PART FOUR

Jazz soundings

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

13 Learning jazz, teaching jazz

DAVID AKE

Not everyone has subscribed to the idea that all people can learn to play jazz. Since the time of the earliest accounts of the music, many writers and audiences have perceived jazz as a 'natural expression' of the performers rather than as a learned and practised behaviour. This perception has taken two predominant modes: that the ability to play jazz passes mysteriously from some invisible source through select 'great' individuals (i.e., geniuses), or that jazz springs forth from a subconscious and unmediated 'voice of the people', more specifically, an apparently unified African-American population. Prevalent as these notions have been, however, neither of them explains certain fundamental aspects of musical performance, and this chapter will focus on some of the ways in which jazz musicians have acquired and handed down to others the practical knowledge of their craft. It will investigate both the informal venues in which individuals learn how to play jazz and, in somewhat greater depth, some of the methods, values and influences of the relatively recent institutionalisation of jazz pedagogy, commonly referred to now as 'jazz education'. But before turning to these issues, it may be helpful to review briefly the attitudes and beliefs behind the aforementioned 'natural expression' perceptions.

'Some folks got it and some folks ain't'

Public notions of jazz as the product of either biology or genius are rooted in a number of historical and cultural domains. First, white audiences and critics around the turn of the twentieth century had come to understand music largely as a notated phenomenon, the craft of improvisation in European-based styles having gradually died out over the course of the previous decades. Consequently, these listeners marvelled at the ability of jazz musicians to vary, embellish and invent melodic lines, seemingly effortlessly and 'out of thin air' (see, for example, Ansermet 1919). Those same milieus had also come to view select painters, poets, writers, and especially musicians, as Artists, separate from and seemingly 'above' the rest of humanity. The public venerated classical virtuosi and composers; in the eyes of many, these musicians replaced the clergy as those most closely attuned to spiritual insights beyond the ken of ordinary men and women (see Horowitz 1998,

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and L. Levine 1988). In time, this reverence for classical Artists extended to jazz musicians as well.

Second, although a virulent and violent racism still gripped much of white America at this time, a frequently misinformed fascination with things African and African-American pervaded the country. It is no small fact to bear in mind that, during the nineteenth century, blackfaced minstrelsy – wherein white and, after the Civil War, even African-American entertainers darkened their faces and presented sometimes cruel, sometimes sympathetic, but generally simplistic visions of southern black life – stood as the most popular form of entertainment. And though the minstrel show's popularity had waned by the turn of the twentieth century, one need only recall Al Jolson's blackface scenes in and as *The Jazz Singer* (1927) to see that many of the images and understandings associated with that institution persisted (see Lott 1993, Cockrell 1997 and Mahar 1999).[1] In Europe, meanwhile, the primitivist bent among painters such as Paul Gauguin and, later, Pablo Picasso also reflected and fuelled the public interest in cultural exotica, including Africana (see Lemke 1998). In all such situations, white Americans and Europeans viewed the 'darker' populations as exceedingly virile and 'instinctive', less guided by intellect or social mores. These understandings certainly contributed to the initial success of such performers as Josephine Baker and Sidney Bechet in Paris, and Duke Ellington at the Cotton Club in Harlem, though only those performers' prodigious abilities can account for their phenomenally long and productive careers.

The two 'natural expression' perceptions described above continue to some degree to this day, and both warrant further investigation. To be sure, Afro-diasporic individuals *have* contributed most of the significant innovations in and influential models for jazz, and that music remains a central component of many African-American communities. However, not all musicians from these communities have played or even cared about jazz; indeed, many black civic and musical leaders, particularly during the first three decades of the twentieth century, distanced themselves from blues and jazz in favour of the perceived 'civilised' and 'sophisticated' music of Europe.[2] On the popular-music side, rhythm-and-blues, soul, funk and rap have held a decidedly broader black listening population in recent decades than has jazz. Still more crippling to the explanation of jazz as innate to all of African-blood lineage is the fact that only a small percentage of those who do play that music attain the level of competence necessary to earn the respect of audiences and fellow players. That is to say, if all African-Americans automatically created music on the level of a Louis Armstrong or Lester Young, black cultures would not celebrate those and other players as outstanding models.[3] Clearly, though jazz continues its strong connections with black America, it reflects no more an intrinsic or exclusive expression of Afro-diasporic peoples than country and western music does for southern

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

whites, or symphonies do for the Viennese. Musical style remains a cultural expression, not a biological one.

Though such bio-musical perceptions appear less frequently now than in the music's earliest decades (at least in the press), the first mode of natural expression outlined above – that jazz passes from The Great Beyond through select musicians – endures in many circles. For instance, the solemn, ritual-like aura that surrounds Keith Jarrett's solo-piano concerts stems in large measure from audience understandings that Jarrett uniquely connects to a type of universal/musical consciousness. Similarly, the existence of San Francisco's St John's African Orthodox Church, where parishioners revere the late saxophonist John Coltrane as 'the divine sound Baptist', reveals the degree to which many listeners (and not just church members) view that musician as one deeply and singularly attuned to a 'higher power'.[4] We can even see that the oft-bandied dictum about jazz to the effect that 'if you have to ask what it is, you'll never know' also supports understandings of the music as somehow outside the realm of general and rational understanding.

I do not wish to suggest that jazz cannot lead, or has not led, to profoundly moving experiences for its adherents, or that it means the same thing to all cultural communities. But we should keep in mind that jazz, as with any cultural product, involves the manipulation of certain materials and the enactment of certain behaviours. And like painters, or writers, or weavers, jazz musicians can learn, indeed must learn the skills necessary to work effectively with those materials and to affect those behaviours. For even in order that audiences may hear and see a particular musician's work as 'jazz', that musician must have already grown familiar with a wide variety of tunes, timbres, rhythmic feels and demeanours specific to jazz communities. Individuals are not 'born to play jazz'; they play the music because they have heard it somewhere and, for a number of reasons, feel themselves intrigued enough to want to learn how to create it.

Of course, not all individuals possess equal aptitudes for all activities: 'talent' does affect the rate at which, and the degree to which, individual players develop their skills. But talent always implies ability within a particular field, and even the most precocious prodigies must internalise the rules, styles and norms of their discipline, if only to reject some of them later. With that in mind, we can now turn to the ways in which musicians teach and learn the various rules, styles and norms of jazz.

Learning jazz

The community

For the first decades of the twentieth century, jazz remained predominantly an urban genre, with players and listeners living and working in close

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

proximity to each other. Such an environment facilitated a phenomenon in which older or more established musicians from local neighbourhoods acted as models for succeeding generations, enacting a 'passing down' that continues in many cities today. Most obviously, mature musicians serve as teachers in the traditional sense: guiding beginners through the earliest stages of musicianship, including selecting an instrument, learning fingerings and embouchures, note reading, technical exercises, as well as the idiomatic songs, sounds, licks and other fundamentals of jazz. Such teachers normally, but not always, receive some sort of remuneration for their services, usually in the form of money, although food, drink and other commodities have substituted for cash.

But local jazz learning also occurs outside formal student–teacher relationships. Hearing a parent, sibling, friend or neighbour during a performance or practice session may motivate a child to pick up an instrument and to follow that older player into music. For instance, Coleman Hawkins stood as a neighbourhood hero to Harlem youths in the 1930s and 1940s, his exceptional musical ability and professional success inspiring a number of local children, including Sonny Rollins, to learn to play.[5] Similarly, authors Lewis Porter and Gene Lees have both written extensively on the Philadelphia neighbourhood in which John Coltrane, Benny Golson, Jimmy Heath and others honed their skills and, in turn, became the models for younger players, among them Coltrane's future pianist, McCoy Tyner (Porter 1998, chapters 2–6; Lees 1994, 123–42). Such neighbourhood musicians do more than encourage youngsters to play instruments. As role models, their approach to jazz helps to determine local aesthetics regarding all parameters of the music, and accounts in large measure for recognisable regional styles such as the penchant for marching-band figures from New Orleans drummers, or the 'big sound' blues approaches associated with Texas-raised saxophonists. At the same time, local leaders also shape jazz in less directly musical ways, setting norms for such aspects as jargon, codes of dress and public behaviour, and attitudes towards other musics and peoples.

Jam sessions play a central role in configuring and perpetuating this local-education process. Sessions establish and maintain the core jazz repertoire as well as the performance and behavioural guidelines just outlined. In short, the jam session audibly and visibly presents for beginning players what their particular jazz community expects of them, some or all of which might transfer to jazz scenes elsewhere. (We should note in passing that any city might serve as home to multiple jazz communities, each carrying its own ideals and practices. For instance, the musicians who congregate around New York's Knitting Factory nightclub learn and maintain very different models of jazz performance, dress and demeanour from those who play in the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, or from the 'Dixieland' musicians who

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

perform at Michael's Pub and other such locales. Musicians may participate in more than one scene, though they will generally adjust their playing and behaviour in accordance with the accepted norms of each. Similarly, we should bear in mind that while any or all of these musical and extra-musical parameters may be passed down locally, the meanings and attitudes surrounding them seldom remain constant as they move from generation to generation. Changing historical realities may change attitudes toward established social institutions or cultural practices.)

One of the most important educational services jam sessions provide is the opportunity for beginning and intermediate musicians to play, or 'sit in', with their more established colleagues. Sitting in allows the beginner to experience 'under fire' subtle yet crucial aspects such as the feeling of an effective swing groove or the ways of group interaction on a bandstand. Sessions also serve as meeting points where players often make their first professional contacts. One outstanding performance at a session can lead to a string of gigs which, in turn, leads to broader playing experience and hopefully a more mature style, as well as an expanding circle of musicians and patrons as a source of future professional engagements.

Finally, the competitive 'cutting contest' mentality frequently underlying this setting also exposes each player's ability in relation to his or her peers, while the almost inevitable 'train wrecks' that occur in a musician's first attempts should suggest areas requiring improvement. For example, a famous story circulates of a Kansas City jam session in *c.* 1936 during which drummer Jo Jones apparently threw his cymbal in disgust at the young and struggling Charlie Parker (see page 144). This episode supposedly spurred the humiliated saxophonist into a period of intense secluded practising, or 'woodshedding', from which he emerged a giant of the instrument. Though the tale may be apocryphal, it clearly shows the importance of jam sessions as both a training ground and as a stage for demonstrating one's ability, and leads us to perhaps the most significant realm of jazz skill development: practising (R. Russell 1973, 83–5).

'Shedding'

We have seen that 'talent' always refers to ability within a specific field, and that not all musicians possess equal aptitude in assimilating new ideas. This phenomenon has led many non-playing listeners automatically to equate playing skills with innate ability, again implying that all performers simply 'have it'. Such a perception overlooks the fact that, at least at some point, every successful musician has spent long hours in solitary practice sessions.

While each player develops a practice routine according to the specific requirements of the instrument concerned, current strengths and weaknesses,

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

and the aesthetics handed down within the chosen jazz community or school, some aspects seem to remain particularly common among jazz musicians. For instance, most work diligently on tone production, referred to by many simply as their 'sound'. Horn players especially may spend hours playing 'long tones' as they check the consistency of their air stream and pitch, as well as the timbre itself. Rhythm-section players also work on sound: drummers experiment with different tunings, cymbals and stick sizes; pianists vary their 'touch'; and bassists strive toward consistent intonation. Since the advent of amplification in jazz, electric bassists, guitarists and keyboardists have searched for synthesizer, amplifier and effects-processor settings that offer the richest and most expressive tone. As shown below, the rise of jazz programmes in schools has affected how these players conceive of and work on their sound.

Another common area of practising entails developing dexterity on the instrument. Scales, arpeggios and other exercises, either self-designed or culled from instruction manuals, provide a framework for musicians wishing to attain a degree of virtuosity that many feel is required since the innovations of Art Tatum, Charlie Parker, Clifford Brown and others. Players possessing outstanding technical ability, or 'chops', often fare well at jam sessions where tempos may tend toward the fast side. A formidable technique can mean the difference between earning a gig or being passed over, especially in bop-oriented communities. For that reason, players may spend the vast majority of their practice time working towards virtuosity.

Finally, jazz musicians practise melodic patterns and tunes specific to their community. This may involve memorisation and repetition of frequently played material (i.e., 'standards'), common phrases or 'original' compositions in preparation for an upcoming gig. If a particular song is based on a harmonic structure, players may devote their time to finding creative yet idiomatic ways of negotiating the chord changes. Contradictory as it may sound, even free-jazz players work on such aspects, as they explore different possibilities for expressive nuance within various improvisational frameworks. Ultimately, musicians practise those areas of performance that will help them sound creative and meaningful within a particular jazz community. We should note at this point that such communities are not always bounded by local geographical area or by a shared time period. The proliferation of recording technology in the twentieth century has profoundly affected the ways in which communities function, leading us to our next topic of discussion.

Listen and learn

No pedagogical tool has left as widespread or as long-lasting an impact on jazz skill acquisition as have the various media of sound recording.

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Records, tapes and CDs not only act as the physical 'texts' of jazz, they also serve as the pre-eminent 'textbooks' of the music, providing study materials for virtually all players. Recordings facilitate learning in at least two ways.

First, the repeatability of recordings enables musicians to familiarise themselves thoroughly with the general sound of the music, as well as the specific nuances of select practitioners. After repeated listenings, many internalise jazz subtleties by singing or playing along with a record, mimicking the melodic lines, dynamic shifts, timbral gestures and rhythmic feels of each recorded player. In addition, repeatability also facilitates transcription, wherein an individual writes down as closely as possible the notes (if not the timbres) of a performance, creating a visual representation of the music to which the student may refer for further study. During the 1970s, music publishers began marketing such transcriptions as pedagogical tools in their own right, reflecting the emphasis on 'note choice' in most jazz-education programmes, a subject to which we will return below.

Second, the combined replicability and portability of recordings facilitates a situation in which musicians who grow up outside the predominant jazz eras and neighbourhoods can still learn the sounds and tunes used by players within those scenes. More than just documents of performances, records create a shared, enduring and mobile body of compositions, melodic fragments, timbres and rhythmic feels. Moreover, experience has shown that records (and also radio broadcasts) can cross racial, national and other boundaries in a way that people often cannot (or will not). That is, individuals who would otherwise have no access to cultures different from their own can experience alternative possibilities of music-making. And while jazz innovations have tended to move from African-American communities to others, the well-documented influence of Frankie Trumbauer's recordings on Lester Young is only one example showing that streams of influence flow in more than one direction. That is not to say that the meanings associated with the music necessarily travel with records. The short-lived furore surrounding Ornette Coleman's music in the late 1950s tells us that Coleman sounded very different to the New York musicians of that time from the way he sounded to, say, guitarist Pat Metheny who was listening in a small Missouri town in the early 1970s. Still, Coleman's recordings remain available, and each subsequent player may adopt and adapt one or more aspect of that saxophonist's approach to jazz.

In formal teaching situations, too, records become a kind of 'shorthand', a form of non-verbal communication, as a teacher or mentor 'prescribes' a certain recording for a student to listen to rather than attempting to notate or verbalise the musical conception. Musicians even use records as a teaching aid amongst themselves when preparing unfamiliar material.

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For instance, a bandleader desiring a particular approach or effect from a group might refer to a famous recorded performance that draws on a similar style.[6]

Teaching jazz

Jazz goes to college

Since 1968, the International Association of Jazz Educators (IAJE) has served as the leading organisation for school-based jazz pedagogy. Each year, the group sponsors and coordinates hundreds of workshops, programmes and conferences devoted to teaching jazz, and functions as an unofficial clearinghouse for instructors and their materials. Though based in the small midwestern town of Manhattan, Kansas, the association reaches around the globe, even extending to Colombia, Russia, South Africa, Kazakhstan and Turkey – areas not generally regarded as jazz centres. And though the following discussion focuses specifically on jazz education in North America, the influence of the IAJE and its membership has been such that the methods and aesthetics discussed below reflect those of teachers, programmes and schools everywhere.

Select college courses in jazz had surfaced long before the emergence of the IAJE and contemporary jazz education. For instance, author Marshall Stearns taught a jazz-history class at New York University in 1950 (his impressive list of guest lecturers and performers included Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie and author Ralph Ellison).[7] Even earlier, Len Bowden began a long and productive career as a jazz educator in 1919 when, as a student-teacher, he led a band at the Tuskegee Institute. Bowden later taught at Georgia State College (now Savannah State College) and Alabama State Normal College, and held a respected position as director of the African-American musicians at Great Lakes Naval Air Station outside Chicago during World War II (see Murphy 1994, and McDaniel 1993).

These individuals aside, one could argue that jazz education, as we understand it today – institutionalised training in jazz performance – emerged in the 1940s. Nineteen forty-five saw the opening of Boston's Berklee School of Music (now the Berklee College of Music) and the Westlake College of Music in Los Angeles (no longer in operation), both of which offered instruction in jazz. Two years later, North Texas State Teachers College (later North Texas State University, and now the University of North Texas) founded a degree major in Dance Band, which focused on big-band performance. All of these programmes turned out excellent performers; Berklee and North Texas continue to do so.

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Yet even these examples stood as exceptions, not as the rule in American colleges, universities and conservatories, the vast majority of which remained staunchly dedicated to providing instruction in the western classical tradition. For, despite the success of the music programmes just mentioned, few offered students jazz in any form during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Some of the more prestigious conservatories not only omitted the genre, but also actually forbade the playing of jazz on school property, with transgressions possibly leading in extreme cases to students' expulsion from the institution.[8]

Even in less prim surroundings, school big bands (sometimes called 'lab' or 'stage' bands) frequently defined the sole jazz outlet, and these were usually offered only as extracurricular activities with few students earning college credit for their participation. Conservatory-trained directors led most institutional big bands of this period: their main responsibilities typically included the concert or marching band (but not the more prestigious symphony orchestra). Not surprisingly, these jazz-band directors generally stressed the same musical ideals that were valued in the other ensembles: centred and stable intonation, correct note reading, section balance and the like, while improvisation often went overlooked.

As demonstrated by recent articles in the IAJE's *Jazz Educators Journal* entitled 'The Improvised Jazz Solo: An Endangered Species' (Jarvis 1990) and 'Don't Neglect Improvisation' (Reeves 1991), discussions of improvisational concepts in big-band rehearsals remain minimal in many schools even now. Exceptions aside, band directors possess little insight into improvisational skills, an absence reflecting their training in European-rooted practices. Meanwhile, to satisfy the demand for amateur jazz-band material, a growing cottage industry of school-oriented big-band composers and arrangers has emerged. These writers, mindful that most ensemble directors still view improvisation as a somewhat mysterious phenomenon (recall the first 'natural expression' mode above), write performers' solos into their charts. Directors often encourage players to rely on these notated passages rather than to improvise, avoiding precarious moments in school concerts or in the annual competitions and festivals held in many countries.

Answering calls for a more 'relevant' and diverse cultural landscape within the academy, jazz-studies programmes have appeared with increasing frequency since the 1970s. In 1972, only fifteen American colleges or universities offered degrees in jazz studies (Murphy 1994, 34). By September 1998, the Music Educators National Conference counted 67 undergraduate and 30 graduate programmes specifically devoted to jazz. In addition, dozens of other schools now offer a 'jazz emphasis' or 'jazz track' under the umbrella of their music performance, composition or education degrees. In all, almost 2,000 music staff in North American colleges teach jazz improvisation or

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

jazz lessons of some kind, while over 1,500 direct jazz ensembles.[9] At the same time, jazz-history classes now constitute some of the largest enrolments among the 'general education' courses offered by music or fine-arts departments.

In order to justify their existence, fledgling jazz programmes need to entice new students. An early solution to this problem sought to foster a reputation through local highschool recruiting or band appearances at festivals. Eventually, the schools hoped, one of their 'products' would find commercial or critical success, engendering word-of-mouth distinction for the institution. A more recent trend involves the hiring of 'name' teachers who hold impressive credentials as professional performers and recording artists. In the US, Charlie Haden at the California Institute of the Arts, Kenny Burrell at UCLA, Max Roach at the University of Massachusetts and Anthony Braxton at Wesleyan University exemplify a few of the well-known jazz musicians who have found that academia can provide a pleasant, creative and stable adjunct to performing. Such academic positions appear particularly attractive to musicians in the light of the medical and retirement benefits available through school employment, especially given the uncertain future that hung over so many jazz performance venues and record labels at the turn of the twenty-first century. This new generation of musician/teachers belies the adage that 'those who can, do; others teach', as jazz musicians – young and old – increasingly consider the college classroom, rather than neighbourhood sessions, to be the prime training ground for beginners.

One significant consequence of the increase in jazz programmes has been the emergence of smaller ensembles (from three to eight players) coexisting alongside the ubiquitous big bands. In turn, the greater soloing responsibilities inherent in the small-group format have necessitated the creation of classes devoted to improving students' improvisational skills. For reasons both practical and accreditational, clear-cut methods and standards of teaching and adjudicating these skills require development: and instructors, administrators and textbook authors have set about devising guidelines. Their concerns have spawned a number of questions. What does an aspiring jazz player need to know in order to be considered a 'good musician'? How does a teacher best go about conveying that information, and how does one test a student's knowledge and understanding of these principles? Should every jazz student be required to study 'classical' music? What is the optimal and practical balance between private lessons, ensembles and classroom instruction (both musical and general)?[10]

The responses of jazz programmes to these questions have varied according to each music department's size, financial resources and, just as important, the values and concerns of its faculty members. But even with

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the hiring of experienced performers and a new small-group emphasis, jazz programmes and published educational materials have tended to valorise the same musical parameters and skills as those stressed earlier by the band directors – that is to say, jazz-pedagogy aesthetics remain decidedly European-based.

Along with the traditional conservatory backgrounds of so many college-level instructors, a significant factor in this musical Eurocentricity involves genre prestige. In order that jazz receives the institutional respect and financial support that its adherents covet, many teachers and authors have resorted to a 'jazz has all of the things that classical music has' approach. For instance, many early academic studies of jazz stem from nineteenth-century European aesthetics that valued 'organic unity', 'motivic development' and harmonic complexity (see Chapter 9, and Walser 1997). By demonstrating that certain jazz solos or compositions worked 'just like the classics', music departments could rest assured that they were still teaching their students 'serious' music. To be sure, such efforts have served to elevate the status of jazz. But as we will see, these ideals also brush aside or ignore much outstanding jazz that counters conservatory-based measures of excellence.

Harmony and the jazz programme's *Gradus ad Parnassum*

One musical area rarely considered in jazz pedagogy includes the sonority-based aspects of timbre and intonation. Music teachers or ensemble directors may raise these issues as they relate to creating a 'good sound', usually thought of as a stable ideal. But discussion of timbral manipulation – employing a variety of tone colours within a musical performance or, for that matter, on one note – seldom arises. The classical orientation of most instructors returns here, for traditional conservatory training provides students with the tools necessary to work within a large-ensemble setting (soloist prodigies excepted). Players win and keep orchestral jobs by realising as cleanly and consistently as possible the notes set down on the printed page in a manner dictated by the conductor. As many very fine musicians have discovered, it can lead to disastrous results, musically and professionally, for players in an orchestral setting to alter their sound radically during a performance (see Vigeland 1991).

Jazz education programmes reinforce these same ideals, setting norms for tone, vibrato and pitch. This pedagogical approach appears somewhat understandable where the big band is concerned, with that larger ensemble's increased possibility for sounding chaotic. Yet it makes less sense in small-group settings where so many important jazz musicians – Lester Bowie, Dewey Redman, Sidney Bechet, Ornette Coleman, Cootie Williams, Miles Davis, Evan Parker and Bill Frisell, to name only a few – earned their reputations through unique manipulations of timbre.

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A concept such as timbral manipulation is most effectively explored in one-on-one lessons. Yet though most music departments provide these for their students, they remain the least cost-effective means of education for colleges and many schools simply cannot afford to provide a teacher on every instrument. Where private instructors are used, departmental hiring policies still favour 'legit' (classically oriented) instructors over jazz-based teachers by a wide margin. For example, in 1997 the College Music Society listed approximately 2,100 oboe and bassoon teachers in US and Canadian colleges and conservatories – more than their entire listing for jazz instructors. In fact, the Society does not provide sub-categories such as 'jazz piano' or 'jazz saxophone', though they do have categories for harpsichord, recorder and even timpani.[11] It goes almost without saying that those instructors schooled in the European traditions will encourage – if not require – their students to adopt the same ideals of sound and technique in which they were themselves trained.

Given that the written score has long stood as the document with which conservatory-trained music teachers and departmental administrators are most familiar, it seemed almost inevitable that the focal points of 'note choice' and harmony would carry over into jazz education. Notation- and harmony-based improvisational theory suits classroom use: notes, chords and harmonic progressions translate easily to paper, blackboard and text-books. Meanwhile, teachers can 'objectively' measure the students' grasp of the materials through written exams. All of which has unquestionably guided the direction of jazz education.

Getting the notes right: the chord-scale system

Since the 1970s, the 'chord-scale system' has stood as the most widely used method for teaching jazz improvisation in college. This approach enables students to identify quickly a scale or mode that will offer the fewest 'wrong notes' against a given harmonic structure. While most college jazz programmes advocate some form of this system, saxophonist, publisher and jazz educator Jamey Aebersold reigns as its most widely influential proponent, as well as its chief codifier. His enormously popular summer camps, and even more popular mail-order books and recordings of the 'music-minus-one' type, have served as the foundation for two generations of beginning improvisers and as the primary texts for many college improvisation classes.

Aebersold's ever-expanding 'Play-A-Long' books and recordings feature standards, typical jazz chord progressions and canonic jazz compositions. The cornerstone of the system is the 'Scale Syllabus' printed on the back cover of each volume. Here Aebersold provides a list of chords commonly found in jazz 'fake-books' along with a series of scale possibilities for each

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

chord. His chart illustrates quite clearly that this improvisational approach encourages a concept of note choice: the student sees a chord and plays a corresponding series of pitches.

Teachers advocating this method encourage their students to recognise chord-scale relationships through all keys and may test them on their ability to memorise them. Beyond familiarity with the typical chord progressions and their concomitant note-choice possibilities, persistent practising of this system also builds technical facility, the ability to 'run' scales and arpeggios in all ranges of the instrument. Yet while this pedagogical approach does succeed for the most part in reducing 'clams' (notes heard as mistakes) and building 'chops' (virtuosity), it ignores important conceptions concerning timbre, rhythm and musical interplay among players.

Even within the advantages that the chord-scale method purports to offer, a number of issues arise. For one, by dividing the twelve possible pitches of the western scale into a binary series of 'right notes' and 'wrong notes', this system precludes the non-scale tones that characterise so much bop and 'free' playing, as well as the 'in between' sounds characteristic of the blues. Such a categorisation also ignores the fact that, even within the list of acceptable pitches, each note always achieves a different effect: playing the flattened seventh degree on a dominant chord does not function in the same way as playing the root of that chord. In other words, players trained in the chord-scale method learn to play on individual chords, and so gain little insight into generating musical direction within a harmonic sequence. The disadvantages of this system may become clear when students begin to question why their own playing does not sound like such outstanding linear-oriented players as Charlie Parker, Sonny Stitt or Johnny Griffin (or, for that matter, the freer jazz stylists). However, this method does present fewer problems over chord-based but harmonically non-functional forms, which helps to account for the popularity among college-level players of less 'teleological' tunes such as John Coltrane's 'Giant Steps' and 'Countdown'.

Free jazz and the classroom

As suggested above, another realm of jazz performance overlooked by the chord-scale method involves the various 'extended techniques' associated with the freer jazz that emerged during the 1960s (see Chapter 11). While many musicians and audiences of that period came to associate unconventional sounds with mystical or transcendental states, the techniques involved in producing those sounds remain teachable and learnable.[12] Yet in order for a teacher and student to begin the process of exploring such devices, both must recognise them as useful, that is to say, 'musical', skills to develop. And to instructors who prize a clear, clean, stable tone, the seemingly

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

otherworldly shrieks, screams, honks, clucks and clicks produced by many avant-garde musicians can sound like sheer incompetent caterwauling.

Even beyond the music, other issues come into play when we discuss the marginalisation of free jazz in the academy. For one, though the quest for the Infinite was not uncommon in the heady days of the mid-1960s, these sorts of goals have proven less acceptable in the very rational world of the university (and they are certainly difficult to grade). More to the point, encouraging students to play 'like that' might to the denizens of music institutions undermine the authority of – even the necessity of – instrumental teachers. Schools run on the tacit understanding that their instructors possess specialised knowledge that they can pass on to their pupils. Instances such as the time when Ornette Coleman recorded *The Empty Foxhole* with his 10-year-old son Denardo on drums (who, though refreshingly devoid of clichés, was not a child prodigy) throw into question the conservatory's *raison d'être*: that individuals require extensive training to earn the title of 'musician'. Meanwhile, parents footing the bill for this sometimes very expensive training might wonder just what sort of school it is that would encourage that type of 'noise', and if their son or daughter might not receive a better education elsewhere.

In addition to these aspects, the increasing collectivity of some freer jazz raises problems for a jazz-conservatory system that, somewhat paradoxically, pushes for standardised performance norms at the same time that it extols individual improvisers. Jazz educators – whether through workbooks, private lessons or in-class improvisation courses – orient their students to esteem the soloist. Consequently, beginners learn to hear recordings of early New Orleans-style bands as quaint reminders of what jazz sounded like in its 'primitive' stages, and to view more recent collective performances as a type of musical deception, cloaking the players' soloing inadequacies. As schools have a mandate to turn out competent, professional musicians, structuring individual displays of versatility and virtuosity offers one way for jazz programmes to ensure that they are producing employable musicians capable of 'making it' in the outside world. At the same time, avoiding freer styles of playing decreases the possibility that a student may be 'faking it', and makes the grading process much more 'objective'. Even for a young player inclined towards collective playing, it is virtually impossible to practise group improvisation alone. With lessons, assignments and practice spaces geared towards the development of individual skills, little if any time or space remains for the development of the very different musical tools necessary to improvise successful collective jazz.

To be sure, much can be gained by fostering professional individual skills in jazz students as they prepare for life as working musicians. Yet by ignoring the musics of the avant-gardists and the early New Orleans players,

https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

jazz pedagogy marginalises other skills and traditions that have circulated in various guises since the genre's earliest days, resulting in a skewed view of jazz history, practices and ideals.

Ultimately, the issue boils down to knowledge: what sorts of knowledge will be esteemed in a given setting? How will that knowledge be transmitted, by whom, and to whom? In many instances, tests and grades measure only a student's ability to reproduce, rather than to apply, a given knowledge system. All of which points out the difference between the playing of jazz, which involves a type of practical knowledge, and the academic theorising about jazz. These knowledges – musical practice and its codifications – do not always overlap completely.

In closing, we should note that the insistence of jazz education to remain based on note-choices might be coming into question among some programmes. For instance, during the Banff Summer Jazz Workshops of the 1980s, saxophonist Steve Coleman taught students his oftentimes extremely intricate compositions by ear. Likewise, the Vail Jazz Foundation workshops for promising highschool players rely solely on aural skills. Most encouragingly, the Music Educators National Conference published *Teaching Jazz: A Course for Study* in 1996. Their four-page section on 'Skills and Concepts' (26–9) recommends that teachers develop students' rhythmic and aural skills as well as their knowledge of scales and harmony. All of which may signal a return of sorts, recalling the early local-community learning process where sound and gesture, and not just notes, formed the core of each jazz musician's schooling.

DISCOGRAPHY

Coleman, Ornette, *The Empty Foxhole*, Blue Note BN 4246/BST 84246, 1966; reissued as CDP 7243 8 28982 2 1, 1994

FILMOGRAPHY

Bach, Jean (producer), *A Great Day in Harlem: A Historic Gathering of Jazz Greats*, ABC Video, 41110, 1995

Jeff Swimmer, Jeff and Gayle Gilman (producers), *The Church of Saint Coltrane*, Tango Films, 1996

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.015 Published online by Cambridge University Press