Dave Weckl. Particulars of style and performance

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Abstract: *Dave Weckl is well-known at present as an iconic artist whose personal style cultivates a unique performing refinement. Along with his performing abilities, he has proved an accomplished composer as demonstrated by works such as "Tiempo de Festival", a collaboration with Steve Weingart and Tom Kennedy. As well as his entire musical trajectory, this work too is influenced by fusion, a 20th century style of music that blends classical and modern features.*

Key-words: *rhythm, fusion, improvisation, style, timbre*

1. Introduction

Dave Weckl (b. 1960) is a remarkable contemporary musician, whose performance stands out with warm sound and richness of harmonics.

Stylistically he is part of the *fusion* movement which essentially combines modern musical styles (rock, soul, funk, R'n'B) with improvisational jazz elements.

Weckl has shown surprising abilities in executing polyrhythms and metrical modulation and exploring such possibilities in the new fusion medium; he is one musician interested in continuously developing the sound palette, a personal configuration of elements and an execution based on combining the traditional grip with the Moeller technique. His grip technique is perfect with flexible but controlled limb movement.

2. Tiempo di Festival

Tiempo de Festival is written for piano, bas, saxophone and drum kit. It was composed in 2001 by Steve Weingart (b.1966), Tom Kennedy (b.1960) and Dave Weckl and is a blend of *jazz, Latin* and *Afro-Cuban* styles.

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Dave Weckl is the one to render a new dimension to the rhythmic parameter with perfect technique that enables him to merge classical rhythms with *Latin* influences. The underlying basic rhythm maintains its complexity throughout the composition and timbre nuance is rendered through a focus on the *cowbel*l, an African percussion instrument.

As far as the setup is concerned, it is notable that an additional smaller bass drum (18 inch compared to the 22 inch standard) is integrated in the original setup. The combination is intriguing due to the different tuning: the standard bass drum tone is low, typical for *funk* style of music, while the smaller size is high tuned as in *bebop* style – an open timbre suggesting some melodic structure (Weckl 2001). To this mixture of musical styles Weckl adds more percussion instruments - *timbale, bongos* and *djembe*, intended to creating a complex sound ambient.

Consequently the entire melodic proposition is dominated by the continuous polyrhythmic element while technically, along certain parts, the right hand will execute the rhythmic percussion part, while the left hand will handle the classical rhythmic part (the drum).

2.1. Stylistic and performing features

The *forte* intro of the work involves an all instrument unison (Figure 1); with the saxophone, the piano and the drum merging together *salsa* and *funk* rhythms. It is notable how the *cowbell* perfectly matches the melody of the piano thus resulting into a great variety of syncopated rhythms with the accent disrupting the initial rhythm and metre enclosed in the binary homogenously formed 4/4 beat. The *crash cymbals* sound as a signal for a repetition of the theme, a changing of parts or they may indicate the metric accent. This type of approach is typical for such styles as classical *jazz, Big Bands, bebop* when the *crash cymbals* used to team up with the brass instruments (Riley 1994, 12).

Fig. 1. *Tiempo di Festival. Intro*

In sequences A (Figure 2) and A1, signature Dave Weckl African rhythms are present resulted from the classical drum kit and the cowbell. Originally they were executed on a *clave* instrument and the effect pursued is a continuous rhythmicity.

Fig. 2. *Tiempo di Festival. The A sequence*

The A1 sequence (Figure 3) is almost identical to the previous one except that it employs the metronome technique – Dave Weckl renders an impression of stability by playing closed *hi-hat* quavers and semi-quavers. This sequence is finalized in the all instrument unison.

Fig. 3. *Tiempo di Festival. The A1 sequence*

In the third sequence (B), *Tiempo de Festival* advances in a *salsa r*hythm (executed on a *ride* cymbal). A particular of this sequence is the fact that the bell of the *ride* becomes a main element in executing the rhythm, replacing the *cowbell*, another is that the rhythm of the bass drum is similar to the *songo* style of music.

The *cascara* rhythm is also present in this sequence (traditionally executed on the *timbales* percussion). For increased rhythmic tension, in certain bars (beat 3, 4 or just beat 4) certain accents are rendered simultaneously by brass instruments and the drum kit. It is also notable that the main melody is rendered by *the snare* drum along with the piano. The return to the main theme is marked by a unison executed by all parts which is preceded by a gap bar allocated to a rhythmic play upon the drum kit (Figure 4).

Fig. 4. *Tiempo di Festival. The B sequence*

This sequence is preceded by A2, which is based on the structure of the previous sequences A and A1. The melodic evolution in sequence C is also interesting (Figure 5) – which functions as the chorus of the work. This time the *snare* element brings into its rhythms motives present in the brass part. From a dynamic perspective, the rhythmic section strictly observes the main theme executed by the solo instrument.

Fig. 5. *Tiempo di Festial. The C sequence*

The piano solo makes the transition to sequence D. In the same Latin style, Weckl this time combines the c*owbell* with the sound of the *snare rim* or even with the *timbales*. This approach renders a sense of space to the piano solo and the sound of the drum band imitates the original Latin percussion.
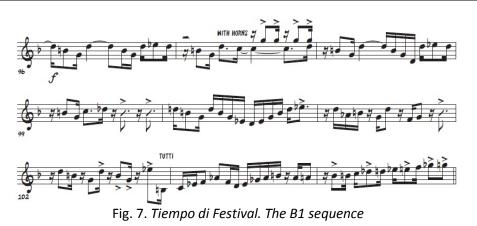
Sequence D is a rhythmical interlude created by the brass section and it is particularly nuanced with the use of the *triplet* (Figure 6). All along the *cowbel*l overlaps the rhythmic theme with its metronome pulsation, at the same time suggesting the typical rhythm of the Latin style.

In the melodic context previously created, a new solo instrument is introduced: the saxophone. With regards to the rhythmic ensemble it is notable that the *hi-hat* stays on crotchet and quaver values and is the element that enables the metronome function.

Fig. 6. *Tiempo di Festival. The D sequence*

The next sequence B1 (Figure 7) is aiming again at rendering the feel of continuity, of rhythmic pedal; here the sound of the *cymbals* need not play at the same volume, the *hi-hat* and the *ride* bell maintain constant velocity. The final theme of this sequence requires bass intervention.

Fig. 7. *Tiempo di Festival. The B1 sequence*

The solo in the middle section of sequence B1 is based on improvisation – within eight bars. In is a personal style of improvisation as Weckl is beginning to transform the main function of the instrument - of creating the rhythmic base – into a rhythmical-melodic movement (Weckl 2001).

This aspect is more evident in the final section of the sequence (Figure 8), in which *the hi-hat* is consistently integrated with its metronome function and furthermore the distribution of grace notes interestingly recalls brass band music. Crash cymbals emphasize the start of the rhythmic theme or form an unison with other elements of the drum kit.

The ending of the sequence once again supports the idea of the work being a fusion of jazz and Latin musical styles. Dave Weckl integrates exotic elements added to the drum kit such as *cowbell*s and *timbales*, in order to approach these styles.

Fig. 8. *Tiempo di Festival. The end of B1 sequence*

The ending of the solo is announced by all parts (in unison) in the same performing manner as sequence B and A2; followed by a replay of sequence A and the beginning of sequence C and the piece ends in a coda (Figure 9) – a return to the main theme, only this time the theme is enhanced by the timbre range and the piece finishes in unison as it has begun .

Fig. 9. *Tiempo di Festival. Coda*

3. Conclusion

The work *Tiempo de Festival* is a complex creation merging classical music styles with the Latin traditional music style and its study carries great importance in shaping the artistic personality and the performing style of every instrument player (as a would be professional).

Along with impeccable technique, sound that may be clear, robust, or delicate (depending on the specifics of each part), it requires solid knowledge of styles under consideration. This piece of music cannot be played accordingly without proper knowledge and without individual study/practice of each separate concept (especially considering the multiple styles employed on a relatively short temporal axis). Furthermore one needs to be familiar with various percussion instruments, the manner in which they are played, the part they need to play and the nuances the composer wishes to render by employing them.

Finally, the ensemble of instruments and the fusion of styles have to be homogenous in order to maintain the integrity and coherence of the music discourse.

References

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