

**Circular composition experiments and the Great American Songbook:  
Artistically researching the relation between older repertoire and contemporary  
creative practices through notation.**

How can artistic research contribute to exploring the relation between a shared older repertoire and contemporary creative practices and new repertoire resulting from there?

I investigate this question through examining the relation between notational practices of jazz standards from the *Great American Songbook* and my own practice as a composer-improviser that has been formed integrally through this repertoire. The Great American Songbook stands for a canon of popular songs from the first half of the 20th century that together with songs by jazz musicians always has served as a core repertoire in jazz. The *lead sheet* has strongly contributed to canonization processes and became established as notation standard for this practice. Its artistic and pedagogical implications have been investigated music-theoretically and music-historically by e.g. Teriete or Kernfeld (Teriete 2020); nevertheless, the perspective from within the practice, in a *transactional* relation to the creative situation (Schön 2017:150-151) offers further, complementary, insights.

When reflecting on the composition process and improvising with my piece *Pulsations* (tenor saxophone/piano) and the *Circular Experiments I-IV* for the *Birgitta Flick Quartet*, resulting from *circular composition experiments*, I found the interplay of lead sheet notation with notation practice used generally in Neue Musik especially interesting. Examining their different functions and affordances for different creative processes and also the musicians' interaction while creating became important for my doctoral research where I investigate – through spiral working cycles between certain creative activities in various combinations – which insights an understanding of composing and improvising as conglomerates of different creative activities can offer; how the different combinations generate and steer different creative processes and kinds of knowledge.

Against this background and with my quartet's improvisation practice as example, I reflect on how a shared artistic practice of working with lead sheets influences new shared approaches to notation and musical form beyond the realm of jazz standards. Examining practices like writing *lines* (contrafacts) and *alternate harmony* (Crothers 2016) shows how bridges can be built between old and new repertoire. I examine my reflections in critical dialogue with other related research, such as Teriete's (Teriete 2020) or Kane's ontological stance on jazz standards (Kane 2018).

**References**

Crothers, Connie (2015). Personal notes of Birgitta Flick from private lessons with Crothers.  
Flick, Birgitta (2023). *Circular Experiment I-IV*.

**AEC European Platform for Artistic Research in Music (EPARM) 2024  
Academy of Music, University of Ljubljana (Ljubljana, Slovenia)**

Parallel Session

Flick, Birgitta (2023). *Pulsations*. Wismar: WismART.

Kane, Brian (2018). "Jazz, Mediation, Ontology." In: *Contemporary Music Review*, 37:5-6, 507-528. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2017.1402466> (2023-11-18)

Schön, Donald A. (2017). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. London: Routledge.

Teriete, Philipp (2020). "'Lead Sheet'-Notation vom Vaudeville bis zum iReal Pro: Zur Geschichte der Notationsformen des Jazz und ihren musiktheoretischen Implikationen." In: *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie* 17/2.

<https://www.gmth.de/zeitschrift/artikel/1079.aspx> (accessed 2023-11-18)

**Relevant audio/video:**

Birgitta Flick Quartet. *Miniatures & Fragments* (Double Moon Records, 2022):

*Live video starting with excerpt of Circular Experiment III*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqwpnWyhekg> (accessed 2023-11-18)

*All the things you are* (Jerome Kern/Oscar Hammerstein II, *Line* by Birgitta Flick)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ov7OSZBX-yM>

Birgitta Flick & Antje Rößeler. *Sending a Phoenix* (WismART, forthcoming 2024):

*Pulsations* (Birgitta Flick) [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rv5Pj-](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rv5Pj-bM0DIq5Fsc1Se6y31kqKM7JG6z/view?usp=sharing)

[bM0DIq5Fsc1Se6y31kqKM7JG6z/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rv5Pj-bM0DIq5Fsc1Se6y31kqKM7JG6z/view?usp=sharing) (accessed 2023-11-18)



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Birgitta Flick is a Berlin based improviser and composer.

Educated as saxophonist at Jazz-Institut Berlin (UdK) and in composition at the Royal College of Music, Stockholm, she works internationally as a freelance musician with her own groups based in Berlin, Stockholm and New York City and collaborates as composer with ensembles such as LUX:NM (DE) or the Staatsoper Berlin's youth choir (DE). Her artistic work is documented through an extensive discography, a recent choir edition by Gehrman's förlag and has been supported by e.g. the Berlin senate, German Musikfonds, JazzBaltica Förderpreis and the Goethe institute. Interdisciplinary work includes the audiovisual performance Reconnecting (with) Traces for the Moderna Galerija, Podgorica, developed in 2023 with Milana Novčić, Nina Perovic and Thomas van Walle. She is a doctoral student in artistic research at mdw, Vienna and presented in 2023 first research results at EPARM (Copenhagen) and FORIM's annual conference (mdw, Vienna).

