

Combining the Sonic and Textural Elements of Jazz and Classical Music

An analysis of Ralph Towner's genre-bending guitar works through his writing techniques and unique approach to improvisation.

By Carlos Alberto Jiménez
Jazz Performance

McGill University
Schulich School of Music
August 2023

A paper submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of D.Mus. Performance Studies

Table of contents

Abstract	3
<i>English</i>	3
<i>Français</i>	4
Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	6
1- About Ralph Towner	8
From jazz pianist to classical guitarist and prolific composer	8
ECM Records and selected discography	10
2- Combining the sonic and textural elements of jazz and classical music	15
Contextualisation through technical language and idiomatic elements	15
3- Writing styles and influences	19
Etudes and elements of the Second Viennese School	20
Impressionist movement	27
Classical/Romantic.....	29
Jazz forms and structures.....	31
4- Improvisational language	36
Improvisational language: Tradition and innovations.....	36
Mixing Styles	38
Pedagogy: The Ralph Towner book	40
5- The Pianistic influence	44
Bill Evans	44
Playing the guitar with a pianistic approach.....	50
6- Conclusion	52
Bibliography	54
Appendix A.	56
(All transcriptions and arrangements by Carlos Jiménez)	56

Abstract

English

Through stylistic crossovers and innovative approaches to composition and improvisation, Ralph Towner blends idiomatic elements of jazz and classical music and uses effective guitar language to create a unique sonic identity. This research illustrates the essential elements and characteristics in Towner's guitar works by bringing to light how he combines and blends sonic and textural elements from both musical styles. The research also considers instrumental techniques and how the guitar's exclusive mechanical layout and fundamental characteristics are part of his creative process. By investigating his influences and studying his musical language through transcriptions, scores, and recordings, the research probes the essence of his artistic output. The outcome of this research reveals his deep and well-crafted ability to blend two musical worlds into one of the most original voices of the modern jazz guitar. Ralph Towner's music represents the perfect unity between composed and improvised music, where classical aesthetic and textures meet jazz's sense of risk and adventure.

Français

Connu pour ses combinaisons musicales éclectiques, Ralph Towner est un compositeur de renom qui se démarque par sa capacité à fusionner des paramètres idiomatiques du jazz et de la musique classique. La présente recherche met en valeur les éléments clés démontrant un amalgame stylistique de textures et de sons, tant au niveau de l'écriture pour guitare que dans l'improvisation. La recherche s'attarde également aux caractéristiques fondamentales de la guitare, entre autres à travers l'analyse de diverses techniques liées à la mécanique de l'instrument, ainsi qu'aux impacts de celles-ci sur le processus créatif. L'analyse de transcriptions, de partitions et d'enregistrements révèle la capacité unique de Towner à mélanger deux styles musicaux, produisant ainsi l'une des voix les plus originales de la guitare jazz moderne. L'œuvre de Ralph Towner représente l'unité parfaite entre la musique composée et improvisée, où l'esthétique et les textures classiques rencontrent le goût du risque et de l'aventure omniprésents dans le jazz.

Acknowledgements

Pursing doctoral studies has been on my radar for about ten years. I have been interested in developing new skills but mainly deepen my knowledge of composers that have specifically written for guitar in a jazz context. The concept of stylistic crossovers was then a big part of my research, which subsequently lead me to revisit my own classical guitar studies of the late 1990s. I've always had a strong connection with the classical guitar. There is something about the purity of the acoustic sound and the abundance of repertoire that makes it unique. I knew that if I was going to pursue this doctoral project, it would have to be with a primary focus on the classical guitar. My teacher, friend, colleague, and phenomenal classical guitarist Jérôme Ducharme was an extremely resourceful person throughout this whole project. His deep knowledge and impeccable mastery of the repertoire and tradition was not only helpful, but a real steppingstone in this journey. It often felt like I was back at square one as if I was learning a new instrument, which in a certain way, that is exactly what it was. Thank you Jérôme for all your generosity and openness. As I often said during our lessons: *"You're always right!"*. To my research committee, Joe Sullivan, and Lisa Lorenzino, thank you for believing in me and supporting me throughout the whole project. I value your input and comments immensely and feel privileged that you all agreed to be on board in this project. A huge thank you to my close friends and colleagues who were always there to support me, answer my questions, listen to my rants, and give me much-appreciated weekly confidence boosts.

To embark on such an intense adventure in my mid-forties was somewhat of a crazy idea, especially with work schedules and kids at home. Nevertheless, my family is my greatest source of inspiration. My partner Anik has always been there pushing me and giving me confidence in what I do. This adventure only worked out because she had my back since day one. I love you with all my heart.

Carlos Jimenez

Montreal, July 2023

Introduction

Along with harmonic and melodic developments, the jazz language has constantly evolved through new instrumental techniques and stylistic blends. Jazz musicians of all instruments have enhanced the possibilities of both improvisation and composition by combining sonic and textural elements from various styles. These combinations have often resulted in major stylistic expansions, where new sounds and approaches have shaped the new directions in the music. In the early 1970s, the jazz guitar sound started to change as guitarists wanted to detach themselves from the traditional horn-like style of improvisation and explore new techniques and sound possibilities. The idea of mixing styles or simply borrow instrumental ideas and concepts from other genres became an artistic statement and a way to develop a new creative process. Ralph Towner is among these influential musicians whose new compositional and improvisational concepts brought new colors to the world of jazz. This research aims to illustrate the crucial elements and characteristics of Ralph Towner's guitar works by bringing to light how he combines and blends sonic and textural elements of jazz and classical music. Through a study and analysis of his musical language using recordings, video performances, transcriptions, and official scores, the research intends to capture the essence of Ralph Towner's creative process and subsequently establish his contribution within the evolution of jazz guitar. Along with the musical analysis, the research will also consider how the guitar's exclusive mechanical layout and fundamental characteristics are part of Ralph Towner's compositional process, and how instrumental techniques are directly influencing his improvisational concept. As an innovative composer and jazz musician, Ralph Towner's music represents an essential source of material to understand this type of stylistic crossovers.

"Most techniques on the existing instrument have pretty much been done and are tried and true. But honing them in your music is inexhaustible. (...) The classical guitar has a tremendous variety of attacks and sounds built into it. And with all these colors that are available, it really is orchestrating." (Prasad, Ralph Towner Unfolding Stories, 2000).

Over the last three years, I've been studying Ralph Towner's music for solo guitar through recordings, scores, and video performances, which has exposed me to a completely different style of writing and improvisational concept. Jazz musicians are trained to interpret and improvise music from minimal information, like a simple melody over a set form, supported by a clear harmonic progression. Contrastingly, Ralph Towner's compositions are often conceived as through-composed pieces, very much like classical compositions, with very specific performance indications. His improvisational concept is rooted in jazz, with clear connections to traditional language but with obvious influences from other styles and a strong connection to the mechanics of the guitar. The objective is to identify and understand the various elements and sources that he uses in his writing process, as well as making clear connections to other composers or important pieces of the classical guitar repertoire that use similar guitar techniques. His approach to the guitar is often considered as "pianistic", which is certainly connected to his background and therefore helps to understand his unique musical personality.

"As an instrumentalist Towner has shaped distinct languages for his classical and 12-string guitars. He has described his approach to the guitar as pianistic. As a composer he remains a unique force, combining baroque counterpoint, rhythms and melodies inspired by Brazilian music and jazz tradition, and a personal approach to harmony and development." (ECM, s.d.)

1- About Ralph Towner

From jazz pianist to classical guitarist and prolific composer

Ralph Towner is an unusual and unique figure in the jazz world. With close to 80 recordings and multiple collaborations, Towner is an original and important voice of the modern guitar. His compositions cover a wide range of styles, with obvious jazz elements and clear influences from other musical traditions. The trademark or distinctive element of his hybrid style resides in his ability to mix classical and jazz techniques, subsequently creating a unique approach to improvisation.

“All at once, he can offer a baroque stateliness, percussive, odd-meter rhythms and eloquent melodic runs that might disappear within seconds or tell an in-depth story. There’s a lot of music pouring out of that lone guitar.” (Tamarkin, 2019)

Aside from being regarded as an innovator for his musical explorations, Ralph Towner is also known for his major contribution to the solo guitar genre and repertoire, as he has produced a considerable amount of works for solo guitar. His compositions are appealing to both classical and jazz guitarists as they cover a wide range of musical language, technical proficiency, rich sonic textures, engaging harmonic and rhythmic structures, as well as giving the performer substantial material for creative improvisations.

“When I went to Vienna, I was a beginner on the instrument and I had vowed to set my piano-playing aside in order to learn the guitar in the best way possible, with no distractions. I spent the first year in a small room near the city limits practicing an average of eight to nine hours a day, seven days a week for nine months straight. A self-imposed crash course, so to speak. After the first year, I began integrating my piano knowledge into the guitar, strongly influenced by the trio of Evans, Scott LaFaro and Paul Motian.” (Cline, 2017)

Born in Chehalis, Washington, he grew up in a musical family with a mother who taught classical piano and a father who played trumpet. Towner started improvising on the piano at an early age and rapidly developed a strong interest in music. He started trumpet lessons when he was seven years old and eventually played in school bands as a teenager. He ultimately discovered jazz through his brother's record collections of mainly big band music and taught himself to improvise by imitating his favorite players. Later he attended the University of Oregon where he registered as an art student but later transferred to the music department to study composition. His interest for the piano and jazz continued to grow and develop as he eventually heard the Bill Evans trio on recordings, which changed him profoundly and made him decide to seriously devote himself to jazz piano. (Sebastiani, 2023)

"It blew me away to the point where I decided to really pursue the piano. (...) Evans' trio also hit me in a way that was completely mesmerizing and emotional. I wanted to know what it felt like to be in that sphere and play music that way. So, I started to clone Evans' piano style." (Prasad, Ralph Towner Magic and Affirmation, 2017)

During his last year at the University of Oregon, he discovered the classical guitar which quickly turned into a serious fascination for the instrument. Ralph Towner says he didn't find his main instrument until he was twenty-two. Even though he played jazz trumpet during his teenage years and jazz piano at university while pursuing classical composition studies, his focus quickly became the classical guitar. (Harrison, Guitar Talk: Conversations with Visionary Players, 2021)

"I studied classical guitar from then on, fell in love with that instrument very late, and was somehow able to go off to Vienna to this great teacher there. Practicing and studying for two years actually" (Harrison, Guitar Talk: Conversations with Visionary Players, 2021)

Back in the United States in the late 1960s, Ralph Towner became part of the vibrant New York jazz scene and quickly became known for his unique musical style. While still playing

piano and collaborating with major jazz artists like Freddie Hubbard and Stan Getz (Held, 2022), he pioneered playing jazz on classical guitar using classical music techniques. Ralph Towner is an innovator who was able to conceive a new approach to improvisation by combining the sonic and textural elements of jazz and classical music, through instrumental and technical language expressed in a hybrid compositional style for guitar. His personal approach to harmonic and melodic development in improvisation and his combinations of baroque counterpoint, rhythms and melodies inspired by diverse musical traditions make him a leading exponent of modern jazz guitar. His music transcends not only the dualities of jazz and classical styles, but also of composed and improvised music.

“Ralph Towner believes music is something that wills itself into existence. He applies that perspective to his compositional approach that has yielded hundreds of pieces across his solo career and as a member of Oregon.” (Prasad, Ralph Towner Magic and Affirmation, 2017)

ECM Records and selected discography

(Edition of Contemporary Music)

“A different type of fusion, represented by a mixing of jazz and classical music, also emerged as an important movement during the 1970s. The ECM record label, founded in 1969 by Manfred Eicher, would play a major role in promoting this new and, at times, contentious approach. True, there had been many previous fusing of jazz and classical music, (...) but none were so influential and far-reaching in their implications. Whereas most of these earlier attempts had emphasized the compositional and formalist aspects of the music, the ECM artists maintained a commitment to the primacy of improvisation.” (Gioia, The History of Jazz, 2021)

A musician’s ability to pursue their vision, develop their creativity, and present it to an audience is often the result of a strong relationship with a record label. These partnerships can be instrumental for artists in the process of developing their own sonic identity. This is true for Ralph Towner, who has been an ECM artist since the early 1970s

and has built up a unique body of work over the last 50 years. His relationship with the German label is an important factor in his career and shouldn't be neglected as it is a crucial element in Towner's stylistic development and creative process. Ralph Towner's music is often considered as having the *ECM sound* (ECM, 2023), which is a characteristic that most artists on the label get associated with and is a result of the label's vision and aesthetics. Although the label showcases a great stylistic diversity in their roster of artists, there is a certain kind of sonic homogeneity in the music as well as recognisable atmosphere in each recording. As jazz pianist Richie Beirach describes it in an interview about his recording experiences for the label, "*ECM is not a jazz label, it's a contemporary improvised music label, which is very different.*" (IJB, 2019) During the early 1970s, the recording sessions often favored a strong sense of space, crystalline clarity, and meditative atmospheres, which set ECM apart from all other American jazz labels who were still presenting jazz with similar aesthetics as what had been done in the previous decade. This was and still is to some extent a trademark and an artistic statement by the label, as each album can be identified as an ECM release from its opening sounds as it carries the simplistic and subtle qualities typically associated with the label. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, European musicians were starting to detach themselves from the swing driven and blues influenced qualities of the Bebop era and began to embrace stylistic blends in pursuit of a new sound. Producer Manfred Eicher had a vision that was a drastic change from what had been done in jazz recordings and decided to present the music in a more European way, with contemporary sounds, a new approach to improvisations, and a focus on acoustic music. The label's motto "*the most beautiful sound next to silence*", is enough to give the listener an idea that the music on the label has nothing to do with the intense and bold New York jazz scene. In his book *How to Listen to Jazz*, Author Ted Gioia talks about the importance of ECM records and how it contributed to the development of a new approach in jazz through multiple groundbreaking recordings. "*Eicher and his company have championed a wide range of musical styles, and eventually expanded their focus beyond the confines of jazz.*" (Gioia, *How to Listen to Jazz*, 2016)

Ralph Towner's discography on ECM records is quite eclectic and includes a great variety of projects involving various collaborations, always with an emphasis on his original music. These recordings have been significant in demonstrating Towner's versatility, both on guitar and piano, and his ability to compose and adapt his music to various styles and group settings. It has also been a valuable and precious archive for fellow guitarists to study his music, but mainly discover and investigate his ever-evolving approach to jazz improvisation.

Selected discography (ECM, s.d.)

- *Solstice*

The first of Towner's recorded encounters with the European players. *Solstice*, recorded in 1974, belongs to the great early projects of ECM, with a new band formed in the studio. (ECM, s.d.)

Jan Garbarek saxophones / Eberhard Weber bass and cello / Jon Christensen percussions

- *Matchbook*

Features Ralph Towner on classical and 12-string guitars, Gary Burton on vibraphone. An album-of-the-year in US magazine High Fidelity and recipient of a 5-star review in Down Beat, Towner and Burton's *Matchbook* stands up today as a timeless instance of the art of the duo, its vibrant spontaneity still alluring. (ECM, s.d.)

- *Sargasso Sea*

Delightful introduction to the guitar duo of Abercrombie and Towner, whose strikingly different styles prove remarkably compatible. (ECM, s.d.)

- *Batik*

Unique production project bringing together Towner's acoustic guitars with the fleet, elastic bass of Eddie Gomez and the detailed drumming of Jack DeJohnette. (ECM, s.d.)

- *A Closer View*

Towner and Peacock share a deep interest in Bill Evans' music, which manifests itself in the light touch, intricacy and sensitivity that pervade the session. (ECM, s.d.)

- *Chiaroscuro*

With Paolo Fresu on trumpet and flugelhorn. An exciting new duo, of unusual instrumentation initiated by American master guitarist Ralph Towner. (ECM, s.d.)

- *Travel Guide*

An international summit meeting, “Travel Guide” features US guitarist Ralph Towner, Austrian guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel, and Kazakhstan-born and Australia-raised guitarist Slava Grigoryan. What all three guitarists share is a strong feeling for structure, a sense for lyrical improvisation and a feeling for space. (ECM, s.d.)

Nonetheless, his solo guitar recordings are at the center of this research as they have vividly and constantly displayed his ability to combine stylistic, idiomatic, and conceptual elements of two musical traditions. Featuring both the classical and 12-string guitars, Towner has established himself as an accomplished composer and guitarist but also as a skilled improviser who generates rich and complex harmonies with a unique sense of melodic liberty. He is considered by many as an innovator with an inimitable style.

“In a strange way, I often compare the ECM collection of works to a collection of authors’ works. It’s nice to have your entire history on one label. It’s quite unusual, especially to have it all still available. It’s still part of the wonderful, idealistic approach ECM has. And Manfred is a very literary person.” (Prasad, Ralph Towner Unfolding Stories, 2000)

The ECM sound and aesthetic has undoubtedly informed his artistic process as every recording has been presented with a constant high standard of artistic expression. Towner’s albums have the elegance and purity of classical music recordings, with the sense of risk and adventure that can be heard on jazz recordings. This is one of the most important qualities of his discography and his live performances as they capture not only his process as a composer and guitarist, but also his impeccable use of the classical guitar technique and language in service of his improvisation output. The trademarks of ECM

records such as the consistent transparent sound qualities and rich textural atmospheres are essentially springboards for artists like Ralph Towner. The label's visionary signature of presenting multi-genre and transcultural projects with blends of classical, jazz, and contemporary improvised music has undeniably helped artists like Ralph Towner in the establishment of their musical persona. The creative freedom and consistency that Towner has preserved over of the last 50 years has solidified his reputation and has subsequently given him access to a larger audience. His separation from the mainstream jazz sound, as well as a traditional style of playing or repertoire has solidified his access to a wider public. His body of work with the ECM label is a testimony of his relentless desire for experimentation and search for artistic originality.

“His music possesses a balanced and beautiful combination of singable melodic lines, rhythmic drive (...), and harmonic invention that combines the directness of, say, music of the Renaissance with the exhilarating advances of the Impressionist and post-Impressionist composers and with what we generally refer to as jazz harmony”. (Cline, 2017)

2- Combining the sonic and textural elements of jazz and classical music

Starting as a shy acoustic instrument before undergoing an electric transformation, the guitar has reached and earned a very important place in modern music, especially in jazz. As jazz producer and writer Leonard Feather puts it: *“The guitar has seen a greater evolution, both stylistically and in technical development, than any other instrument in jazz.”* (Feather, 1996) Guitar players have contributed to the newness of modern jazz through endless experimentations, generating new sounds and adding new possibilities to the music. Innovations through stylistic blends have also given guitarists many opportunities to borrow instrumental techniques from other genres and mix them with jazz to create new ways of expression. Many modern guitarists have been active participants of this concept, perhaps without realising they were following steps and techniques first introduced by guitarist and prolific composer Ralph Towner, an important instigator of this kind of musical amalgam.

Contextualisation through technical language and idiomatic elements

Defining and contextualizing the concept of blending styles is essential to understand Ralph Towner’s musical identity and creative process. Combining the sonic and textural elements of jazz and classical music is more than just playing a classical instrument in a jazz setting or improvising on a classical piece. Towner’s approach is contemporary and different, making his music hard to label and define. His self-taught jazz approach mixed with a formal classical training on piano, trumpet, guitar, and composition gave Ralph Towner a unique perspective on how to use advanced technical language, but also idiomatic elements from both styles. As an improviser, he changed the traditional parameters by adapting a jazz concept to new repertoire that embraced the compositional and instrumental aesthetics of classical music, thus creating a new and unique voice. Both his writing and performances share legitimate stylistic qualities from both genres, without losing a sense of identity or intention. Towner’s body of work is a refined creative process and approach to improvisation where jazz is simultaneously

influenced by advanced instrumental techniques and a deep knowledge and mastery of both styles. As mentioned in chapter one, Towner never really considered the guitar, let alone making it his main instrument, until he was 22 years old while already having advanced skills and professional experience as a jazz pianist. His foundational training in composition and instrumental techniques came to him as a pianist.

“I wanted to become a composition student and shifted to piano, later also incorporating a guitar focus. That’s what I am: a piano player who plays guitar. It’s always been my approach to the instrument.” (Prasad, Ralph Towner: Sense and Sensitivity, 2010)

But as he decided to fully dedicate himself to the classical guitar, idiomatic techniques became an important part of his musical expression. Through classical guitar techniques, Towner managed to craft a style that used a large spectrum of tone colors and a wide range in dynamics. In today’s reality, electric guitar players have access to a vast selection of effects, amps, and software to alter their sound in both live and recording situations. However, in the late 1960s, jazz guitar was still in development and the focus was mainly on developing language rather than experimenting with sound. It did eventually change but more coming out of the jazz and rock experimentations of the 1970s. Ralph Towner’s commitment to the guitar’s technical language led him to take complete advantage of the instrument’s limitations and capacities. Fingerstyle techniques involving nail shaping for specific sounds as well as exploring diverse attacks for different tone colors are an integral part of his playing, but also his writing. The polyphonic qualities of classical guitar writing certainly influenced his writing but also his improvisations.

“The classical technique got the most sound, the most colors and articulation. When I studied the classical guitar, all I played was classical music and I tried to stay away from improvising.”

(Menasché, 2020)

Jazz guitar is traditionally played on electric instruments and uses mostly language developed by horn players. (Berliner, 1994) However, Ralph Towner developed a unique

way of expression by using both technical and stylistic elements rarely used in traditional jazz. To fully understand his approach of stylistic blends, and how much the mechanical layout of the guitar is a part of his writing and improvisation concept, it is imperative to consider Towner's inclusive and open-minded attitude in music. Just a quick look at the variety of projects he's been involved with since the early 1970s is enough to see how Towner is no stranger to musical blends and experimentations. But his music involves a different type of interactive playing that is based on dynamic variations and sound explorations rather than on the harmonic and melodic liberties that jazz players often display while performing. There is an inherent "classical" character to Towner's sound, both in the delivery and the general energy of his music.

This type of musical aesthetic is not typical of jazz but is certainly becoming a new territory to explore as musicians are starting to blend and borrow elements from various musical styles. Jazz guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel who plays with a deep mastery of the traditional jazz language, doesn't shy away from his classical music influences, both in his writing and playing. Like Towner, his wide range of dynamics and various techniques to generate colors and tones on classical guitar is not a typical choice for mainstream straight-ahead jazz but rather a result of consciously blending styles and aesthetics. It enhances the sonic possibilities and gives a unique character and personality to the music.

"The classical guitar is so satisfying. It's a fantastic instrument for writing because you have such a clear response in terms of resonance, which is not as strong on the electric guitar. Everything you write in terms of polyphonic material works on acoustic guitar and will work with a string trio or anything similar because you hear the overtones. As a composer, I try to control these colors and see if they fit together. And that's something that is so great on a good classical guitar, because that aspect is amplified." (Muthspiel, 2023)

Despite Towner's strong statement *"I'm a piano player who plays guitar"*, it is fair to say to his music is genuinely guitar music. The writing style and the required performance techniques are fundamentally rooted in classical guitar. This could be seen as the guitar's

limitations but in Ralph Towner's case, it's more about being specific. His musical relationship with the specificity of the guitar, along with his unique ability to combine stylistic languages has shaped his music into an unmistakable sound.

3- Writing styles and influences

“Towner is among the most intriguing guitarists, and among the most unusual jazzmen to have emerged in recent years.” (Mitchell & Sallis, "Ralph Towner, A Chorus of Inner Voices" *The Guitar In Jazz, An Anthology*, 1996)

Ralph Towner often credits the virtuoso classical guitarist Julian Bream (1933-2020) as an important influence for his demonstrations of sonic possibilities and textural range of the guitar. Discovering the 1967 ground-breaking album entitled *20th Century Guitar* (Bream, 1967) was a defining moment of his career, that fuelled his passion and dedication for the instrument as well as for the repertoire. While studying at the Vienna Academy of Music with renowned professor Karl Scheit, Towner was exposed to a large amount of classical guitar music. As he spent countless hours studying and working on the assigned pieces, which were essentially etudes, Renaissance Lute music and Baroque transcriptions, he learned about the principals and fundamental elements of classical guitar technique. (Held, 2022)

This deep immersion in the repertoire as a student and performer inevitably influenced his compositional process. It enhanced his ability to exploit the instrument's wide dynamic range, the possibilities of various tone colors, and the different types of attacks and articulations on classical guitar. In the following years, Ralph Towner made his mark as an innovative guitarist and composer. Important career decisions like moving back to New York city to work as a jazz pianist in 1968 or signing a record contract with ECM records in 1972, followed by the release of his first solo album *Solo Concert* in 1979, helped him gain recognition among other rising musicians of the scene. His reputation as a guitarist and composer kept growing and eventually solidified as he multiplied collaborations with groups like the *Paul Winter Consort, Oregon* which he co-led with Paul McCandless, Glenn Moore and Collin Walcott, or his guest appearance on *Weather Report's* 1972 album *I Sing the Body Electric*. Consequently, Towner's contribution as a composer has always been multidimensional as he has written music for various

ensembles of diverse instrumentations. Furthermore, his large collection of solo guitar works has been well documented through official scores and other publications and demonstrates the numerous influences within his writing techniques. Ralph Towner has written many through-composed pieces, with no added improvised sections, that can be compared to the writing styles of other composers. Guitarist Nels Cline describes this as the combination of *“the directness of, say, music of the Renaissance with the exhilarating advances of the Impressionist and post-Impressionist composers.”* (Cline, 2017) Ralph Towner often cites the impact of other composer’s works on his own process. Perhaps not in a direct and obvious way, but his compositions have some elements of many contemporary composers, as well as noticeable aspects of the impressionistic movement, and even some Renaissance and Baroque writing styles.

“I was familiar with these composers, as well as Schoenberg, Webern, Stravinsky, and many others, having gotten a diploma in music composition before embarking on the study of the guitar in Vienna. The diploma wasn’t exactly a goal for me, but the exposure to more complex 20th-century music in my composition studies was invaluable.” (Cline, 2017)

Etudes and elements of the Second Viennese School

Through analysis of his solo guitar works, one can observe how other composers’ ideas and concepts have influenced his musical world. There is a direct association and stylistic resemblance in his Etudes (technical studies) with classical guitar repertoire. Traditionally, an *Etude* is a short composition that is designed to solidify a specific technical skill. Ralph Towner has written a series of Etudes for solo guitar that focus on specific skills to enhance the control of various possible tone colors, as well as for developing multiple techniques to gain flexibility with melodic and rhythmic inflections. For example, his etudes have technical elements akin to those used by composers like Villa Lobos and Leo Bower, two major figures in classical guitar repertoire. Without being too obvious in their similarities, especially since nothing indicates that Towner was specifically being influenced by the works of other composers, many elements of these etudes carry the

musical content often included by these types of pieces. Moreover, atonality and intentional dissonance are also important elements in Ralph Towner's music, especially the etudes and some short pieces for solo guitar. There is an obvious influence from composers like Arnold Schoenberg and his pupils, Anton Webern, and Alban Berg, the main actors in the development of this musical movement. Their music was often characterized by its expanded tonality concepts, chromaticism, lack of firm tonal centers, angular melodic contours, as well as the use of the serial twelve-tone technique. (Neighbour, Griffiths, & Perle, 1983) In a unique and compelling way, Ralph Towner succeeds at incorporating these contemporary elements into his writing, resulting into a series of well-crafted, intriguing, and engaging series short pieces.

1- The Hollows

With an unusual melodic geometry and mysterious harmonies, this composition is an arpeggio study that requires varying the distance between the right hand and the bridge of the guitar to generate multiple tone colors as well as contrasts with dynamics. It also requires that the arpeggios are played as separate lines as opposed to broken chords without letting the notes ring or sustain. In the second section of this piece which starts at measure 32, Towner uses a writing technique akin to one used by Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos in his etude no5. Both compositions have a similar three-dimensional structure as an ostinato figure interacts with both the melody and bass patterns. In both cases, the ostinato figure stays in the middle part and act as an anchor, from which the melody and bass parts can either stay static or move. It's interesting to see how Villa-Lobos uses development and movement in the bass part while Towner keeps the movement in the melody while maintaining a grounding bass line. Example 1 demonstrates the similarities between both composers in their writing techniques.

Example 1.

Ralph Towner - *The Hollows*

The musical score for Ralph Towner's *The Hollows* is presented in three staves. The first staff features a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a melodic line and a bass line. Annotations include 'ostinato figure' (a dashed line under the first two measures of the bass line), 'static bass pattern' (a dashed line under the first two measures of the bass line), 'melody' (a bracket over the first two measures of the treble line), and 'ostinato continued' (a dashed line under the last two measures of the bass line). The second staff continues the piece, with 'melodic development' (a bracket over the last two measures of the treble line) and 'ostinato figure development' (a dashed line under the last two measures of the bass line). The third staff shows a 'new ostinato figure continued' (a dashed line under the first two measures of the bass line).

Heitor Villa-Lobos - *Etude n.5*

The musical score for Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Etude n.5* is presented in three staves. The first staff features a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a melodic line and a bass line. Annotations include 'static melodic statement' (a bracket over the first two measures of the treble line), 'fixed ostinato figure' (a dashed line under the first two measures of the bass line), and 'developed bass pattern' (a dashed line under the last two measures of the bass line). The second staff continues the piece, with 'melodic development' (a bracket over the last two measures of the treble line) and 'developed bass pattern' (a dashed line under the last two measures of the bass line). The third staff shows a 'developed bass pattern' (a dashed line under the first two measures of the bass line).

Leo Brouwer - *Danza Caracteristica*

The image displays three staves of musical notation for Leo Brouwer's *Danza Caracteristica*. The first staff is annotated with "cell 1" above the first measure and "repetition and slight variation" above the second measure. Below the first staff, a dashed line indicates a "bass pattern" consisting of a sequence of notes. The second staff is annotated with "repetition continued" above the first measure and "bass pattern" below the first measure. The third staff features a trill-like passage marked "arm VII" above the final measure.

3- The Juggler's Etude

Ralph Towner's *The Juggler's Etude* contains two arpeggio techniques, one of sustained broken-chord effects, and one of non-sustained chords for accented melodic passages with strong rhythmic drive. To properly execute the chordal outlines as a melodic sequence, the performer must lift the appropriate left-hand finger from each note the instant the successive note is played. The balance between the two arpeggio techniques throughout the piece is an effective way of changing the textures but also of showcasing a variety of melodic writing. Similar techniques can be heard in works by composer Leo Brouwer, as he often uses innovative and unique approaches in his compositions, which are a trademark of his writing style. There is a strong rhythmic element in both composer's approaches. Brouwer's series of etudes, *Estudios Sencillos*, offer a wide range of technical and textural possibilities. Etude no. 9 is a great example where he uses similar slurs as used by Towner to provide rhythmic contour and melodic drive. Both use combinations of triads with open strings, surrounded by chromatic notes and supported by a low sustained pedal tone, from which the melodic passages can be played with accents and definition. There are also harmonic elements suggesting polytonality as

different triads are superimposed against the pedal tone. Example 3 demonstrates the similarities between both composers in their writing techniques.

Example 3.

Ralph Towner - *The Juggler's Etude*

The first system of notation includes the following annotations: "let ring" above the staff, "open string triad" with a dashed line over the first two measures, "F maj", "Emin", and "G maj" below the staff, and "pedal tone" below the bass staff. The second system is marked "marcato" and includes the annotation "slurs and chromaticism on melody" above the staff and "F#maj" below the bass staff. The third system is marked "let ring" above the staff.

Leo Brouwer - *Estudios Sencillos IX*

The first system includes the annotations "let ring" above the staff, "chromatic approach to triad" above the staff, "open strings" below the staff, and "pedal tone" below the bass staff. The second system includes "accented melody with chromatic clusters" above the staff and "new rhythmic pattern in the bass" below the bass staff. The third system includes "Gmaj" below the bass staff.

4- The Lizards of Eraclea

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the influence of the Second Viennese School and its innovative approach is also noticeable in Towner's writing. His usage of atonality, angular melodic contours, and chromaticism often gives an extra modern character to his etudes as it demonstrates his ability to work with multiple writing techniques. Example 4 is an excerpt of a piece entitled *The Lizards of Eraclea*, which offers a clear example of this type of compositional language that contributes to the already wide range of musical colors that make Ralph Towner's a strong contemporary voice for the guitar. The melody is constructed using a combination of major and minor triads that are sequenced in wide intervallic leaps, interjected with chromatic enclosures as each chord is heard.

Example 4.

Ralph Towner - *The Lizards of Eraclea*

The musical score for Example 4 consists of three staves of music in 8/8 time. The first staff (measures 89-92) features a melody with wide intervallic leaps and chromatic enclosures. Chord labels above the staff are C, Ab, C, G#m, and C. A dashed line connects the notes of the C chord in measure 92 to the notes of the G#m chord in measure 93, with the annotation "the bass suggests a Gaug triad" below it. The second staff (measures 93-96) continues the melody with chord labels C, Ab, C, and G#m. The third staff (measures 97-100) features a more rhythmic melody with chord labels Fm, G#m, Fm, and Em.

Impressionist movement

Ralph Towner's harmonies are an important trademark of his music as they often carry key elements of the numerous influences that have shaped his music since the early 1970s. Along with the constant and efficient rhythmic drive of his etudes, the instantly recognizable Towner character or mood is often the result of his unusual, at times mysterious, but always rich harmonies. Instrumentally, the piano influence is obvious in his music. His formal years as a pianist combined with his university studies in classical composition exposed him to contemporary piano music and eventually led him to the influence of the impressionist musical movement. Many Classical music composers of the 19th and 20th century exploited techniques which focused on moods and atmospheres, sometimes generated by unexpected harmonic colors. (Bernstein, 1961)

Through his explorations with the guitar's technical parameters, Towner managed to translate these sounds to the guitar with his unorthodox techniques and unique usage of open strings for chordal constructions. Compositions like *The Pendant* and *Turning of the Leaves* are notable examples of such unconventional harmonic qualities often present in Ralph Towner's music. Always guided by a strong and clear melodic statement, these pieces offer dense harmonic structures that can sometimes seem disconnected or unrelated to the melody, but ultimately support and enrich the lyrical qualities of the piece. Towner also uses those harmonic structures as vehicles for his melodic inventions, subsequently creating new improvisational language. Example 5 demonstrates some harmonic ideas illustrating Ralph Towner's unique colors and sounds for chord voicings as well as his use of repetition in both melodic contour and accompaniment patterns.

Example 5.

Ralph Towner - *The Pendant*

*Repeated rhythmic pattern in the accompaniment throughout the piece

The musical score consists of four systems of music, each with specific annotations:

- System 1:** Features a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The notes are grouped into chords. Annotations include "contrary motion in the inner voices" (indicated by a dashed line over the inner notes) and "repeated bass pedal supporting different harmonic colors" (indicated by a dashed line under the bass notes).
- System 2:** Labeled "lyrical melody". It includes the following chord annotations: G#m/A, G/A, Em/A \flat , and G#m9. A note is marked "let ring". An annotation "*open strings chord" points to a specific chord. Below the system, it says "static bass with chromatic movement in the chords".
- System 3:** Includes chord annotations: Em(maj7)/G, Em9(maj7), G#m9, and G#m9. A note on the second staff is marked "same chords different bass".
- System 4:** Labeled "chromatic descending melody and harmony". It includes chord annotations: G#m/F, G/B \flat , A \flat \circ /E \flat , and G \circ /E \flat or E \flat 7(\flat 9). The last chord is marked "*incomplete chords". Below the system, it says "static bass".

Ralph Towner - *Turning of the Leaves*

The image displays five systems of musical notation for the piece "Turning of the Leaves" by Ralph Towner. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a bass line. The notation includes various chords and melodic phrases, with several annotations:

- System 1:** Labeled "lyrical melody" above the staff. Chords include F#°/E, E maj9, F#°/E, and E maj9. Below the staff, it says "repeated bass pedal supporting different harmonic colors".
- System 2:** Chords include Eb7alt, G#m9, B 7/F#, G#m/F or F°, and G#°/A# or Bb7(b9). Annotations include "*triads over basses" and "*II V motion".
- System 3:** Labeled "lyrical melody" above the staff. Chords include B°/A, A maj9, F°/A, and A maj9. Below the staff, it says "repeated bass pedal supporting different harmonic colors".
- System 4:** Chords include G#sus, G#m, A#°, and D#7b9(b13). An annotation "*II V motion" is present.
- System 5:** Chords include Ab, Ab9sus, Ab, and Ab9sus. Below the staff, it says "repeated bass pedal supporting different harmonic colors".

A bracket on the left side of the first two systems is labeled "similar idea different key".

Classical/Romantic

Other compositions in Ralph Towner's body of work have elements of the Classical and Romantic periods. These pieces are constructed with harmonies, structures, and technical requirements that are reminiscent of stylistic approaches use by famous guitar composers like Fernando Sor and Francisco Tárrega. With techniques like clear tonal centers, parallel movements between the melody and the bass, steady accompaniment patterns, lyrical melodies, and simple structures, Towner demonstrates his versatility using an approach akin to this era of guitar writing. Even though these pieces are written specifically for guitar, there is often a sense of transcending the instrument as the writing doesn't focus exclusively on the guitar's technical language. In other words, these pieces could easily

be played on piano for example, as their textures and overall characters involve a lyrical melody supported by a steady accompaniment part. Some of these compositions are short in their structure with simple, diatonic, and consonant melodies unlike his more modern style of writing. A good example is a composition entitled *The Reluctant Bride*, which has elements akin to the writing style of Spanish composer, Francisco Tárrega. The 3/4 meter with the *half note - quarter note* melodic pattern in parallel motion with the bass, supported by a syncopated accompaniment is in Towner's words:

"a straight-forward classical mode much in the style of Tárrega." (Towner, Solo Guitar Works Volume 1, 2002)

Example 6.

Ralph Towner - *The Reluctant Bride*

parallel motion in melody and bass

consonant melody: targets the 3rd of each chord

steady rhythmic figure for accompaniment

Francisco Tárrega - *Lagrima*

parallel motion in melody and bass

consonant melody: targets the 3rd of each chord

steady rhythmic figure for accompaniment

Jazz forms and structures

Despite his distinct association with classical guitar writing techniques, Ralph Towner has written many pieces that are inspired by jazz forms and popular structures in their conception. Even though his compositional versatility is prominent through a wide range of stylistic approaches, Ralph Towner is ultimately a jazz musician whose works can provide significant materials and options for improvisation. Whether playing one of his technical studies with atonal flavors or an impressionistic piece with dense and dark harmonic colors, Towner always demonstrates his jazz instincts by delivering adventurous and fearless improvised solos on both live and recorded performances. This duality has enriched and solidified his reputation as a composer and a performer, but also as an improviser and a jazz musician. For this reason, his music has been studied, analysed, and performed by classical and jazz musicians as it fulfills both styles' artistic and creative outputs.

Exploring his discography is an excellent way to contextualise his writing and improvisational techniques. Along with his through-composed works, his recordings include many projects with un-apologetic jazz inclinations with improvisation and interplay as the main intentions. Ralph Towner's compositions often exhibit a deep sense of harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic freedom through open forms and intense improvised interactions between the musicians. Early recordings like *Matchbook* (1974), *Batik* (1978), or *Old Friends New Friends* (1979) have a clear sense of jazz interplay. The repertoire sets up the general mood of the music and generates intense and spontaneous interactions between the band members. The more intimate instrumental settings of later recordings often feature repertoire that is perhaps more involved harmonically and leads to different improvisations and interaction possibilities. Symmetrical structures, elements of the blues language, diatonic and modal harmonic progressions, all are part of Ralph Towner's compositional arsenal and contribute to expand the language. These musical tools have enhanced his improvisational concepts and have helped him re-invent his compositions for each performance, which is an essential element of jazz music.

The following is a detailed list of 10 compositions by Ralph Towner that best represent the jazz side of his writing. Even though some of these pieces could be arranged and performed as short through-composed solo pieces, their construction reveals an intention for improvisation and group interplay. Structurally and harmonically, the writing techniques are jazz influenced and provide the performer with rich material for melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic inventions.

Refer to **appendix A** for full transcriptions

1- Creeper

(Transcription and arrangement: Carlos Jimenez, 2021)

Creeper follows an unusual but effective concept of using a different structure for the solo section (24 measures) than for the melody (32 measures). The melody is written in two parts, using rhythmic displacement that is transposed over four different keys. The last section is seven measures long with a variation of the main melody, still using a similar rhythmic displacement idea but with a new time signature. The harmonic structure is a simple progression of parallel minor 7th chords, moving in thirds or whole steps.

2- Haunted

(Transcription and arrangement: Carlos Jimenez, 2023)

Haunted is a short AABA form that utilizes superimposed major and minor triads over consonant and dissonant basses, creating an effect of polytonality (Fmin/A or G#min/A). Towner uses the open “A” string of the guitar as a pedal point to move unrelated triads but connects them to a very strong melody with repeated melodic cells and rhythmic patterns. There are interesting blends of both jazz and classical styles, incorporating writing techniques like polyphony and counterpoint, but also providing a good structure for improvisation through unusual harmonies.

3- Hat And Cane

(Transcription and arrangement: Carlos Jimenez, 2023)

Hat And Cane is structured as a jazz piece following an AABA form, which uses a harmonic progression that offers quite unique choices for improvisation. The A sections are constructed

with the idea of moving major triads over all the open bass strings of the guitar (E, A, D). The B section has more of a jazz sound as it moves through descending minor chords in whole steps. There's also a very effective rhythmic idea in the A sections which superimposes quarter note triplets and half-note triplets in 4/4 time with a straight feel. The rest of the piece is played with a swing feel. The soloing section is slightly different as it employs a different number of measures for each section, and a simplified harmonic structure.

4- I Knew It Was You

(Transcription and arrangement: Carlos Jimenez, 2021)

I Knew It Was You is a composition based on a recurrent rhythmic pattern, transposed in three different key centers, while supporting a repeated melodic idea. It is like an ostinato figure, functioning as a grounding structure from which a lyrical melody emerges. The piece has many elements of jazz harmony but also crosses over to different styles such as Brazilian music with rhythmic elements of inspired by samba.

5- Mingusiana

(Transcription and arrangement: Carlos Jimenez, 2023)

Mingusiana is a tribute to jazz bassist and composer Charles Mingus. Like many of Mingus' blues compositions, this piece doesn't follow a strict blues form but has clear references to the blues. Towner utilizes dense dominant 7th chords to support a rather simple and floating melody made of dotted half-notes moving in descending intervals, which is also embellished by a quarter note contrapuntal line in the chordal accompaniment. The harmonic density of the main form is followed by an interlude consisting of a repeated F# pedal point, changing the overall atmosphere of the piece.

6- Raffish

(Transcription and arrangement: Carlos Jimenez, 2023)

The main concept in this composition is superimposed rhythmic patterns. *Raffish* is written in two sections with ostinatos on both the melody and the bass figure going against each other. There is an interesting rhythmic displacement effect as the melody and the bass pattern suggest different meters. This piece uses specific guitar techniques where multiple parts are interacting with each other. The harmony of the first section takes advantage of the guitar's tuning in fourths as the

chords are all written using quartal harmony. The second section presents new rhythmic patterns with more complex harmonies to support a more lyrical melodic statement.

7- The Prowler

(Transcription and arrangement: Carlos Jimenez, 2021)

This composition emphasizes both melodic and rhythmic contrasts. *The Prowler* is an AABA form that is structured around a repeated harmonic pattern using two chords (A sections), and a chromatic movement of Dominant 7th chords (B section). The A section functions more as an open “vamp”, which in jazz terms means a repeated chord progression or rhythmic figure, while the B section has an active and elaborate melody transposed through different key centers.

8- Tramonto

(Transcription and arrangement: Carlos Jimenez, 2021)

Tramonto (sunset in Italian), is a jazz ballad that combines a lyrical melody with a modern harmonic structure. The melody is supported by colorful harmonies with both modal and tonal elements. The development happens through a repeated melodic cell, pedal points, inverted chords, and parallel chordal movements using open strings and specific guitar voicings.

9- Trellis

(Transcription and arrangement: Carlos Jimenez, 2022)

There is an overall modernistic approach to this composition as it combines a rather mysterious melody with dark and floating harmonies. Ralph Towner often explores the colors of triads over consonant and dissonant basses in his writing, and this piece is a notable example of that technique. Through pedal points and a non-standard form, *Trellis* develops into an unusual form and unconventional harmonies that are akin to the sounds of the modal jazz explorations of the 1970s.

10- Very Late

(Transcription and arrangement: Carlos Jimenez, 2021)

Ralph Towner often credits Bill Evans as one of his biggest musical influences. Towner’s *Very Late* shares many structural, harmonic, and melodic ideas with Evans’ composition entitled *Very Early*. Aside from the obvious play on words in the title, *Very Late* is also written in an A-B structure and

has two melodic ideas with variations. Towner uses eight measure phrases to develop his melodies and utilizes a harmonic structure that is based on repeated chord types, like minor 7th chords in parallel motion. *Very Late* is a jazz waltz that moves through various tonal centers and offers a real challenge for melodic improvisation.

4- Improvisational language

“The usefulness of expanding these musical qualities or techniques is analogous to the development of an extended vocabulary. The function of the vocabulary is not necessarily to increase the amount of verbiage to be used, but to extend the range of choices available from your expressive palette.” (Towner, *Improvisation and Performance Techniques for Classical and Acoustic Guitar*, 1985)

Improvisational language: Tradition and innovations

Despite all the influences that inform his music, Ralph Towner’s compositions are created with a complete mastery of idiomatic elements from the classical guitar tradition. Nevertheless, his music has a definite jazz sensibility, always combining a strong rhythmic drive with a sophisticated approach to improvisation. His early years as a jazz pianist absorbing the innovative and interactive jazz improvisation concepts of the Bill Evans trio surely gave him the foundational elements for his own approach. That conceptual influence of the piano in Towner’s playing is omnipresent but his music is ultimately a result of superior knowledge of guitar techniques. As certain things are just impossible to transfer from the piano to the guitar, Ralph Towner has succeeded at adapting pianistic concepts and develop a rich and complex harmonic language that was not part of the current jazz guitar sound of the 1960s. The idea of a common jazz language guided by a more traditional approach was somewhat challenged in the early-mid 1960s, as new players and composers introduced a new jazz language and slowly started to depart from the bebop horn-influenced melodies. Through musical blends, stylistic experimentations, and innovative instrumental techniques, jazz became synonymous with individual creativity and subsequently grew into the perfect pretext for crafting a unique and personal sonic identity.

“In addition to my classically styled technique, the music that I’m playing is very keyboard oriented. I treat the guitar quite often like a piano trio; if I’m playing alone, it’s often a one-man band approach. I seldom run these voices through simultaneously, although that’s the illusion.

Each part of the music gets my attention as it's going by, which it does at quite a rapid rate."
(Mitchell & Sallis, "Ralph Towner, A Chorus of Inner Voices" *The Guitar In Jazz, An Anthology*,
1996)

In his improvised solos, Ralph Towner uses the conventional routines of jazz, which consist of stating the melody, improvising over the form, re-stating the melody, and perhaps adding a little improvised musical conclusion. With his fingerstyle approach he utilizes techniques that are specific to the guitar and directly influenced by his classical training. For example, there are many polyphonic movements and contrapuntal textures as well as various techniques like rest strokes, free strokes, tremolo, and other combinations of left-hand slurs that make his playing different. Even though he does often play single lines like most guitar players, Towner often develops his melodic improvisations on a single string horizontally rather than playing vertically through the fingerboard positions. This allows for possible open bass strings to be added and give harmonic support to the melodic inventions, and also keeps an equal tone quality as the melody is kept on one string. Another technique which quite rare on electric guitar is that Towner often slurs fretted notes to open strings in first position. This allows for fast and efficient position shifts and creates an interesting rhythmic effect. He also uses percussive sounds and prepared guitar techniques like putting a piece of paper under the strings to create an African harp sound. Most of these techniques can be found in classical guitar repertoire and are used by guitarists as tools for expression, which is not something that is done on electric guitar in a jazz context, primarily for sonic reasons but also for stylistic reasons. Tone colors and sound explorations are not as present in jazz as improvisation focuses more on what is being played over the chord changes. Towner's solo guitar style allows him a greater liberty with improvisational techniques since he isn't limited by the sound of a group or a stylistic direction. Even though his music is composed and arranged, his technical facility on the guitar allows him a great deal of spontaneity in his improvisations as he uses the guitar to its full potential. Much like any accomplished jazz improviser, his style covers a full range of harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic ideas as well as a wide spectrum of colors, textures, and dynamics.

“The usual canard about a classical approach to improvised music prattles on about a loss of spontaneity, a dry and sterile attitude. (...) To me, there’s nothing to be uptight where a jazz player is concerned about being classically trained or influenced. On the contrary, it’s a technique, in a way, of being able to make really fine discriminations and articulation in playing.”

(Mitchell & Sallis, "Ralph Towner, A Chorus of Inner Voices" *The Guitar In Jazz, An Anthology*, 1996)

Mixing Styles

Today, many stylistic blends can be observed in various musical cultures. Jazz has influenced a great number of musicians and composers from other countries and has created interesting crossover genres where improvisation meets composition and specific forms. For example, many Brazilian musicians will use jazz influenced techniques and language and add improvised sections on traditional music like choro or samba. The influence of other musical styles has always been an important part of the development of jazz. The Jazz Fusion era (sometimes called Jazz Rock) of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s is often regarded as a transitional period where artists like Miles Davis, Larry Coryell, John McLaughlin, or Gary Burton pushed the boundaries of jazz and introduced new ideas and concepts creating a detachment from the tradition. (Berliner, 1994) This period is often regarded as a moment in jazz history where the guitar flourished and developed into a unique and important voice of modern music. It had the sound of the overdriven rock guitar, with the melodic and harmonic sophistication of jazz. It subsequently brought a new way of improvising as the more traditional jazz language was slowly enhanced with new sounds. The jazz language can now be examined or analyzed from different angles and styles, as well as different countries and traditions.

Ralph Towner’s music is a perfect example of mixing styles. While being strongly influenced by the classical guitar tradition, his compositions are structured and designed with multiple components of modern jazz writing that consequently serve modern improvisation concepts and approaches. His compositions are often perceived as being a

perfect blend of classical architecture and jazz philosophy, where composed and improvised music meet through stylistic crossover. From a repertoire point of view, his pieces are conceived as solo guitar pieces and many classical guitar players have performed his compositions in recitals, omitting the improvisation sections. Ralph Towner always includes improvisation in concerts and recordings, using the repertoire as a vehicle for spontaneous inventions as he interprets the melody, improvises on the form, or perhaps adds an improvised prelude, interlude, or conclusion.

The idea of mixing styles is at the center of this research. Prior to Ralph Towner, the jazz guitar had a specific sound and role. It followed the natural evolution of jazz through the development of improvisational language and repertoire. Guitarists essentially followed the trends by adapting new concepts to their playing and learning the popular songs as all other instrumentalists did. One of Ralph Towner's major innovation as a jazz musician, and consequently as a guitarist with a classical training, is that he was able to use the classical guitar technique and repertoire in a jazz context. Most guitar players of that era used electric instruments played with a plectrum and none of them had played jazz on a classical guitar using the classical technique. Up to that point, late 1960s early 1970s, many versions of jazz influenced styles were being discovered as musicians started to insert jazz concepts into other styles of music as well as blending various musical traditions. A good example is the *Mahavishnu Orchestra* formed in 1971 by English guitarist John McLaughlin which essentially blended jazz concepts with Indian classical music and rock elements. (Berliner, 1994) Most of these experimentations involved playing traditional and newer concepts within a new musical context. The language developed in the 1960s was still being used but with a different musical background and feel. What's unique about Ralph Towner's innovations is that he essentially uses the classical guitar language with a jazz approach. This means applying to jazz improvisation diverse polyphonic techniques and interpretation aesthetics that are usually associated with classical guitar repertoire. For many guitar players, it sounds as if he is improvising with classical music. His compositions are strongly influenced by classical writing

techniques and serve as the harmonic and structural foundation for his improvisations, which are full of spontaneous inventions as in jazz. For any listener who is not familiar with the subtleties of the jazz language, Ralph Towner can sound like a classical guitarist due to his flawless instrumental technique and deep musical expressiveness informed by a strong attention to sound production and quality of tone. It is even sometimes hard to tell where the written part transitions to the improvised section, which is actually a special quality of both his playing and his compositions.

"I like to play, I like to improvise, and I don't want to record something just because it sounds beautiful. (...) Most people don't know when the improvising starts and when the writing part has connected to it, which is exactly my intention and it's a wonderful thing. You know, when you're improvising in jazz music, that's the development section in classical music." (ECM, 2023)

Pedagogy: The Ralph Towner book

"The intention of this book is to provide you with musical instruction and material to assist you in learning improvisation, along with fundamental tone production and performance techniques."
(Towner, *Improvisation and Performance Techniques for Classical and Acoustic Guitar*, 1985)

From a pedagogical point of view, classical guitarists benefit from a well-established tradition and an abundant library of repertoire composed specifically for the instrument. However, in the jazz guitar world, technical proficiency is often neglected to the benefit of theoretical concepts. The existing popular jazz guitar books and methods like *The Joe Pass Guitar Method*, *The Mickey Complete Course in Jazz Guitar*, or Pat Martino's *Linear Expression*, often have an emphasis on improvisation techniques rather than instrumental technique. Subsequently, jazz guitarists are often exposed to opposing pedagogical approaches which can ultimately affect and even impede their technical development. To this day, the bebop model of improvisation is a primary element of jazz education. Jazz

has been studied and analyzed extensively through its melodic innovations but also through its harmonic and rhythmic developments, regardless of the instrument.

“(Be)bop harmonic thinking revolutionized the flow of the melodic line in jazz.” (Gioia, The History of Jazz, 2021)

Yet, with its fundamental structure rooted in oral tradition, learning jazz is often compared to learning a language. You need to hear it and be able to imitate it if you want to speak it freely. The expression *jazz language* is often used within the jazz community, as well as in jazz education and among jazz musicians. It implies a knowledge and proficiency of common tools, concepts, and techniques used to improvise and play “accurately.” Jazz students of all instruments are encouraged to use recordings as a primary source for learning the language by transcribing solos, chord progressions, rhythmic patterns, and any other musical element that can contribute to a better understanding of the style. (Haerle, 1980)

“Beyond the pleasure that they derive from listening, students also treat recordings as formal educational tools. Since 1917, this fixed representation of historical literature of jazz on commercial recordings has, in effect, served as the aural musical score, well suited to scrutiny and analysis.” (Berliner, 1994)

Nevertheless, a solid mastery of instrumental techniques is an implied requirement for jazz students to fully experience the jazz language. This is precisely the reason why Ralph Towner’s book became such an important resource for guitarists interested in learning a new approach to improvisation. Published in 1985, *Improvisation and Performance Techniques for Classical and Acoustic Guitar* is a book that is considered a must-have for both jazz and classical guitarists, as it offers unique aspects of Towner’s concepts for improvisation. Through various technical exercises dealing with multiple fingerstyle techniques over arpeggios and chordal workouts, as well as thorough analysis of some of his compositions, Ralph Towner opens a window into his musical mind and gives guitarists

a chance to better understand his sonic identity and approach to improvisation. The material is presented with a strong emphasis of the guitar's technical dimension, as each example and exercise are written with specific indications for fingerings, voicings, and positions. What makes this publication so unique is that unlike most books on jazz improvisation where the material is presented with a theory point of view, this book deals exclusively with the guitar's technical and sonic possibilities. Ralph Towner's style of improvisation is conceptually influenced by many musical sources as well as other instruments, but the instrument's technical dimension is the primary focus of this pedagogical publication. Throughout the book, Ralph Towner emphasizes the importance of understanding the mechanical layout of the guitar as it forces the player to develop new skills and master the technical realities of the guitar.

Included topics:

- *Damping technique*, which teaches you how to control or stop the vibration of sustaining strings.
- *Prepared arpeggios*, for volume control, tone, and independence of individual fingers.
- *Poly-metrical rhythmic groupings*, for strong rhythmic development and the ability to feel and play two (or more) time signatures occurring simultaneously.
- *Simultaneous finger combinations*, for independence in multiple voices.
- *Chordal plucking*, involves the usage of the thumb along with the other fingers and develops volume control and evenness in all the voices of the given chords.
- *Melodic playing*, focuses on single line melodies using the alternation of two fingers. A technique reminiscent of tonguing for wind instruments.
- *Right-hand and left-hand exercises*, to develop extreme contrasts between *staccato* and *legato* playing, as well as various slurs techniques.

Along with the multiple exercises and demonstrations of these technical topics, Ralph Towner includes valuable thoughts and points of views on more conceptual aspects of his artistic approach. He discusses and shares his thoughts on subjects like expectations in music, solo guitar playing, atonal improvisation, harmony, scales, and guitar voicings. He also includes short etudes and scores for some of his compositions with detailed descriptions and performance indications. Towner plays both the classical and 12 string acoustic instruments using exclusively fingerstyle technique, which is rather uncommon for the electric guitar players. Both his improvisations and compositions are full of polyphony, counterpoint, and require a strong mastery of classical guitar techniques. Overall, *Improvisation and Performance Techniques for Classical and Acoustic Guitar* is a rich and informative resource to understand Towner's approach for both writing and improvising, and how the specificity of the guitar is an integral part of his process. At first, the material can seem to be aimed exclusively at classical guitarists who wish to develop improvisational skills, but it also gives important and valuable concepts for electric players wishing to add the acoustic dimension to their sound palette. As he points out in the book's introduction:

"It is my hope that the content is accessible to a wide range of player skills, including those with minimal experience on the classical or acoustic guitar."

5- The Pianistic influence

"I don't care that it's a guitar, this is my own little travelling piano" (Held, 2022)

Bill Evans

There is a common fascination with pianist Bill Evans among jazz musicians. Many discovered him on the Miles Davis masterpiece *Kind of Blue*, as he introduced a new approach to jazz piano, different from the bebop style of the late 1940s and 50s. Bill Evans contributed to the development of the modal approach in improvisation with musical concepts and textures coming from contemporary classical composers but also from the impressionistic musical movement.

"Kind of Blue, in fact, represented a meeting point between jazz improvisation and some significant harmonic and colorist aspects reflecting the typical French flavor of Impressionist and post-Impressionistic music." (Pieranunzi, 2001)

His musical training from age six to thirteen was strictly focused on composers like Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Rachmaninoff, Debussy, and Ravel (Pettinger, 1998), which consequently influenced his playing and writing style. His lyrical and poetic melodic approach, combined with a deep knowledge of harmony and jazz vocabulary made him a unique figure in jazz. The turning point for Bill Evans is the iconic first trio of the late 1950s with Scott LaFaro on bass and Paul Motian on drums, which became one of the most celebrated piano trios in jazz history. The group focused on jazz standards and original compositions, with an emphasis on interplay among band members, often referred as *"three-way improvisation."* (Pieranunzi, 2001)

"I started getting serious about the piano when I heard Bill Evans. Hearing Bill and that trio (...), that set a standard for this kind of jazz interaction." (Held, 2022)

Ralph Towner often credits Bill Evans and his trio as his main influence. Both his compositions and playing style had a huge impact on Towner as a young New York jazz pianist in the 1960s.

“The Scott LaFaro-Bill Evans combination really hooked me into jazz, (...) I guess the trio concept has really been applied to my guitar style.” (Mitchell & Sallis, "Ralph Towner, A Chorus of Inner Voices" *The Guitar In Jazz, An Anthology*, 1996)

Certain standard songs made famous by the Bill Evans Trio made it into Towner’s list of works that he performed and recorded on solo guitar. Using elements like re-harmonisations and left-hand piano voicings from the Bill Evans’ versions, Towner developed a harmonic style that technically is guided by the guitar’s mechanical possibilities but is conceptually influenced by pianistic language. On his first recording for the ECM label, a collaboration with bassist Glen Moore called *Trios/Solos* (1973), Towner recorded a Bill Evans composition called *Re: Person I Knew* using an overdub recording technique that allowed him to play duo with himself on twelve strings guitar and piano. Towner’s piano playing is extremely reminiscent of Evans’ touch, phrasing, and delivery. This recording technique was also used by Evans on his 1963 album called *Conversations with Myself*. Ralph Towner has since recorded solo guitar arrangements of many standard songs made popular by Bill Evans, including:

- Gloria’s Step (Scott LaFaro) (Towner, Anthem, 2000)
- I Fall in Love Too Easily (Styne & Cahn) (Towner, Open Letter, 1992)
- My Man’s Gone Now (George Gershwin) (Towner, Timeline, 2006)
- My Foolinsg Heart (Young & Washington) (Towner, My Foolish Heart, 2016)
- Nardis (Miles Davis) (Towner, Solo Concert, 1979)

“Guitars are way down on the list of things that blew me away. Everything on Sunday at the Vanguard with Bill Evans, Scott Lafaro and Paul Motian influenced my playing more than any guitar record. It impressed me conceptually in terms of how to play with another person, the use of the bass, and harmony and melody.” (Sallis, 1996)

The Bill Evans influence is especially noticeable on these recordings as Towner recreates and adapts Evans' harmonic language and interactive quality of his playing on solo guitar. Another example is Evans' famous composition called *Waltz for Debby*. It was originally recorded by Evans as a solo piece in 1956 on an album called *New Jazz Conceptions*. (Evans, *New Jazz Conceptions*, 1956) The Bill Evans trio later recorded it as part of its famous series of *Live at The Village Vanguard* albums. (Evans, *Waltz For Debby*, 1961) Ralph Towner wrote an arrangement for solo guitar and kept some of the original harmonies and structural ideas, like going to 4/4 time for the soloing section even though the melody is in 3/4. This arrangement can be heard on Towner's 1992 album called *Open Letter* (Towner, *Open Letter*, 1992). In this arrangement, Ralph Towner borrows elements from the original version like chord voicings and melodic lines as illustrated in the examples below.

Waltz For Debby

Album: *Waltz For Debby*
Live at the Village Vanguard

Bill Evans

Piano

The image displays a piano accompaniment for the piece 'Waltz For Debby'. It consists of two systems of four measures each. The first system shows the initial chords and melodic fragments. The second system, starting at measure 5, shows a more complex harmonic structure with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Waltz for Debby

Bill Evans
Arr: Ralph Towner

Classical Guitar

The musical score is written for Classical Guitar in 3/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, and the second staff contains measures 5 through 8. The music is characterized by a mix of chords and melodic lines, with some notes marked with accidentals (sharps and flats). The first staff shows a sequence of chords and a melodic line starting with a quarter note. The second staff continues this sequence, with a measure marked with a '5' indicating a fingering or a specific technique.

Towner's interest and fascination for Bill Evans' concepts is also present in his writing. On his 2001 album called *Anthem* for the ECM label, Ralph Towner wrote and performed a piece entitled *Very Late* that shares many structural, harmonic, and melodic ideas with Evans' famous composition *Very Early*. Aside from the obvious play on words in the title, Towner's *Very Late* uses a similar A-B structure, with a 16 measures section for the first melodic idea. Evans' composition uses multiple V-I cadences and a repeated melodic motif using wide intervals. The element of repetition is present throughout the whole piece. Towner's composition avoids the predictable cadences but rather employs a harmonic structure that is based on repeated chord types, like minor 7th chords in parallel motion. Like Evans, Towner uses a melodic pattern that is present throughout the piece, as well as using a very similar closing eight note melodic statement before the repetition.

Very Late

Ralph Towner

A Bm7 G#m11 A maj9/C# F maj7/G *2nd X only*

5 G#m7 Em9 F maj7/A Ab/Gb Gbmi7(b5)

9 G/F F Ab/E G#dim/A Am Cm6/Eb

13 G Db7sus Gb 1. C7sus

Very Early

Bill Evans

Cmaj7 Bb7 Ebmaj7 Ab13(b9)

Dbmaj7 G13 Cmaj7 Bb7(#11)

Dmaj7 Am7 F#m11 B13(b9)

Em11 Ab13 Dbmaj7 1. G7sus 2. G7(b13)

At a time where jazz language was dominated by bebop and blues, Bill Evans is arguably the first jazz pianist to have used classical elements in a jazz context. By bringing elements of the impressionist musical movement and borrowing concepts from Debussy and Ravel, Evans changed the sound of the jazz piano for decades to come. In a recent interview about his career, jazz pianist Richie Beirach elaborates about classical music influences in Bill Evans' writing as well as his contribution in Miles Davis band:

"Bill was the first white piano player that brought classical aesthetics into Black culture with the Miles Davis recording Kind of Blue. (...) he brought in the classical aesthetic of touch, tone, and harmony. Because Kind of Blue was a very fragile, delicate recording with interactions, (...) Bill was perfect for it." (Liebman, Beirach, & Renker, 2022)

There are many connections to be made between Evans and Towner regarding the influence that classical music had on their creative process, and ultimately the development of their musical voices. Both have a strong background in classical music and this formal training served them to craft a new and revolutionary approach to jazz improvisation and composition.

"Bringing out the expressiveness of which the human voice, or some wind instrument like the trumpet, are capable poses thorny problems for the pianist. Evans resolved them by making use of devices which originated partly in classical piano music, and in this way brought about a silent revolution." (Pieranunzi, 2001)

Playing the guitar with a pianistic approach

“All my jazz influences come from piano players.” (Held, 2022)

Ralph Towner’s playing is often described as pianistic. One of the primary factors in achieving a pianistic approach on guitar is playing with a fingerstyle technique. This gives guitarists access to polyphony, counterpoint, or any musical idea involving multiple voices played simultaneously with a clear sense of independence in each voice, as opposed to a monophonic texture with a plectrum. Towner is a world-renowned guitar player that fully understands the instrument’s language, yet there is a certain quality in his musical expressiveness that is closely linked to the piano. Although his writing style is clearly rooted in the classical guitar language, his overall performing approach often transcends the guitar and points at his pianistic background. Nevertheless, his delivery and use of various tones and colors is a result of his mastery of the classical guitar repertoire. Evidently, the piano and the guitar are quite different physically and offer completely opposite sonic possibilities, especially in volume and register. But there is a certain common ground that can be explored within the execution of certain harmonic ideas and other musical concepts. This is particularly noticeable in Ralph Towner’s musical delivery, as he exploits and treats the polyphonic aspects of his music (written and improvised) in a way that is closely connected to how piano players achieve a certain sonic quality that is unique to their instrument.

“I got fascinated with the classical guitar and attracted to it because it could do what the piano could do.” (Bakert, 2023)

The general idea in this matter has to do with how multiple voices can be played simultaneously on the guitar and be given individual colors with specific musical intentions. This is a concept that is not foreign to classical guitar players, as the repertoire is full of passages with contrapuntal ideas and chordal expositions where a melodic statement needs to come out of dense harmonies and be heard, regardless of its register.

Towner has succeeded in bringing his technical mastery to a level where musical intention and melodic direction transcends both instrumental and technical parameters. Both his improvisations and compositions are excellent examples of this type of playing. Playing the guitar with a pianistic approach is rather conceptual and can be observed by comparing different ways of playing in a similar stylistic situation. Like the piano, the guitar is an instrument that can accommodate both melodic and polyphonic playing. However, when describing his pianistic approach, Ralph Towner often refers to his treatment of multiple voices. There is a sound hierarchy that can be attained with a “pianistic” technique which allows the player to control each separate voices of a chord for example and master the individuality of each finger. The result is complete control on volume, tone, color, and subsequently musical intention. This is something that is rarely addressed by jazz guitar players, simply because it is not traditionally part of the language. Towner often mentions Bill Evans as his main inspiration for voice leading and inner melodic movements in his chordal playing, and how different from other piano players his left hand was. (Held, 2022) These techniques are omnipresent in classical guitar repertoire and serve as the perfect tools for polyphonic playing. The expression “pianistic approach” is mainly relevant when looking at Towner’s playing from a more traditional jazz guitar perspective. Certain elements of traditional jazz guitar playing like the predominance of the electric guitar, the usage of plectrums, and the horn-influence type of improvisational language, helped shape the sound and overall identity of the jazz guitar. Eventually, as the language developed, other players like Ed Bickert and Lenny Breau adopted playing styles that also were labeled as “pianistic”. (Sallis, 1996) It is primarily the harmonic language that gets the pianistic treatment.

6- Conclusion

In July of 2021, jazz guitarist, composer, educator, and producer Joel Harrison published a book called *Guitar Talk: Conversations with Visionary Players*, which presented a collection of interviews with over 20 guitarists in which they all discussed their experiences with the concept of blending styles. The book is incredibly insightful as it gives the reader a clear idea on how many different paths can lead to creativity on guitar. The guitar community is quite eclectic, and this book gave an accurate depiction of how diversified and complex the guitar language can be.

“This book celebrates the enormous range of approaches and sounds encompassed by the modern guitar, which by now can do almost anything. It can howl, scrape, scratch, scream, sing, pluck, and soothe. It’s a rhythm machine, a soundscape generator, a delivery system for the most assaultive volume and the most delicate harmony. In jazz contexts, especially since the early seventies, it is now an institution, and there are more and more classical composers incorporating it into their works.” (Harrison, *Guitar Talk: Conversations with Visionary Players*, 2021)

The concept of crossover styles and techniques for jazz guitar is still new and very specialized. Only a small number of jazz guitarists have made it an integral part of their musical output. By using techniques and stylistic elements that are rarely used in a traditional jazz context, it enhances the possibilities to expand the language and gives the music a sense of uniqueness. Ralph Towner’s process of combining the sonic and textural elements of jazz and classical music is a definite example of using foreign concepts to jazz and turning them into unique and creative tools. His musical concept is a mixture of specific idiomatic elements coming from traditional and contemporary jazz, with classical music textures and writing techniques. There are many angles to this research that can be examined to fully understand Ralph Towner’s process. His background in classical music as a young student, his dedication to jazz improvisation as well as his deep interest for Bill Evans’ artistry, his full commitment to the classical guitar language, and his long-

term relationship with the ECM record label. All are important factors of his development as a composer and guitarist, and key elements in his musical identity. As jazz music has reached a point where influences are coming from a wide variety of styles and musical traditions, it is inevitable that the tools and influences used by musicians are establishing new stylistic parameters. Jazz is an art form in constant development and the many new approaches that musicians bring to the music are often the inception for new trends or approaches. This research revealed Ralph Towner's profound ability to combine two stylistic worlds into one of the most recognizable and unique voices of the modern jazz guitar. With his hybrid approach, Ralph Towner's music represents the perfect harmony between composed and improvised music, where classical aesthetic and textures meets jazz's sense of risk and adventure.

Bibliography

- Bakert, B. (2023, 06 13). *Guitar Legend Ralph Towner*. Retrieved from Youtube: <https://youtu.be/jcbsT6vQ51s>
- Berliner, P. (1994). *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*. Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press.
- Bernstein, L. (1961). *What is Impressionism? / Bernstein • New York Philharmonic*. Retrieved from Young People's Concerts: <https://youtu.be/XOIpRmBvHLg>
- Bream, J. (1967). *20th Century Guitar*. UK: RCA Victor.
- Cline, N. (2017). Focused: An Appreciation of The Genre-Bending Guitar Work of Ralph Towner. *The Fret Board Journal*.
- ECM. (n.d.). Retrieved from ECM Records: <https://www.ecmrecords.com/artists/1435045753/ralph-towner>
- ECM. (2023, April 15). *ECM Records Podcast*. Retrieved from ECM Podcast Episode 20 - Ralph Towner: https://youtu.be/pBq_6UrKKzw
- Evans, B. (1956). *New Jazz Conceptions*. Riverside Records.
- Evans, B. (1961). *Waltz For Debby*. Riverside records.
- Feather, L. (1996). The Guitar In Jazz. In J. Sallis, *The Guitar In Jazz: An Anthology* (p. 11). University of Nebraska Press.
- Galbraith, B. (2002). *Guitar Solos, Thirteen Standards*. Mel Bay Publications.
- Gioia, T. (2016). *How to Listen to Jazz*. New York, USA: Basic Books.
- Gioia, T. (2021). *The History of Jazz* (Third Edition ed.). New York, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Haerle, D. (1980). *The Jazz Language: A Theory Text for Jazz Composition and Improvisation*. Miami: Warner Bros. Publication.
- Harrison, J. (2021). *Guitar Talk: Conversations with Visionary Players*. Cambridge: Terra Nova Press.
- Held, P. (2022, January 18). *Ralph Towner Interview*. Retrieved from Youtube: <https://youtu.be/A01zGgXzgro>
- IJB. (2019, February). *ECM50 | 1977 Richie Beirach about recording the albums "Hubris", "Elm" and "Sound Suggestions"*. Retrieved from IJ. Biermann : <https://youtu.be/NrC8C210u2l>
- Liebman, D., Beirach, R., & Renker, K. (2022). *Ruminations & Reflections: The Musical Journey of Dave Liebman & Richie Beirach*. Torrance, CA, USA: Cymbal Press.
- Menasché, E. (2020, July 03). *Gearhead: Ralph Towner's Acoustic Arsenal*. Retrieved from Jazz Times: <https://jazztimes.com/reviews/products-and-gear/acoustic-arsenal-ralph-towner/>
- Mitchell, C. (1996). *The Guitar in Jazz: An Anthology* (Vol. Ralph Towner: A Chorus of Inner Voices). (J. Sallis, Ed.) USA: University of Nebraska Press.
- Mitchell, C., & Sallis, J. (1996). *"Ralph Towner, A Chorus of Inner Voices" The Guitar In Jazz, An Anthology*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
- Muthspiel, W. (2023, February 15). *Blending Styles Interview Series*. (C. Jimenez, Interviewer)

- Neighbour, O., Griffiths, P., & Perle, G. (1983). *The New Grove second Viennese school : Schoenberg, Webern, Berg*. London: Papermac/MacMillan.
- Pettinger, P. (1998). *Bill Evans: How My Heart Sings*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Pieranunzi, E. (2001). *Bill Evans: The Pianist As An Artist*. Roma: Stampa Alternativa.
- Prasad, A. (2000). *Ralph Towner Unfolding Stories*. Retrieved from Innerviews, Music Without Borders: <https://www.innerviews.org/inner/towner.html>
- Prasad, A. (2010). *Ralph Towner: Sense and Sensitivity*. Retrieved from Innerviews: <https://www.innerviews.org/inner/towner2.html>
- Prasad, A. (2017). *Ralph Towner Magic and Affirmation*. Retrieved from Innerviews: <https://www.innerviews.org/inner/ralph-towner>
- Sallis, J. (1996). *The Guitar in Jazz: An Anthology*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska.
- Schroeder, D. (2018). *From The Minds of Jazz Musicians*. New York: Routledge.
- Sebastiani, A. (2023). *Ralph Towner and the Guitar*. Avellino, Italy: Guitart.
- Tamarkin, J. (2019, April 25). *Everybody Digs Ralph Towner*. Retrieved from JazzTimes: <https://jazztimes.com/features/interviews/everybody-digs-ralph-towner/>
- Towner, R. (1974). *Solstice*. ECM Records.
- Towner, R. (1978). *Batik*. ECM Records.
- Towner, R. (1979). *Solo Concert*. ECM Records.
- Towner, R. (1985). *Improvisation and Performance Techniques for Classical and Acoustic Guitar*. New Jersey, USA: Century Music Productions, Inc.
- Towner, R. (1992). *Open Letter*. ECM Records.
- Towner, R. (2000). *Anthem*. ECM Records.
- Towner, R. (2002). *Solo Guitar Works Volume 1*. USA: GSP Productions.
- Towner, R. (2002). *Solo Guitar Works, Volume 1*. USA: Guitar Solo Publications.
- Towner, R. (2006). *Timeline*. ECM Records.
- Towner, R. (2008). *Chiaroscuro* [Recorded by R. Towner, & P. Fresu]. Udine, Italy: M. Eicher.
- Towner, R. (2016). *My Foolish Heart*. ECM Records.
- Towner, R., & Abercrombie, J. (1976). *Sargasso Sea* [Recorded by R. Towner, & J. Abercrombie]. Oslo, Norway: M. Eicher.
- Towner, R., & Burton, G. (1974). *Matchbook* [Recorded by R. Towner, & G. Burton]. [CD]. Ludwigsburg, Germany: M. Eicher.
- Towner, R., & Muthspiel, W. (2012). *Travel Guide* [Recorded by R. Towner, W. Muthspiel, & S. Grigoryan]. Lugano, Switzerland: M. Eicher.
- Towner, R., & Peacock, G. (1995). *A Closer View* [Recorded by R. Towner, & G. Peacock]. Oslo, Norway: M. Eicher.

Appendix A.

(All transcriptions and arrangements by Carlos Jiménez)

Creeper

Ralph Towner

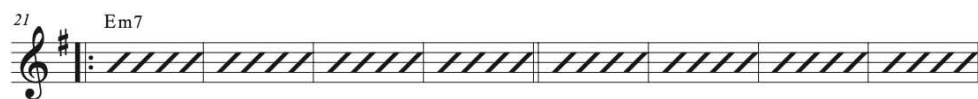
Classical Guitar

Acoustic Bass

2

Creeper

21 Em7



29 Gm7



37 Bm7 Am7



41 Gm7 F#m7(b5) B7alt



After solos **D.S. al Fine**

Haunted

Ralph Towner

Classical Guitar

A

5

9

13

17

21

22

h. XII

B

2

Haunted

C

Musical notation for measures 1-8. Measure 1: Fmi/A. Measure 2: A triad (F, A, C) with a '3' above it. Measure 3: Ami. Measure 4: Bbmi/A. Measure 5: Dmi/A. Measure 6: Dmi/A. Measure 7: Dmi/A. Measure 8: Dmi/A.

29

Musical notation for measures 9-16. Measure 9: G#mi/A. Measure 10: G7/A. Measure 11: Ami. Measure 12: Ami. Measure 13: Ami. Measure 14: Ami. Measure 15: Ami. Measure 16: Ami. Section ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

33

Musical notation for measures 17-24. Measure 17: Ami. Measure 18: Ami. Measure 19: Ami. Measure 20: Ami. Measure 21: Ami. Measure 22: Ami. Measure 23: Ami. Measure 24: Ami. Section ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

35

Musical notation for measures 25-32. Measure 25: Ami. Measure 26: Ami. Measure 27: Ami. Measure 28: Ami. Measure 29: Ami. Measure 30: Ami. Measure 31: Ami. Measure 32: Ami. Section ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

39

Musical notation for measures 33-40. Measure 33: *rit.* Measure 34: *rit.* Measure 35: *rit.* Measure 36: *poco rit.* Measure 37: *poco rit.* Measure 38: *poco rit.* Measure 39: *poco rit.* Measure 40: *poco rit.* Section ends with a double bar line and the word "Fine".

Score

Hat And Cane

Ralph Towner
Transcription: Carlos Jiménez

Swing ♩ = 180

A

Classical Guitar

Double Bass

Measures 1-4: Chords G#/E, A/E, B/E, C#/E, A#mib6, G#/A. Includes triplets in the guitar part.

Measures 5-8: Chords G/A, G#/E, F#/A, C/D. Includes triplets in the guitar part.

B

Measures 9-12: Chords G#/E, A/E, B/E, C#/E, A#mib6, G#/A. Includes triplets in the guitar part.

Measures 13-16: Chords G/A, G#/E, F#/A, C/D. Includes triplets in the guitar part.

2

Hat And Cane

C

Em11 Dmi11/A Cmi11 3 Eb9sus B/A# A6 G#mi

19

F#mi Em11 Dmi11/E F9sus/E 3 C#E

23

B/A# A/G# G/F# A/G# B/C# C/B D/E

D

G#/E A/E B/E C#/E A#mi b6

29

G#/A G/A G#/E F#/A C/D

***Tag for ending

I knew It Was You

Classical Guitar

Ralph Towner
Arr: Carlos Jimenez

Intro *rubato*

A

a tempo

B

2 I knew It Was You

19 B C F G Cmi7 Db7sus Gbmaj7 Bbmaj7(#11) Bbmaj7(#11)

21 Ebmaj7 Abmaj7(#11) Gbmaj7 Bbmaj7(#11) Ebmaj7 Abmaj7(#11)

25 Gbmaj7 Bbmaj7(#11) Ebmaj7 Abmaj7(#11)

Solo section

31 C Ami9 Cmaj7 Fmaj7(#11) Ami9 Cmaj7 Fmaj7(#11) Ami9 Cmaj7 Fmaj7(#11) Amaj9/C#

33 Ami9 Cmaj7 Fmaj7(#11) Ami9 Cmaj7 Fmaj7(#11) Ami9 Cmaj7 Fmaj7(#11) Cmi11 Ebmi11 Gbmi11

37 Amaj9/C# Dmaj7(#11) Amaj9/C# Dmaj7(#11) Bbmi7 Bbmaj7(#11) Bb7sus G7sus

Open solos

41 Cmi7 Ebmaj7 Abmaj7(#11) 1. Cmi7 Ebmaj7 Abmaj7(#11) Gmi7 Db7sus Eb7sus G7sus Db7sus F7sus

Last time only

45 2. Cmi7 Ebmaj7 Abmaj7(#11) Ab G B C F G Cmi7 Db7sus Eb7sus G7sus Db7sus F7sus

D.S. al Coda

I knew It Was You

3

D

Chord progression: $G\flat$ maj7, B maj7(#11), $E\flat$ maj7, $A\flat$ maj7(#11)

52 $G\flat$ maj7, B maj7(#11), $E\flat$ maj7, $A\flat$ maj7(#11)

55 $G\flat$ maj7, B maj7(#11), $E\flat$ maj7, $A\flat$ maj7(#11)

57 C maj7, F maj7(#11)

rallentando Fine

Score

Mingusiana

Swing ♩ = 85

Ralph Towner
Arr: Carlos Jimenez

Classical Guitar

Chord labels for the Classical Guitar score:

- Staff 1: Db7alt, Bb7alt, Gb7(b13), B7sus, B7
- Staff 2: Bb13, Eb7alt, Db7alt, F#7sus
- Staff 3: Ebmaj7(#9), C7alt, Fmaj7(#5), Bb7alt/F
- Staff 4: G13, Bb7(#9), Ab7alt, C#7sus
- Staff 5: F#mi11

Score

Raffish

Ralph Towner

Arr: Carlos Jimenez

Straight

♩ = 140

Classical Guitar

Acoustic Bass

5

A

13

17

2

Raffish

Musical notation for measures 20-23. Measure 20 is the start of a first ending (1.) with a repeat sign. Measure 21 continues the first ending. Measure 22 is the start of a second ending (2.) with a repeat sign and a 'harm.' (harmonic) instruction. Measure 23 continues the second ending.

Musical notation for measures 24-27, marked with a 'B' and a double bar line with a repeat sign. Measures 24-27 feature a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes and rests in both staves.

Musical notation for measures 28-31. Measures 28-30 continue the complex rhythmic pattern from the previous section. Measure 31 is the start of a first ending (1.) with a repeat sign.

Musical notation for measures 32-35. Measure 32 is the start of a second ending (2.) with a repeat sign. Measures 33-35 continue the second ending.

Musical notation for measures 36-39, marked with a 'C'. Measures 36-39 feature a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes and rests in both staves.

Raffish

3

Musical notation for measures 38-41. The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex texture with multiple voices in both the treble and bass staves. Measure 38 starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The music includes various chords and melodic lines, with some notes beamed together. Measure 41 ends with a double bar line.

Musical notation for measures 42-45. The score is in 4/4 time. Measure 42 starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The music includes various chords and melodic lines. Measure 45 ends with a double bar line and the word "Fine" above the staff.

Open

Musical notation for measure 47. The score is in 4/4 time. The measure is marked "Open" and "E7(#9)". The notation shows a treble clef and a key signature of two flats, with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end.

On Cue

Musical notation for measures 48-51. The score is in 4/4 time. The measures are marked "On Cue" and contain the following chords: C#mi7(b5), Cmaj7, F#13(b9), and B7(#9). The notation shows a treble clef and a key signature of two flats, with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end.

Musical notation for measures 52-54. The score is in 4/4 time. The measures are marked "On Cue" and contain the following chords: C#mi7(b5), Cmaj7, F#7, B7, and E7. The notation shows a treble clef and a key signature of two flats, with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end. Measure 54 includes a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.) leading to a double bar line and repeat dots.

D.S. al Fine

The Prowler

Ralph Towner

Em9 A9/C#

5

A

13 muted string

1. 2.

B

F#13(b9) G13 G#7alt A9 Bb13 Eb7(#11) Ab13(b9) Db7alt

22 F7alt Bb13(b9) Eb7alt Ab13(b9) Db7alt F#13(b9) B7alt

2 The Prowler

C

30 muted string

34

38

Tramonto

Ralph Towner

Classical Guitar

A maj7/C# Ebm9 3 F#m11 G#7sus Cmaj7 F#maj7/A#₃ Am9 Emaj9/G#

Fmaj7(#11) Bbmaj7(#11) 3 Cmaj7 Db7alt F#m11 B7sus 1. Esus E 2. Esus E

D/E Db/E 3 A°E Emaj7(#5) 3 Bbm7(b5) Eb7sus 3 C/Eb Abm9(maj7) Em(maj7)/G

B/F# G/F# 3 B/F# Fm7(b5) 3 Em9 Am9 Cmaj7 Fmaj7(#11) F#m7 Ab/B

A maj7/C# Ebm9 3 F#m11 G#7sus Cmaj7 F#maj7/A#₃ Am9 Emaj9/G#

Fmaj7(#11) Bbmaj7(#11) 3 Cmaj7 Db7alt F#m11 B7sus Esus E *last X only

Ending
rallentando Am9 Dmaj9(#11) C/D F#m11 B7sus Esus E Fine

♩ = 120

Trellis

Ralph Towner

Classical Guitar

E7(b9)sus L.V. Amib6/E improvised arpeggio

A tempo

G#7#9(#5) Bmb6 Bmb6 3 x Bmb6

A

F/E G#/A F/C# F#/G

E7(b9)sus F#7(b9)

Bmi

B

F/B G#/B F/G F#7(b9)sus

E7(b9)sus F#7(b9) Bmi

2

Trellis



C

Musical staff 30: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Chord symbols above the staff: Am9(maj7)/B, A maj7(#5)/G#, D7alt, Gmi. The staff contains a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a half note G4.

Musical staff 33: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Chord symbols above the staff: Gmi, Bmi/F#, F sus. The staff contains a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a half note G4. There are triplets of eighth notes in the final two measures.

Musical staff 37: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Chord symbol above the staff: L.V. The staff contains a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a half note G4.

D

Musical staff 40: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Chord symbols above the staff: A 7(b9) sus, A 13, A 7(b9) sus, A 13. The staff contains a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a half note G4.

Musical staff 44: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Chord symbols above the staff: F maj7/G, F#/G, F maj7/G, F#/G. The staff contains a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a half note G4. There are four-note slurs over the first two measures.

Musical staff 48: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Chord symbols above the staff: C#7(b9) sus, C#/E, F 7alt, Bbmi7. The staff contains a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a half note G4. There are four-note slurs over the first two measures.

Trellis

E

D/B \flat C \sharp /B \flat B aug/B \flat G/B \flat

57 G \sharp dim F/A G \sharp /E

61 F/C \sharp F \sharp /G E 7(\flat 9) sus F \sharp 7(\flat 9)

65 B mi

Ending

69 G \sharp 7 \sharp 9(\sharp 5) A \sharp dim B mi

73 G \sharp 7 \sharp 9(\sharp 5) A \sharp dim B mi **Fine**

ritardando

Very Late

Ralph Towner

A

Bm7 G#m11 Amaj9/C# Fmaj7/G *2nd X only*

5 G#m7 Em9 Fmaj7/A Ab/Gb Gbmi7(b5)

9 G/F F Ab/E G#dim/A Am Cm6/Eb

13 G Db7sus Gb C7sus

17 2. C7sus Fmaj7(#11) B7sus

B

Fm11 Bbm11 Fm11 Bbm11

24 Fm11 Bbm11 Fm11 C7sus

Last X only

28 **Fine**