

Musical Investigation Rough Draft

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Rhythm

- Both pieces share a duple meter, with a steady beat, although “So What” is at a slightly faster tempo.
- The melodic players in “So What” tend to stay slightly behind the rhythm section, while Shankar’s playing is right on time with the drums and accompaniment.
- Both pieces use syncopation extensively, and the lead melodic players often use complex dotted quarter and eighth notes in their improvisation, along with frequently playing on the upbeat instead of the downbeat. In the case of “So What”, the eighth notes are actually extended into pairs of dotted eighth notes and sixteenth notes, which creates a swing rhythm.
- Both pieces also shift in rhythm density, starting with a less dense opening riff, then evolving into more complex, denser riffs.

Dynamics

- Both pieces’ dynamics are largely controlled by the improviser. In “Raag Khamaj”, Ravi Shankar frequently uses crescendos to build texture and emotion into his playing.
- The improvisers in “So What” and “Raag Khamaj” also employ sudden increases and decreases in dynamic. For example, Miles Davis, in his solo, begins with a series of muted, mellow riffs. However, this is interrupted by a sudden, loud sequence of 3 identical notes, which breaks the theme introduced earlier.

- Both Davis and Shankar use explosive and crisp attacks of the notes, in comparison to the much softer sustain and decay periods.

Melody

- Both songs alternate between legato and staccato playing, sometimes even consecutively for example, at the 6:20 mark in Raag Khamaj, Shankar repeats the same riff in staccato and legato style, one after the other.
- Both songs feature a “head” melody that is played at the beginning and end of the piece, but all of the other melody is improvised for both pieces.
- Ravi Shankar and the Davis Sextet, especially John Coltrane, frequently use scalar melodic constructions in their improvisation. Coltrane often precedes his riffs with runs up or down the Dorian scale, while Shankar often traverses the entire Raga, and both improvisers often end these riffs on the tonic.
- Both pieces have an extremely large range, and they traverse this range mostly in small steps, giving them a conjunct style. However, sometimes the improvisation will feature sudden jumps to high notes, to add drama.
- “So What” differs importantly from “Raag Khamaj” in that the main melody is actually in the bass line, as opposed to being in the sitar, which is the primary melodic instrument.

Harmony

- Both pieces feature an accompaniment section to provide harmony, although the rhythm section in the Davis sextet is much more complex than the tamping used to provide support to the sitar in “Raag Khamaj”.
- Both pieces use harmonies that do not fit in the traditional major minor classification. “Kind of Blue” uses the Dorian mode, while “Raag Khamaj” features semitones and a more complex modal scale known as a “Raga”
- Despite the tonality not being major or minor, the harmonies between instruments are generally consonant, with Evan’s piano comping quickly shifting to match the current improviser’s scale.

- The accompaniment uses full chords for harmony in both pieces, with Evan's frequently hitting minor 7 chords to fit the Dorian scale, while the tanpura cycles through fragmented chords in "Raag Khamaj," often shifting between the tonic and dominant.

Tone color

- Both pieces feature a very high range, especially with the sitar in "Raag Khamaj." However, even though the sitar has a greater range than any of the individual instruments in "So What," the improvisation is split between 3 different instruments with different ranges, making the range between pieces about equal.
- "So What" has more instrumentation, with 3 different melodic instruments compared to only the sitar, allowing for greater tone color.

Texture

- Both pieces feature homophonic style, with a single melodic instrument playing over the accompanying harmonic instruments.
- While both pieces do feature harmonies, they lack more complex harmonic structures in comparison to Western Classical music, such as counterpoint. However, while both pieces are not extremely developed in texture, they make up for this with intricate improvised melodies that constantly surprise the listener.

Form

- Both pieces follow a head - improvisation - head format, and both pieces do not fit into any of the traditional classical forms such as binary, ternary, etc.
- Both pieces are completely instrumental, and do not feature any vocals or lyrics.