

Diverse Musical Explorations in a Global Context

Yuhan Zhong^{1,*}

¹ Upper Arlington High School, Upper Arlington, Ohio 43221, United States

* Correspondence: maciezhong@gmail.com

(Received: 06/08/2024; Accepted: 09/06/2024; Published: 09/10/2024)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37906/isteamc.2024.6>

Abstract: Music, in all its diverse forms, transcends strict boundaries and communicates a universal language that unites people across cultures, histories, and personal experiences. This journey is a vibrant fusion of sounds, rhythms, and traditions, blending elements from various musical genres and cultures worldwide. Beginning in the early 20th century, compositions like Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" reshaped the landscape of classical music. Indie musicians such as the Buena Vista Social Club further expanded these limits, merging Latin classics with innovative new styles of musical production. Moving into the 21st century, artists like Depeche Mode continue to astonish listeners with electronic beats that capture the essence of contemporary digital music.

Keywords: Global music, Musical Exploration, Modern electronic music, Personal musical adaption

1. Introduction

Music, in its many forms, transcends rigid boundaries and speaks a universal language that connects people across cultures, histories, and personal experiences. This exploration invites us to embark on a journey through a rich culmination of sounds, rhythms, and traditions, drawing from diverse musical genres and cultures around the world. From the intricate harmonies of Western classical compositions to the intricate melodic motives of jazz, from the soulful melodies of Latin America to the contemporary innovations of electronic music, this exploration seeks to illuminate the profound ways in which music reflects and shapes human identity.

In examining the diverse sonic landscapes that span continents and eras, we not only uncover the unique cultural contexts that have given birth to these musical forms, but also recognize the shared emotional and artistic impulses that unite them. Through this lens, we gain a deeper appreciation for music as both a mirror of society and a transformative force that inspires generations of new creativity. In this exploration, we venture through a rich, dynamic world of sound. Each note, beat, and melody tells a story that broadens our understanding of the boundless creativity that music enables.

2. Classical Explorations

Maple Leaf Rag - Scott Joplin:

Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" remains quintessential to the history of ragtime music, encapsulating both technical innovation and cultural significance. In the United States, Ragtime emerged in the late 19th century and flourished into the early 20th century, serving as a precursor to jazz and many other genres ("Ragtime"). Joplin, often dubbed the "King of Ragtime," played a pivotal role in popularizing this genre

with his catchy and memorable compositions ("Scott Joplin"). Similar to most pieces in the ragtime genre, "Maple Leaf Rag" was written mainly for the purpose of musical enjoyment.

From a technical standpoint, the "Maple Leaf Rag" embodies the syncopated rhythms and lively melodies, consistent with the traditional conventions of ragtime. Syncopation, as well as the displacement of rhythmic accents away from the strong downbeats, is a defining feature of ragtime music ("Ragtime"). In the "Maple Leaf Rag," syncopation is a crucial part of the composition, creating a dynamic and energetic feel throughout the piece. This syncopation occurs mostly in the melody while the bass notes are holding a steady, continuous eighth note tempo. Instead of starting on the downbeat, the melodic material of almost every section starts on the second beat of a sixteenth note division (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1: Syncopated melodic material

Throughout the piece, Joplin utilizes ties and sixteenth notes rests in the middle of a beat to add even more variation to the syncopation. These variations move the note away from a down beat, instead displacing it to create a more off putting and interesting rhythm. Most often, Joplin adds a to the last note of beat one, carrying over the note until later subdivisions of the second beat (Figure 1.2). The continuous eighth notes in the bass act as a metronome for the more complex and syncopated rhythms in the melody.

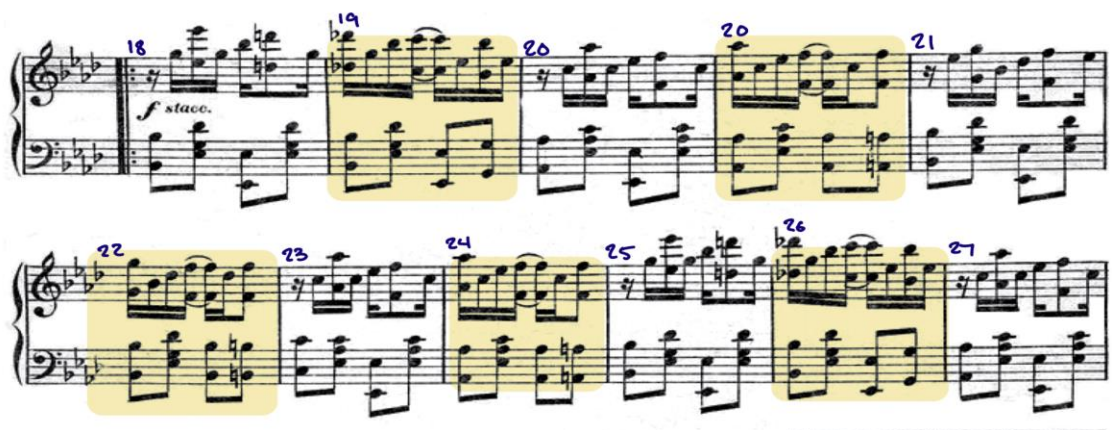


Figure 1.2: Ties used to increase variation in syncopation

Additionally, the composition is structured into multiple sections, following the standard ragtime form of ABACD (“Characteristics of Ragtime”). Each section is composed of sixteen measures and are repeated, except for the recapitulation of section A. A recapitulation such as the one Joplin decided to incorporate was common in ragtime music and considered essential in emphasizing the main subject (“Characteristics of Ragtime”). All the sections feature a unique melody while maintaining thematic coherence through recurring rhythmic motives and harmonic progressions. The A and B sections typically contain the main thematic material, while the C and D sections offer contrast through modulation and variation.

El Cuarto De Tula - Buena Vista Social Club:

Buena Vista Social Club embodies a rich musical tradition rooted in Cuba's cultural history. The group's formation can be traced back to the late 1990s when producer Nick Gold and his indie label World Circuit set out to produce an album that would showcase the talents of veteran Cuban musicians (Tsioulcas). The project's goal was to revive the sounds of traditional Cuban music, bringing back the son cubano, bolero, and danzón, which had faded from the international spotlight (Barton). Buena Vista Social Club's surprising immediate success ignited a resurgence of global interest in traditional Cuban music and culture. One of the group's earliest hits, “El Cuarto De Tula”, was originally composed for the sake of musical enjoyment. It can also be considered a global context because it features instrumentation and styles specific to traditional Cuban music.

“El Cuarto De Tula” follows the classic son Cuban structure, characterized by its distinctive montuno and tumbao patterns. A montuno refers to a repetitive and sometimes melodic phrase unique to a specific piece, usually played by two instruments in harmony (“Afro-Cuban Latin Jazz”). This paves a harmonic and rhythmic foundation that ties the piece together. In “El Cuarto De Tula”, the montuno is shared by the trumpet and trombone as they play in sync throughout the piece. The tumbao, on the other hand, is the repetitive bass ostinato that provides the song's rhythmic groove and syncopated feel, often played by the lowest instrument in the group (Figure 2.1). These elements create a cohesive structure that allows improvisation and interaction among the musicians.

The image shows three staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Montuno 1 - Trumpet' and uses a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The middle staff is labeled 'Montuno 2 - Trombone' and uses a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The bottom staff is labeled 'Tumbao - Tuba' and uses a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. All three staves show a repetitive rhythmic pattern. The trumpet and trombone parts consist of quarter and eighth notes with stems pointing up and down, often beamed together. The tuba part consists of a steady eighth-note bass line.

Figure 2.1: Montuno & Tumbao

Another instrument that plays a central role in Cuban music is the claves (“Claves”). This high-pitched instrument establishes the latin jazz “feel” of the song, consistently repeating a 2-bar phrase with a distinct rhythmic ostinato. In “El Cuarto De Tula”, the clave rhythm follows a classic 2/3 Son form (“Claves”). This form consists of two quarter notes beginning on beat two of the first measure followed by a more syncopated rhythm in the next measure (Figure 2.2). The claves continue this rhythm without much

alteration throughout the entire composition, serving also as a guide for vocal and instrumental improvisation.



Figure 2.2: Clave Rhythm

The melody of "El Cuarto De Tula" is characterized by the improvisatory nature of its melodic phrasing, which is a reflection of traditional Cuban music ("Afro-Cuban Latin Jazz"). The vocalists and instrumentalists of this composition infuse their performances with melodic embellishments including trills, grace notes, and slides, sometimes even adding improvised variations of the original melody. These embellishments are symbolic of the fluidity of Cuban music and contribute to the expressiveness of the piece. "El Cuarto De Tula" effectively fuses the improvisational elements of jazz with the traditional rhythms and instrumentation of Cuba's cultural music.

3. Modern Electronic Music:

Enjoy The Silence - Depeche Mode:

Depeche Mode's "Enjoy the Silence" emerged during the peak of the synth-pop movement throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. Characterized by electronic textures and industrial sounds, the band's unconventional music was a dominant force in both pop and rock. Starting out from Basildon, UK, Depeche Mode became one of the essential contributors to the New Wave era and revolutionized synth technology in live performances ("Depeche Mode"). "Enjoy the Silence" was almost immediately a commercial success, reaching the top 10 in numerous countries and earning critical acclaim for its innovative production (Chan). This piece can be classified as one of the modern eras because of all the electronic instrumental and synthesizer use.

Despite the simple chord progressions, the layers Depeche Mode adds to these harmonies creates both depth and a sense of complexity. During the introduction, the chords alternate back and forth between C minor and E-flat major. The verses utilize the addition of the major sixth chord, A-flat, to add more tension and act as a buildup. The third in the E-flat is also flattened to create a contrasting minor sound. At the climactic choruses, the minor subdominant is added and used to start phases, making the chord progression distinct from a verse or interlude. This sequence is used during the synth solos and bridges of the composition (Figure 3.1). Throughout the whole piece, Depeche Mode was able to create captivating, unique melodies with the use of only five chords.

Intro:	Cm	IEb	ICm	IEb	x3
Verse:	Cm	IEbm	IAb	IAb	x2
Chorus:	Fm	IAb	ICm	IEb	I
	I	Fm	IAb	ICm	IB IB
	n.c.	I			
Break:	Cm	IEb	ICm	IEb	x2
Synth:	Fm	IAb	ICm	IEb	x2

Figure 3.1: Chord Progression Breakdown

Following conventions of electronic music, Depeche Mode uses looping and layering techniques in their compositions (Miraglia). Throughout “Enjoy the Silence”, synth sounds are mixed and layered with electric guitar as well as both acoustic and synth drums. The form can be broken down into sets or loops of four measures, which repeat to become verses or choruses. Often at the start of a set of four, a new component of the piece is introduced, merging into the already existing layers of the piece. Depeche Mode adds more of these components throughout various sections to bring up the energy and add depth to the melody (Figure 3.2). These components themselves are quite simple, but they work together to create the recognizable sound of the piece.

The musical score for Figure 3.2 shows five staves: Voice Synth, Strings Synth, Bass Synth, Aux. Synth, and Elec. Guitar. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The chorus begins at measure 16. The Voice Synth part consists of a simple melody. The Strings Synth part enters at measure 16 with a sustained chord, marked *ppp* (pianissimo) and then *mf* (mezzo-forte). The Bass Synth part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes. The Aux. Synth and Elec. Guitar parts are silent throughout the shown section.

Figure 3.2: Addition of strings during chorus

4. Personal Musical Adaption

Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On” is a sharp reflection of the political state of the nation, representing the height of controversy at the time. “What’s Going On” embodies the energy of much of the United States during the early 1970s, a time period marked by civil unrest, activism, and a call for peace (Russell). Gaye captures these themes and gives voice to peaceful protest when he writes the lyrics “War is not the answer,

for only love can conquer hate". In another instance, the lyrics "Don't punish me with brutality" expresses the relationship at the time between authoritative figures and citizens (Gaye).

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the rise of pop and R&B fusion brought on a new era of music that became mainstream. Marvin Gaye played a crucial role in this development as one of the most influential artists in the Motown label (Early).

When adapting "What's Going On" into a piano solo, I wanted to incorporate the intricate aspects of the original piece while also maintaining the recognizable melody and some representation of the vocal harmonies. To create a score for my adaptation, I played the part into a midi keyboard while the Logic program notated what I was playing. I then later played the adaptation on an acoustic piano for the final recording.

In the opening measures (1-4) of the piece, I transferred the notes originally played by electric bass directly into notes in the left hand. However, instead of the downbeat of "1" being a singular bass note, I changed it to a closed F major chord in order to add fullness and establish the tonality of the piece (Figure 4.1). In the right hand, the notes being played are transcribed from the melodic riff played originally by a saxophone (Figure 4.1). The tempo in the right hand is treated more freely, like a cadenza, and may vary {Upload 2 1:59 - 2:08}. This is in line with the conventions of many R&B pieces as they feature improvisational elements that could not be captured by only sheet music.



Figure 4.1: Score of intro (Measures 1-4)

In Gaye's original recording, multiple instruments work to establish the harmony in the piece while a solo instrument highlights specific riffs or melodic phrases. In addition, there are also drums as well as lead and backing vocals present to establish the rhythmic feel and melody respectively. When creating my adaptation, it was challenging to combine all of these elements of the original piece into a single part for one player. I had to choose the parts that I felt were essential, even if it meant leaving out another important part. The parts that did make it into my adaptation were the ones that I felt the piece wouldn't be easily recognizable without.

During the verses and choruses, I placed the melody that was originally in the vocals into the highest note of the right hand; these melodic notes are highlighted in the visual (Figure 4.2). As the harmonies in the piece changed, this placement would allow melodic material to stand out, as if someone was actually singing the part {Upload 2 2:09 - 3:34}.



Figure 4.2: Highlighted melodic notes

Because I had to condense multiple instruments into a single part, I utilized chords and accented notes in the left hand as well as some additional voicings in the right hand to maintain the harmony and chord progressions. For example, the tonal change from F Major to D Minor and later to G Minor is depicted in the left hand from measures 8 - 13 (Figure 4.3). The chords I added in the right hand mostly represent the notes in seventh and ninth chords Gaye’s original. I felt that without these distinct tonalities, the piece would feel incomplete and inconsistent with the original progressions.



Figure 4.3: Chords in bass

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, music transcends boundaries, speaking a universal language that unites people across cultures and experiences. This exploration has navigated a rich tapestry of sounds, rhythms, and traditions, from the intricate harmonies of Western classical music to the improvisational spirit of jazz, the soulful melodies of Latin America, and the innovative landscapes of electronic music. By delving into these diverse forms, we not only uncover the cultural contexts from which they arose but also recognize the shared emotional and artistic impulses that connect them. Through this lens, we gain a deeper understanding of music as both a reflection of society and a transformative force that inspires creativity. Ultimately, music tells stories that broaden our appreciation for its boundless ability to connect, reflect, and inspire across time and space.

References:

- "Afro-Cuban Latin Jazz." The Jazz Piano Site, www.thejazzpianosite.com/jazz-piano-lessons/jazz-genres/afro-cuban-latin-jazz/. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- Barton, Laura. "Buena Vista Social Club: The Legends Look Back." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 22 Mar. 2015, www.theguardian.com/music/2015/mar/22/buena-vista-social-club-the-sweet-sound-of-cuba. Accessed 4 Mar. 2024.
- Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "ragtime." Encyclopedia Britannica, 20 Jan. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/art/ragtime>. Accessed 8 March 2024.
- Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Scott Joplin." Encyclopedia Britannica, 22 Feb. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Scott-Joplin>. Accessed 8 March 2024.
- "Buena Vista Social Club - El Cuarto De Tula (Official Audio)." YouTube, uploaded by World Circuit Records, 30 July 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaKKELQWhbs.
- Chan, Anna. "Depeche Mode's 10 Biggest Billboard Hot 100 Hits." Billboard, 5 Nov. 2020, www.billboard.com/music/rock/depeche-mode-biggest-billboard-hits-9478312/. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- "Characteristics of Ragtime." Jazz in America, Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz, www.jazzinamerica.org/jazzresources/stylesheets/4. Accessed 8 Mar. 2024.
- "Claves." On Music, dictionary.onmusic.org/terms/5338-claves. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- "Depeche Mode." Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, 16 Oct. 2020, www.rockhall.com/depeche-mode-inductee-insights. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- "Depeche Mode." Spotify, open.spotify.com/artist/762310PdDnwsDxAQxzQkfX. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- Early, Gerald. "Motown." Britannica, Encyclopedia Britannica, 7 Feb. 2024, www.britannica.com/topic/Motown. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- "Enjoy the Silence (2006 Remaster)." YouTube, uploaded by Depeche Mode - Topic, 28 Aug. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bYKZbWxKoQ.
- Gaye, Marvin. "What's Going On." Musixmatch, 1967, www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Marvin-Gaye/Whats-Going-On. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- Joplin, Scott. "Maple Leaf Rag." IMSLP, 17 Feb. 2013, imslp.org/wiki/Special:ImagefromIndex/270188/hfbu. Accessed 2 Mar. 2024.

- "Maple Leaf Rag." YouTube, uploaded by Scott Joplin - Topic, 23 June 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mj-m7wQ-yB0. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- "Marvin Gaye - What's Going on." YouTube, uploaded by Marvin Gaye, 29 Dec. 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-kA3UtBj4M. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- Miraglia, Dusti. "What Are Loops in Music? The Alluring Power of Repetition." Unison Audio Inc., 14 Aug. 2023, unison.audio/what-are-loops-in-music/. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- Russell, Melody. "The Enduring Meaning behind Marvin Gaye's Signature Hit 'What's Going On?'" American Songwriter, Aug. 2023. Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.
- Tsioulcas, Anastasia. "20 Years On, That Buena Vista Social Club Magic Endures." NPR Music, NPR, 26 Sept. 2017, www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2017/09/26/552677631/20-years-on-that-buena-vista-social-club-magic-endures. Accessed 8 Mar. 2024.