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Teaching Improvisation and the Pedagogical History of the Jimmy Giuffre 3 — 2012

Introduction

Speaking about improvisation is counterproductive, because if I explain it to you, I'm presumptuously assuming that I know best how it should be done, and then you don't have to come up with your own solutions. By telling you what to do I am circumventing your creativity. (Paul Bley)¹

The role of improvisation in the music education system has been a subject of much debate since jazz courses began being offered at universities, conservatories, and high schools in the mid-twentieth century. The growth of interest in jazz in university music departments has required instructors and administrators to develop strategies for teaching improvisation that are distinct from the text-based methodologies that dominate Eurocentric music pedagogy. As the jazz curriculum at universities has mirrored that of the European music tradition in becoming classicized around particular histories, repertoires, and performance practices, it is increasingly necessary to revisit our approaches to music pedagogy to account for changes in the cultural field that students enter when they leave academic institutions. The issues raised in recent scholarly writing about improvisation point to the potential benefits of music schools moving away from a trade school model of education towards encouraging students to become critical, creative citizens. Such an ideological shift is crucial in a cultural context where the institutions that support the musical trades—such as symphony orchestras and jazz clubs—are disappearing at an accelerating rate. If students are encouraged to develop their “own musical material and lexicon,” we can begin to connect music education to deeper social issues by helping them to self-identify as producers of culture, rather than as consumers and copyists of existing art forms (Lewis, 2000, p. 83).

Maud Hickey (2009) offers an insightful and informed argument for reevaluating how improvisation is taught in an article for the *International Journal Of Music Education* titled: “Can improvisation be ‘taught’?: A call for free improvisation in our schools.” Hickey argues that, “...the music education community’s current drive to include improvisation in school music is limited in its approach,” and that currently dominant teaching strategies inhibit students’ “creative musical growth” (p. 286). She goes on to assert that improvisation cannot be taught; rather, it is “a disposition to be enabled and nurtured” (p. 286). Scholar and improviser George Lewis (2000) echoes these observations, noting the emergence of a critical discourse around the role of improvisation in the musical education system:

As the study of improvisative modes of musicality, regardless of tradition, has begun to assume a greater role in the music departments of a number of major institutions of higher learning, it is to be expected that the nature, necessity and eventual function of such pedagogy would be scrutinized—and eventually contested—from a variety of standpoints, both inside and outside the academy. (p. 79)

My experience as a musician and researcher is illustrative of this growing interest in studying “improvisative modes of musicality” in university music departments, as well as of the attendant critical discourse that has arisen around this development. This scholarly trend is represented in part by the multidisciplinary Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice (ICASP) project, based at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, and the International Society for Improvised Music (ISIM), which was founded in 2006. Along with the increase in academic work on improvisation, my experience as a freelance music teacher suggests that enrolment in university jazz programs is steadily growing, so it seems increasingly urgent to scrutinize the currently dominant teaching strategies if educators are interested in committing themselves to fostering students’ “creative musical growth.”

Hickey’s article is based on research into improvisation pedagogy at the level of early

childhood education, but many of her observations are relevant to a critique of the institutions of higher learning to which Lewis refers. The purpose of this article is to offer suggestions for developing alternative pedagogical strategies at the university level. The study of improvisation in university music programs has generally been confined to jazz departments, where teaching practices have coalesced around instructing students in how to navigate the harmonic structures of a repertoire of standard tunes. Typically, these tunes are reduced to a series of chord-scale relationships that students learn to negotiate with patterns and melodic phrases derived from the pitches contained in a harmonic sequence. Although this process, or a variation of it, is crucial for learning to play jazz, few musicians would argue that the “rote regurgitation of prepared patterns” (Lewis, 2000, p. 83) will lead one to the kinds of “self-expression and collective experimentation” (Borgo, 2007, p. 65) that are perpetually evoked by improvisers—jazz or otherwise—as the goal of improvised musical performance.

David Borgo (2007) attributes the difficulty institutions experience with nurturing and evaluating student creativity to how the “music academy” operates under the notion that, “...the process of learning ‘what’ and ‘how’ to improvise” occurs “prior to, and separate from, actually ‘doing’ it” (p. 65). Trombonist and writer Scott Thomson (2007) echoes this description of the systemic impediments to effective improvisation pedagogy:

Most students learn to play music in a particular style or genre, often starting as children, and the goals of their education correspond with the established aesthetic criteria of the style in question. ... In contrast, collective improvisation does not uphold dominant aesthetic or technical criteria that players must master as a benchmark of their “education.” As a working methodology, improvisation does not proscribe sounds, sound sources, or instrumental techniques and, though the priorities of each performer will inform the aesthetic goals of any performance, strict notions of technical excellence are difficult to assess. (p. 2-3)

Thomson’s and Borgo’s arguments illustrate how, if properly structured, improvisation pedagogy offers the opportunity for students to take the materials of established music traditions and

manipulate them to explore new musical and social relationships. A meaningful engagement with improvisation thus requires music educators to nurture situations in which students are free to collectively experiment, and to develop evaluation strategies that attend to students' individual creative growth, as opposed to measuring skill acquisition against a standardized curriculum.

Rather than directly answering the question in her title, Hickey concludes her article with a recommendation for further research to address gaps in the school music curriculum:

[We] need to collect pedagogical histories of the masters in the field in order to learn more about how they learned. ... Information gleaned from these studies should be made useable by current school music teachers. (295)

Throughout her article Hickey references formative works by George Lewis (2000) and Paul Berliner (1994) as examples of how improvisation is taught and learned. These texts, along with other studies by Eddie Prévost (1995, 2011), Derek Bailey (1993), Ingrid Monson (1996), Thomson (2007) and Borgo (2007), offer important "pedagogical histories," as they all deal with improvisation as both a skill that is learned and refined over time and a disposition for creativity that translates these skills into meaningful musical experiences. Building on these and other works, I will present my research into the rehearsal methods of the Jimmy Giuffre 3—an under-documented, yet influential American jazz ensemble—as a specific example of masters in the field whose pedagogical histories offer a model that educators can use to develop fresh strategies for teaching improvisation.

The Giuffre 3's rehearsal techniques—which I will describe in detail in section III—are compelling for how they deconstruct the basic building blocks of Western music towards the goal of finding new ways for an ensemble to improvise together. The trio members' recollections reveal a critical thought process that can be productively applied to diverse musical formations, including jazz, classical, popular, and non-European musics, to arrive at vastly different musical

discoveries than those documented on the trio's recordings. Although in their time the Giuffre 3's innovations were primarily contained in the jazz field, when transplanted into the contemporary musical context their ideas represent what Edward Sarath (2010) calls a "trans-stylistic" approach to improvisation. By questioning their internalized musical conventions the trio opened themselves to sounds and modes of musical organization that were different from the jazz performances of their time. Sarath argues that to foster creativity educators need to develop teaching strategies that offer a "user-friendly" entryway" for musicians to learn to improvise together:

The very thought of making music apart from the printed page can be intimidating for many musicians, and this challenge may be exacerbated when style-specific constraints are imposed at the outset. By contrast, the trans-stylistic approach seeks first to elicit a creative flow that extends from each musician's unique ... [musical background] and life experience. (p. 1)

If approached with curiosity and a willingness to experiment, the musical exercises that can be derived from the recollections of the Jimmy Giuffre 3 can aid in the development of new approaches to improvisation pedagogy that allow space for and nurture the musical diversity of the contemporary university classroom.

I - Jimmy Giuffre and the Practice of Free Improvisation

Jimmy Giuffre led several different drummer-less trios under the name The Jimmy Giuffre 3 throughout his career, the best known of which featured guitarist Jim Hall and either trombonist Bob Brookmeyer or bassist Ralph Peña. This version of the Giuffre 3 had a jazz hit with a tune called "The Train and The River" in the late 1950s. My focus for this article is Giuffre's subsequent trio with pianist Paul Bley and bassist Steve Swallow, which was his primary musical project from 1960 to 1962. Giuffre, Bley, and Swallow—in direct response to the pioneering

work of Ornette Coleman—participated in the avant-garde jazz scene in New York City in the early 1960s that included musicians such as Cecil Taylor, Don Ellis, Carla Bley, George Russell, and Bill Dixon, among others. These musicians were concerned with finding ways to structure improvised performances that avoided the compositional forms, harmonic progressions, rhythmic schemes, and melodic structures that typified jazz of the late 1950s.

In their brief time together the Jimmy Giuffre 3 recorded three studio albums: *Fusion* (1961) and *Thesis* (1961) on Verve Records, and *Free Fall* (1962) on Columbia.² The music on these albums represents an important link between the song and pulse-based free jazz of Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler, and the less-structured music of the European free improvisers who emerged in the late 1960s, such as Derek Bailey, Evan Parker, John Stevens, and Eddie Prévost. Giuffre, Bley, and Swallow disbanded their trio in 1962, but reunited briefly in the early 1990s, touring Europe and recording four new studio albums before Giuffre became too ill to perform. My investigation of the trio's rehearsal methods will focus on their initial period of activity in the early 1960s. There is still very little written on the Jimmy Giuffre 3—notable exceptions include Graham Lock's interview with Giuffre in his book *Chasing The Vibration* (1994), in which he specifically discuss the trio with Bley and Swallow, and a chapter dedicated to Giuffre's 1950s work in Los Angeles in Ted Gioia's *West Coast Jazz* (1992), which is somewhat dismissive of this trio. I hope that this brief pedagogical history will help in the re-evaluation of their contribution to improvised music in North America and Europe.

The first stage of my research into the Giuffre 3 was practice-based, as I wished to incorporate their musical approach into my creative work as a bassist and composer. I transcribed and analysed the music on their recordings, then formed a trio of saxophone, piano, and bass to perform these transcriptions. This was a formative musical experience for me, as I

learned much about ensemble improvisation from attempting to emulate the Giuffre 3's performance practices. I eventually began composing original music using ideas derived from the Giuffre 3's recordings, and my own trio remains an on-going creative project.

The second stage of my research began with reading Steve Swallow's (1998) liner notes for the CD reissue of *Free Fall*. Swallow's description of working with Giuffre suggested to me that they would be a compelling case study for improvisation pedagogy:

From the moment we came together, the trio rehearsed several times a week, long and hard. ... We set about to subject all the unconscious, given assumptions in the music we played to stern scrutiny and reevaluation. ... We spent as much time talking as playing at our rehearsals, asking such questions as: How can we play at a given rate of speed, but without a fixed tempo? For how long is it possible to improvise without reference to a tonic pitch? What's the longest unbroken melody we can play?

The revelation that this ensemble developed a systematic method of practicing ensemble improvisation was intriguing, given the dominant conception of free improvisation as spontaneous, "personalized, creative expression..." (Sarath, 2010, p. 2). In addition, much recent scholarly work on improvisation revolves around the political and social implications of improvised music, largely due to the important connections between free jazz and the civil rights movement in the US in the 1950s and 1960s. Understanding the political context for free jazz is crucial, yet the academic discourse tends to obscure the particular musical materials that early free improvisers used and developed in their search for alternative methods of music making. Swallow's comments point towards the possibility of a material analysis of free improvisation through a detailed investigation of the Jimmy Giuffre 3's rehearsal practices. Such an analysis could begin to address the significant gaps in jazz education around post-bebop improvisatory practices.

To follow up on Steve Swallow's brief description of the band's working methods in his liner notes, I arranged telephone interviews with Swallow and Paul Bley, with the specific

intention of questioning them about how they learned to improvise together. Jimmy Giuffre had unfortunately lost the ability to speak due to Parkinson's disease in the decade preceding this research project, so I did not have the opportunity to interview him before his death in 2008. Bley's and Swallow's detailed answers to my questions provided significant insight into the music documented on their recordings, and into the avant-garde jazz scene in New York in the early 1960s. Bley's and Swallow's recollections of rehearsing with Giuffre are presented here as just one example of the myriad developments that took place in jazz in the early 1960s. There were many other ensembles engaged in similar work, but the Giuffre 3 are significant in that they were able to document their efforts on recordings, and in how they became an important touchstone for many European musicians who were seeking new ways to improvise. The trio's recordings, though they were heard by a limited audience, contributed to the formation of a distinct improvised music field in the late 1960s that was contemporaneous with the jazz field in which Giuffre, Bley, and Swallow were situated.

Following these conversations with the surviving members of the trio, I worked to integrate Bley's and Swallow's ideas about ensemble rehearsing into my creative practice and teaching. I began incorporating the Giuffre 3's concepts into rehearsals with my trio, a process that resulted in transformative experiences for each of us, and the development of a coherent group approach to ensemble interaction. The teaching exercises I have derived from Bley's and Swallow's recollections have proven to be just as effective and inspiring to beginning improvisers, offering students an accessible entryway into free improvisation. This article offers a few key examples of the Jimmy Giuffre 3's rehearsal exercises, structured in a way that reflects my experience working with these ideas as both a player and educator.

II – Agency, Creativity, and Disposition

Hickey’s argument for changing the music education system is founded on her belief that current teaching methods fail to encourage and reward creative agency in students. The notion that it is not possible to teach creativity is a common theme in discussions about fine arts education, and Hickey (2009) reiterates this dictum in the firm assertion that, “*True* improvisation cannot be taught—it is a disposition to be enabled and nurtured” (p. 286, italics in original). Leaving aside the problematic notion that there is such a thing as “true” improvisation, Hickey’s comments point to the difficulties in encouraging and evaluating creative thinking in an institutional context. To respond to this challenge, it is necessary to establish an environment where students are encouraged to think critically about the sounds they absorb on a daily basis, rather than treat music as a set of rules and stylistic ideals to be learned and reproduced. Hickey addresses this point directly when she suggests that creativity emerges through “teaching thinking as a disposition rather than any one skill or set of skills to be learned. That is to think of teaching in terms of enculturation through exposure to cultural exemplars and the subsequent development of a disposition to understand”(p. 286). The way forward she proposes involves creating situations where students will develop their critical and creative thinking capacities through “learner-directed activity,” a process that will require teachers to develop alternative documentary forms and evaluative strategies to judge students’ independent experimental work (p. 292). The notion of developing a disposition to improvise—which English percussionist Eddie Prévost (1995) refers to as an “investigative ethos” (p. 3)—is crucial to the productive use of the examples I will give of the Jimmy Giuffre 3’s rehearsal methods. Once students understand the basic parameters of these methods, the learning process becomes entirely self-directed. By internalizing a disposition to work creatively with the materials and knowledge they

have on hand, students might begin to move beyond reproducing the music of others towards developing personal musical responses to their specific social and cultural situations.

This goal of fostering critical social engagement through music has a meaningful parallel in Ian Angus's (2009) writings on the state of the humanities in the education system. Angus argues that the humanities offer the intellectual tools to resist the increasingly entrenched conception of a university education "as simply an aid to the individual confronting the job market" (p. 14). He goes on to assert that the humanities nurture "[the] ability to think meaningfully about one's experience, [which] allows a deeper judgment of the current situation," (p. 19) and that, "genuine searching requires criticism of received truth and constituted powers..." (p. 22). This view of an arts education has particular relevance in the ongoing debate about the role of music departments within the university system, as the "job market" for which music students are preparing has been steadily shrinking over the last few decades. The idea that a post-secondary music education prepares students for the job market also conflicts with the notion that university music departments are intended to produce creative artists. As Angus notes, creativity is based on criticism of the inherited materials (received truths) and genre conventions (constituted powers) that characterize a particular art field. This ethos clearly informs Steve Swallow's comments above. Teaching creativity—or, in Hickey's words, teaching thinking as a disposition—requires establishing a learning environment that allows students to experiment with generating new (to them at least) musical forms and ensemble relationships. If creatively presented, improvisation pedagogy can mirror Angus's vision of the humanities, as studying improvisation can enable in students a critical attitude towards citizenship, subjectivity, and society.

To clarify further, I am not suggesting that improvisation is an “ideologically correct” way of making music that we are ethically obligated to encourage our students to pursue (Stanbridge, 2008, p. 8). I accept Alan Stanbridge’s (2008) critique of the tendency towards utopianism in recent improvisation scholarship, and wish to be clear that improvisation, like any art practice, has its limits for generating social change. With this cautionary note in mind, studying improvisation can expand students’ understanding of what it means to be a musician in contemporary society. I also recognize the danger in presenting a singular ensemble as a “cultural exemplar” in an educational context, for such an example might influence students to simply recreate a particular set of sounds to please those evaluating them. We must therefore be conscious of how we use these exemplars to not inhibit students from making creative discoveries and crafting their own judgments about their experiences. We must also be wary of making improvised music a discrete stream within the academy in the way that jazz and classical music currently coexist, for the productive value of improvisation lies in the friction it generates when cross-pollinated with other performance practices.

Although I will present the Giuffre 3’s innovations in terms of how they departed from the standard jazz practices of their day, I do not propose that free improvisation is superior to jazz improvisation, or that true creativity demands a comprehensive rejection of the music of the past. As Steve Swallow explained it, the trio saw what they were doing as an extension of the jazz tradition, and they used the materials and relationships they had internalized through playing jazz as points of departure for expanding that tradition:

I think we moved on purpose and deliberately away from references to the Tin Pan Alley tradition, away from the usual piano-bass-lead voice structure of the music, and away from tonal references and fixed pulse. Very often we would stop a piece if any of us felt that we were lapsing into vernacular, or into roles that had been played out many times before. I don’t think that that meant that we disapproved of *Sonny Rollins at the Village Vanguard*; on the contrary, we revered that stuff. In a way that’s the most sincere praise

of Sonny Rollins—not to even dare to venture into what he had done so well. And there were other people with whom we were in contact in New York at the time who were similarly inspired by the possibility of making a radical break with the past. We weren't so much concerned with where we were in history as we were with just solving these problems, because they were there and demanding solutions.

Despite their interest in making a “radical break with the past,” Bley and Swallow, and to the best of my knowledge Giuffre himself, continued to call themselves jazz musicians, as opposed to the group of English improvisers that emerged after the Giuffre 3's initial recordings—such as Derek Bailey, Evan Parker, and Eddie Prévost—who consciously distanced themselves from jazz. The political and racial dynamics of the jazz and improvised music fields are far more complex than I can deal with here—for an important account of these issues, see George Lewis (2004, 2008), who has written persuasively on the implications of imagining improvisation as a dehistoricized musical practice. The exercises I will be describing in the next section will likely lead students towards sounds that are generally identified with free improvisation, but this approach is not intended as a rejection or dismissal of established jazz practices. As Edward Sarath (2010) notes, “The trans-stylistic approach is not to replace style-specific engagement but to lay groundwork that enables musicians to move freely between both worlds” (p. 2). The Giuffre 3's rehearsal techniques offer a supplemental process that can aid students in making the necessary connections between the skills they acquire through conventional methods and the next step of creating art that reflects the aesthetic and political ideals of the people making it.

III - The Practice

The pedagogical strategies that may be derived from the Jimmy Giuffre 3's rehearsal techniques hinge critically on the understanding that the trio intended them as experiments for refining their “musical ears” and ability to interact with each other (Borgo, 2007, p. 66). Their rehearsal

techniques were therefore not expected to generate coherent musical performances in the manner of indeterminate compositions, conducted improvisations, or theatre improv games; instead, their playing in rehearsal was intentionally removed from the frame of performance to allow them to focus on solving particular musical problems that, in Steve Swallow's words, "were there and demanding solutions." It is important to note that the trio's recordings—both live and in studio—were based on compositions that Giuffre wrote in response to their playing in rehearsal. Swallow described their creative process: "We'd discuss something, Jimmy would hear something in our playing on Tuesday, and on Wednesday there would be a new piece that expanded on what had happened on Tuesday." Most of these compositions, especially on *Free Fall*, provided only minimal melodic, rhythmic, and structural information, so the improvising sections were quite open. Their rehearsal techniques were therefore designed to broaden the trio's conceptions of what was possible musically when they played together, and they realized these possibilities through the improvised sections of compositions. Following the Giuffre 3's innovations, and those of other improvisers and composers such as Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, John Cage, and Cornelius Cardew, many musicians in Europe and North America began improvising entire performances without any predetermined compositional frameworks. The first recording of an entirely improvised performance in the jazz field was led by Lennie Tristano in 1949, so there was historical precedent for the Jimmy Giuffre 3's approach to ensemble improvisation; however, other musicians did not follow Tristano's prescient example in a sustained way until over a decade later, when the idea of free improvisation began to gain traction among adventurous musicians.

Paul Bley described the trio's rehearsal techniques as being based on "premises for improvising." This phrase refers to the treatment of "high-level aspects of musical gesture,

interaction, and form” as materials for manipulation, as opposed to restricting oneself to fixed systems of sonic organization like predetermined compositional forms, the Western tonal system, or a steady rhythmic pulse (Borgo, 2007, p. 76). Bley provided details on this concept:

If you sense the band has roots all the way to the beginning of early jazz, when the band plays you can use these indications as premises for improvising. For example, the blues can be a premise. You don't need a particular piece, a key, or even to have twelve bars—you just need agreement on the premise, which leads the band to a certain feeling. A piece isn't a blues because it has so many bars or the usual progression, but because it has the right feeling, and this feeling is what you are really talking about in improvised music. The liberties you want to take with the basic premise are up to you.

An equally important idea that determined their approach was Giuffre's notion—which he traced to his interest in chamber music—that the instruments in the trio be “equal voiced, where everybody has exactly one-third of the responsibility,” rather than being limited to the conventional soloist and accompaniment roles of traditional jazz (Bley). With these ideas as an operational framework, the Giuffre 3 examined basic musical elements and constructed exercises to search, in Swallow's words, for “musical possibilities that we didn't know existed before.” I have chosen three particular musical exercises based on the premises of tonality, pulse, and counterpoint to illustrate the Giuffre 3's approach to learning to improvise together. The brief descriptions to follow demonstrate a particular way of thinking about music that can be productively applied to other premises and musical contexts.

For the first example, Steve Swallow recalled that tonality was a recurring topic of debate, and described how exploring this premise presented him with specific challenges:

The issue of whether what we were playing was tonal or not was forever alive, and there seemed to be endless possibilities that were worthy of discussion and playing about. We spent a lot of time talking about whether or not reference to a root note, to tonality, was inevitable—was it possible and/or desirable to play without reference to tonality at all? As a bass player I had a strong vested interest in roots, but Jimmy would throw down the gauntlet and say something like: “Stop seeing that thing you're playing as a bass. Now, let's play for ten minutes, and you're not the bass at any time during those ten minutes.” So we'd do it, and I would get frustrated and say something like, “I can't help it, I'm the

lowest guy. When I play a note I hear what's going on on top of it, and if I sense that if I moved a half step down I would cause a V-I resolution to happen then it's virtually impossible for me not to do it." And Jimmy would simply say, "Well, don't do it next time and see what happens."

Swallow's efforts to resist his tendency to resolve notes according to tonal conventions ultimately led to the tonally ambiguous performances featured on the trio's recordings, and, perhaps just as importantly, to the bass assuming a more interactive role in their music than it does in standard jazz ensembles. As a piano player, Paul Bley encountered similar instrumental challenges in their exploration of tonality and harmony, and modified his playing accordingly:

A pianist has two hands, so why would you limit your role to outlining the harmony by playing a set of rhythmic chords? That's just one device that a pianist can use when playing. In a sense harmony is really simultaneous vertical melody, so in Giuffre's music you could play fewer chords and treat the piano more like a horn [traditionally the lead voice in a jazz ensemble, assigned primarily to voicing horizontal, melodic material].

These examples demonstrate how addressing one premise leads to other questions; in this case, exploring the structures and limits of tonality revealed the need for the individuals in the group to question and modify their approaches to playing their instruments.

The trio had similar ideas about manipulating musical time, and conducted a purposeful deconstruction of the regular pulse that characterizes most jazz. Bley described their intentions with this premise:

The three of us had all played a lot of music with a steady pulse. When we started to work together we played a lot of free music without any pulse at all, and also a lot of music that went from pulse to no pulse and back... One was not better than the other. The trick is to have the flexibility to do what you want, when you want.

Building on this ideal of rhythmic flexibility, Swallow provided detail on how they worked collectively towards expanding their understanding of musical time:

We'd spend hours talking about how if you're not going to play with a fixed pulse, how many gradations of tempo can we conceive of and execute? Is there a tempo that exists between medium and fast, or medium and slow? Can you have very slow? Then can you split those in half? In addition to the question of whether or not we can play without

reference to a fixed pulse, the question arose: can we each play a distinct pulse so that there are three clear pulses going on at the same time, without stumbling as we listen to each others' pulse? That would be several days' worth of work.

In treating time in this way the Giuffre 3 elevated pulse to the level of the primary elements of variation in jazz improvisation—melody, harmony, and rhythm—and thus opened up a range of new musical possibilities.

One more example demonstrates how the Giuffre 3 worked towards developing the kind of collective, shared knowledge that might be called 'ensemble musicianship.' Steve Swallow described an exercise they developed to explore how the registers of their three instruments influenced their interactions:

As an exercise we would very consciously play in the same register, all of us clustered around middle C for ten or fifteen minutes. That would be the only given. Then we would stop and do the opposite. Paul would play as far above Jimmy as he could and I would play as far below Jimmy as I could, and we would observe the effect of the three voices being separated by as much air as possible. And that would indicate to us that it was a lot easier to hear the music as counterpoint when there was separation between the voices. When we played right on top of each other it tended to sound like clusters and it was more difficult to distinguish the individual voices. Again, we'd ask the question: "Is counterpoint essentially more valuable than the other stuff?" The answer would be no, that each musical approach would have its place, and we now had a better understanding of how our instruments could work together.

This exercise demonstrates how even a physically fixed premise, such as the ranges of the instruments in an ensemble, can be unpacked to reveal internalized musical conventions that are analogous to Angus's "received truths." Once opened up for close analysis these conventions can be deconstructed towards developing, in George Lewis's (2000) words, an individual and collective "lexicon" based on the participants' experiences as they experiment with various premises (p.83).

Swallow's and Bley's accounts of playing with Jimmy Giuffre indicate that the basic goal of their rehearsal techniques was to develop a collective well of sonic resources that could be

drawn from to suit the needs of particular musical situations. This development of musical knowledge involved a combination of playing and talking about music, and on a shared “commitment to [an] investigative ethos” (Prévost, 1995, p.3). The ensemble-based pedagogical exercises that can be derived from these examples can begin to address David Borgo’s (2007) concerns about contemporary music education:

By conceiving of musical “knowledge” as individual, abstract, relatively fixed, and unaffected by the activity through which it is acquired and used, music programs have devalued the experimental, exploratory, and collective qualities that ... inform the development of musical ears, memory, instincts, sensitivity, and, ultimately, creativity. (p. 66)

Borgo goes on to stress the importance of experiential learning in music, arguing that it is not enough to simply develop an interest in improvisation. Creativity requires the kinds of skills that are only developed through collective experimentation: “Far from a simple matter of disposition, if one learns to play music through the predominant use of inscribed forms of knowledge, making the necessary connections between ear, mind, and hand to become a fluent creative improviser may always remain difficult” (p. 67). Recognizing that there are significant challenges to teaching and evaluating improvisation, teachers and administrators can begin the process of reforming their approaches by fostering situations where students can conduct the kinds of collective experiments pursued by the Jimmy Giuffre 3. Increasing students’ opportunities for collaborative, self-directed learning will give them both the musical skills and creative dispositions to respond to the shifting demands of the cultural field.

IV - Conclusion

The Jimmy Giuffre 3’s recordings are over five decades old, so the musical innovations they contain have long since been incorporated into the general set of practices that characterize the

improvised music field. Rather than pointing towards a new approach to free improvisation, this research on the Jimmy Giuffre 3's rehearsal methods illuminates the need for an epistemological shift in the discourse of improvisation pedagogy to account for persistent gaps in currently dominant teaching methods. Two key points emerge from this analysis: the importance of collective experimentation to developing musical knowledge, and the need to recognize that free improvisation, which is discursively reduced to being about emotional and political expression, is also a rigorous, thoughtful, and material-based musical practice. As such it merits the same kind of disciplined engagement that is applied to the more easily codified harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic elements of bebop jazz. By stripping away the tonal structures and rhythmic schema that characterize Western music, Giuffre, Bley, and Swallow were able to focus on the interactive elements of ensemble music making, elements that cannot be easily reduced to, or communicated through, conventional musical notation. Bley's and Swallow's descriptions of the Giuffre 3's rehearsal methods thus offer an important historical link between the harmony- and composition-based learning strategies comprehensively documented by Berliner (1994) and Monson (1996), and the practice of free improvisation as described by Derek Bailey (1993) and Eddie Prévost (2011).

The insights gained from analyzing the rehearsal practices of the Jimmy Giuffre 3 will not be new to experienced improvisers, for they already know that free improvisation requires discipline, practice, and critical thinking, and will likely be familiar with the substantial recorded history of the music. But it is hoped that the remembrances of these creative musicians will offer an entryway into free improvisation for educators and students who have been either resistant to this part of the jazz tradition, or simply unsure of where to start exploring collectively improvised music making. Based on my own practical experience with this material, the Giuffre

3's approach has just as much to offer experienced improvisers as it does to beginners, for as bassist Mark Dresser notes: "The more we...develop [our] ears and skills, the better equipped [we] will be to work in an ever-changing situation" (Borgo, 82). Students who explore the ideas documented here will not necessarily create new musical forms and practices in a global sense, but they are likely to make important personal creative breakthroughs, particularly if they have limited experience with improvising outside of the normative harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic forms of Western music.

Considering the experiences of the Jimmy Giuffre 3, I contend that improvisation may most usefully be thought of as an embodied practice that is shared through time, between participants. It cannot be communicated through a fixed text, and a teacher can't tell you exactly how to do it. But it can be experienced, and given the proper conditions students can internalize a disposition to generate and explore new ideas. The exercises that might be reconstructed through Bley and Swallow's remembrances of their rehearsal practices should not be expected to produce interesting music on their own, but if treated with curiosity and an appropriate level of rigour these techniques can enhance students' musicianship in meaningful ways. By following the Giuffre 3's example of collaborative, heuristic learning, students can begin to make discoveries that will enable them to generate creative responses to our shifting musical environment.

To conclude, a music education that includes improvisation can go only a small way towards generating a more critical, creative citizenry. As Alan Stanbridge (2008) argues, imposing a "socially transformative role" on improvisation reflects unrealistic expectations on the ability of musical practices to enact "an extra-musical agenda" (p. 8). Although the potential for music to generate large-scale social change is minimal, nurturing in students a disposition that recognizes that our situations—both musical and social—are mutable rather than fixed offers

the possibility of local, gradual change. If we can foster situations where students are compelled to find their own solutions to musical problems, then they might begin to mobilize the resulting sense of agency in other parts of their lives to deal with the inequalities and injustices of contemporary society that artistic activity alone cannot adequately address.

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all non-cited quotations from Paul Bley and Steve Swallow are from personal interviews conducted on 25 March 2006 and 16 February 2006, respectively.

² *Fusion* and *Thesis* were out of print from their original release until 1992, when ECM Records reissued them as a two-compact disc set titled *1961*; Columbia followed with a remastered edition of *Free Fall* in 1998. Along with these reissued studio documents, in the early 1990s Hat Hut Records released two previously unavailable live radio broadcasts from the trio's 1961 concert tour of Germany: *Flight, Bremen 1961* and *Emphasis, Stuttgart (1961)*.

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