

Thesis of DLA Dissertation

Bálint Gyémánt

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF PAT
METHENY'S WORK THROUGH HIS TRIO
RECORDINGS UP TO
THE YEAR 2000

Supervisor: Tibor Csuhaj-Barna

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I. Antecedents of the research

Pat Metheny is one of the most influential figures in contemporary jazz guitar. His body of work has been analyzed extensively, most often through stylistic and formal examinations of his various musical periods. However, to the best of my knowledge, no comprehensive research has yet been conducted that specifically approaches his compositions and creative process from the perspective of his work within the trio format. In this study, I sought to explore how working within this ensemble setting might differ—whether in terms of composition or improvisation. I aimed to understand whether Metheny adopts a distinct approach during the preparation phase or in terms of the level of elaboration in pre-composed material. My connection to this ensemble form is also personal, as I have been an active performer in the trio setting for over two decades. This dissertation is further enriched by Pat Metheny's own narrative, as I had the opportunity to meet and interview him directly on the subject.

II. Sources

As primary sources, I relied on interviews conducted with Pat Metheny over the past five decades, as well as English-language academic literature that analyzes his work from various historical periods. A key aspect of the analytical process was the comparison of officially published sheet music with my own transcriptions. I considered the in-depth, multi-hour interview conducted by Rick Beato in 2022 to be of particular importance, as it provided valuable insights that helped shape the focus and direction of the research. The foreign-language sources included professional books, musicians' autobiographies, interviews, educational materials, research articles, theses, and doctoral dissertations. Among the Hungarian-language sources, the work of János Gonda proved to be the most significant, especially in clarifying key concepts used throughout the dissertation. YouTube also served as an essential platform, allowing access to a wealth of interviews and archival concert footage. Nevertheless, the most crucial information was conveyed through the musical narratives found on the recordings themselves.

III. Method

In the first chapter of the dissertation, I aimed to summarize the music industry context into which Pat Metheny emerged, examining the state and direction of jazz and improvised music at the time. Following this, I analyze what Metheny himself has described as one of the most significant works influencing his compositional and improvisational thinking to this day. My research focuses on five trio albums recorded between 1975 and 2000, all of which represent key realizations of Metheny's musical and artistic vision within the trio format. My working methodology involves exploring the background and creative context of each selected album, followed by an in-depth analysis of one composition from each record. This analysis is conducted from rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic perspectives. In addition to engaging with relevant academic literature and analyzing published scores, I also drew from key interviews in an effort to better understand Metheny's artistic *ars poetica*. The final chapter presents the in-depth interview I conducted with

the guitarist. The full transcript, including all questions, is provided in the appendices at the end of the dissertation.

IV. Results

The examination of Pat Metheny's trio work has substantiated several significant conclusions. Notably, his artistic output reflects aspects of his personal background and cultural heritage, particularly the fusion of the simplicity inherent in American folk traditions with the structural and harmonic complexity of jazz, as well as the enduring influence of bebop idioms. Furthermore, the research confirms that Metheny's compositional and improvisational approach within the trio format is marked by a distinct attitude—one that embraces a heightened openness to spontaneous formal and dynamic developments. These findings are consistent with the perspectives articulated by Metheny himself in the course of the interview conducted for this study.

V. Documentation of the activities relevant to the topic of the dissertation

My career as a performing artist has always been closely intertwined with my work as an educator. For me, sharing the knowledge I have acquired is not merely an opportunity, but a vocation. It is an honor to think and work collaboratively with young artists such as the students of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. In all my teaching endeavors, I am committed to supporting their artistic and professional development at the highest possible level.

Teaching Activity:

2014–2022: Instructor of Jazz Guitar and Ensemble Practice at the Bartók Béla Secondary School of Music and Practical Training

2022–present: Lecturer at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, Jazz Department – teaching Jazz Guitar as a principal subject, Ensemble Practice, and various elective music courses

Recordings:

Gyémánt Bálint, Juhász Gábor:

(*Budapest*: Hunnia Records, 2011) HRCD1110

Harcza Veronika, Gyémánt Bálint: *Lifelo**ver*.

(Berlin: Traumton Records, 2013) HVQCD03

Harcza Veronika, Gyémánt Bálint: *Tell Her*.

(Berlin: Traumton Records, 2016) HVQCD05

Gyémánt Bálint: *True Listener*.

(Budapest: BMC Records, 2017) BMCCD252

Harcza Veronika, Gyémánt Bálint: *Shapeshifter*.

(Berlin: Traumton Records, 2019) HVQCD06

Harcza Veronika, Gyémánt Bálint: *About Time*.

(Freiburg: Jazzhaus Records 2022) JHR215

Gyémánt Bálint: *Vortex of Silence*.

(Freiburg: Jazzhaus Records 2023) LC09471

Concerts:

2013.10.03. MÜPA – Veronika Harcsa, Bálint Gyémánt
album release concert

2014.12.21. MÜPA FSZ – Bin-Jip feat Erik Truffaz

2016.12.07. Liszt Academy Grand Hall – Harcsa/Gyémánt
album release concert

2019.06.27. MÜPA - Harcsa Veronika, Gyémánt Bálint
album release concert

2022.11.22. MÜPA - Harcsa Veronika, Gyémánt Bálint
album release concert

2024. MÜPA FSZ Gyémánt Bálint Trio album release
concert

2024.04.12. Bremen (DE) Jazzahead! showcase koncert

2025.05.30. Magyar Zene Háza - Gyémánt Bálint Trio