

# NARRATIVE APPROACH IN GROOVE-RELATED MUSIC

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## INTRODUCTION – the story of my research:

During the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras, western composers have used various traditional forms to structure their works. For example, each dance of a Baroque suite had its own rhythmic character and tempo. The sonata form affected composers until the twentieth century, adapting the traditional form to a new musical language. In Jazz music, the tendency to write music following forms borrowed from the past is really popular. The structure, that we can find in a lot of Big Band pieces, formed by an intro, exposition, development and recapitulation with the “shout chorus” (in which the whole ensemble plays the theme or a special) has classical reminiscences (e.g. certain aspects ABA-form). Moreover, if we consider the main Jazz repertoire (e.g. Standards from Real Books) we can also say that almost all the compositions are based on pre-defined forms (e.g. blues, 16/32 bar form, rhythm change form, etc.).

Except “free Jazz” in which the player, starting from a concept has the freedom to develop his musical thinking only through improvisation, in Jazz there is still the tendency to write music starting from rules, such as pre-defined chord progressions or fixed forms. As a composer I found it interesting to find a way to open the traditional use of form in Jazz, and I decided to investigate on how it is possible to relate the aspects of musical narration to the aspects of form. The question that led me to find answers and start this journey was:

**How can I relate the aspects of form in my groove-related music by analyzing the aspects of musical narration?** This allowed me to open the traditional way of writing groove-related music, rethinking the use of the constructive approach in writing in “groove”. The use of narrative approach was also a pretext to reflect on the representation of meanings into music, and I included in my research some reflections about the role of musical perception.

The concept behind the musical narration defines the form, and the narrative approach opened me to a variety of possibilities to develop musical material in my composition. The constructive approach used to build up the groove (at a Micro level) can be implemented with the narrative approach (at a Macro level).

I will start this research-paper with a first chapter to introduce what I took as examples of program and narrative Jazz music. In this chapter I will also introduce some concepts about composing on a Macro and Micro level. If we want to avoid starting from rules, we have to look at the composition process from a Macro level. Like most architects design their buildings not by putting bricks on top on another, but making a blueprint, most composers design their composition not by putting notes or chords after each other but shaping the form at a Macro level. If we take as an example: “Scenes from Childhood” written by M. Schneider we can find a real program on which the pieces are based, with sense of laying out a path going to a positive meaning at the end of the pieces. I will discuss better this in the Chapter 1 of my report.

In the second chapter I research on musical perception, since the audience perceives the form and the structure of a piece as a result of a musical experience. That is connected to the idea that the audience perceive the “whole” structure of the piece, therefore the Macro level is connected to the perception of form. Musical semiotic and psychology gave me information to lay my research on



something concrete from a theoretical point of view. In this chapter, I will present the result of this theoretical part, to make a solid theoretical background about the mechanisms of human perception. This is my first intervention cycle.

Through expectation, memory and entropy it is possible to rethink the “groove” as something that, although it is fixed in a way, can be modeled within the musical narration, making contrasts that are vital to drive the story’s action. In this way I used the narrative approach to expand the use of the constructive approach. I used it to build up the groove from another perspective.

In the third chapter I will present my second intervention cycle. In this cycle I moved more to the narrative approach. Focusing on a Macro level, I will introduce some concepts and elements of the “art of storytelling”, translated into the musical language. In the last part of the third chapter I will explain how I created musical devices at a Micro level. If we compare the whole form of a piece to a mosaic, then we can make two considerations:

- 1) If we look at the mosaic from far away, we see the whole image perceived in its homogeneity, but if we have a closer look, we can see all the pieces making up the mosaic.
- 2) When we look at all the pieces we can observe differences in shape and color, even when they look similar. We can also think that, behind the disposition of the pieces, there is logic. To think about groove-related music in this way, we expand the traditional use of the constructive approach (e.g. the way of building up the groove) through narrative approach, the musical story that we want to tell and organize on a Macro level.

In the fourth chapter (and last intervention cycle) I will talk about the relation between program and narrative music in Jazz. In particular I will present as main example my piece for Jazz Orchestra and Soprano. This chapter is also a way to show in practice a lot of the concepts presented in the previous chapters.

I found interesting to blend elements from different musical genres. I decided not to put boundaries around Jazz music, because nowadays Jazz is a genre that is influenced by Classical Contemporary music, with all its different languages (from tonal, atonal, serial, minimalism, etc.), as well as pop, rock, electronic music. Indeed I decided to use the term: “groove-related music” instead of Jazz, pointing out the term “groove” as the main characteristic of my music. In this sense, Jazz can be considered groove-related music.

Through musical narration I wanted to find a way to interact with these different genres and develop a personal language.

The narrative behind the musical idea led the choice of musical material to be used in a composition. In this way it was easy to blend different genres and styles in my music. Through this process I tried to define my own musical language, focusing on the narrative strategies in order to develop the musical material instead of considering the aesthetics and the origin (in sense of musical style) of it. Every story needs to be thought of in relation to listeners. In this way this research offered me an opportunity to reflect on the relation between the composer, in this case me, and the audience.

In the conclusion I will present my results and my answers to my research question, and showing possible starting points for future research.

## RESEARCH METHODS:

Chapter one and two of my research are based on existing literature and compositions. I analyze examples of D.Ellington and M. Schneider in order to find musical devices and narrative strategies. (e.g. chord voicings, rhythmic patterns, etc...). The literature around musical perception and the role of music communication have been important to define a clear theoretical background. It is a broad and controversial topic and I decide to limit myself to some theories and inspiring books about the role of the brain in musical experience. In particular, I want to mention two books: J. Sloboda, "The musical mind" and O.Sacks "Musicophilia/ Tales of music and the brain". Those books have been important for me to have an idea of the mechanisms of musical perception. As a composer, I have tried to orient my research to something practical, with the aim to find a different approach to Jazz composition. In this sense I can say that this research is mostly practice based. I will give a lot of musical examples (sketches, tryouts, excerpts from famous jazz pieces) to illustrate the compositional process and that I will also present the final compositions in this report. You can find these in chapter three and four.

As an appendix, I add recordings of my compositions as concrete sound examples within my research. I decided not to put boundaries around Jazz music, because nowadays Jazz is a genre that is influenced by Classical Contemporary music, with all its different languages (from tonal, atonal, serial, minimalism, etc.), as well as pop, rock, electronic music. Indeed I decided to use the term: "groove-related music" instead of Jazz, pointing out the term "groove" as the main characteristic of my music. In this sense, Jazz can be considered groove-related music. Through musical narration I wanted to find a way to interact with these different genres and develop a personal language.

This research is important for my personal development and can be interesting and inspiring for other composers who want to using a different approach to Jazz composition and strategies, and to expand the narrative aspect of their music.

# FIRST INTERVENTION CYCLE

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In this cycle I started researching on examples of program and narrative jazz music. After taking in consideration Duke Ellington (e.g. “Black, Brown and Beige”), I decided to narrow the field to the contemporary jazz scene, and in particular, I have analyzed some works of Maria Schneider.

I have taken this choice after listening to a presentation that she made before one concert, in which she explained the story that inspired the piece called: “Hang Gliding”. Since I was looking for musical devices in Jazz used to represent meanings into music, I have started to transcribe some excerpt from “Scenes from Childhood” and “Hang-Gliding” and I analyzed some of them.

The next step was reflecting on the use of form and on a way to open the traditional use of form in Jazz and I formulated my research question:

**How can I relate the aspects of form in my groove-related music by analyzing the aspects of musical narration?**

Then, I started to follow two parallel paths:

- Researching on what is involved at the Macro level: the article of J. Tenney: “Form in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music” was a great starting point to define a system to shape the form on a Macro level. The musical perception involves a multi-layer system in which different parameters influence the listener’s perception of form. Another book that I considered for this first step was: J.Sloboda, “The musical mind”
- Researching on what is involved at the Micro level: the concepts of expectation, entropy and memory led me to find the connection to groove-related music. In this cycle I experimented some musical devices that I used for my compositions.

My first composition in which I experimented a different approach based on shaping on a Macro level the form was: “4Songs4Seasons” for solo violin

Like the title suggests, the piece is based on four miniatures that are the musical representation of the seasons.

This was also the opportunity to find a way to express meanings in music, and in particular, in groove-related music.

The result was important, but I decided to extend the complexity of form in my music looking at the storytelling strategies. That was the starting point for the second intervention cycle.

# 1 THE MUSICAL FORM

## 1.1 State of the Art in Narrative and Programmatic Jazz Music

In the modern big band writing it is now quite normal to think about large forms, very different from the traditional big band music of the great composers of the past such as Count Basie, for example. In my thinking, the narrative value of the story determines the length of the piece, but I will explain this idea later. If we consider modern jazz composers, among others, like B. Brookmayer, M. Schneider, V. Mendoza or the young American composer D. James, we can still find the idea to blend classical music with jazz. This is automatically a way to rethink the form and create other possibilities to open it up. Even Duke Ellington has tried to blend jazz with classical music, especially in his late production. I will introduce one composition of him, a sort of "a tone parallel to the history of the Negro in America."<sup>1</sup>

I went further in my research and I found several examples about the use of the jazz language in relation with a extra musical content, real examples of program Jazz music. In particular, I decided to take two examples of Maria Schneider, who led forward the language innovation done by the generation of composers like: Bob Brookmayer and Gill Evans. The pieces that I have analyzed are:

- "Scenes from Childhood" by Maria Schneider
- "Hang-gliding" by Maria Schneider

All these examples show the attempt to write a musical narration using jazz language. This was the trigger element for my research. I defined criteria<sup>2</sup> for the music analysis and I collected different sources<sup>3</sup>, like musical scores, interviews and articles.<sup>4</sup> One of the goals of my research was to find a way to create musical devices referring also to jazz language.

If we look at Jazz as a genre in which we used to start composing from rules, here we have the example of a different approach, a narrative approach. I was impressed by a live recording of a concert, in which Maria Schneider introduces one of her most famous pieces: "Hang Gliding". She explains what led her to write the piece and what she wanted to represent. About the work, as she also wrote in the liner notes: "Hang Gliding is entirely about movement, an impression about my experience of hang gliding in Rio de Janeiro: the suspension, grace, lift, acceleration accompanied by the rush of apprehension and exhilaration" (*Allegresse ENJ-93932 New York Jan, 2000*). The composition conveys that sense of floating and flying, through the use of mixed meter, a rich array of instrumental combinations, dynamic pacing, and a colorful harmonic language. Rather than based

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1. This description Mark Tucker, ed., *The Duke Ellington* also appeared in the original Carnegie Hall program, repr. In

<sup>2</sup> The criteria that I used are: *Dynamics, density, tempo, register, articulation, quality and direction of the melody; complexity and use of tonality, modality and atonality.*

<sup>4</sup> Sources are listed in the "reference list and bibliography" chapter

upon a chorus structure, the form consistently evolves while making use of earlier melodic ideas, and avoids consistent four-and eight-bar divisions.

Ex. 1 “Hang Gliding” (Maria Schneider)

In this example we can see how she built up the groove to express this sense of apprehension. The use of multi-meter and the syncopation in the piano accompaniment are basically the devices that she used to achieve that result. Over this pulsating rhythm, the sense of anxiety increases through a dense harmony and in particular, through several tonal cluster chords in the brass.

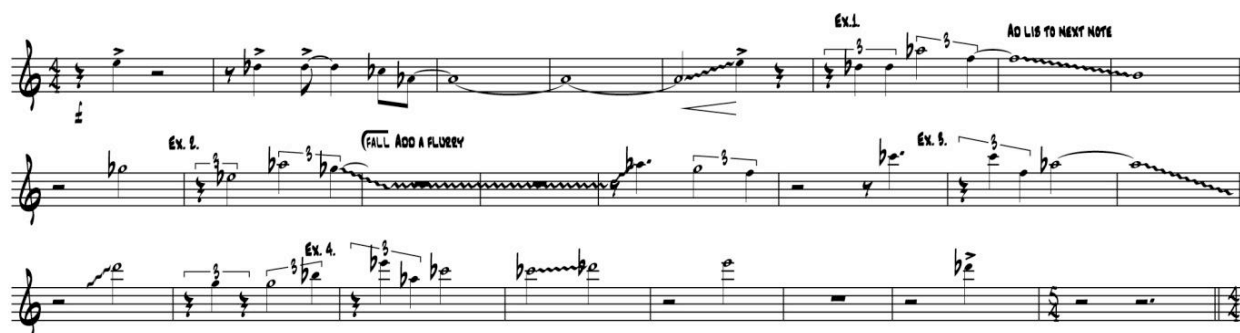
The climax is reached when the Flugelhorn starts the solo with a spare accompaniment of the piano, which gives the sense of freedom and relief. Also the character of the piece changes, the dynamics is softer and the harmony becomes less dense. I basically founded two reasons behind the use of these devices. One is related with a sort of archetype or archetypal structure that, independently from any musical genres, influences the perception of the musical gesture. The other reason is related with the use of cliché, in which the relation with the style and the musical language, in this case Jazz, is really important.

Another example is “Scenes from Childhood” is a three-part suite written by Maria Schneider, commissioned in 1995 by the Monterey Jazz Festival. The suite is performed by the Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra and is included on her album called: “Coming About” (1996).

The three movements of the suite are united by the use of a programmatic theme with each movement being inspired by a childhood memory. M. Schneider writes that the piece is about “arrival, about finding the positive in what used to seem negative.” There is a particular use of

melodic/harmonic material in order to create the “positive” direction of music. For example, in the first movement, the harmonic background is dissonant, in contrast with the consonant approach of the third movement. This element inspired one of my composition for saxophone quartet that I will present in the next chapter, called: “Lullaby for an inconsolable pessimist”.

‘Bomb shelter Beast’, the opening movement of “Scenes from Childhood”, is inspired by the “gut-wrenching fear of illogical things... You know, monsters under the bed – that kind of thing.”(Maria Schneider) The movement doesn’t really have a distinguishable melody, however does have a reoccurring triplet motif.



Ex. 2 “Scenes from Childhood” (Maria Schneider)

The harmonic background is totally unconventional. She uses lot dissonances in low register; also the instrumentation choice is effective in this direction, painting the image of the “scary” monster under the bed.

There is a transition to the “more positive situation” in the ending of the movement. She uses more consonant voicing but still in low register.



Ex. 3 “Scenes from Childhood” (Maria Schneider)

'Night Watchmen' and "eerie nocturnal landscape set outside Maria's childhood home" follow this. M. Schneider recalls "the atmosphere was surreal: men working in the mill by day, watchmen making the rounds at night. That's what 'Night Watchmen' is about: imagination and fantasy. And about discovering your own sensuality: attraction, repulsion, confusion." (Maria Schneider)

This movement contains plenty of chorale-like figures, plus an appearance of the triplet motif from 'Bomb shelter Beast'.

She gives the sense of quiet with melodic intervals based on 5th and using the "augmentation" technique to expand the feeling of the tempo (e.g. using the same melodic fragment with triplets as in bar 3 and 4 of the previous example) The melody also quotes the motif of the bomb shelter but she uses a-modal minor background to give the sense of "mystery" in contrast with the dissonant one of the first section.



Ex. 4 "Scenes from Childhood" (Maria Schnieder)

The final movement, 'Coming About', shares its name with the album's title, a sailing term for a manoeuvre also known as tacking. Following the increasing levels of tension in the previous movements, 'Coming About' provides a significant contrast, reminiscent of "summer days spent sailing on a Minnesota lake."

After an open piano solo upfront in the third movement, in Coming About, the full band enters with a figure baring a striking resemblance to the triplet motif from 'Bomb shelter Beast'. The three notes here make up a major triad starting on the third, descending to the root then jumping up to the fifth.



Ex. 5 "Scenes from Childhood" (Maria Schneider)

## 1.2 Shape and Structure

According to the definition of J. Tenney, published in the Dictionary of Contemporary Music (1973) we can make a distinction between *shape* and *structure* of a musical piece. In the most general sense: *shape* is the variation of some attribute of something in space or time, and *structure* is the disposition of parts, relations of part to part, and of a part to whole. In music, shape is *the result of changes in some attribute or parameter of sound, in time*, while *structure has to do with various relations between sounds and sound-configurations, at the same or at different moments in time* (J. Tenney). As I explained before, the word “form” is often used in a restricted sense, but watching the 20<sup>th</sup> century music, it has tended to break away from the traditional use of the term, yielding a variety of new possibilities.

Shape and structure imply at least two hierarchical levels of organisation and perception (“whole” and “part”). Any thorough description of the form of a piece of music must therefore include descriptions at several of these hierarchical levels. A description of shape of a formal unit at one of these hierarchical levels frequently involves certain statistical characteristics of the formal units at the next lower level. We thus have three aspects of form to consider, at each hierarchical level: the structural (internal relations), the morphological (shape), and the statistical (state, condition). It will be found, as we proceed, that shape, at a given hierarchical level, depends on a statistical properties at the next lower level, while structure, at a given level, depends primarily on the morphological properties at the next lower level, secondarily on the structural and statistical properties at the next lower level.

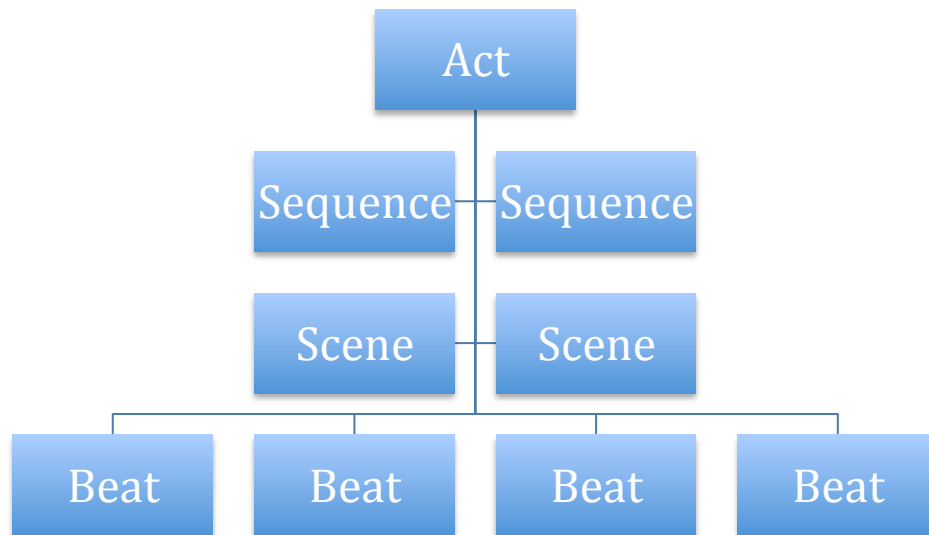
This relation reveals the old problem of “form vs. content”. In this case we can call content the “result” of form. In this way, all levels are linked each other.

We perceive the form as a result of the musical experience of the “whole” piece. In narrative music, the musical story is plotted through the whole form of the piece and the task for the composer is to design the form in order to make it functional for the story. In the next chapter I will explain better how I start from a concept, from the topic of my story, to shape the form.

In this view, we assume the importance of the role of perception of the “continuum” (the “whole” form). Relating to this, we can also consider other functions like: *musical memory*, *entropy*, and *redundancy*. The first one is the accumulation of musical events in the memory of a listener, the second is the unpredictability of a musical events sequence and the last one is the predictability of a sequence, that we can also define with the “jazzy term”: pattern.

I also like the idea of simple gestalt units at a lower level that form sequences and than more complex structures at higher levels. This concept is used also by film directors to divide the act in sequences and beats (McKee). In this case we can consider an act of a movie as a “whole” in which it is possible to recognize every part at lower levels, in a hierarchical order:





Pic. 1 Synthesis of McKnee's theory of constructive approach in movies

Looking at the previous graph and according to the theory of McKnee we can see the lowest level, in which we can find the smallest part called: "beat". This represents the change of behaviour in action or reaction of the characters. If we compare this to music, we can consider, as smallest part, a musical event that might be a note, a trill, a noise, a chord, a glissando, or even a more complex element like a musical or rhythmic "motive".

Going back to the original idea of the subdivisions of elements in a movie, we can find at an upper level: the "scene". This is defined as the interaction of the changes of behaviour in one place at one time. In music we will have as interaction of simple musical events several possibilities. If we consider a collection of basic rhythms, the structural relations might be based on additive or divisive approaches, or in poly-metric or poly-rhythmic structures, in order to increase the rhythmic complexity. Furthermore, if we consider a collection of pitches, than we also have different possibilities to organize them in a tonal or atonal way, and in a horizontal or vertical way, increasing the melodic and harmonic complexity.

The more we go to the top level, the more the morphological relations will affect the shape. If we involve other aspects of the form, like density, dynamics and register, we will immediately add more parameters to define the upper level and the whole shape. Explaining better this concept we can consider a simple musical example.

Starting with a collection of pitches we can organize them through internal relations that we define structural, and through morphological relations like dynamics and register. The result at the upper level is a sequence/phrase that maybe in a tonal contest will suggest to perceive an harmonic direction, and if it starts in piano going to a forte, it will tell us something about a sort of climax that will affect the upper level, and so on, until the whole form.

I will describe some examples from one of my pieces for saxophone quartet, called: “Obsession”.

♩=82

Soprano Saxophone

Alto Saxophone

Tenor Saxophone

Baritone Saxophone

Ex. 7 “Obsession” (C.E.Patti)

The lowest level is represented by a collection of staccato notes. The organisation of these pitches is based on a rhythmic, melodic and harmonic approach. The two bars that I showed in the previous example are the first organisation in a sequence of musical events. As you can read in the title of this piece, the idea was to organize the motif in order to give an obsessive feeling. Regarding the internal relations, I tried to construct the motif giving it a clear rhythmic and harmonic dance-like connotation, borrowed from jazz language. The idea was to structure the material in relation with sound configurations that are part of our heritage as jazz listeners.

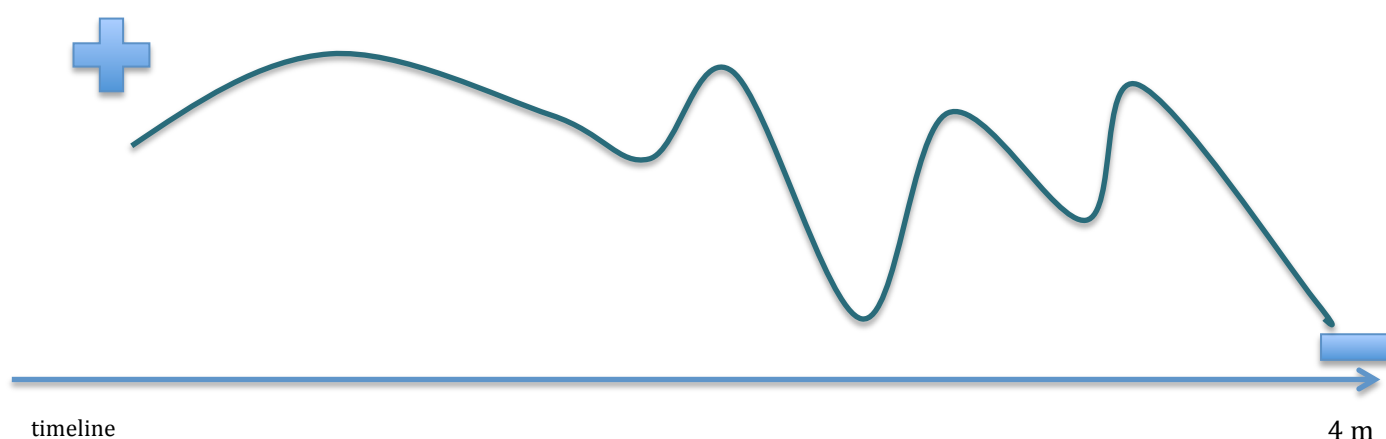
The functions that I introduced before: memory, entropy, redundancy, are influenced by the meaning of the story that I wanted to tell. In something that is obsessive, the use of the entropy's function is really low, and the concepts of memory and redundancy are strongly used. The obsessive motive drives the entire action of the musical story that I represented in this piece. This element is something that I will call in the third chapter, the “conflict” (using a rhetorical term), or saying it in another way, the trigger element of the story.

### 1.3 Macro and Micro Level

In this chapter I want to explain better the concept of shaping the form, and how I used it for my compositions. When we think about the form of the piece, we investigate the role of the musical parameters and how they are involved in order to represent the concept that we want to express.

I started this dissertation explaining the relation between the “whole” form and the “part”; through different levels, we can go from the whole to the part and vice versa, but we can also basically define two fields: one is the Macro level and the second is the Micro level. They are linked each other and every change at the Macro level affects the Micro level and vice versa.

This is another example from my saxophone quartet triptych. The piece is called: “Lullaby for an Inconsolable Pessimist”. In the next picture you can find the first sketch of the concept that I represented.



Pic. 2 Shape of “Lullaby for an Inconsolable Pessimist” (C.E.Patti)

Assuming that the title has a programmatic function, we can deduce that the piece is a lullaby with the aim of cheering up a pessimist. The last one, the protagonist, is inconsolable, so it means that there is no “pay off” in my story. If we connect optimism and pessimism with positive and negative we can immediately get the graph that is represented above. After this first sketch I started to find how the musical parameters such as: *Density*, *Dynamics*, *Register* and *Tempo* describe the aspects of form.

Since it is a lullaby, I started to think about a system in which all these parameters are organized in order to create a lulling feeling. First of all: the tempo that I chose is 58 bpm and the meter that I chose is 6/8. It is not a coincidence that a lot of lullabies have this meter. That because the internal ternary subdivision of the two beats in a slow tempo gives a sense of peacefulness. Dynamics are involved in this way: basically the piece is in the range of piano, but when I wanted to

represent the refusal of the pessimist I imagined the range of forte. This was also a clue to think about the ending of the piece. The range of the density is not so wide as well as the range of register, that because there is a relation with the “cantabile” character of the lullaby.

After planning this and designed the shape of the piece at the Macro level, I started to create devices on a Micro level, researching for the structural relations that I explained in the previous chapter. Starting from a group of pitches and chords, I created a melody and countermelodies, establishing rhythmical relations and tonal relations.

There are different ways to find musical devices and I will explain better the topic in the third chapter, but the main idea is that the narration leads to choose the right strategies to work with the material and to create devices. Before going further, I will introduce some more examples of shaping the form at Macro level.

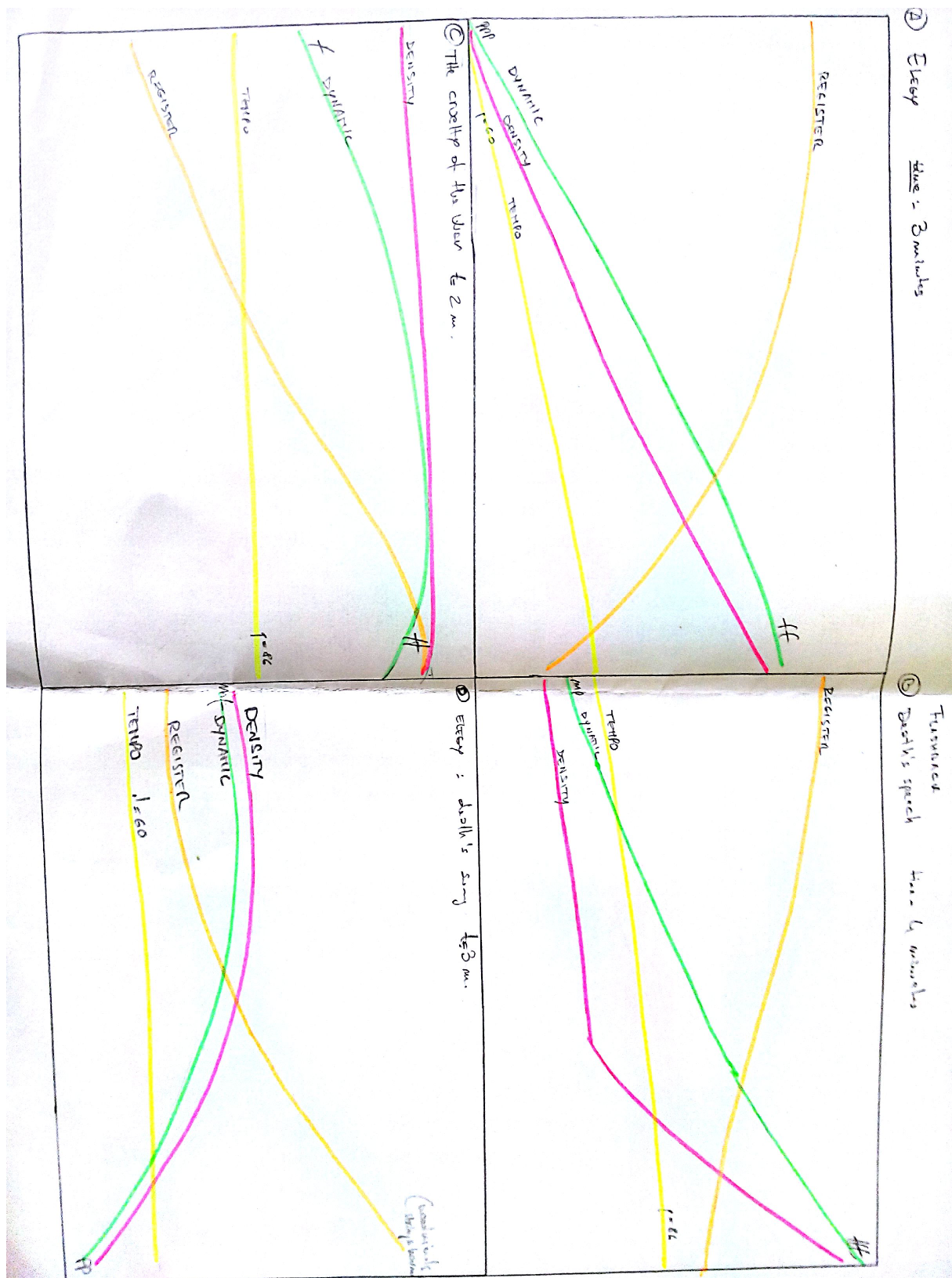
The following one is a piece that I wrote for the AKOM Ensemble<sup>5</sup> and it was premiered in November 2014 in Schiedam. The piece is based on a poem written by G. Ungaretti, an Italian poet who wrote lot of poems inspired by one of the most tragic war: the First World War.

The poem on which is based my piece is called: “Soldati”. The idea of the poet was to relate the fragility of soldier’s life to autumn leaves. Autumn has also a romantic image for the poet, so much so the poem is part of a book called: “Allegria”. In my piece written for large ensemble and baritone voice I wanted to represent these meanings starting and ending with a kind of sorrowful elegy and building up a climax in the middle of the piece, representing the destruction of the human life. In this piece I had also the opportunity to use one device that I found in my “zero composition” called: “4Songs4Season”.

Remaining on a macro level, I started to shape the form and design the curves of the musical parameters involved. Hereunder is represented the first sketch of my piece.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.akom-ensemble.com/>



Pic. 3 Evolution of parameters in "Come Foglie" (C.E.Patti)

In this piece there is also a program and it is divided in four parts:

- Elegy
- Death's speech
- The cruelty of the war
- Elegy

In the second part I wanted to resemble the wind as a representation of the death, whose words are assigned to the singer. The graphical representation of the register (Pic.3), suggest a high range in the beginning, going to the low range in the end. When I had to write and orchestrate the music I used woodwinds in high register and I added strings at the end, increasing also the density of the musical gesture. This shows how musical parameters affect the process of writing music.

The third part is the part representing the cruelty of the war, and the curve of density and dynamics led me to think about a wide use of the ensemble and a range of dynamics going from "forte" to "fortissimo".

On a micro level, I designed a system to represent the falling leaves and the constant noise of the wind in autumn. The descending melodies work perfectly to represent the falling movement, and the choice to orchestrate several descending lines in the woodwinds was mandatory if we consider the archetypal representation of the wind through blowing instruments. In the third part, the "gentle" wind becomes a storm and I used diminution and rhythmic interpolation with triplets to manipulate the original musical material.

## 2 THE MUSICAL FORM

### 2.1 The perception as a multi-layer system

When I started the First Intervention Cycle of my research I thought it was appropriate to investigate the field of musical psychology and semiotics. Although the topic is really broad, and in the beginning I have been a little bit far from my main path as a composer, I think it was helpful in order to understand how to deal with the representation of meanings into music and with the audience's perception of the music language unfolded through the musical narration.

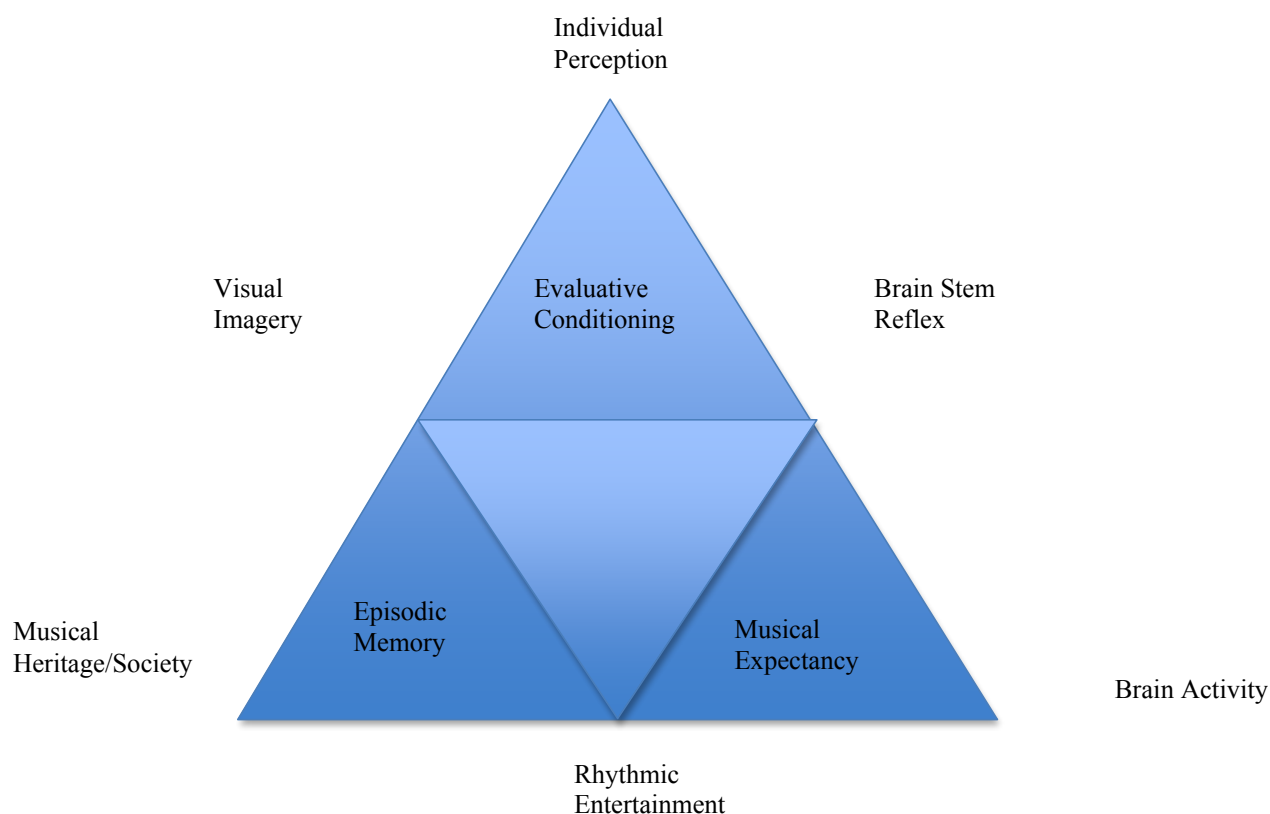
The topic is also a bit controversial, because even researchers have so far been unable to offer a satisfactory account of such emotions aroused by music. Ever since Plato, people have thought that there is a special intimate relationship between music and the emotions, but in fact there are several such relationships. Some people have claimed that music can represent the passions. According to the Baroque doctrine of Affections, different movements of a suite or concerto should represent distinct emotional states, different intervals have a precise meanings linked with particular symbols. During music history, there was a different point of view about representation of emotion in music.

I tried to make my conclusions and I can say that if we consider a set of meanings in which we can relate particular sounds or sound configurations to particular emotion, we can create a sort of "Musical dictionary" of emotions.

This happened in Baroque Music and it is still a valid approach if we want to use the "cliché" in representation of what can be defined "mood"<sup>6</sup> (e.g. the use of music in movies or videogames). I went further in my research, and the theory that I found satisfactory was a theory in which we consider the perception as a multi-layer system where the interaction of different parameters makes the explanation of the phenomenon in a more reliable way. That means also more variables in dealing with the expression of meanings into music. I thought it was important to make a steady theoretical background before investigate the role of perception. After reading the theory of emotion of Peter Juslin (Department of Psychology, Uppsala University, SE-75142 Uppsala, Sweden), I implemented it with my idea of perception as a triangle between the individual perception, the musical heritage and the brain activity.

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<sup>6</sup> Affective state that feature a lower felt intensity than emotions, that do not have a clear object, and that last much longer than emotion (P. Juslin/ D. Västfjäll, 2008)



*Pic. 4 Multilayer system of perception*

In this image I grouped all the functions that I found in three macro areas that which correspond to the three angles of the triangle. I will report below the explanation of the mechanisms explained by Juslin with some remarks of mine:

**Brain stem reflex** refers to a process whereby an emotion is induced by music because one or more fundamental acoustic characteristics of the music are taken by the brain stem to signal a potentially important and urgent event that needs attention. In music, this may involve sounds that are sudden, loud, dissonant, and feature fast or rapidly changing temporal patterns. Brain stem reflexes are quick, automatic, and unlearned. A response to an auditory event suggesting 'danger' can be emitted as early as at the level of the inferior colliculus of the brain stem. This mechanism, however, will primarily evoke arousal, rather than discrete emotions.

**Rhythmic entrainment** refers to a process whereby an emotion is evoked by a piece of music because a powerful, external rhythm in the music influences some internal bodily rhythm of the listener (e.g., heart rate), such that the latter rhythm adjusts toward and eventually 'locks in' to a common periodicity. The adjusted heart rate can then spread to other components of emotion such as feeling, through 'proprioceptive feedback'. This may produce an increased level of arousal in the listener. Musical properties that can contribute to such reactions are a strong pulse (e.g., 'techno music'),



preferably one that is relatively close to the natural heart rate or respiration of the listener, and a tempo *accelerando* that may help to 'drive' the pulse. Since 'oscillators' (autonomous rhythmic processes) do not synchronize instantaneously, the entrainment mechanism is a slower induction process than a brain stem reflex. However, the entrainment-inducing qualities of music might produce feelings of arousal, communion, and perhaps even trance-like altered states of consciousness (e.g., shamanic rituals, rave parties).

**Evaluative conditioning (EC)** refers to a process whereby an emotion is induced by a piece of music simply because this stimulus has often been paired with other positive or negative stimuli. For example, a particular piece of music may have occurred repeatedly together in time with a specific event that always makes you happy, such as meeting your friends. Over time, through repeated pairings, the music itself will eventually evoke happiness even in the absence of the friendly interaction. EC may occur even if one is unaware of the contingency of the two stimuli. Which element of the music best serves as the 'conditioned stimulus' and its degree of generalization and discrimination remain to be explored - though the melody or theme of the music could be especially effective, as illustrated for instance by Wagner in his Leitmotif strategy.

**Emotional contagion** refers to a process whereby an emotion is induced by a piece of music because the listener perceives the emotional expression of the music, and then 'mimics' this expression internally. Why would listeners react in such a way to music? The answer lies in the fact that music often features acoustical patterns similar to those that occur in emotional speech. One might thus hypothesize that that we get aroused by voice-like features of music because a brain module responds quickly and automatically to certain stimulus features as if they were coming from a human voice conveying emotion – presumably through some kind of 'mirror neuron' system involved in empathic responses. Instrumental teaching often aims for the voice as an ideal, and most music today includes vocals, making a contagion reaction even more plausible. However, this could also involve 'voice-like' instruments, like the cello or the violin. Indeed, I have theorized that a 'contagion module' in the brain might treat such instruments as 'super-expressive voices': they are reminiscent of the human voice and yet go much further in terms of their expressive features (e.g., wider pitch range).

**Visual imagery** refers to a process whereby an emotion is evoked in the listener because he or she conjures up inner images (e.g., of a beautiful landscape) while listening to the music. The listener appears to conceptualize the musical structure via a metaphorical, nonverbal mapping between the metaphorical affordances of the music and 'image-schemata', grounded in bodily experience. For instance, in listening to a piece one can hear a melodic movement as 'upward' and then visualize oneself 'flying higher'. Listeners may presumably respond to these mental images much in the same way as they would to the same stimuli in the 'real' world. Note that the listener may influence the imagery to a considerable extent: Although images might come into the mind unbidden, in general a listener may conjure up, manipulate, and dismiss images at will. Yet, certain musical

features (e.g., repetition; predictability in melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic elements; slow tempo) may be especially effective in stimulating imagery. It should be noted that there are wide individual differences between listeners regarding imagery: Some experience it regularly, whereas others hardly experience it at all.

**Episodic memory** refers to a process whereby an emotion is induced in a listener because the music evokes a personal memory of a specific event in the listener's life. Music often evokes episodic memories, and some of these can be strongly emotional, perhaps because the physiological reaction patterns to the original events are stored in memory along with the experiential content. Episodic memory appears to be one of the most common sources of emotions to music, judging from ESM data. Listeners actively use music to remind them of valued past events, which suggests that music serves an important nostalgic function in everyday life. Episodic memories associated with music from young adulthood seem especially vivid, perhaps because many self-defining experiences tend to occur at this stage of life development, with music playing a prominent role in establishing a self-identity. Episodic memories featuring music can truly be the 'soundtrack of our lives'.

**Musical expectancy** refers to a process whereby an emotion is induced in a listener because a specific feature of the music violates, delays or confirms the listener's expectations about the continuation of the music. However, this concept does not involve any unexpected event that can occur in relation to music. It only refers to musical expectancies that involve syntactical relationships between different parts of the musical structure. Such expectations are based on the listener's previous experiences of the same musical style, as suggested by Leonard Meyer. Emotional reactions to music are usually evoked when the listener's musical expectations are somehow disrupted, for instance by unprepared or unexpected harmonic changes, as shown in Sloboda's research.<sup>7</sup>

The last mechanism led me to research for strategies in writing "groove-related music" with the idea of repeating rhythm. Repetition is connected with the concept of expectation. I will dedicate a paragraph to it. This is also one of the main points of my research.

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<sup>7</sup> The Musical Mind, Sloboda, Clarendon Press, 1986

## 2.2 Musical narration and mechanisms of perception

In this chapter I want to show one of the musical result of my First Intervention Cycle. In the piece called: “4Songs4Seasons”, I tried to use the theoretical notions that I presented before in order to picture the four seasons through four miniatures for solo violin.

When I had to write the miniature called Primavera (“Spring”), I have started to reflect on an effective representation of the spring. I chose one element: bird songs. Then, I started to parameterize this element according to the theory of Juslin and to my “triangle”.

There is something at the brain level that is immediately connected with the sound of bird songs: trills, high register and repeated fast complex rhythms, arousing in the listener a sense of excitement. This is related to the musical phenomenon and not to the image of the birds, but assuming that the title of a composition has a programmatic function (A.Schoenberg: “Fundamentals of Composition”) we can immediately connect those sounds, and this feeling to what is part of our background and heritage, or better, our visual imagery, and then we will imagine birds.

This is a way to express meanings into music, but there are other parameters like: the evaluative condition, the episodic memory and the emotional contagion, which are variable from person to person, and they affect in different way the perception of the music. The mechanisms related with the individual perception can be inhibited by the title that moves the listener to a narrow range of expectations. In this sense the “programmatic” title affects the narrative function of the piece, making the communication of meanings more intelligible.

Since my research is also experimental based, I started to write sketches, trying to represent something instantly recognizable for the brain and related to a common visual imagery.

To introduce some of them, I want to point out that this experiment was an attempt to find a different way to prepare musical material and does not want to be an absolute method of representation of meanings. All the sketches became ideas and material for original compositions that I wrote during the second year.

This is an example from my miniature for violin called: “Primavera”. I tried to notate a bird song. Of course my example is not comparable with the masterwork of Messiaen, but it wanted to be an attempt or, at least, a starting point to find something immediately related with the perception.

Ex. 8 Primavera (C.E. Patti)

The musical score consists of three staves of music for violin. The first staff begins at measure 17 and contains four measures. It features a trill (tr) in the first measure and a trill (tr) in the fourth measure. The second staff begins at measure 21 and contains four measures. The third staff begins at measure 25 and contains four measures. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, trills (tr), and dynamic markings (V). The key signature has one sharp (F#).

The first two bars represent the original transcription that I have made, then I started to treat the bird song as a musical material for my composition, involving all the structural relations at Micro level (e.g. rhythmic interpolation, transposition) and the morphological relations at Macro level (e.g. trajectory: rise form, curves of dynamics, tempo and register).

In this miniature representing the autumn, I decided to resemble the movement of the leaves and work on the emotional contagion. The descending melodies represent the movement of the falling leaves and the internal rhythm, that never follow the same subdivision of the phrase, helps to represent the discontinuous and fluctuating movement of it.

16

2 4 3 3 1 2 vibrato A 1 E

*f*

20

molto vibrato

24

Più mosso

vibrato

28

poco vibrato

Ex. 9 *Autunno* (C.E. Patti)

The minor harmony that I used was a choice that I made in relation with the mechanism of the emotional contagion. Since autumn is linked with a sense of melancholy, I decided to set my melodic material in a minor key. That because we “mimic” internally the emotional expression of the music, arousing sadness and melancholy.

The last example is basically a transcription of a famous alarm ringtone. This motive was only an experiment at the beginning, but it became the “leitmotiv” of a musical story for clarinet and piano called: “Dreams come true as long as the alarm goes off”. This was a concrete sound of which I transcribed the rhythm and the melodic direction. As probably everybody experienced, we start to listen the alarm softer before waking up and louder the more we start to be conscious. Also the curve of density and dynamics at the Macro level are organized in a way that the more we go to the end of the piece the more annoying the motive become. This is another clear example of how the musical narration and the representation of meanings offer a different perspective for composer to organize and develop musical ideas. In this sense I can say that one of my goal of the research was achieved from the outset.



Ex. 10 *Dreams come true as long as the alarm goes off* (C.E.Patti)

At the end of my first intervention cycle I decided to move a little bit away from this field and focusing more on the musical narration itself, instead on its function in representing meanings. Anyway, the result of this theoretical part of my research affected my way of writing music in a more conscious way and with more attention to the relation between the composer and the audience. In the next chapter I will deepen the role of music expectation in groove-related music and, with particular attention to jazz music and its relation with the jazz background/musical heritage of the listener.

## 2.3 Memory and expectation in groove-related music

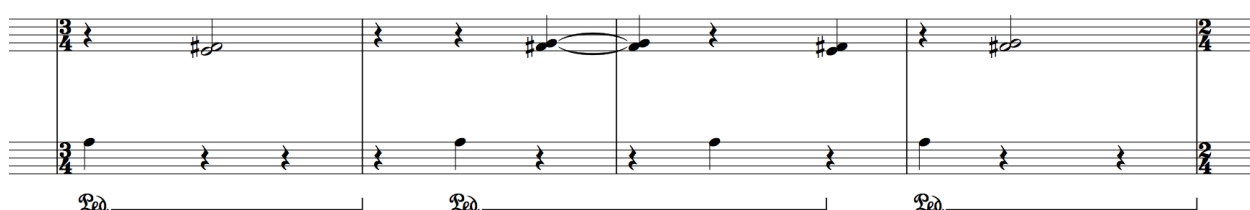
After this first theoretical part of my journey I decided to continue applying some of these concepts to my research, looking for ways to expand the possibilities of writing groove-related music. In particular I worked with the concept of memory and expectation. Groove is intended as a sense of propulsive rhythmic feel. To achieve this feeling, the groove should be a repetition, a sort of pattering of musical events. There are several arguments around this topic. We can say that we are able to recognize the groove when we notice something that is repeated. Repetition is an important characteristic of music and it is something that is also related with the concept of memory. We are

able to recognize a “pattern” because, after the repetition of musical events, we understand the intrinsic organization of it.

In the other side, we can also say, according to the Aristotelian definition of Narration, contrasts are vital to build up a story. I have started to research on a way to make contrasts within something that for definition is fixed in a way.

When we deal with repetitions we build a set of expectation in the mind of the listener. The more we repeat something, the less the listener will perceive a contrasting element in our musical communication, or he will get a clear message that there is nothing new happening. According to our ability to see things in their “whole structure”, we are able to recognize similar things, even if they are not completely the same. Because of this principle, we can also say that we are able to reconstruct the whole structure, even if some parts are missing in it.

Translating this into a musical language, it means that when we deal with groove, we do not have to repeat exactly the same pattern, but we can repeat it with some slightly differences. In this way the listener will perceive that we are repeating something, but at the same time we will give to him new information and new elements of our story.



Ex. 11 “I know the answer” (C.E.Patti)

The example<sup>8</sup> above shows how it is possible to repeat something without copying exactly the same pattern. This is a simple way to repeat a kind of “waltz”, displacing the accents of the basic rhythmic cell contained in the first bar. In this piece the listener is able to recognize the “groove” even if the rhythm is slightly different. In particular, the strategy that I used to achieve the result is to repeat the basic rhythmic cell of the first bar, a sufficient number of times to create a “memory” in the listener, and gradually displacing the accents to grab the attention of him and playing with his expectation.

The concepts of expectation and memory are also important if we think about harmony and melody. Especially in Jazz, where is really common to think of chord changes (and most of them are coded in kind of jazz vocabulary), it is really helpful to reflect on the expectation, finding a way to expand the language.

<sup>8</sup> example from: “I know the answer” for Symphonic Jazz Orchestra, C.E. Patti

In the next example<sup>9</sup>, I will show another device that I used to open up the use of my musical language as a composer. In this piece there are clear references and quotations of folk music; this material has a really strong popular connotation, which means that is well rooted in which I called in the first chapter: musical heritage. In this case the expectation is really high and is really easy to make our music too predictable for the audience.

The musical score is written for Clarinet and Piano. It is in 3/4 time and consists of three systems of staves. The first system starts at measure 13, the second at measure 19, and the third at measure 26. The music includes various dynamics such as *p*, *mf*, and *f*, and articulations like *gliss.* and *cresc.* The piano part features a steady bass line with some harmonic support.

Ex. 12 "Dreams come true as long as the alarm goes off" (C.E.Patti)

This doesn't have a negative connotation, and it is indeed the example of building up the memory, but if in our musical narration we want to make contrasts and unfold our story, then we have to find ways to be less predictable.

I like the idea to compare the technique of composing to the oratorical techniques. Basically we have two possibilities: making hard contrasts, by introducing a new and contrasting material, and achieving fluency by introducing gradually small differences. The choice is lead by the plot of our musical story. The devices that I used in this piece to create expectations and false expectations are two:

<sup>9</sup> example from: "Dreams come true as long as the alarm goes off" for Clarinet and Piano, C.E.Patti



- The rhythm is treated like in the previous example, displacing accents and avoiding playing always the bass on the downbeat.
- The melody and the harmony are transposed by a half - step (as you can see in this example above) or by a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> or a major 7<sup>th</sup>. The transposition has itself a narrative power because it tells something about the memory, something that we take as a reference point, and it introduces at the same time, something new in our narration.

Since my music is groove-related, I think that these elements are vital for my development as a composer. At the end of this intervention cycle I set the basis to bring in practice the theories that I have found during the research process. In the second intervention cycle, I continued to develop the devices, shifting my research towards something more practical.

# SECOND INTERVENTION CYCLE

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In this cycle I extended the use of form, analyzing the strategies used in storytelling. Since we can look at a composition as a sort of musical story, we can shape it thinking on a functional organization of its musical material. This is what is called: plot.

When we think about a story we can define some attributes that I called **elements of narration**, which are important to define the starting point for writing the musical story.

I translated into music these functions used by storytellers to shape and organize their stories. I found a lot of parallelisms between the trajectories of stories and the trajectories of the musical parameters involved in a musical composition, such as dynamics, density, register, tempo.

This gave me the opportunity to look at the form from a different point of view. The result was another different way to avoid starting writing groove-related music in a traditional way. I point out the term “different”, because this research does not want to claim an absolute or better way to write music.

From this intervention cycle I used musical narration as a way to develop my musical language.

Characterizing the story through the elements of narration, I found out that the story influences the choice of the origin of the musical material. In this way I blended different styles and musical languages.

I think that it was a way to improve the expressive power of my music, without limiting myself to a precise musical genre.

Continuing to think on a Macro and Micro level, I found the connection between what is defined narrative approach and constructive approach.

The first one involves the relations between the aspects of form and the aspects of musical narration and the second one is related with the way of organizing the musical material in “groove”. If we compare this to a mosaic, we can understand how the relations between the organization of musical material on a Macro and Micro level are related to each other.

If groove can be considered as something fixed in a way, through narrative approach it is possible to make contrasts, which are important to build up a narration.

I found several musical devices based on the results of the first intervention cycle.

### 3 STORYTELLING STRATEGIES IN MUSIC

In the second intervention cycle I started to investigate program music and in particular the relation between the organization of the parts of the story, or better, the plot and the musical narration. I have started researching on musical examples; we have several of them in Classical, and Romantic music, as well as in jazz music, as I presented in the first chapter.

After a while, I realized that it was more inspiring looking around and finding examples from the “contemporary” world, that because if we look at commercials, movies we find out that storytelling has a primary role in the modern communication. Even simple messages are organized in a way to catch the audience, or the consumer, in the case of a commercial. New media also affected the way to convey messages. It is inevitable to think that they affected also the music storytelling. One basic consideration is that the length of musical stories is influenced by the new way of fruition of media contents. The attention span of the audience is decreased. If we want to work on a large form, then we should think about ways to keep the attention span until the end of our piece, or finding new ways to organize the length of our musical stories. I realized that even in the TV-series, which are really popular nowadays, directors are using new ways to organize the plot, giving to the story a sense of unpredictability of the path and creating a sort of multidimensional narration. This thing led me to think about what I called multimodal work, a different way to stretch the length of our form through different pieces that are part of the same musical story.

Going back to the topic of this chapter, I think it is important to define storytelling as the art of organization of the elements in a story.

I tried to compare the trajectory of stories to the trajectories of musical pieces. When we talk about defeat, a climax, a “pay-off” and conflict, we can immediately find relations with the music.

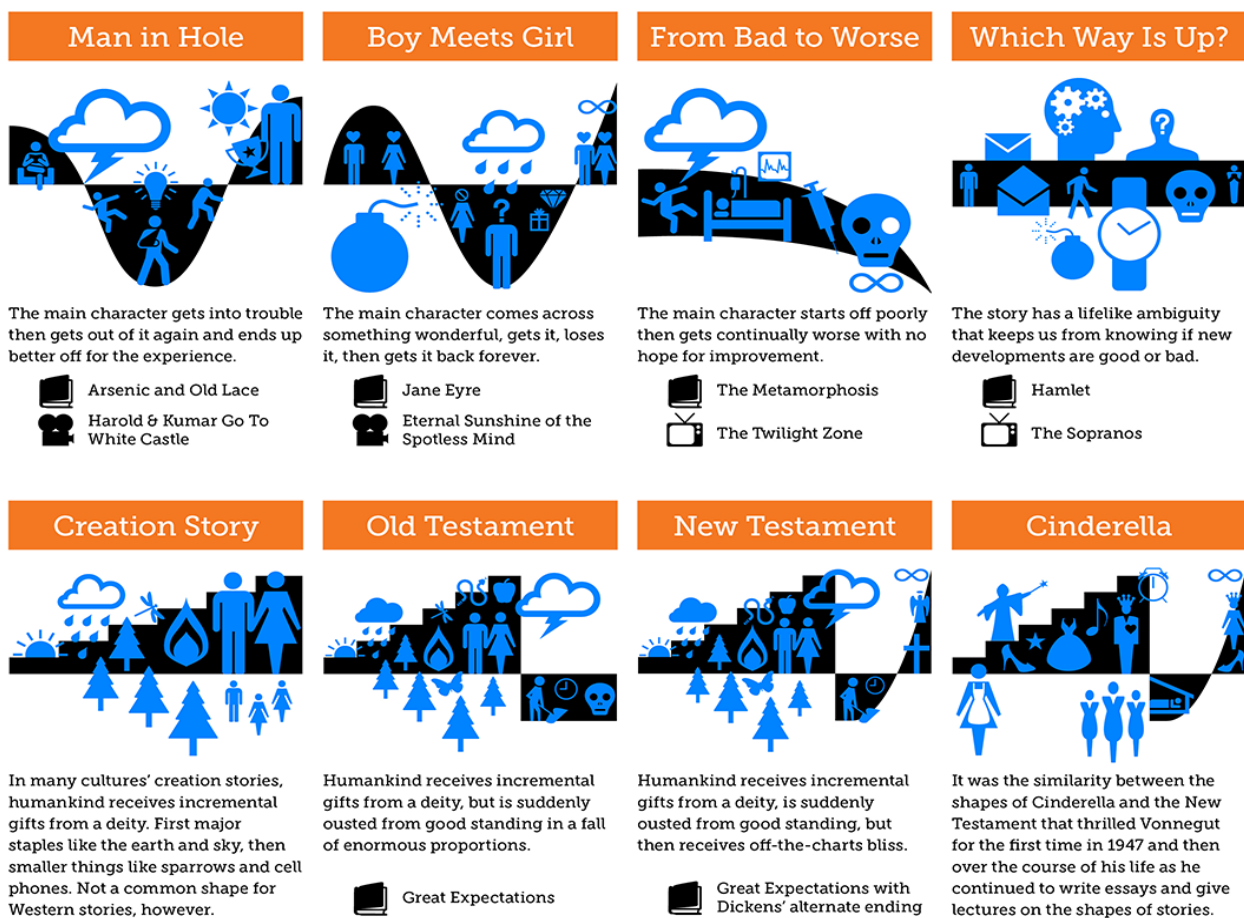
I will present my research process on it and my result in the following paragraphs.

#### 3.1 Shaping the form: Story & Plot

First of all it is really important to make a distinction of what is defined as “plot” and as “story”. When we talk about **story**, we consider the natural organization of events, but when we want to organize them in a different and functional way, then we talk about **plot**.

**Plotting** is the sense of direction, a sense of laying out a certain path, which the audience can follow. We are used to the archetypical trajectories of triumph and defeat, because they represent something that is related with our natural life, in which we can succeed or lose. Since the Greek tragedy these elements were used to shape and organize stories. Through the literature's history we can find an evolution of these trajectories, but the elements are always basically three: **exposition**, **confrontation** and **resolution**. In a technical way, we can say that we always have: **hook**, **hold** and **pay off**.

If these elements are organized in a progressive way then we have the “arch trajectory”. In music that is still one of the most used trajectory, in which the climax is always in the middle of the piece and there is a sort of preparation and path going to it, and then a release phase that, in most of the cases, is the reprise, or better, the recapitulation (if we want to use a term from the sonata form). Researching on this aspect I found the thesis of the American writer Kurt Vonnegut, in which he said that in every story the main character has it's own up and down moments that can be graphed to reveal the story's shape. That was interesting because it resembles the idea of the archetype trajectory of triumph and defeat. In the following image you can see different trajectories, according to the definitions of Vonnegut.



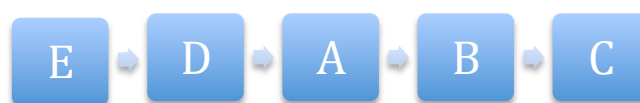
Pic. 5 from “Archetypal trajectory of stories” (K.Vonnegut)

We can simply imagine a translation of these graphs in music as curves moving up and down in relation to a hypothetical climax, but if we consider the modern storytelling, we have a sort of multidimensional narration, in which these trajectories are crossed. One of my goals was to find a way

to represent these complex trajectories into music. Relating the concept of plot to the functional organization of musical material we have different possibilities to break the progressive path of the archetypal trajectories that were presented before.

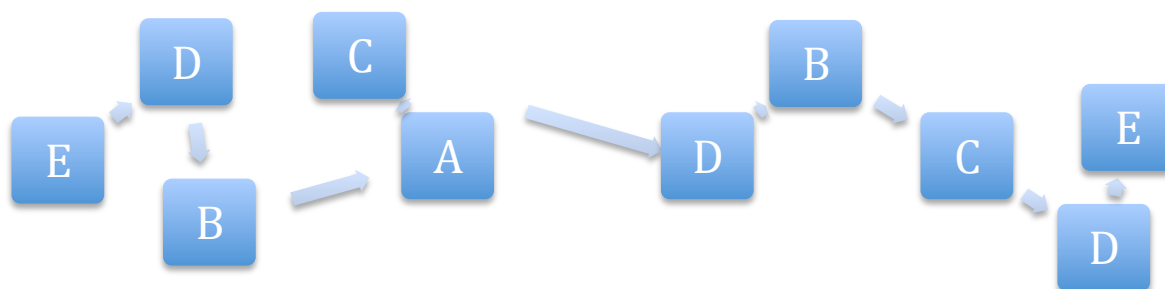


Pic. 6/7/8 Plot of *"Dreams come true as long as the alarm goes off"* (C.E. Patti)



Pic. 6/7/8 Plot of *"Dreams come true as long as the alarm goes off"* (C.E. Patti)

The previous picture illustrates the functional order of the elements of narration. In the next example the complexity is increasing avoiding the linear order and introducing repetitions. The frequency and the way to organize repetitions are related to the concept of entropy and redundancy that I introduced in the second chapter.



Pic. 6/7/8 Plot of *"Dreams come true as long as the alarm goes off"* (C.E. Patti)

This example shows what I did in the piece for Clarinet and Piano. The piece is about dreams and the disturbing feeling that we have when we wake up by the alarm. The real order of the story is the simple connection between the dreaming moment of the protagonist and the moment in which he listens to the annoying sound of the alarm and he wakes up. The functional representation of the events, and in this case since it is a musical narration, of the musical material, is organized in the following way.

The piece starts with the annoying sound of the alarm and ends with the same sound. In the middle we have the "dreaming" part and within this frame we have also other elements of the story,

like: the moment in which the character starts to listen the alarm, the refusal to wake up and the “snooze and postpone” moment.

To explain better the program behind the piece we have:

A= the “dreaming” mode

B= the alarm starts ringing

C= trying to catch dreams and avoiding to listen to the alarm

D= the “snooze and postpone” moment

E= the sound became annoying and the character is waking up

I can imagine that the story doesn't sound interesting, but I chose a simple story to experiment these techniques. Of course the way I developed this path is more complicated because when we want to organize a story we have to think also about parameters linked with the representation of the characters and the story set. In the next paragraph I will introduce the functions of narration, and my translation of these into a musical language.

### 3.2 The elements of narration

When we think about a story then we have to define elements that characterize it, such as: plot, setting characterization, atmosphere, point of view and conflict. These elements are borrowed from the rhetorical way of organizing the part of the speech.

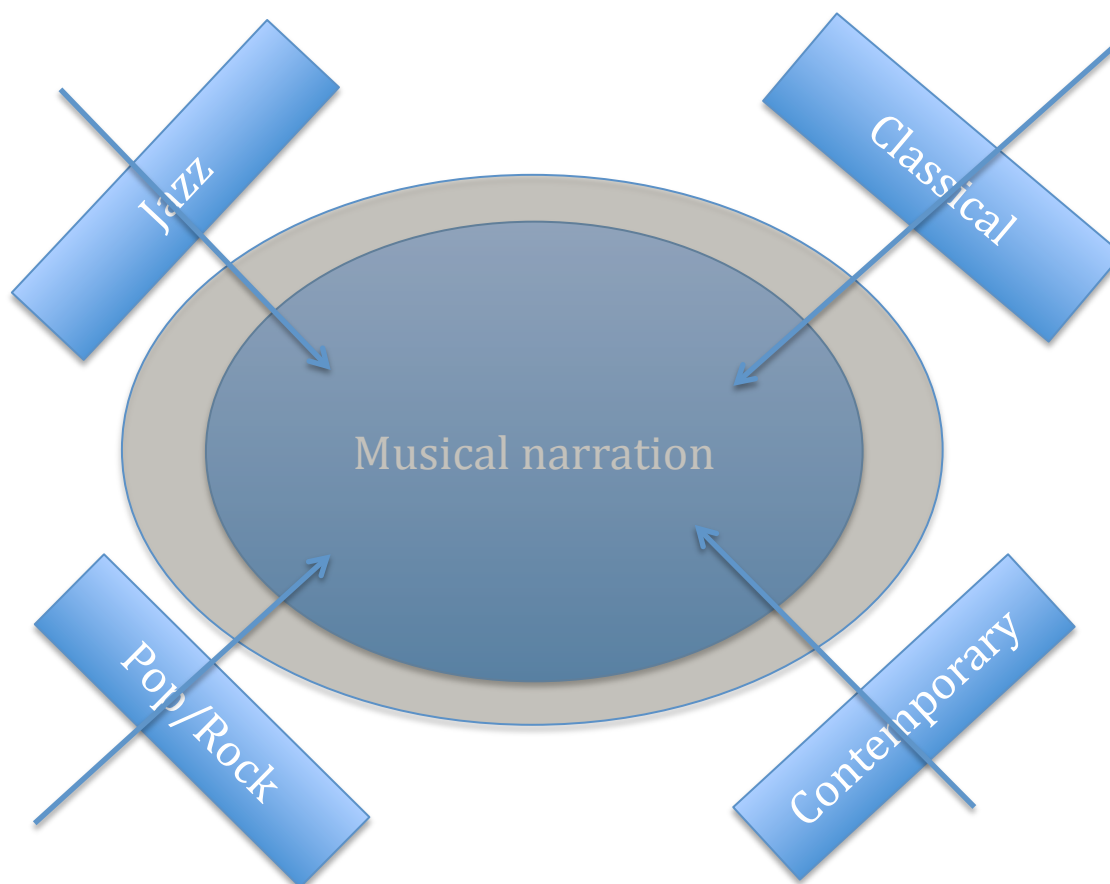
To describe the previous list of elements of narration we have:

- 1) **Plot:** the functional sequence of events (musical events) that take place in a story.
- 2) **Setting:** the origin of musical material.
- 3) **Characterization:** the methods used to present the main musical ideas as a sort of characters
- 4) **Atmosphere:** the general mood or feeling established in a piece
- 5) **Point of View:** who is narrating the story (diegetic function)
- 6) **Conflict:** the emotional trigger, the central element that drives the action of a story.

I have already deepen the plot in the previous paragraph. Going further, if we consider the **setting**, we describe the environment in which the story is set. If the story is set in the past or in a particular environment, like desert or an historical site we must stick to use a precise description of it.

In music I used this concept to borrow elements from different genres. If my musical narration needs more atonal language instead of tonal or modal, I will keep elements from that language.

In this way I will give to my music a clear connotation, a clear set. Since my musical background is various, I like to blend different elements and dealing with musical material coming from different musical languages.



Pic. 9 Musical Narration and musical genres (C.E.Patti)

The previous picture shows exactly what I meant before about blending musical languages. In this case I can say that musical narration is also an opportunity to broad the musical language and make it more personal. Through it, I rework ideas without simply using them. I treat also the “cliché” in that way and the result is a language that I think is personal because it comes from my background and is processed in order to tell a story that is always different. Because of that, I also have the freedom to write music without limiting myself to a precise style or genre.

The **characterization** is the process whereby characters are defined. If I work with musical ideas I can identify a hierarchy in which one musical element is more important than another one. We can consider the main musical idea as a sort of main character, the protagonist, and we can have also an antagonist or simply a subordinate character. To give an example, in the piece that I have already showed for piano and clarinet, the “alarm sound” is a sort of antagonist.

The **atmosphere** is the general mood or the feeling established in a piece. This element is also related with the use of cliché, or better with the use of a coded language. I want to point out the relation with what I defined in the second chapter as “musical heritage”. In the miniature for solo violin inspired to autumn I decided to use a tonal language and in particular a minor key to establish a sad mood.

In the piece for Saxophone Quartet called “Obsession” I used a dancelike rhythm to create the atmosphere of an obsessive dance. In this sense, the atmosphere of the piece is given by the meaning that we want to represent. When we unfold a story we have basically two possibilities: the first is to use an external narrator and the second is to use the character’s **point of view** to tell the story. This element of narration can be translated into music if we consider, for example, one particular instrument to introduce a new musical idea in the musical narration. We can also switch the point of view introducing new ideas through different instruments. The last element is the **conflict**. This is a term borrowed from Latin, which means in a broader way the element that drives the story’s action.

It is the emotional trigger, the motivation behind the narration. To quote again the piece for saxophone quartet “Obsession”, the conflict is represented through the unceasing motif that takes over the other musical ideas. All these elements are important for me to project the piece on a Macro level and organize all my ideas. This was the reason that led me to think about music storytelling, developing tools and a system to organize a musical narration.

### 3.3 Micro Level: constructive approach and groove

In the previous paragraph we talked about what can be defined as narrative approach. Using this approach we can work on the plot of our musical story at a Macro level, but when we have to move to the Micro level, we have to consider that writing in “groove” involves the use of another approach: the **constructive approach**.

Both approaches seem unrelated to each other but, if we consider the “groove” only as an organization of the material, we can still think in a narrative way. Furthermore, going back to the first chapter - in which I introduced the relation between the “part” and the “whole” - we can build our groove from small musical parts but thinking of a bigger sequence on an upper level, which will represent part of our story.

To talk about this relation, I will start to introduce something that, although is not immediately related with music, has brought me to reflect on the use of the constructive and narrative approach in writing groove-related music.

If we compare the structure of the groove with the structure of a mosaic, we can look at the image represented by the mosaic in two different ways: far from the source or really close to it.





Pic. 10/11 Mosaic from the historical site: La Villa del Casale (Piazza Armerina, Sicily)

This is part of a big mosaic representing a hunting scene (from 320-330 a.c.). The whole story is made of a surface of 66 square meters filled with small colorful pieces. This opera is part of the floor of “La villa del Casale” (Piazza Armerina –Sicily). I put this image to explain what I said before about using the constructive together with the narrative approach. Looking at the picture we can observe that:

- There is a “groove”, or better, a sense of rhythm in the picture.
- This feeling is given by the repetition of small parts.
- There is also a sense of direction, because this repetition is organized in a precise way: it’s clear that all the characters represented are moving toward the right side of the picture.
- The dog and the horse give a sense of anxiety.
- The two hunters are represented with a suffering face.
- The use of colors shows a predominance of dark shades in the left side getting lighter on the right side.
- Even where is a repetition of pieces of the same color there are slight differences.



After these observations, we can say that there is a clear narration in the picture. The way the story is unfolded involves the use of “groove”, made by the small pieces all together. If we consider this picture part of a big story in which the storytelling is brought to a major complexity we can still put these small pieces in relation to each other, even though we have different situations represented (e.g. the colors used are the same, the background is the “trait d’union” of the story).



Pic. 10/11 Mosaic from the historical site: La Villa del Casale (Piazza Armerina, Sicily)

If we look at this picture is not clear and understandable the organization of the small pieces, but we perceive the whole structure. This is exactly what I meant in the first and in the second chapter about the human perception of the musical form. We are also able to have a close look to understand all the techniques used to organize the material, but we perceive something that stand also a part of that organization. This is what I think is important to understand that the narrative approach is a way to organize things at the Macro level, but we can use a constructive approach to organize things at the Micro level.

If we leave the mosaic and we move more to the music we can also think about a rhythmical pattern as an organization of accents, but we can also listen to it as a rhythmical phrase. Like the color of the pieces of the mosaic has different shades - although it represents the same object (e.g. the pink color of the skin) - also in a musical pattern we can have slight differences in the

repetition of elements. This is a way to connect the constructive approach used at the Micro level to the narrative approach, that is something needful to think at the Macro level.

In the “Lullaby for an Inconsolable pessimist” you can see how I used the constructive approach. In that piece I divided the material in two fields: the first related with a melodic motif and the second related with a rhythmical accompaniment.

The rhythmical matrix is in 6/8. The rhythm within the piece is organized in a way to give sometimes a sense of floating and other times a clear subdivision of the meter. As I have explained before, in order to make contrasts, the repetition is made to create false expectations in the way of perceiving the “loop” and creating a rhythm that is driving (one of the main characteristic of groove).

At the same time, these false expectations contribute to add new elements in the musical story, like the organization of the background’s pieces in the first mosaic’s picture. In the following example the melody is organized through the four instruments in between the groove’s matrix. This excerpt is a sort of climax of the piece in which various elements flow together.

All the small parts that represent the basic material are organized together, and we can see this example at various levels. If we isolate the first two bars we can see how the basic idea - the rhythm with the eight and quarter notes - is treated in different ways: shifted and mirrored or displaced and stretched.

The melody has this element but we can look at it through an upper level, considering it more in a horizontal way. The way is organized is to give the singing character of it but at the same time is part of the groove, part of the rhythmical motor of the piece.

This is a system to treat the groove not only as the accompaniment of the piece, but also as a leading part of it. If we want to have another visual comparison, we can think about the difference between the mosaic - with all the characteristics explained before - and the subdivision of pixels in columns and rows.

This was one of the results of my Intervention Cycle, because I learned how to approach the groove in a multidimensional way and not only as a rhythmical structure of the piece.

The musical score is presented on four staves. The first staff (treble clef) begins with a melodic line marked *mf*, followed by a *f* dynamic, then *mf*, and later *meno* and *cresc.* The second staff (treble clef) features a more active line with *mf*, *f*, and *mf* dynamics. The third staff (treble clef) shows a line with *mf*, *f*, and *f* dynamics. The fourth staff (bass clef) provides a rhythmic foundation with *mf* and *f* dynamics. The score includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks, illustrating the complex interplay of melodic and rhythmic elements.

Ex. 13 “Lullaby for an Inconsolable Pessimist” (C.E.Patti)

Without criticizing the tradition of groove-related music, this differs to the ordinary way of composing Jazz, in which there is a clear subdivision of roles between instruments playing the melody, the rhythm and the harmonic accompaniment.

The subdivision of roles amongst the instruments is decided at a Macro level through the plot of the musical story and the narrative behind the piece leads this choice.

# THIRD INTERVENTION CYCLE

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In the last cycle I reflected on the difference between program and narrative music and I assume that groove-related music can be **programmatic**, if it is related to an extra musical content or **narrative**, when there is no relation with an extra musical content. This implies two things:

- In narrative music, the narrative approach is used only to organize the musical material within the musical story.
- Program music is narrative as well, but this is a univocal relation.

In this intervention cycle I worked on large forms and on large ensemble, in order to increase the complexity of my musical stories.

The more complex is the story, the more important is the plan at the Macro level, with all the choices that we make shaping the form of our composition.

In this cycle I used the system derived from the results of the previous intervention cycles to organize my musical stories.

The artistic outcome that shows a big step compared to my first composition for solo violin is: “I know the answer” for Soprano and Jazz Orchestra.

This piece is both programmatic and narrative and resembles the results of this research process.

## NARRATIVE vs. PROGRAM MUSIC

When we talk about narrative approach it is easy to misunderstand what is related with the organization of the musical material - following strategies borrowed from the art of developing a narration - and what is referred to an extra musical content.

We can say that the first concept is narrative in a broad sense, or better, in an abstract sense. Therefore, narrative is about the musical perception of the functional organization of sounds events, according to the parameters and strategies that I explained in my first intervention cycle. From the composer's point of view, it might be useful to organize the musical material in order to achieve fluency and coherency in the musical plot. That we called as: **narrative music**.

The second concept is what can be seen as a use of narrative in relation to an extra musical story, or a program that we can call it: **program music**.

If we look at the music history we can find several examples of program music, composers like Berlioz, Wagner, R. Strauss, Berg, Berio - just to mention a few of them - have written several programmatic masterpieces. In Jazz I have already shown the example of M. Schneider.

Even nowadays there is still a tendency to write program music, that because of the influence of new media, and the use of video or live installation in concerts. Mason Bates, the young American composer in residence of the Chicago Symphony orchestra, wrote several pieces in this manner, including also electronics. He explained in one of his articles called: "The mechanics of musical narrative"<sup>10</sup> his idea of renovating the way of composing program music.

In the following paragraph I will show how I can blend the two approaches in writing a piece for Jazz Orchestra and Soprano. In this piece there is a program that is based on a psychoanalytic session between a singer - which represents delusions, defeats, but also ambitions and dreams of being an artist - and her psychologist. The last one is represented by the audience, who is the "passive" listener - at least in the role of the story and not in the role of perception - of the soprano's monologue.

The story is set in a psychologist's room and the way is organized is functional to represent the different feelings of the soprano.

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<sup>10</sup> Bates, M. "The mechanics of musical narrative" – link: <http://www.masonbates.com/blog/the-mechanics-of-musical-narrative/>

### 3.4 “I know the answer” (for Jazz Orchestra and Soprano)

As I have introduced before, this piece can be considered as a 7 minutes story about being an artist nowadays. Several articles about the problems of being an artist nowadays inspired me, so that I started to write a text based on those articles. In this paragraph I will focus more on the music instead of the program behind it - explaining the approaches that I used to write the piece - and showing, with some examples, how I made in practice what I presented in the first and second intervention cycles.

This piece is an expression of mixed emotions and feelings from sadness and delusion to ambition and determination. I tried to create basically two environments, which follows one another: one is connected to the inner feeling of the artist and the other is connected with the reason. The last one is also a “safe place”, the psychologist’s room, where the singer has a detached attitude, describing her feelings in a neutral way.

There is also a criticism behind the piece and the title wants to mock all what can be defined “easy psychology” that boast to know all the existence problems of the humans and pretend to have an answer to all of them. To use the parameters introduced in the third chapter we can say something about the narrative plan behind the piece.

- 1) **Plot:** is multidimensional and I will explain how I shaped the form at the Macro level in the next paragraph.
- 2) **Setting:** the origin of the musical material is Jazz with some influences of modal music.
- 3) **Characterization:** the methods that I used to present the musical ideas will be discussed later in the next paragraph.
- 4) **Atmosphere:** the general mood is ironic, but there are some points in which I created the feeling of frustrations generated by the inner struggle derived from her mixed feelings of happiness and delusions. Of course this is achieved within the use of Jazz language and irony.
- 5) **Point of View:** the story is narrated by the Soprano but there is one moment in the middle of the piece in which she speaks using the words of the psychologist – this text is taken from Freud’s explanation of dreams<sup>11</sup>.
- 6) **Conflict:** the emotional trigger is the inner struggle derived by the contrasting feelings that an artist, but also everybody, lives swinging between happiness, pride, sadness and frustration.

The choice of using a Soprano with the orchestra is meant to represent, with more emphasis, the image of “prima donna”, willing to give her life for the moment of the performance. The historical role of the soprano is ideal to create this dimension of the show. In this sense, the psychoanalytic session’s room becomes the stage of the performance.

In the next paragraphs I will show how I worked on Macro level to shape the form of the piece and on Micro level working on musical devices.

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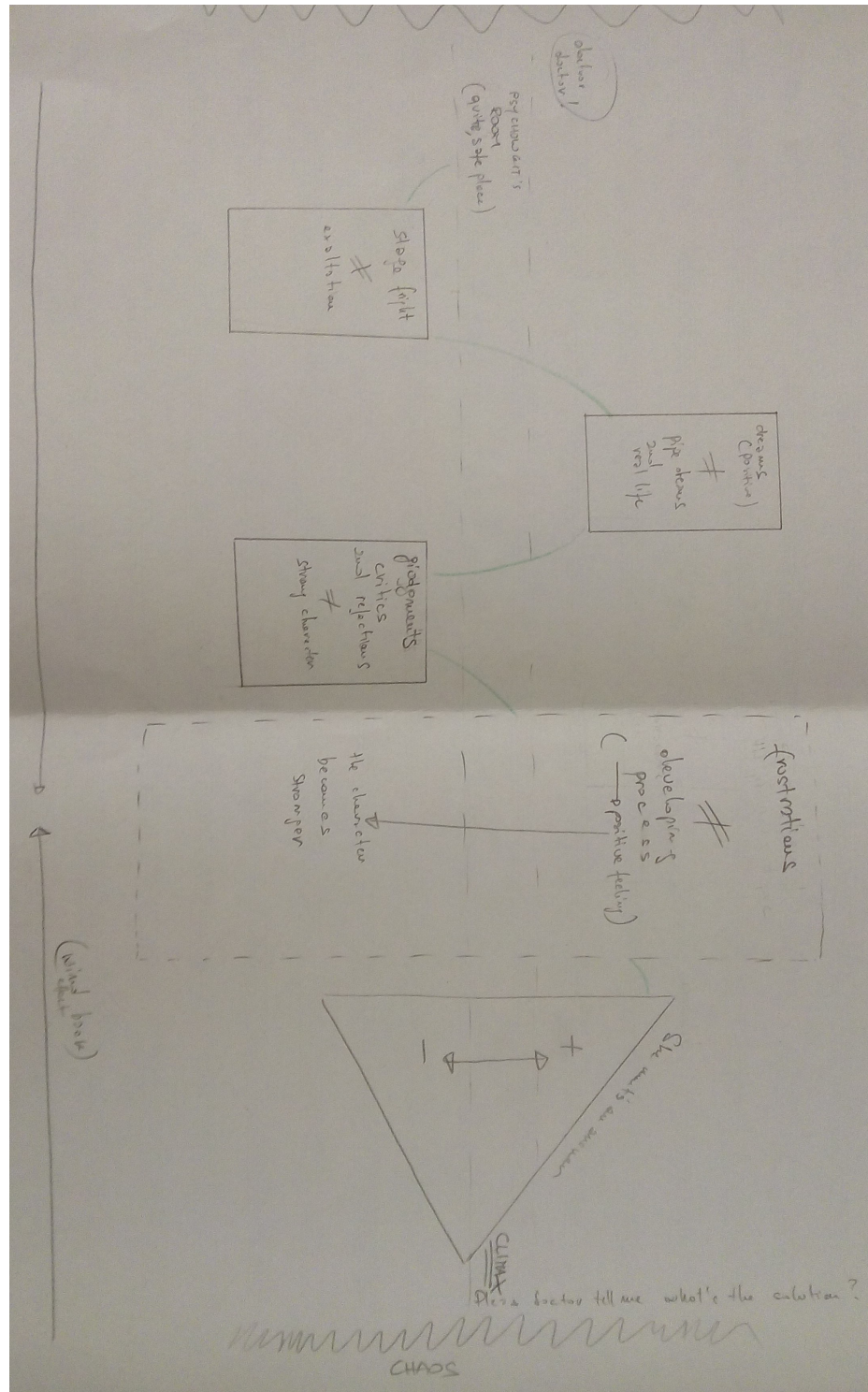
<sup>11</sup> Freud, Sigmund “*The Interpretation of Dreams*” - the Illustrated Edition, Sterling Press 2010



### 3.5 Plotting the musical story

In this paragraph I will explain how I worked - starting from the concept and the general idea that I presented above - to shape the form of the composition.

Since it was a commission<sup>12</sup>, the length of the piece was imposed: 6 minutes maximum. Therefore I had to put boundaries to the form.



Pic. 12 Plot of "I know the answer" (C.E. Patti)

<sup>12</sup> The Big Day – Rotterdam De Doelen – 28/03/2015- Codarts Contemporary Jazz Orchestra



The idea was to create a multidimensional narration, switching the point of view between the consciousness of the artist and the “safe environment” of the psychologist’s room. The plot is organized in a linear way - because the timeline - and the “motif” of the room recurs constantly, giving the feeling of continuity. Within this main path there are moments resembling the consciousness of the artist. The music is the expression of her feelings and the lyrics work as an external comment to them.

In the next picture you can see my plan at the Macro level. This was my first step in turning the story into a musical story.

Staying at the Macro level, the piece is in general based on contrasts. The piece starts with the protagonist entering in the psychologist’s room. At the end all the feelings get into a sort of climax, the moment in which she gets really nervous and in which the Soprano asks for an answer to her problems. There is no answer and the piece ends with a cluster, the same that opens the curtain on the story, creating a frame in which it is developed. In this case the sketch is like a storyboard - on which is based the piece - and differs from the ones that I showed in the first chapter - representing the evolution of musical parameters within the piece.

Through this sketch it was easy to create and develop musical material at the Micro level in relation with the content that I wanted to represent within the timeline. As we can see, I chose a different approach to write a Jazz piece. All the choices regarding the harmonic progressions, the techniques used to orchestrate the musical material came later when I started to organize the Micro level.

At this level the narrative approach is related to the program instead of the organization of the musical material. In the next paragraph I will show how I have organized the Micro level to translate the meanings into sounds. Before going further I want to point out some excerpts from the score, so that it is possible to visualize the sections that I showed in the *Pic. 12*. After the cluster chord in bar n.1 - in which the listener is catapulted into the story - the first section (rehearsal mark 1) begins. The waltz is the musical expression of the “safe environment” of the room. The skepticism of the protagonist is represented through the use of a poly-meter structure with empty bars to create a sense of intermittence in the steady pulse of the waltz. The way I constructed the groove in this section - since waltz is groove-related - is functional. The displacement of the bass, which is never on the downbeat and the rhythmical matrix in the strings work like a texture underneath the horizontal development of the melodies in the woodwinds and in the vocal part.

Through the piece there are several episodes in which the protagonist describes her fears and worries; the music resembles the mood, changing gradually the waltz into a more “agitated” groove in  $\frac{3}{4}$ . The more the piece goes on, the more the anxious feeling increases. Since the plot is not linear and it is based on shifting of behaviors, I used some musical devices to point out the changes of mood and the first statement (“the psychologist’s room”). In general I used the same key to represent this first statement and I moved to other keys to represent the inner journey of the protagonist.

To point out this changing I used the triplet motif - that opens and closes the piece. When the music goes back to the original key, the listener perceives a sense of relief. The more I go far from the original musical statement, the more the memory of the listener recalls the main path. This device was useful to create the depth in the musical narration and it opens a new way of unfolding a musical story. We can find a clear example of this strategy in the excerpt among the bar before the rehearsal mark 6 and 8, where the waltz starts again. At that point, it is continually interrupted to suggest the real changing of mood of the protagonist who gets really anxious. This is created by the musical transition (rehearsal mark 10) that brings the listener to a new episode. This is the only point in which the Soprano speaks, or better sings, with the words of the psychologist. It is a moment in which she becomes aware of her situation and, through the words of Freud, she describes with detachment what dreams represent in our mind. The waltz is turned in an austere jazz waltz. The density here is low, and the instrumentation is really empty (just a jazz trio with the singer) to point out the cold attitude with which she describes the dreams. After few bars, the background starts and, increasing the density, the transition goes to the central part of the piece. In this part I used the orchestra as a real jazz orchestra, bringing the musical language more to jazz.

From rehearsal mark 11, a new section starts and the previous musical material is elaborated in a more “jazzy” way. From the rehearsal mark 15, the waltz is back again, but the function of it now is changed. It doesn't cheer up the protagonist anymore, but it becomes a motor of a more intense groovy section that closes the piece. In this part the soprano, after her psychological journey, finds the strength to grab her life and turning it in a stronger way.

She becomes stronger but, at the same time, she stays “moody” and she will ask at the end of the piece: “Doctor what is the solution?”, leaving the audience to imagine a possible answer. This episode that closes the piece is based on addictive rhythm.

The groove matrix is developed through the whole orchestra creating a sense of chaos, underlined with the use of the scat by the soprano. She tries to overcome the groove leading, without success, the orchestra. At the end of the piece after her question, we can find again the triplet that also opened the piece. It was my choice to give a sort of frame to the composition, that it meant to create strong boundaries around this surreal story.

## CONCLUSIONS

At the end of this research process I can make two different types of considerations and draw different conclusions. One is about my point of view as a composer and the second is about the artistic outcome of this research. I can say that the process was interesting and it affected my way of composing jazz music, allowing me experimenting new methods to elaborate the musical material within the jazz language. It affected my way of composing in three ways:

- 1) I use the narrative approach to plot my musical story and I shape the form of my compositions, by avoiding filling pre-defined forms (*see chapter 2*).
- 2) I also choose the jazz language for a composition (e.g. certain types of chord progressions, which sound jazz) as a consequence of a choice that follows a narrative need (*see chapter 3*).
- 3) I learned to organize material at a Macro level, which is useful to balance the musical ideas within the piece (*see chapter 3.1 and 4*).

On top of these three points, the improvisation, in this way, results more balanced and more homogeneous with the rest of the piece. The role of improvisation gets more important, it is not the pretest to let the players improvising but it has a precise narrative value (*see chapter 3*).

Narrative approach in groove-related music means combining it with the constructive approach, which is needful to build the groove matrix in order to hold up the piece. I experimented how to combine these two approaches that seemed at the start of my research far with one another. The solution I found, was to limit the constructive approach to the Micro level as a “tool” to organize the musical material in rhythm (*see chapter 2.3 and 3.3*). I found it effective to present the parallelism with the idea of a mosaic to show what I think about this double approach. The constructive approach is about the organization at the Micro level and the narrative approach is at the Macro level. By thinking on this, it is possible to combine and use them together. This is possible if I am able to constantly switch from one level to another during the composition process.

Translating the elements of narration into music, gave me the opportunity to broad my musical language and not limiting myself to the use of the jazz harmony - and in general the Jazz language - in a traditional sense. The aesthetics is an effect of the composing process and it is not the trigger of it. Just to give an example: when I want to use the swing in a big band piece, I use it because there is an important reason for my musical story and not because I am writing a jazz piece for big band. This research changed my way to approach jazz composition and music composition in general.

As I have already said, through musical narration, it is possible to take elements from different genres. This was also an opportunity to broad my musical language as a composer.

The negative aspect of it is that, sometimes, it is easy to abuse the “cliché” belonging to the musical genre from which we get inspired. That because, when trying to resemble meanings into music, we look for something that it is clearly understandable to the listener.

For example, when we want to write a lullaby it is really common to use certain type of harmony, rhythm and melodic shape. We should look for a sort of archetype, in order to focus the attention on the musical gesture that it represents, and not considering only the average musical representation of it. This is an aspect that I am still trying to improve; in fact, I do not say that the artistic outcome of this research shows a perfect example of the representation of meanings into music. I can say anyway that they represent, compared to my previous compositions and my “zero-point composition”, a good result of the use of form and a good attempt to write music using a personal language.

When I started to research on the role of perception I had the feeling that I was looking for something that was not clearly defined. All the theories around it are controversial and we can find several points of view. At a certain point of the process, I decided to take what I thought was important for me as a composer to create a series of tools useful to manipulate the musical material in order to increase its dramatic power. I learned how to treat the groove, and how to play with the expectations of the listener (see chapter 2.3). That was an interesting result for me.

In my second Intervention Cycle, I found out also that if we want to tell a good story, we have to address the story to the audience. This made me to think that the relation between the composer and the audience is important and it affects the way to tell the story and the choice of the musical material.

After these considerations it can be said that I got several answers to my research questions:

**How can I relate the aspects of form to the aspects of my musical narration?**

**How can I extend my narrative abilities in groove-related music composition?**

It is possible to use the aspects of form in relation with the aspects of musical narration in order to plot our musical story and it is possible to do it in “groove”. Through narrative approach I organize the musical story at the Macro level. The use of musical devices, which involves the organization of musical ideas at the Micro level, is possible using constructive approach. In this way the constructive approach is linked to the narrative approach. The groove – that is something considered fixed for its repetitive character - is the expressions of the contrasts that make up the musical narration.

## SCORES AND AUDIO RECORDINGS:

(Scores and audio recordings are in the media content CD)

- *"4Songs4Seasons"* for solo violin (C.E. Patti)
- *"Dreams come true as long as the alarm goes off"* for clarinet and piano (C.E. Patti)
- *"A Pessimist's night dream"* for saxophone quartet - Sleep Rough, Obsession, Lullaby for an Inconsolable Pessimist (C.E. Patti)
- *"Come Foglie, e il vento in Autunno"* for large ensemble and voice (C.E. Patti)
- *"I know the answer"* for soprano and Jazz orchestra (C.E. Patti)

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## NETWORK:

