

Essay on jazz as Contemporary music, Colours, Silence and More.

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What is jazz? It depends on who you are asking, where you come from, and what kind of culture you are raised in. In the article «The word jazz », Krin Gabbard says: «By contrast, the term jazz is routinely applied to musics that have as little in common as an improvisation by Marilyn Crispell, (New York avant garde pianist), and a 1923 recording of King Oliver and his Creole Jazz Band».

Jazz in Europe is different from jazz anywhere else. Europe has a strong classical music culture, and the nature of jazz music is to pick up influences from different cultures. Contemporary European music from the 20th century is responsible for fundamental music innovations that jazz can take advantage of. This has in some cases been done by introducing noise, atonality and serialism as musical material. Jazz is more than the circle of fifths. It is sound. John Coltrane showed us towards the end of his life that jazz was not «pretty». He played «sheets of sound», an expression that directed towards noise. Electronic instruments, synthesizers, samplers and computers have made it easier to apply noise to the concert situation. The ear has become more familiar with hearing sounds never heard before. Extemporaneous use of this musical material is combined with the practise of the same person being both performer and creator.

The use of long parts of silence may bring us to think of John Cage, but futurist poet/artist/composer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti did this in his «Cinque sintesi per il teatro radiofonico» (Five Syntheses for the Radiophonic Theatre) some 20 years before Cage's «4'33''». To experiment with silence and noise has a certain impact on the listener. As extreme elements in music, and as musical contrasts this will affect the listener's feelings.

Music, dance, theatre and visual arts have traditionally in European culture, except from in opera, been kept separately. In other cultures such as native and primitive ones, the word music does not even exist. It is not common to think about music as a separate artistic expression.

Most artistic expressions have a lot in common. Visual expressions influence music and vice versa. Colours, textures, lines, shapes and forms are common

language for both. The Dutch painter Piet Mondrian worked on different theories including music and painting. In his «Theories of Abstraction in Painting and Music» he tried to find a relationship between pitch and colour. Areas of certain colours refer to sounds with definite pitches, while blank areas without colours refer to sounds without definite pitches. Visual notion of size refers to dynamics, and positions in time relate to positions in space. Abstract art is about conveying the essence of something, (feelings, ideas) without showing the original form. In this area music and painting can meet each other. Music, as an abstract art form, is using associations to moods, temperature, movement, etc. In painting, abstractions can be made by associations of particular colours, lines, shapes and geometric figures. In researching these relationships, finding common ground and working together, one will clarify to a certain point why painting and music influence each other and why it is a source of inspiration both for musicians and painters.

When having a musical idea, it is the artist only who can understand it fully. It is therefore important to follow this idea all the way to the performance. To follow it through notation, choice of musicians, rehearsing, sorting out practical details on stage, sound projection, (mixing) and presentation. In order to present a complete vision of the artistic idea, it has to be thought through very carefully. This is all part of the art work; to be in full control of the final presentation from beginning to end, so what the audience see is the artist's pure vision.

The important music is beyond category. It breaks down given rules and barriers, and defines new set of rules in order to break them too.

Improvisation, as being the core of jazz music.

Research and development are the key words. My understanding and knowledge about jazz has been developed by studying the music itself, and by reading books, articles and interviews. This research and study has led me to find out more about my own musicality and how I relate to express myself through music. A major part of my time has been committed to the study of improvisation as being the core of jazz music. I have been asking questions: «How do I improvise?» «What are the differences between composing and improvising?» Since my main focus has been on jazz after 1960, (Ornette Coleman's album «Free Jazz» was recorded this year), I have been concentrating on free jazz and music related to this style. My frustration and challenge has been; «How do I, as also being a composer, relate to free

improvisation?» Improvisation can be understood as spontaneous composition. «What happens when I improvise freely?» «How free is it?» In playing free music, I often come up to a border where I discover that I cannot go further. I have reached my limitation. «What kind of limitation are we talking about?» There are two: Internal and external. «How much, and what, is saved in your musical memory?» «How much of it can I get up front at the right moment while playing an improvisation?» External limitations can be the instrument, technique and to relate to a composition. Freedom can be the biggest limitation; in having every possibility in front of you, and in how to make «the right» choices.

The understanding of the use of free improvisation inside a structure became stronger after having reflected on this. Free improvisation can under the right circumstances become even more significant when put into a musical architecture, or when it reacts with or against a loose or defined form. As a composer, I realise that I wish to have some sort of control of the music. At the same time it is important to let go of this control in order to let the music develop into something that I cannot predict. My musical architecture has to be flexible, it has to be able to handle improvisers' need to go on their own discovery in my «building», and the «labyrinth» has to be made in such a way that the improvisers can communicate.

When improvising or composing, I work mostly with these musical expressions: Melody, rhythm, harmony, sound and form.

When writing or improvising a melody, quite often I will choose a free tonal or atonal direction. This is linked up to my thinking about harmony which does not follow the tonal paths of traditional jazz harmony which I later will discuss. The melody is a strong musical element which I have no intention to avoid. Different modes, or modality, such as scales from renaissance church music or ethnic based scales, has a tendency to lock you in, unless you break out and play against the mode. It is sometimes necessary to play against the musical material to create tension and contrast, and always be prepared to do the opposite of what is expected. Melodies created by the use of whole tone scales, chromatics, big intervals or a combination of these often tend to satisfy my musical ear.

When thinking in terms of rhythm, I often tend to have John Steven's «Rhythm Tree» in mind. This makes you change between rhythms based on 2 and rhythms based on 3, and in 5 and 7 as well. When shaping an improvisation, and working with rhythms, it is essential to create the development of space. Any combination of rhythms might serve your purpose as long as they are used to create the shape of the improvisation.

My ideas of harmony are based on essential harmonic techniques of contemporary music of the twentieth century. My personal taste and likings have been my guide line. This led me to discover the use of chords by fourth or fifths, chords by seconds or seventh, polychords and any combination of these.

«He would borrow a horn, anybody's horn, and it would always come out his sound»

Sound is personality. Especially on wind instruments. The sound in these instruments is personal in the way it is created, because of the fact that the physique of the player shapes the sound. When talking about specific wind instruments, the sound can more or less be shaped to the player's preference if the quality of the instrument can answer to the demands. The sound is in the imagination, and can therefore be created the preferred way on any specific instrument. Speaking about the trumpet: This chapter is not dedicated to go into details about the effects of different shapes of mouthpieces, bores and shapes of trumpet tubes, but it is important to be aware of the impact this can have on your playing. Special setups and combinations of these will make it better to play in different settings. Personal sound is a combination of your physics, imagination and instrumental equipment. The use of vibrato and tuning will to a certain degree decide your sound. Vibrato has a strong effect in altering the sound/tuning, and it is easy to forget that it is quite common to use it unconsciously. «You can play flat in tune and sharp in tune» is not only a funny remark, but it also tells us that anything goes as long as we are conscious about what we are doing.

Form is the dramatic room in which music live. In this room it has to move fast, it has to move slowly, it needs peaks, valleys and surprises. The form is also representing «a road map» of the composition. «Where does it go?» «What happens along the road from beginning to end?» «How long is it going to be?» The composition, as a story, can be looked at from these angles, and can be filled with suitable musical material. The composer's challenge is to dramatise the story.

Discussion of key musical qualities.

Should a musician have to relate to style? Miles Davis said: «It's all about style» It is a good quality knowing different musical styles, and to be able to use it. There will always be a way to play when having this knowledge. Then,

what about the personal style? Personal style can be a musician's choices from many styles. It can be a musician's development to practise, listen and always choose what is understood as quality for each individual. In jazz, personality and individuality are key qualities. How to find your own voice is one of the key questions in becoming a jazz musician. It is dependent on the instrument, and sound, phrasing, voicings or articulation are key issues. In order to create a personal sound, wind instruments seem to be the easiest ones. Especially the saxophone which thereby has become the most prototypical of modern jazz instruments. The same story apply for the brass instruments, although timbral resources seem to be more restricted. Especially on the trumpet. The embouchure is shaped by the size and form of the lips, by the shape of the teeth and by the size of the mouth. Since the way of producing the sound on a trumpet is so delicate, there are fewer alternative ways of doing it than on e.g. a saxophone. Creating musical individuality can also be done by the way phrasing is made, how chords are voiced and by inventing personal phrases. This essay is not discussing specific details on all instruments, but will stress the importance of having an individual expression whether it is articulated with sound, phrasing, voicings or in other ways.

Communication skills are a necessity when being a jazz musician or improvising musician. It is important to know the different roles a musician should have when playing in a band. Independent of instrument, there are at least three main roles every musician should be aware of:

The soloist who stands out making a major statement, and being the focal point of the sound coming from the band.

The accompanying musician who supports, communicates and makes remarks and responses. This role will always try to get the best out of the soloist, and make him/her sound the best possible.

The silent musician who knows when not to play. It creates a certain energy in a band when someone is not playing, and the important skill is to know when this is needed in a band.

When performed well, these roles can make the band sound good. It creates changes in the texture of the music, it creates energy, and it makes communication flow better. It will shape the music, and be important tools to know and to use in all musical activity. In collective improvisation these skills are a necessity to be able to make music together at all.

Communication within a band is worth a study. A good dinner with the band can be as good a rehearsal as any. How the musicians communicate and relate

to each other in general can be an important factor in how they play together. A big part of the game is by intuition be able to understand and figure out how other musicians (in the band) will play. In many ways it is comparable to an intimate relationship; knowing, but also be able to surprise. The idea that the output, (the music), will become bigger than the sum of each individual's input, (synergy), should be supported. Key musical qualities such as the relationship to the instrument, musical memory, reading skills, to know when to be or not to be a leader, and to have the knowledge to arrange and compose music are all very valuable musical qualities.

A dangerous place for an artist to be, is when the solution is found, and thinking that this is it. Then, it, (the music), is going to be recreated again and again.

It is all in your mind and imagination. Inspiration for being creative can be found everywhere; e.g. in visual arts, architecture, dance, food, travelling, and in noise.