

*A. Pokaz***ON SPECIFICITY OF VIRTUOSITY IN JAZZ PIANO IMPROVISATION**

*The article under consideration deals with virtuosity in jazz performance in the aspect of succession of the European traditions of the art of musical improvisation. The skill of a jazz improvisator to combinatorial thinking, which forms a specific form of virtuosity in jazz performance, is specially emphasized.*

*Keywords: virtuosity, improvisation, jazz, performance skill, tradition.*

In descriptions and characteristics of jazz music, the concept of virtuosity, meaning the skill of jazz performers, is of frequent and usual occurrence. This refers to the cases about masterly possession of musical material, performing technique and improvisational process. Actually improvisation, as a specific form of jazz, raises the question of the specifics of virtuosity in jazz music, its relevance to the academic tradition of musical professionalism. However, with all the obviousness of this issue, it remains open until now: in Ukrainian musicology it was not specifically discussed, the information and materials on it are contained in the majority in English and Russian sources. Therefore, it is considered relevant the appeal to this problem, which is of practical value for modern jazz pianists and performing practice in general.

The improvisational thinking of a jazz musician, which is based on the ability to combinatorics, operates with a variety of building materials (in A. Kozlov's terminology, "bricks" – prepared cliches and "blocks" – quotes) that he uses both consciously and unconsciously [4, p. 6]. To achieve this the musician shall "... put this material into memory, ... from it one can depict something beautiful and logical, or it can be ugly. Everything depends on the abilities of the improviser" [4, p. 6]. Or: "... often in order to expand the range of their own capabilities, improvisers borrow models from a variety of musical styles and directions, remelting them later according to one's own understanding. The wider the range of models used in improvisation, the more chances for the performer to build an interesting, vivid improvisational play" [9, p. 15-16].

It is known, in the early eras (Renaissance, Baroque), any musician who wrote music should have acquired the skills of improvisation. And one of the earliest known forms of such skills in the European musical and performing tradition was the art of diminuity. Diminutions (from Latin *diminutio* – reduction, synonyms: in Italy – *passagio*, in Spain – *glosa*, in England – *division*, in France – *double*) – this is the technique of composition and

reception of ornamentation, widespread in the music of the 15-17th centuries. The basic principle of diminution is the proportional reduction of the duration in relation to the melodic original, which could be fixed in the notes. As ornamentation approach, the diminution was a replacement of the original large duration by a passage from notes of lesser duration, which in sum were equal to the original length. With this technique of rhythmic composition, it is usually associated not so much with improvisation as with the manifestation of "mobile form elements" (the definition of E. Denisov). Initially, diminution was improvisational, but with time it began to be written out in the note text.

Means and techniques of improvisation based on polyphonic techniques, described in treatises of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, show that the basic principle of improvisation training is the play according to the certain models ("The Art of the Game of Fantasy", a treatise of the Spanish organist and theorist Thomas de Santa Maria). Early stages of ensemble improvisation in the practice of minstrels – in memory melodies-invariants were kept as the modal basis [8]. And also the practice of the three and four-voice organs of the 11th century – the melody of the Gregorian chant (modal and harmonic basis), performed by a tenor, to which any other voices were attached (according to certain rules) was the basis. Thus as a result of this vertical connection, accidentally, the most unexpected and abnormal harmonies could arise.

Until the 19th century, musicians created various "instructions" for improvisation, based on various blocks and models that the improviser had to master before automatism. Only under such conditions the musician could perform the performing process, in the basis of which lies the mechanism of combinatorics – music was created from ready-made, long-preserved musical fragments. It was in this context that the idea of the musician's special skill was developed – virtuosity, as the ability "then and there" to use the most diverse combinations of the means of musical expressiveness – melody, rhythm, registers, texture.

Considering the meaning of the term "virtuosity" in the vocal and instrumental music of the 16th and 18th centuries, G. Muradyan focuses on the fact that it differs quite a bit from the understanding of virtuosity adopted in the subsequent time as "fluency of the fingers" and mobility of the technical apparatus as a whole. "It is at this time that a new type of instrumentalist is formed, which is called a virtuoso – merging in one person the performer and the creator of music; in his performance skill, creative imagination, "inventiveness" is estimated [6, p. 8]. The idea of virtuosity developed at that time in the environment of vocal

and organ music: in both the great importance was attached to the melodic ornamentation, which was the improvisational basis of performing. In organ music, virtuosity was not always directly related to the melodic factor: "It is quite obvious that the meaning of the word "virtuoso" reflects not the fluency and ease of passing passions, as in Italian singing, but ingenuity,"inventory"of the texture" [Ibid.].

In this sense, the technique of the general bass, which is widespread in the musical art of the 17th-18th centuries and which made up the technological basis of the performing arts, is extremely revealing. Specially trained musicians possessed fluent improvisation of basso-continuo and intensively developed virtuosic performance technique, which was embodied in the ability to vary the texture of the presentation by means of "decorating" chords with the techniques of melodic figuration. On the one hand, the technique of digital bass reflected the leading importance of the harmonious factor in the evolution of European music at the stage of the formation of homophonic-harmonious thinking, but on the other – the essentially improvisational nature of the performing arts.

For a very long time in European musical culture improvisation was understood precisely as "art", and not as the main form of music making. In the early epochs (from the Renaissance, the Baroque to the 19th century), every musician, while composing music, had to acquire the skills of improvisation. Such composers as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt, Chopin are known not only as creators of masterpieces of the world musical classics, but also as brilliant virtuosos who possessed mastery of improvisation and the ability to create music "then and there". Until the 19th century, musicians created various "instructions" for improvisation, based on various blocks and models, "... having perfectly mastered them, but improvisator (thus improvisation based on memory) creates it from ready-made, long-preserved in memory musical fragments. And, creating their own instrumental concerts, in the cadenza of the composers counted only on improvisation of the performer", Z. Yadlovskaya notes [11, p. 73]. Improvisation for a long time was understood as an obligatory skill of the performer, but virtuoso liberties of such improvisers naturally differed from the composer's idea. The consequence of this was a detailed writing out (fixation) in the notes of a musical text.

Therefore, researchers talk about the decline of the centuries-old tradition of improvisational music already in the Baroque era. Thus also the fact of the revival of its traditions (namely, the technique of digital thoroughbass) in the twentieth century, in jazz

performance, which is promoted by numerous editions of jazz standards with digits for improvisational accompaniment, in which melodies perform the function of an obligate voice (10, p.147 ).

So, in many modern teaching aids on jazz improvisation, the concept of a thoroughbass is never used on a piano, however, the teaching method is based on this principle – the existence of a digital basis for improvisation.

The structure of most of the teaching aids is similar and reflects the general classification principle of the ways of improvisation – *harmonious, rhythmic and melodic*. Accordingly, the technique of mastering jazz improvisation in teaching aids, ultimately, is aimed at the formation of pianist skills and abilities associated with the possibility of combinatorics of harmonic, rhythmic and melodic formulas-models. Moreover, it is important to develop a creative approach to the "original" material of the student ("bricks" and "blocks", in the terminology of A. Kozlov), which stimulates an individual vision of the structural, compositional and expressive possibilities of the musical "construction material". It is this commitment to "creativity" provokes the jazz improviser to reach the maximum reach of rhythmic, melodic and harmonic patterns, which, ultimately, shall constitute his vast "vocabulary", which he can use in the process of creating a musical composition. And the fuller and more diverse this "vocabulary" is – the more combinatorial possibilities a pianist has, which are manifested in his virtuoso possession of musical material.

The most common directions of pianist mastering of the mentioned forms of jazz improvisation traditionally are reduced to the following:

*Melodic improvisation.* When forming a musician's notion of this form, it is necessary to acquire the practical skill of figurative "processing" of the original melodic model (i.e. the reception of melodic ornamentation). At the same time, an important condition is understanding of the original stylistic "message" of the classical jazz tradition: the theme (melodic model) and variants of its modifications in the process of improvisation should be sufficiently close, "synonymical", recognizable by ear. Undoubtedly, the process of mastering melodic improvisation in each specific case will be individual. Researchers of jazz improvisation, speaking about its theoretical and methodical side, about the methods and tools of academic work, argue that the gradualness of the process is an invariable condition for a successful result. "The student makes the first attempts in the field of melodic improvisation, using relatively simple intonational twists (melodic "embryos"). In the future,

in accordance with the principle of increasing the complexity of academic work, he goes into his improvisational research to the level of more complex syntactic units (motive, phrase, sentence) "[7, p. 20-21].

*Harmonic improvisation.* The initial point here is the study of jazz harmony – a large-scale and capacious phenomenon, but the decisive moment here can be mastering the basic principles of accordion (structure, typical combinations and sequences). It is this point that determines the possibility of forming a "piano dictionary", which in the future allows performing various variants of harmonization of the melodic model in the process of improvisation, and also creates certain combinations of sounds based on the jazz accordion. I. Ovcharov correctly notes that with this approach in the musician's thinking, the interconnection of the melodic and harmonic elements is «strengthen», ensuring the style quality of the improvisational process. "The principle of correspondence, of the semantic consistency of melody and harmonious accompaniment in the process of improvisation is introduced into the student's consciousness, the principle, the deviation from which leads in sound anarchy and nonsense" [7, p. 21].

*Rhythmic improvisation.* This form is extremely important for a jazz improvisator, because, as you know, rhythm is the very core of jazz music, its main expressive element. Rhythm is the most important instrument of a jazz musician who is able to influence melody as well as harmony, and in general all aspects of musical expression – dynamics, timbre, texture, articulation. It is the rhythm that in jazz is the "guide" of the expression of musical expression, the "soul" and "nerve" of the improvisator, which create the uniqueness of the performing manner. Rhythmic freedom, which is a distinctive feature of jazz performance, is directly connected with the same vocabulary of the improvisator, as the "play" with rhythms and durations (typical "bricks" and "blocks") becomes in the perception of the listener the illusion of complete freedom from any schemes and the uniformity of unfolding musical material. That is why in the textbooks, the method of mastering typical rhythm formulas - duols, triplets etc., as well as exercises based on the fragmentation of larger durations into smaller ones – is often suggested as the basic method, which is the standard reception in jazz music that provides the dynamics of the thematic development and expressiveness of expression.

A special point in rhythmic improvisation is the techniques of accentuation and syncopation, which are the most important means of musical expression and the individual manner of an improviser.

Also, among the forms of jazz improvisation, it is necessary to distinguish textured and timbre-dynamic improvisation, the latter of which is actively discussed by researchers in the methodical aspect: "Timbre dynamics, color nuance, coloring of sound in certain "colors"(bright – matte, warm – cold etc.) also belongs to the varied components of jazz compositions. Having received the necessary information and methodological instructions from the teacher, the student starts to exercise, at first consciously, and later spontaneously, "from intuition" finding various colorful "outfits" for his improvisations, taking certain sound and color decisions in his playing practice "[7, p. 22].

Modern practical tools have basic sections that aim to master the principles of harmonic, rhythmic and melodic improvisation [2; 12]. In some of them, special attention is paid to shaping, up to the development of the sonata form [9], and also to the textural shade of jazz improvisation [13]. Among modern practical manuals on piano jazz improvisation there are also those aimed at a more differentiated approach to basic improvisational principles, while taking into account the expressive possibilities and nature of the instrument. Thus, in R. Stolyar's manual about free improvisation in jazz includes the following sections: improvisation on one sound, improvisation, intervals and chords in improvisation, tonal and atonal improvisation, the use of specific pianoforte resources in improvisation, the construction of a form in free improvisation. Such an approach gives an opportunity for a comprehensive mastering of the principles of the improvisational process, taking into account all the parameters of musical techniques and expressiveness – from a single sound to shaping and technological resources of the instrument.

Practical experience of jazz pianists – from the very beginnings of jazz development, and even in its classical era – has not been systematized for quite a long time. Accordingly, the notion that there is virtuosity in jazz performance is very vague and inconclusive in its conceptual expressions. This is due to the fact that improvisational art for a long time developed according to the laws of oral tradition: from master to student, from idol to imitator. "... early jazz was generally a purely oral tradition without any written documentation. In the early period of the history of this music, everyone learned to play only by ear, first by looking at older masters, then playing with them (including jam), and later,

after jazz penetration into the record (... since 1917 ... ) – listening to their recordings, by "removing" from records ... So, it all started with self-study, with the transfer of skill from musician to musician "[5, p. 14]. Often having no idea about the "theory and history of music" and sometimes about musical notation, many jazz performers were guided only by those settings that have nothing to do with the classical system training of a professional musician: a great desire to play, and be able to play like "that one great" – an idol and a standard. In this case, we are dealing with the principle of self-development and self-learning of a musician, which in pedagogy is called accidental, or associated learning – that is, a process of accumulating knowledge and skills that is not regulated by a systemic education. "At that time, as is known, there were no jazz schools, and all the musicians learned on their own, who as they could. This explains the originality of the methods of sound production and the most unthinkable variants of hands position. Sometimes you watch a video tape with the recording of a concert of "jazz stars" of past years and clearly understand that this pianist from the point of view of the classics is simply "incompetent", but there is another feeling that *this* music can be played only with such a hands position, such techniques, otherwise it will lose its "flavor" [1].

The possibility of professional education for jazz musicians appeared only in the 1940s, when the first specialized educational institutions began to open in America, and together with them, systems and methods of teaching were formed. As it is known, due to ideological circumstances, the tendencies in the development of musical culture, clearly traced in the West, almost did not touch Soviet music, which naturally affected the practice of jazz education and the post-Soviet space. R. Stolyar, author of a practical manual on modern jazz improvisation, fairly notes: "The assertion that the art of improvisation is a kind of piece goods "that this art can not be taught is nothing more than a widespread (primarily in a professional environment) delusion caused by lack of information in the field of improvisational teaching ... " [9, p. 9].

As we can see, the skill of jazz improvisation and the image of a jazz improviser, to which the concepts of "virtuoso" and "virtuosity" are often applied, have been the subject of scientific discussions relatively recently, and there are very few considerations on this matter. However, turning to various historical ideas about virtuosity in professional musical performance, we come to two significant conclusions. First, the virtuosity of the jazz performer is largely correlated with the understanding of this phenomenon in the academic

tradition of musical professionalism of early eras. The notion of virtuosity evolved in the context of the art of improvisation, the virtuosos were usually called improvisational musicians, who were known precisely as performers, and not as composers. Virtuosity in jazz is not a technique of the play, but a technique of thinking, an intellectual combinatorics that allows the performer-improviser to "play" elements of his "vocabulary" – melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, textural, timbre-dynamic and other formulas. Virtuosity mastery of musical material and musical process in the process of jazz improvisation can be understood as "... a system of artistic thinking and stylistics – ... musical idioms, speech clichés as the basis for the generation of individual musical speech" [3, p. 9].

Secondly, the masterly skill of jazz improvisation can be taught: it is a very individual learning process (depending on the individual abilities of the musician), but it is quite feasible. Many jazz musicians talk about this. And the emphasis in this case is not so much on the technical equipment of the musician – "virtuosity" in the traditional sense, but on the special mobility of the mind, its ingenuity, i.e., the virtuosity of thinking. "A person who has decided to devote himself to improvisation should have an analytical mind in order not only to copy other people's phrases, but to understand the law, derive the formulas according to which they are built. And then already substitute their notes in them. And then already go further – try to invent own laws, formulas," writes A. Kozlov [4, p. 3]. And the higher the skill – virtuosity – of the performer, the more diversity and creative ingenuity is introduced into the process of creating music "then and there".

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