

INTRODUCTION

Jazz *Is* Black Music

Negro jazz, Negro music, Negro art, Negro melodic peculiarities, Negro Scale variants, Negro poignancy, special Negro flavor, Negro timbre, Negro singing voice, Negro character, Negro species of melodic syncopation, Negro rhythmic patterns, Negro tone color, Negro manner, Negro harmonies and the Negro scale. The greatest single racial influence upon American music as a whole has been the Negro.¹ – Leonard Bernstein

In many respects, I represent a unique anomaly amongst my peers at both the performance and pedagogical levels. My chosen course in navigating both academia and music performance is atypical, at best. I've experienced first-hand the pedagogical processes championed by academia (as both student and teacher), immersed myself in the performance and pedagogical philosophies of both jazz and classical styles, and more importantly, have often been placed in the position to decide whether to accept or reject those pedagogical philosophies based on their effectiveness, appropriateness, coherence and resonance with the ethnically-informed musical principals that I believe to be important.

With both practical experience and “street-level” education² serving as the foundation of my upbringing in jazz music, my musical journey to date has forced me to negotiate the intellectual and cultural transition from practitioner to professor. A stark dissonance between the pedagogical approaches

employed in academic and street-level practitioner culture has sparked an internal conflict within me as both an educator and a performer. Having spent significant time on both sides of the equation, grappling with and attempting to reconcile the differences between these two opposite, yet connected, approaches serves as the seeds of necessity for this book.

Before making the decision to pursue jazz music full time, I dedicated all of my time and energy to the study of classical saxophone. With only a handful of jazz experiences in those early years, very little effort was invested in grappling with the style. My classical pursuits culminated in earning a master's degree in 1999; at which time I took a year or so away from school to teach and perform before eventually completing a second master's and doctorate (in jazz studies) in preparation for my search for work as a college professor.

Professional life for someone trained exclusively in classical saxophone in the metro-Detroit area was particularly challenging. Apart from the occasional performance given by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra that called for saxophone, classical performance opportunities were exceptionally rare. As I worked to organize and promote my own performances in my hometown (Pontiac, MI), I was forced to face another harsh reality – very few people in my immediate community were interested in hearing classical saxophone music. This is not a jab at the quality, beauty or integrity of classical saxophone. Quite the contrary, much of the music I learned during those years was beautiful, virtuosic and challenging material that I respect and value to this day. However, this epiphany forced me to consider something that I never needed to ponder in academia. How does the music I play resonate with people beyond those who are engaged in a similar pursuit? Plainly put, classical saxophone music does not vibrate with general frequencies that are respected, appreciated and embraced by predominantly African-American communities. My parents were both civic-minded, and raised my brother and me up to always be mindful of, and of service to, our community. The reality that my life's work was not something attractive to, or readily accepted by, my people was a bitter pill to swallow. This realization became the source of considerable internal conflict.

On the heels of this epiphany, I was forced to look beyond classical performance to earn a living. Unfortunately, my master's degree meant that I was overqualified for many entry level non-music jobs, and left me underqualified to begin a college teaching career. I settled on becoming a substitute teacher during the day and working part-time as a clerk and saxophone instructor at one of the local music stores on nights and weekends. Though not ideal, this

allowed me to remain somewhat connected to the two things I loved most – teaching and the saxophone. My job at the music store facilitated a chance encounter that would completely change my outlook on music. The store’s guitar instructor³ came in frantically one evening after the saxophonist for his blues band quit the group an hour before a gig. He asked me if I would be willing to fill in. Despite my repeated warnings that I had very little non-classical experience and knew almost nothing about playing chord changes, he insisted that I would be just fine and that he could really use my help.

I reluctantly agreed to play the gig, which was at the Blue Note Café – a coffee shop in downtown Pontiac. Though a classical saxophonist through and through, I always had a great ear for music. In my younger years, I would make a game of playing back music from TV shows, movie themes and popular music on the radio for fun. While I knew relatively little about the inner workings of blues or jazz, those aural skills quickly became my lifeline on the gig I accepted. Using my ear to emulate the sound of a “blues” saxophonist as best I could, I made it through the performance. Ultimately, as I was playing, I realized I was having the time of my life! Compared to months and months of effort invested in correctly playing the notes that someone else composed in my classical studies, I was making my own spontaneous music for one of the first times in my life. More importantly, what I loved the most about this experience was how people reacted during the performance. The people in the room were moving and grooving to the music in a way that I had never experienced in classical performance. The exchange of energies between the band and the audience was absolutely infectious, and I quickly found this performance dynamic to be addictive. The music was fun, expressive, spontaneous, mentally challenging and something entirely new to me. In short, the experience was absolutely liberating! At the conclusion of the show, I knew for certain that this kind of music would be a permanent part of my future. I was asked to join the band as a permanent member, and immediately accepted the invitation.

The (relative) harmonic simplicity of the blues was a convenient segue into the world of jazz improvisation, as most songs were based on only a handful of chord changes that were very logical and familiar in arrangement. The structure of the songs were also fairly straight-forward, allowing me to concentrate on the skill that was most challenging for me – the act of improvising. While the theory aspect of the blues is relatively simple, the real beauty and complexity of the style comes in generating a sense of emotional electricity with the listener while playing. From the days of my father playing B.B. King,

Little Milton and Bobby Blue Bland in our home, I had an innate understanding that conveying “the story” was mission number one in the blues. In fact, as I pondered all of the Black music I had been exposed to (R&B, Soul, Funk, Hip Hop, etc.), I came to the realization that *all* those styles were striving to achieve the very same goal – just in different ways. My previous musical frame of reference (in the performance sense) was a style that demanded that composer intent be placed above that of the performer. While the skill of effectively conveying *someone else’s* musical wishes is a profoundly challenging thing in and of itself, it left me ill-equipped to smoothly transition to a style of play that lives almost exclusively in the realm of self-expression. At the very core of my being was the understanding that effectively doing so is absolutely necessary if my blues playing was to be authentic.

As my comfort and confidence in playing the blues grew, I began to feel somewhat confined by the limited harmonic content of the style. In my desire to stretch out to explore new musical directions, I started to explore the connections between the blues and jazz. Though the harmonic make-up of standard jazz tunes is significantly more complex, the blues gave me a basic harmonic foundation with which to begin these explorations. Along the way, the blues group I joined disbanded and the band’s guitar player and I formed a jazz and blues based guitar/sax duo group. This group was interesting in that during guitar solos, I would construct/walk bass lines traditionally used in Latin and swing-style jazz. I took for granted just how difficult this skill was, but it fast-tracked the development of my ability to read chord changes at a time where negotiating jazz theory and nomenclature was my biggest obstacle. Not only was I forced to learn this information quickly, but was required to put it to practical use in public on a semi-regular basis. Learning this critical information outside of the comfort of an academic environment, applying it in unconventional ways and learning to do so while still connecting with an audience is the cornerstone of my level of respect and appreciation for street-level jazz education.

My foray into the Detroit jam session scene quickly taught me that while I had a few good things going for me, I had *much* work left to do to become a competent jazz musician. Though my skillset was ample for the type of performances I had played prior, I was sorely underprepared to step onto the scene and play with established jazz players in the city. The jam session community was a nurturing, yet brutally honest group. Players in my peer group freely exchanged ideas and information about the music with the sense of a strong comradery and fellowship in negotiating the intricacies of jazz performance. Once it was obvious that you were *serious* about pursuing the music, you were

welcomed with open arms. This sense of welcome was not necessarily the case with the elder statesmen though. They listened for a level of intent, purpose and potential in what you offered as a musician and gradually decided whether to open the knowledge vault to you. This process of earning their respect was often not a pretty one, and usually meant that you would likely endure treatment that equates to a type of “hazing”.

One of my more memorable incidents happened at Baker’s Keyboard Lounge, one of Detroit’s most established jazz clubs. Wednesdays were the big jam session night, and it was hosted by pianist Teddy Harris, along with Donald Mayberry on bass, George Garrison on drums and Buddy Shabazz on congas. I was called up by Teddy to play on a song one night, and after being asked if I would be okay with the tune, I replied “yes”. In reality, I *did not* know the chord changes to the tune, and was a bit overconfident in my abilities to use my ears to “hear” my way through the song. The song began and my performance of the melody was abysmal, at best. As the solo section of the tune began, I easily missed⁴ 80% of the chord changes during the first 2 choruses – but kept playing as if I was somehow going to *make* what I was playing fit the chord progression. As we got a few measures into the 3rd chorus, Teddy stopped playing, stopped the rest of the band, slowly turned to me and said, “Young man, get the fuck off the stage!” The most embarrassing musical moment of my life had just transpired in front of a packed house at the top jazz club in town. Needless to say, I promptly packed up my horn and went home.

That night was a tough one for me. I knew exactly what I had done wrong and what actions prompted Teddy’s harsh reaction, but why would he embarrass me like that in front of all those people? After a few days of licking my wounds, I made it my mission to reclaim my respect! With some serious woodshedding of the prior week’s problematic tune under my belt, I went back to Baker’s the next Wednesday and made calling this song my first order of business. This time around, however, I played it like I owned it. From that day forward, Teddy and the rest of the cats in the band were very welcoming, open and generous with their tutelage. I didn’t understand at first, but this whole ordeal was simultaneously a lesson and a test. The lesson was that if you don’t know a tune well enough to play it competently, don’t say that you do. It’s both dishonest and disrespectful to the music and musicians you’re playing with. The test was to see how I would rebound from the events of the prior week. Would I fold up shop and never return, or would I come back stronger as a result? In the eyes of these giants of Detroit jazz, returning well prepared earned their respect, and conversely, their willingness to take me under their wing. In all of my 13 years

of study in academia, no lesson taught in that environment has come even close to the effectiveness of the scenario shared above.

My Baker's ordeal also illuminated another deficiency in my playing – the fact that my knowledge of standard jazz repertoire was insufficient in comparison to my peers. The best way to conquer this issue is through gigging regularly, but as a late bloomer in jazz, my skills were not yet strong enough to warrant calls for professional gigging opportunities. My inadequate level of play made jazz gigs far and few between, so I resorted to unorthodox means to generate the performance opportunities I needed. I purchased 20 or so Jamey Aebersold Play-Along books⁵ and negotiated a weekly Friday night gig in the basement tequila lounge of a Pontiac nightclub named Crazy Moe's. In this basement, I set about the task of refining my playing abilities – using the Aebersolds as a substitute for the live band that I wasn't yet good enough to play with on a regular basis. Eventually the idea caught on, and I added a steady Saturday night gig to my weekly routine. I continued this approach for a year and a half before live performance opportunities picked up enough to not need to continue playing alone. At the conclusion of that year and a half, I had successfully memorized well over 300 songs, learned to make something as mundane as an Aebersold convey emotional substance to listeners and improved my playing to a point where my phone rang regularly for gig opportunities around town. I endured some ridicule from my peers for my choice to play so often with backing tracks, but when I emerged from that experience as an entirely different level of player, the laughing quickly stopped.

Looking back over the last 16 years, the level of musical growth experienced in those non-academic years far outweighs the growth that occurred in my academic work. Yet, many of the lessons and processes that take place in this type of experiential learning are not traditionally included in the academic jazz learning experience. The potential reasons behind this trend are partially my motivation for creating this book. Taking stock of the perspectives my musical background has afforded me, the years spent studying classical music allowed me to thoroughly sample the general strengths and weaknesses of music study in academia. Furthermore, it provided first-hand experience in comprehending and negotiating a system of teaching that is centered around the assertion that Eurocentric music is the standard by which all other styles are to be measured. My street-level experience learning jazz music provided intimate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of that approach, and in the process, has promoted a healthy understanding and respect of those intangible aspects of jazz that are essential in the connection between the

music and everyday people. My extensive experience with both learning and teaching jazz in an academic context enables me to speak about academic jazz culture from a place of intimate knowledge, and more specifically, examine its strengths/weaknesses from a place of actual lived experience. The diversity of my educational profile, dichotomy in my jazz background and inside perspective on Black music culture place me in a unique position to examine the issues raised herein in a thoughtful, authentic and responsible way.

Let's anecdotally examine the issue of ethnicity and cultural accountability from a different perspective – that of an African-American studying European classical music. In my days as an undergraduate saxophonist, I repeatedly encountered a problem with my applied classical teachers that speaks directly to the heart of preserving respect for musical ancestry, and more specifically, the way in which our recognition of such a thing impacts both what we do and how we do things while undergoing formal academic study. As a classical saxophonist, it is customary to spend months preparing a piece of music for public presentation. In striving for excellence, performers typically invest hundreds of hours practicing to meet the style's demand for perfect execution of the written music. The performance culture of a classical musician is more so focused on developing the ability to express the composer's creative voice accurately than the development and refinement of individual expression. It prizes technical execution above all else, which is clearly evidenced in the way this musical culture views technical mistakes during performance. Additionally, the culture has little, if any, tolerance for deviation from what is on the printed page.⁶ The ability to accurately execute the printed music is a primary and consistent factor in determining admission into college programs, competition winners and assessing one's suitability for a career as a professional performer and/or teaching professional. By nature, the culture of classical music performance is invariably linked to a level of rigidity that is difficult to find duplicated in any other style of music in the world. That rigidity is as far removed from the fundamental principles of the African-American musical esthetic as anything could possibly be, where precision (in the literal sense) is subjective and relative to effective and persuasive communication of individual expression and compelling narrative.

My days studying classical music presented an interesting philosophical dilemma. While the pursuit of technical precision in performing the music was an interesting and worthwhile endeavor in and of itself, playing music the *exact* same way over and over again for months on end was somewhat unsatisfying. After working tirelessly to execute what was on the page as precisely as possible, I found myself wanting to deviate from accepted norms in

interpretation: variations in the scheme of the dynamics, variation in speed and depth of vibrato, pushing and pulling of tempo, variations in emotional intensity that contradicted traditional interpretations of the music, etcetera. In essence, I was compelled to make the music *my own* by bending the boundaries of traditional interpretation to make space for the inclusion of *my individual voice and creative ideas* in the performance of the music.

My weekly lessons with my applied saxophone instructors were both stressful and frustrating during those years. In presenting my “adjustments” to the music I was working on to my instructors, I found those artistic decisions being summarily and consistently overruled. I understood fully that as a performer of someone else’s composition, I did not have the right to alter (in the literal sense) the music I was performing. However, I strenuously objected to having little (if any) say in the esthetic qualities of the music. Without fail, I found my attempts to personalize interpretations of pieces to not only be dismissed, but outrightly unwelcomed. In the end, I elected to take the safe path and learned to quell my personal urges in an effort to maintain healthy and respectful relationships with my professors. However, this pedagogical and artistic dynamic became a source of considerable resentment that eventually prompted a permanent shift away from classical study.

After looking back on those experiences years later, I had an epiphany that is central to both my current state of inner-peace with the aforementioned situation and my understanding of the notion of cultural accountability in the performance of music. I realized that my classical teachers were *absolutely correct* in insisting that I corral my interpretive instincts. I now recognize that I was attempting to project interpretive principals rooted in African-American music culture onto a style of music that is distinctly rooted in the musical esthetics and performance tradition of European music. As an extension of (and out of respect for) Eurocentric music culture, playing this music commands that the interpretation of the performer align with acceptable esthetics and performance practices of its source culture. While there are customarily a handful of accepted interpretations of any given piece,⁷ they invariably share the same culturally-driven principles at their core. Unwavering demand for precise technical execution, the use of an “acceptable” saxophone sound, insistence on precise tuning, demonstrating accepted performance practices/etiquette and the lack of liberties afforded to the performer are all foundations of the Eurocentric musical tradition, and conversely, standard performance protocol in the style. If the cultural source of that music is to be fully acknowledged in performance and practice, I am obligated to both respect and reflect the aforementioned principles as

best possible at *all times*. While difficult to accept at the time, my teachers were attempting to instill a lasting respect for the musical culture, principles, and related esthetics that surround the music I *chose* to study. An extension of that teaching is the fact that the two are a package deal, and that genuine respect for, and the representation of, these musical principles is requisite for authenticity. While difficult to discover that so little individual expression and personal creativity is *welcomed* in a music style that is so very demanding to master, duly recognizing and respecting its source culture meant that this was simply a musical fact of life. I could either accept the terms of these rules, or choose a different musical direction. Of absolute consequence here is the role that my teachers played in preserving the integrity of that musical tradition, and the energy exerted in ensuring that I demonstrated similar respect for cultural cues while under their tutelage. This dynamic is tangible proof that communication of the need for cultural respect can indeed be effectively transmitted in an academic environment – should there be a recognized need, and genuine desire, to do so.

None would argue the fact that classical music is distinctly Eurocentric in nature (both esthetically and by way of governing performance and compositional process), and more specifically, that this music is predominantly the creative musical voice of White European males. We currently have hosts of classical practitioners of practically every race/ethnicity imaginable studying, creating, analyzing and performing the music all over the world. Regardless of that fact, we continue to universally observe and respect that this music as directly linked to European culture. This is clearly evidenced in standard musicology courses, which are almost entirely focused on the life, culture and historical context in which White European males created the music being studied. During the past 75 years, a diverse group of composers, performers and scholars from around the globe have made meaningful and noteworthy contributions to classical music. Despite this fact, we could not (and should not) change the ancestral DNA of that music nor negate its direct correlation to Eurocentric culture. Despite the overwhelming presence of Americans in the field of classical music performance, composition and scholarship, none attempt to co-opt that music as simply “American” music. The country’s embrace of the term “America’s Classical Music” to describe jazz, in and of itself, indicates widespread recognition of classical music’s European affiliation. We justly give Europe its proper credit for the significance and substance of music that is directly connected to, and reflective of, its culture and people. America frequently borrows from and/or builds upon that musical tradition, but it would be inconceivable to embrace it to a degree that implies appropriation. If the story shared above demonstrates

anything, it clearly illustrates that there is firm and decisive resistance to tampering with the cultural integrity and identity of this music.

Let's examine jazz music using a similar lens for a moment. Jazz music began as a style that was practiced almost exclusively by African-American musicians, and from its onset, was imbued with esthetic qualities of, and predicated upon performance practices that are foundational to, African-American music. During the years of its early development, jazz music grew out of an African-American cultural milieu defined by imposed hardships. The music served a distinct cultural purpose that fundamentally "answered the immediate needs of Blacks."⁸ In many cases, "American students, both black and white, have been taught that African music – indeed anything African – is savage, primitive and pagan, and that Afro-American music – blues, gospel, rhythm and blues and jazz – lacks the sublimity, objectivity, logic, morality and craftsmanship of Western music."⁹ In its first two decades of existence, many Americans regarded jazz (specifically that which was overtly connected to Black culture – by sound or by way of the skin color of the musicians performing it) as innately distasteful and erosive to the moral/cultural fabric of the country. White youths aside, a significant portion of White America wanted absolutely nothing to do with jazz or its native practitioners. Of course, this attitude changes dramatically once the music is commodified, appropriated (via various efforts to "concertize", "sophisticate" or "civilize" the music by White bands/composers approximating the sounds heard from Black jazz musicians/groups), receives national exposure and emerges as something far more valuable (in the monetary sense) than simply music made by primitives in brothels and speakeasies. The roots of jazz are unquestionably traceable to African-American culture, and frankly put, every stylistic evolution in the first 70 years of jazz's existence is a direct reflection of, or in reaction to, the artistic will of African-American trendsetters of the music. Ellsworth Janifer speaks a profound truth in stating:

...without probing their [African-American practitioners] significance and the significance of the music, the true meaning of jazz can never be communicated, no matter how deft the musical analysis or how scholarly the bare historical facts of jazz styles are set down by White critics who refuse to face the nasty, exploitative realities inherent in the history of Black jazz.¹⁰

Jazz is not innately an exclusive art. It is, and always has been, an open art that African-Americans have shared willingly and remains receptive to practitioners of any culture. At the same time, the sheer number, ethnic descent or individual influence of participating artists do not change the circumstances

surrounding the conception, incubation, birth and inseparable connection of jazz music to African American culture. Similarly, my earnest desire to express classical saxophone music in a way that reflected my Black heritage could not, and should not, be able to turn classical music into African-American music. That music is inexorably bound to its source culture, and regardless of how inconvenient or counter-intuitive it may have been for me, my teachers insisted that those cultural ties be conclusively represented when performing in the style. Regardless of my intellectual comprehension of and/or ability to play classical music well, ***the music is what it is, and belongs to a culture that is not my own***. It would be both disrespectful and a brazen display of arrogance (not to mention strenuously objected to) to claim any kind of cultural ownership of the music style based on my participation as a practitioner, scholar and/or composer alone. Much as DNA wholly determines our identity as human beings, so too does the historical and cultural DNA of jazz determine its identity as a Black music style. Jazz is open and welcoming to all, but its inviting nature should not be misinterpreted as justifiable cause to appropriate ownership or otherwise blur the abundantly clear correlation between jazz and its ethnic roots. Just as I was an African-American performing and composing Eurocentric music in my classical studies, all other cultures who are involved in the performance, composition and instruction of jazz must also openly recognize the blunt reality of that dynamic: ***I am an accomplished performer/composer/scholar of a style of music that emanates from a culture that is not my own***. Refusing to do so would be a willful continuation of the cultural appropriation of Black music in this country. Not doing so in a meaningful way also opens the door for justification of the growing disconnect of jazz from its cultural roots, and negates any real need to respect and uphold its connection with the very spirit and essence at the core of its ethnically-informed identity. Pianist Billy Taylor sums up this line of thinking succinctly in urging that, “Those of us who belong to the ethnic group which created jazz should be concerned about the fact that jazz is being studied, analyzed, documented, defined, and supported in White schools and communities while being virtually ignored in black schools” and that “We [Black people] should be studying it, teaching it, presenting it, defining it, recording it, filming it, documenting it, publishing it, and most of all *supporting* it.”¹¹

Others who straddle the line between music and cultural criticism have taken note of the aforementioned trends, and expressed opposition to the cultural implications of their existence. Music critic and cultural scholar Stanley Crouch bitingly addresses this concern in explaining:

Jazz has always been a hybrid. A mix of African, European, Caribbean and Afro-Hispanic elements. But the distinctive results of that mix, which distinguish jazz as one of the new arts of the twentieth century, are now under clear assault by those who would love to make jazz no more than “improvised music” free of definition. They would love to remove those elements that are essential to jazz and that come from the Negro. Troublesome person, that Negro.¹²

The cultural DNA and artistic evolution of jazz music is directly and unequivocally linked to the tastes, performance practices, experiences and musical aesthetics prevalent in African-American culture. It has evolved in contemporary society to include aspects of other cultures around the world, but at its core, we must fully acknowledge that the glue which binds these mixed elements remains conclusively linked to African-American music culture. In acknowledging this fact, we must also acknowledge that, in the interest of demonstrable respect for (and preservation of) characteristics that shape the music’s very identity, the music itself should remain reflective of that cultural connection – regardless of the ethnicity or cultural affiliation of the individual practitioner. In conversing with Nicholas Payton on the function of cultural connectivity in musical identity, he expressed the fundamental issue at the core of this concern in stating, “If it’s not connected to the culture, then it’s not *that* anymore. That’s the issue with what *jazz* is.¹³ Jazz is not connected to the culture, so no matter what you do, that’ll never change.”¹⁴ Furthermore, it is imperative that intellectual credit not only be given in theory, but also in practice. Without doing so, this acknowledgement is little more than a patronizing indulgence that does little, if anything, to bring about significant and meaningful reforms in the way that we perform, compose, teach and otherwise represent the music.

Both street-level jazz practitioners and jazz academics agree that the proliferation and perpetuation of jazz music as a substantive artistic form or genre in our society is important. On this particular point, however, the instruction, inherent values and emphases of these two worlds often differ so drastically that it’s worth considering the possibility of lasting damage done to the very fiber and integrity of the music itself. The significant shift in philosophy and core values when transmitting jazz music through the academic model has the potential to essentially redefine and re-shape the music into something that fails to reflect the history, principles and esthetic spirit that comprise the sonic and ethnic essence of jazz. We must also consider the notion that in the presentation of jazz in an academic context, important cultural aspects of the music are, in effect, being “lost in translation” along the way.

While the aforementioned concepts are often discussed informally amongst peer groups, no one has yet opened up these issues for contemplation or meaningful debate within the academic community. With academic environments now serving as the primary training ground for emerging jazz musicians, the logical platform to initiate this conversation is amongst those who are poised to have a direct and lasting impact on the philosophy of a significant number of new practitioners. The topic of race and ethnic influence is unavoidably at the center of this conversation. Essentially, there is cultural dissonance created in forcing ethnically-derived art forms into an academic construct that is not designed to facilitate that content. Jazz does not naturally fit with the Eurocentric music model that most academic music programs were specifically designed around. As a country, we Americans tend to avoid pointed conversations on issues surrounding race, but in the case of jazz, we've reached a point where the conversation is long overdue and absolutely central to the future of our field.

While it is one thing to simply state the need for dialogue, it's quite another to be a catalyst for that conversation. The primary purpose of this book is to be exactly that. As is often the case in discussing sensitive issues, it's quite possible that the content of this book will illicit defensiveness or resistance from some readers. The assertions made are not intended to point fingers or alienate one group over another, but rather to encourage serious and thoughtful discussion regarding the way in which we represent jazz music in our teaching. We must closely consider exactly what we are doing, why we are doing it, what we are potentially overlooking as we do what we do, and how these factors influence jazz music as a whole. In the traditional academic model, constant concerns about classroom evaluation, the perception of pedagogical effectiveness, time management, content presentation and classroom organization all have the potential to tempt professors to take a standardized approach to instruction that is based in learned habitual behavior. For most instructors, it's only natural that personal experience guides the way in which we teach what we teach and the musical values we both endorse and impart. However, if our *habitual* adherence to traditional pedagogical models and/or gaps in our personal experiences endangers the cultural integrity of jazz music, it is certainly worthwhile to re-evaluate the way we represent jazz music in our classrooms.

The interviewees included in this book were chosen, first and foremost, for their esteemed status on the national jazz scene. Since the issues being explored here deal with the balance between academic and street-level pedagogical approaches, I sought interview subjects who work in both arenas. Many have achieved a strong balance of these two worlds, with established and flourishing

careers as both jazz performers and instructors/clinicians/resident artists at the collegiate level. Diversity of perspectives was also a priority, as the interviewees represent as much variety as possible concerning ethnicity, gender, and age. Whenever possible, arrangements were made to conduct interviews in person, as I learned quickly that face-to-face interviews tended to be more nuanced, candid, conversational and relaxed in nature. However, both financial constraints and logistics surrounding availability of both interviewer and interviewee affected the feasibility of conducting all interviews this way. Finally, interview questions were pre-planned, and interviewees were primarily asked the same questions. However, in discussing such delicate topics, it was crucial that the conversation be allowed to unfold in an organic and natural way. While the prepared questions served as the backbone of each interview, space was allowed for the exploration of related tangents introduced during responses from each interviewee.

A prepared conversation introduction was used at the onset of all interviews conducted. This introduction reiterates the crux of what was included in my initial approach for inclusion in this work, and was intended to direct interviewee focus on the specific nature of the topics explored herein. At least a month had passed between accepting my interview request and our discussion, so starting each interview in the same way was important in ensuring that everyone began the conversation with a uniform understanding of the orientation of the questions that would follow. The introduction is given below, and with the exception of only minor variances in wording from interview to interview, it reads as follows:

I'm working from a theory that insinuates that the field of jazz education is systematically weeding out the concept of soulfulness in jazz music. My experience in academia suggests that the business of education has, in many ways, changed the complexion of jazz performance in the heightened emphasis placed on harmonic and technical complexity and decreased emphasis on expressive musical qualities which, in my opinion, make jazz a unique musical entity. Presenting jazz in an academic setting has encouraged scholars and educators to dissect and analyze the harmonic make-up of the music, but in the process, has brought about an unhealthy fixation on those analytical and more tangible aspects of the music. This fixation leaves behind the inconvenient aspects of the music that are not so easily quantified and/or presented in a concrete fashion – namely the role of soulfulness, expressiveness, and the connectivity of the music to everyday people. This approach seems to pluck out those aspects of jazz that are easy to evaluate or conveniently fit into educational texts, but leaves behind those expressive qualities that are not so easily quantified – essentially fixating on the skeletal structure of the music while ignoring the very spirit from which those technical elements emerge. Are we doing the music a disservice by meticulously analyzing the music of late John Coltrane

without factoring into the equation the spiritual fire and cultural context in which that harmonic vocabulary was forged? My study seeks to address questions of this nature. Many believe that jazz educators are often highly credentialed, but are not necessarily the strongest practitioners of the music. In looking at the current community of jazz educators, it is difficult to deny that there is a remarkable imbalance in diversity when it comes to the ethnic and gender make up of faculty members in collegiate jazz programs worldwide. Is it possible that this imbalance in diversity is a contributing factor to the remarkable orientation of jazz toward the technical and less toward the ethnically-informed essence of the art form? If those that are the leaders in jazz education do not embrace the necessity of such musical principles in their own conceptualization of the music, is it not plausible that those same people are not imparting the importance of those qualities to their students? I hope to explore the viability of this theory through conversations with those in the elite club of being both accomplished performers and educators in the field, and that's why I've come to speak with you today.

There are seven key issues that this book strives to explore through conversations with these top jazz performers and educators. First, academic jazz instruction at the collegiate level is, by virtue of its very nature, undermining the importance of culturally-informed characteristics at the heart and soul of jazz music. The general esthetic properties of jazz music typically being played in academia and jazz music performance in African American culture differ dramatically. The esthetic properties of jazz emerging from players who primarily receive their musical training in academia tend to lack the emotional potency, conviction, expressivity and other intangible essences that separate culturally-informed jazz music from other styles of music. These esthetic properties coincidentally tend to be common musical properties that are prevalent in other forms of music (blues, gospel, rhythm and blues, etc.) emanating from the Black music culture. The emergence and prominence of derogatory comments such as "You play like a schoolboy" as a colloquial phrase implying stiff, unemotional and uncommunicative playing directly reflects widespread recognition of this dynamic within academic jazz.

Second, the business of jazz education places emphasis on concrete factors while downplaying the importance of esthetic traits at the root of the music's culturally-informed identity. The traditional system of jazz instruction in academia evaluates and rewards students on their ability to correctly or incorrectly execute concrete and codified material (i.e. scales, patterns, licks, transcriptions, etc.). This approach makes evaluation simple and places the music in a black or white context that fits academic culture particularly well. However, the accurate execution of tangible aspects of jazz music marginalizes those intangible nuances that directly connect jazz to Black culture and are far more difficult to effectively teach and evaluate in an academic setting. This

pedagogical approach also propels the jazz textbook/method book market in that it becomes significantly easier to generate appropriate resources when the music is placed in a distinctly binary context. Coincidentally, presenting the music in this way also sidesteps the *need* for the instructor to be a culturally-informed practitioner. With basic musical knowledge and sufficient time invested in studying course content, any person formally trained in music can teach jazz in academia – even those with little or no time invested developing a strong authentic relationship with the culture of the music.

Third, a significant lack of ethnic diversity amongst collegiate jazz educators is having a palpable impact on the ethos of contemporary jazz and the esthetic principals embraced by emerging jazz students. As jazz began to find its way into academia, the music itself – let alone the ethnic practitioners of the source culture from which the music was directly connected – was not a welcomed addition to the curriculum. At their 2014 annual meeting, the African American Jazz Caucus (AAJC) estimated that Black presence on academic jazz faculties represent no more than 10% nationwide. Other studies¹⁵ estimate Black presence to be in the 20% range. Using even the most conservative of these figures suggests that approximately 80% of all collegiate jazz faculty members are White – the vast majority of which are males. Is this lack of diversity having a palpable effect on the esthetic values being emphasized in academic jazz, and if so, in what way?

Fourth, current hiring processes in collegiate jazz programs promote the exclusion of those educated under the street-level/practical experience training model. As a result, there is a considerable lack of street-level principals, philosophy and perspectives represented in the way jazz is taught in academia. While colleges and universities are admittedly making strides to better reflect ethnic and cultural diversity in their faculties, academia is a system that traditionally respects and reveres pedigree over practical experience. Over the course of the past 20 years, it has become standard practice that those who wish to teach jazz at the collegiate level typically must earn a doctorate before they can be considered for a tenure-track position. While some schools have wisely made exceptions to this rule and hired full-time instructors without this degree, the custom amongst the vast majority of colleges is to require a terminal degree. In the process, many of the music's most experienced and culturally qualified practitioners (both Black and White) are summarily excluded from consideration because they have chosen to dedicate their lives to immersion in jazz culture as opposed to the formal academic study of it. This means full-time practitioners with real-world experience are sorely underrepresented in academic settings.

Fifth, in placing heightened value on tangible aspects of the music, colleges and universities teach students to value those tangibles (i.e. patterns, licks, scales, technical execution) above the intangible essence of the music (i.e. emotion, connectivity to people, expressiveness, soulfulness). This, ultimately, diminishes the perceptible connection that jazz has to its roots in Black music culture. Successful execution of patterns, licks, scales, the completion and accurate performance of a transcription are all common tasks that aspiring jazz students are asked to complete during their time as collegiate musicians. Successful and consistent execution of such tangibles is rewarded above all else with both faculty approval and strong evaluative marks given for doing so. The result is a surge of students onto the world jazz scene who value technical execution over those expressive aspects of the music that most closely reflect the soul of the music. Coincidentally, the sheer number of students who are using college as a training ground for jazz promotes the potential re-shaping of the sonic identity and/or trajectory of jazz music into something that embraces and idolizes the technically accomplished over emotive players.

Sixth, the purely academic background of many jazz professors enables them to teach the music in a way that reflects their instruction. Since many of the musical elements rooted in Black culture that dominate street-level performance are marginalized (if not omitted altogether), the core of the style's cultural DNA (as presented in academia) is ill-represented. In other words, the traditional pedagogical model minimizes the need for those teaching to acquire intimate experience with/an understanding of the street-level (Black) musical culture from which jazz emerged. As an extension of that circumstance, this cultural disconnect is replicated when others who also receive their primary jazz training in academia enroll in, complete, and go on to teach in/direct their own academic jazz programs. This process has flooded college jazz program faculties with an influx of instructors who not only lack sufficient exposure to street-level performance culture to represent it effectively in the classroom, but also feel secure enough in the routine existence of their cultural shortcomings to neither recognize this as a deficiency nor consider such a deficiency as problematic.

Seventh, White males dominate the field of collegiate jazz pedagogy, and pedagogically speaking, it is human nature for educators to teach from a place of personal experience – using individual tastes, customs and learned cultural cues to shape the way in which they conceive and teach the music. While it is not uncommon for Black and White to “borrow” heavily from each other's culture, African-American and Eurocentric musical tastes, principals, performance practices and esthetic expectations generally differ. This is not to say that a

member of one of these cultures cannot genuinely internalize and represent the musical culture of the other, but such an authentic exchange of culture amongst those who teach in academic settings appears to be more the exception than the rule. With the dominance of White males amongst college jazz instructors, does that cultural superimposition have the potential to influence the tenor of musical esthetics revered in that environment? If so, does that circumstance have the potential to fundamentally alter the way that jazz is conceived, represented and reproduced amongst collegiately trained jazz students?

It is with these issues in mind that the conversations that follow were initiated. The interview process was approached from an objective standpoint in that there was no vested interest in corroborating or debunking any of the issues presented. This book is aimed at exploring the validity of the issues raised against the lived experiences of those who command respect in the field of jazz – both inside and outside of academia. Whether conversants agree or disagree with my assertions, the nature of the topics explored herein provides an abundance of substantial perspectives to discuss. What was of the utmost importance here is that an open, candid and direct dialog on these topics be achieved between interviewer and interviewee. Fortunately, all participating subjects fully understood the significance of these factors and willingly obliged these wishes by engaging in straight-forward and unscripted dialogue on these sensitive, yet incredibly vital, issues in jazz education.

Notes

1. *Findings*, 48.
2. “Street Level” education is an informal phrase used colloquially amongst jazz musicians. It indicates the process of learning jazz through the act of performing the music in real world settings (or on the bandstand), and indicates a definitive separation from the process of learning jazz in an academic setting. Street level jazz education includes apprenticeships with older/established jazz musicians, learning the etiquette and performance practices of the music in the act of doing from/with those who are doing it, and gleaning the needed relationship between the music and listener from practical experience.
3. The guitarist’s name was Lee Weiss.
4. Common euphemism used amongst jazz musicians that means to make mistakes in playing/improvising over one or more chords in a given song’s underlying chord progression.
5. Jamey Aebersold Play-Alongs are a series of jazz books that package sheet music for common jazz tunes with a CD of a jazz rhythm section playing a recorded accompaniment to those songs. These resources are a longstanding resource used in jazz pedagogy, and often use highly respected national jazz players on the recordings. They are popularly used to

- practice improvising over jazz tunes with the benefit of the sound of a full rhythm section accompanying you as you do so.
6. In all fairness, there are some contemporary 20th century compositions utilizing extended techniques (the exploration of sounds an instrument can make beyond those customarily perceived as conventional) that rely on the performer's creative interpretation of a composer's literal directions (rather than the customary playing of a series of notes specified by the composer) as the foundational basis for a composition. While this kind of composition does rely heavily on player execution of provided instructions, the compositions are often quite abstract and esoteric in nature.
 7. These interpretations are often dictated by the perceived leaders of performance on a given instrument. Once that status is achieved, significant variations in musical interpretation may be made without issue. This group consists of an exceedingly low percentage of practicing classical musicians. Up and coming practitioners (students, in particular) are not customarily afforded such artistic license.
 8. Haber, *Race Relations and Their Expression in Jazz*, 3.
 9. Janifer, *The Role of Black Studies in Music Education*, 150.
 10. Janifer, *The Role of Black Studies in Music Education*, 185.
 11. Taylor, *America's Classical Music*, 289.
 12. Crouch, *Three Polemics*, 383.
 13. Payton is an outspoken advocate for changing our use/understanding of the term "jazz" to more accurately reflect the music's cultural embodiment and the term's history. He advocates that music which emanates from and remains culturally connected with Afro-American culture be simply called "Black American Music". In his view, the use of the term "jazz" to label modern day iterations of the music which lack perceivable cultural connection is both acceptable and appropriate.
 14. Payton, Interview by author.
 15. Specific details (both study credits and figures) are presented in Chapter 11: Conversation.

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