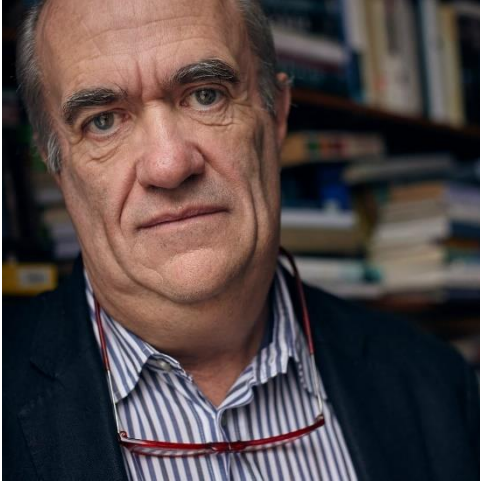


## SOME THOUGHTS ON JAZZ EDUCATION

by Ian Muldoon\*

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*Follow the thing to see where it will take you - or follow the rhythm. But don't try to wrest meaning from it. If you think too much, you're fucked.*

- Colm Tóibín, 2021



*William Blake...*  
PORTRAIT BY T PHILLIPS

*Innocence dwells with  
Wisdom, but never with  
ignorance.*

-Blake, 1802

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*\*Ian Muldoon has been a jazz enthusiast since, as a child, he heard his aunt play Fats Waller and Duke Ellington on the household piano. At around ten years of age he was given a windup record player and a modest supply of steel needles, on which he played his record collection, consisting of two 78s, one featuring Dizzy Gillespie and the other Fats Waller. He listened to Eric Child's ABC radio programs in the 1950s and has been a prolific jazz records collector wherever he lived in the world, including Sydney, Kowloon, Winnipeg, New York and Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Coffs Harbour. In 2021 he published a collection of essays on jazz subjects, entitled "My Jazz Odyssey: Confessions of a Lifetime Enthusiast".*



*Music is always more than notes. It is made out of sounds. Confusing these two is not a small matter.*

-Ted Gioia, 2019



*What is jazz? The rhythm - the feeling. It can be taught. Or at least its mechanical aspects can be. I think that out of so many of these thousands of musicians, plenty are mechanical, rather than real jazz musicians."*

-Coleman Hawkins (1904-1969)

**M**y first encounter with authority was on 4th March 1939 when Doctor Robert B Bennett of Wyuna Private Hospital, Manly, whacked me on my bottom to get me to sing, and sing I did. Then there was my grandmother whose authority with a pot stick across my legs was enshrined in the phrase "It's for your own good!" There were teachers too, including the Deputy Principal of Balgowlah Boys High who gave me "six of the best" with a cane for reading a "dirty book" written by Carter Brown called *The Blonde* with a very fine (so I felt) illustration on the cover. In 1955 I was "encouraged" to join the RAAF to get me away from Queenscliff beach which had more appeal than Manly Boys High.

"Shut up. You're out of tune and speaking it!" shouted the RAAF Hut NCO, as I, a 19-year-old Frank Sinatra, ripped into *The Lady Is A Tramp* (Rodgers/Hart). I shut up and thought "Funny how Corporals thrive on exercising their authority at every opportunity (I thought too of Hitler)." From a very early age I would sing to myself, or hum, or whistle, or blow through a gum leaf, or a comb with tissue paper just like many another boy on planet earth and yet I would shut up when in view of

another human, or when ordered to do so by a figure of authority. Figures of authority and rules and correct music can be a bane on that most beautiful quality, innocence. And music. And much else. It was quite a satisfactory revelation to learn later on I had no need of a musical education to sing the blues.

Now when I'm resigned to sitting alone on a hill divested of all material goods waiting for Moksha to arrive or alternatively feeling down and contemplating jumping off the hill to end it all, I sing the blues, or I think of or listen to Pharaoh Sanders starring with the London Symphony Orchestra (*Floating Points* on Luaka Bop 2021); or Xmas day 2021 at Opossum Bay, Tasmania, listening to 22-year-old music teacher (piano/drums) Oliver Quinn telling me about his teaching principle "if you love it play it"; or Terence Blanchard's Opera in *Jazz Fire Shut Up In My Bones* (2021) performed by the NY Metropolitan Opera in 2021; or Johnny Greenwood and his music to the films *You Were Never Really Here* (2017), *Power Of The Dog* (2021) and *Licorice Pizza* (2021); or Andrea Keller's music to the film *Journey Home* (2021); or James Brandon Lewis and Chad Taylor playing Ellington's *Come Sunday* at Willisau in 2019 and then my heart sings too. Maybe I'm mad. It's possible. Jazz is music, yes. But it is also the sounds of the best and most beautiful of humanity voicing a yearning for freedom, for life, for connection with others.

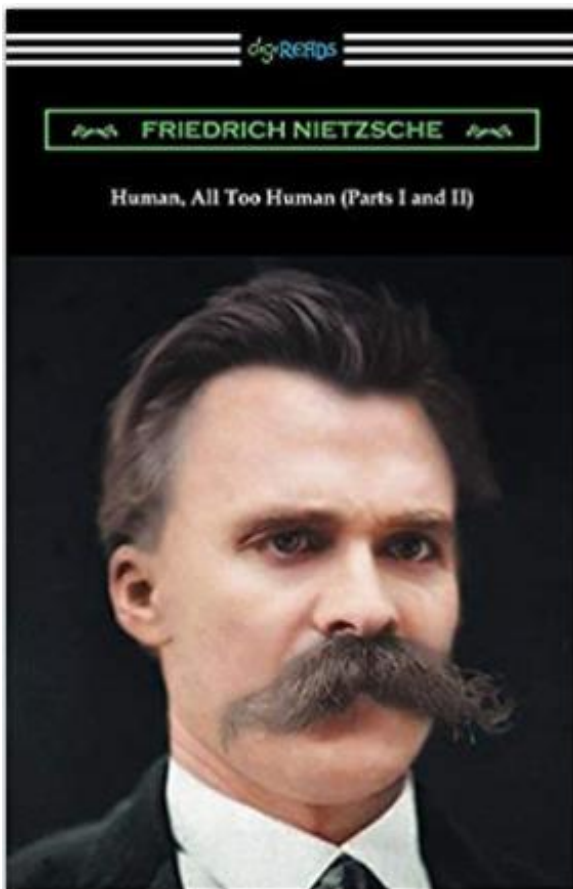


*When feeling down and contemplating jumping off the hill to end it all, I sing the blues, or I think of or listen to Pharaoh Sanders (above) starring with the London Symphony Orchestra... PHOTO CREDIT STUART NICHOLSON*

But the tension between what is "correct", what is "music", and who can play it, has been a very long and tortuous road culminating in one extreme with the policies of political movements of the 20th Century such as Fascism and Communism (Maoism) and at the other extreme John Lennon pronouncing he's more popular than Jesus

Christ. The basis for the notion of “good” and “bad” in music has not been just a whim of dictators or fanatics or ego but a process of thinking that perhaps is summed up best by Nietzsche and his work *Human, All Too Human* (1878) where he opines:

*...in Germany a twofold current of musical evolution: on the one hand a host of ten thousand with ever higher, more refined demands, listening ever more intently for the “meaning”, and on the other the enormous majority growing every year more and more incapable of comprehending the meaningful even in the form of the sensually ugly and therefore learning to seize with greater and greater contentment the ugly and disgusting in itself, that is to say, the basely sensual, in music.*



Just as the seeds of jazz were starting to germinate, it was seen before it matured, as “ugly and disgusting” by world leading philosophers.

The music labelled “jazz” is the most influential art to emerge in the last 200 years. It is the most revolutionary and evolutionary advance in Western music since Bach whose great contribution was harmony (cf the exquisitely beautiful Motet *Jesu, meine Freude* BWV 227 by Barockorchester Stuttgart or Cantata 150 as performed by Voces 8 on *After Silence*). And remember none of Bach’s music was printed or distributed until 50 years after his death. The consequence of the Bach advance meant perfection in piano tuning. The hours spent by the blind aged tuner on a magnificent grand piano preliminary to a Bach performance in the Pere Portabella film *Die Stille Vor Bach* speaks to that need. Bach’s teaching mantra was “balance,



order and harmony". Some Bach piano compositions made by a pianola are convincing - A pianola version of any great jazz pianist is not convincing perhaps excepting ragtime. And as melodic as the Russians may have been, the great explorations in melody occurred in South Asia.

The Indians may have developed melody and Bach harmony, but jazz has advanced rhythm - "there was no piano-based music that had anything to do with groove before American slavery" (Ethan Iverson). Rhythm and the individual instrumental voice has been advanced to celestial heights yet jazz (especially rhythm) remains the least understood and least appreciated by authorities who run the music establishment. By authorities I mean educators, governments, musicians, parents, the Board of the ABC, and philosophers. Record companies mainly don't care because their motives are profit driven. Old music, popular music, and other arts are showered with Government and company financial largesse but jazz is not because it is labelled a minor niche genre, despite it influencing all other music. At the Sydney Opera House in 2022 Swanton's major work *Ambon* or *Iron In The Blood* by Jeremy Rose might have been featured as major productions, but no, it's ballet from Denmark, ballet from Russia etc, and other works for the pleasure of retirees of Mosman and Woollahra.



*At the Sydney Opera House in 2022 works such as "Ambon" by Lloyd Swanton (left) or "Iron In The Blood" by Jeremy Rose (right) might have been featured as major productions, but no...  
PHOTO CREDIT  
PRUDENCE UPTON*

In every other field of endeavour - cricket for heaven's sake; cooking; gymnastics - being the "best" or the "most" is celebrated and honoured, but not in the arts, especially music, particularly the finest music, jazz. With the authority of a Prime Minister who represents the lowest common denominator in our society whose vision amounts to salesmanship of one of the least important people in contemporary

life: himself, jazz remains a beacon of hope for the individual spirit, just like the great artist Ai Weiwei who believes “liberty is about our right to question everything” jazz does that, including musical rules, the canon, and established musical authority, and it does it at the highest artistic level of performance and creativity. But teaching this art is profoundly challenging. The young, as I learned teaching high school, are drawn to routine, predictability and order in their teachers even if they are drawn to the joy of play in their souls.



*Ai Weiwei: liberty is about our right to question everything...*

As an English/History/Drama high school teacher I’ve met hundreds of individuals who have quite firm views on what constitutes good and bad teaching. Indeed, some of them consider themselves very well informed on education generally. Their main qualification, and this is especially true of those who have the strongest opinions, is that they went to school. And it's this experience which seems to have shaped their beliefs, and understanding, more than any evidence, or reading, or by the views of practising professionals. Having said that my views are far from settled and to be truthful constantly evolving though some ideas are more firmly entrenched than others - including my belief that the most important quality for teaching is “human”, unrelated to skills or formal qualifications and that far from being an “authority” an English/History teacher has an interaction with students where each serves the other in a process of learning.

A firmly entrenched idea is that for the past 100 years formal education, education promoted by Governments to fuel economies, has drifted inexorably away from the “soft - easy -sciences” and the arts generally - philosophy say, or literature,

or history - to the “hard - difficult -sciences” of engineering, chemistry, medicine, mathematics. And don't the latter crow and exult about their credentials and worth? It seems conservatives are taking us back to the industrial revolution where people were needed for factories and were bred for that purpose, a theme developed by writers such as Aldous Huxley whilst the rich, like the contemporary Gina Rinehart, try to keep the workers in their rightful place - increasing one's own personal wealth.



*Gina Rinehart: keeping the workers in their place, while increasing her personal wealth... PHOTO CREDIT TONY McDONOUGH*

A powerful image of contemporary Chinese education was that of primary school children doing mathematics using the Abacus with astonishing dexterity and speed: just like living machines. Such activity may be excellent for use working in a factory assembling iPhones but it does little to help us understand who we are, what we've done, why we did it, what we should do, and where we might be going, among other things. This especially applies to the great industrial powerhouse of modern China where two billion humans are intent on the production of material goods with Art relegated to mass entertainment with the startling exception of Ai Weiwei. In our society tradespeople are the new middle class. Writers, poets, musicians, philosophers, artists, sculptors, perhaps even architects, are among the underclass, and increasingly so.

In Kenzaburo Oe's novel *Rouse Up O Young Men of the New Age!* (Grove Press, NY, 2002) the protagonist's handicapped son receives piano lessons from Mrs T: "Though Eeyore's fingers were long and well shaped, he moved them clumsily, yet she did not focus on developing his technique. Her lessons were about creating a



route to communication with Eeyore through music that sometimes seemed superior to my own relationship with my son.” (p 140) Mrs T seems a wise and sensitive teacher. Enthusiasm, that which master trombone artist James Greening exhibits in performance, is viewed perhaps as unartistic by some. To pose as knowing, “cool”, or so experienced in the subject under consideration that it has to be placed within the context of thousands of others similar to it, is the preferred role to be played. But childlike enthusiasm, or even childlike innocence, is a very desirable state of being is it not? The argument by Rousseau that man is inherently good and has been corrupted by “civilisation” is one promulgated by an Enlightenment icon who first love was not philosophy, or ethics or history, but music. If you want to grasp the origins of music, you must change and become like little children, the evangelist tells us.



*Enthusiasm, that which master trombone artist James Greening (above) exhibits in performance, is viewed perhaps as unartistic by some... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

Perhaps it all began with Pythagoras who tried to define music (sound) by using numbers and ratios, and still educators persist today in explaining how we differentiate music from noise. Mark Twain once remarked (eh eh!) that “Wagner’s music is better than it sounds”, the same great writer who had African Americans as moral leaders in America’s greatest single literary work *Huckleberry Finn*. After Pythagoras (male) authorities saw the importance of music for military and teaching purposes. Evidence suggests pre-Pythagoras women were the pre-eminent drummers using a frame drum and Sappho was the proto-love song and Greek lyric inventor. But men prevailed, and ruled. There is little more threatening to the powerful than signs of individualism - cf Xi Jing Ping and modern China. Not wearing a national flag pin in one’s lapel when one is a politician is dangerous to



reputation. And so is a new kind of love song “invading” the USA by a band called The Beatles.

Plato saw music as important to bringing harmony into society at large and warned against “changing to a new form of music, since it threatens the whole system.” In his time the flute was the musical reference but in our time the modern guitar represents the exact danger Plato warned about - untuning of the universe. Sonny Sharrock undoubtedly would have caused Plato considerable grief. Preceding Christianity the Stoics argued the best solution to frustrated emotions and desires was to curb wanting. The Chinese idea was that a well ordered music made a well ordered society and this is the basis of Chinese music theory.



*Sonny Sharrock:  
undoubtedly he  
would have  
caused  
Plato considerable  
grief...*

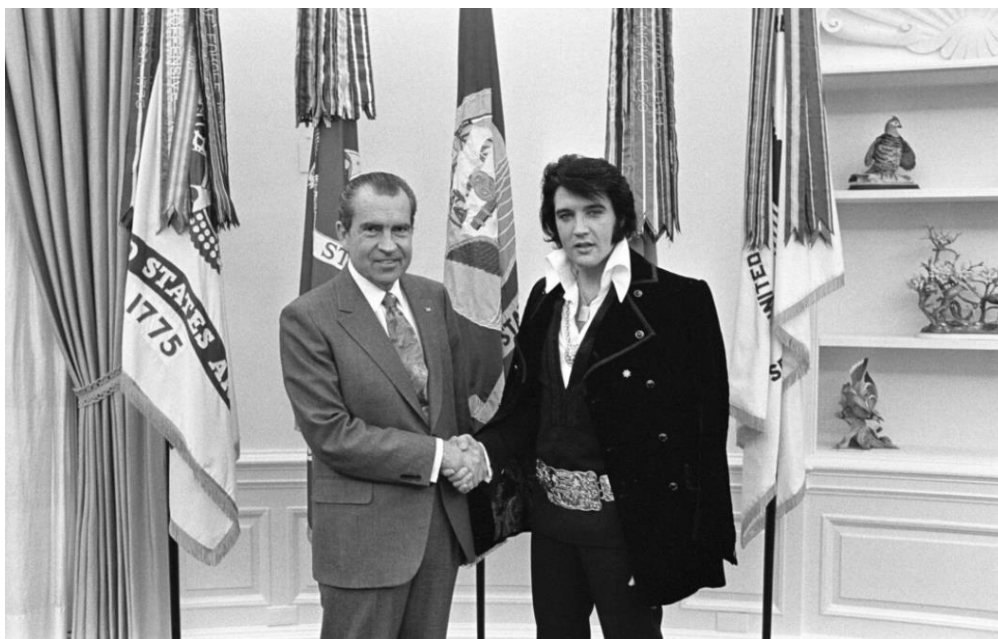
Early Christianity policed uncontrolled singing by the population and controlled what music was played and preserved in writing. This policing lasted 1,000 years and in the 20th century fundamentalist Christians railed against Alice Cooper consorting with demons and John Lennon who announced he was more popular than Jesus Christ. But what of the outsider slave?

Neither the Greek nor American slave was of their owners' society and had no recognition or allegiance to the values and conventions of that society. Where the rich and powerful are against changing the status quo, in music or in other arts, the slave is ignorant of that status quo and just makes art in the first instance and especially in our context, music. And crucially, it's music of personal expression. Whether it's the exclusive laws and rules of Greek democracy, fascism, communism, Christianity, Islam or Judaism, or The Australian Club, the loathing of the different, the individual, is manifest, sometimes illegal, sometimes fatal. But it's impossible to quench the human need for music, to sing, and to play, and humans will sing and make music regardless of who's in charge, and who's in control of the circumstances in which the human exists.

In my beginning and even now, I make my (sometimes dissonant, sometimes atonal, often out-of-tune) music for myself. Like the predawn chanters in medieval times or church congregations today, music has usually been made throughout history with no audience in mind. The Renaissance changed all that when entertainers were expected to please an audience. And it was connection to dance that saw audience driven music evolve through rondeau, rondo, carole, minuet, waltz, and the four-bar phrase - whether used by Mozart or Beethoven - which emerged from dance rhythm.

Personality in Western music began to emerge with sonatas and opera around the 17th Century but not all were pleased. Who else but the representative of God on earth, the Pope, had to make an ordinance on music? Music! My grandmother used to say: "Heaven help us" but not in the way perhaps that the Pope decreed. In *Docta sanctorum partum* (1324/1325), Pope John XXII railed against new school music which "divided the beat, choked it with notes, dismembered melodies, and sing discants". Albert Ayler, Bud Powell, and Jimi Hendrix must be burning in hell as we speak. But Protestants may have been more destructive. In Zurich in 1525 *all* church music was banned as being the "the Devil's bagpipe." Despite the work of these significant authorities music became more personal, autobiographical even, and a means of voicing feelings of dissent, or outrage. It mirrored the revolutionary events that were occurring across Europe in particular.

Interestingly whether it's Beethoven or Elvis Presley, the musical rebels became in time embraced by the very same institutions that initially damned them: President Nixon receiving (white) Elvis Presley at the White House may be a pre-eminent instance of this. Dylan getting the Nobel prize and Jagger a knighthood are also examples. They were seen ultimately as useful to the State, humanising the leader, showing he "was in touch" with his people. But more significant than musical rebels, was the importance of the home and salon. In 1850 in London there were 200 piano manufacturers serving the local market.



*Elvis Presley (right) with Richard Nixon at the White House: a pre-eminent instance of musical rebels becoming in time embraced by the very same institutions that initially damned them... PHOTO COURTESY US NATIONAL ARCHIVES*

Then came the black underclass and its triumph over the music business - a poor and hated minority, the property of others, whose art reshaped the tastes of the entire world. This was one outcome of the African slave trade, a music called “jazz”, which redefined the art of Western music and is a profound evolutionary advance on it, blossoming in parallel with the growth of the machine age: the age of science, factories, engineering, of alienation from work, of anomie, and reacting to that growth with a human cry of human feeling bringing individual expression back to a world of “more”, of contradictions and ambiguity where “freedom” can mean acting against the common good by refusing a vaccine, or freedom to financially exploit others without consequence, or refusing to be the property of others.

As early as 1690 slave fiddlers were enlisted to perform for white dancers in Virginia. However, the melodies of the blues failed to fit established notation and though blues musicians could play and sing in tune, they *refused* to do so. At the same time classical composers like Erik Satie embraced the times, for example, in his Ballet *Parade*, which featured sounds of typewriters, foghorn, pistol, and clanking milk bottles alongside ragtime. But classical music “modernism” became esoteric, academic and unrelated to audiences whilst jazz swept the world in popularity, culminating in the 1930s and 1940s with swing (Benny Goodman was a pop culture hero), and the 1950s and 1960s with rock and roll (Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones sourced much of their music from African American blues).



*While classical music “modernism” became esoteric, academic and unrelated to audiences, jazz swept the world in popularity, culminating in the 1930s and 1940s with swing. Benny Goodman (pictured above) was a pop culture hero...*

The flautist and philosopher Lucian Timotheus (C 100 Athens) taught that the “royal road to fame” was not through audience but assembling a small group of experts who, if they enjoy the music, will ensure the performer will gain a national reputation. In *A River Sutra* (Penguin 1993) a story by Gita Mehta, a music student spends the first month sitting listening to birds of an evening and is not permitted to sing. The teacher demonstrates that a peacock’s cry is the first note of the scale *Sa*; a calf calling its mother is *re*; if you sing *ga* very quickly it is the bleating of a goat; and at night *Pa* the song of the nightingale. Benedetto Marcello (1720) taught that aspiring composers should not know any rules about composition except some vague generalities - he should not for example, see any differences between diatonic, chromatic and enharmonic genera, but must jumble up all three in a single canzone.

In jazz, W C Handy, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis and George E Lewis inter alia have all, famously, referred to the “music” of birdsong and used it in composition. Why Charles Parker Jr was nicknamed Charlie is common enough for those so christened, but to be called “Bird” was at first a jibe, which became an honorarium, a matter of pride, after Dizzy Gillespie imbued it with dignity and reverence possibly because birds provide a wide variety of “song”, baffling our sense of interpretive communication. Parker had exceptional musical qualities and could indeed “sing like a bird”. In short, birds are valuable musical sources (teachers?). But all nature, indeed sounds of life manufactured or natural are sources for the artist.



*Charlie Parker: being called “Bird” was at first a jibe, which became an honorarium, a matter of pride... PHOTO COURTESY GARY GIDDINS BOOK CELEBRATING BIRD*



*Harlem Air Shaft* (Ellington) has been studied as an example of programme music by Edward Green (*Journal of Jazz Studies*, vol 7, no 1, pp 28–46, Spring 2011). He quotes Ellington:

*“Take Harlem Air Shaft” Duke said. “So much goes on in a Harlem air shaft. You get the full essence of Harlem in an air shaft. You hear fights, you smell dinner, you hear people making love. You hear intimate gossip floating down. You hear the radio. An air shaft is one great big loudspeaker. You see your neighbor’s laundry. You hear the janitor’s dogs. The man upstairs’ aerial falls down and breaks your window. You smell coffee. A wonderful thing is that smell. An air shaft has got every contrast. One guy is cooking dried fish with rice and another guy’s got a great big turkey. Guy-with-fish’s wife is a terrific cooker but the guy’s wife with the turkey is doing a sad job.” Duke laughed. “You hear people praying, fighting, snoring. Jitterbugs are jumping up and down always over you, never below you. That’s a funny thing about jitterbugs. They’re always over you. I tried to put all that in Harlem Air Shaft.”*

And Dave Brubeck relates that during train travel Ellington liked to sit in the very last car over the wheels, so that he could feel the steady clicker-clack rhythm as they passed over the railroad ties.



*Duke Ellington pictured in front of the train in which the Ellington orchestra travelled: Ellington liked to sit in the very last car over the wheels, so that he could feel the steady clicker-clack rhythm as they passed over the railroad ties... PHOTO CREDIT GAI TERRELL GETTY IMAGES*

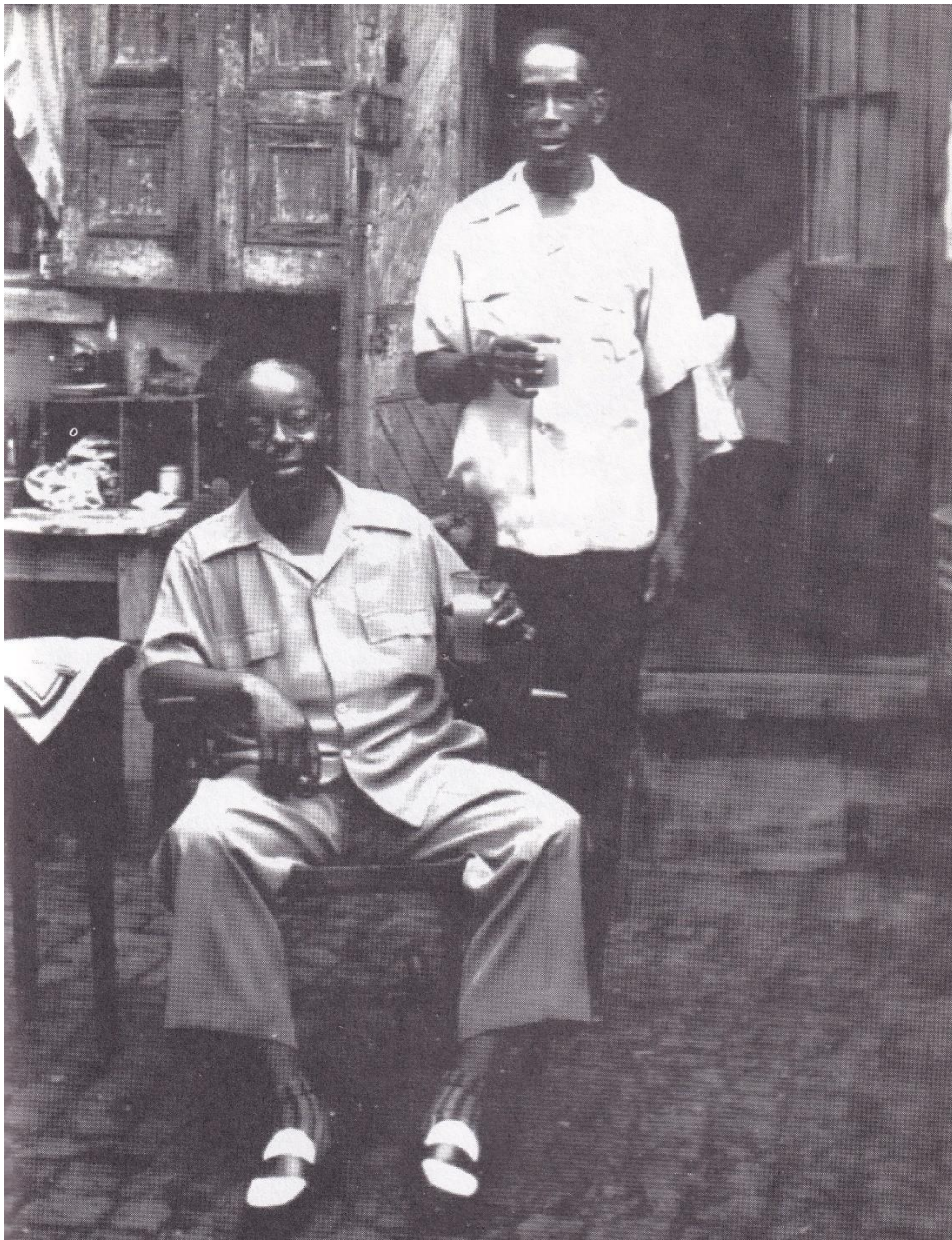
But teaching and learning an instrument of music, the rudiments of playing, come first. Around 1900 the self-taught clarinet player Alphonse Picou was invited by the leader Boo Boo Fortunea to join his band. At rehearsal, there was no music and Picou was instructed to play in the choruses. After listening and learning and getting good enough he could solo. He later said: “I remember when we got a new piece of music we would get the music and play the tunes with the music, then, after that we didn’t need the music no more. We’d go ‘out of the way’” (*Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya*, Shapiro & Hentoff, Dover, NY, 2017, p.19).



*Self-taught clarinet player Alphonse Picou: he was invited by the leader Boo Boo Fortunea to join his band around 1900...*

In New Orleans over the period at the beginning of the 20th century, aspiring African American musicians could not afford formal music lessons. Baby Dodds began playing tin cans which he’d punched holes in, using chair rounds for sticks but subsequently had four years of music lessons. George Lewis (1900-1968) never had a music lesson in his life and enjoyed a second coming so to speak during the New Orleans revival period after WW11. Composer and pianist Clarence Williams(1893-1965) who wrote inter alia *Ain’t Nobody’s Business If I Do*, had eight piano lessons all told, but played so much piano, he claimed, that he allowed only 15 minutes for dinner so he could practice more! None of Buddy Bolden’s original band members

could read music. Bunk Johnson could fake over 500 songs. Johnson taught Louis Armstrong how to hold a cornet and place it to his mouth.



*Baby Dodds (left) with George Lewis (right) in New Orleans in August 1944: Dodds began playing tin cans which he'd punched holes in, using chair rounds for sticks; Lewis never had a music lesson in his life ... PHOTO CREDIT BILL RUSSELL*

The riverboats and their mainly dance bands were called conservatories because the likes of Fate Marable demanded musical discipline. Some musicians were scared to learn to read because they believed it may destroy their ability to improvise. Bix Beiderbecke was a pianist first who never learned how to read music as a pianist. Whilst a member of Jean Goldkette's Orchestra he did learn to read but his real teacher was Freddy Farrar (*Hear Me Talkin' To Ya*, p 141). Coleman Hawkins



studied music from age six, first on piano, then on cello and took up the tenor saxophone at age nine. After lessons he would practice the rest of the day. W C Handy's most important teaching point was one should "look for truth" in music. Drummer Jo Jones whilst working with The Blue Devils, studied the phrasing of the leader bassist Walter Page. Jo Jones also references the jam session:

*...the guys did take the time to study, and when they had found something new they would bring it up to the session and they would pass it around to the other musicians, no matter what the instrument they played. So they would try that particular riff or that particular conception at a session and perfect it. ( Hear Me Talkin' To Ya, p 293).*



*Jo Jones (far right) pictured here with Teddy Wilson (left) and Lester Young (centre); whilst working with The Blue Devils, Jones studied the phrasing of the leader bassist Walter Page... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

But what of today? Have the lessons of learning by past masters been embraced or not by modern musicians? Have educational authority figures embraced or rejected this music labelled "jazz", called "something else" by Sonny Rollins?

On the international stage, the Metropolitan Opera, New York, in its 2021-22 season is producing the first performance of an opera by a jazz composer, and musician and trumpet master, Terence Blanchard. Although George and Ira Gershwin's



opera *Porgy and Bess* has been embraced by jazz musicians, the Gershwins were not jazz musicians or jazz composers as such, though they were much influenced by jazz. Blanchard's artistry is especially noteworthy for his musical narrative skills, a feature which has its roots in the blues and much of jazz which always "tells a story". The *New Yorker* music critic Alex Ross commented "Blanchard summons up disparate characters and scenes within the frame of a *distinct musical voice*." (18/1021).



*Terence Blanchard: he summons up disparate characters and scenes within the frame of a distinct musical voice...*

Master contemporary jazz pianist Vijay Iyer is a professor of the arts at Harvard University. In Australia, universities employ great artists such as James Greening, Sandy Evans, Simon Barker, Paul Grabowsky and Andrea Keller. So there is, as Banjo Patterson intoned, movement at the (jazz) station.

I have no special knowledge about the teachings of music conservatories in Australia or the university curriculum on improvised music, and I can only refer to instances publicly available, to those that teach there, and some recent students. International master contemporary and experimental trombone player Professor George E Lewis has been one among many artists in residence at Monash University (2013). Major artist Andrea Keller is the Head of Jazz and Improvisation at Melbourne University, a department with a significant presence within the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music. Guitar player Hilary Geddes, though unable to read music, was accepted into Sydney University Conservatorium and went on to win the 2021 Freedman Jazz Fellowship. Student of Sydney Conservatorium Tessie Overmyer performs with the band Mingus Amongst Us and more than holds her own with some of the most distinguished artists in the business. These instances provide insights into the sensitivities, creative imaginations, and artistic visions of those that teach in our major educational institutions - lucky are the students who gain entry.

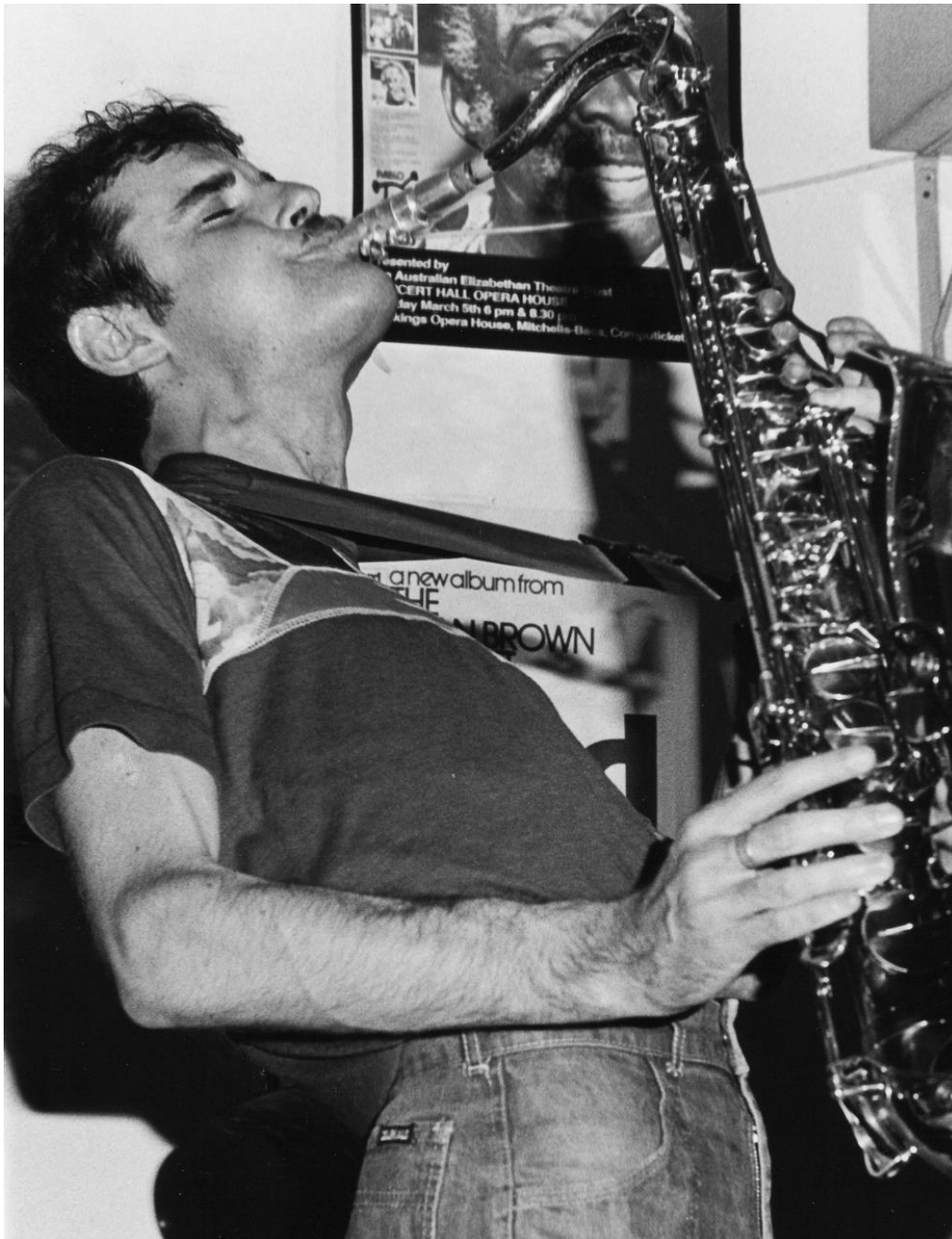


*Guitarist Hilary Geddes: though unable to read music, she was accepted into Sydney University Conservatorium and went on to win the 2021 Freedman Jazz Fellowship... PHOTO COURTESY ABC JAZZ*

As to pedagogy, my first lesson in creativity, was by a Mr Furzer of Manly West Public whom I had in 1947 in third class and later in fifth class. He'd sometimes say "Enough with relative pronouns! I'm going to read a western for you today." He instilled in many of us a love of reading, just as my mother and grandmother instilled a love and reverence for Fats Waller and Duke Ellington. James Greening relates how he was in a band led by Paul Grabowsky and he got to solo and he heard a "Sherman tank" come over the top of him, and it was Mark Simmonds on tenor –



“ahhh”, thought Greening, “so that’s how you play!” In short, creative lessons come in a variety of forms, and an education is not one exam but a lifelong journey and the sources of inspiration may be as wide as the imagination of the student.



*James Greening heard a “Sherman tank” come over the top of him, and it was Mark Simmonds on tenor. “Ahhh”, thought Greening, “so that’s how you play...” PHOTO COURTESY JULIEN WILSON*

I was excited to attend a very warm and friendly High School music class of Garry Lee’s some years ago just to get the feel of young people grappling with the complexities of this great art. Garry is a professional musician of long standing

whose instrument of choice is the vibraphone. He has been teaching jazz for 40 years. His method centres on three elements: listen, practise, perform.

Garry made the point, which is established in the preceding paragraphs, that artists like Louis Armstrong, Clarence Williams, Buddy Bolden et al grew up in musical environments, where they were surrounded by the sounds of much music - opera, street bands, military music, vocal quartets, jazz bands - where in modern times one's musical environment is often homogenised through elevator music, television music, Spotify, MTV, radio top 40 and so on and virtually no street music, and sparse live venues. In short, the music student has to specifically listen to jazz through recorded documents some hours each day supplemented whenever possible by live performances.



*Garry Lee (far right), pictured here with two guitarists, Hank Marvin (left) and George Benson (centre): Lee's method centres on three elements: listen, practise, perform...PHOTO COURTESY GARRY LEE*

In terms of practise, one reads of masters like a young Charlie Parker practising eight hours a day sometimes up to 15 hours. Tessie Overmyer, a young very busy student and performer of alto saxophone studying at Sydney Conservatorium studies a



minimum of two hours a day. Garry's modus operandi is, "after listening for a considerable time (to recorded music of masters) isolate phrases I enjoy by favourite jazz improvisers and then practise them by often juxtaposing them with my own ideas - which could frequently be ideas I stole from Bird, Wes, Milt et al in the first place".

Ms Overmyer seems a reserved, reflective personality but to witness her performance with the Sydney Conservatorium Jazz Orchestra in the concerto work by Andy Fiddes featuring trumpet soloist Scott Tinkler called *Fiddes V Tinkler*, or hear her soloing with the nonet led by Steve Fitzmaurice in the group Mingus Amongst Us, is to witness a musician who expresses much individual passion through her horn and has the making of a serious artist of the genre. And performance as often as possible is the third element which even before the onslaught of Covid is perhaps the most challenging of all because of its scarcity. But musicians can practise where some other performing artists like actors, cannot.



*Tessie Overmyer: a musician who expresses much individual passion through her horn and has the making of a serious artist of the genre...*

I tend to believe creative writing can't be taught. In my own case my mother believed writing was a noble calling. F R Leavis taught that serious literature made one a better person. And I liked reading. Garry Lee made the point that music students have to *enjoy* listening to jazz and listen to a lot of it. I read a lot. In writing I went through a Hemingway phase at 19, and was much praised by my teacher. In jazz, an interesting comparison regarding influence and imitation is that between alto saxophonists Jackie McLean and Christopher Hollyday who were both devotees of

Charlie Parker. The former was much influenced by Parker but developed an original voice fuelled by his own personality and is recognised as an influential master in his own right. Hollyday has an astonishing technique, dexterity, and execution, which a listener can marvel at but remain resolutely unmoved and uninvolved. Hollyday's early promise was never fulfilled.



*Jackie McLean (above) and Christopher Hollyday (below) were both devotees of Charlie Parker. McLean was much influenced by Parker but developed an original voice fuelled by his own personality and is recognised as an influential master in his own right. Hollyday has an astonishing technique, dexterity, and execution, which a listener can marvel at, but remain resolutely unmoved and uninvolved...*



Finally perhaps, is the “zone”, that mysterious place where creativity is unleashed. One common problem is self-criticism, where that phrase, or that sound, jars and discourages. In teaching one golden rule is encourage the good, and ignore the bad. Some believe drugs are necessary and in some famous writing instances absinthe, opium, and alcohol have been used as fuel. In music their use is much more complicated and I imagine much depends on how much, what and how often. Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington and others had quite firm views that their use impaired creativity, practically and imaginatively. Writers have described entering a Zen-like zone when writing. Musicians have spoken of out of body experiences when playing. One artist, Simon Barker, uses running as a way of unleashing the mind. Did Bernie McGann whilst practising in the bush have his imagination fuelled by birds and nature?

These few thoughts on jazz education were helped by two works. One was a classic by musicians about the music called *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya* by Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, Dover, NY, 2017. The other was by Ted Gioia called *MUSIC: A Subversive History*, Basic Books, NY, 2019. May I leave the final thoughts to Edward Kennedy Ellington?



*Duke Ellington: the memory of things gone is important to a jazz musician...*

*The memory of things gone is important to a jazz musician. Things like the old folks singing in the moonlight in the back yard on a hot night, or something someone said long ago. I remember I once wrote a 64-bar piece about a memory of when I was a little boy in bed and heard a man whistling on the street outside, his footsteps echoing away. Things like these might be more important to a musician than technique.*