

WORDS: instant composing and improvisation method

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PREMISE *(personal)*

The creation of the WORDS method starts from the need to create a fresh, new, complete but unexpected, unconventional kind of music that does not conform to any kind of language or genre.

Composing music requires Rhythm, Melody, Harmony, Timbre and Dynamics. These elements manifest themselves at their purest stage when they are played extemporaneously (improvised we might say), while, on the other hand, when they are interpreted with prior study, they become more minute and refined, yes, but they lose the initial honesty that only intuition can give. *As I wrote, this is a personal premise, with personal opinions which reflect my idea of music.*

Music that is therefore honest, pure, intuitive and direct can only arise from improvisation, because the moment it is improvised, the music, gets a whole other meaning:

all of a sudden that super catchy melody that you create in the moment and repeat becomes so precious, precisely because it is extemporaneous. At that moment the musician's interpretation of that melody is at its most active, intimate, pure, inward, truthful, the least filtered possible, and the most honest at all. At that moment the musician feels a guiding energy, and he definitely senses a "self" within the music, his creation.

The same is true for the listener: even if he or she is not aware that that melody is improvised, he or she would perceive a different "transport," specific to a musician who plays instinctively, on the spot (then, the fact that one knows that everything one hears is improvised probably also activates an intellectual appreciation of the performance).

Therefore I dream of music whose Rhythm, Melody, Harmony, Timbre and Dynamics come from these primordial abysses of human being: WORDS is my means to touch and grasp this kind of musical, human and artistic expression.

At the teaching level...

WORDS can be brought into play with musicians who have the same training and background (jazz, contemporary music, or other), but things get interesting when the musicians' backgrounds are heterogeneous: the fewer constructs, clichés, and habits there are, the more room is given to a certain degree of expressive and creative freedom.

For high-level performance with the WORDS method, one definitely needs experienced improvisers (from any musical context) who have perfected: listening, responsiveness, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic awareness, compositional awareness, and in short, you name it...

But this does not detract from the fact that the method remains a valuable tool for musicians approaching improvisation even for the first time.

Indeed, in my humble opinion, starting improvising with such a method that does not inculcate harmonic, rhythmic and whatever else rules in the artist's intellect, is the best way to approach improvisation: an art that is too often related only to jazz or the like, and that instead contains

extremely broad outlets in the artistic sphere, especially in our age where music is taking undefined and adventurous tracks (which I personally look forward to discovering!). Beginning to improvise with the WORDS method means first learning to jump in, and immediately after that learning to use the musical **instinct** that resides within each of us. Instinct is the most important tool in the journey of improvisation, but it is not always easy to stay connected to this faithful guide. It makes use of our ear and our feelings, and only once we feel connected to it should we begin to intellectualize our playing. It is a slow path, and the more calmly and serenely you take it, the more it rewards you.

I would like to note here right now, at this time of the reading, a “technique” that I think could make many aspiring improvisers understand the right approach to connecting with your gut.

I like to call it “**The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance**”: sometimes it has happened, and it still happens, that during an improvisation I have no idea what to do, I am completely lost, and I no longer find a common thread in the performance. At that point, one thing you can do among others is to “go ignorant.” You play something solid, safe, without thinking too much, something that maybe doesn't have anything to do with the context, just play it with confidence and even a little bit of cheekiness. At that moment you are overcoming your insecurities, your doubts, and you are silencing your thoughts, the ones that come from outside and distract you from staying centered.

Here, by doing this exercise, time after time, you will eliminate the enemies of intuition, and you will regain contact with your intuition, return to the center of yourself, and be able to see the thread of improvisation clearly.

Maybe the first few times you will play something awful, but I assure you that you will slowly learn to dose your ignorance and stay connected to the musical context around you at that moment.

We can say that this is the “key rule” for all aspiring improvisers in the WORDS method.

EXPLENATION

In the music I dream of, there are no rules of language membership, restrictions of musical style or genre, conception of form, pigeonholing of harmony and temperament.

Music comes from something that is not part of these constructs; music is the root from which these constructs were then conceived and intellectualized.

The root is within us, the root is us: it is us in connection with ourselves, us in connection with nature and life, us in connection with others, us in connection with art.

In the music I dream there are only identities of musicians influencing each other, respecting each other, giving and receiving.

SPHERES

My method, to try to bring out the essence of human being in music, starts with a cognitive, “mindfulness” exercise.

Try to perceive now that YOU are essentially made up of **three main spheres**:

- **the Intellectual Sphere** (*i.e., thoughts coming in, everything mathematical and technical, the rational, the logical, the intellectual, the philosophical, the analytical*);
- **the Bodily Sphere** (*i.e., that which puts you in contact with your body, movement, temperature, internal and external sensations, grip, pain, anxiety, excitement*);

- **the Spiritual Sphere** (*i.e., everything that “makes you connected upward,” things you struggle to explain in words, the empty-minded approach, feelings for something or someone, love, hate, realization, memories, faith, perception of the divine, perception of you*);

Dividing these spheres is, of course, impossible; it would be utopian to be able to perceive only one sphere at a time; we are one of all of these. But trying to perceive (not just imagine) a single sphere activates mechanisms in our system that surely many of us are not used to being in touch with. And these mechanisms will be very useful to us.

WORDS

These 3 spheres are brought into play in the music through **5 categories of words**, which are the real engine of this improvisational method:

- **Shapes** (*i.e. triangle, dot, line, circle, etc.*)
- **Colors** (*i.e. white, red, black, dark, light, etc.*)
- **Actions** (*i.e. walking, talking, dying, etc.*)
- **Ways of Being** (*i.e. shy, tribal, slippery, dark, angry, etc.*)
- **Objects/Places** (*i.e. mountain, grandmother's house, wallet, calculator, fingers, etc.*)

Each word is full of **inspiration, input and suggestions** for approaching improvisation, and is related to one (or more) of the above spheres.

Each of these categories will have to be approached differently by the musician, who will bring a specific type of creativity into play.

We need this in order to have a clear method that can guide us through the process of creating music while trying to cover all the elements that art needs.

Let's go into more detail:

OBJECTS/PLACES

*are part of the **Spiritual Sphere***

These words evoke images, and many of them probably specific memories and feelings. That is precisely what we must hold on to in order to interpret these words.

I use the place “Grandma's House” a lot, it evokes a clear image and strong feeling: in my case it is Nostalgia, Love, Affection, Cuddles... And that is what I try to put into music.

If I said “Waterfall,” this word has no particular affective meaning for me, so I would focus on what I see, hear and feel when I am in the presence of a waterfall: lots of water noise, fast movement, clear colors, a certain calmness, etc. And then I try to translate these things into music in my own way. If the “Waterfall” is an important place where profound events happened for another musician, he or she will probably interpret it very differently from mine.

The same applies to objects. I take the example of “Computer,” for me this machine is synonymous with technique, technology, complicated stuff. I will play phrases and notes that give me the feeling of complicated in some way.

The interpretation of these words is very subjective; a very free and loose type of creativity is used. It takes inspiration from our sensibility and connection with our being.

ACTIONS and WAYS OF BEING

*are mainly part of the **Bodily Sphere***

Although they also clearly touch the Intellectual and Spiritual spheres, we arrange these two categories under the Bodily Sphere.

When we read these words we must try to get in touch with our body and **feel** the sensations and information it sends us. Then try to translate this experience into music. Here are some examples: "Walking: what do I feel when I walk? The springiness, the steady pace. Maybe I actually play a Walking. Maybe while I'm playing I also start walking around the stage or the venue. To feel clearly what it suggests to me.

"Climbing": tremendous effort, using the muscles of the body. I play straining, maybe going toward the high register.

"Shy" I play very softly, and few notes. I intervene in the improvisation in a timid way.

"Slippery" I can mimic the sliding of a person, some glissato. Or play very legato and soft phrases with lots of vibrato. Maybe with an acid sound.

"Tribal" I hear drums, a steady, ancestral rhythm. Tribal.

The interpretation of these words sometimes starts from the other spheres and then perceives the bodily sphere: imagining oneself doing something before feeling it in the body for example, or using a feeling to experience a sensation.

A type of creativity is used that "mimics," imitating the word in one way or another.

SHAPES e COLORS

*are part of the **Intellectual Sphere***

It means that we approach the word and what it **represents** with our intellect, with rationality. This is precisely why, for these two categories, we have more precise rules on how to approach improvisation:

Legend: M = melody | R = rhythm | H = harmony | T = timbre | D = dynamics

SHAPES touch M and R (tangentially H as well)

A dot is a short note;

A line is a long note, or a melodic line (a succession of connected notes);

A triangle is 3 lines and/or 3 dots: I can repeat a rhythmic and/or melodic cell of three notes, or play 3 notes "a third" apart;

A circle is a line with infinite motion, as if it were a loop, a chasing line;

COLORS touch H and T

Black represents sounds in the low register and/or a dark timbre, suggests a minor key;

White represents sounds in the high register and/or a bright timbre, suggests a major tone;

Colors in the middle can then gradually go from the lowest to the highest register by going from black to white (same for dark to bright timbre).

Colors can also elicit a specific tonality: during my many experiments with varied musicians, I have found that several musicians play in Yellow in D major.

Le Forme ed i Colori possono anche toccare le altre sfere (Spirituale e Corporea), dipende dall'approccio che il musicista adotta per far sì che la sua interpretazione della parola sia in grado di aggiungere qualcosa di sensato e "bello" all'improvvisazione in atto.

As you may have already guessed, D (dynamics) is an element of music that is modulated much more by the other categories of words. Shapes and Colors want to stimulate your intellect more mainly with H, M and R.

Instead, the interpretation of these words has different constraints; a type of obstacle-driven creativity is used here. It takes inspiration from our brain and our ability to analyze. In this case, the more constraints we have, the more our creativity is stimulated.

Although these rules are essential to the success of WORDS improvisation, it is **critical** to understand that you are making music and improvising with other performers. If your musical intuition takes you outside of what the word suggests, follow your intuition. The ultimate goal is the music itself and the creation of "beauty," not a school exercise.

One must always find the **meaning of music**. So here more than ever, **rules are made to be broken**.

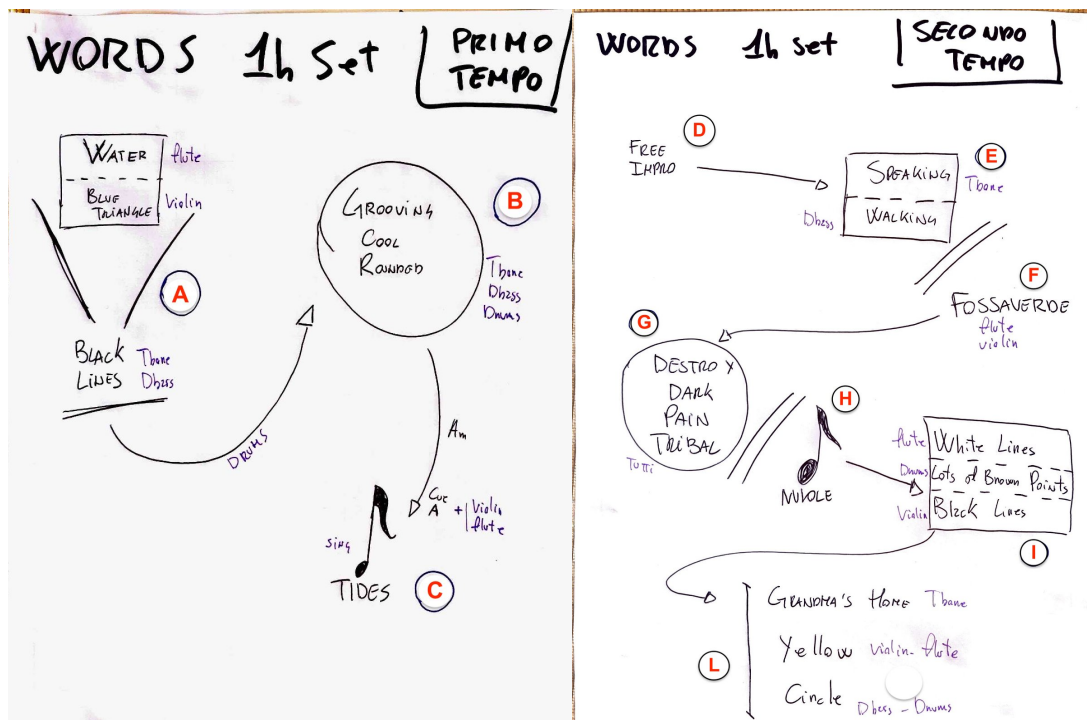
FORM

The last ingredient of the WORDS method is the indispensable **form**.

Having a form of the piece/set is important compositionally to have a beginning, a development and an end. This way musicians will always know where they are coming from, where they are, and where they need to go.

The form of WORDS simply consists of **sections** and **transitions**, which are expressed in various **symbols**.

A WORDS score, with sections and transitions making up the form, looks like this:



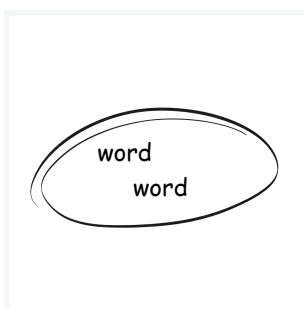
Where **A** is the first section, **B** the second, and so on. Transitions are represented by arrows and lines.

In the “primo tempo” we have 3 sections and 2 transitions, in the “secondo tempo” we have 7 sections and 6 transitions.

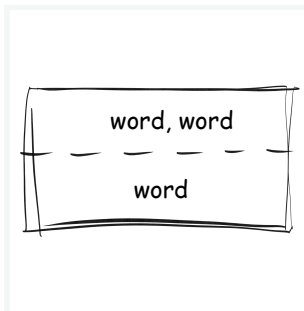
Each section is an improvisation characterized by specific compositional/improvisational elements inspired by the words themselves.

Transition can be defined as that lapse of time where one moves from the improvisational materials of the current section to those of the next section.

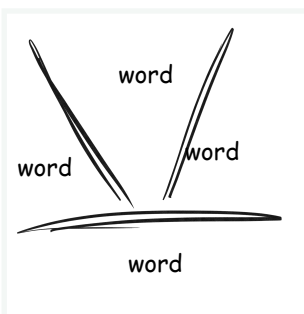
Let's look at the various symbols that represent the **SECTION**:



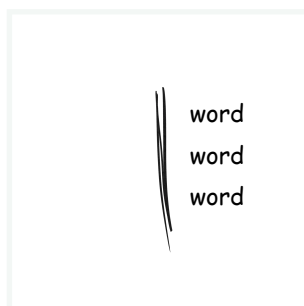
CIRCLE: is an inclusive symbol. Each word expresses meaning and gives improvisational inputs; all words included in the circle combine their meaning and inspirational power. In the circle you can write as many words as you want to create a world, an imagery, inspired by multiple meanings.



RECTANGLE: Instead, it is a dividing symbol. The rectangle can be divided into two or more parts, each part being assigned to a musician (or more than one). Each musician improvises with his own word, knowing that he is communicating with another musician who has a different word, at the same time, with interplay. If you want to eliminate interplay and have two musicians improvising at the same time but without listening to each other, you can add this symbol between spaces: \\
\\



INVERSE PYRAMID: This is a cue system. The word in the middle at the top is assigned to the musician who begins the impro. On call, musicians with the words on the left and right begin, contributing to the 'improvisation already started by the first one. Then the musicians with the word at the bottom are added, adding another layer to the musical world that has probably already been created, confirming and/or developing it.

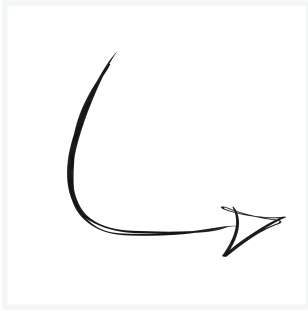


HERARCHIC LINE: gives a depth perspective to the section. Like a painting we will have who is in the front, who is more in the background and who is more in the background. It's like assigning roles to the musicians, whoever has the first word at the top has to come out more, so they will have the melody, the second one will take care of the 'harmony for example, the third one the rhythm, the fourth one the color and timbre, and so on.

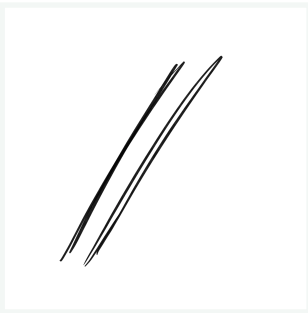


NOTE: It simply indicates the performance of a written piece. In the midst of so much improvisation, sometimes you need something more solid, also to make the listener's attention always active. Generally, the pieces that are performed are very open anyway, and there is a lot of room for improvisation.

Now instead we see the symbols that represent **TRANSITION:**



GRADUAL TRANSITION: you will gradually move from one section to another. Each section will feature composite elements (rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, timbral or whatever). To execute a perfect transition, you need to identify these elements well in the current section, and have in your head (by imagining and improvising them) the elements of the next section. And then slowly move from one section to the next by evolving the musical elements of the first to the second.



CUT TRANSITION: you move from one section to another suddenly, with a sharp cut! Usually, this transition also indicates an impactful ending, not fuzzy but on call all at once. Often there is a stop after this transition to then start with the next section. But the whole thing could also happen very quickly, depending as always on what the music suggests at that moment.

Combining sections and transitions creates the form of the improvised performance. The words inspire the musical material that represents each section and transition.

Words can be assigned, in the preparatory stage of the score, to individual instruments or even to more than one musician; either in sections or in transitions.

Below I offer a few examples to help you understand what you have read so far, and I would like to assure you that **the WORDS method is much easier to intuit than to understand:** a live experience of the method, complemented by oral explanations, is surely the most effective way to understand it and to treasure it for one's own artistic and musical pursuits.

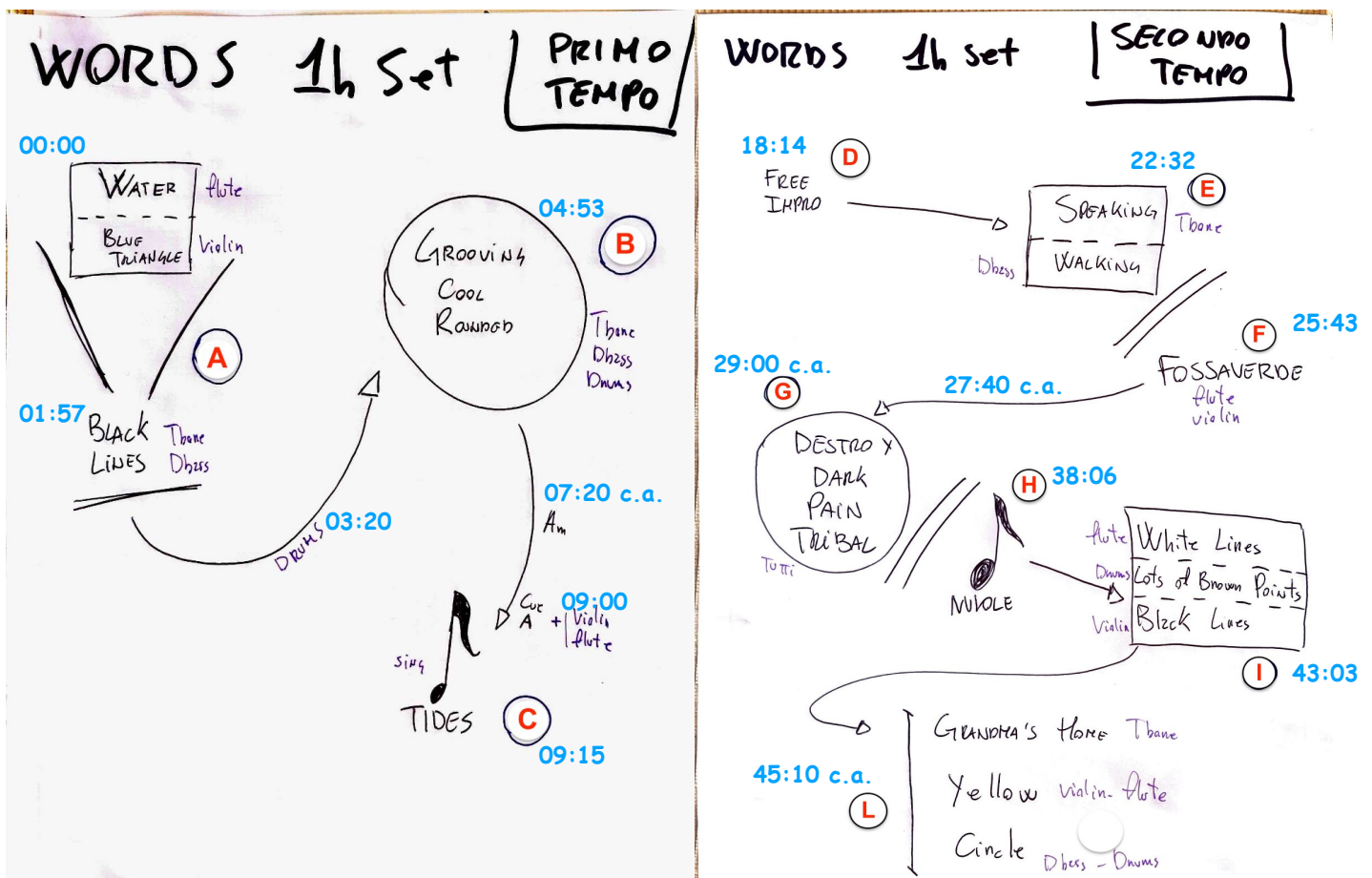
EXAMPLES

I offer the following concert from 04/24/2024 at the "Roode Bioscoop" in Amsterdam. This concert is an excellent example of performance, also contains written pieces and was recorded (video and audio) by professionals.

Concert Roode Bioscoop X Amarte - W O R D S



Below you can see the concert score containing indicative **minute markings** to understand where the various sections and transitions are located.



Another performance that I love immensely, and which I think is an exemplary example of how my method should then influence anyone's musical approach, is the following.

A live performance for the Sudtiroal Jazz Festival (Bolzano): with wind trio formation (trumpet, sax, trombone) we are 3 days hiking in the Dolomites and perform one concert a day.

This is the concert on the last day, the weather is mild, sunny just right, there is a slight breeze, and everyone listens in religious silence. After the concert we return to Bolzano for more concerts.



Grandma's Home - **tbone**

Yellow - **sax&trpt**

Circle - **sax&trpt**

It is the section I call “grandmother's home,” I use it often, it always creates interesting moments. I assigned the first line to the trombone (myself), which will in fact perform a melody inspired by my grandmother's house. Then the second word Yellow (which will influence the harmony and timbre) is assigned to both the sax (Leonardo Rosselli) and the trumpet (Antonio Glazkov Moreno). The same goes for the third line with the word Circle (which instead gives an input of “rhythmic continuity”).

This section is in the middle of the performance, so we come from a rhythmic part, we tar together (as you will hear) and at some point the magic begins.

The most important thing about this example is that Antonio goes against the rules big time!

After I finish my melodic solo the section should end, he feels like continuing though, he wants to have him the melodic part at some point.

This happens at minute 05:13, and if you notice I try to cut it short by playing a clear V - I on the bass at 05:40, but Antonio doesn't give up and at minute 06:08 he takes his beautiful solo, closing the section himself.

Antonio, at that moment, felt an inner need to continue so strongly that he followed his instincts, trusting Leonardo and me both as musicians (with a responsive and sensitive ear) and as humans (with empathy and understanding of the situation).

Somehow the music asked for that additional part, but we are also the ones who made the music ask for it.

