

THE USEFULNESS OF ART AND THE THIRD STREAM

by Ian Muldoon*

The *Usefulness of Art* is the title of a five-CD document released in 2019 on Fat Rain Music. Adam Simmons is the creative force behind both the document and its manufacture. The document is an attractive fold-out product which would make a fine gift for a music lover. Simmons is the composer, arranger, leader, and instrumentalist playing respectively soprano saxophone, baritone saxophone, shakuhachi, bass clarinet, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone, and alto flute. There are liner notes by Simmons related to the genesis of his involvement in the “arts” and the ideas behind the title as well as his personal reflections on what “use” he might be to society given his education and training at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA).



Adam Simmons: playing respectively soprano saxophone, baritone saxophone, shakuhachi, bass clarinet, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone, and alto flute...

**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.*

Each document preserves a performance of five separate projects, respectively: *Concerto for Piano & Toy Band*, 4 & 5 March 2017; *The Usefulness of Art*, 26 & 27 August 2017; *Travelling Tales*, 6 & 7 December 2017; *The Calling*, 5 & 6 May 2018; and *The Kites of Tianjin* 28 & 29 July 2018, all recorded by Myles Mumford at forty-five downstairs, Melbourne.

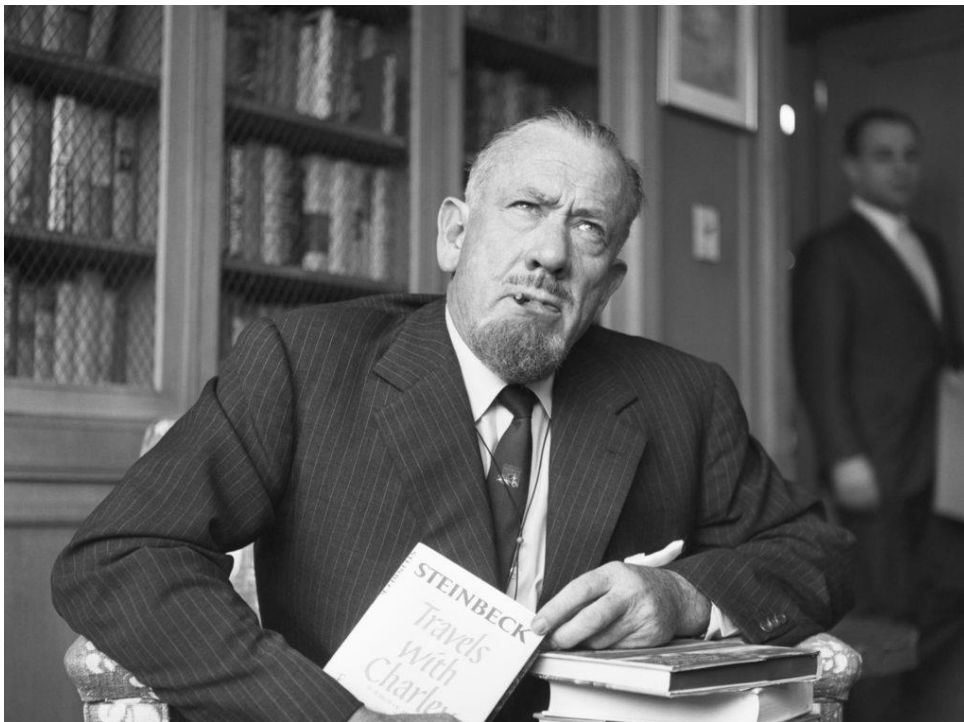
The presentation, title and ideological construct of these documents, is suffused with an earnestness and ambition that may prompt some reflection by anyone interested in the arts: especially those concerned with improvised (jazz) music. Some thoughts are offered in this essay on what is known as Third Stream Music, on Arts education, and the general theme of “usefulness” of “jazz”. The main thesis is that the musical elements of rhythm and improvisation, may be compromised only up to a point without losing the precious qualities which make jazz “jazz” and the most engaging and brilliant musical development of all.

“Third Stream Music” is the name given to music that is intended to be a fusion of classical and jazz. The instrumentation itself is not the basis of this music: *Charlie Parker With Strings* is not “Third Stream Music”. European instrumentation or “classical” instrumentation has been used by jazz players at its genesis. Keith Jarrett playing Shostakovich is not “Third Stream Music”. But jazz musicians have appropriated “classical” themes, ideas, forms, and techniques just as they have appropriated Indian music, Indonesian music, Hungarian folk music and any other music as they see fit.



Keith Jarrett (above) playing Shostakovich is not “Third Stream Music”...

It is misguided to ignore the sociological elements that propel creative artists. The disjunction between its humble beginnings and its aspirations has inspired many of the finest practitioners of jazz to adopt not only the external trappings of classical presentation, but to attempt to weld classical form to jazz itself. The inspiration arises from, one may speculate, the observation that classical music is taken seriously and jazz is not. Jazz is often deemed “popular” music. In the *The New Yorker* magazine in 2019, under the section "Goings On About Town" jazz is included under the heading *Night Life* along with Indie Rock bands, Awesome Tapes From Africa, and G Funk music whilst “classical” music is given its own heading. It might be said that *The New Yorker* is reflecting the social reality, the status of each; after all, the insignia for the magazine is a male in a top hat and formal dress, ironic or not.

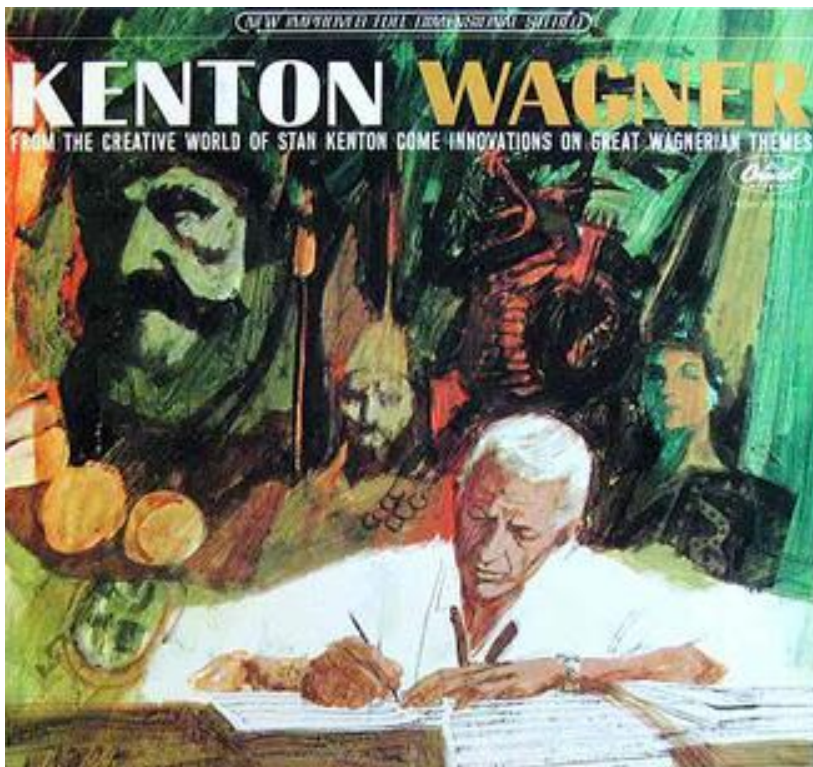


Nobel prize-winning author John Steinbeck (pictured above): Great reward can be used to cover the loss of honesty (among other artists) but not with jazz players...

But consider these comments by Nobel prize-winning author John Steinbeck on the jazz player and jazz music: “Great reward can be used to cover the loss of honesty (among other artists) but not with jazz players. Let a filthy kid, unknown, unheard of and unbacked sit in - and if he can do it - he is recognised and accepted instantly. Do you know of any other field where this is true?” It is in fact, far more demanding to be an accomplished jazz musician than it is to be an accomplished classical musician. Keith Jarrett, Benny Goodman, Brad Mehldau are among those who have been both, but to witness the gap, is to listen to classical pianist Jose Iturbi attempt to play “simple” boogie woogie on the piano and fail spectacularly.

**Gary Giddins, Weather Bird, Jazz at the Dawn of the Second Century, OUP, NY, 2004, p605.*

The Stan Kenton Orchestra may have been the first jazz band to formally adopt a classical approach to jazz music, as opposed to the occasional use of classical techniques by musicians like Duke Ellington who adapted, for example, Debussy impressionism to such works as *Dusk*. The nadir of Kenton's classical appropriation may be his 1964 album *Kenton/Wagner* (Capitol) where he did arrangements of eight Wagner (opera) compositions, played piano and conducted his 25 piece "jazz" band in homage to Richard Wagner. In my view, he made a fool of himself. Make no mistake, Kenton provided employment, and training to a great number of outstanding jazz instrumentalists, composers and especially arrangers and there is a world of difference between his Wagner efforts and the arrangements of say, Pete Rugolo, or Bill Holman or Bill Russo.



The 1964 Capitol album Kenton/Wagner: Kenton made a fool of himself, says Ian Muldoon...

And consider this view (1956) of Kenton by his employee Bill Russo: "Stan Kenton plays piano well, but will never be remembered as a great jazz musician. He writes arrangements for the band, but the works of the Stan Kenton Orchestra that have won the most critical acclaim were not his. It is his leadership and the ability to extract the most from each individual who works with him that will assure Stan Kenton an important place in the history of American jazz."

**Will Friedwald, Notes to Stan Kenton: The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Holman and Russo Charts. Edition 1760, 1991, Mosaic Records, Stamford, CT Page 1.*

Consider just some of the 39 players in Kenton's 1950 aggregation of 3rd February 1950 when *Solitaire*, a composition and arrangement by Bill Russo, was recorded: Bud Shank, alto saxophone, clarinet; Bob Cooper, tenor saxophone, oboe, English horn; Buddy Childers, Maynard Ferguson, Shorty Rogers, Chico Alvarez, trumpet; Milt Bernhardt, Bill Russo, trombone; John Graas, French horn; Laurindo Almeida, guitar; Shelley Manne, drums and Don Bagley, double bass.



Stan Kenton and his band, circa 1946... PHOTO COURTESY KEN BURNS JAZZ

To claim Kenton made a fool of himself is an arrogant assertion made by a listener who has had no musical training. Nevertheless, the basis is made in the belief of a fundamental contradiction between the two musics. Classical music is a composer's music where form is paramount and the instrumentalist has respect for the idea of that form. There is improvisation in classical music but it is not a dominant feature. There are rhythms in classical music, but it is not a dominant feature. Harmony and melody are also important but less so in jazz music.

It may be useful to make a comparison with literature, between a master craftsman literary artist, and a modern poet. The first is William Shakespeare and Sonnet 33 from his "youth" sequence:

*Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;
Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.
Even so my sun one early morn did shine*

*With all-triumphant splendour on my brow;
But out, alack! he was but one hour mine;
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.
Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;
Suns of the world may stain when heaven's sun staineth.*

The rhythm, the ambiguities of meaning, the metaphors, the drama, the imagery, but most importantly, the wit in being able to match the narrative perfectly to the form ABABCDCDEFEFGG makes it a very satisfying work of art. A problem is set, and is resolved in a couplet. It is as perfectly crafted as it can be. It's as satisfying as mathematics too can be satisfying.

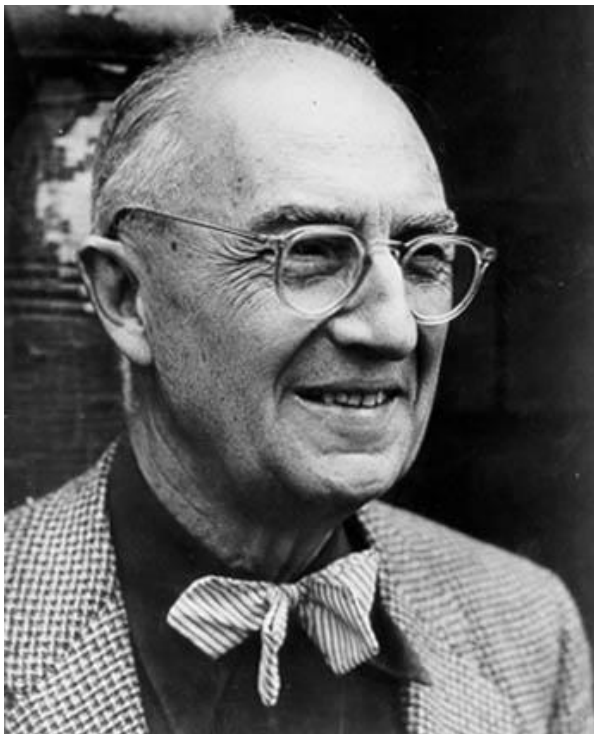
And now this by William Carlos Williams who spoke of language having to be about the things of the world, meaning when talking ideas, abstraction and emotions they must be grounded in things.

*so much depends
upon*

*a red wheel
barrow*

*glazed with rain
water*

*beside the white
chickens*



William Carlos Williams: if anything, he creates an image and creates an ambiguity, and a feeling, almost a tingling joy, but no resolution...

Williams does not “solve” anything. If anything, he creates an image and creates an ambiguity, and a feeling, almost a tingling joy, but no resolution. To some the Williams poem is just as satisfying art, perhaps more satisfying art, than Sonnet 33. To some, the music, ambiguities, freedoms, unknowingness, repetitions of *The Wasteland* are as accomplished and as satisfying as *King Lear*. The point is just as we no longer want to keep recreating architectural edifices such as Notre Dame, because it is of its time and place, so the arts have moved on, not least music, in particular its most brilliant and accomplished manifestation, jazz (improvised) music. Thus form is not the overriding imperative. Feeling through rhythm and improvisation, harmony and lastly, melody, is. Connecting more effectively to the breathing, feeling, human is its paramount glory without compromising any intellectual attractiveness. Bach created one form of music: interesting, complex, intriguing, satisfying, and Basie another, particular, thoughtful, precise and using placement, space and timing to powerful effect. John Lewis was profoundly interested in both. But it was Basie who provided the most musically powerful influence on Lewis.



John Lewis: profoundly interested in both Bach and Basie, but it was Basie who provided the most musically powerful influence on him... PHOTO CREDIT GIANCARLO BELFIORE

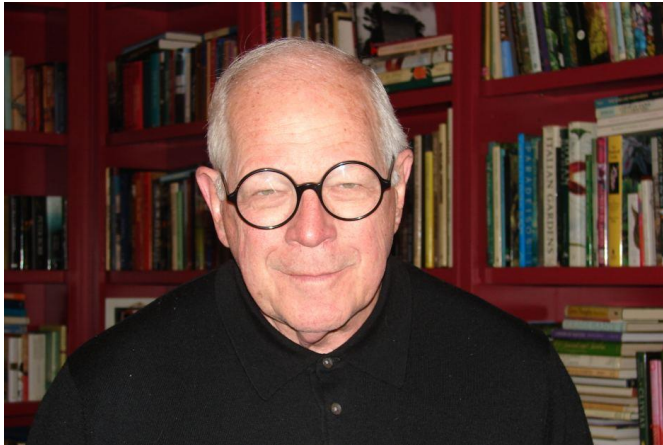
The music we call “jazz” which has its roots in the African American slave diaspora, has as its basis, two fundamental elements: rhythm, and improvisation. It is these two elements together which distinguish it from other musics, even though some kinds of rhythm exist in other music genres, and some form of improvisation exists

in all other music to varying degrees. Western so-called classical music reigns as that which is considered most highly developed especially in regards to harmony perhaps not as developed in terms of melody where Indian music seems to have advanced, but “classical” has the highest status in Western culture if not in most cultures.



Some see Richard Wagner (pictured above) as the epitome of artistic musical evolution...PHOTO COURTESY WIKIPEDIA

But it might be argued, as it will be here, that the further classical music so-called evolved and developed - some see Richard Wagner as the epitome of artistic musical evolution - the further it moved away from humanity itself. The bigger the orchestra, the longer the composition, the more majestic its themes perhaps rooted in classical mythology, the more dramatic its harmony, then the greater its claim to be “High Art”. And the trappings of high art, include impressive venues in which to witness this art: huge concert halls, coliseums, lavishly furnished top architect-designed Opera Houses replete with art works on the walls and marble and crystal in the decorations. The music is presented in formal dress in homage not just to the composer but also to its audience and its prominent champions, such as locals like Leo Schofield, pre-eminent in his pretentious advocacy.



Leo Schofield (above) pre-eminent in his pretentious advocacy....

Yet though, size has its attractions - 671 choristers and 48 instrumentalists singing and playing Handel's *Hallelujah* in Sydney 14/12/19 - Bach's solo cello suites may have just as a profound an impact and may be more musically interesting. Similar considerations enter into the work of John Lewis whose aspirations to size and seriousness may never have quite matched his brilliant piano solo work, even considering the Modern Jazz Quartet. Stan Kenton too, had aspirations which manifested in the size of his orchestras and his engagement with modern arrangers, both jazz and modern classical.

Stan Kenton must be considered the forerunner to the evolvement of Third Stream Music whose most distinguished advocate emerged as John Lewis.



Pete Rugolo: the first significant Kenton arranger...PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

The first significant Kenton arranger was Pete Rugolo engaged as Kenton's chief arranger in 1945. Rugolo had been Darius Milhaud's apprentice. He was responsible

for the Stan Kenton Progressive Jazz Orchestra from 1947 to 1948 and was the chief architect of the Innovations in Modern Music Orchestra of 1950 and 1951. From his pen came a fusion of modern classical music and jazz.



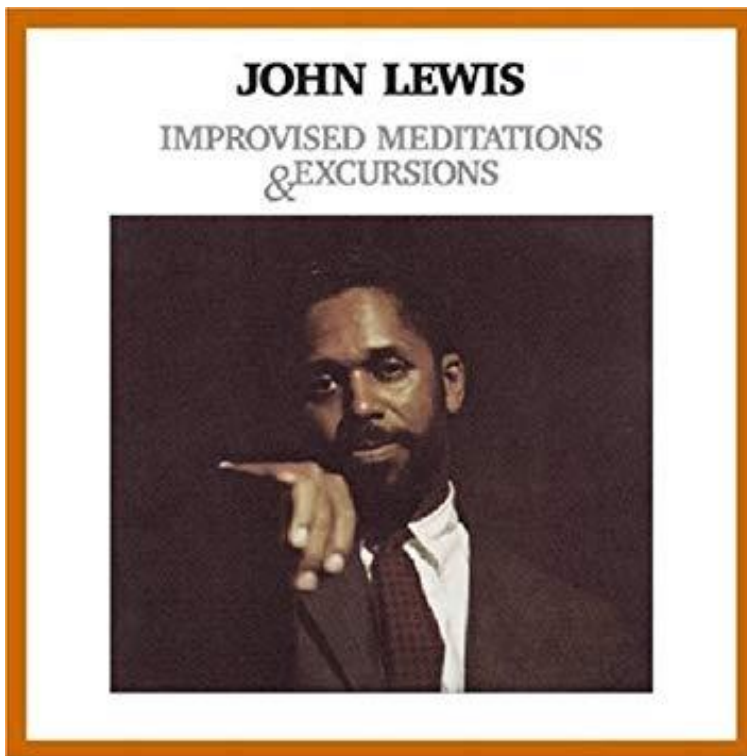
The 1956 album Kenton in Hi Fi: worth revisiting...

In my view, much of Rugolo's work is interesting historically but perhaps of limited musical appeal (enjoyment). Even so, one of Kenton's most appealing efforts and one worth revisiting is *Kenton in Hi Fi* (1956) which has the following superb Kenton composed tracks arranged by Pete Rugolo: *Interlude*, *Minor Riff*, *Collaboration*, *Concerto to End All Concertos*, *Artistry in Boogie*, *Lover* (Rodgers and Hart) and *Unison Riff*. This album swings and has inspirational solos. *Innovations in Modern Music* (1950), and *A Concert in Progressive Jazz* (1947-1951), arranged by Rugolo are documents which have their champions, but they are not the music one turns to for listening pleasure.

In the end Kenton was driven by his musical ambition to progress, by an intellectual drive to explore, come hell or high water, modernity in contemporary classical music at the expense of rhythm and improvisation in his homage to form, but he was not unaware of this. He said: "progressive musicians should listen to a down-to-earth blues record, to see what these older, more experienced musicians have in their playing that we haven't got. We should, we must, get back to the real voices of our

music from an emotional standpoint. I listen to Armstrong. I listen to Hines".* Is it another case of a gifted and talented artist believing "jazz" was not "serious" enough music, that it needed "classical" musical forms to attain another level of Art?

The external trappings of formality, in suits or evening dress, have been adopted notably by Stan Kenton, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, but also in small groups most famously by John Lewis and the Modern Jazz Quartet. John Lewis, one of the great jazz artists, was the foremost practitioner of Third Stream Music. He made a distinction between jazz and "serious music", if we accept that Horst Lippmann's notes to the Atlantic (1959) album *Improvised Meditations & Excursions* by John Lewis, are valid: "John Lewis with his strong commitment to 'serious' music as well as to jazz and blues, naturally enough is creating a new music that partakes of both these mutually exclusive worlds. Some may think that John's deep admiration for Europe and its musical ideals make him less genuine a jazz musician." The assumption behind these words and behind the motivations of Lewis are evidence of the inferior status of improvised (jazz) music in the eyes of many including its practitioners.



But on the album itself, which has seven tracks comprising four standards and two Lewis originals, with one track by Charlie Parker, reveals the improvising genius of Lewis at its best. *Now's the Time* (Parker) reveals the Basie pianism influence in his careful plinking, use of space and boogie referencing, backed by the swinging, churning rhythm team of George Duvivier on double bass and Connie Kay on drums.

**"The Overview: The Perfect Kentonite"* in Will Friedwald, *Notes to Stan Kenton: The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Holman and Russo Charts. Edition 1760, 1991, Mosaic Records, Stamford, CT Page 1.*

He reinvents *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes* (Kern) and brings it percussively back to its melodic musical essence again with Duvivier and Kay. A superior version I'm yet to hear.

Afternoon in Paris (Atlantic) recorded 4 & 7 December, 1956, with Lewis, piano; Sacha Distel, guitar; Barney Wilen, tenor saxophone; Pierre Michelot (1-3) or Percy Heath (4-6) acoustic bass; and Connie Kay (1-3) or Kenny Clarke (4-6) drums; has four standards and two originals, including the title track, and is a straightforward album with some fine guitar solos and interesting introductions to some songs. It indicates again through its references and musicians the attraction Europe had for Lewis. It's a fine jazz album.



One of his more ambitious projects is *The Golden Striker* which has John Lewis on piano and conducting; Melvyn Broiles, Bernie Glow, Alan Kiger, and Joe Wilder, trumpets; David Baker and Dick Hixson, trombones; Ray Alonge, John Barrows, Al Richman, and Gunther Schuller, French horns; Jay McAllister (tracks 1, 3-7, 9 & 10) or Harvey Phillips (tracks 2 & 8), tuba; George Duvivier, bass; and Connie Kay, drums. The title track is preceded by *Fanfare (11)* and opens with a solo bass moving into an orchestral chorus across the stereo sound stage addressing each orchestral side of brass and winds, backed by the drums of Connie Kay. Its form is simple and its highlight is the piano solo by Lewis bracketed by orchestral statements. Similarly, *Piazza Di Spagna* has a fine piano solo with the orchestra providing a fanfare-like sound stage.

John Lewis was born in La Grange, Illinois 3/5/20 and died 29/3/2001 in New York. He began piano lessons at age six. He encountered a recording of Louis Armstrong quite early, and developed an interest in jazz. Earl Hines, Fletcher Henderson, Jimmie Lunceford and especially Duke Ellington were among his listening experiences. Pianists that enthralled him included Fats Waller, Art Tatum and the Chicago masters of boogie woogie. He started performing at age 10. He was drafted into the Army during WW2 where he met Kenny Clarke. In 1946 he brought to Dizzy Gillespie an arrangement on which he performed piano, and a month later was invited to replace Thelonious Monk on piano and became as well Gillespie's official manager. He composed some of Gillespie's most successful charts including *Two Bass Hit*, *Stay On it*, and *Emanon* as well as *Toccata for Trumpet and Orchestra* which premiered at Carnegie Hall. He also played with Charlie Parker on *Parker's Mood* and with Miles Davis on his *Birth of the Cool*.



John Lewis at the piano, with trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie (in the foreground) during the forties...

The first incarnation of the Modern Jazz Quartet was Lewis, piano; Milt Jackson, vibraphone; Ray Brown, double bass; and Kenny Clarke, drums. In 1952 Brown left to support his wife, Ella Fitzgerald, and Clarke, hindered by the meticulous instructions favoured by Lewis, left also with Connie Kay replacing him on drums.

The MJQ made its debut in 1952 at Chantilly, West Fourth Street, New York. The band lasted until 1974, but had reunion gigs beginning in 1981.



The Modern Jazz Quartet, with John Lewis at the piano, then clockwise Milt Jackson, Percy Heath, Connie Kay...

Lewis continued his involvement with classical music including solo recordings of Bach. He composed film scores for *No Sun In Venice* (Vadim) and *Odds Against Tomorrow* (Wise) and scored a ballet *Original Sin*. He taught at Harvard and CCNY. In terms of his piano style Whitney Balliett wrote:

*Although his playing - simple, single-note melodic lines that have a dogged, crystalline quality - has a deceptive, amateur air, he often puts together, form combinations of nearly childish figures, solos that take on the ring of classic improvisations. He is an economical pianist - in a transcendental way - and he succeeds where most pianists fail, in transmitting his emotion. Lewis' best solos develop an irresistible rhythmic momentum, and when he rises into the upper registers, where he often ends his solos, he seems to tap the sky. He is probably the most undervalued pianist of his generation.**

Allow us then to consider some documents of Lewis beginning with the eponymous document itself.

From *Third Stream Music* (1957) we have five tracks: *Da Capo*, (Lewis) with bass: Ralph Pena; clarinet, tenor saxophone: Jimmy Giuffre; guitar: Jim Hall. *Fine* (Giuffre), bass: Ralph Pena; clarinet, tenor saxophone: Jimmy Giuffre; and guitar: Jim Hall. *Exposure* (Lewis), bassoon: Many Zegler; clarinet: William McColl; flute: Bob Di Domenico; French horn: Paul Ingraham; and harp: Betty Glamann. *Sketch* (Lewis), viola: Carl Eberl; violin: Gerald Tarack and Alan Martin. *Conversation* (Schuller), viola: Carl Eberl; violin: Gerald Tarack and Alan Martin. John Lewis is on piano throughout; Percy Heath on double bass; Connie Kay on drums; Milt Jackson on vibraphone; Joe Tekula on cello on *Exposure*, *Sketch* and *Conversation* and Gunther Schuller conducts these three works. If we take the ten-minute *Exposure* as an example, we may note the lack of swing, an indifferent structure (form), some interesting tapestry of sounds in the chorus, but with the most compelling music being the solo piano of Lewis which in its singular etched percussive simplicity is quite riveting.



The solo piano of Lewis: in its singular etched percussive simplicity, it is quite riveting...

*88 *The Giants of Jazz Piano*, Robert L Doerschuk, Backbeat Books, San Francisco, 2001, p 166.

The standard *Django* was written by John Lewis as a lament for his friend Django Reinhardt's death on 16th May 1953. It sounds simple to the casual listener, opening as a ballad with an up-tempo swinging mid-section taken by Milt Jackson, then returning to the ballad (if not dirge) at the end (cf Slovenia live concert of MJQ on 27th May 1960). It has a strong melody, swings with exploratory rhythm and has a harmonic interest making it an enticing balance of musical tension. But consider this analysis by Ted Gioia:

*After the mournful introduction, the song moves into an unconventional 32-bar form for the solos. The A section, repeated twice, is only six bars long - usually eight bars would be expected in this kind of piece. The B section does last eight bars, but shifts into an unusual pedal point over the tonic. Then at the moment one would anticipate a return to the A section chords, Lewis introduces a new 12-bar segment of the song, with a surprising boogie bass motif tossed in at the end. By the standards of jazz composition, this whole work is an oddity, but to add a further twist, Lewis draws on elements of the opening dirge to serve as an interlude between solos, only now played in double time. The end result is more an obstacle course than a blowing tune, but indicative of the formalist tendencies that set Lewis apart from other jazz combo performers of his day.**

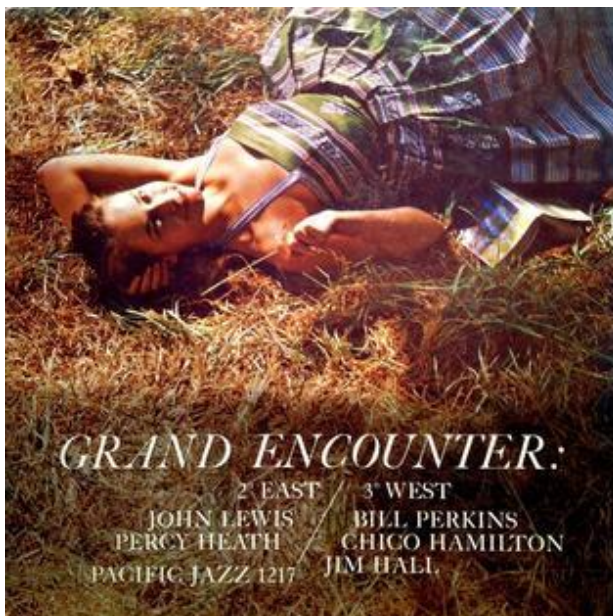


Ted Gioia: an analysis of John Lewis's standard Django...

**Ted Gioia, The Jazz Standards, A Guide to the Repertoire, OUP, NY, p 82*



Fontessa is a marvellous MJQ album with seven compositions which reflect an intelligent and inspired programming with three standard ballads: *Angel Eyes* (Dennis/Brent), *Willow Weep For Me* (Ronnell) and *Over the Rainbow* (Arlen/Harburg) and *Woody 'n' You* (Gillespie) and *Bluesology* (Milt Jackson) with two originals by Lewis, *Versailles* and *Fontessa*. Some highlights include the opening track *Versailles* which has a lattice-like interplay between vibraphone and piano with Bach counterpoint in evidence; the bluesy *Angel Eyes*; the ballad *Fontessa* with a powerful melody, strong harmony and tempo changes; a substantial vibes solo on *Over the Rainbow*, and a brilliant single note, space aware, elegant, deceptive solo by Lewis on the swinging *Bluesology*.

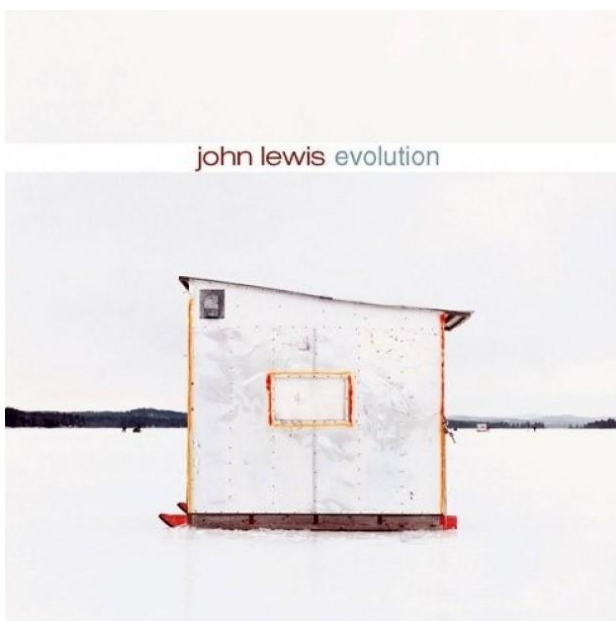


The 1956 album *Grand Encounter: 2 Degrees East- 3 Degrees West* with Lewis, piano; Bill Perkins, tenor saxophone; Jim Hall, guitar; Percy Heath, acoustic bass; and Chico Hamilton, drums; is a perfect realisation of relaxed straight-ahead mainstream modern jazz played by respective masters of their instruments.

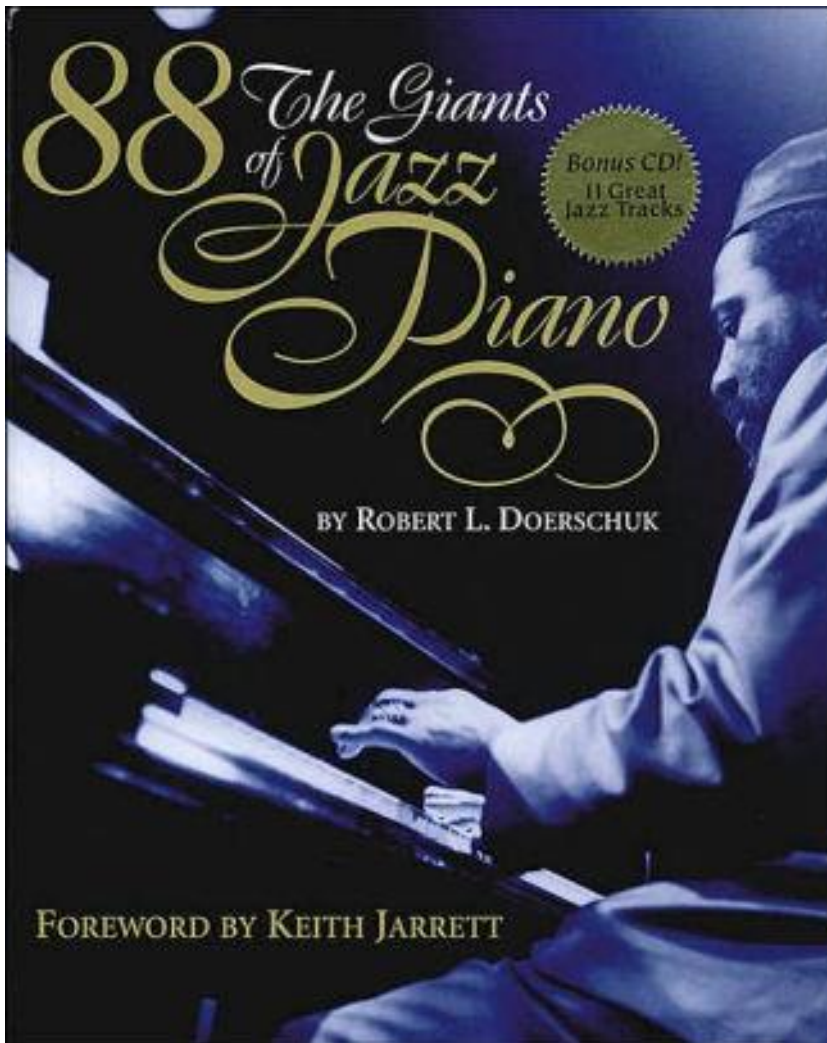
Of the many documents made by the MJQ the one titled *Dedicated to Connie*, which is a live recording made in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on 27th May 1960, is an excellent representation of what might rightly be considered the finest iteration of Lewis' journey into what is called "Third Stream Music" and in that iteration the elements of swing and improvisation were not subordinate to form.



But it's difficult to go past the documents *The John Lewis Piano* or *Jazz Piano International* as his best work, or to claim his *Evolution* which he recorded in 1999, some months before his death, is one of the finest examples of pianism extant. Music is not just about the music, or the instrument, it's about the listener and improvising master musicians know that in listening to each other. But in the same way, the audience listener, when every space is filled with notes, with music, there is no room for that intense engagement - admiration, yes, as with Art Tatum - but when the silence beckons, the listener's mind responds, sometimes with electric expectation, sometimes with beauty. Lewis, like Basie, Jamal and others, allowed the silence.



My thoughts on John Lewis correspond to these words beautifully put by Doerschuk: “The lesson of Lewis is that if one measures eloquence by the power invested in each single note, then his notes are among the most persuasive in all improvised music”.*



The phrase *The Usefulness of Art* is an intriguing title and a contentious idea. It reminds one of a council meeting where art is on the agenda and a decision is needed to purchase a public sculpture. “How is this going to make money for the shire?” might be a query. Nevertheless, many of us may see Art as providing succour, insight, relief, joy, connection even “spiritual enlightenment” for want of a better term, as opposed to the failings realised by the promises of religion.

When I walk through my local community the presence of the few public sculptures does help to lift the spirits along with birdsong, and the Australian bush, Coffs Creek and the gentle surf. But the sight of a church fills me with disgust, fear and loathing. And this is not a feeling I was born with or taught to feel - it has arisen through experience and intellectual inquiry. In the beginning it was an awareness

*88 *The Giants of Jazz Piano*, Robert L Doerschuk, Backbeat Books, San Francisco, 2001, p 168.

that “Church” was like a club that was open to those willing to abide by certain rules. The Church of England club was for the upper classes, and the Roman Catholic Club was for the working classes (Irish) and the Chinese market gardeners. Later in life, the Church revealed itself as a place of prejudice, discrimination and myth. Then as a source of great wealth, and finally as place dangerous for young boys. There were also religious cults, Scientologists, Hillsong and Revivalists amongst them. Regardless, they were all considered “charities” for tax purposes. But these are just personal feelings and the rantings of an individual atheist who grew up surfing in the shadow of St Patrick’s College (National Catholic Seminary 1889) Manly which still looms over South Steyne, North Steyne and Queenscliff beaches.

In more formal terms, the three major Deist religions, Islam, Judaism and Christianity, are exclusive, exploitive, patriarchal establishments built from tribalism and mythical beliefs. They may have served some purposes over the evolution of civilisation, but their usefulness has waned dramatically since the Age of Enlightenment. They are also the basis for much conflict in the modern world. The Arts on the other hand, are inclusive, universal, and able to release the best creative instincts in us all. Artist Ai Weiwei is the most important and most famous Chinese extant for good reason: it is Art that liberates humanity. Music, of all the Arts, is the most accessible, and uplifting and powerful, and jazz (improvised) its most significant development.



Artist Ai Weiwei (above) is the most important and most famous Chinese extant for good reason: it is Art that liberates humanity...

Art's purpose is not to be "useful". Its purpose is manifold. Perhaps its most vital role is revealing the truth of things, including human affairs. In literature that may mean Arthur Miller's *Crucible*, or Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* or Primo Levi's *If This Is A Man*. In painting it may mean Rembrandt's *Self Portrait* or Picasso's *Guernica*. In music it may mean the *7th Symphony* of Shostakovitch or a version of *Strange Fruit* by Billie Holiday or *Alabama* by John Coltrane or *Ambon* by Lloyd Swanton. It is also vital to humanity's urge to creativity, to give individual expression to feelings and ideas. It's also a source of joy. The public display of art, music or the visual arts, architecture, serves too as a means of communal celebration of that creativity and a manifestation of the "angel" side of "man".

My own feeling is that J D Allen in his notes to his document *Barracoon*, on Savant, (2019) expresses a view that may be common to many contemporary creative artists:

I think it would be dishonest of me to pretend that the unveiling of today's political climate (the world over) did not play a part in how I personally played (on this CD). These particular vehicles of expression fit the bill for me to have a good scream and a good cry. One of the first lessons that was taught to me, when I became a student of the art form, was to develop the tools to able to play what I feel, see and hear. I have accepted the fact that is a personal, lifelong pursuit - despite what is old, new or popular. Art does not ask for permission or beg for acceptance. No one has exclusive rights to love, hate or tragedy - the three components that most Art forms have in common.



American Saxophonist J D Allen: Art does not ask for permission or beg for acceptance...PHOTO COURTESY NEW YORK TIMES

In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Arts is to be found on page 27 opposite the Share Market results. There are 10 pages dedicated to sport. There are no pages dedicated to religious issues. This is probably a fair measure of the status of each in Australia except to make the observation that more people attend Arts establishments or events, than attend sports events.

When life is contemplated in all its strange variability and civilisation thought of, and what that means: where we live, how we live, surviving or thriving, and consider urban societies such as Australia, a desert continent with the majority of us hanging on to its rim, then Melbourne must be reckoned as one of the most desirable cities in which to thrive. On a range of criteria for a particular organisation or publication, Melbourne has been accorded some few times the most liveable city in the world. Live venues for music, and other arts, was not one of the criteria yet Melbourne has more live venues than either London or New York, two cities with many times the population and reputation than Melbourne.

Do live venues make the city more liveable? Or, are the live venues the result of Melbourne's liveability: its excellent public transport; its health system; its infrastructure; its educational facilities; its waste disposal? It may be there is a point where each feeds on the other: arts training facilities produce artists who need outlets; a comfortable middle class which desires entertainment; the young needing places to meet.

One of the institutions that fulfil the need and the desire, is the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). My eldest son is a performing arts drama graduate of the cohort which included director Andrew Upton. Its contribution, and the contribution of similar Australian arts institutions to the arts including music is inestimable.



The Victorian College of the Arts... PHOTO COURTESY WIKIPEDIA

Adam Simmons' collection of works called *The Usefulness of Art* (5CD) stands permanently as a reminder not just of his creative accomplishment, but also of the contribution the VCA made to its realisation and the support given by various arts organisations and government arts funds, including the City of Melbourne and the Australia Council.

The first album documents the *Concerto For Piano and Toy Band* by Simmons which was recorded live before an enthusiastic audience with Michael Kieran Harvey, piano and Adam Simmons Creative Music Ensemble. The musicians included Adam Simmons, soprano, baritone saxophone, shakuhachi; Cara Taber, alto saxophone; Gideon Brazil, tenor saxophone; Gemma Horbury, trumpet; Bryn Hills, trombone; Howard Cairns, double bass and Hugh Harvey, drums. It is in three parts, with spoken prologue, two spoken interludes, and spoken Epilogue quoting Confucius. The execution does not match the ambitiousness of the piece which verges on portentous. Loud percussive orchestral repetition in the manner of Steve Reich is a feature of Part 1 with a contemporary classical piano solo following. The piano provides sounds resembling gently falling water through to grand fortissimo. There is a sudden stop to the loud chorus which occurs a number of times to dramatic effect and audience enjoyment. Hugh Harvey provides effective jazz drumming throughout and is a musical standout. There is a fine trumpet solo. Michael Harvey is a talented contemporary classical pianist with a wide range of skills including obvious percussive ones. The piece would have provided impressive musical theatre in performance.



Adam Simmons (fifth from left) with his Toy Band: impressive musical theatre in performance...

The eponymous album *The Usefulness of Art* was performed live on August 2017 by Adam Simmons Creative Music Ensemble with Adam Simmons, bass clarinet, leader; Samuel Boon, saxophone; Cara Taber, saxophone; Gideon Brazil, saxophone, flute; Paul Simmons, saxophones; Gemma Horbury, trumpet; James Wilkinson, trombone; Bryn Hills, trombone; Miranda Hill, double bass; Niko Schauble, drums; Hugh Harvey, drums; Nat Grant, percussion; Diokno Pasilan, percussion; David Brown, guitar; Pete Lawler, voice, space drums; and visual design by Diokno Pasilan and Christine Crawshaw. It's in six parts which segue from beginning to end. The tone is sombre. Drums provide a patterned foundation. Repetitive ensemble motifs are a feature. Solos by alto saxophone, bass clarinet and guitar and an effective trumpet solo in *Empathy*, with *Generosity* being the most satisfying music provide the overall impression.



A shot of the Adam Simmons Creative Music Ensemble...

The album *Travelling Tales* performs the suite of that name and is in nine parts with an encore entitled *Travelling* at track ten. The suite is performed by Adam Simmons and the Arcko Symphonic Ensemble. Simmons is on soprano and tenor saxophones, bass clarinet; with the Arcko Symphonic Ensemble conducted by Timothy Phillips; Violin 1: Zachary Johnson, Jeremy Blackman, Larissa Agular, Felicite Heine, Leigh Raymond; Violin 2: Philip Healey, Susan Pierotti, Naomi Durston, Sophie Dunn, James Steendam; Viola: Christian Read; Matt Laing, Eli Vincent, Eunise Cheng. Cello: Caerwen Martin, Stephanie Arnold, Yelian He, Gemma Tomlinson. Double bass: Nicholas Synot and Miranda Hill. Visual design by Christine Hanshaw and Adam Simmons. The suite begins with a low bass hum then a soprano sax overlays this. On *A Single Step*, there is a march tempo chorus overlaid by a saxophone solo. *The City That Never Sleeps* is a highlight with up-tempo violin creating traffic busyness again with a saxophone solo overlaying this in slow tempo. Repetition of simple figures by the strings is a feature throughout. It is a brave effort rather than a compelling one.

The CD *The Calling* records the suite of that name and is performed by Adam Simmons Creative Music Ensemble augmented by Afrolankan Drumming System. The musicians include Adam Simmons, soprano saxophone, leader; Gideon Brazil, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone; Paul Simmons, soprano and alto saxophones; Gemma Horbury, trumpet; Gavin Cornish, trumpet; Bryn Hills, trombone; Miranda Hill, double bass; Howard Cairns, double bass; Niko Schauble, drums; Hugh Harvey, drums; Nat Grant, percussion; Carmen Chan, percussion including vibraphone; Peter Lawler, space drum (hand pan); Afrolankan Drumming System: Ray Pereira, djembe, conga, dundun; Kanchana Karunaratna, gata bera, thammattama. Compositions are shared between Simmons (4,7,8), Pereira (3) or both (2,5,6,9) and Pereira and Karunaratna (1).



Another shot of the Adam Simmons Creative Music Ensemble...

The *Welcome* track which opens proceedings with some inspired fast tempo conga playing slows midway with added (possibly Niko Schauble) percussion, then returns up-tempo. There are some churning conga rhythms in *Part 1 - The Calling* title track, slowly building in volume with chorus of horns which dramatically stop, conga solo, horns return and the music builds to a climax. *Train* is effectively atmospheric of that rhythm with distant voices repeating “got the ticket”. The second train piece has an impressionistic Ellingtonian arrangement featuring conga rhythms, a chorus of horns crying and a fine trombone solo, slowing in tempo as the “train” ends its journey. The third train piece (track 7) has a bass figure repeating with horns signalling and congas interjecting. The longest piece *Part 4 Connection: The Tooth of Buddha* is in three sections: the first a solemn march tempo created by a range of percussion, then horns cry and fade before the middle section of flute(?) sole instrument providing a dramatic contrast to the beginning, and then the final section which slowly builds to an orchestral climax.



Yet another shot of the Adam Simmons Creative Music Ensemble...

The CD *The Kites of Tianjin* contains a performance of that suite by the Adam Simmons Creative Music Ensemble with Simmons: shakuhachi, tenor saxophone, alto flute, leader; Cara Taber, alto saxophone, flute; Gideon Brazil, tenor saxophone, flute, piccolo; Paul Simmons, soprano saxophone, bass flute; Samuel Boon, baritone saxophone, flute; Gemma Horbury, trumpet; Bryn Hills, trombone; Howard Cairns, double bass; Niko Schauble, drums; Nat Grant, drums, glockenspiel; Carmen Chan, marimba, Pete Lawler, space drum (hand pan) and Wang Zheng-Ting, sheng.

The first two tracks, *A Child's Kite*, and *Can You See the Wind*, are meditative and atmospheric and segue to track three, *Bamboo, paper and string* which is enlivened by strong percussion and effective rhythm, an arc of development and a strong conclusion, not just drifting off into silence. A trombone solo by Bryn Hills and trumpet solo by Gemma Horbury help a lot to consolidate this fine piece, a highlight of the programme. The high-pitched reed sound which serves to climax some parts I take to be the sheng.

Track 4 of the CD is called *A Thing of Beauty*, which is reminiscent of Chinese music, has a march-like chorus, patchwork of percussive sounds, with a middle climax of collective improvisation, closing with a repetitive melodic chorus. One recalls Eddie Condon's remark (or perhaps it was Louis Armstrong) referring to bebop as "Chinese music". In Simmons' efforts no bebop is evident and the Asian influence and music references are entirely positive and aesthetically pleasing. In *Ready to Fly* the saxophone and sheng have a conversation of sorts. *Free as the Birds* opens with a

collective improvisation, then features a long slow solo by the Shakuhachi, backed by the hushed waves of cymbal sounds and occasional punctuation by the marimba.



Adam Simmons: attempts at melding European music with jazz in the tradition of Third Stream Music....

The final document is called *The Kites of Tianjin* and seems a more coherent, compelling and enjoyable programme of music for the jazz lover than does the first two performances in the cycle, the *Concerto for Piano and Toy Band* and *The Usefulness of Art*, which are attempts at melding European music with jazz in the tradition of Third Stream Music. The work comprises eight parts and is performed by Adam Simmons Creative Music Ensemble plus Wang Zheng-Ting.

The Calling is perhaps the most successful suite overall with seven percussionists who add some interesting rhythmic complexities to the music.