



A quantity-over-quality approach to composition didactics

Blank page anxiety and overcritical inner voices are two of the most feared enemies of creativity and, yet, they are widely experienced: almost anyone, especially when approaching musical composition for the first time, have had to deal with them. Many quit because of them.

This anxiety and this negative self-talk are mostly a consequence of expectations set too high: the role models (the great composers of the past) seem so hopelessly unreachable, hence the students feel the pressure of comparison. When someone's self-worth as a composer relies almost exclusively on the perceived value of his own work, achieving perfection becomes an imperative.

With such high standards in mind, no idea appears to be good enough to be put down on paper: predictably, an hour can easily pass by and no single note has been written. Part of the issue is the concern about the possibility of composing a mediocre piece of music. But writing bad music should not be avoided at all costs, let alone stigmatized, but rather embraced as a step towards the path of improvement.

We, as educators, have a great responsibility in helping our students overcome their fears: we can achieve this by focusing less on the "how good" and more on the "how many". The presentation will look at how a quantity-over-quality approach could weaken the aforementioned negative forces, while, at the same time, give the students more opportunity to improve their skills. This would ideally result in a virtuous cycle of improvement. The discussion will bring on the table all the ways this could be done in a practical way and, hopefully, thanks to the experience of the participants, find new ideas that could benefit composition didactics in the near future.

Gabriele Ceccarelli is a composer, arranger, conductor and music teacher based in Rome. Born in 1993, he studied at Saint Louis College of Music (Bachelor in Jazz Piano and Master in Jazz Composition) and graduated discussing a thesis on "Recomposition and its applications in jazz practice". He is currently majoring in Orchestral Conducting at Conservatorio "Luisa D'Annunzio" in Pescara. He has written music for various ensembles (jazz orchestra, jazz combo, television orchestra, string quintet, saxophone quintet), as well as arrangements for solo artists such as Paolo Fresu, Javier Girotto, Natalino Marchetti and Marco Siniscalco. As a conductor, he has walked on prominent stages, such as Auditorium Parco della Musica, Teatro Eliseo and Casa del Jazz, all of which in Rome.

In 2018, he was one of the finalists of the International Composition Contest Scrivere in Jazz (Sassari, Italy). In the same year, he was also selected to be part of Italian Jazz C.R.E.A, a project dedicated to research and innovation in the jazz composition context. Thanks to this, he visited the UNT Division of Jazz Studies (Denton, TX) and the Conservatorio Superior de Música de Navarra (Pamplona, Spain), rehearsing his music with local bands. In 2020, he entered the final round of the Jazz Comp Graz competition, placing himself in the top ten. Later, in March 2021, he attended EPARM (European Platform for Artistic Research in Music) as a speaker, with a contribution titled "Recomposition: a practical approach".



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In 2022, he founded LOJI - Libera Orchestra del Jazz Italiano as conductor and co-director, publishing “feat. Marco Siniscalco”: the purpose of the orchestra is to promote Italian jazz and give value to its rich tradition. In 2023, he is the lead director of “Nuovi linguaggi per F.P. Tosti”, a project whose purpose is to bring students to work on the music of composer Francesco Paolo Tosti, re-reading it from the perspective of a jazz musician. He has a strong foundation in jazz tradition; at the same time, he looks at the most diverse musical worlds, from folk to ancient music, with genuine curiosity. His works are a euphoric, optimistic, and multifaceted representation of everyday scenes, introspective and retrospective visions, and have a ceaseless, friendly narrative flow.