

Panel: Improvisation, Cultural Policy, and Arts Funding

Chair: Shawn Van Sluys (Musagetes Foundation)

Alan Stanbridge

Abstract

A Nightmare on the Brains of the Living: Cultural Policy, Government Funding, and Contemporary Music

In sharp contrast to common practice in Western art music, which has seen the virtual eradication of the albeit modest improvised elements formerly present in baroque and classical music, the primarily improvisatory nature of jazz has militated against its preservation and dissemination in the form of fixed scores. This emphasis on improvisation rather than a written score resulted in jazz, especially in its first half century, being neglected by the academy, given that the analytical tools of musicology and music analysis are primarily geared towards notation and notated works. Moreover, as the study of jazz began to be integrated into university programs and academic curricula in the 1960s, it often conformed to standard musicological techniques and approaches, which failed to address the specificities of the music – for example, in the transcription and analysis of improvised solos as notated texts, emphasizing characteristics such as thematic unity, often at the expense of any broader socio-historical contextualization. By the latter decades of the twentieth century, however, the academic study of jazz had expanded considerably, and the development of the field of Jazz Studies introduced a series of broader analytical perspectives, stressing the historical, cultural, social, and political contexts of the music's development. In parallel with these developments, programs in instrumental instruction and jazz performance become more common in universities and colleges on both sides of the Atlantic, and at least one improvisation-based research project received substantial financial support from the Canadian government.

Despite this new-found cultural legitimacy, however, and unlike the history of court patronage in Western art music and the subsequent patterns of arts funding adopted by many Western governments, the performance, presentation, and practice of jazz and improvised music have never enjoyed the levels of state support afforded classical music and opera. The Western art music canon remains irrefutably at the core of the music policies of the vast majority of arts funding agencies, perpetuating a conceptualization of 'music' that is far from inclusive or comprehensive. If, as I argued in a recent article, government funding of music continues to be dominated – to paraphrase Marx – by 'the tradition of all the dead generations,' then the current status quo in cultural policy does, indeed, weigh like 'a nightmare on the brains of the living' – and especially so on the brains of those committed to the future development of jazz and improvised music. Although the problem may be a relatively easy one to diagnose, the range of potential and realistic solutions is considerably

more vexing. For decades now, the patterns of funding for music have been predicated not only on a narrow understanding of what constitutes ‘music’ – with its concomitant and limited models of performing ensembles, repertoire, and management – but also on particular, and often highly specialized, configurations of venues, promoters, and audiences. In this paper, I examine the ways in which current music funding patterns might begin to be challenged, exploring, for example, the possibilities for greater collaboration and crossfertilization between the contemporary jazz and improvised music scene and the field of contemporary new music – two cultural sectors that, notwithstanding their often striking similarities, too often remain resolutely distinct.

Biography

Alan Stanbridge is an assistant professor in Visual and Performing Arts at the University of Toronto, cross-appointed in graduate programs in Music and Museum Studies. Dr. Stanbridge is the recipient of a Faculty Teaching Award for his contribution to undergraduate teaching. Dr. Stanbridge’s current research focuses on the discursive construction of musical meaning and cultural value, and is supported by a grant from SSHRC. He has published numerous articles on popular music, jazz history, and cultural policy, and he is currently working on a book entitled *Rhythm Changes: The Discourses of Jazz*, to be published by Routledge. He is a contributor to the *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, and a member of the Editorial Boards of the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* and the *Jazz Research Journal*.

In a previous life, Dr. Stanbridge pursued a fifteen-year career in professional arts management and music promotion in Britain, during which time he held the post of director of the Glasgow International Jazz Festival, and promoted concerts and specially commissioned projects featuring Ray Charles, Cab Calloway, Stan Getz, Lee Konitz, Gerry Mulligan, Astor Piazzolla, Willem Breuker, Derek Bailey, John Stevens, the Brotherhood of Breath, Fred Frith, John Zorn, Tim Berne, Philip Glass, and John Cage, among many others.

Rob Wallace

Abstract

***“Space is the Place”:* Venues and other Vicissitudes of an Improvising Musician**

As a performer and sometime-promoter of various genres of music not usually supported by major government institutions or broad public consumption – including free improvisation, post-bebop jazz, Hindustani classical music, Arab art music, and punk rock – I have been on both sides of an important barrier historically preventing music and musicians from thriving in North American

(and probably most other) culture(s): the barrier of money. I have struggled both to get paid as a musician and to fairly compensate performers in music series that I have booked and promoted. Part of the difficulty in fair compensation is due to the cost of renting the performance venue, either by the musicians/promoters themselves or by the entrepreneurs – barkeeps, restaurateurs, et. al. – who provisionally own the space but who are often themselves renters. This rental cost, which must be met before any musician gets paid for her labor, often gets passed on to musicians and audience members via minimum drink purchases, cover charges, or booking fees. Ironically, moving outside of brick-and-mortar venues can accrue similar costs, when even busking in some cities requires pay-permits. On a larger scale, if performances are allowed in the more institutionalized halls of culture, ticket prices often prohibit the deepest listeners of the music from attending shows. All of these matters are separate, too, from any aesthetic, spiritual, and acoustic concerns that might come into play when choosing whether or not to perform in a given venue. Thus, from all perspectives of music culture under capitalism – performer, promoter/owner, and audience member/listener – the space of performance can significantly alter the place of that performance within society, physically, psychically, financially, and otherwise. While this has been the case for arguably much of the last one hundred-plus years or more, it nevertheless remains a crucial and ubiquitous problem for music-making. Relying on ethnographic research, paired with historical and quantitative analysis, my presentation investigates some possible ways in which creative musicians can better deal with this day-to-day reality, recently exacerbated by the ongoing real-estate crisis.

Biography

Rob Wallace is an author, teacher, scholar, and musician. He writes about poetry, improvisation, modernism, globalization, and popular music and performs as a percussionist in a variety of musical genres. His forthcoming book, to be published by Continuum Press, is titled *Improvisation and the Making of American Modernism*. Some of his recordings can be found on the pfMentum label. Dr. Wallace is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Guelph with the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice project.
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Eitan Wilf

Abstract

Unexamined Forms of Cultural Dissemination and the Limits of Cultural Policy

French cultural policy, especially since the establishment of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1959 by de Gaulle, has served for many other countries – European and non-European – as a model of an explicitly and intentionally

interventionist policy. It represented a belief in the right and duty of the French government to actively intervene in the arena of culture in order to further the goals it deemed important. Such a belief seemed natural among French policy makers on the background of the notion that French culture is an icon of French nationhood.

For example, in 1981, under the influence of the Minister of Culture at the time, Jack Lang, the emphasis in cultural policy shifted into a struggle against what was termed 'American Imperialism' in the cultural realm. At stake was a battle against the perceived infiltration into French culture of numerous standardized forms of American popular culture, which could threaten French cultural identity. The battle was to be fought by means of both actively supporting the production of French cultural forms through grants and subsidies, and the establishment of quotas and restrictions on the importation and dissemination of American cultural goods into France. In 1993, French policy makers succeeded in excluding audiovisual products from the anti-protectionist provisions of the 1993 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Known as the 'cultural exception,' the rationale for such a policy was that cultural forms cannot be treated as regular commodities such as cars and ovens, but must be protected against the forces of the market through subsidies to local production and restrictions on the importation of foreign cultural products. The alternative to this would be the erosion of cultural difference by a hegemonic American culture. In this paper I argue that French cultural policy and similar initiatives in other countries have viewed cultural production and dissemination too narrowly. They have focused on traditional means of mass communication such as radio, television, film, printed press and literature, on the one hand, and on traditional notions of cultural producers such as media corporations and conglomerates, on the other hand. Other forms of cultural production and dissemination have been left completely unexamined. I explore the implications for cultural policy of one neglected dimension of cultural production and dissemination based on two year ethnographic fieldwork in two post-secondary jazz programs on the East Coast in the US. Specifically, I focus on the training of European jazz musicians in post-secondary jazz programs in the US and the establishment of affiliate jazz programs in Europe by European graduates of the American programs. These European schools rely on curriculum material (such as method books) designed by the American programs and provide sites for the American schools to recruit foreign students on the background of dwindling American-domestic enrollment rates.

I suggest that a detailed analysis of this form of cultural dissemination can further our understanding of globalization, cultural standardization and homogenization, the limits of interventionist cultural policy, and the dynamics of what has been inadequately called 'American cultural imperialism.' More importantly, the paper explores the non-linear and rhizomic nature of cultural dissemination and suggests 'improvisation' as a useful trope with which to delineate the contours of this phenomenon and to rethink the potentialities and

limits of interventionist cultural policy.

Biography

Eitan Wilf is completing his PhD in anthropology at the University of Chicago. His dissertation explores the emergence of post-secondary jazz education in the US with respect to the problem of cultural standardization. He is interested in the many challenges, paradoxes and ironies of the introduction of cultural practices from a bygone past – real and imagined – in which the socialization into jazz music was informed by specific and marginalized cultural sensibilities, into the highly different present of the mainstream institutional environment of higher education. His dissertation documents the ways in which ideologies of race, orality and literacy, cultural hierarchy, gender, and artistic autonomy/commodification have mediated this transition in modes of socialization. As his research explores the mediations of past, present, and future within the changing world of jazz music, it provides an ethnographic treatment of temporal imaginations not only in their verbal, visual, or written, but also in their sonic forms.