

Berklee College of Music

**A holistic approach to the creation of music**

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>1.INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.JUSTIFICATION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.APPROACHES FOR THE COMPOSER PERFORMER .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3.1. STORY DRIVEN COMPOSITION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3.2. PERFORMING WITH AWARENESS .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4.METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>4.1. PRACTICING WITH A PURPOSE .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>4.2 SEPARATING PRACTICE FROM CREATION .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>4.3. KEEPING IT SIMPLE. THE RULE OF SIX.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>4.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF A JOURNAL.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>5.CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>6.BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>31</b>

## **Abstract**

This project is a documentative essay in which I will explain some of the methods and approaches I've been using throughout the years, and in the Master's course at Berklee Valencia in the 2018-19 year, that have helped me have a better grasp on how to convey a story when composing or performing, while staying true to myself, and be more efficient with my creative process. These approaches, and the research behind how they came to be, have helped me understand more the most effective ways I can work with when creating music, or practicing. In this documentative work, I will explain the inspirations and origins of this approaches, and will be relating them to the compositional process I've been involved in this year, writing and recording demos of my pieces, and taking part in the recordings of the musicians I've worked with throughout the year, as well as to my daily practice routines. I strive with this work to show the "how" and "why" of my creative process, so that in the future it might help someone incorporate some of the approaches stated into their own way of creating, or to inspire them to explore the way they work, to hopefully understand themselves as musicians in a deeper manner.

*Keywords:* composition, performance, practice, drums, approaches.

## **1.Introduction**

Throughout the years, I've spent countless hours developing my technique, sound and knowledge as a musician in a mostly self-taught manner. While I've had a couple of private teachers here and there, most of my theoretic knowledge has come from my personal investigation, study, and practice, until I enrolled in the 2018-19 Master's in Contemporary Performance (Production Concentration) at Berklee Valencia. From this self-disciplinary way of learning, in which I explored the essentials and most of my theoretic knowledge, I've developed an identity and sound I considered as my own. In this examination and documentative work, I intend to present a series of approaches I use when performing, composing, recording, practicing, and overall all the areas I work in as a musician. My intention with this is to show the benefits and possibilities of having an approach that focuses on the overall meaning and purpose of what we want to create or convey, which in my case would be telling a story through music. A holistic approach refers to how all the elements that make up a given thing, relate to the overall purpose of it, it's about thinking of everything in relation to the bigger picture, much like we as musicians follow a dress code for certain concerts to compliment the music, or how a picture frame is picked with care and much thought to make the art have a bigger impact.

It is implied, that when it comes to art no single approach or way of thinking is correct or incorrect due to the subjective factors of taste, influences, upbringings... and that this investigational work only presents my personal view on topics such as harmony, melody, rhythm, improvisation, composition, soloing, or practice. All of the approaches and methods that will be presented in this project must be taken as a point of view, rather than a statement,

as even though I'll give insight into mostly macro-concepts related to the creation of music, I by no means discard the importance of theory and the already established concepts that are prevalent in the theoretic/academic field, as they are supposed to be explored with just as much depth as the broader concepts I'll be expanding on, and used in correlation to one another, and without them I couldn't have been able to apply the approaches I will mention. This is not an essay debating if an academic background is better than a self-taught one, but an exposition on why myself, having had such a heavy self-disciplinary upbringing, and now being also involved in an academic one, can see the benefits on merging purely theoretical content with an exploration process in which influences from other fields of art such as literature, film-making, cooking...etc, can benefit any artist, and enable a more purposeful way of music-making.

With this work, I will present the methods and approaches mentioned, relating them to already existing performances or compositions that I've used as inspiration throughout the years, to compositions I've been a part of this year while at Berklee or to my own compositional and practice process. I'll divide this essay into three chapters. The first one will explore my way of looking at rhythm, melody and harmony, the three most crucial aspects of any musical composition, what they represent to me, and how we can use them cleverly when trying to convey a story, seeing the correlation between the three of them. I will present analogies that might help both anyone without any knowledge of the manner to understand them, and musicians who already know these concepts to see them differently, while giving an insight on my process and way of composing, showing my demos as examples of how I try to convey a story with music. Chapter two will relate more to the performing side of an artist, sharing some concepts and theories I use when taking part in the compositions of other musicians, or when playing in a live setting, helping them tell their own narrative. In the last chapter of this essay,

I will show how I've come up and developed these approaches throughout the years, examining my practice routines and some methods and tools I use on a daily basis to help me use these concepts effectively, and that prepare me for any musical situation that might benefit from these approaches.

## **2. Justification**

This essay came about through my need of finding a way of conveying a story to myself and anyone who listened to my compositions or performances. In my early years of practicing I always found similarities between the fields of cooking, film-making, and literature, the way artists in those fields worked, and how musicians create. All of these artists spent countless hours refining their craft and polishing the techniques and knowledge necessary to achieve a purpose with their art. In my case that purpose has always been conveying a story through my music, as that's the feeling I got out of listening to my favorite composers, such as "Chopin", "Ryuichi Sakamoto", "The Reign of Kindo", and many more. As time passed, I came across some approaches that even though originated from art fields outside of music, worked for my creative process, after doing some research on how artists from other fields created, and how their methods could be incorporated into my own process. For me, the compositions that have inspired me profoundly throughout the years have usually not been the most difficult ones, but those that have a clear structure, that convey a narrative, and that make you feel as if you just read a novel, watched a movie, or listened to the most wonderful story told by those who lived it. From this, I decided I would always approach music from a broader, more general point of view, as I firmly believe musicians are as much of storytellers as any writer, painter, or sculptor, and should explore ways to convey a meaning with their craft.

I see great importance in showing the way I create, to not only expand on these concepts and theories in the future as a composer and performer, and in my practice routines, but to also use them as a method of teaching, as throughout the years, when doing so privately I've come to the realization that most students give too much attention to the overly-specific concepts, theories and techniques, while forgetting to give attention to the why all of these topics came about, which was to express an idea and ourselves. My journey as a musician and student, in both the non-academical and academical field have inspired me to see the benefits of both fields, and also the flaws or obstacles that can rise from having a narrow mindset in them. With this essay I don't intend anything more than showing myself as an artist, the process I embark on when composing, performing, or practicing, and my vision. No matter the background of any artist, I believe it is imperative that we keep an open mindset about the array of possibilities that can come from looking at creation with an open mind, getting inspiration not only from our specific field of art, but also the ones that while on paper can seem unrelated, in reality they are.

For me this is the only way I've seen I can create. When composing, I've noticed that if I don't have a clear understanding of the story I want to convey, it all falls apart, the harmony starts feeling empty or uninspired and the melodies begin sounding forgettable and shallow. When performing too, if I don't adopt an aware and present attitude, playing to say or tell something, I start feeling dishonest and vague. And so, even though this reflective paper is nothing but a subjective essay on how I target these aspects of music, that can have an infinite amount of approaches from one musician to another, the relevance of it comes from the importance of each musician analyzing, and realizing why we do what we love, how we do it, and all the thought process behind it.

This work therefore is nothing more than an ode to the joy of creating art with an open mind, a presentation on my own way of looking at music.

### **3.Approaches for the composer performer**

#### **3.1. Story driven composition**

When it comes to harmony, melody, and rhythm, a lot of theory starts taking the main role of the conversation. Chord progressions, tensions, cadences, syncopation, polyrhythms, modes... etc... Obviously, theoretic knowledge must be used and incorporated when trying to compose based with these three concepts, but to me, it's more about driving the creation of music to the story one wants to convey with them. I've spend a lot of time learning the musical theory needed to compose, both in a self-taught manner, searching and reading books, and in my academical year at Berklee Valencia, and still, after almost 12 years of playing music, I keep using them only after finishing a composition by ear, in case there is a problem in the composition, or some areas on it that could be improved.

An example I always come back to when starting a new composition is thinking of the piece as if I was telling a clear story, relating the harmony to the setting, melody to the characters, and rhythm as the pace of the narration. With this in mind, before embarking on a new composition I always write a short narration, a description of the story I want to tell with the piece I'm going to start composing. This helps me intensively when creating music, as by doing so I can clearly see the different sections of the song, that will correlate to the introduction, body, and conclusion of the story. I can also see with this the different



characteristics of those parts, as for example if I want the middle section of the story to have a sadder feel, I will modulate to a minor key, or add more tensions to the melody, or play more with diminished and half-diminished chords... etc, if I want a character of the story to come back only in the later part of the story, then maybe I'll assign a melodic phrase to that character, or if I want the story to experience a break in the pace, much like a flashback in a movie, I'll play with the rhythmic instrumentation. This technique is easy to do before composing, and for me it's proven to be quite useful.

In my composition "Trust", I used this mentioned approach. The composition is about the concept of trust, and how when its broken, even when it appears to be gained back, it's not the same. As so, before sitting in the piano, I wrote this short piece of text to dictate the music:

"This piece is about the fragility of trust. Trust is a gift, a beautiful one that few get, and must cherish, as it's fragile like glass. Takes so little to break, and when it shatters, you can always glue it back, and put all the pieces back together, but the crevasses are visible, and even though it's put together again, it will never change back to its original state"

This very short piece of text gave me more insight about where I wanted to take my composition than all the theory I learnt to that point. With those four lines of text I decided to divide my composition into three segments: Trust being given, trust being broken, and then rebuilt again to not be the same. Three sections of the composition, one more welcoming, another more fragile, edgy and uncomfortable, and one final section, that somehow has to convey a similar feeling to the first section, but changed. With this in mind, I created a A - B - (solos) - C structure, the A section having a much more calm and gentle melody (which is supposed to be trust itself) than the B section, in which the melody is descending chromatically

with of the chords. Later on, after the solos, in which the trumpet accompanies the piano (which is the voice for the main protagonist of the story I move on to the C section. In this section I came across the question: ¿how do I convey the feeling of trust being given back and not being the same? After questioning this, I came back to my analogy of harmony being the setting, and melody being the characters. If trust is the character, and what has changed for the worse is the situation, then a harmonic changed would be the way to go. I assigned after this the chord progression of the B section, a much more dark and uncomfortable feeling one, to the same exact melody of the A section. With this, I aimed to achieve the narrative process of telling, through music, that a situation can make a change for the worse, while seeming the same.

Joe Sturges

**A**

1m (add11)      bVIIIm (add6)      bVI(add6)      IVdim7

Gm(add4)      Fm<sup>6</sup>      Cm<sup>7</sup>/Eb      C<sup>°</sup>7

5      1m (add11)      bVIIIm (add6)      bVI(add6)      V7

Gm(add4)      Fm<sup>6</sup>      Cm<sup>7</sup>/Eb      D<sup>7</sup>

2

**Outro**

19      1m (add11)      #VII 6(b5)      VIIIm6      IV/5

Gm(add4)      F<sup>#</sup>6(b5)      Fm<sup>6</sup>      C/G

23      bVI(add6)      Im7/5      IVm7      IVm7 (b5)/b3

Cm<sup>7</sup>/Eb      Gm<sup>7</sup>/D      Cm<sup>7</sup>      Cm<sup>7</sup>(b5)/Eb

This composition, while having a very simple approach, in which the phrase of the melody in the A section signifies the character or feeling of trust, while the harmony throughout the song dictates the change of situations, was one of my first approaches at creating with a story in mind beforehand. With a story at hand, the overall feeling can come with more ease.

This types of ways of thinking at composition can come naturally when composing without being too aware of it, as harmony is based on change, while melodies are much more prone to be repeated, but if we as composers assign these meanings to the melody-harmony and rhythm while writing, the compositions will breathe a much more real and relatable attitude.

This approach of relating musical concepts to elements of the story is not new, and a lot of composers I've drawn inspiration from throughout the years, such as "Richard Wagner" or "Howard Shore" among many others, have developed ways of relating theory to a story, with examples such as the "leitmotif" being incorporated in many composer's way of writing music. The leitmotif, which is a concept I explored while at Berklee Valencia after realizing the influence of Howards Shore's pieces in my compositions, is "a short, uncomplicated musical phrase or theme, usually ne to three measures, which is employed, and reused, by the composer when he deems it (Bribitzer-Stull 2015, Cambridge University). It's a technique explored and initiated by Richard Wagner, with the most noticeable example of this being his four piece musical drama "Der Ring des Nibelungen", in which this leitmotif "became a musical theme representative of a figure, an event, an emotion, a thought, an idea, or a concept in the drama, which theme he repeated, often in subtle but distinct, varying, and often tempered

pitch, tone, and/or intensity according to the interpretive demands of his dramatic argument” (Bribitzer-Stull 2015, Cambridge University). For example, the “Tarnhelm Leitmotif” was a seven-bar melodic phrase that Richard Wagener used whenever the “Tarnhelm” (a magical helmet that enabled “Mime”, one of the characters of the drama, to shapeshift) appeared, signaling to the audience the relevance of this magical object, and establishing a strong musical connection with it. It’s a motif played by French horns, with a very somber and mysterious sound that correlates to the meaning of the item.



(Music notation obtained from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N82zEAbWyT4>, “25 Tarnhelm: Des Ring Des Nibelungen”)

Since then, and with special relevance in film composition, as the relationship of the visuals with the music makes this correlation much more obvious, composers have been using these approaches to not only create a stand-alone musical experience, but also one that relates to a story and a general purpose. Howard Shore showed a similar approach in his work for “The Lord of The Rings” trilogy, a huge inspiration to my compositional projects. In these films, Shore relates leitmotifs to characters, regions, and situations, changing them accordingly when the overall arch of the story changes. From all of the leitmotifs he uses, the most important ones are the theme for the “One Ring” which Howard considers as the main theme of the trilogy, the “Themes for Mordor”, the “Themes of the Hobbits” or “The Shire”, and the “Themes of the Fellowship”. All of these themes are based on short melodic passages with which the listener can identify the thematic outline of the scenes. Howard Shore, while writing the score, considered the immense amount of changes the characters experience in this

adventure, with the fellowship splitting, the main protagonists feeling homebound, the forces of evil taking the upper hand, or hope coming back at times of need. With this in mind, he modified these themes accordingly, creating a beautiful landscape of sound, in which the soundtrack itself tells a story just as good as the visual one. As an example, let's focus on the "Shire Theme", which represents the Shire (the home of the hobbits) and home, and occurs a many time whenever the Shire is mentioned or one of the hobbits talks of going home. It is often played with a pennywise, which gives the song a warm and comforting feeling. This theme sounds multiple times throughout the trilogy, but it is the moments that Shore picks to put this theme in, and the instrumentation, that gives it a whole different dimension. Three examples of how Howard varies this leitmotif are in the songs "Concerning Hobbits", "The Breaking of the Fellowship", and "The Black Gate Opens". All three of these songs contain the mentioned "Shire Theme", but with variations so it suits the story, and tells one of its own. In the first one "Concerning Hobbits" we hear the leitmotif played on a tin whistle, a very traditional instrument, is later on accompanied by a fiddle mainly. In this variation of the leitmotif, the orchestration gives a welcoming and comforting feeling, as the traditional instruments often resemble the sound of rural areas and festivities. On the second song mentioned, "The breaking of the Fellowship", the same motif is played on a string orchestra, slowed down, and played only in a broken down manner, to seem familiar to the listener, and give a feeling of nostalgia, as we recall the theme of the hobbits, yet it's not quite the same, only to bring the leitmotif fully after a string section passage, this time with a flute. The flute has a warmer sound than the tin whistle, it seems more distant and nostalgic, this paired up with where this song is placed (when the fellowship of the ring is broken, and Bilbo, the companion of Frodo, proves its loyalty, following him, and venturing further away from home), makes the leitmotif have a very different effect than in "Concerning Hobbits", as it is not so cheerful anymore, but distant, and nostalgic. In the last example mentioned, "The Black Gate

Opens”, the protagonists Frodo and Bilbo are at the last point of the adventure, and the furthest away from home. Bilbo tries to make Frodo remember the shire, mentioning the fields, the food, the people... while the leitmotif mentioned is playing in the background, though, as he is consumed by the weight of the ring, he can't remember, and so the leitmotif doesn't get to finish, and the melody of the Shire doesn't play in its entirety. Both the scene and the music work in perfect conjunction in, as when Sam mentions the shire, the leitmotif plays, not in its entirety though. Paired up with the description of their home, the orchestra plays an extended passage that breaks the leitmotif, as if it can't be finished unless Frodo remembers the shire.

The leitmotif is a powerful tool one can use subconsciously when trying to put a familiar melody in a different harmonic environment, as the overall chord-scale relationship changes, and the effect the melody has changes with it, much like when a character is being put in a different location or situation. Howard Shore has been a big inspiration to my work throughout the years, and I've tried to learn from how he uses the leitmotif, incorporating a similar approach to my pieces, like in the example of “Trust” stated before.

In my composition “Summer” I use a similar method than in “Trust” but rather than using melody of harmony as the main tool for storytelling, I used rhythm. Throughout the song, there is a very constant mid-high dynamic groove done by the upright and the drums, that camouflages the very diatonic melody, and make it seem very busy. When the rhythm section drops out after the solos, and only cymbals remain, the composition acquires a much more soothing and calming attitude, driven by the simple melody. This composition is supposed to represent how fond memories arise without our knowledge, as distracted by the busyness and fast-paced rhythm of the day to day tasks (rhythm section), we only come back to the memory, after time passes. The melody from the A and B sections doesn't differ too much from the C

section one, all three sections have very diatonic melodies, without a lot of subdivisions, but the charm of it is only noticeable when taking away the rhythm section. Again, like how I did in Trust, I wrote a short narration before starting the composition process, that helped me identifying the different parts and moods of the story. “Distracted by the day to day tasks, a memory is only created after time passes, and only the memory remains”. This short phrase already gave me three blocks in which I divided the song, the “A” and “B” section, in which the melody is hidden with the busy rhythm section, the Solo section (a vamp over Cm7 and Bbmaj7, supposed to represent time passing) and the C section, in which the piano is the only thing that remains with simple cymbal ornamentation, representing how the memory is the only thing remaining.

### **3.2. Performing with awareness**

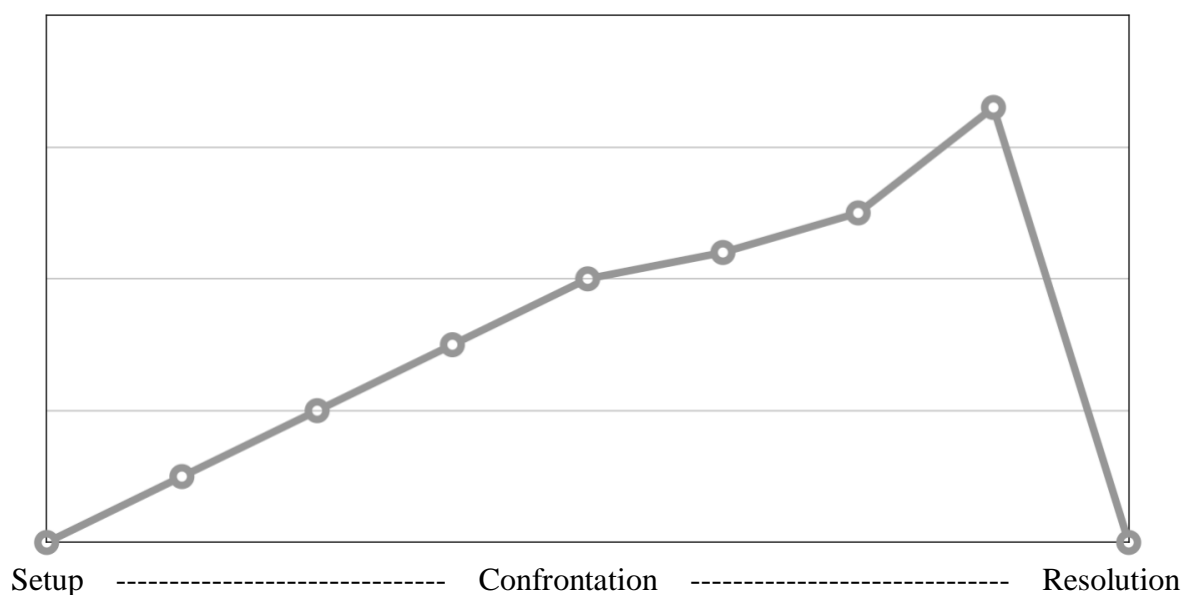
As musicians and performers, we are going to be playing on stage and in the studio quite frequently. With this in mind, it is mandatory that while doing so we maintain an aware and honest approach, as it is very easy to fall prey to trying to show off or being egocentric, instead of thinking of the music. This is especially important in jazz as a lot of time musicians are in the spotlight of the solo. Through solos one is able to present themselves as a person with their playing, but that opportunity is wasted if we decide to show off arrogantly. Soloing and improvisation became a key element to my practice time, as I wanted to be able to, just like I do when speaking to someone, be able to follow a narrative, and contribute to it. In this case, I found some approaches that relate to cooking and literature, that helped me develop this mind-set.

In my teenage years, I was mesmerized by the similarities between cooking and music. Both are arts that require a lot of training and technique to be able to get the sounds out of the instruments or the flavors out of the ingredients. Both require a fair bit of awareness when playing or cooking, as even though a chef may like certain flavors on its own, or a musician certain techniques or chords, or voicings or scales, if those ingredients are put incorrectly in conjunction to one another, you'll end up with a poorly done dish. Even an extra amount of salt or pepper, or a tiny bit of overplaying can make a plate taste bad, and a song or solo seem more like a monologue from the performer, rather than a conversation.

Jiro Ono, the 93-year-old world class sushi chef, owner of Sukiyabashi Jiro, has a very interesting view on sushi making, and he has become throughout the years a big inspiration to me. In his restaurant, he only accepts a very limited number of guests (eight), to which he elaborates a stablished menu with no choice for the consumer, as he believes in the storytelling of the dishes. He crafts each sushi piece with care, technique, and knowledge, and every one of them compliments the previous piece, and paves the way to the next one, through the relationship the different ingredients and flavors have between each other. He divides the experience into three parts, with sushi pieces that complement each other and make each section of the menu cohesive (Yusuke-s, 29-07-2018, JW Web Magazine) . From this I learnt that, if a sushi chef can achieve this level of story-telling, dividing the experience into three parts, much like a story (introduction, body and conclusion) why wouldn't we as musicians be able to do the same? With this in mind, I always aim to divide my solos and improvisational pieces into segments that are easily recognizable, cohesive, and thematic. While taking part in the recordings of my fellow classmates this year, I've had the opportunity to work and play in a variety of songs and compositions. In all of them, when given the chance to solo, I divide any improvisational segment into easily recognizable parts, that divide the solo into thematic



segments, and help tell the story in a better way. Choby Scheufler asked me to take part in the recording of his composition “Dile a Mi Madre”. This composition makes way for a drum mallet solo section in the middle of the song. I divided the solo into two parts using a similar approach than Jiro. The composition is about the death of his father, a very mournful and quite sad story, and so this solo would discredit the meaning of the song, and make it less cohesive if it was all about the fast and technique driven grooves. After knowing that I had to deliver on a minimalistic and sentimental approach, I tuned the drums to a similar tonality than the song scale, as mallets make getting the tone out of the drums much easier, and allow for a more melodic way of drumming to be explored with much more depth. With all these tools I then divided the solo into three acts following the “Three-act” structure concept prevalent in so many movies and stories, and a very similar approach to the one mentioned by Jiro Ono. This three-act structure is a very simple tool that has proven to be very useful to screenwriters when trying to convey a story in an effective and relatable way. In a nutshell. The three acts are labeled as setup, confrontation, and resolution (Moura, 01,06,2014, elementsofcinema.com) . A very simple visual representation of the Three Act structure can be following:



The setup is where the main characters of any story are introduced, in this case my story being the solo and the characters being the notes, the tensions, and the different colors of the drums. On the confrontation, these characters evolve and start interacting more and more between each other, and with the elements of the story, which in this case relate to these notes having more subdivisions, the dynamics evolving, and the space or places in which I don't play having a bigger importance in the overall aspect of the solo. The confrontation is a very interesting part of any solo, as in my opinion it can make it or break it. If in the solo I executed in "Dile a mi madre" I incorporated a new and different color in the middle of the solo, like for example a percussive instrument that wasn't played before in the song, it would've created a disconnection with the story, as if a new character got introduced in the middle segment of a dramatic scene without any background or meaning behind it. Knowing this I find it very important that, when playing a solo, I take all of this information into account, as introducing new colors or sounds in such an important section, can break the continuity and identity of the song. After the confrontation a resolution takes place, in which usually the climax is reached, to then end the story. Resolutions are very hard to approach in a solo, as the solo normally appears in the middle section of a song, and so using the solo as a conclusion of the whole piece doesn't have the same effect, as if two climaxes would take place in a story. Normally I've experienced that my solos end with the confrontation, or in the climax sometimes, as in a compositional setting, after the solos, the songs usually end with another chorus, or another section. This is exactly what happened in Choby's piece. I needed to end my solo in the confrontation, and after it the last chorus would come, triggering the climax in that last chorus, and ending the song in the last section of the resolution, the lowest dynamic point.

Much like a children's story, I try to start my solos simple, and add more intricacies as it goes on, releasing the tension in the conclusion, and finishing the narration. From Jiro and chefs in general I also learnt the importance of simplicity. Jiro states in the documentary "Jiro Dreams of Sushi" that the most important ingredient is rice, not the fish, or the sauce, but rice. Rice is the foundation, the basis of any sushi plate. Rice, fish, and sauce are the three most crucial ingredients that he uses in his dishes. The beauty of simplicity. With this I got inspired by the significance of the simple foundations of music, and the importance of not oversaturating the listener on solos. It's very easy to, in a piano solo, modulate to different scales, add as many tensions as possible, go from one mode to another... or in rhythm solos to play as many strokes as possible, bombarding the listener with as much sound as one can play. From my point of view, the beauty of solos lies on the effortless approach to telling a story with the tools we as musicians have (technique, harmonic knowledge, orchestration... etc). I applied these to the solo I did on "Dile a mi Madre", utilizing three tools (tensions by pitch bending, dynamics and subdivisions) as my principal ways of driving the story.

Another instance in which I decided to incorporate these "Three Act Structure" much like Jiro does in his menus was in my composition "Three Days Under a Moon". This piece, which is one of my more classically influenced ones, is supposed to represent being unable to live the moment. While composing, I got mesmerized by the constant change of mostly half diminished, diminished, and minor chords in a chromatic manner, with a melody that justifies the almost non-functional harmony in this piece. By writing these chord changes, that are mostly represented by constant quarter notes, I tried to convey the feeling of things not stopping, always changing, and never really settling. The piece ends in a C minor chord, that, while it would seem resolved, as that would be the first degree, the tonic, has the fifth sharpened. I did this to end the piece on an unstable sonority, so the purpose of the story is

fulfilled. As stated, I divided the piece into three parts, much like the “Three Act Structure” explained before. The first sections state the mood and sonority with of the piece, like the introduction of a film or novel presents the main characters and setting. In the second part, which is the longest, I play with the dynamics and the space in between the chords, as the second part of the section is the longest one, and therefore has the most changes. In the final section, we reach the climax of the song, being heard by a wave of quarter note triplet cluster chords, the busiest subdivision in the song.

# 3 Days under a Moon

Joe Sturges

♩ = 72

1

Piano *Espressivo*

Fm(add9)/G F<sup>o</sup>/G G(b9) Cm<sup>7</sup>/Eb F<sup>o</sup>/D

Pno.

Fm<sup>6</sup> B<sup>o</sup>/F Cm<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>(sus4) F<sup>7</sup>/C

Pno.

Fm<sup>7</sup>/C F<sup>o</sup>/D Bb<sup>7</sup>/D Cm<sup>7</sup> F<sup>o</sup>/D

2

Pno.

Dm<sup>7</sup>(b5) Dm<sup>7</sup>(b5) Ebmaj<sup>7</sup>(sus4)/D Ebmaj<sup>7</sup>(sus4)/D

Pno.

Dm<sup>7</sup>(b5) Dm<sup>7</sup>(b5) Ebmaj<sup>7</sup>/D Ebmaj<sup>7</sup>/D

Pno.

C<sup>o</sup> C<sup>o</sup> Fm<sup>7</sup>/C F<sup>o</sup>/D

2

26

Pno.

Cm<sup>7</sup> Cm<sup>7</sup> Fm<sup>6</sup>(add9) Fm<sup>6</sup>(add9)

31

Pno.

F<sup>m7</sup> F<sup>m7</sup> Ab<sup>m</sup> Ab<sup>°</sup>

35

Pno.

Cm<sup>7</sup>/Eb Cm<sup>7</sup>/Eb Eb<sup>7</sup> Eb<sup>7</sup>

39

Pno.

Dm<sup>7</sup>(b9) Dm<sup>7</sup>(b9) F<sup>m7</sup>/D F<sup>m7</sup>/D

3

43

Pno.

Fm<sup>6</sup>(add9) Abdim<sup>7</sup>(add6) Cm<sup>(b9)</sup>/G Gm(sus4)(b9) Fm<sup>9</sup>/G F<sup>m7</sup>/D

47

Pno.

Cm<sup>(#5)</sup>

I also used “Three Days Under a Moon” as a way to experiment with the array of possibilities the contemporary musician has at hand, and how they can help convey a story. With my Roland SP 404 SX sampler I sampled and chopped an interview made by Charlie Rose to the actor Bill Murray. In this interview Bill talks about being present in the moment, a topic that relates deeply with the meaning of the song. I chopped the interview so a clear message is stated, dividing the segments of the interview so they accommodate to the structure of the song. Using this interview, combined with the performance, I believe the message was delivered. I opted to do so taking advantage of Berklee’s “Forum for the Contemporary Performer” class, as this wasn’t the first time I incorporated this sampler into my performance, but it was the first one to do so in a solo act, so there was room for mistakes. Even though I defend that the song itself should be able to transmit any subjective message to the audience (in the final version of this song, aimed to be recorded in the future for the EP, the upright bass will improvise over the chord changes taking the role of the interview samples) so they can relate them to the occurrences that have happened to them, and get the meaning out of it, as musicians we can take advantage of the tools at hand as powerful approach when conveying a story.

#### **4.Methodology**

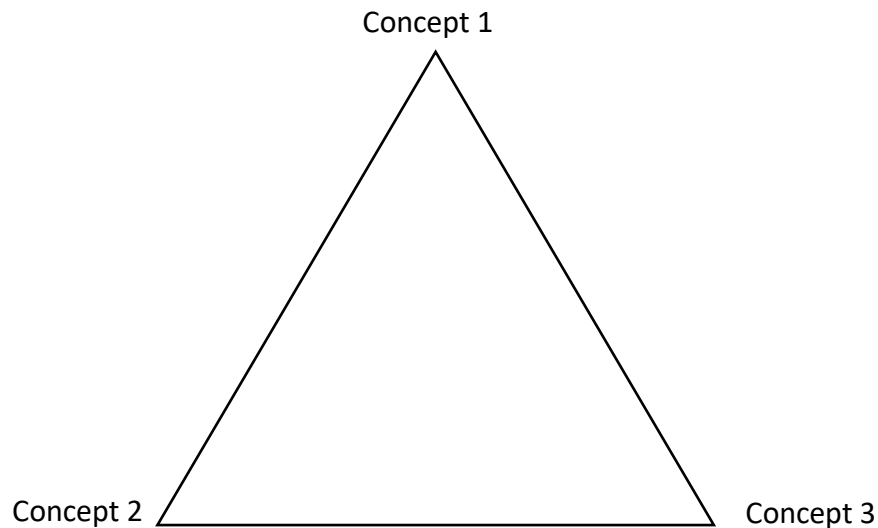
##### **4.1. Practicing with a purpose**

To be able to achieve all the approaches mentioned before, I’ve developed throughout the years a practice routine and methods that help me have a clear mind, utilizing all the tools that I have efficiently, in order to be prepared to approach a new composition or be able to use the techniques at hand to deliver a story live.

When practicing I use what I call the “Theory of Three”. This is a routine that has helped me be more concise when trying to play in a cohesive way without incorporating too much concepts and cluttering the overall sound of what I’m playing. It’s based on practicing three concepts at the same time, trying to make them work together. While practicing in the past, I realized, and especially when it comes to technique, that I was practicing all of these concepts in a very isolated way, and that I wouldn’t use them in a way that helped the purpose or narrative of the song. Rarely would I incorporate these techniques in the same way I was practicing them (i.e. mechanically playing fast strokes, looping a certain groove, playing a scale up and down, looping a finger digitation exercise on the piano for dexterity...etc), and when the moment would come in which they would come in useful, I delivered poorly, as I wasn’t use to playing them in a musical context. After realizing this, I started creating this practice plans, in which I concentrated on three topics per four months. This large time span allowed me to dig in deep to the vast array of possibilities that can come from the simplest technique/concept. After deciding which concepts I would be practicing on the following months, I worked on them individually on certain days, but mostly used this so called “Theory of Three” in which, after having some knowledge or basic grasp of the techniques/concepts at hand, I would improvise a tiny solo (3-10 min approx.), combining them, in conjunction with the “Three Act Structure” approach mentioned before. With this approach, I not only explore the different musical scenarios I will be able to incorporate certain techniques in (while practicing them to existing, compositions or tracks), but I also see how they can be used on their own in conjunction to one another in a musical scenario, in which the segments and parts of the improvised piece help in applying these concepts in a musical way, as without these “Three Act Structure” I realized it was really easy for me to focus on one of the three concepts, rather than the three of them with one another, giving more relevance to one of them in the



introduction for example, and to another one in the confrontation or resolution of the improvised piece.



As an example, while at Berklee Valencia, from September to May I mostly practiced (in this case on the drums) ride sound, hand technique, feathering the bass drum, brush technique, phrasing, rudiment orchestration, and jazz vocabulary. In those nine months, I used this “Theory of Three” in ways such as: practicing to improve my jazz vocabulary to classic jazz albums, such as “Kind of Blue” by Miles Davis, “A Love Supreme” by John Coltrane or “Sunday at the Village Vanguard” by Bill Evans, while trying to always feather the bass drum and just play the ride cymbal, or constructing a three act solo based on a rudiment, while only using brushes over a melodic phrase on the toms, or trying to apply a certain rudiment while phrasing to the melodic movement of the tracks of any given jazz album. The possibilities are endless, and that in conjunction with the limitation of focusing all these possibilities on the relationship of three concepts between each other, creates a very challenging, yet fruitful practice routine in which without realizing, I’ve become much more aware and present when improvising and trying to incorporate the studied techniques, in both a live setting, a recording scenario, or when composing (in this case the rhythmic parts).

I started applying this way of practicing three years ago, and it's proven itself to be very useful throughout the years. In the previously mentioned song "Dile a mi Madre" by Choby Scheufler, this practice routine showed its results, as in the solo I had a clear mind, and picked three elements to have the main role (melodic orchestration while pitch pending to get the notes out of a minimal kit, subdivisions and phrasing), helping it being connected and cohesive. It is implied that in any given musical situation more than three elements are going to be present when playing, but I've experienced that if I keep a clear mindset of which three elements of my playing will have the lead role in any given situation, the performance will be enhanced, as it won't be cluttered by a huge array of elements that distract the overall attitude of the composition.

#### **4.2 Separating practice from creation**

A problem I've come across throughout the years is that I've merged my practice time with my compositional time. The usual situation would be that I started practicing a certain scale, improvising over certain chords to improve on my vocabulary, or begun applying a certain technique to a tiny solo, and suddenly, maybe through a mistake, or through pure accident, I came across a phrase, groove, or chord progression that I got mesmerized by. At that point, I stopped practicing, grabbed my pen and paper and wrote it out, and with that practice time became compositional time. Now, granted, this is not necessarily a bad thing, and still to this day this keeps happening, and I embrace it, as any glimpse of inspiration has to be taken advantage off, quoting Pablo Picasso "inspiration exists, but it has to find you working", but I've found that for me, it's much more effective to have a dedicated time for composing, and one for practicing, as if I dedicated one day to finding the right color, to then

the next day apply to a painting. With that in mind, I try to always divide some days of the week to strictly practicing new concepts and techniques, and others just being dedicated to composing. This keeps me updated with myself, as whenever I come across a new concept I want to apply in a composition, the more effective I am in my purely-practical days, the more effective I will be applying the concepts to a new piece.

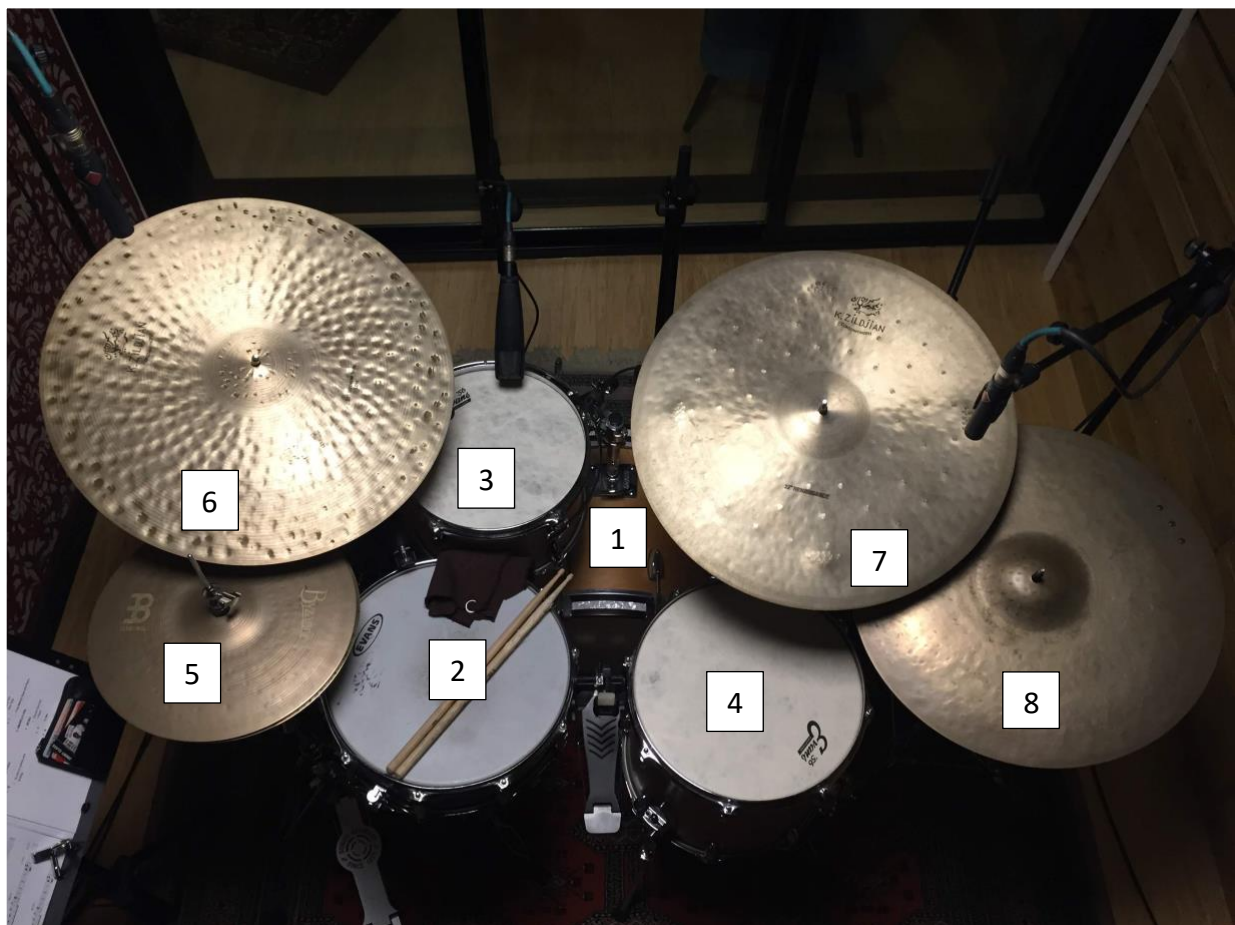
#### **4.3. Keeping it Simple. The Rule of Six**

Four years ago, while being under the mentorship and tutelage of Paul Stocker in his jazz ensemble, the drumkit in the academy we used to play had only three-pieces available to play (bass drum, hi hat, snare). At that time, I was very much used to playing in the configuration I used to practice with, a four to five-piece drum kit (bass drum, snare and two to three toms), with an average of four to five cymbals, and so this situation meant that all my muscle memory and orchestration approaches were compromised, as now an 8-10-piece setup would have to be adapted into a 3 piece one. This was an eye-opening moment for me, realizing I was too focused on the technicalities and options at hand when playing a drum kit, rather than in the musicality and honesty when playing, as when adapted to a minimal kit, my playing felt very much compromised, and I confronted the fact that till that point I didn't have a sound of my own, but rather a sound that would only come out in a specific environment. After realizing this, in the coming months after that point, I started simplifying my setups as much as possible. Again, like in the "Theory of Three" I've concluded that for me restrictions force me to think more for the music, the sound, and the story I can tell. After seeing the results of my musicality improving from that point on, I decided to experiment, and see what type of setup enabled me to be the most musical, and I came up with what I call "The Rule of Six".

The rule of six is the summary of much experimenting with different setups. This rule applies to the fact that I've realized I stop making musical decisions after incorporating more than six pieces into my setup. By all means this might be a bit extreme, as in a multitude of situations I've had to incorporate more pieces, as in some musical situations, specially collaborating with other musicians and their compositions, sometimes there's the need of a broader pallet of sounds. The point of this rule, is not to follow it religiously without an exception, but rather for me to realize when I stop being musical, so I can practice more effectively and make better music. I realized that after adding more pieces to the kit, I processed my choices worse, and rather than using each piece with awareness and with a purpose, I started recycling what I would do in some other pieces of the kit, and incorporate it into another one. This rule was created four years ago, and I still find it useful to this day. It's been a very disciplinary and eye opening realization, playing with the least pieces possible, while having a palette of sounds diverse enough to add a lot of colors, and even though more and more today I find myself using more pieces in specific occasions, I still go back to the "Rule of Six", practicing a lot of times with a two piece, or a three piece setup, to be more engaged and aware on how I create music. On the times that I do add more pieces, I've found that that I no longer recycle my musical choices, proving to me the importance and outcome of having used this limitation while practicing for this past four years. Some examples of the " Rule of Six" approach I go back to are the following:



As stated, in a multitude of occasions this year, while collaborating on the many projects of my friends and classmates at Berklee Valencia, and outside of the college, I've used a bigger kit than what I'm use to, but only when needed for the music, and I'm grateful that in the majority of these recordings, I haven't had to, as it signifies that to some degree, I can play for the music, and in a variety of musical situations, with a minimal approach. For example, in Ricardo Osorno's first debut album "Introspección", I used the following configuration:



After many years of practicing with this approach, I can say that when I add pieces, it's for a musical reason, a purposeful way to benefit the music.

#### **4.4 The importance of a Journal**

To keep up with my progress or lack off it when practicing, and make sure I apply all of the approaches mentioned previously, I write daily what I do in my practice/compositional sessions in a journal. This enables me to be honest with myself on a daily basis, and come to terms with me not practicing efficiently, spending too much time on a certain topic while disregarding others, or being unproductive with my time overall. In this journal I write every day what I practice/compose or my work with other musicians, and what I feel about it. Granted, some entries in the journal are way more descriptive than others, either because some days I have bad practice sessions overall, other days I haven't gotten a conclusion or progress out of a practicing/writing session, or some instances in which I wrote an entry last minute, without taking the time to properly explain, but without a doubt this has been one of the best choices I've done in my daily routine. It keeps me honest and grounded, and has made me much more conscious of how I spend my time. In the past I use to lie to myself a lot in terms of how I thought the outcome of a practice session was, while in reality a lot of times there wasn't much proper practice. I started journaling my progress on the fifth of December of 2017, in preparation for my audition of Berklee's Master in Contemporary Performance, and to I've been writing in it daily since then. This year, due to the overflowing amount of playing I've done, in ensemble classes, recordings, rehearsals, practice...etc. I've experimented with a couple of ways of organizing and writing what I've done in each day. Before doing my Master's degree, I use to write an estimate of the time I spent practicing/writing, either on the drum kit or piano, and even though I kept writing in the journal in this manner for the biggest part of the master's course, recently I've changed my writing approach. This is due to the fact, that I believe even though in some entries you would see "Drums: 5h... Piano: 3h...etc.", it didn't mean much in terms of effective practice, as maybe half of that time or more was spent

in rehearsals, ensemble classes etc... and even though it was true that I spent that time playing, not all of it was practicing. For the purpose of being more honest and up to date with my practice/compositional time, and how I spend it, I've changed as of recently, from writing the estimate time I've spent on the instrument, to writing the time I've spent on them either practicing or composing, and I write a summary of what I've done in terms of projects, rehearsals... etc, separately. This is so I don't give the false impression to myself in the future when coming back to these entries that I've spent my time practicing or composing more effectively than I've actually done, and it has proven in the past month and a half to make me have a better grasp on how I spend my time. This a method and tool that anyone can use, and from my personal experience, dedicating ten minutes of my day to journaling, has proven to make me more efficient with my practice time and more focused on the areas I really want to improve on.

## **5. Conclusion**

This project has been an ongoing one for a few years now. I've defined in this CE reflective paper some of the approaches I've developed throughout the years, that still enable me to this day to have a clear and focused creative process that accommodates my needs and vision as an artist. Like stated in the introduction, this is nothing more than a personal view, as some of these processes might not work from musician to musician. Rather than applying them straight into their way of creating, this essay is more a statement on how, throughout the years, defining and getting to know how I work better in relation to what I want to achieve, has helped me deeply. I will keep developing these approaches more and more through the years, and will surely create new ones. The creation of art is a gift we as artists should be proud of being able to do, and we should take that gift as a responsibility to give back to the world as much as



possible. Art, our instruments, and approaches, are nothing but a vessel to make a change through our vision, and with this paper I've explained the ways I found are enabling me to do so (or try to) more and more, and I hope that inspires and promotes any artist of any discipline to create more and more, with discipline, care, and honesty.

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