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## The psychology of music creation

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to conduct a study on the origins of music creation and its metamorphosis. A parallel is drawn between improvisation and composition, making analogies with other fields such as rhetoric and literature. The two terms incorporate a series of processes, mental structures and a thorough preparation, clear examples found in previous eras, improvisation having a leading place in Baroque and Classicism. The article aims at psychological models encountered in improvisation and composition, creativity being investigated in this context. Improvisation and composition present a series of similarities and differences, being argued by presenting the main theories, which are based on a psychological profile of the individual, carefully studied over the decades. The metaphysics of music and the physical and mental processes that the composer or improviser goes through, have often been associated with other fields of research, such as language, theater, poetry, rhetoric and much more. Their study and presentation have as role the artistic development of the complete musician, whether it is a soloist, composer or improviser.*

Key-words: *psychology, improvisation, composition, creativity*

### 1. Introduction

The psychology of music has been an appealing subject over the years, presenting an increasing importance in recent decades. As for the complete musician, a clear distinction will be made between performance, expression and creativity.

The study traces the direction towards improvisation and composition, where the creative side is mainly studied, the participatory character being essential in this musical field. When referring to improvisation, most of the time it will be correlated with jazz music but there is specified that it is very important to

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determine the improvisational basis in order to later draw the coordinates that connect spontaneity with creativity. Practical concerns and pedagogy lead to poetic inspiration and to the way in which improvisation and composition are manifested in the associated arts. Musical creation and improvisation are two similar sides that have a number of similarities in the case of genre but the types of action have a number of distinctions. Human poetry is expressed by completing the two sides. At the base of the creative potential is the imagination, defined as a conscious mental process through which ideas or images of previously perceived objects, events, relationships are evoked. Imagination can be involuntary or voluntary, with its two forms, reproductive or creative imagination.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1. Historical context in drawing a parallel between improvisation and composition

Defining improvisation as an immediate product with an unforeseen character (Sarath 2002, 189), it underlies the composition, flourishing in Baroque and Classicism. In a series of cases, the composer is also a performer, the performance being based on an improvisational interpretive act. Researchers believe that improvisation does not require an audience but the act can be performed individually, without audience or performance on the stage (Biasutti, Frezza 2006, 1464). Thus it is made parallel with the consecrated composers of the previous eras, who are also improvisers. The act of composing music is the elaboration of a musical work, accompanied by musical notation, with universally recognized semiotic meanings (for example score, tabulation) or other aspects typical of the creator, equivalent through explanations. According to Harvard Dictionary of Music, improvisation is “the art of performing music spontaneously, without the aid of manuscript, sketches or memory. Also, in a more restricted sense, the art of introducing improvised details into written composition” (Harvard Dictionary of Music 1974, 404). Inevitably in the composition of the improvisational musical discourse are the intervals and the rhythm, the two basic elements of the song, which support the possible chromatic elements or other melodic notes that could contribute to the achievement of a successful improvisation. Being a combination between the transmission of feelings and technical skills, improvisation finds a series of features in common with composition. The history of music presents the

life and compositional style of each outstanding character but few times the emphasis has been on the improvisational side and on the analysis of such features. Improvisation is most often attributed to twentieth-century music, referring to jazz and blues, but since medieval times, improvisation has played an important role in musical life. A mention in this sense is found in an old polyphony treatise from the ninth century, called *Musica enchiriadis* (Berkowitz 2010, 247). There can be found information according to which the improvisation dates before the music notation. The 14th century represented the beginning of the distinction between composed and interpreted works or those made spontaneously, based on indications.

The Baroque period presents forms in which certain sections have an improvisational character. Johann Sebastian Bach and Joseph Handel composed preludes and suites in which the performers have as indication a chain of chords on the basis of which they had to improvise passages. Ornaments represent another form of improvisation, observing how the composition is combined in a brilliant way with improvisation, the performer having therefore the role of both improviser and performer. Basso continuo was another form of improvisation in which the performer could display his improvisational mastery. Baroque music encouraged improvisation, as the notation was often reduced only to the presence of basso cifrato, as such, the performers made real improvisations starting from the landmarks suggested by the composer. The dynamics of the music were irregularly arranged and the sound intensity often changed unexpectedly. The music had a relatively constant tempo and its key was major (considered to suggest joy) or minor (considered to suggest sadness).

Classicism was another important moment in the history of composition in which improvisation played a significant role. Referring to musical Classicism, the form called "Theme and variations" retains elements of the main theme but unknown coordinates can be reached that deliberately remove the melody from the originally exposed theme. It was often found in composers such as Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven. This musical form returns to the original theme as spectacular as possible. Besides the themes and variations and solo cadences in which improvisation was a necessity, the composers used to offer examples of improvisational virtuosity. Mozart was known for his incredible improvisational performances since he was a child also being mentioned the so-called duels between Mozart and Muzio Clementi or between Beethoven and Johann Nepomuk Hummel.

Musical Romanticism offered performers and soloists the opportunity to improvise. Franz Liszt was popular for his concerts. The audience could offer him different musical themes and he would improvise on a given theme or play scores in the opposite direction. The role of improvisation would begin to decline until the twentieth century, when a series of practices from previous eras were resumed and taken over. Currents such as Aleatoricism and Serialism will transform the performer into both composer and improviser, who may or may not have precise indications, on the basis of which to create an original performance.

## 2.2. Models of creativity in musical creation

The concepts of improvisational construction and their study led to theorizing new patterns. Tests over time have attributed a number of similarities with Chomsky's linguistic models to the improvisational model (Sarath 2002, 193). In addition to hierarchizing musical concepts in a grammar-like manner, the model could be treated in layers, as found in Heinrich Schenker. In the Background there can be found the basic structures, the harmonic chains that depend on the level of improvisation level. Significant notes will be added in the Middleground and finally, in the Foreground, there will be a corollary of the performer's in-depths, namely the improvised line itself. A recognized model of improvisation (Biasutti, Frezza 2006, 1465) elaborates this process as the synthesis between a state of flow that leads to contemplation and anticipation. The repertoire is the one that will be a tool of expressive communication in order to obtain feedback (Figure 1). All this five parameters are related to interdependence and include cognitive, motor, psychological processes, in order to complete the improvisational performance. The compositional act contains all these five stages but each has a greater variability. When the creative act is extended over a long period of time, the flow will change periodically, the transmission of emotion will be perceived differently in the various periods of creation, and the feedback will appear much later than in the case of improvisation.

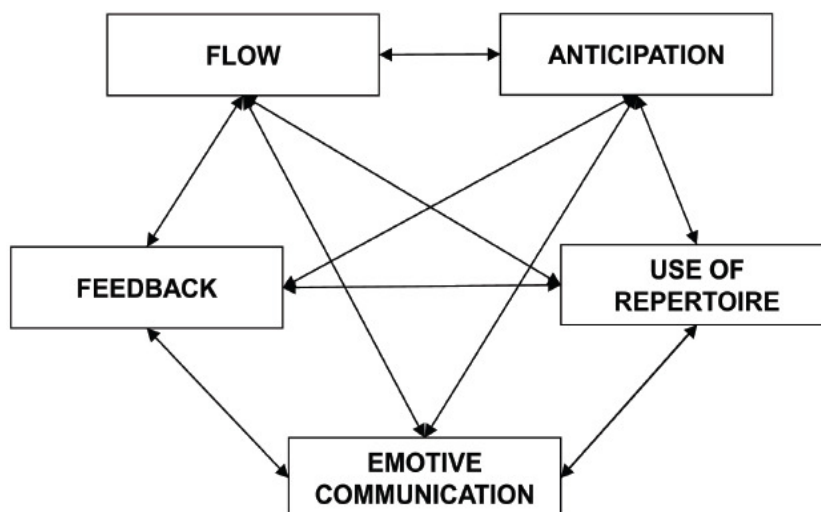


Fig. 1. *The dimensions of musical improvisation identified by Biasutti and Frezza (2006, 1466)*

The pillars of this model are found in several similar studies, an example being the approach of anticipation in the case of improvisation, as being short-term, which lasts about two seconds, medium-term, about 10 seconds and long-term, throughout the entire creative act (Pressing 1988, 143). In addition to this model, there are important the three stages that target the repertoire (Pressing 1988, 152). His cognitive model involves a careful selection of the repertoire, followed by a hierarchy of improvisational structures to be addressed, following the association of melodic links with patterns of improvisation that persisted in the performer's memory.

There are several similar theories, the degree of complexity and importance given to common elements making the distinction between them.

### 2.3. Physical and mental aspects of the musical creation model

Improvisation and composition present motor, mental and of course mental challenges. All these will manifest themselves simultaneously, however, in different percentages, depending on the nature of the interpretative act. Starting from the common aspects between the two sides that will eventually lead to oppositeness, the studies carried out in time are important (Sarath 2002, 195). The big difference

is given by the fact that in the case of composition, the author can reflect on the result (Berkowitz 2010, 157). In antithesis to this process, improvisation is based only on the moment of the interpretive act, presenting a high degree of pressure on the performer, who at the moment of improvisation will simultaneously combine patterns, coordination, rhythm and harmony. The improviser cannot manifest excessive control, unlike the composer, who benefits from a greater extension in time, his creation being characterized by a certain rigor in the application of the sets of rules. It is not a continuous process, it can be resumed or divided into sections and all these can be completed over time. The complexity of the composition will be greater than in the case of improvisation, being necessary a considerable experience for the latter. In terms of motor skills, the improviser must study continuously in this regard, while in the case of the composer the skills of a performer are not mandatory. Aiming at communicating with the audience, when the composer is not a performer, there is a risk that the message will be influenced by the interpretation, the authenticity having a more pronounced character in the case of improvisation (Biasutti, Frezza 2006, 1465). Both improvisation and musical composition imply a high level of creativity, this being present in rudimentary form especially in the case of children. Studies show that no specialized musical training is required for a high level of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 134). The involvement of practical and technical skills and the use of sets of musical rules will be done in a specialized framework, the composition requiring their close observance, then deriving improvisation, so similar to composition, but requiring in addition to mastering the set of rules, an ability to apply the theory instantly, with no possibility of revision.

### 3. Conclusions

The contribution brought by the latest studies in musical psychology, in terms of the field of improvisation in relation to that of composition, is particularly important, the two fields being interdisciplinary connected. It refers to an integrated experience, being a mix of deliberate and pre-existing practical elements. An empirical approach reveals that music is represented by basic laws. All these have a deep character of universality, behaving separately on the territory of art. These legitimacies represent a basis but have the character of variability. It can lead to countless forms, not necessarily independent ones. Their existence is due to the basic laws, this aspect being applied in the two sides of the musical

creation presented in the article, different and at the same time related to interdependence.

Improvisation offers a perfect framework for the manifestation of human feeling but is conditioned by the chosen moment, always varying the final product and performance. On the other hand, the composition will always be accompanied by a certain creative will and desire, rendered by the mastery of the performer, which may or may not be confused with the one who gave life to the work. Also, the composer follows certain structures, a set of rules, and he continuously improves his work, he can draw passages that will be later chiselled and led to the final result, the process being extended over long periods of time.

Improvisation is primarily constrained by two fundamental aspects, namely the technical and motor skills but also those related to how to memorize the sets of rules and apply them at the time of creation. According to another point of view (Pressing 1988, 167), these are the basis of improvisation, seen as a pyramid. At the top of it there is found the actual moment, which can be represented by the improvisation or a mix between composition and the improvisational spirit, in which certain passages or the entire performance are composed according to fixed coordinates, previously captured on the score. Both improvisation and composition are situated in the space of creation, having their origins in ancient times. It is necessary for the complete musician to know the differences and similarities between these two complex processes in order to be able to combine them but also to draw clear limits when the creative act requires it.

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