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Thesis

***Kris Davis, an analysis of her composition, improvisation and
the interaction between both***

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Abstract:

"Kris Davis, an analysis of her composition, improvisation and the interaction between both" is a dissertation based on the investigation of pianist and composer Kris Davis' music. Through the analysis of different tunes from different albums, this thesis seeks to understand and draw conclusions about the origin of her compositional and improvisational style, as well as present some of her approaches and musical resources that make possible the result of such a personal and creative language. This essay's methodology is based, for a high percentage of the time, on the analysis of transcriptions of her compositions and solo extracts besides improvised fragments. Some original Kris Davis scores were also used, as well as direct information obtained through an interview, in addition to articles and critic reviews.

Extracto:

"Kris Davis, un análisis de su composición, improvisación y la interacción entre ambas" es un trabajo basado en la investigación de la música de la pianista y compositora Kris Davis. A través del análisis de músicas de diferentes discos suyos, este trabajo busca comprender y establecer conclusiones sobre la procedencia de su estilo compositivo e improvisatorio, así como descubrir algunos de sus abordajes y recursos musicales que hacen posible el resultado de un lenguaje tan personal y creativo. La metodología de este trabajo se basa, en un elevado porcentaje, en el análisis de las transcripciones de composiciones y de extractos de solos y fragmentos improvisados. También se utilizan algunas partituras originales de la autora, así como información directa obtenida a través de una entrevista, además de artículos y reseñas.

Extracte:

"Kris Davis, una anàlisi de la seva composició, improvisació i la interacció entre totes dues" és un treball basat en la investigació de la música de la pianista i compositora Kris Davis. A través de l'anàlisi de músiques de diversos dels seus discs, aquest treball cerca comprendre i establir conclusions sobre la procedència del seu estil compositiu i improvisatori, així com descobrir alguns dels seus apropaments i recursos musicals que fan possible el resultat d'un llenguatge tan personal i creatiu. La metodologia d'aquest treball es basa, en elevat percentatge, en l'anàlisi de les transcripcions de composicions i extractes de solos i fragments improvisats. També s'utilitzen algunes partitures originals de l'autora, així com informació obtinguda a través d'una entrevista, a més d'articles i ressenyes.

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1. Introduction

Kris Davis, a Canadian pianist and composer, but resident in New York for many years, is considered one of the most innovative pianists currently active in the city's creative and jazz scene. In recent years she has released numerous recorded works as leader, co-leader and collaborator through which she has achieved the recognition she enjoys today internationally.

I myself have been following and listening to the music of Kris Davis enthusiastically for many years. For me, she has been a huge source of inspiration and a vital musical reference point. I find her compositional work and improvisation language very interesting. Her compositions oscillate in a very fluid way between predetermined (composed) material and improvisation. The elements with which both are constructed retain so much internal coherence and share such a tightly-formed language that on occasions it's difficult to distinguish the composed and improvised sections. This fascination, and the desire to deepen my engagement with her music through study and analysis, is what led me to choose this topic as the subject of my thesis.

In this piece of work I will study the resources employed within her compositional as well as improvisational language, in order to reach conclusions about the way in which the interaction between both has been constructed and the result of such a personal and creative musical discourse.

1.1. Biography

Kris Davis was born in Vancouver in 1980 and brought up in Calgary, Alberta. She began to study piano at the age of 6. Training in classical piano at the Royal Conservatory was the start of her musical path. During her years in secondary education she discovered jazz and became more and more absorbed in it until, at the end of this period, she moved to Toronto, where she studied jazz piano at the University of Toronto. ¹

¹ R.Adler, David. *Kris Davis: Good Citizen. The pianist-composer takes stock of her journey* [online]. Silver Spring: JazzTimes, 10/06/2014 [Consulted: February 2019]. Available on: <https://jazztimes.com/features/kris-davis-good-citizen/>

Still in Canada, aged 20 and at the Banff International Jazz Workshop, she had one of her first contacts with free jazz. There she got to know Tony Malaby and Angelica Sanchez, musicians with whom she established a friendship with and people she would collaborate with in the future².

In the year 2001 she moved to New York where she graduated in classical composition at the City College of New York, at the same time as she was being introduced to the jazz scene of the city.

Since her arrival in New York, Kris Davis has emerged, little by little, as one of the most outstanding figures in the jazz and creative panorama of the city. Her musical focus and approach, put simply, combines jazz improvisation and composition with prominent influences from classical and contemporary composition of the 20th century. This work has produced an extensive and innovative discography which has received local and international recognition.

As leader she has a discography of 13 albums with different formats: solo piano, duos, trios, quartets, sextets and octets. In these she has been able to call on musicians such as Tony Malaby, Russ Johnson, Jason Rigby, Eivind Opsvik, Jeff Davis, Ingrid Laubrock, Tyshawn Sorey, John Hebert, Tom Rainey, Mat Maneri, Trevor Dunn, Ben Goldberg, Oscar Noriega, Joachim Badenhorst, Andrew Bishop, Nate Radley, Gary Versace, Jim Black and Craig Taborn.³

In parallel with this she has been a co-leader, collaborator and accompanist of numerous artists. Many of these are those named previously; others include John Zorn, Terri Lyne Carrington, Don Byron, Michael Formanek, Mary Halvorson, Stephen Gauci, Michael Bisio, Tomasz Dąbrowski, Andrew Drury, Jon Irabagon, Reuben Radding, Ralph Alessi, Stephan Crump, Eric McPherson, Rocket Engine, Jon Irabagon, Kermit Driscoll, Andrea Wolper, Eric Revis, Michael Musillami, Matt Bauder, Nick Fraser, Devin Gray, and Winged Serpents⁴.

²Ratliff, Ben. *New Pilots at the Keyboard* [online]. New York: The New York Times, 10/6/2011 [Consulted: February 2019]. Available on: <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/07/arts/music/four-young-pianists-on-the-rise-in-the-jazz-scene.html?pagewanted=all>

³Davis, Kris. *Kris Davis Music* [online]. [Consulted: December 2018]. Available on: <https://krisdavis.net/music/>

⁴Davis, Kris. *Kris Davis.wiki* [online]. [Consulted: December 2018]. Available on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kris_Davis

Kris Davis has been dubbed a “Rising Star” by the magazine *DownBeat* and as one of the 25 most important artists who will define the direction of jazz in the following decades.⁵

Over the years, moreover, in addition to the recognition she has received from the critics in media as relevant to jazz as *The New York Times*, *Pop Matters*, *NPR*, *LA Times* and *Jazz Times*, she has received prizes such as the *Doris Duke Impact* in 2015. She has also received commissions to compose for *The Shifting Foundation*, *The Jazz Gallery / Jerome Foundation* and for the *Canada Council for the Arts*. Currently she teaches at *Princeton* and at the *New School in New York*.⁶

2. Kris Davis, an analysis of her composition, improvisation and the interaction between both.

2.1. Influences

When I heard the music of Kris Davis for the first time, what attracted my attention was as much her strong personal style in the role of composer as in that of pianist and improviser. In both guises her music seems to draw on various sources and influences. A very personal combination of composition and improvisation can be discerned and, at the same time, across her discography, she passes through a variety of stages in the development of her creative process.

On the one hand - still referring to my first impressions of her music, as I listened to it for the first time, and before attempting a more detailed analysis - I perceived music with a high degree of improvisation. Music that was highly fluid, with a very free and open concept of improvisation, which could fit the mould of free jazz. At the same time the compositional part was present, and it could also be seen that on many occasions there might be a compositional framework. This framework seemed to provide concrete structures to each piece and the interaction, between the composed and improvised sections, was one of the characteristics supplying the sensation of fluidity and openness.

⁵Henderson Lab, Joe. *Downbeat Critics Poll Winner. Kris Davis* [online]. San Francisco: SFJAZZ, 9/09/2017 [Consulted: February 2019]. Available on: <https://www.sfjazz.org/tickets/productions/kris-davis/?performanceNumber=10183>

⁶Davis, Kris. *Kris Davis Bio* [online]. [Consulted: December 2018]. Available on: <https://krisdavis.net/bio/>

On many occasions the question arose as to whether I was listening to a written / predetermined part or an improvised one.

The different influences which Kris Davis has had, and has developed in her work, are those which have produced such a personal and characteristic musical discourse and language. On the one hand, during the period in which she studied jazz piano at the University of Toronto, she studied the jazz tradition, immersing herself in the language of pianists like Bill Evans, Thelonious Monk, Herbie Hancock, Bud Powell, Wynton Kelly and Keith Jarrett. In this period she was mainly playing and studying standards.

Subsequently, now established in New York, the musical evolution of Kris Davis was highly influenced by the regular sessions which she was participating in with Tony Malaby and other musicians he invited along, to talk about music, play and improvise. In these sessions Tony Malaby suggested new ways of approaching the role of pianist and showed her other ways of improvising and conceptualising what she was playing, seeking structures other than those of the standards, for example.⁷

In this period she was studying classical composition in the City College of New York. Since that time contemporary composers such as György Ligeti, Morton Feldman, Luciano Berio, John Cage and Steve Reich have been important sources of inspiration, as well as artists like Paul Bley, Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman.⁸⁹¹⁰

2.2. Composition and improvisation

In the following section I will present an analysis of some of Kris Davis' original compositions. I've selected a number of her pieces that have inspired me a lot and that I would consider representative examples of the richness of her work, and what is characteristic about it.

⁷Davis, Kris (2017). "The Slightest Shift. Developing a Personal Language through Composition". A: Zorn, John. *Arcana VIII: Musicians on Music*. Nueva York: HIPS ROAD, chapter 5, pag. 47.

⁸Davis, Kris (2017). "The Slightest Shift. Developing a Personal Language through Composition". A: Zorn, John. *Arcana VIII: Musicians on Music*. Nueva York: HIPS ROAD, chapter 5, pag. 47.

⁹Lynch, Dave. *Kris Davis Biography* [online]. Allmusic [Consulted: January 2019]. Available on: <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/kris-davis-mn0000979382/biography>

¹⁰ Interview with Kris Davis (in appendix)

2.2.1. Iron Spider

“Iron Spider” is one of the songs on the album “Paradoxical Frog” (2009), by the trio made up of Kris Davis, Ingrid Laubrock (tenor saxophone) and Tyshawn Sorey (drums). This album brings together original songs by the three members of the trio. “Iron Spider” is one of those written by Kris and the analysis which I’ll present is based on my own transcriptions.

Compositional structure:

This piece has various predetermined sections that are combined with other improvised ones. The improvised sections construct a discourse addressed at the successive composed parts, creating continuity and narrative form within the structure.

On analysing it I observed a structure that consists of two large sections, A and B, as well as a final C section that works as a coda.

The initial section A, the character of which is expansive, intense and energetic, is built on the following base composed for the piano:

The image displays two staves of musical notation for piano. The top staff is labeled 'Piano' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Pno.'. Both staves are in 3/4 time and use a key signature of one sharp (F#). The top staff contains five measures of music, each marked with a repeat sign and 'x3' above it, indicating a triplet of each measure. The bottom staff contains six measures of music, starting with a measure number '6' above the first measure. The notation includes various chords and melodic lines, with some notes marked with accidentals (sharps and flats).

The drums provide a uniform texture, creating a layer of intense sound, regular and in crescendo. In parallel, the saxophone improvises on this base provided by the piano and drums, with a “free” approach and also with great intensity and dynamism.

Following on from this fragment the drums enter again and, in trio, a new improvised part unfolds and moves towards the coda finale, at 3:43 minutes.

The first system of the musical score features two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Sax.' and contains a single treble clef with a whole note G4, followed by a double bar line and repeat sign, then another whole note G4, another double bar line and repeat sign, and finally a whole note G4. The bottom staff is labeled 'Pno.' and contains two staves (treble and bass clefs). The treble clef has a whole note chord of G4 and B4, followed by a double bar line and repeat sign, then a whole note chord of G4 and B4, another double bar line and repeat sign, and finally a whole note chord of G4 and B4. The bass clef has a whole note G3, followed by a double bar line and repeat sign, then a whole note chord of G3 and B3, another double bar line and repeat sign, and finally a whole note chord of G3 and B3.

The second system of the musical score features two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Sax.' and contains a single treble clef with a whole note G4, followed by a double bar line and repeat sign, then a whole note G4, another double bar line and repeat sign, then a whole note G4, another double bar line and repeat sign, and finally a whole note G4 with a fermata. The bottom staff is labeled 'Pno.' and contains two staves (treble and bass clefs). The treble clef has a whole note chord of G4 and B4, followed by a double bar line and repeat sign, then a whole note chord of G4 and B4, another double bar line and repeat sign, then a whole note chord of G4 and B4, another double bar line and repeat sign, and finally a whole note chord of G4 and B4 with a fermata. The bass clef has a whole note G3, followed by a double bar line and repeat sign, then a whole note chord of G3 and B3, another double bar line and repeat sign, then a whole note chord of G3 and B3, another double bar line and repeat sign, and finally a whole note chord of G3 and B3 with a fermata.

The coda is shaped using the same concept as the beginning of B: the same game between sax and piano is present with sequences of notes and established harmonies. The drums provide accompaniment and rhythmic interaction in a minimalist form, and with very discreet dynamics. The harmonic progression of these measures finishes in a chord of d-flat major, coinciding with the chord that marks the beginning of the whole piece (measure no. 1) and creating a sensation of tonal repose.

The number of repetitions of each measure seems to be open to the choice of the moment.

Improvised elements:

The piano develops the theme in the open section of A.

At the end of the first written fragment the piano improvises using the same rhythm, but varying the chords until, in the minute 00:46, these chords turn into clusters, which initially keep the same rhythm. Little by little this variable changes and develops together with alternating clusters in different registers. This material comes together with the rest in the composed ending of this section.

The improvisation in B marks a contrast in relation to the intimate fragment that precedes it, written for the duo of piano and sax. This improvisation begins at the 2:09 minute point. The sax develops the same minimalist concept that it was playing in the written part of B, while the piano and drums establish a dialogue in the mode of “question – answer”, very evident in the “strikes” (drums) and short, energetic and dissonant phrases. The piano resorts again to the use of clusters.

At the 3 minute mark the piano brings a new texture to the improvisation, playing a repetitive melodic-rhythmic motif that is developed, varying and descending progressively until it reaches very low registers, where the interaction with the drums in “question-answer” mode comes back, once again using energetic clusters in various registers. At this moment the sax takes on a more melodic role, repeating another melodic-rhythmic motif which will serve as the “cement” to reunite the material of each instrument as, in a progressive manner, the drums and the piano will move past the interwoven dialogue to play in unison these “strikes” and clusters, reinforcing the powerful first two sections of each three in the sax part. This final passage of the improvisation of B, which I would define as an improvised fragment but with a previously established concept, will serve as an outro in order to arrive at C or the coda finale.

2.2.2. Feldman

“Feldman” is another one of the songs on the trio album “Paradoxical Frog”. As the title suggests, this is a piece inspired by the music of the 20th c. US composer Morton Feldman (1926-1987).

On this occasion I’ve been able to employ the original score of Kris Davis, made available by her (score in appendix), which has been a great help for me in being able to understand, in more detail, the way in which this composition is constructed.

Compositional structure:

When I listened to this piece, score in hand, I observed that it only began to sound or be identifiable at 3.01 minutes. From this minute onwards I was able to follow the piece from the beginning to end easily, reading it on the score. I concluded that the written part that I received started at 3.01 minutes.

After various listens I reached a second conclusion: the three first minutes belonged to an improvised section. Therefore, in order to begin, I’ve analysed this song with these two parts differentiated: the first, produced by improvisation, works as an introduction to the second part, based on the written composition and beginning at the 3.01 minute point.

Throughout the whole piece you can appreciate the influence of Morton Feldman at various levels: the use of an atonal harmony, the use of the concept of “indeterminate music” in some fragments (a compositional focus which aims to leave open to chance or choice and the performers’ interpretation of some aspects of the work) (measure 27, 31-33 and 34); the utilization of rhythms that seem free, drifting; the use of some asymmetric patterns (measure 27 and 28 of the clarinet in Bb, measure 31, 33, for example); the relaxed character that predominates in the work (with the exception of some parts), as well as a slow, progressive evolution of the discourse of the piece.¹¹.

From 3.01 minutes onwards I’ve identified 5 sections.

¹¹Wikipedia. *Morton Feldman*. Wiki [online]. [Consulted: March 2019]. Available on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morton_Feldman

Section A of measures 1 to 12 functions in the same way as the introduction.

Section B of the measures 13 to 25 evokes works such as Feldman's "For Philip Guston" and "Piano and String Quartet", through the leisurely repetition of different phrases that occurs.

Section C runs from measure 27 to 30. This section employs the concept of "indeterminate music", proposing a free interpretation of the written line for the clarinet and an improvisation matching the style of the composed line for the piano in these measures. This part works as an interlude before section D, in measure 31, where a collective solo appears, conducted and with concrete indications.

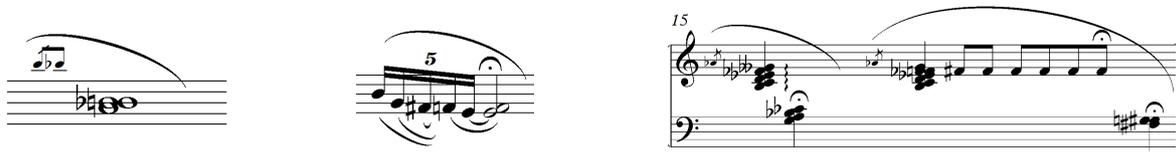
Lastly, we encounter the finale, E, at measure 35, which functions as a coda and in which we return to the relaxed, drifting character of the beginning, with a similarly intervallic, harmonic, and rhythmic construction, composed around phrases. The use of a long, deliberate moment of silence at measure 37 is also characteristic.

Improvised elements:

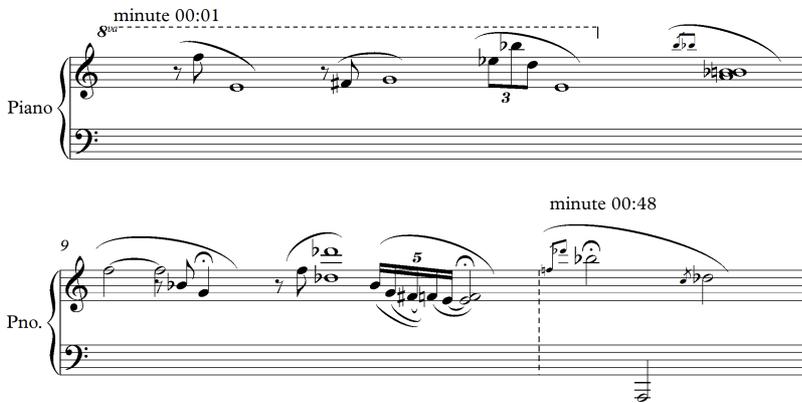
The language utilised during the whole piece, regardless of whether it's the improvised or composed part, maintains a common aesthetic. It is a language with elements which can be pigeonholed within contemporary classical music and with a great influence from the music of Morton Feldman. The use of a textural focus in the music, of the creation of different atmospheres, of rhythms that are irregular and not well-defined against a concrete pulse, the type of harmonies, the phrasing and melodic sketching from a perspective close to atonality would all be relevant traits.

In the first three minutes of collective improvisation it can be heard that certain compositional resources are used in the improvisation. On the one hand, at a structural level, there is a musical direction that emerges from a beginning with a lot of space and little activity until it progressively leads to more activity and a certain density coming from the elements articulated and greater virtuosity (rapid, lengthy phrases in the piano, etc).

With regard to the piano we can appreciate the use of harmonies that are similar to those of the second composed part, examples of which include voicings made up of small clusters and intervals that are more closed and dissonant:



In addition, phrases appear that create textures and an atmosphere similar to those of the beginning of the written section:



As well as this, there are pianistic phrases closer to the contemporary piano of Feldman and others:



(minute 1.04)

Already within the composed section, we encounter two moments open to improvisation, but with the concept of “indeterminate music” identified previously. This is in measures 27 and 31, where the improvisation is tied to the score indications. In the particular case of measure 27, the improvisation is based on simulating the style of the written fragment. For the piano, it consists of clusters of three notes coordinated through irregular rhythms. The indication at measure 31, however, consists of playing the written fragment in unison and gradually deconstructing it, descending chromatically until arriving at the next written fragment at measure 33.

2.2.3. B Side

“B Side” is one of the songs on the album “Good Citizen” (2009). The album was recorded in a trio alongside John Hébert (double bass) and Tom Rainey (drums). All of the songs are originals by Kris (with the exception of tracks 8 and 10 which were co-written with the other members of the trio).

Compositional structure:

The two compositions described previously are characterised, among other things, by having an elaborate compositional form consisting of various successive sections (which are seldom reprised or played in the same way). From a formal perspective one could refer to the use of an approach similar to classical music. By contrast, “B Side” suggests more of a jazz approach with respect to the theme and language utilized (transcription attached in the appendix).

The structure is the following:

Theme – Drum Solo – Theme (until measure 15) – Piano Solo – Outro from the solo, from measure 25 to the end.

The theme is made up of a written melody for the piano and line for the double bass. The “non-use” of chords and comping in the left-hand is characteristic, as much in the written theme itself as in the piano solo. This aspect relates to a conscious aesthetic decision that Kris Davis took at a particular moment in her career, in which she decided not to play chords any more and to only play lines. She began to investigate improvising in this way, as she had already lost interest in the traditional sonority of jazz piano in which constant chords and comping are supplied by the left hand.¹²

In relation to the language of “B Side”, there are various aspects that are classifiable within a more jazz language, such as the constant “walking bass” line in the double bass, the swing style, the explicit, regular pulse and the rhythmic, melodic material of the piano employed as much in the melody as in the solo, as well as the global form of the theme, often used in jazz: “theme-solos-theme”.

¹²Ratliff, Ben. *New Pilots at the Keyboard* [online]. New York: The New York Times, 10/6/2011 [Consulted: February 2019]. Available on: <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/07/arts/music/four-young-pianists-on-the-rise-in-the-jazz-scene.html?pagewanted=all>

Turning to the harmony, I observed a lot of movement with relation to V - I (a dominant to tonic tension or simply harmonies that occur in intervals of fifths). In the attached transcription I've presented the corresponding analysis.

Improvised elements

The piano solo begins in minute 1:41. After transcribing and analysing a fragment of the beginning I observed various characteristic elements. On the one hand, the double bass, which improvises freely in the form of the “walking bass”, frequently employing a combination of close steps and jumps in fifths (above all perfect fifths as well as diminished fifths or tritones). On the other hand, I observed that in the piano improvisation phrases are constructed with clear tonal centres; at the beginning of this they are more evident and, as it progresses, there are passages in which they are less present and the approach is also intervallic and textural. I'll set out the harmonic analysis of the first phrases of the solo:

Harmonic analysis of the piano line:

The approach of the solo (and of the theme) is not tonal. But the fact of listening to a melodic line, where certain tonal centres freely emerge – added to the double bass

foundation which generates a sensation of tension, relaxation and direction (generated by the movements in fifths and single-step lines) – helps the solo generate a certain sense of harmonic direction, of tension and rest, of melodic-harmonic fluidity and of discursive coherence. “B Side” is based on a language originating in free jazz.

2.2.4. Pass the Magic Hat

Pass the Magic Hat belongs to the album “Capricorn Climber” (2012). It’s an album for quintet where we find, alongside Kris Davis on the piano, Mat Maneri (viola), Ingrid Laubrock (saxofon), Trevor Dunn (double bass) and Tom Rainey (drums and glockenspiel). Once again, it’s all original music by Kris with the exception of track 8 which was written by the group collectively.

Compositional structure:

By means of the transcription that I carried out I’ve been able to analyse “Pass the Magic Hat”.

The composition is made up of two distinct pieces. The first is from the beginning to 4.26 minutes and the second is from 4.27 to the end.

First Piece:

This is constructed around the following line, composed for double bass, which is sustained for the whole piece as it repeats on loop until the coda:

The musical notation is written in bass clef and consists of three staves. The first staff starts with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff continues the line, featuring a 3/4 time signature, a triplet of eighth notes, and a 4/4 time signature. The third staff concludes the piece with a 2/4 time signature and a double bar line with repeat dots. Measure numbers 5 and 10 are indicated at the start of the second and third staves respectively.

Above this line (played in time from the beginning) Kris Davis plays a long, progressive solo that concludes at the 1.58 minute point, where a second written voice for the piano is added to the double bass line, creating these two lines (that will go on repeating themselves on loop until the coda) as a base for a saxophone solo:

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system is labeled 'Melody' and 'Bass line'. The second system is labeled '5' and the third system is labeled '9'. The score is written in treble and bass clefs, with various time signatures (4/4, 3/4, 2/4) and key signatures (one sharp, one flat). The notation includes eighth notes, quarter notes, and rests, with some measures containing triplets. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the third system.

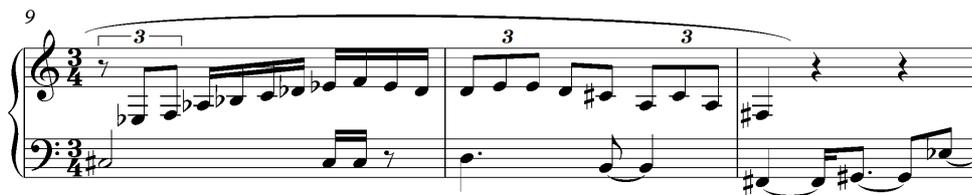
After the development of the saxophone solo, this ends up doubling the composed line for the piano for a round and, at 3.49 minutes, the whole quintet play the coda (shown in the appendix). The viola appears for the first time in the coda of this piece.

Improvised elements:

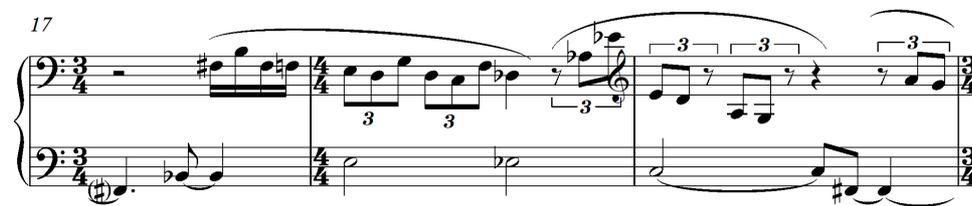
In my opinion one of the most striking, scintillating aspects of the piano solo in this piece is the rhythmic richness and flexibility. Kris Davis sets up a game with the flexibility of the tempo, the phrasing and the rhythmic figures. This is something with which Tom Rainey, the drummer, also works constantly. Thus, we have a double bass line that is maintained, clearly marking a constant beat (albeit with a rhythm composed so it doesn't make the grounding of the time obvious) and the piano and the drums which construct and deconstruct this sensation of shared pulse. However, the three are very clearly defined

within the cyclic form. In the drums we can appreciate the regular support provided at certain important points within the lineal form of the double bass, as well as in the case of the piano solo, emerging from phrases more free rhythmically to ground the unison moments (or not), in concrete notes that return to generate a sense of anchorage in the form and shared pulse. Next, I will present some moments in which this occurs.

- Measures 10 and 11 in the transcription of the solo (appendix):



- Measures 18 and 19 in the transcription of the solo (appendix):



kris Davis employs 8th notes with swing phrasing in moments in which she wants to make the shared beat clearer. Measures 28 or 31-32 of the transcription (appendix) are an example of this.

The phrases that Kris Davis plays have a high degree of fluidity and a rhythmic-melodic richness, finally amounting to a considerable complexity and technical virtuosity. The variety of melodic ideas, rhythms and harmonies that appear create a solo of great expressivity.

In relation to the harmony, after analysing the melodic and harmonic material of the solo and of the composed parts, I've reached the conclusion that there's a freer intervallic and melodic scheme, without a conception of fixed or established tonal centres. The fact of having the form clear and being able to accompany and reinforce points of the structure, as well as the melodic ability to build such musical phrases from a free and open mode of listening, and with such a rich rhythm, gives her the enormous sense of discursive solidity and coherence that she possesses.

Second Piece:

This second part of “Pass the Magic Hat” constitutes an entire section written for piano, sax, drums and double bass that functions as the base of a long solo for viola. Transcribing this piece had its difficulties at a rhythmic level and being fairly long it might appear that it would be difficult to identify the form. However, on completing the transcription and analyzing it in detail, I was able to conclude that this part could be conceived of as a form of blues, being treated with a lot of freedom and space between one harmony and another.

The main tonal centre of this piece is B major, having the fourth and the fifth step (E and F#) as the other two strongest points of harmonic support. We can observe a harmonic relation identifiable as the blues:

B Major (I) measure 1 / / /

5 E (IV) measure 15 / B (I) measure 20 /

9 F# (V) measure 26 / B (I) measure 31 /

This form is repeated two times and ends with a small coda in B major.

The viola also approximates to a somewhat “bluesy” language in its solo in measure 53.

On the other hand, it’s interesting the way in which the harmonic material is created, composed through a horizontal approach in which the double bass, the sax and the piano interweave melodic phrases and lines of different lengths, interacting in a subtle manner.

2.2.5. Twice Escaped

This is another beautiful song by Kris Davis. It belongs to the album “Waiting for you to Grow” (2014).

On this occasion she returns to the trio format alongside John Hébert (double bass) and Tom Rainey (drums).

Compositional structure:

The concept on which this song is based is similar to that of the first piece of “Pass the Magic Hat”: one composed bass line which repeats on loop and above which a piano solo is built, until it culminates in a finale composed for two lines, one the initial bass (which will be doubled by the piano in this finale) and another higher melody for the piano which the right hand plays.

By contrast to the first piece of “Pass the Magic Hat”, in which a regular pulse was present from the beginning, in “Twice Escaped” the appearance of the bass line and the improvised material is presented through rubato. There’s a process in which “no beat” or rubato is gradually left behind, from the moment when the bass line starts emerging in accordance with the improvised material in the piano and viceversa, until, slowly, the changes and the tempo start to approximate to the final tempo, ending up playing the theme (melody and bass line) that I’ll show next (transcription attached in appendix):

The image displays a musical score for the piano part of the song "Twice Escaped". It consists of three systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system (measures 1-4) starts in 6/16 time, changes to 5/16 in measure 3, and returns to 6/16 in measure 4. The second system (measures 5-8) starts in 6/16, changes to 5/16 in measure 7, and returns to 6/16 in measure 8. The third system (measures 9-12) starts in 6/16, changes to 5/16 in measure 10, and returns to 6/16 in measure 11. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Improvised elements:

“Twice Escaped” is a big piano solo which ends in the final melody previously set out. The creation of the discourse spans the rubato from when the notes of the final line, written for double bass, start appearing, in a direct or more roundabout, “embellished” way, according to the piano improvisation (and vice versa), to the “a tempo” improvisation in the final melody. At a harmonic level, it’s the double bass and the piano which establish an interaction based on maximum listening to carry the discourse, in a progressive manner, towards the a tempo and rhythmic ending.

At the beginning, between the different notes established in the double bass line, there is a reasonable amount of space and a harmonic approach can be discerned in which each bass note generates a tonal centre. I’ll subsequently present the extract from the beginning of the song where I’ve analysed the harmonic material:

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with a piano (Piano) and double bass (D.B.) part. The tempo is marked "Rubato".

System 1:

- Chords:** C#m, C, Emaj7
- Measures:** 1-4
- Notes:** The piano part features a melodic line with triplets and slurs. The double bass part provides a harmonic foundation with sustained notes and some movement.

System 2:

- Chords:** Abmaj7, A#11, F7, E#11
- Measures:** 5-9
- Notes:** The piano part continues with complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets. The double bass part has a more active line with triplets.

System 3:

- Chords:** Bmaj7, C#maj7, Amaj7#11, Cmaj7 #11
- Measures:** 10-12
- Notes:** The piano part features a dense texture with many notes and slurs. The double bass part has a steady, rhythmic accompaniment.

System 4:

- Chords:** E, Ab, A, F7#11
- Measures:** 13-16
- Notes:** The piano part has a melodic line with slurs. The double bass part has a simple, rhythmic accompaniment.

System 5:

- Chords:** Bm7
- Measures:** 17-20
- Notes:** The piano part features a melodic line with triplets and slurs. The double bass part has a simple, rhythmic accompaniment.

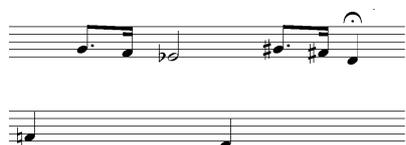
In this beginning it can be clearly seen how each bass note establishes a tonal centre. However, as the piece advances, the melodic-harmonic material utilized by Kris Davis becomes less obvious and a more intervallic approach can be identified, modal on certain occasions and with a “free” language guiding the improvisation.

A recurrent feature is also the fleeting use of particular fragments and small, verbatim and /or embellished phrases from the final melody composed within the solo. For example:

- Minute 0:59, which coincides with measures 10 and 11 of the composed melody and with the fifth transcription system (attached):



- Minute 1:10, which coincides with measures 4 (the last note), 5 and 6 of the composed melody (even though on this occasion the piano phrase appears displaced a measure in relation to the bass) and with the end of the sixth and beginning of the seventh transcription system (attached):



- Minute 1:42, which coincides with measures 4, 5 and 6 of the composed melody and with the twelve transcription system (attached):



In “Twice Escaped” we encounter a completely horizontal approach with respect to the composition and improvisation, where the appearance of chords is practically non-existent (it’s only in the first return of the solo that certain major 3rd intervals are heard in the piano), and this is one of the main concepts established at both levels in this song.

The flexibility and the capacity to play with the tempo and its construction is another of the principal characteristics in the improvisatory scheme of this song, and the trio functions as a machine or an organism in perfect coordination.

At the same time the phrases improvised by Kris Davis - in addition to technical and melodic virtuosity - play with duration, with beginning and ending in less obvious places, and this lends the solo a great sense of openness and freedom.

2.2.6. Berio

“Berio” is another one of the songs that make up the album “Waiting for you to Grow”. It’s inspired by the work “Sequence IV for piano solo” by Luciano Berio. In this piece Kris incorporates the harmonic style, the articulation and the use of the sustain pedal of Sequence.¹³

On this occasion, too, I’ve been able to rely on the original score and an explanation by the composer herself.¹⁴

Compositional structure:

“Berio” constitutes a structure of two parts differentiated from one another but linked through a careful, progressive build-up. The first is based on a series of chords written for piano and inspired by the harmonies of “Sequence for piano” by Berio:

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system, labeled 'Piano', consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) in 4/4 time. It contains seven measures of chords. The second system, labeled 'Pno.', also consists of two staves in 4/4 time, starting at measure 9. It contains seven measures of chords, with the final measure ending with a double bar line. The chords are complex, featuring multiple notes and accidentals, characteristic of Berio's style.

¹³Davis, Kris (2017). “The Slightest Shift. Developing a Personal Language through Composition”. A: Zorn, John. *Arcana VIII: Musicians on Music*. New York: HIPS ROAD, chapter 5, pag. 47.

¹⁴Davis, Kris (2017). “The Slightest Shift. Developing a Personal Language through Composition”. A: Zorn, John. *Arcana VIII: Musicians on Music*. New York: HIPS ROAD, chapter 5, pag. 47.

In this first part we encounter a series of chords for piano in a cyclic form. The rhythm of the chords changes in each cycle, slowly evolving until it reaches the second part, planned for improvisation. At the same time, the double bass and the drums act and interact independently of the piano, through written rhythms and sections of improvisation.

The second part (starting from measure 80) is a fragment of cyclical improvisation for piano, demarcated within the form of this group of measures in the final part of the composition. Having passed through it, playing the composed material, the piano remains improvising on this form, while the double bass and the drums continue playing the written part. Kris moves playfully between improvisation and alighting on concrete written points of the form, creating an elastic interaction between the piano and the double bass plus drums. On reaching the final stretch of the theme and the culmination of the solo, in measure 93 and minute 8:01, the improvisation opens up to the whole of the group, until it concludes by playing the written part of these last two measures.

Improvised elements:

As I was saying in the compositional structure section, the solo on the final cyclical part, that Kris Davis performs, plays between improvisation on the form and the execution of particular written measures, alighting on these as if they were part of the discourse of the solo. The arrival at these points is completely organic and it's difficult to tell, if you're not familiar with the written part, when you're dealing with improvised material and when you're dealing with written material. Next, I'm going to present the beginning of the solo, which coincides with measure 82, at the 5:51 minute point:

The image displays three systems of musical notation. The first system, labeled 'Piano', shows measures 82 and 84. Measure 82 features a triplet of eighth notes in the treble clef. Measure 84 is marked 'written' and shows a complex rhythmic pattern with slurs and triplets. The second system, labeled 'Pno.', shows measures 4, 3, and 3, with the text 'approximate rhythm' written below the staff. The third system, labeled 'Pno.', shows measure 8 and measure 91, with the text 'measure 91, written' below it. The notation includes various rhythmic values, slurs, and dynamic markings.

It is notable how she constructs melodic-rhythmic phrases that in themselves are of a great technical and expressive richness and at the same time drive the discourse forward and combine organically with the measures 84 and 91, which, in this case, form part of the written score.

Rhythmically too there's a game of elasticity and of the greater and lesser establishment of a shared pulse. The piano, on occasions, improvises sharing a beat with the double bass and drums and, on others, seems to depart from it following a parallel beat which, rapidly and in any moment, can return to connect itself with that of the tempo of the piece. As the solo progresses, the rhythm of the improvised phrases becomes more and more virtuosic.

Up to 8:01 minutes (measure 93), the language of the piano solo was one of a melodic-rhythmic character from an intervallic perspective and a "free" approach, coinciding with the written material utilized (which contains virtuoso passages in the style of the "Sequence" that combine phrases and rhythms of considerable technical difficulty). From this minute onwards, in the mini-section ending of the last two measures, which open up to a collective solo the material utilized for improvisation, it's also an extension of the written material for the piano part in those: the improvisational discourse is constructed around the rhythmic game between voicings similar to those written. At the same time the rhythm

employed in the improvisation is similar to that featured in the written part. In this final fragment, therefore, the improvisation is based on the development of the written material.

The intervallic focus and approach, harmonic (not tonal), as well as the rhythmic coherence between both parts (improvised and written), make the total feeling of the improvised section one of great fluidity, elasticity and stylistic coherence with respect to the language utilized.

2.2.7. The compositional process of Kris Davis

In the article which Kris Davis wrote (“The Slightest Shift. Developing a Personal Language through Composition”) for John Zorn’s book “Arcana VIII”¹⁵, she explains the compositional process that she follows and that she has come to establish as her own after various years of experience.

This process is made up of various phases. The first is conceived as what she calls “macro-composition”: this is the first approach to the piece, away from the instrument and the moment of brainstorming ideas. In this phase she conceives the global form of the piece and decides how she wants it to function musically and what elements she wants to develop in it (some technical or conceptual aspect, etc).

The second phase of the compositional process, Kris Davis conceives of as the phase of micro-composition. In this phase the specific, concrete material is generated that will make concrete the concept of the “macro-composition”. A final score is obtained as a consequence of the completion of this phase, a score written for the whole ensemble.

Finally, as soon as the score is written, comes the third and final phase: “the process of bringing the piece to live performance”. This last phase encompasses the whole practical process, from personal study and rehearsals with musicians up to the interpretation in concert and / or recording. As Kris says in her article, “one of the most exciting moments in the process: finally hearing the music come to life”.

¹⁵Davis, Kris (2017). “The Slightest Shift. Developing a Personal Language through Composition”. A: Zorn, John. *Arcana VIII: Musicians on Music*. New York: HIPS ROAD, chapter 5, pag. 47.

2.3. Solo Piano

Kris Davis has two albums for solo piano “Aeriol Piano” (2011) and “Massive Threads” (2012).

Both albums contain original compositions by Kris Davis and a version of a jazz standard. In “Aeriol Piano” we find “All the Things You Are” and in “Massive Threads” the song “Evidence” by Thelonious Monk.

In these two albums we can once again appreciate the extraordinary combination of languages originating in different sources of inspiration.

In “Aeriol Piano” what we hear spans a version of “All the Things you Are” - with a prominent influence from the solo in the same song performed by Paul Bley in the album “Sonny Meets Hawk” by Sonny Rollins, where the harmonic structure of the melody is secondary, letting the thread of the melodic ideas guide the discourse through the song ¹⁶- up to compositions of a distinct compositional and conceptual structure, highly innovative and creative.

One example is the composition “Saturn Return”, with clear influences from the music of John Cage¹⁷. This is a composition in which the piano is “prepared” in a high percentage of the different fragments.

The form of the composition is the following:

Section A (composed) – Section B: Solo – Section C (composed).

A and C are parts composed and conceived for prepared piano with a style very close to that of the work of John Cage such as the “Sonatas and Interludes” for prepared piano or “The Perilous Night”.

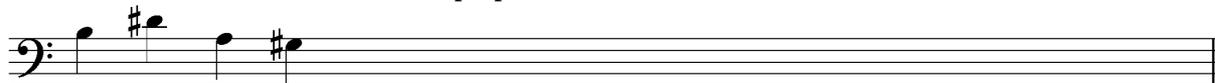
B is a solo for piano which is built around a base, rhythmically semi-regular, of a line of four notes in the left hand. The right hand carries out a solo in a medium-high register of the keyboard where the notes are not prepared. As it goes on, it plays in the area of prepared notes and ones that are not prepared in the improvisation. Finally, at the end of the solo, the improvisation is developed in the area of prepared notes in order to direct it towards and unite it with the composed part C.

¹⁶Davis, Kris (2017). “The Slightest Shift. Developing a Personal Language through Composition”. A: Zorn, John. *Arcana VIII: Musicians on Music*. New York: HIPS ROAD, chapter 5, pag. 47.

¹⁷ Interview with Kris Davis (in appendix)

Next I will present the harmonic analysis of the initial fragment (minute 4:21) of the first part of the solo, where we can observe certain tonal centres that Kris Davis could have been listening to while she was realizing it:

The solo is built around these "prepared" notes in the left hand



Solo:
(minute 4:21)

This approach in the improvisation, where small or intermediate-sized melodic cells appear to come from spontaneous listening and 'in the moment' from some tonal centres, is highly influenced by the music of Ornette Coleman, who Kris Davis studied a lot for a period of time.¹⁸

Additionally, we encounter improvised phrases (set in the context of the typology previously set out) that suggest a more intervallic focus. In measure 21 of the transcription (attached), we find an example:



¹⁸ Interview with Kris Davis (in appendix)

Or even a phrase that seems to be a dodecaphonic series, in measure 40 of the transcription (attached):



The conception of time is also an important trait in this piece and in the moment of the improvisation, since it creates an illusion of pulse through the use of recognizable rhythmic figures. However, these are interpreted with flexibility and a light rubato that, added to the phrasing of the left hand that doesn't keep a regular beat either, give a more floating sensation to the tempo and rhythm.

On the album "Massive Threads" there's also a collection of seven original songs (plus the creative version of "Evidence"), on which a variety of formal and conceptual approaches can be observed.

One of the compositions that caught my attention on this album is "Ten Exorcists". On this there's a clear influence from the minimalist music of Steve Reich and of John Cage as well (transcription in appendix).

It's a composition that passes through different sections that don't repeat themselves. The first constitutes a stage of various phases of development of melodic-rhythmic cells for prepared piano. It reminds me a lot of the work "Piano Phase" by Steve Reich.

Next we encounter an improvised fragment, contrasting to the previous material, with extremely rapid phrases of a high virtuosity which are tied together without pauses between them and which play with prepared and non-prepared notes.

After this comes a written passage, conceptually and by character equivalent to the beginning of the piece. This is followed by a final improvisation whose unifying and structuring element is that of perfect fourths as the generative material of the whole improvised fragment. The melodic improvisation in the right hand above the unstable execution (rhythmically speaking) of these perfect fourths in the left hand in various registers, as well as the rhythmic interaction of both hands playing this interval in an interwoven way with irregular rhythms, provides the final soundscape for the piece.

2.4. Interaction between improvisation and composition

After listening, analysing and studying in greater depth the music of Kris Davis, I've been able to understand better the way in which it happens and works.

The works which I've been analysing in this project are representative of the global work of Kris Davis. In these a compositional framework is established where the combination of composition and improvisation is key to constructing the sound-world of each piece.

As we've seen, the quantity of musical influences which Kris Davis has had is clearly reflected in her compositions and in her way of improvising. One could say that all these references, or sources of inspiration, have passed through her personal filter and have been transformed into new music nurtured by Kris Davis.

Her music explores an enormous variety of forms of musical expression by means of composition and improvisation. On occasions the departure point is the composed part, that promotes the investigation of new ways of developing the improvisation, so it comes together and creates stylistic and conceptual coherence with the written part. On other occasions it's the improvisation approach which develops a way of interpreting the composed part (as is the case with her versions of the standards like "All the Things you Are", "Evidence", etc.).

With regards to the aspect of improvisation, the rigorous study that she's undergone (searching for resources that permit her to create highly free, flexible material, "on horseback" between a more "traditional" jazz language and a more "contemporary" and "free" language"), ensures that it remains relevant to a large variety of sonic contexts.

On the other hand, her compositions stage the exploration of concepts, ideas, instrumental techniques, forms, and sound-approaches of a varied nature in which a number of musical parameters are developed.

In the article which she wrote for John Zorn's book "Arcana", Kris Davis explains her conception of composition as a medium for establishing a framework for improvisation: "I was curious about composing as a means of establishing a framework for improvisation. In an early composition, *Bloodwine* (on the album *The Slightest Shift*) written for my quartet with Tony Malaby (saxophone), Eivind Opsvik (bass), Jeff Davis (drums) and myself (piano) I explore the usage of short phrases and textures that quickly shifted from one idea

to another. Some of the melodic phrases were written out so that there were moments we played in unison while some of the textural material were notated graphically. At certain points in the tune there are directions for the drums and bass to swing and suggested note durations in phrases between the piano and saxophone, but the pacing is meant to be determined by the group, establishing a feeling of elasticity. We performed Bloodwine and other pieces using similar compositional and notational methods. I loved that even though we were playing the same compositions the music could be so different from performances to performance. Eventually this elasticity in the band's sound stretched not just from tune to tune, but over an entire set of music: we could jump around between tunes, or leave things out completely. The compositions functioned as the framework but ultimately each performance was about improvisation and reacting in the moment.

I found that through composition, I was able to clearly define a concept or language and apply those concepts to my improvising. Performing my compositions taught me how to think compositionally when improvising. And as I wrote more music I realized that the act of composing was an opportunity to challenge myself as a player, writing things I *wished* I could play, but *technically* wasn't able to reach yet.¹⁹

Also stating as an example the composition "Berio", analysed previously, Kris summarises her work again in an enlightening way: "There were moments in that score where there are very written out things that if you just heard them they probably sound improvised. Like the piano chords going by. If you hadn't seen that score and you just heard the recording, you would think maybe I was just improvising, but then when you saw the score, you saw that it was a longer form. And around that, the bass and the drums were directed to improvise at certain moments. Sometimes using that language that they had, sometimes just being totally free. So, that's a way of controlling the pacing of something, like the overall arc and structure of the piece, but using improvisation to do that. So there's both happening at the same time. Improvisation and composition".²⁰

¹⁹Davis, Kris (2017). "The Slightest Shift. Developing a Personal Language through Composition". A: Zorn, John. *Arcana VIII: Musicians on Music*. New York: HIPS ROAD, chapter 5, pag. 47.

²⁰ Interview with Kris Davis (in appendix)

2.5. Other characteristic traits

Up to now in this piece of work I've presented the reflections made on the compositions where composed and improvised parts constitute the whole of the music.

I'd like to dedicate a small space in this thesis, so it doesn't remain unmentioned, to another important facet of Kris Davis, that of "free improviser": Kris Davis also performs concerts of "Free Impro" and even has an album called "Duopoly" (2016) in which 8 duos feature, each duo with a different musician and in each one playing a composed piece and a totally improvised piece (16 tracks in total).

Another characteristic trait which I wouldn't want not to comment on is the sound of Kris Davis on the piano, a breathless, warm and immersive sound which emerges from a great technical control over the instrument and a great musical sensibility at the moment of playing.

3. Conclusion

The realisation of this piece of work has enabled me to reach different conclusions.

Through the analysis and investigation carried out I've been able to get to know the work of Kris Davis at a deeper level; I've discovered new parts of her discography that I didn't know and I've understood in a more detailed manner the mechanisms that occur in her music. Personally, it's been extremely enriching to return to listen to certain pieces that I already knew and admired (but wasn't always sure about how they were constructed) to come to understand them in greater detail. Better understanding of her music has generated even more admiration and, even if the knowledge that I had of her, before completing this thesis, had already had a great influence on me when it came to thinking of my music, after this immersion I've been able to clarify certain concepts and adopt new ones.

The work of Kris Davis is characterised by its enormous creativity; by the vast exploration of new forms of expression through composition and improvisation (as much at a level of orchestration as from a pianistic perspective); by a rigour and a great technical / expressive quality in the final result of her instrumental performance and by having attained a strong personal style and voice within jazz.

It's interesting and important to observe that what we might label as "personal style", "own voice" "creation of a language" is the result of a process in which material is investigated, that has been the object of development, and that this development has an origin, roots, musical antecedents.

In the case of Kris Davis, her music is the result of a combination of influences and studied languages: the base of all of this is a solid control of the language of jazz, which encompasses everything from the jazz tradition in piano (Wynton Kelly, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, Herbie Hancock, Bill Evans, Keith Jarrett) up to free jazz, and this interacts with precedents in the music of some contemporary composers of the 20th century. Her composed work as much as her improvisational language are a dynamic and rigorous confluence of these stylistic universes, jazz being its general framework.

I consider the music of Kris Davis to constitute an invaluable contribution to jazz and also to jazz piano. What she offers musically, her compositional material, her pianistic and improvisational approach, all this furnishes us with an innovative language and an enormous creativity. Kris Davis joins the list of artists that demonstrate how the human being is capable of reinventing herself afresh when it seemed that everything had already been said.

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5. Appendix

Discography:

The following is Kris Davis' personal discography:

- Lifespan: 2003 (Fresh Sound New Talent)
- The Slightest Shift: 2005 (Fresh Sound New Talent)
- Rye Eclipse: 2007 (Fresh Sound New Talent)
- Good Citizen: 2009 (Fresh Sound New Talent)
- Paradoxical Frog: 2010 (clean feed)
- Aerial Piano: 2011 (clean feed)
- Union. Paradoxical Frog: 2012 (clean feed)
- Massive Threads: 2012 (Thirsty Ear)
- Capricorn Climber: 2013 (clean feed)
- Waiting for you to grow: 2014 (clean feed)
- Save your Breath: 2015 (clean feed)
- Duopoly: 2016 (Pyroclastic Records)
- Octopus: 2018 (Pyroclastic Records)

Transcriptions:

IRON SPIDER
Transcription. Section A, composed

Kris Davis
"Paradoxical Frog"

A

Piano:

The musical notation consists of two systems. The first system is labeled 'Piano' and features a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody in the treble clef is marked with 'x3' above it, indicating a triplet. The bass clef part consists of chords. The second system is labeled 'Pno.' and also features a grand staff. It begins with a measure number '6' above the treble clef. The melody continues in the treble clef, and the bass clef part continues with chords.

The piano improvises from this rhythmic pattern.
Drums and sax continue to develop their improvisation



Outro: piano and drums in unison:

The musical notation is for the 'Outro' section, labeled 'Piano:'. It features a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody in the treble clef is marked with 'x8' above it, indicating an eighth-note pattern. The bass clef part consists of chords, with the word 'clusters' written below the notes in each measure.

B Side

Transcription. Theme

Kris Davis
"Good Citizen"

Piano

D.B.

E Am / D(#5) G Abm Db A7

5 Ab(#5) D Db G7 C

9 A D Ab E Am E C#7 F# A# D

13 G7 C# C(#5) D#m Dm

17 C#m G7 C B7 Am D

21 Bb Eb#11 Ab Db Gb A D G A7

25 D A Ab(#5) B G(#5) Bbm E G

29 Ab Db7 C G C

B Side

Transcription. Piano solo extract

Kris Davis
"Good Citizen"

Harmonic analysis of the piano line:

Piano

D.B.

1 E Dmaj7 3

5 D7

9 Abmaj7 Dmaj7 3 G

13 Dmaj7

4/4 2/4 4/4

17 Dm Bbmaj7 Emaj7 Eb#5

4/4

21 Eb

4/4

25 B7

4/4

29 3

4/4

Pass The Magic Hat

Transcription of the double bass line. Piece 1

Kris Davis
"Capricorn Climber"

5

10

This block contains the transcription of the double bass line for the first piece. It consists of three staves of music in bass clef. The first staff starts with a double bar line and a repeat sign, followed by a 4/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat. The second staff begins at measure 5, featuring a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff begins at measure 10 and ends with a double bar line and repeat sign. The time signature changes to 3/4, then 4/4, and finally 2/4.

Pass The Magic Hat

Transcription of a melody composed around a double bass line

(which works as a foundation for the sax solo, as an outro from this solo and as a bridge to the coda)

Kris Davis
"Capricorn Climber"

Melody

Bass line

5

9

This block contains the transcription of a melody composed around a double bass line. It consists of three systems of music, each with a treble clef staff for the melody and a bass clef staff for the bass line. The first system starts with a 4/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat. The second system begins at measure 5 and includes a triplet of eighth notes. The third system begins at measure 9 and ends with a double bar line and repeat sign. The time signature changes to 3/4, then 4/4, and finally 2/4.

Pass The Magic Hat

Transcription. Piece 1: Coda

Kris Davis
"Capricorn Climber"

Musical notation for measures 1-4. The piece is in 4/4 time. Measure 1 contains a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a quarter note in the left hand. Measure 2 features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a quarter note in the left hand. Measure 3 has a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a quarter note in the left hand. Measure 4 concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a quarter note in the left hand. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

5

Musical notation for measures 5-7. Measure 5 is in 3/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. Measure 6 is in 2/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. Measure 7 is in 4/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

10

Musical notation for measures 10-15. Measure 10 is in 3/4 time with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. Measure 11 is in 2/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. Measure 12 is in 2/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. Measure 13 is in 3/4 time with a quartet of eighth notes in the right hand. Measure 14 is in 2/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. Measure 15 is in 4/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

16

Musical notation for measures 16-18. Measure 16 is in 4/4 time with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. Measure 17 is in 3/4 time with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. Measure 18 is in 4/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

19

Musical notation for measures 19-23. Measure 19 is in 7/8 time with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. Measure 20 is in 4/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. Measure 21 is in 4/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. Measure 22 is in 4/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. Measure 23 is in 4/4 time with a quarter note in the right hand. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Pass The Magic Hat

Transcription of the beginning of the piano solo. Piece 1.

Kris Davis
"Capricorn Climber"

Piano

The first system of the piano solo consists of three measures. The first measure is in 4/4 time and contains three eighth-note triplets in the right hand. The second measure is in 4/4 time and features a descending eighth-note scale in the right hand. The third measure is in 3/4 time and contains a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The bass line consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment in 4/4 time, changing to 3/4 time in the final measure.

Pno.

The second system of the piano solo consists of three measures. The first measure is in 4/4 time and contains a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The second measure is in 4/4 time and features a descending eighth-note scale in the right hand. The third measure is in 3/4 time and contains two triplet eighth notes in the right hand. The bass line continues with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in 4/4 time, changing to 3/4 time in the final measure.

Pno.

The third system of the piano solo consists of three measures. The first measure is in 4/4 time and contains a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The second measure is in 4/4 time and features a descending eighth-note scale in the right hand. The third measure is in 3/4 time and contains a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The bass line continues with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in 4/4 time, changing to 3/4 time in the final measure.

Pno.

The fourth system of the piano solo consists of two measures. The first measure is in 4/4 time and contains two triplet eighth notes in the right hand. The second measure is in 4/4 time and features a descending eighth-note scale in the right hand. The bass line continues with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in 4/4 time.

Pno.

The fifth system of the piano solo consists of three measures. The first measure is in 4/4 time and contains a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The second measure is in 2/4 time and features a descending eighth-note scale in the right hand. The third measure is in 4/4 time and contains a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The bass line continues with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in 4/4 time, changing to 2/4 time in the second measure and back to 4/4 time in the third measure.

Pno.

The sixth system of the piano solo consists of three measures. The first measure is in 4/4 time and contains four triplet eighth notes in the right hand. The second measure is in 4/4 time and contains three triplet eighth notes in the right hand. The third measure is in 3/4 time and contains a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The bass line continues with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in 4/4 time, changing to 3/4 time in the final measure.

18

Pno.

21

Pno.

24

Pno.

28

Pno.

31

Pno.

35

Pno.

39 4 3 3 3 3 3

Pno.

43 3 3 3 3

Pno.

Pass The Magic Hat

Transcription of piece 2. Material composed for sax, piano and double bass.

Kris Davis
"Capricorn Climber"

Sax

Piano

D.B.

Musical score for measures 1-4. The score is for Saxophone, Piano, and Double Bass. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 1: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter rest. Double Bass has a half note G2. Measure 2: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note A4. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4. Double Bass has a half note G2. Measure 3: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note B4. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4. Double Bass has a half note G2. Measure 4: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note C5. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4. Double Bass has a half note G2. The time signature changes to 2/4 for measure 5.

5

Sax.

Pno.

D.B.

Musical score for measures 5-7. The score is for Saxophone, Piano, and Double Bass. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 5: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note D5. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4. Double Bass has a half note G2. Measure 6: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note E5. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4. Double Bass has a half note G2. Measure 7: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note F#5. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4. Double Bass has a half note G2. The time signature changes to 5/4 for measure 8.

8

Sax.

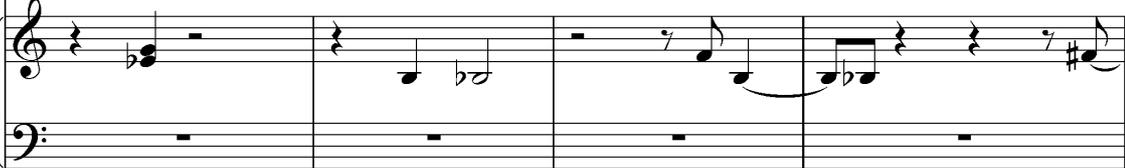
Pno.

D.B.

Musical score for measures 8-11. The score is for Saxophone, Piano, and Double Bass. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 8: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4. Double Bass has a half note G2. Measure 9: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note A4. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4. Double Bass has a half note G2. Measure 10: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note B4. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4. Double Bass has a half note G2. Measure 11: Saxophone has a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note C5. Piano has a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4. Double Bass has a half note G2. The time signature changes to 2/4 for measure 12.

24

Sax. 

Pno. 

D.B. 

28

Sax. 

Pno. 

D.B. 

32

Sax. 

Pno. 

D.B. 

4 36

Sax. *8vb*

Pno.

D.B.

40

Sax. *(8)*

Pno.

D.B.

44

Sax. *8vb*

Pno.

D.B.

48

Sax.
Pno.
D.B.

52

Sax.
Pno.
D.B.

56

Sax.
Pno.
D.B.

60

Sax. 

Pno. 

D.B. 

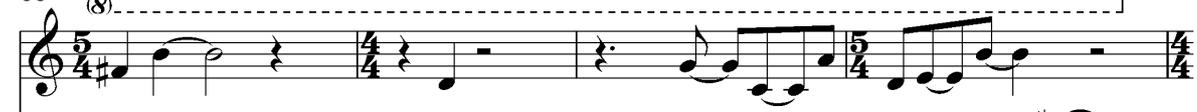
64

Sax. 

Pno. 

D.B. 

66

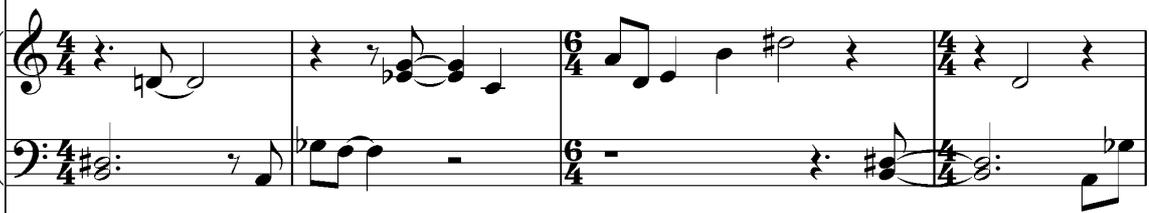
Sax. 

Pno. 

D.B. 

70

Sax. 

Pno. 

D.B. 

74

Sax. 

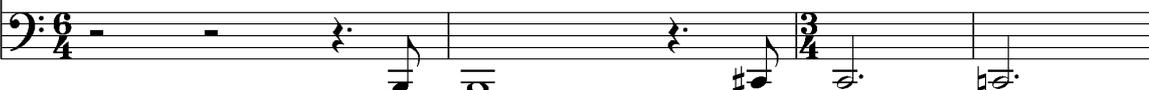
Pno. 

D.B. 

78

Sax. 

Pno. 

D.B. 

8

82

Musical score for Saxophone (Sax.), Piano (Pno.), and Double Bass (D.B.).

- Sax.:** Bass clef. A dotted line with a circled '8' above it spans the first measure. A bar line is present in the second measure.
- Pno.:** Treble and bass clefs. A treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) is shown. A dotted quarter note is written in the treble clef. A bar line is present in the second measure.
- D.B.:** Bass clef. A dotted quarter note is written in the first measure. A bar line is present in the second measure.

Twice Escaped

Transcription. Final melody with double bass line

Kris Davis Trio
"Waiting For You To Grow"

Piano

Musical notation for Piano, measures 1-4. The score is in 6/16 time. Measure 1: Treble clef has a quarter note G4 with a sharp sign, followed by eighth notes A4 and B4. Bass clef has a quarter note G3 with a sharp sign. Measure 2: Treble clef has a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes A4, B4, and C5. Bass clef has a quarter note G3. Measure 3: Treble clef has a quarter note B4, followed by eighth notes A4 and G4. Bass clef has a quarter note G3. Measure 4: Treble clef has a quarter note G4 with a sharp sign, followed by eighth notes A4 and B4. Bass clef has a quarter note G3.

5

Pno.

Musical notation for Pno., measures 5-8. Measure 5: Treble clef has a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes G4 with a sharp sign and A4. Bass clef has a quarter note G3. Measure 6: Treble clef has a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes B4 and C5. Bass clef has a quarter note G3. Measure 7: Treble clef has a quarter note B4, followed by eighth notes A4 and G4. Bass clef has a quarter note G3. Measure 8: Treble clef has a quarter note G4 with a sharp sign, followed by eighth notes A4 and B4. Bass clef has a quarter note G3.

9

Pno.

Musical notation for Pno., measures 9-11. Measure 9: Treble clef has a quarter note G4 with a sharp sign, followed by eighth notes A4 and B4. Bass clef has a quarter note G3. Measure 10: Treble clef has a quarter note A4, followed by eighth notes B4 and C5. Bass clef has a quarter note G3. Measure 11: Treble clef has a quarter note B4, followed by eighth notes A4 and G4. Bass clef has a quarter note G3.

Twice Escaped

Transcription of the beginning of the piano solo

Kris Davis Trio
"Waiting For You To Grow"

Rubato

Chords: C#m, C, Emaj7, Abmaj7, A#11, F7, E#11, Bmaj7, C#maj7, Amaj7#11, Cmaj7 #11, E, Ab, A, F7#11, Bm7

Measure numbers: 5, 10, 13, 17

Tempo: Rubato

21 Em Abm Am

25 F# (Amaj7#11/D#) B 7b13

30

33 Ab D#11/A

37

41

44 3

Musical notation for measures 44-46. Treble clef has a melodic line with slurs and a fermata. Bass clef has a supporting line with a triplet of eighth notes.

47

Musical notation for measures 47-50. Treble clef has a melodic line with slurs. Bass clef has a supporting line with a triplet of eighth notes.

51

Musical notation for measures 51-55. Treble clef has a melodic line with slurs and a fermata. Bass clef has a supporting line with a fermata.

Free double bass, very melodic

56

Musical notation for measures 56-59. Treble clef has a melodic line with slurs. Bass clef has a supporting line with a fermata.

60

Musical notation for measures 60-61. Treble clef has a melodic line with slurs. Bass clef has a supporting line with a fermata.

They begin to approach the final tempo of the theme and leave the rubato

BERIO
Transcription. Piano solo extract

from minute 5:51,
coinciding with measure 82

Kris Davis Trio
"Waiting For You To Grow"

measure 82 measure 84, written

Piano

4

Pno.

approximate rhythm approximate rhythm approximate rhythm

8

Pno.

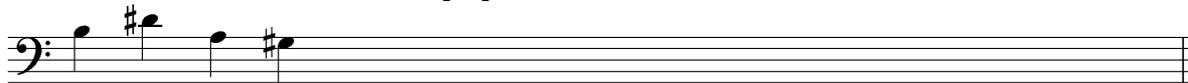
measure 91, written

Saturn Return

Transcription of an extract from the solo

Kris Davis
"Aeriol Piano"

The solo is built around these "prepared" notes in the left hand



Solo:
(minute 4:21)

6 F#m Cm G# Ebm7

11 Ebm7 G7 8va

16 G7 G pentatonic blues +3^aM Ebm

19 Ebm

23

28

33 8va

37

TEN EXORCISTS
Transcription

Kris Davis
"Massive Threads"

Piano

x23

x21

Pno.

3

x16

x15

Pno.

5

x17 y 1/2

x5

Pno.

7

x3 y 3/4

Pno.

9

x6

Pno.

12

x6

14 x5

Pno.

16 x6

Pno.

19 x2

Pno.

21 x2

Improvisation: Some extracts
(minute 3:00)

Pno.

(minute 3:07)

24

Pno.

27 Written section
(minute 3:34): x19 (approx.)

Pno.

30 x11 x12

32 x5

34 x2

36 x2

Improvisation: some extracts from the right hand (The left hand improvises with perfect fourths in a lower register, creating aleatoric rhythms and a sense of freedom from pulse).
(minute 4:43):

39

43

Scores:

Feldman

C score

kris davis

Clarinet in B \flat

Piano

$\text{♩} = 90$

B \flat Cl.

Pno.

B \flat Cl.

Pno.

$\text{♩} = 60$ As if one instrument was playing these lines

4x

2
17

B♭ Cl. *4x*

Pno. *4x*

21

B♭ Cl. *p* *f*

Pno. *p* *f*

25

B♭ Cl. *p*

Pno. *p*

27

B♭ Cl. *interpreted freely-more movement*

Pno. *improvise in this style*

play this fragment in unison 4x and then start to deconstruct it- gradually and chromatically moving the fragment lower to bar 33

3

B♭ Cl.

Pno.

31

open

open-piano cues to bar 35

ff

pp

B♭ Cl.

Pno.

35

p

mp

$\text{♩} = 90$

B♭ Cl.

Pno.

42

p

3

Interview with Kris Davis (11/03/2019):

1.- How does improvisation works in your music, in your compositions?

K.D.: I try to blur composition and improvisation and use compositional tools to direct the improvisation. So whether that's finding a language that you might improvise with or creating shapes that you play around there are some structural part of the music that is incorporated into the improvisation. And sometimes I was just trying to... yeah I guess that's the the main thing structure improvisation using composition.

2.- What resources/concepts do you use more often in improvisation?

K.D.: When I'm playing I try not to think too much, whereas when I'm practising improvisation then I'm thinking a lot and working on very detailed, defined concepts. So I work on that for practice and it could be something to do with language, something to do with something physical getting around the instrument, it could be composition of the idea more abstract..of dealing with something visual and trying to express that in the music.

3.- In your piece, "Saturn Return" from Aeoriol piano, did you think in tonal centers in the solo?

K.D.: I don't remember that much about the piece and improvisation. The beginning part there was kind of a melodic phrase that I was playing with a little bit where I prepared the piano and then the left hand like crashing with the mallet inside the piano would overtake almost like a giant wave be coming and taking over the more melodic white note jam. And then I think the second part was very influenced by John Cage and his "Piano pieces the perilous night". It was an exploration of playing with those ideas, the rhythm and preparing the piano, bringing in rhythmic, melodic structures, over a repetitive phrase that was prepared... But I can't remember that much about moving in and out of tonality.

4.- Listening and transcribing some piano solos of yours, I note phrases that are in punctual tonal centers but they switch quickly to others. Do you work with this concept?

K.D.:I'm probably not thinking at that point but I had practised a lot Ornette's music and

that helps to develop the ideas around the tonal centres, because when I'm playing I'm just not really thinking about what key I am in or what's happening, I try to follow my ear and maybe play melodically at that point, or maybe not play melodically. Also that's such a wide scope. I mean, melody can mean a lot of different things as you know. If it sounds more triadic based it's probably because I've played a lot of Ornette's music and that has been a big influence for me. Learning the melodies, transcribing his solos, and transferring it to a more free context where..I dunno.. I guess just trying to see where I can make that work. And feeling the different intervallic relationships as well.

5.- Do you sometimes work with dodecaphonic series or with serial concepts when improvising?

K.D.: Sometimes I'll write music that's more based on atonality or serialism as a starting point but there's no set system that leads into that it can be much more free and all about the decision making process so if I hear the serialism is going this way and I want it to go this way I have to consider do I want to go against what I feel or try to go.. You know there's no right answer for that sometimes it's just ok this time we're going to change because that is what I'm hearing and I want it to be this way or maybe let's go with this way which doesn't feel as natural but maybe there's something in that to lead to a new kind of way of approaching melody, or whatever in that moment.

6.- In rehearsal, when presenting your pieces to the other musicians, what type (and volume) of indications do you give? What parameters do they usually affect?

K.D.: There are multiple staves for writing the pieces. Some working on coming with a big idea and developed as colour material...

When I give the music, sometimes it's not that developed. I give instructions sometimes otherwise, sometimes I just give it to them and I say ok let's play and see what happens, and so it's different every time. The most important for me is that the people I'm playing with that they're able to express themselves freely in the music, so if that means that the vision of the piece changes slightly then that's ok. Not all the time but most of the time the people that I'm playing with are intuitive to the music and they might end up just providing another colour that I wasn't expecting, but like the decision-making process of the atonal line, and if I go with it or against it sometimes you have to accept the other choice that wasn't you were hearing necessarily to see where that can go and to grow. It's always just

part of the conversation... or when I play with younger people, like students... I'm more thinking about what I want them to do. And I think that helps to get more to what the part of is in the piece that I'm looking for. But I do give a lot of verbal instructions so scores when I go to work with students it's hard to just [...] the score and think they will be able to play the music. It often needs more explanation than what's on the page.

7.- With the musicians you usually play with, do you consciously share an aesthetic, a common way of creating and approaching improvisation?

K.D.: I wouldn't say a style necessarily but a sense of knowing themselves as a musician and understanding the language. So, even if it's someone who doesn't share a similar aesthetic, if they're a good musician, a developed and experienced musician, that's really what matters the most. For example, I played a concert a couple of weeks ago with Jeff Tain Watt and we played a whole set of free music and I don't think that that's something that he normally does, but he's an excellent musician and he has an incredible sense of rhythm, and he's a good listener, and he knows that world even though he doesn't do it as much. You know, it works. And it's interesting for me because he'll often make a decision that I wasn't expecting and for me that's really amazing. So, it's not that it has to be about sharing the same aesthetic, because that can start to trap you in some ways. It's nice to reach out to other musicians in other communities. But there has to be awareness of improvisation and how free improvisation works and the history of that music, I think. ... If you're playing with someone that doesn't have that aesthetic, that understanding of free improvisation, you can use composition to bring that out, and that's where we were talking about composition and how it would look with improvisation. That is a concrete way of getting other artists that don't have experience to play free music and be more free, I guess, and interact and listen in a different way.

8.- Would you like to add something else?

K.D.: Just that, you know, it's always good for me to use examples so that you can see what I'm talking about. So that piece, in that article, you know, Berio. There were moments in that score where there are very written out things that if you just heard them they probably sound improvised. Like the piano chords going by. If you hadn't seen that score and you just heard the recording, you would think maybe I was just improvising, but then

when you saw the score, you saw that it was a longer form. And around that, the bass and the drums were directed to improvise at certain moments. Sometimes using that language that they had, sometimes just being totally free. So, that's a way of controlling the pacing of something, like the overall arc and structure of the piece, but using improvisation to do that. So there's both happening at the same time. Improvisation and composition.

Glossary of Terms:

- Comping: Accompaniment. These are the chords, the rhythms and the melodies that pianists, guitarists or drummers use to support the solo lines or melodies of a jazz musician. It's also the accompaniment that the left hand provides for the ideas of the right hand of a pianist (or viceversa).

- Walking Bass: This is a technique of accompaniment employed usually by jazz bassists and double bassists. It consists of creating a bass line that marks out the time of the measures in a regular way, generally in quarter-notes (or half notes) and in different kinds of metres. The main characteristic of the walking bass is – as its name indicates – the capacity to move in close steps, using above all melodic steps of a tone or semitone ascending or descending.

- Loop: Sound or combination of sounds that repeat in a continuous, circular manner.

- Bluesy: Characteristic of the blues style.

- Free: Referring to free jazz, the style of jazz that emerged in the United States in the 1960s, which practices improvisation in an entirely free way without the obligation to interpret a melody or follow a formal structure with established chords.

- Voicing: Arrangement of notes in a chord.