

# The Performer-Composer: A Practice in Interrelation

## Introduction

This exposition is the presentation of my final project of master studies in performing music with specialisation in jazz double bass, spanning from autumn 2021 to spring 2023. During the course of my studies, I have been grappling with questions regarding the intersection between performance and composition. As a performing jazz musician in Norway, I almost exclusively perform original music composed by bandmates or myself. The use of material composed by others is scarce, and the performing composer seems ever present. This blurs the lines between compositional intention contra performer's interpretation, between precomposed material contra spontaneous improvisation.

My first two projects have reflected on how the composition as an object can evoke or restrain creative improvisation and interpretation. For my first project I transcribed, performed and researched music by other performing composers. I explored where the lines between composition and improvisation might be drawn, and how compositions indirectly influence my improvisations. For my second project, I composed and performed music researching alternative notation and oral composition approaches. I strived to create less specific compositions, more open to the creative interpretation and improvisation of the performing musicians.

## Research question

In this project, I seek to shift the focus from the composition as an object itself, to my role and process as a performing composer, turning myself into the object of study. My central research question is: **"How does my dual role of performer-composer interrelate and enrich my artistic praxis as a performer?"** The phenomenon of the performing composer is by no means new, being commonplace in the premodern era [O'Grady, 1980, p. 58-59], again becoming popularised in contemporary music [Groth, 2017, p. 14], while also being widespread in popular musics. The resurgence of this praxis in contemporary music has made it an establishing and relevant field of research [Beaubeais, 2020; Groth, 2017]. However, most existing research has focused on the phenomenon from a composer perspective, whereas I consider it from a performer perspective. What I seek to contribute is to examining artistic possibilities this dual role

facilitates and articulate realisations acquired through engaging in it that may be relevant as a performer in general.

## Method

My method is artistic research. I do not assert to do research *on* music [Borgdorff, 2006, p. 6-7], as a musicological study of the performing composer role in general would be. My approach is rather to research *in* music, expanding and developing my experiences as a performing composer. I compose, perform and reflect on the interrelation of the dual role of the performing composer. It is an auto-hermeneutical approach [Gorichanaz, 2017] in which my experiences and processes, my unique approach to this dual role is the focus of research. The research question is not, and can not be, answered through academic text alone. Rather, the research question is addressed in my artistic praxis. This exposition seeks to disseminate and reflect on processes I have been engaging in while exploring the research question artistically.

## Structure:

This main section of this exposition are the two pages "performer" and "composer." These discuss the research question from two different vantage points. Each page informs the other and is informed by the other. I encourage the reader to explore this exposition in a non-linear fashion, jumping to sections of interest and relevance to you.

In the "Performer" pages, I describe my aesthetics, performing praxis and rehearsal processes as a performer. I discuss the term "interpretation" at some length, demonstrating how a performing composer praxis problematises hierarchical attitudes often associated with the term. In the "Composer" pages, I also describe aesthetics and artistic praxis, but from the perspective of me as composer. I discuss the relationship between improvisation and composition and how a performing composer praxis problematises concepts of "the composition" as a static entity. Finally, I describe my compositional process. On the bottom of the front page is a section documenting artistic results. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the totality of the artistic research project and how engaging with the research question has led to artistic development.

# Performer

## A Performing Aesthetic Manifest

My performing aesthetic

- Is responsible for the musical whole:
  - As a performing composer, my ear is always listening to the whole of the music rather than my part. I may play chordal, rhythmically, simple, melodic etc. depending on what I is needed at for the whole as I see it. The bass role is not always my primary focus.
- Grooves
  - I wish for my performance whenever appropriate to groove and swing. I see this as a musical aspect that increases joy for all listeners and performers, and a musical aspect I wish to let permeate most of what I perform.
- Has an interesting timbre
  - I wish for every tone that I play to sound interesting in and of itself. It should not be a plain tone, but have some kind of exciting texture happening.
- Emphasises interplay
  - Communication, response and interplay with the other musicians are a central part to my performing aesthetic. I constantly seek to respond and elicit response from my fellow musicians. I seek to, as bassist Rufus Reid suggests, split my concentration evenly between melody, chord, rhythm and bass section in the music. [2000, p. 66]
- Displays virtuosity
  - By virtuosity, I do not necessarily "playing fast." I rather means to in some way impress the audience through skill, for the purpose of strengthening trust between audience and performer. Once trust has been established, provocative artistic choices are more intuitively read as artistic choices rather than mistakes.
- Is melodic
  - I hear and remember music as melodies, and approach chords as the melodies of bass notes.
- Has an auditory approach
  - My musical approach is not based on reading, but hearing. The score (if there is one) is used initially to get an idea of the music. But once I have an auditory sense of the music, I perform from memory and only use the score as a reference.
- Adjusts to context
  - I listen to the resulting sounds, and figure out what sounds as intended, what needs to be adjusted and what perhaps sounds better than intended. This provides a basis for feedback and collective development of the composition.

## Describing my artistic praxis

In discussing my interrelating roles as performer and composer, I wish to first describe my artistic praxis. I am a musician performing, at the moment, mostly in the quite different genres of modern jazz, church music, session work and West/Northwest African musics. My primary instruments are double and electric bass, and I also enjoy dabbling with secondary instruments of which I have recorded several. I see myself as a versatile musician who adjusts to context and genre. I like the challenges and opportunities for growth that come with a varied artistic praxis, and see it as a necessary skill to be able to work as a freelance musician. I admire bassists such as Ron Carter and Pino Palladino, who, while having their own distinctive style, manage to adjust and adapt to a multitude of genres.

In my master project, it has been necessary to put some aspects of my artistic praxis in focus and others less so. I have been reflecting, not on the versatility that lies as a foundation for my artistic praxis, but rather on the questions "Who am I, on my own terms?" "What music do I wish to create?" This has led me to focus on my praxis as a performing composer in a jazz context, where I have more influence on the artistic outcome. Though other parts of my artistic praxis have not been in focus for my master project work, they have informed it and been informed by it.

## Rehearsal Processes

As a jazz musician, I perform in bands in which all music is composed by bandmembers. The field of free improvisation is not the one I specialise in, though it's occasionally used as a technique inside and between compositions. I relate to Øyvind Skarbø's claim on the cover text to Bly de Blyant's debut album: "*Free improvisation is a method, not a genre.*" [2013] The first thing that happens when initiating a project is creating compositions - or at the very least compositional sketches. Depending on the level of compositional detail, initial rehearsals can range from rehearsing a finished compositional idea, to co-creative processes evolving from simpler compositional sketches or free improvisation. In initial rehearsals, focus is often on understanding general compositional ideas and potentialities. I will show some excerpts of dialogue from a specific rehearsal where I was the composer.

Norwegian:

**Musiker:** Er det i den lange Bb-månen der tempo går opp?

**Meg:** Kanskje litt gjennom hele A-delen også på en måte.

Musiker: Ja!

**Meg:** Men spesielt der.

**Annen musiker:** Fordi B-delen er i 85-90 BPM? Det er dit vi skal?

**Meg:** Det er dit vi skal.

English:

**Musician:** Is it in the long Bb-major chord that the tempo rises?

**Me:** Perhaps a little through the entire A-section as well.

Musician: Yes!

**Me:** But especially there.

**Another musician:** Because the B-section is in 85-90 BPM? That's where we're going?

**Me:** That's where we're going.

The musicians ask to clarify compositional elements that are uncertain, in order to get a correct understanding of the composition. Meanwhile, I listen to the performance and verbal inputs of the musicians to see if they take the composition in another direction than I originally envisioned, which often gives interesting artistic results.

After getting an initial idea, new rehearsals are set and the composition goes through a kind of ripening unconsciously in between rehearsals. When the composition is touched upon again, it is with a stronger sense of certainty and familiarity than initially, making more experimental approaches to interpretation viable. The musicians become more involved in shaping the composition and its aesthetics, giving feedback and suggesting ideas. The performing composer has the last word on broader compositional elements like form, style, dynamics, progression etc. The performers have the last word on their performance - grooves, voicings, improvisational approaches etc. In the undefinable overlap between the whole and its parts, meaning has to be negotiated.

Norwegian:

**Meg:** Jeg synes at den loopen der [C] er liksom sin egen del, så vi kan holde på en liten stund med den.

**Musiker:** Det som er litt corny, er når vi har vært så lenge på den 15/4 polyrytmen eller hva det var, og så går vi tilbake til den andre [4/4]. Går det ann at de to taktene før loopen har litt underdelinger i den enda mer, sånn at det liksom glir over i hverandre?

**Meg:** Så at vi ikke spiller tydelig 4/4 de taktene der?

**Musiker:** Ja, kanskje for at bare det ikke plutselig stopper, men at det glir, for hvis det skal gå en stund er det tøft at det glir ut, kanskje?

**Meg:** Jada!

English:

**Me:** I think that the loop there [C] is kind of its own part, so we can play that for a little while.

**Musician:** You know, what's a bit corny is when we've been so long in that 15/4 polyrhythm or what it is, and then go back to the other [4/4]. Is it possible that the two measures before the loop have a little more subdivisions, so they kind of glide into each other?

**Me:** So we don't play clearly 4/4 those measures?

**Musician:** Yes, perhaps just so it doesn't suddenly stop, but it glides, because if it lasts a while, it's cool that it glides out, perhaps?

**Me:** Absolutely!

The negotiation goes back and forth, moving just as much through interplay in performance as through verbal discussion. There happens a kind of collective reflection in action. [Borgdorff, 2006, p. 5] A bandmember instigates a certain kind of performance, for instance by suddenly performing with extended tonality. I follow their lead into experimental harmonic territory. But the bandmember perhaps desired to create a contrast to my performance, and change their performance immediately as soon as I start imitating theirs. I understand their approach, and hold my ground with the original tonality instead, perhaps even simpler than initially to provide a stable foundation for their tonal ventures. No words have been spoken, but the performance of the composition, the musical roles of the instruments and the aesthetic expression of the performance has been negotiated through practice.

Sometimes, a composition changes and undergoes several stages in rehearsals. The composition *The Sphinx* [Cort Piil, 2021] is an example (not composed by me). Initially, it was performed as a typical jazz ballad, with the bass holding long notes, drums playing with brushes, etc. As a result of workshop-like rehearsals, the composition became polyrhythmically centred, with every instrument playing a different time signature divisible within a 6/4 bar. After a while, the strict systems felt constraining, and we wanted to free it up with the rhythm section playing fast double tempo swing and the melody instruments playing rubato, a similar approach to the composition *Lonely Woman* [Coleman, 1959]. Over time, it collapsed into everyone playing rubato, giving it a calm, solitary feel as I see it. The only elements constant through the interpretational history are the melody and chords. Were they to be disregarded from reflection, there would be no way to hear that we were performing the same composition through its different versions. We can truly hear Leech-Wilkinson's assertion that "*the same notes can make (and have made) substantially different music.*" [2016, p. 328]

## The Debatable Term of Interpretation

Many words could be used to describe the musical performance of a composition, but in the educational context in which I am situated, the dominating term is that of "interpretation." A performer interprets a composition. One try to understand the composer's intentions through their score and turn them into sound through performance. What the composer has made clear, one strives to play as intended. Where there is ambiguity in the score, one may reason their way to figure out how to perform. The performative liberty starts where the composer's specificity ends. But the performative liberty is not entirely free. If the composer has not indicated tempo, for instance, one is not free to play in any tempo. One must reason from the existing elements of the score, from other works of the composer, from the historical style, from

interpretational history, historical sources, etc. to figure out what the composer could have meant. *"How fast is allegro vivace? (...) How loud is forte? (...) How should this passage be played? These sorts of questions preoccupy serious musical performers. They are questions of interpretation."* [Krausz, 1993, p. 1]

This may be a constructive approach to performing music composed by others, perhaps particularly the romantic and modern-era music for which the terms are devised. But for me as a performing jazz composer, the notion of performance as interpretation seems somewhat absurd, and the associations the word carries limits my creativity. What does it mean to interpret? It seems to me in a general sense to imply deciphering the meaning of someone else's thoughts and clarifying what is unclear, translating it in order to present its meanings to a third party. In music, the term seems to me to superimpose an understanding of the composition as a stable, finished entity, something existing in the past or in a platonic plane. The notion that *"each musical work we hear has, somewhere Out There, a corresponding Platonic entity that exists prior to, and indeed independent of all performance."* [Small, 1998, p. 113] My role as performer seems to be to interpret and represent this entity to an audience, attempting to be as faithful as I can to the composer's musical meaning. It hallows the role of the composer to an exalted position, in which they know exactly what they want and are the primary creative agents of the musical process. It is the composers' thoughts and visions who are to be represented faithfully, and I am the composer's instrument, transforming their abstract thoughts to concrete sound. It is *"the centuries' old formula of the omnipotent composer and subservient musician."* [Cornish, 2015] I exaggerate somewhat, but only to display the problematic assumptions covertly understood (or misunderstood) in the vocabulary of musician as interpreter.

## The Absurdity of "Interpreting" My Own Composition

But what does it mean for me to interpret a composition of which I am the composer? If interpretation signifies the clarification of what is unclear, the interpretative process collapses when I know exactly what I meant. If the performer's activity is primarily interpretation, it would seem that performing self-composed music would be the least creative kind of performance, since all ambiguity and unclarity in compositional intention, which the interpretative process is dependent on, is done away with. It would follow that the performance of self-composed music gives more identical performances over time, since I, the performing composer, know my compositional intentions and have no need for interpretation.

I asked a classical musician I know: *"What would performance without interpretation look like?"* I paraphrase his response: *"If even possible, it would be probably be quite mechanical, in that all variation of phrasing, dynamics, timbre etc. is removed and the music is performed simply as written."* It is similar to how Stravinsky defined his ideal of performance not as *"interpretation,"* but rather as *"execution"* [In Small, 1993, p. 6]. The

consequence for the performing composer seeking to perform self-composed music, seems to be to execute them simply and plainly in a less creative approach than performing the music of others, as a composer I know said: *"I am no longer a composer when I'm performing a piece."*

Another musician I talked to had a creative approach to bypassing this dilemma, which I paraphrase: "When I interpret a piece by myself, I first compose it, then let it rest for a while. When I pick it up again, I pretend that it was written by someone else - someone preferably dead, but at least someone I could never contact to ask questions. I assume that they have not written anything outside the score that could guide me in interpretation, that the score is the only document left. Then I start the process of interpretation."

I find these approaches and experiences fascinating, because they differ so drastically from my own. In my experience as a performing composer, self-composed pieces have the greatest variety in performance, which runs contrary to what one would expect if conceptualising the composition as a stable, finished entity. The process of performing self-composed music is for me vibrant and creative, varied and captivating. I engage in the same creative process when I compose and when I perform self-composed music, the approaches have many similarities.

I'll present this as a philosophical argument in order to illustrate the logical fallacy:

Supposition 1: The primary creative process of performing scored music is interpretation.

Definition: The process of interpretation is (linguistically) defined as seeking to understand the composer's intentions in order to present them musically to an audience.

Supposition 2: My performance of self-composed music does not involve interpretation (in the definition above).

Conclusion: My performance of self-composed music involves a low degree of creativity.

As the conclusion is self-evidently false (I hope!), some sort of logical fallacy or false presupposition must be present. Since supposition 3 is derived from and about my own personal experience which I know better than any others, I assume that the fallacy is in either supposition 1 or 2. Either 1: the process of interpretation is not the primary creative process in performance, but other more underrecognized creative processes are at play in performance. Or 2: the term interpretation is not actually what it makes itself out to be. It is a term used for something different than what one would expect from the word's general usage. For me as a performing musician, these two potential fallacies are essentially the same, in saying that interpreting the composer's intention is not the primary activity involved in performing self-composed music, there are other underrecognized processes in play as well.



## Non-Interpretative Processes in Performance and Composition

I will now look at some of the similarities I experience between performance and composition: I am both processes a creative agent: generating, moulding and presenting music. As a composer, I generate abstract musical ideas, mold them through development/revision and present them in notated or oral form to musicians. As a performer, I generate audible sounds, mold them through my control of an instrument and present them to a physical or digital audience. The medium differs, but the processes are for me the same, and this is perhaps even more true for the performance of self-composed music.

In both contexts, I ask myself similar unconscious questions: "Who am I, artistically?" "What do I want this music to be?" "What can I express musically, today?" "What can I do that has aesthetic value for me?" "Do I wish to approach this the same way as before?" "How should I develop this?" "Does this work?" "How should I relate to the intentions/desires/requests of others?" "Should I adjust to this context, and in that case, how much?" "What expectations do people have to me, and should I fulfil them or not?" "How does this sound for an audience unfamiliar with the music?" "How much should I adjust my music to audience expectations?" "Are my expectations about audience expectations correct?" "What is this music really about?"

If I spend all my time on performance one week, I am a better composer the next. If I spend all my effort on composition, my experience implies that I would inadvertently become somewhat of a better performer as well. The processes seem to me deeply connected. But how can it be, that the processes of composition and performance, ever construed as dichotomic contrasts, are so relatable in my experience? Perhaps Small's concept of musicking is a more accurate description of my creative processes than a musicological approach dichotomising and dissociating the creative process. *"To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing (...) or (...) by providing material for performance (what is called composing)." [Small, 1993, p. 9]* Small's conception of performance, composition and more as a unified, intergrated activity resonates with me and reflects in my artistic praxis. Of course, performing and composing in their conventional approaches do have defined differences such as the medium of mediation (sound versus score), their modes of existence (auditory versus conceptual), their purpose (for audiences versus for performers), etc. But what I attempt to highlight is that the artistic processes are in many ways the same in my praxis. In the void left after the removal of interpretative process, I see innumerable other creative processes revealing themselves, within the overarching process of musical performance. In my performance of self-composed music, I see many activities that I engage in that I would not define as interpretation. These performative activities needs to be discerned and engaged in, of which I will name some:

- I reimagine

- I know my original intention with the composition, but I ask myself what I want it to be today? I reconceptualise the composition and let it be moulded by the musicians involved, the room/context, the improvisations occurring in and around it, the need for variation and so on. Ndiyabulela Dizu - section.
- I recompose
  - In performing, I make decisions about what my composition becomes. This unique performance has consequence for the future conception of my composition. I elaborate compositional ideas in performance, I change compositional ideas, I resolve unclarities, I decide whether to let improvisations from the past be reperformed, reimagined, etc.
- I adjust
  - I listen to the resulting sounds, and figure out what sounds as intended, what needs to be adjusted and what perhaps sounds better than intended. This provides a basis for feedback and collective development of the composition.
- I improvise
  - To me, improvisation is not only performance with new melodies or rhythms, but all spontaneity that happens in performance, so that even a rigid adherence to score can and usually will have elements of improvisation, or spontaneous music-making as it could also be called.
- I interplay
  - I listen to my bandmembers, and they listen to me. We communicate with, influence, inspire and contrast one another through music.
- I phrase
  - I perform with varied dynamics, timbre, microtempo etc. to make the performance engaging. I consider this a separate process to interpretation.

## Redefining Interpretation

In some paragraphs, I might have seemed overtly critical to the performative tradition of classical music. That is not my intention. Rather, what I propose is that the vocabulary commonly used to discuss those performative traditions misleads us the actual processes the performer may engage in. I agree with Göran Hermerén's opinion that *"Personally, I refuse to restrict interpretations by definitional fact to interpretations of the intentions of the composer. (...) Is the mind of the composer the only mind we are interested in understanding?"* [in Krausz, 1993, p. 30-31] Still, his quote highlights the oxymoron that the word interpretation produces.

If I disregard the composer's intention (as I understand it), as I wish to perform their composition with some other aesthetic qualities, my performance may have a claim to aesthetic value. But it does not have a claim to be called an interpretation, rather risking being called a misrepresentation because of the dominance of the term interpretation in describing performance. Still, whether a performance is a true interpretation or not, is as I

see it, not the most interesting question. The center of discussion should be potential aesthetic value and experiences.

In time, I've understood that the usage of the term perhaps differs from its linguistic definition (interpreting the composer's intentions). In the start of my project, when I understood the term linguistically, I felt it as a limiting word, defining the extent to which I can be creative as only those aspects which the composer has left unclear. But through discussions with other musicians, my experience of the term has changed. I've seen that the term interpretation for many classical musicians does not indicate a limit to creative freedom, but actually its opposite. It gives them a room to interpret differently from other performers. It legitimises quite different performances, in arguing them to be different interpretations of the same composition. The ambiguities of the composer provide an avenue where they can express themselves. However, I still see the term in itself as having a potential for misleading, though I acknowledge that the artistic processes the term is used to describe are very legitimate, interesting and carry great aesthetic value.

## Performing as if I was the Composer

When I, as a performer, perform music composed by others, there comes certain considerations into play that one avoids in performance of self-composed music which I have discussed mostly so far. Now I have to consider how truthful I should be to the composition, how I should relate to the aesthetic of the bandleader/conductor, what my role is in a certain context, etc. Still, I think there are some realisations arising from performing self-composed music that are relevant to performing compositions by others.

As an alternative performative practice, I like to sometimes test out performing a composition as if I was it's composer. I imagine that I had creative authority over the performance and everything described in the sheet was intentionally put there by me. Then I experiment with how my interpretation changes, and consider which elements of change are of aesthetic interest. Usually, I gain a larger understanding of and experience of ownership to the composition. When I imagine why I would put an articulation mark at a certain point, had I been the composer, I start to see the musical meaning of the articulation rather than performing it mechanically. It also opens a greater possibility for expressing myself in the composition.

I've been reflecting on how much a performance is *my performance* of a composition or how much it is an execution of the *composer's* vision. The musical literature shows immense contrasts in answering this dilemma, from the composer-oriented perspective: "*These, then, are the two kinds of art in music - the creative and the interpretative. (...) the performer, no matter how great his skill and how keen his insight, can but bring to life the creative thoughts of the composer.*" [Whybrew, 1963, p. 79] To to the performer-oriented: "*The performer's role is always the same; he is always an active creator, shaping and molding [sic] the abstract scheme furnished him by the composer*" [Meyer, 1956, as

cited in O'Grady, 1980, p. 56] My compositional praxis has greatly informed my foundational values on this dilemma in the direction of the performer-oriented. Of course, any answer to such a dilemma should be sensitive to context, as some performative practices hold more legitimacy in some genres and among particular composers than others, and I of course adjust to what is appropriate in a certain context.

But to reference an experience from my performing composer praxis: when I am the composer, I do absolutely not want the musicians to merely execute my music mechanically and correctly. Several conductors have encouraged in rehearsals "*just play what is written. Don't think, don't be a musician, just do what the composer says.*" Were this to be said about my compositions, I would be appalled. When I am the composer, I long for the musicians to take ownership of the music, to do something with it, to bring something of their own to the table and find a kind of middle point in which you can hear both composer and performer. I am overjoyed when musicians take the role of active participator and surprise me with their performances, it is very much wished for approach. Some interpretations might occasionally not be to my preference, but that is a risk I desire them to take, because the overall expression of active creativity means more to me than disagreements about particular segments.

As a performer, I am surprised by my positive attitudes as a composer. When I perform a composition, I am usually by default nervous to do something "wrong." I wish to please the composer and honour his or her written instructions. But as a composer, my focus is not on right or wrong according to the score. Rather, the composition is a framework, a starting point for initiating the process of creating wonderful performances. The difference of my intuitive ideals when I am placed on different sides of the score is drastic.

To me as a composer, even the notes themselves are open to discussion. In the realm of traditional interpretation, the musical aspects of dynamics, tempo, expression, etc. are seen as more open to debate and variation, whereas pitch and rhythm less so. [Krausz, 1993, p. 1-3] The alteration of notes, for any reason, is blatantly disregarded with arguments such as that were alterations allowed, "*what would keep an interpreter from transforming Beethoven's Fifth Symphony into "Yankee Doodle?"*" [ibid., p. 3] Krausz's quote seems to embody a culture of mistrust to performers, implying that were performers given too much creative scope, it would lead to the dismembering of the composition rather than enhanced performance.

As a composer, my desires for interpretation are quite opposite from the typical description of interpretational possibilities. Traditional notation needs content - pitch and rhythm. Without these, music cannot be expressed in traditional notation. If I as a composer desire to convey a vague idea, a starting point, a tonal landscape etc., I am forced by the format of notation to represent it very concretely, perhaps more specifically than I wish the idea to be. In my music, where composition and improvisation are integrated, this poses an ever present challenge. It often makes the notes seem more

specific than I desire, due to the fact that pitch and rhythm is required in a traditional format. However, notational elements such as dynamics, tempo and expression are not required, and so are placed there intentionally. If there is a forte, it is there for a reason, but notation of how to arpeggiate a chord may just be an example. If that is my experience as a composer, perhaps the prevailing attitude that notes are indisputable could, at least in some contexts, be opened up for discussion.

Naturally, this is only based on my experience as a composer. Different composers have different attitudes and as a performer I have to be sensitive to what kind of performance is desired and appropriate in a certain style, context or in works by a certain composer. If I perform in a symphony orchestra, the conductor is the leading creative agent and I must adapt to my role. I am well aware of this. But on the other side: I've been to band auditions where skilful musicians were not hired, because they played the music too correctly. The band desired new creative input, but their loyalty to score hindered them from getting the job.

My intention with this discussion has not been to say that all music should be performed with large creative liberties at all times. My contribution is rather to suggest that a practice of performing as if one was the composer can be a supplement in musical performance and preparation for performance. It is an approach which in my experience reduces performance pressure, instills a creative approach, increases sense of ownership to the music and (at least in a jazz context) often is desired by composers.

# Composer

## A Compositional Aesthetic Manifest

My compositional aesthetic:

- Is tradition-innovative
  - Clearly rooted in musical traditions, while actively seeking to develop those traditions further through innovation. I seek not to merely replicate tradition, but to utilise it in new ways.
- Is saturated
  - My music seeks to excite many musical aspects and layers at the same time. The music is not primarily oriented around either melody, harmony or rhythm, but seeks to generate excitement in all these simultaneously.
- Is stringent
  - I seek for my music to have inherent limitations, rules and guidelines. My compositional processes is characterized by a strictness inspired by that of counterpoint studies. It is not stringency itself that is the ideal, but the stringency produces stylistic results that interests me.
- Is afro-inspired
  - The active inspiration from African musics is a way to acknowledge and honour the legacy of jazz an afro-American form of art. I take inspiration from concrete musical examples, ethnomusicological writings [Dlamani et al, 2017; Kubik, 1994; Berliner, 1993] and music encountered while living in Southern Africa, altering and adapting theoretical concepts to my context.
- Mixes individualistic and collectivistic approaches
  - I want my music to be individualistic in the sense that one can hear the individual expressions of musicians. Yet I want it to be collective in the sense that there is a coherent style. An example is how I often prefer duos or dialogues to solos. I urge two musicians to "solo" simultaneously, seeking to hear the interaction between them and the composition.
- Seeks a spiritual subtext
  - I hold that spirituality and art are connected on a deeply human level and gives the possibility for a deeper aesthetic experience [See Demmrich, 2018; and d'Aquili & Newberg, 2004]. The exploration of this is central in my music and I see potential for new musical expressions, as *"of the modern music genres, jazz is probably the least explored by Christian composers and performers"* [Dowley, 2011, p. 244].
- Leans towards Apollonian aesthetics
  - Apollonian aesthetics represents beauty, order and light, contrary to Dionysian aesthetics of fragmentation, disharmony and death. I use these Nietzschean categories based on their reinterpretation in d'Aquili & Newberg [2004, p. 40] I find that it is the Apollonian aesthetic that resonates with me most.

## Contextualising my Performer-Composer Praxis

I am inspired in my praxis as performing composer by the balance between compositional vision and room for improvisation/interpretation/reimagining of Ndabo Zulu & Umgidi Ensemble [2020], The Unity Band [2019], Aloft Quartet [2020], Maria Kannegaard [2017 & 2016] and Chick Corea [1968].

My harmonies borrow inspiration from McCoy Tyner [1974], my arranging techniques from Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers [1956], the approach to spirituality in jazz from Alice Coltrane [1970]. Innumerable other performing composers whose music influences mine could be mentioned.

In terms of approaching the role of bassist bandleader, I see a contrast between the approach of Paul Chambers [1957] and Charles Mingus [1959]. Chambers uses the bandleader role to display virtuosity and expand the musical role of the instrument, whereas Mingus uses the bass as a vehicle for bandleading, putting focus on the music as a whole. My praxis is closer to that of Mingus than that of Chambers. My bass playing usually maintains a more traditional role as foundation in the music, and my focus is on the music as a whole rather than my individual performance.

## Defining "A Composition"

In discussing my compositional praxis, I feel it essential to discuss how I conceptualise and relate to the concept of "a composition" in my artistic praxis. There are several theoretical approaches to this topic: Is the composition the score itself, the intent of the composer(s) predating the score, the audience's perception, some aspect of the auditory realisation, etc? What is it that makes several different and unique musical performances be experienced as essentially the same "composition"? Ringer & Crossley-Holland states in Encyclopedia Britannica that the concept of a composition "*presume a tradition in which musical works exist as repeatable entities...*" [Ringer & Crossley-Holland, 2008]

This entails that that the "thisness" of a composition, the properties and characteristics that make it a particular composition, lies in its potential for repetition. A composition has, in this sense, an element of similarity across different renderings, constituting its unique character. Ringer & Crossley-Holland lays the composition's ontological foundation in stability of auditory realisation, not in the score itself. This contrasts a notation-centred view of composition, including oral composition in their definition.

Yet, the criteria of potential repetition poses challenges for jazz-oriented compositions, as the quote continues: "*...in this sense, composition is necessarily distinct from improvisation.*" [ibid] The argument might go: due to improvisation's spontaneous and ever-changing nature, it self-evidently contradicts the repeatability of compositions. Composition and improvisation are different worlds, forever separated by their different

nature. However, Ringer & Crossley-Hollands distinction between composition and improvisation does not resonate with my artistic praxis in this aspect.

Composition -> Improvisation

In my artistic praxis, composition and improvisation are thoroughly integrated. I am always looking to create compositions that evoke improvisation for the performers. I want the composition to give a kind of creative energy that fuels improvisation. I use notational approaches, manipulate the musical flow or instruct orally in a way that I hope inspires the musicians to co-create the resulting sound. I will give some simple examples:

For a notational approach: in the tune Epiphany [Thomas Lossius Septet, 2021], I add intentional open space in the music and write "fill the space" in the score. By giving room and responsibility, I elicit improvisation from the performing musician.

The image displays a musical score for the tune 'Epiphany' by Thomas Lossius Septet (2021). It consists of two systems of music. The first system begins at measure 9 and includes a first ending bracket over measures 9-14. The chords indicated above the staff are 1. Cm7, Dbm7, Gb7, and Bmaj7. The second system begins at measure 15 and includes a second ending bracket over measures 15-18. The chords indicated are E9(sus4), Cm7, Bmaj7, and E6. The text 'fill the space' is written in the piano part of the second system, indicating a space for improvisation. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass staff.

Another approach which is difficult to name, but which I call manipulating the musical flow, I exemplify with the tune "Yeah!" [Briotrio, 2021]. In my compositional space, I experiment with performing over many variations of the chord changes, in order to find a variation that feels inspiring to improvise over. If the changes are too simple, I tend to only improvise known patterns and melodies, getting no creative input from the composition. Too hard, and the mathlike manoeuvring hampers my improvisational flow. I compose, looking for potential avenues where the musicians have room to improvise and express. How they respond to this depends of course on the genre the performers are trained in and their individual approach, but what I describe is a clear experience in working with jazz musicians. In this example, the original variation had just slightly too much detail and the small simplification of removing the D+7 chord had considerable effect in easing the flow.



## "Yeah!" - solo section variations

**Original variation** Ebm7 Bmaj7 Emaj7 Fm7

5 Dbmaj7 Gbmaj7 D+7

**Most simplified variation**

9 Ebm7 Bmaj7 Emaj7

13 Ebm7 Bmaj7 Emaj7

**Medium variation - this one was chosen**

17 Ebm7 Bmaj7 Emaj7 Fm7

21 Dbmaj7 Gbmaj7

For an oral approach, I sometimes don't write chord changes for solos at all in advance, but improvise in rehearsals and find a structure that works, such as for the tune *Ethereal Brother* [Briotrio, 2021]. Here, I knew the original chord variation had too little variation to work well for a piano trio by my aesthetics, but I had no ideas for an alternative. So, we freely improvised the solo section in rehearsals and it gradually took form, working well.

## Ethereal Brother - solo section variations

**Original variation** Fmaj7/A Gmaj7/A

**New variation - decided through improvisation**

5 Am G x8 Fmaj7 G6 x4

## Composition <- Improvisation

After finishing the score (though it may be revised), I present it to the band and encourage them to relate to it as an outline or blueprint, co-creating the actual sounding music. I hope for them to approach it with the mindset that *"seen in the context of performance cultures, scores are much more like theatrical scripts than the literary texts as which musicology has traditionally understood (or misunderstood) them."* [Cook, 2013, p. 1]

When we start performing, sometimes the musicians suddenly improvise something I would never expect. It fits perfectly and now the composition seems bland without it. We decide to always do it, to repeat it at every performance. What was once improvisation has now become part of the composition (as defined by Ringer & Crossley-Holland's criteria [2022] as that a composition is a repeatable musical entity). The musicians participate actively, and their improvisations impact and change the composition, in line with Christopher Small's observation that *"composing begins when a performer, liking what he or she has just done, repeats it."* [1998, p. 113] An example of this phenomenon is the decision in Alice [Briotrio, 2021] for the drums to groove very much and be highly active in sections, particularly from 1:45 - whereas I originally imagined it more introspective.

This raises the question: whose composition is it now? I laid a framework that encouraged improvisation and creative participation, but it was the musicians who co-created and developed the composition. This contrasts stereotypical concepts of what the composer is. *"The idea of the composer as the sole, solemn genius author of the musical work has not always existed, but is estimated to have consolidated during early romanticism."* [Groth, 2017]

The process of composing and improvising in my artistic praxis work in tandem, in synergy. Improvisation births the composition. The composition evokes improvisation. Improvisation crystallises into the composition (in that certain parts of the improvisation becomes the composition through constant repetition). So and so on, the interaction goes and the composition keeps evolving. The composer who finalised the score is not the only composer, but every performer who participates is in some manner a composer, co-creating the composition through their performance.

I relate this to Dewey's process-oriented concept of art production: *"The process of art in production is related to the esthetic [sic] in perception organically - as the Lord God in creation surveyed his work and found it good. Until the artist is satisfied in perception with what he is doing, he continues shaping and reshaping."* [Dewey, 1980, p. 49] The process of shaping and reshaping is for me the essential work of composition, or perhaps of artistic production in general. In slight contrast to Dewey, however, I feel no need to define an end for the artistic process and rather see it as an ever ongoing process. Occasionally,

the process of composition may have a momentary end in a composition being finalised and polished for performance in concert or recording. But once those performances are concluded, the creative process starts anew and the composition is once again considered mouldable.

## A Compositional Process: Ndiyabulela Dizu

To give an example of a compositional process, I will detail the process of creation for the work Ndiyabulela Dizu (translating to "Thank you, Dizu" in isiXhosa). The background for this work were my studies in South Africa, where African neo-traditional musician Dizu Plaatjies taught me the basics of the instrument Uhadi and the musical style it is part of.

The composition emerged from improvisation and experimentation on the instrument by myself. I had practiced mostly existing repertoire but been encouraged to compose new works. The rhythm of a triplet-subdivided 6/4 appealed to me with it's many polyrhythmic possibilities, and this particular pattern stuck with me.

In transferring the composition to piano, the affordances of the instrument changed the approach to the composition. From being rhythmically and melodically oriented, the harmonic potentialities of the composition became a focal point. I experimented with how the ideas of the composition could be developed and form a compositional whole.

I had to decide which band I felt the tune would fit the most within, and decided for the project under my own name, Thomas Lossius Septet. In writing the sheet, I decided to omit the harmonic varieties I just explored. This is due to an ideal I have explored in my previous project that I term unfinished a composition, stripping the composition to it's bare bones and to it's central idea. This gives more room for the performers to co-create the work, to fill in the details I as composer could have filled in but decided not to. I could have written down chords and idea developments that I had made, but preferred to keep it open to encourage active co-creation.

♩=110      In Xhosa style

Piano

The composition was set as an interlude on the album. The general idea was presented briefly orally on a rehearsal, but the score was not presented until in studio. This was due to time constraints, but generated a positive kind of intensity. I decided to perform the composition on double bass rather than Uhadi to make it different from the Xhosa music

from which it is inspired and rather in the style of the overall album. We decided to do the melody as a call-and-response pattern, leading into collective improvisation until I signalled the end of the composition.

For the release concert, I wanted to not replicate the album, but rather play the songs in such a way that they sounded new. The reimagining it in the way that this composition, rather than being a piece by itself, was set directly as a coda to the tune Jacob's Ladder, continuing the built up energy of that performance. It then deconstructs into a piano solo ended by musically cuing on to the tune Incarnation. At times during this performance, all original elements of the composition had been removed except the time signature. The key is changed from the initial idea, the bass pattern simplified to rhythmical drone playing, the melody is playfully interpreted and the chord structures are related to freely. New elements such as call-and-response patterns, dialogic improvisation and a general playful attitude has in time become an essential part of the composition through collective creative processes.

## A Dynamic Conception of The Composition

One might ask why discussing the meaning of the term "a composition" is so essential to me. The reason is to make an artistic claim in defining composition in my artistic practice. For me, I define "a composition" as *a stability in flux*. It is that which is stable within a musical performance. It may be the result of a physical sheet, oral composition and/or crystallised improvisation. Yet, over a span of time, this stability is not stable. It morphs and develops, ever in flux. This is why I do not define it as a stability between performances, but in performance. The stability that constitutes the core of a composition is for me ever changing, being refined and influenced by its performers. The composition's interpretational history bleeds into its very being, making the memory of interpretations as central to the conception of the composition as the sheet music or recording itself.

Dethroning the notated sheet from being conceptualised as The Composition Itself, to rather being the outset for a creative process, frees me as a performer from a self-conscious mindset, focusing on my mistakes and failures to perfectly execute the composer's vision. It instead reorients my thinking towards aesthetic creativity, seeking to bring forth the musical beauty of the composition, wherever I see it. These are perspectives that emerge from seeing the interrelated subjectivity of being both composer and performer, and they are further explored in the performer section.

## Min kompositoriske prosess - norsk

Til slutt på denne siden vil jeg beskrive min kompositoriske prosess, og har skrevet dette på norsk. Det gir meg en bedre språklig flyt og uttryksmulighet å bruke morsmålet når jeg snakker om en slik veldig personlige prosess.

Min komposisjonsprosess starter sjeldent ved bassen, men heller ved pianoet. Pianoet gir meg større mulighet til å høre og skape en musikalsk helhet. Det gir også en viss avstand mellom komponist og utøverrollen, som gjør at jeg kjenner meg mindre bundet av komposisjonene når jeg plukker opp bassen for å fremføre de.

Komposisjonsprosessen starter. Jeg setter på et opptak på mobilen og spiller noen toner på pianoet - noen ganger med øynene lukket for ikke å falle inn i kjente mønstre. Tonene setter i gang assosiasjoner, de vil et sted. Det kjennes som de har en vilje i seg selv. En ledetone vil gjerne oppløses, men jeg ønsker ikke en ren konsonans. Jeg lar den gjøre som den vil, den skal få oppløse seg - men jeg endrer tonene rundt så de skaper ny spenning.

Noen ganger treffer jeg en akkord jeg ikke planlagte, en "feil." Jeg prøver å gi den en sjanse, justere litt, høre for meg om den kan være spennende og lede til noe nytt. Ofte må jeg stoppe opp - vente, lytte - slå akkorden én gang til for at klangen skal vare. Jeg lytter for å se om klangen modner for meg. Om jeg liker akkorden bedre etter hvert som jeg venner meg til den. Jeg slår den én gang til, prøver å forestille meg hvor det kan bevege seg hen, hva denne akkorden vil.

Jeg blir ofte veldig påvirket av sinnstemningen jeg kommer til pianoet med. Noen ganger har jeg masse energi - jeg hamrer løs på tangentene rytmisk og utforsker bitonale muligheter. Jeg følger energien, heller enn å tenke. Andre ganger kan jeg komme til pianoet nedstemt. Jeg setter meg ned og starter rolig. Det føles som å øse ut følelsene i pianoet og se de bli omformet til noe vakkert. Det som før var vondt er nå blitt en ressurs for å skape vakker kunst. Andre ganger kommer jeg til pianoet av plikt, sliten og lite kreativ. Da tenker jeg konseptuelt, utforsker et nytt akkordsystem, leter etter nye muligheter. Musikken får et mer analytisk og teoretisk preg, men virker ikke av den grunn mindre estetisk vakker.

De gangene som føles mest meningsfulle, kjennes komposisjonsprosessen for meg nærmest åndelig. Det kjennes som jeg lar meg drive av en kraft utenfor meg selv. Jeg lar meg lede av en strøm av inspirasjon. Det dukker opp idéer på tangentene, idéer som føles dypt meningsfulle og viktige. Det føles ikke som jeg er opphavsmannen til idéene, men jeg lar de strømme gjennom meg og repeterer de som et slags ritual. Plutselig bommer jeg. Det er noen noter som ikke passer inn, magien blir brutt. Jeg prøver å famle tilbake til der jeg var, men selv om jeg spiller akkurat det samme kommer ikke den samme stemningen. Tonene føles tilgjort og presset, de mangler den uanstrengte flyten. Jeg leter videre en liten stund før idemyldringen roer seg.

Jeg kjenner meg igjen i erfaringene til billedkunstner Gunhild Sannes: *"Når jeg tenker meg om så opplever jeg ikke egentlig maleprosessen som bønn, den er bønn. Men hva betyr nå det? Det er som at jeg vet det er bønn, uten helt å klare fatte dybden i hva det*

*innebærer.*" [2021] For meg er det uforståtte i dette noe av det som gjør det vakkert. Jeg gir meg over til noe som kjennes som en kraft utenfor meg selv (og som jeg identifiserer som Gud), og opplever en veldig kompositorisk energi utifra dette.

En vanlig idemyldring varer i 10-20 minutter. Jeg skruer av lydopptaket på mobilen. Så føler jeg meg tom. Tappet, tom for energi, tom for kreativitet. Det er grunnet disse øyeblikkene at opptakene er så viktig i min kompositoriske prosess. Jeg klarer ikke å gjenskape øyeblikkene, de er borte når de er ferdig, og jeg mangler energien til å notere de umiddelbart.

Men jeg tar vare på opptakene. Når jeg reiser eller venter, hører jeg gjennom de. Jeg vurderer hvilken som er verdt å jobbe videre med, for når jeg idemyldrer prøver jeg å være fri fra selvkritikk. Jeg klassifiserer de beste opptakene i hvilket band de kan passe til. Jeg tenker på hva de forskjellige musikerne kan synes er spennende å spille. Noen opptak liker jeg godt, men passer ikke til noen band, men kan kanskje bli til et nytt prosjekt 5-10 år frem i tid. Jeg noterer ned kjerneidéene på noter, så jeg kan jobbe videre med det en annen gang.

Senere kommer jeg tilbake til idéene. Jeg utforsker potensielle kontrastdeler. Jeg prøver å lage det man i litteraturen kaller en disposisjon - en oversikt over hva som skal med og hvordan rekkefølgen skal være. Jeg jobber vertikalt med elementer som form, struktur og helhet. Jeg har erfart at hvis jeg blir for fornøyd med en del for tidlig, ønsker jeg at alt må bli like bra som den - og får skrivesperre av presset jeg gir meg selv. Jeg lar derfor alt være løst og udefinert frem til jeg ser en kontur av helhet. Så begynner jeg å jobbe horisontalt - med momentane elementer som arrangement, melodier, orkestrering, presis notasjon etc. Til slutt tar jeg et steg tilbake og vurderer om jeg kan fjerne detaljer for å gi rom til musikerne så de kan forme komposisjonen.

Notasjonsformatet er forskjellig for forskjellige band. For Thomas Lossius Septet gir jeg musiker-spesifikke noter til alle, som gir meg mye arrangeringsmuligheter. I den foreløpig navnløse Kvelvane/Berntsen/Lossius/Sagebø-kvartetten har jeg heller jobbet med lead sheet-formatet for at vi skal kunne utarbeide låtene i fellesskap. En låt til septetten kan ta opptil 40 timer å lage, mens noen lead sheet-baserte låter har vært ferdig på et par timer arbeid, spredt utover tid. Det tar ofte et par år fra den første ideen i en komposisjon kommer til den er ferdig og fremføres.

Idéen blir så presentert på bandøvelser, som jeg beskriver i delen om øvingsprosesser.

## **My Compositional Process - English**

In concluding this page, I will describe my compositional process and has written this in Norwegian (with translation here). I get a better linguistic flow when use my mother tongue in discussing such a personal processes.

My compositional process rarely starts with the bass but rather with the piano. The piano gives me greater possibility to hear and create a musical whole. It also gives a certain kind of distance between the composer and performer roles, which makes me feel less limited by the compositions when I pick up the bass to perform them.

The compositional process starts. I click record for a voice memo on my mobile, and play some notes on the piano - sometimes with eyes closed to not end up in known patterns. The notes give associations, they want to go somewhere. It feels as if they have a will by themselves. A leading tone wants to be resolved, but I don't desire a pure consonance. I let it do as it pleases, I let it resolve - but I change the notes around it to create new tension.

Sometimes, I hit a chord I didn't plan, a "mistake." I try to give it a chance, adjust it, see if it can be exciting and lead to something new. Often, I have to stop - wait, listen, play the chord once more for the sustain to last. I listen to see if the sound matures for me. Whether I like the chord better as I get used to it. I play it once more, try to imagine where it can move, what this chord wants.

I am often very influenced by the mood I am in when coming to the piano. Sometimes, I have lots of energy - I go crazy on the keys rhythmically, exploring bitonal possibilities. I follow the energy rather than think. Other times I may come to the piano low-spirited. I sit down and start calmly. It feels like pouring my emotions into the piano and see it be remade into something beautiful. What was previously negative has now become an asset for creating beautiful art. Other times, I come to the piano from duty, tired and not so creative. In such cases I think conceptually, explore a new chord system, look for new possibilities. The music becomes more analytical and theoretical approach, but not necessarily less aesthetically beautiful.

The times that feel most meaningful, the compositional process feels almost spiritual for me. I feel in some way moved by a force outside of myself. I let myself lead by a stream of inspiration. There seems to appear ideas on the piano keys, ideas that feel deeply meaningful and important. I don't feel that I am the originator of the ideas, but I let them flow through me, repeating them as a kind of ritual. Suddenly, I miss. I play some tones not fitting in, and the magic is broken. I try to stumble back to where I was, but even if I play exactly the same, the energy I experienced is nowhere to be found. The notes feel insincere and forced, they lack the effortless flow. I explore further for a little while before the exploration falls to a rest.

The experience of visual artist Gunhild Sannes resonates with me: *"When I think it through, it is not that I experience the painting process as prayer, it is prayer. But what does that mean? It is as if I know it is prayer, without fathoming the depth of what that entails."* [2021, my translation] The inability to understand this phenomenon is part of

what makes it beautiful to me. I give myself over to what feels like a force outside myself (and which I identify as God), and I experience a strong compositional energy arising.

A usual exploration of ideas lasts 10-20 minutes. I stop the voice memo. After the exploration, I feel drained, out of energy, out of creativity. It is because of these moments that voice memos are so important to my compositional process. I can't recreate these moments, they are gone when finished, and I do not have the energy to notate them immediately.

But I keep the voice memos. When I travel or wait somewhere, I listen through. I now judge which ideas are worth developing, as I try to be free from self-criticism when exploring. I start differentiating the best recordings, deciding which band they can fit. I think about what the different musicians might like performing. There are some recordings that I like I like, but doesn't fit any band, and perhaps develops into a new project 5-10 years in the future. I notate the core ideas so I can develop them further later.

Later, I return to the ideas. I explore potential contrasting parts. I try to create a disposition, as they call it in the literature - an overview of what is included and in which order it is presented. I work in a vertical manner with elements such as form, structure and the holistic vision of the composition. I've experienced that if a section becomes too developed too early, I want everything to be as good as it, and get writer's block from the pressure I put on myself. Therefore, I let everything be loose and undefined until I see a contour of the whole. Then I start working horizontally - with detailed elements like arrangement, melody, orchestration and precise notation. Finally, I take a step back and consider whether I can remove details to give room for the musicians' co-creation.

The notational format looks slightly different for different bands. For the Thomas Lossius Septet, I give musician-specific sheet music to everyone, giving me a lot of arranging possibilities. In the as-of-now nameless quartet Kvelvane/Berntsen/Lossius/Sagebø, I've rather worked with the lead-sheet format so that we can work the tunes out collectively. A composition for the septet may take up to 40 hours to compose, whereas some lead sheet based tunes may be finished in a couple of hours work, spread out over a stretch of time. An idea usually takes a couple of years from initial idea to being finished and performed.

The ideas are then presented in band rehearsals that I describe in the section on rehearsal-processes.



# Conclusion

## Discussing the research question

In the introduction, I argued that the research question is an artistic one and can not be answered in academic text alone, but through artistic praxis mainly. For this reason I will not give a textbook answer to the research question, but rather expound on how engaging with it has developed and evolved my artistic praxis and articulate some results the research has had for me as a performer-composer. I will restate the research question:

"How does my dual role of performer-composer interrelate and enrich my artistic praxis as a performer?"

Before I started my master studies, my method of composition consisted of countless hours with Sibelius, listening to (horrific) MIDI playbacks and adjusting notes. Yet, I had an unease about this, as I had an impression it was hard for the musicians I composed for to express themselves in the highly composed music I wrote. Likewise, in my performance of scored music, my focus was primarily on playing "correct," making my double bass sound like what the composers might have heard in such composition programs. To summarise how this has changed as a result of my project work: I have let my performance become more compositional; and my compositional process has become more performative. I will explain this in more detail:

As a performer, I have become surprised by my open attitude as a composer: how positive I am to co-creative processes even in context of scores. Though the scores present the music as black and white, I've experienced that my intentions as a composer are more open than the scores make it seem. This has been a key realisation, a turning point, changing my approach to performing scored music. When I see that my scores look more specific than I intended them to be, I realise that the perceived specificity of the score may be misleading. If I, as a composer, long for the musicians to put their life and soul into performing the composition creatively, perhaps I should also do that in performing the music of others. Ditching the term "interpretation" has in this process been helpful in order to come to the score with a more personal and creative mindset. I don't like to think that I am interpreting the composer's intention, but rather that the composer and I are co-creating music to some extent. My primary question in performance is no longer primarily how to perform correctly, but asking what I envision this music to be, how performance of this score can create musical meaning and aesthetic value as I see it.

As a composer: my compositional process has become more performance-centred. Recognising the performing role as an essentially creative one makes it a relevant method for composition. I now let compositions arise through performance and develop through

performance. The score has become more a tool for memorising my own compositions, rather than being considered the composition itself. Being a performing composer gives vast possibilities for letting go of creative control. It opens up for compositions less specific, more trust based, more personal, less hierarchical. The project work has awakened my curiosity about ways of engaging performing musicians I work with in active creative processes where they can shape the artistic result to a great degree. This is something I carry with me from this project work, which I can continue exploring for years to come.

## Final thoughts

Before concluding, I wish to make some remarks about the role of performing composer praxes in performing music education. A recurring question that has been asked regarding my project work is "do you study performance or composition?" Though the technical answer is performance, such questions uncover an attitude that unnecessarily bisects many (particularly jazz) musicians' artistic praxes: namely that performance and composition have to be viewed as two separate activities. This notion has had the effect that only the performing part of my artistic praxis has seemed relevant in an educational setting, whereas compositional skills and praxes are mostly considered irrelevant. This seems counterintuitive to me. In my performing praxis as a jazz musician (and especially a bassist), composition, bandleading and performance are thoroughly integrated. My individual performance as a bassist is not the most interesting part of the artistic result as I see it, as my bass performance usually constitutes a minor part of the overall sound the audience hears. Discussing a holistic approach considering composition, co-creation, bandleading, interplay and performance seems more fruitful, relevant and reflective of my artistic praxis.

This is, as I see it, an example of how institutions founded on tenets of classical music are situated in a discourse that does not manage to reflect jazz (and other genres) rightly, and needs to adapt their thinking to engage in the discourses of other genres. Like Cristopher Small [1998, p. 9], I advocate for a wide definition of performance, blurring the lines between composition, bandleading, performance, etc. I hope this exposition may contribute to legitimising composition and compositional practices as an integrated part of the performing jazz musician's praxis.

## Special thanks

I want to give special thanks to:

Stephan Meidell, my project supervisor through these years, who has helped a lot in the development of this project work.

My wife Ingvild for lots of support.

My father Trond for innumerable interesting discussions on artistic research.

God, who my belief in influences my artistic praxis in innumerable and unexpected ways.

# Artistic outcomes

## **Briotrio - Yeah! (2021)**

Status: Released. The recording of this album was done before my master studies started, but its post production has happened during my master studies.

Tracks:

- 1: Yeah! (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)
- 2: Toyota Yaris (Arne Skorpe Sjøen)
- 3: Whalesnail (Ingrid Øygard Steinkopf)
- 4: Sailorboy (Arne Skorpe Sjøen)
- 5: Alice (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)
- 6: Pemba (Arne Skorpe Sjøen)
- 7: Vent Nå Litt (Arne Skorpe Sjøen)
- 8: Jambo King & Jambo Queen (Ingrid Øygard Steinkopf)
- 9: Ethereal Brother (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)

Personell:

Ingrid Øygard Steinkopf (Piano, flute, backing vocals)  
Arne Skorpe Sjøen (Drums, vocals)  
Thomas Aurlund Lossius (Double Bass, Uhadi, backing vocals)  
Feat. Kirsti Huke (Vocals)

Recording, mixing and mastering by Rudolf Fredly

Released by AMP Music & Records

## **Thomas Lossius Septet - Album II**

Status: Much of it is composed and rehearsed for my master concert. Not yet recorded.

Tracks:

- 1: Contemplation (Kyrie)
- 2: Life (Gloria)
- 3: Untitled
- 4: Untitled
- 5: Reflections (Agnus Dei)

## **Cort Piil - Leaving Home (2022)**

Status: Released.

Tracks:

- 1: Sitting by the Harbour (Andri Schärli)
- 2: Leaving Home (Andri Schärli)
- 3: Paintings of My Past (Andri Schärli)
- 4: Running into Yourself (Andri Schärli)
- 5: The Sphinx (Andri Schärli)
- 6: Snowfall in Piedmont (Andri Schärli)
- 7: These Things I Ask Myself (Andri Schärli)
- 8: The Bird That Learnt to Fly (Andri Schärli)

Personell:

Andri Schärli (Saxophone, compositions)  
Soohyun April Jang (Violin)  
Peter Dybvig Søreide (Guitar)  
Thomas Aurlund Lossius (Double Bass)  
Amund Nordstrøm (Drums)

Recorded and mixed by Steffen Peters in Duper Studios

Mastered by Karl Klaseye at Øra Studio

Released by AMP Music & Recordings

## **Briotrio - Album III**

Status: Applying for funding to record.

Tracks:

Kontraknara (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)  
Velferdsstaten (Arne Skorpe Sjøen)  
Ring & Reply (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)  
A Sunny Day in Bergen Town (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)  
Minor Leaps (Ingrid Øygard Steinkopf)  
Voyage (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)  
Demring (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)  
Unbrakonøkkel (Ingrid Øygard Steinkopf)  
Swirl in town (Ingrid Øygard Steinkopf)  
Unnamed waltz (Arne Skorpe Sjøen)

## **Røed/Aagaard/Lossius/Øverby - Album I**

Status: Recorded

Tracks:

Blast From the Past (Lyder Øvreås Røed)

Metamorfose (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)  
 Andri (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)  
 Unknowing (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)  
 Markneukirchen (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)  
 Untitled (Thomas Aurlund Lossius)

Personell:

Lyder Øvreås Røed (Trumpet, flugelhorn)  
 Johannes Nøkling Aagard (Guitar)  
 Thomas Aurlund Lossius (Double bass)  
 Ola Øverby (Drums)

## Pendulum Phases

Pendulum Phases is a post-minimalist framework for bass improvisation. It is composed of repetitive patterns built from the overtones of open strings. Overtones - the music predating man, permeating every natural sound, providing the building blocks of all music theory. Overtones - being generated from the pendulum movements of the string, ever moving in and out of phase with its creator. The improvisation invites the audience to a state of contemplation and deep listening.

Pendulum Phases consists of a composed version, in order to convey and polish its techniques. The techniques are also used as an approach to improvisation in solo contexts, in ensembles and in interdisciplinary performances.

## Live concerts/gigs during my master studies:

2023:

30/5 Exam concert with Thomas Lossius Septet  
 29/5 Exam concert with Vidar Eldholm  
 14/5 Church service in St. Jakob  
 6/5 Concert with Hassan El Bouzidi, Bergen  
 6-7/5 Church services in Landro, two per day  
 29/4 Concert with Insihar, Bergen  
 23/4 Church service in St. Jakob  
 20/4 Church performance in Eidsvåg  
 14/4 Solo performance at art exhibition opening  
 19/3 Church service in St. Jakob  
 11/3 Concert with Adama Barry, Bergen  
 9/3 Educational performances  
 8/3 Church service in Johanneskirken  
 26/2 Church service in St. Jakob  
 29/1 Church service in St. Jakob

15/1 Jazz concert with Cort Piil, Stavanger  
 14/1 Jazz concert with Cort Piil, Haugesund  
 7/1 Church gig, Landro Kyrkje  
 3/1 Educational performance with Briotrio

2022

26/12 Christmas concert with Renate Ekerhovd and Lasse Økland, Sotra  
 11/12 Church service in Eidsvåg  
 11/12 Church service in Arna  
 7-9/12 Christmas concerts with Marthe Valle, two per day  
 3/12 Concert with Hassan El Bouzidi, Bergen  
 28/11 Jazz concert with Cort Piil  
 20/11 Church service in St. Jakob  
 20/11 Church service in Kristkirken  
 12/11 Concert with Adama Barry, Bergen  
 11/11 Educational performance solo  
 11/11 Educational performance with Vidar Eldholm  
 10/11 Jazz concert with Cort Piil, Oslo  
 30/10 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Oslo  
 27/10 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Bergen  
 23/10 Church service in St. Jakob  
 9/10 Church service in Norwegian Church Abroad, Berlin  
 5/10 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Berlin  
 2/10 Church service in Eidsvåg  
 1/10 Church concert in Eidsvåg Church  
 17/9 Song evening in St. Jakob Church  
 11/9 Church service in St. Jakob  
 28/8S Church service in St. Jakob  
 27/8 Educational jazz concert, Bergen  
 27/8 Educational classical concert, Bergen  
 22/7 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Karmøy  
 26/6 Performance in wedding  
 16/6 Church concert in Fridalen  
 15/6 Exam concert with Briotrio  
 12/6 Church service in St. Jakob  
 9/6 Church concert in St. Jakob  
 26/5 Church service in Landås  
 15/5 Church service in St. Jakob  
 7/5 Two church services in Landro Kyrkje  
 1/5 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Bergen  
 28/4 Church service in Vaksdal  
 22/4 Jam opening, Bergen  
 21/4 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Bergen

20/4 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Voss  
19/4 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Lepsøy  
3/4 Church service in St. Jakob  
3/4 Church service in Bergen First Methodist Church  
27/3 Church concert in Skjold  
13/3 Church service in St. Jakob  
20/2 Church service in St. Jakob  
17/2 Educational jazz concert with Batagraf  
8/2 Educational performance with Briotrio  
23/1 Church service in St. Jakob  
16/1 Feature performance with Martin Vinje

2021

12/12 Church concert in Landro  
9/12 Exam concert  
5/12 Church service in St. Jakob  
21/11 Church service in Nidarosdomen  
20/11 Church concert in Strindheim  
17/11 Church concert in Bethel, Bergen  
17/11 Feature performance with Briotrio, Osøyro  
14/11 Church service in Skjold  
11/11 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Oslo  
8/11 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Stanghelle  
7/11 Jazz concert with Briotrio, Karmøy  
6/11 Concert with Adama Barry  
31/10 Church service in St. Jakob  
10/10 Church service in St. Jakob  
3/10 Church service in Skjold  
19/9 Church service in St. Jakob  
9/9 Church service in Nykirken  
4-5/9 Church service in Landro, three per day  
29/8 Church service in Dale Kirke  
25/8 Jazz concert with Thomas Lossius Septet, Bergen

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