Re-centering Indigenous Knowledge Systems into Contemporary Jazz Bass

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Compulsory Declaration

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Introduction

The trajectory of this project has changed drastically since the time I first started conceptualizing and working on it. Initially, I wanted to look at two geographical regions - Southern Africa & the Middle East - and see what contrasting elements these regions have in their musical and cultural traditions. I wanted to focus on these regions from the perspective of a practicing musician, using the instrument that I feel most comfortable with, the bass (double bass and electric bass). One of my principle aims for this was to explore ways to get better at my instrument which one does not usually get in their years of schooling as a music major at a South African university. Since these regions and their musical traditions are vast, I used the bass as my point of entry, so I chose two bass players, one from each region, to study further and hopefully get some personal insight from them. I chose to look into the careers and music of Shane Cooper (South Africa) and Avishai Cohen (Israel). Over the course of researching both artists and an incredibly detailed interview with Shane Cooper, I realized that these artists are individual components within the larger machinery of each region's respective music industry. Each region's music scene is different, as is to be expected, but what drew me to these two specific countries was that their people's identities have been formed by harsh and cruel environments. The diamond is interesting perhaps as an example as there are physical forces and strife to create the object in the earth, and physical and social forces to extract it. Could there be a comparison to musicians creating music in these regions or in general? In a similar way to diamond being formed under high pressures, so have these societies cultures been shaped by war, famine, strife and settler-colonialism. With so many constraints and volatility in each region, the cultures, and more specifically the musical cultures, of these two regions is somewhat of an invaluable resource. However, who is bearing witness? If one listens to the general soundscape of music in popular media, there is an underlying feeling that if music isn't from the United States or Europe it is somehow less relevant or is destined to be appreciated by a select few people who just genuinely enjoy the music. On further analysis of these two regions I can tell you that from a jazz bass players perspective they are of the utmost importance. Each region plays host to an immeasurable number of talented musicians but the bass players in my opinion are top class. Bassists like Shane Cooper, Herbie Tsoaeli, Johnny Dyani, Spencer Mbadu, Victor Masondo, Bakithi Khumalo, Musa Manzini, Eldred Schilder and Gary Kriel to name a few, have paved the way for South African and surrounding countries bassists. Whether it be by their virtuosic levels of playing or their beautiful melodies and compositions. In the Middle East there are some of

the most highly innovative and cutting-edge bassists in the world. Bassists such as; Avishai Cohen, Adam Ben Ezra, Omer Avital, Assaf Hakimi, Daniel Ori, Vik Momjian, Alon Oleartchik, Yossi Fine and Selcuk Sun have influenced jazz musicians around the world with their distinctly unique sounds and formidable playing.

I found both regions alluring at first simply because they are outside of the Western canon of jazz. I'd obviously heard and studied a lot of South African jazz but had hardly encountered Middle Eastern jazz in school or university. I also realised speaking to some musicians from Europe and the America's is that Southern African jazz doesn't really feature on their musical radar, however Middle Eastern jazz does. What quickly emerged in my research is that the music of both regions seemed to lull me into what I would describe as a false sense of familiarity. For instance, both regions have indigenous and traditional musics that can be cyclical in nature. Such as that of the *Maqamat* and the Uhadi bow music. They each provide a 'groove' sensation to them, meaning that they have a constant rhythm that could possibly induce a trance like listening state. However, the listening experience and playing/performative experience are two very different realms which I found out the hard way, which is an important aspect of performance-based research which underscores this entire project. After many hours of hashing away at my basses I must report that I am still nowhere near where I would like to be in terms of ability to play these regions' genres and stylistic approaches. It would take a lifetime to truly understand each region's idiosyncrasies and incorporate them into one's playing. Being able to utilize something such as microtonal and quarter tone notes on one's instrument doesn't come naturally. It has to be soaked into one's self through cultural and spiritual means. Learning from the outside like this really made me aware of how difficult it was understanding certain compositional and improvisational techniques and incorporating them into my playing. What the experience and research process has done though, is it led me to grow beyond the status quo of bass playing and pursue interesting new techniques, sounds, timbres and tuning systems along with some contextual knowledge that gave rise to these sound qualities and performance techniques.

What started off as an unsure research endeavor turned out to be fruitful and a lot more beneficial for myself than I had realized. This led me to ask why I had not learnt information like this in school or university, and subsequently led to the main question behind the creative project: "How do modern day performers reconcile the international and commercial styles widely circulated with local and indigenous sounds of their country's roots?" How does one

embrace indigeneity in a contemporary cosmopolitan sense? I have been a music student in South Africa since primary school and I have seen schools and universities struggle with incorporating indigenous knowledge systems in their classes and courses, if at all. My goal with this project was to take inspiration from these geographical regions in ways that could possibly be implemented in the practice routines of other performing musicians. Perhaps someday these ideas and musical systems may find their way into our school syllabi.

Being born and raised in South Africa, some musics were more available than others in relation to the rest of the world. I have also played a lot our country's traditional jazz which has led to other encounters with people who play indigenous instruments. My interest peaked hearing new sounds and seeing new techniques that could possibly be transferable to my instrument. My ideas were formulated over time with my first year of studies mainly focused on research behind these regions and their cultural music traditions. This obviously led me down the rabbit hole of academia and how many articles are helpful, somewhat useful and completely unrelated. A general consensus that I began to focus on regarding these two regions is that they do not play by conventional Western standards such as the definitions and theories I had learned in school settings. Other interesting themes explored in this research include the formal and informal sides of learning music, the healing and spiritual side behind musical traditions and improvisation as a lens looking into creativity, all of which I discuss in the concluding sections. Also, being a music student, I wanted to share these ideas in a way useful to others and therefore used notating and transcribing certain things with Western notation and theory in order to help the analysis side of the research.

In the following paper I will discuss: the pre-colonial aspects of both regions, and my adaption/emulation thereof. (At no point am I trying to recreate or "improve" these indigenous musics, rather, the main goal was to learn from them as alternative models and a move to decenter European-based music pedagogy.) This is a common modern reality of many musicians I have worked with and how they/we reconcile with their/our roots. Formal vs informal music education and it's socio-cultural impact. The re-centering of indigeneity whilst wrestling with settler-colonialism. These topics accompanied by my method for learning new styles of performing on the bass will show how important non-western elements are to the future of artistic education.

This research utilizes musical analysis and transcription, biographical backgrounds, and interviews of artists. Academic and scholarly writings such as books, journals and

dissertations pertaining to the relevant genres and cultural traditions were also used. Research pertaining to Middle-eastern and Avishai Cohen's music is mostly based on these former mentioned resources. Research regarding African musics and Shane Cooper also includes ethnographic methods such as formal and informal interviews, first-hand observation, and lessons. A verbal agreement and understanding was made with Shane Cooper that he would be a part of my research in this capacity. Transcriptions are used for analysing compositional and improvisational elements in these musicians' music as documented through both commercial and informal video and audio recordings.

I am first and foremost a bass player, whether it be the double bass or the electric bass. Because of that, I am approaching this research as a performer applying knowledge to my discipline. I clearly have a bias towards the bass but for me it is simply the most practical and versatile instrument. I use a few different basses to help translate the indigenous aesthetics and soundscapes these two geographical regions. I composed some melodies and used some improvisational techniques from these aforementioned regions in order to demonstrate my ideas. A lot of these techniques stem from regional vocal techniques as each region has a specific sound / language that is used when approaching improvisation. On the fretless bass and the double bass, I really tried to make use of microtones and quarter tones to help get the inflections that exist in the music from the middle-eastern region. Each region's music that I studied has a specific scale harmony that is used and it is imperative to play the correct notes within that scale to achieve the authentic sound.

Regional Inspirations: Composing Melodies as Vessels for Improvisation

In the following sections I outline the creative inspirations behind each piece composed for the recorded performance central to this project. I performed the pieces in relation to a musical map of sorts beginning with South Africa and traveling north towards the Arab Peninsula and the Middle East.

Southern Africa

1) "Ndinovuyo" (See Appendix A)

I composed this melody entitled *Ndinovuyo,* which roughly translates to "I'm happy" ("I've got happiness"). I had originally wanted to title it *Ndivuyani* but later realised it didn't work for the context of the music. The reason being is, it was the idea of this melody that started my journey of instrument and sound emulation on the bass. It has been an enlightening process and I have had some enjoyable encounters and musical epiphanies with regards to my instrument. I had first seen the *uhadi* instrument at the University of Cape Town in around 2016. It was such a peculiar looking instrument at the time. I had never really been exposed to indigenous instruments before so I wondered how this instrument would sound. I eventually managed to watch a concert performed by the staff of the music faculty and was in awe of the master musician Dizu Plaatjies. He performed on various instruments that night but the one that stuck out to me the most was the *uhadi.*

At first glance the instrument does not appear too complex, after all it is a musical bow with a single string and a gourd resonator. However, there is a lot more to the instrument than its minimalist construction.

> "The *uhadi* consists of a single metal string attached to a thin wooden shaft and a resonating gourd or calabash which is usually a hollowed-out pumpkin shell. The instrument is played by striking the string with a thin wooden stick. Differences in pitch are then achieved by either altering the tension of the string (which can be tuned to any desired pitch) or when the performer "stop-grips" the string between the thumb and forefinger of the left hand. This results in a note which is most often at the interval of a tone higher" (Zaidel-Rudolph and Watt 2006, 140).

Traditionally, the instrument was usually played by women as an accompaniment to a solo voice or multiple voices. In contemporary society it is not out of place to see a man play the instrument as well. It has grown in popularity in the Cape Town area through the efforts of Associate Professor Dizu Plaatjies. I have been fortunate enough to perform in the UCT Pan-African ensemble for the past three years. The ensemble is open to all streams of music majors but is comprised primarily of students majoring in African music. It was in this ensemble where I got to meet musicians who regularly played these indigenous instruments. One of these musicians I met, Thabisa Dinga, is a phenomenal *uhadi* player and all-round performer. I got to work more closely with her and others who played *uhadi* throughout 2019 to 2021. It was during these encounters when I really got to understand some of the nuances of the instrument. When it comes to weather effects, such as temperature and humidity, the *uhadi* is extremely difficult to work with, even in comparison to my highly temperamental basses. The tuning of the instrument can go out within a matter of hours or minutes and at times trying to get it back into tune can prove more difficult than just playing the instrument. After a couple of these encounters, I started to notice that some of the challenges in combining indigenous instruments with "modern" instruments may be a result of imposing a set of expectations from one context to another. By this I mean indigenous instruments were made to be in tune with themselves and are the main tool used to accompany voice or multiple voices. The *uhadi* can never really be out of tune in this context and the other instruments and scales I chose to use for the following four pieces function in a similar aspect.

Aside from the use of strings and a resonator which is the body there are obvious differences between the bass and *uhadi*. However, there are alternative ways of playing the bass in which you can attain a similar sound signature. For the context of the *uhadi* sound source I decided to use the electric bass to emulate the timbral aspects of the instrument. The *uhadi* is played by hitting the string with a thin stick beater (*umqungu*) which is not something one usually does on a bass instrument. The closest technique is *col legno* which is used in classical music where string instruments such as violin, viola, cello and double bass use the wooden part of the bow to hit the string. It is not often seen but is used for its unique timbre in orchestral or chamber works. Hitting an electric bass string with a tool or stick of some sort is significantly more difficult because of the angle of the strings in relation to the player. This brings me to an important point. The sound that the beater gets out of the string is a single note, however the acoustic resonance of the *uhadi* produces upper harmonics of the single note you are

playing. So even if you do play one root note, you will attain harmonics such as the 3rd, 5th, flat 7th and sharp 11th. This is based off of the overtone series (a waveform system rooted in physics).

The first two methods I used for emulating the stick beater on the electric bass was to use a drumstick and a chopstick, however, both proved to be inefficient in creating the sound I was after. The drumstick was too heavy and cumbersome which hindered timing and accuracy. The chopstick worked a little better but the sound was thin and tinny. Neither really fit the sound profile I was after. I moved to hitting the string with my finger soon realizing that if I hit the string with the tip of my finger and catch some of the nail on the string a more percussive twang is added to the note. This was a step in the right direction but still not similar enough to the *uhadi*. I had seen the concept of using your fingernail to scratch the string instead of one's fingertips used by two prominent bass players in South Africa: Shane Cooper based in Johannesburg and Schalk Joubert based in Cape Town. I adopted this technique and it was the closest sound to the *uhadi* I had achieved on the bass by far, but it was not direct fit straight away. There are several things that factor into the tone of the scratching nail: where your nail is positioned in relation to the pickups, how the bass is equalized with the regards to the treble, middle and bass frequencies, and which pickups are engaged (front pickup which is closest to the neck, back pickup which is closest to the bridge or both). On my Jazz Bass, I preferred the sound of the front pickup as it gave the fingernail sound some more bite and gave it adequate body. I added some treble (higher frequencies) to the tone as well. Additionally, whilst scratching the string, as you bend the string up and down with your left hand you attain different harmonics out of the note. The more you bend the string the more the fundamental of the harmonic's frequency changes similar to when *uhadi* (specifically the gourd resonator) is pulled away from the body.

Once I had found a suitable tone I conducted some further research by listening to many *uhadi* players to better understand other aspects of playing. In particular, I videoed Thabisa Dinga performing two songs on the instrument and was impressed by her musicianship. On the surface, the *uhadi* makes use of two core notes and the harmony is added by the harmonic frequencies as well as a vocal melody. However, the rhythmic playing behind it is a different kettle of fish. After the listening and analyses of the sources I had gathered I started to figure out what melody I might compose in this two-note harmonic progression. From a Western theoretical point of view the songs have a modal tonality that could be described as Lydian

(the fourth mode in the major scale). What sets this mode apart from a normal major scale is that it has a raised fourth degree (in jazz parlance we refer to it as #11 (sharp eleven) which is an upper tension). In order to create the melody, I made use of a looping effect pedal to help add accompaniment. In the end it was this layering on the loop pedal that helped give me more context and insight into the composition behind *uhadi.*

The song "Ndinovuyo" begins with the simplest form of the sound of *uhadi* in a 3/4 time signature. I chose 3/4 specifically as I feel it depicts the phrasing of my melody the best. You could however interpret the song in 6/8 time as both time signatures are closely related and are just felt differently. Transcription has its limitations due to these types of issues of representing one tradition with notation that emerged from another context. The compositional sound consists of the fingernail on the string playing the two-note progression and improvising with the rhythmic displacement and modulation. Eventually it comes back down to the basic accompaniment line and that is when it is looped and layered as an accompaniment. From here I add chordal harmony and some other rhythmic elements as another layer looped on top. This establishes the groove and the Lydian sound. I drew influence for the melody from different South African artists, the language and idiosyncrasies they use in melodies and improvisation. These artists include and are not confined to: Latozi "Madosini" Mpahleni, Thandiswa Mazwai, Keenan Ahrends and Sisonke Xonti After the melody has been stated for a while I then expand on the sound and use it as a vessel for improvisation.

To my mind, this is one of the most important parts behind the premise of this project. This is a proudly South African way of educating students in jazz and possibly other genres of music. Teaching the song in this sense allows a student to learn indigenous history but also contemporary jazz theory. When you first start learning jazz theory you are introduced to the modes. This song can help facilitate a connection with the Lydian mode in a more local context. This could prove useful to school, as well as, university students.

2) "Helping Hand" (See Appendix B)

The mbira is generally associated with the Shona culture and predominantly played in modern day Zimbabwe but is found across Southern Africa and overseas. I came across the Shona words "kubatsira zvakanyanya" which roughly translates to 'very helpful'. I had been

getting some language tips from a native Shona speaker and she was also in fact, very helpful. So, this song "Helping Hand" came to fruition[1]. My first recollection of the *mbira* was watching a documentary around early 2017 which explained that the instrument is played at ceremonies where it is used to heal those who are ill, or it may be used as a medium to contact ancestral spirits of those who have passed on. Although I did not delve further into the instrument then, I always appreciated the unique sound and timbre that it produces.

This aesthetic stuck with me and ultimately in 2019 searching for an alternate way to play the bass like an *uhadi*, I was inspired to try to emulate the sound of the *mbira* on the bass. Although the instruments are dissimilar, I took up the challenge to get a composite sound profile as close as possible to the originals. According to Hugh Tracey:

> "Generally speaking it is a small instrument which is held in the two hands and played by plucking the metal reeds or lamellae, which produce the notes, with the thumb and first finger of each hand. These metal reeds, either of iron or brass, generally the former, are fixed onto a wooden sound board of convenient size, averaging about six inches broad by eight inches tall. The method of fixing varies with each district but as a rule the reeds are slightly 'S' shaped to give them spring, the lower end of the 'S' below the metal bridge giving the note, while the upper end gives the necessary resistance to a metal bar which holds them all on place… The sound board, also, may or may not be hollowed out. When it is, it is often played without an additional gourd resonator, or '*ichese*' – clear" (Tracey 1969, 78).

Usually, the *mbira* is placed in a resonator box and has bottle caps (or shells or other metallic objects) attached to either the resonator or the *mbira* itself. This develops a buzzy timbre which may help induce a trance state in the music. When the tines are plucked, an individual will end up hearing the attack of note as well as the rattle of the bottle caps. This timbre combined with the fact that the instrument is inherently polyphonic, meant that I would need to figure out a way to change the bass timbre and play more in a chordal manner. I decided to go with the four string electric bass again, because it is more well suited to chordal playing allowing me to play at most four notes at a time. For the timbre change I borrowed a technique I had seen South African bassist Shane Cooper use, which was to wrap a piece of torn or cut paper around the strings near the bridge down at the bottom of the bass. At first sight, it didn't look like a viable tactic for a good bass tone, but one thing I have learnt throughout this process is that you have to abandon all previous assumptions. The paper helped create a buzzy timbre almost sounding like a natural overdrive (the fuzzy distorted

[1] Thank you, Talin Bingwa.

sound from increasing the gain on an amplifier). The paper would rattle between all the strings but in the same breadth would deaden the strings a little leaving less room for sustained notes. I had spoken to Cooper about this technique some years ago, but never really grasped the concept. So, in 2021 I decided to interview him to find out more. What I learnt is that this falls into the category of a 'prepared instrument' used in classical composition where you alter the instrument in such a regard that the timbre changes and you technically have a new or different sounding instrument. I had seen this concept implemented on a piano before, where someone had put tacks into the veld part of the hammers. Luckily, I did not have to go to this extent on my basses. The paper in-between or around the strings meant that the bass now classified as a prepared bass. Cooper went on to tell me he had used other devices such as guitar picks and pegs to help create different textures with his bass, ultimately trying to emulate other instruments. This was a fortunate coincidence seeing that I was trying to do the same thing.

Hence, I began experimenting with this prepared bass concept. I initially tried the approach of wrapping the paper around the strings but had little success with a consistent sound. I eventually ended up weaving the paper through the strings and had a lot more success with this method. This sound was the closest thing to a *mbira* that I had tried thus far. What I did not realise is just how drastic the changes are when the papers dimensions are altered. For instance, I first used a ruler to rip different sized pieces of paper and experimented with how they interacted with the strings on the bass. The smaller pieces allowed more sustain whereas the bigger pieces dampened the sustain of the notes. The different sized pieces of paper changed the transient of the notes whilst also changing the speed/frequency of the rattle. The smaller pieces seemed to rattle faster and the larger pieces slower, yet still fast enough for someone not to not really see a difference. I then went on to use pieces of paper that I cut cleanly with a pair of scissors. I was under the assumption that it would probably work better as there were no rips or uneven edges playing havoc on the strings. As it turned out, my assumptions took me into the opposite direction. Eventually I noticed the more I played the more the clean-cut paper would rattle and get dislodged from its position in-between the strings. The ripped papers rough edges surprisingly helped the paper stay more lodged in-between the strings and the bridge. I ended up finding my holy grail of paper slices which turned out be a width of around 4cm and a length of 21cm which is just the normal width of an A4 piece of paper.

The next hurdle to overcome was how the pickups interacted with the paper. The magnetic pickups of a bass do a very good job of receiving a clean and concise note/frequency. However, with my prepared alteration it did not pick up the notes as clearly due to the paper and only picked up a miniscule amount of buzz form the paper. Grappling with this became a bit of a nightmare as any equalization or tone settings I tried to adjust in order to rectify the issues was unsuccessful. Ultimately, I would have to place a microphone near the bridge and the paper to really pick up the natural buzz that I could hear from the instrument. In the end I decided to use no equalization and just used both pickups in tandem (although I used the back pickup little more in favour of the front pickup as it gave a clearer tone for the polyphonic aspect of the composition.

As with the *uhadi* piece, once I had sorted out the timbre, I was ready to compose a song. However, an important part to this was reproducing something that was stylistically accurate. In order to do this, I began to conduct research. At first, I watched several videos and eventually enlisted some help from another friend at the university, Lutho Mzongwana. From what I had seen in previous encounters his craft over the instrument is masterful. I had been lucky enough to share the stage with him throughout the years of this project (2019-2021) and had heard a lot of his different songs. I managed to get him aside for an afternoon to record a video and ask him some questions on the sound production and technique behind playing the instrument. The instrument is a lot more intricate than I had anticipated. Mzongwana showed me that the *mbira* can usually play between three or four notes at a time, either together in unison or in an interlocking pattern. What was so interesting to me was the rhythmic elements behind these interlocking harmonic phrases. Translating that to bass proved difficult as I had to find the perfect chord inversions with correct fingerings in order to keep the pattern going consistently. I found a progression that worked and stays somewhat faithful to the style of songs I had listened to. “Helping Hand” would be an interesting study for any bass player as well as other instrumentalists. Experimenting with such techniques that one is not necessarily used to can help broaden their musical horizons. Zimbabwean *mbira* music has naturally evolved into different styles of popular music. One of those styles is known as *Chimurenga*. *Chimurenga* music makes use of a band format, generally incorporating guitar, bass and drums. This was one of the closest sources of *mbira* music that I could find that included bass, however I decided to stay away from the bassline side of the music. Rather I focus on the overall sound and melodic/chordal approach of the *mbira* as a whole and apply that to the bass.

East Africa: The Middle Ground

3) “Ambassel Study” (See Appendix C)

I now reach the part of the project that extends me further out of my comfort zone. On my journey researching music of the Middle East I found a useful starting point in Ethiopia as a midway point between the two regions I have been focusing on. Ethiopian musical practices share similarities with both those of Southern Africa and the Middle East. For instance, they also have a bow instrument similar to that of *uhadi* called the *masenqo*. However, this bow is bowed more similar to that of a violin or cello. Ethiopian music also uses interesting scales and modes which resemble those used in the Middle East. The sound characteristics of their phrasing and ornamentation in their melodies is something that I am not used to and has proven to be a challenge for myself but has definitely expanded my ear. For this study I decided to focus on a particular mode called *ambassel*. It is the foundation for this melody and improvisation thereof. It has a distinct sound and only consists of five notes, making it a pentatonic scale. In jazz contexts one would describe the notes in the scale with numbers, which would be the following; 1, b2, 4, 5, b6. This in the key of A would translate to A, Bb, D, E, F. (see Mekonnen 2010, 312).

Some other Ethiopian scales may appear to share the same notes as Western pentatonic scales but have their own names and identities within the Ethiopian context. From what is understood though, the *Ambassel* scale is uniquely Ethiopian and is a biproduct of the region (see Mekonnen 2010, 312).

From a Western-centric viewpoint one might find the intervallic sound qualities of this scale to be other worldly. I myself did not come across Ethiopian scales in all my schooling career but found it fascinating once I encountered it. My first encounter hearing it was in 2018, watching South African jazz guitarist Reza Khota. I ended up being so intrigued by the sound that I went straight up to him after the show finished and asked him what the concept behind some of his songs were. He told me about Ethiopian scales and how he had spent numerous years learning the sounds of that region. This is evident particularly in a song of his entitled “*Yekatit*” from his quartet album *Liminal.* Fascinated by the sounds he had created I went and stuck my toes in the proverbial water. Unfortunately, it ended just there, at the toes. Fast

forward to 2020 and this project was in full swing enabling me to dig a bit deeper. This "Ambassel Study" really tries to pay homage to that sound I fell so deeply infatuated with.

I decided to compose this melody using the double bass as I wanted to create something more lyrical in nature. The double bass is a perfect instrument in this case as it has no frets and allows for slides, shakes, wobbles and other ornamentation for this type of music. This also helps the phrasing of melodies sound more natural and gives a sense that the bass is more vocal than usual. Another key aspect about this study involves the tuning system. The way in which this scale is set up leaves space for microtonality. Microtonality is sometimes described as "the notes in-between notes" referring to the twelve notes used within the Western classical notation system. Microtonality may not be seen as a normality within the Western paradigm, however throughout the world microtonality and other tuning systems appear quite regularly. In East Africa and the Middle East, one will hear microtonality from voices as well as fretless instruments such as the oud and violin. Many East-African countries make use of microtonality and is evident as low on the continent as Tanzania and Zanzibar which can be heard in their traditional Taarab music. It is incredible to think that this whole world of tonality is basically on Southern Africa's doorstep, yet the mainstream music educational system makes little to no effort in making it accessible. Either way, microtonality plays a key role in Ethiopian styles and proved the most difficult thing for me to grasp.

In order to learn to play microtonality I had to listen and live it as best I could. I listened extensively to Ethiopian music, listening to vocal and string inflections specifically. This helped me get used to playing what I was hearing. At first grappling with "out of tune notes" was a struggle for me but that construct had no more leverage in what I was applying. Of course, one can still play out of tune whilst performing indigenous musics but this tuning system, novel to me, allowed me to forget about my entire musical upbringing and focus on something brand new. For months I painstakingly transcribed the phrasing of vocalists and eventually I got to a point where I could just about play microtonally somewhat organically. This is a system that takes years to grasp and master but I am happy with what I was able to learn in the amount of time I had.

The Middle East

4) "*Zanjaran* Study" (See Appendix D)

The tonality of this composition is based off of a highly influential system of musical structures and traditions from North Africa and the Middle East. This system is called the Arabic *maqam* (plural *maqamat*) and its origins can be traced back to around the 14th Century. The use of *maqamat* come from religious or traditional backgrounds and are highly improvisational in nature. I found a helpful reference point in a piece performed by an Egyptian composer, Zakariyya Ahmad (1896 – 1961). The song is named *Ya Halawet El Donya (Oh How Sweet the World Is).* Ahmad composed many traditional and folkloric songs, which include solo pieces, film scores, operettas and Egyptian patriotic songs. In 1931 he would go onto compose songs for one the most influential Arabic artists of all time: Egypt's national icon, Umm Kulthum (Goldschmidt 2000, 17).

Despite this, there is very little documented on Ahmad's work with Kulthum. It is unclear which of her songs he composed and any resources pertaining to the topic are virtually non-existent. *Ya Halawet El Donya* translates to "Oh How Sweet the World Is". It is assumed that this piece was written at a good time in Ahmad's life and it is commonly associated with significant events, such as a wedding. A nice definition of the *maqam* system describes it as the following:

> "…a system of scales, habitual melodic phrases, modulation possibilities, ornamentation techniques and aesthetic conventions that together form a rich melodic framework and artistic tradition."[2]

Each *maqam* belongs to a tonal family and is built by tethering together scale fragments known as a *jins* (plural *ajnas*). The *jins* that starts the *maqam* is inherently the family it belongs to; however, this is not true for all cases. The family it belongs to will determine how the intervals, melody and overall mood will be produced from the constituent *ajnas*. The *maqam* Ahmad used is called *Zanjaran* and is a *maqam* belonging to the *Hijaz* family, which subsequently starts from the first degree of the scale using *jins Hijaz*. *Maqam Zanjaran* contains one more *jins, jins Ajam,* which follows on from *jins Hijaz* at its modulation point (4th degree of the scale), known as the *ghammaz.* Together these *ajnas* create an uplifting major tonal sound, however, the interval between the 2nd and 3rd degrees can be played

[2] https://www.maqamworld.com/en/maqam.php Accessed 6 November 2021.

smaller than the way it is notated using conventional Western notation. This means there is an element of microtonality that adds to the overall sound of the *maqam* and the song as a whole. These are rather noteworthy elements that should be focused on when listening. This specific sound signature caught my ear and made me want to learn more. From a Western-centric viewpoint one might say the melody contains both major and minor elements, and that it contains a happy uplifting side as well as a darker somber side. These sides are brought on by varied vocal inflections in traditional performances, which proved to be the most challenging aspect to translate onto the double bass.

Since Ahmad's piece's inception, there have been a few adaptions / interpretations created showing that the song is an important part of not-only Egyptian but African and Middle Eastern cultures. Here are some popular interpretations performed by:

- Sayed Mekawy from the album, *Awkaty Betehlaw*.
    - Worked closely with lyricists, Fuad Haddad and Salah Jahin, two Egyptian vernacular poets who were influenced by Bayram al-Tunisi.
- Sheikh Imam from the album, *The Encyclopedia*.
    - Worked closely with lyricist Ahmed Fouad Negm, an Egyptian vernacular poet with a legendary folkloric reputation.
- Ahmed Abdalla from the album, *King Tut – The Music of Egypt*, as well as the DVD, *The Spirit of Egypt.*

In order to emulate this tradition on the double bass I had to listen to different sources as reference points to try to internalize the sound of this particular scale. This process was undeniably beneficial as it has broadened my research knowledge as well as my instrumental technique. In order to recreate this piece, the use of an underlying droned note helped act as an accompaniment. Usually, a low drone note is emitted from either a stringed instrument or something akin to the Indian *shruti box.* To keep this drone going I made use of an effect pedal (the Electro-Harmonix Freeze Sound Retainer) which works similar to the sustain pedal on a piano. When pressed down it sustains a note played until your foot is lifted off again. This would prove difficult to hold throughout the performance, but the pedal luckily has a latch function where it will just hold a note indefinitely once the button is pushed. This accompanied with a low drone of a bowed note on the double bass proved to be the perfect foundation for this piece.

One of the most important aspects to translating a predominantly vocal tradition on the double bass was making use of the bow. Traditionally a bow is used in classical double bass, and I think it is one of the best ways to get a more emotive sound out of the instrument. It is especially useful in trying to emulate vocal inflections and techniques that otherwise could not be done with just plucking the strings with your fingers. In fact, the entire piece is bowed with no use of plucking at all. The piece starts with a main theme that is revisited throughout the form of the study. I then start to delve into the improvisational aspects of the sounds of the *Zanjaran maqam*. In doing so I tried to stay along the lines of the way musicians from this culture improvise.

> "We have, first of all, the tones of the *maqam,* from which the performer draws more or less at will, in any order as long as the melodic movement is largely scalar. At a higher level there are motifs of three to five tones that are associated with each *maqam*: these evidently must appear at least occasionally" (Nettl 1974, 14).

I try to make use of the microtonal aspects that the vocalists in these contexts attain. I also make use of certain extended bow techniques like using the side of the hair on the bow to get a lighter raspier timbre, as well as making use of the *Sul ponticello* extended bow technique which involves bowing the strings as near as possible to the bridge which produces a glassier sound that helps emphasize harmonics as well as higher frequencies. The equalization of the bass is set flat with all potentiometers on the amp set to 12 o'clock.

I wrote this *Zanjaran* study with C as the tonic: C, Db, E, F (*Jins Hijaz*) G, A, Bb, C (*Jins Ajam)*. The difficult part grappling with this musical tradition was getting away from habits rooted in Western harmony and opening myself up to the sounds and traditions that come with the *maqam.* Given my limited exposure to this, trying to recreate the culture and tradition is not possible, but I hoped merely to learn more through embodied learning rather than reading alone. The premise behind the *maqam* and the secrets it holds is a long winding road that requires years of dedication and involvement, something that I would never accomplish in the limited years I had to do this project. However, I hope the influences that I have managed to pick up and retain from learning this kind of music helped develop new ways I approach my instrument. In schools and universities, instruments that make use of a bow are almost always classically implemented in teaching. The *maqamat* can help musicians looking to learn an instrument with a bow approach the educational side of it from a different

angle. Obviously the tried and tested Western classical system works but that it is the default system in so many parts of the world should perhaps be challenged. The *maqamat* could be such a crucial study into the other side of music that non-Middle Eastern countries never see or hear. As a South African this experience was mind-altering as I got to see musical approaches relating to my instrument through a completely different lens.

5) "Oud Study" (See Appendix E)

I can count the number of times I have seen an oud in real life on one hand. Living in South Africa it seems to be a rarely utilized instrument and the times I have seen it played was by a travelling artist from outside the country. When I saw it for the first time in 2018 it struck me as being a special instrument just from the sound it produced. While consulting numerous videos and recordings, I found a musician who appeared to play the instrument effortlessly. His name is Yair Dalal, an Israeli musician with Iraqi-Jewish heritage. Not only is he a formidable musician but a vocal peace activist. It was through his videos I discovered crucial information pertaining to the instrument and its heritage. [3]

The oud was originally established in North Iran / Azerbaijan / Iraq and was called the *barbat* which translates to a duck, as its shape loosely resembles that of a duck's body when it is in water (Listen for Life, 2011). Although the bass guitar does not look like a duck, it does share some similar characteristics with that of the oud. For instance, the oud is a stringed instrument with a similar construction to modern guitars. It consists of a body (resonator), a neck with fingerboard, and a scroll or head where the tuning machines/pegs sit. It is akin to that of an acoustic guitar. The oud does not have a known date of invention but archaeological findings seem to place it back around 3000 years ago. Since its inception it has traveled around the world and been adapted by different cultures, some referring to it as a lute.

The oud is a fretless instrument allowing for more expression as well as microtonal melodic elements. (Electric bass guitar is usually fretted but there are different versions of the instrument including fretless.) The oud is generally played with a plectrum / pick which helps give it a noticeable attack to the notes. Now playing with a pick in the bass world is a hotly contested topic. Usually, it is reserved for those who play rock or heavy metal and tends to be frowned upon by bass players of other genres. However, picking technique is a difficult

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jwl9QJWq-2o Accessed March 2021

technique to make use of if you are not used to it. Though I have never been formally trained to play with a pick, I think this was a good way of bridging that gap. I have been forced to develop picking technique in a new and unfamiliar way which has ultimately been beneficial to my playing overall.

The oud is considered the king of Arabic music and can be seen played at various ceremonies, whether it be religious, celebratory or for healing purposes. One thing that is extremely interesting is that each of its strings relates to a certain element. For example, if someone develops a fever and is burning up the oud player would counteract that and play a string with the tonality of water. This would help calm the individual and quell their suffering. On the other hand, sometimes the oud player would need to play with a fire tonality to burn away a specific problem in someone. The oud can also be tuned in a multitude of ways with some oud's having six strings and others having twelve which doubles up on strings of the same note. Taking this all into account was extremely challenging in trying to translate the characteristics of oud onto the fretless bass.

Playing the fretless bass can be difficult in its own regard without frets to keep you in tune. Luckily, I have quite a few years on the double bass under my belt so my concept of intonation is relatively sound, albeit not perfect. Moreover, my sense of intonation is rooted in the Western 12-tone system. So being mindful of intonation and tuning was a concern, not to mention the challenge of playing with the plectrum, something fairly new to me. I felt oddly upset with myself when I first picked up the plectrum, mainly because it had taken me my entire musical life up to this point to actually sit down with a pick and implement it into my playing. Secondly, I felt a little ashamed as this technique is something that has been shunned in many contemporary jazz circles in which I spend most of my music making.[4]

I immediately noticed that playing with a plectrum on bass is rather difficult. Compared to guitar or oud the strings are a lot thicker and require a lot more force to make a good sound. This obviously effects the speed and fluidity of your playing and I found that my dexterity wasn't as proficient as when I played with my fingers (plucking). This was something that I had to work on and still don't feel entirely comfortable doing but I was forced to develop the technique slowly but surely. I started slow with long notes, trying to keep the attack of the

[4] I've seen some incredible bass players in the rock and funk realms who impress beyond measure with their formidable picking techniques, yet there's a stigma behind using a pick on bass in our society. Maybe it's not that important but definitely something to consider.

notes consistent. This meant that all notes should technically sound the same and not have spikes in the volume. After all, playing with a pick requires a lot of restraint as it is an inherently more percussive timbre that the bass doesn't usually make use of in the jazz realm. After struggling for a few months, I decided to go to a jazz guitarist, Michael Bester, who helped explain picking technique from his perspective as a guitarist. This definitely helped but I still had to try and adapt those concepts he had shown me to the bass. I went and worked on my down and up strokes and eventually got to a place where I was somewhat comfortable utilizing the picking technique. The challenging part came when I had to try emulate the rapid style of picking that oud players use. They have so much control with the plectrum especially at high speeds. I practiced this and got fairly far but could never really get close to what oud players can accomplish.

The next aspect of this study was to try and attain the sound signature I was looking for from the oud. I noticed that a lot of oud players would make use of a drone like element but would come from playing a lower frequency string continually throughout the piece. In order to get a sort of drone like sound I detuned my bottom E string to a D which is two semitones lower than usual. This helped give a more open sound to the bass as my strings were more openly tuned, meaning they worked more sonorously together just played by themselves. This resulted in the four bass strings being tuned to D – A – D – G. I think this helped attain what I was looking for although it was quite difficult balancing all the lower frequencies harmonically, seeing that the bass is an octave lower than a guitar and an oud. I then tried to make use of the microtonal aspects of the oud, taking advantage of the fretless bass. I tried to use stylistic traits from the oud, voice and violin to attain this. In the end I think I got what I needed whilst still remaining respectful to the original style and not overdoing certain aspects I was not used to.

This was by far the most difficult study to create out of the five I wrote for the project. Two contributing factors led to this: 1) my limited knowledge about the oud and its stylistic traits (which is to be expected) 2) my initial inability to play with a plectrum (less expected). Writing this study was a huge wake up call for me as it brought out a lot of holes in my playing and musical knowledge (and perhaps ultimately a big reason for pursuing the project). In terms of bass education this study would force a student to use a technique that they would otherwise not use in their jazz or classical careers (picking technique). This study could also prove to be a useful model that introduces students to concepts of microtonality. It

would also help introduce different cultural aspects from regions such as the Middle East and Northern Africa that one would not usually learn in an institutionalized jazz curriculum.

Each of these studies in musical creation and composition gave rise to various technical and musical insight, not typically found in standard music curricula. During the research into the background and broader aspects of music making related to these styles and genres, several larger themes emerged which I will discuss in the section that follows.

Emergent Themes and Considerations

Reflections on Improvisation outside of Jazz

There are many musical traditions (many older than jazz) that are predominantly reliant on improvisation. There is some potential in decentring and broadening understandings of jazz through the understanding of what came before. Improvisation is defined by some as a sudden creative impulse and is closely linked with jazz musics. Its inception was not well received as early jazz was associated with the black working class in the highly segregated American south. This led to negative perceptions of the genre rooted racial stereotypes, which were also applied to the art form that is improvisation. Non-western improvisational styles were frequently labelled as 'tribal' and in today's society are labelled as 'world'. Perhaps this was due to a bias towards notational absence as non-western cultures followed a more aural musical tradition than a written one (Nettl, 1974). On the other side of the spectrum, Western classical music tends to be confined to the notational system and has very little (when playing a *cadenza*) to no improvising at all.

Improvisation was around a considerable amount of years before the jazz genre came to fruition. African and Euro-Asiatic improvisational practices existed long before the concept of improvisation within jazz pedagogy. Different musical genres and forms around the world such as; Middle-Eastern *maqamats,* Indian *ragas,* Yugoslav heroic songs, Indonesian *gamelans,* Persian *radifs* and *dastgahs* and African drumming groups all make use of improvisatory techniques in their traditional musics. However, these genres were not always

documented as many of them followed a more aural tradition of learning music throughout history (see Nettl 1998 and 2009) . Certain societies have particular techniques or teachings for composition set in stone, which influences how musicians improvise over songs/pieces.. In this kind of environment the spontaneity of the improvisation and the precise formatting of the composition coexist. Model improvisors from around the globe extend and elaborate on top of an already established sound, usually a drone or specific harmony. This concept of improvisation is seen as more of a journey and musicians will tend to outline a beginning, middle and end. Most performers have years of personal practice to substantiate their improvisation and will play off of reference points and sound densities in order to get their voice in the music across. These types of improvisors try to get away from the norm of the mind in the cognitive process and let the body (ears) drive the creativeness. Pauline Oliveros stresses the concept of 'deep listening' which involves meditating on the sounds with global and focal attention. This promotes the stimulation within the brain during the creative process, and helps musicians verbalize what's in their head rather than going off of muscle memory. This can be seen as the verbalization of the brain.

Many Non-western forms of improvisation are based on systems of modes. The modes can be built off of a tonic pitch or the former mentioned drones or pedal notes. This can help develop a musician's scale knowledge, experimenting with different sounding scales. These forms of improvisation may be embedded in complex systems of rhythmic structure that can be metric, pulsed, or non-metric. In pursuing this, musicians can develop a strong inner rhythmic feel or pulse from this.

Improvisation also helps distinguish different roles between soloist and accompanist. Each has a specific role; the soloist gets to freely express themselves but the accompanists have to listen carefully and support the improvisor without getting too in the way. This can be difficult in some contexts where a song is mainly just improvisation. The *taqasim* genre is a great example of this and is significant because it is textless and essentially meterless. These compositions don't have to be bound to a fixed form, key, tempo or rhythm.

AJ Racy describes improvisation as "a highly individualized art, an ideal medium for self-expression" (Racy 2009, 316). It, in a sense, requires musicians to be introspective and amplifies their hopes, dreams and aspirations from within, outwards. Considerations need to be taken into account as people experience emotional states differently as the improvisation will embody their personal traits/characteristics. The experience behind improvisation has the

ability to engage our senses and can trigger certain neurons or pressure points in the brain and body. This shows us that the nature of improvisation is inherently human in nature. Thus, the audience plays a crucial role in the improvisatory process. Racy also suggests that the freer improvisations of the Indian *alap,* the Persian *avaz*, and by relation free jazz, are "intimately linked to the ways in which the performers and the listeners both conceptualize and feel the music." (Racy 1998, 104) These aforementioned genres emphasise these significant points of departure for composition, improvisation, aesthetic preferences, instrumental techniques and associated cultural values. One of the first researchers to shed some light on transnational improvisation is Bruno Nettl. He explains that music may be able help oneself understand certain cultural values better through the creative spectrum between improvisation and composition. These values could be views regarding individual freedoms, collective identity, historical knowledge, intellectual discipline, spiritual beliefs and egalitarian values (Nettl, 1974).

It is because of these values that certain genres spread further and resonate with more or different people. Janet Fargion suggests that, "music style requires a technical and social infrastructure for it to flourish." (Fargion 2014, 143). Fargion has done an immense amount of research on *taarab,* a popular dance music from Zanzibar which is usually for parties celebrating different stages in the life cycle. *Kidumbak taarab*, a type of *taarab,* is usually performed for the purpose of dance and the freedom of expression. Performances are usually outdoor and dress is casual compared to more refined *taarab* styles. The audience has proven to be extremely important in the creation and survival of this music and the main consumers are predominantly married women. The music is surprisingly driven by the audience and the development of the music is technically driven by the women. Musicians play to excite these audiences and tend to bring out certain feelings or dance moves through their improvisation in the music. Nettl explains certain aspects of Arabian improvisation requires musicians interacting with the audience in order to achieve a desired emotional state, some of which are known as *tarab* (loosely translated as ecstasy) or *saltanah* (musical self-absorption). Exceptional, unexpected, or surprising moments are what really resonate with audiences and are significant as they elicit a reaction from the observer.

Steven Feld suggests that some musicians impart indigenous feelings onto their music which contrasts well with contemporary improvisational methods. (Feld, 1999). African musical genres, especially in Zimbabwe, take influence from the spiritual realm as well as nationalism

(Turino, 2000). A wide array of politics, progressiveness, history and philosophies around universalism are contained in African cosmopolitans. Throughout history African cultures have had to deal with many forms of appropriation. Likewise, many artists on the continent have been slowly re-appropriating popular Western music through an "Afrocentric lens." Jesse Stewart is a researcher that focuses on musical improvisation as a means to foster a sense of community in and outside of academic institutions. Issues such as sexism were resolved in musical and social dialogue through the performative process of improvisation. This in turn made others more aware of marginalized groups and that issues like sexism, misogyny, xenophobia and racism still exist in today's societies.

Kathyrn Ladano explains that some people are afflicted by other strife's such as performance anxiety. Individuals that suffer from this illness are unable to perform in front of people, whether in a performance space or a teaching setting. Through her findings it was proved that certain individuals suffering from performance anxiety could be rehabilitated through free improvisation. This created a safe place for those feeling isolated or removed, and brought them into a collective. This helped foster a sense of community, helping those suffering through healing and empowerment. Free improvisation could help children with anxiety or other mental instabilities in the educational system. This kind of pedagogical approach shifts the emphasis away from grades and towards "attendance, participation, mental presence, and effort." (Ladano 2016, 51). Jesse Stewart stresses certain aspects about learners need to be addressed in order to achieve an environment that breeds inclusivity. One of the most important lessons for students to understand is that there are no wrong notes. Each individual shares a responsibility for the music created together within the collective. Participants need to be mindful of their musical choices as their choice of expression can affect other performers and the overall composition. Dynamic listening needs to be adhered, participants need to contribute when required or lay out when others are contributing. In order to counteract fear paralysis from too much freedom, Stewart used techniques similar to conducting but mainly used well known folk songs as a foundation on which to improvise over.

Improvisation has helped societies throughout the ages with; the fostering of community through inclusivity, the alleviation of mental illnesses, and eliciting emotions or feelings that provide a degree of healing. I think free improvisation would be a welcomed addition into school syllabi. Today's society stresses industrial careers and children are boxed into certain

career paths from a very young age. There has been a rapid decline in ways of expressing creativity in our educational systems. Free improvisation could be a relieving factor to learners, and could ultimately set them on the right path towards introspection. This has the potential to alleviate a lot of depression in modern society. Nettl describes improvisations as, "The elusive psychic space that exists between the mental or emotional mechanisms that lead to musical production, and the musical product itself, may be the very creative field that renders improvising enticing and ecstatic, as well as mystifying and technically challenging." (Nettl 1974, 15).

Improvisation is thus an integral part of human nature. Unfortunately, it is more typical for current institutions to teach jazz-based improvisation. Jazz was and still is inherently spiritual as it was informed by the culture surrounding it. It is however only one lens to look through when improvising. There are many indigenous forms of improvisation in the world and many jazz musicians (and musicians in general) would benefit from studying them in order to unlock different views and angles to approach improvisation moving forward.

Spirituality and Healing in Musical Performance

Music is a multifaceted topic and has mainly been used throughout history as a means of entertainment or spiritual release. Traditionally spiritual release would be related to religion or specific cultural traditions and rituals, however in modern society what is spirituality? This is a broad and philosophical question but it raises points as to how people perceive spirituality and whether they believe in a different head space or realm that has nothing to do with the real world. A certain song can remind one's self of something or someone and it can conjure up memories, images, scents, a sense of nostalgia and ultimately transport us to another world. This is the power that music has on the subconscious. Music has a way of stimulating the brain and can cause one to feel emotion or even stimulate goose bumps. Certain sounds or music resonate with particular values or memories people have and in turn can help heal one's inner state or psyche.

Techniques such as heterophony, syncopation, movement, odour, colour, shapes and other dramatic-sensory textures are all elements that add to the performative side of musical and spiritual healing. Marina Roseman discusses the concept of four axes of inquiry which musical healing can be built upon. These are musical, biomedical, sociocultural and

performative axes. Each axis is an integral part of spiritual healing. However, in terms of the profession of healing we're looking at two different realms essentially. The medical realm, which focuses on the biomedical approaches to illness and health, illness aetiology, symptomology and treatment protocols. And the musical realm, which focuses on musical/ kinetic knowledge and performance practice. Both realms are heavily influenced by things such as gender, politics, subsistence, economics, and religion to name a few. Many of these aspects can be philosophical or cosmological in nature but are catalysts for spiritual healing through music. "Music is an artefact of (a) the physics of sound, (b) the biophysiological realms of perception and sensation, and (c) social cultural, historical, and individual realms of meaning." (Roseman 2008, 29).

Music healers around the world exploit certain musical techniques in order to stimulate both sides of this consciousness and to help create a sense of equilibrium amongst the two. One such technique is to shift the tempo of a certain healing song to liken that of a walk or a heartbeat. This helps establish a sensation of cultural and emotional meaning through the change in the physics of sound. Another contrasting technique healer's use is increasing the tempo of songs whilst being performed in order to portray the condensation of time. These healers tie musical sound structures and sociocultural meanings together with their performative manipulations. These manipulations can include; intonation and melodic contour, the duration of simple and complex rhythms, vocal interactions such as heterophony and polyphony and many different ensemble possibilities. Usually healers make extensive use of dance as people can trace emotions in motion. This provides sensory excitation or anesthetization allowing patients to be taken on an imaginary journey. Rhythmic dance music can also help establish a collective pulse, biologically with rhythms such as heart rate or symbolically and empathetically through imagined metaphors and cultural meaning. (Roseman, 2008).

A recent medical discovery has proven that group-drumming can alter both neuroendocrine and immunologic systems in the body which means music has the potential to be immunoenhancing. The human body is complicated and ethnomusicology has limitations to understanding its biomedical aspects but it is undeniable that certain musical elements can shift or alter one's frame of mind. For instance, *Nchima* healers from the Malawian region have the ability to identity and be possessed by spirits through dance and trance at ceremonial gatherings. They enter a different head space or realm and can, in essence, communicate with

the physical and spiritual world. Healing is not just the straight forward medical realm as people have come to think but it contains ontological and cosmological aspects of holistic well-being. People have the innate ability to travel between the physical and intangible. This is best observed through a description of a Tumbuka healer, Mseka, and helps define the different states that healers can decipher: "It's no coincidence that possession trance, as an extreme form of being-away, is often read from a Eurocentric viewpoint as a form of madness – a psychological pathology. This is not a drifting in and out of being-there as in daydreaming, but an exponential drift to an extreme being-away that is sustained over long periods of time in an intense musicality. Being-in-the-world and being-in-between. Separates dancing the question from dancing the disease. One is amnesic, the other a boundary phenomenon. When Mseka divines, he is possessed and not possessed, the lion and not the lion, both there and not there at the same time. Trance-dancing is a liminal opening, a gathering in the density of being where the fourfold of mortals and spirits, earth and sky meet." (Friedson 2000, 78).

Listening to performative healing music can significantly help access certain memories or visions, especially with many live sensory textures surrounding you. These two instances prove to us that music has a way of impacting the subconscious. With a society wrought with depression and mental illness holistic healing is a way for people to reconnect with certain parts of themselves they may have forgotten or never knew they had. Music can play such a substantial role in this healing. It would be great to see performative and group healing at all clinics and major wellness centres. Music healing has the potential to effect lives for good and if implemented in in certain 'diseased' areas, could help save a few more lives from mental health disorders. Mental health disorders seem to have been emerging exponentially throughout the youth, at the very least, they are being discussed more frequently. Incorporating spiritual healing through music may be a way of countering certain issues. Whether it is a budding instrumentalist, a school child or a university student, steps can be taken to reduce harm before it sets in for the long run. Speaking as a musician, we don't always know that we have that kind of influence on people's psyches and spiritual well-being. It is an important part to music making and one that comes with a lot of responsibility. I would suggest that it is a valuable resource that can inform the way musicians compose and release music into the world.

Looking to the Future: Modes of Learning

Southern Africa and many non-western regions have had their societies decimated by colonialism resulting in distinguishable inequality. In South Africa specifically, the current older generation of colour was marginalized during the Apartheid era and, in most instances, were never allowed to step foot into a tertiary institute. Speaking to South African jazz pianist and Blue Note recording artist Nduduzo Makhathini, I found out that this created a stigma towards academic institutions amongst musicians of the local populace. A clear divide between those trained informally and those trained formally was created, two factions of South African jazz. On reflection we can obviously tell that this was the ultimate goal of the Apartheid regime and has unfortunately left a bitter taste in the mouths of so many musicians in South Africa. What makes it worse is that 'informal' music was never really recognized by the formal institutions until Apartheid was abolished. In some ways, this is similar to the reception of early jazz in the US discussed earlier. Makhathini describes the South Africa context at length here:

> "Yet this so-called 'informal' knowledge was largely ignored by the curriculum once they arrived on campus (as it is still the case with many jazz programs in South Africa today.) In exploring the contents of the jazz curriculum, I ask whether, and to what extent, the formal jazz curriculum acknowledged the knowledge systems that produced and transmitted South African versions of the jazz art form before its arrival, which lay in the realm of the informal. It is important to note, however, that from these early years, musicians who were self-taught or came from other sources of knowledge were regarded as "unschooled", as politics of a distinction between formal and informal knowledge systems was already beginning to emerge… It is important to note that learning music at this time was intertwined with ways of living and being in a community, thus the process of learning and transmission was closely linked to daily experience." (Makhathini, 2021).

The unfortunate reality behind this was that there were so many talented musicians that would be deemed geniuses in contemporary society. However, they were never given the recognition they deserved. Many 'informal' musicians had their music die out with them, or are solely remembered aurally by students and disciples of their music. The educational system back then never found the need to document these local musicians' music and we are ultimately paying the price for that now. Another aspect of this was that if underprivileged artists were documented or recorded, they were more times than not, taken advantage of. The case of Solomon Linda and his song *Mbube* is a prime example of this. Linda was a man with charisma, wisdom and a keen ear for melodies. He was revered by many for his talents and

helped develop local music whether it was through live performances, recordings or even in township music contests. Unfortunately, his talents were commercialized by a higher corporate structure, and this was easy to do at the time as many laws bypassed people of colour's, especially black individuals, rights. *Mbube,* one of Linda's original compositions, went on to be appropriated by American musicians, some not even understanding what they were doing. *Wimoweh* and *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* were clear adaptations of the original song and were somehow created legally under the guise of copyright laws in South Africa and the United States of America. At the time *Mbube* was classified as an 'African Folk Song' thus was open to adaptation due to the instated copyright laws of the time. Just because it was legal though does not mean it was ethical, the recording company made him sign over his rights for a measly fee and he himself was never appropriately compensated. Linda, as respected and as talented of a man he was, had his creativity stolen by higher powers for selfish capitalist gain and later passed away bitterly impoverished. (Malan, 2003)

How can a society truly come back from all of the atrocities committed? If anything, it is up to us now, to re-centre these legendry musicians in our societies. The reason why I wanted to approach a topic like this was because of two trailblazing musicians in their respective regions. Shane Cooper and Avishai Cohen are two highly competent bass players from South Africa and Israel respectively. These musicians have been influential in my own musical growth and studying them has shown me that they have immense respect for past musicians, cultures and traditions. Cooper is one of the most down to earth musicians one can speak to and has helped the South African jazz scene evolve over the years he has been active. He has a plethora of knowledge in many genres and styles and has made a concerted effort to implement indigenous sounds and art forms into his music. His recent album *Happenstance* implements indigenous instruments such as *uhadi*, mouth bow, drums and flute, as well as performative tools such as prepared instruments, where paper is put on the bass and piano in order to create different sound signatures that are inherently African sounding. Cohen on the other hand has approached composing jazz using his Middle Eastern roots as influence. Cohen is one of the most established bassists on the world and has over fifteen albums to his name. Some of these make extensive use of indigenous sounds and extended techniques that I tried to implement into this project. Noteworthy albums to listen to are *Sensitive Hours*, *Seven Seas* and *Almah.* These albums move further away from his formal jazz upbringing and start to re-centre his roots and cultural sounds. Both musicians are integral parts of their music industries and are inspirations to upcoming bassists around the world. Their identities

are so strong that they have slowly become pillars one can look towards for fresh ideas and interesting concepts. Taking this all into consideration they are definitely two contemporary jazz bassists that don't conform to the 'rules' of jazz and have helped pave the way for new interpretations of jazz in a cultural context.

Personal Reflections on the Creative Project Itself

I have learnt a lot of crucial information over the time I have been working on this project. If anything, I feel like there is a lot more to uncover and learn. This project has been limiting in some factors as I did not have all the time I wanted due to the pandemic and national lockdown levels. At first, I was also very hesitant to approach a project like this, mainly due to my own upbringing. I am a white male in South Africa, which means I have had a privilege to education and other aspects of life that others don't necessarily have. Grappling with indigenous instruments and art forms scared me, mainly because my lineage is not from here. I had so many mental blocks keeping me from ever starting the process of learning. However, once I got stuck into learning and understanding what was actually happening around me, did I start falling in love with art forms that I had never thought I would be exposed to. This project has shown me there is a lot more out there in the world than what we know. We as musicians tend to get stuck in our own little bubbles. We learn the same kinds of music and never really test or push our boundaries. This process has shown me it is possible, and it could possibly even be implemented into schools or universities.

I also felt the project was limiting in certain cultural aspects. There a lot of cultural issues that have not been addressed due to me either not understanding them fully, or because I had a limited amount of time and limited amount of words I had to get my point across. I still have questions regarding the ethical implications of a project like this. For instance, at what point does innovation become appropriation? It is all well trying to conceptualise contemporary ways of approaching traditional elements but they need to be represented properly and stylistically in terms of music. However, sound can be easier manipulated than language and I therefore had more of a leg to stand on throughout this entire process. The most important thing for me was making sure that I stayed true to myself and the music. Jazz as well as indigenous musics have a deep tie to racism and patriarchal issues. We can't erase those aspects behind the culture of the music. What I suggest we can do, is start breaking down the

walls that divide us as musicians, as human beings. We should be implementing more variety into our school and university syllabi, compared to the stock standard way of educating music through a strictly Western lens. We have so many different cultures and musicians around the world that are never heard of, and it's time we learnt something from them.

Appendix A

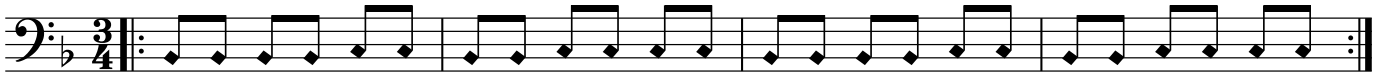
Ndinovuyo

Uhadi Explorations

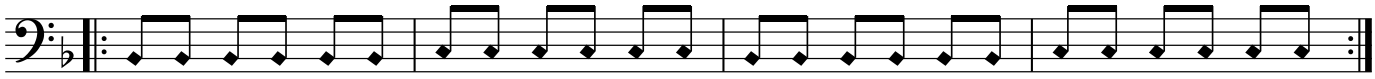
S. de Souza

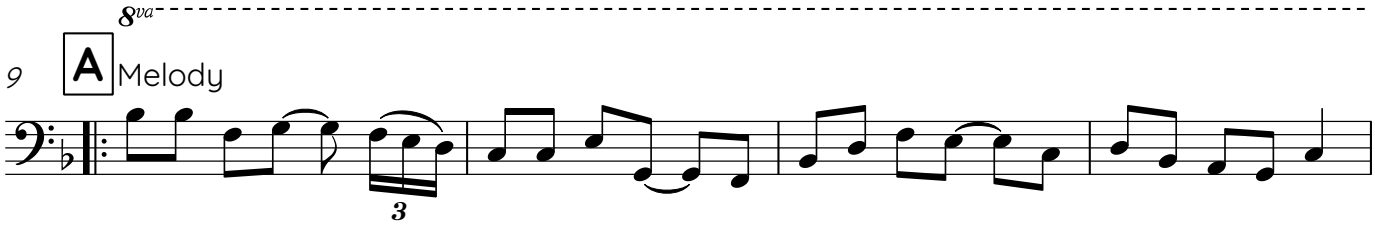
♩ = 105

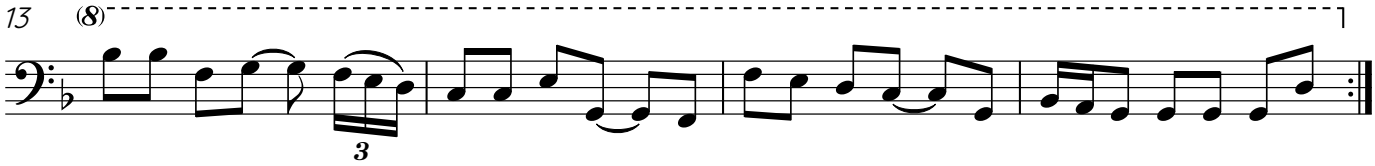
Intro Play by scratching with fingernail



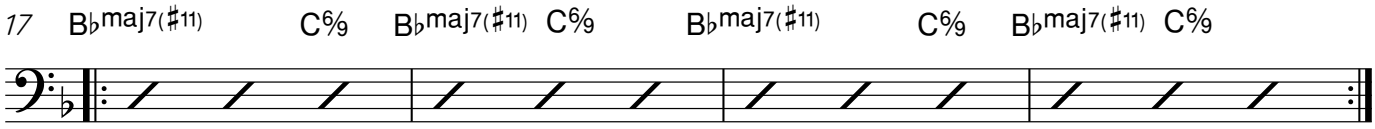
5 Example of metric modulation



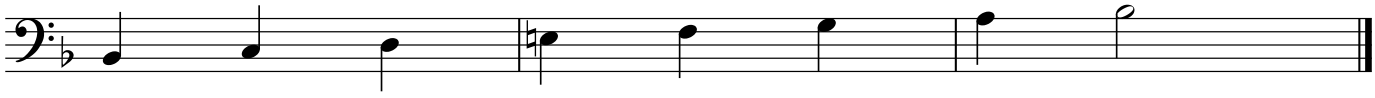




Solo



21 Bb Lydian scale used for improvisation

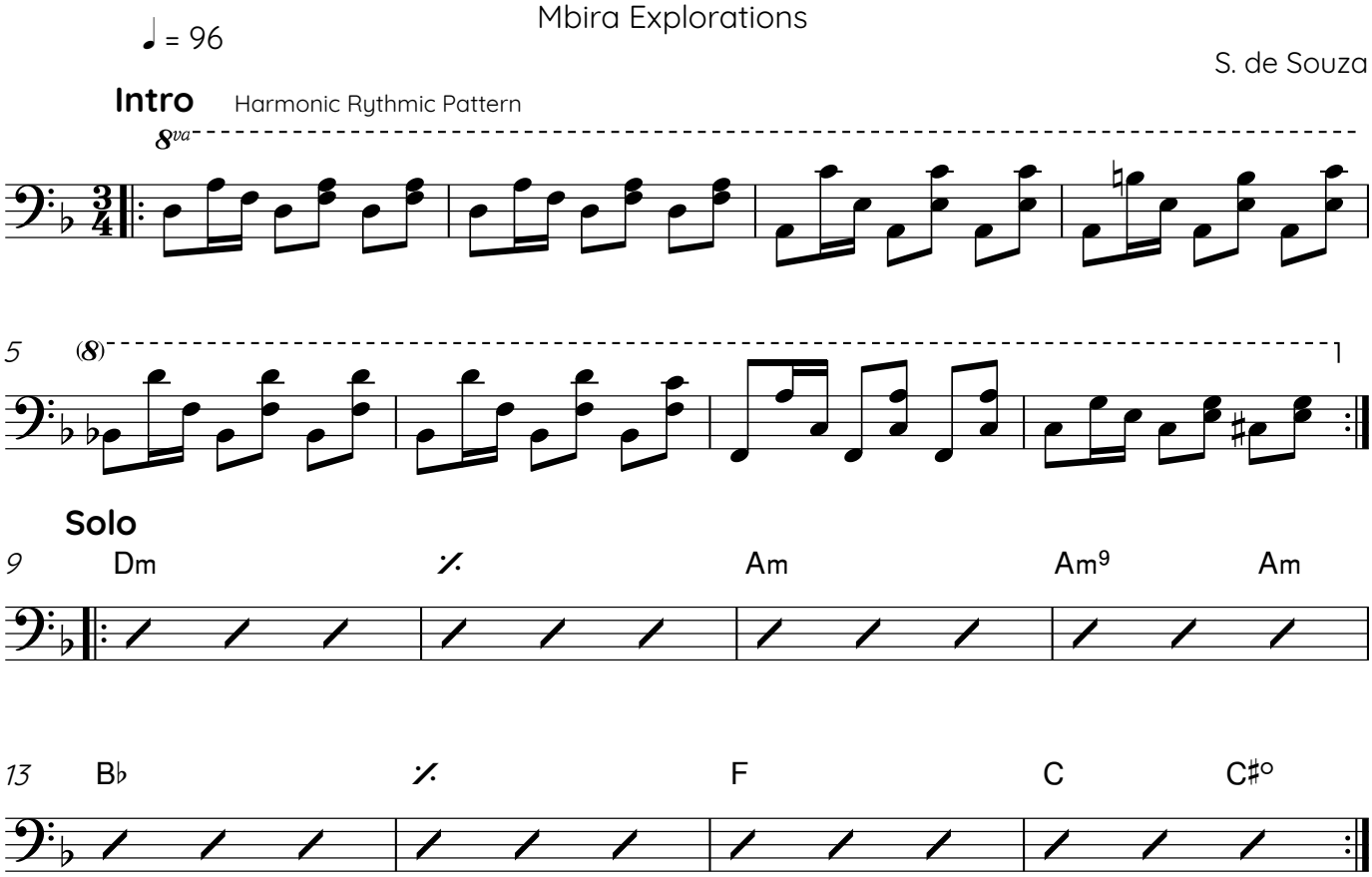


When playing with the fingernail it is important to bend the string in order to get different harmonic frequencies out of the string.

Appendix B

Helping Hand

Mbira Explorations



Put paper inbetween the strings near the bridge

Use the paper to it's full potential by highliting the buzzy timbre, whether it be by accentuationg certain notes or using chords to add a layered aspect to the effect.

Appendix C

Ambassel Study

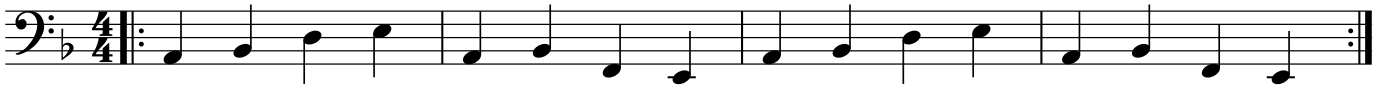
Ethiopian Exploration

♩ = 88

S. de Souza

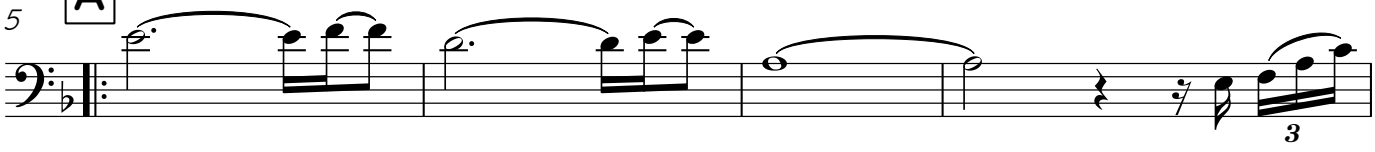
Intro Ostinato bass pattern

pizz.

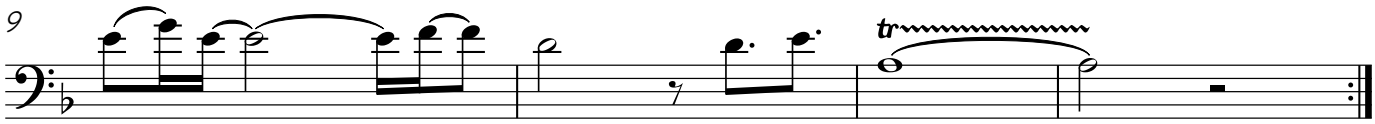


A Melody

5

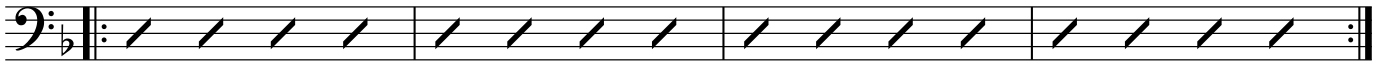


9

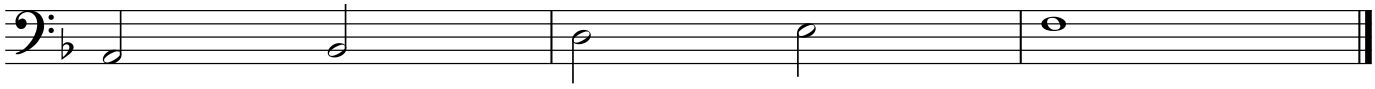


Solo

13 No conventional chord symbol for this scale



17 *Ambassel* pentatonic scale used for improvisation



One can further elaborate on this scale by adding microtonal aspects to their improvisation. The best intervals to experiment with this do not belong to the scale and are found between the 3rd and 4th degrees, as well as the 6th and 7th degrees of a natural minor scale. This would be between C and D, as well as F and G respectively in the context of this study.

Appendix D

Zanjaran Study

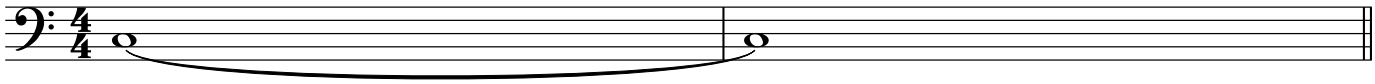
Middle-Eastern *Maqam* Exploration

S. de Souza

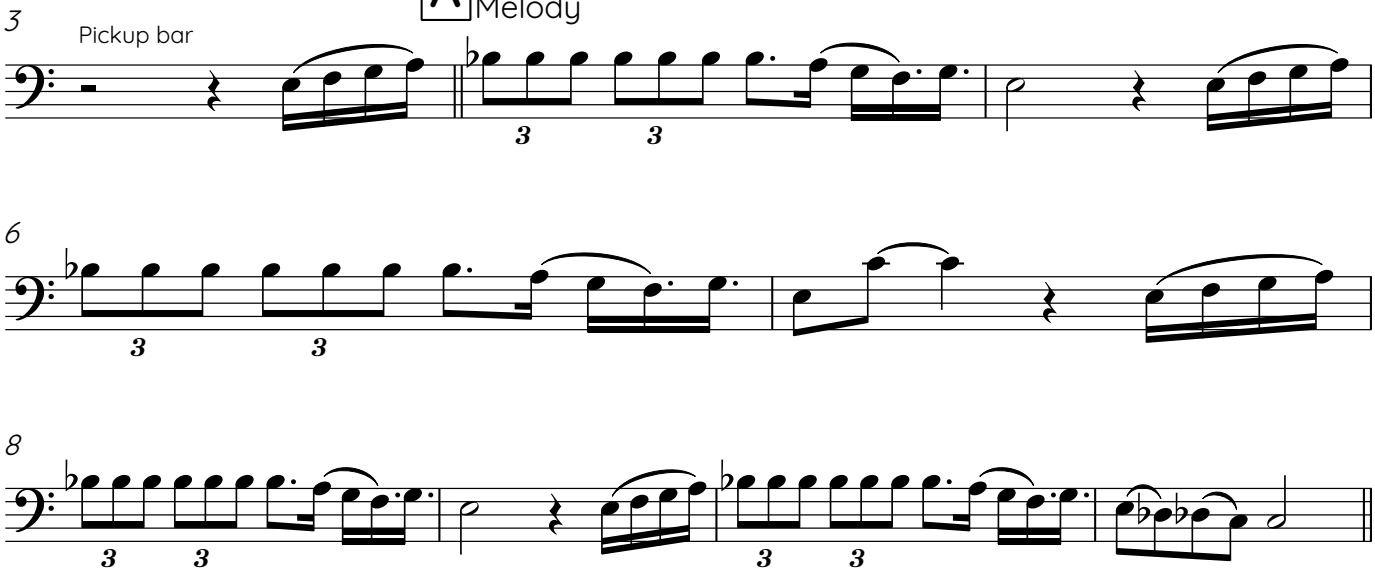
Open

arco

Pedal note to be continued under melody and improvisation

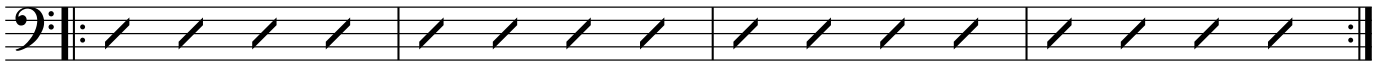


A Melody

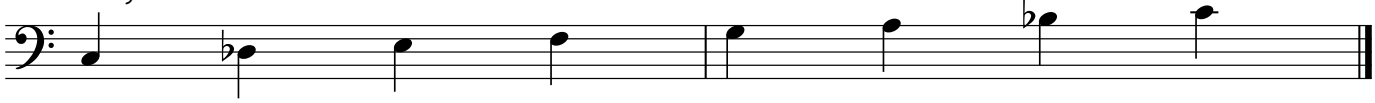


Solo

12 Revisit melody throughout whilst soloing with the scale below



16 *Zanjaran* Scale



When using the bow try emulate vocal phrasing. One can further elaborate on this scale by adding microtonal aspects to their improvisation. The best interval to experiment with this is found between the 1st and 2nd degrees of the scale. This would be between C and Db in the context of this study.

Appendix E

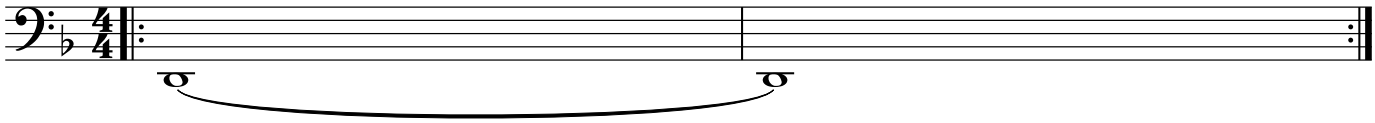
Oud Study

Utilising the Plectrum

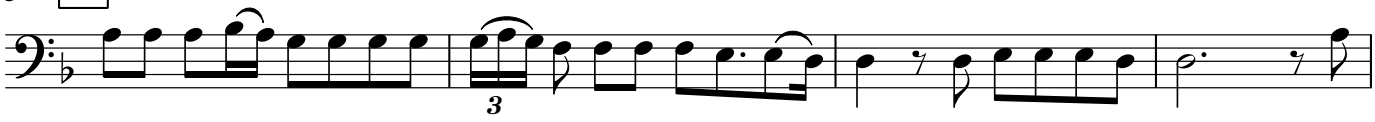
Open

S. de Souza

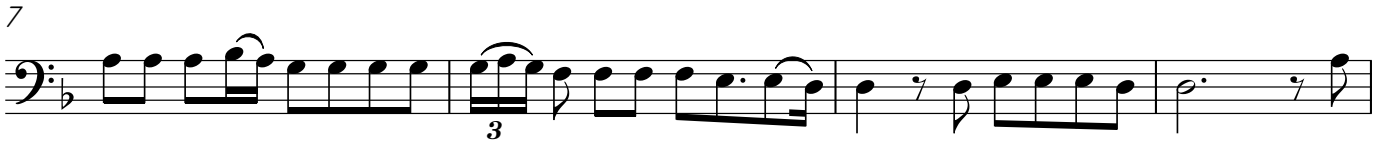
Intro Drop D tuning & use plectrum



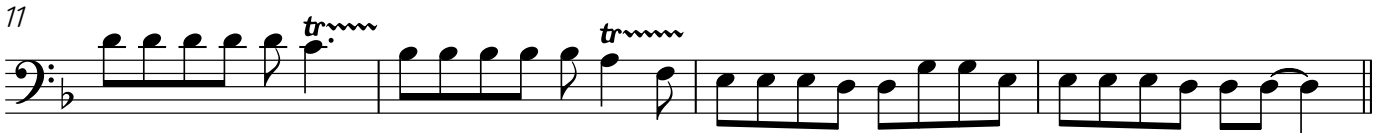
3 **A** Melody



7

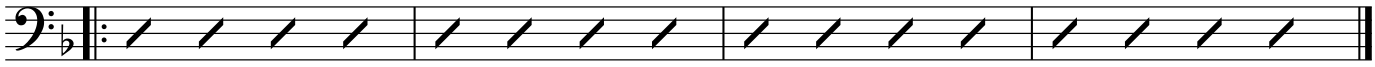


11



Solo

15 Dm 𝄎 Dm 𝄎



One can further elaborate on this scale by adding microtonal aspects to their improvisation. The best intervals to experiment with this is found between the 2nd and 3rd degrees as well as the 3rd and 4th degrees of the scale. This would be between E and F, as well as F and G respectively in the context of this study.

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