

Thesis of DLA dissertation

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**THE PRESENCE AND ROLE OF IMPROVISATION
IN MUSIC**

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I. Antecedents of the research

This essay can be a thought provoking and inspirational synopsis for all those who are interested in creative methods for expressing music. In addition to this, it can provide assistance in the theoretical and practical “perception” of improvisation, and in avoiding the incorrectly formulated opinions and flawed judgments surrounding it in many cases.

It provides a comprehensive profile of the practice of improvisation from a vocal and instrumental viewpoint, throughout the various eras of musical history. It presents their essential necessity and introduces the significant influence they have had on composers and performers. The joy of improvisation in singing and playing instruments can be shown in essentially every stage of the development of music history and always had the power to bring forth new forms.

There is hardly any area of music that has remained unaffected by improvisation. It also played a significant role in the development of the various techniques for musical instruments and forms of composition. The manifestations and relationships connected with this are described in detail in the individual sections.

II. Sources

The dissertation is split up into 5 main sections:

1. The concept and interpretation of improvisation

2.The manifestations of the forms of improvisation, their shaping, development and changes in emphasis through the various eras of musical history:

In the Baroque music subsection of the 2nd chapter the books of Robert Donington: *A Performer's Guide to Baroque Music* (translation by Dezső Karasszon. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1978) and Nikolaus Harnoncourt: *The Musical Dialogue* (translation by Judit Péteri. Budapest: Editio Musica, 1988) provided important information. In the subsection on jazz, inspiration was provided by the books of András Pernye: *A Jazz (Jazz)*. Gondolat Kiadó, 1964, Budapest and János Gonda: *A Rögöntözés Világa (The World of Improvisation) II.III*. Editio Musica, Budapest, 1998, and my personal experience in the theoretical and practical course on teaching jazz led by Károly Binder at the Martyn Ferenc Művészeti Szabadiskola (Ferenc Martyn Free School of the Arts) (1998-2001)

In addition to this, there were further sources for the chapter, amongst others, as examples: Robert Haas: *Aufführungspraxis der Musik* Wiesbaden, Lauber-Verlag 1979; and Domenico Corri: "*Treatises on Singing, Variation of a passage, explanation of the graces*" London, Chapell 1810.

3.Improvisation in the teaching of music

In the writing of this chapter, the experience and its documentation (compositions and pictorial analogies) of 25 years of teaching at the Martyn Ferenc Művészeti Szabadiskola (Ferenc Martyn Free School of the Arts) in Pécs founded by Ferenc Lantos and Mária Apagyí served as a basis, which was further enhanced by the practice of music.

4. The existence of improvisation on the oboe in various periods

The examples of improvised embellishment from Baroque and Classical music also came from my own experience as a performer, thus from Händel: Water Music Suite in F major, 2nd movement Adagio oboe solo melody structure embellishment version 2 in the orchestral work; and the recorded concert cadence according to my improvisation in connection with the 1st movement of Mozart: Oboe Concerto in C-major. Amongst other musical examples are Heinz Holliger's aleatoric piece, Studie über Mehrklänge, in which the oboe, known as a monophonic melodic instrument, is invested with innovative "polyphonic" tonality, Musikverlag Hans Gerig, Köln; and Mátyás Seiber's work entitled Improvization, in its recorded and transcribed form show improvisation clothed in a compositional form, edition Schott 10648 (London 1958).

5. The role and significance of improvisation for composers and performers

The final section of the essay is comprised of writings and quotes about famous improvisational musicians and their improvisations, which testify to their impact and significance on inspiring improvisation for performers and composers.

The article Günter Philipp: *Klavier, Klavierspiel, Improvisation* Leipzig, VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik 1984 served as a source.

III. Method

Improvisation as a possible method of expression for linguistic tools

Through a broad scale of instrumental and vocal examples, the dissertation sheds light on how to experience creative processes

formulated in the language of music by improvisation in the practice of music; according to predetermined perspectives or in a free, unconstrained form. It presents the various types of methods and techniques for embellishment that also reflect the creative approach. Therefore improvisation, as the creative form of musical education, or the impact of the presence of creative thinking – introduced as a thesis – are given particular emphasis in this essay. The innovative quality of my method was that it was possible to see the existence of improvisation and its role discussed from vocal and instrumental approaches comprehensively throughout the eras of musical history.

Musical improvisation is not a musical phenomenon for its own sake, but a complex system where on the basis of defined considerations or in a free, unbound form anything can be expressed or stated through the exploration of all of the characteristics of the aforementioned aspects. Without the command of a common language or organizing principles and without being in tune with one another a dialogue cannot come about, just a chaotic, unintelligible jumble. The experience obtained in art also reinforces our ability to “think jointly” in our everyday life.

The dissertation presents the existence and practice of improvisation in musical compositions from various eras from the aspect of an oboist. Improvisation is “breathing” for the performer, in which the practice of music becomes more complete through the enjoyment of musical thought in a creative manner. With nearly 25 years of practice in improvisation as a soloist, as a performer in orchestras and as a music teacher, I would like to encourage my fellow musicians towards this joyous experience.

IV. Results

Observing the organizational forms of nature – the elements, structural principles and relationships originate from and are based upon common roots. Common points of convergence may be found to be the same in various scientific and artistic fields: for example natural science or dance, literature, music and fine arts. In musical instruction, by teaching the foundation of the language and stressing its special properties the pupils can utilize it independently as well. Improvisation distinctly aids in the teaching of classical music by perfecting one's use of the language of music and its linguistic expression. *Improvisation – composition – interpretation* comprises an inseparable trio.

Quoting Kodály:

“Every able-bodied child would improvise if allowed. The natural way small children express themselves is to hum, their speech is half song.”¹ The richest manifestation of improvised music in the 20th century was jazz, the genre of improvisation. In the jazz genre improvisations based on harmony play a crucial, elementary role. The harmony is characterized by the organic weaving of motifs and development of melodies created in series.

A common aspect of improvised music is that there is a point of departure or organizing principle as the basis of the performance. It cannot be stated that improvisation is lacking all stylistic or compositional basis, but how many and what kind of necessary elements – we can call the sum of these elements the “model” or “organizing principle” – it has varies between cultures and genres.

Musical cogitation occurring in a creative manner, which *represents a*

¹ Kodály, Zoltán: *Music in the Nursery School* (1941-1957)

state of preparedness for me, also manifests itself in my orchestral work. I can approach my tasks with a wider viewpoint and I can relay the written piece to the audience with a different understanding and expression because I do not just receive the linguistic tools and manners of expression, I try them out for myself. Therefore, the relationship of musicians who are well-versed in improvisation to written pieces also alters. *The practice of music becomes genuinely complete for me through the enjoyment of these interactions.*

V.Documentation of the activity relating to the subject matter of the dissertation

Concerts and recordings:

From 1991, I have given successful concerts on several occasions with the piano instructor Mária APAGYI at the Művészetek Háza (House of Arts) in Pécs and in other cities, (Balatonföldvár, Kőröshegy, Zagreb) and in addition we played regularly at exhibition openings and conferences. In our concert repertoires musical improvisations were always played as well.

In 1993, in Pécs I presented Heinz HOLLIGER's work entitled Chord Study, for which I know of no interpretation in concert by another performer in Hungary.

In 1996, at the 2nd National Improvisation Conference in Pécs I played in concert as a soloist and in a chamber group.

In the records issued by the group Simply English of Andy ROUSE in 1997 and 1999 I make *improvisational oboe solos*.

In the summer of 2002 I performed an improvisational concert with the artists APAGYI Mária, GYÖNGYÖSSY Zoltán and KIRÁLY Csaba in the context of the Földvári Days festival.

16-23 May 2005 at the Hungarian Academy in Rome I actively

participated in APAGYI Mária's course on improvisation, and played as a soloist and in a chamber group in the closing concert.

On 15 September 2005 I performed an independent improvisational concert with the pianist APAGYI Mária. *Improvisations of various styles and character* were played at the concert, and a CD recording was made of it. The program of this concert was as follows:

Woven Sounds; Repetition; Baroque; Hommage a' Kodály Zoltán; Hommage a' Olivier Messiaen; Hommage a' Duke Ellington; Spinning; Symmetry; Meditation; Latin; Improvised playing of Tilles Béla: "Image of a Score of Euphony"; Improvised playing of one sheet of Lantos Ferenc's series entitled "Sounds"

In November of 2015, at the 30th anniversary concert of the Martyn Ferenc Alapfokú Művészeti Iskola (Ferenc Martyn Primary School of the Arts), I performed improvisations with the National Theater trio, the artists Mária Apagyi and Kyle Gregory (trumpet, U.S.A.), and following this I also played with the teachers' chamber orchestra.

In the autumn of 2015, in the Bartók Emlékház (Bartók Memorial House), I participated on several occasions in the presentation of examples of improvisation in the series of performances for teachers and students with creative practical programs entitled "Let's Improvise together with Mária Apagyi".

It is to my great joy and honor that for nearly 25 years I have been able to play with Mária Apagyi and we have been able to discuss professional and personal issues. The ideas and tasks of improvisation are created on the basis of thinking together during the course of joint work. My love for improvisation has grown over the years and has become a permanent, organic part of my practice of music, so that I can no longer imagine my activities in any other way.