

FEATURES OF THE COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTION COMPOSER – CONDUCTOR – PERFORMER AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE ARTISTIC PRACTICE OF JEAN-DENIS MICHAT

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SUMMARY. The present study examines the communicative dimensions of the artistic activity of the contemporary French saxophonist Jean-Denis Michat. The musician is a highly accomplished performer on various members of the saxophone family who, in his compositional practice, actively integrates established academic traditions of earlier stylistic epochs with elements derived from jazz and popular culture. Such an approach not only reveals the extensive expressive and technical potential of the saxophone family – including the use of unconventional playing techniques – but also contributes to the enrichment of the original repertoire written for these instruments. Continuing the traditions of collective music-making associated with saxophone ensembles, J.-D. Michat also appears in the role of conductor, directing a large saxophone ensemble and shaping its artistic profile. In addition to expanding the ensemble's repertoire through arrangements of works that have acquired the status of canonical compositions, the musician – drawing upon his own performing experience and detailed knowledge of the technical and timbral possibilities of each member of the saxophone family – creates original compositions specifically conceived for this instrumental formation. From this perspective, the article investigates J.-D. Michat's artistic practice in terms of communicative interaction, encompassing the interrelated functions of Composer – Conductor – Performer, whose mutual interrelation forms a unified artistic and interpretative process.

Keywords: communication; non-verbal interaction; academic performance practice; Jean-Denis Michat; conductor; composer; saxophone; large saxophone ensemble; saxophone orchestra; saxophone choir; repertoire; contemporary music

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Introduction

Collective music-making has constituted a widespread form of leisure since the Middle Ages. But the ensemble formats that are now regarded as traditional gradually took shape and crystallized during the period of the Classical composers. Although the popularity of canonical chamber formations – such as the string quartet, the piano trio, and the woodwind or brass quintet – has by no means diminished, contemporary composers, in their ongoing search for new sonic possibilities, increasingly combine unconventional instruments within ensemble settings. The invention, in the mid-nineteenth century, of the saxophone family – distinguished by its rich timbral palette, flexible dynamic range, and a wide variety of articulatory and technical possibilities – significantly stimulated the emergence of ensembles and even orchestras consisting exclusively of instruments from this family. Academic musical culture, which initially received the saxophone with a certain degree of caution, ultimately encouraged performers to form large ensembles composed solely of representatives of this instrumental group. The initiative for such formations most often came from prominent representatives of the saxophone performing tradition.

The creative profile of J.-D. Michat, regarded today as an important figure of contemporary academic saxophone performance and a composer of original works for the saxophone family, has repeatedly attracted the attention of the scholarly community. The distinctive synthesis of established examples of the Western classical tradition with extended performance techniques has been received with considerable interest not only among performers but also among musicologists, who perceive these works as vivid manifestations of the interaction between tradition and modernity. As a multifaceted artistic figure, his creative activity extends far beyond the composition and performance of works for solo instrument. In his pedagogical work, J.-D. Michat has established various saxophone ensembles for which he composes original works, prepares arrangements of canonical repertoire from the world's classical heritage, and frequently appears in the role of conductor or ensemble leader directing the ensemble from within. Despite the growing recognition of J.-D. Michat as both performer and composer, his artistic activity has not yet been examined as a specific form of communicative practice within the triadic relationship Composer – Conductor – Performer, whose internal interaction shapes a distinctive model of contemporary musical creativity.

The aim of this study is to identify and analyze the distinctive features of communication within the triadic relationship Composer – Conductor – Performer, in a situation where all participants of the communicative act are embodied in a single artistic figure, as exemplified by the contemporary musician J.-D. Michat.

The achievement of this objective requires the completion of several research tasks, namely:

- to identify the historical preconditions that contributed to the formation of collective performance practices, as exemplified by large saxophone ensembles;
- to analyze the creative activity of J.-D. Michat in the context of the integration of the communicative roles Composer – Conductor – Performer;
- to elucidate the specific influence of each component of the communicative triad on the professional practice of the composer, arranger, conductor, and performer;
- to characterize the distinctive features of communication between J.-D. Michat, in his role as conductor, and a large saxophone ensemble.

Review of literature on the topic

The rapid development of the academic saxophone tradition, particularly within the sphere of academic saxophone performance, has encouraged scholars to turn increasingly to the study of the distinctive features of this instrumental family from a variety of analytical perspectives. The French school, in particular, has served as a paradigmatic model in the formation of the academic saxophone tradition, while also functioning as a pedagogical and artistic laboratory for the exploration of new performance techniques, a tendency reflected in the study of Liliia Maksymenko (2012)³ and Andriy Yaskiv (2025)⁴. The ensemble-specific characteristics of performance, particularly in the original works of J.-D. Michat, have been examined in a number of research papers by Ukrainian and international scholars, including Pavlo Barabashchuk (2023)⁵,

³ Maksymenko, Liliia. "Frantsuzska saksofonova shkola: dyskurs rozvytku ta suchasnyi stan" (French saxophone school: developments and the modern condition). In *The Scientific Issues of Ternopil National Pedagogical Volodymyr Hnatiuk University. Specialization: Art Studies*, vol. 1, 2012, pp. 59-65.

⁴ Yaskiv, Andriy. "Metodychni zasady hry na saksofoni Zh.-D. Misha ta Zh. Venturi (na prykladi posibnyka "Suchasnyi saksofon")" (Methodological principles of saxophone performance by Jean-Denis Michat and Gérald Venturi (based on the manual "Le saxophone contemporain")). In *Bulletin of the Lviv University. Series of Arts Studies*, vol. 27, 2025, pp. 208-219. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30970/vas.27.2025.208-219>

⁵ Barabashchuk, Pavlo. *Kamerno-instrumentalni ansambl za uchastiu saksofona: kompozytorska tvorchist ta vykonavska praktyka (Chamber-instrumental ensemble with the participation of the saxophone: composer's work and performance practice)* (DMA Dissertation), Ukrainian National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music, 2023, 113 p.

2024⁶), Dmytro and Liliia Maksymenko (2023)⁷, Stanislav Nidzelskyi (2025)⁸, Zhongbei Ma and Preeyanun Promsukkul (2025)⁹. Substantial scholarly contributions addressing the issue of communication in musical art include the monograph by Olena Berehova (2013)¹⁰ as well as studies devoted to the specific communicative aspects of the conductor's professional activity by Oleksandra Berestovska¹¹ (2025). In addition, valuable materials for the present article are video recordings that document the professional activity of J.-D. Michat as conductor with the large saxophone ensemble of the Conservatoire de Lyon, Artisanat Furieux, particularly the concert performances presented in the video promotion materials (2013)¹², video recording of the concert performance of Felix Mendelssohn's *Symphony for Strings No. 5* (2013)¹³, *Fête de la musique*

⁶ Barabashchuk, Pavlo. "Ansambleva spetsyfika vykonannia kontsertu dlia saksofona «Shams» Zhana-Deni Misha (na prykladi vykonavskoi interpretatsii Tomasa Kurtsa z orkestrom saksofoniv)" (Features of the ensemble performance of the concerto for saxophone Shams by Jean-Denis Michat: the case of Thomas Kurtz's performance with an orchestra saxophones). In *Art Research of Ukraine*, vol. 23, 2023, pp. 238-246. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31500/2309-8155.23.2023.299281>

⁷ Maksymenko, Dmytro; Maksymenko, Liliia. "Internatsionalnyi orkestr saksofoniv - yak odna iz form zaklyku do myru na prykladi odnoimennoho tvorcu Zh.-D. Misha" (The international saxophone orchestra – as one of the forms of call for peace on the example of the work of the same name by J.-D. Michat). In *International scientific conference Development of culture and art in the war and post-war periods*, 2023, pp. 19-22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-341-5-4>

⁸ Nidzelskyi, Stanislav. "«Zaklyk do myru» Zhana-Deni Misha dlia ansamblu saksofoniv: folklorni vidlunnia u suchasnomu muzychnomu dyskursi" («Call for peace» by Jean-Denis Michat for saxophone ensemble: folklore echoes in contemporary musical discourse). In *Current Issues of the Humanities*, vol. 85 (2), 2025, pp. 119-126. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/85-2-18>

⁹ Ma, Zhongbei; Promsukkul, Preeyanun. Cross-Cultural Fusion in Contemporary Saxophone Music: A Study of Middle Eastern-Arabic Elements in Jean Denis Michat's 'Shams'. In *Revista Electrónica de LEEME*, vol. 55, 2025, pp. 261-282. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58262/LEEME.55.0016>

¹⁰ Berehova, Olena. *Intehratyvni protsesy v muzychnii kulturi KhKh-KhKhI stolit (Integrative processes in musical culture of the 20th-21st centuries)*, Institute for Cultural Research of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, 2013, 232 p.

¹¹ Berestovska, Oleksandra. *Diialnist operno-symfonichnoho dryrhenta: komunikatsiini aspekty (The work of an opera and symphony conductor: communication aspects)* (PhD Dissertation), Municipal Higher Education Institution "Dnipro Academy of Music" of the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Council", 2025, 281 p.

¹² *Artisanat Furieux / Promotion 2013*. Classe de saxophones du Conservatoire de Lyon (direction artistique: Jean-Denis Michat), 2013. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xq8XLoFySdc&list=PLdUp34nANI0xmQej4FD_4ezDjl4LSEfCC&index=7

¹³ Mendelssohn, Felix. *Symphonie pour cordes n° 5 (arr. N. Gascon)*. Artisanat Furieux: ensemble de saxophones du Conservatoire de Lyon (direction: Jean-Denis Michat), 2013. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O7bFPHCVI0&list=RD9O7bFPHCVI0&start_radio=1

(2021)¹⁴, *Les 30 ans* (2025)¹⁵.

Despite the scholarly attention devoted to the compositional output of J.-D. Michat and to works written for large saxophone ensembles, a noticeable gap remains in the study of the communicative interaction Composer – Conductor – Performer, a model that is particularly relevant to twenty-first-century musical practice. In the artistic activity of J.-D. Michat, these roles are embodied within a single creative figure, where each component of the triad exerts a reciprocal influence on the others.

Materials and methods

In order to achieve the stated aim and address the research objectives, the following methods were employed:

- the method of historical reconstruction was applied in order to recreate the historical process of the formation of ensemble performance practices and the development of communicative relationships between Composer – Conductor, Composer – Conductor – Performer, and Conductor – Performer;
- the communicative-interpretative method provided the theoretical basis for substantiating the mutual influence of the communicative links within the triad Composer – Conductor – Performer, as illustrated through the creative activity of J.-D. Michat;
- the comparative method made it possible to trace changes in the communicative channels employed by J.-D. Michat, depending on the cultural-historical context, the evolutionary transformation of the conductor's role, and the significance of the performing ensemble in relation to the repertoire being interpreted;
- the analytical-performance approach facilitated the examination and interpretation of the non-verbal communicative means employed by J.-D. Michat, in his role as conductor, in interaction with a large saxophone ensemble in order to achieve a coherent and artistically convincing interpretation.

¹⁴ Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Concerto Brandenbourgeois no. 3, BWV 1048 (arr. J.-D. Michat)*. Ensemble de saxophones du Conservatoire de Lyon "L'Artisanat Furieux", "La fête de la musique", 2021. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjZK-HgO5Rs>

¹⁵ "Artisanat Furieux": *Classe de saxophone PPES*. "Les 30 ans" (solist – Claude Delangle, direction – Jean-Denis Mchat), Conservatoire de Lyon, 13.12.2025. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHp_-kA2SbA&list=RDH8MMIFTSJfU&index=3

Source base of the study

The research is based on publicly available video recordings of concert performances by the large saxophone ensemble of the Conservatoire de Lyon conducted by J.-D. Michat.

Results and Discussion

Communication in music represents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. According to the widely known Shannon–Weaver model, any act of communication includes several essential components: the information source, the transmitter, the communication channel, the receiver, and the destination. Within this framework, the traditional communicative chain in musical practice may be described in terms of the following components: Composer – Performer – Listener. O. Berehova observes: “Thus, the composer encodes their creative concept in musical signs and symbols; the performer decodes these notational signs and re-encodes them into the language of musical sounds; the listener perceives the sonic version of the work and attempts to decode the composer’s creative intention.”¹⁶ The intermediate component – the Performer – may be expanded, particularly in situations involving a collective body of performers, such as an orchestra or a choir.¹⁷ In such cases, the conductor becomes a crucial component of the communicative process, acting as the embodied mediator of the musical work, the interpreter of the composer’s intention, and the figure who first transmits the encoded musical information to the performing ensemble and subsequently to the audience.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the communicative relationship Composer – Conductor – Performer (including the musical ensemble) was often embodied in a single figure – the court Kapellmeister. Heinrich Christoph Koch notes that “the position of Kapellmeister is entrusted to a musician appointed to compose musical works specifically for the court, to select and prepare other artistic works for performance, and to supervise

¹⁶ Berehova, Olena. *Intehratyvni protsesy v muzychnii kulturi KhKh-KhKhI stolit (Integrative processes in musical culture of the 20th-21st centuries)*, Institute for Cultural Research of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, 2013, 232 p.

¹⁷ Berestovska, Oleksandra. *Diiialnist operno-symfonichnoho dryrhenta: komunikatsiini aspekty (The work of an opera and symphony conductor: communication aspects)* (PhD Dissertation), Municipal Higher Education Institution “Dnipro Academy of Music” of the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Council”, 2025, p. 103.

the entire musical activity during its execution.”¹⁸ Contemporary musical practice increasingly tends toward the differentiation of communicative roles. Initial musical education, however, traditionally remains grounded in the acquisition of performing skills. At later stages of professional development, distinct representatives of specialized artistic domains emerge: composers engaged primarily in creative work, conductors of various professional orientations, and performers, each occupying a specific position within the communicative chain outlined above. Nevertheless, the history of music demonstrates that combinations of conducting and compositional practice are by no means uncommon. Such figures include Richard Wagner, Gustav Mahler, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Leonard Bernstein, and others, whose artistic practice exemplifies the integration of multiple communicative roles within a single creative personality.

The abandonment of the tradition of conducting one's own works may be explained by a number of factors. Among the most significant is the difficulty of separating the identity of the composer – who constantly compares the performance with their own artistic conception – from that of the leader of the musical ensemble, whose task is to work effectively with the performers in order to achieve a convincing interpretation. This issue is addressed by the conductor of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Esa-Pekka Salonen, who observes: “...when you rehearse your own works you hear music which is basically very close to something you dreamed of, but it is not necessarily exactly the same. So you start thinking whether the problem is in the playing or in your conducting; whether the problem is your instrumentation or whether you were not able to convey your ideas in musical notation. Then you actually forget about the rehearsals and start thinking about other things.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century there are notable exceptions, particularly in cases where the leader of an ensemble or orchestra simultaneously acts as composer, conductor, and even as a direct performing member of the musical collective.

Instances of combining the communicative roles of conductor and performer are characteristic of ensembles and orchestras formed from timbrally homogeneous instrumental groups, as well as within historically informed performance practice, which involves a return not only to historical instruments but also to period-specific principles of directing musical ensembles. Particular attention should be given to ensembles and orchestras whose members belong to the same instrumental family – for example, saxophones.

¹⁸ Koch, Heinrich Christoph. *Musikalisches Lexikon*, Frankfurt am Main, 1802, p. 826.

¹⁹ Duffie B. *Conductor / Composer Esa-Pekka Salonen*. Recording of a conversation from January 16, 1988, Chicago. URL: <https://www.bruceduffie.com/salonen.html>

Despite the relatively recent emergence of these instruments, they have rapidly gained popularity across a wide range of musical styles, including the sphere of academic musical practice. One of the principal reasons for this lies in their remarkably broad range of timbral and expressive possibilities: "Despite the challenges in mastering pitch, the saxophone can mimic the expressiveness of string instruments and the warm timbre of the human voice. In an ensemble, it can produce the powerful sound of brass instruments while also possessing the softness and delicacy of woodwinds. Its capabilities in both solo and ensemble settings allow it to excel in bands and orchestras, showcasing a unique sound, especially when playing alongside other saxophone members."²⁰ Considering that, at the time of the creation of the saxophone family, the structure of the traditional symphony orchestra had already largely taken shape, the inventor Adolphe Sax deliberately designed an entire family of instruments capable of supporting ensemble performance. The Paris Conservatoire was among the first institutions to recognize the considerable potential of these newly created instruments. Since that time, the French academic school of saxophone performance has remained a paradigmatic model within the development of the instrument's classical tradition.²¹²²

Among the various methods of developing and refining performing mastery, collective performance occupies a particularly significant place. The possibility of forming large saxophone ensembles and orchestras represents an effective mechanism for the development of the communicative skills and competencies essential for a saxophonist's professional activity. The first attempts to establish such ensembles were initiated by Adolphe Sax as early as the late nineteenth century. The idea of creating saxophone ensembles was subsequently continued by Marcel Mule, whose ensemble gradually "developed into an independent chamber concert group. At the initial stage, the ensemble's repertoire consisted primarily of arrangements of works representing various stylistic periods – from the Baroque to Romanticism –

²⁰ Ma, Zhongbei; Promsukkul, Preeyanun. Cross-Cultural Fusion in Contemporary Saxophone Music: A Study of Middle Eastern-Arabic Elements in Jean Denis Michat's 'Shams'. In *Revista Electrónica de LEEME*, vol. 55, 2025, p. 262. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58262/LEEME.55.0016>

²¹ Maksymenko, Liliia. "Frantsuzska saksofonova shkola: dyskurs rozvytku ta suchasnyi stan" (French saxophone school: developments and the modern condition). In *The Scientific Issues of Ternopil National Pedagogical Volodymyr Hnatiuk University. Specialization: Art Studies*, vol. 1, 2012, pp. 59-65.

²² Yaskiv, Andriy. "Metodychni zasady hry na saksofoni Zh.-D. Misha ta Zh. Venturi (na prykladi posibnyka "Suchasnyi saksofon")" (Methodological principles of saxophone performance by Jean-Denis Michat and Gérald Venturi (based on the manual "Le saxophone contemporain")). In *Bulletin of the Lviv University. Series of Arts Studies*, vol. 27, 2025, pp. 208-219. In Ukrainian. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30970/vas.27.2025.208-219>

transcribed by Mule himself.”²³ The first saxophone orchestra was established in Bordeaux by the distinguished French pedagogue and performer Jean-Marie Londeix. This ensemble consisted of representatives of the entire saxophone family and included twelve performers. Such an instrumental configuration – ranging from sopranino to subcontrabass saxophone – subsequently became the traditional model for the saxophone orchestra, also commonly referred to as a saxophone choir. Today, large ensembles composed exclusively of instruments from the saxophone family exist in numerous conservatories and music academies across the United States, Europe, and Asia, reflecting the continuing development of academic saxophone performance within diverse centers of professional musical education.

Given the relatively recent development of the saxophone tradition, compositions written specifically for representatives of this instrumental family have absorbed stylistic tendencies associated with Romanticism, Expressionism, and Modernism. The instrument’s rich timbral resonance, wide palette of articulations, subtle dynamic gradations, and the extensive range of extended performance techniques have attracted composers and stimulated the creation of works that highlight the full expressive potential of the saxophone. Among the musicians who combine adherence to academic traditions with an active exploration of the instrument’s extended technical resources is the young representative of the French school, J.-D. Michat. As a professional virtuoso saxophonist, he prepares arrangements of works from the Baroque and Classical periods while also composing original pieces based on classical compositional principles, into which he actively integrates extended performance techniques.

J.-D. Michat developed as a performer during his studies at the Paris Conservatoire, where a student in the saxophone class of the internationally renowned musician, Professor Claude Delangle. He actively tours internationally, performing both works accompanied by orchestra and chamber repertoire with piano. J.-D. Michat is also regarded as a prominent representative and advocate of the style known as *à la française*, a tradition characterized by “a close connection with vocal technique, since the foundation of wind performance lies in the imitation of the human voice, the emulation of vocal practice, and a particular attention to the timbre of sound, which constantly remains in a phase of exploration, development, and refinement.”²⁴ Possessing a rich timbral palette together with considerable dynamic and articulatory flexibility, the

²³ Maksymenko, Liliia. “Frantsuzska saksofonova shkola: dyskurs rozvytku ta suchasnyi stan” (French saxophone school: developments and the modern condition). In *The Scientific Issues of Ternopil National Pedagogical Volodymyr Hnatiuk University. Specialization: Art Studies*, vol. 1, 2012, p. 61.

²⁴ Idem, p. 64.

musician frequently participates in the premiere performances of contemporary works. In this way, a direct communicative interaction emerges with modern composers, for whom the full expressive potential of the saxophone is revealed more fully. Such collaboration within the Composer – Performer relationship makes it possible to minimize the communicative noise that often accompanies the interpretation of works by deceased composers, allowing for a more immediate and precise realization of the author's artistic intention.

J.-D. Michat also transmits his performing experience through his pedagogical activity as Professor of Saxophone at the Conservatoire de Lyon. In addition to his teaching duties, he regularly appears as a guest-lecturer and performer and serves as a jury member in leading international saxophone competitions. Within the framework of his pedagogical work, the musician establishes saxophone ensembles of various instrumental configurations, providing students not only with opportunities to develop their performing skills but also to become acquainted with the specific communicative dynamics that arise within an ensemble environment. In view of that the repertoire available for saxophone choirs remains comparatively more limited than that for ensembles of strings or other wind instruments, J.-D. Michat "... developed a sharp work of transcriptions to impose the saxophone as a new instrument of 'Classical culture'."²⁵ Considering the musician's fascination with works of earlier stylistic epochs, as well as with the technical and expressive capabilities of the saxophone, J.-D. Michat has produced numerous arrangements of well-known compositions spanning the period from the Baroque to Romanticism. In this context, special attention should be paid to the distinctive interactional model, Arranger – Performer, the combination of which within a single artistic figure facilitates the careful selection of repertoire for transcription with full consideration of the instrument's performing potential. Arrangements created by professional performers for a particular instrument or instrumental family – a practice especially widespread among wind instrumentalists – take into account not only timbral compatibility but also the specific nuances and characteristics of each instrument. This includes, among other aspects, fingering combinations, intonational characteristics, register-related timbral variations, dynamic capacity, the palette of articulations, as well as various technical and instrument-specific aspects. In such cases, the resulting arrangement tends to remain as close as possible to the original composition while also ensuring a technically comfortable performance.

In addition to possessing a high level of organizational ability – essential for the formation of ensembles and for encouraging performers to engage in collective music-making – J.-D. Michat also appears in the roles

²⁵ Michat, Jean-Denis. Official website. URL: <https://www.jdmichat.com/bio>

of artistic director and conductor. It should be noted that, depending on the work being performed, the means by which the saxophone ensemble is directed may vary. An analysis of video recordings of the saxophone orchestra published on the official YouTube channel of J.-D. Michat²⁶ reveals several recurring strategies in his direction of the ensemble. As has already been noted, the artist demonstrates a clear affinity for the traditions of academic musical culture, while at the same time allowing for the integration of jazz and improvisational elements within his performing practice. When performing works belonging to earlier cultural-historical epochs, J.-D. Michat, both as performer and as artistic director of the ensemble, adheres to traditions of the respective historical period. At the same time, the analysis indicates that the interaction models employed by the musician vary depending on the work being performed, reflecting – much like in the historical evolution of musical practice – the gradual transformation of the conductor's role itself.

Among the communicative models employed by J.-D. Michat as conductor is the interaction with the ensemble from within the collective itself, that is, while simultaneously acting as a performing participant. Such interaction – primarily auditory in nature – can be traced back to early examples of ensemble practice. For instance, in earlier musical traditions the cantor would often perform their part more prominently than the others, thereby assisting the ensemble in maintaining coordination. Later, with the development of orchestral practice, similar communicative functions were assumed by the performer of the basso continuo part or by the first violin during the Baroque and Classical periods. With the gradual departure from the monodic tradition and the increasing complexity of ensemble textures, purely auditory communication from the ensemble leader was no longer sufficient as the sole means of coordination and therefore required reinforcement through additional channels. Historically, the visual channel of communication emerged as the most effective. Given the practical difficulty of combining instrumental performance with the execution of explicit metric conducting patterns, musicians increasingly relied on visual cues – gestures, bodily movements, and facial expressions. It should also be noted that, unlike the seventeenth–nineteenth centuries, when gestural movements were often exaggerated due to the limited rehearsal time and the comparatively lower level of professional training among performers, contemporary musicians predominantly employ symbolic gestures that unite performers through shared breathing, indicate entrances, and coordinate dialogic musical exchanges. It is precisely this multimodal communication – a combination of auditory and visual channels – that

²⁶ Michat, Jean-Denis. Official YouTube channel.
<https://www.youtube.com/@jdsample7678/featured>

J.-D. Michat employs when integrating performance with the act of conducting. This can be observed in several performances of his arrangement for saxophone orchestra of J. S. Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major*, BWV 1048. Considering that the recordings selected for comparison differ in their dates of production and involve different performers, it can be concluded that J.-D. Michat deliberately adheres to this communicative model, consciously incorporating historically established channels of musical communication.

Taking into account the specificities of saxophone performance – where both hands remain occupied during playing and therefore cannot be used for conventional conducting gestures – J.-D. Michat employs alternative means of direction. These include movements of the instrument itself, the use of body posture, coordinated breathing, facial expression, and direct eye contact with the performers. It should be noted that, for wind instrumentalists, the use of additional bodily movements during performance is relatively common and often contributes to a more vivid interaction within the Performer – Audience relationship. In order to avoid unnecessary “noise” in the communicative channel caused by excessive gestures, however, J.-D. Michat largely refrains from pronounced movements of both the instrument and the torso during performance, introducing them only at moments that require clear coordination of the large saxophone ensemble. Such gestures are typically employed at structurally significant points, including the beginning and the end of a phrase, moments of collective breathing – particularly important for wind performers – as well as during dynamic and tempo changes, antiphonal exchanges between instrumental groups, and similar situations requiring coordinated ensemble interaction.

The contemporary practice of combining the roles of Conductor – Performer within a single artistic figure, particularly in large wind ensembles, remains relatively rare, in contrast to its more frequent occurrence in chamber orchestras, vocal ensembles, wind quintets, Baroque orchestras, and similar formations. Such a mode of interaction requires an expanded range of professional competencies, as it demands from the performer not only a thorough command of their own part but also a comprehensive knowledge of the entire score, together with the ability to maintain effective communication with the ensemble. Particular emphasis must therefore be placed on the precision and expressive clarity of non-verbal means of communication, whose full and continuous use is often limited by the practical conditions of performance.

In the course of analyzing the creative activity of J.-D. Michat as the leader of a saxophone ensemble, several instances were identified in which the musician assumed the position of conductor standing separately at the conducting podium. His conducting repertoire includes a number of works that have secured a place among canonical works of the academic repertoire. For instance, an examination of the arrangement of J. S. Bach's *Passacaglia*

and *Fugue in C minor*, BWV 582 (arr. N. Gascon)²⁷, demonstrates that, although the musician occupies the role of conductor, he employs rather restrained non-verbal means in his communication with the ensemble. His conducting practice combines clear, restrained beat patterns with musically expressive gestures, accompanied by almost constant eye contact with the performers and by coordinated breathing – an element that constitutes an especially important component of effective ensemble interaction.

J.-D. Michat has also introduced works of the Romantic period into the repertoire of the large saxophone ensemble, including F. Mendelssohn's *String Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major* (arr. N. Gascon). Particular attention should be given to the refinement of the conductor's musically expressive gestures, which correspond closely to the character of the performed work while deliberately avoiding exaggerated expressive movements. As a result, the audience is able to concentrate fully on the musical performance itself, without the communicative "noise" that may arise from excessive attention to the conductor's physical presence. An especially noteworthy feature of this recording is J.-D. Michat's use of the conducting baton. Considering that Felix Mendelssohn played a key role in restoring the tradition of using this distinctive conducting attribute – intended to enhance the visual component of communication within the Conductor – Ensemble relationship – it may be interpreted as a symbolic gesture through which Maestro J.-D. Michat pays tribute to the composer-conductor.

During the performance of M. Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*²⁸, J.-D. Michat gives clear preference to expressive gestural language in his communication within the Conductor – Ensemble relationship. This approach appears fully justified by the impressionistic character of the work. Through his conducting gestures, the musician visually articulates the dynamic flexibility, textural richness, and the broad flow of sound inherent in the composition. Particular attention should also be drawn to the metaphorical dimension of the conductor's gestures, as discussed by.²⁹ It may be hypothesized that such gestural responsiveness is related to mechanisms often discussed in connection with mirror-neuron processes. This may explain why such gestures

²⁷ *Artisanat Furieux / Promotion 2013*. Classe de saxophones du Conservatoire de Lyon (direction artistique: Jean-Denis Michat), 2013. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xq8XL0FySdc&list=PLdUp34nANl0xmQej4FD_4ezDj4LSEfCC&index=7, 1:20

²⁸ *"Artisanat Furieux"*: Classe de saxophone PPES. "Les 30 ans" (solist – Claude Delangle, direction – Jean-Denis Michat), Conservatoire de Lyon, 13.12.2025. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHp_-kA2SbA&list=RDH8MMIFTSJfU&index=3, 0:37 – 2:00

²⁹ Bräm, Turing; Boyes Bräm, Penny. "Der Versuch einer Klassifizierung der Ausdrucksgesten des Dirigenten". In Fähndrich, Walter (Hg.), *Improvisation III*, 1998, ss. 220-248. In German.

quickly elicit a corresponding response among the performers. This phenomenon becomes particularly evident in the way the members of the large saxophone ensemble gradually mirror the gestures of J.-D. Michat, creating what appears to be a deliberately coordinated visual effect. In reality, however, this reflects inherent mechanisms of human perception, which contribute to the visual embodiment of the auditory message being transmitted.

During performances of A. Piazzolla's³⁰ most well-known works arranged for saxophone ensemble – namely *Escualo*, *Ave Maria*, *Fugata*, *Oblivion*, and *Libertango* – communication within the Conductor – Ensemble relationship is largely based on clear metric conducting patterns complemented by occasional metaphorical gestures, while interaction with the soloist is maintained primarily through direct eye contact. In these performances, J.-D. Michat clearly differentiates the functional roles of the ensemble. At certain moments, the fifteen members of the group assume the role of a rhythmic–harmonic accompaniment, allowing the soprano saxophone soloist to emerge prominently. At other points, however, the ensemble appears to enter into a form of musical dialogue – a quasi-competitive one – with the soloist, functioning as a fully active participant in the unfolding musical action.

Up to this point, the analysis has focused primarily on works by composers from different cultural-historical periods, in which particular attention was drawn to the arranger's understanding of the specific characteristics of the saxophone family in order to achieve a "natural" ensemble sound despite the unconventional instrumentation. It is therefore necessary to consider another important dimension of the French musician's creative activity – his work as a composer. J.-D. Michat's compositional work was quickly recognized within the community of saxophonists. His works were not only welcomed as valuable additions to the repertoire but were also incorporated into the programmes of leading saxophone competitions as original compositions of a high artistic and technical standard. Given that he has composed a substantial number of works for the saxophone, a particularly close interaction can be observed within the communicative relationship Composer – Performer. As a professional saxophonist with a high level of technical mastery, J.-D. Michat possesses a thorough understanding of the expressive and technical capabilities of instruments within this family and clearly differentiates the stages involved in mastering them. Consequently, J.-D. Michat as composer is able to receive immediate feedback on his compositions. He frequently

³⁰ "Artisanat Furieux": Classe de saxophone PPES. "Les 30 ans" (solist – Claude Delangle, direction – Jean-Denis Mchat), Conservatoire de Lyon, 13.12.2025.

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHp_-kA2SbA&list=RDH8MMIFTSJfU&index=3, 6:51 – 12:00.

performs his own works not only as a distinguished soloist but also as their conductor.

The combination of the communicative roles Composer – Conductor entails several advantages, most notably those related to the precision of interpretation. At the same time, in order to minimize potential communicative “noise” when other conductors subsequently work with the score, the composer seeks to provide the most accurate and detailed notational guidance possible.

Within the Composer – Conductor relationship, the primary medium of communication is the musical score, which functions as the principal medium through which compositional intention is encoded. It must be taken into account that this process of encoding is constrained by the relatively strict conventions of musical notation, which may already introduce certain forms of “noise” into the communicative channel. In order to reduce such ambiguities, J.-D. Michat often accompanies his works with an introductory commentary and supplements the score with a series of explanatory notes – authorial remarks that may concern aspects of sound production, character, or expressive intention. At this stage it should be noted that the notated material itself contains a relatively low degree of communicative ambiguity. This is largely due to J.-D. Michat’s profound knowledge of the instrument’s technical characteristics, its dynamic gradations, and the timbral properties associated with different registers – an expertise that stems directly from his high level of performing mastery as a saxophonist.

J.-D. Michat has composed a number of works for large saxophone ensemble, including *Massive Haka*, *Pasta Concerto*, *Shams*, *Psychose*, *Malala*, *Game in Gap*, *Call for Peace*, *Suite Française*. Among the characteristic features shared by all of the aforementioned compositions are pictorial imagery, vivid programmatic expression, and elements of sound imitation. The specific features of the musical language of these works, as well as their musicological analysis, have been examined in the studies of P. Barabashchuk^{31, 32},

³¹ Barabashchuk, Pavlo. “Ansambleva spetsyfika vykonannia kontsertu dlia saksofona «Shams» Zhana-Deni Misha (na prykladi vykonavskoi interpretatsii Tomasa Kurtsa z orkestrom saksofoniv)” (Features of the ensemble performance of the concerto for saxophone *Shams* by Jean-Denis Michat: the case of Thomas Kurtz’s performance with an orchestra saxophones). In *Art Research of Ukraine*, vol. 23, 2023, pp. 238-246. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31500/2309-8155.23.2023.299281>

³² Barabashchuk, Pavlo. *Kamerno-instrumentalni ansambl za uchastiu saksofona: kompozytorska tvorchist ta vykonavska praktyka (Chamber-instrumental ensemble with the participation of the saxophone: composer's work and performance practice)* (DMA Dissertation), Ukrainian National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music, 2023, 113 p.

L. & D. Maksymenko^{33, 34}, S. Nidzelskyi³⁵, Z. Ma & P. Promsukkul³⁶. In certain cases, the compositions written by J.-D. Michat can be interpreted as artistic responses to geopolitical developments, major international cultural events, or as reinterpretations of classical traditions. Combining the communicative roles Composer – Conductor, the musician often relinquishes, in concert performance, the conventional role of the conductor as interpretative authority, instead assuming a more functional role as a rhythmic coordinator of the ensemble. This approach may be explained by the complexity of the musical language and by the frequent metric changes of these works. In such situations, the leader of the large saxophone ensemble assumes primarily the role of coordinating the performance. Accordingly, the non-verbal means of communication employed are largely limited to conducting patterns and preparatory gestures (upbeats), while metaphorical gestures may occasionally be introduced when required to facilitate the ensemble execution of extended performance techniques. It should also be noted that this transformation of the conductor's role corresponds with broader tendencies in contemporary musical practice, which increasingly seek to engage the audience in a more active and participatory relationship with the performance.

Conclusions

Collective performance, like any other form of musical activity, cannot be realized without taking into account the specific features of communicative interaction. The analysis of J.-D. Michat's artistic practice as an internationally

³³ Maksymenko, Liliia. "Frantsuzska saksofonova shkola: dyskurs rozvytku ta suchasnyi stan" (French saxophone school: developments and the modern condition). In *The Scientific Issues of Ternopil National Pedagogical Volodymyr Hnatiuk University. Specialization: Art Studies*, vol. 1, 2012, pp. 59-65.

³⁴ Maksymenko, Dmytro; Maksymenko, Liliia. "Internatsionalnyi orkestr saksofoniv - yak odna iz form zaklyku do myru na prykladi odnoimennoho tvoru Zh.-D. Misha" (The international saxophone orchestra – as one of the forms of call for peace on the example of the work of the same name by J.-D. Michat). In *International scientific conference Development of culture and art in the war and post-war periods*, 2023, pp. 19-22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-341-5-4>

³⁵ Nidzelskyi, Stanislav. "«Zaklyk do myru» Zhana-Deni Misha dlia ansamblu saksofoniv: folklorni vidlunnia u suchasnomu muzychnomu dyskursi" («Call for peace» by Jean-Denis Michat for saxophone ensemble: folklore echoes in contemporary musical discourse). In *Current Issues of the Humanities*, vol. 85 (2), 2025, pp. 119-126. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/85-2-18>

³⁶ Ma, Zhongbei; Promsukkul, Preeyanun. Cross-Cultural Fusion in Contemporary Saxophone Music: A Study of Middle Eastern-Arabic Elements in Jean Denis Michat's 'Shams'. In *Revista Electrónica de LEEME*, vol. 55, 2025, pp. 261-282. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58262/LEEME.55.0016>

recognized representative of the academic saxophone tradition reveals a distinctive integration of several important communicative roles – Composer – Conductor – Performer. The sphere of communicative relationships within his artistic practice exerts a significant influence on the unique character of saxophone ensemble performance. As a performer, a leading composer, and a skillful arranger, J.-D. Michat demonstrates the full expressive potential of the saxophone family. His awareness of historical performance traditions is reflected not only in his arrangements of works for large saxophone ensemble but also in the models of ensemble direction he employs. The musician's restrained manual conducting technique is effectively complemented by a range of non-verbal communicative means, which find resonance in the ensemble and contribute to the coherent realization of interpretation. Thus, the artistic personality of J.-D. Michat has shaped a distinctive communicative unity of multiple roles whose interaction facilitates a fuller artistic realization, repertoire enrichment, and broader promotion of the large academic saxophone ensemble within the context of contemporary musical practice.

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