



BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE

June 2016

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Trading Conversations: When Improvisation Enters the Dialogue

By **Mónica López-González**

During a recent workshop I gave on storytelling, neuroscience and musical improvisation, I was asked during the Q & A: Do you believe improvised music is our best narrative tool for expression? My answer was about the differences and similarities between music and language; the remarkable correlation between musical elements like mode, pitch, tempo, and rhythm, and our behavioral expression of emotion (such as the tendency to combine minor keys, lower pitches, and slower tempi to represent sad, gloomy times); and, most importantly, what makes musical improvisation such a special activity to understand how our minds deal with the daily and spontaneous problem-solving moments of navigating our world.

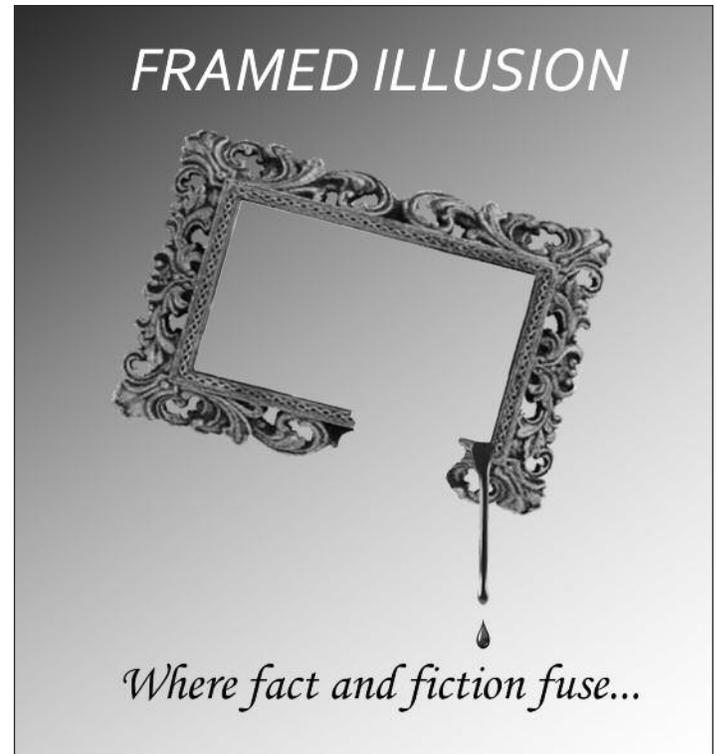
For the past couple of years I've been creating and producing through La Petite Noiseuse Productions a set of theatrical productions that push the boundaries of audiovisual storytelling: *The Final Draw* in 2014, where pianist and composer César Orozco improvised emotionally rich melodies in reaction to a couple's dialogue in a cabaret; and *In Session* in 2015, in which pianist and composer Todd Simon improvised striking melodies and nuanced textures in reaction to a psychotherapist and her client's conversation during a session. Together, these projects exemplified the incredibly acute capacity of an improvising musician to translate in real time emotional, bodily and conceptual situations into consecutive phrases without once missing a narrative beat.

That brings up the question: What if there are two musicians each, reacting to the same conversation and yet spontaneously communicating musically with each other? June sees the premiere of *Framed Illusion*, my one-act play set in an interrogation room during a murder investigation. Musicians will improvise to the dialogue, sliding between fantasy



PHOTO COURTESY OF NICO SARBANES

Framed Illusion features Baltimore's own rising star, composer, trumpeter and vocalist Nico Sarbanes.



and reality. I enthusiastically look forward to hearing how the musicians will trade phrases as the actors take turns in a game of wits!

Framed Illusion features Baltimore's own rising star, composer, trumpeter and vocalist Nico Sarbanes; Canadian-born bassist and recent graduate from Peabody Conservatory Alex Fournier; and Maryland's own wonderful actress and recent graduate from Salisbury University, Linda Bancroft.

Framed Illusion premieres at Baltimore Theatre Project, June 2-12, then debuts in cabaret style at Germano's. For more information, visit www.lpnproductions.com.

Monica López-González earned a Certificate of Art in Photography from Maryland Institute College of Art and a Ph.D. in Cognitive Science from Johns Hopkins University.

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