Ostinato

In music, an **ostinato** (derived from Italian: "stubborn", compare English: *obstinate*) is a motif or phrase which is persistently repeated in the same musical voice. An ostinato is always a succession of equal sounds, wherein each note always has the same weight or stress. The repeating idea may be a rhythmic pattern, part of a tune, or a complete melody in itself.[1] Both "ostinatos" and "ostinati" are accepted English plural forms, the latter reflecting the word's Italian etymology. Strictly speaking, ostinati should have exact repetition, but in common usage, the term covers repetition with variation and development, such as the alteration of an ostinato line to fit changing harmonies or keys.

> If the cadence may be regarded as the cradle of tonality, the ostinato patterns can be considered the playground in which it grew strong and self-confident.
>
> —Edward E. Lewinsky[2]

Ground bass

Ground bass or *basso ostinato* (obstinate bass) is a type of variation form in which a bassline, or harmonic pattern (see Chaconne; also common in Elizabethan England as *Grounde*) is repeated as the basis of a piece underneath variations. Aaron Copland[3] describes basso ostinato as "the easiest to recognize" of the variation forms wherein, "a long phrase—either an accompanimental figure or an actual melody—is repeated over and over again in the bass part, while the upper parts proceed normally [with variation]." However, he cautions that, "it might more properly be termed a musical device than a musical form."

Ostinati are to classical music what riffs are to popular music. Although the term "riff" can refer to any short series of notes that create a melody within the melody of the song, it doesn't necessarily have to repeat to become a riff, unlike ostinato. They have a large role in improvised music such as in jazz and Baroque music. A "favorite technique of contemporary jazz writers", ostinati are often used in modal and Latin jazz, traditional African music including Gnawa music[4] and boogie-woogie.

Applicable in homophonic and contrapuntal textures they are distinguished as "repetitive rhythmic-harmonic schemes", the more familiar accompanimental melodies, or as purely rhythmic.[5] The technique's appeal to composers from Debussy to avant-garde composers until at least the 1970s "lies in part in the need for unity created by the virtual abandonment of functional chord progressions to shape phrases and define tonality".[5] Similarly in modal music "relentless, repetitive character help to establish and confirm the modal center".[4] Their popularity may also be justified by their ease as well as range of use, though "ostinato must be employed judiciously, as its overuse can quickly lead to monotony".[4]

Notable examples

Classical music

Ostinati are used in 20th-century music to stabilize groups of pitches, as in Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* "Introduction" and "Augurs of Spring".[1] A famous type of ostinato, called the *Rossini crescendo*, owes its name to the crescendo underlying a persistent musical pattern, which usually culminates in a solo vocal cadenza. This style was emulated by other bel canto composers, especially Bellini; and later by Wagner (in pure instrumental terms, discarding the closing vocal cadenza).

Riff

A **riff** is an ostinato figure: a repeated chord progression, pattern, refrain or melodic figure, often played by the rhythm section instruments or solo instrument, that forms the basis or accompaniment of a musical composition. Though they are most often found in rock music, Latin, funk and jazz, classical music is also sometimes based on a simple riff, such as Ravel's Boléro. Riffs can be as simple as a tenor saxophone honking a simple, catchy rhythmic figure, or as complex as the riff-based variations in the head arrangements played by the Count Basie Orchestra.

The riff from Black Sabbath's "Iron Man" is characteristic of Rooksby's description: only four measures repeated, played low on a guitar as part of a heavy metal (rock) arrangement

The Kinks' "You Really Got Me" guitar riff. Play

David Brackett (1999) defines riffs as "short melodic phrases," while Richard Middleton (1999)[6] defines them as, "short rhythmic, melodic, or harmonic figures repeated to form a structural framework." Rikky Rooksby [7] states that "A riff is a short, repeated, memorable musical phrase, often pitched low on the guitar, which focuses much of the energy and excitement of a rock song."

The term *riff* entered musical slang in the 1920s,[8] and is used primarily in discussion of forms of rock music or jazz. "Most rock musicians use *riff* as a near-synonym for *musical idea*."[9] The etymology of the term is not clearly known. Some sources explain *riff* as an abbreviation for "rhythmic figure" or "refrain".[10] Use of the term has also misleadingly been extended to comedy where *riffing* is used to mean the verbal exploration of a particular subject, thus moving the meaning away from the original jazz sense of a repeated figure over which the soloist improvises, to instead indicate the improvisation itself: that is, improvising on a melody or progression as one would improvise on a subject by extending a singular thought, idea or inspiration into a *bit*, or *routine*. Charlie Parker's 1945 recording "Thriving on a Riff" brought the term to more popular awareness.

Use in jazz and R&B

In jazz and R&B, riffs are often used as the starting point for longer compositions. The "Night Train" riff was first used in Duke Ellington's "Happy-Go-Lucky Local", which Ellington had recycled from Johnny Hodges' earlier "That's the Blues, Old Man".

The riff from Charlie Parker's bebop number "Now's the Time" (1945) re-emerged four years later as the R&B dance hit, "The Hucklebuck". The verse of "The Hucklebuck", which was another riff, was "borrowed" from the Artie Matthews composition, "Weary Blues". Glenn Miller's "In the Mood" had an earlier life as Wingy Manone's "Tar Paper Stomp". All these songs use twelve bar blues riffs, and most of these riffs probably precede the examples given.[11]

Neither of the terms *riff* or *lick* are used in classical music; instead, individual musical phrases used as the basis of classical music pieces are called ostinatos or simply phrases. Contemporary jazz writers also use riff- or lick-like ostinatos in modal music and Latin jazz.

Riff driven

The term *riff driven* is used to describe a piece of music that relies on a repeated instrumental riff as the basis of its most prominent *melody*, *cadence*, or (in some cases) *leitmotif*. Riff-driven songs are largely a product of jazz, blues, and post-blues era music (rock and pop).[12] The musical goal of riff-driven songs is akin to the classical *continuo* effect, but raised to much higher importance (in fact, the repeated riff is used to anchor the song in the ears of the listener). The riff/continuo is brought to the forefront of the musical piece and often is the primary melody that remains in the listener's ears. A *call and response* often holds the song together, creating a "circular" rather than linear feel.[13]

A few well-known examples of riff-driven songs are "I Feel Fine" by The Beatles, "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" by The Rolling Stones[14] , "Black Dog" by Led Zeppelin[15] [16] , "Outshined" by Soundgarden, "Enter Sandman" by Metallica, and "Symphony of Destruction" by Megadeth.

Vamp

In music, a **vamp** is a repeating musical figure, section,[17] or accompaniment used in jazz, gospel, soul, and musical theater.[18] Vamps are also found in rock, funk, reggae, R&B, pop, country, and post-sixties jazz.[17] Vamps are usually harmonically spare[17] : A vamp may

Vamp riff typical of funk and R&B.[17] Play

consist of a single chord or a sequence of chords played in a repeated rhythm. Vamps are generally symmetrical, self-contained, and open to variation.[17] The equivalent in classical music is an ostinato, in hip hop is the loop and in rock music is the riff.[17]

The slang term vamp[17] comes from the Middle English word "vampe" (sock), from Old French "avanpie", equivalent to Modern French *avant-pied*, literally "before-foot".[19]

The term vamp has another meaning in music, which is "to improvise simple accompaniment or variation of a tune." Outside of music, the noun vamp means "something patched up or refurbished" or "something rehashed, as a book based on old material." Similarly, outside of music, the verb "vamp" means "to put together, fabricate or improvise": "With no hard news available about the summit meeting, the reporters vamped up questions based only on rumor."[19] These other meanings are related to the musical meaning, in that a musical vamp is a "fabricated" or "improvised" "rehash" of standard, stock musical phrases.

Classic examples in jazz include "A Night in Tunisia", "Take Five", "A Love Supreme", "Maiden Voyage", "Cantaloupe Island",[4] and Chameleon. Two rock examples include the long jams at the ends of "Loose Change" by Neil Young and Crazy Horse and "Sooner or Later" by King's X.

Jazz, fusion, and latin jazz

In jazz, fusion, and related genres, such as latin jazz, a background vamp provides a performer with a harmonic framework upon which to improvise. A vamp at the beginning of a jazz tune may act as a springboard to the main tune; a vamp at the end of a song is often called a tag.

Well-known examples

Vamping is used to establish the Afro-Cuban feel of the Bebop standard "A Night in Tunisia". "Take Five" begins with a repeated, syncopated figure in 5/4 time which pianist Dave Brubeck plays throughout the song. Vamps are also used in 1970s-era jazz-funk and jazz-rock songs such as "Maiden Voyage" and "Cantaloupe Island".

The music from Miles Davis's modal period (c.1958-63) was based on improvising songs with a small number of chords. The jazz standard "So What" uses a vamp in the two-note "Sooooo what?" figure, regularly played by the piano and the trumpet throughout. Jazz scholar Barry Kernfeld calls this music "Vamp Music." This period of Davis' music has also been called "Impressionist jazz," because it uses some of the same musical features and devices as the so-called "Impressionist" style of classical music of Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy.

Examples include the outros to George Benson's "Body Talk" and "Plum", and the solo changes to "Breezin'".[17] The following songs are dominated by vamps: John Coltrane, Kenny Burrell, and Grant Green's versions of "My Favorite Things", Herbie Hancock's "Watermelon Man" and "Chameleon", Wes Montgomery's "Bumpin' on Sunset", and Larry Carlton's "Room 335".[17] An example of vamp use in rock music is the ballad section of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody".

Gospel, soul, and funk

In gospel and soul music, the band will often vamp on a simple ostinato groove at the end of a song, usually over a single chord. In soul music, the end of recorded songs often contains a display of vocal "pyrotechnics", such as rapid scales, arpeggios, and improvised passages. For recordings, the sound engineers will gradually fade out the vamp section at the end of a song, to make the transition to the next track on the album. Salsoul singers such as Loleatta Holloway have become notable for their vocal improvisations at the end of songs, and they are sampled and used in other songs. Andrae Crouch extended the use of vamps in gospel, introducing chain vamps (one vamp after the other, each successive vamp drawn from the first).[20]

1970s-era funk music often takes a short one or two bar musical figure based on a single chord that would be considered an introduction vamp in jazz or soul music, and then uses this vamp as the basis of the entire song (*Funky Drummer* by James Brown, for example). Jazz, blues, and rock are almost always based on chord progressions (a sequence of changing chords), and they use the changing harmony to build tension and sustain listener interest. Unlike these music genres, funk is based on the rhythmic groove of the percussion, rhythm section instruments, and a deep electric bass line, usually all over a single chord. "In funk, harmony is often second to the 'lock,' the linking of contrapuntal parts that are played on guitar, bass, and drums in the repeating vamp."[17]

Examples include Stevie Wonder's vamp-based "Superstition"[17] and Little Johnny Taylor's "Part Time Love", which features an extended improvisation over a two-chord vamp.[20]

Musical theater

In musical theater, a vamp, or intro, is the few bars, one to eight, of music without lyrics which begin a printed copy of a song[21] and which the orchestra or other accompaniment repeats during dialogue or stage business, to provide musical accompaniment for onstage transitions which are of indeterminate length. The score will provide a one or two bar vamp figure, and indicate "vamp till cue" by the conductor. The vamp gives the onstage singers time to prepare for the song or the next verse, without requiring the music to pause. Once the vamp section is completed, the music will continue on to the next section.

The vamp may be written by the composer of the song, a copyist employed by the publisher, or the arranger for the vocalist.[21] The vamp serves three main purposes: providing the key in which the song will be sung, establishing the tempo, and scene design, or providing emotional context for the song about to be sung.[22] The vamp may be as short as a *bell tone*, *sting* (a harmonized bell tone with stress on the starting note), or measures long.[22]

The rideout is the transitional music that begins on the downbeat of the last word of the song and is usually two to four bars long, though it may be as short as a sting or as long as a Roxy Rideout.[23]

Electronic music

The first ostinatos in Electronic music were created on Moog modular synthesizers systems that used sequencers as well as Buchla instruments. In the Berlin School of electronic music, Tangerine Dream and Klaus Schulze employed both ground bass ostinati as well as other sequences repeated through their pieces. Initially analog, sequences that make up these ostinati were entered by setting knobs on the Moog 960 sequencer or sliders on the ARP Sequencer. In the mid-seventies, Oberheim introduced the DS-2 Digital Sequencer which allowed for up to 72 events to be stored. As the electronic music world developed, sequencers began to be added to synthesizers as Arpeggiators. For examples of the above, see Tangerine Dream's Phaedra, Klaus Schultz's Moondawn, and Larry Fast's Electronic Realizations for Rock Orchestra. Many Synth Pop bands such as Tubeway Army used ground bass ostinati created on arppegiators.

Electronic music, especially that of the dance variety, has relied on ostinato-like basslines, especially that of tunes from the genre relying on the Roland TB-303 synthesizer (which was originally developed in 1982 by Roland as a "bass-player substitute" for guitarists, but gained more favor in later years as a bassline synthesizer in its own right). Since the 303 also has a pattern sequencer as well and can be controlled to play back at various speeds, it is very easy to create ostinato basslines with it, and genres of electronic dance music such as acid house and psy trance consist of such, created by the 303 and similar synthesizers.

Indian classical music

In Indian classical music, during Tabla or Pakhawaj solo performances and Kathak dance accompaniments, a conceptually similar melodic pattern known as the Lehara (sometimes spelled Lehra) or Nagma is played repeatedly throughout the performance. This melodic pattern is set to the number of beats in a rhythmic cycle (Tala or Taal) being performed and may be based on one or a blend of multiple Ragas.

The basic idea of the lehara is to provide a steady melodious framework for rhythmic improvisations. It serves as an auditory workbench not only for the soloist but also for the audience to appreciate the ingenuity of the improvisations and thus the merits of the overall performance. In Indian Classical Music, which is drawn from the ancient vedic traditions, the concept of 'Suum' (pronounced as 'sum') carries paramount importance. The Suum is the target unison beat of any rhythmic cycle. The second most important beat is the Khali, which is a complement of the Suum. Besides these two prominent beats, there are other beats of emphasis in any given taal, which signify 'khand's (divisions) of the taal. E.g. 'Thriputa' taal which is a 7 beat rhythmic cycle is divided 3-2-2, further implying that the 1st, 4th, and 6th beats are the prominent beats in that taal. Therefore it is customary, but not essential, to align the lehara according to the divisions of the Taal. It is done with a view to emphasize those beats that mark the divisions of the Taal.

The lehara is usually played on the Harmonium, Sarangi or even the Violin. The playing of the lehara is relatively free from the numerous rules and constraints of 'Raga Sangeet' which are upheld and honoured in Indian Classical Music. The lehara may be interspersed with short and occasional improvisations built around the basic melody. It is also permissible to switch between two or more disparate melodies during the course of the performance. It is essential that the lehara be played with the highest precision in Laya(Tempo) and Swara control; which requires years of specialist training (*Taalim*) and practice (*Riyaaz*). It is considered a hallmark of excellence to play lehara alongside a recognised Tabla or Pakhawaj virtuoso. While there may be scores of individually talented

instrumentalists, there are very few who are capable of playing the lehra for a Tabla / Pakhawaj solo performance.

Other instruments like Sitar and Sarod have also been used to play the lehara, but very sparingly. E.g. Pandit Ravi Shankar has played a 12 beat lehara on the Sitar for Ustad Allah Rakha during his solo performance in 1967 at the Monterey Music Festival. Similarly Ustad Ali Akbar Khan has played numerous leharas on the Sarod with Pandit Mahapurush Mishra. There maybe other notable artists who may have also played the lehara on other unconventional instruments like Santoor, Shehnai, Bamboo Flute, Mohan Veena, etc.

Some historical uses

As a very accessible frame that allows improvisation, the ostinato was heavily used in the Baroque epoch. For about a century and a half (starting around 1770), the technique was almost abandoned. It suddenly revived in the dawn of the 20th century with the development of jazz music[24] and also became "perhaps the most typically twentieth-century accompanimental device" used in classical music, in part because of its neoclassical appeal.[5] By the end of the 1910s, the first records featuring jazz music were released. While most of the performers were not able to notate music, mainly the surviving records prove that early jazz music used a technique similar to ostinato.

References

[1] Kamien, Roger (1258). *Music: An Appreciation*, p.611. ISBN 0-07-284484-1.

[2] Bella Brover-Lubovsky (2008). *Tonal space in the music of Antonio Vivaldi*, p.151. ISBN 0-253-35129-4.

[3] Copland, Aaron and Rich, Alan (2002). *What to Listen for in Music*, p.117. ISBN 0-451-52867-0.

[4] Rawlins, Robert (2005). *Jazzology: The Encyclopedia of Jazz Theory for All Musicians*, p.132-133. ISBN 0-634-08678-2.

[5] DeLone, Richard (1975). "Timbre and Texture in Twentieth-Century Music", *Aspects of 20th Century Music*, p.123. Wittlich, Gary (ed.). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. ISBN 0-13-049346-5.

[6] Middleton, Richard (1990/2002). *Studying Popular Music*. Philadelphia: Open University Press. ISBN 0-335-15275-9.

[7] Rooksby, Rikky. *Riffs: How to create and play great guitar riffs*. San Francisco: Backbeat Books. pp. 6–7. ISBN 0-87930-710-2.

[8] Rooksby, ibid, p. 6

[9] Middleton 1990, p. 125

[10] "Riff" (http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=riff), *Dictionary.com*.

[11] Covach, John. "Form in Rock Music: A Primer", p. 71, in Stein, Deborah (2005). *Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-517010-5.

[12] Rolling Stone (1992). *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll* (3 Sub edition ed.). Random House. pp. 61. ISBN 978-0-679-73728-5.

[13] Horner, Bruce (Editor), Swiss, Thomas (Editor) (1999). *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture* (Paperback ed.). Blackwell Publishing Limited. pp. 143. ISBN 978-0-631-21264-5.

[14] Bogdanov, Vladimir; et al (2003). *All Music Guide to the Blues*. Backbeat Books. pp. 477. ISBN 0-87930-736-6.

[15] Fast, Susan; et al (2001). *In the house of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the power of Rock Music* (1 ed.). Oxford University Press. pp. 33. The song (Black Dog) represents a defining moment in the genre of hard rock, combining the elements of speed, power, an artful and metrically clever riff. ISBN 0-19-511756-5.

[16] "The Greatest Songs Ever! Black Dog" (http://www.blender.com/guide/67808/greatest-songs-ever-black-dog.html). *Blender Magazine*. . Retrieved March 2, 2010.

[17] Marshall, Wolf (2008). *Stuff! Good Guitar Players Should Know*, p.138. ISBN 1-4234-3008-5.

[18] Corozine, Vince (2002). *Arranging Music for the Real World: Classical and Commercial Aspects*. Pacific, MO: Mel Bay. p. 124. ISBN 0-7866-4961-5. OCLC 50470629.

[19] "Vamp: Definition, Synonyms and Much More" (http://www.answers.com/topic/vamp). *Answers.com*. Answers Corporation.

[20] Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, Eddie S. Meadows (1998). *California Soul*, p.224. ISBN 0-520-20628-2.

[21] Craig, David (1990). *On Singing Onstage*, p.22. ISBN 1-55783-043-6.

[22] Craig (1990), p.23.

[23] Craig (1990), p.26.

[24] Popp, Marius (1998). *Applicatory Harmony in Jazz, Pop & Rock Improvisation*, Introduction. ISBN 973-569-228-7.

Further reading

- Homo, Bruce; Swiss, Thomas (1999). *Form and Music: Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell. ISBN 0-631-21263-9.

External links

- Jazz Guitar Riffs (http://www.jazzguitar.be/jazzguitar_licks.html)
- 'Ostinato' - Falconiero, Marini, Merula, Ortiz, Pachelbel, Purcell, Valente & Anonimi, Jordi Savall, Hesperion XX - Alia Vox 9820 (http://www.classicalacarte.net/Fiches/9820.htm)

Article Sources and Contributors

Ostinato *Source*: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?oldid=452218096 *Contributors*: 18 hours, Academic Challenger, Altenmann, Alxndr, Antandrus, ArdClose, Azkm, B0Rn2bL8, Benitoite, BlackSabbath1996, Blanchardb, Bruce1ee, Calca123, Camw, Cgingold, Ched Davis, Chochopk, Chubbles, Cindera, Closedmouth, Curran429, DMacks, Dave Bass, DavidRF, Dawnseeker2000, DeadEyeArrow, Deb, Debivort, Deltabeignet, Drawn Some, DulcetTone, Edward Tambling, EldKatt, Epbr123, Ericorbit, ErkinBatu, Ettrig, Excirial, FMAFan1990, Fabiform, Fdmundo, FlyingToaster, Fratrep, Furrykef, Gabriel Roth, Gaius Cornelius, GeeJo, GoingBatty, Highwayman65251, Hyacinth, Hypersonic12, Impy4ever, J D Skottes, Jafeluv, Japanese Searobin, Jbalint, JeffreyAtW, Joe Decker, John R Murray, Jonathan Oldenbuck, Jubileeclipman, Julin123, Julinsmells, Just plain Bill, K7jetto, Kar.ma, Katarighe, Kazamatsuri, Keinstein, Kenyon, Kingpin13, Kithira, Kmill, Kudret abi, LazySofa, Legofreak2008, Light current, Matthewt73, Mburgh, Mcld, Micru, MisterScience, Mkknyr, Mushushu, Ndenison, NemethE, Nurg, OnBeyondZebrax, OriginalJay, Ortolan88, Oscar O Oscar, Oxymoron83, Pethan, Pichote, Polishname, Possecomitatus, Pre10s, Quadell, Recury, Red dwarf, Redheylin, Reghoward, Rfl, Scieberking, Scottandrewhutchins, Seb35, Shadowjams, Sluzzelin, Snuitkever, Sofia Roberts, Spettro9, Sreyas1234, Steevm, SvNH, Syrthiss, Tanketz, Tarquin, TenPoundHammer, Tommy2010, Tweekedkenny, Twelvethirteen, Violncello, Wahoofive, White rotten rabbit, WildKard84, Zinnmann, Zoe, 302 anonymous edits

Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors

Image:Iron Man riff.svg *Source*: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Iron_Man_riff.svg *License*: unknown *Contributors*: User:Keenan Pepper

Image:The Kinks You Really Got Me riff.PNG *Source*: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:The_Kinks_You_Really_Got_Me_riff.PNG *License*: unknown *Contributors*: User:Hyacinth

Image:Funk & R&B vamp riff.png *Source*: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Funk_&_R&B_vamp_riff.png *License*: GNU Free Documentation License *Contributors*: User:Hyacinth

License