

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

Ballads In the Style of Pat Metheny

A study of four compositions

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Abstract

This work examines the devices found common in the ballad works of the composer, Pat Metheny. Four compositions were analyzed and a comparative study was done with the objective of determining the compositional style or techniques present and common in the ballads. The four compositions are Unity Village, Always and Forever, Never Too Far Away and Letter From Home.

A Jazz composition is a complex creation, with a lot of areas of discussion, but the analysis presented will only be concerned with the "fixed" portions of the compositions, which are the composed melody and harmony. A stylistic account is then offered based on the findings to give a better understanding of Pat Metheny's approach to ballads.

There is scope for further study on the subject based on wider genres and more works, and the methodology could be modified to fit the objective.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Since bursting onto the international jazz scene in 1974 with vibraphone great Gary Burton, Pat Metheny has pushed boundaries of the conception of the jazz genre, extending and innovating in the areas of jazz guitar and composition. A very versatile and prolific composer, he has released over 200 works, including compositions for solo guitar, small ensembles, electric and acoustic instruments, large orchestras, and ballet pieces, with settings ranging from modern jazz to rock to classical.

The objective of this research is to look out for stylistic approaches on composition, focusing on ballads, that is evident in four of his works. The compositions will be analyzed, focusing on melodic and harmonic aspects, and similarities in compositional devices on all four compositions will be detected and presented to establish a brief stylistic account of the composer. A further aim is to investigate the nature of his composition style right down to the basic building blocks of rhythm and pitch in order to understand and enhance appreciation of his works, especially ballads. The four songs to be analyzed are Unity Village (1974), Letter From Home (1985), Never Too Far Away (1990), and Always and Forever (1992).

The intention of this research is to provide interesting insights into Pat Metheny's composing style, in order to enrich and enhance the vocabulary of composition students like myself, and to explore the possibilities in approaching a composition, especially in the widely misunderstood genre of ballads, by learning from the master of his craft.

1.1 Background

Pat Metheny was born in Kansas City on August 12, 1954 into a musical family. Starting on trumpet at the age of 8, Metheny switched to guitar at age 12. By the age of 15, he was working regularly with the best jazz musicians in Kansas City, receiving valuable on-the-bandstand experience at an unusually young age. Metheny first burst onto the international jazz scene in 1974. Over the course of his three-year stint with vibraphone great Gary Burton, the young Missouri native already displayed his soon-to-become trademarked playing style, which blended the loose and flexible articulation customarily reserved for horn players with an advanced rhythmic and harmonic sensibility - a way of playing and improvising that was modern in conception but grounded deeply in the jazz tradition of melody, swing, and the blues. With the release of his first album, *Bright Size Life* (1975), he reinvented the traditional "jazz guitar" sound for a new generation of players. Throughout his career, Pat Metheny has continued to re-define the genre by utilizing new technology and constantly working to evolve the improvisational and sonic potential of his instrument.

Metheny's versatility is almost nearly without peer on any instrument. Over the years, he has performed with artists as diverse as Steve Reich to Ornette Coleman to Herbie Hancock to Jim Hall to Milton Nascimento to David Bowie. He has been part of a writing team with keyboardist Lyle Mays for more than twenty years - an association that has been compared to the Lennon/McCartney and Ellington/Strayhorn partnerships by critics and listeners alike. Metheny's body of work includes compositions for solo guitar, small ensembles, electric and acoustic instruments, large orchestras, and ballet pieces, with settings ranging from modern jazz to rock to classical.

As well as being an accomplished musician, Metheny has also participated in the academic arena as a music educator. At 18, he was the youngest teacher ever at the University of Miami. At 19, he became the youngest teacher ever at the Berklee College of Music, where he also received an honorary doctorate more than twenty years later (1996). He has also taught music workshops all over the world, from the Dutch Royal Conservatory to the Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz to clinics in Asia and South America. He has also been a true musical pioneer in the realm of electronic music, and was one of the very first jazz musicians to treat the synthesizer as a serious musical instrument. Years before the invention of MIDI technology,