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Narrative Strategies in Three Versions of *Autumn Leaves* by Julian Lage

Estratégias narrativas em três versões de Autumn Leaves por Julian Lage

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Abstract: This article investigates three solo performances of *Autumn Leaves* (D–F) by the American guitarist Julian Lage (1987–), interpreting them from the perspective of storytelling and the Theory of Musical Narrative of Byron Almén (2008). The study expands on previous analyses by incorporating a new recording from 2023 and compares the results with three versions of *My Favorite Things* (A–C) by Jonathan Kreisberg (1972–), discussed in the author's previous work. The methodology combines narrative analysis at three levels (agential, actantial, and narrative) with observation of acoustic parameters measured in LUFS and LRA, and identification of "support points" — recurring elements that structure performance. The results reveal that Lage constructs his musical narratives through the manipulation of contrasts of texture, register, dynamics and time, and by a rhetorical game between conformity and nonconformity to the form of the standard, which constitutes two main narrative conflicts: (1) the progressive contrast of musical elements and (2) the exploration of the listener's expectations. The three performances present a convex narrative arc, in which the intensity grows until the climax is around two-thirds of the total duration, and resolves into a coda that resumes thematic fragments. Comparatively, Kreisberg's performances exhibit greater formal constancy, less dynamic range, and recurrent melodic support points, while Lage's approach favors more conceptual support points with improvisational freedom. It is concluded that both develop their own narrative strategies, expressing their musical identities through improvisation. The analysis highlights musical storytelling as an expanded and intertextual process, which manifests itself not only in an isolated performance, but throughout Julian Lage's artistic trajectory.

Keywords: Musical Improvisation. Jonathan Kreisberg. Julian Lage. Storytelling. Musical narrative.

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Resumo: Este artigo investiga três performances solo de *Autumn Leaves* (D–F) pelo guitarrista norte-americano Julian Lage (1987–), interpretando-as sob a perspectiva do *storytelling* e da teoria da narratividade musical de Byron Almén (2008). O estudo amplia análises anteriores ao incorporar uma nova gravação de 2023 e compara os resultados com três versões de *My Favorite Things* (A–C) por Jonathan Kreisberg (1972–), discutidas em trabalho anterior do autor. A metodologia combina análise narrativa em três níveis (agencial, atorial e narrativo) com observação de parâmetros acústicos medidos em LUFS e LRA, e identificação de *pontos de apoio* — elementos recorrentes que estruturam a performance. Os resultados revelam que Lage constrói suas narrativas musicais por meio da manipulação de contrastes de textura, registro, dinâmica e tempo, e por um jogo retórico entre conformidade e não conformidade com a forma do *standard*, o que constitui dois conflitos narrativos principais: (1) o contraste progressivo de elementos musicais e (2) a exploração das expectativas do ouvinte. As três performances apresentam um arco narrativo convexo, no qual a intensidade cresce até o clímax situado em torno de dois terços da duração total, e se resolve em uma coda que retoma fragmentos temáticos. Comparativamente, as performances de Kreisberg exibem maior constância formal, menor amplitude dinâmica e pontos de apoio melódicos recorrentes, enquanto a abordagem de Lage privilegia pontos de apoio mais conceituais e com liberdade improvisatória. Conclui-se que ambos desenvolvem estratégias narrativas próprias, expressando suas identidades musicais através da improvisação. A análise evidencia o *storytelling* musical como um processo expandido e intertextual, que se manifesta não apenas em uma performance isolada, mas ao longo de toda a trajetória artística de Julian Lage.

Palavras-chave: Improvisação musical. Jonathan Kreisberg. Julian Lage. *Storytelling*. Narratividade musical.

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1. Introduction

In this article,[1] I analyze[2] three performances of *Autumn Leaves*[3] on solo guitar by the American Julian Lage (1987–), using ideas from the field of

[1] This work was carried out with the support of the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (CAPES) - Funding Code 001.

[2] In this article, the Chat GPT tool was occasionally used to assist in the review and synthesis of some textual ideas elaborated, and in the transcription of some excerpts from interviews. All content was reviewed and re-edited by the author for the presentation of the final text.

[3] The performances of *Autumn Leaves* (D–F) can be accessed at the following links: performance D, from the CD *Gladwell* (Lage, 2011a): https://youtu.be/warQF_GHoAs; The transcription of performance D by François Leduc (2017), used in the text: https://youtu.be/hwQqqtdZ66o?si=3Xhld2JvOr6s988l; performance E, live at Denison University (Lage, 2011b): https://youtu.be/OuQ4hETyVSg; The transcript of the performance is accessed via the YouTube channel Sharp Eleven Music (2018), used in the text: https://youtu.be/R1MMLvyvMDY?si=AA_UnGsJMA0H9c3z; performance F, live in an interview

storytelling and Byron Almén's Theory of Musical Narrative (2008). In my thesis (Gonçalves 2022), I studied two versions (D and E), and here I incorporate a new performance from 2023 (F), expanding the comparative analysis, also using concepts such as narrative arc, support points, and sound intensity measurements (in LUFS and LRA) with the iZotope RX8 and Transcribe! software. I argue that when analyzing the three versions (called D-F below) we observe some narrative *storytelling* strategies in the musician's performances. In addition, I briefly compare these analyses with three performances (A, B, and C, A–C below) of *My Favorite Things*[4] by the American Jonathan Kreisberg (1972–), investigated in my thesis and in a recently published article (Gonçalves 2025), which allows us to observe distinct and recurrent narrative strategies in the work of each musician. This text establishes continuity with the thesis and the article mentioned, adopting the same methodologies and concepts for analysis. This approximation evidences the evolution of the research, enables the direct comparison of the data and dispenses with the detailed representation of methodological justifications or concepts already discussed, and the reader can resort to the previous works mentioned throughout the text for a more in-depth consultation.

2. *Storytelling* and Musical Improvisation: Characteristics and Skills, and Their Relationship with Narrativity

According to the authors reviewed in my research,[5] it is noticed that several jazz improvisers, such as the exponents John Coltrane, Lester Young,

for Rick Beato's YouTube channel (Lage; Beato 2023): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49KwbU0hT3w&t=4343s.

[4] The performances of *My Favorite Things* (called A–C below) are in the references of the work (Kreisberg 2013, 2013a, 2020), and can be accessed at the following links: A (album *ONE*, 2013) – (https://open.spotify.com/intl-pt/track/1QQM6NjGYmMQIpa2xQwSzg?si=e164659e760647a7) ; B (Mallemort, France in 2013) - https://youtu.be/176_h6jz2PM; C (Tokyo, Japan, in 2020) - https://youtu.be/iQxxit4kz6Q .

[5] In my thesis (Gonçalves 2022), there is a more detailed explanation of the concept and references. Some of the works consulted in the research on the concept *storytelling* were those of Brian Harker (1997), the book by Paul Berliner (1994), Vijay Iyer (2004), Richard Niles (2009), the works of Sven Bjerstedt (2014; 2015a; 2015b) among others. The ideas of *storytelling* are also used by Brazilian musicians in their works, as cited in a recently published article (Gonçalves 2025).

Charlie Parker, Pat Metheny, Brad Mehldau and others, from different generations, describe their improvisation process saying that they play as if they were going to "tell a story with music", the so-called *storytelling*. In a recent interview, we can observe Julian Lage's view on the subject:

> Improvisation is so interesting because we all do it in one way or another. Whether it's making decisions about how we play a chord in a pre-written song or generating ideas and developing them in a free environment, it's just part of our DNA. It's like how we speak. I do think that there's a marriage between movement, the physicality of our hands, and our intelligence about music. *I think at the end of the day it's really storytelling. I think it is about narrative, drama, tension, release – all those things are first and foremost. And then it's a matter of just how you realize that.* (Lage 2024 author's highlight[6])

In previous work (Gonçalves 2018), I summarized that Paul Berliner (1994) identified seven characteristics of the *storytelling* and six skills required for the musician, while Sven Bjerstedt (2014; 2015a) points out six characteristics and three abilities.[7] Other studies highlight skills relevant to improvisation. Martin Norgaard (2011) identified four strategies for creating musical material (use of memorized phrases, harmonic prioritization, melodic prioritization, and recapitulation), and two approaches to study and performance (theory mode and play mode). In a previous work (Gonçalves 2017), I identified melodic manipulation procedures commonly used in musical improvisation (paraphrasing, thematism, motive development, formulaic improvisation, and free thematism).

We may think that there may be an explicit intention of the musician to tell a story. At the same time, Bjerstedt argues that

> Several of the jazz musicians I interviewed seem to adhere to the view of musical storytelling as the construction of musical meaning by the listener through narrativization or the construction of a script. (Bjerstedt 2015a, p. 51)

We can consider that the listener — and, in the case of this work, the music analyst — has an active role in the perception of a musical narrative through

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[6] The video can be accessed at the following link, excerpt from the speech at [00:28]: https://youtu.be/RZF72R3IwJ8?si=zdso02dlN0fE0O9.

[7] As an example, we could consider Berliner's characteristic 1) — "To start the solo from the beginning" - for example, using a simpler phrasing, with short and spaced phrases at the beginning of the improvisation.

sounds.[8] In this sense, it is possible to establish an articulation between the field of *storytelling* and narrative studies.

3. Concepts from Almén's Theory of Musical Narrative – Three-Level Analysis

Byron Almén's theory of musical narrative (2008) is adopted as a methodological reference in this work.[9] Inspired by the work of semiotician James Jakób Liszka (1989), Almén defines narrative as the transvaluation of culturally significant differences through a sequence of actions. Thus, the narrative meaning in music arises when we identify passages from one initial state to another, perceived as states of order and transgression. This change is analyzed through the concepts of *markedness* (differentiation between elements), *rank* (hierarchy assigned in time) and *transvaluation* (passage from one state to another).

The narrative analysis proposed by Almén is organized into three levels. At the agential level (first), musical material is segmented, for example, into isotopies, cohesive units that according to Eero Tarasti (1994) They can be deep structures, thematicity, texture, genre elements, among others. I interpret and use the concept of isotopies[10] as being able to manifest itself in different musical

[8] This perspective is explained by Ricardo Alves (2019), for whom music is not narrative in itself, but the listener has the potential to listen to it narratively. The way in which this process of "narrativization" occurs in musical cognition is also studied by Elizabeth Margulis (2017) and Sven Bjerstedt (2014), and can be related to the level of aesthetic analysis of Jean-Jacques Nattiez (2002). This complexity of the issue is addressed by Eero Tarasti (2017) and Byron Almén, who propose an analysis of the narrative aspects through their structures, a perspective also adopted in this work.

[9] For a more detailed explanation of the theory of musical narrativity, see the author's works (Almén 2003, 2008) "I also synthesized some concepts of the theory in my previous work (Gonçalves 2022). The field of musical narrativity has gained space in academia over the last few decades, and for an overview of its evolution, see, for example, the works of Bruno Angelo (2011), Fred Everett Maus (1991; 2001), Byron Almén (2008), Michael Klein (2013), Vincent Meelberg (2009, 2014) and Eero Tarasti (2017).

[10] In my thesis (Gonçalves 2022) I discuss in more detail and comment on how the segmentation of isotopies was done in different narrative analyses, for example in the works of Vinícius Fernandes, Guto Brambilla and Fernando Iazetta (2017), the work of Solon Manica (2016), Ricardo Tanganelli da Silva's (2017), among others from Almén's own theory. Works more linked to the analysis of popular music and jazz have also used the theory of Almén and other authors in the field of narrativity, such as Michael Chryssoulakis (2016), Gerald Massoud (2019). Like the

sections, phrases or motifs, differentiated by opposition of musical parameters. The actantial level (second) examines the dynamic relationships between these isotopies: variations in register, texture, duration, or musical intensity, which modify the narrative and make it progress. At the narrative level (third), the trajectories of order and transgression are investigated, configured according to four archetypes: comedy, romance, irony/satire and tragedy (Almén 2003).

It is important to emphasize that the determination of the archetype does not depend only on the musical data, but also on the interpretation of the analyst or listener. As Almén states (2008 p. 55), narrative reading requires attributing value to events, so that meaning emerges from the interaction between musical elements and the interpretive point of view.

4. Other Concepts: Narrative Arc, LUFS Analysis, LRA, and Support Points

As I have reviewed in previous works (Gonçalves 2018; 2022[11]), the narrative arc in music can be applied to improvisation or composition as a way of organizing or analyzing trajectories of tension and resolution, density and rest. This trajectory can be built and perceived through different musical parameters that evolve over time. Turi Collura (2008) and Ingrid Monson (1996) highlight aspects that influence musical density and intensity: (1) number of notes; (2) dynamic; (3) rhythmic density or complexity; (4) melodic variations and ornamentations; (5) harmony; (6) interaction between musicians; (7) use of the register (low, medium or high); (8) timbre; and (9) *groove* style. The perception of these changing parameters contributes to a dramaturgical listening to the performance. According to the literature review, there is a strong tendency to produce a narrative arc of the convex type in most of the pieces and musical

latter authors, I have worked in my publications to strengthen the intersection between the study of popular music with the presence of improvisation (and *storytelling*) with the field of narrative analysis, a perspective also somewhat explored by Sven Bjerstedt (2014).

[11] In previous works I presented a more detailed review (Gonçalves 2018, 2022)(Gonçalves, 2022), but I highlight here some authors who address the narrative arc in literature and music— Gerald Prince (1989), Jamey Aebersold (1992), César Guerra-Peixe (1988), Ted Pease (2003), John Damian (2003), Kofi Agawu (2009), John Rink (1999). On the other hand, Derek Bailey (1993) reports an artistic proposal by his group Joseph Holbrooke in which they tried to get rid of the concept of tension and resolution in their performances.

improvisations in general (Frieler *et al.* 2015). This type of narrative arc begins with a section of low musical intensity/density, moves to high intensity (climax), and ends at low intensity (release, resolution or relaxation). I argue that this typical narrative arc occurs in the analyzed performances by Lage and Kreisberg (performances A–F)

Another tool that I have used for quantitative analysis of the dynamic parameter is the study of phonograms based on the LUFS (*Loudness Unit Full Scale*[12]) and LRA (*Loudness Range*[13]) measured by the iZotope RX8 software, of the phonogram as a whole, or in selected excerpts.

I have been formulating the concept of *support point* (or *pivot point*) as a recurring element that organizes musical discourse, working in transitions, connections of excerpts and musical sections, both for performance and musical analysis. They can take the form of motifs, phrases, melodic contours, or dynamic features, and stand out when they appear in similar positions in different performances. Its repetition with variations creates coherence, reinforces musical narrativity and acts as a guide for the performer, offering predictability and direction in improvisation. They are related to the concept of *markedness*, as they often mark contrasts, cadences and changes in musical form.

5. Brief biography and overview of Julian Lage's work

Julian Lage is an American guitarist born in 1987 in Santa Rosa, California. He started on the instrument at the age of five and soon stood out as a prodigy, recorded in the documentary *Jules at Eight*, available in excerpts on YouTube.[14] In

[12] According to Bobby Owsinsky (2017), the term and concept LUFS have become widely used in the phonographic and audiovisual industry as a standard for measuring musical amplitude and digital signal level, and has an advantage of objectively representing the human perception of sound volume.

[13] The concept of dynamic amplitude used in this work is taken mainly as a comparison between the different performances analyzed, and the parameter called *Loudness Range* (LRA), analyzed by the iZotope RX8 software, is taken as a reference. According to the software manual, the LRA: "shows the dynamic range (as defined by BS. 1770). This value reflects the dynamics of audio levels in the selection."

[14] Some of the excerpts from the documentary, which appear to have been captured by different users of exhibitions on TV channels, are available on YouTube at the following links, accessed on 11/10/2021 (Becker; Lage 1996) : *Heath De Fount-Haberlin in "Jules at Eight* -

his late teens (2004–2005) she joined vibraphonist Gary Burton's group, and in the following years collaborated with names such as Herbie Hancock, Cristian McBride and Kenny Werner. He studied at institutions such as the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and the Berklee School of Music, cited by Scott Yanow (2013).

Figure 1: *Gladwell* album cover (Lage 2011). Source: Spotify

As I reviewed in my previous work (Gonçalves 2022) there is a tradition of solo guitar (without accompaniment) in jazz since the mid-twentieth century, represented by names like Joe Pass, Joe Diorio, Ted Greene and, more recently, Peter Bernstein, Derek Bailey, Antoine Boyer and several others. Julian Lage and Jonathan Kreisberg are part of this lineage, articulating traditional resources of the genre with a personal style[15] of improvisation and performance.

Lage's early records — *Sounding Point* of 2009 and *Gladwell* of 2011, whose cover is in Fig. 1 — present varied instrumental formations, including solo pieces, duos and groups with percussion, saxophone, cello, and guitar. At this stage, the musician resorted to semi-acoustic guitars, such as the Linda Manzer

https://youtu.be/s7FY65rd03I; *TV show Zone 6/Broadcast Date - 12/27/96* - https://youtu.be/NWhycYyys9I.

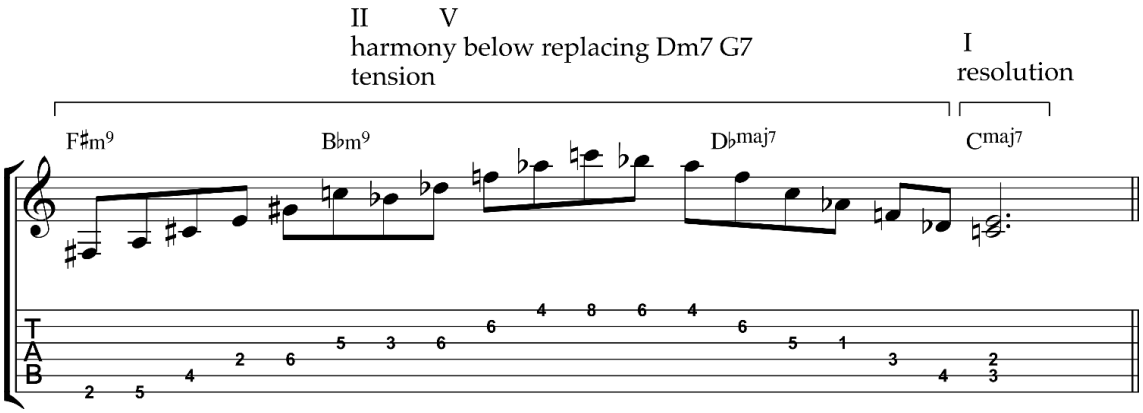
[15] I use the term Personal here in the sense of John Kratus' style analysis (1995) and Personal Voice as a characteristic of the *storytelling* by Sven Bjerstedt (2014). Kratus in his work shows how the development of skills by the improviser occurs throughout his career and studies, going through different phases, until he reaches his own style of performance.

used in *Sounding Point*. Over time, he began to explore other textures, recording solo steel guitar albums, such as *World's Fair* (Lage 2015), and more recently adopting electric guitars such as the Telecaster and his model signed by Collings. This instrumental diversity marks each stage of his trajectory.

In an interview at the time of *Sounding Point*, Lage stressed that he sought a musical balance that went beyond virtuosity, wishing the album to have narrative quality (*storytelling*), as well as at the time of *Gladwell*. As he stated: "*I wish there was more narrative on the album.* [...] I think we did a great job making an album that says what we wanted to say." (Julian Lage apud Ferrucci 2009, translation and author's emphasis).

6. Freedom of interpretation, use of tension and release by Lage

In the article *Learning songs in three dimensions* (Lage 2011c), the musician talks about how when learning a song one can have different approaches – establish and play a specific arrangement, or try to play each performance in a more improvised way, which is what he often does. When we listen to different performances of the same piece by Lage, we can see that the freedom to create with different musical elements stands out.



Example 1: Phrase played by Julian Lage, in which he demonstrates the concept of tension and resolution (or release) on progression II V I in C Major (transcribed by the author)

In an explanatory interview available on YouTube, Lage talks about the way he thinks about the regions of tension and release (or resolution), of dominant and tonic — he recurrently superimposes different and unexpected

harmonies (especially in the dominant region) with the intention of generating tension, as in Ex. 1, in which it plays the arpeggios of F♯m9, B♭m9 and D♭Maj7 replacing a traditional II V I, where one would expect Dm7 G7 (Lage 2009[16]).

In the article entitled *Twelve Observations About the Guitar* (Lage 2017), the musician deals with several topics. In observation number 4, called "You're Worth Listening To," the musician proposes a practice that exercises improvisation, but suggests a certain structure in the creation of small improvised pieces:

> Record ten 1-minute compositions per day while looking at a timer. [...] As you play, try to create architecture as the seconds pass: by the 30-second mark, you're about halfway done so maybe that's when you play a bridge; at a quarter of, you are starting to bring it to a landing. When the timer turns off, you stop. (Lage 2017, p. 198)

The idea that performance suggests a beginning, middle, and end refers directly to *storytelling*, while the notion of "bringing it to a landing" implies the construction of a narrative arc: progressive intensification to a culminating point and decrease at the end. The fact that the practice has a programmed duration also indicates a certain planning, bringing improvisation closer to an underlying narrative structure. Lage has been practicing this type of creation since he was thirteen years old (cited in the article), which probably contributed to internalizing such strategies in time-limited performances.

7. Comparative Analysis of Three Versions of *Autumn Leaves* by Julian Lage

I present a comparative analysis of three performances of *Autumn Leaves* by Julian Lage: the album version *Gladwell* (Lage 2011), the live performance at Denison University in the same year (Lage 2011), and the one conducted in an interview (Lage; Beato 2023), designated as D, E and F (referred to as D–F, below).

Autumn Leaves is considered *standard* piece of the jazz repertoire, originally composed in France by Joseph Kosma around 1945 (Baudoin, 2012). It has been recorded by several artists of the genre such as Cannonball Adderley (feat. Miles Davis), Nat King Cole, Chet Baker, and also several guitarists in solo

[16] Excerpt in [03:55] of the video, can be accessed at the link: https://youtu.be/sA4cbr69LwA.

guitar versions such as Joe Pass, Ted Greene and Lenny Breau, and even Brazilian guitarists such as Hélio Delmiro, on the CD Romã (1991), and Olmir Stocker. The song contains a 32-bar form, which I divided into 4 sections of 8 bars (A1–A4) for the purposes of this analysis. The song is in G minor, with traditional tonal harmony.

7.1. Analysis of LUFS, LRA and large dynamic variability in perf. D–F

The images obtained in the Transcribe! and iZotope RX 8 show that the performances of Lage (D–F) have a greater range of dynamics, while those of Kreisberg (A–C) maintain a more contained variation (see Fig. 2–7). In the Transcribe! figures, the digital waveform represents the amplitude (dBFS) with decibel lines *full scale* of stereo channels over time, with waveforms represented from the beginning to the end of each phonogram; in RX 8, the LUFS and *Loudness Range* (LRA) data provide objective measures for this comparison, also measured from the beginning to the end of each phonogram.

Fig. 6 shows that the LRA of the D–F performances varied between 13.3 and 17.8 LU, while in the A–C performances the values are between 4.4 (perf. A) and 9.5 (perf. C). Fig. 2–5 show that the waveform of performance A (Kreisberg) presents greater homogeneity compared to the D–F (Lage) performances. These data indicate that Lage's recordings have a significantly greater dynamic range than Kreisberg's.

If we expand the comparison to recordings with other performers[17] on the guitar solo by *Autumn Leaves* (Julian Lage, Hélio Delmiro, Joe Pass and Earl Klugh) analyzed in the iZotope RX 8 software, it is observed that the perf. D de Lage has the highest dynamic range (17.8 LU). Next come Delmiro (10.1 LU),

[17] Throughout this research, I listened to several versions of *Autumn Leaves* by various lead guitar performers, and obtained some phonograms of the performances through *streaming* and shopping apps such as Google Play Music and Apple Music. Some links to listen to versions are below:

Julian Lage, album *Gladwell* (Lage, 2011): https://youtu.be/warQF_GHoAs; Hélio Delmiro, on the album *Pomegranate* (1991) - https://youtu.be/EQaD-CZ_RoE ; Joe Pass, album *Virtuoso #4* (1983): https://youtu.be/uArmORHR3AM; Earl Klugh, album *Solo Guitar* (1989) - https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=g7EfANed_I4&feature=share; Other performances, not analyzed in the software for dynamic range, but listened to for comparison: Lenny Breau, album *Cabin Fever:* https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=1S4oO4sZRoY&feature=share; Joe Pass, album *Unforgettable* (key E minor [Em], Nylon guitar): https://youtu.be/3ByxUuBm-Z8;

Pass (8.8 LU) and Klugh (7.3 LU). Despite the differences in arrangement between the performers, the values show how Lage stands out from the others, whose tracks are relatively close. By observing the waveforms of these recordings[18] with the *Transcribe!* software, it is noted that Lage's has the most marked dynamic curve, with a prolonged and stable accent after the second half of the play — evidence of the narrative arc discussed in the following analysis.

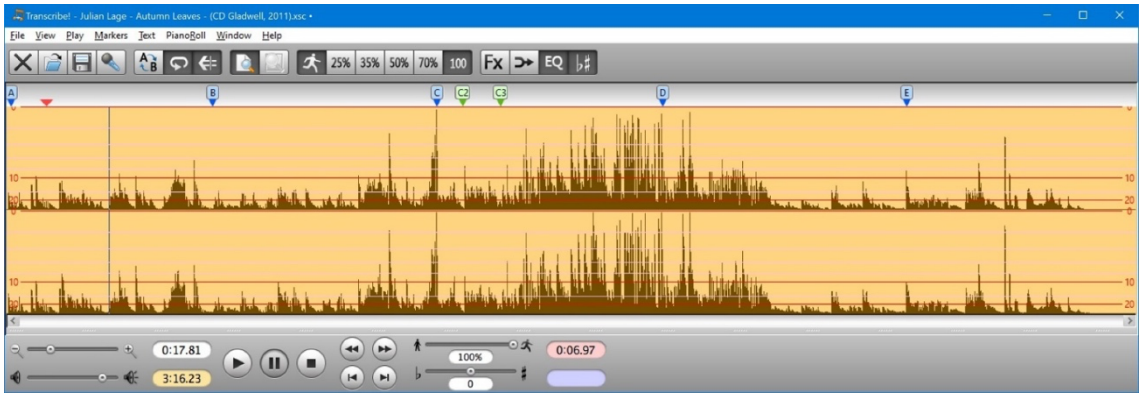


Figure 2: *Autumn Leaves* waveform, Perf. D (*Gladwell*, 2011) by Julian Lage

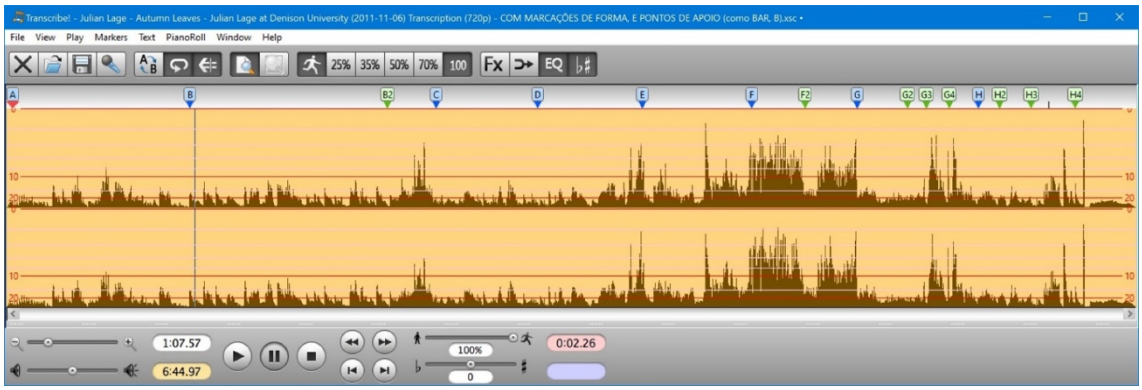


Figure 3: *Autumn Leaves* waveform, Perf. E (in Denison, 2011) by Julian Lage

[18] The complete data of these analyses, with the figures of the software, can be seen in my thesis (Gonçalves 2022).

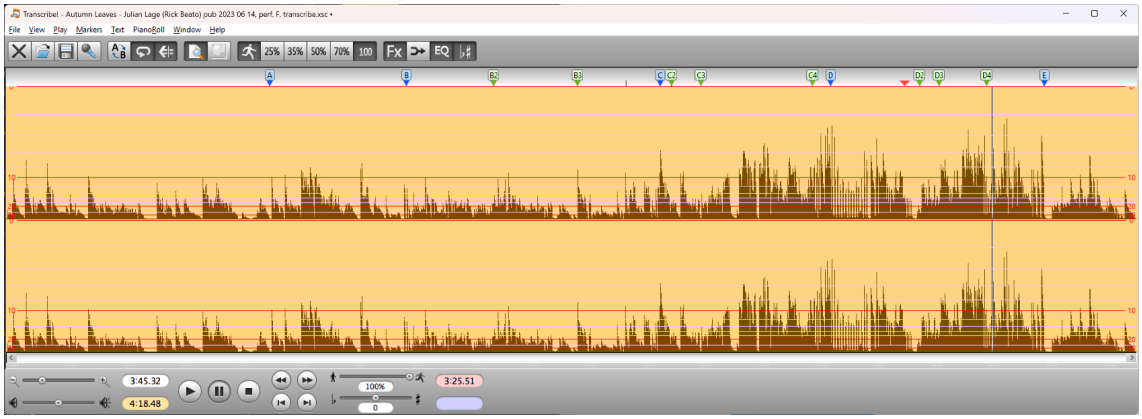


Figure 4: *Autumn Leaves* waveform, Perf. F (in Beato, 2023) by Julian Lage.

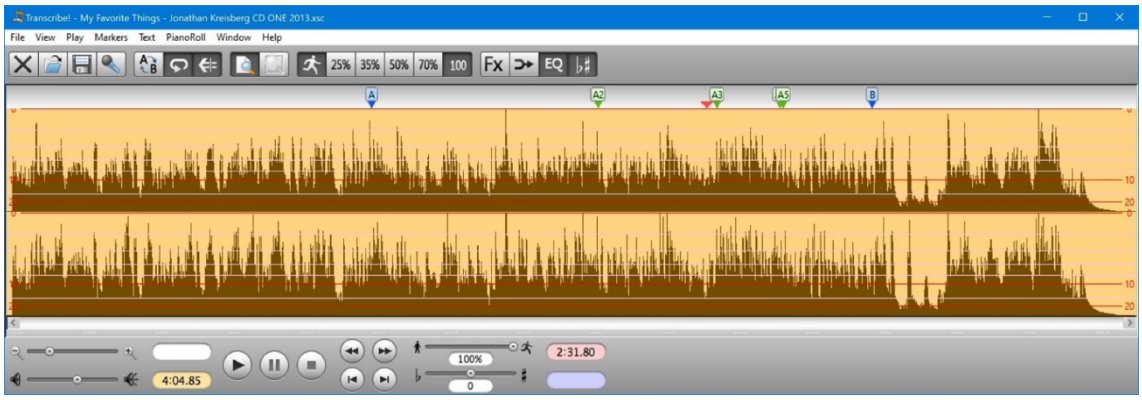


Figure 5: *My Favorite Things* waveform, Perf. A (*ONE*, 2011) by Jonathan Kreisberg

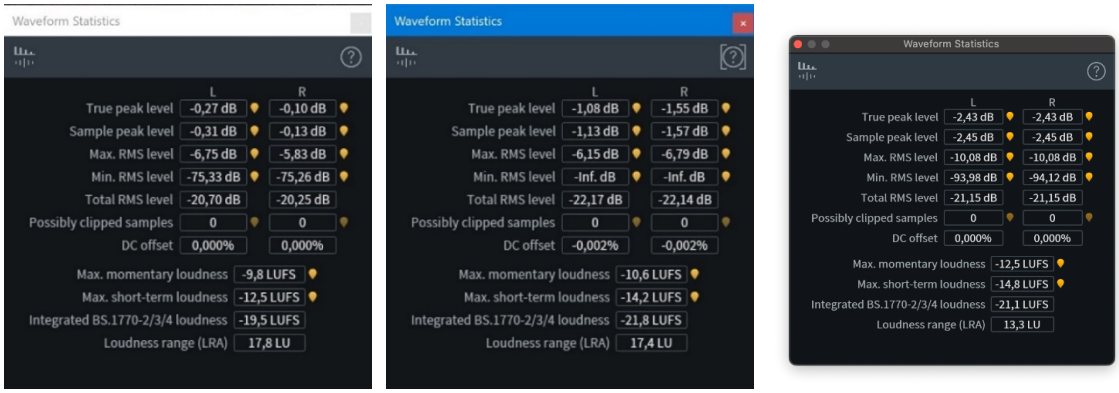


Figure 6: Data measured by the iZotope RX8 of the perf. D–F (in order) of *Autumn Leaves* by Julian Lage

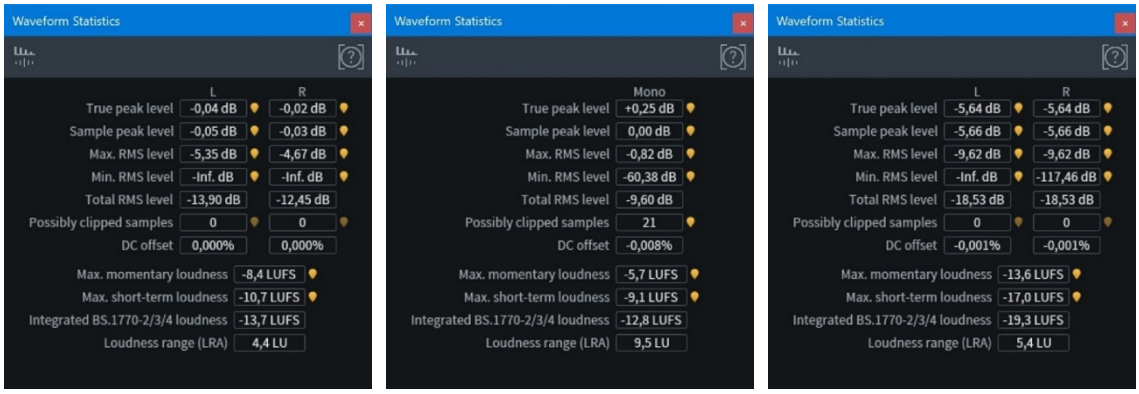
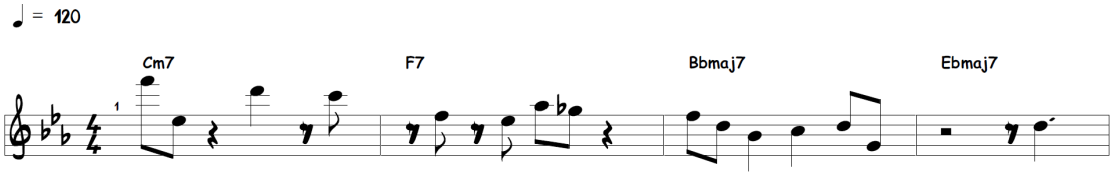


Figure 7: Data measured by the iZotope RX8 of the perf. A–C (in order) of *My Favorite Things* by Jonathan Kreisberg

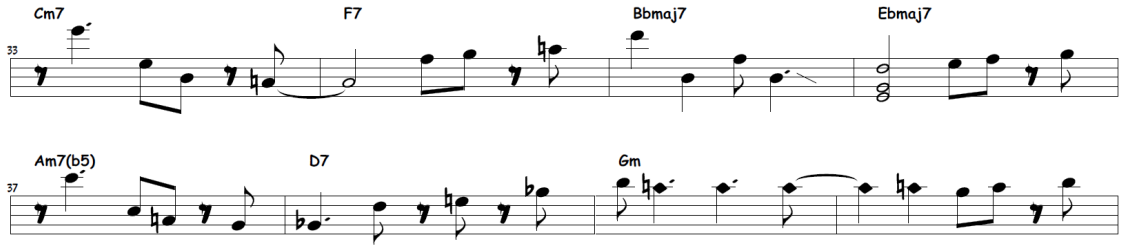
7.2. The narrative arc of *Autumn Leaves* on the album *Gladwell* (2011), perf. D

In performance D, I name each chorus D1 to D5 (four choruses plus the coda) and the sections as A1 to A4, each with eight bars. It is observed that several parameters discussed in the revision of the concept of narrative arc act together and undergo modifications throughout the performance, mainly: (1) number of notes, (2) dynamics, (3) melodic variations and ornamentations, (4) harmony and (5) *groove style*.

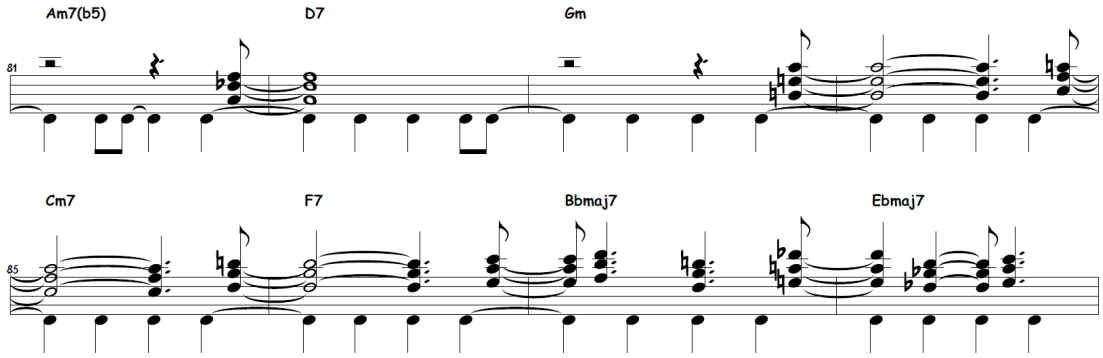
D1: The performance begins with single line phrases, based mainly on eighth notes, but enriched by rhythmic accents and dynamic curves (Ex. 2). This texture predominates throughout the first chorus, interrupted only by passages in two notes in bars 14 and 19. The finish of the first chorus leads to a denser texture, with an accompaniment character. Thus, Lage seems to start by grabbing the listener's attention with a rhythmically expressive melodic phrasing, preparing the entrance of the theme in the next chorus.

Example 2: Excerpt on D1 on [00:00] in perf. D for *Autumn Leaves* by Julian Lage. Transcription by François Leduc (2017)[19]

[19] The transcription can be accessed at: https://youtu.be/hwQqqtdZ66o?si=3Xhld2JvOr6s988l.

D2: The second chorus marks the presentation of the theme, in polyphonic texture, with a clear separation between the main melodic voice and complementary lines. The low voice fulfills a harmonic function, as in measure 33 (Ex. 3), in which the notes E♭–B♭–A outline the conduction of the progression Cm7–F7. Another relevant aspect is the increase in melodic density: while in the first chorus (mm. 21–24) there are 15 attacks, in the same point as the second (mm. 53–56) there are 24 notes. Thus, chorus 2 presents greater musical intensity, resulting from the more complex texture, the introduction of a widely known melody and the increase of notes in the phrasing.



Example 3: Excerpt on D2 on [00:36] in perf. D for *Autumn Leaves* by Julian Lage. Transcription by François Leduc (2017)



Example 4: Excerpt on D3 at [01:34], leading to the climax of the perf. D. Transcription by François Leduc (2017)

D3: The transition from second to third chorus resumes the use of chords to delineate harmony, but with dynamics opposite to that of the previous passage: while the D1–D2 transition is smooth and at rest (below –20 dB, Fig. 2, marking B), that of D2–D3 increases in intensity, reaching a peak close to 0 dB (marking C). The chorus proceeds with denser phrases, such as the four-bar

phrase (mm. 69–72), which contains 28 notes—surpassing the phrase of D2 (mm. 53–56, with 24 notes). Another striking element is the introduction of major triads in the high strings, supported by the bass pedal in D (open fourth string), with *crescendos* which culminate in five note chords (m. 81 onwards, Ex. 4). The result is a significant increase in musical intensity, configuring the second half of D3 as the *climax of the performance,* confirmed by the amplitude graph (Fig. 2), which shows high and homogeneous amplitude in this stretch.

D4: The fourth chorus maintains the dense texture coming from the climax, with strumming chords and firm pulsation, in high dynamics. In [01:57] some attacks refer to a complete rhythm section, such as snare or drum cymbal, reinforcing the sense of an ensemble. The continuity of intensity is gradually transformed: Lage relaxes the tempo, adopts *the palm mute* (changing the timbre) and reduces the density of the five-tone chords for lighter, contrapuntal textures, in two voices and softer dynamics. At the end, in A4, he briefly mentions the melody, a resource that works narratively to reconnect the listener to the form of the music and reinterpret the musical discourse.

D5 (coda): The coda repeats the last four bars of the form three times, a typical feature in popular music arrangements. Lage performs it in contrapuntal texture, alternating melodic phrases and chords in *chord melody style*. The dynamics are low, the tempo slows down progressively and certain phrases sound almost *ad libitum*, following the breath of each one. The citation of the melody, the expanded register in the phrase of [02:48] (from low to high) and the dominant-tonic cadence reinforce the function of narrative conclusion. The ending contrasts with the beginning: if at the beginning we hear *fast single lines* and without explicit reference to the theme, here the ending occurs in slower tempo, piano and marked by melodic evocation, closing the narrative arc.

7.3. Narrative analysis of three versions of *Autumn Leaves* by Julian Lage

Table 1 (pp. 22–23) shows common and particular elements of D–F. If we understand the musical narrative as *transvaluation*, we can investigate whether in the D–F performances there is the construction of an initial order and its transgression — which would characterize a narrative trajectory. This implies identifying changes or oppositions (*markedness*) in the musical elements throughout the piece. Some questions can guide the analysis:

Q1) Are there enough changes in the musical elements to interpret the D–F performances as musical narratives?

Q2) What differences or oppositions between musical elements are relevant to characterize stages of order and transgression, gradual or abrupt?

Q3) What common and distinct aspects emerge in the narratives of the D–F performances, and what do they reveal about Julian Lage's narrative strategies?

In performance D, several elements combine to drive the narrative arc: firm and rubato (fast/slow) time contrasts, texture variations (from *single lines* to dense chords, bass pedal, *strumming*, homophonic and polyphonic textures) and dynamic changes with peaks of intensity between phrases and choruses. Thus, we can consider that D1 establishes an initial order, gradually transformed by the introduction of new elements in D2 and so on, in each chorus. We can interpret that the opposition between textures — monophonic in the first chorus and polyphonic in the second, and the new elements introduced in each chorus — constitute a relationship of *markedness* that contributes to the perception of a narrative trajectory. Thus, I argue that in performance D, each chorus brings gradual changes that we can consider to build stages of order and transgression. Performances E and F also feature typical narrative arcs — albeit with distinct elements.

This type of production of contrasts with musical elements, evident in the change with each chorus of the perf. D is explicitly mentioned by Lage in a recent interview, and can be seen as a strategy or narrative tool recurrently employed by the musician. In the following excerpt, the musician says how he varies parameters such as register, timbre, *voicings*, and later in the interview, he mentions how he changes the harmonic content used throughout his improvisations within each chorus:

> You know, so if you're dealing in the middle of the instrument, and you're dealing with certain voicings, and they sound so impactful, and man, you know, this is sounding great. Well, *about a chorus later*, I'm so tired of that buildup, because I've had this frequent, this mid-range thing that's mounting and mounting and mounting in the room. So I do find myself kind of bursting those bubbles a lot, you know, so, or trying to get out of a frequency range of the guitar before it becomes, I guess, just too much of a thing. So I'll stay in the mid-range. Okay, this is about to get a little too dense. I'm going to go high. I'm going to leave space to recalibrate. I'm going to go low. I'm

> going to get something sharper. Play something with more attack. I'm going to use only my thumb, so it's more dulcet. Just because no sound is empirically good or bad, it's just kind of how it fits. (Lage 2024, author's highlights[20])

A relevant aspect is that Lage begins the performance in D1 with improvised phrasing in a fast tempo, creating surprise in the listener. Instead of following the typical theme–improvisation–theme macroform (Gonçalves 2022), he subverts expectations: he begins with an impromptu introduction in *single notes*, quotes the melody only partially in the chorus (D2), introduces counterpoints and never presents the entire theme (section A3 does not appear). Thus, the quotations function as narrative guides within a predominantly improvised discourse.

This play with expectations — sometimes confirming, sometimes violating the form known by the listener — can be understood as a fundamental rhetorical resource in jazz language. In this sense, it is close to the concept of *signifying* by Henry Louis Gates (1988), originally formulated for African-American literature and applied by studies to improvisation in jazz, in which oral and written rhetoric is transposed into musical discourse.

An approach that bears similarity to Lage's can be observed in *My Funny Valentine*, in Miles Davis' live recording of 1964, analyzed by Robert Walser (1993).[21] The author shows how Davis plays with the listener's expectation by manipulating the form and melody of a widely known song, also establishing intertextuality with previous versions. This rhetorical game manifests itself in the alteration or omission of parts of the melody, in the incorporation of "mistakes" as part of the improvised speech, and in the taking of risks during the performance. According to the author, Davis (considered one of the leading

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[20] Excerpt from the interview [11:32], available at: https://youtu.be/t3RUKRKEGV8?si=txc5GaKHke9gnv3s&t=692

[21] Walser's work is part of a field that analyzes jazz improvisation from its own processes of signification, rhetoric and intertextuality. In contrast, Gunther Schuller's classic article (1958) upon *Blue 7* Sonny Rollins' was criticized for applying European music methodologies to jazz, interpreted as an attempt to legitimize improvisation as equivalent to written traditions. Authors such as Walser and Samuel Floyd (2002) emphasizes that the essence of jazz lies precisely in its rhetorical and interactive processes. In the words of Walser (1993, p. 359), analytical methods borrowed from traditional musicology may legitimize jazz in academia, but "they are clearly inadequate to help us understand jazz and explain its power to profoundly affect many people", because they make the rhetorical and meaning dimensions invisible.

figures of the jazz genre, who influenced musicians of later generations) transforms the song into a vehicle for recreation. I argue that Lage does the same with *Autumn Leaves:*

> The whole point of a jazz musician like Davis playing a Tin Pan Alley pop song can be understood as his opportunity to signify on the melodic possibilities, formal conventions (such as the AABA plan of the 32-measure chorus), harmonic potentials, and previously performed versions of the original song. […] The melody of "My Funny Valentine" was so familiar to his audience that Davis did not need to state it before signifyin' on it; two brief phrases serve to establish the tune. (Walser 1993, p. 351)

In this same sense, we observe in an interview that Lage exposes his vision that the songs he plays are like a "springboard," or we could say a vehicle, for the spontaneous musical expression of the moment. For the musician, during the performance there is freedom to change the harmony, melody and other musical parameters, depending on the emotional expressiveness of the moment. We can relate this approach to the concepts of *storytelling* in items about spontaneity and playing something new, as Berliner and Bjerstedt mentioned in Tab. 3 (p. 32):

> We can jump from a song from one record to a song from another record in a way that *we're not playing them like the record*, per se. […] but *the notion that the music is a springboard, the songs are a springboard.* But the temperament — the emotional temperament, the rhythmic temperament, the melodic temperament, *and the narrative in the harmony, of course — those are all more moment-specific.* We don't have to go play it like the record, and I find that incredibly exciting, you know, and challenging. (Lage 2024, author's highlights[22])

If we consider the breaking of expectations and the rhetorical game as relevant in the narrative trajectory, we can understand them as sources of narrative conflict, associated with the opposition between order and transgression. This feature can be related to what Almén (2008) it is called primary narrative level analysis. Among the possibilities of characterizing narrative conflicts, the author highlights the opposition "formal conformance versus nonconformance," in which the formal paradigm of a piece represents the initial cultural hierarchy, and our expectations about its conventional unfolding become the measure for the narrative trajectory:

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[22] Excerpt from the interview in [38:33] of the video, available at the link: https://youtu.be/_hsTW1Gypew?si=9INg-kr4FyiYgQQ3&t=2313

> Formal conformance versus nonconformance. In interpretations of this type, a formal paradigm itself represents the initial cultural hierarchy, and our expectations of its conventional unfolding become the measure for the narrative trajectory. (Almén 2008, p. 164)

If we consider that Lage begins performance D by violating the culturally expected practice in traditional jazz — presenting the theme before the improvised section, the chorus D1 can be understood as *a marked element*, as opposed to the unmarked practice of improvising only after the theme. In performances E and F, Lage also begins the piece with a long introduction without demarcating the form. During the introduction, F improvises over a part of the form (starting in part B) without introducing the melody of the theme before improvising. Thus, we can identify two types of narrative conflict:

NC1) in the monitoring of the evolution of the musical elements in each chorus, the contrast produced, its impact on the narrative arc and on the listener's perception;

NC2) in the exploration and violation of the listener's expectations, involving common jazz practices, complete or fragmented melodic quotations, relationship with traditional form and harmony, and intertextuality with other versions.

We can answer affirmatively to question Q1: a narrative is perceived in the performances. As for Q2, the conflicts NC1 and NC2 reveal two ways of accompanying it. The progressive changes of the musical elements (NC1) mark the passage from an initial state of order to transgression. The rhetorical game of conformity and non-conformity (NC2) reinforces the perception of these stages and sustains the character of *spontaneous storytelling* in each performance. Thus, it makes sense to listen to *Autumn Leaves* considering the two conflicts in parallel, as both illuminate the unfolding of the trajectory. In essence, I argue that the narrative is built by the rhetorical game of creating musical intensity — manipulation of elements such as number of notes, texture and register — combined with the articulation of expectations of citation of the melody, present in the imagination of the listeners.

The analysis developed so far can be associated with the agential and actantial levels of Almén's theory. If we accept these observations, the possibility opens up for interpreting the third level as well—the determination of the narrative archetype. In this sense, performance D begins in order (D1, *fast single lines*), but already in D2, with the partial introduction of the melody and the

addition of intensity, transgression germinates. The climax occurs without melodic citation, but with high intensity (dense texture, bass pedal, high number of notes, high dynamics), reinforcing the rupture of the initial order. The conclusion, in slow tempo and with recognizable melodic quotations, contrasts with the beginning, reaffirming the transgression as a prevalent element.

Thus, this trajectory can be interpreted as the victory of transgression over order, forming a comic archetype. However, if we understand D1 as an initial transgression and D2 onwards as the reestablishment of order, the narrative could be read as romantic. In both cases, I consider that the exact determination of the archetype is less relevant than the arguments and justifications constructed at the agential and actantial levels, which underpin the narrative interpretation of the performance.

The detailed narrative analysis of performance D also applies to performances E and F, as in them we identify the same two narrative conflicts: the contrast between musical elements (NC1) and the rhetorical game of intertextuality with the melody of the theme (NC2). As we can see in Table 1 and throughout the text, the performance E is the only one in which the entire melody of the theme is clearly exposed. However, even in this apparently more traditional performance (E), Lage introduces an element of surprise by inserting an unexpected chord that suggests a momentary escape from form, evidencing the rhetorical game. At the same time, the narrative conflict NC1 also manifests itself, since there is an evident manipulation of different musical elements — number of notes, textures and dynamics — that progressively build musical intensity.

In performance F, on the other hand, Lage does not present the complete theme: he limits himself to playing the beginning of the melody and performs only occasional quotations throughout the improvisation. This procedure reinforces the rhetorical character of the performance, which dialogues with the listener's expectations of recognizing the song, but at the same time frustrates or redirects them. As in D and E, the contrast of elements such as texture, register, number of notes and dynamic variations produces the narrative conflict NC1, driving the musical trajectory.

Version	D, studio version, from the album *Gladwell*, released on 01/01/2011	E, Live concert at Denison University, on 06/11/2011	F, In an interview with Rick Beato, published on 14/06/2023
Duration	03:16	06:26	04:18
Progress in b.p.m.	Beginning at 216, dropping to 160; time plus *rubato* in the coda	140 in the intro; 230 in the theme and improv., falling (up to 200); Coda with freer tempo	Start *ad libitum*; improv. and theme *on time* at 200 bpm; coda at approx. 114 bpm
Musical form	Four choruses plus coda	Introduction, six choruses and coda	Long intro, three more choruses and coda
Presentation of the theme and improvisation, observations on the form	Presents an excerpt from the theme at the beginning of the second chorus (melody A1 and A2) Quotes melody (excerpt from A4) on the second chorus Quotes melody (excerpt from A4) in the fourth chorus, modified with B♭–B–C chromaticism At no point during the performance is the A3 segment heard. At the end of the performance, it does not make clear the resolution of the theme in the G note	Form: Introduction (20c.); chorus 1–2 are expositions of the theme – Theme 1 (rubato) and 2 (on time), until [03:10]; chorus 3–6 with more improvised character Unlike the performance D, the region with a more improvised phrasing character begins only in the third chorus Coda: quotes melody from the end of A4 (last 4 m.), and repeats the passage twice, interspersed with improvised phrases and chords + arpeggiated phrases on the tonic chord, Gm	Long intro: Intro 1 —begins *ad libitum*, at [01:01] refers to the form; incomplete chorus 1 (only A3 and A4) Intro 2 (a tempo) [01:32]; — phrasing referring to tonality (Gm) Chorus 2 [01:52] – A1 theme in time but doesn't follow the melody in A2 and A3, follows with motif development and improvisation Chorus 3 [02:30] – improvisation (prepares climax in A4) Chorus 4 [03:08] – improvisation (A1 climax) Coda [03:44] – repetition of the last improvised phrase, quote from the ostinato bass
Elements common to the three perf. (D–F)	Presentation of the theme in a different way at each performance (consistent with the improvised approach) Alternation between textures demarcating the form – *single lines,* two or more voices in counterpoint, dense chords Production of a narrative arc, with preparation of the climax, which takes place in the second half of the performance Time or tempo manipulations, playing more freely and sometimes *in time* Sense of cut time, phrasing with relaxed dynamics and agogic (tempo) gives intention of accents in the 2nd and 4th beats. Presence of strumming groove type Use of natural harmonics, pedal notes, open strings (with playful or other functions on each perf.)		
Elements common to perf. D e E	Bass pedal in D, with triads over bass on the perf. D in [01:34], and in octaves without triads in perf. E in [04:42]; Presence of walking *bass*		

Particular elements in each performance	The performance begins on time with improvised phrasing in *single lines;* gradually adds backing chords, and *strumming* with full texture; improvisation mixed with the exposition of the theme Note pedal A, with natural harmonics, in the presentation of the theme, in [0:44], seems to have no function of delineating harmony Superposition of arpeggios on the dominant region in [01:21], which prepares for the Gm	Begins the perf. more slowly, with chords marking tempo (intro) Elements of surprise in the B section of chorus 6, in [04:45], the "story within the story" and freedom in musical form with *strumming* Unexpected chord BAdd4/Add9 (with E open string) on [05:35] to end the "story within story" section The coda phrase lacks the chromaticism between the notes B♭ and C, which is present in version D Natural harmonics, in [02:41] in the presentation of the theme, possibly more related to the harmonic progression, making it more evident	Reference to the ostinato bass present in the arrangement of *Autumn Leaves* from the recording of Cannonball Adderley, on the album *Something Else* (1958) on coda Telecaster electric guitar tone, with fewer peaks and lower *loudness range* value (Fig. 5) In [02:44] note pedal E with open string and with natural harmonics in the middle of the improvised discourse (also present in the other perf.), but in this one over Cm chord in the middle of chorus 2 Natural harmonics and open strings as rhetorical elements: [00:17], [02:44], [03:32] Stacatto chord sections have a similar function to *strumming* sections in perf. D and E (producing richer texture in the middle of the perf. to create variations in improvised speech, peak intensity) – and then return to phrasing in *single lines* in [03:28], ends climax demarcating the form, entering part B

Table 1: Elements of the three performances of *Autumn Leaves* by Julian Lage, compiled by the author

Table 1 shows several common and particular elements of F–D. In the three performances, the exposition of the theme takes various forms, reflecting Lage's improvised approach. Perf. E[23] has a longer duration and a more contemplative beginning: a slow introduction with chords precedes the theme, which is then reintroduced over a fast-tempo ostinato groove. The contrast with D is present, although both share the use of the high-pitched voice for melody and low-pitched responses in counterpoint — with D being more polyphonic

[23] For the performance E and its six chorus, I use the denominations Eintro, E1 to E6 and Ecoda to designate the location of the musical aspects in the form.

and E being somewhat more linear. In F, the theme is introduced after a long introduction divided into two parts (one *ad libitum* and another in time), with only section A1 fully exposed; The remaining sections develop motives, improvisations, and lead to the climax, followed by a coda that cites an ostinato on bass ([03:44]).

Version	D	E	F
Description and date	Studio version of the album *Gladwell*, released on 01/01/2011	Live concert version at Denison University, on 06/11/2011	In an interview with Rick Beato, published on 14/06/2023
Climax Preparation (1)	[01:34] to [1:53], done with bass pedal with parallel triads above, increasing dynamics and peaks; after preparation enters *strumming region*	[04:10] to [04:27], made with uninterrupted phrasing with a high number of notes and a wide register; after climax with homophonic attacks	[03:04] to [03:08], after the previous region of alternation of *single lines* and chords, the preparation for the climax made with the contrast brought by chords with increasing dynamics and peaks, in *strumming*
Climax plateau region (2) and main climax elements	[01:53] to [02:13], of the total of [03:16] (Note: We could alternatively consider the plateau as extended until [02:23], when the melody of the theme returns, in the coda) Main elements: *strumming,* homophonic attacks, strong dynamics	[04:27] to [05:04], of the total of [06:26] Key elements: *strumming,* parallel homophonic attacks — strong start, and creating intensity variations; peaks of strong attacks in e.g. *strumming* [04:52]	[03:08] to [03:28], of the total of [04:18] (Note: We could alternatively consider the plateau as extended to [03:45], when a clear demarcation in the shape is perceived, entering the coda) Main elements: parallel homophonic attacks (farther from harmony than in perf. E), less dense texture than E, explores more severe region; *Less evident strumming* (uses more hybrid picking)
Climax plateau region, in percentage	117–133s, out of total 196s (16s); 59–67% of dotal duration (plateau without extension); about 8% of the total	267–304s, out of a total of 386s (37 s); 69 – 78%; about 9% of the total	188–208s, out of a total of 258s (20s); 73–81% of dotal duration (plateau without extension); about 7% of the total

Table 2: Elements of climaxes in the performances of *Autumn Leaves* by Julian Lage (compiled by the author)

The three versions also use natural harmonics, but with different functions: in D2, as a pedal note (note A); in E2 (note F♯), suggesting Gm(Maj9); and in F, as a playful dissonance, with the harmonic of the high E note over the

Cm chord ([02:44]), a joke reinforced by the interpreter's smile.[24] This playful character reappears in [03:34], with the creative use of open strings — an example of a recurring gesture in Lage, which includes expressive pauses and unexpected chords, such as the BAdd4/Add9 in [05:35] of the performance E, ending a "story within the story."

Table 2 shows the various climaxes of D–F, with their detailed characteristics. In the construction of narrative arcs in D–F, the climax appears after the middle of the performance, starting around 2/3 of its duration, as expected in traditional narrative arcs. The climax region is present in all versions, but its preparation varies in each one. If we distinguish two phases—(1) the preparation and (2) the climax plateau—we observe differences in the way each performance organizes this process, as summarized in Table 2. The three performances use similar narrative strategies (*crescendo*, denser textures, variation of techniques) to prepare and sustain the climax, but each with different emphases: in D, the percussive force and timbres; in E, the density and the continuous phrasing; in F, the harmonic contrast, the bass exploration and the hybrid picking.

7.4. The bass pedal in D (dominant) on the perf. D and E

In the D and E performances, Lage uses the bass pedal in D, dominant of the key in G minor, but in slightly different ways.

In performance D, the pedal appears at [01:34], marking the entry of A3 in the third chorus (D3). It is played on the open fourth string, accompanied by parallel triads on the high strings (Ex. 4). This resource intensifies the narrative by reinforcing the dominant region and creating, with the upper voices, a chromatic and dissonant section, with greater harmonic freedom. The result is increased texture, dynamic variations, and the clear transition to the plateau of the climax of performance.

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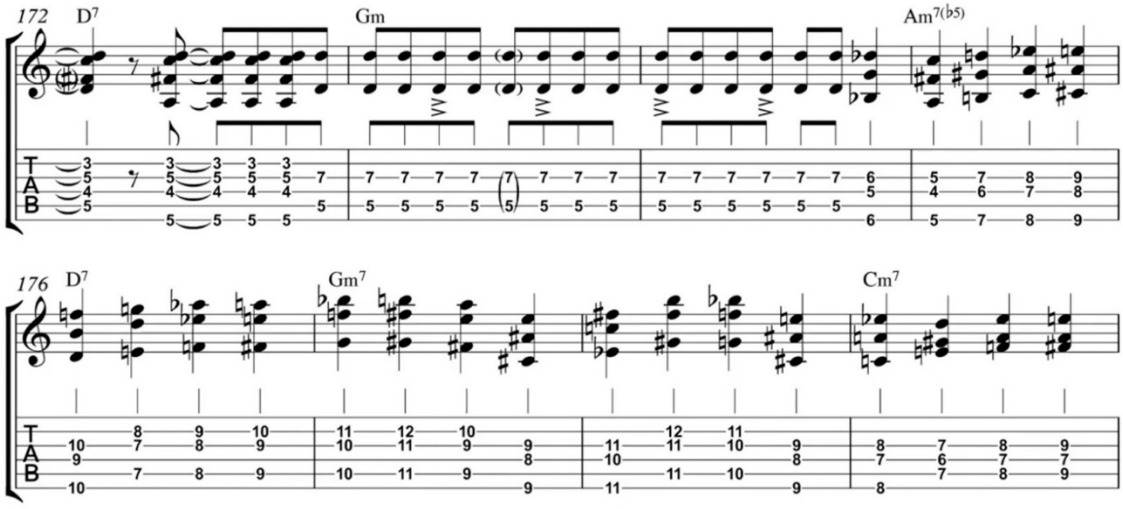
[24] This resource of playfulness and interpersonality is also present in Brazilian instrumental music. In a previous work (Gonçalves 2017) I showed how drummer Edu Ribeiro from the Brazilian group Trio Corrente used the resource of paraphrasing the melody in a literal way in a live performance of the piece *Lamentos* (Torres; Pauleli; Ribeiro, 2012), a feature identified by a light laugh perceived in the audience of "understanding" the game, from [04:05] to [04:35], available at: https://youtu.be/c2louOmTdyw?si=V8kYNZgOZbgeZ9Qt.

In performance E, the pedal appears in [04:42] (Ex. 6), two bars before A3 in the fifth chorus (E5). Unlike D, it is played in unison octaves, with no triads over the bass. Here, the pedal inserts itself inside the plateau already started in [04:27], functioning as a connecting element between the beginning of the climax and the *strumming*.



Example 5: Excerpt in E5, in [04:42] of *Autumn Leaves*, bass pedal at climax. Source: Sharp Eleven channel (Music 2018)

Therefore, in both performances, the bass pedal acts as a narrative *support point*, demarcating formal sections and directly influencing musical intensity. Although used at different times, it fulfills a similar function: to make clear the story told, and the relationship of the improvised elements with the musical form.

7.5. The climax and unexpected elements in the perf. E, the "story within the story"

The plateau of the climax in performance E has a longer duration compared to performances D and F. We can hypothesize that this plateau has a longer duration because the performance also has a longer duration – that is, the plateau duration increases in direct proportion to the size of the performance, if a proportional narrative structure is maintained. One difference to note is that in Kreisberg's improvisations in *My Favorite Things* I considered that the climax

region had the same duration in the three performances, A–C, not varying proportionally according to the duration of the performance.[25]

Listening to the performance E I have the feeling that the plateau of the climax has been extended – as if in the midst of a narrative structure a "story within the story" has emerged, or a detour in the middle of an improvised speech – that goes from [05:23] to [05:35], in bars 205 to 216 in the transcript obtained by the Sharp Eleven channel.[26]

Let us look at this structure of what I have called the story within the story: when we begin to play the sixth chorus, (A1 of E6), Lage continues to play with the texture of *strumming* in the style of Freddie Green[27] what he had been doing in the fifth chorus. However, there is a percussive attack that marks the two choruses, E5 and E6, making the musical form's punctuation very clear to the listener (the attack is marked with the letter G in Fig. 3). Lage plays in E6 with a texture similar to what came before, but with a much lower dynamic range, averaging around -20dB (compared to around -10dB at the end of the previous chorus, A4 of E5). These elements show how we can observe the clear demarcation and opposition between these choruses, and concretely highlights the relationship between *markedness* in this excerpt, basis of the narrative conflict NC1 argued.

In the quoted excerpt, from [05:23] to [05:35], Lage seems to play not strictly obeying the musical form of the piece, but also not totally detaching

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[25] Aspects analyzed in more detail in my thesis and in a recently published work (Gonçalves 2025). If we take into account that performance C lasts longer than A and B, with a chorus more of improvisation, if the same idea of proportional increase of the climax region that seems to occur in Lage's performances were followed, the climax of C should last longer than that of A and B.

[26] The link to access the transcription is in footnote 2, also available as an attachment to the thesis (Gonçalves 2022), starting with the G2 marking of the Figure 3.

[27] This texture of *strumming* produced by Lage seems to refer to and have similarities with the way of playing of guitarist Freddie Green. Green spread his style by playing in the pianist's band and bandleader Count Basie. Green's accompaniment style is a reference in jazz guitar accompaniment, which produces a voice leading that makes harmony clear by using the thirds and sevenths of chords, while contributing to a strong rhythmic sense of establishing a firm pulse, playing chords in all four beats of the quaternary measure. Some aspects of his biography and style can be found in Scott Yanow's book (2013). We can consider that this reference to a predecessor and well-known guitar style is also an element that can arouse in the listener some kind of intertextuality with the phonographic and sound history of the jazz genre, contributing as a factor of narrativization by the listener.

himself from it. Little by little, he introduces a *rallentando*, reaching a slightly slower tempo (bringing to me as a listener the feeling that this passage evokes *laziness).* Instead of resolving the musical form in A2 and moving on to A3, Lage keeps repeating some chords around the G minor (Gm) region, the resolution region of A2 instead of strictly following the form and harmonic progression that would start in A3. After this stretch of repetitions, Lage plays an also unexpected chord, the *BAdd4*/*Add9* (using the high open E string on the guitar), played half a step above the expected resolution in B♭Maj7. This chord can be seen as an application of the musician's reasoning to create musical tension with a chord that is unrelated to the underlying harmonic speech, as explained by Lage himself, seen in Ex. 1.

This region is unexpected in the narrative of the performance and in my view it is one of the passages in which Lage explores the game with the listener's expectations. The informed listener possibly has the feeling (as I did) of asking himself some questions such as (Q4): ”What happened to the musical form? Has Lage got lost in the form? Has there been a change in the key center? How will he solve this unexpected stretch?”, among other questions. After this first surprise chord, Lage resumes his improvised phrasing following the form of the song, but now in slower and freer time, moving to another small fermata in a resting chord, an E9#11, this one as a substitute dominant with a clear function of preparing the chord that begins the coda section (E♭mMaj7), where the return of the melody quotation occurs.

The return of the phrasing obeying the form, and especially the return of the melody, place the listener again in the form of the piece that he has as a reference in his cultural baggage. The listener who possibly asked himself the questions mentioned above in the text (Q4) has them answered by the musical discourse itself, when the return to the original and expected form and tonality occurs. Thus, I consider this section to be a striking example in the perf. E of the rhetorical game present in Lage's improvisation, the basis of the narrative conflict NC2 argued. Other examples of this game are also present in the perf. D and F, mainly linked to the expositions of the themes, and other musical elements analyzed.

7.6. Other common and peculiar elements in each performance (D–F)

In the D and E performances, Lage's guitar timbre approaches an acoustic sound, the result of the combination between the capture of the body of the instrument by a microphone and the electric pickup. The rapid decay, typical of acoustic instruments, makes this timbre especially suitable for the use of strumming and rhythmic grooves. This timbristic choice dialogues with his discography: it is also perceived as in *Gardens*[28] from the album *World's Fair* (Lage 2015) where there is a large presence of strumming. In the perf. D and E, peaks of dynamic intensity are perceived in the region of *strumming*, which refer to typical attacks of a jazz rhythm section — as in D [01:58] and E [04:52] — possibly acting as formulaic resources and *support points* within the narrative.

In more recent recordings, such as *Etude*,[29] from the album *Squint* (Lage 2021), the musician uses a solid electric guitar, with a less acoustic sound, more sustain and closer to that of performance F, with a certain ambience of reverb, but without the use of delay. In *Etude* and other recent recordings still perceive saturation typical of tube amplifiers.

In performance D, the melody of A3 acts as a *support point*, quoted at the end of chorus 2 ([01:03]) and chorus 4 ([02:23]), as a narrative reminder. In the performances E and F, however, this quotation does not occur, revealing variability between the versions.

The note E (sixth in Gm6) works as a *support point* in the three performances and a prominent sound, but in different contexts. In *E*, appears recurrently as a melodic or chord coloring note, serving as a resolution target at various times ([02:19], [03:08], [03:28]) and also in low voicings that marks rest and drives the rhythm. In *D*, appears in arpeggios ([00:08]) and as a resting note in the transitions between choruses ([00:34], [01:12]), as well as integrating the final resolution chord. In *F*, in addition to standing out in the playful episode already commented ([02:44]), the note E reappears in the coda ([03:59]), associated with the ostinato bass. This coda explicitly cites the ostinato of the introduction of the arrangement of *Autumn Leaves* (featuring Miles Davis) on the

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[28] The play *Gardens* can be heard at the link: https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=bvq3Y2wpRzY&si=mhz67Io3bX2_KWed

[29] The official video for this *Etude play* can be watched at the following link: https://youtu.be/bFRVK_1o2cU

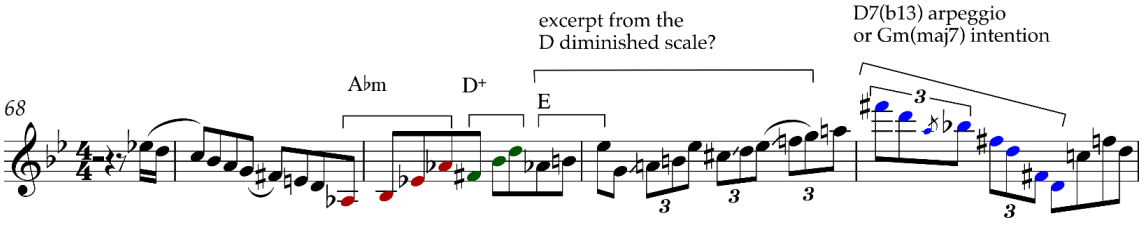
album *Something Else* (1958), by Cannonball Adderley. In this excerpt, Lage sustains the high F♯ note while performing the ostinato in the low region, simultaneously highlighting the major seventh and major sixth in the Gm chord, based on the melodic minor scale. The reference to the ostinato works as a rhetorical resource, contributing to the *storytelling* and for the intertextuality of the performance with the jazz tradition.

An important aspect is the freedom to reinterpret the melody and its negotiation with the form, which is different in each performance. In the coda of the perf. D ([02:23]), Lage plays the part corresponding to the lyrics "*But I miss you most of all, my darling, when autumn starts to fall,*" but does not strictly follow the number of syllables: he suppresses the syllable "*but*" and, in [02:28], he adds a chromatic note between B♭ and C in the excerpt "*when autumn,*" creating an extra note in relation to the original lyric.[30] In the coda of the perf. E ([05:47]), the passage is similar, but without the chromatic addition. In perf. F, the freedom is even greater: in chorus 2 ([01:52]), Lage cites A1 *a tempo*, but does not respect the rhythmic division of the lyrics, and in A2–A3 he does not follow the melody, continuing the idea started in A1. He uses the procedure of developing motifs, repeating the rhythm of the phrase and adapting it to the harmonic progression, which is maintained. In this way, the three performances show how melody, form and harmony serve as a vehicle for improvisation, inserting themselves in Lage's characteristic rhetorical and narrative game.

A particular element of performance D is the phrase of bars 69–73 in the chorus D3 ([01:19]), which marks a peak of musical intensity due to the increase in the number of notes and harmonic superpositions that introduce sounds out of key, accentuating tension. The excerpt exemplifies the practice described by Lage in an interview on Ex. 1, to superimpose triads and materials of different scales in the dominant region to create inventiveness before resolution. Here, the triads of A♭m, D+ and E appear, followed by an arpeggio interpretable as an extension of the dominant one (D7♭13) or as a tonic with a major seventh

[30] As shown in recent work (Gonçalves 2025), in the perf. A–C of *My Favorite Things,* Jonathan Kreisberg also does not perform all the notes of the melody according to the rhythmic division of the lyrics, a procedure also similar to that of pianist Fábio Torres when interpreting the music *Lamentos* by Pixinguinha with Trio Corrente (Gonçalves 2017). I argue that adaptations of melodies is a typical feature of instrumental popular music.

(GmMaj7), according to Ex. 7. The phrase occurs in A3 of the form, in which the progression would traditionally occur as | Am7♭5 | D7 | Gm | Gm |.



Example 6: Phrase from bars 69–72, in [01:19] in performance D of *Autumn Leaves*, by Julian Lage[31] (transcribed by the author)

7.7. Possible storytelling elements in *Autumn Leaves*, and in the work of Julian Lage

One way to listen to D–F performances is to understand them as intertextual reinterpretations, which dialogue with previous versions of *Autumn Leaves*. The narrative conflict NC2 connects to this idea, part of the rhetorical game of improvisation and the concept of *signifying* discussed by Gates and Walser. Lage combines elements of traditional jazz guitar styles — *strumming*, *single lines*, *chord melody* — into an arrangement with a typical narrative trajectory of beginning, middle, and end. By evoking Freddie Green's rhythmic use of chords, or the chord melody tradition of Joe Pass, Ted Greene, and Joe Diorio, he simultaneously speaks to the genre's tradition, and asserts its interpretive individuality, setting up a form of intertextual musical storytelling.

In an interview to promote the album *Gladwell* (Lage, 2011b) which includes the performance D, Lage comments on the artistic conception of the project, using metaphors and highlighting the concept of *storytelling* as a central element of his proposal:

> Upon embarking on this record, the band was looking for a creative paradigm that we could use, something of a through line where we could *compose and improvise with a certain story in mind.* (…) And Gladwell is basically a small-town square (…) And we had this idea to write music that

[31] For some excerpts from this performance D, I used in this work the transcription of François Leduc cited above. Some notes and small details appear to be inaccurate in parts of Leduc's transcript, however, and I corrected them in my version presented in this example. A detail I noticed, for example, is that Leduc spells the last note of bar 70 as C, and the note played seems to me to be B, characterizing an arpeggio of an E-major triad.

> would basically sonically walk you thought this town. (Lage 2011b,[32] author's highlights)

In an interview with *Music Radar*, when asked what he would like to improve in his playing, Julian Lage cites the desire to improvise in different ways and create more solid narratives. He states, "I want to have a stronger sense of time and *groove*, as well as accompaniment. Also, I want to work on different kinds of soloing and *creating stronger narratives*" (Lage 2018). In an interview with the site *Metropolis* (Noblat 2021), the musician comments that he seeks to represent the informality of oral discourse on the guitar. In an interview with the channel *Acoustic Guitar Magazine*, reflecting on his work in different formations — with his group, in partnerships with musicians Nels Cline and Chris Eldridge, or in contexts ranging from avant-garde to folk and to jazz, the guitarist says that the common element to all is the relationship with tension, relaxation and narrative. All these excerpts reveal aspects that can be related to concepts of storytelling and narrativity.

(Berliner 1994)	1) It is necessary that the musician can produce his phrases according to the harmony of the theme (skill 1) 4) Use of diversity of materials in improvisation (skill 4) 5) Know how to produce tension and resolution (narrative arc or peaks of musical intensity) (skill 5, and characteristic 2) 6) Improvise in an unpremeditated way. Improvise by trying new ideas. Take controlled performance risks.
(Bjerstedt 2014; 2015a; 2015b)	1) Being open, present and attentive: "being open, being present in the moment, being able to listen both to others and to one's inner voice" (2015b, p. 2) 2) Spontaneity (or intuition) 3) Balance: playing with balance and variety between musical elements and different approaches to improvisation
(Norgaard 2011)	2) harmonic priority — use of notes based on their relationship to harmonic progression); 4) recapitulation (*ongoing line)* – observed, for example, in the use of quotations from the melody as a connecting element of the narrative.

Table 3: Possible elements of *storytelling* in *Autumn Leaves*, in the D–F versions by Julian Lage (compiled by the author)

[32] The video can be accessed at the following link: https://youtu.be/KqbkslC7ozU.

> I think by nature I like doing a lot of things at the same time […], they all have the guitar in common, *and they all deal with narrative, they all deal with tension and release*, and they all deal with having your facility be kind of not an issue. You know, there are things that you aspire to be as able to fulfil whatever musical idea you have.(Lage 2015b,[33] author's highlights).

We can relate Lage's previous quote with the abilities of *storytelling*, performance strategies and cognitive processes linked to improvisation (Gonçalves 2022). In his interviews, the musician highlights his preparation and constant search for improvisational freedom, something noticeable in the variability and care of execution of D–F performances. To reach this level, Lage mobilizes precisely the skills pointed out by Berliner and Bjerstedt, as well as strategies for generating musical material described by Norgaard, confirmed in the analyses and synthesized in Table 33232.

A distinctive aspect of Julian Lage's solo performances is the wide dynamic variety. This trait appears repeatedly in the comparative analyses of this work and constitutes a concrete element of his style: his "personal voice" on the guitar and singular way of telling stories, of his exercise of musical *storytelling* (item 5 of Berliner in Table 3). In an interview with *Guitar World* (Lage, 2015c), the musician confirms this search for dramatic intensity, relating it directly to the conscious use of dynamics:

> I think it's as simple as that I'm a sucker for as wide a dynamic range as you can have on the guitar. […] *I'm drawn to players that have a sense of drama*, ones that know how to drip you and make you feel like the end of their solo coincides with the end of the world! […] *I might purposely play with dips in volume and incorporate a balance of staccato and legato lines. It's conscious in the sense that I'm making an effort to do it, but I always feel like I could do more.* (Lage 2015c author's highlights)

8. Final Considerations: Narrative Strategies in Lage and Comparison with Kreisberg

The narrative analyses of the three performances of *Autumn Leaves* (D–F) reveal a coherence in Julian Lage's strategies: the construction of musical intensity through contrasts and the manipulation of the intertextual expectations

[33] Excerpt in [07:30] from the video available in https://youtu.be/GoLK4Gq3wMA?si=XYhQHSRmJd7bEIDh&t=450.

associated with the song's melody. In these versions, two types of narrative conflict are identified: the first (NC1), based on the variability of the musical elements — number of notes, texture, register, agogic (tempo), and formal demarcation —, and the second (NC2), related to the rhetorical game between improvisation and form, in which the musician alternates between situating and leaving the musical form ambiguous for the listener, as in the ”story within the story” observed in performance E. Despite differences in duration, tempo and structure, the three performances share the same principle of convex narrative arc, which translates Lage's improvisatory and spontaneous approach. The recurrence of thematic fragments, the development of motifs, and variations in texture demonstrate a rhetoric of performance centered on the freedom and reinvention of the material.

We can hypothesize that, by adopting the artistic practice of constructing narrative arcs in an improvised way since adolescence, as he himself mentions in observation 4 of his cited article (Lage 2017), Julian Lage internalized typical strategies of elaborating this type of arc. Thus, this recurring practice possibly consolidated itself as one of his central tools for the production of storytelling or musical narratives.

The comparison between Lage and Jonathan Kreisberg, also considering the A–C performances of *My Favorite Things*, shows that both build recurrent narrative trajectories, guided by elements of arrangement and improvisation, but with different emphases. As analyzed in a recent study (Gonçalves 2025), Kreisberg presents greater constancy in musical form, clarity in the demarcation between theme-improvisation-theme sections, and narrative conflicts defined between homophonic isotopies and single lines, lower variation of LRA (4.4 to 9.4, as opposed to Lage, with 13.3 to 17.8). Lage, on the other hand, favors variability, dynamic and textural diversity and greater freedom in the exposure and reinterpretation of the melody and materials of the improvisations. In *Autumn Leaves*, Lage demonstrates a more evident degree of improvisation and malleability, reconfiguring the arrangement and form in real time.

The *support points* function, for both, as structural landmarks for both the performer and the listener — recognizable elements that sustain the narrative in the midst of improvisation. In Kreisberg, these points are predominantly melodic (recurring phrases, arpeggios and triads with ninth), while in Lage they take on a more conceptual and contrastive character: alternation of textures, alternation

of free and *a tempo* agogic (constant tempo), use of bass pedal, partial quotations of the theme, note E (sixth of Gm) as a prominent sonority and expressive use of natural harmonics. For Lage, these resources potentially serve as tools of orientation during the performance – at the service of his narrative strategies; for the listener, they configure intelligible landmarks within the rhetorical negotiation of improvisation.

There is also a difference in the timbre choices: Kreisberg uses sounds with more effects (*reverb* and *delay*) and electric guitar, while Lage opts for more acoustic and dynamic tones, evidencing a search for a more natural sound.

Recurring elements are present not only in the analyzed performances A–C and D–F, but in other of their performances. As an example, we observe in relation to Kreisberg the phrasing with chromaticisms in the bebop scale present in *Caravan, Summertime* and in *My Favorite Things* (Gonçalves 2025); in relation to Lage, open triads are present in his interpretations of *Autumn Leaves*, *Freight Train* and in his *Etude n. 1*, as I showed in my thesis and in another recently published work (Gonçalves 2022, 2025).

These contrasts, recurring and peculiar elements, added to the narrative organization and the support points, outline the individual style of each musician. These strategies and recurrences, observed in different contexts and performances, allow us to understand improvisation as an expanded storytelling process, in the sense proposed by Vijay Iyer (2004), for whom musical history is not restricted to an isolated solo or performance, but also manifests itself in a single note and in a lifetime of improvisations. Thus, both Lage and Kreisberg construct musical narratives that go beyond the analysis of a single performance. The comparative analysis between performances by the same musician, and by one musician with the other, helps us to understand how each one transforms improvisation into narrative and storytelling, how this is an expression of their musical identity.

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