



ElectroJazz

EP Recording featuring a mix of musical and production elements
from Jazz and Electronic music traditions

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1 - INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS ELECTROJAZZ?

Most electronic music productions on this planet today feature complex sounds and a very high level of production while lacking more interesting and developed musical concepts. On the other hand, most jazz music productions on the planet today feature advanced harmonic, melodic and rhythmic ideas but they are usually mediocre productions either completely acoustic or featuring a very low level of sound design and mixing/mastering techniques. This is what makes these two music styles different, but they are also very close to each other in a way. Both electronic and jazz music were born under the same premise, make people dance. Both genres are very rhythmic oriented, both showing a very strong sense of pulse. We could easily describe both as being “beat” oriented musical genres, much more than other music styles like classical music or even rock and pop music are.

Of course both electronic and jazz music have gone through a deep process of development during the years, giving birth to many sub-genres and mixes of genres, but although many attempts of introducing electronic music elements into jazz and vice versa have been done over the years, we have never really heard about a clear and defined mix of genres in this case. Very well known jazz artists, like Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea or Joe Zawinul, are famous for having introduced electronic synthesizers into their compositions and performances, and many house music productions feature samples from famous jazz tunes or even soloing instruments over repeating chord progressions, but I think it is not adventurous to affirm that the boundaries for a new mix of genres have never been clearly established. “Jazz fusion” for example, is a well established mix of genres -mix of funk, rock and R&B with jazz: featuring rock beats, distorted guitars, big drum kits and synthesizers playing leads and pads- but we never experienced such a phenomenon between jazz and electronic music.

The idea behind “ElectroJazz” was to approach a new mix of genres, featuring the most characteristic and strong elements -both music and production wise- from both worlds, jazz and electronic music, and to

illustrate it recording an EP of original music in this new style. The result was much more than that. Not only a new mix of genres was approached, but also a new way of approaching composition and performance.

2- MUSICAL ELEMENTS: MIXING TWO GENRES

In order to approach the creation of a new mix of genres it was vital to understand and classify the main elements from the original forms of music and identify which ones of those were gone to be thrown into the palette of musical devices that would ultimately give shape to ElectroJazz. Let us divide the elements present in every single genre of music into the three most basic categories: rhythm, harmony and melody.

2.1- Rhythm

We know that the common denominator between electronic and jazz music is the “beat”, so a strong sense of pulse and a deep rhythmic feel is one of the key elements to be present in this new style. From there let us classify some of the most important rhythm related musical and production devices featured in both genres.

Jazz music today, as the result of its evolution through different periods of time -swing era, bebop era, post bop, cool, etc- features a great variety of grooves, with both binary and ternary subdivisions, and a great amount of tempos that go from very slow ballads at 30 bpm or less to frenetic high tempos at 350-400 bpm. The existence of the “swung” eighth note makes it even difficult to classify most jazz grooves as binary or ternary, most of them being somewhere in-between, or featuring a strong ternary rhythm section with a more free, and somewhere inside the frontier between ternary and binary, soloist. To make things even more complicated expert soloists usually place their notes in different points of the beat, creating the effects commonly known as playing “behind the beat”, “in the pocket” -for right on the beat- or “ahead of the beat”. This gives this music a very special forward motion, result of the usual virtuosity and high instrumental training of its players, which is unheard of in any other music style.

Having all this basic jazz rhythmic concepts in mind, we know at this point that ElectroJazz should somehow include between their rhythmic elements:

- A strong sense of pulse: "beat" oriented
- Both binary and ternary subdivisions
- Great range of tempos
- Freer approach to rhythm in the soloist phrasing: different points in the beat and different degrees of swing

A further analysis of the rhythmical elements commonly used in jazz music reveals a high level of syncopation, where usually phrases start at a weak point in the bar and extend into a strongest point often crossing the bar line. This phenomenon goes hand by hand with a strong sense of backbeat, where the weakest beats in the basic 4/4 bar become accented and carry a lot of rhythmic weight. Hemiolas are also very common, overlapping diverse groupings of subdivisions -for example groupings of three eights notes over groupings of two eight notes-, and also, in modern times, jazz soloists love to take syncopation and hemiolas to a higher extent, where they usually play phrases in a different metrics than the one the rhythm section is playing, creating polyrhythms that go way beyond the bar line.

Jazz music also incorporates elements from different cultures around the world -mainly because of the great level of immigration into the United States in the last decades- and one of this elements, original mostly from Balkanic countries is odd meters. It is common today to perform jazz standards that used to be in 4/4 or 3/4 in all kind of odd meters, being the most common ones 5/4, 7/4, 5/8, 7/8 and amalgams of these: 11/4, 13/4, 15/4 etc.

Borrowing from these more advanced jazz rhythmic concepts, ElectroJazz should also feature:

- High degree of syncopation
- Hemiolas
- Polyrhythms
- Odd meters

Rhythm in electronic music is a very different picture. Of course, it is also beat oriented and the sense of pulse is very strong but in a whole other way. While jazz music is usually recorded with the whole band playing together in real time in the studio and usually without a click track -the lack of a metronomic sense of tempo allowing for slight general tempo increases and decreases generates a very special forward motion associated to the style- it is not so in the case of an electronic music track. An electronic production rarely feature players recording in real time. Most of the time music is recorded through MIDI controllers and its placement adjusted to a tight metronomic grid representing time subdivisions, which in this case more often than not are binary subdivision. The groove is in this way mathematically and metronomically perfect and it provides a different kind of forward motion. In the last times many electronic music producers have complained about electronic music feeling too rhythmically precise and “groove pools” have grown very popular, where an algorithm that emulates the note’s placement, amount of swing and accents from a particular groove can be applied to preexisting MIDI recordings that were originally exactly in the grid. Examples of groove pools could be anything from “old swing” to “hip hop” or “funk”, each one emulating the percentage of swing present in every consecutive eight notes -between straight eighths to triplet feel to sixteenths feel- and the most representative ways of placing notes and accenting the different bits and subdivisions in the bar in these particular styles.

This metronomic sense of pulse in electronic music is a direct consequence of the nature of the element that generates it: drums machines. This hardware devices -very popular during the 80’s when the emblematic Roland Tr-808 was introduced- were the first machines to be able to generate an electronic drum pattern, usually based in just a small group of sounds -kicks, toms, snare, hi-hat and cymbals-, and they allow the user to program the placement of these sounds into a sixteenth note grid generating a one, two, three or four bar long sequence that repeats over and over, usually looking for a hypnotic or trance like drumming effect. Of course today drum machines are both hardware and software and feature an infinite number of sounds, sequence lengths and grid types, but the main principle is still the same and, on top of that, many electronic producers still prefer the vintage characteristic sound of the old drum machines. These gives us these elements from electronic music rhythm to include into ElectroJazz:

- Metronomic rhythmic grids
- Groove pools
- Drum machines
- Repetitive drums patterns

2.2- Harmony

Jazz music usually feature a larger amount of harmonic devices than electronic music does. Once again, the hypnotic quality that electronic productions often show is the result of a great amount of repetition. This does not mean that the harmonic movements and devices featured in electronic music are always simple, more often than not they are not and sometimes they are even borrowed from the jazz harmonic tradition, it just means there is usually less harmonic changes being used in an electronic production than in a jazz production. Commonly, in an electronic tune there is a small amount of chord changes that repeat extensively, contributing to the hypnosis that the repetition in the drums generate, while many jazz tunes are famous for showing a great amount of chord changes over which the soloists can improvise expressively.

Jazz harmony is a very rich tradition that borrowed from european classical music, blues and many other cultures around the world. It is such a broad topic that is impossible to resume inside this paper, but let us talk briefly about the main elements of jazz harmony which must be incorporated into ElectroJazz in order to make it a successful mix of genres.

Jazz tunes form different eras go from extremely diatonic to a major or minor key to completely atonal and free. Often, jazz harmony goes through different keys using many different modulation techniques and also feature short modulations, or tonal areas, inside a given tonality -like modal interchange or side sleeping. There is a great use of the dominant chord, which often feature a lot of different tensions combinations and different chord scales, and also usually appears in the form of “secondary dominant” and “extended dominant” chains.

Chords are usually outlined with complex voicings organised in thirds, fourths or even both at the same time and it is also common the use of fifths and clusters in chordal structures. Tensions in chords do not necessarily resolve, but give another flavour to the sound and improvisation allows for more than one chord scale to be featured in a single chord at the same time. Chord progressions are usually long, often starting apart from the tonic and taking a long amount of chord changes hitting different areas before arriving to it again. These are just some of the characteristic jazz harmonic devices, the list is endless and countless books have been published about this topic.

Let us classify now the main harmonic elements that we can borrow from both traditions in order to give harmonic shape to ElectroJazz. From the electronic music world we should include:

- Efficient and short chord progressions
- High degree of repetition contributing to a hypnotic mood

And from the jazz harmonic tradition:

- Complex voicings with tensions
- Use of typical jazz chord scales
- Modulation to different keys

2.3- Melody

Just like happened when we discussed about harmony, electronic music tends to do a really efficient and compact use of melody. Melodies are usually played by lead synthesisers and are commonly short, rhythmic and highly repetitive. Once again this contributes to the hypnotic properties of this kind of music. Many electronic productions do not even have a melody, the weight of the composition being carried by the harmony

and the rhythm in this cases. In other occasions, melodies are just small motives that develop through different sections of the tune. On the other hand melodies in jazz music are usually very rich both in the sense of the written melody of the tunes -that are usually called "heads"- and the melodies created through improvisation over the tune changes. Jazz melodies are rhythmically and harmonically complex, they frequently involve different pulse subdivisions, involve chord tensions and make a great use of chromaticism. Melodic development is also one of the main characteristics of jazz tune's heads and jazz improvisation, often involving phrases that develop through the different sections of the tune. Once again, lets borrow elements from both traditions in order to approach a new mix of genres. ElectroJazz should borrow from the electronic music melodic tradition:

- Short, rhythmic and highly repetitive motives that contribute to a hypnotic mood
- The lack of melody sometimes, so that the weight of the composition is entirely carried by the harmony and rhythm of the tune

From the jazz music melodic tradition ElectroJazz should take:

- Rhythmically and harmonically complex melodies
- Real time creation of melodies through improvisation
- Melodic development
- Use of chromaticism

3- PRODUCTION ELEMENTS: MAKING THE RIGHT DECISIONS

In ElectroJazz, and any other kind of music where electronics play an important role, production is almost as important as the music itself. Production is a large concept and in almost every serious project it is divided into several areas, being artistic and executive the most common ones. Talking about artistic production is talking about decisions and these decisions can affect different stages of every single track creation. Everything from what instrumentation should be used, what kind of atmosphere the track is going to have, how long the tune is going to be or what form is going to follow, how much bass will sound in the mix or how loud the general volume of the track will be, needs a production decision to be taken.

From the composition and arrangement processes to the tracking, editing and mixing/mastering processes let us define the main concepts to be defined when we approach the production of this new mix of electronic and jazz music.

3.1- The form and length

The form and length of a tune has an extremely important impact on the listener's perception of the music. Every style of music follows particular kinds of forms and track lengths and electronic and jazz music are not an exception. Traditionally, Jazz tunes, particularly the songs belonging to the American standard jazz repertoire, are structured in short heads followed by a longer section of improvisation, and finished by coming back to the same opening head as closure. Sometimes introductions or codas are added to the beginning or ending of the songs. The heads usually follow an AABA, ABAC or AB form of 32 to 64 bars in total, and the improvisation section occurs over a loop of the same form as the head, that goes on till the last soloist finishes his/her solo allowing for the last head -head out- to finish the tune. In this sense jazz songs forms are very compact. The material is presented, then there is some development of the material, with maybe some new additions to it, and finally the original material comes back.

This very compact approach to musical form is also followed by electronic music, the one main difference being the lack of improvisation. The development of the material is usually achieved in this genre by the repetition of some motives while sounds are added, morphed or taken away. In many cases it is more a development of the sounds and how they interact with each other creating intensity grows and drops rather than a strictly musical development.

In both genres the length of the tunes is extremely variable. In jazz music, it can depend on how many soloists are playing or how long each individual solo ends up being. In electronic music, it depends if we are talking about a radio edit production, where the commercial 3-4 minutes are respected, or if we are talking about an independent production where the length can be much more than that. In any case, the length of the tune should be justified by the amount of events happening into it so that it never feels too long. I think it is safe to define this guidelines in relation to how form is approached in this ElectroJazz project:

- Form is very compact
- The material is presented, developed and brought back for ending -exposition, development, recapitulation
- Improvisation takes place in the same form than the head presents
- The length of the tunes can be variable but never feel too long

3.2- The instrumentation

In a traditional music talk about instrumentation we talk about acoustic instruments and the role they will play in the piece. Basically every instrument from a symphonic orchestra to the human voice to more exotic instruments from every single part in the world would come to mind. But as soon as we throw electronics in the picture, the discussion becomes much more interesting. Now we are talking about two possibilities: using instruments and creating instruments. Synthesizers, samplers, audio and MIDI effects, bring the game to a new level. The possibilities of orchestrating pieces not only with the timber of instruments that exist on the

planet right now in mind, but also with the timber and properties of instruments that one can create from scratch using technology, are endless.

Jazz music is traditionally an acoustic form of music and some particular instruments have played a very important and characteristic part in this music all along its history: drums, double bass, piano, guitar, the voice, saxophone, trumpet, clarinet, flute, trombone and percussion are among the most representative ones. Of course some electric and electronic instruments have also been used extensively in this music -particularly in some sub genres of jazz, like jazz fusion: electric guitar, keyboards, synthesisers, etc.- but it is in electronic music where synths, samplers, effects and sound designing techniques get to their maximum expression. Synthesis and sampling techniques have multiplied over the years, as have the number of software and hardware synthesisers and samplers available in the market today. It is an endless array of possibilities.

At this point it is very obvious that ElectroJazz should feature both acoustic and electronic instruments, and should present a great load of both traditional orchestration concepts and electronic sound designing concepts. Given my background as a piano player and my intention to do this project completely by myself, I decided at this point that the acoustic instruments to be featured in it were going to be:

- acoustic piano
- voice

, which does not mean at all that any other projects in this genre could not feature different acoustic instruments, particularly if they have had a prominent function in the acoustic jazz tradition. I also decided to use those synthesisers, samplers and effects I feel more comfortable with for my electronic sound designing, but once again, any other choices in this particular area would be equally valid, particularly if the software/hardware selected has had a prominent role in the history of electronic music. Given my experience as an electronic engineer and my studies of electronic music production and sound designing I decided to use:

- Subtractive synthesisers:
 - Sylenth, from LennarDigital
 - Massive, from Native Instruments
 - Z3TA+2, from Cakewalk
 - Monark, from Native Instruments
- FM synthesiser:
 - FM8, from Native Instruments
- Ableton Live 9 “Sampler” and “Simpler”
- Ableton Live 9 audio and MIDI effects

3.3- Recoding, mixing and mastering

Usually, in a traditional music production, recording, mixing and mastering are three very different processes that take place in different moments of time -sometimes very separated in time- and even in different places - for example the recording can be done in one studio, the mixing in a mix specialised studio and finally the master in another master specialised studio. On the other hand, in electronic music, many times everything happens at the same time inside one single computer, and it is sometimes even done by just one artist, that plays the role of composer, performer and engineer/producer at the same time. Both of these approaches are totally valid for our purpose, but once again, given my intention to do this project completely by myself I chose the second one. For this project of ElectroJazz, I chose to record, mix and master everything by myself and everything in one single computer running Ableton Live 9 as DAW. This made the processes of recording, mixing and mastering highly interactive, to the point that sometimes the three of them were happening at the very same time. This was already a lot of interaction to take into account and to be able to manage, but things got a lot more interesting when naturally I started composing and arranging the tunes at the same time that I was recording/mixing/mastering them. I consider this one of the best outcomes of this project and I call it “A new approach to music creation”. I will talk more about it in the very next chapter.

4- COMPOSING AND RECORDING ELECTROJAZZ: A NEW APPROACH TO MUSIC CREATION

As an active jazz piano player and composer who has released two original albums in the past few years, I am used to the traditional order of things in terms of how music is created. Every time that I have decided to put one of my tunes on record the process had always been the same: it started with me sitting on the piano, writing down the notes and harmony in a piece of paper; when the music was ready I would rehearse it with the band and played it live as much as possible to get it solid under my fingers; once it was sounding at the desired level we would get into the studio and record the music; and finally I would be present and participate in the mixing and mastering process to finish the production. This way of doing things, the traditional way, has radically changed for me within this project. I have approached a new way of organising the processes of composition, recording and production, which is only possible given the hybrid -half electronic half acoustic- nature of this music. It is a completely new level of interaction between this, originally isolated processes, and it has dramatically changed the way I think about writing and recording music. As difficult as describing a creative process can be, I will try my best to explain it in the following paragraphs, given that I consider this my best achievement during the development of this “ElectroJazz” EP.

Let us try to imagine for a second that music can be composed, performed, recorded, mixed and mastered at the very same time. Instead of talking about different processes that take place in different moments and places, one only starting after the previous one has completely finished, having all these processes occur in the same moment. This would mean a lot of things, starting with an enormous level of interaction between all these processes, but let us go further imagining that all these simultaneous processes are being handled in real time by just one person, one single composer/performer/producer. This is exactly how creating this project turned out to be for me.

In order to do this it was vital to use a platform that would allow me to interact between the different processes in a seamless way, and Ableton Live, given his electronic music oriented layout, turned out to be the perfect tool for this purpose. The process of creating a tune started creating a new Ableton Live session and creating two to four MIDI tracks -on which I would load synthesisers and drums racks in order to design the sounds that were in my mind in that particular moment- plus one or two audio tracks, one for the acoustic piano and, if the tune featured voice, one for the vocals too. The next step was to come up with the first musical idea and record it-either laying down a drum bit in the drum rack, a chord sequence using a pad sound or a melody in a lead sound, for example. At this point, either the next musical idea had presented itself or the previous idea had dictated the changes that needed to be done in the sounds so that their design would perfectly fit it. The next musical idea would be recorded and it would also inform the sounds, the sounds would inform the music and also, at any time, effects were inserted into auxiliary tracks and the master track itself, that would inform both the sounds and the music. The sounds are being designed according to what the music needs, the music is written according to what the sounds suggest and the mixing of the tracks, effects inserted and mastering tools are being added in real time while the music is being composed and recorded! Maybe this is not such a breakthrough for an electronic musician, but it is for a jazz or classical musician/composer, and the fact that this music is incorporating so many elements from the jazz world opens a new door to how musicians coming from this background experience music creation.

Let us think in a particular example. A jazz music or classical music composer would think, for example, of the range of the instrument he/she is writing for. This range would determine the octave on which he/she is going to write a particular musical idea for that instrument. Let us bring the same composer into an "ElectroJazz" environment, using Ableton Live and designing his own sounds instead of using solely acoustic instruments. Now, not only the range on which the sound sounds best would influence the octave the composer writes on, but also, for example, the length of the sound's decay would dictate him how often the notes should change, and the amount of reverb or delay being used in the master track would inform him about what rhythms would work best with the music idea to be written, etc. Now, it is not only the properties of the instrument shaping

the musical idea the composer is witting, it is also sound design parameters or mixing/mastering tools being applied informing him on his writing. The same goes backwards, if the composer, for example, has a particular musical idea in mind that would need an instrument that can play chords in closed position in a very low octave without sounding muddy, this would lead him to design the sound taking away many low frequencies using a high pass filter and also to use a very short tail reverb and a short feedback delay. Now the musical idea has informed the sound design and the mixing/mastering decisions.

I could write an infinite number of examples like the ones above. The level of interaction between these previously completely isolated processes is just unheard of for me, and eventually the music recorded in this project is the result of this interaction. We can not say that this music was composed, recorded and finally mixed/mastered, this music was just “created”, with all these processes working as one.

5- PERFORMING ELECTROJAZZ: A CHOREOGRAPHY OF MUSIC

Performing “ElectroJazz” is completely different from any other performance experience I have had in my life. From the first moment I thought about creating this music, I knew it was not only meant to be recorded but also to be performed. Both Jazz and electronic music are styles of music that have been developed mainly through the interaction of musicians right on the stage, and since this project pretends to incorporate as many aspects from these two styles as possible, live performance also plays a big role in “ElectroJazz”

Approaching this kind of performance, just like the rest of this project, as something that was going to be done completely by myself implied a lot of challenges. Of course, this is not the only approach that can be taken if someone decides to play this kind of music live -many different configurations of musicians could work- but the idea of playing this music alone, as a solo performance, goes hand by hand with the electronic music tradition and also a big part of the jazz music tradition, where solo performances represent a great part of the history of both these musics.

In order to play every single electro jazz tune just by myself I needed to take many decisions, starting with what my set up was going to be. Of course I am not able to play every single musical part at the same time, so having my laptop by my side running Ableton Live is absolutely essential. The first key to the success of the performance is to decide what am I going to be doing at every single moment of the piece and what will Ableton be doing itself. This is a vital step and, in some way, I compare it to the process of designing a choreography, where movements are to be assigned to different dancers that will interact with each other in order to transmit a concrete idea. A dancer cannot perform more movements than what his/her body allows, but if the roles are assigned in the best possible way between the dancers, the movements that he/she realises will have the maximum impact over the general concept being presented to the audience. Following this basic idea, I structure every piece as a sequence of sections, and for every one of these sections I ask myself:

- What are the main and more prominent melodic and harmonic elements present in this section? -is it the bass, the pads, the lead...?
- How many of those elements can I perform at the same time?
- What is the set up that i would need in order to be able to do it and how will I assign those elements to the instruments I got on the stage?

Once this questions are answered, I move to the next section in the piece and answer them again. Answering them for every single section in the tune gives me a close idea to what are the instruments I need to bring to the stage and what parts are those instruments going to be playing in every single section of the tune.

In my case, having an acoustic piano is vital, given it's important role in all of my pieces, and I also bring to the stage keyboard MIDI controllers that I assign to the different sounds/instruments in the piece. Although it is not always the case, usually my tunes follow the classical texture of bass, pads and melody -melody being played either by the piano or a lead sound- so I tend to bring to the stage:

- Laptop, running Ableton Live
- Acoustic piano
- 3 keyboard MIDI controllers
- Microphone -for those tunes that feature vocals

Also, I make sure that at least one of the MIDI controllers has enough assignable knobs and faders, so that I can map them to important parameters of the sounds that can be changed in real time.

Performing this music requires a lot of rehearsal time, half of the effort going to the musical part and the other half to the choreography itself. It is vital to not only memorise the music -harmonic changes, melodies, form, solos structure, etc- but also to memorise the choreography of movements that need to be performed in order

to change from one sound to the other in every different section of the tune. This second part of the rehearsing process is completely new for me and thus is the more challenging in my case. I am used to be sitting in front of the piano and dedicate all my efforts to get the best out of this single instrument. When it comes to ElectroJazz tunes, I got to be thinking much more than that every single moment that goes by. I have to remember the musical parts but I also must remember which one of the keyboards each hand should be playing or what parameters they should be changing through tweaking the knobs or faders. This requires to practice each tune many times, thinking like both a musician and a dancer at the same time.

6- CONCLUSION

The recording of an ElectroJazz project has allowed me to approach all the processes involved in music creation in a complete different way. My traditional approach to composition, instrumentation, arrangement, performance, recording, production, mixing and mastering has been completely reshaped in order to succeed elaborating this project.

From all this processes, I believe it is the composition and performances processes the ones that represent a breakthrough with everything that I knew before. Having the music, sounds and mixing/mastering techniques fully interacting with each other while the music is being composed/recorded is a complete different approach for a jazz music composer like me, and opens so many doors and possibilities that I am sure I would be committed to their discovery and exploration for the rest of my life. Also, performing this music live has forced me to think about playing and rehearsing in a very different and more efficient way, which, not only inside an ElectroJazz setting but also applied to a traditional jazz setting, can be of extreme help.

I believe this EP represents a great contribution to today's Jazz and electronic music scenes, and it could serve as inspiration for other musicians to pursue a similar project in the future. As for myself, my next endeavour will consist in expanding this EP into a LP recording featuring 8-10 tunes in this innovative style.

I firmly believe jazz music will continue raising its level of production in the upcoming years and likewise I believe electronic music will also increase its level of musical complexity. Both styles of music, with their tools and strengths, are getting more and more together each day, and this "ElectroJazz" project pretended to reflect and add to what is already happening.

7- SUGGESTED LISTENINGS, READINGS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

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