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As Time Goes By: A Study of Jazz Contrafacts

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## Abstract

## SUMMARY OF CONTENT

Throughout the history of music, it has been seen as a way to express what it means to be human, as an auditory way to tell stories, and to serve as a reflection of the times. In America, one of the most prominent forms of music in the early 20th century was Jazz. It was (and still is) a characteristically ‘American’ art form, that has its roots in African/American and European styles of music, especially the blues, which bears many of its foundational chord structures (for example, the 1-4-5 progression which was very prevalent in Jazz music and the “blue note”/blues scale, which are used universally in Jazz) (Welchez, 2019).

After its preliminary conception, the Jazz idiom began to spread throughout the world and evolve upon meeting different regional and cultural styles of music. The most notable being Bossa Nova, which was conceived in Brazil by such musicians as Antonio Carlos Jobim and Joao Gilberto when they began to merge traditional Brazilian music with Jazz voicings, with the most notable of these being the entirety of the 1964 album *Getz/Gilberto* in which American tenor saxophonist Stan Getz is featured alongside Brazilian musicians Joao Gilberto, Antonio Carlos Jobim, and Astrud Gilberto. The most famous sample of Bossa Nova included on the album is the critically acclaimed “Garota de Ipanema” ( The Girl from Ipanema) which features a weaving of Bossa rhythm and Stan Getz’s Lester Young-influenced saxophone lines (Getz and Gilberto 1964).

The 1970s saw the beginnings of Jazz-Fusion in America, seeing the rise of such groups like Weather Report with virtuoso bass player Jaco Pastorius, Chick Corea’s Latin Jazz fusion group Return to Forever. Also leading this movement were musicians from more traditional styles of Jazz from the fifties and sixties including Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock. Jazz Fusion was characterized by the traditional horns of Jazz music but with the additions of electronic

effects, most notably the electric piano. Its styling melded traditional Jazz with others (including Rock, Latin, and Funk). Jazz continues to evolve in conjunction with other forms of music today. In my research and participation in playing Jazz, I have found one particular form of Jazz composition to be the most interesting; The Jazz contrafact.

## THE JAZZ CONTRAFAC

The jazz idiom has always been a form of music that has allowed artists to freely express themselves through music, albeit within the restrictions of chord changes through a song, mostly in jazz standards). Though there is no single ‘origin’ for the Jazz contrafact, but I hypothesize that Jazz musicians first began to compose these types of songs in the 1930s, when the jazz sub-type of ‘be-bop’ or ‘bebop’ began to emerge with such musicians as saxophonist Charlie Parker trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, and drummer Max Roach at the forefront of this movement (Welchez 2019). Bebop is characterized by fast tempos and virtuosity in improvised solos. This type of music had evolved from earlier ‘dance-hall’ jazz which is characterized by vocals and tempos that are easily danced to (ballads, up-tempo swing that is best exemplified through the earlier recordings of Duke Ellington and His Orchestra (“It Don’t Mean a Thing if it Ain’t Got That Swing”) (Welchez 2019). With the freedom that and the overall mindset and prospect of making exciting new music, the contrafact was born.

The Jazz contrafact emerged as a new way for Jazz composers to express their ideas. In its simplest form, the Jazz contrafact existed in the form of preference of a chord structure that a composer enjoyed. The original chords of the song they had chosen served as the skeleton for which their melody could follow, as well as a bouncing board for which to be inspired to write their melody, yet they were not confined by them if they felt the urge to alter the way the piece

sounded. In the process of writing a Jazz contrafact, the composer may change the tempo, time signature, key signature, style the song is performed in, and overall feel of the song (Welchez 2019).

For example, if one is to look at the composition “Kcams” composed by jazz musician Matt Otto, which is a contrafact of the Coleman Hawkins tune “Smack” with no prior knowledge of either song, they will not be able to tell that they are using the same chord changes due to the different tempos of the songs, the style in which each is played (“Kcams” is played in a Latin/bossa nova groove, while “Smack” is a swing tune played with different feel and groove) (Otto 2019). Another example is the tune “Ablution” by Lennie Tristano, which is a contrafact of the Jazz standard “All the Things You Are”. If you compare, say, the Lee Konitz version of “Ablution” to one of Charlie Parker’s recordings of the tune, the listener first notice the blistering speed at which “Ablution” is taken at, as well as the very dense melody that is being played. On the other hand, Charlie Parker’s version will follow the melody of the original, which is a take on the vocal melody of the original song. Overlooking the embellishments that Charlie Parker adds to the melody, it is much more simple and linear. Jazz contrafacts can take many different forms as allowed by the composer.

I first came across this term in my freshman year as I was attending the Jazz Combo class at the University of California, Riverside. In class, the professor had mentioned that a tune we were playing was a ‘contrafact’, (I believe it was the Horace Silver Tune “Jucy Lucy”, a contrafact of the tune “Confirmation”, by Charlie Parker. The professor explained the meaning of this interesting new term, and I became hooked on the subject. In my senior year, I decided that I wanted to do a project on the process of composing Jazz contrafacts. In the end, I composed three: “Duplicity” on the jazz standard “Softly as in a Morning Sunrise”, “In Other

Words” on the jazz standard “Autumn Leaves”, and lastly “Never Have I Ever” on the jazz standard “ There Will Never Be Another You”. In the following pages, I will present the melodies of the original tunes, my contrafact on each of them, and offer some explanation to the pieces.

#### CONTRAFAC #1: “Duplicity”/ “Softly as in a Morning Sunrise”

The tune “Softly as in a Morning Sunrise” was originally written in 1928 by songwriters Sigmund Romberg and Oscar Hammerstein II for the operetta “The New Moon”. The song was originally conceived as a tango, but since then has become a very popular tune for Jazz musicians to cover in their repertoire (The Ultimate Jazz Musician Resource, 2019). The specific recordings that I listened to gain a foothold on the chord changes, melodic line, as well as give ideas for what to do with my contrafact were the tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins’ version on the live album “A Night at the Village Vanguard” recorded at the Village Vanguard in 1958 with Wilbur Ware on bass and Elvin Jones on drumset, as well as pianist Sonny Clark’s version on the studio album “Sonny Clark Trio” recorded in 1957. The contrafact that I composed for the piece, titled “Duplicity”, uses riff (more formally known in music as an ‘ostinato’. In the key of concert C, it starts off with notes that are very similar to the original melody of “Softly as in a Morning Sunrise”, with the exception that the line is repeated when the A sections progress over most of the I chords (in this case, Cm7).

# "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise"

- Sigmund Romberg / Oscar Hammerstein II

A

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, D-7b5, G7

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, D-7b5, G7

A

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, D-7b5, G7

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, Fm7, Bb7

B

Musical staff with notes and chords: Ebmaj7, C7b9, 3

Musical staff with notes and chords: Fm7, D-7b5, G7b9

A

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, D-7b5, G7

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, (D-7b5, G7)



"Duplicity"

- Robert M. Hara, Jr.

A

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, D-7b5, G7 (triplets)

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, D-7b5, G7

A

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, D-7b5, G7

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, Cm7

B

Musical staff with notes and chords: Ebmaj7, C7b9

Musical staff with notes and chords: Fm7, D-7b5, G7b9

A

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, D-7b5, G7

Musical staff with notes and chords: Cm7, D-7b5, G7, Cm7, (D-7b5, G7)

The B section is composed of a lick from the Sonny Rollins recording of “Softly as in a Morning Sunrise” during which he plays a lick on the intervals of 3-5-8-5-4-3. I inputted this on the ‘and’ of 4 on the first beat of the B section, which is a very uncommon practice in Jazz. This was more of a creative decision, so as to take the listener’s ear away from the riffing/ostinato of the A section, which I play the figure of 1-b3-1-b3-5 (using triplets to lead into the measures, rather than playing straight on them in order to give a driving push to the melody of the contrafact).

The usage of a riff/ostinato figure in “Duplicity” came from listening to Duke Ellington type swing, most notably that of tunes such as “Cotton Tail” in which saxophonist Ben Webster plays a repeated line. I also heavily listened to Ben Webster’s rendition of the Jazz tune “Poutin” (specifically, a live recording in which he plays with pianist Oscar Peterson and bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen recorded on video in Hannover, Germany in 1972) as well as Dexter Gordon’s rendition of “Blues Walk” and “Society Red” which all feature heavy usage of riffs/ostinatos through their respective melodies.

#### CONTRAFACIT #2: “In Other Words”/ “Autumn Leaves”

The tune “Autumn Leaves” is a famous Jazz standard originally written in 1945 by songwriters Joseph Kosma with original French lyrics by Jacques Prévert (originally “Les Feuilles Mortes”) for the film “Les Portes de la Nuit” (Doors of the Night”) (The Ultimate Jazz Musician Resource, 2019). This is another Jazz standard that has been covered countless times by Jazz musicians (most notably for myself; the version on the album *Somethin’ Else* by Cannonball Adderley featuring Miles Davis).

"Autumn Leaves"

— Joseph Kosma/Jacques Prévert



A

Cm7 F7 BbM7 EbM7

A

A7 D7 Gm7 Gm7

A

Cm7 F7 BbM7 EbM7

A

A7 D7 Gm7 Gm7

B

A7 D7 Gm7 Gm7

B

Cm7 F7 BbM7 EbM7

B

A7 D7 G7 G7

C

A7 D7 G7 G7

"In Other Words"

- Robert M. Hara, Jr.

Cm7 F7 BbM7 EbM7

A A7 3 D7 Gm7 Gm7

Cm7 F7 BbM7 EbM7

A A7 D7 Gm7 Gm7

A7 D7 Gm7 Gm7

B Cm7 F7 BbM7 EbM7

A7 3 D7 G7 G7

C A7 3 D7 G7 G7

This song holds very personal meaning to me, and I chose it specifically for that. It was the first Jazz tune to which I memorized the chord changes to (which is a staple on Jazz; most musicians memorize their tunes and can improvise on them as well).

In the same vein, the contrafact that I created for it, titled “In Other Words” is put to a Bossa Nova beat, which is the Jazz subgenre that really caught my ear and heart when I first started listening to Jazz in my teens. As I have stated, Bossa Nova, or ‘New Beat’ is a musical style that originated in Brazil in the 1950s-1960s, with Brazilian musicians Antonio Carlos Jobim and Joao Gilberto percussively based on the rhythm of the clave (1-and-3-1-and). Arguably, it gained international attention upon the release of the 1964 album *Getz/Gilberto*, a collaboration between American Jazz tenor saxophonist Stan Getz and Brazilian Bossa Nova musicians Joao Gilberto on guitar and vocals, Antonio Carlos Jobim on piano, and Joao’s wife Astrud Gilberto on vocals. The single from the album “The Girl from Ipanema” gained worldwide popularity and gained an international audience for Bossa Nova. The combination of Getz’s Lester Young-inspired saxophone playing (melodic and wistful with a tremendous amount of subtone), Joao Gilberto’s guitar playing and airy voice, Antonio Carlos Jobim’s great phrasing throughout, and of course Astrud Gilberto’s wistful and light vocal work on the album make it a cornerstone of the Bossa Nova movement in Jazz.

I was inspired to write the melody of my contrafact for this piece based on the Bossa Nova playing of saxophonists Stan Getz and Paul Desmond, whose light and airy tones seemed to perfectly complement the overall feeling that the tunes had. For example, in “The Girl for Ipanema” each main melodic instrument takes the melody once (first Joao Gilberto in Portuguese, then Astrud Gilberto sings in English, and so on) then they progress into solos. In one of the later instances in which the melody is being played, Stan Getz plays lines that weave

in and out of Astrud Gilberto's melody. These lines focused on the usage of voice leading in playing musical ideas that are closely related to the melody, yet do not restate it but support and give substance to it.

The melody uses a majority of voice leading lines. In Jazz, and more specifically Jazz improvisation, the half step interval that occurs between the 7th degree of the V chords and the 3rd degree of the II chord is known as voice leading and is universally used in improvisation to give a sense of melodic cohesion when creating melodic lines in solos. In analysis of my contrafact, the first note that I play is the 9, which I like to use in my improvisational efforts whenever I can because it creates a sort of wistful feeling when played against the 2 or 1 chord in a ii-V-I progression. I voice lead from the 7th (Bb) of the 2 chord into the 3rd of the 5th chord (A). I follow this trend throughout most of the A sections and try to utilize the 3rd of the chord whenever I can because it is the note that contextualizes and identifies the quality of the chord. The B section utilizes 1-3-5-7 arpeggios ending on the thirds for this reason as well.

### CONTRAFAC T #3: "Never Have I Ever"/ "There Will Never Be Another You"

The tune "There will Never be Another You" was originally written in 1942 for the musical *Iceland* (The Ultimate Jazz Musician Resource, 2019). Like the other two pieces that I have focused on, it has become a Jazz standard and is played widely throughout Jazz circles. It utilizes an ABAC form over the course of a 32 bar chord progression. This song, in particular, was the first contrafact that I had composed for this entire set. It was originally conceived as a melody meant for one player, but with the help



# THERE WILL NEVER BE ANOTHER YOU

-HARRY WARREN/MACK GORDON

**A**  
Fmaj7 E-7b5 A7

D-7 C-7 F7

Bbmaj7 Eb9 Fmaj7 D-7

G7 G-7 C7

Fmaj7 E-7b5 A7

D-7 C-7 F7

Bbmaj7 Eb9 Fmaj7 B-7 E7

Fmaj7 E7 A-7 D7 G-7 C7 F (C7)

FINE

# NEVER HAVE I EVER

TENOR SAX 2

ROBERT HORA  
SEAN MOYNIHAN

Handwritten musical score for Tenor Sax 2 of the song "Never Have I Ever". The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. It consists of five staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second staff has a measure rest marked with a '5'. The third staff has a measure rest marked with a '9'. The fourth staff has a measure rest marked with a '15'. The fifth staff has a measure rest marked with a '17'. The score includes various chord symbols such as Fmaj7, Em7(b5), A7, Dmin7, Cmin7, F7, Bbmaj7, Eb9, Fmaj7, Dmin7, G7, Gmin7, C7, E D#, G, E, Bmin7, E7, Fmaj7, E7, Amin7, D7, Gmin7, C7, and Fmaj7 C7. There are also some handwritten annotations like '3' and 'b' above notes, and a circled 'D' above a note in the third staff. The piece ends with a double bar line.



of my cohort in the music program as well as Music Composition major Sean Moynihan, we were able to harmonize the tune for a total of four horns total: alto saxophone or trumpet on the melody, two tenor saxophones on lower harmonies, and baritone saxophone on lowest harmony. On the previous page, I have displayed the part that I play when we play it live, the harmony of the second tenor saxophone in the mix.

My overall inspiration for writing the tune came from listening heavily to the 1957 Miles Davis album “Birth of the Cool”. It was revolutionary at the time due to the more subdued, ‘cooler’ music that it displayed. From the point on, Jazz in America was separated into two distinct styles depending on geography. The east coast, where Jazz already established itself as a major driving force of music in the first half of the twentieth century, was known for its virtuosic Bebop players that were well known for playing seemingly impossible lines at breakneck tempos of whom included the likes of legendary trumpet players Dizzy Gillespie and Clifford Brown, legendary alto saxophone player Charlie Parker (also known as ‘Bird’) as well as drummers Max Roach and Art Blakey. This side of the country was known for its more ‘fiery’ variety of Jazz known as ‘Hot Jazz’ (Welchez 2019).

The west coast of the country (primarily centered around the Los Angeles Jazz scene) was primarily known for more subdued tones with more distant phrases, and an overall economy of choice. Players known for this style of Jazz include tenor saxophonists Stan Getz and Warne Marsh, alto saxophonist Paul Desmond, baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan, trumpet player Chet Baker, and pianist Dave Brubeck. The polar opposite stylings on either side of the country and the musicians who played each style made this a very interesting musical environment at the time (Welchez 2019).

I composed this tune in inspiration from the more subdued tones of the west coast jazz scene of this time in the history of Jazz. As I have stated, inspiration from this piece came from listening to the 1957 Miles Davis Album “Birth of the Cool”, specifically the song “Boplicity” which uses figures composed of quarter note triplets as I have used in bar 6 as well as an ascending line in measures 9 and 10 on the quarter notes on beats 2, 3, and 4. This style is reminiscent of what I heard in baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan’s lines in the tune.

From the process of the composition of this tune and hearing the final product at the end with all of the different harmonizations taking place, it was very interesting how close it came in some spots of the contrafact to the tune which most of my inspiration came from, “Boplicity”, without ever really being a direct copy of the tune. Overall, I was pleased with the final product and think that it is the best out of the three compositions.

## CONCLUSION

This project really made me appreciate the art form that Jazz is much more than I had previously. It made me realize even more than before that there are deep social connections between music and us that really defines the human experience. The joy that I experienced when sitting down by a piano to write these pieces really made me enjoy what I was doing. The fact that I was able to bring in all of my past experiences playing and listening to jazz, be it the inflections that I use in my playing or the musical styles that I prefer playing over in the Jazz idiom, I felt that I was able to fully bring myself into my work, and this project has inspired me more than ever to continue composing Jazz pieces, specifically some with original chord changes when I feel that I am ready to pursue that interest. I can truly say that I put myself in the shoes of

Jazz musicians who came before me and lived the process, and made my own experience out of it, which is something I will always carry with me whenever I play these tunes in the future.

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