



# ***“JAZZ PARA EL AUTISMO”***

## **Reflective Paper**

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# 1. Summary of the Project

*"Jazz Para El Autismo"* was a collaborative Project between the Contemporary Performance (CP) and the Global Entertainment and Music Business (GEMB) Master Programs at Berklee Valencia. Jacopo Mezzanotti (Artistic Director, CP Program) and Felipe Saalfeld (myself, as head manager, producer and promoter, GEMB Program) joined forces together to create a unique and innovative show, in the form of a Symphonic Jazz concert, to be presented to the local Valencian community and raising funds for a local NGO.

## **Artistic perspective: Symphonic Jazz Concert**

From an artistic perspective, the concert featured mostly Jacopo's original Jazz compositions, all arranged by himself in a very innovative way for performing live for his Netherlands based Jazz band "Joe Midnights Space Trio"<sup>1</sup> together with a Classic Symphony orchestra and a Jazz Big Band on stage. Today, the "*Metropole Orkest*"<sup>2</sup> founded in 1945 in Netherlands, is one of the unique examples of a project that arranges contemporary music in this way for all kinds of artists, such as: Pat Metheny, Snarky Puppy, Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Al Jarreau, Bono, Elvis Costello, Within Temptation, John Scofield, Steve Vai, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacopo Mezzanotti, <http://www.jacopomezanotti.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Metropole Orkest, <http://www.mo.nl/en/>

## **Social perspective: MUA Organization**

The concert was with non-profit purposes. All profit generated from the concert was donated for an emerging NGO from Valencia called MUA organization<sup>3</sup>, “*Música para el Autismo*” (Music for the Autism), which works doing alternative music therapies for kids with autism. As described on their webpage by Jordi Ardit, director of the NGO:

*“We are a non-profit organization with our head office in Valencia (Spain) that aims to help people with autism to improve their personal development through music”.* The money raised will help the NGO to keep on with their fund programs for families in social risk in need for therapy for their children.

## **General Outcomes**

- Date/time: May 26<sup>th</sup> 2015 at 8:30 PM
- Venue: Espai La Rambleta<sup>4</sup>, Valencia, Spain
- The Stage: 47 artists on stage, including the Jazz trio, the symphony orchestra, the big band, the director, and the special guests
- Attendance: Almost full house, 589 (out of 650 available) successfully delivered tickets, being 495 sold tickets and 94 courtesy tickets.
- Total NGO net profit raised: **4777.12 €**

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<sup>3</sup> MUA “*Música Para el Autismo*”, <http://musicaparaelautismo.org/en/>

<sup>4</sup> Espai La Rambleta, <http://larambleta.com/>

## 2.Process

### **The “Lunch Accident”**

September 2014, at Berklee Valencia’s cantina. At that time I was still confused with lots of different ideas for the concept I wanted for my CE. Nevertheless, I already knew I wanted to make a live intervention, something big, and also challenging. Therefore, I was trying to find if someone in Berklee was also in my “frequency”, so I wanted to meet as much people I could and talk about projects. I had already met Jacopo at that point, but just having quick hall conversations, random chatting. That specific day, I joined Jacopo for lunch, but we didn’t discuss anything about CE. We were sharing music tastes, until he told me that he would love to make a project here in Berklee where he could present his music arranged for an orchestra, but regarding the fact of just writing the arrangements would take him so much time, he was searching for someone interested in helping to make this a real professional spectacle. I felt that I was in the exact place where I was meant to be at that moment. I showed my interest to Jacopo, and we organized so we could meet together again and discuss this more in depth. It turns that his inspiration was the music arrangements-type of thing that the Metropole Orkest does. He was particularly inspired by the concert of Pat Metheny featuring the Metropole Orkest. For his undergrad, he did a small orchestral set and recorded it as a live-promo documentary for his band “Joe Midnights Space Trio”. I could imagine the artistic concept perfectly. As for me, I was also familiar with the Metropole Orkest, inspired by progressive rock guitar player Steve Vai’s live DVD “Visual Sound Theories”. I could understand and feel the passion behind this, and

the importance of achieving this challenge, artistically. I felt I was at the right place, and I told him I wanted to be 100% full time committed to this project, and make it my culminating experience as well at Berklee. We made a first draft proposal, and went to discuss this project with my program director Emilien Moyon. The rest of this challenge is history now.

### **Going no-profit**

We had a difficult challenge already, in terms of production. In addition, we knew that as foreigner Master Students we could give away something more to our hosting city of Valencia. We came out with the idea of making this concert as a fundraiser for charity. I got together with Clara Barberá (Student's affairs) and she gave me a list of local charities that we could cooperate for. "*Música Para El Autismo*" (MUA) gained our attention immediately as it was the only one related with music and also Jacopo and me have already had experience with kids with autism. I decided I would write to them first, receiving an almost immediate response from their director Jordi Ardit. He told me he already had a great experience with Berklee when they did 2014's Version of the Berklee Ball as a fundraiser for the NGO. Personally, I think that as musicians, or content producers, we have a fundamental social role. From my point of view, we make music and generate experiences as pure ways of culture, art and entertainment. MUA is using music for healing people. Not only children with Autism, but also families that have loss their faith in ways society could incorporate their children and bring happiness to them. It's the music. Music is the connection between us, and is what made us commit to get as much funds possible for helping MUA continue their important and noble labor.

### **3.Results: how the project did and did not align with expectations**

My overall goals for this project were 2:

1. Produce a unique and innovative concert on a professional level and present it to a large number of patrons in the city of Valencia.
2. Get at least 80% of the ticketing income to the NGO, understanding that the remaining 20% would cover inevitable costs for the production of the concert.

The first important achievement was selecting and booking our venue. Making this decision was a key element for our show, at the same time as facing our first challenge: get a 650 seats capacity theater sold. Realistically, we knew that this goal was quite ambitious, as we are presenting Jacopo's band as headliner, which is not known here in Valencia. Part of my ticketing strategy was to consider giving away a maximum of 100 tickets as guest-special invitations, so we could assure a minimum attendance. The reality was, we were able to deliver 589 tickets, meaning we got about 90% of the capacity of the theater. Because all the general seats were used, the theater looked almost full house. Being that said, the only empty seats were the very limited upper balcony ones. Great achievement!

The experience of making a crowdfunding campaign was new and challenging for me as well. I wanted to raise 2000 € in a one month campaign, expecting that my social media campaign would help me to have mostly Spanish Valencian donors. Before launching the campaign, we crafted a 2 minutes call of action video with the help of my GEMB peers Oscar

Tecuanhuey and Oliver Chiu. The launch and the first week of campaign started well. But as days passed over, I could see how the buzz and the energy was decreasing. After commissions, we raised 1086 € from this campaign, with most of the donators being my family and close friends, instead of people from Valencia. Not my expectations at all.

As the project was starting to take form, we were still raising funds. So it was very important to keep control of the budget. Every euro my team wanted to spend was a trade off as far as extra non-ticketing potential income for the NGO. Therefore, our decisions were based on how the investments (as we did for example with the high-resolution physical programs, or the special awards for the musicians) would extremely benefit and enhance the experience for our audience or our artists, making the event more professional.

The date of the concert was getting near and we started facing last minute problems, mostly a bunch of musicians from the orchestra who left the project 3 days before the concert, unbelievably. In addition to the artistic chaos we struggle trying to find replacements, this was delaying the delivery of the program of the event. Somehow I finally finished working it with the help of my GEMB fellow Fernanda Gomez one day at 5 in the morning doing the last minute changes before our deadline for sending them to print.

Choosing and then coaching the volunteers for the day of the event was very challenging as well. First of all, we created a very detailed timeline and show-flow for the event with Jacopo, which I would be presenting the day before the concert in a general meeting with my different teams (stage, recorded-audio and hosting). As an overall, the teams did a great job, following almost every detail I wanted, and also being fast and creative when facing

specially stage production logistic problems. They knew they had to follow the precise instructions that the production manager I chose, my fellow GEMB Alejandro Morales, would tell them from the upper cabin, where I was also supervising everything.

Lastly, from the 589 tickets delivered, we sold 495 and we delivered 94 to our guests (from the 100 maximum that I calculated previously). With this being said, and considering our available budget and our expenses, we raised 4777.12 € for *Música Para el Autismo*. This amount corresponds to the 98% of the direct ticket revenue stream, raising my initial goal from 80% to 98%.

It's an overall success, and despite the fact I couldn't make the 100% ticket revenue, or the 650 seats, we all did a fantastic job accomplishing all our goals.

## 4.Next step

The Concert and the project itself received a great acceptance throughout the Valencian community. Lots of members from our audience and also some of our musicians reached out to us immediately after the show to ask when the concert would take place again. We felt really happy to have delivered a great experience, both to our audience and to our musicians and staff, playing music for a good and noble cause as *Música Para el Autismo*. Since the overall success, we are in conversations now in between Jacopo and Jordi Ardit (NGO Director) to establish the name (brand) "Jazz Para El Autismo" and make this an annual concert in a bigger scale, or perhaps a tour through Spain and Europe in the future. For doing this, we understand we have to have a managing team as well as a local promoter



and producer involved and interested. Since I'm going to be working in Madrid, I'm going to be involved more like a consultant for the project. Going further, I think I can use my professional experience so I can do general consulting services for this kind of projects in the near future. I hereby encourage the Berklee faculty to motivate future students for making more big productions at the same time as helping NGO's like MUA. Collaboration spirit is one of my core competences, and I also encourage Berklee to make more multi-programs cross collaborations.

## **5. Contribution to the discipline and profession**

Organizing this project implied high level of logistics, team working and fast decision-making.

Since I want to make a career in Live Entertainment, as a producer or promoter, I understand the importance of all these elements regarding a live show.

As from the production-wise, we had to figure out how to make this concert from zero. We didn't have money, we didn't have any equipment available nor any place to fit more than 40 musicians. Also, we were making a very unique artistic configuration, which needs special knowledge from people that are going to work on the audio reinforcement. I'm talking specifically to put a Jazz trio with a symphony orchestra and a jazz big band all together. As far as what will be the challenges I will face in the future, I feel more prepared for "orchestral-wise" details from a production point of view, which I personally feel fascinated for.

Being patient and flexible is another lifetime in-development skill that will help me in my profession (perhaps in all professions! as a very transversal soft skill). As a leader, it's very important to show yourself calm in critical moments, so your team will not lose their focus. Delegating is another story. As the passionate leader of a project, I want everything as perfect as possible, and I know I'm capable for doing it because I trust myself. But team working is not only about trusting yourself, but also trusting your team. It is physically impossible to be responsible for everything in a complex operational project, so delegating becomes a crucial element. For that, personally, I like to feel comfortable and select by myself who is going to be involved in my projects. Jazz Para El Autismo has been a great experience for developing my leadership.

One last contribution, very important for the Live Entertainment world, was networking with a lot of people throughout the process. We talked to a lot of artists, promoters, and different audio-visual experts that gave us their input for the project, as well as some collaboration for the concert itself. When giving flyers and promoting the concert, people really react different when the producer of the concert is the one doing the "guerilla marketing". I felt a lot of support and I established important professional and also random casual connections with entertainment professionals as well as music lovers.

## **6. Impact on the student completing the work**

As a more personal point of view, working with Jacopo has been my highest approach to the Jazz world ever. Most of my personal projects are related to rock, pop, electronic or progressive instrumental oriented. I've opened my mind to understanding more the ideas and the creative process of a Jazz virtuoso.

I faced a lot of emotions during the process of making this project. Mostly, I received a lot of good responses and positivism from my peers, my supervisors and the city of Valencia. Nevertheless, I faced hard criticism and "pushing-down" adversity. Some people didn't believe that I was really going to be able to make this project happen. They thought this idea was out of boundaries for a school project and kept pointing the impossibility of handling so much complexity, on a logistics and production point of view. This happened to our team in different levels. The key was our unity and our self-team support. In a way, we inverted roles being "psychologists" to each other, in the way that when I was injected with bad feelings Jacopo was pushing me up, and vice-versa.

Lastly, and personally, my most important personal impact was to involve myself with an NGO related with autism. Part of my personal story is growing up with a close family's son who was born with a high level of Autism. Today, Diego is 18 years old, and he is available to speak and to read, even finishing traditional basic education (before high school) as his highest achievement. I know him since little and I've witnessed all his progress. Nevertheless, this progress would not be possible without the constant push of a family full of love surrounding him. When I met Jordi Ardit, the NGO's director, I felt this same love

and push from himself and his family for his son (which coincidentally is also called Diego). Discovering that his little boy reacted different and positive with musical stimulus was his inspiration for creating MUA. I deeply felt that connection and I definitely wanted to help as much as I could with this project. For our crowdfunding video, we went to visit one of MUA's therapy centers. It's really difficult to explain how I felt in that moment, but for sure, I was totally convinced that I was doing exactly what I had to do, helping this noble cause acknowledging the daily efforts that all these families do for their children.

## 7.References

Jacopo Mezzanotti official, <http://www.jacopomezanotti.com/>

Metropole Orkest official, <http://www.mo.nl/en/>

MUA "*Música Para el Autismo*", <http://musicaparaelautismo.org/en/>

Espai La Rambleta, <http://larambleta.com/>