

Improvising, Composing and Arranging in Jazz



Improvisation is the art of composing in the moment while performing, without a written score. It is what sets jazz apart from other music. It may or may not be true that no other music makes every musician rise to a certain level of thought and creativity.

To say that jazz musicians improvise does not mean that they play without thought or that there are not arrangements or plans for what will be played.

The distinction between improvisation and composition is not as well-defined as it might seem. Both are forms of composition, and both are involved to varying shapes of performance. Some composers are able to show their compositions (which may or not be written in a score) by singing them or playing them for the musicians who will perform them. And some compositions have always been developed through and during rehearsal.

A further complication in the composer-improviser distinction is the importance of the arrangement. An arrangement is a plan that musicians agree to stick to before they play, intended to give shape to their performance. An arrangement, then, may be simple as an agreement to play the melody at a certain point, to solo in a certain order, and to stop at a particular moment. Arrangements can be agreed upon just before the music begins or even take shape as they are played: "head arrangements" are often developed in the playing, made up time after time, with some parts being added as they go along and others dropped. In small groups, an arrangement may provide riffs to be played behind a soloist.

How spontaneous is improvisation? Sometimes even the greatest musicians rehearse and plan a solo, playing the same solos year after year, making only small changes over time. How do musicians go about improvising? Is it possible to improvise melodies from scratch, working with nothing more than emotional and intellectual resources? Yes, it is, but more often jazz musicians choose to improvise something all members of the musical group know from memory - or they may read from a lead sheet, a musical outline that contains the melody line, the harmonic structure (indicated by alphabetical and numerical symbols of the chords), and perhaps the words of a song. They may alter the original melody in whole or in part, changing the phrasing, the rhythm of the melody, the intervals in various ways - by recombining, adding, subtracting, transposing, inverting, or playing it backwards.

In jazz it is the activity itself that is important as the outcome. This is music that is learned in doing and collective playing.

(after John F. Szwed "Jazz 101: F Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Jazz")

riff – 1) Небольшая ритмическая фигура, часто служащая сопровождением к сольной импровизации; 2) Импровизация музыкальной фразы или отрывка в джазе

spontaneous = unplanned - спонтанный

scratch – пометки / каракули на черновике

outline – набросок

to subtract – убирать, изымать

to transpose - транспонировать, преобразовывать

outcome - результат