

## Leeds International Jazz Education Conference (2012): Global Perspectives on the Practice and Pedagogy of Jazz History in the Twenty-First Century

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The Leeds International Jazz Education Conference (LIJEC) was established in 1993 to bring together leading scholars, musicians, and educators from around the world. The 2012 conference had the explicit theme of jazz education in the twenty-first century, leading to international discussions of the necessity of jazz education in today's environment, and the potential merits and pitfalls of such programs. Many topics were explored throughout the duration of the conference, including: the role of jazz singers' sound vocabulary in musical practice; teaching rhythmic improvisation by integrating traditional Brazilian and modern jazz concepts; the mechanics of jazz composition; the role of mentors in British jazz education; and interaction in John Coltrane's living room. In addition, percussionist Trilok Gurtu gave a fascinating keynote demonstration, and the National Youth Jazz Orchestra of Great Britain gave a workshop and concert.

In the closing plenary session, speakers from around Europe and North America were invited to explain their opinions on the importance of history in contemporary jazz education in their respective regions or countries. The opening statements of the speakers are summarized in the short papers that follow and give an overview of the main themes of the conference, as well as suggesting ways to move forward in jazz education.

UK-based independent scholar Brian Priestley suggests in his piece that today's jazz *teachers*, never mind students, do not have an appropriate breadth and depth of knowledge of early jazz. Jeremy Hepner (an instructor at the Teachers College, Columbia University in New York, and President of the Canadian Association for Jazz Education) addresses the tensions between Canada's proximity to the United States and its historical association with Europe in the formation of a Canadian jazz identity. Heli Reimann (a researcher and PhD fellow in the Department of Musicology at the University of Helsinki) offers a reading of canonized American jazz as the central focus of jazz education, suggesting that in Eastern Europe, musicians

frequently cross generic boundaries. Estonian jazz, Reimann suggests, can be seen as peripheral to the established American jazz scene and its related pedagogical traditions. My perspectives as a Senior Lecturer in Jazz at the host institution (Leeds College of Music) are drawn from my doctoral research and explain the importance of three facets of contemporary British jazz education: transgenerational mentors (the informal practice of learning from the experiences and abilities of older musicians); learning from existing jazz recordings; and the study and performance of jazz repertoire in repertory bands. Anthony Bushard (an Assistant Professor in Music History at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln) concludes the selection with an evaluation of the role played by jazz history when developing a graduate program in jazz at his own institution. He explains his explicit intention of building bridges between the university and local audiences, in order to reverse the separation of the academy and the people.

The plenary session was provocative and resulted in much energetic and impassioned debate. The main topics that emerged focused on the difficult position today's jazz educators face internationally. First, given the progressive nature of jazz, how can a set of rules for teaching the music be defined? We agreed that elements of repertoire and existing traditions need to be taught, but jazz is frequently—more often than in other idioms such as rock and pop—defined by its innovators. Given also that all the speakers at this event brought different geographical perspectives—from countries whose musicians may have experienced jazz first, second or third hand—deciding what historical material to include in jazz education is problematic.

And while no one on the plenary panel or in the audience disputed the importance of jazz history and traditions in education, a jazz syllabus that is centered on historical practices is in danger of losing its contemporary drive. Indeed, the very word “conservatory” suggests looking back and preserving an existing music, rather than looking forward with inventiveness.<sup>1</sup> Canon formation in jazz has been a central problem to jazz discourse for many years now, and the issue shows no signs of receding. How do practitioners of a developing music acknowledge the music's history, while continuing to move forward? This issue is explored in several of the contributions to this piece.

Finally, in a music in which boundaries of form, timing, and harmony are extended in the name of development, how can we as international jazz educators create a syllabus and framework for assessment? If becoming a convincing and expressive jazz musician means breaking conventions, by definition any assessment criteria will be outmoded. The following papers suggest existing and proposed solutions to these dilemmas.

1. Audience members suggested alternative, more progressive, names for the institution of the conservatory; “visionatoire” and “observatory” were popular choices.