

Proposal for Honors Capstone Project:

Jazz Guitar

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Overview

In the spring 2021 semester, I will celebrate perhaps my largest area of growth in college--learning the guitar--by studying and performing jazz guitar repertoire. Much of this study will speak to the question, “How does the guitar, an ancient, multicultural instrument, interpret jazz, a novel, fundamentally American art form?” A holistic answer will be sought from three angles: (1) reflecting on my study of classical guitar (and other pre-jazz genres) (2) analyzing structure, transcribing, and writing original arrangements of jazz and contemporary standards, and (3) performing these arrangements at the end of the semester.

For guidance on these various aspects of the project, I will enroll in 1 credit hour of MUSI 4V71 (Independent Study in Music) under the direction of Dr. Enric Madriguera, Russell Cleveland Professor in Guitar Studies. Dr. Madriguera’s background in relevant fields (i.e., classical guitar, Spanish and Latin American music) will particularly provide direction as I pursue angles (1) and (2) mentioned above, and his years of touring and performing experience will guide me as I prepare for aspect (3). I will work with Dr. Madriguera on a weekly basis to discuss the pieces I am studying and review my arrangements.

It is likely that the end-of-semester performance will be virtual. To this end, I am prepared with high-end audio and video equipment. I have used this equipment before on various guitar projects,¹ and it nicely captures the tone and frequency response of both acoustic and electric guitars. The final performance will likely be shared on YouTube (like many of A&H’s COVID-era productions and performances).

Background

I was drawn to the guitar from an early age, largely due to my wonderful pre-school and kindergarten Spanish teacher Ms. Maria. She played a beautiful, yellow-golden classical guitar with nylon strings. I remember how magical it was to see and hear her fingers effortlessly strum the strings. She had a great sense of time and rhythm. Guitarists with a strong sense of rhythm continue to speak to me and inform my approach to playing any instrument.

My middle- and high-school days were devoted to learning piano and bass guitar. I became proficient at these instruments but felt that my heart was elsewhere as I began college. When I first seriously laid my hands on a guitar in the fall of 2017, I immediately fell in love. That summer, I had been listening to the virtuosic guitarist Joe Pass and was determined to be able to replicate his sounds. I learned a few jazz voicings (largely informed by my knowledge of bass chord voicings) on my roommate’s cheap acoustic guitar, and before long, I was playing jazz standards.

The following summer, I decided that some formal training would be beneficial. So I enrolled in Prof. James Wilder’s Guitar I class (an introductory guitar course offered at UTD). It was a very helpful course in which I gained dexterity and finger independence and grew more comfortable playing solo. I also enjoyed learning about the cultural aspects of the guitar (its history, pedagogy, evolution, etc.). I

¹ Please visit my [YouTube page](#) to see examples of these types of recordings.

continued this journey by enrolling in Dr. Madriguera's Guitar II and Guitar Ensemble courses the following fall and spring. By the end of the spring 2019 semester, I was beginning to feel more confident with expressing myself on guitar.

Then, my guitar journey took a wonderful turn: overseas. I traveled to Spain with members of the UTD Guitar Ensemble to study classical guitar for two weeks. I treasure every moment of this experience. Spain is the birthplace of the modern classical guitar, and I learned so much about the history and building of the instrument while there. I also learned a lot about playing guitar in different contexts (solo, band, ensemble, duet, etc.). I made such wonderful friends in Spain (and am still in touch with them today) and enjoyed many late-night jam sessions.

When the COVID crisis materialized in the spring of 2020, I was forced to give up playing bass in my band. I felt my motivation shift away from the bass to the guitar. Over the next several months, my guitar skills sharpened tremendously. I developed my own right-hand technique, largely inspired by Wes Montgomery and George Benson. My comfort with playing bebop vocabulary grew, and I taught myself many new voicings. I also explored blues guitar during this time and recorded a collection of songs called "[Blues in June](#)." Towards the end of the summer, I was also growing competent with other styles of guitar, including playing in open tunings (which resulted in the project "[Ode to Friends](#)") and playing lap-style, like my friend [Stephen Houpt](#).

Personal Motivation & Preparation

The guitar (and its many derivatives) is perhaps the most historically significant and ubiquitous instrument across cultures. When guitarists interpret jazz and contemporary music, they are bridging the eastern and western musical diasporas, as well as the past to the present. As a first-generation American with ethnic ties to India, this project is of deep personal interest. While primarily exploring the guitar interprets jazz, this project will also shed light on smaller, more personal questions: "How did the 20th and 20st century's most notable jazz guitarists lead their lives?" "From where did they draw their musical inspiration?" "How did they balance their various cultural and professional identities in the composition and playing of this norm-defying music?"

I am prepared to tackle the academic and technical difficulties that this project demands. My participation in UTD's Guitar Studies Ensemble as a bass guitarist (which included a two-week trip to Spain in 2019) has helped me communicate musical (and verbal) ideas across cultures. I have also written arrangements for the guitar ensembles and have learned "how far to go" with arrangements (in terms of clarity, simplicity, legibility, and level of difficulty). Since much of the music is improvised, most of the arrangements will just be the structure of the tunes, with perhaps a few figures written explicitly. I also have over a year in arranging experience and am comfortable in both Finale and Sibelius programs. My experiences in Digital Music I (MUSI 2319) and Digital Music II (MUSI 3389) have prepared me to efficiently and coherently arrange several pieces.

I have developed the work ethic and responsibility necessary to successfully complete this project through my leadership of various Dallas-area bands, including Addis and the Bards of Mayhem. I have built the competence and musical literacy that MUSI 4V71 will demand through my professional experience as the bassist for the Crosswinds Jazz Band, the C3 Big Band, and Strictly Tablue (a local blues band).

Below I have enumerated my goals for the corresponding independent study and have outlined a potential curriculum that would help me make the most of the semester.

Specific Goals and Learning Outcomes

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- 📖 Refine my improvisational skill to maximize creativity, spontaneity, and motivic development
 - 📖 Solidify my sense of “time” and deepen my rhythmic “pocket” by studying notable jazz guitarists
 - 📖 Explore how jazz guitar has evolved from the 1940s-1990s by learning and researching repertoire
 - 📖 Gain exposure to world music by defining musical culture and musical etiquette
 - 📖 Improve my music-notation skills (likely in Sibelius)

Curriculum

- 📖 Review literature relevant to jazz fusion
- 📖 Study the music following guitarists:

Django Reinhardt	January 11 th -22 nd
Antonio Carlos Jobim	January 25 th -February 5 th
Joe Pass	February 8 th -19 th
Wes Montgomery	February 22 nd -March 5 th
George Benson	March 8 th -26 th
Bireli Lagrene	March 29 th -April 9 th
Joscho Stephan	April 12 th -April 23 rd
Prepare for performance	April 26 th -May 7 th

- 📖 Rehearse and perform an hour-long program that features original interpretations of jazz and contemporary standards

Organization

I have created a [website dedicated to this project](#). All relevant paperwork, thoughts, recordings, and drafts will be uploaded here. This also serves as an easy, self-contained way for me to share my project with my family and friends.

Equipment

I intend to provide my own equipment. I will play an acoustic Silvertone guitar with a Fishman soundhole pickup through a DV Mark amp. I may also record myself using a handheld TASCAM Linear PCM recorder.