

MY MUSICAL IDENTITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION.....	4
3. ACTIONS.....	4
4. THE PROCESS	
4.1. Research and preparation.....	5
4.2. Transcription.....	5
4.3.Composition.....	6
4.4. Performances.....	7
4.5. Recording.....	7
5. SONGS RECORDED	
5.1. Mi Changui.....	8
5.2. Como Fue.....	8
5.3. Lidia.....	8
5.4. De Rejo.....	8
5.5. A Paula.....	8
5.6. Drume Negrita.....	8
5.7. El Güije.....	9
5.8. 5.8. Un Yoruba meets Russian.....	10
6. PROMOTION.....	13
7. CONCLUSIONS.....	16

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Finally, I wish to thank my parents for their support and encouragement throughout my study.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cuban music surrounds me ever since I was born. When a child, my first music experience was the sound of Orquesta Original de Manzanillo and of the wind orchestra Glorietta Morisca, which used to play danzon and other traditional Cuban music in the park of Manzanillo, my native town, called 'La tierra del Son' as well, 'the land of the son'. I remember being taken away by this music and my childish desire to learn how to play the flute and the saxophone.

My musical training began at the age of 5 playing the recorder. Two years later I began studying the piano at a local music school, and later, at the age of 11, I got familiar with jazz, beginning with the records of Charlie Parker and Paquito de Rivera.

At the age of 16 me and my brother decided to move to Moscow where I attended Gnesin music high school and studied classical and contemporary saxophone repertoire, mostly French. Studying there helped me to learn the traditional repertoire and get the foundations of the instrument, sound and the technical skills.

Later, my teacher noticed my constant interest in improvisation and Jazz and recommended me to continue my studies at the Department of Gnesin Music Academy where began taking my first steps in jazz and improvisation. My deep interest in my roots as a person and search of self-identification through my music led me to the idea of fusing the two music cultures that I was always exposed to.

I gathered all the possible information about the traditional styles and to listen to lots of recordings. I transcribed numerous compositions and solos, started a trio where I sang traditional Cuban music and a Latin Jazz quintet the repertoire of which consisted mostly of my transcriptions and adaptations.



Figure 1: Cafe Yauzskaya, Moscow

I tried to meet every Latin musician that would visit Moscow and to talk with him or her whenever I could. Among them were Claudio Rodity, Horacio Hernandez, Diego Urcola, Rebeca Mauleon and many others.

My thesis in Gnesin Music Academy was about Afro-Cuban and Latin jazz. It an analysis of the styles and analysis of transcriptions of compositions by groups like Irakere, Bronx Horns, Claudio Rodity, Emiliano Salvador, Paquito D’Rivera, Hilton Ruiz, Arturo Sandoval.

At Berklee Valencia I continued transcribing and learning about Afro-Cuban music. I took clases with Alain Perez, Yoel Paez and was fortunate to

have guidance of my teacher and mentor Perico Sambeat in many aspects of jazz improvisation and different styles as well as an unconditional help and support of Enric Alberich in composition and arrangement, etc.

I met many Cuban musicians outside Berklee and made performances and collaborations with them. Among them are Carlos Sarduy, Abel Marcel, Ariel Bringuez, Javier Masso, Julio Montalvo and his Latin big band, Jeorvis Pico, Roque Martinez, etc.

2. PROJECT

The concept of my project is to complete my previous work and to make musical illustrations of it. It contains a general theoretic work with an overview of the main styles of Afro-Cuban music. As a part of this project during the year I composed, 5 original tunes and arranged 3 Cuban traditional songs, performed and recorded them.

3. ACTIONS

The interesting feature of the project is that all the musicians on my recordings are not from Cuba but they are all great jazz players. This fact was very important during the whole process, the pieces that were created and recorded later were written for specific players that I counted with.

The process involved many actions that were happening simultaneously. Listening, Transcription, Composition, Arrangement, Instrumentation, Performing, Recording etc.

For me the biggest challenge was organization, it took the most part of time and energy and would teach me some new things every time I would start a new project.

It was important to show the material regularly in public during regular gigs, be able to get feedback and do the necessary corrections.

As a result of my work I began trying other instruments in my music and experiment with new instrumentations. The flute, the soprano saxophone, singing would be heard more often as well as the use of electronic elements etc.

Before starting composing the pieces I created a time line and divided the whole process into three parts.

4. THE PROCESS

4.1. Research and preparation.

During this period I transcribed numerous solos and arrangements and made a list of CD's I would later transcribe. I listened to each carefully, making notes on the ideas that attracted my attention and the features I would like my music to have. During that time I was taking all the core theory courses on harmony, ear training, composition and arrangement.

4.2. Transcription

Here are works of other that I listened and transcribed at that period among them are:

1. Emiliano Salvador "Puerto Padre".
2. Tony Martinez and the Cuban Power "Noticias de Cuba"
3. Tony Martinez "Maferefun"

4. Eddie Palmieri "Listen Here"
5. Ray Vega "Latin Jazz Sextet"
6. The Bronx Horns "Catch The Feeling"
7. Jazz Meets Cuba
8. Antonio Hart "Amo tu sonrisa"
9. Larry Coriel Live From Bahia
10. Ray Barretto "Trancedance"
11. Perico Sambeat Ademuz
12. Carlos Sarduy "Charly en La Habana"
13. Alain Perez En el Aire
14. Irakere 30 Años
15. Paquito D´Rivera Reunion
16. Diego Urcola Appreciation
17. Victor Mendoza "Black Bean Blues"
18. Frank Emilio Flynn Barbarisimo
19. Paquito D´Rivera Live at the blue note

Among with the jazz transcriptions I would make on a weekly basis for my classes over 100 transcriptions were made during the year.

Later during the process of composition the source of inspiration were life situations and some of my pieces are dedicated to people that are dear to me. I would let go my imagination and then adapt the piece to the most appropriate style groove, tempo etc. that would reflect the mood and feelings.

Many times at start I wasn't sure about what I was to create stylistically though it was very clear to me what I wanted say in each piece. I made a big pool of ideas and concepts that I used later.

4.3. Composition

I kept a notebook of the musical ideas that were coming to me on the way as well as recording every melody that appear in my mind on my telephone and

later listening them through and transcribing the ones that could be developed in to a composition.

Each one would appear in different situations and would be inspired by a particular person or mood. That's how I've got to the idea of story telling.

After that I would try to play it to someone and make the necessary corrections arrangement wise, etc. And after that record it.

4.4. Performances.

I began organizing gigs in different venues in Valencia; playing my songs with the musicians I would later record them with.

In total I made 30 performances during this year 8 of them featured my original material.

All the songs represent various elements of Latin and Afro-Cuban jazz.

4.5. Recording

8 songs were recorded during the second semester. Most of them are arranged for a 5-7piece band: a saxophone, a trumpet, flute, trombone and a rhythm section;

During the process of composition my focus was not only on the Afro-Cuban elements but also on the elements of Russian Folkloric music.

5. SONGS RECORDED.

The songs I composed, arranged and recorded are:

1) Mi Changui (Jazz-Folk Fusion)
2) Como Fue(Afro-Cuban Russian Fusion)
3) Lidia (Bolero-Danzon)
4) El Guije (Bolero-Danzón)

5) Yoruba meets Russian (Jazz Folk Fusion)
6) De Reajo (Fusion-Songo-Mozambique)
7) A Paula (Balad)
8) Drume Negrita (Jazz-Folk Fusion)

A real person inspires every composition and arrangement and behind each there is a story.

5.1. Mi Changui.

I have a personal bound with this style. Changui is an ancestor of Cuban son originally from the part of Cuba called Oriente.

The city where I was born Manzanillo, is the provincial center of Granma that is famous for its musical tradition. I used to listen to this style from my very early childhood and wanted to make a tribute to the style.

5.3. Como Fue

This traditional Bolero is very dear to me, the first version was recorded by Benny More and then it was made popular by Paquito D´Rivera.

5.3. Lidia

This piece is dedicated to my grandmother. She played a very important role in my life and my musical education.

5.9. De Reajo

This piece is inspired by Cache Bache a Trova Duo from Havana

It first was composed as a song and I wanted to give a fresh perspective to it putting it into a contemporary jazz context.

5.10. A Paula

Is dedicated to a very dear person to me.

The piece is very emotional and intense. It is eclectic in many ways as it brings together music and poetry. I tried to keep the instrumentation simpler to convey my emotions.

5.11. Drume Negrita

Is my arrangement of a traditional lullaby by Ignacio Jacinto Villa - Bola De Nieve.

I was inspired to do this arrangement by my teacher and mentor Perico Sambeat after hearing his own version of it.

Now lets take a closer look at two of the compositions I recorded and the elements used in them.

5.12. El Güije.

El Güije is eclectic in many ways; it represents two worlds that are so different and yet have so much in common. In this piece I'm mixing Russian folkloric music elements and Afro-Cuban melodic elements. It starts on a D pedal on the base.

The main color is Dsus11 sound, after that the instruments begin creating a musical conversation interchanging ideas and building up.

When I was choosing the instrumentation I was going for a specific sound that would illustrate the concept I've been working on.

Trombone and Trumpet represent the afro-Cuban side; soprano is balancing in the middle of the two worlds playing Russian and Afro-Cuban melodic material.

In the climax point of the composition I'm using a folkloric Russian instrument – Rozhok that plays a drone and then an ostinato melody creating a base for the Russian folkloric voices to come in and conclude the piece.

I extracted the vocal parts from Russian Folkloric song "The King on the city goes" performed by Sergei Starostin and using Ableton Live made loops of them that are being brought in by a DJ. My idea was to use a DJ as a member of the group and make him interact with the band and be part

of the conversation.

Ex. Female choir loop.



Ex. Score Yoruba Meets Russian

MELODY

A **YORUBA MEETS RUSSIA** **3**

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Yoruba Meets Russian". The score is arranged in a system with seven staves. From top to bottom, the staves are labeled: S. Sk. (Soprano Saxophone), B. Tr. (Baritone Trumpet), T. Sk. (Tenor Saxophone), Tbn. (Tuba/Euphonium), PNO. (Piano), Bass, and D. S. (Drum Set). The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex melodic line for the saxophones and tuba, with a steady bass line and a rhythmic drum pattern. The piano part is mostly silent, with some light accompaniment. The score is marked with a box 'A' at the beginning and a '3' at the end, indicating a three-measure phrase.



This piece was inspired by Kiran, the son of my very good friend Carlos

Sarduy. Once he brought his 5-year-old son to the rehearsal.

I noticed that we had many things in common, he is being brought up in a similar situation as I was.

The work started immediately, brainstorming and searching for the ideas and the necessary elements to make this composition.

The tune has AABA form, solos are played on form. It also has a DJ solo in the middle on the vamp in the rhythm section.

The tune is based on the Afro-Cuban Riff, motifs of which are used during the whole piece. There are many ingredients I'm putting together. It opens with a base riff from the Afro-Cuban tradition; the rhythm used is called Palo Habanero.

Pic. (musical example)

The image displays musical notation for a piano piece. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows a piano part with a base riff, featuring a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The riff is composed of eighth notes and rests, with triplets indicated by brackets and the number '3'. The second system shows a DJ solo, represented by a series of slanted lines on a staff, with a 3/4 time signature and a key signature of one sharp. The third system shows a piano part with a groove, featuring a key signature of one sharp and a 3/4 time signature. The groove is composed of eighth notes and rests, with triplets indicated by brackets and the number '3'.

The piano takes over creating the groove and brings in the interlude.

I extracted choir material from sacred Yoruba chants and adapted them using Ableton Live to fit the composition. Various Yoruba loops are being thrown in by the DJ.

EX. Yoruba Loop 1.



Ex. Yoruba Loop 2.



The melody is played by the Flute and The soprano sax and the guitar. The melodic voice is played by the flute. I choose this timbre to emphasize its playful character and tried to make it sound more in the Cuban flute tradition.

The A section is a linear melody that moves like a snake through the chords. The B section has more space, and its main character is cantabile.

6. PROMOTION.

After finishing the production of the compositions it was very important to me to show my work and get feedback from public. This is how I started organizing concerts and promoting my work. Here are some of the posters for the events that were organized.

6.1. Concerts

Ex. 1



Figure 2: Ubik Cafe, Valencia

Ex. 2

ALEXEY LEÓN LATIN JAZZ QUARTET

Alessandro Cesarini Alexey León Piotr Orzechowski Mariano Steimberg

28/03
Viernes/Friday
22.45 h.

Jimmy's
glass

Ex. 3

Literato Azorin, 13

UBIK CAFÉ

4 Mayo
13.30

ALEXEY LEÓN CUBAN-RUSSIAN JAZZ QUARTET

Composiciones y canciones originales, una historia contada a través de la música...

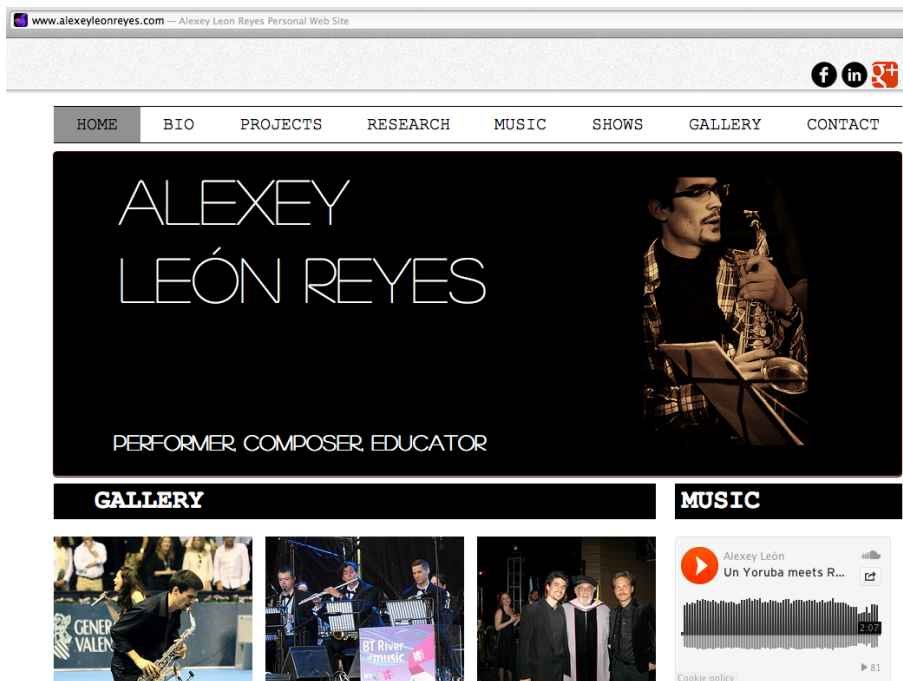
Max Ridley Alexey León Piotr Orzechowski Mariano Steimberg

Ex. 4



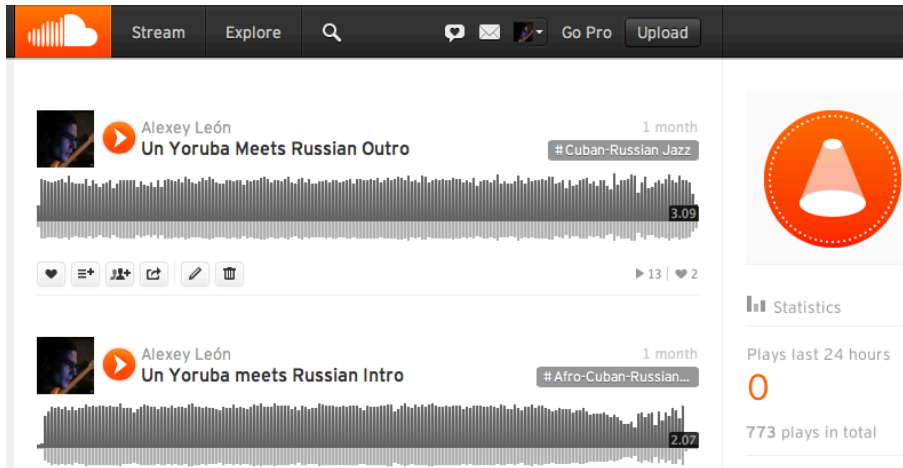
6.2. Next step was to create my personal web page.

Ex.



Later I made a Sound Cloud Page and put out snippets of my recordings.

Ex.



6.3. Than Facebook artist page as well as YouTube channel to put out promotional videos from concerts and studio sessions.

7. CONCLUSIONS.

The execution of this project allowed me to realize and reflect a part of my musical journey and to become closer to my roots musically.

During the process I learned a great amount of new things in various spheres of musical and non-musical knowledge.

It was very important to develop basic engineering and software skills as well as leadership, build relationships and improve time managing.

The future outcomes of this project are a presentation and a book of Latin jazz licks for melodic instruments.

My idea is to find out how to utilize the concepts and elements of Latin music in other styles and develop a teaching method that would help students improve their musicality through it.

Further I want to develop a method of teaching Latin jazz language to musicians playing melodic instruments bearing in mind to its various aspects (phrasing, typical harmonic situations, etc.)

