On Rhythm and Meter

Hi Mark! Hope you're doing well man. Anyhow, I am catching up on mails, as it usually goes, several months after the fact.

Have not read your whole paper, "Metric Consonance/Dissonance," but was reading a bit here related to the examples you had questions about below.

On May 29, 2014, at 7:00 PM, Mark Baynes wrote:

Hi Brad,

Thanks for your comments man, really appreciate it.  If possible I would like your take on meter too.  I noticed that you use some really interesting devices.  In my thesis I have labeled them diminishing dispersal, disjunct rhythm, metric asynchronicity, metric shift, expressive variation and temporal density.  That doesn't really matter much; I have included an excerpt of my thesis that deals with meter if you want to read it.  There are a couple of points that I have drawn below, using less formal terminology; this may be a little quicker.

I have noticed that you sometimes build phrases that gradually speed up (for the lack of a better word).  This is a diminishing dispersal part.  Example:





As you can see, your phrases become more metrically dense with time; could you talk a little about that Brad?  I don't hear many jazz players playing like this.

**Yeah, I see what you mean in both of the examples and it was never something I was aware of until seeing your analysis with the examples! I recognize it more as a "thing" in my playing in ballads, as in the "Nearness of You" example you have there. I guess the urge would be mostly expressive, if I had to guess: Starting from the perspective of adhering to the ballad tempo, and then kind of getting carried away in something more "rhapsodic" - like unleashing it, letting the horse out of the gate.**

Another part I would love your take on is when you deliberately play with a kind of stutter, kind of disjunct metric feel.



**It was really fun to see how you managed to notate that snipped in the solo of Anything Goes! This is a kind of playing that I think a lot guys are getting to now - I'm not sure if I've had a hand in the influence or if I'm just on the wave with everyone else the last 15 years or so. Probably a bit of both. I hear, for example, Chris Potter, playing like this rhythmically in a way that is completely his own. He and I came up together at the same time and I think it's a bit of a thing from our generation, maybe? Anyhow, here's how I would describe the rhythmic impulse: I'm feeling the physical pleasure of constantly superimposing two things over the meter: 8th note triplets (sorry you call all these things quavers, semi-quavers etc), and, more subtly, perhaps, dotted 8th notes. Now to get wonky, as I'm sure you've observed: If you put a series of quarter notes against quarter note triplets, you'll get a constantly repeating ratio of 2:3. If you put a dotted 8th note against a quarter note, you will have a ratio of 4:3 - that is, four dotted 8th notes for every 3 quarter notes. This ratio can also be "inverted", though: we can turn it "upside down" in our head, without changing anything, and view it as 4 8th notes to 3 quarter note triplets. All of these relationships deal with feeling the tug of something with a multiple of two against something with a multiple of 3.**

**When it moves into blowing as in the example you gave: It's a kind of metric modulation I suppose, related to what you are describing as "metric shift". We did this in a very literal sense on a tune of mine, "Nice Pass", and also earlier on an arrangement of "Anthropology" on my record with Jorge and his brother Mario. There, we subdivided the 4/4 bars into 3 beats, then split those dotted half notes in half, getting a dotted quarter note, and finally split the dotted quarter note into dotted 8ths. The idea, though, was for us to always adhere strictly to the form of the original tempo - time would be "going by" at the same pace throughout the whole tune - but to give an illusion of stretching or diminishing time by creating phrases in my improvisation that correspond more with the various accents that Jorge and Mario/Larry would set up on every three beats of whichever subdivision. The tempo might appear to be stretching out or retracting in an unorthodox way: not simply in half, or doubled, that is. But in fact the actual tempo - and more importantly, all of the harmonic information we are addressing, and the 32 bar form - would not change. What you have is*a relationship*: between the original tempo and the implied other tempo. So I agree with you, disagreeing with Love's definition of metric shift that you site, when you write:**In the case of Mehldau’s music, I disagree with Love’s definition, as there is clear evidence of the schematic meter played either on the piano or heard in some form by the rhythm section. **The idea, indeed, is that the listener can hear and feel both meters - the actual and the suggested. It's perhaps "deconstructive", to use a bandied word, in the sense of allowing the listener to question his/her assumptions about meter and tempo.**

**In those two arrangements on the rhythm changes, we examined it literally, inviting the listener to hear systematically this relationship, by a kind of *stretto* technique of making the subdivisions of those 4:3 ratios smaller. Jumping to your example on *Anything Goes*, to put it briefly: this is the kind of blowing I'm doing there, only now, it is simply in the context of the meter with no literal arrangement under it where Jorge and Larry must systematically play other subdivisions. Nevertheless: Jorge, following so many great jazz drummers before him, is constantly subdividing his beat and giving me triplets, and Larry is as well, in between his downbeats. So a lot of what I am doing is *playing lines that suggest the ratio meter in their logic, superimposed over the existing meter.* So when they are notated as you have done, they look rather funny. Here is a very literal example, something I'll just make on my Sibelius, of how this might look in this tune:**



**So that's on the first bars of the A section. Here are phrases  - note the slurs - that have a logic of "4". Yet they do not correspond to 8h notes or quarter notes. They have been "warped" into the 8th note triplets. Note that the 3-2 subdivision of the bar means that the actual delineation of the chord changes will fall somewhere between what those phrases suggest.**

**Here would be the same kind of thing but with 8th note triplets:**



**You see what I'm getting at. So I'm responding to these subdivisions I'm hearing that are such a big part of jazz, and then making phrases that are suggesting that warped meter. Now if you go back to some of those phrases you have analyzed, you may be able to see it in that light. Make sense? For all I know, you have touched on this elsewhere in what you've written already in clearer terms. It looks like what you're addressing a bit with your sub-chapter on "metric shift" and the example from "Knives Out". (You could make more out of that if you wanted, going into how those groups that you've bracketed more specifically suggest a meter of 5/8 - but I digress ha ha!)**

**The last point I would make is that, as you see, in any given tempo, these 8th triplets and dotted 8th notes are very close together in terms of how fast they move by. The 8th note triplets are a bit faster - but just a hair! This makes for an interesting job, as I know from trying to transcribe things I'm learning from non-notated performances: Is it more properly an 8th note triplet, or a dotted 8th note, or some mixture of the two, or sometimes an 8th note group of 5? The answer, often, in actual praxis, is that it is not clearly defined for the performer, and it may shift between all of these, as the player warps in real time - the idea may hover back and forth between any of those combinations. I would be curious if you have observed this phenomenon, because I've thought about it a bit over the years, and it comes up a lot in transcription.**

And finally metric comments would relate to when you just seem to discard the sense of meter altogether, usually in climactic sections of your solo.



**Indeed, on that example from "When It Rains", which you very heroically notated, I'm just going for it. The mental process is probably something like, "Begin here, sweeeeeep acrosssssss...., wind up here and stop." Chopin went for it a lot like this in his music and managed to notate it - if you look at some of the crazy tuplets he comes up with in his nocturnes - groups of 11s and 17s that go against a bass in a 6/8 or 3/4 meter. I'm sure his influence is there.**

If you could jot down your thoughts on these specifics I would appreciate it so much man.

In addition, expressive variation is something you employ a lot e.g.  'back', 'forward', straight over swing (and vice versa) and use of superimposing 12/8 and 4/4 feels in ballads and between hands.  I am guessing Erroll Garner may be an influence here but I would love your take.  I have read your interview about how you describe trying to phrase your melodies like a singer; this takes me some of the way to understanding which is cool.  My take on this is that any shift in expressive variation acts as a kind of emotional amplifier, adding salience to the sonority (like during a cadential rall, that delays resolution).

Does any of this make sense Brad?  It's great to be talking like this; your last email was very helpful.  I hope that you get some more down time to quickly jot down your thoughts.

**You asked in another mail about Erroll Garner and I did listen to one record of his quite a bit, love his playing. So that could indeed be in there as influence! Have to run now but hope that's of interest to you and I did enjoy reading some of your paper! Hope all is well with you Mark, Brad**

On Narrative, Superimposition and Influences

Hi Mark,

Just over here in London catching up on e-mails. Well, we talked a bit more about what you're discussing there below when we saw each other at the club last week. But just to briefly follow up...In terms of the influences for trying to improvise narratively, Monk would be big there, in the way he approaches soloing on his own compositions - he really just plays the tune continuously throughout his solo, with all of this brilliant, often humorous variation. Also certain solos, like Sonny Rollins' on Blue Seven. Miles Davis' solo on "Autumn Leaves", the version from the Cannonball date, "Something Else". And lots of classical stuff.

For the yoking of minor and major modes, I do recognize what you're talking about. I've thought about it a bit and it's definitely something I like to exploit because of the emotional tension and catharsis it can create in a musical performance. Influences...well, the blues, in a very fundamental way. But then mixing that feeling of the blues with all the classical stuff I've absorbed. Schubert is big for mixing of minor and major modes. He is doing more toggling - switching back and forth - while what you are describing is actually when I'm overlaying them together, at the same time. But Schubert is really big for me. And then Strauss, Mahler...Check out, if you haven't Strauss's *Metamorphosen*  - that is chock full of those notes that should be wrong but are so beautiful in the context he places them in. Good voice leading goes a long way. That piece is very big for me. Also *Adagietto* movement of Mahler 5, last movement of Mahler 9...I'm trying to think of specific examples of these kinds of wrong/right things; that's all I come up with now. B