

# Keith Jarrett's Solo Concerts

# Abstract

## The Sounding Process And The Ever Progressing *Now*

**An investigation into how the aesthetics, concept and approach of Keith Jarrett are reflected in his improvised solo concerts, with a special focus on the Kyoto Concert.**

The thesis investigates how the aesthetics, concept and approach of Keith Jarrett are reflected in his improvised soloconcerts. This will include an analysis of Jarretts improvisational methods, his characteristics as a pianist, a picture of his concerts in general as well an analysis with three main-focus points of the Kyoto Concert from the 10-LP album "Sun Bear Concerts" recorded in Japan 1976, released 1978 and reissued in 1990 as a 6 double cd.

The thesis starts out with a basic but necessary discourse about improvisation in general as well as in music. A key-statement and reference point for the entire thesis is, that all improvisation needs a frame, a *point of departure*, just like childrens play, or sporting events need rules and frames, and that this framework, when all is improvised, has to be created on the spot, and on the fly. As an example, I display how this need manifests itself in childrens play, as well as in improvised theatre, where the first thing to do is create a mutual reference point. This part of the thesis also deals with the terms improvisation and composition, terms that increasingly often are seen as a continuum. This is relevant because Jarrett sees the two terms as being closely related and because the discussion sheds light on Jarretts approach to improvisation.

In my musical analysis I have shown how Jarrett, in the intuitive process and ever progressing *now*, creates the above mentioned indispensable frames. I have, in the analytical search discovered, that the necessary framework in Jarretts improvisational process takes shape as "things" I have chosen to call "*gestalts*", which in this context means "*a shape*" or "*something that will be of importance*". These *gestalts* are Jarretts immediate guide and way ahead during a solo concert. Some of those *gestalts* can indeed be motifs, others can be a chord progression repeated, or just a 3 beat-feeling for example, which is why terms as "motif" or "theme" would be too narrow. The music-analysis parts of the thesis reveal how the Kyoto concert can be seen as 14-15 consecutive "big *gestalts*" tied together, enriched and exploited by a very large amount of "smaller *gestalts*".

Others, namely Gernot Blume and most notably Peter Elsdon have chosen to define Jarrett's use of different styles throughout a typical solo concert as the "main tool" in the landmark/frame creating process. My conclusion differs, but I do agree that they an important role. In his Ph.D about Jarretts solo concerts Peter Elsdon points out how the different styles have different languages, different

amounts of "space and direction" and are widely connected with different emotions and moods. As such they do have an influence on the shifting character of the process, playing a role in the overall structuring and as such often interacting somehow with Jarrett's gestalts.

Still, in the improvisational process that contains a myriad of choices that has to be made *now*, it is evident that Jarrett needs something very concrete and immediate, something with *substance* and that is exactly what the use of gestalts provides. So, the gestalt model adds to the big picture of how Jarrett methodically spoken, does what he does.

Being totally improvised a Keith Jarrett solo concert is, from start to end, an intuitive creative process. It is basically a ritual that displays Jarrett as a shaman or spiritual guide, and it is characterized by a search for ecstasy and release. It is this process and experience that Jarrett wants to display and pass on, and give a full-valid picture of. Jarrett sees himself as a medium in this process, that, in his eyes, is about much more than music. It is about spontaneous creativity, originality, openness, about letting go, and about rejecting the rational one-dimensional way of thinking, alienation, and product oriented control, that according to Jarrett dominates the western world and way of thinking.

It is important to bear in mind that Jarrett's aesthetics and overall concept are more than just an in principle not needed neo-religious superstructure. The aim to walk on stage "empty", the articulated attempt to avoid clichés, as well as the ritualised stage-setting, all in an attempt to bring on an experience of a spiritual nature, are all factors that have importance all the way out into the sounding music, and the choices Jarrett takes in the improvisational process. Jarrett doesn't jump the fence where it is lowest, and this is being illustrated in the general discourse as well as in the analysis of the Kyoto concert.

I have, in an attempt to illustrate the results from the analysis, created a "multi-parameter" graphical picture of the entire concert. This picture is in itself used as basis for further discussion, and containing certain meta-levels of subjective nature, it also gives an impression of the progress of the entire process and its ups and downs. The thesis also contains small discourses about Jarrett's career, about the creative process, and about the relevance and shortcomings of traditional musical analysis in connection with total-improvisation.

Basic analysis of the "unfocused" parts of the Kyoto concert, as well as transcriptions of all three focus points, are to be found in the appendix of the thesis.

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