

(Paralyzed on One) Sideman: Disability Studies Meets Jazz, through the Hands of Horace Parlan

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Introduction by Sherrie Tucker

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[Streaming video of Introduction by Sherrie Tucker and Keynote Address given by Alex Lubet](#)

***Sherrie Tucker:** It is a tremendous pleasure for me to introduce to you our keynote speaker, Professor Alex Lubet, who comes to us from the University of Minnesota, where he is Professor of Music, Jewish Studies, and American Studies, as well as head of the Interdisciplinary Graduate Group in Disability Studies. Professor Lubet is a composer, improviser, performer, and interdisciplinary scholar who has contributed to a number of fields—including transcultural music-making, jazz studies, and theatre studies—and is the leading scholar in the convergence of Disability Studies and Music. His forthcoming book, *Music, Disability, and Society* (Temple University Press) will be the first single-author scholarly book to emerge from the growing field of disability studies and music, of which he has been a primary figure. Professor Lubet combines theoretical perspectives from disability studies with improvisation studies, jazz studies, ethnomusicology, and pedagogy. I cannot think of a more appropriate keynote speaker to address this colloquium on Improvising Bodies.*

*I would quickly like to share with you the story of my own introduction to Professor Lubet's work, which is a direct result of my participation in the ICASP research initiative. I am a member of one of the Area Groups in ICASP: the "Improvisation, Gender, and the Body" team. During our first set of meetings, right here, exactly three years ago, a group of scholars and artists came together with interests in gender and the body, from perspectives of gender studies, theories of race, sexuality studies, space and sound, listening, jazz history, and embodiment. As we began to talk about what we might do together, we found that one of the scholarly fields that seemed to be doing very exciting work in theorizing "the body" was disability studies—and we decided to learn more about it. Some of us began working with Pauline Oliveros on the Adaptive Use Musical Instrument program for people with disabilities (that we will present on and demonstrate tomorrow) and as part of that, began doing readings in disability studies over Skype. My colleague, Ray Pence, who writes about the Disability Rights movement, provided a reading list, and on it, multiple times, was the name Alex Lubet. Ray had written an article on Curtis Mayfield for a special issue of *The Review of Disability Studies* that focused on disability studies and music. This special issue was co-edited by Alex Lubet and Na'ama Sheffi—it is a remarkable set of readings. Our group quickly learned that disability studies is a field with much to contribute not only in regards to people with disabilities, but to studies of culture. Disability studies critiques the notion of the "disabled body" as a problem to be solved: the problem, according to disability studies, is the culture that defines some bodies as normal, and some bodies as abnormal; some as whole, others as incomplete; some as the standard by which others are measured, and others as those below the standards that must be directed toward measuring up.*

*One of the articles that Professor Lubet wrote and that our group read together, called "Tunes of Impairment: An Ethnomusicology of Disability" in the 2004 issue of *Review of Disability Studies*, helped us to think not only about how people with disabilities are either included or excluded in music-making, but to analyze musical cultures for the extent to which they are enabling rather than disabling to bodies. He makes us aware of the disabling effects of some forms of musicality as opposed to others. Free improvisation comes out rather well in his analysis, when compared to, say, Western Classical Music. I highly recommend this article and his other writings to anyone interested in improvisation, community, and social practice.*

*Today, he will present from his forthcoming book, *Music, Disability, and Society* (Temple University Press, 2011), which is pre-orderable, by the way, from the press. Just go to the Temple site—the paperback is reasonably enough priced to consider for course adoption. His talk is entitled: "(Paralyzed on One) Sideman: Disability Studies Meets Jazz, through the Hands of Horace Parlan." We are delighted to have him with us today to provide the keynote for our colloquium on Improvising Bodies. Please join me in a warm welcome for our keynote speaker, Professor Alex Lubet.*

Alex Lubet: It is an extraordinary pleasure and honor to keynote this conference. I am, of course, happy for myself and even gladder for the uniting of jazz and disability studies in such an auspicious venue. I am the first and only musician working in disability studies who does jazz research, which must have made filling the slot simple.

Disability studies considers disability from sociocultural, legal, political, policy, and aesthetic perspectives, in contrast to the medical model. Disability studies is aligned with the disability rights movement and regards disabled people as a minority group that seeks social justice and equity through the transformation of the human environment, rather than as a medical problem or disease in need of cure at best or incarceration or eradication at worst.

Canada is uniquely poised to offer wisdom and reason to disability studies, as evidenced by a decision to foreground disability concerns at a conference on music associated with the hyperability of virtuosic improvisation. Canada has demonstrably contributed to disability studies a middle path between US and European—mostly British—interpretations of social model principles.

The social model of disability is the foundation of our field: it distinguishes embodied impairment from socially constructed disability in a manner largely analogous to the relationship between sex and gender. Disability studies and the social model have origins in the UK, where disabled people have looked upon themselves primarily from a social movement, economic rights perspective: first from a still influential, neo-Marxist paradigm that is these days countered by a more left-liberal pragmatism.

The British sometimes call our American model of disability “cultural,” rather than “social,” meaning that we characterize disabled people as a minority group whose struggles resemble those of oppressed races and sexes, rather than emphasizing class. This may be more a reflection of different national histories than varying attitudes with regard to needs and imperatives. It makes for different disciplinary emphases, our European colleagues favoring the social and behavioral sciences and applied fields like education, while Americans lean toward the humanities and history. Canadians appear positioned between these two biases. This is empirically evident from monitoring the two major disability studies discussion groups, the American DS-HUM and the British DISABILITY-RESEARCH, for Canadian content.

Disability studies in music is thus far mostly American (see Lerner and Straus). At the risk of hubris, but also demonstrably, I was the first scholar to publish in the intersection of these fields (“Performing Arts Medicine”; “Tunes”). I would characterize my work as leaning toward the European model. By this, I mean that I rarely write about repertoire. My primary concerns have been musicians with disabilities and those potential musicians with disabilities who have been disenfranchised (“Disability Rights”)—that is, workers and students. As others at this colloquium will demonstrate, music making is always possible, regardless of a person’s impairment. Further, music is both a human need and a human right, as evidenced in music’s ubiquity everywhere.

Others studying music from a disability perspective write almost exclusively on the Western canon, primarily using metaphor as an analytical tool. Nearly all their work is grounded in traditional music theory and musicology, and thus inaccessible to disabled people who have been denied access to music and music education. At the risk of harshness, my published position is that such exclusionist work is thus not disability studies at all (“Epistemology”). I am, as previously stated, alone among musicians writing about disability studies in jazz (“Les Paul”; “Music, Disability, and Society”). Jazz is not my only subject, but it may be the most important.

In much the same way Canadians bridge the differences between US and UK disability studies, disability studies in jazz is positioned to meld the aesthetic and the political, a task this visionary festival has also assumed throughout its existence. While it would be folly to ignore jazz as artistry, jazz has always been more about the work of art and the workers of art than about works of art. Jazz is always being made, never remade. Like a shark, jazz perishes if it stops moving. Bob Dylan, another great improviser and the subject of my book in progress, could have been talking about jazz when he said that “He who is not busy being born is busy dying.”

Although only one of five chapters of my forthcoming *Music, Disability, and Society* focuses on jazz and three concern Western classical music, much of the book is about outing how the classical music cultural system disenfranchises so many from full or indeed any musical participation, other than passive reception or perhaps music therapy. Classical music is both emblematic of and an agent in the denial of disability rights, at times in manners that intersect with matters of race, gender, language, and Diaspora. Within this context, jazz provides a cultural alternative, born of Africa and adversity and dedicated to the proposition that art is an activity of flawed if sometimes virtuosic human beings rather than a repertoire of canonized, inerrant texts.

The focus of my chapter on jazz is the uniquely embodied virtuosities of three musicians with physical impairments: guitarist Django Reinhardt, vocalist Jimmy Scott, and pianist Horace Parlan. While Parlan may be the least known—though, of course far from unknown—I find his story the most interesting and exemplary, one to which I have returned often.

I must preface my discussion of Parlan by explaining why I did not choose to write about blindness in jazz. It is, of course, very familiar, but it is also relatively unremarkable, as so many of the world's musics are full of blind performers. There have even been performance genres and professions set aside for blind musicians, both men and women, notably in the Ukraine (Kononenko) and Japan (Matisoff). The binding theme of *Music, Disability, and Society* is my theory of "social confluence," wherein I state that the fundamental unit of identity in contemporary society is no longer the nation-state, tribe, family, or individual, but the social confluence, the encounter of the moment, the environment in which one operates at any given time. For blind musicians, jazz and much of African-American music, so grounded in orality, constitute social confluences of considerable enablement and equity. During the actual musical act, the impairment may remain, but there is little or no disability.

The same can sometimes, but not always, be said of physical impairment and jazz. The three jazz artists profiled at length in *Music, Disability, and Society* all have significant impairments that mandate alternative virtuosities that jazz, as a cultural system, is able to accommodate, but which classical music can incorporate either badly or not at all. Here, Parlan's case is crucial. He is a polio survivor, hemiplegic (paralyzed on one side). His right hand is, it appears, almost immobile. But he is a big man with large hands, whose second and fifth or sometimes second and third fingers extend such that he can use them to play in a manner akin to mallet percussion. That he is capable of this is unremarkable. That he has had a major career is truly significant. Surprisingly, what is even more impressive with regard to jazz's ability as a cultural system to incorporate musicians with physical impairments that impact performance is that Parlan is likely best known not as a soloist but as a sideman.

The importance of Parlan's sideman status is best understood by means of comparison. For example, in classical music, there are a number of prominent soloists and conductors with significant impairments. They include Itzhak Perlman, Rachel Barton Pine, Evelyn Glennie, Thomas Quasthoff, James DePriest, and Jeffrey Tate. Of these, only Glennie has an impairment – she is hearing impaired – that might potentially impact her music making, although it appears not to do so in any way that she cannot manage splendidly. There are also several famous left-hand only classical piano soloists, whose consideration I will reserve for a later comparison with Parlan. Jazz has, of course, also had its share of prominent soloists with disabilities, including Michel Petrucciani, Ray Charles, Art Tatum, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Lennie Tristano, and many others, some with substantial sideman careers as well.

However, there are few classical artists with significant visible impairments at any level less than superstar or, as we say in disability studies, "supercrip." To support this, I ask you to count the number of wheelchair using musicians you have seen in orchestras or opera as, if you will, the classical music equivalent of sidemen. If the answer is much more than none, I will be shocked. I base my own observation on nearly forty years of study and teaching in schools of music ("Tunes" 134).

If it seems counterintuitive that the presence of a minority group within the rank and file of a profession is more significant than their representation among the stars, please bear with me. First, understand that "minority group" may be defined differently here. For example, both women and disabled people are minorities in jazz, while African Americans are arguably not, though they have certainly endured discrimination within the culture at large, both as black people and as musicians, in jazz and other idioms.

The significance of Parlan as sideman versus soloist is illuminated by the career of another "sideman," not in jazz, but in rock. You may have noticed that heretofore I have used the term "sideman" unapologetically and without qualification or irony, despite being a very sensitive and, I might add, really short man. Now you will see why. Recently, Carole King and James Taylor reunited for a 40th anniversary tour. Prior to her first collaboration with Taylor, King had been one of the most successful songwriters in the world—unusual for a woman—the composer half of a wife-husband team with lyricist Gerry Goffin. But King had had little success as a performer, which, I have argued elsewhere, had much to do with her obvious Jewishness in an era of polite anti-Semitism. Taylor had much to do with promoting King as a performer. She would eventually reign for many years as the most successful female recording artist in history, while also having as a pianist, according to critic Robert Christgau, "the first widely recognized instrumental signature ever developed by a woman." When interviewed with Taylor on America's Public Broadcasting System, she thanked him effusively, not for making her a star—which had long been possible for women artists, especially if they were singers, nubile, and played nothing more dangerous than acoustic guitar—but for having her in his band as, quote, a "sideman." Taylor had invited King to cross pop's last frontier for women, to be accepted not as a spectacle or diva, but as a member of the instrumental body politic, as, if you will, one of the boys in the band.

It has been similar for Parlan, though with the obvious difference that King's sex places no limits on her piano technique while Parlan's physical impairment does. It is to the credit of jazz as a cultural system, as a social confluence, that those bandleaders who engaged him—most notably Charles Mingus, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, and Archie Shepp—recognized Parlan for what he can do, play the piano in a uniquely virtuosic manner, rather than for what he cannot do, play even the simplest notated music written for two-handed pianists. While this flexibility is obviously possible in jazz, it is utterly impossible in classical music, where pianists with hand injuries, such as Gary Graffman and Leon Fleisher, are permitted to use only their "good" hand, confined to a miniscule repertoire of "specially" composed pieces. While both men have been soloists—that is, spectacles—they could never serve as citizen accompanists, boys in the band.

In *Music, Disability, and Society*, the possibilities for physically impaired virtuosity in jazz are contrasted with the impossibilities of classical music. The site where this difference is clearest is the piano, the only instrument that can, in classical music, be played without modification by a hand-impaired performer who, however, must play a severely modified and attenuated repertoire. Parlan has technical limitations as well, of course, as we all do, but owing to jazz protocols of interpretation and improvisation, range of repertoire is not among them.

Heretofore, I thought there were limits on the degree of enablement possible in jazz, given jazz protocols of virtuosic display and real time performance that may not be inviolable, but are certainly traditional and have in many ways benefited the music greatly. There are events at this conference and festival that may impact these protocols and traditions, to the benefit of disabled people. In any case, Parlan—and, I would add, Django Reinhardt—are musicians whose hand impairments have impeded their playing and made certain technical "basics" impossible, while their other hands and fingers have functioned remarkably. Parlan has one of the best left hands in jazz history, borne out at times by critics who have far overstated the facility of his right hand, apparently unaware of what the left hand was doing (Fujiwara).

In contrast, classical music is disabling for pianists with hand impairments. Musicologist Neil Lerner has observed that in classical music there are pianists and one-handed-pianists, by which he means that all one-handed repertoire is so labeled and that no one confined to performing those works can escape being branded, or as we say in disability studies, "enfreaked" by them. Further, both of the most famous one-handed pianists of our time, Gary Graffman and Leon Fleisher, appear to have less impaired right hands than Horace Parlan. It may be that it is the protocols of Western art music that forbid their use, rather than the hands themselves. Both these artists and many others have focal dystonia, often called musician's dystonia, a neurological condition that is typically so task specific that it only affects the activity, in this case, over-practice and over-performance, that – along with heredity – caused it. Because playing causes focal dystonia, classical pianism is not only disabling, it is also impairing. The medical literature reports that this condition is almost unknown in jazz (Altenmüller and Jabusch 9), owing to the inherently less repetitive nature of improvised music, especially improvisational rehearsal, and jazz's emphasis on musical values other than textual inerrancy.

Parlan serves as an exemplar of jazz versus classical praxis of physical impairment, his playing contrasted with one-handed classical pianists and pianism. In classical music, there is no clear distinction between pianists and pianism. The state of one-handedness is dictated less by artists themselves—most with an unused, largely task-specifically impaired right hand—than by rules and repertoire. (The one-handed classical pianist who established the core repertoire through his many commissions and arrangements was Paul Wittgenstein, a war amputee—but he is the exception.) Thus one may usually speak of one-handed classical pianism without reference to particular pianists in a manner that could never be applied to Parlan, as the specifics of his hands are integral to his art.

I offer examples of Parlan's playing in three contexts. As with guitarist Django Reinhardt, his impairment is rarely if ever so obvious that one could identify it with complete assurance without prior knowledge. It is probably always possible for a pianist to play the same music with unimpaired hands. Further, detecting the impairment aurally requires listening for that which is not being done and presuming with confidence that the reason is that it cannot be done. If this is not a logical fallacy, it is close. At the same time, once one knows of the impairment, if the listener knows the instrument well enough, the distinctiveness becomes apparent. In Parlan's case, the stylistic uniqueness owes both to his right hand impairment and his extraordinary left hand.

On *Horace Parlan by Horace Parlan*, from 2000, he plays solo and with Danish bassist Jimmi Pederson. The spiritual "Deep River," a solo, and Parlan's own composition "Party Time," with bass, reveal at least three distinctive textural elements that flow from his unique hands. The virtuosity of his left brings an element of stride tradition into a post-bop style. The left hand bears full responsibility for the bass register and much of the harmony and melody in the remaining range. The melody is distributed between the hands, which means that, when it is fast, it is often in the

middle register, with comping in both hands above and below the tune. The left hand strides to do double or even triple duty: bass, harmony, and melody. The melody-in-the-middle texture is not one I know to be common in other jazz pianists, but it is one that would naturally occur to Parlan, given what his hands can do. Finally, the limitations on Parlan's right hand give him the courage to play melody exceptionally slowly, with great deliberation and lyricism, always in octaves, as it appears he must always use both working fingers at once. When he comps with his right hand, he often angles it like a mallet percussionist to get different harmonic intervals.

Parlan is not quite a sideman on his 1987 *Duo Reunion* with Archie Shepp, with whom he is much identified, but he is an accompanist much of the time. Sometimes he utilizes a traditional stride texture, his left hand dominating with bass notes and chords in the expected rhythmic locations, but that is not the norm. More often, the texture remains stride, with the piano covering all the necessary roles and registers, but with no expectation that the bass notes will appear on any particular beats. There is rarely an effort to compensate for the lack of a rhythm section: Parlan plays with the beat, but rarely keeps it. His textures are thinner than those of other pianists. His hands simply cannot be in every place at once and he relies more on his left hand here than in other contexts. His proclivity for long ascending melodies runs contrary to typical tonal inclinations and appears to emerge somatically from the left hand's inclination to move toward the body's center of gravity. There is more counterpoint, fewer chords, and a sense, despite a return to chord changes and 32-bar song form for Shepp, that this is still rhythmically and timbrally free jazz. A pianist with two fully functioning hands could play like this, of course, but would almost surely rarely, if ever, think to do so. For Parlan, it is somatic, idiomatic, and instinctive. The sparseness is extraordinary, even more for Parlan's judicious pedaling. These are duets and piano solos like none other. There are fewer notes, but far more unexpected turns of phrase, and thus much more music. An exemplar is Billy Strayhorn's "A Flower is a Lonesome Thing."

Parlan comes closer to the sideman role in a 1999 concert performance from Montreal. He and Shepp are joined by bassist Bill "Vishnu" Woods, but no drummer, for Shepp's "Mama Rose," a "My Favorite Things"/"Impressions"/"Chim-Chim-Cher-Ee"-like composition in which Shepp plays, recites, and sings. Here, Parlan takes it relatively easy, striding very little and giving the bassist plenty of room at the bottom to function as the trio's rhythmic engine. Parlan comps left-handed only, omitting voicings another pianist might choose, and uses his right either for occasional accents or, more often, to play slow moving countermelodies much like those he uses in his solo. These are among the most languorous melodies in jazz that I know, at least in a medium- or up-tempo by a pianist. But the division of labor between his hands is as close to that of a typical, able-bodied modern jazz pianist of any Parlan performance I know. He sometimes plays in thirds with right hand fingers 2 and 3, rather than 2 and 5. As always, his right hand fingers key in rhythmic unison.

When Parlan is a sideman, his embodied distinctiveness emerges in yet other ways. During his solo on "Things Ain't What They Used to Be," from 1994's *New Morning: The Concert in Geneva* with Shepp's quartet, he sometimes plays with a conventional texture, but also sometimes lays out the right hand, trades off melody between hands antiphonally such that their respective melodic styles could not be more different, and even inverts functions, soloing left and comping right. In contrast, though, his accompaniments to Shepp's sax and voice are conventional and fully voiced. In this latter context, his impairment is least if at all obvious, except perhaps for a proclivity toward block chords when comping, with independent hands a rarity.

It is interesting that Parlan's hand impairment is most obvious—in a positive way, because of the uniqueness of his playing—in the context in which he is most exposed and least assisted, his duos with Shepp, where the expectation of any other pianist would be a fuller texture. His impairment is least conspicuous comping as a sideman in a band with full rhythm section, where his chording is texturally much like other pianists. In jazz, Parlan is able to be both citizen and soloist.

Jazz has been an enabling environment for Horace Parlan, the only pianist of whom I am aware in any genre who began his career hand-impaired. He has worked in every capacity from solo to big band playing under several legendary leaders. Critics often note that his distinctive virtuosity flows in large measure from his unique embodiment. In contrast, I am unaware of this being said of Django Reinhardt, whose playing, to the contrary, has been described in quite opposite terms, as utterly able-bodied (Givan). Perhaps Parlan's most celebrated recordings, the duos with Shepp, are those where his impairment inspires some extraordinary textures.

If my writings on jazz heretofore served in large part to illuminate a study that dwelt mostly on classical music and the music education system it dominates, I will close by inverting that process. My critique of classical music—the field in which I earned my three degrees—is neither of repertoire nor people, but of a cultural system that should meet human needs better, particularly the need to make music. I argue that jazz does meet those needs better in at least some cases and offers lessons that could be emulated across many musics. Having contrasted the case of Horace Parlan with that of one-handed classical pianism, the latter a case of institution more than individual, I will necessarily

expand that perspective to include the unique case of the only prominent hand-impaired classical pianist who performs two-handed.

Classical music, like Christianity and Cartesian philosophy, has difficulty with bodies. This is a rich topic, but suffice it to say here that, for classical pianists, an impaired hand is almost always no hand at all: something to be shunned, exiled, functionally amputated within the confines of this social confluence. In some cases—presumably some players simply quit—the left hand is left to soldier on in a handful (pun intended) of pieces ultimately written simply for “left hand,” rather than for any pianist in particular and his (it is always a man) impaired but still somewhat functioning appendage. Given also the extraordinary rate of serious injuries and other health conditions incurred by classical musicians (to which I have barely alluded here, though there has been extensive research), the sense that classical praxis’s relation to the body is both alienated and alienating is clear.

But the plot has become somewhat thicker in recent years, owing to the rehabilitation of likely the best known of one-handed classical pianists, Leon Fleisher. In our own time, Fleisher was the prominent classical pianist most dedicated to the hope of recovery, aggressive in his pursuit of treatment, and most afflicted with despair and even suicidal impulses because of his loss. Since 1995, through Rolfing and Botox treatments, he has been able to return to two-handed playing (Brubach). He does not, however, claim to be cured and is careful not to overtax his right hand. He has even been known in recital to interrupt impromptu a two-handed work and substitute a left-hand piece because his right-hand is not up to performing (Pisetsky 6). The significance of Fleisher’s performance practice is that he is now playing with an impaired hand, something unprecedented in classical music. Through Fleisher’s two-handed performance, we may gain new insights into physical impairment across musical cultures and into what can be learned from Horace Parlan’s legacy in jazz.

As a left-handed pianist, Fleisher is spectacular. This can be witnessed in a live performance of the best-known left-handed work, the Ravel Concerto in G major. Most of the important left hand works are concertos, in which the orchestra functions as a sort of prosthesis. As a relevant aside, my most recent research concerns Oscar Peterson and the variety of musical prostheses he employed after a massive stroke in 1993 impaired his left hand.

In 2004, Fleisher recorded a cd entitled *Two Hands*, his first both to utilize and advertise his rehabilitation. The playing is, as could be expected, beautiful and thoughtful. Nothing about the performance implies impairment, except the absence of one virtuoso piece that Fleisher apparently chose not to attempt, even with the assistance of digital micro-editing that would have enabled numerous takes of brief passages with plenty of rest in between. Bach’s “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” exemplifies his repertoire choices.

As a one-handed pianist, the classical music cultural system, the social confluence in which he performs, has both impaired and disabled Fleisher, though his disability can be spectacular. His two-handed playing is elegant, but far from spectacular—and it is still disabled. Because of the protocols of classical piano music, in particular the relatively even distribution of difficulty between the hands, Fleisher, who, like Horace Parlan, has extraordinary left hand technique, can never display his unique virtuosity when he also uses his right hand. As a two-handed player, he may be, unlike Parlan, even more disabled than as a lefty, deprived of the opportunity to play using both hands to their fullest capacities.

Little remains to be said in conclusion, beyond that jazz has enabled a great pianist with an impaired hand who could never have had a career in other musics. Although Parlan is struggling professionally now and ailing, the protocols of jazz permitted him artistry without disability, something that cannot be said of Leon Fleisher or other similarly hand-impaired classical keyboard artists. It is worth noting that even with the late-onset impairment that largely incapacitated his left hand, which would have made even a one-handed career as a classical pianist impossible, lacking a formidable right hand-only repertoire, jazz praxis enabled Oscar Peterson to continue performing almost unabated from his (incomplete) recovery in 1995 until his death in 2007. Had Leon Fleisher been a jazz musician, like his son Julian, his impairment would almost surely never have occurred, as focal dystonia does not often appear to affect improvisers (Altenmüller and Jabusch 9).

I’ll end by revealing that I’ve been indulging in a thought experiment in which I try to imagine whether some of my favorite jazz pianists would continue to play after incurring a hand impairment and how they might sound. I keep thinking of Cecil Taylor, were his right hand to close into a fist. I’m confident he would keep performing with both hands and that I would want to be there to hear it. Thank you.

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