



things that you hope  
a human being will be

2011 IMPROVISER-IN-RESIDENCE JANE BUNNETT  
WITH VIDEOS BY DAWN MATHESON

DVD INSIDE



Published by Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice (ICASP) and Musagetes

# things that you hope a human being will be

2011 IMPROVISER-IN-RESIDENCE JANE BUNNETT  
WITH VIDEOS BY DAWN MATHESON

# Credits



**Things that you hope a human being will be:  
2011 Improviser-in-Residence Jane Bunnett,  
with videos by Dawn Matheson**

Published by the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice research project (ICASP) and Musagetes

Edited by Ajay Heble and Alissa Firth-Eagland  
Texts by Shawn Van Sluys, David Lee, Ajay Heble with Jane Bunnett, and Dawn Matheson

Designed by Art Kilgour, [writedesign.ca](http://writedesign.ca)  
Copyedited by Karl Coulthard  
Printed by Ampersand Printing

ISBN 978-0-9877238-1-9

The Improviser-in-Residence Program is a collaboration between ICASP and Musagetes.

## ICASP

The international Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice (ICASP) research project explores musical improvisation as a model for social change. The project plays a leading role in defining a new field of interdisciplinary research to shape political, cultural, and ethical dialogue and action.

Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice  
Room 042 MacKinnon Building  
University of Guelph  
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1  
519.824.4120 Ext. 53885  
[improv@uoguelph.ca](mailto:improv@uoguelph.ca)  
[www.improvcommunity.ca](http://www.improvcommunity.ca)



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



## **Musagetes**

Musagetes is an international organization that seeks to transform contemporary life by working with artists, cultural mediators, public intellectuals, and other partners to develop new approaches to building community and culture. We believe that art and ideas strengthen the social fabric of cities.

Musagetes

PO Box 1326

Guelph, ON N1H 6N8

519.836.7300

[info@musagetes.ca](mailto:info@musagetes.ca)

[www.musagetes.ca](http://www.musagetes.ca)

## **Image Credits**

P 59–62 and cover by Thomas King

P 42–53 by Dawn Matheson (extracted from videos *Soundpainting*, *Katy's Song*, *Interruptions*, and *Jane Bunnett and the Vertical Squirrels*)

# Acknowledgements

Jane Bunnett, Centennial CVI [John Goddard], Contemporary Music Ensemble, University of Guelph [Joe Sorbara], Larry Cramer, Give Yourself Credit [Tracy Hunter], The Guelph Jazz Festival, Guelph Youth Jazz Ensemble [Brent Rowan], Homewood Health Centre [Calvin McConnell], Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice, Elizabeth Jackson, Rob Jackson, John F. Ross CVI [Dale Hobbs], KidsAbility Centre for Child Development [Sue Gibson], Marcelle Kosman, Nicholas Loess, Musagetes, Barbara Sellers, Rachel Shoup, The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, St. Joseph's Health Centre, Kim Thorne, The Ontario Trillium Foundation, Shawn Van Sluys, Amadeo Ventura, Vertical Squirrels [Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, Lewis Melville, Ted Warren], Rob Wallace, Nora Webb, University of Guelph Women's Chamber Choir [Marta McCarthy]

# Contents

Preface, by Shawn Van Sluys . . . . .	7
Deep Roots–Broad Horizons, by David Lee . . . . .	9
Things that you hope a human being will be – Jane Bunnett in conversation with Ajay Heble The 2011 Improviser-in-Residence Interview . . . . .	13
What Was Now, by Dawn Matheson . . . . .	43
Jane Bunnett: Photographs, by Thomas King . . . . .	59
Timeline of Activities . . . . .	65
A Selection of Videos by Dawn Matheson ( <i>Soundpainting</i> , <i>Katy's Song</i> , <i>Interruptions</i> , <i>Jane Bunnett and the</i> <i>Vertical Squirrels</i> ) . . . . .	DVD



# Preface

by **Shawn Van Sluys**

Jane Bunnett believes deeply in the power of art to transform the way in which we live in the world and relate to others. That's why it was so appropriate to invite her to be the first Improviser-in-Residence as part of the new collaborative program launched in 2011 by Musagetes and the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice research project. Throughout the year, Jane spent several days in Guelph each month, musically improvising to stretch the boundaries of our experiences as individuals and communities. Art moves us to the realm of imagination, and, as Nietzsche famously said, it justifies life.

For the people in Guelph with whom Jane worked over the year of her residency, the experience of musical improvisation was profoundly moving. The evidence of this is presented in a series of short videos by Dawn Matheson, a Guelph-based artist. The responsiveness of the musicians to each other and their environment built

empathic understanding beyond that which is possible through a fleeting contact with artistic creativity. This publication peels back the layers of the improvisers' experiences through a collection of videos, interviews, and other texts.

At the heart of the collaboration between Musagetes and the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice research project is our central belief that the arts mediate our understanding of the world around us. Jane Bunnett makes it real!



# Deep Roots—Broad Horizons

Jane Bunnett and the ICASP/Musagetes Improviser-in-Residence Project

by David Lee

In any context, Jane Bunnett would be singled out as a remarkable wind player, an improviser fluent on different flutes with—even more exceptionally—the ability to play through all the registers on soprano saxophone without ever sounding shrill or strident—itself a rare accomplishment. However, the career she has built in Canadian music over the past thirty years is built on much broader foundations.

Trained as a classical pianist, Jane’s first jazz inspiration was significant for two reasons. One, it was a live performance—and live performances reveal musical dynamics that are largely hidden on records. Two, it was a live performance by Charles Mingus, a major jazz figure whose ensembles, more often than not, framed improvisation in ways that were explosive and unsettling, perhaps providing an indicator for the many directions Jane would follow in her own music-making.

When Jane Bunnett emerged as a player/composer in the 1980s, there were three main options open to a young female Canadian jazz musician: lead a band, in the familiar role of the bandleader/virtuoso as heroic outsider who blinds us with instrumental brilliance and confounds our expectations with the music’s twists and turns; assume the readily available and more lucrative “siren” role, the role of the entertainer—preferably in a black cocktail dress—who is there to fulfill audience desires, a persona for which the jazz industry has a seemingly bottomless appetite; or move to New York, where—although as the song says, “if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere”—even exceptional musicians can disappear into that still-seething jazz melting-pot, or after a few years return home much wiser and poorer. Jane chose none of these.

## Jane Bunnett's musical world has been uniquely constructed upon a series of collaborations, constantly changing and occasionally overlapping

Instead, Jane Bunnett's musical world has been uniquely constructed upon a series of collaborations, constantly changing and occasionally overlapping. The one constant in these collaborations has been her husband Larry Cramer; a full partner in musical endeavours, not only personally but as a trumpeter, organizer, and producer; a man to whom Jane gives full credit for his contributions to their music's success.

But during that early exposure to the Mingus band, Bunnett, who had trained as a classical pianist, was particularly impressed with Don Pullen, the great African American pianist whose own keyboard technique was so radical that it has often been misunderstood and, although widely appreciated, rarely appropriated. Perhaps it was Bunnett's own "outsider" status that drew her to a number of the maverick virtuosos of American jazz— Pullen, as well as tenor saxophonist Dewey Redman and vocalists Jeanne Lee and Sheila Jordan, all unique and

visionary stylists who played, toured, and/or recorded with Bunnett and Cramer's groups until the early 1990s.

These singular efforts distinguished Jane as an artist not only curious and imaginative, but notably hard-working. As she and Larry carried on studies with Barry Harris in New York and Steve Lacy in Paris, she also played and recorded with major pianists such as Paul Bley, D.D. Jackson, Stanley Cowell, and Marilyn Lerner; and musicians as varied as Charlie Haden, Andrew Cyrille, the Penderecki String Quartet, Billy Hart, Henry Grimes, and Slim Gaillard.

However, at the same time that she was forging a singular career by identifying herself with American post-Coleman improvisers, Jane began cultivating another musical genre just as singular, one that set her apart just as much from the musics being made by her Toronto contemporaries. On a vacation to Cuba in 1982, she and Larry encountered Cuban music and musicians.



Over the years, this has led to a dual initiative: while incorporating Cuban music and musicians into their own projects, they have also devoted much time and effort to scouring North America for used musical instruments sorely needed by Cuban students.

The Cuban connection became something all-consuming, involving collaborations with major Cuban musicians such as Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Frank Emilio, Guillermo Barreto, Merceditas Valdés, and especially Hilario Durán (a pianist whose influence on Bunnett was mutual). Durán moved to Toronto in 1995 and has built a successful North American career as both a teacher and a composer/performer.

Bunnett has built a career that has won her two Grammy nominations, several Juno awards, the Order of Canada, and an honorary doctorate from Queen's University—but, impressive as they may be, these signs of success are of little use in evaluating an artist who

continues to confront the changing challenges of the improviser's process. On the heels of a CD featuring vocalists, one that her website admits is an attempt to "crossover to a mainstream audience," Jane agreed to be the pilot artist in ICASP's collaboration with Musagetes for their pioneering Improviser-in-Residence project—an experience that brought her face to face with many wide-ranging aspects of the Guelph community. The contrast between these two projects is perhaps emblematic of Jane's refusal to be pigeonholed, a sign of the ongoing growth and development of one of the most unique artistic visions in Canadian music, a vision dedicated to "all these things that you hope a human being will be."



# ‘Things that you hope a human being will be’

Jane Bunnett in conversation with Ajay Heble: The 2011 Improviser-in-Residence interview

Transcribed by Elizabeth Johnstone

*On February 11, 2011, I sat down with Toronto-based soprano saxophonist, flutist, and bandleader Jane Bunnett for an interview in front of a live audience at the Guelph Public Library for a session of Thinking Spaces: the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice Reading Group. Earlier that day, Jane had participated in a series of unannounced public interventions during which she and two other musicians (Rob Wallace and Amadeo Ventura) had walked into Guelph cafés, libraries, and a downtown bookstore with their musical instruments in hand. Handing out sundry percussion instruments to passersby and encouraging participation from her (sometimes captivated, sometimes bewildered) accidental audiences, Jane and her fellow animators transformed these public spaces, which, for a few moments, unexpectedly came alive with the spirit, spark, and sense of creative community-making that so often characterizes improvised music. These interventions were the first in a series of public events to showcase Jane*

*Bunnett’s role as our inaugural year long Improviser-in-Residence, a new initiative made possible through a partnership between the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice research project and Musagetes. In the interview, we had a wide-ranging conversation focusing on Jane’s impressive body of work, her plans for the year long residency, the social force of improvised forms of creative practice, and the characteristics that define a good improvising musician: in Jane’s words, “that the person listens when you’re playing with them, the person is generous, the person is supportive. All these things that you hope a human being will be will come out in the musical activity.”*

– Ajay Heble  
Guelph Public Library  
February 11, 2011

**AH:** And now I’ll be talking to Jane [Bunnett]. Jane is our inaugural Improviser-in-Residence, which is part of a

My observation is that people ultimately do have rhythm – we white people have rhythm!

collaborative partnership between the ICASP project—Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice—and Musagetes. When we were searching for candidates for this inaugural residency, Jane quickly rose to the top of our wish list. She is, of course, no stranger to the Guelph community. She's gifted us with several remarkable and memorable performances here over the years at the Guelph Jazz Festival. She also comes to us with significant experience working with at-risk and inner-city populations, and with a profound commitment to intercultural music-making. She's a multiple Juno award winner, a recipient of the Order of Canada, a Grammy Award nominee, and an artist whose recordings and performances have allowed her to move impressively across many dimensions of musical experience. Working in and working across different contexts of music-making—Cuban musics, post-Monk and post-Mingus, avant-garde, free jazz, new music, gospels, spirituals, and

the list goes on—she's worked with Don Pullen, Steve Lacy, Sheila Jordan, Jeanne Lee, Charlie Haden, Andrew Cyrille, the Penderecki String Quartet, Slim Gaillard, Henry Grimes, Hilario Durán, Paul Bley, the Cuban piano masters, Billy Hart, Stanley Cowell, Dewey Redman, and the list goes on and on and on. It's a veritable who's who of creative music. Indeed, her work represents an exceptional trajectory through the entire history of contemporary jazz and improvised music. It really is an honor to have you here as part of our residency program.

**JB:** Thanks. It's an honor to be given this great opportunity. It's a challenge, but every time I'm coming into town I just think that it's a gift also for me because for me there will be a lot of self-discovery, being aware of things that I take for granted. So, this is an interesting facet, to have a different learning curve with this.



**AH:** Perhaps we could start by talking about the work you're going to be doing as part of your residency here. This is, of course, a brand new initiative for us and for you—and it's really one I've dreamed about for a long time—having an Improviser-in-Residence position. We've all heard about Composers-in-Residence, Artists-in-Residence ... but I've always thought, wow, wouldn't it be great to have an Improviser-in-Residence position. And from the start it's been about something that's a little bit different from the standard academic residency. For me, this is first and foremost a community residency, that is, we want to bring artists and community partners together to create these sustained projects in the community. It certainly means a lot to have you here. Can you talk about what it means for you to be the very first Improviser-in-Residence here in Guelph?

**JB:** As I mentioned, there's already been some sort of discovery, things that, like I've said, I've taken for granted. My observations that I've taken, even from [the unannounced public interventions] today, is that people ultimately do have rhythm. We white people have rhythm! But it was interesting because if in the library you could see that people were joining in, that some of them were sort of half way there because of the commitment to just totally engage ... if they were amongst friends, there was a little part of them that didn't totally want to take the hand off the laptop. I don't know if they were half pretending they were doing something—I couldn't do that—half doing the rhythm thing and then typing. But generally people looked quite happy when they engaged in the musical activity.

**AH:** The first thing I noticed was just the smiles.

**JB:** Mmhmm.

**AH:** At the library, and the Bookshelf, and the café, you went in unannounced and provided them with the gift of music and people were lighting up.

**JB:** It's an incredible opportunity we as musicians have, like you said, to engage the community and draw people out and hopefully be conduits—is that the right word—to be able to get different groups to ... this is a new thing, and for me, you can't sort of walk in and say "I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this." These ideas are sort of moving around, and as I get to know people and get to know the personality of a certain group, and of course the facilitator that you're working with, I see that there will be tie-ins. At first, when we talked about doing that, I thought, "this is contrived, I don't see how this is possible," when you've got people with all sorts of different

issues. But I think it will be possible to put some groups together that people maybe wouldn't have thought could work together. For example, we've just done a couple of sessions at Homewood [Health Centre], and both of them have been totally different. The first one was quite remarkable because there was one woman who came in, and she definitely did not want to be there. She came in and she looked very, very unhappy. She's from Nunavut, and I had been told that she hated white people, so prepare for that, and I don't blame her ... She was sitting there, and right away when someone has their arms like this it's going to be hard to pry those arms away and put an instrument in there. Gradually, we were able to connect and she was able to connect with the group. At one point, it was so funny ... it was either that day or the day before, working with KidsAbility, which is another group, I guess you are all familiar with KidsAbility. We worked with them the year before and we were doing this potato

## I think with music there's something that is bigger than you, but you're still a part of it and you still feel like you have some power to control what's happening

chip song and it turned into peanut butter, and I mentioned this to the group at the Homewood. Taking a word and how words have rhythm, like peanut butter. She picked up on it right away, this woman. Peanut butter. Oh, I should backtrack a bit. Just before that we were all sitting down drumming and I got up and I started to move with the drum. I started to actually dance a bit with the drum as I was playing. And she got up and all of a sudden she was dancing around the room, hitting the drum, and she had heard me talk about peanut butter and she starting going "peanut butter, peanut butter," and she's hitting the drum and really getting into it. "Peanut butter!" and everyone started joining in. The doors were open and I thought, "If anybody walks by, if any of these doctors walk by, they're probably going to close us down." But we were all singing and everyone hitting the drum, going, "peanut butter, peanut butter," and she was having the time of her life. And at the end,

we just sort of talked as we were packing up and I asked her, "How do you feel?" And she said, "I have never been so happy in my entire life!"

**AH:** So what do you think accounts for that change?

**JB:** Well, I think the fact that she was connecting with people that she's probably been sitting around with in group therapy and been probably very intense. A lot of people in that place are going through something at that time, and I think that in so many ways, that music, in a million different ways, and one of the things is that it takes you out of ... that it's not just you ... that you're part of something bigger, and also that you do have some control. I think with music there's something that is bigger than you, but you're still a part of it and you still feel like you have some power to control what's happening. You're a part of something, you're a part

You know, we've had music in our culture since way before the language, we had words, so if it was banging rhythms, that existed before

of the piece, you're a part of what is happening at that moment. I think it's abstract, but at the same time it's such a grounded thing. You know, we've had music in our culture since way before the language, we had words, so if it was banging rhythms, that existed before. And I think it's just such a strong instinct. And in our culture, in North American cultures, because in so many others it's not a problem, and in Cuban culture I've seen it first hand, that everybody is a participant in Cuban music. You don't sit back and watch other people perform. You may have other people that are better musicians or more equipped, or technically they're advanced, but still there's a participation. The audiences are very important participators in musical activity in other cultures, and in our culture it's been cut off. Even in East Coast culture there's more, Newfoundland and P.E.I. and those places, there are kitchen parties and music. People are bang-

ing on something. So they're engaged in the activity; whereas here, we have sort of left it for ... it's a specialty.

**AH:** So these interventions that you've just done today, of course, were an attempt to encourage people to engage in that act of participation?

**JB:** Yeah. I think even if it just makes somebody think for a moment about music, then that, in itself, is even an important thing: "Oh, there was some musical activity that sort of passed by me today." And I think anything that you do as a group, and in the reading I've been doing lately, that's why even those rock songs, "We will rock you," look at the phenomenon, stadiums of people going [Jane demonstrates] stomp, stomp, clap, stomp, stomp, clap. All these people that are just engaged in something, and it's so powerful!

**AH:** I know you've spent a lot of time and energy in preparing for the work you're doing here.

**[To audience]** While Jane is here, she's going to be working with several different groups in the community, ranging from students in high school to patients at health-care centres to people who have acquired brain injuries, people suffering from trauma, kids with physical and developmental disabilities.

**[To Jane]** And I know that you've spent quite a bit of time thinking about each of these groups you're working with and designing projects specific to those groups. I'm wondering if you find yourself following the plans that you've prepared, or are there situations where you find yourself having to reinvent your methods? I'm thinking by way of a context for this question about a comment you made to me in a previous interview. You were talking

about that wonderful record you made with Paul Bley, *Double Time*, about how you really prepared for that recording by working on all this music, and when you sat down to do the record with Paul he resisted your efforts. You said to me, "He didn't really let me prepare." You told me in that earlier interview that Larry Cramer, your musical and life-partner, told you, "This is what you do best. This is what you practice for. This is why you spend all those hours working on things—so you can jump into a situation like this and just play. And not play the licks that you've been working on." And I wonder if there is something similar going on in the work for this residency. I know you've been talking about these plans you're putting into place. Are those plans being resisted when you find yourself in the moment in those situations?

**JB:** Well, I'm sort of formulating things, formulating projects that I would like to see happen, but there will

ultimately be a lot of shifting because I know some of the stuff is not totally formulated. And I think that it's really important for me to get a sense, like I said, of the dynamic of the group. Like especially, for example, [when working with students at the alternative high school] Give Yourself Credit. These kids must have an incredible amount of courage to be doing what they're doing. It's really hard for them. A few of them have kids too, and here they are they're working towards a high school credit. So my idea may not be their idea. I might get in there and they might totally resist. What I think is so cool is not so cool. And then I'm going to have to do some shifting because ultimately I want them to be engaged in something they are really excited about. You have to go with the group and work with them and what they want. I can't just go in and impose some idea that I think is so cool. So I'm hoping that they are going to think that the idea is cool, and that we'll be able to do something that's

going to give them a face. I'm very project-driven. Being the sort of person that I am, I need to have a goal at the end when I do something. So with each group I've tried to think of something that will showcase the work in the end to the community and will maybe bridge a gap. In the case of Give Yourself Credit, that these kids will be able to vent if they need to vent on what their situation is, that somehow they can get some respect. And that the community will respect the organization and what these kids are trying to achieve, and they'll get a credit for it too.

**AH:** Let's talk about improvisation, which is, of course, the central focus for this residency. What attracts you to improvised music and do you think there's something, in particular, about improvised music-making that speaks to and resonates with these communities that you're working with, many of which are marginalized?

## That's the exciting thing for me: just starting with a blank wall, nothing's there, and then creating something

**JB:** Well, I guess the first thing is that you can never duplicate. Every performance, every activity is unique in itself and that's what makes it special. We're trying to develop something, and if, by improvising, we improve on an idea ... that doesn't mean that we're always going to do something totally, totally different; but we're going to embellish something, make it bigger, go one direction, go a different direction than expected but still on a course. That's the exciting thing for me: just starting with a blank wall, nothing's there, and then creating something, something that has meaning not only to the people doing it, but the activity at that moment, the pleasure that you get when you actually are playing. Like with musicians, when you're playing with like-minded musicians, that feeling is one of the most wonderful feelings in the world. Time stops. Everything stops. You kind of lose sense of yourself. I mean, I always find for me no matter how terrible I feel ... there was one day when I

walked into the Homewood, and I just really felt like I was the last person who should be in here with these folks because I feel terrible myself today. And I felt great afterwards. I mean after the activity, working with them, and just improvising, I felt so much better. That connecting, there's no language, it's the music that's happening. It's a very powerful and very remarkable thing to do.

**AH:** This comment that there's no language except for music puts me in mind of something else you said in that previous interview we did, which is perhaps worth repeating here. We were talking then about an ad hoc grouping of musicians, improvising musicians, I'd brought together at the Guelph Jazz Festival. You were playing with Getatchew Mekuria from Ethiopia and Jah Youssouf from Mali and Alain Derbez from Mexico and Hamid Drake from the U.S.: musicians from all around the world. And the amazing thing about that event is that

many of you were meeting for the very first time and doing so onstage in front of an audience, and that you were performing with no pre-arranged musical direction and there was no language in common. There was literally no language in common onstage, and yet you created absolutely wondrous music. In thinking about that event, we started talking in that interview about the extent to which musical improvisation might be linked with these broader social issues: communication, human rights, social justice, building community. And you said to me: "When you sit down and you're in a collective like that it entails all the things that we as human beings should just be, and in that way, it can teach something to the listener to carry forth too. Just dealing with all the things that life entails." Now it's clear to me that, in speaking with you, and indeed in speaking with so many of the artists who play at the Guelph Jazz Festival, that there is something profoundly important going on

in that moment, when musicians improvise together, especially improvising across these global communities. Something profoundly important is going on in terms of the kinds of broader social issues we were talking about there. Now in your case, you've done a whole lot of work, not only in inter-cultural contexts ... your work with and commitment to Cuban music and Cuban musicians certainly comes to mind ... but you've also done a lot of work in Toronto and now in Guelph with at-risk and inner-city kids and populations. I'm wondering if you can say a bit more about how some of your previous experiences have shaped your understanding of the social importance of improvised music? And are there particular instances? You've already begun to talk about these in terms of some of the work you've done in the residency, but are there other particular instances you can talk about where you really felt that you were making a difference, having an impact with your music, a particular kind of

## All these things that you hope a human being will be will come out in the musical activity

social impact? You mentioned some of the examples from Homewood. I know certainly from talking to the parents and the staff and the kids at KidsAbility about the work you did there a few years ago, it's tremendously inspiring for those people. But I'd be interested in hearing from you if there are particular moments that stand out as having an impact.

**JB:** Gosh, there are lots. It's more so down the road where people will come up to you and say, "Four years ago I heard you. I just was going through something, or something or another was happening, and I heard a performance with you, and did this thing and it just helped me so much." That kind of stuff, I do hear that a lot. Because I feel like the music that I do comes from a very spiritual place. I'm not a religious person in the context of going to church and that kind of thing—as much as I like churches—but I find for me when I play music I try

to do it from a very deep place. Musicians that I like to work with and hope to work with are the kind of people that, as human beings, even if they weren't musicians, they would still be the kind of people I would want to be around. The fact that they play music is great. Those kind of personality traits in the music are very important, that the person listens when you're playing with them, the person is generous, the person is supportive. All these things that you hope a human being will be will come out in the musical activity. I think when the situation is right like that, you mentioned Dewey Redman and Don Pullen, many of the musicians that I've worked with have been from that place. Even Paul Bley, who's crazy, crazy! He's brilliant crazy, but he's still, as a musician, incredibly ... I've never had quite an experience such as playing with Paul Bley, and what he gives as a musician. It's unexplainable, really. I think that translates to people, like the people that like what I do, and then you get that nice

I started playing when I was 22. So I started quite late. But I feel musically because of certain things that have happened that I can connect with people musically

feedback. Because sometimes you just feel like chucking it, which I have. Three years ago I was ready to quit music. I hit the wall and had enough. I made 17 records. I can't do it anymore. I'm tired. I'm tired of making records and I'm tired of touring. I'm tired of feeling like, "Oh she just put out another record ... great." But it was a very interesting transition to get myself out of that, and get back into music. So now I feel like with working at Homewood and working with some people, I know what that feeling is to feel disengaged from music too. I'm not the kind of musician ... I think there are a lot of musicians out there who were, at seven years old, protégés, and by the time they were 17 or 18 they were terrific musicians. I haven't been an academic, and I started playing when I was 22. So I started quite late. But I feel musically because of certain things that have happened that I can connect with people musically. I have a different way of working, and I think certain people pick up on that.

**AH:** In terms of the impact of your music, as I said earlier, one example that certainly comes to mind for me has to do with those workshops you did with KidsAbility here a few years ago.

**JB:** Rob [Wallace] was with us, too.

**AH:** Rob and Larry [Cramer] were part of that. This [KidsAbility Centre for Child Development] is an organization that works with kids who have physical and developmental disabilities here in Guelph, and they're all very excited to have you back working with the kids there again this year as part of your residency. Now, when you were here a couple of years ago, those workshops that you did with the youth culminated in a brilliant performance that you did at the Jazz Festival tent, which is the largest outdoor venue at the Jazz Festival, where there are literally thousands of people. Those workshops were

hugely inspiring I think for all of us, and anyone who was participating and watching. Many people in the audience were moved to tears. And the interviews that we conducted afterwards with the participants and with the staff from KidsAbility made it clear just what a significant impact you had on those kids. And I remember remarking to you right after that final concert with the kids how ... I think you only had three or four workshops with them ... imagine if we had a whole year. Well, now we do! That's the amazing thing. I thought you were able to accomplish so much just in that short period of time. So, now we have a whole year, and I'm wondering what this opportunity for extended contact might enable you to do that you couldn't do the first time around?

**JB:** I think fine tune things a bit more. I think some of the regulars that are back, they are more comfortable with me. They know me a little bit. And probably we'll

increase the repertoire. We have a songbook together now. Thanks to Slim [Gaillard], he's given me some material to work with. There's a couple of new kids in there. One who's really dynamite actually. We just have to make sure he doesn't steal the show, because he's a bit of a ham. He's a great kid. I think we'll just be able to have more pieces of music, and be able to present them. Maybe give more kids more cameos than we had before.

**AH:** One of the things you did last time was you had each of the kids bring a photograph and create a kind of composition or story around the photo.

**JB:** Yes, we're doing that again too.

**AH:** I thought that was very successful.

**JB:** We've got a few things up our sleeve. It's gonna be fun.

**AH:** In addition to being a performer, improviser, composer, educator, and bandleader, you're also an organizer. Indeed, you're one of the driving forces behind the Art of Jazz Festival (Toronto), and I know that the Art of Jazz has an educational mandate, that it does a lot of outreach work in the community as well. I'm wondering if you see connections between your work as a festival organizer with the Art of Jazz and the work you're doing with the residency.

**JB:** Yeah! It's just giving me more opportunity to develop my skills, number one. Well, number one, let me take my hat off to you because this kind of thing could never happen in Toronto, I don't think, what you've done. I mean maybe it could, but we're a long way from ... because of

the kind of community Guelph is. It's very rootsy, and partly because it's a university town, there's a great sort of feeling of teamwork here. I mean, just doing what we were doing today, I'm sure I would have got my soprano [saxophone] shoved down my ... [grabs throat, laughs] if I did that at the reference library! I think there's a lot to learn by working in a smaller community ... how to go out and then work in a larger community. It think some of the things we're doing ... it would be very difficult. The Art of Jazz, we worked up in the Jane and Finch area with about 350 kids that were bussed in from all the schools up there up to one of the schools, CW Jefferys. We were working with Jon Hendricks, and that was, how do you say it, just an overwhelming project because of the amount of kids and the organization of trying to bus kids in. And the biggest thing is that, unlike here in Guelph, the family thing is so rough now in Toronto. There are so many moms and no fathers in the situation,

The corporation that's down there that owns everything in the Distillery, they're really not ... I'll get in big trouble for this but, anyway ... it's not their agenda, really

so the family structure is so disheveled, and so when you're working with young people it's difficult—very, very difficult! It's difficult here, but not as difficult. I think I've been given an opportunity to do what I like to do and, maybe at some point, help in Toronto. Or actually, possibly going down into the Regent Park area. Next year they're building a whole new complex down there. So I think the Art of Jazz will be having an office down there, and we will be working with youth in music down there.

**AH:** So even though the festival is moving its location, you're going to continue to work in Toronto.

**JB:** Yes. The next couple of years we'll be working in Brampton, and they're sure we'll be there forever, and who knows, you know? But I'd like to get back into Toronto too, but for us in the Distillery [district] the place is just too rich for our blood [laughs]. In the sense—you all

know the Distillery, right—they're about boutiques and the high-end. We're talking about the real estate people. What do you call them ... the Corp. The corporation that's down there that owns everything in the Distillery, they're really not ... I shouldn't be, I'll get in big trouble for this but, anyway ... that it's not their agenda, really. So, that's why. They're building condos and two of the stages are gone that we were working in. Condos are going up and that's going to be two, three years of condo building. Yah. We need more condos. So, that's one of the reasons we moved [the Festival] to Brampton, and they're thrilled to have us. But still I'd like to be back in Toronto, too. It's keeping your chops going, you know. Just keeping the momentum ... you know what it's like, if you take a year off, it's tricky to get back in the saddle.

**AH:** That's true.

## I was a very, very rebellious teenager, and so fortunate that I ended up okay

**JB:** That was the choice, but this is an amazing opportunity. Like I said, self-discovery, going to the Homewood and KidsAbility, and Give Yourself Credit. That's the group I like most ... teenagers. I was a very, very rebellious teenager, and so fortunate that I ended up okay. Because, you know, I had some real brushes in my teenage life. So I like to work with at-risk kids. I think the potential is HUGE for them. And just a lot of them have been dealt really crappy circumstances. They're not in the position where they want to be.

**AH:** What do you think the greatest challenges are going to be during this year that you're with us at Guelph?

**JB:** Take a guess?! Doing it all! It's a hell of a lot, right Kim!

**Kim Thorne:** You can do it.

**JB:** Just keep breathing.

**AH:** Making it all happen.

**JB:** Making it all happen. But I've got great people working with me, so ...

**AH:** Shifting focus a little bit, can you talk about what it's like to be a woman improviser in what is largely a male-dominated field?

**JB:** Sometimes good, sometimes bad. Sometimes it's great! Let me put it this way, if it's a women's festival, it's great if they hire me. I love the women's festivals, and if they don't hire me, I hate them! Generally, it's great. I've been fortunate, partly because my partner is a trumpet player so he often can be in the picture. But I've had a couple of pretty bad experiences, when I didn't choose

I almost got in a fist fight on the stage because he told me I had to get off the stage, and that I shouldn't be playing, and to go home and practice

my adversaries, I guess is the word. A very bad experience in the North Sea at a jam session. I'll tell you that story another time ... But it was actually a musician that was in Wynton Marsalis' big band, at the North Sea Jazz Festival Jam Session. I almost got in a fist fight on the stage because he told me I had to get off the stage, and that I shouldn't be playing, and to go home and practice. He pulled this ... in front of a huge room of people, and I could have handled it better myself, but being feisty I decided to make a real scene out of it. But ultimately, I got him fired ... because his display was really uncalled for. It was a whole group of young women that were overseas. It was one of these IAJE [International Association for Jazz Education] all-women groups. They were all up front just watching this thing happen. So I kinda felt like ... I just had it out with the guy. And then I wrote a letter and put it under his door and that went over well, but ... [laughter] So, there's been a few things but not a lot. The

reason being because a lot of the time I've chosen, I've been careful to not put myself in a situation where I will be really vulnerable and possibly get my feelings hurt. I haven't gone into situations trying to prove something: "I'm going to walk into the situation because I want to play," or something like that. The musicians that I've worked with have all been really supportive and great people, and so if you keep those kinds of things in mind then, you sort of buff yourself to what people are saying about you.

**AH:** What about the industry, more broadly?

**JB:** Well, to tell you the truth, I try and manipulate that. To be perfectly honest! I really do. I mean, my mother always said to me, "You get more bees with honey." I don't mean it the way that just came out. Oh, my god! But I mean, there's no reason to walk into a situation and be

‘Get a New York address.’ He told me, ‘It doesn’t even matter if it’s just a box. Just get a New York address.’ And I was like, ‘God!’

a certain way. You try to be up front and respectful and treat me ... there have been a couple of things that have happened, that I’ve lost ... you know what’s been more of a problem, to tell you the truth, and I seriously mean this, being Canadian.

**AH:** I was just going to say ...

**JB:** Being Canadian. Not being white, not being a woman, but being Canadian, and not having a New York address. People have told me, the critics, US journalists, say stuff: “She doesn’t live in the States.” This is a New Yorky thing too. I’ve played in New York: “Well, she doesn’t live here. Where’s she from? Canada?” You can’t be any good if you’re from Canada. In fact, Paul Bley was one of the musicians. He saw my bio when we were doing *Double Time* and he said, “Take it out that you’re Canadian.” He said, “Take it out of your bio. Don’t say you’re Canadian.”

I said, “Really? But I’m proud to be Canadian.” He said, “No, that doesn’t work,” and he told me, “Get a New York address.” He told me, “It doesn’t even matter if it’s just a box. Just get a New York address.” And I was like, “God!”

**AH:** So have you done those things?

**JB:** No, I haven’t. I haven’t. I haven’t. Maybe I should. I should listen to Uncle Paul.

**AH:** I just have one more question.

**JB:** Well, they’re good questions. They’re hard questions.

**AH:** Earlier today you were involved in a number of unannounced public interventions, and I think they went off really well, and I was just wondering if you could tell us about your response to what went down.

**JB:** It was fun because I think most of the people were really nice. Don't you think, guys? They were nice. There wasn't one nasty ... I know in Toronto, for sure, if we'd done it in Toronto there would have been ten that would have been, "Get out of my face!", definitely. But everybody was smiling. "Okay, I'll shake this. I don't really want to but I will."

**AH:** But by then they wanted to, right?

**JB:** Yes, some of them were sort of like ...

**AH:** Those people in the library, on campus, they were totally into it!

**JB:** They were like, "I won't do it. I won't do it." But next time you see them, finally they got into it. And it was interesting because most people were sort of halfway

there. They weren't totally (gesturing with a hand shaking up and down). There were a few that got totally into it, but there were some that were like, "I'm talking to my friend and I'm shaking the banana, and I'm doing my computer too." So they were wanting to hide a little bit behind something, and not totally look like they were getting into it. And I thought it was interesting too ... I tried to make a point about looking into people's eyes ... cause I tend to close my eyes sometimes when I play, but I tried to look people in the faces as they were playing because that's an important thing when you're playing too ... to have eye contact with the musicians. Because it's not ... I mean I do close my eyes when I'm concentrating, but there still should be a certain amount of eye connection ... because you get a sense of body language and where the music is going to go. Is this person really digging what I'm doing? Are they following? So it was

interesting because everybody really looked me in the face. Nobody turned away when I looked at them.

**AH:** How did today's experience compare to the stint you did at St. Lawrence Market [in Toronto], where you were busking.

**JB:** Oh, that was painful. So for those who don't know, the *[Toronto] Star* did a ... it was around JUNO time and they wanted to see how people respond to their Canadian ... a Canadian artist. So luckily they put me in the St. Lawrence Market, which was better than [what they did with] Joshua Bell. They put Joshua Bell in the Wall Street subway. Poor guy. So this was a copycat thing. Some people would push their kids up: "Put some money in the hat. I'm not gonna do it, but you're gonna do it." So that was kind of interesting. Generally, people were quite nice, but nobody did come up and speak to me. The

*Star* reporters were running after them and asking them questions afterwards. But Joshua Bell, his experiences were terrible. Now mind you, it was work time. This was 8:30 in the morning. They actually had it on camera where the parents would have their kid and they would be taking them out of the subway, and the kid would be like, "What is he doing?" Trying to see the violinist, and the parents were standing in front of the kid's view so they couldn't see Joshua even playing. "We're not going to stop for the music." And you see these kids, "I want to stay," and the parent pulling the kid. I made more money than he did [laughing]. I made forty-six dollars and he made twenty-five. It was very interesting. This was Wall Street, and I'm in a market. Much more the kind of person who wants to meet the sausage guy and wants to talk sausages and stuff, whereas on Wall Street no one's talking sausages. But it was a different environment. Still, the guy makes 30 to 40 thousand dollars a

concert, and one woman put in 20 dollars because she'd seen him three weeks ago. But nobody recognized him. Nobody stopped a second to hear him. So, it was a pretty good experience, but this was better. We didn't give instruments out either. They probably would have run.

**AH:** Well, you brought some music ...

**JB:** Well, you suggested I bring some ...

**AH:** Do you want to play something?

**JB:** Well ... what do you think? I don't know ...

**AH:** What did you bring?

**JB:** I brought this one that has a bunch of stuff. It's got some Paul Bley, and this is sort of my own bootleg. I

There were six people commissioned to write music for their favorite park in Canada. And everybody's piece was eight minutes, four seconds, eight minutes, six seconds. Isn't that weird?

make the bootleg 'cause I owe the record company like eight thousand dollars [laughs]. I can't buy any more CDs. So, I did this. Well maybe ... this hasn't been released. I'm trying to think of what to do ... Maybe I'll play you this. This is something I did with all nature sounds in Algonquin Park. And it's just a short piece. I was actually commissioned by the CBC to do it. And it was interesting. There were six people commissioned to write music for their favorite park in Canada. So, I think Bruce Cockburn did one, and what's-her-name from out east. And everybody's piece was eight minutes, four seconds, eight minutes, six seconds, everybody's piece. Isn't that weird?

**AH:** It is weird.

**JB:** So this was done ... [working with CD player] Oh, Miss Techie ... with bata drums, which are the hourglass Cuban drums and myself on piano and playing flutes.

I like playing that for Cubans because there is so much space in there. They're like, 'I don't get it.' That was Pancho [Quinto] playing there

And it's a song cycle. In the Afro-Cuban music you have all these different saints, which are connected to the elements of nature. So it can be fire, water, trees, green—they're connected to colours. They're called the Orishas. And this is a song cycle of all the different particular ... because each saint has a particular rhythm. This is called "bata mata chango." So it's all the whole cycle of all the Orishas compacted into this eight minutes. And you can hear all these nature sounds. So I'm trying to think what I'm going to do with this. I would like somebody to actually animate something for it.

[Music plays.]

**JB:** Summer's only how many months? [laughs]

**AH:** That's beautiful.

**JB:** Thanks. That was kind of a different departure for me. I like playing that for Cubans because there is so much space in there. They're like, "I don't get it." That was Pancho [Quinto] playing there.

**AH:** Oh, was it?

**JB:** Yeah. That was fun playing with Pancho. Afterwards, I took it back and played it for his family. It was cool and unusual.

**AH:** Maybe we can see if people from the audience have questions for Jane.

**Audience Member:** We all have that slightly blissed out expression of having meditated through that beautiful piece.

**JB:** It is ... I haven't listened to it in a while, but I like the zone it put me in when I was working on it. I would love to ... I have this idea ... I just haven't met the person to do it, but an animation. Do you remember Norman McLaren?

**AH:** I do.

**JB:** Do you remember the one where the drop of water hits the ... it takes place in a canoe. Does it take place in a canoe or something and then there was a fly on his skin? ... Anyway, I'd like something that would start with a drop of water, and then the ripples come out and then all these things start to happen with the ripples ... animals ...

**AH:** I have someone in mind for you ...

**JB:** Do you? Really? I'd like to do that. I don't know what I'd do with it after I do it, but ... get it shown on an airplane or something. [laughing] Maybe, I don't know.

**Audience Member:** I want to ask a question about that really touching incident you brought up in the Homewood, with the indigenous woman who was so angry.

**JB:** Mmmhmm.

**Audience Member:** ... and then so happy. Where are you going to go from there?

**JB:** Well, it was interesting. So, so, so ... I was so pumped on Wednesday to see her, right? So this is how life goes, right? I'm pumped and I told Larry about her. I called that night and I was pumped because I was really nervous about going into Homewood. Anyway, I'm all excited

I say, 'Hey, how are you doing? We're going to play today.' She said, 'No, I'm not coming today.'

to see her and I'm waiting in the hall. Guys are waiting outside to load the stuff in and she's coming out to have a smoke, and I say, "Hey, how are you doing? We're going to play today." She said, "No, I'm not coming today." "Oh." I'm taking it totally personally, of course. "Ohh." "No," she said, "I'm having a caribou roast. And I've been waiting for the caribou roast. And, and, and." I said, "Oh. It's only from three to four thirty. Can't you come and do the music and then go do the caribou roast?" She was going to a friend's house because someone had brought some caribou. And she said, "Nope. I've been waiting for this for a long time. And I'm taking him, and I'm taking her, and I'm taking ..." and she ran down ... You're taking the whole class! So finally when Calvin [Clinical Social Worker at Homewood] came up, "Oh I've got an incident." "Well, don't worry. I've heard. I ran into her, and she told me." I don't know how she sabotaged the class. He said, "Maybe we'll just cancel because I don't see the

point." But you know she was nice about it. I said, "I'm sorry. I'm gonna be so disappointed. You were so great last week. Oh, and I had some ideas about this week." "Nope. I'm not coming to class this week. You'll see me again but not today." So off she went. So Calvin said when we got in there, "I don't know. We'll see. I don't know what's going to happen. We'll see." So we went in there and there's two totally brand new people sitting on the stage. And I said, "Well, we can still do something with two people," and one other enthusiast: this one guy who's very enthusiastic. He's got one rhythm that he really does well and he does it a lot. He said, "Well, do I have enough time? Do you want me to go out and round up a few people?" "Sure, if you think you can." So he comes back in five minutes. No, he doesn't come back ... All of a sudden these women start coming in the door ... five ... and then four more ... and then he came and stuck his head in to make sure they got in and then he went

out again. So he was out there hustling people in for the session. So how many did we have? Quite a few.

**Audience Member:** Ten or eleven.

**JB:** No, didn't we have more than that? It was way more than the first one. So, anyway, all these folks came in and they were pretty enthusiastic. And all first-timers except for a couple. And then one of the guys decided not to go to the caribou roast and came to the class. So, anyway, I hope she'll be here next week, because she really did say she had a good time. Food won. Food and music, it's a tough call, right?

**Audience Member:** But maybe a similar collaborative community experience, right?

**JB:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely! Well, something like that is a part of somebody's culture. I don't blame her. Can I come? Is there really caribou?

**AH:** Any other questions from the audience?

**Audience Member:** I just was wondering when you were talking about the interventions today ... because a lot of site-specific work that isn't in theatres, there are negotiations of the space and the people in the space and sometimes it's really complicated. And you were saying that in Toronto they would have been really annoyed and not into it. But I wonder if they would have been, because I was worried about that here too because it's a library and people are supposed to be quiet.

**JB:** Yes.

**Audience Member:** I mean, upstairs I knew there would be kids that would be interested, but I wasn't sure about downstairs. I wonder if it is about the way you set that up. There was such a warmth and there was such a connection with everybody. I think that possibly that was why people were willing to go with it. But I wonder how the kind of spaces and the people in the spaces affect the kind of music you make, because obviously you've just done this beautiful site-specific park piece which is from Algonquin, which is totally different ...

**JB:** Well, definitely. If you get a bad reception you don't feel exactly welcome to be like, "I'm going to play for you ... if you like it or not." ... The Red Brick [Café] was especially easy to play because people were joining in. When you walk into a bigger space, like the big library, it's a little bit trickier because there is so much space. But in the smaller areas where you are contained, it's kind of

like everybody ends up, when you have a party, in your kitchen. Why is that? When people are tight together, it's like people sitting in a circle playing. It was interesting, for example, with KidsAbility I'm now sitting on the floor which actually gives me some issues with my back, but it seems to be much better to be on the floor with them, playing with us all at the same eyesight. I don't know how we came about figuring that all out, but when I sit at the piano it's really [points]—maybe that's why we get you to play the piano! I'd like to do both, but we'll figure out ... It's good because with the kids we're more connected, instead of being on chairs and people are all at different levels.

**Audience Member:** I was just thinking of the meat counter at the St. Lawrence Market saying it's too loud for my business and you feeling really ...

I guess music is also its own negotiation, in a way. It's interesting because I've always just gone out and played music and now I'm having to think about things

**JB:** Oh I felt just terrible afterwards, like, "Okay, I'll just pack up and go ..."

**Audience Member:** And the kind of conversation you had to have, right, of how to then think about playing your own music?

**JB:** No, I really didn't feel like playing afterwards. But if the guy's trying to make a living, you know, and he can't hear ... gives her pork sausages and she wanted lamb, it's not good for business, so ...

**Audience Member:** These negotiations in space are complicated ...

**JB:** But you know what, I guess music is also its own negotiation, in a way. It's interesting because I've always just gone out and played music and now I'm having to

think about things. Really hard!! (laughter). We musicians just want to play, eh? Give me a bottle of beer and I'll play. That's it. But now I have to think heady stuff. You're making me think, Ajay!

**AH:** Anybody else want to make Jane think?

**Audience Member:** Can I ask you a question about you and music? You say you were late coming to music. You were 22. And in sort of the same breath you said you were really profoundly affected by the power of connection through music. Is that what drew you to music?

**JB:** Yes. Absolutely. And I have to say there was one really pivotal experience. Everyone does have a pivotal experience. Ballet dancers ... they say, when they went to see the Nutcracker. And everything was [Jane gestures with dancing fingers] ... and that moment they decided

There's always some thing, and for me it was really hearing Mingus, Charles Mingus in San Francisco. It so blew my mind, because I thought they were all classical musicians

that they wanted to do it. There's always some thing, and for me it was really hearing Mingus, Charles Mingus in San Francisco. It so blew my mind, because I thought they were all classical musicians. And later I told Don Pullen that and he just thought it was hilarious that I thought that. Here's a guy who started out playing organ in trios, you know, strip clubs and stuff. First church, but his early gigs were ... Anyway, but I thought that they were all classical musicians because their technique was so ... they had such command of their instruments. But then there was this dialogue that they were having together. I looked at that and thought, "This is one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. Look how these guys are communicating with each other." And that's what really made me think I want to become ... I want to be in, up there, in that kind of environment where everybody is communicating like that. And I was playing classical piano at the time, so when I came back from

that trip it was "finish up my piano studies, and I want to play jazz." I knew at that point.

**AH:** And here you are.

**JB:** And here I am. Here I am.





# What Was Now

On the video documentation of Jane Bunnett's residency

**by Dawn Matheson**

This email showed up in my inbox on Feb. 16 of last year.

*From: Ajay Heble*

*Date: Wed, Feb 16, 2011 at 8:28 PM*

*Subject: job with ICASP?*

*To: Dawn Matheson*

*Dear Dawn,*

*I hope this note finds you well. I'm writing to see whether you might be interested in considering taking on some short term work with ICASP. We're looking to hire someone to do some creative (video and other) documentation of our Improviser in Residence initiative (this year, as you may know, our Improviser in Residence is Jane Bunnett). If you're interested and available, perhaps we can arrange a time to meet to discuss.*

*All the best, Ajay*

I wasn't. That's not to say that the improviser project didn't intrigue me, or that I didn't want to work with Ajay Heble. I'd been a fan of Ajay's many projects over the years. A floor once separated us in Guelph's Trafalgar Building: he upstairs with the Guelph Jazz Festival, me down with the Guelph International Film Festival (now the Festival of Moving Media). He let me project a giant eyeball on the side of a heritage building downtown for one of his festivals. In its pupil, I'd inserted archival film footage of mainstreet action shot over the past century. I once installed a shower in St. George's fountain from which I broadcast songs submitted from the private showers of anonymous Guelphites. And, for Nuit Blanche—a nocturnal community carnival initiated by Ajay which takes the successful annual nighttime outdoor art experiences in Paris, Montréal, Toronto, and other cities and applies that model to Guelph—I invited four jazz musicians to engage in silent staring sessions

I don't know the language, especially that of improv jazz. Who was I to provide insight into something I didn't get? How could I do justice to the work of Jane Bunnett?

with strangers, their gaze captured in close-ups then projected in a storefront window.

See, I knew Ajay was fantastic to partner with—an open-minded, endlessly enthusiastic type. It's just that with this latest invitation, I thought he was off. I don't do music. I appreciate it from afar, but I don't know the language, especially that of improv jazz. Who was I to provide insight into something I felt I didn't get? How could I do justice to the work of Jane Bunnett—she of the multiple Junos and the worldwide reputation as one of the finest artists working in contemporary jazz?

But Ajay has a keen sense of knowing: he sees things in people when they don't see them themselves. That's what I discovered when I met with him at the Second Cup across from the University of Guelph. He told me that Jane would be collaborating with local community groups—mostly non-musicians, many with special needs. This would be new for her. Jane would be in a role

where, she, too, feared she might be ill suited. Ajay had seen possibility.

For my part, Ajay wanted someone to help tell a few stories of these collaborations from the community side through a series of videos. This interested me, so long as I could find a way to share in the storytelling with the participants.

I'd start with one video.



### **Video One: *Interruptions***

I first met Jane by spying on her, digitally. As the residency had already begun, I had hours of footage to screen, shot by Ajay's team of student videographers. Jane looked cool and excitable. She was playful but serious with her talents, a master of a casual intensity. I liked her.

The ICASP team had decided the best way to introduce the Improviser-in-Residence to Guelph was to simply have Jane blast her horn in public places, flit her flute in libraries, bookstores, and coffee shops, unannounced and uninvited. This was met with an extreme set of reactions: people who were into it and people who weren't, which, I would soon learn, set the tone for the whole residency.

I was most drawn to the footage shot at the University of Guelph's McLaughlin Library by Nicholas Loess, a PhD

candidate in the department. He had a particularly keen eye for finding hidden paths of narrative, his camera following an invisible trail of sound, wandering through the air, resting on faces and objects.

Here at the library, Jane faced the most competition for the attentions of her unsuspecting audience. These students were all under the spell of the modern malaise: digital distraction. It was as though Jane was sparring sonically with text messages, smashing status updates with her saxophone.

I decided to meddle with this interplay of sound and digital waves by superimposing text from actual electronic messages, but where to find them? It was impossible for me to collect digital data from a room full of strangers after the event, so I posted an open call for messages on my Facebook page. Hundreds of random emails, anonymous personal texts, and entire histories from cellphone chats landed in my inbox. Just as these



digital dispatches interrupt us in our daily lives with oft-times non-germane trivialities yanking us from the present moment, so, too, would the captions inserted overtop of the McLaughlin Library footage.

*Am I the only one who finds it totally bizarre that Tony Clement is a Clash fan? Are you out there still babe? I love you lots, banana!!!! Mom loses her belly with one weird tip [www.flatbelly.com](http://www.flatbelly.com).*

Such digital fripperies battled onscreen with Jane's musical interruptions.

### **Video Two: Jane Bunnett and the Vertical Squirrels**

The next time I met Jane was as an audience member. She was performing with Ajay's band, Vertical Squirrels, for a noon-hour concert in a classroom at the university. Nicholas and I would both shoot. I'd select one song where the magic really happened, then cut a short highlight reel. Problem was the whole concert was one big hour-long song. Being that they'd never played together before and had decided to forgo a rehearsal, it was all stupendously magical to me. Here's where my artistic predilection for collaboration comes in handy: bandmember Lewis Melville and I would screen the footage together, him yelping at the good bits. I cut between Nick's close-ups and my long shots and sixty minutes of energetic music-making was distilled down to ten.

Jane passed instruments around to the dozen-or-so participants. Sound happened. It started out soft and tentative, then swelled

### **The Video That Never Happened: Homewood Health Centre**

The first time I followed Jane on one of her forays into the community was to the Homewood Health Centre. I was to videotape a session with Jane and a group of patients being treated for post-traumatic stress disorder. Here, I got to see Jane in action with mostly non-musical strangers, many emotionally vulnerable. The footage would be used for research purposes, not for the general public, as consent was never granted. It is understandable—privacy is important, and mental health comes with such a stigma. Still, I wish we could have shared in the thrill.

I'd come to know Jane as the chatty type, but here she hardly spoke. *I'm sure a lot of them get sick of being asked a million times a day: "How do you feel?" ... "Now, how do you feel?" And it's like, "I feel shitty! You asked me*

*ten minutes ago. I still feel like shit!" Well, I didn't want to do that.*

Jane started by making sounds, then tapping out a rhythm. She passed instruments around to the dozen-or-so participants. Sound happened. It started out soft and tentative, then swelled. The group, who ten minutes prior were subdued and reticent, were expressive and engaged. I was dying to see what Jane thought of the session. She invited me back to her room at the Best Western to share a bottle of Valpolicella. Here I got to know Jane by interviewing her.

**Jane:** I'm not, you know, a music therapist. It's not my training. I go all over the world and often I may not have my band, so I quickly have to use my judgment and intuition, instinctually suss out the scene and try to encourage music to happen ... Really, I try to make people feel

good. (Pause) On the weird side, in some ways, I think I am good for this.

**Dawn:** Because you can make people feel good.

**Jane:** Yeah! Being able to bring the best out in somebody, playing music with them. 'Cause you know, everybody is capable of rhythm and music.

**Dawn:** Everyone has a heartbeat. But when Ajay brought you on, did you think you would be working strictly with musicians?

**Jane:** Ok, I'll tell the story fast. I got the call ... I can't remember when I got the call, but it was after I had a really bad hand injury which took me out of commission for months and months and I cancelled a tour. So financially

I took a bit of a beating and things were tough. "It's an Improviser-in-Residence gig," [Ajay said]. "I'll do it!"

Then, we had the first meeting and I was totally like: "Oh my, oh my god—this is really overwhelming. And nobody else has done it, and there is not a template about how to do this." But, you know, now I think it's in my personality. I think that's probably what Ajay recognized in me, that I've always been highly collaborative ...

The first get-togethers with people were really tough. I just had so many nights where I was up thinking, "What am I going to do?" I'm a very goal-oriented person. I'm not into just process. I like process, but I like process that has a goal at the end of it. Since I was a kid, you know it was all "Let's do a show!" ... And this wasn't that.

But, I feel that music is something that really should be a part of everybody's life, that it shouldn't be elitist. In this society, we haven't put the importance of music into people's lives—playing music together. In other cultures,

## The healing powers of music are incredible. Already in my short time at Homewood, having just met these folks who never even picked up an instrument, something happened

music is totally integral as the social fabric which connects people. Like out on the east coast—their kitchen parties where everybody is dancing and playing an instrument. In Aboriginal culture, people are drumming and chanting together.

The healing powers of music are incredible.

Already in my short time at Homewood, having just met these folks who never even picked up an instrument, something happened. Here, we're on the same playing field. It's not like: "Who's the better musician?" We all begin at the same starting point. We have a totally natural ability for music and yet somehow it is instilled in us that we can't [make music]. And then we do. It's just as natural as walking. It really blows my mind to see it happen ... To get kind of new-agey on you: the vibrations of music alone affect people. It's a true phenomenon.

**Dawn:** You said, "We're all at the same starting point." When you come into a group, like at the Homewood, what is that starting point?

**Jane:** You sit down and you try to be honest. We're all human beings, we all feel, we all have certain hurdles, you know, that we have to get over ... and music is a way to connect. It's part of the cycle of life. We hear it all the time. We hear it in bird sounds. Some of the sounds are beautiful and some of them aren't so beautiful, but they all register certain emotions in us. And, I guess for a lot of people, when depression or certain things happen, those things shut down. You shut down that ability to feel. I think music can open you up to be able to receive things—to receive good things from people. It just allows you to put out energy and to take in other people's energy. To have an exchange. It's another form of dialogue if you don't want to talk.

Some people don't engage because it feels very foreign and weird to them to have to play music. But gradually, maybe, they start to feel comfortable with it

I look at Homewood and go "Homewood is life." I take my hat off to those people, because they are there trying to improve themselves and take care of something that is not working for them, right? They're there for a very positive reason. But everyday we go out and there is hard stuff in the world that we have to deal with. We can't always just get together and say, "Let's have a drum circle and work it out." It's sort of a Utopian dream that we're all on equal footing. This is where the interesting experiment happens. Some people don't engage because it feels very foreign and weird to them to have to play music. But gradually, maybe, they start to feel comfortable with it. Even if they're just slightly tapping a tambourine, that's a start.

**Dawn:** We are a very self-conscious society and music is always associated with being free.

**Jane:** Yeah. It's terrible, actually, you know. My experience with Cuba is that at social activities, everybody is dancing, and it's unseen that somebody is sitting down not dancing. It's the total opposite here. People are like, "Ohh. Look at that guy dancing. He looks like an idiot."

**Dawn:** Why? I don't know if you can answer that, but you are right. I'm one of those people you are describing. I don't dance; I don't do music.

**Jane:** We have to get you up then!

**Dawn:** Yes, but why not you? You are part of this culture, why did music work for you?

**Jane:** Because I got emotionally moved by it at a very young age. I connected. From my early experiences playing along with records ... And later, I fell in love with the

communication between musicians. You go to levels that you don't go to in your normal activities. Music can be very enlightening, and it just makes you feel good. And the fact that you're making music that makes you feel good—that makes other people feel good. It's a win-win situation.

**Video Three: *Give Yourself Credit***

*(In order to protect the privacy of participants, this video is not included on the DVD.)*

Before this project, I had no idea that there was a high school downtown for street-involved kids and youth-at-risk. It's one big classroom next to the Speed River with around 18 teens finding innovative ways to complete their credits. Teachers and social workers share in the instruction and support. Some students choose to be there; others are pressured to be there. From my short stint, I noticed that most kids, for whatever reason, didn't see themselves as very capable.

Jane had already attempted a couple of sessions with ten or so students. She wasn't getting much of a response. Jane is the determined type, and eventually, in spite of a limited time to gain trust, she managed to get a few off the couches and up to the keyboard to plunk out

My way in would be to get the students to help in the documentation. As I was a complete outsider, I didn't feel right sticking a camera in their faces

a melody. By the time I arrived to film, she had a guy on flute, a few girls doing background doowap, and several tracks recorded. A song was in the works. Rob Jackson, an undergrad with ICASP, was the real activator in initiating participation. He was a regular around Give Yourself Credit, leading a running club. By the fourth session, he had encouraged some pretty decent lyrics.

My way in would be to get the students to help in the documentation. As I was a complete outsider, I didn't feel right sticking a camera in their faces, so I asked one of their peers to do it. One guy was keen to learn camera as he wanted to make a music video for his friend's punk band. I showed him the ropes and he started messing around with the ICASP equipment.

For additional media, the students were already well equipped: the cellphone is a part of most teens' anatomy. They would take snaps of day-to-day life in the classroom, downtown, and on field trips.

I would just need to find a student to edit with. To my surprise, the most disengaged youth during Jane's sessions—the one who up and left as soon as the music-making began—came forward to edit. This girl was sharp and street-smart; but she was hard to reach, as she was living in a tent in St. George's Square for the Occupy Guelph protest. When she did show, she was keen and decisive and felt at ease with the editing program remarkably quickly. Some of the improvisation footage she balked at; other bits she was into. You can so trust youth for honesty.



#### Video Four: *Katy's Song*

It quickly became obvious to me that the most authentic relationship forged was the one Jane made with the little musicians at KidsAbility, a local organization for children living with special needs. These kids all instantaneously accepted Jane, responding to her spontaneous, unassuming, and oft-times goofy behaviour. Several lived with severe physical and mental challenges, yet each jammed without inhibition on the keyboard and drums, on the umbrellas, the bags of potato chips, and other such instruments.

Indeed, there was a real cacophony in the activity room at the West End Recreational Centre one Tuesday each month, but the thing that kept pulling my attention didn't make any sound at all. It was the parents on the other side of the glass. I'm not sure if they could hear any noisemaking—no matter, they were all ears.

Being a mother myself, I know something of the pride and pleasure in watching your kid “do their thing.” Here were theirs, free and expressive and so very joyful in their bodies. From the looks on the parents' faces, this engagement seemed so desperately vital, I decided this was the story I wanted to pursue.

As Jane said, each one of these awesome kids should have a video made about them, yet I would have time to pursue only one. I hoped that this story might hint at the kind of experiences the other kids and their parents seemed to be having.

Katy is a 16-year-old girl who is developmentally delayed and living with autism. Although her receptive language is very high, her verbal output is severely limited; yet Jane and Katy shared a remarkable dialogue. This exchange, *Katy's Song*, was improvised live at the Guelph Jazz Festival in front of thousands of audience members.

I met with Barbara, Katy's mom, to talk about what happened. Then I asked Jane to give me her side of it.

**Barbara:** Early on we noticed Katy was auditorily motivated. She picks up an object and the first thing she does is try to find out what kind of sounds she can make with it. She has done this since she was little.

**Dawn:** How did you come to this workshop?

**Barbara:** We signed up with Jane so that Katy could be with musicians who are interested in dialogue that is non-verbal.

**Dawn:** Tell me about the connection with Jane.

**Barbara:** There seemed to be a special relationship that developed right away. Jane had the children bring in an

object or a picture and focus on the emotion that came with it. Then she brought the children together to play music around that feeling. For Katy, it was bypassing language that I think helped her to engage with Jane. She gets to express herself without words ... Katy is selective about remembering people's names. If you ask her who she plays jazz with, she says "Jane." That tells me how powerful Jane's personality is for Katy. She only names people who she connects with. Katy sees Jane and she beams.

**Dawn:** How did *Katy's Song* come about?

**Barbara:** During the sessions when Katy's turn came on the keyboard—I watched it happen through the glass—it was so obvious it was *Katy's Song*. It was about her chance, she had the focus. She knew the time was for her.

It is always such a roller coaster ride with Katy. The Jazz Festival under the tent was beautiful, but getting to the tent was touch and go

When Katy was in kindergarten, a music teacher noticed that she picked out harmonic intervals on the keyboard. Sometimes she does it to play along, but other times, it is a way to calm herself. It was beautiful to witness Katy communicate with Jane on her flute and her saxophone ... a beautiful interchange, going back and forth with the tones and the mood.

**Dawn:** You were crying watching her at the Jazz Festival.

**Barbara:** It is always such a roller coaster ride with Katy. The Jazz Festival under the tent was beautiful, but getting to the tent was touch and go. She was so disregulated in the park. She was upset about what was now, what was next. We almost didn't make it. But as soon as she got there, and she saw Jane, she settled herself right down. On stage—for that moment, for that one moment—I could see Katy's joy. And I need to see

that—it's not about me—but to see Katy's joy, that's what I live for. I bring her to these places and spaces to try for that. To try for that peak experience for her so that she has happy things to remember. Memories are so powerful for Katy. When she is unhappy, she can go to these happy places and times in her memory. We were building a positive memory. The sense of community that we felt in that tent—everyone, I mean everyone pulling for our kids, for their success—it was beyond words. A moment beyond words! I was grateful. I had tears. Tears of joy. To be able to say, "Here's my little one, my little one doing her thing." I just love seeing her do her thing. And she was doing it so beautifully. It soared. Jane made it soar.

Then I asked Jane about playing music with Katy.

**Jane:** When it came to the time to do Katy's piece [we developed a piece for each kid], hers became very hymn-



like, almost anthem-like. Very deep, very dense ... There was this electricity. It was unusual. I just felt that she was deeply listening to what I was playing. Sometimes I would follow her. Sometimes she would follow me. There was an exchange of musical lines ... She's funny, she'll just all of a sudden switch a timbre and the sounds will totally shift. I don't think it's arbitrary. A very interesting dialogue was happening between us on our instruments. It was fascinating. It was inspiring. She'll play for a really long time. She's just like me. She doesn't want the song to end. I don't want the song to end.

### **Video Five: *Sound Painting***

The final video I made on Jane's residency was an about-face in terms of subject positioning and process. I first saw Joe Sorbara direct the Contemporary Music Ensemble at an evening rehearsal of undergrad music students. Jane sat in as a band member. I was entranced by Joe's warm-up routine, made up of dancing gestures that commanded different sounds from the musicians. I loved how he moved, how he was so noisily silent. He told me it was a method of live sign language composing called Sound Painting. It was not an improvisation technique, but a vernacular whereby each movement indicated a very specific performance. I had never heard of it. Neither had Jane. I thought it would be interesting to shoot a teaching video with Jane attempting to learn it live for the first time. I'm not sure whether or not Jane found it "interesting," being put on the spot learning

something entirely new in front of a camera. She is a sport, all right.

For this video, I shot the footage and Nicholas edited it, the reverse of the first video, *Interruptions*. I knew I wanted to use split screen so that the audience could see Joe's silent expression and hear Jane's audio interpretation. I asked Nick for his creative input on how he might structure the piece based on the raw footage I shot, consisting of two separate but identically framed shots of Joe and Jane facing their respective cameras. A few weeks later, I was cc'd on an email Nick sent to Joe explaining his editing direction:

*From: Nicholas Loess*

*To: joe sorbara*

*Sent: Wednesday, 23 November 2011, 14:14*

*Subject: Sound Painting Vid*

*Hi Joe,*

*So I'm working away on the sound painting piece and I wanted to run what I've got so far by you. I've visually structured it around your particular gestures to begin with.*

*I've tried to create a kind of visual painting with looping panels unveiling your gestures with different colour effects attached to them. I have an audio track of you explaining the process of sound painting as the gestures unfold on your portion of the screen.*

*I have Jane on the other side of the screen, and will have her gestures unveil as she plays them. This sequence is four minutes long and will fade into a long dissolve of your and Jane's exchange.*

## Such is the nature of things: so many stories, we have to choose which few to tell

*I've attached a screen shot showing what I mean for the first part.*  
*Cheers,*  
*Nick*

Nick's intensive fragmentation of the footage resulted in four minutes of visually entrancing video where, as Nick explained, "the gestural performativity that Joe displayed in teaching Jane the language of *Sound Painting* became the visual emphasis of *Sound Painting*."

In all, I made just six videos, missing many stories. Even one I did make, I didn't have the space to cover here in this chapter: Jane improvising with students and actors at a community-university conference, CU Expo in Waterloo. This video is available on the ICASP website. Such is the nature of things: so many stories, we have to choose which few to tell. We have to decide on which now to be in. As someone who popped in and out of the Improviser-In-Residence's numerous collaborations with some ten organizations in the community, I hoped to have captured a little of those exchanges, both the ones that worked and the few that didn't—just to keep it real. Throughout, I was so often reminded how important it is to say "yes," not just for the participants and for Jane, but for me as well.

# Jane Bunnett

Photographs

by **Thomas King**





THINGS THAT YOU HOPE A HUMAN BEING WILL BE





THINGS THAT YOU HOPE A HUMAN BEING WILL BE





# 2011 Improviser-in-Residence: Jane Bunnett

## Schedule of Events

Tuesday January 11, 2011	Guelph Youth Jazz Ensemble workshop
Tuesday January 18, 2011	KidsAbility Centre for Child Development workshop
Wednesday January 19, 2011	Homewood Health Centre workshop
Tuesday February 8, 2011	Guelph Youth Jazz Ensemble workshop
Wednesday February 9, 2011	Homewood Health Centre workshop
Friday February 11, 2011	Music Interventions at U of G Library, Red Brick Café, Bookshelf & Guelph Public Library
Friday February 11, 2011	ICASP Reading Group
Monday February 14, 2011	Give Yourself Credit workshop
Tuesday February 15, 2011	Centennial CVI High School workshop
Tuesday February 15, 2011	John F. Ross CVI High School workshop
Tuesday February 15, 2011	Contemporary Music Ensemble workshop, University of Guelph
Tuesday February 22, 2011	KidsAbility Centre for Child Development workshop
Tuesday March 8, 2011	Guelph Youth Jazz Ensemble workshop
Wednesday March 9, 2011	Homewood Health Centre workshop
Thursday March 10, 2011	Performance with Vertical Squirrels at U of G SOFAM Noon Hour Concert
Tuesday March 15, 2011	Contemporary Music Ensemble workshop, University of Guelph
Monday March 21, 2011	St. Joseph's Health Centre workshop

- Tuesday March 22, 2011 KidsAbility Centre for Child Development workshop
- Tuesday April 5, 2011 Contemporary Music Ensemble workshop, University of Guelph
- Saturday April 9, 2011 Performance with Contemporary Music Ensemble
- Tuesday April 12, 2011 Guelph Youth Jazz Ensemble workshop
- Wednesday April 13, 2011 Homewood Health Centre workshop
- Monday April 18, 2011 Give Yourself Credit workshop
- Tuesday April 26, 2011 KidsAbility Centre for Child Development workshop
- Tuesday May 3, 2011 Guelph Youth Jazz Ensemble workshop
- Wednesday May 11, 2011 CU Expo performance
- Monday May 16, 2011 Give Yourself Credit workshop
- Tuesday May 17, 2011 Give Yourself Credit workshop
- Tuesday May 17, 2011 John F. Ross CVI High School workshop
- Tuesday May 24, 2011 Boathouse Café performance with KidsAbility & Guelph Youth Jazz Ensemble
- Friday June 3, 2011 John F. Ross CVI High School workshop
- Friday June 3, 2011 Public Jam Session & Dance Party at St. George's Square,  
Downtown Guelph (in partnership with the Guelph Contemporary  
Dance Festival and the Guelph Jazz Festival)

Wednesday September 7, 2011 KidsAbility Centre for Child Development workshop  
Saturday September 10, 2011 Guelph Jazz Festival performance with KidsAbility  
Wednesday, October 12, 2011 University of Guelph Symphonic Choir workshop  
Wednesday October 26, 2011 Homewood Health Centre workshop  
Wednesday October 26, 2011 University of Guelph Chamber Choir workshop  
Wednesday November 9, 2011 John F. Ross CVI High School workshop  
Wednesday November 9, 2011 Homewood Health Centre workshop  
Wednesday November 9, 2011 University of Guelph Symphonic Choir workshop  
Wednesday November 23, 2011 CFRU radio station appearance  
Wednesday November 23, 2011 Rogers Television interview  
Wednesday November 23, 2011 University of Guelph Chamber Choir workshop  
Thursday December 8, 2011 Year-End Celebration Concert and Video Screening

# things that you hope a human being will be

2011 IMPROVISER-IN-RESIDENCE JANE BUNNETT  
WITH VIDEOS BY DAWN MATHESON

**Jane Bunnett visited Guelph** in 2011 as the inaugural Improviser-in-Residence, co-presented by the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice research project (ICASP) and Musagetes.

She developed a rich tapestry of musical events and workshops with several communities in a way that expanded our experiences with music and engaged our creative selves. This publication shares her work in Guelph through an introduction by Shawn Van Sluys, an interview with Ajay Heble, a text and four videos by Dawn Matheson, an essay by David Lee, and photos by Thomas King. This publication with accompanying DVD captures the warmth and generosity of spirit that Bunnett shared with Guelph during her time here which is not soon forgotten.

