



# RMA abstract- writing session

8<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2026, 3-4 PM

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# Overview of session

- ▶ What are abstracts?
- ▶ Examples of good abstracts
- ▶ Guidelines on writing abstracts
- ▶ Group writing time
- ▶ Time to share (if you like)

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- ▶ What is an abstract?
  - ▶ Why do we write them?
  - ▶ When do we write them?

# Examples of good abstracts

RESEARCH ARTICLE | APRIL 01 2014

## Gunther Schuller and the Challenge of Sonny Rollins: Stylistic Context, Intentionality, and Jazz Analysis

Benjamin Givan

For their help during this article's gestation, I thank Fernando Benadon, Bob Blumenthal, Scott DeVaux, Terri Hinte, Dan Morgenstern, Lewis Porter, Sonny Rollins, and Gunther Schuller. The musical transcriptions are my own.

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Scholarly opinion has for many years been divided over Gunther Schuller's landmark 1958 article, "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation." Jazz theorists view the article's close analysis of Rollins's 1956 jazz saxophone improvisation "Blue 7" as one of their discipline's founding statements; historians and ethnomusicologists meanwhile tend to fault it for neglecting cultural context. In either instance the specific details of Schuller's analysis have been largely accepted as being internally consistent. The present study proposes that the analysis of jazz improvisation ought to engage more extensively with broader stylistic issues in addition to the specifics of isolated individual performances. Such a musically contextualized perspective reveals that Schuller's principal argument—that, in this particular improvisation, Rollins developed motivic elements of a composed theme—is false. "Blue 7" was in fact improvised in its entirety, and the melodic pattern that Schuller cited as a thematic motive was one of Rollins's habitual improvisational formulas, heard on many of the saxophonist's other 1950s recordings. This canonic recording, as well as the notion of Rollins as a "thematic" improviser, therefore needs to be reconsidered.

**Keywords:** jazz, improvisation, analysis, Sonny Rollins, Gunther Schuller

## "Is the Duke deserting jazz?"

classicalisation through improvisation in Diminuendo and crescendo in blue

Katherine Williams

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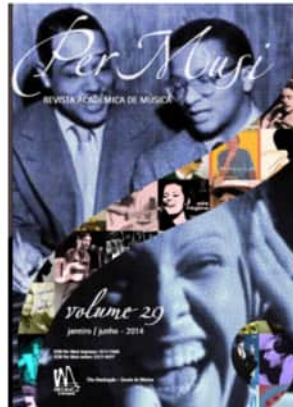
Fausto Borém

Federal University of Minas Gerais

**Keywords:** Diminuendo and crescendo in blue by Duke Ellington, Jazz composition and improvisation, Classicalisation of popular music

### Abstract

Since the beginning of Duke Ellington's career as composer and leader of his own jazz orchestra in the 1920s, a common critical theme has been the comparison with European art music composers such as Delius and Debussy. Assertions such as Constant LAMBERT (1934) statement that Duke Ellington set a "standard by which we may judge ...highbrow composers" focussed on the complex compositional devices in his output. Rather than restate these oft-cited judgements of Ellington's compositional style, this paper examines the intersection between the classical and jazz styles by analysing typically improvised sections of Ellington's work. Consideration of the development of an improvised baritone saxophone solo on Diminuendo and crescendo in blue indicates the establishment of fixed solos in the Ellington Orchestra's repertoire. The degree of composition implied by this warrants further thought.



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Original Articles

## Improvisation as Composition: Fixity of Form and Collaborative Composition in Duke Ellington's *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue*

Katherine Williams

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### Abstract

Since the beginning of Duke Ellington's career as composer and leader of his own jazz orchestra in the 1920s, a common critical theme has been the comparison with European art music composers such as Delius and Debussy. Assertions such as Constant Lambert's 1934 statement that Duke Ellington set a "standard by which we may judge ...highbrow composers" focused on the complex compositional devices in his output. Rather than restate these oft-cited judgements of Ellington's compositional style, this paper examines the intersection between the classical and jazz styles by analyzing typically *improvised* sections of Ellington's output.

Consideration of the development of a baritone saxophone solo, improvised material in the interlude, and the role of Ellington's piano in three recordings of his 1937 *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue* (from 1937, 1953 and 1956) indicate the establishment of fixed solos in the Ellington Orchestra's repertoire. The degree of composition implied by this warrants further thought. Through analysis of Ellington's original sketches for the piece, close study of these recordings, and engagement with contemporary criticism and later scholarly sources (in particular the writings of Bruno Nettl) I evaluate the implications of the predetermination suggested by the treatment of improvisation by Ellington and his band members over this period.



# Simple guidelines for writing an abstract

([Katherine.Williams@Liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:Katherine.Williams@Liverpool.ac.uk))

- ▶ What are you looking at
- ▶ What timeframe/geographical scope
- ▶ What's your methodology
- ▶ What are your conclusions (or what do you expect them to be if the research is ongoing)?

To note: for a paper, keep it focused! There isn't space to talk about much!

# Auntie Freya's Top Tips for Writing Abstracts

- ▶ *DO*
- ▶ Draw the reader into why they want to read/hear your piece.
- ▶ Clearly state your argument, methodology, or findings.
- ▶ Establish key terms and ideas.
- ▶ Identify the authors of any really central concepts.
- ▶ Make a clear link between key concepts and your argument.
- ▶ Use key parts of the completed work if it's helpful.
- ▶ Keep to the word count, whatever it is.
- ▶ Follow the style guide, if one is set.

## *DON'T*

Lose too many words scene-setting.  
Contextualise too broadly.  
Quote directly at length.  
Use jargon your readers won't understand, or abbreviations without first defining them.  
Use contractions (isn't, won't, doesn't, etc.)

## *SUGGESTED HIT-POINTS*

A hook: here's an interesting anecdote or thing I noticed that piques the interest.  
The context: the bigger picture in which the hook sits; the questions it raises beyond the single instance; identifying your core research question for the piece.  
The scholarship/methodology/concepts: outline the key ideas or methods you'll be using to address the research question.  
The argument: an explicit statement to the effect of "in this paper/article I will argue...".

# Guidelines for writing abstracts

(<https://www.amsmusicology.org/guidelines-for-writing-an-ams-abstract/>)

## ▶ General

- ▶ **Read some successful abstracts.** Identify commonalities and conventions but be aware that the initial proposal might have contained more specifics on findings and conclusions.
- ▶ Be clear, concise, and compelling. Don't try to be clever, complex, or cute.
- ▶ Be collegial. Unless the purpose of your paper/session is to correct or refute, don't criticize other scholars or bemoan the shortcomings of a whole field.
- ▶ Use simple, short sentences. A direct and concise first sentence can be powerful.
- ▶ Avoid (or explain) jargon, acronyms, or other specialized terminology that wouldn't reasonably be familiar to all the members of the Program Committee.
- ▶ Multiple paragraphs (e.g., 2 or 3 in a 350-word abstract) are generally easier on abstract readers' eyes than a single, long paragraph.
- ▶ Consider that readers will likely spend no more than a few minutes on your abstract and may be reading hundreds of others.

## Individual papers, individual abstracts for panel sessions, lecture recitals and posters

- Successful abstracts usually provide answers to a small core of questions:
  - What is your argument?
  - How did you reach your conclusions?
  - Why are your conclusions important/new enough to share?
- Provide an easily identifiable thesis statement, e.g., "This paper argues (demonstrates, etc.)."
- Articulate the scope of the paper whether in terms of repertoire, dates, region, people, etc.
- Indicate how your work connects to or builds upon the work of other scholars.
- Identify your source material and methodology, e.g., archives, interviews, analysis.
- State clearly what your findings are.
- Answer the "So what?" question: the fact that no one has done it before, or that the subject is mainstream, is not sufficient. (Think about what someone in a different musicological area might find useful in your work.)
- Minimize speculation. If you say "I hope to find ..." or "I hope to raise questions about ..." you're unlikely to inspire confidence.

### Call for proposals

Proposals are welcome from postgraduate research students (e.g. PhD, MPhil, MRes) in any area of Music, including musicology, ethnomusicology, popular music, sound studies, music psychology, composition, audiovisual media, performance, and/or other creative practices, and research that cuts across disciplinary boundaries. For poster presentations, proposals are also invited from students enrolled on postgraduate taught programmes (e.g. MA, MSt, MMus) as well as research degrees.

All proposals must be submitted by **Tuesday 15 September 2026** via [the conference submission form](#).

### Academic Papers

Papers should be of no more than 20 minutes' duration. The proposal should include a title and abstract of no more than 250 words.

### Lecture-Recitals

Lecture-recitals should last no longer than 30 minutes. The proposal should include a title and abstract of no more than 250 words as well as the name of participants, the repertoire to be performed and a sample recording (of no more than 5 minutes).

## Birmingham, UK 2027

### Thursday 8 – Sunday 11 April 2027

The tenth Rhythm Changes conference will take place at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (RBC), UK, from 8 to 11 April 2027. This four-day multidisciplinary conference features keynote, academic papers, and panels, and brings together researchers, writers, musicians, critics, and others interested in jazz studies from around the world.

For our tenth conference, we have an open call for papers addressing the meaning and significance of jazz from multiple academic perspectives, including cultural studies, musicology, cultural theory, music analysis, jazz history, media studies, and practice-based research. What are you working on now? What are your thoughts? Bring them, share them with us.

We particularly welcome proposals from under-represented groups and communities in jazz studies and academia more generally, including people of colour, those who identify as women and gender diverse, and people with disabilities. Our call is open.

### Further information

Please submit your proposal (max. 250 words), including a short biography (max. 50 words) and institutional / organisational affiliation (if any), as a Word document to Nicholas Gebhardt and Tony Whyton (Conference directors): [rhythmchanges2027@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:rhythmchanges2027@bcu.ac.uk). Papers are 20 minutes long (plus 5-minute Q&A); panels contain three papers. We also welcome panel proposals of three or four presenters. If you have a format that doesn't fit these conventions, talk to us: if we can accommodate it, we will.

The deadline for proposals is **15 September 2026**; we will communicate outcomes to authors by **October 2026**. The conference committee comprises Christa Bruckner-Haring, Nicholas Gebhardt, George McKay, Beatriz Nunes, Sarah Raine, Loes Rusch, Walter van de Leur and Tony Whyton.

# Group writing

- ▶ 30 minutes!



Anyone want to share or have a question?

