

LOOPER DEVICES, JAZZ AND EDUCATION



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Looper history and jazz

Context: audio layering before digital loopers

- *Musique Concrète*
- Tape loops used by 'minimalist' composers

Terry Riley (1963): *Music for The Gift* (Part 1)



Karlheinz Stockhausen

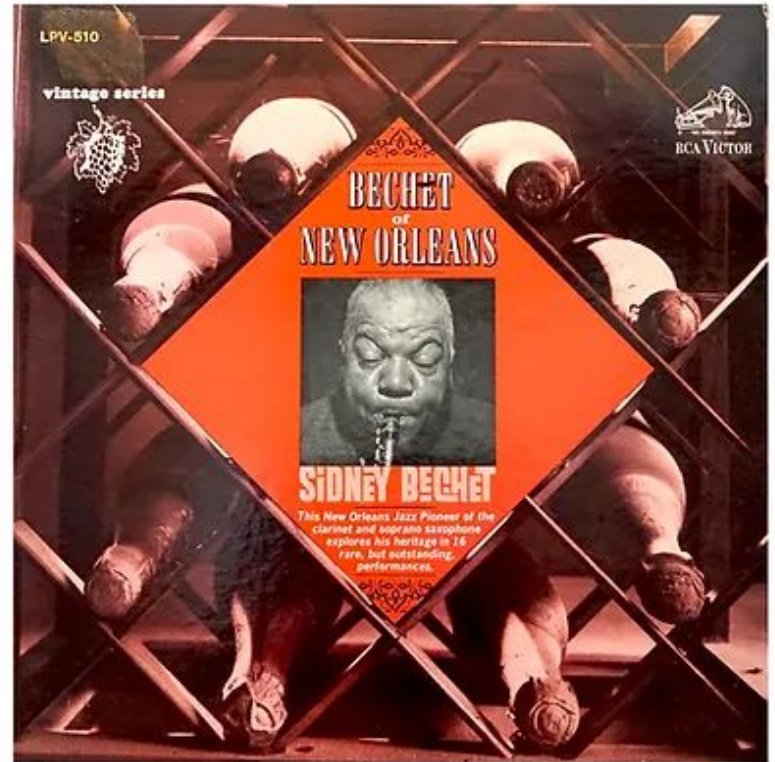
Looper history and jazz

Early example of overdubbing in jazz:

Sidney Bechet (1941): ‘The Sheik of Araby’



“I started out by playing *The Sheik* on piano. Then I put these earphones on and played the drums while listening to my piano. I meant to play all the rhythm instruments first, but I got all mixed up and grabbed my soprano, then the bass, then the tenor saxophone, and finally finished up with the clarinet.” (Hoefler 1965)

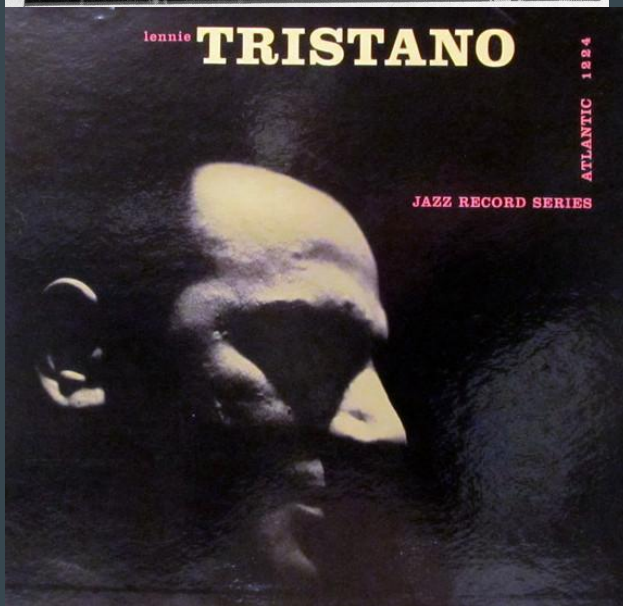


Looper history and jazz

Overdubbing (and controversy) in jazz:

- Les Paul and Mary Ford (including overdubbing in live performance)
- Lennie Tristano:

“The general gist of the controversy was that by doing things that couldn’t readily be replicated live (though Lennie later proved that some of them *could* be done live), Tristano was somehow being dishonest, or had separated himself from something that was essential about jazz.” (Jago 2013)



Looper history and jazz

More recent uses of looping in jazz:
analogue then digital devices

Zbigniew Seifert (1976): 'Kind of Time'



Looper history and jazz

The creative and social construction of technology: one-person bands

- Digital looper devices allow the performer “to capture ‘takes’ from her own performances in real time and reorganise these into larger forms that resemble those found in [other] musical genres” (Richardson 2009: 95, discussing KT Tunstall’s looper pedal performance).
- One-person bands exemplify “some of the key qualities idealised by theorists of a free-market ‘entrepreneurial selfhood’” (Chapman 2013).
- “The problem with doing-it-alone, of course, is that it risks abandoning the collective cultural (and public) good” (Brennan 2015: 263).

Study project, data and method

- Students of music education (University of Helsinki)
 - Find a personal approach, finish a recording of a work
 - Reflect in an essay
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- Written reflections (N=26) in 2021 and 2023
 - Content analysis approach
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- Focus: Loopers' applicability as a practicing aid, in music education and engaging personal creativity

Device examples



Results: Working, learning and skills

- Looping is hard but fun
- Rhythmic accuracy is a frustrating challenge
- Empowerment and self-esteem (Yes, I can)

- Skills will develop (but didn't within this timeframe)
- Looper is an effective practicing aid

“...it's a raw but authentic instrument for musical creation.” (S20)

[See also Jürjendal et al. (2016). Using Looper As An Alternative Teaching Tool In Traditional Music Improvisation.]

Results: Technology

- Looper technology wasn't that difficult
- Positive experiences in recording yourself (no need to be perfect)
- Play with the sound
- Good practice in listening
- Simpler loopers don't allow to remove layers
- Looper increases self-criticism

“..as the number of layers grew, the pressure to succeed grew as well..” (S18)

Results: Pedagogy

- Certainly applicable in the kindergarten and primary school (kids will love it)
- Better than “push a button pedagogy” on an iPad

“...for my opinion this project gave a fine example on how one can integrate music technology to music education, and what it can be in its simplest form...” (S8)

“...using looper technology for improvisation practice could at best strengthen students’ agency...” (S20)

“...it can be rather challenging to take an advantage of a looper in the school, especially if we look for music education approaches that are more student-centered.” (S16)

Results: Creative process

- Looper makes you focus on the arrangement
- You can create a tune fast
- Storytelling and soundscapes: what a potential!
- Repetitive musical structures and lack of drama

“..if the chord changes maintain constantly the same, a looper limits a bit, for example, what kind melodies one can develop into a song.” (S5)

“..working is more free, easier and so-to-speak more relaxed than in conventional composing.” (S17)

[See also Pachet et al. (2013). Reflexive Loopers for Solo Musical Improvisation.]

Loopers and jazz education

- Quick reference tool for practicing (time), composing and arranging
- Part of contemporary, fundamental digital tools?
- Repetitive elements problematic within jazz context (lack of interaction)
- Soundscapes and ambience

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