

## “Like What?” for Jazz Orchestra: A Creative Research in Music Composition

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### Abstract

*Like What?* for Jazz Orchestra is creative research in music composition. This project aims to juxtapose different post-bop jazz musical concepts combining upper-structure triads, pentatonic scales, constant structure, irregular pulses, and polyrhythmic texture. It derives from the post-modernism trend with the knowledge to use and combine jazz harmonic and rhythmic tools available through history. The composition was orchestrated for a jazz orchestra, or in other words, a jazz big band. The length of the composition is approximately 7 minutes. The piece was performed by several ensembles such as Siam Jazz Orchestra (Euprasert, 2018), Thailand All-Star Jazz Orchestra (Euprasert, 2017a), Fu Jen Big Band (Euprasert, 2017b), Taipei Jazz Orchestra (Euprasert, 2016), and Ruamsmai National Youth Big Band (Euprasert, 2015). The composition was published by Jazz Education Abroad, USA.

**Keywords:** *jazz orchestra, music composition, jazz composition, jazz harmony*

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### 1. Introduction

As jazz scholarship progresses, various knowledge, techniques, and secrets behind jazz historical musical artworks have become commonly available to today's artists. Jazz musicians now have been trained to be able to execute and appreciate different musical tools that had been used and developed by their jazz predecessor throughout the whole twentieth century. Also, with this handful of knowledge, we cannot help but experiment with our knowledge by combining different musical methods and create such a rich history and rich musical knowledge-based musical artworks. In the era of gigantic information and big data, the trend of post-modernism within our jazz field has been flourishing.

Since post-modernism is still one of the important trends in jazz, the researcher cannot look away from this high potential musical opportunity. In this creative research project, the author composed a new musical composition using various jazz composition techniques and knowledge available in his arsenal. The piece is a post-modernism collaging between harmonic tools and rhythmic tools under the umbrella of jazz style. The format for this creative research is a composition for a jazz orchestra, or in other words, a big band. The piece has been performed by several ensembles such as Siam Jazz Orchestra (Euprasert, 2018), Thailand All-Star Jazz Orchestra (Euprasert, 2017a), Fu Jen Big Band (Euprasert, 2017b), Taipei Jazz Orchestra (Euprasert, 2016), and Ruamsmai National Youth Big Band (Euprasert, 2015). Taipei Jazz Orchestra released the recording of *Like What?* in 2019 (Euprasert, 2019).

### 2. Objectives

The objectives of this research are to contribute to the repertoire of jazz orchestras by composing an original work using a post-modernism approach and to compose an original work for professional ensembles.

### 3. Materials and Methods

*Like What?* is based on various compositional techniques from different points and corners in jazz history. The composition is a juxtaposition between these concepts and placed carefully next to each other to create a united jazz compositional structure in a post-modernistic manner. The researcher split the methodology into two stages (1) scouting and preparing harmonic and rhythmic compositional materials and (2) composing stage.

### 3.1 Musical Material Preparation

3.1.1 Gather information regarding harmonic and rhythmic tools available in jazz in the twentieth century through recordings, scores, books, and articles

3.1.2 Select and pair harmonic and rhythmic tools to be a collage with each other and look for the possibility to create the composition out of the materials on hands

3.1.3 Study post-modernism and collage techniques in jazz to be used in the composition

### 3.2 Compositional Method

3.2.1 Conceptualize and select compositional techniques

3.2.2 Materialize the composition by composing the piece

3.2.3 Appropriately select musicians to perform the composition

3.2.4 Assign the solo improvisation roles to the selected chairs of the band

3.2.5 Rehearse with the band and make some minor adjustment to the score if necessary

3.2.6 Perform the original composition

3.2.7 Complete the written research document based on the composition

## 4. Results

This creative research juxtaposes various concepts from different parts of the jazz tradition through materials in the piece: melodic materials, harmonic materials, and rhythmic materials. Concepts in these materials were invented and used in different decades and different groups of musicians. *Like What?* has the post-modernism characteristics in the piece through the unification of musical concepts originated from multiple parts of jazz history. The creative process is to connect these musical fragments from different historical backgrounds and chronological locations into a composition. The analysis will go through the form of the piece (Table 1).

### 4.1 Main Melody

*Like What?* consists of four melodic concepts: constant structures, pentatonic, diminished scale, and polychords arpeggiation. These concepts could happen separately or simultaneously depending on the musical appropriation. The main theme is in a modified minor blues form (Example 1).

The main theme is 18-measure long with two sections, 12 measures and 6 measures. The first part (mm. 9-20) can be easily distinguished as the main theme, while the second part (mm. 21-26) can function dually as another part of the main theme and the transition to the next section of the grand scale of the composition.

The first part of the main theme can be divided into 4 phrases. The first two phrases (mm. 9-11 and mm. 12-14) are each 3-measure long accompanied by an only jazz-funk groove from the drums. The first measure is the actual melodic phrase followed by two measures of drums solo fills.

The first phrase carries the first five notes of D and C-flat (B) major scales. The shape of the melodic cell starts in the D tonality then maintains its shape to be on B tonality creating the same structure and polytonality (Example 2).

The second phrase is similar to the first one. There are two melodic cells within the phrase, but this time, they do not create the constant structure nor polytonality. This time the phrase is in the octatonic scale or diminished scale in jazz term. The first cell of the second phrase outlines A13b9 while the second cell outlines C13#11 (no 9th). Superficially this seems to be polytonality but they both convey the A half-whole diminished scale (Example 3).

The melody continues with the arpeggios of D and Gm7 then lands and holds on the 7<sup>th</sup> degree of the next chord Emaj7#11 which is Eb (D#). The counter-melody comes in Eb minor pentatonic as the D# was held. At this point, it shows the combination of Eb minor pentatonic on top of bass E can give us an E Lydian modality (Example 4).

**Table 1** Form

| Hypermeter                                 | Idea/Musical Event  | Measure | Rehearsal Mark |
|--|---|---------|----------------|
| Introduction                               | Tempo 126 bpm,<br>Time Signature 4/4,<br>Drums alone set the main groove, jazz-funk.  | 1-8     | N/A            |
| Main Theme<br>(Head-in)                    | The main theme is played in unison by the top half of the saxophone section, the top half of the trumpet section, and the pitched rhythm section in the modified extended minor blues form.<br>The theme is played conservatively with drums fill-ins, countermelody from lower horn sections, and background pads by the trombone section. | 9-20    | A              |
| Transition                                 | Drums maintain 4/4 jazz-funk groove, while the rest of the band play 10/16 or (2+3+2+3)/16 chordal punches creating the polyrhythmic feeling of 10/16 or (2+3+2+3)/16 over 4/4.   | 21-26   | B              |
| Transition                                 | Drums maintain 4/4 jazz-funk groove, while the rest of the band play 10/16 or (2+3+2+3)/16 chordal punches creating the polyrhythmic feeling of 10/16 or (2+3+2+3)/16 over 4/4.   | 21-26   | B              |
| Improvisation                              | Piano solo (with the optional 1 <sup>st</sup> tenor saxophone) over the modified extended minor blues form. The modification uses Lydian and a fully-diminished modality instead of the traditional bVI7#11-V7alt-i turnaround at the end of the form, which makes the form consist of 14 bars instead of 12 bars.                          | 27-40   | C              |
|  | The solo continues with background and countermelody sparsely played by the horn section.   | 41-54   | D              |
| Tutti                                      | Saxophone unison exchanges melodic conversation with brass unison.<br>These two rehearsal marks occasionally have chordal pads and harmonized kicks from the brass section.   | 55-83   | E-F            |
|  | Drums solo with tutti punches from the whole ensemble. The whole ensemble plays thick chordal rhythmic kicks while the drums solo around the kicks.   | 84-100  | G              |
|  | Open drums solo until the cue   | 101-108 | H              |
| The Return of the Main Theme<br>(Head-Out) | Exactly the same as rehearsal mark A.   | 109-120 | I              |
| Ending                                     | Using the same materials from the transition (rehearsal mark B) but extends the end to set for another brief drums solo before the last chord as the ending.  | 121-130 | J              |

9 N/C

12 N/C

15 Emaj7(#11) Cm

18 Emaj7(#11) Dmaj7(#11) Cmaj7(#11) G/A $\flat$

21 C/D $\flat$  D $\flat$ /E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /C C/B $\flat$  D $\flat$ /C B $\flat$ /A $\flat$  C/D $\flat$  D $\flat$ /E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /C C/B $\flat$

23 D $\flat$ /C B $\flat$ /A $\flat$  C/D $\flat$  D $\flat$ /E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /C C/B $\flat$  D $\flat$ /C B $\flat$ /A $\flat$  C/D $\flat$

25 D $\flat$ /E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /C C/B $\flat$  D $\flat$ /C E $\flat$ /D $\flat$

**Example 1** The main theme and transition of *Like What?*

9 N/C

**Example 2** Pentatonic cells in constant structure in D and B



**Example 3** A half-whole diminished scale by outlining A13b9 and C13#11(no 9<sup>th</sup> with 7<sup>th</sup> harmonized by guitar, piano, bass, 1<sup>st</sup> tenor saxophone, and 2<sup>nd</sup> trumpet)

The main melodic line moves again with C minor blues. Then C minor pentatonic or C minor blues without the b5 or Gb continues in the melody and lands back to the previous chord and mode Emaj7#11 or E Lydian. The melody and harmony make a sequence by moving parallelly as the constant structure downward for two additional times with a whole step each time. The sequence creates the rhythmic hit implying the polyrhythm of the three against four. The rhythmic sequence continues to the fourth time but breaks the constant structure and lands on a diminished tonality in G/Ab or Abdimmaj7 with the melodic line continues on an octatonic as Ab whole-half diminished scale (Example 5).

The piece continues to rehearsal mark B with a transitional material before launching to the first solo. The transitional material is constructed by the polyrhythm of 10/16 or (2+3+2+3)/16 over 4/4 for five measures followed by a measure of a sustained chord to reset the groove preparing for the solo (Example 6). The harmonic choices are the upper structure chords of diminished-major 7<sup>th</sup>, dominant 9<sup>th</sup> sus4, major 9<sup>th</sup> #11 rotating around the phrase, and sus4 b9. The orchestration grows from the lower to the upper register and ends as a long tutti chord in the last measure of the section.

Seven chords appeared in the rehearsal mark B. There are four chord qualities and calls for modes or scales. The harmonic choice of diminished-major 7<sup>th</sup> is C/Db, which calls for a whole-half diminished scale. The harmonic choices of dominant 9<sup>th</sup> sus4 are Db/Eb and Bb/C, which call for Mixolydian modes. The harmonic choices of major 9<sup>th</sup> #11 are C/Bb, Bb/Ab, and Eb/Db, which call for Lydian modes, whereas the harmonic choice of sus4 b9 is Db/C, which calls for a Phrygian mode (Example 7).

#### 4.2 Solo Section

The piece enters the solo section in the rehearsal mark C. The solo section is designed for a piano solo but also leaves chord progressions on the 1<sup>st</sup> tenor saxophone as an optional solo. The guitar also receives the chord progressions and can do either comping or soloing. The form of the solo is a modified minor blues form. The first 8 measures are preserved, but the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> measure are on Lydian modalities while the 4-measure tail of the form contains diminished-major 7<sup>th</sup> modalities (Example 8).

From mm. 27-34, the soloist can use any tools that are commonly used on the minor blues form such as minor blues scale, pentatonic minor scales, melodic minor scales, and Dorians. However, from m. 35, the soloist needs to go after the given chord symbols. On Emaj7#11, Dmaj7#11, and Cmaj7#11, the soloist has to play Lydian mode, while in mm. 37-40, the soloist has to play whole-half diminished. The polytonality of these slash chords has already been discussed (Example 7). After mm. 27-40 have been repeated a few times, the background will come in on the same chord progression.

The musical score for Example 4 is a multi-staff arrangement. It begins at measure 14. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Alto 1 & 2:** Play a melodic line in the first measure, then hold a whole note chord in the second measure.
- Tenor 1 & 2:** Play a melodic line in the first measure, then hold a whole note chord in the second measure.
- Bari. Sax.:** Play a melodic line in the first measure, then hold a whole note chord in the second measure.
- Tpt. 1 & 2:** Play a melodic line in the first measure, then hold a whole note chord in the second measure.
- Tpt. 3 & 4:** Play a melodic line in the first measure, then hold a whole note chord in the second measure.
- Tbn. 1, 2, 3, & B. Tbn.:** Play a melodic line in the first measure, then hold a whole note chord in the second measure.
- Gtr.:** Play a melodic line in the first measure, then hold a whole note chord in the second measure.
- Pno.:** Play a melodic line in the first measure, then hold a whole note chord in the second measure.
- Bass:** Play a melodic line in the first measure, then hold a whole note chord in the second measure.
- Dr.:** Play a rhythmic pattern in the first measure, then hold a whole note chord in the second measure.

The score is written in E major/Lydian mode, with the Eb pentatonic minor scale superimposed. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The score is labeled "Example 4 Eb pentatonic minor on top of E Lydian".

**Example 4** Eb pentatonic minor on top of E Lydian

Gtr.

Pno.

Bass

$E\Delta(\sharp 11)$   $D\Delta(\sharp 11)$   $C\Delta(\sharp 11)$   $G/A\flat$

**Example 5** Constant structure on Lydian modality, three over four, and diminished scale and modality

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$C/D\flat$   $D\flat/E\flat$   $B\flat/C$   $C/B\flat$   $D\flat/C$   $B\flat/A\flat$   $C/D\flat$   $D\flat/E\flat$   $B\flat/C$   $C/B\flat$   $D\flat/C$   $B\flat/A\flat$   $C/D\flat$   $D\flat/E\flat$   $B\flat/C$   $C/B\flat$   $D\flat/C$   $E\flat/D\flat$

*mp*

24

*sfz p*

**Example 6** The 10/16 or (2+3+2+3)/16 over 4/4

Example 7 displays six polychord formulas and their related modes or scales, each shown on a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb).

- Staff 1:** Polychord formula  $C/D\flat$  and  $D\flat^{\circ}maj7$  is associated with the **Whole-Half Diminished Scale**. The scale notes are:  $D\flat, E\flat, F, G\flat, A\flat, B\flat, C, D\flat$ .
- Staff 2:** Polychord formula  $D\flat/E\flat$  and  $E\flat^9(sus4)$  is associated with the **Mixolydian** mode. The scale notes are:  $D\flat, E\flat, F, G\flat, A\flat, B\flat, C, D\flat$ .
- Staff 3:** Polychord formula  $B\flat/C$  and  $C^9(sus4)$  is associated with the **Mixolydian** mode. The scale notes are:  $D\flat, E\flat, F, G\flat, A\flat, B\flat, C, D\flat$ .
- Staff 4:** Polychord formula  $C/B\flat$  and  $B\flat^{\flat}maj9(\sharp 11)$  is associated with the **Lydian** mode. The scale notes are:  $D\flat, E\flat, F, G\flat, A\flat, B\flat, C, D\flat$ .
- Staff 5:** Polychord formula  $B\flat/A\flat$  and  $A\flat^{\flat}maj9(\sharp 11)$  is associated with the **Lydian** mode. The scale notes are:  $D\flat, E\flat, F, G\flat, A\flat, B\flat, C, D\flat$ .
- Staff 6:** Polychord formula  $E\flat/D\flat$  and  $D\flat^{\flat}maj9(\sharp 11)$  is associated with the **Lydian** mode. The scale notes are:  $D\flat, E\flat, F, G\flat, A\flat, B\flat, C, D\flat$ .
- Staff 7:** Polychord formula  $D\flat/C$  and  $C(sus4\flat 9)$  is associated with the **Phrygian** mode. The scale notes are:  $D\flat, E\flat, F, G\flat, A\flat, B\flat, C, D\flat$ .

**Example 7** Polychord formula and their related modes or scales



27 **C** Cm Piano solo

31 Fm Cm

35 E $\Delta$ (#11) D $\Delta$ (#11) C $\Delta$ (#11) G/A $\flat$

39 C/D $\flat$  On Cue

**Example 8** The solo form and harmony

#### 4.3 Ensemble Playing and Shout Chorus

The background eventually takes over the solo and enters the ensemble playing section. The form and the chord progression are still the same as the solo section. The bass and drums keep the accompanying roll throughout the ensemble playing section (mm. 55-82). The rest of the ensemble divides into two groups, in which the first group consists of alto saxophones, tenor saxophones, guitar, and right-hand piano and the other group consists of baritone saxophones, trumpets, trombones, and left-hand piano. The two groups exchange some musical conversations and create call and response textures.

During the minor chords, Cm and Fm that were preserved from typical minor blues form, the melodic materials playing over them are in pentatonic minor. The melodic materials adjust accordingly to the major 7<sup>th</sup> #11 chords with Lydian modes as well as when the diminished-major 7<sup>th</sup> chords appear, the melodic material changes to whole-half diminished scales.

In mm. 79-82, the instrumentation grouping changes and stirs the texture up to launch to the tutti shout chorus in mm. 83-100, which focuses mainly on rhythmic hits. The whole ensemble hits the rhythmic figures together as tutti in forte dynamic. These hits leave rooms for the drums to fill in. Thus, this section also functions as drums soloing section with chordal rhythmic hits by the whole ensemble. The drums eventually take over the whole ensemble in rehearsal mark H, which turns to be an open drums solo section without any accompaniment.

#### 4.4 Melody Out and Ending

The main melody returns in rehearsal mark I after the drums solo. Followed by the transitional material with the 10/16 or (2+3+2+3)/16 over 4/4 in rehearsal mark J. A fragment from the main theme returns briefly afterward launching a brief drums solo and ends the piece with the big last chords afterward.

### 1. Discussion

The author surveyed different jazz harmonic and rhythmic tools and experimented with selected musical-tool candidates by pairing them and juxtaposing them to come up with a perfect solution, resulting in this composition, *Like What?* The tools used in this main melody section are constant structures, pentatonic, diminished scale, and polychords arpeggiation. The rhythmic tools are polyrhythm of 10/16 or (2+3+2+3)/16 over 4/4 and a funky groove appears in the transition toward the end of the main melody section.

The author employs a minor blues form with some modifications by changing from measure 9 of the form to a constant structure harmony, followed by upper structure triads on the whole-half diminished

scales. Instead of having a total of 12 measures like a typical minor blues form, the author expands the solo form to 14 bars. The solo instrument choice is piano with instrumental substitutions as tenor saxophones or guitar.

The ensemble playing divides the band into two groups and has them exchange musical activities in a call and response fashion. The grouping of instrumentation scrambles mid-way and evolves into a full tutti texture in a shout chorus manner. The shout chorus focuses on hitting the rhythmic figures in a forte dynamic which gives opportunities for the drums to fill in and that is turned into a quasi-drums solo and enters to a full unaccompanied drums solo.

## 2. Conclusion

The Creative research, *Like What?* was derived from the post-modernism trend with the knowledge to use and combine jazz harmonic and rhythmic tools available through history. The composition is orchestrated for a jazz orchestra, or in other words, a jazz big band. The length of the composition is approximately 7 minutes. The piece has been performed by several ensembles such as Siam Jazz Orchestra (Euprasert, 2018), Thailand All-Star Jazz Orchestra (Euprasert, 2017a), Fu Jen Big Band (Euprasert, 2017b), Taipei Jazz Orchestra (Euprasert, 2016), and Ruamsmai National Youth Big Band (Euprasert, 2015). Taipei Jazz Orchestra released the recording of *Like What?* in 2019 (Euprasert, 2019). The composition was published by Jazz Education Abroad. This creative research, *Like What?* expands the jazz existing tools and composition approaches as well as stretches the boundary of jazz compositional vocabulary and merging jazz elements from different points in time. By combining available musical substances, these musical experimental reactions produce new substances to be used and keep being experimented with in the future.

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