

Panel: Jazz Education, Jazz Activism, Jazz Futures

Peter Johnston

Bio

Peter Johnston was born in Windsor, N.S., the son of a high school music teacher and a Baptist Church pianist. He studied composition and double bass at Dalhousie University, alternating academic endeavors with tours of North America as part of a traveling swing band. After completing his studies at Dalhousie, Peter moved to Toronto in 2001 and began working as a freelance musician, music teacher and novel editor. After several years in Toronto Peter returned to the academic life, completing a master's degree in composition at York University in 2005. He is currently working on a PhD in Ethnomusicology at York University while still maintaining an active career as a performer and composer. Peter's research interests include exploring the creative processes of free improvisers, specifically focusing on the ways in which ensembles approach the integration of composition and improvisation in their performance practice.

Abstract

"Searching for Uncommon Ground: Eddie Prévost's Improvisation Workshop and the Construction of Collective Identity"

This presentation explores the social and musical relationships that are investigated and enacted at Eddie Prévost's Friday night improvisation workshop in London, England. Prévost has been convening this community gathering for the past eight years, and I was a regular participant from October 2006 to April 2007. The workshop is intended to be a 'safe space', where participants can freely explore the sonic possibilities of their instruments and interrogate the creative process in real time. At its best moments it is a site where co-operation, collaboration, and shared discovery are the key values, rather than the competitive 'cutting' atmosphere that frequently characterizes jazz jam sessions. Yet the freedom that is allowed in the workshop presents a unique challenge, as the participants must negotiate between the restrictions that may potentially result from a hardening of collective musical practice, and the consequences of unbounded communitarian experimentation. This workshop should not be approached as simply an idealized situation for free creative expression, but rather as a cultural work-space, where the participants are granted the opportunity to critically challenge their musical habits and work towards personal and collective change.

The workshop ideally functions as a musical laboratory for those involved; there are no restrictions on what instruments are welcome, or on the musical or cultural backgrounds of the participants. In my time at the workshop there were participants who were experienced with many different idioms, including jazz, rock, free improvisation, Turkish music, electronica, western classical music, and beat poetry, among many others. The international reputation of the workshop ensures that there will be visitors from other

countries, such as myself, taking part for various lengths of time. As such, the workshop offers the opportunity for transcultural communication, as each participant is asked to respond to the musical needs of the collective, rather than to express themselves through whichever idiom they may be used to. The danger in this approach is the potential establishment of a dominant middle ground, such that musical moves from outside the collective aesthetic become disruptive, and the proposed freedom of the space becomes qualified in particular ways. The freedom of the event thus needs to be coupled with a critical thought process in order to prevent the “no-boundaries” nature of the event from becoming its own orthodoxy.

This workshop offers a unique opportunity to examine this struggle in detail, as both long and short-term participants confront the tensions that arise between the pursuit of social ideals and the defence of creative freedom. My presentation will focus on practitioner narratives to explore notions of freedom, community, and cultural relevance as they are played out in the workshop. I will draw on both my own experiences and those of other participants collected through interviews to investigate how the musical relationships formed in Prévost’s workshop can inform society at a broader level.

Roger Mantie

Bio

Roger is a PhD Candidate in Music Education at the University of Toronto, where he conducts the Hart House Symphonic Band and directs the Royal Conservatory of Music Jazz Ensemble. His research interests lie in theorizing avocational and lifelong music making, music teacher training, and school curriculum and instruction.

Abstract

“Is Jazz Dead: Who’s Asking and Who Cares?”

In *Is jazz dead? (Or has it moved to a new address)* Nicholson (2005) examines the by now familiar agonistic relationship between ‘preservationists’ and ‘progressives’ during the 1980s and 1990s, ultimately arguing that most of the creative energies in jazz are occurring outside of the United States (which would seem, in his analysis, to subsume Canada). Among the causes Nicholson considers for the cessation of creative impulses in North American jazz is the phenomenon of ‘jazz education.’

In 2003-2004, the author interviewed leading Canadian university jazz educators (‘selected experts’) about their perceptions of public school jazz education. Among the issues raised in the author’s empirical research are: school jazz curriculum and instructional practices; the International Association for Jazz Education’s jazz curriculum and its relationship to school teaching practices; and

the role of improvisation in the teaching of jazz. Among the findings were that university jazz educators were unfamiliar with the central tenet of the IAJE curriculum that “jazz can and should be taught as aesthetic education.” For the ‘selected experts,’ jazz curriculum and instructional practices should, at a minimum, emphasize ear training and listening skills, improvising, theory, large ensemble playing, and jazz history. These aspects, in the opinions of the ‘experts,’ were, for the most part, neglected in current jazz teaching practices, which tend to demonstrate an emphasis on part playing, balanced and blended ensemble work, and generally good intonation and tone quality. While there was unanimous support among the ‘experts’ for the importance of improvisation in the teaching of jazz, there was disagreement on the extent to which this was believed possible, and on the possible solutions to rectify what was generally perceived to be poor improvisation occurring at the high school level.

This paper examines the state of jazz and jazz education in Canada using the theoretical frameworks of Wenger’s (1998) ‘communities of practice’ and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) ‘situated learning.’ The author attempts to highlight the political tensions that surround broader issues of curriculum and instruction, incorporating strands of critical, feminist, and postcolonial theory. These issues are put into the larger philosophical contexts of education, pedagogy, and schooling. The author draws not only upon Nicholson (2005), but on a broad variety of sources within both jazz and educational literature, as well as his own experience as a high school jazz educator and professional jazz musician.

Alexandre Pierrepont

Bio

Alexandre Pierrepont is a social and cultural anthropologist working at Paris-VII and Sciences Po (France), specialized in the internal alterations (at the corner of otherness and togetherness) of the Western World and in the African American musical continuum as a social institution. He has just completed a PhD on the AACM. Alexandre is a writer (*Le Champ jazzistique*, Parenthèses, 2002), translator (*William Parker’s Sound Journal*, Jalan/Sons d’hiver, 2004) and artistic adviser for labels and festivals.

Abstract

“The Inside (Outside) Songs of William Parker”

William Parker created his tribute to Curtis Mayfield in 2001, at the Banlieues Bleues festival in the northern suburbs of Paris. On this occasion, he also ran a workshop based on some of the songs by Mayfield, with more than one hundred kids and teens. In the last ten years or so, Alexandre has watched William Parker in many different teaching positions/situations in Europe, from the nursery school to the university, to high schools or music schools. Every time, every human being, from age 7 to age 77, had to sing his or her own song, using his or her own voice, and find a space where all the songs of all the people

involved could be played and heard. As another great bassist, Malachi Favors Maghostut, used to say: "There's a message in the music for you". This presentation will focus on three faces of such a message: the heterogeneity, the flexibility and the creativity – where music functions not only as a site for cultural memory or memorialization, but also as a site for cultural imagination.

Andrew Jacob Scott

Abstract

"Community as a site of Jazz Pedagogy: Exploring Toronto's Jam Sessions from 1956-1962"

Experimentation on the bandstand is of central importance to jazz pedagogy. Although all musicians spend hours cloistered away practicing their instruments, a great deal of learning in jazz is social. As a highly participatory art, jazz musicians learn tunes, ensemble dynamics, accompanying sensitivity and many other musical and aesthetic considerations through performance and jam session. Often comprised of both men and women, blacks and whites, experienced musical professionals, rank amateurs, budding enthusiasts and audiences anxious to hear what is often considered to be the most spontaneous and "real" jazz, "jam sessions" blur the lines between performance as play, practice, entertainment or art. As equal parts pedagogy and collegial intercourse, jam sessions have "functioned as a large educational system for producing, preserving, and transmitting musical knowledge, preparing students for the artistic demands of a jazz career through its particularized methods and forums" (Berliner 37).

For Toronto's black jazz community in the late 1950s, the Sunday sessions at St. Christopher House (Kensington Market), which were pedagogical, social and musical events, were of paramount importance to the musical development of many in that musical community. As drummer Archie Alleyne recalls, St. Christopher House was "where many of the younger black musicians used to go to jam on Sunday afternoons and learn [emphasis his]," giving currency to DeVaux's point that the jam session was the first setting of jazz pedagogy (DeVaux 202-235).

In this paper, I offer a history of Toronto's jazz jam sessions of the late 1950s and early 1960s and demonstrate how community can act as a site of pedagogy. Through ethnography and musical analysis, I explore the immediate connection between pedagogy and performance that occurred in Toronto's black musical community of the late 1950s-as saxophonist Doug Richardson points out, "I was honking that one note from the beginning" -and show how pedagogical sites also offered means of community building.