

This short composition portfolio comprises 40% of the requirements for the Master of Music Degree in performance and composition at Rhodes University. In addition to the music presented here, I played two public exam recitals of 70 minutes each. While I played piano as a child, my main instrument during my BMUS studies at the University of Cape Town (2004-2007) was the saxophone. In 2010 I was diagnosed with Polymyositis (an auto-immune disease) which particularly affected my breathing and therefore my ability to play the saxophone. For this reason I opted to play my recitals on the piano. The first recital focused on interpretations of Swing Era, Bebop and post-Bebop standards such as: Someday my prince will come, What is this thing called love, In your own sweet way, Eternal Triangle, Recordame, Peace, Dolphin Dance, Caravan and Some other blues. The second recital comprised of seven original compositions that were presented in trio, quartet and quintet settings.

For the MMus in Performance/Composition the Rhodes University Calendar allows candidates to compose in any style or genre. In the case of portfolios that draw on popular and jazz approaches to composition that involve improvisation as part of their performance, candidates are required to present:

- **5 original compositions presented as lead sheets:**
- **4 small ensemble arrangements – two standards and two originals**(I include two extra tracks 'African Dance' and 'Ai Horace' with score and audio) It was recorded with my first band 'Modal Interchange.
- **3 large ensemble arrangements of two of the other originals and one standard**
- **A "reflective document" in which I briefly explain some of the aesthetic decisions made when writing each of my compositions and arrangements.**

## **The Truth Be Told**

As a saxophonist I enjoyed improvising on modal tunes because it allowed for more creativity and exploration. Likewise as a pianist I enjoy modal tunes because the song can be unpredictable. The song can lead to straight ahead swing playing or be groovy. That is the beauty of it all. 'The Truth be Told' can be played in either a swing style or funk style. The piece opens with the melody harmonized in 4<sup>ths</sup> between the horns and the voicings of the piano are voiced in fourths: paying tribute to the modal era of music. Miles Davis especially utilized this approach in his composition "Milestones"(1958). But the ultimate album where this style of playing is taken to the next level is the album "Kind of Blue"(1959).

With a quartal harmony approach, it allows for the piece to sound more open and 'bigger' especially with the horns and piano voicings. It grants the soloist more freedom when improvising. McCoy Tyner is considered one of the most influential jazz pianists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His maximalist style of piano playing is easily comparable to that of John Coltrane. Tyner's melodic vocabulary is rich, ranging from raw blues and complex superimposed pentatonic scales and his unique approach to chord voicings (mostly fourths) has inspired me to compose this piece. The pentatonic scale will complement the sound of this piece very well as well. The half-whole diminished scale could also be used to improvise over the changes.

I have chosen two chords as the main focal point of the piece C7altered and Db/C. Although, fairly similar sounding chords, it allows the improviser to experiment more freely with an altered sound.

By the late 1960's the use of modal resources had become widely accepted in jazz. The modal approach also became a common feature in popular rock, funk and jazz-funk genres, in the form of extended scale-based soloing over harmonic support of only one or two chords.

I have chosen to write the piece for Alto and Tenor saxophone accompanied by a standard jazz rhythm section (bass, drums and piano). With a groovy/busy drum and bass part. The melody consists mostly of semi-quaver triplets with slight variations further on in the piece. The piece then ends with a drum solo backed with the horns playing the same part as in the introduction section.

## **A Vibe For A Brother**

A vibe for a brother was written for Moreira Chonguica (ethnomusicologist, saxophonist, songwriter and producer). It is a soul/funk piece with a high level of intense energy throughout the piece. The short funky cross rhythms in the horn section and the funky rock beat layered down by the rhythm section brings a well-known saxophonist to mind, Maceo Parker.

The rhythms and riffs that Maceo would play in the James Brown Band were very energetic and pulsating. "A Vibe For a Brother" too has energetic and pulsating rhythms.

The defining elements of this piece are as follows: Counter/Cross rhythms of the horns, Horns playing in unison, harmonized melodic phrases and Chain-like effect of melodic phrases within the horns with a strong, steady and funky accompaniment from the rhythm section.

The instruments that I have chosen for this piece are as follows: A full horn section that consists of: Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Baritone sax and Trumpet and Trombone. The soprano and tenor saxophone will double up most of the times and split into a 4<sup>th</sup> apart when in harmony. The baritone doubles up with bass guitar. The timbre of the baritone saxophone combined with the bass adds a 'funky' colour to the piece. It has a standard rhythm section consisting of drums, bass, keyboard, electric guitar and a synth solo.

Bars 18, 22, 53, 57 are in a time signature of 2/16 . It was never my intention to play a 2/16 bar. That is just how that specific melodic pattern worked out. The passage would begin on the 3<sup>rd</sup> beat but towards the end the beat would shift into 2/16.

The soprano saxophone and piano play the lead melody throughout the piece while the horns accommodate the melody either through harmony or counter melodies. Bars 16, 20, 51, 55, get busy due to the canon effect between the horns. The horns are harmonized in fourths and the melodic phrase itself descends in fourths. The bass guitar descends down chromatically.

The solo backings in particular from bar 30 I found to be very interesting because each horn part has a completely different melodic part. For example: The soprano and alto parts go together. The tenor/baritone, the trumpet/trombone. And when put together one has a variety sounds put together under a soloist.

The piece ends with all the instruments improvising and 'talking'/socializing together with a sudden abrupt end.

### **The Unseen Image**

*Star Seeding* (1995) has always been one of my favorite Bheki Mseleku albums. The track 'Melancholy in Cologne' inspired me to write this tune. I have taken a particular chord progression that he uses, the (1-#4-4)-(2 minor b5)-(dom7 alt)-(1 major) progression. But I have created a slight variation to that sequence. My progression is 1-#4-b6-b3-b2-1. Expanding on the major 7th chord sound. The progression takes place from the C-section and E-section (with added backings and harmonies in the horns).

The trumpet plays the main melody part with the tenor saxophone playing the harmony and trombone at some sections. Although the piece is repetitive at times, the main idea is for the rhythm section (especially the drummer) to 'build' up the song to create contrast and variation.

## **There Is Always Hope**

In 2014 I was diagnosed with an auto-immune disease called: 'Polymyositis'(inflammation of many muscles). I could not stop thinking of how good God has been to me, for sparing my life and it was while I was going through the worst of the disease that this song played in my head. I composed it in 2010.

The tune evokes Gospel Rock/RnB artists such as Doobie Powell. There is always hope is a simple yet emotional song. It has an A-A-B-B-A form.

The 'A' section has a rock/hip-hop feel whereas the 'B' section transitions into a reggae section for the solo section. The solo backings played by the horns are short and precise. The organ starts to play at the solo section connecting the harmonies while the horns play a harmonized off-beat rhythm.

I have also always appreciated the simple yet, complicated rhythmical style of reggae music. The staccato horn backings are voiced closely together in order to create unity and stability over the soloist. Bob Marley's music has influenced me greatly, especially the horn lines that he would use in his songs such as 'Iron, Lion, Zion'.

After the solo section when the melody comes in, the soprano saxophone plays a counter melody to that of alto and tenor saxophone.

## **A Soulful Journey**

A Soulful Journey is a song that is dedicated to the great FelaKuti, inventor of Afro-beat. I feel that Fela's approach to music is one of open-mindedness and soul. I used the trumpet and saxophone as lead instruments with the guitar harmonizing the melody at times. Although there are repetitive passages of music, which is very common with Fela's music, I did add a modern touch to the song by adding extra chords such as polychords and 7<sup>th</sup> chords to create a fuller harmonic basis for the improvisations. The drummer plays a soukous drum rhythm (originating from West Africa) also referred to as the Rumba (not to be confused with the Cuban Rhumba). There is a vamp section at parts of the piece where the soloists are given the opportunity to express themselves and improvise freely.

## **African Dance**

A fairly straight-forward song. A feel good song. In this song the guitar takes the lead role. The piece basically consists of 5 notes (pentatonic scale). This piece has 3 sections with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> sections repeated. The chord progression comes from the Phrygian turnaround with a variation: (1 minor-b3 major-b6 major-b2 major).

## **Bluesette**

Having always been a fan of Toots Thielmans and the harmonica I saw it fit to arrange a well-known standard of his 'Bluesette'.

I decided to use the flute, tenor saxophone and soprano saxophone as the front-line instruments. Accompanied by a slightly Latin infused piano, bass and drums rhythm section. The flute adds a beautiful soft tone to the piece together with the tenor and soprano

There is a lot of inter-play amongst the horns throughout the piece. The melody is shared between the tenor and soprano saxophone. What I thought would be interesting is if I had to super-impose parts of the main melody at different parts of the song. Bar 13 and 14 is one example of this and then brakes in harmony at bar 15.

Instead of playing a traditional  $\frac{3}{4}$  drumswing rhythm I thought that I would approach it in a latin style groove, especially the drums and bass. Because the melody is fairly on the beat throughout the piece, I felt that the rhythm section will create more movement and diversity to the piece.

The B section begins with only the piano and horns. The piano plays a constant staccato figure in the right-hand and a dotted crotchet rhythm in the left-hand. The bass comes in 4 bars later all they way to the end of the piece.

The last time that the melody is played I decided to use a bit of re-harmonization. I harmonized each melody not with a chord for the first 2 bars. Another technique that I used from bar 100 onwards is that I would approach the dominant chords from a semi-tone above.

### **Blues For Alice**

Charlie Parker has always been one of my favorite alto saxophone players. I just had to arrange a piece from that era. I have played this piece many times before in various ensembles and have always found it to be very challenging and exciting to play.

I thought that it would be interesting to arrange Blues for Alice in 5/4. The beginning of the piece opens up with an extract from one Charlie Parker's solos on Blues for Alice. I have chosen to use both the alto and the tenor saxophones as Parker was a master of both.

Instead of being a standard 12 bar blues, it is now 13 bars long due to the time signature and the variation of melodic rhythm; to make it fit in with the changes.

The backings that I decided to use for the solo section comes from a very popular Parker head, 'Now's the time'. Only parts of the melody were used with rhythmic variation. The horns play in unison.

The C-Section is the 'shout chorus' of the piece. I tried to apply the elements that are typical of the bebop style in the shout chorus: outlining of the chords through arpeggios up to the 9<sup>th</sup> where the 2<sup>nd</sup> beat is a triplet rhythm. Playing a diminished chord starting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the dominant chord. The piano plays a harmony to that of the alto and tenor. The left-hand and right-hand can either play together in unison or the right-hand only.

The final head is the Parker head 'Confirmation' for 4bars and returns back to the head of 'Blues for Alice'

### **Someday My Prince Will Come**

The first time that I heard this piece was in my first year of study at UCT. It's a well thought out piece with chords that complement each other really well. Since then, I have always enjoyed playing this piece.

This song was originally from Walt Disney's 1937 animated movie 'Snow white and the seven dwarfs. After doing research and trying to figure out an approach for this song I thought what would add on to the song and not take too much away from it's original sound.

The introduction starts with the flute playing a solo melody over the changes accompanied by the strings: cello, viola and violin.

Two other composers and arrangers who I have grown fond of over the years are Gil Evans and George Gershwin. I have tried to infuse harmonies of classical music and jazz music into this song. The strings have a lot of sustained harmonies at their various sections creating continuity and development. Like Gil Evans who strived to develop new and unique musical voices he drew inspiration from diverse sources and would often include instruments that were uncommon example, the French horn. He could "re-compose" a piece of music and make it entirely his own. And this is what I tried to do with this piece.

When the 'A' section starts there is a kind of call and response interaction between the tenor and trombone that accompanies the alto saxophone melody.

When the solo section starts the cello plays a constant 'alberti bass figure' through the changes with the violin and viola playing in harmony.

### **References:**

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**\*\*Extra versions of compositions\*\***

### **The Truth Be Told (Version 2)**

I have changed the introduction section a bit. On the second repeat, I changed the rhythm to the introduction. Bars 35-36 is a drum and tenor saxophone only, solo section. This allows the soloists more freedom to play and creates a new dimension for this piece. The introduction comes in again at 'G' while the drummer continues to solo. This time round the introduction section moves up in semi-tones, rhythmically augmenting the sound of the piece for 3 bars. Bars 43 to the end is a 2 bar 16<sup>th</sup> note passage with the trumpet and tenor. The rhythm section plays the hits.

### **The Unseen Image (Version 2)**

The trombone joins in at the 'B' section with a 'catchy' 5 note phrase, hinting that this can be a funky piece as well. For the solo section I have the horns just playing whole notes. In a sense acting like a nice quiet synth pad.

### **There Is Always Hope (Version 2)**

I have altered the form slightly. The piano plays the first 'A' and then the horns join in on the second 'A'. I have included the flute. It lightens up the arrangement a bit. I have included a guitar and flute duet solo to be played over the last head all the way to the end. On the last head the violin plays a basic broken chord pattern. I have also transposed the organ an octave lower.

### **Someday My Prince Will Come (Version 2)**

I have included a soli section from bars: 97-112.

# Reflective Document

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