

## **Examiner's Report: PhD in Music (John Ernst Oosthuizen)**

**Dissertation Title:** *The Use of Jazz Style Elements in the Organ Compositions of Surendran Reddy (1962–2010)*

**Candidate:** John Ernst Oosthuizen

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### **I. Overview and Summary**

John Ernst Oosthuizen's dissertation, "*Die gebruik van jazz-stylelemente in die orrelkomposisies van Surendran Reddy (1962–2010)*", presents a sophisticated and theoretically nuanced interrogation of genre hybridity in late 20th- and early 21st-century organ composition. Centred on two seminal works by South African composer Surendran Reddy, *Toccata for Madiba* (1997) and *Mayibuye Suite* (2001), the study articulates a critical response to the limitations of traditional Western analytical frameworks when applied to compositions steeped in jazz idioms.

To remedy this, Oosthuizen constructs a bespoke analytical framework synthesizing elements from Nikolsky's expressive parameters with stylistic taxonomies drawn from both international and South African jazz traditions. The dissertation demonstrates how Reddy's genre-fusing approach (coined "clazz") mobilizes the organ as a politically and aesthetically pluralistic medium, enabling both performer agency and cultural critique.

Methodologically rigorous and conceptually mature, the work situates Reddy's music within broader discourses of post-Apartheid identity, performance practice, and stylistic innovation. It stands as an exemplary contribution to the fields of music analysis, jazz studies, and South African art music, offering an original lens on how the organ can function as a dynamic vehicle for inter-idiomatic synthesis and socio-cultural expression.

### **II. Original Contributions and Strengths**

The dissertation presents a mature and theoretically advanced contribution to the overlapping fields of musicology, performance studies, jazz analysis, and South African cultural discourse. Central to the originality of the study is its re-conceptualization of the analytical apparatus needed to interpret hybrid musical works, and specifically those that resist the stylistic and categorical boundaries of Western art music analysis. By foregrounding the intersection of classical and jazz idioms within organ repertoire, the candidate opens new interpretive terrain not only within South African music scholarship, but also internationally where studies of genre hybridization remain relatively underexplored at the level of organ composition.

The dissertation's most notable strength lies in the development of a tailored analytical framework ( Chapter 2) that addresses the insufficiencies of traditional methodologies when faced with works that collapse distinctions between "high art" and vernacular idioms. Drawing from Aleksey Nikolsky's eleven aspects of musical expression and extending them through categorical engagement with both international and indigenous jazz style elements, Oosthuizen creates a structured yet flexible hermeneutic tool that is at once analytically robust and musicologically sensitive.

This framework, in my opinion, is more than adaptive or derivative: it emerges from the ontological demands of the repertoire itself and therefore makes a more substantive

methodological contribution. The distinction drawn between international jazz idioms (Chapter 3) and uniquely South African sub-genres (Chapter 4) provides a culturally grounded typology through which the expressive and structural elements of Reddy's compositions can be meaningfully decoded. Such nuance demonstrates the candidate's keen understanding of stylistic micro-differentiation, a level of granularity too often glossed over in studies of fusion genres.

The application of this framework to Reddy's two principal organ works in Chapters 5 and 6 is exemplary in its analytic depth and clarity. The analysis reveals the syntactical and semiotic functions of jazz-style elements within the compositional fabric. This is most clearly seen in the close reading of the *mbaqanga*- and *marimba*-influenced sections of *Toccata for Madiba*, where the candidate identifies how rhythmic displacements, harmonic substitutions, and modal layering construct meaning that is both politically resonant and aesthetically innovative.

Further, the dissertation contributes to performance studies by framing the organist not as a passive reproducer of notated text but as an active co-creator of meaning. The absence of exhaustive performance instructions in Reddy's organ works is not treated as a lacuna but as an invitation to interpretive freedom, situating the performer within a post-structural paradigm of text-realization. This is theoretically significant, aligning with contemporary performance theory that regards interpretation as a site of cultural inscription and dialogic exchange.

The candidate also demonstrates an impressive command of intertextual discourse. References to historical precursors of genre fusion from Gershwin to Schuller's *third stream* concept are deployed as integral interlocutors in the analytical narrative, which lends the work a historiographical richness and places it firmly within the scholarly tradition of investigating musical syncretism.

Oosthuizen's engagement with Surendran Reddy's philosophy (particularly the notion of "clazz" as a space of aesthetic reconciliation and sociopolitical engagement) adds an additional layer of interpretive depth. The analysis transcends the purely musical to offer insight into the ideological commitments embedded in Reddy's works, especially in their reflection of post-Apartheid aspirations and transnational identity formation.

Therefore, the dissertation's strengths are multifaceted:

- An original analytical framework that respects the ontologies of hybrid music;
- Detailed, informed, and rigorous analysis of stylistic elements in context;
- A sophisticated view of performance as an interpretive and political act;
- An integrated methodology that fuses theory, analysis, and cultural critique;
- A clear contribution to the advancement of South African musicology and the global study of genre fusion.

### **III. Constructive Critique and Areas for Development**

While Oosthuizen's dissertation is commendable in both scope and depth, several areas invite further elaboration or refinement. These are not detracting flaws, but opportunities for continued scholarly maturation and enhanced clarity.

Firstly, the **rhetorical density of the analytical framework**, specifically as presented in Chapter 2 and the extensive appendices, while impressive in its taxonomic ambition, occasionally risks overwhelming the reader. The proliferation of subcategories and stylistic descriptors could benefit from occasional visual consolidation (e.g. tables or hierarchical

schemata) to enhance readability and pedagogical utility. For future publications, a slightly more streamlined presentation of the framework would likely facilitate its uptake by fellow scholars and performers seeking practical analytic tools.

Secondly, the **discussion of improvisation**, a cornerstone of jazz practice, is under-emphasized in the performative readings of Reddy's compositions. While the dissertation effectively analyzes the jazz-style *elements* embedded in notated scores, it engages less with the improvisational ethos that undergirds much of jazz's performative grammar. Given Reddy's own proclivity for extemporization and stylistic fluidity, a more robust engagement with theories of improvisation (Berliner, Monson, or Nettl) could deepen the account of how performer-agency is enacted in real time, especially in interpretive passages lacking prescriptive notation.

A related point concerns the treatment of **organological specificity**. While the dissertation alludes to the organ's evolution (e.g. Hammond instruments, registration practices, and theatre organs), these references could be expanded to more directly address instrumental constraints and affordances...particularly regarding how organ design interacts with jazz idioms. For instance, how do aspects like tremulants, manual configuration, or pedalboard design facilitate or limit the articulation of swing, groove, or polyrhythm? This question is particularly relevant given Reddy's imaginative re-contextualization of the instrument and may warrant more detailed elaboration in any future monograph or journal article.

Additionally, the dissertation's critical discourse could occasionally be **theoretically enriched by engaging more extensively with postcolonial musicological thought**. Although the political dimensions of Reddy's music are acknowledged (especially in relation to *Toccata for Madiba*) a more overt conversation with thinkers such as Kofi Agawu, Veit Erlmann, or Deborah Wong could have fortified the interpretive framing of "clazz" as not only a stylistic synthesis but also a sonic response to cultural hybridity, exile, and memory in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Finally, while the dissertation rightly focuses on Reddy's compositional output, a brief comparative reference to other South African composers experimenting with stylistic synthesis (Abdullah Ibrahim, Paul Hanmer, or Arthur Feder perhaps?) might further contextualize Reddy's position within a broader national or continental aesthetic genealogy.

These observations do not detract from the work's central achievements but point toward rich trajectories for further development and dissemination. The dissertation's foundations are eminently strong; these minor expansions would only serve to enhance its academic and artistic resonance.

#### **IV. Publication Potential**

John Oosthuizen's dissertation demonstrates significant scholarly and artistic merit, and several components are eminently suitable for publication in high-impact academic venues. Most notably, the analytical framework for the interpretation of hybrid jazz-classical compositions (specifically as applied to the organ repertoire) constitutes a major theoretical innovation. This framework, if rearticulated with slightly more concise taxonomy and supported by selected case studies from *Toccata for Madiba* and *Mayibuye Suite*, could form the basis for a standalone article in journals such as *Music Theory Online*, *Analytical Approaches to World Music*, or *SAMUS* (South African Music Studies).

Furthermore, the in-depth stylistic analysis of *Toccata for Madiba*, with its intertextual layering of mbaqanga, fugue, and improvisatory elements, could be expanded into a performance-

focused article suitable for journals like *Performance Practice Review*, *Organ Yearbook*, or *Jazz Perspectives*. The interpretation of the organ as a postcolonial instrument, liberated from its Euro-liturgical associations, aligns with current trends in decolonial music scholarship and could invite fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue.

In addition, the appendices containing codified style elements and transcriptions could be adapted into pedagogical resources or analytical models for conservatories or music theory programs focused on genre fusion, post-tonal analysis, or jazz idioms in non-traditional instrumental settings.

The dissertation offers rich potential for serial publication across at least three major axes: (1) analytical method; (2) performance-practice insight; and (3) South African post-Apartheid aesthetics. With minimal editorial revision, these contributions can meaningfully advance both scholarly discourse and practical engagement within and beyond South Africa's academic music community.

#### V. Final Recommendation

I have carefully examined the doctoral dissertation "*Die gebruik van jazz-stylelemente in die orrelkomposisies van Surendran Reddy (1962–2010)*" submitted by John Ernst Oosthuizen, and I am of the considered opinion that it meets and in certain respects exceeds the scholarly standards required for the conferral of the PhD degree. The dissertation demonstrates exceptional analytical acuity, theoretical innovation, and stylistic maturity in its treatment of genre hybridity, music analysis, and performance practice within a South African context. It offers an original and rigorous analytical framework, supported by detailed application to two of Surendran Reddy's major organ works, while making a significant contribution to the fields of musicology, jazz studies, and cultural discourse.

The candidate exhibits a high level of intellectual independence and theoretical sophistication, and the work is eminently suitable for scholarly publication. **I therefore recommend without reservation that the degree be awarded.** Warmest congratulations to both the candidate and the promotor for an outstanding contribution to music scholarship.

Yours sincerely



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