the beginning of something that will be completed with the new inputs of the following cycles.

3.1.6 Outcomes

[10 AR Reference Recording 02 \(David Vaamonde López\)](#)

Here is the final result of this cycle, which in the end is almost a random snippet taken out of a much larger and more complex process. Therefore, I don't consider these 2 interludes to be the finest of my improvisations, but a very good example of my current point in this journey. I opted for showing the less rationalised takes, in which it is easier to see the strongest and weakest points of my artistic proposal in the present, so that I can get as much constructive feedback as possible.

Apart from the possibility of analysing my evolution through the Reference Recordings in order to make the next steps of the research, the main outcome I can extract from this cycle is the construction of an efficient theoretical and practical framework to guide my improvisations on stage while taking into account the particularities of their context. No matter what happens next in my research, this fundamental basis is already there and I think it is solid enough to sustain the different approaches I would like to develop in the future, so I consider it a success for the current state of the process.

Besides, I can point out other complementary outcomes that belong to the subjective and personal domain of the research, such as a bigger confidence in expressing myself through improvisational forms, the development of my creativity as a musician or the discovery of new musical resources, but these are skills that will be enhanced during the whole process as a consequence of the concrete, specific goals that I will acquire in each research cycle.

3.1.7 Feedback, reflection and conclusion

The external feedback I got from my network was a bit superficial in general (i.e. preferences about stylistic elements), but there were some very meaningful aspects regarding the research that I could take. The first one is the perception of development from the beginning of the process; this can seem obvious, but I think that in research projects like this one is not that straightforward that you will get improvements after carrying out certain research strategies.

Secondly, the ideas I want to convey seem to be clear for the listener, no matter if they like them or not. It could happen that they get a completely different idea from what I intended when listening to my improvisations, and it could be completely fine for me as long as they perceive it as a meaningful element in the whole performance and feel engaged to it somehow. But, at the same time, I consider that it is very positive to be able to establish this effective communication process with the audience and have some control on it, because it can be a very powerful tool in order to enhance some aspects of my discourse.

As it is the following idea I want to point out, which is the change in the perception of Rachamninov's piece depending on the features of the interlude. Actually, this can determine the direction of the whole thing, since I would have the chance to manipulate to some extent what perspective of the

written music I perform I want to offer to the audience, leading to a more holistic, integrated identity of the whole performance.

In relation to this, I was recommended by the improviser Carles Marigó to research on the cinematographic technique called “Kuleshov effect”, in which the author can influence the perception of a certain scene from the audience through a specific combination of frames. It is definitely a subject to incorporate in some point of the research, which reminds me about different ideas that are spread over different spots of the process (Moore’s reflection on the importance of shared codes in improvisation, McGowan’s comment on getting inspired by literature structures or my findings in the experimentation regarding quotations and humoristic elements).

My own reflection about this recording relies basically on the impact that the research cycle had on my improvisations, which I consider very positive, because I can notice a big improvement in the coherence and solidity of my discourse. Besides, I perceive a more determined attitude in my playing, sending the message that I know what I want to say right now and how I will do it, even if I am completely on the edge at some moments. In fact, I think there is also an improvement in my ability to react to the sudden elements that come over and use them as part of my discourse, generating a feeling of building a narrative right on the spot, with no planning needed.

However, all this is possible because of my biggest achievement of this cycle, which is the development of my current guidelines that become my safety net and the invisible threads of coherence that make the difference with my starting point. This system is not carved in stone of course, but I think this recording shows how helpful it can be to structure an improvisation due to its foundation in theoretical and practical research, taking inputs from different knowledge areas and putting them together to pursue a specific goal.

But, above all, it gave me the chance to discover a bunch of different paths which I can follow in order to get closer to my objective at the end of the project, so I come back to the beginning of the circle with some answers and many more questions; always a good sign when talking about research and the best way to round up this cycle.

3.2 Second research cycle

3.2.1 Overview of second research cycle

The focus for this cycle is developing my use of extended techniques in improvisation from a technical and artistic point of view. As I will explain in the following pages, I took the final recording of the last cycle as a starting point and, according to the feedback and my later reflection upon it, I designed a data collection in which I combined different approaches, ranging from philosophy to current practice review, in order to inform my practice.

Once I got some specific findings, I started experimenting according to them and came up with a clear artistic insight about the topic and certain technical proficiency on it, that I carried into my next Reference Recording. After analysing it, I could identify the strong and weak points of the materialisation of the process and establish the current outcomes of my work, as well as a list of pending achievements for the third and last cycle.

3.2.2 Reference recording

[10 AR Reference Recording 02 \(David Vaamonde López\)](#)

This recording was made in April 2022 at Codarts (Rotterdam) in which I play 2 different versions of the ending of Mozart's *D Major Sonata* K. 576, followed by an improvised interlude and the first bar of *Moment musical* op. 16 no. 3 by S. Rachmaninov. The first one (until 2:40) is the relevant one for this cycle, since the interlude is based entirely on the use of extended techniques.

3.2.3 Feedback and reflection

As a starting point for this cycle, I asked some experts for feedback on the previous recording and they showed me clearly a common path for development, in which all of them agree. All of them pointed out that they found a bit too sharp the contrast between the written pieces and the interludes, because of the timing and the absence of material development (Ned McGowan) or the lack of shared elements between the interlude and the surrounding pieces (Federico Mosquera, Ricardo Descalzo), among others. As a result, this issue must be addressed at some point.

However, each one of them also gave me particular remarks that I find interesting. For example, Ricardo Descalzo told me that he would care a bit more about gestures and body movement while improvising, because this is important to communicate an idea of spontaneity and confidence in the creation process. Therefore, it can be annoying or disappointing for the listener if I show certain doubts or I rush when displaying a certain musical idea or technique. Besides, Ned McGowan focused on some

compositional aspects of my improvisation, like duration and the presence of a narrative, but also on the amount of extended techniques included and their speed of development. That is, doing more with less, so that the audience can take these techniques as the core of the improvisation and listen to an unfolding process that drives them through the interlude while connecting the pieces.

And last, but not least, I also wrote down my own feedback before asking the experts. On the positive side, I think that the discourse of the interlude is interesting and works well, even if the contrast with the surrounding pieces can be perceived as shocking. Besides, I think that the combination between the material displayed in and out of the keyboard is quite accurate, but it still can be improved in order to avoid the feeling of “catalogue” or showcase when the different techniques appear. The negative remark relates to the variety of used extended techniques (that is, timbrical resources), since it is quite limited and it can be perceptible from outside that it is somehow an obstacle to the improviser’s imagination, that seems to be bigger but translated into the same little group of different sounds all the time.

After collecting all this information, I have been reflecting on it so that it makes part of my artistic development through this cycle, but certainly not everything can be handled at the same time, since the arc of this process is rather short and many of the suggestions I received go beyond my specific goal for this stage of the research, even being still useful and interesting. Therefore, I decided not to drive my attention directly to them, but try to incorporate them on the way while sticking to the original target. Of course, it’s not possible to achieve an outstanding result without putting the focus on those aspects, so I expect to address them in a more specific way in my last cycle, according to the next Reference Recording.

That said, there is still a big question to be answered: which elements of this feedback will frame my following steps? It is obvious that acquiring more skills in extended techniques playing is just a matter of training and practice, but the approach, meaning and purpose of their use is not. Furthermore, all of them gave me some references to look up to, which definitely will make part of the data collection.

Finally, all the received advice concerning other topics that the main focus of this cycle will be very useful in order to design my intervention with an artistic purpose, not only transferring my findings from the data collection to my practice, but also setting them within a broader context, in which artistic choices take place already.

3.2.4 Data collection & data analysis

As I said before, this data collection will be framed taking into account the many references I got from my network, as well as some personal interests related to the topic that I wanted to address in order to enrich the meaning of my further practical application. As a result, I came up with a structure that organises the information according to the aspect it is related to and its source at the same time, establishing 3 categories: Free jazz philosophical principles (bibliographic documentation), conversation on improvisation and experimental music making with Josué Amador (interview) and examples on practical application of extended techniques in 20th-21st centuries piano playing (media footage), rounded up with a quasi-experiment that connects with the following intervention stage.

Apart from the previous topics, I would like to mention that some manuals on piano extended techniques (such as Proulx⁴ and Vaes⁵) are also part of this data collection even if I am not going to make any specific comments on them, due to their purely technical approach. However, they will be very important when going forward to the intervention stage as consulting guides for my use and development of extended techniques in the piano.

3.2.4.1 Free jazz philosophical principles⁶

3.2.4.2 Conversation on improvisation and experimental music making with Josué Amador⁷

In the following lines I will summarise and reflect upon my meeting with the Mexican guitarist, improviser and composer Josué Amador. It was a very interesting and distended talk in which we covered my research topic as a whole, while putting the focus on this cycle. During the interview, many ideas, concepts and names came through, but they can be easily divided into 2 big groups.

On one hand, we discussed my research question in a word, that is, the fact of incorporating improvisation within a classical/contemporary programme, particularly in the form of interludes. He suggested that it would be interesting to “compose” the improvisation somehow, taking into account that for him the only difference between these 2 art forms (improvisation and composition) is how they are

⁴ Proulx, Jean-François. *A pedagogical guide to piano extended techniques*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009

⁵ Vaes, Luk. *Extended piano techniques: in theory, history and performance practice*. Leiden: University of Leiden, 2009. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/15093>

⁶ The full text can be found in Appendix 6, for the sake of the readability of this report.

⁷ You can listen to the whole interview here: [16 Interview with Josué Amador](#). Also available on Appendix 4.

developed through time (composition as slow motion improvisation or improvisation as composition on the spot).

Therefore, he recalls Earle Brown's open form works (such as the *String Quartet*⁸) and the notation system he labelled as "proportional notation" (present in pieces like *4 Systems*⁹ for piano, derived from the Medieval pneumatic notation, as well as Cecil Taylor's maps for improvisation. What these 2 figures have in common is that they designed a sort of guidelines for creative music making in which just a few elements are given (a certain rhythmic pattern, a chord, a timeline, a brief structure...) so that the performers have plenty of room for improvisation without facing the vast abyss of total freedom.

Concerning my particular case, he told me that this could be a nice way to find a certain connection with the surrounding written pieces while keeping a broad space for exploration and creativity. In this way, I would create some material in advance, manipulating some elements from the written pieces as I find suitable for making later a sort of scheme that structures my interlude in a particular way.

On the other hand, we went more specific into the topic of this cycle, particularly trying to find an answer for this question: which would be the best way to approach piano preparations in relation to my project. At first sight, two obvious possibilities appear: to make it permanent or temporary. That is, thinking of a certain palette of timbres that will define the colour and the sound of my improvisations (and even my performance of the written pieces) or, on the contrary, using only devices that can be easily displayed and removed while playing.

This a thrilling debate, at least for me, in which many variables and parameters come together and aesthetic choices play a fundamental role. In any case, we had a very interesting exchange of ideas that didn't result in a definitive answer (the most likely thing to happen, of course) but made me realise and think of certain aspects related to this big question.

The first one was the importance of the visual aspect of my performance, which connects with some of the feedback I received from my experts in the beginning of the cycle about gestures. In this sense, the fact of putting in and taking out objects from the piano is a double-edged weapon, because it can add an interesting "show" element to my performance but it also breaks the flow of the musical discourse when stopping to manipulate these items.

We also got to talk about the implications of preparations on experimentation, because if they were made permanent, it would be really interesting to let them affect the written pieces as well and see the results; or, even more, to design the preparations taking into account the specific context they will be displayed, in a way they affect the pieces to the desired extent and then showcasing a variety of different timbres when getting to the improvisations.

Related to this, many references of different improvisers, composers and pianists came along, and this led us to address the issue of how to relate to the resources that they use to tackle the same questions I am facing now. As a result, we came to the conclusion that originality and authenticity don't arise from a technical skill many times, but from the use people make of it. In fact, even when someone

⁸ Brown, Earle. *String Quartet* (1965). [Earle Brown - String Quartet \(1965\) \[Score-Video\] - YouTube](#), accessed on: 9/11/2022

⁹ Brown, Earle. *4 Systems*. [Earle Brown - 4 Systems. Piano: Juan Carlos Vasquez - YouTube](#), accessed on: 9/11/2022

claims to have created something new, it's possible (and likely) that someone else did it already before. An example of this could be the rhythmic notation system used by Brown, which he even assumed that it wasn't a discovery from him, but he claimed it as his own because of the particular use he made of it.

To sum up, it was a very holistic and rewarding conversation in which I could gather some valuable information that I didn't know before, but, even more importantly, I could reorganise, connect and reflect upon different topics and debates with new eyes, broadening my insight and exploring unknown possibilities as a result.

3.2.4.3 Examples on practical application of extended techniques in 20th-21st centuries piano playing

In this section I will be looking at different examples I found in the last months in which extended techniques are used in piano playing, especially while improvising, so that I can have a better picture of the current practice and get inspiration for developing my own approach to the topic. Therefore, I will be not only collecting the relevant information for my research but also giving my perspective about it, so that artistic choices start taking place from this moment, following the philosophical considerations made in this report until now.

The first video I would like to analyse is a brief interview with the Dutch pianist Albert van Veendendaal¹⁰, whose focus as a musician is prepared piano playing, both for written and improvised music, having also some pieces written by himself for this instrument. I selected this footage out of many more I have also consulted because it is very practical and concise. In 5 minutes he explains and demonstrates briefly some of the techniques he uses more often, at the same time that we can see one of his prepared pianos. I said this in plural on purpose, because that is precisely what defines his vision and what I find more interesting about his artistry.

He conceives preparations as newly invented pianos (or even instruments, in a more abstract way) in which develop complete maps of sounds that serve his artistic ideas. In this way, he would design a totally new setting, a particular group of different timbres throughout the harmonic harp that fits the expressive idea he has in mind. I consider this to be a magnificent starting point to approach the fact of preparing the piano with meaning and purpose, as well as a great guideline to do it in a coherent and efficient way. In fact, I was highly inspired by his ideas in order to embrace the possibility of incorporating objects to my playing and realising the artistic benefits that it could bring to my performances.

From a more technical point of view, his techniques are rather conventional within the world of prepared piano and always involve a permanent preparation with a very detailed build up, which makes it harder to incorporate to a hybrid scenario as the one I intend to put into practice.

¹⁰ Veendendaal, Albert van. Interview (Dutch). [Albert van Veenendaal - Interview \(Dutch\) - YouTube](#), accessed on: 9/11/2022

But there are even more radical approaches, as the one developed by the Australian pianist and composer Cor Fuhler.¹¹ Here we can see 2 people manipulating the piano with a big variety of objects (more sophisticated than the simple ones from Veendendaal, like e-bows and magnets), alongside some live electronics that process the sound that comes out of the piano in real time. As a result, the sound approach is much more abstract and the focus is placed onto the collision of different sounds in and through time rather than the specific timbre itself.

Even if I feel closer to the ideas of Veenendaal, I appreciate very much some of Fuhler's techniques such as the ones mentioned above, which makes me wonder if both approaches couldn't be combined. Besides, the artistic idea of this particular improvisation is very attractive to me, but I would definitely materialise it in a quite different way.

There are also pianists from other musical contexts that get into extended techniques, like in conventional jazz playing, and here is a fine example, the Spanish pianist Marco Mezquida.¹² In my opinion, he has mastered the palm-muting in a way I have ever seen, being really proficient at it and getting a really beautiful tone and different colours with help of the sustain pedal and the overtones released by the pitches of the displayed chords. This is especially visible between the minute 22 and 32 of the recording, when he also occasionally includes a few objects in a very discreet way, such as a wooden box or a stick, and he doesn't even use them all, but it is already interesting the fact that he considers the possibility of using them in his context.

Talking about mainstream contexts, I find the ultimate example in Hauschka (Volker Bertelmann), a German pianist, composer and improviser focused on new age, minimalism and film music while using prepared piano in his performances, proving that style and timbral experimentation are 2 independent variable. In the footage I selected for this review,¹³ I like the palette of sounds that he uses and his employment of preparations seems really elegant and effective to me, so they convey the idea of a prepared piano (an imagined instrument in the manner of Veendendaal) without requiring a very complicated setup. In that sense, objects like the e-bows or the tambourine play a fundamental role. However, I still wonder how I could incorporate some of these elements without compromising too much the rest of my performance, such as the magnets attached with tape or the wooden sticks.

Going now to the opposite side, we encounter Stephen Scott, American composer and founder of the well-known contemporary music group The Bowed Piano Ensemble. In this case, we have an interview¹⁴ which shows the preparation they usually use in their performances and explains many of its particularities, including how they deal with some technical issues such as marking strings, ensemble playing, reading scores and more. But the main reason I included this video is because it shows really clearly what bowed piano is and its multiple applications.

¹¹ Fuhler, Cor and Unami, Taku. Cor Fuhler and Taku Unami at dOeK Festival #8 part 1. [Cor Fuhler and Taku Unami at dOeK Festival #8 part 1 - YouTube](#), accessed on: 9/11/2022

¹² Mezquida, Marco. Marco Mezquida Solo Piano. Ac Recoletos Jazz. [Marco Mezquida Solo Piano. Ac Recoletos Jazz - YouTube](#), accessed on: 9/11/2022

¹³ Bertelmann, Volker (Hauschka). Hauschka at NPR: Improvisation. [Hauschka at NPR: Improvisation - YouTube](#), accessed on: 9/11/2022

¹⁴ Scott, Stephen. Stephen Scott demonstrates the Bowed Piano. [Stephen Scott demonstrates the Bowed Piano - YouTube](#), accessed on: 9/11/2022

I found it really interesting that he uses different devices taking into account the different string materials and how he increases the possibilities of the techniques by combining it with others, such as some rubber-made muters that have the exact shape of the 3 strings per pitch that I found amazing. He also uses plectrums in a very interesting way that I will try in my intervention for sure.

Again, his approach is rather permanent concerning preparation, but some elements can be adapted to more improvised contexts. In fact, during the interview he is asked about the use of surface preparations in the way of Cage and he associated that kind of devices to improvisation situations, therefore he shares the same concerns about the convenience of using some preparations when creating in real time.

One person that deals with it with great ease is Carles Marigó,¹⁵ who is carrying out a project combining Bach music with improvisations after some pieces, in which extended techniques and objects are involved. Against the general tendency within the reviewed examples until now, he only uses devices that are easily included on the strings and removed as shows the following figure:



Fig. 1: Carles Marigó's setup for improvisation

At the same time, he uses the same conception of the timbre map that I introduced in the beginning when talking about Veenendaal. But certainly this approach is more dynamic, flexible and versatile, which I appreciate very much because it allows me to change the setting when suitable and also preserve the original timbre of the written pieces if I want.

However, I have a criticism to make of his artistry, as a way of advice for myself. I find that the fact of combining improvisation with written music doesn't put apart the thrive for a musical result as developed as possible, so that the extended techniques are not the whole proposal in itself, but just a means to achieve specific artistic goals that are more difficult to reach without the timbral parametre.

¹⁵ Marigó, Carles. Breaking Bach with ping-pong balls.

https://www.instagram.com/reel/CjV6KfYDoE1/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link, accessed on: 15/11/2022

In this sense, I think Agustí Fernández gathers all virtues in his improvisation named *Llimona*¹⁶ (“lemon”, in Catalan). He is a worldwide famous improviser into the scene of free improvisation and he has collaborated with all the main figures of the trend, including one of the authors included in Epigraph 3.2.4.1, Derek Bailey. Going now to the footage, he uses only one device (a metallic bar to press on the keys and modify the timbre by hiding and highlighting overtones) that needs no time for setting up, he achieves a surprising but coherent sound result and he develops a sense of form with a very minimal approach towards material.

As a result, I consider this a very fine example to illustrate where I position myself within the coordinate system of extended techniques usage in piano playing. Dynamic, as simple as possible, flexible, meaningful, surprising and efficient. As happened when talking about the philosophical principles, it is also good to know other approaches, because there is always something to learn or incorporate in specific situations from proposals that differ from my point of view both aesthetically and conceptually, but the most enriching part of the process has been indeed to be able to put in words and sounds (to conceptualise, in a word) which direction I am going to take in my intervention stage.

3.2.4.4 Quasi-experiment

As a starting point for this transition between the more theoretical research to my practice, I just played around for a while with the different devices I gathered after reviewing the practice of other artists and adding some of my own as well. They all have in common that they are really simple objects that are part of our daily life, most of them easily removable from the strings without a great visual impact in the performance. Therefore, in the beginning the idea was to forget completely about complex preparations, as a result of the discussions previously held on this topic.

However, during those first attempts I felt that I needed more variety in my resources in order to really cause an impact on the audience through the displayed extended techniques, so I thought that it might be a good idea to mix both approaches in a way that affected as little as possible to the rest of my performance. My longing was for some sounds that were totally apart from the regular piano sound, since every device I would use (mainly surface preparations, that is, objects placed on the strings) affected the standard timbre without eliminating it.

Then I remembered listening to the classic *Sonatas and interludes* by John Cage back in time, and I realised that I could get inspired by his first experiments with prepared piano in order to get that kind of percussive, muted sounds. For those pieces, the used objects are basically different types of screws in combination with rubber pieces to mute the fundamental pitch; so I decided to do the same in my own way on the edges of the register.

This was the beginning of the real experiment, when a certain organisation of the process appeared. Therefore, I firstly divided all the retrieved sounds depending on their colour in a very basic way, so that I have some “dark” sounds (screws, for example) and “light” ones (like the bouncing balls). But later on, instead of categories to group the sounds I decided to label them one by one, giving them certain features that would identify them within my inner database. So now I have a fixed list of objects

¹⁶ Fernández, Agustí. *Llimona*. [Llimona | Agustí Fernández - YouTube](#), accessed on: 3/10/2022

(including pingpong balls, rubber pieces, fishing line and a long etcetera) that have attached qualities such as warm, muffled, percussive, lyrical, exciting or blue.

I am aware this is a pretty personal and subjective way of operating, but I have conceived it as the kind of experiment that leads to the creation of material when composing written music, an alchemic combination of intuition and technical knowledge in which the final decisions are always completely based on the individual criteria and the first reaction when carrying out the process.

As a result, I let the written music be the reference system and the only limiting element (though necessary) for displaying my freedom and making artistic choices, with special focus on the topic of this cycle (that is, making a selection of timbrical resources according to this specific context) but also regarding some others aspects included on the received feedback in the beginning of this period, such as the enhancement of compositional aspects in my improvisations or the visual appearance of my performance, that will conduct the development of the next stage.

3.2.5 Interventions / practical application

The final design of my intervention consists in connecting J.S. Bach's *D minor Harpsichord Concerto* (1^o mov.) and F. Chopin's *4th Ballade* with a short interlude (around 1-1:30 min) in which there is a gradual change from the character of the first piece (powerful, motoric, energetic) to the one of the second (melancholic, lyrical, intimate), going through a completely different sonic (timbrical) world and re-elaborating some material of both pieces on the edges of the improvisation.

In order to achieve that, I started working on the timbrical setting for this specific case, in which I wanted basically 5 types of sounds: dry, percussive, slightly pitched sound; resonating bells; frantic analogue synth-like set; ethereal, randomising sounds and metallic glissandi. On the way, I added some extra elements in order to generate more variability among the different attempts, so this mixed approach of a basic timbrical map with some additional tools happened to be one of the most valuable ideas that emerged during the practical application.

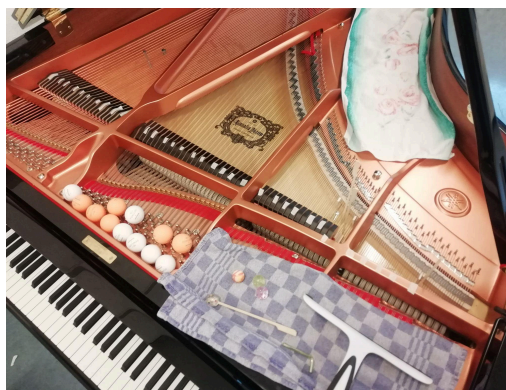


Fig. 2: Final setting for this intervention cycle

As you can see, I placed the most invasive sounds on the edges of the piano (the 2 thick, heavy screws for the resonating, bell chords on the low register and the percussive sound on the high one), with my frantic set between D6 and G6 combining muted pitches with rubber, altered pitches with screws and overtones with chopsticks, and finally a variety of removable objects (bouncing balls and cleaning device for ethereal sounds, Allen key for metallic sounds and ping-pong balls + homemade mallet as bonus).

I tried to have a minimal approach to all aspects of the intervention, so I refined the setting by eliminating other devices until I reached this one, in the same way that I aimed to keep the structure and the material as simple as possible, following my conclusions of the data collection. Therefore, I decided to connect timbre and form, so that every change of sound led to a different stage of the structural arc I wanted to create from the 2 different characters of the written pieces, and I picked only one element from them to shape the material: the main rhythmic pattern from Bach and a broad, major chord from Chopin.

Performance-wise, this is very helpful to guide myself while playing and to be clear and organic when developing ideas. Besides, all these choices are also related to the importance I give to the reception in this process, including the audience as an agent of the musical event, enhancing the experience of the moment through improvisation.

However, I came across some challenges during this process, that were basically related to the visual aspect and the narrativity of my improvisations. Regarding the first issue, I was aware from the beginning that I took an important risk when I decided to display such a big variety of sounds in such a short period of time, because that would imply a lot of additional movements in order to manipulate objects and change from one timbre to another.

In order to handle it, I worked very much on transitions, finding different strategies for keeping the musical discourse going on in such a way that it remained the centre of attention when I had to deal with practicalities. These strategies ranged from the actual movements (almost choreographic) when putting and releasing objects or pressing the keys on prepared pitches (for not destroying the surprising effect) to the chosen order in which the different sounds appear, so that the shifts were as efficient as possible.

For example, I had to alternate the use of removable objects with the preparations previously set up on the strings, in order to avoid the change from grabbing one object to another; but also I had to adapt the placement in time of certain musical ideas so that they lasted enough time to manipulate the different sounds without being too rushed.

Talking now about the narrativity, it was very important to me that the concept of my improvisations was easily understandable by the listener, so in every take I went deeper on accumulating resources for that purpose, little hints that everybody could grasp in order to follow the process intuitively, no matter how exotic or even discomforting the sound palette could result for somebody. They are materialised always in a second layer, recalling stereotypes in a veiled way, therefore aiming for a difficult balance between directness and subtlety.

As a result, I came out with a combination of very striking sounds within a classical piano recital and a variety of references to some auditive common places for almost any audience that I find very interesting and useful when trying to convey an expressive and narrative idea to the listener while being innovative and surprising in the used means.

Summarising, it was indeed a very rewarding and enjoyable process for me, in which I could fit together the different pieces of the puzzle that I had compiled during the previous weeks through the different strategies of my data collection, even if there are always doors left open for the future, new endeavours to be explored and incorporated to the growing art object that I am creating during this research process.

3.2.6 Outcomes

[17 AR Reference Recording 03 \(David Vaamonde López\)](#)

This recording was made on 19th November 2022 at CODARTS Rotterdam, lasting 2 minutes and 29 seconds and performed on a prepared piano by David Vaamonde López.

3.2.7 Reflection, feedback and conclusion

Even if the specific topic this time was the development of extended techniques within my improvisations, the technical aspect has been shadowed somehow for the longer arcs that come from earlier phases of the project, for my conception of improvisation (both in theory and practice) has been significantly developed and more precisely directed towards a certain spot within the vast field that I have been mapping with my data collections, with much many territories to explore though.

In the same way, my improvisational skills follow an evolution process of its own, getting enriched with the different tasks in which I get them involved. If I had to be more specific about this, I find now that my inclination towards experimentation and taking risks on spontaneous creation is bigger, at the same time that I experience the act of improvising with a better long-range sight, so that I perceive clearly my position in time and space in relation to the artistic idea I want to display, which is also strengthened now by a growing amount of resources to set the conditions for real freedom without constraints.

However, some of my experts pointed out some interesting issues to work on in the future. For example, Asim Halvarwi still finds my improvisations to be a catalogue of extended techniques, missing a linear direction as a whole within the different sections. Besides, he remarks some extended techniques appear with no musical context and some material can be developed further by making variations. Furthermore, my piano teacher Bart van de Roer was concerned about the reception of such an adventurous approach and how the preparations affect the classical repertoire played around them, aiming for a pure showing of all worlds.

From my side, I can say that I feel engaged and enjoy listening to this improvisation; in other words, I think that really adds something to the regular alternative that is just silence between both pieces in the form of a sonic trip to other worlds. That said, there are some aspects that I think that can be improved, like the gesture. Even if I have been working on it specifically, there are still a couple of spots (when grabbing the metallic bar, for example) that the doubtiness in my movements breaks the flow of the music and gives a certain feel of uncertainty.

It is true that sometimes it can be even positive to show the risky position of the performer while daring to create in real time in front of the audience, but it is a pity when it goes completely against the artistic intention at that moment, as it happens in this case.

Another aspect to work on is the speed for unfolding ideas. As I said before, I glued structure and timbre on purpose, but not the material. However, the gradual transformation from the rhythmic nature of the music based on the short-short-long pattern to the harmonic-colouristic approach seems to be affected too much by the different sounds that appear. I wouldn't say that a new element comes in with each one of them, but for sure that they debilitate the thread that binds everything together and conveys the mental image to the listener.

At the same time, I highly appreciate the result of incorporating such a big amount of devices for just a short interlude, because they make such a big contribution to the attractiveness of my language with all their colours and textures and drive my piano playing much closer to my imagination, which was one of the main concerns when I decided to spend a whole cycle with this issue. Furthermore, I think that the more abstract ideas driven from the data collection have a significant impact into my practice, like the importance of dynamism or the incorporation of interplay elements into my solo improvisations, using the dialogue with the random melodies of a bouncing ball with a satisfactory result.

Finally, I would like to say that, despite the rather positive tone of this reflection, I felt that this process was too short and, as a consequence, there is still room for many more improvements within this specific area. I am happy with the actual (and relatively small) evolution of my practice because I can relate that I am on the good track, but I envision at the same time a much more polished and richer sound result that really makes justice to all the artistic and conceptual work behind it. Of course, this requires time, perspective and practice, so I go forward with my project full of hopes and expectations in order to put into interesting sounds all the artistic growth that this research is carrying into my practice.

3.3 Third research cycle

3.3.1 Overview of third research cycle

This last cycle deals with time management in improvisation and the intuitive elements that are present in the core of my improvisations. These focus points are basically the 2 main aspects that haven't been covered during the previous cycles; the first one is the most repeated comment from my experts in the previous Reference Recording feedbacks and the second one is a set of skills and aesthetics ideas that feel natural for me, so I don't have the inner necessity to find an explanation to them while it can be interesting to know for others.

Therefore, this time the data collection will address both topics while the intervention in my practice will focus more on enhancing the time management skill by using scores and diagrams for improvisation, having the acquired awareness about my own aesthetics as a background element.

3.3.2 Reference recording

[17 AR Reference Recording 03 \(David Vaamonde López\)](#)

This recording was made on 19th November 2022 at CODARTS Rotterdam, lasting 2 minutes and 29 seconds and performed on a prepared piano by David Vaamonde López.

3.3.3 Feedback and reflection

The 2 experts that took part in this feedback (Josué Amador and Feliu Gasull) agreed quite a lot on their remarks about my performance without knowing the opinion the other has at all. Therefore, both of them are mainly concerned about the transitions between the different ideas but also about how these ideas themselves are developed through time.

They feel the discourse is too fragmented and there is material for many more minutes of music, but the lack of structure frustrates the hypothetical development of some of these ideas, which they found promising and powerful. On the other hand, Feliu also pointed out that sometimes I opt for musical elements that are a bit obvious, so I should be more careful and stay honest to myself.

Talking now about the transitions, the main comment is that they should be more gradual (that is, unfolded over a longer period of time) so this element in combination with a longer development of every idea would give a more pleasant and natural arc to my interludes.

I can't do anything else but agree completely with their thoughts, but, at the same time, the Reference Recording format puts some (unconscious) limitations, especially in time, that can distort a bit the sense of proportion and make more noticeable all these phenomena that they talk about. Therefore, I think that some of it will be solved when I get to try my whole project out in a longer setting, but certainly they have been able to give me the main points of attention for this cycle in a very specific way, so I will invest the following steps of the process to get some improvement on them.

3.3.4 Data collection & data analysis

This chapter includes 3 different layers, designed from the feedback received about my last Reference Recording. The first one is mainly artistic in the form of an autoethnography, in which I take a closer look at the main features of my improvisational style; followed by a more philosophical one, a conversation with Feliu Gasull on musical identity and many more topics, and finishing with a quasi experiment in which I cover the most technical aspects of the current topic.

3.3.4.1 *How do I improvise?*

The header of the following text is a very big question to face, so it took some time before I could make the first steps to handle it. Of course, the first thing is to incorporate it into the daily practice, in order to start identifying patterns, common elements, etc. in the most usual context possible. This process lasted some weeks until I came with 3 main aspects that define my intuitive improvisational style: **harmonic language**, **melodic development** and **treatment of metre**.

Thus, the following lines are just a summary of the conclusions I could draw from such a holistic and hardly accountable process. However, I will document my explanations with some examples and references that help to sufficiently give a clear picture of it.

- *Harmonic language*

If I feel a strong connection with any feature of my improvisations, that is harmony. However, this is a very general topic, so I had to dig deeper into my own practice in order to recognise more specific elements that give a certain character to my harmonies, either on their own or combined among each other. Therefore, the next paragraphs will deal with my approach to 4th/5th-interval chords, triads and superstructures.

The first device can seem very straightforward and simple at first, but it is actually a very powerful tool. They are indeed chords composed by the superposition of some 4th or 5th intervals in a row, so they have a very strong identity because of their symmetric feature, but they can be modified in a way that they offer much more possibilities.

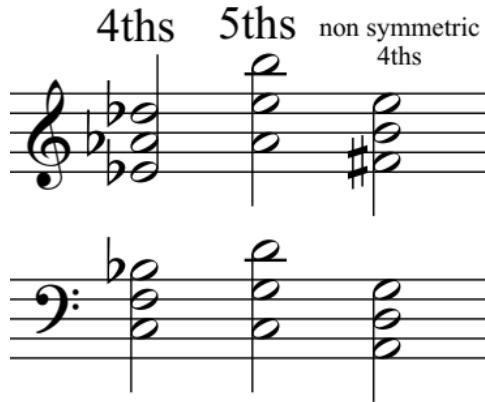


Fig. 3: Example on 4ths and 5ths chords

In the beginning, I started doing this intuitively, but later on I found out the harmonic concept of the American composer Vincent Persichetti and everything levelled up strongly. In his book *Twentieth-Century Harmony*¹⁷ Persichetti develops a complete theory for modern harmony by classifying any chord depending on the basic intervals they are made of: chords by seconds, by thirds, by fourths, etc.

There I could conceptualise better and expand my awareness about a harmonic tool that I started using just as a finding in the practice, with a limited amount of modifications, similar to the one shown above in Figure 3. However, Persichetti opened the door for me towards a more analytical approach without lacking the connection with a creative use of the technical resources. He starts making a distinction between 3-note, 4-note, 5-note and multi-note quartal chords, in order to make a deep commentary on the specific features of each subcategory, as shows the following example:

A quartal structure more resonant than a three-note chord by fourths is made by adding another fourth to the chord. The new tone forms a consonant interval (tenth) with the bass tone and adds color and variety to quartal harmony. Four-note chords by fourths are extremely useful in their three inverted forms because of the variety of intervals they contain.

Ex. 4-24



¹⁷ Persichetti, Vincent. *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1961.

Fig. 4: Persichetti's explanation of 4-note quartal chords¹⁸

This way of thinking made me come back to my practice and think about it in the same way. As a result, I could derive an additional idea related to this topic.

So, if we made an analogy with the chromatic colour wheel and we associated the all-4ths chord with one of the coldest tones (blue or purple, for example) and the all-5ths chord with its opposite in the warm side (orange or yellow) it is possible to explore the whole spectrum in between only using this resource.

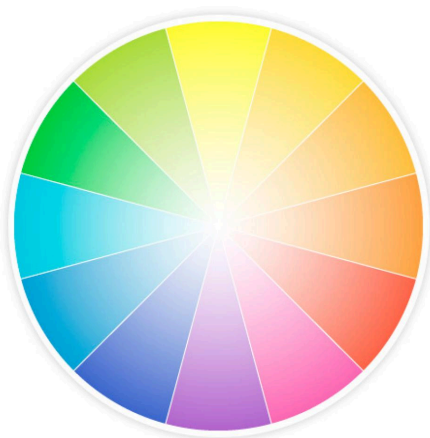


Fig. 5: Chromatic colour wheel

The way to do that is basically breaking the symmetry implicit to the 4ths and 5ths models at some point(s), altering the relationship between the blocks in one hand and the other or the intervals within them, either combining different intervals or inverting some of them. As you can see, the number of possibilities is huge and I would like to develop further this concept in a more detailed way, filling in the wheel above with specific examples for all the intermediate steps. In any case, when I improvise and I think in terms of coldness and warmth, I already have at my disposal a palette of harmonic colours with a common base that I can use.

¹⁸ Persichetti, Vincent. *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1961, p. 101



Fig. 6: Modifications on 4ths and 5ths chords

But this is not the only element that makes part of my harmonic concept for improvisation, since triadic language is also fundamental for me. The main reason for this is that it immediately establishes a connection with the tonal world even if it is placed in an environment of a different nature, serving as a bridge between 2 independent dimensions. This association provokes that an unknown (Western) audience can relate to a specific musical discourse while not understanding everything about it, having a feeling of veiled comprehension that I find very interesting.

The way I incorporate triadic chords is linked to the third element I wanted to comment on, superstructures¹⁹. Of course, this last concept is much broader, but applied to triads it results in harmonic structures in which consonance and dissonance are very balanced, sometimes conveying an ambiguous feeling. For instance, it is possible to achieve very interesting structures just displaying 3 major triads along the different registers of the piano, like in the following example:

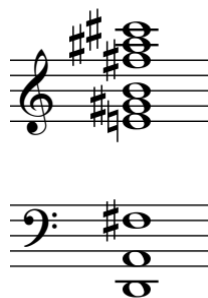


Fig. 7: Example on triadic structures

¹⁹ Persichetti calls them “Polychords” (see chapter 7 on the above referenced *Twentieth-Century Harmony*)

Besides, triads are very useful to harmonise melodies. Therefore, using a combination of major, minor, augmented and diminished triads both in root and inverted position is possible to transform a very simple (or not) melody into something completely different.²⁰ If used in a constant way, it can be tiring and non interesting for the listener, but as a sporadic resource I find it very useful.

Now talking about the above-mentioned superstructures, it is as simple and as complex as making new chords out of combining 2 or more pre-existing ones. In terms of combinatory, this increases a lot the number of possibilities but it easily leads to unpleasant results too. As Persichetti also explains:

Multi-unit polyharmony is so massive and complex that the notes of the bottom triad must often be spread apart. Some units should be overlapped and others should have the space between them widened. Doubling and coupling enlarge a polychord without adding to its complexity.



Fig. 8: Persichetti's explanation of multi-unit polyharmony problems²¹

Therefore, it is something that must be used carefully, especially when combining complex chords, but it also is a very quick way to get a super dissonant sound with bigger coherence than just a simple cluster, or to avoid the tendency to go into extreme chromaticism in order to achieve dissonance. In a few words, superstructures can provide very dissonant but broad-range harmonic resources.

Before finishing this chapter I would like to mention another essential element as well, which is intuition. In the end, this is just an intellectual exercise in order to conceptualise and communicate ideas that are, to a certain extent, a result of immediate reaction upon diverse stimuli without a conscious process of thought. Besides, the features I commented on above are the ones that I consider more characteristic from my playing, but they are not always present and, when they are, it is always in combination with many other resources that may be more standard.

²⁰ See Olivier Messiaen: *Le baiser de l'enfant Jesus*

²¹ Persichetti, Vincent. *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1961, p. 152

- Melodic development

This aspect has been widely mentioned among the people that have listened to my improvisation until now, since most of them found it quite particular, so I decided to take myself a closer look into it in order to get a general insight about it. What I could find is that the main characteristic consists of using very short motives that emerge from the harmonic progression I have in mind at a certain moment. You can find an example here: [01 AR Reference recording 01](#) (0:55-1:25)

They usually combine minor/major seconds with some leaps with the aim of connecting the most interesting notes from each chord among them and, as I could conclude from analysing my own practice and previous recordings, I tend to not develop them very much, but rather jump from one little idea to another, letting other parameters (mainly harmony and texture) lead the discourse and its coherence. Therefore, I don't consider my improvisations mainly melodic, even if I don't renounce to have a lyrical approach to my musical creation.

Besides, I very often use a tool that allows me to handle such an important aspect in this particular way: dialogues. In my playing I am constantly looking for a dramatic effect by opposing different characters, ideas of different nature (i.e. lyrical, rhythmic, etc.) that enhance the narrative feature of the music, which is always the most necessary grounding from my point of view.

As a result, even if the typical development through variation and repetition of a single idea or motive is not happening very often or to the extent that is usual, I manage to establish a functional melodic discourse through this technique of question and answer, speech and comment, claim and response.

However, sometimes the more common techniques are also taking part, the only difference is their relevance within the process. For example, a very simple and efficient way of creating a Q&A effect is by doing a variation on a preceding idea, while the focus is not on the way that variation is made.²² Thus, the rhetorics of it become the main element (the main idea conveyed to the listener) instead of the aesthetic pleasure implicit in admiring the technical skill of the improviser. In other words, the technical resource serves a major artistic goal and is not the purpose itself.

Finally, the last resource I would like to mention is related to the theatricality involved in my melodic conception, which is the use of *recitativo*²³ style. I feel very comfortable communicating just with a melodic line, full of fermatas and space for declamation where I can fully explore melody as an expressive tool without subordinating it to other parameters, such as harmony and rhythm.²⁴ In the previous example, even if there is certain harmonic content (based on modal chords as pedal notes) and a free metre, I think it is clear that the melody conveys the discourse alluding to the features previously described.

²² [04 Permutation 3](#) (0:45-1:05)

²³ “Form of declamatory speech-like singing used especially in opera or oratorio. Serves for dialogue or narrative (as a means of advancing the plot), whereas the subsequent aria is often static or reflective. [...] Types of recit. are: *recitativo accompagnato* or *stromentato* (It., acc. or instr. recit.), introduced c.1663, in which the v. is acc. by instr.; *recitativo secco* (It., dry recit.), in which the notes and metre of the singing followed the verbal accents, accompanied only by occasional hpd. chords, perhaps with a vc. or other instr. taking the bass line.”

Retrieved from: Kennedy, M. and J.B.: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

²⁴ [08 Permutation 7](#) (2:00-3:15)

As a conclusion, I want to say that I found it very rewarding and interesting to carry out this process, because it made me reflect on a musical parameter that never has been a priority intuitively, but I realised that still I could find my own way to do it, with some interesting features that I wasn't fully aware of before. Meanwhile, I think that I have a great room for development in it for the future, so that is the best outcome I could get from this introspection exercise.

- Treatment of metre

Regarding this aspect, I knew from the very beginning which was the main thing to say, since I have a strong tendency to improvise without metre, *ad libitum*. I find the grid of metre very limiting when diving into the spontaneous creation, and I embrace very easily the freedom that the time dimension gives me in order to display my musical ideas without any boundary involved. I think this characteristic is so straightforward that it doesn't even need to be illustrated with an audible example: the reader can grasp it just by clicking on (almost) any of the recordings included in this report.

Nevertheless, at certain points I need to supply my improvisations with some motion, what I usually do is suggest different metres and grooves for a short period of time. But even in this case I do it in a rather flexible way, with no intention of being utterly precise in timing; indeed I am not a very rhythmical improviser.

There are also some occasions when I like to get into a different environment and I do it by changing my approach to metre. Then, I usually incorporate irregular metres like 5/8 or 7/8 in combination with straight ones (4/4, 3/4) switching from one to another in a very quick way, creating a wonky feeling while the pulse is very stable, as if it were always the same metre with accents and syncopations all over the place.²⁵

It may seem that my analysis on this aspect has been more superficial, but is simply an element that I usually approach in the same way. As a result, I think I could give myself the opportunity to explore other ways of conceiving it, both as a technical skill and as an expressive tool for artistic needs at some point.

Now it is time to address the initial question (that is, *How do I improvise?*) as an ending point for this reflection. My main thought is that I am not very sure yet if the employment and conceptualising of these technical resources is enough to give a proper answer to such a big query. In any case, I still give a great value to this process because it has forced me to reflect about my own practice as a whole, even though splitting it later into smaller pieces.

As a result, I could acquire a much detailed insight on it, identifying strengths, affinities and spaces for growth. I really hope this better picture of myself as an improviser has an impact on both the listener and myself for carrying out our task within the communicative situation involved in music making.

²⁵ [27 Irregular meters example](#)

3.3.4.2 Interview on musical identity: Feliu Gasull²⁶

In order to enhance the introspective process I carried out with the previous chapter, I decided to hold an interview with one of my main references in music and life, Catalan guitarist and composer Feliu Gasull. He is a very special person and musician, with a great personality and a very particular but solid way of thinking about art and all its implications. Therefore, I thought he was the perfect person to ask about his insight on his own musical identity and get inspired by his vision in order to get a clearer picture of myself, using him as a mirror.

The result was a mesmerising conversation, in which many topics came across and intertwined with the focus I intended to establish for the sake of this project. Now I will try to select and summarise the main ideas that this enlightening encounter has brought into my own process.

Regarding the definition of musical identity, Feliu stated that it is the combination of learning and filtering information through perception. In his opinion, however, mixing different inputs is a hard task, so it is important to do it with honesty, “without losing connection with the centre”; the centre being that inner feeling of staying true to oneself, to one’s essence and identity.

According to Feliu, we all know when a note that we have just played or written is the right one or not in a completely intuitive way, and that is the only criteria to judge the authenticity (that is, the righteousness) of our music. Opposed to this model, he presents the more “scientific” musicians, who settle their groundings on the vast theory developed through the years.

Getting more specific about improvisation, he says that relying completely on pre-established resources can be dangerous and lead to “decaf” versions of the greater musicians from the present and the past. Therefore, he suggests that those resources must be only a platform to jump into the full experience of the present, which implies an ecstatic feeling that represents what music really is: a sonic metaphor of a superior entity that cannot be synthesised.

Through art we are looking for indefiniteness, for a symbolic representation of the infinite, the meaning of everything (life, love, divinity, etc.). But in the very moment we try to set limits to it, to label it, to categorise it, it is gone. That is the reason why his relationship with the academy in the arts is very complicated.

From his point of view, its scientific nature (that is, the necessity of giving a rational explanation for everything) causes that, instead of providing the students with tools and resources for reaching those sublime experiences, the scholars keep on asking for justifications for everything the students do. As an alternative to always talking on behalf of others, Feliu proposes to experience life and music to the maximum and take our own conclusions according to one’s filter, one’s identity, taking that as the most truthful source of knowledge.

To be honest, I think there is little to add to what he said. For me, these more alternative perspectives are completely necessary in our times, since they bring us back to critical attitude and reflexive thinking while pointing out (usually) the failures of the system in a very sharp, precise way.

²⁶ You can listen to the whole interview here: [18 Interview with Feliu Gasull](#). Also available on Appendix 4.

Besides, it is very inspiring to see a person of his age still pursuing answers and posing questions to the world and himself with such humility and curiosity, which I think is the real core of any succeeding musical identity, beyond a list of technical resources.

3.3.4.3 Quasi experiment: Designing and using scores for improvisation

This chapter aims to tackle what is the core element of this cycle: time management in improvisation. In order to achieve that, I have designed an experiment to start trying out some ideas and see how they work. Therefore, this time the goal is not to determine which one is the best option out of all the possibilities, but to test them all and develop a self training in order to make all of them work and see their particular characteristics.

In this case, the 2 pieces that I will use are Brahms *Intermezzo in A Major*, op. 118 no. 2 and Chopin *Ballade no. 4*, op. 52.


The plan is the following: I will always take the same specific element from the first and the second of the written pieces, as well as a single original idea for the middle part of the combinations. For each of these 3 sections I will establish 2 values: short (ca. 30'') and long (ca. 1'), leading to a total length of approximately 2-3 minutes, as shows this table:

<i>1st-piece-based material</i>	<i>New idea</i>	<i>2nd-piece based idea</i>
SHORT	SHORT	SHORT
LONG	LONG	LONG

The next step is to make all the possible combinations, as it is shown below:

	<i>1st-piece-based material</i>	<i>New idea</i>	<i>2nd-piece based idea</i>
1	SHORT	SHORT	SHORT
2	SHORT	SHORT	LONG
3	SHORT	LONG	SHORT
4	SHORT	LONG	LONG
5	LONG	SHORT	SHORT
6	LONG	SHORT	LONG
7	LONG	LONG	SHORT
8	LONG	LONG	LONG

And, last but not least, to define which are the resources to be used and make the score that rules out the whole experiment:

<i>1st-piece-based material</i>	<i>New idea</i>	<i>2nd-piece based idea</i>
Variations on  + arpeggiated accompaniment	Atonal, frantic rows of notes Quick polyphonic gestures	Repeated notes in octaves

Once the design stage is concluded, it is time to explore all the different combinations. I recorded one sample of each one of them in order to make a brief commentary that combines my ideas about how they work in relation to timing and form and my experience during the experimentation process. This information can be found in Appendix 7.2.

Before closing the report on this experiment, I would like to add some general conclusions to all the more specific previous comments. First of all, I think it was proved very sufficiently that the use of this kind of diagrams is a great success. If I would compare with some improvisation recorded in previous stages of this project, I see a much bigger coherence, a clearer shape and a more fluid discourse, resulting in a more effective way of connecting the pieces.

Besides, it is a great tool from a technical point of view, that allows me to have much more mental space in order to put the best of my imagination into the interludes. Of course, it is very important to take care about how far the establishment of musical elements gets, so that there is still enough room to actually create a new piece of music on the spot, even if there are some prepared guidelines.

But in any case, it makes a great difference when dealing with proportion issues. Not only because it provides a system to handle it, but also it allows to dial it according to the context and the artistic goal the performer has for that interlude. This is very important for me because I think it is the greatest upgrade this experiment has brought into my playing, and it will determine for sure the last steps of this project before coming to an end.

In other words, I am not only paying attention to proportion and time management from a technical point of view, but also as an artistic tool, a means of expression that makes part of the core of my framework for improvised interludes between written pieces.

3.3.5 Interventions / practical application

As it already happened in my first research cycle, the experiment already takes some space from the intervention phase, so I had to design it according to that premise. For that, I decided to incorporate an extra element that I hadn't explored before while applying the conclusions of my data collection in a practical case.

This time I will take for the first time ever 2 non-contrasting pieces, from the same composer and even from the same cycle; I am talking about *Música callada* (no. XVIII and XVII) by Frederic Mompou. Therefore, in the following lines I will explain in detail how I approach the preparation of the interlude with the additional challenge that the style, character and proportion of the 2 pieces is (almost) the same, so I can't rely on the implicit contrast to make it work: instead of going from A to B, it will be more like departing A to back to a place really closeby.

The first step was to select the material I take from the written pieces as well as the original element I add in between. My idea was to allude to different parameters while keeping the essence of both pieces, so I decided to take the texture and the metre from the B part of the first piece, which is all about an unconcluded search for the sublime, and to create a chord alike the ones that bind the second piece, a very deep meditation in sound.




Fig. 9: 2 first bars of B section from *Música callada XVIII* by Frederic Mompou

Afterwards, I started thinking about the best way to complement the previous ideas and I had a dilemma between two different approaches. I could either go for an extreme contrast, going out of the calmness of the aesthetics or just make a smooth connection, keeping some shared groundings and only manipulating a few parameters. In order to make a decision, I thought about the journey as a whole and then I saw that it had no sense to make such a sharp change for a few seconds between 2 short pieces (2-3 minutes each), so I went for a more gradual transition.

At this point I remembered some of the reflections I made during my experiment in the data collection, especially regarding option number 5 and 6, in which I realised that the “new idea” could work as a downhill and a crossfade between the other 2 sections, respectively. So I opted for merging both

approaches and I decided to incorporate a short recitativo as the only new element. In this way, I had a decrease in density that reduced the level of energy while having an elegant bridge between the two different atmospheres (textures) that belong to Mompou's music.

<i>1st-piece-based material</i>	<i>New idea</i>	<i>2nd-piece based idea</i>
6/8 metre, polyphonic texture (B section)	Recitativo, one voice with pedal	

Once having the material, it was needed to associate a certain duration for each section. Taking into account the previous thoughts, it was clear that the middle part had to be short and smaller in proportion to the other 2 sections. Therefore, the only decision to make was if both of them were to be long or not. In order to tackle that, I zoomed out again and I noticed that the second piece was slightly longer, and the related material I was dealing with in the improvisation was very minimal (just a chord), so I thought that it was very appropriate to go for a **Long-Short-Short** shape (Option no. 5 in my experiment).

This proportion was not only part of the previous steps of the design, but also fits to balance the first and second piece between them, which I consider very important regarding that they have many things in common, so they can easily become a single unity if the interlude manages to merge them. Therefore, this interlude won't aim to build a third unity between the 2 pieces or to highlight the differences they have, but connect them in such a way that they can almost seem just one musical object.

[28 AR Reference Recording #4](#)

4 Research findings and outcomes

4.1 Documentation and explanation of the research outcomes

My research outcomes consist of a demo recording in which I show a combination of the specific elements I worked on during the 3 research cycles. That is, I present a video in which I play 2 complete classical piano pieces with an improvised interlude in between that contains extended techniques to some extent and has been designed using a score with basic material and a proportion (timing) scheme. This interlude and all its elements will respond to specific artistic ideas, with the aim to present the written pieces in a different way than usual, either enhancing some of their particular features or changing their context on purpose.

The two pieces I selected for this demo are *Cordes-à-vide* by Gyorgy Ligeti and Intermezzo op. 118, no. 2 by Johannes Brahms. Both of them are part of my current repertoire and I feel attracted to the idea of presenting the result of this project going against the chronological order that is so common in piano solo recitals. Besides, their expressive characteristics are very appealing in order to make an interlude in between, going from the still, subtle atmosphere from Ligeti to the heartfelt, singing tone of Brahms.

Therefore, when designing this interlude I wanted to make that journey in such a way that both Ligeti and the interlude work as a preparation for one of the masterpieces from Romantic piano repertoire. Ligeti's extraordinary craftsmanship strongly invites the audience to sharpen their ears, let their thoughts go and focus completely on sound and follow the architecture of the different threads of fifths that create this musical cathedral.²⁷ So I wanted to preserve that mood until Brahms appears out of nowhere, in such a way that the audience listens to this very well-known piece from that perspective.

As a result, I decided to start with a short soundscape that keeps the '5ths atmosphere' with the addition of extended techniques in order to use timbre as a contrasting new element, leading into a short sequence of complex harmonic structures that start the trip towards tonality, as the sun appearing from behind the mist, concluding with longer section in which the texture from the Intermezzo is introduced, with an expressive build up that only falls down in the very last moment to land into the intimate *piano cantabile* of the first bars by Brahms. The table below describes this in a more direct way:

²⁷ For extra information, see: Aimard, Pierre Laurent. *Ligeti: Étude no. 2 - Cordes-à-vide* | Pierre Laurent Aimard explores the work. [Ligeti: Étude No. 2 – „Cordes à vide“ | Pierre-Laurent Aimard explores the work - YouTube](#). Accessed on: 21/05/2023

<i>1st-piece-based material (ca. 30'')</i>	<i>New idea (ca. 30'')</i>	<i>2nd-piece based idea (ca. 1')</i>
5ths soundscape with extended techniques	Vertical harmonic structures broad, polytonal chords	Cantabile tonal melody with arpeggiated accompaniment

Even if there is already a fixed plan behind, the spontaneity is not affected. Out of this single scheme endless possibilities can come out, but the coherence and effectiveness of the interlude is quite guaranteed. The rest depends on the most important ingredient for improvisation: the awareness of the present (and all its implications). Therefore, the following video is just a sample that belongs to the precise moment of the recording and might be very different to the one that would emerge while reading these lines.

[29 AR Reference Recording #5](#)

4.2 Self-assessment of the research outcomes and expert feedback

The previous recording shows which the state of my improvised interludes is, including their imperfections. Therefore, I think this is not the optimal version, but indeed it is the best example to accurately portray the ending point of this project. I appreciate very much the organic feel that this interlude has, with a clear direction that proves the effectiveness of the additions made without getting artificial, but also the fact that a certain effort is still present and noticeable.

That is a clear signal of the new and old challenges that are yet to be accomplished, such as the concentration needed to connect 2 difficult pieces as these ones without a rest and with the additional task of making an interesting musical bridge between them. I consider this is very positive, because it gives me a clear insight into the next steps to take in this never ending process.

Finally, I would like to point out the notable development I can perceive regarding the main comments of my experts in previous recordings that led to the different research cycles, especially regarding the last one, which was the hardest obstacle I had to overcome in the whole process. It had started as a very subjective insight ("I would like my interludes to be meaningful and coherent") but now has become an objective topic (proportion) with a set of tools related to different parameters (timbre, melody, harmony, structure) that have been proved to work and have an impact in my practice. And that is the main success I derive from comparing my first Reference Recording to the last one.

My experts agree mostly on my perspective, having a positive insight on these outcomes, while showing which are the fields that still need attention. For example, Feliu Gasull would like to have a greater surprise when finding himself in the second piece, blurring the borders between the interlude and the beginning of Brahms, and encourages me to experiment more with duration, going for much longer or

shorter approaches with the same or different ideas about proportion between the different elements of my musical unity.

Besides, Josué Amador appreciates the unity created by the 3 musical pieces while he wonders if the role of extended techniques could be more accurate (he thinks it has little relation with the rest of the of the material, at least used in this particular way) and proposes to expose the pieces in a horizontal way rather than a vertical way. This means that, instead of just connecting the 2 written units of music with a new piece, I would present them simultaneously and interconnected with improvised fragments, which I find really interesting and appealing.

4.3 Conclusion

First of all, I think the results of this research project match my goals at the beginning of the process. I have noticed a big development in many areas (artistic insight, different technical skills, etc.) that led to an accomplishment of the main purposes that motivated me to carry out this work during the last months.

I think that my improvised interludes now have a stronger coherence within themselves and the context they are placed in, as a result of the development of a whole system that makes them work in all kinds of situations, always serving an artistic idea. That gives me a great freedom as a musician in order to incorporate my own voice, my own vision upon all those masterpieces from the past that I admire, with independence of the particular programme I am dealing with.

Besides, I truly believe that these interludes are now able to make a difference from the listener's perspective, even if this is something to be confirmed by the audience. From my point of view, they add some artistic value in a direct, clear and understandable way after all the upgrades that they had during the whole research process. Therefore, I consider that they can trigger a positive change that helps the classical piano solo music adapt to the present time in terms of format and staging.

But for me, the main outcome of this project is the artistic growth that I experienced. Now I feel much more connected to my growing identity as a musician, particularly to my improvisations. I have acquired the capacity to think in a much deeper way about my artistry in all directions: what, why and how to do it. I also reinforced my insight about art in many ways, confirming some intuitions, expanding my knowledge and changing my mind about some aspects.

At the same time, I still see a big room for development. This was just a starting point in many ways and there are many aspects that were left along the way or treated briefly (such as duration or material creation and development) that I would like to look into in the future. I feel like this research project was a pilot study for a much deeper process to carry out during my career, finding new answers and posing new questions to myself.

Finally, I need to say that this project allowed me to explore the joy of creation in the present moment in a way I could not experience before. For me, making music cannot make more sense than in this way, letting the imagination be and exploring all what the complex system made by a human being doing art for other humans in a specific time and space can offer as an experience for them all.

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6 Network

Ned McGowan: Research coach, composer and improviser

Carles Marigó: Pianist and improviser, very involved in innovative classical and inter-/multidisciplinary projects

Bart van de Roer: Piano teacher

Paul van Brugge: Composition teacher

Federico Mosquera: Pianist, composer and research coach

Carmen Kleykens: Cellist and composer focused on new improvisation forms, multimedia composition and interdisciplinary projects

Dani Espasa: Pianist, harpsichordist, improviser, arranger, conductor

Josué Amador: Composer, improviser and researcher, focused on applying different forms of improvisation to contemporary music composition and performance

Juan de la Rubia: Organist in Sagrada Família (Barcelona), he is a reputed improviser with expertise in stylistic improvisation, from 16th to 20th-century

Ricardo Descalzo: Spanish pianist, specialised in contemporary music performance

Richard Barrett: Composer, improviser and researcher on contemporary music and new formats

Abe Rábade: Jazz pianist and composer

Feliu Gasull: Classical and flamenco guitarist and composer

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of all AV media included in report

Appendix 1.1: First research cycle

[01 AR Reference recording 01](#)

[02 Permutation 1](#)

[03 Permutation 2](#)

[04 Permutation 3](#)

[05 Permutation 4](#)

[06 Permutation 5](#)

[07 Permutation 6](#)

[08 Permutation 7](#)

[09 Permutation 8](#)

[10 AR Reference Recording 02](#)

[11 Interview with Carles Marigó](#)

[12 Interview with Juan de la Rubia](#)

[13 Interview with Ned McGowan](#)

Appendix 1.2: Second research cycle

[14 Feedback from Ricardo Descalzo](#)

[15 Feedback from Ned McGowan](#)

[16 Interview with Josué Amador](#)

[17 AR Reference Recording 03](#)

Appendix 1.3: Third research cycle

[18 Interview with Feliu Gasull](#)

[19 Option no.1](#)

[20 Option no. 2](#)

[21 Option no. 3](#)

[22 Option no. 4](#)

[23 Option no. 5](#)

[24 Option no. 6](#)

[25 Option no. 7](#)

[26 Option no. 8](#)

[27 Irregular meters example](#)

[28 AR Reference Recording 04](#)

[29 AR Reference Recording 05](#)

Appendix 2: Critical media review

- Alperson, Philip.: 'A topography of improvisation'. In: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* , SUMMER 2010, Vol. 68, No. 3, pp. 273-280

This article, as its title shows, aims to offer an overview of improvisation in human activity as a concept from a philosophical point of view, focusing on musical improvisation. The author divides his analysis into 3 subjects ("improvisation; spontaneity and freedom", "skills" and "social dimension") developing different ideas within each one that contribute all together to show one of the multiple sides of improvisation as a human activity.

In the first part, he talks about the double conception of improvisation as action and product determined by the context and tries to define what makes improvisation to be perceived as that, taking into account that planning always is part of improvisation and vice versa. In relation to this, he refers to the impression that the observer has about freedom being displayed on the spontaneity of the activity and to the element of risk as main features.

In the second one, he describes with all sorts of details some of the musical skills involved in improvising, which are connected with technical and expressive issues also present in performance. Besides, he explains that these musical skills are responsible for offering a context against which improvisation emerges, consequently enhancing the illusion of total freedom being displayed at the moment. He also mentions cognitive implications in neuronal activity from both musicians and audience when improvisation takes place and points out that the listener's attraction lies partially on *witnessing the shaping activity of the improviser*.

Finally, he reflects on the social implications that improvisation has for musicians while playing together and refers shortly to the series of protocols and behaviours settled into musical improvisation contexts (particularly in jazz), giving implicitly the idea that improvisation finally develops its own patterns even if it seeks total spontaneity, and to its connections to history and culture, which work as stimuli in some cases for generating the act of improvisation.

After this summary of the content, I would like to remark that I consider that this philosophical approach to the topic is essential, no matter what my opinion is about the specific ideas of the author, because I think that it is necessary for me to build up a solid thinking frame which lies behind the artistic materialisation of the project, taking also into account that it is based on the concern about the essence of the live concert experience and its current state in classical music. This ideational context would be a guide for not getting lost in the subjectivity of musical reception and having always a framework where experiment and develop musical skills and strategies that eventually become part of the artistic outcome of the research.

As a result, I have chosen this article as part of my Critical Media Review, also because it maps the phenomenon in a very concise way, which allows the reader to make its own reflections about the topic and consider the discussions that are displayed throughout the article in order to build up an informed opinion about them. Obviously, I am currently in that starting point, so I prefer not to make a valoration of the content further than highlighting its clearness in the explanation of concepts compared to

other similar texts included in the Reference List and emphasising the role of aesthetic reflection in this project.

- Brown, L.B. "Improvisation" In: *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 59-69.

This article makes an overview of the improvisation phenomenon from different perspectives, aiming to give a broad and complete definition of the concept. Therefore, it addresses many issues concerning the topic of improvisation (artistic quality within impro, considerations about spontaneous creation, boundaries between impro and performance, "work-performance" concept, etc.) but it would be too long to explain them all in this report, even if all of them are relevant for my research.

That is why I decided to focus only on 2 topics that I would like to highlight. The first one is the summary of the main features that all the existing theories about improvisation share, which are the influence of intentionality, the presence of elements of risk and creativity as re-elaboration of pre-existing structures in real time in order to build a coherent musical discourse from them.

These 3 ideas are crucial for me in order to frame the identity of my improvisations and strengthen their impact on the audience, as well as conceptualise a sort of guidelines for bearing in mind during the creative process.

Besides, there is a huge debate that this article addresses which is the relation between improvisation and composition. Firstly, Brown explains 2 paradigms: impro as composition (the only difference between them is how both processes occur in terms of time) and impro versus composition (considering improvisation more fundamental in musicianship than composition and distinguishing them as prospective and retrospective models or ways of making music)

Afterwards, he continues discussing the ontology of improvisation from these 2 opposite perspectives and the idea that a work of art must be worked out and conceived during a period of time before being considered as that (then improvisation wouldn't have that consideration) or at least revisited (then remains unclear because it is possible to record an improvisation and listen to it again, but maybe it is not an improvisation anymore...). However, it seems very interesting to me that improvisation is previously considered as a legitimate art form when comparing it with composition.

To sum up, Brown doesn't give a clear conclusion regarding this fundamental issue and declares that it is an unfinished task for the music philosophy, but I must say that I have reached a solid position after reading and reflecting upon all the ideas gathered in this text.

For me, improvisation and composition are independent and equally valuable art forms that reach a similar artistic result (a particular organisation of sound) using different methods and highlighting different aspects of the creative process involved. Therefore, they are not 2 variants of the same category but they are not opposed in a hierarchical relation neither (improvisation as composition in real time, composition as written improvisation) even if improvisation is often involved in composition as a technique and not as an artistic practice in itself, showing that intentionality certainly plays a crucial role in this discussion.

- Jarrett, Keith. *The Art of Improvisation*. [Keith Jarrett - The Art of Improvisation Part 6/10 - YouTube](#), accessed on: 3/10/2022

For this brief commentary I would like to focus only on the first minute of this fragment, because it is closely connected to the topic and offers the opportunity to reflect on and discuss it. In this footage, Keith Jarrett is being asked about his classical background, especially about his appearances on stage playing Mozart Concertos, and, suddenly, he adds a striking comment about the reason for which he doesn't improvise his own cadenzas: *"When they think of improvisation, they think of connecting one written thing to another written thing. When I think of improvisation, I think of going from zero to zero. [...] At least I was still being true to myself and to the importance I think improvisation had"*.

It seems obvious that such an affirmation from a figure like Jarrett may cast doubts on the core of this project and its significance. However, I think that Jarrett's reflection responds to a sacralised vision about improvisation, where the cult of the spontaneous creation as an abstract concept is put on the spotlight, while its sound materialisation may become less important. That said, I completely respect this point of view not only because it comes from one of the most relevant voices someone could imagine, but also because I totally see the point of having that perspective, since it highlights the act of improvising as a distinguished art form and claims for its consideration in comparison with performance or composition and I support this idea.

Nevertheless, I would rather demystify all forms of musical making and cross all borders between them, so that the musical discourse and the interactions among the musicians, the audience and the musical act become the main priorities. Therefore, I opt for putting the art form at the service of a bigger purpose, instead of only giving value to it in itself.

- Levin, Robert. *Improvising Mozart*. [Robert Levin: Improvising Mozart - YouTube](#), accessed on: 1/10/2022 (47:00 - 1:00:00)

This fragment of a lecture in Cambridge University the pianist and improviser Robert Levin talks about the relationship between Mozart (but also his contemporaries) and improvisation through the "improvised" preludes he wrote for his sister Nannerl due to her inability to improvise on stage.

Some striking features of this music are its function as modulating interludes in order to avoid disturbing the sensibility of the audience with sudden key changes between written pieces but also its non-metrical nature (hard to imagine in the late 18th Century, for me at least).

Besides, Levin comments on the textural layout of the improvisations, which follow CPE Bach's advice ("the best way is to lay on a bass line and then add upper figures"), and explains that Mozart's improvisation were told to be the only worthy at his time to be listened to as music, due to his "clear architectural sense, rhythmical fluidity and flexibility of discourse", according to him.

I consider the previous information very interesting for my own research not only because of its intrinsic value, but also due to the connection it has with the written music I perform and the fact that it is a strong precedent in the past. Therefore, I think that applying some of these principles in my practice will generate an invisible association with the Western Classical tradition which will automatically supply my artistry with coherence and meaning, which is basically what I am looking for with this project.

- Marigó, Carles and Alonso Mudarra. “Obertura” and “Fantasía”, in *Ibéricos*. With Carles Marigó (piano). [Obertura \(Marigó\) & Fantasía \(Alonso Mudarra\) - YouTube](#), accessed on: 1/10/2022.

This is a paradigmatic practical case of which I intend to do while using my own musical resources. In this footage, Carles Marigó improvises an introduction to a Fantasy by a Spanish Renaissance composer. It is true that the Fantasy genre has an improvisational nature which helps in order to melt and join both musical items, but what really strikes me is the perfect balance between the stylistic contrast and the connections driven through other parameters such as texture or character.

As a result, it is easy to guess that he is elaborating his own musical discourse in the beginning, which creates a big expectation in the audience and serves as a superb preparation for getting them into the written music that is yet to come, but then there is a sort of magical moment where the joint between the 2 materials is completely blurry and the transition feels so natural as if both elements were always supposed to be together.

Of course, this is a very subjective and superficial analysis, but I think that it is still useful to include these inputs since they are an inspiration for my practice and push me to develop a more objective approach to the act of improvisation on stage.

- Mehldau, Brad. *After Bach (Live at Philharmonie de Paris), Part 5*. [Brad Mehldau - After Bach \(Live at Philharmonie de Paris\), Part 5 - YouTube](#), accessed on 3/10/2022

This is a recording from a live performance which relates to the LP with the same title, released in 2018. However, this performance has a particular feature, since there are some improvised responses to Bach's pieces, as occurs in this case with E flat Major Prelude (WTC I). Just after playing the Prelude, he starts improvising (even showing some doubts in the beginning) and creates a piece 3 times longer than the original which captures the mood of the Prelude and shows Mehldau's vision of its expressive core, translating it little by little into a different language and sonority and coming back to a more paraphrasal style near the end of the piece in order to round the circle. It is also interesting to listen to the way he keeps a coherent relationship with the Bach piece by means of texture, trying to follow the same polyphonic structure and density throughout his discourse.

I find this example very interesting since it is one of the rare ones in which an improvisation conceived after a written piece previously performed is not looking for imitating that style. On the contrary, this improvisation comes from understanding the essence of the written piece and sharing it with the audience in a different appearance, which may even be more attractive and closer to the ears of some people in the audience. Therefore, it is not only a contrasting and/or innovative element during the recital, but also helps to establish an effective communication among all the subjects that participate in a musical event.

- Moore, R. "The Decline of Improvisation in Western Art Music: An Interpretation of Change." In: *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 61-84 (June, 1992).

This paper focuses on finding an answer to the phenomenon described in its title through the influence of social changes from the late 18th Century until the present, since at that period improvisation was as relevant in Western music as in many other traditions in which improvisation plays a central role.

The first idea that Moore points out is the relevance of the cultural environment and the stylistic knowledge for performers and listeners in order to take part in an improvisation-based musical act, since for him improvisation can be defined as a event-based musical act which derives from long-standing structures shared by a group of people and the individual interpretations of them.

In other words, it is a way of making music in which a deep understanding of certain codes is needed, there is no notation and the goal is the free expression of the artist within a defined aesthetic. Therefore, we could say that he conceives improvisation as improvisation on style, which makes sense when talking about a totally Western Classical environment.

At this point is when social changes get into the discourse, because in the late 18th Century Classical music was associated with the court, but this changed in the following decades with the arisal of the middle class and the bourgeois. These new social groups felt attracted to this music as a way of integrating in the high class and enhanced the dependence on notation that is still present today in Western music (in the court it wasn't necessary to be precise and exhaustive in notation since everyone knew the codes already).

As time continues to go forward, the relationship with the original forms and the communal sense within this tradition decreases more and more and by the end of the century improvisation is completely out of the game. Instead, the musical world in Western societies is already splitted into art and popular music as a result of the mutual influence that the cultural manifestations of the former aristocracy and the more recent working class exert on each other.

Talking now about the 20th Century, Moore criticises the approach of the avant-garde composers, since it doesn't care about the importance of communication in music and its emotional power, and this attacks directly the possibility of survival for improvisation as a result of the divorce between new composers and audience. Besides, he declares that experimentalism is negative for improvisation, since it is an oral tradition and needs the preservation of certain codes. On the other hand, he also criticises historicity, because it goes against the innovation and spontaneity involved in improvisation and shows a reverential attitude towards the works of the past, referred to as "tyranny of tradition".

Finally, he concludes that it is necessary to bring in the experiences of modern life in order to reactivate the role of improvisation in Western musical world, resulting in an aggregate from present and past in which every musician finds his own expression, enhancing the engagement between the performer and the music he plays.

After the detailed summary of this essay (deleting some of this information the argument of the author would be incomplete) I would like to comment on some aspects that I find especially relevant. It is evident that this discourse derives from 2 specific premises: the unavoidable connection between improvisation and style or tradition and a sociological approach to aesthetics relying on social classes.

Therefore, I might not agree completely with his vision since I have a broader idea of what improvisation can be and I don't dare to affirm so firmly that music "belongs" to a certain group in society.

At the same time, his diagnose of the implications of improvisation within the musical act and its relationship with the agents that take part of it, as well as the explanation of how they evolved during the last centuries resonate me very much, so I will take into account his conclusions in my practical application of this research, even if I would be more cautious when taking a stance on certain topics.

Appendix 3: Full feedback on reference recordings

Reference Recording #1

Bart van de Roer: First of all, I envy anyone who has the ability to improvise, so I congratulate you for having such skills. I liked it so much in general terms, but I would suggest finding more contrast between the improvised music and the written one. Your topic reminded me of a concert I have listened to recently, in which a string quartet played an arrangement of the Goldberg Variations by J.S. Bach alternated with Saariaho's music. This big contrast in style caused each variation to seem completely new and much more expressive, even if I had already listened to it several times during my life. Therefore, I guess you can use such a powerful tool as improvisation for the same purpose in a very effective way.

Carmen Kleykens: There are three main parameters in free improvisation that help me to analyze sound material, in this case, the video AR Reference Recording #1 by David Vaamonde. They are intrinsically related to language, communication, the social and cultural functions of music, and any of the sound practices we "perform" as musicians: concerts, recitals, rehearsals, installations, recordings...

The first parameter is temporal and structural listening, the adaptation of our auditory memory to it. In this case, when I listen to David I wonder if he has thought about how long he will play, if the audience will be able to understand without remembering the beginning of the relationship between improvisation and Rachmaninov's piece... One of the best parts of being an improviser is that you don't live in "time 0" as in composition, where rewinding, building, and developing don't happen at the same time, the time of the "Now." As improvisers we take temporal decisions in the "now". That's why I think it's something to think about, how much time I have between when I start playing a piece and how much time my ear will need to remember or forget it, depending on what we want to do.

Time in quantity but also in motion. In David's video, I can read that this temporal process is premeditated but still we have to keep in mind that it is a recorded improvisation and the basis of the project is to be able to perform it in live concerts, recitals. I believe that wondering if enough time has been spent for our memory to be forgotten is also an important fact to situate the function of improvisation within a concert because if not, we would only use previously constructed works and lose the wonderful sound world that David develops in this video. In addition, the temporal interpolation between improvisation and the written work, how long there is ambiguity between whether it is improvised or not, and whether the listener perceives the acquired memory are relations that one must ask oneself before

approaching such a project, so based on how we listen and how we perceive the conducted improvisation.

The second parameter, the most objective of the three, is the tonic and sonic analysis of the material that David presents to us. We can play with memory and with the time we give to the audience, but it is essential to propose different relationships with the sound material presented to us. David for me proposes a melodic, textural, and of course harmonic change of the written pieces. Even without knowing them, it is easy to glimpse the change of articulation and texture when he begins to improvise and when it is written.

For me, with my background in improvisation and contemporary music, there's a lack of timbre change. Even in the same language, separated from my practice, you can always risk greater timbral contrasts. In traditional classical education, the timbral aspects of our instruments are lagging behind the formal and harmonic aspects, which damages the perception of the timbre, of the texture of a sound itself. If we want to play with auditory memory and with the perception of what we play, it is essential to give listening tools that are perceptible not only structurally, but also at the individual moment. Pillars of changes or of timbral relationships that can be carried even in the written work for interpolation with improvisation.

The third parameter and the most subjective of the three is the chosen aesthetic. I think it's risky and very well chosen by David the written pieces he plays. Why? They do not reject their aesthetic taste, their education, or their daily practices and also incorporate inner portions with other improvisational languages more jazzist and folkloric, creating the context for listening. Still, I think that for a recital and even more wanting to incorporate improvisation, a very exhaustive search for a narrative arc must be made in the written pieces. To improvise is not to lose that arc, in this case, it adapts to it and gives different contexts to the works we would hear. But obviously, this has a historical context within conducted improvisation, the creation of new concert formats, and the use of different practices within it. That's why I think that this arc should also include another type of language with which David is not in his comfort zone (be it contemporary, Renaissance, electronic, urban music. . .) being a very good experiment for the audience if he is really creating in his own language, is in the language of others or in an unknown language.

In my opinion, David can experiment more with the times, in the timbre, and in the contextual use of the works without losing the sublime personal language he offers us. It's not every day you can hear something of that artistic quality and be able to analyse it.

Carlos Maldonado: First of all, it is very interesting the concept of creating an interlude between these two pieces. The transition is very natural even though you're not using strictly classic or romantic harmonies.

From my point of view, I would have stayed a bit longer around the more classical patterns and harmonies, before going deeper into the interlude itself. Because, even though it was a very smooth change, I felt it a bit soon (considering the length of the interlude). In the end it is great how it is connected to Rachmaninoff, the next piece doesn't catch me by surprise due to the use of closer harmonies and gestures to Rachmaninoff.

Summing up, I enjoyed the feeling of not knowing where you're taking us with this interlude until the very end, it feels like a journey.

Federico Mosquera: I think that the interlude that you have improvised (or perhaps semi-improvised) to connect the end of the Mozart piece with the beginning of the Rachmaninov piece is tremendously original. Bravo! I really like the atmosphere you create, especially when you get closer to the Rachmaninov: there are very magical moments! But I see two possible criticisms that can lead you to organize your first cycle of research. The first is that the transition between one work and another is not totally organic. I am aware that this is something very subjective, but I would think of making an interlude that, firstly, had fewer pauses (the material is perhaps too fragmented in the proposal you present) and, secondly, had more to do with both written pieces. This is easy to say, but tremendously difficult to do! My advice would be to use Mozart motifs and themes more explicitly and gradually bring them to the initial motif of the Rachmaninov piece.

Another possible criticism would be the unity of language: we have three different harmonic languages in very little space: Mozart's, a harmonic language linked to jazz, and Rachmaninov's language. This is a problem? Absolutely not! You are free to do what you want! But I can think of other possibilities that you can explore, and that's what research is all about. My suggestion would be: what would happen if you stepped out of your jazz "comfort zone" and explored an improvisation built almost entirely according to the style in which pianists improvised in classicism? The idea would be to do it freely, without the need for musicological criteria, but in such a way that we do not suddenly jump from Mozart to Keith Jarrett.

Carles Marigó: The feeling I have is that you do not clearly show what your artistic intention is when doing this interlude. What is the OBJECTIVE? Why do you do it? What does adding this improvisation contribute that the silence between works does not provide?

If we make a parallel between music and painting, we could compare listening to two such imposing works to visiting two paintings in an exhibition. What happens when you walk from picture to picture? What do you want to provoke in the visitor? Your improvisation, using an interesting pastiche language, is like a beautiful drawing that you make on the wall between painting and painting. You are filling in the space in which the listener reflects, the silence. Why?

My feeling: you need to define your intention better.

My own reflection: Taking into account that the original intention when recording the video was to connect both pieces stylistically (let's say, to make a smooth transition between them) I will analyse the result from that perspective.

That said, the main idea I can bring up is the fact that the Mozart style elements vanish too early, leading to this half impressionist-half jazzy mood very soon, while the gradual approach to the emotional depth and dramatic lyricism of Rachmaninov is managed better (which is a good thing, indeed).

Besides, there is also an important thing to point out regarding the middle section of the interlude, which is the lack of unity on the displayed material. There are different ideas and resources that belong to a certain stylistic context but they don't build a solid musical discourse, so they just seem to coexist and go each one after the previous one.

However, the main questions that I can extract from recording and reviewing this video concern directly the approach to improvising the interlude; that is, I realised that the main debate is about the goal

of the improvisation rather than its sound materialization (which is also crucial, of course). Therefore, I came up with different possibilities (stylistic connection, extreme contrast, capture mood of the moment, etc.) which now must be tested in order to figure out which is the best framework to develop the improvisation both stylistically and structurally.

Reference Recording #2 (end 1st cycle)

Carlos Maldonado: I notice a big amount of differences and an evolution as well between the first Reference Recording and this one, since the identity of the improvised interlude is much stronger and more independent in relation to the written pieces in this case. Now focusing only on this recording, I personally prefer the second version of the interlude, because I can find more relatable material and I perceive a better connection between the pieces. However, I must admit that the first version generates an interesting feeling of uncertainty and expectation, even if I am less used as a listener to this kind of soundscapes and it is hard for me to feel engaged to them.

Carles Marigó: In the first improvisation, using extended techniques mixed with post-impressionistic sonorities works really well. There is a noticeable connection with the ending of the previous piece but you propose a very interesting sound environment. That gives lots of meaning to the improvisation, because you take us to the moon for coming back to Rachmaninov later. According to the amount of displayed material, I think the length of the interlude is too short; it needs more development.

The second one drives the listener to a very beautiful and contrasting world in relation to the 2 pieces. The form works well.

From my point of view, I think that the function of the interlude in both cases is quite different. The first one doesn't have a clear melody, but it has a more distant texture and flavour, so I perceive that it helps to refresh the ear in order to start listening to Rachmaninov in a pure way and coming from a very interesting place. On the contrary, the second one suggests a not so contrasting transition, containing traditional melodic structures and development in combination with interesting harmonies. Therefore, I listen to Rachmaninov from a familiar perspective afterwards.

The most interesting feature of the recording is how the listening attitude towards the Rachmaninov piece changes. The piece itself seems to be different, talking to the listener from another perspective. Comparing the 2 versions I thought about the Kuleshov effect; I guess there is a lot of research in there.

Reference Recording #2 (beginning 2nd cycle)

Federico Mosquera: Before timbral richness, one of the aspects that I value most when judging an improvisation (on a given material) is the thematic coherence. That is, that the improvisation has recognizable elements of the material on which it is based, even if they are not literal. As for this, I have a hard time immediately seeing the relationship between the Mozart you just left with the immediately following: the moment when you start playing inside the piano harp. What is the relationship between those 4 notes you press on the piano harp and the subsequent chord you play on the keyboard? In general I ask this in the whole dialogue you establish between the piano harp and the keyboard. I find it hard to see a relation to Mozart, and I would prefer to use all these techniques either in relation to what we have heard before or in relation to what is to come next (Rachmaninov). Otherwise, it seems a somewhat arbitrary juxtaposition, albeit a very beautiful and imaginative one!!! If I had to do it myself, I would use all those techniques you use so well, but in relation to Mozart and/or Rachmaninov motifs, very altered harmonically and melodically, but always recognizable.

I love the pizzicato, or more percussive technique within the piano harp, that you initiate at 1:46. Especially in response to the note you leave resonating from the keyboard just before. It would be great to use this technique motivically with some aspect of Mozart or the piece by Rachmaninov. Or even transforming motives from Mozart bit by bit into Rachmaninov, if that is the function this improvisation serves.

[14 Feedback from Ricardo Descalzo](#)

[15 Feedback from Ned McGowan](#)

Reference Recording #3 (ending 2nd cycle)

David Vaamonde: First of all, I feel engaged and enjoy listening to this improvisation; in other words, I think that really adds something to the regular alternative that is just silence between both pieces in the form of a sonic trip to other worlds. That said, there are some aspects that I think that can be improved, like the gesture. Even if I have been working on it specifically, there are still a couple of spots (when using the metallic bar, for example) that the doubtiness in my movements breaks the flow of the music and gives a certain feel of uncertainty.

It is true that sometimes it can be even positive to show the risky position of the performer while daring to create in real time in front of the audience, but it is a pity when it goes completely against the artistic intention at that moment, as it happens in this case.

Another aspect to work on is the speed for unfolding ideas. As I said before, I glued structure and timbre on purpose, but not the material. However, the gradual transformation from the rhythmic nature of the music based on the short-short-long pattern to the harmonic-colouristic approach seems to be affected too much by the different sounds that appear. I wouldn't say that a new element comes in with each one of them, but for sure that they debilitate the thread that binds everything together and conveys the mental image to the listener.

At the same time, I highly appreciate the result of incorporating such a big amount of devices for just a short interlude, because they make such a big contribution to the attractiveness of my language with all their colours and textures and drive my piano playing much closer to my imagination, which was one of the main concerns when I decided to spend a whole cycle with this issue. Furthermore, I think that the more abstract ideas driven from the data collection have a significant impact into my practice, like the importance of dynamism or the incorporation of interplay elements into my solo improvisations, using the dialogue with the random melodies of a bouncing ball with a satisfactory result.

Asim Singh Halwarvi: - [] Opening theme is interesting material but it could have developed further in the piece. It does not connect with the rest of the musical material.

- [] 21" - Rhythmic motives are always a good idea when the piano is prepared. Great!

- [] 35" - very well executed sound with the metal object. The harmonic series is clearly audible with the metallic noises. Personally, a little out of context as there is no connection with the previous material. The change was sudden.

- [] 46" - Muted sound of the piano using the wiper fits well with extended chords. It gives the impression of an electric piano in a jazz context.

- [] 1'29" - Adventurous move with dropping the rubber ball on the strings. The indeterminate sonic result and glissando bridges the previous and the next material, that sounds like based on a whole tone scale, very well.

- [] 1'42" - Interesting ornamentation with the mallet.

- [] 1'49" - Maybe the ping pong ball is not the best idea to press the string. The change in sound is subtle. If that is what you were going for then ignore this comment.

- [] 1'55" till 2'02" - Beautiful moment, nice harmonies.

- [] 2'03" - I like the detailing with the extremely low and high pitches causing an inharmonic spectra.

- [] 2'08" till 2'29" - Nice theme. It suggests a conclusion / coda.

Final Remarks

Excellent piano playing, well done! Exploratory approach with various materials and preparation. Great! Although, the recording seems to be a compilation of different extended techniques. At the moment, the different sections miss a linear direction as a whole. Some extended techniques appear with no musical context and some material can be developed further by making variations for example. More context can also be given to the listener by composing non-prepared musical material that would also fit well with preparation. At 2'03" is an example of this where the prepared sound was seamlessly incorporated with the harmonies. I would recommend more of this approach. Overall, it is a very good start. Look for more objects, devices or maybe even electronic devices like guitar pedals for new sounds on the piano. You may find prepared piano sounds that are even more unconventional while experimenting.

Bart van de Roer: You are certainly getting far away from our lessons on classical repertoire, but in my opinion, your use of extended techniques is aiming to attract an avant garde audience and towards Bach and Chopin instead of the other way round. In other words, I am afraid the standard classical audience might not buy your additions.

Besides, be careful about the issues of prepared piano with classical pieces. Show all worlds in the best condition possible.

Reference Recording #3 (beginning 3rd cycle)

Josué Amador: Musical wise, I think that your recording is very interesting. My favourite excerpts are the fragments between 0:25-0:32 and 0:47-1:05. My only criticism is that it feels very fragmented to me, the continuity of the musical discourse is lost and therefore it becomes a sort of collage of different ways to approach the piano: in other words, a collection of extended techniques rather than a form of musical expression.

This recording is 2,5 minutes long but many things are happening and that results in the loss of attention from the listener. I would advise you to try longer structures and let the material spread through time. For example, the first improvised segment (0:25-0:32) is very good but lasts only 7 seconds. Maybe it would be interesting to try improvising for 10 minutes or 20 only using that material and transforming it gradually or incorporating some elements from the next motive little by little. It would be also nice to listen to all the recording, that is, including the 2 full written pieces in order to know its proportion with the rest. Context also changes perception.

Feliu Gasull: In general terms, I think it is a good exercise, compressed into 2 minutes and a half. You display a nice variety of sounds, showing 3 different worlds in a sort of collage that I like and connecting them in a coherent way.

However, I think this last aspect could be enhanced, since I am missing more references with the material of the written pieces and within the ideas of the improvisation, which is, in my opinion, what makes the music be what it is. Besides, I think you could be more truthful and honest with yourself, I can perceive that you are using some pre-established resources that are not very convincing for me, such as the muted 7th chords close to the beginning; you can find something more interesting than that.

Finally, I would consider creating a clearer unity out of the 3 different pieces of your prototype, so that the transition between them takes much longer and the listener can only be sure to be in an unknown world once he is completely digging into it.

Final outcomes

Josué Amador: From all the recordings I have listened to from you, this is definitely the one that is the best achieved. The transitions between the three pieces (Ligeti, Improv, Brahms) are very well constructed. Especially between the Ligeti piece and the interlude. During the improvisation one hears motives and harmonies that refer to the material presented in the other two compositions. This, together with how well combined certain parameters of the three pieces are, such as tempo, general dynamics, musical narrative, etc., make the performance feel not like three pieces set out one after the other, but like a single work in its entirety. This is something that, in my opinion, was still missing in the earlier recordings.

At minute 3:30 you use an object to cover the strings. This gesture only appears only once in the nearly 11-minute recording. For the listener, this gesture is lost in memory and loses meaning. In the end it is understood as an accident, as an anecdote that remains unresolved. I think if you want to use it, you

would have to find a way to give it meaning. I would ask myself, why is that motif there at that moment and how does it relate to the rest of the piece?

Regarding the recording in general, the division between the 3 parts is only appreciated if the listener knows the works, otherwise, it would seem like one long piece with several sections. This is one of the aspects that I find most valuable in your exploration. Artistically speaking, this makes me think of the connection, in terms of space-time-aesthetics, etc., that you create between the three composers. As a way of really extending these pieces and the piano repertoire by building something new with it.

In terms of research, I would find it interesting to know how you created the interlude in relation to the other two works. It would also be valuable to reflect on your experience as a performer in playing this 11-minute work, as it seems to me that it must be much more demanding than if you played the pieces one by one. Not only because of the length, but because of the complexity of the meta-work and the role you take, which is simultaneously as performer, composer, and improviser.

That even makes me think about the practice of DJs and how they deconstruct existing material to re-compose it in completely different settings. Maybe that would be my recommendation for the future, to explore once again this meta-work in a way that the 3 initial pieces are not exposed "vertically", but, "horizontally". That is, not, one after the other, but, the three sub-pieces executed (somehow) simultaneously. Like a Dj taking fragments of a song to incorporate them into another, linking them through improvisation.

Feliu Gasull: In comparison to the previous recording, I think there is a noticeable development regarding my main concerns at that time: coherence and proportion. Now the change feels more gradual and there is a certain amount of uncertainty that could still be enhanced, having a greater surprise as a listener when Brahms starts as out of nowhere. It was good to listen for once your prototype as a whole, but I wonder what would have happened if the duration was managed differently. I think that is something you can really look into in the future.

Appendix 4: Transcription of interviews

Interview with: **Carles Marigó**

[11 Interview with Carles Marigó](#)

David: What role do you think improvisation plays in the current musical world, especially in classical music, and how it relates to the audience?

Carles: If we consider improvisation as a way of expression rather than a musical tool, I think it attracts less people than in the 70's, when the free jazz and the electro-acoustic music scenes came together and the avant-gardes had a solid and broad audience. Nowadays, we don't longer seek innovation for innovation when improvising, preferring to look for our own voice.

D: Which is your individual approach to the act of improvising?

C: I have a classical background and I lacked a creative side in it, so I started improvising when I was a child, because I found composition was a too slow process. Besides, I like thinking that I don't use a specific language when I improvise, so I know how many different styles work, try to catch their essence and apply all these resources constantly combined as suitable. Definitely, what I appreciate the most about improvising is the fact of generating a lot of musical material on the way.

D: What inputs do you think I can take from extended techniques and multi/interdisciplinarity for my project?

C: Firstly, extended techniques are the best way to incorporate improvisation in classical music recitals, because they offer by means of timbral changes the key to catch the audience's attention through contrast. This effect works really well and there are lots of examples that confirm it, such as the combination of fast and slow movements in the Sonata form since Baroque period, the usage of certain contrasting smells and flavours in wine tastes in order to enhance the characteristics of each one of them or the arising of programmes where combinations such as Berio's vocal music and Renaissance motets are made.

Secondly, interdisciplinarity is really easy to reach as a soloist, and you can develop it as far as you are able to imagine. That is because all the non-musical concerns you have are joining the music to achieve a common goal, which is what interdisciplinarity is about. Therefore, all your decisions concerning areas such as visual language or narrative are contributing to build up an interdisciplinary approach to your practice.

D: Since you have some previous experience on the topic, I would like to know if you could give me some advice before I start this adventure.

C: Don't be afraid to try things out and value the audience feedback. I don't want to say anything further because I want you to find your way, but think also about the written pieces you are playing with your improvisations and give importance to the particular moment of the performance (the mood of the audience, the specific space and time, etc.). In the end, this is not categorizable, since some projects are born bearing improvisation as a contrasting element and finish like a historical trip through time connected by improvised pieces ("Ibéricos" project, 2018), so the most important thing is having a clear idea that puts everything together.

D: Finally, I admire your ability to manage your eclecticism as a musician when you improvise, being so coherent with your diverse background and elegant in your ideas at the same time. Are there some tips for achieving that?

C: Well, in my mind it seems more like a pastiche, since all of us know exactly what the musical reference is at each moment when we improvise, but mostly the audience doesn't notice that. That said, there are 2 possible paths concerning this issue: the intellectual one (that is, the one both of us take, which consists on understanding every style that influences us) or the alternative one, which means trying to be as original and authentic as possible by means of pure sound experimentation (i.e. Agustí Fernández).

Taking this into account, the tip I can give you within our path is to connect your compositional work with your improvisation. When you compose, little by little you start to develop your own musical resources through time, so it is very interesting to put these ideas into improvisation, since they are the most particular items you have as a musician.

Interview with: **Juan de la Rubia**

[12 Interview with Juan de la Rubia](#)

David: What role do you think improvisation plays in the current musical world, especially in classical music, and how it relates to the audience?

Juan: I think it is becoming more and more popular as a particular feature of the performer, because this kind of personal contribution and special connection is highly appreciated by the audience.

D: Do you have some previous experience on improvising during your recitals? If so, could you give me some advice?

J: Yes, of course, I have done it many times. Rather than giving you some advice, I can tell you the way I do it. Even if some planification is always involved, the most important thing is to value the moment you are on stage and to do what suits better for that particular moment. I think a concert is always a mix of surprises and fulfilled expectations, so pay attention to keeping this balance and to the environment and avoid programming improvisations after certain pieces or styles, because it can frustrate your creativity on stage.

D: Which is your individual approach to the act of improvising?

J: I would split it into 2 different branches. On one hand, we have improvisation after a certain style, which causes admiration in the audience since they are able to recognise certain melodic, rhythmic and harmonic structures that are familiar to them; and, on the other one, we have free and experimental improvisation, which I develop using the particular features of the organ and it is more spectacular than the previous one, due to the spontaneous creativity it involves.

D: What knowledge do you think I can take from developing my skills in classical improvisation for this project?

J: You can incorporate lots of things. Taking into account that almost every style comes from a previous one, learning the codes from Baroque to Neoclassical style would be really interesting to understand better every style. Besides, you can dig deeper into one parameter and develop it later in your own way, such as melodic development.

D: Your concert with Marco Mezquida, called *Bach and Forward*, was crucial to decide to start this project and I included it as part of my reference list. Therefore, I am very curious about knowing more details about the process.

J: Firstly, something really interesting is that the Palau staff was the one who made this proposal to us. We knew each other for many years and we had a mutual admiration for each other, but we come from such different backgrounds that we were a bit frightened to collaborate on our own. Finally, we realised we have a common basis and the process was about mutual learning all the time.

Talking about the musical result, we fixed some elements while we were experimenting in our first meetings, but this doesn't make it less improvised, since the indetermination in the final result is always there. Besides, the visual projections were also improvised; in fact, the resources weren't ready until the general rehearsal on the day of the concert. The artist attended some rehearsals just to have an idea about what the music would be about, but we weren't aware about the huge impact of the visuals until we saw the recording after the concert. It made a big difference.

Finally, I would say that I consider this as one of the most successful projects in my career (in fact, we are going to do it again next year in the same venue) and I think that the musical world is going forward in that direction: making live shows with live elements that connect with the audience and fit their necessities.

Interview with: **Ned McGowan**

[13 Interview with Ned McGowan](#)

Interview with: **Josué Amador**

[16 Interview with Josué Amador](#)

Interview with: **Feliu Gasull**

[18 Interview with Feliu Gasull](#)

Appendix 5: Scores, pictures, graphics



Fig. 1: Carles Marigó's setup for improvisation



Fig. 2: Final setting for this intervention cycle

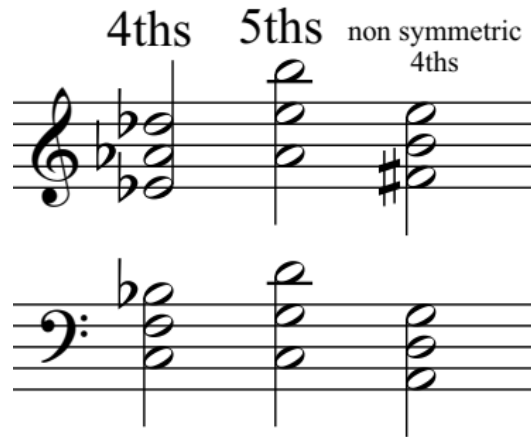


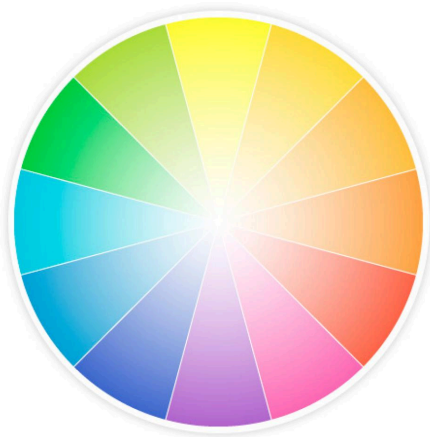
Fig. 3: Example on 4ths and 5ths chords

A quartal structure more resonant than a three-note chord by fourths is made by adding another fourth to the chord. The new tone forms a consonant interval (tenth) with the bass tone and adds color and variety to quartal harmony. Four-note chords by fourths are extremely useful in their three inverted forms because of the variety of intervals they contain.

Ex. 4-24



Fig. 4: Persichetti's explanation of 4-note quartal chords²⁸



²⁸ Persichetti, Vincent. *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1961, p. 101

Fig. 5: Chromatic colour wheel



Fig. 6: Modifications on 4ths and 5ths chords



Fig. 7: Example on triadic structures

Multi-unit polyharmony is so massive and complex that the notes of the bottom triad must often be spread apart. Some units should be overlapped and others should have the space between them widened. Doubling and coupling enlarge a polychord without adding to its complexity.



Fig. 8: Persichetti's explanation of multi-unit polyharmony problems²⁹

²⁹ Persichetti, Vincent. *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1961, p. 152



Fig. 9: 2 first bars of B section from *Música callada XVIII* by Frederic Mompou

Appendix 6: Free jazz philosophical principles (3.2.4.1)

One of my biggest questions when getting into this new way of improvising for me (that is, moving the focus from parameters such as rhythm, melody or harmony to a more abstract one like timbre) was if something in my conceptualization of the music making may be added or changed, because of the implicit links that exist between a certain practice and its codes (both sensory and intellectual). As a result, I became interested in knowing more about the musical trend to which I associate these musical resources: free jazz.

Even if it can sound strange, I wasn't attracted that much by knowing which kind of sonic appearance these musical events have, but I found very intriguing how they think about their artistry to pursue such results, because I thought they might be using a different paradigm than regular classical or jazz musicians and I could benefit from incorporating to my vision certain aspects of it that resonated with me.

But, before getting into detail and checking whether my first guesses were right or wrong, I must say that the title of this fragment is rather misleading on purpose. As you can imagine, it was the one I wrote down at the beginning of the process, but I wanted to leave it anyway so that I can now discuss how established certain labels are for the standard musician which start getting more and more liquid when going deeper into the topic.

Therefore, I have now many doubts about if there is something that can be clearly defined as "free jazz" and, taking for granted that such a thing exists, whether it has a solid theoretical frame that can be referred to as their "philosophical principles". That said, I want to clarify that I don't mean by saying this that some general considerations can't be made, but for sure there are a wide variety of approaches that may be not easily combined among each other. However, I will try to make an overview of the topic in the following paragraphs as a summary of my readings about it, the findings I considered interesting for me and my thoughts about them.

Of course, the first thing to do is settle the terminology. The definition of the concept "free jazz" (or free improvisation) is a matter that is in permanent discussion, so that almost every author comes up with their particular vision of it, even writing whole articles and essays only to explain it. Nevertheless, I will make a first distinction between the 2 labels presented at the beginning of this paragraph, based on the common agreement of the different fonts I will cite during these lines, which might seem pretty obvious, but is actually quite profound.

"Free jazz" is normally used to refer to the trend generated by some jazz artists (Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Lennie Tristano, even John Coltrane³⁰) who gradually stretched the boundaries of harmonic, melodic and rhythmic language and its fixation when playing their tunes until leaving them completely open and free from idiomatic bindings, while "free improvisation" would refer to a less specific approach, usually related to contemporary classical music. That said, I will use from now on the term "free improvisation" to avoid that my words might be related only to the phenomenon in jazz tradition, but as a whole.

³⁰ See general introduction to improvisation made on Barrett, Richard. *Music of possibility*. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2017. p. 27-29

As a next step towards understanding a bit more about this complex topic, I will cite Bailey's definition of free improvisation, for it is the one I find more generic and applicable to more situations from all those I could read until now:

"Diversity is its most consistent characteristic, It has no stylistic or idiomatic commitment. It has no prescribed idiomatic sound. The characteristics of freely improvised music are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the person or persons playing it. Historically it predates any other music. [...] The skill and intellect required is whatever is available. [...]"

*Opinions about free music are plentiful and differ widely. They range from the view that free playing is the simplest thing in the world requiring no explanation, to the view that it is complicated beyond discussion. There are those for whom it is an activity requiring no instrumental skill, no musical ability and no musical knowledge or experience of any kind, and others who believe it can only be reached by employing a highly sophisticated, personal technique of virtuosic dimensions. Some are attracted to it by its possibilities for musical togetherness, others by its possibilities for individual expression."*³¹

Now anyone could discuss that this definition does barely "define" any feature about our topic, and so did many authors after reading the passage. However, I would say this is the only one that really tries to conceptualise what it really is in current (and past) practice and not what they think it should be, according to their own ideas or aesthetic principles.

At the same time, I think that some of those attempts are very valuable as well, because they add certain connotations to the term in different directions, relating each one of them to my own insight in a particular way, which leads me to adapt or reaffirm my own thoughts about it. A good example is the theory of "The Field of Musical Improvisation", developed by Marcel Cobussen et al., which intends to establish the same principles to all kinds of musical improvisation, no matter if they are idiomatic or not:

*"The point of departure is the idea that the FMI can be regarded as a complex system, a network culture. Understanding the FMI means gaining a clear insight into the collective behavior of its agents, behavior that is not predictable in terms of the dynamics of its component parts. The FMI theory especially wants to take into account the dynamic, interactive, and emergent qualities of performance as well as the historical, cultural, and societal contingencies of musicians, audience, and others belonging to the music world."*³²

After this first statement, the authors explain the different principles of their theory, being the most interesting ones the ecological conception of improvisation (in which there are different actors within the same system that interfere among themselves and the environment as a result of their particular actions) and the idea of nodality confronted to centrality.

³¹ Bailey, Derek. 'Improvisation: Its nature and practice in music'. Hachette Books, 1983. pp. 83, 85

³² Cobussen, Marcel, Frisk, H. and Weijland, B. 'The Field of Musical Improvisation'. Available on: [The Field of Musical Improvisation - Marcel Cobussen \(free.fr\)](http://www.free.fr/~cobussen/), p. 1

This approach is especially appealing for me because it deals with certain elements that I usually consider when thinking about improvisation, such as the role of the audience and the importance of the reception when analysing the musical event, and tries to develop a general system for any musical improvisation, which I find challenging but very interesting so that the eternal discussion about idiomatic/non-idiomatic that concerns us right now is completely out of their speech. However, it is also true that it is easily noticeable the relation of these principles to some of the natural behaviours in collective free improvisation, which Cobussen et al. try to expand to other situations where they are not so evident.

But the aspect that strikes me the most about this theoretic proposal is the breakdown with the idea of circles when talking about interactions in music making, in order to replace it with the idea of a net. This is the key to consider the existence of a field, a dynamic space in which all the musical actions take place affecting each other and the people involved in the event.

Maybe this is far beyond the current topic, but I needed to include it anyway because it made me reconsider the most fundamental aspects of my thinking and forced me to pose big questions to myself that are really important to my practice, such as: how does this concept work in solo improvisation? Does free improvisation still take place if we put interplay out of the equation?

Bailey argues that solo improvisation is necessary for free improvisation in order to develop and update our language, practise our improvisational skills and work on the sense of form, even though its ultimate expression arises when playing with others, for the musician has a gregarious attitude, according to his words.³³

This is a common place when trying to define free improvisation, as show the following examples by Cardew³⁴:

"Virtues that a musician can develop

[...]

3. Selflessness. *To do something constructive you have to look beyond yourself. The entire world is your sphere if your vision can encompass it. Self-expression lapses too easily into mere documentation – 'I record that this is how I feel'. You should not be concerned with yourself beyond arranging a mode of life that makes it possible to remain on the line, balanced. Then you can work, look out beyond yourself. Firm foundations make it possible to leave the ground.*

4. Forbearance. *Improvising in a group you have to accept not only the frailties of your fellow musicians, but also your own. Overcoming your instinctual revulsion against whatever is out of tune (in the broadest sense)."*

And Butcher³⁵:

³³ Bailey, Derek. 'Improvisation: Its nature and practice in music'. Hachette Books, 1983. pp. 105-112

³⁴ Cardew, Cornelius. "Towards an Ethic of Improvisation" (originally published in 1971), in Barrett, Richard. *Music of possibility*. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2017. pp. 30-31

³⁵ Butcher, John. 15 Simple Statements on Free Improvisation – with Illustrations and Contradictions". *Magyar Műhely* 37:108–109 (Winter 1998/Spring 1999) pp. 104–105

- “1. Group improvisation involves an attempt to make music that no one player could imagine. It should force the musicians beyond their own conceptions.*
- 2. Each player should equally be able to affect the content, form and direction of the music at any moment.*
- 3. The physicality of sound production is inescapably connected with the creation, not just the execution, of the music.*
- 4. Free improvised music is necessarily spontaneous, but is built on a background of years of study, experiment, thought and experience.*
- 5. There exists the possibility of trying to play a music with no history.*
- 6. Free improvisation shows that complexity is actually very natural.*
- 7. Contemporary music seems to operate within a continuum – from the often refreshing ideas of "sound left to be itself" to the sometimes grotesque extremes of "self expression." Free improvisation can operate anywhere within this. Often, most interestingly, with ambiguity - even at different points simultaneously.*
- 8. The listeners hears the reasoning behind musical choices in real time.*
- 9. Regular improvising means engaging with that Derek Bailey has described as a "search for whatever is endlessly variable."*
- 10. In most of the free improvisation I enjoy, decisions are made and techniques developed for "musical" rather than for "instrumental" reasons.*
- 11. Improvising musicians are continually modifying their intentions in response to each other. This happens at the actual point of creation and execution – sometimes against an individual player's own preferences.*
- 12. Tim Hodgkinson has written "Improvised music grips human beings because it is illuminated by the vivid presence of myriad possibilities that were not taken."*
- 13. Most performers are aware, moment by moment, of only a few things they can do which will sound "right" compared to hundreds that will sound "wrong." Free improvisation is very constrained and probably shouldn't be called free improvisation.*
- 14. Players intuitively choose the actual music content according to the unique circumstances around each performance. The room's acoustic, the day's travel, the nature of the audience, their last few concerts, what they ate for dinner.*
- 15. In improvisation you can hear the human beings behind the instruments."*

Both examples take for granted that free improvisation takes place in a collective way, and that is indeed what practice shows from the sixties already. However, I am not very keen to agree on that assumption, so I will try to deny it as a general principle with my practice, instead of building up a theoretical argument that would be much harder to articulate and much less effective for my purposes. In any case, I would like to comment further on Butcher's statements, because they put on the table many ideas that I find very interesting.

Starting with the very first one (which already sets a challenge to my attempt to bring free improvisation principles into my practice as a soloist), I completely agree with it, but I also find that it is not the only way to go beyond my own conceptions. In my case, there is another element that plays the same role that the specific context built up from other musicians' choices, among others (see points 11 to 14 above) plays for Butcher: the written pieces that surround my improvisations. Their expressive content,

their sonic appearance and even their social and historical connotations prevent me from the total freedom that Stravinsky³⁶ already denied and Butcher also refuses implicitly in his discourse.

Another interesting idea appears on the third statement, because it connects directly to one of the focal points that my experts pointed out in the feedback about my last Reference Recording: gesture. But here it is carried to the next level, not being relevant only for a proper execution but also for the creation. That makes me think of a holistic conception of my creative process when improvising, in which sound production and body movement are the two sides of the same coin. Definitely, an idea to have in mind during my intervention.

Going on with principle number 5, we get to one of the key points that I haven't addressed thoroughly yet, which is presented here in a very smart way. Talking about stylistic connections, Butcher suggests that there is the possibility to avoid them, but not the necessity of such a thing. Again we have someone attempting to define (free) improvisation that sets apart what from the outside seems to be the core of the topic.

I think this is a wiser approach than the one Bailey took when introducing the concept of "non-idiomatic" as an alternative to "free" improvisation. From my point of view, this was an apparently easy way for Bailey to escape from dealing with the enormous amount of "problems" that the discussion about freedom could bring in relation to music making. But actually it is a trap, because it denies the possibility of using idiomatic references in a freer context for artistic reasons of self-expression or connotative meaning.

As Barrett says, "*free improvisation as 'free' in the sense of being open to any possibility, free of constraints either to adhere to or to reject references to existing musics and materials*"³⁷. Cardew also agreed on that, as the same author remarks:

*"Cardew clearly realised that any attempt to specify how 'good improvisation' should sound or be structured, would be bound to fail: whatever concrete suggestions might be given, following them would no more guarantee a satisfactory result than contradicting them would guarantee an impoverished one."*³⁸

Therefore, we can perceive that, no matter how complex and confusing all discussions made on this topic may seem, there are some rather general agreements on certain aspects that help us very much to map the field, even if we have a different perspective from the most accepted one, as happened with the idea of free improvisation as basically collective.

That said, I could stay very long with each one of the affirmations by Butcher, since they are really inspiring and thoughtful, but I will make just a few more remarks before going on with my overview on the topic. The first one is about the particularities in reception about improvisation that the author points out and that I share very much. I have been defending from the very beginning of this research project the power of improvisation to connect with the audience in comparison with other forms of music making and I very much like the way Butcher is able to explain it in specific terms. Therefore, what makes

³⁶ Stravinsky, Igor. *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures for 1939-1940*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1947

³⁷ Barrett, Richard. *Music of possibility*. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2017. p. 30

³⁸ Barrett, Richard. *Music of possibility*. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2017. p. 32

improvisation different is how close brings the musician as a human being and his creative process to the listener, who experiences both realities at the very moment of the performance. It is, indeed, “a celebration of the moment”, as Bailey affirms in the conclusion of his well-known essay³⁹; but also a celebration of human expression through art by means of creativity.

My second additional remark connects with the last idea, since it refers to points 7 and 9, which show the main features that make (free) improvisation a powerful and appealing resource now for the musician. It allows self-expression and experimentation simultaneously and invites the musicians to engage in the “search for whatever is endlessly variable”⁴⁰. To be honest, this is so stimulating to me that I don’t find it necessary making any further comments on it.

Finally, I would like to point out how striking is the affirmation contained in point 13 about the constraints of free improvisation. We already discussed this a few paragraphs above referring to stylistic commitment, but now we can address it again by facing this statement to the definition that Barrett himself makes of free improvisation: “I use the term “free improvisation”, then, to describe a method of musical creation where the framework or model itself is brought into being at the time of performance”. “⁴¹

This means that, opposed to the narrower space of idiomatic improvisation models, free improvisation is so free that these models are created every time in a particular way and they are defined differently on each attempt. As a result, the definition of what is right or wrong is part of the displayed freedom, instead of a threat against it. Besides, “the “freedom” of free improvisation is in itself a contribution to a possible wider discussion of what freedom might mean, rather than a demonstration of a particular view of freedom”⁴²

This conflict arises from the historical development of the trend, as the same author explains:

The early years of free improvisation were often characterised by an explicit rejection of any preexistent forms or materials, typical in this connection being Franco Evangelisti’s commandments for the Gruppo di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza, of which he was a founder member in 1964, where each member was committed to a set of basic principles: “no priority of an individual player was to be allowed, no sound was to be produced which was bound to the tonal system, no rhythmic periodicity should be created, no easily-remembered motives were to be introduced, no exact repetition of a former occurrence was to be performed.”⁴³

This was a rather artificial way of establishing a total rupture with all the things known until that moment, as an outburst of the deep desire of freedom. And, even though the general perspective changed when time passed, the stereotype remained and there are some people that still interpret whatever system or pattern as a total denial of freedom, which I am not very sure to agree with.

³⁹ Bailey, Derek. ‘Improvisation: Its nature and practice in music’. Hachette Books, 1983. p. 142

⁴⁰ Butcher, John. 15 Simple Statements on Free Improvisation – with Illustrations and Contradictions”. Magyar Műhely 37:108–109 (Winter 1998/Spring 1999) pp. 104–105

⁴¹ Barrett, Richard. *Music of possibility*. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2017. p. 28

⁴² Barrett, Richard. *Music of possibility*. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2017. p. 32

⁴³ Barrett, Richard. *Music of possibility*. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2017. p. 29

In any case, the important thing is, following with the wise words of Barrett, “[...] *that what is possibly most attractive about improvisation is that all of this can be true.*”⁴⁴ And this short sentence could be a good summary also of my own conclusions after all the readings I made. Going deeper into the topic made me realise that, once more, there are no absolute truths in art, and this wouldn’t be different of course.

In fact, its main power certainly comes from the diversity that Bailey points out in his definition, even if I consider it very positive to know the main tendencies of the past decades in order to better understand the different shapes that its materialisation takes and to which ideas they respond. Now it is time to collect all the different ideas and thoughts that my reactions to the readings produced and build my practice on top of them: freedom in improvisation as capacity of choice on whether reference known codes or not, incorporate interplay and dynamic interactions between elements in solo improvisation as well, improvisation as celebration of the moment (communion with people in the audience through creativity), etc.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to briefly mention that free improvisation has been a tool, a means of communication for social and intellectual issues. For example, in the 60s it was the symbol of Black Nationalism in America against discrimination and claimed as that by some of the main figures of the moment (like Ornette Coleman) that adhered themselves to the movement. However, some authors like Iain Anderson⁴⁵ cast some doubts over this consensus, arguing that the audience of this music at the time was basically middle-high class white people with an intellectual life, that listened to this experimental, avant-garde music in reduced spaces, sometimes even private. And it also had its relation with more general philosophical trends, since it was easily recognisable how the different approaches to free improvisation within contemporary classical music and jazz supported their ideas in modern or postmodern thinking frames.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Barrett, Richard. *Music of possibility*. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2017. p. 33

⁴⁵ Anderson, Iain. *This is our music: Free jazz, the Sixties. And American Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007

⁴⁶ See *Introduction* of Dean, Roger T. *New Structures in Jazz and Improvised Music since 1960*. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1992

Appendix 7: Detailed comments on experiments (3.1.4.3 & 3.3.4.3)

Appendix 7.1: Experiment from chapter 3.1.4.3

- [02 Permutation 1:](#)

My remarks about this permutation regard the difficulties I found in every take to develop the notion of complexity without stepping out of the idea of connection. If I were critical, I would say that the complexity is replaced by abstraction and darkness in the journey of this interlude, going from a relatable textural motive to more vague material, which certainly connects well with the second piece but lacking some structural sense.

- [03 Permutation 2:](#)

In this case the possibility of changing the content in the middle section of the interlude offered me more pathways for developing a musical discourse, as well as experimenting with different technical resources which allowed me to conceive an interesting soundscape environment. However, I think there is still work to be done in terms of form in order to make this combination function properly.

- [04 Permutation 3:](#)

In my opinion, the introduction of the melody as a key element results in an increase of the coherence of the interlude. Besides, I think that the idea of gradual complexity is conveyed clearly in this particular example and the absence of a contrast element in the guideline is no longer a problem. According to this, I felt quite comfortable while working on this setting, being a good framework for developing different ideas and expressing myself.

- [05 Permutation 4:](#)

This example is not particularly remarkable in many aspects, but I decided to include it as part of the report anyway because I think it is very useful to comment on some transversal elements that affect other permutations too.

The first one is the importance of a smooth transition to the fully improvised content when using material from the written pieces, which I think is well managed in this case, but it comes second many times. This happens because I am usually more focused on coming up with some interesting idea or trying to shape the structure for the whole interlude in advance rather than staying on the moment, which is very difficult but beneficial for the final result, even if it causes some blunders during the improvisation.

This connects with the following aspect: the sensation of risk. In this example I can feel the uncertainty of myself trying to discover on the way what is going to happen next. Later there are other examples where this element is also quite noticeable and I think it is a key point for success, now also from a practical point of view.

Finally, I want to remark on the presence of humoristic elements in the first part of this recording, which surprisingly are a very good spice for my taste. As a listener, I think they generate a special connection with the moment and catch my attention specially, since I am always waiting for an unexpected element to come over. Therefore, it is a pathway that I would like to dig in and incorporate as part of my improvisational language.

- [06 Permutation 5:](#)

In comparison with all the previous cases, the contrasting mood provides me automatically with a broader scope of possibilities for conceiving the interludes, since the limitation given by the mood of the written pieces is not there anymore. As a result, this example is fully developed from a technical gesture: hand percussion on the strings.

Even if my skills are quite limited sometimes as the recording shows, it was very interesting for me this exploration, because it allowed me to pursue the same goals as in every permutation but using a completely different source, which sometimes resulted to be more suitable than the conventional ones (i.e. it was easier to build up a gradual complexity).

Besides, I think this combination of parameters has a great expressive potential but I feel that I am lacking a bit of vocabulary in order to articulate a wide variety of discourses following this improvisational path, so I guess there is an interesting research in there for the future.

- [07 Permutation 6:](#)

This recording enhances and supports some of the ideas I enunciated regarding other permutations which of course are not exclusive of those ones. Therefore, here is easily noticeable a vague structural sense (at least in the way it was supposed to be for the sake of the experiment) and not very smooth transitions from and to the written pieces.

However, I chose this example because it shows how diverse in colors, sounds and gestures a piece of music can be when you aim for extreme contrast focusing on the timbre. In fact, I think I got a bit lost in all the different elements I discovered on my way but at the same time I appreciate it so much both as part of my creative development but also as a true example of improvisation, in the broadest sense of the word.

Furthermore, I would like to point out the difficulties (at least from my perspective as a performer) for recalling material from classical pieces when using a completely different musical language. It is likely that it is just a matter of trying for more time, but I am not completely sure that such a combination will be easy to make it work.

- [08 Permutation 7:](#)

The following lines may put some question marks on everything I said until now but actually they just prove that art hardly ever is a matter of black or white. And that is because in this example we can find a fine example of what I was trying to achieve during the whole experiment using a melody-based language.

I guess it is easy to observe a tendency in my reflections and comments towards the benefits of crossing the boundaries of the 88 keys, but this case made me realise that there is not only a right answer. Just using a random melodic motive that came to my mind on the spot I could develop the idea of complexity at the same time that I squeezed the possibilities of that melody to my maximum.

In fact, I think I did it too much, because when I listen now to this interlude I would rather skip the final descending transition to the second written piece and leave it on the edge of the climax, so that the effect is much clearer. Nevertheless, here is the true learning experience of this process, so I can't be more glad about it.

- [09 Permutation 8:](#)

This last example is especially interesting regarding the use of vocabulary, since it shows a special focus on its development rather than the structural perspective shown in other cases. As a result, the transitions from and to the written pieces are still missing. But apart from that, there are only positive aspects that I could point out.

One of them is the effectiveness I find here in terms of communication through musical discourse. This is achieved with a sense of coherence in the displayed material added to the presence of noticeable risk (i.e. little tempo nuances trying to find the next desired sound in the meantime). As I explained extensively in previous chapters of this report, the communication element is essential for me, so these results are outstandingly important for my goals in the whole research.

The other one I would like to comment on is closely related to the last one: the emotional power of improvisation, which I personally perceive clearly in this example. Actually, I would say it is inseparable from an effective communication process with the audience. In short, these are green sprouts that enhance my confidence in the future of the project during the prospective phases of the process.

Appendix 7.2: Experiment from chapter 3.3.4.3

- [19 Option no.1:](#)

This first example had at first an advantage for me, due to the symmetry among the 3 different sections. However, all of them are relatively short, so I wasn't very sure about which would be the result. As the recording shows, that balance is indeed present and gives as a consequence a rather neat outcome, but my surprise when listening to it back is that it doesn't feel so short as I thought it would.

Since the chosen elements are very simple, it is possible to present them and carry a brief development out before changing to the next idea, so the arc is present and the interlude doesn't get that feeling of being an independent piece, since the total duration is quite short (less than 2 minutes).

On the other hand, it is hard to get very far in such a short period of time, so I would choose this option when I would like to connect the 2 pieces without a real intermission between them, rather than creating a third unity that has its own identity.

- [20 Option no. 2:](#)

This time there was a big challenge, that was balancing the last long section with the 2 previous ones. After some attempts, I decided that the best way to do it was to make that part the core of the improvisation, so the idea was to push the whole discourse towards that point, instead of having an enormous introduction to the second piece with a lack of momentum. As a result, the repeated notes became independent from the music they derive from and seem to be a consequence of the previous ideas.

I find it interesting to manage the timing in this way when going from a short, light piece to a more relevant one in narrative, expressive or technical terms, because staying so long in that hidden announcement of the second piece functions as a highlighter for what is yet to come. In any case, I think the key is that both the chosen element for improvisation from the written music and the structure work in such a way that the ending has certain power in relation to the rest of the interlude.

- [21 Option no. 3:](#)

Before starting to experiment, I thought this one would be the most straightforward option of them all, since it resembles the standard way of thinking that I followed during the whole project: brief transition in and out of a main original idea. However, what happened is that the relation between the 2 short transitions and the middle section was always completely unbalanced for my taste.

The reason for that is that the first connection seems too fast for such a simple middle section that almost crashes into a new written piece. Therefore, I envision two solutions for this situation; either I manage to make a bigger development with such a simple idea for the middle part or I fill it with more content beforehand. Actually, I think that it could work even better if I would stretch more that bigger section, so that the proportion is so different that the core achieves a stronger relevance within the whole discourse.

- [22 Option no. 4:](#)

In order to make this combination work, I opted for merging the long section into one big wave with points of tension and release, ups and downs, while blurring the boundaries between them. This “tsunami” feeling works pretty well, since it gives a big impulse from the first piece to the second and the arrival into Chopin’s universe benefits from this smooth and fluid entrance.

However, I think I can enhance this effect more and create a bigger impact, being more explicit and radical in this approach, so it is clearly understandable. In any case, another way of approaching time management with a solid connection with my artistic needs.

- [23 Option no. 5:](#)

Here there was a major change compared to the previous examples, which is the bigger size of the first part. At first, it was quite challenging, since it was something that I haven’t done before, especially in the previous cycles when I always jumped into some new idea very quickly.

Little by little, I got to understand that I should make that beginning a more relevant piece of my discourse, forcing myself to grow a longer arc from that motive. As a result, I got an improvisation “after”

the first piece that at some point takes a turn in order to introduce a new idea as a downhill, for finally going up again with a small spoiler of the second piece.

At this point, I already found a solid thinking process in order to handle different proportions, which is very rewarding and useful in order to adjust my improvisations to different contexts in a more accurate way, according to my artistic goals.

- [24 Option no. 6:](#)

This setting could be called the negative version of number 3, and, as it can be presumed, it was hard for me to make it work. The main reason is that I couldn't find a way to reduce the initial lack of balance sufficiently, especially towards the second part of the improvisation.

The first section works on its own, but it feels a bit unnatural for me to stay so long in the last part after such a short bridge, with a new idea that seems to belong nowhere. Therefore, I am not particularly satisfied with this option, I can hardly see a situation in which I would use it, at least with this approach to the material. As in number 3, maybe the way to make it work is exaggerating the difference between the two lengths, in such a way that the middle part is just a short crossfade between the material related to the written pieces.

- [25 Option no. 7:](#)

In this case, I had no assumptions before sitting in front of the keyboard, since I would have never thought of this combination on my own. However, I am very satisfied with how it works and the particularities I could find while doing it. That is because the beginning of it advances a symmetrical shape that in the end is cut to dive into the second piece at a faster pace.

Therefore, I could develop sufficiently the take-off from the first piece and work into the middle part with no rush, but later I haven't had to deal with a very long transition towards the second piece, which, according to this recording, could be even shorter, stressing more this implicit effect that the structure has.

To sum up, this is a very effective option that I could use in many different cases, because its main strength is its inherent coherence and functionality, and I consider it a finding that derives completely from this experiment.

- [26 Option no. 8:](#)

The last combination is the other symmetric option, like number 1, being only different to this one in terms of length. Therefore, I think it is interesting to compare their functioning regarding this aspect. I knew beforehand that this example would lead to a 3-minute-long interlude, which I thought could be a bit too long. Now, after listening to the result of my experimentation, I confirm that guess.

Maybe it is a consequence of only playing a few seconds from the written pieces, but I have the impression that this interlude becomes already an independent piece, even if most of its material derives from the other ones. Therefore, I wonder if it is only a matter of proportion or I would take the same conclusion if placing it between 2 Beethoven Sonatas, for example.

In any case, there is another issue with this example, which is the technical challenge of stretching the material for that period of time. It seems that 1 minute is almost nothing, but when having 3 notes or even 1 as the core material it is hard to keep relating to it for a long time without getting into something completely different. Besides, since the goal is to connect the other two pieces, it is not possible to make a great journey without failing into that mission of landing safely on the second piece.

As the main outcome of this last experiment, I take the reflection on duration that it triggered on me, as well as the training in material development to improve my skills as an improviser.