

Performance Appraisal

Introduction

What is your chosen genre?

My chosen genre is Jazz Saxophone.

List the titles and composers of your 3 chosen pieces

Take Five by Dave Brubeck/Paul Desmond
Sophisticated Lady by Duke Ellington
Lotus Blossom by Dave Sanborn

What are the characteristic features of your instrument and what is special about the music it can play?

The music the saxophone can play is very varied. It can play classical, jazz, blues, big band, March e.t.c. There are lots of different styles but the most common is probably jazz. The saxophone is used as it has a number of sounds and techniques which are associated and used for jazz, such as bending notes.

What is the range of your instrument?

My instrument has a range of three octaves, from Bb to Bb:

Performance Piece

Which piece did you perform?

I performed Take Five by Dave Brubeck.

Historical Context: Why and how was the piece written?

The piece was written in the 1960's as a joint effort between Paul Desmond and Dave Brubeck. However, most of it was by Dave Brubeck. The piece was primarily written for the Dave Brubeck Quartet which consisted of: Dave Brubeck himself

Joe Morello
Eugene Wright
Paul Desmond

The piece was written on a stave using traditional notation.

What is the style of the piece?

The style of the piece is bluesy/jazzy and swung.

What are the main features of the style?

The main features of the style are a swung rhythm, a laid back approach and an atmosphere which gives a feeling of ease and relaxation. It is composed in such away that there is a relatively easy to listen section and then a more exciting middle section. Finally it returns to the original easy to listen to section.

Are there any special performing techniques?

Yes. In bar 3 the Glissando is used. The articulation is generally separated and in the B section there are a few instances where staccato is used (bars 10 to 16). The piece is meant to be swung throughout but less so in the second section.

Is the range fully explored? Why?

The range of my instrument isn't fully explored in this piece as it wouldn't have been appropriate and would have changed the whole atmosphere and sound to the piece. In my opinion it would have spoiled the piece and feel of it.

Is the instrument's tone used to good effect?

There are uses of long notes in the low register to show off the beautiful, mellow tone of the saxophone. There is an example of this in the second time bar.

How does the composer use the capabilities of the instrument in it?

The composer uses the fact that the saxophone is fairly easy to glissando on and also uses the fact that the saxophone sounds good in the lower register and the higher but not the middle. Therefore the composer has used mainly the lower and higher, and occasionally the middle.

How does the piece contribute to the genre/tradition?

The piece contributes to the genre/tradition in the way that it has all the general characteristics of jazz such as a swung rhythm and a laid back feel. However it is not like most jazz pieces in that it does not have an improvising section. In this way it is more like a blues piece as they tend to have less improvising. However, its style suggests it is jazz as supposed to blues. Therefore it is hard to say how it contributes to the genre/tradition.

What is the role of the performer?

The role of the performer is to play to play the solo part and make the piece sound jazzy, bright and lively.

Is your piece an arrangement? Why has it been arranged? What has been changed to make it playable by you?

Yes, my piece is an arrangement. It has been arranged to make it playable as a solo as it was originally composed for and performed by a quartet and therefore the way the tune passed between them and the way the various parts worked meant it could not be played by a solo instrument. Therefore, as it was an extremely popular tune it was arranged so solo instruments could play it. It has been arranged by Paul Desmond who was the alto saxophonist in the Brubeck quartet, for solo saxophone.

The things that have been changed are the way the part works and communicates with the piano. The original structure has also been changed as the original version had an improvising section and also went on for a lot longer.

Comparison with the other two pieces

What features are the same in all three pieces?

The features that are the same in all the pieces are that they all have roughly the same tempo marking. Other than the fact that the genre is the same for all 3 pieces, they haven't really got anything in common other than the tempo marking.

What features are different in all three pieces?

There are many features that are different in all three pieces. To begin with there is a major difference between Lotus Blossom and the other two pieces. The difference is that there is an improvising section in Lotus Blossom but not in the other two. Another is that the whole structure and style of Lotus Blossom is different from the other two. Take Five and Sophisticated Lady don't really differ that much from each other except that Sophisticated Lady is technically harder and uses a lot more technical features than Take Five.

Another major difference is that Take Five and Sophisticated Lady are arrangements where as David Sanborn's piece, Lotus Blossom, is the original version. This is because Lotus Blossom was originally written for the solo alto saxophone whereas the other two weren't.

Compare the performing techniques required in all three pieces

In Take Five the performer needs to give the piece a feeling of being laid back but still an air of excitement. This can be achieved by playing the piece fast but fairly relaxed at the same time. Sophisticated Lady requires a much more slow and "ballady" feel with a lot of emotion. The B section has to be very expressive and fast feeling, not

played faster but the way in which the performer makes it feel, and sound should make it sound excited. Lotus Blossom has to be a performance which comes from you as supposed to from the paper on which it is written. The improvising section is quite a large section of the piece and therefore is a very important part of the piece which the performer must give to the piece.

The three pieces differ quite a lot from each other in the performing techniques. They are all different styles of jazz: Bluesy

Ballad

Performance which comes from you.

They all need different things in the way in which you play and perform them. Take five needs to be laid back, Sophisticated Lady needs to be emotional and Lotus Blossom needs to come from your own heart rather than the dots on the paper.

However, although the styles are all very different, they all fit into the category known as jazz.

Does the historical period from which the pieces come from affect the way they are composed and performed?

No. The pieces are all written within 70 years of each other and therefore do not differ that greatly. Lotus Blossom is the most recent having been composed in the last 10 years. You can tell this as it is more sophisticated and complicated than the other two. However, it is hard to compare them or say about the historical period as Take Five and Sophisticated Lady are arrangements which have been done within the last decade or so. Therefore they have also been changed slightly to adapt to the current expectations of jazz as a whole.

Is your instrument used differently in all 3 pieces? Why?

No, my instrument has been used the same way in all the three pieces. This is because the saxophone can't really be used in many different ways as it cannot use mutes or any special enhancement techniques. However there are a number of tricks and idiomatic performing techniques that can be used. For example the glissando which has been used in Take five and Sophisticated Lady.

Does the expectation of the audience affect the way the pieces are composed or performed?

The expectation of the audience means you have to play the pieces very strictly to the style of jazz they belong to. You have to make sure a ballad sounds like a ballad and a blues piece sounds bluesy.

If there is an improvising section such as that in Lotus Blossom, the audience expect you to continue on the theme of the piece and not change it completely. They also expect to be taken on a musical journey through the piece but mainly the improvisation.

The expectation of the audience, therefore, does affect the way the piece is performed.

Are all the pieces composed and notated in the same way?

Yes, all the pieces are composed and notated in much the same way. The structure varies slightly but they are all more or less composed in much the same way. The notation is more or less the same. The only difference is that in the B section of Lotus Blossom, it is an improvising section. Therefore there aren't exact notes written down just the chords written above the stave. Other than that they are all written in the same way and use traditional notation.

The Performance

What went well and why?

The performance did generally go well as a whole. I did all the technical things marked on the music such as staccatos and slurs.

I also played the piece as I think the composer intended. My diminuendo in the coda was very good and the last note which was pp and staccato was very well done I felt. I am glad that that bit went well as I have been working on that section to get it to work and sound as it was intended. I don't think it is quite there yet however, but it is better than before.

What might have been improved? How?

My articulation of the top notes could have been improved a lot. I could improve this by using a better reed, tonguing better and hitting the reed in the correct place.

I could have improved my tone, especially in the top register. I could also have improved my timing at the end of the B section as I was not entirely with the piano.

This can all be improved by more practice by myself as well as with the piano.

Was it technically fluent?

The piece was technically fluent, I performed all the special effects well, I felt, such as staccatos and dynamics. One example of where it was particularly technically fluent is in bar 5 with the use of the glissando.

Was it musically successful?

Yes, I think the piece was musically successful. My phrasing was generally accurate and I think I managed to communicate the piece well throughout the entire duration of

the piece although I felt it was better conveyed during the A section. The B section I found was a little jumpy and I didn't really communicate the piece as well as I possibly could.

Do you think the performance was as the composer intended it? Why?

Yes I do believe I played the piece as the composer intended because I followed all the composers directions; staccatos, dynamics and glissandos. As well as timings and speed.

What special features in your performance made it effective and as the composer intended?

The special features that made the piece as the composer intended is the things which Brubeck/Desmond wrote in as well as the way that I tried to convey the piece as I was performing it.