

Improvisation in the digital age: New narratives in jazz promotion and dissemination

ABSTRACT

Those that create, promote and disseminate jazz are experiencing a period of radical change. The dwindling interest from the major labels in releasing jazz has led to a mushrooming of both traditionally imagined and virtual independent jazz labels, often musician-led by individuals or collectives. Despite the 'democratised' potentials of digital dissemination made possible through third party vendors and streaming services such as iTunes and Spotify, modest or non-existent advertising budgets and lack of coherent marketing strategies often result in independent releases being drowned in the noise of an overcrowded marketplace. Financial returns from limited sales are also modest. The commercial underpinning that in previous times afforded the jazz musician both potential apprenticeship and *métier* has become fractured through increasing scarcity of record company and private/public funding. Against this black backdrop, musicians have engaged in new ways of disseminating their work. DIY strategies, such as free download netlabels or interactive app-albums, have become increasingly commonplace. Fresh approaches — the need for which are highlighted in this article with reference to the European jazz scene — indicate how musicians are networking informally, often with little or no institutional support. This paper highlights to what extent market realignments have prompted individual and collective creative responses to current difficulties associated with the promotion of jazz music.

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Introduction

BLEEK: People are listening to my voice. SHADOW: Nobody's listening! BLEEK: I'm telling you ... people are listening to my voice. SHADOW: Ain't nobody coming, Bleek!

In this dialogue excerpt from Spike Lee's (1990) film *Mo' Better Blues* [1], two characters — Bleek, a trumpet player, and Shadow, his saxophonist — give voice to two antagonistic viewpoints that are very common among jazz musicians. Bleek is a purist who sees jazz music as an artistic expression of himself as an individual and of his cultural heritage (in this case African-American). Shadow is a pragmatic musician who repeatedly calls Bleek back to reality. The first, entangled in his idealism, is above all concerned with revering the "great jazz giants", mastering his technique and pursuing his own sound — his "voice". The second one reminds him that "nobody's listening" and no one is attending their concerts anymore because, simply put, their music no longer gives the audiences what they want. The two decide to go their separate ways. Shadow reformulates his band's image — to one more appealing to contemporary jazz fans — and soon finds success. Bleek, after a period of self-examination while obsessively listening to John Coltrane's records, decides to abandon music and becomes a reputable family man.

Though not necessarily in such finite terms, and generally with a less dramatic outcome, this dichotomy is common among jazz musicians. All seem to zealously hone their technical skills while compulsively chasing the individual "voice", but while some either fail to appreciate that "nobody's coming" or, on realization, fail to understand why, others take positive action to reimagine the ways in which they relate to jazz and how it is communicated to the audience.

Indeed, this dichotomy is the same one that stands as the cornerstone of Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) theoretical model for his field of cultural production. Bourdieu defines two logics that confront each other for power relations within the same artistic field [2] — the first, which produces art for art's sake, rejects the sheer pursuit for profit and stands against the power of cultural institutions; the second, which creates art according to the audience's expectations and the critic's legitimacy [3].

Through our personal experiences as jazz musicians, we bear continuous witness to such frictions between old and new guards. Whether expressed as frictions between traditional and radical, bebop and swing, American and European, black and white or analogue and digital, the argument essentially boils down to one of authenticity and tradition versus the conquering of new frontiers.

While the majority of the jazz world remains bound to the dissemination and promotion of music using the templates of the previous century, a notable few have engaged in new and timely ways of communicating both with existing audiences and attracting new fans employing a mind-set in tune with the modern age.

The arrival of the digital age and the cultural dissemination machineries of the Internet have caused irreversible changes to the ways in which musicians and audiences relate. However, many in the jazz music industries can be observed to be wilfully resistant to many of these changes, clinging often to the tried and tested and harking back to “better times”.

There is much talk currently of a music industry in crisis [4] — albeit the one that many of us grew up with — through the post-digital devaluation of product and the sheer volume of online recorded artefact and only the foolhardy would proffer a definitive solution to the difficulties faced in sustaining a livelihood and profile for today’s musician. Yet, progress is not for turning and we stand on the edge of a new cultural landscape, with untested value chains, where innovative and creative strategies and reappraisals of identity are key to the health and sustainability of jazz in this new millennium.



1. Things ain’t what they used to be

1.1. The jazz canon — Real Books, records and LP covers

In 1949, saxophonist James Moody recorded his rendition of Jimmy McHugh’s 1935 song *I’m In the Mood for Love* [5]. The success enjoyed by this particular recording made Moody’s solo become a musical reference, independent from the original tune. Six years later, singer Eddie Jefferson wrote new lyrics for what was by then a standard, naming it *Moody’s Mood for Love* [6]. This recording has inspired singer Jon Hendricks to approach song writing by using the same practice (writing lyrics for instrumental jazz solos), thus creating a new style, which came to be known as “vocalese”.

Every artistic movement comes from merging and/or rejecting some of the characteristics of previous movements. In music, particularly jazz, imitating certain soloists and reinterpreting standardized musical excerpts can lead to the establishment of new musical styles.

The American jazz tradition [7] has been constructed mainly in the presentation of historical periods corresponding to a succession of styles: New Orleans jazz in the 1920s, swing in the 1930s, bebop in the 1940s, cool in the 1950s, and so on. The narratives created for each one of those periods/styles have been largely based on a “substantive agreement” in which “deserving” musicians were elevated within “the pantheon of great innovators” and in which recordings were selected and added to “the canon of recorded masterpieces” [8]. The jazz canon is a result of the combination of spontaneous agreement and authoritative statements. On the one hand, the narratives created by music critics, industry executives and scholars around specific features of some musician’s performances and recordings, have served as “official” authentications for assembling that “pantheon” and roll-call of “masterpieces”. On the other, for

musicians and fans, the jazz canon is the result of a natural selection of which tunes, licks and recordings have stood the test of time.

“Getting into jazz” is a process that usually begins by listening attentively to canonised recordings and absorbing jazz’s particular vocabularies. In a musical tradition where “imitating seasoned improvisers” is a key factor to the learning process, both live performances and recorded improvisations provide models of jazz vocabulary for young musicians and fans alike [9].

Many of the most popular jazz compositions — the standards — are repeatedly transcribed and compiled into Real Books and often used as learning tools. Real Books, as well as their many variations (Fake, Latin Jazz, Jazz Rock and, latterly, iReal Books), provide conventional harmonic sequences and phrase components that are acquired and employed as parts of each new musician’s improvisational complex vocabulary.

Also the iconography featured on jazz LP and CD covers provides musicians and fans with a unique and identifiable imagery with which the music is associated [10]. The proliferation of “coffee-table” books dedicated to jazz albums’ cover art illustrates the importance of records as tangible objects to the construction of the jazz canon.

Recordings, texts and imagery form the backbone of the jazz fan’s knowledge — a knowledge that is then tested, transferred and augmented through peer exchange.

1.2. The way we listened, learned, created and shared

Since the decline of the age of the gramophone in the 1980s, musicians have been consistently challenged to adapt to ever-shifting industry goalposts brought about through advancements in the technologies of creation, dissemination and commentary. The gramophone, which since the early years of the twentieth century had given rise to the commodification of recorded artefact [11], provided a sense of industry permanency for those who created and those who sold recorded music for some 50 years. During this epoch, the progression from rehearsal room, to touring circuit, to record deal formed the career template for many aspiring musicians. The record deal represented the apex in the progression from amateur to professional musician.

The musician’s record collection, and those of their peers, contributed significantly to both individual and collective musical development. A new release would be eagerly anticipated, the purchase price saved up for and, having brought it home, friends and fellow musicians were typically invited to gather around the record player to listen and give comment. Records provided a sense of personal and collective identity, a tangible and authoritative source of reference for musical inspiration and contextualised learning. Solos and licks were studied and assimilated, the more challenging examples often at half speed (16RPM), and arrangement and production techniques of different albums scrutinised and compared. Information on history, aesthetics, process and methodology could often all be gleaned from extensive liner notes, and album artwork was pored over and imprinted on the cultural psyche.

The stability of the industry model, controlled by what evolved into a handful of powerful record companies, by no means represented an open door to most musicians. The few that were fortunate enough to secure a deal often found their artistic ideals at odds with the commercial concerns of their paymasters — after all, advances in royalties and promotional budgets had to be recouped and the goal was, therefore, generally to appeal to as large an audience as possible.

Smaller, independent labels sprang up to challenge the hegemony of the majors [12]. Although such smaller labels operated independently to the corporate structures of their “big brothers” [13], they faced largely similar challenges in the production, distribution and marketing of physical product. Those that demonstrated consistent success were often bought over by one of the major labels and subsequently made a subsidiary of their focus business. Cynically speaking, independents provided a commercial and aesthetic test-bed for the majors [14].

The first major challenge to the age of vinyl came with the introduction of the compact cassette tape in the mid-1960s. Music could now be domestically copied and shared direct from source. The consumer had been given a power of curation over music that had, until then, rested predominantly with the record company, radio station or artist.

The 1980s saw the introduction of the compact disc and thereby the digitisation of music and the rise of the music video with traditional music radio facing a robust competition for audiences from MTV and its copiers. Freedoms delivered through the availability of affordable home recording, digitization of music, portability and the pairing with video paved the way for how we now consume and interact with music content on the Internet.



2. Along came the digital age — From real to virtual spaces

2.1. From real to virtual spaces

Music is by nature a shared experience, whether within a community, between composer and performer, musician to musician, performer and audience or amongst a wider peer group [15]. This act of sharing was amplified beyond the scope of most of our imaginations with the arrival of the Internet in the 1990s. The Internet presented opportunities for seemingly limitless inter-connectedness. Musicians could share ideas, collaborate and present creative outcomes far beyond the confines of physical proximity and their audiences were given access to recordings with unprecedented immediacy and scope.

Computing technologies gave rise to affordable home recording and production standards that outstripped previous formats, such as the reel to reel or cassette four-track. Outboard hardware was replaced by software, and editing in the digital realm was significantly easier than the tape splicing of previous technologies. On upload of creative products,

comment and critique were almost instantly available from all manner of far-flung sources, whether from fellow musicians, fan base or other interest groups. Possibilities, for many musicians, seemed limitless in this new digital arena.

Their listeners, however, equally embraced this spirit of sharing. The appetite for freely available and transferable audio was quickly capitalised on by the likes of Napster (1999), LimeWire (2000) and Pirate Bay (2003), sending shockwaves through the traditional dissemination industries. Record companies were suddenly forced to find solutions to the management of digital rights (DRM) and found their livelihoods under far greater, and immediate, pressure than that which had been foreseen by the home-recording formats of compact cassette and the recordable CD [16]. Additionally, and as an evolution of compact cassette and the recordable CD, file formats such as the MP3 allowed new ways for listeners to relate the sequencing of music [17]. The “music album” format inherent to vinyl, CD and cassette was largely replaced by the personalised playlist, often an assorted collection of various artists from single or multiple genres.

2.2. File share goes legit

In attempting to stem the flow of illegal downloads, “legitimate” portals for the purchase of digital content were established in the form of iTunes (est. 2003) and Amazon (est. 2008). With this legitimisation of digital music, a new industry “middle-man” came into being.

Whereas in the pre-digital age, the musician’s aspiration was to secure reviews in local press as a precursor to piquing the interest of national press and music magazines, digital publications are often narrower in discussion and therefore arguably a more effective way to reach a specific audience — whether predicated on genre, age-group, or other demographic. Jazz-specific sites such as All About Jazz (www.allaboutjazz.com) and Organissimo (www.organissimo.org) offer not only artist reviews but also act as advocates for all things jazz related by including writing on the music’s history, aesthetics and providing a database of musicians, recordings, venues, festivals and gig listings.

While the Internet has given rise to a more horizontal platform for creation, dissemination and commentary, the industries that traditionally nurtured and exploited creative musical practice are suffering under the onslaught of piracy and alternative distribution models. The industries’ troubles are directly reflected in the diminishing role for jazz on major record labels and mainstream press:

“The music business in general is shrinking. And when there is trouble in high-grossing pop world, the big record labels usually start their cost-cutting with small divisions like jazz and classical music even if these divisions are showing a modest profit.”

“... more and more young artists will find self-determination as the most satisfying route to purse. That route may mean more work and acquiring

more skills, but determining one's own destiny and retaining ownership of one's own music is certainly worth the price." [18]

The shrinking profile of jazz in the mainstream media has challenged its practitioners to invent and develop alternative cultural communities alongside new routes to listener and market.



3. How we have adapted

3.1. Adapting to change — From local to global scenes

Jazz music is traditionally observed as having evolved from the scenes in which it was played. Whether we talk about the stylistic differences between West Coast vs. East Coast American jazz, Chicago vs. New York or European vs. American, geographic location would appear to have exercised influence over aesthetics, stylistics and attitudes adopted by musicians [19]. Where this was, perhaps, more the case in the previous century, the interconnectedness of the digital age has to an extent challenged and exploded notions of such physically imagined borders. The scene, once defined by physical proximity between players and their audiences, now exists also on a virtual level, with musicians united by common interests communicating and networking with one another on a global forum. This is not to say that the virtual scene has replaced the physical but, rather, that it has added to and exploded our concepts of scene and community.

The ways in which musicians learn their craft, interact with one another, define their creative identity, sell themselves and disseminate creative artefact have all been significantly impacted by the arrival of the Internet [20]. Today's musicians engage with contextual research and conduct much of their instrumental learning through watching YouTube clips. They engage in forum discussions on history, aesthetics, musicology, technique and technology, they promote themselves through EPKs (electronic press kits), websites and social media platforms and monetize their recordings through the machineries of digital download and streaming. Today's musician barely needs to step away from the computer except to play a live gig in front of a real audience.

This is a far cry from learning to play a musical instrument from a respected teacher, working through established syllabi, and being scrutinized on the live circuit by a dynamic peer hierarchy, and absorbing the contextual writings of venerated commentators. The old model of building a reputation locally before venturing out on tour and face to face networking to get a foot on the music industry gravy train of touring, festivals, record contract and radio play has in many situations been replaced. Attracting industry attention is as likely to be achieved through the garnering of high numbers of YouTube plays and Internet "hits" and "likes".

The recording of creative artefact has equally been impacted by the arrival of digital age [21]. The traditional route often involved the making of a low quality demo to present to record company A&R men (they were almost always men) in the hope of securing a contract which brought with it a commitment to making and paying for a high quality recording, mass production and marketing. Following miniaturization, advances in recording quality and affordability of digital technologies, many musicians have forsaken the local recording studio, choosing instead to record, edit and mix from the comfort of their own home. And, by extension, many have also looked beyond traditional labels and distributors, instead getting their wares to market via third-party Web stores while retaining control over content, image and marketing. Others, often seeking the safety-in-numbers benefits of artist collectives, have created independent net labels as shop-windows to their creative activities.

3.2. Creative democracy or the rise of mediocrity?

The opportunities for musicians to create, deliver and opt to financially recoup their investments (or not) in the digital environment, while ostensibly sidestepping commercial/artistic frictions associated with the traditional industries, have been heralded by many in the terms of some sort of utopian democracy — an environment that gives a voice and a platform to any and all creatives while diminishing the power of industry appointed gatekeepers and taste-makers. Such freedom comes, as we have witnessed, at a cost.

Quality filters have all but been removed from every aspect of the creative process and in the dissemination of its product. Compositional technique, musicianship and production values are by no means a given in the plethora of new music presented through the likes of iTunes, YouTube and Spotify. In taking control of every aspect of production, individuals' failings often come into focus through their presentation of poorly recorded and performed music, low quality artwork and misdirected marketing strategies, with audiences running the risk of becoming lost in the noise of an unchecked continuum of new releases. In the absence of the selection, development and promotion of artists by major record labels, coupled with the diminishing roles of traditional print and broadcast media, the very nature of our understanding of many of the factors governing cultural output and reception are being challenged.

3.3. Goodbye to progress and pigeonholing

In the absence of the centralised governing bodies of record label, radio station and music press, it is left to the listener to discover and decide what is worthy and what is not. The repertoire and musicians that define the twentieth century jazz canon were to no small extent predicated on an industry that relied on its past experience to gamble on the nature of what the listener wanted next. Artists worked towards achieving a convincing musical point of difference and a substantial fan base that, in turn, would bring them to the attention of A&R personnel. These agents would then develop the artists' skills and often push them to adapt their creative output to align with prevailing trends. The artist's output was then promoted to radio and television through pluggers and on the live

scene through bookers and promoters. The music industry, or industries, represented a multi-cog scrutiny machine that, while responding to listening trends, also exercised significant decision-making powers over what should be regarded as embodying cultural importance and currency.

Boundaries of genre and style were key factors in the industries' business and marketing strategies. Record store inventories were partitioned by genre, and album cover art typically reflected specific genre based visual expectations. Simply put, customers knew what they were buying into by purchasing a Blue Note, Capitol or ECM record. A specific label's artist roster, production aesthetic and packaging coalesced in the delivery of a reassuringly "known quantity" that ran side by side with those of their competitors. Those musicians who made it onto a record company roster became waypoints in the music's historiography — if you were recorded, you were on the right track to become canonised and your output slotted into the cultural timeline from which history was subsequently constructed.

Culture in the current digital environment may therefore be said to have become horizontal rather than progressive. The way we now consume music often abstracts it from the time and context in which it was made. We dip into the unknown, often making qualitative decisions after only a few seconds of listening, before moving on to the next track. The immediacy and availability of music on the Internet as musical experience is a far cry from the interest and commitment demonstrated by physically going to a record store listening booth to sample new releases.

As listeners in the digital age, our desire to catalogue what we hear is markedly different from the way record companies went about it in the past. Our primary track-by-track concern is more likely to be predicated on immediate and de-contextualised gratification. Track trumps album — we have less interest in the cultural journey but more in the exemplar. Our time is limited, attentions short, and we are used to getting what we want without having to wait.

One wonders whether musical movements as discrete as last century's Rock and Roll, Disco, or Punk could have come to light had they had to contend within the cultural blizzard of the digital age and, by extension, whether we will ever see and hear their like again? Creative reaction was once a slower process. Years went by before Progressive Rock gave its lengthy answer to the three-minute pop song, Disco redressed that balance and Punk in turn railed against prevalent sugary, dance floor production. Today, reaction is near instant. Popular culture, to paraphrase David Quantick of the NME, is eating itself, and all that surrounds it, in a continuous, non-linear orgy of appropriation and regurgitation.

3.4. Democratized creativity — The amateur is the new professional

In this climate, it has become harder than ever for musicians to culturally locate themselves. Musical identity has become increasingly complex in its makeup through our listening and assimilating across (and often in ignorance of) genre, style and epoch. The amateur has been elevated to the status of the professional [22] — indeed the term "professional" can often assume unpleasant connotations of mass produced culture amongst musicians. Identity is "always already an ideal, what we would like to be,

not what we are" [23], however, as the money to be made from recorded artifact has dwindled, musicians have had to find other reasons to "pursue the dream" — or perhaps better put, have had to find new dreams to pursue.

The argument that the money is instead to be made in the live sector is a moot one, in that this only applies to recording artists with considerable and established fan bases and not to those operating within a local scene or playing niche music. Here, the reality is that if not paying to play, gig fees have in real terms decreased year on year for the past 30 years making it almost impossible for most to seek a living solely from playing in front of a live audience.

The musician's *raison d'être* has become increasingly tangled up in the value systems of cultural and social capital [24], and removed from simply making an "honest living" through the writing, playing and performing of music. Active or passive engagement with music is widely recognised as having far reaching educational, social and health benefits, yet society is increasingly reluctant to pay for it or include it in general and political discourse.



4. Where we find ourselves

Since its transition from popular entertainment music to art status in the second half of the twentieth century, serious fault lines have appeared in how we relate, both as listeners and as musicians, to jazz. On a given evening we might enjoy a rarified, and ticketed, listening experience in the austere surroundings of the concert hall followed by an "after hours" free gig in a local jazz dive. There are clear distinctions between a "listening gig" and one that provides a sonic backdrop to merrymaking. Jazz is played on all manner of platforms and serves a variety of functions — from the artistic edification of the human condition to adding glitz to a cocktail reception. Its function is social in the broadest of contexts — from being a voice of dissent and a champion for change to serving as a place of comfort and familiarity steeped in traditions and fulfilling expectations.

The functions of jazz and the platforms on which it is performed coalesce in a confused overlapping of high and low cultures in which musicians are tasked with serving both — often to audiences seemingly unaware of the difference. The rates of pay depending on type of engagement also adds frustration to the forming of a musician's self-image — a late-night, three-set bar gig typically pays significantly less than a shorter concert hall performance and the real money is to be made playing at wedding receptions and car showrooms.

As a result of its elevated cultural status, jazz has entered the academe, as both fields of practical and theoretical study, but is at the same time widely perceived as being at its most "authentic" when presented by the autodidact or informally schooled. Musicians (especially of the older

generation) are themselves often wary of the academe and its formalization of what is felt might better be achieved through a journey of experientially informed, self-discovery. Nonetheless, the formal validations of achievement offered by a growing number of educational institutions are seen by many not only as a route to employment, but also an affirming benchmarking of individual musical progression.

4.1. The boom in European jazz education

Formalized jazz education is a relatively recent “phenomenon” in Europe. Though some European jazz courses have been in existence for more than 50 years (by example the Jazz Department at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz, Austria in 1963, and the Jazz Programme at the NTNU in Trondheim, Norway in 1979), the 1990s and early 2000s saw the creation of numerous jazz departments throughout European universities as an alternative to existing classical music provisions. This exponential growth has led in the last few years, and especially following the 2008 economic crisis, to an overabundance of graduate jazz musicians flooding the marketplace and struggling to find work.

In an era where the musician is typically required to act as his or her own agent, promoter, producer and press relations officer, whilst keeping up to speed with emerging recording, performance and dissemination technologies, many institutions, unsurprisingly, struggle to keep their curricula current. Alongside studies in practical musicianship there is an unquestionable need for a broader approach that includes networking, communication and “real world” integration. Although many institutions acknowledge these industry demands, most struggle to keep abreast of which skills might best be fostered to prepare a graduate jazz musician for a sustainable career in what is, and always has been, such a challenging and competitive industry.

Although these issues have been debated in several European jazz promoter and academic forums, such as the European Jazz Network’s [25] meetings and the Rhythm Changes’ [26] conferences, there remains no universal transnational strategy to address these demands.

4.2. Funding — Jazz is the foundling brother of classical music in Europe

When assessing the cultural capital of jazz in Europe, realities differ from country to country, region to region. The Nordic region has long established public funding policies that support “national” jazz both in terms of heritage and cultural export, whereas Southern European countries, including the Iberian, tend to financially favour folk-based “traditional music” (Fado and Flamenco). Throughout Europe, the lion’s share of public funding continues to be awarded to classical music and opera in their recognition as the “official” European musical art forms.

This funding status quo is consistently being challenged by jazz promoters and musicians alike and has led to the establishment of lobbying groups in the form of national jazz federations, most under the umbrella of the European Jazz Network (EJN). Here, again, there is a widespread feeling (certainly amongst musicians) that, as with many in the academe, funders

are slow off the blocks in evaluating and responding to the cultural realities of the post-digital music world.

4.3. Streaming over ownership — Borrowed artefact

We stand at a crossroads in our relationship to both the digital and the virtual. Our on-line shopping habits through global behemoths such as Amazon with stack-them-high-and-sell-it-cheap business models have demonstrated a negative impact on the local market. Major music retailers across Europe such as HMV, Virgin either have been replaced by stores (often virtual) that sell an amalgam of multiple cultural products and household appliances or have had to diversify from their once core business of selling music by offering the gamut of multimedia wares in order to compete and the specialist record store has become just that: specialist (and few in number).

The streaming of music via Spotify, Pandora, Deezer, X Box, etc. has attracted increasingly negative press, not least from those who produce music, due to the scant remuneration that their services pass on to artists. A growing number of individual artists and labels are beginning to withdraw their catalogue from these services and opting instead for more “traditional” points of sale.

Social media has similarly begun to lose its shine. Once lauded as an open and positively liberating network for social communication, rising concerns over personal privacy, targeted marketing through user profiling and manipulated interaction through selective feeds have caused users to reappraise their relationships to Facebook, Twitter and other media.

In this climate of artist and consumer mistrust, many have begun to hanker for a simpler life — one in which human contact and exchange is performed on a more tangible basis. The rise in popularity of the urban “Farmers Market” is an indicator for such a move towards authenticity and physical interaction. Provenance has become a byword for quality, often at a “reassuringly” inflated price. And this trend can be similarly observed in sectors of the music industry.



5. The nature of creation and the need to disseminate

5.1. Merging industry roles

The appetite for contact between artist and consumer and vice versa appears to be increasing. The establishment industries of the last century and those of the current, in effect, kept both parties apart while relying on another set of industries, print and broadcast, to bridge that gap. Now, the promoter is often also a record label owner and blogging pundit (while also being the bass player in someone else’s band). Roles are merging and the enthusiast-entrepreneur is coming to the fore. Most jazz musicians today manage their own publicity and image, book their own

tours, communicate directly with their audiences, and sell their own music, at gigs and from their laptop.

5.2. Nostalgia Times X Squared — Retro, personalisation and the new audience relationships

While the live sector continues to enjoy some degree of success in the digital age (with limitations), it affords musicians the most direct point of sale and contact with their audience. Many performers choose to man the post-gig CD and merchandise stall personally, giving their fans the opportunity to interact in the reassuring knowledge that merchandise purchased has been touched by the hand of the artist. With the general decline in recorded music sales, many artists have adapted by offering a variety of extra-musical merchandise to monetise their touring operations, ranging from the t-shirt, poster, to personalised trinketry.

The limited edition, often hand-numbered, album is also popular with fans. It bestows a sense of uniqueness and rarity on product that is most often otherwise, in its simplest terms, nothing more than a copy of a master recording made up of zeros and ones. Homemade covers, from hand-drawn, to hand stitched also serve to entice the consumer alongside individualised inserts and other forms of accompanying art and print-work.

Value in rarity has, of course, long been recognised within the mainstream. The limited edition has long had its place in the jazz economy, more recently in the individually numbered re-release box sets of Columbia and Mosaic Records and 7" vinyl, bundled release, of Arve Henriksen on Rune Grammofon in 2012.

New ways of interacting with audiences through product have also emerged. In 2013, Dutch jazz trio Tin Man and the Telephone released their third album as "the world's very first jazz app album". It consists of essentially five tracks that can be manipulated by the users — turning different instruments on and off, adjusting separate volumes and choosing different solo takes. The app can also be used during live performances. A "remote control function" allows users to chat with each other during the performance, to comment the show by throwing virtual tomatoes or bras at the band and to choose which of the musicians should play a solo. The show is essentially a set of humorous interactive games between the band and the audience, which would certainly be considered an appalling experience by many jazz purists. A screen behind the band shows each interaction in real time — the number of tomatoes or bras that are being thrown at the band or how many spectators are selecting one of the following five options: "theme", "piano solo", "bass solo", "drum solo" or "please stop! I hate jazz".

5.3. Know your audiences

There are, however, limitations to the practicality of comparing like-for-like the jazz marketplace with that of other music forms. There remains significant work to do in the mapping the jazz audience. In the last 30 years, a small scattering of reports on jazz audience demographics have followed Mike Paxton's (1990) [27] seminal study, especially in the U.K.,

while in other European countries data that exists on jazz audiences is taken mainly from reports conducted by national agencies, not specifically on jazz but on more general cultural consumption trending. In the research conducted for EJM by Fiona Goh (2012) [28], for instance, although data gathered from the surveys' respondents (EJM members — national and non-national organisations) provides quantitative data (number of attendees), it delivers only scant information on audiences' demographics (age, gender, location), demonstrating how little jazz promoters know about who attends jazz events. Such examples stress the need for a comprehensive trans-European study in this field that is yet to be undertaken [29]. Jazz not only seems to "lack marketing staff, skills, budgets and resources", it also, and crucially, lacks "an understanding of its audiences and potential audiences" [30]. The deficit of information regarding who attends and consumes jazz in Europe almost certainly poses an additional obstacle to raising funds and sponsorships, so vital to the sustainability of jazz.

Additionally, complexities in the way that jazz is perceived by its audiences further problematize its mapping within the context of European cultural consumption. Firstly, whether to classify or promote jazz as highbrow, middlebrow or lowbrow seems to be open to debate, "because while its roots are clearly lowbrow, it is now taught in conservatories of music as highbrow, and largely consumed as middlebrow" [31]. On the other hand, the majority of jazz concertgoers are observed as being omnivorous cultural consumers that show tendency to search for crossovers between several music genres:

"Promoters and enthusiasts also express concern about maintaining artistic integrity at a time when commercially marketed jazz is dominated by 'crossover' artists: drawing in new audiences by these means brings the risk of 'inherent artistic constraints in promoting the composition and performance of music that is easier to decode and understand, but less intellectually and artistically credible.'" [32]

Especially since the confusion of "fusion" in the 1970s jazz musicians have come into closer contact with their rock and pop (and indeed classical and traditional music) counterparts, often finding themselves in unfamiliar surroundings on non-jazz performance platforms. "Jazz" today is a broad umbrella, under which many different sub-genres coexist and cross over with musical traditions from variety of geographic latitudes and historical time frames. Many have tried to learn from these experiences and attempted to adapt the business trappings of other genres to jazz ends and, thereby, accepted the risk of further scrambling the market, often with limited success. Jazz promoters, labels and critics are typically stubborn in how they consider jazz best presented to their audiences, preferring to rely on tried-and-tested, stereotypical portrayals that are more easily aligned with the aesthetic of the music's past.

5.4. DIY

An increasing number of today's musicians promote themselves without the mediation of the traditional music industry. The divorce between musicians and record labels is, in part, explained by the limited returns

obtained from record sales. Only three to 10 percent of records released recoup their investment [33], leaving little room for new musicians to emerge through major record labels, which are more likely to invest in “safe products”. Reissues of remastered, historically significant albums and anniversary editions from already established musicians provide a “safer bet” to the mechanical rights holders than investment in new and untested music and musicians [34].

DIY embodies the will to self-determine and is a commonly observed response to periods of economic downturn and polarised politics. As George McKay (1998) writes on the role of DIY culture in Punk music during the Thatcher years, “there is a tremendous emphasis ... laid on actually *doing something* in the social or political realm” [35]. DIY culture promotes a “democratic system media”, where collective participation and free access are key factors [36].

Where on the one hand DIY culture is doubtlessly socio-economically driven, it is also a practical response to an artist’s lack of funds or industry support as well as a valuable means of scene-building [37].

5.5 Video

Such homemade, or DIY, ethos can be observed in recent music videos within and beyond the jazz genre. For example, indie rock band OK Go’s pioneering low budget, single-shot *A Million Ways* attracted many millions of YouTube viewers since its 2005 release.

Another notable exponent of “reality” video is alt-rock documentary maker Vincent Moon who, in *The Takeaway Shows* (2006–2009), favours a single shot, “guerrilla film-making” approach in contrast to the slick post production associated with MTV and the digital age. Imperfection is valued here as a marque of authenticity and brings the films’ subjects closer to the notion of an authentic audience experience. Moon’s work, in concert with many other contemporary creative artists, is released on the Web under Creative Commons licence [38].

The idea of authenticity is also present in other examples. Using a simple still camera, the *A Música Portuguesa a Gostar dela Própria* (*The Portuguese Music Loving Itself*) pan-genre series has both ethnographic and promotional purposes, using video as ways to preserve a cultural music heritage while promoting new musicians from contemporary genres.

In that jazz is a predominantly performative genre, live videos generate particular appeal to the music’s followers. They allow the viewer, as records allowed listeners in the past, to copy a solo note-by-note (frame-by-frame), with the advantage of actually observing how the musician physically articulates their performance. Most jazz musicians and jazz labels provide live performance videos on their Web sites reflecting the fact that the performance has a long pedigree in the jazz tradition in informing and confirming a musician’s competence as an improviser. Video is also perceived as a powerful multimedia promotional tool which can more easily capture the attention of new and existing fans and efficiently convey a label’s image aesthetics and/or ideologies.

5.5. Net labels

The will to disseminate music at the margins of the traditional music industry has encouraged independent musicians, individually or as collectives, to establish net labels. On the one hand, the digital revolution in the music industry has made production, distribution and promotion both accessible and affordable, blurring the lines that once determined the specific and differentiated roles played by musicians, producers, promoters and consumers. On the other, the decriminalisation of file sharing on the Internet has enabled new legal solutions for straitening the ties between listeners and users [39].

In their more radical manifestation net labels, as independents before them, represent a stand against the conditions imposed by the traditional music industry.

Sintoma Records (2013), a Portuguese collective platform for jazz musicians, provides all of its members' albums for free download. Its motto, "no middleman", accentuates the degree to which the label's actions are DIY oriented. Initially formed by saxophonist Desidério Lázaro and guitarist João Firmino, two former jazz students educated in The Netherlands, Sintoma Records has grown exponentially in only a year. In June 2014, 15 different albums were released and two Sintoma festivals had been produced. Sintoma (Portuguese for "symptom") emerged at a time of particular social unrest.

Bound in common with other Mediterranean neighbours by the constraints of economic bailout, Portugal could offer few, if any, pathways for young artists to thrive. Despite jazz having become increasingly present in the country's cultural scene, opportunities to work became scarce. DIY ethos, through the creation of a net label, was therefore seen as an active reaction to a hostile economic context and the materialisation of an already established network of independent musicians.

The emergence of "musicians-for-musicians' labels" can be observed Europe wide. Jazz, often seen as an imported American music, has traditionally attracted only a small slice of European cultural funding in relation to the Classical, Opera and Traditional musics of individual European countries, and the need for direct action from European jazz musicians has consistently come to the fore.

Some U.K. examples include Edition Records (est. 2008), an "artist based label" formed by pianist/composer Dave Stapleton and photographer Tim Dickeson (rejuvenated in 2009 after signing a deal with distributor Harmonia Mundi); Whirlwind Recordings (est. 2010), "a record label completely owned and operated by musicians" which carefully positions its operations and roster beyond jazz by giving a home to "genre-defying artists who draw inspiration from a mix of global music traditions past and present"; F-IRE Label (est. 2004), the members of which "retain the 100% of the copyright and have the freedom to benefit from their work as they like"; Impossible Ark Records, "an artist run record label which produces limited runs of vinyl backed up by digital downloads", using "analog production techniques" and "press[es] to 180 gram vinyl and

have hand pressed sleeves"; and Manchester-based Efpi Records (est. 2009), which is "both an independent record label and an umbrella organisation working to promote the activities of an emerging generation of musicians working across all areas of contemporary jazz, improvised and experimental music."

The mission statements promoted by these examples demonstrate the practical responses of musicians operating in an industry that is both in a state of flux and at risk from lack of funds and funding.



6. Jazz community real and virtual

6.1. Somewhere over the rainbow — Belonging to nowhere

Community in jazz is experienced in many ways and on many levels. There is a sense of community felt amongst musicians, fans of the music, jazz academics, critics and other commentators — community spirit permeates every corner of the fragile infrastructure that supports and defines jazz. Community is built variously on senses of shared histories (personal and global), text (literary and auditory), language (musical and spoken), lifestyle and aspiration.

Improvisation-based performance is the cornerstone that binds that sense of community: it defines in what terms every member perceives what it means "to belong". The act of improvising is supposedly concerned with defying boundaries and deconstructing established models; it can be characterized as belonging to something while, at the same time, "belonging to nowhere" [40]. Similarly, community in jazz is less defined by constraints of time and space than by "operative tensions ... that are at stake in the making of community as an ongoing and dynamic inter-relational process" [41].

Although face-to-face interaction continues to embody the notion of real community, we have seen that the virtual meeting place has increasingly become the platform on which to disseminate jazz events, recorded music and its narratives. Increasingly, the jazz community is becoming consolidated and nurtured in the virtual arena. Reaching a large public when promoting a concert, a record release or simply sharing jazz trivialities has become easier now than even a decade ago. However, the virtual jazz community is only a small part of, and often lost in, the cacophony of cultural noise that defines the Internet.

The jazz community currently treads an uncomfortable path on one side of which is the face-to-face interaction of the gig and the outmoded industry that created its canon, and on the other the seemingly limitless and ever mutating resources and opportunities provided by the Internet. Perhaps due in no small part to the genre's basis in, and reverence for, tradition, the jazz community continues to organize itself around conventional models of relationship with music and is often seen to

struggle in effectively embracing new technologies of creation and transmission.

6.2. *Falling behind*

And here we can say that we have reached the crux in the paradigm of how the jazz community relates to technology. Given that throughout the twentieth century jazz was present in (and indeed spearheaded) many of the technological revolutions in the music industry, it now seems rather to lag, and even resist, change. In the first sound films, in early radio and TV broadcasting, in the proliferation of vinyl, in the mass media coverage of music, in printed media music criticism, in the democratisation of music analysis in printed LP sleeves, in creating the notion of studio sound design and conceptual albums, in fashioning a consistent iconography for a musical genre, jazz had its feet firmly under the table. Today, however, it seems that the jazz industries have become averse to technological and cultural change and clumsy in their navigation of social interaction in the digital age. It is left to musicians to reinvent themselves and their music for a new age — often straining to free themselves from the bonds of expectation as clung to by an outmoded industry.



Conclusions

Jazz musicians can currently be seen to look on with jealousy at the advances in dissemination and audience development in the field of popular music, only adopting new strategies once past their sell-by date. Too often the front-facing image of jazz can be found wanting. The Web design associated with jazz is routinely outdated in functionality and visually unattractive, and poster and printed programme design lacking in *zeitgeist* or vision. Jazz has been slow to embrace the power of social media and seems to consistently arrive late at the table be it in the examples of MySpace, Facebook and Twitter.

The jazz musician is a complicated beast. The music is grounded in tradition and validated by demonstrable expertise and peer appraisal — often at the expense of other music forms. A sense of musical superiority and a right to be heard and remunerated can often be observed amongst jazz musicians. The jazz musician is thereby caught between the need for self-affirmation through exposure [42] and the frustration of the diminishing financial returns in achieving this. It is the exception that a jazz musician can fill a stadium, or for that matter a larger concert hall, and fees on the pub/club circuit have far from tracked the inflation of living costs and deflation of currency value. Jazz record sales have since their heyday in the first half of the twentieth century represented at best a single-figure percentage of overall music sales — the wholesale devaluation of recorded music has only served to squeeze the jazz musician's income from recorded music even further.

It comes as no surprise that in this straitened climate many cling

hopelessly to a pre-digital idyll and curse the arrival of the Internet and its “democratising” effect on the makers of music. The future, uncharted as it is for us all, lies in adapting to local and global change, technological innovation and reappraising the past — for surely the past is best, albeit respectfully, left behind if jazz is to sustain as the cultural force for change that it once embodied. Currently it is primarily musicians that are spearheading such a metamorphosis through DIY initiative. Their actions are often desperate in the face of a stubborn industry that risks suffocating the energies of those determined for jazz to remain vibrant and current.

Much is made of the aging demographic amongst jazz concertgoers. Where those that were young in the heyday of jazz are today doubtlessly more mature in years, there is also a growing number of young people being introduced to jazz through instrumental tuition at schools and through extramural studies. This “acceptance” of jazz within music education can be witnessed in the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) examinations board having developed a jazz curriculum to prepare students for increased opportunities for jazz studies in the Conservatoire and in the examples of new jazz programmes at four Portuguese universities in the short period of only six years. Nonetheless, jazz continues to be promoted with older generations in mind and is still trying to find effective ways to entice younger concert audiences. A more acute problem is, perhaps, that the average age amongst jazz promoters is on the increase and there appears to be few younger promoters entering the fray.

Increasingly, live jazz is positioned within or alongside other music genres such as “world music” and “blues”, the premise, one might suppose, being that if jazz is perceived as being part of a wider-ranging musical expression, a wider range of concertgoers might be tempted to embrace it. However, whether polarizing audiences’ expectations of what jazz is — from a gratis, informal background music (low-brow), to a ticketed, formal experience (highbrow) — or “sugaring the pill” by disguising it within genre-crossover may ultimately lead to the alienation of potential attendees and cause them to reject jazz as “not for them”.

These things said, at the 2014 Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival in Scotland, attendance numbers were up by 40 percent in comparison with the previous years’ figures, due in no small part to innovative private/public partnership agreements and through engagement with social media [43]; and at the 2013 Lisbon Out Jazz, partially as the result of aggressive marketing strategies and an effective sponsorship structure, attendance was estimated to have been 120,000 [44] — an absolute record for jazz festivals in Portugal. Through developing and growing the audience for jazz, the lobbying for government funding and private sponsorship will be strengthened, and in engaging with and nurturing young musicians and concertgoers, jazz stands a chance of surviving the twenty-first century. As an eleven-year-old concertgoer [45] was heard to remark: “If I’d known jazz sounded like this, I wouldn’t hate it so much”.

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Notes

1. Spike Lee, *Mo' Better Blues* (40 Acres and a Mule/Universal Studios, 1990; distributed by Universal Studios 2004) DVD, 130 minutes.
2. Bourdieu, 1993, p. 238.
3. Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40.
4. Dolata, 2011; Rabe, 2011; Wikström, 2005.
5. Recorded in Sweden, where James Moody, 24 years old at the time, stayed for three years, from 1948 to 1951, after he had played in Dizzy Gillespie's band for two years. Previously released by Metronome in Europe, the recording was then launched in the U.S. on Prestige. Available from James Moody & the Swedish All-stars, *Greatest Hits* (Prestige 179), CD.
6. Though written by Eddie Jefferson in 1952, it only became noticed when singer King Pleasure first released it that same year with great success. Available from King Pleasure, *Original Moody's Mood* (Prestige 7386), LP.
7. Much has been written and debated on how the history of jazz has tended to be American-centered and its canon built on the model of Western classical music. On this matter, see Krin Gabbard (1995), Kenneth Prouty (2010), pp. 19–43, and George McKay (2005).
8. DeVeaux, 1998, p. 485.

[9.](#) Berliner, 1994, p. 95.

[10.](#) Carrard, 2004.

[11.](#) Frith, 1987.

[12.](#) Already in 1952, bassist Charles Mingus and drummer Max Roach, though relatively popular musicians with a substantial recording careers at the time, founded Debut Records — an independent label set to showcase new talents, free from major labels' impositions. Though it only released 12 albums in its short existence before it was shut down in 1957, Debut issued the historical Jazz at Massey Hall, which assembled a rare and unique line-up of luminaries from the bebop era — Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and Bud Powell alongside Mingus and Roach. This historically significant recording was made available, not by any major label that alone would have had difficulty in bringing together such prominent musicians, but by an independent label operating at the margins of the big companies.

[13.](#) Lee, 1995.

[14.](#) Frith, 1987.

[15.](#) Nettle, 1995; Finnegan, 1989.

[16.](#) Michel, 2006.

[17.](#) Sykes, 2009.

[18.](#) Cuscuna, 2005, p. 69.

[19.](#) Jackson, 2012.

[20.](#) Dillon, 2005.

[21.](#) Alexander, 1994.

[22.](#) Prior, 2010.

[23.](#) Frith, 1996, pp. 121–123.

[24.](#) Bourdieu, 1993.

[25.](#) The EJN was created in 1987 by Italian jazz promoter Filippo Bianchi and by his determination to connect with other jazz promoters, and collaborate in organising tours and festivals. Today it is the largest jazz network organisation in the world, with close to 61 associates (festivals, clubs and concert venues, independent promoters, national organisations) in 20 European countries.

[26.](#) "Rhythm Changes: Jazz Cultures and European Identities" was a three-year project (2010–2013) funded as part of the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA), which included experts in jazz research from seven European universities in five countries, such as project leader

Tony Whyton and George McKay (University of Salford), Andrew Dubber (Birmingham City University), Nicholas Gebhardt (University of Lancaster), Franz Kerschbaumer and Christa Bruckner-Haring (University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz), Anne Dvinge (University of Copenhagen), Walter van de Leur (University of Amsterdam), and Petter Frost Fadnes (University of Stavanger). Its main goal was to examine the way in which jazz has developed in different European settings by a comparative study on community, history and national identity. The project team continues developing research networking in transnational jazz studies.

[27.](#) Paxton, 1990.

[28.](#) Goh, 2012.

[29.](#) *Cf.*, Bruckner-Haring and Whyton, 2013.

[30.](#) McIntyre, *et al.*, 2001, p. 3.

[31.](#) Peterson and Kern, 1996, p. 901.

[32.](#) Oakes, 2003, p. 167; Burland and Pitts, 2010, pp. 125–126.

[33.](#) Leyshon, *et al.*, 2005.

[34.](#) Cuscuna, 2005.

[35.](#) McKay, 1998, p. 4.

[36.](#) Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee, 2008.

[37.](#) Strachan, 2007.

[38.](#) Creative Commons was established in 2001 to respond to the changing nature of intellectual property in the Internet age. By introducing a variety of “some rights reserved” templates for the distribution of creative output, Creative Commons has challenged traditional intellectual property frameworks by recognising and reflecting shifts in the way that creative artefact is shared, sampled and repurposed.

[39.](#) Galuszka, 2012.

[40.](#) Monson, 2004.

[41.](#) Fischlin and Heble, 2004, p. 17.

[42.](#) Peltz, 2012.

[43.](#) Attendance figures announced by Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival 2014.

[44.](#) Attendance figures announced by Lisbon Out Jazz 2013.

[45.](#) Post-show comment by an audience member at Haftor Medbøe Group at Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival, 2012.

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