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Remembering in Jazz: Collective memory and Collective Improvisation

Speaking of jazz performances, the late composer Alec Wilder is reported to have once said “ I wish to God that some neurologists would sit down and figure out how the improviser’s brain works, how he selects, out of hundreds of thousands of possibilities, the notes he does at the speed he does - how in God’s name his mind works so damned fast! And why when the notes come out right, they are right (Wilder as quoted in Suchor 1986:134).” There are undoubtedly many people who, after listening to an improvised solo, have wondered either the same question or something akin to it.

Recently, Paul Berliner published the results of his fifteen-year ethnomusicological study of jazz improvisation, entitled *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (1994). *Thinking in Jazz* is a wonderful comprehensive “tome” detailing many aspects of the ever elusive art of improvisation. Berliner would probably not wish to consider himself a neurologist, yet despite this he may have found the solution - or at the very least, a good-sized portion of the solution - to Wilder’s question. Quite simply stated, the solution is that behind each improvisational performance is an entire lifetime of experience which the performer utilizes to make “the notes come out right.” Berliner’s study essentially lays to rest the popular but misleading notion that improvisation is a completely spontaneous art form (i.e. something not given much thought).

The purpose of this paper, as its title may reflect, is to expand on Berliner’s work by drawing upon the concepts of memory and performance as utilized in recent anthropological research and applying these concepts to Berliner’s heavily documentary research on the learning process in jazz as well as the metaphor of “storytelling” (see Berlin 1994:201-220) used by jazz musicians to describe improvisation. In order to accomplish this, I will first give a brief synopsis of common musical form in Jazz. This will then be followed by a discussion of some conceptions of jazz as proposed by various ethnomusicologists and anthropologists. Secondly, I wish to summarize Berliner’s findings regarding the learning process in jazz. This summary will then lead into a discussion of some possible roles of memory in jazz improvisation via cross-cultural comparison. Finally, as this type of comparison becomes problematic if taken to the point of rigid adherence to certain shared characteristics, the insights gleaned from these comparisons will be applied and modified to jazz. Hopefully this exercise will shed light on aspects of collective memory and collective improvisation within the jazz medium.

As a final note before beginning a discussion of musical forms commonly used in jazz improvisations, I should state that this paper will take into account only bebop and its related genres with common, recurring chord progressions (e.g. 12 bar-bar blues, 32-bar AABA and ABAC forms, etc.) And not “free” or “out” jazz as documented by researchers

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such as David Such (1993). I emphasize that the reason for this is not to exclude “free” jazz from being considered a form of jazz. This omission exists only as a result of the fact that although more memory undoubtedly plays a major role in this genre of jazz compared to “mainstream” jazz, “free” jazz deliberately attempts to release itself from the constraints of song structures imposed on jazz standards and similar pieces of music. While the relevance of the subsequent discussions to “free” jazz becomes debatable in regard to some aspects of this paper, some of the principles generated in what follows could be applied to “free” jazz.

Some Thoughts on Jazz

Jazz improvisation is unique and a little bit surrealistic in that it creates something new and different while using traditional components. Jimmy Heath and John Coltrane both expressed amazement at how Dizzy Gillespie could begin the tune “I Can’t Get Started” differently every time he played it (Berliner 1994:269). Indeed, in the majority of jazz performances well-known traditional compositions are used as “vehicles” for improvisation (Berliner 1994:63).

In bebop and its related genres, the structures and chord progressions of popular songs as well as 12-bar, 24-bar, etc., blues progressions are used quite frequently for these “vehicles”. The “popular” song structure used by jazz musicians is almost always the 32-bar AABA form with each section comprising an eight bar phrase. These pieces are exemplified by such songs as Vernon Duke’s “I Can’t Get Started”, mentioned earlier, and George Gershwin’s “I Got Rhythm”. In contrast, blues songs often vary more in their structure than popular songs, but do have regular, repeating chord progression as well. For example, the 12-bar blues has an AAB structure with each section consisting of four measures. Often times jazz performers will begin and end the song by playing the “head” of the tune - that is, the recognizable melody associated with the song. During the middle of the piece, the musicians play improvisational lines over the chord progression of the song. When jazz musicians create new songs, the chord changes of previously composed songs are often “recycled” into the new musical piece. For example, Charlie Parker’s “Mohawk” is really Ray Noble’s “Cherokee” with a different melody, and the alto saxophonist’s “Kim” is a “recycled” “I Got Rhythm.”

When jazz musicians “solo” (this word is a bit misleading and will be dealt with later in this paper) over a set of chord changes known by all of the accompanying musicians, the participants (including the audience) are well aware of “what to expect next” in regard to the progression of chords in a song. In other words, those accompanying the soloist(s) are providing a foundation for the song that, in most cases, everyone is familiar with. These accompanists could theoretically play the underlying chord progressions of the song while the soloist continues to improvise “over the top.”

Thomas Brothers has compared this concept of improvisation over an underlying preconceived structure to the music of the souther Ewe people of Ghana (1994). Ewe musicians divide themselves into two rhythmic groups during the performance” one which plays a cyclical underlying pattern and another which plays improvised lines over the cyclical

foundation. The soloing group is perceived by the Ewe as being both connected to, and yet detached from, the cyclical foundation (Brothers 1994:488). Brothers argues that this musical style is very similar to the manner in which a jazz soloist improvises over the accompanying cyclical chord progression. Thus, by way of analogy,

“The jazz soloist relies mainly on correct harmony (i.e. consonance, playing the melody without variation) for achieving agreement with the cycle and on details of phrasing (i.e. dissonance, “blue notes”, and extra musical “mimicking”) for achieving disagreement...the soloist’s melody is perceived in terms of the cycle (Brothers 1994:489- comments are mine).”

In this manner, the improvised line is both connected to and detached from the chordal foundation. Quoting Duke Ellington’s view on dissonance in jazz: “Dissonance is our way of life in America. We are something apart, yet an integral part (Brothers 1994:503).” Brothers concludes, “Perhaps the paradoxical play between connection and detachment...has something to do with the experience of African-Americans as a minority group in the United States (Brothers 1994:503).”

Brothers notion of the improvisation (or on a higher allegorical level, the musician) as being both connected to and detached from the underlying structure (or society) is a concept which seems to fit rather nicely under Victor Turner’s idea of “liminality” - that is “betwixt and between”, or neither this nor that, yet both simultaneously (Turner 1967:93-111). This concept of liminality seems to be rather popular as others have come to the same conclusion while applying Turner’s term (or similar terms) to different aspects of jazz.

Ethnomusicologist Ingrid Monson is a second example of those who have applied the liminal concept to jazz. In an article titled “Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation: Irony, Parody, and Ethnomusicology,” Monson argues that “opposing aesthetics” (e.g. “Being serious/playing [swing]; cleanliness/dirtiness; knowing rules/breaking them [1994:291]”) and “the heterogeneity of musical elements found in jazz improvisation [are] deeply related to the heterogeneity of African-American cultural experience (Monson 1994:311).” Similarly, Frank Salamone writes “jazz is not simply West African and the tension produced by its essentially [European and African] dual heritage is compounded many times over through a series of contradictions within the music itself...Out of that tension comes much of the creative force for jazz (1988:97).”

While the works of these three authors do have much to offer any ethnomusicological discussion of jazz, the similar conclusions of these arguments are a bit problematic. Even though jazz is without doubt strongly African-American in its heritage and could be taken by many to metaphorically represent the social role of a minority group in American society, I do not believe this meaning to be inherent in the music. Consequently, I find anthropologist Ann Beeson’s article on the narrative qualities of jazz to be rather enlightening both in its own right as well as in its potential for “pulling” useful concepts out of the aforementioned articles - avoiding becoming entangled in the sticky matters of race and to “whom” jazz belongs.” Beeson’s concept of the tradition/innovation paradox is one which, for the most part, avoids racial issues while still managing to consider the musical heritage.

Beeson has stated that jazz musicians are victims of a paradox common in many forms of art:

“On the one hand, spontaneity and creativity are highly praised. On the other hand, jazz players show a strong respect for the past in their art, and a deference to legendary players is considered appropriate and necessary in the creative learning process. Aesthetic tensions like the tradition/innovation dialectic keep the music vibrant and alive (Beeson 1990:2).”

Likewise, Frank Salamone also perceives this paradox as one which “combinations of awesome, weird, and wonderful new things [are] made up from scraps of old elements (Salamone 1988:94).” Keeping this tradition/innovation paradox in mind, I hope that a brief overview of Berliner’s findings on learning processes in jazz will further heighten understanding of jazz and jazz improvisation.

Learning the Changes

Education, whether formal or informal, is a major part of becoming assimilated into any culture, and jazz musicians are not an exception to this seemingly universal observation. “For almost a century, the jazz community has functioned as a large educational system for producing, preserving, and transmitting musical knowledge, preparing students for the artistic demands of a jazz career through its particularized methods and forums (Berliner 1994:37).” Berliner lists some of the methods by which the student of jazz learns “how to play jazz” as: “hanging out” with both local musicians and those in town for a gig, on vacation, passing through, etc.; attending “jam sessions” with peers in the community and occasionally with professional musicians who may be “sitting in” on the performance; becoming apprenticed to a mentor in the jazz community or enrolling in and receiving instruction from an established musical institution; and perhaps most importantly, intensively watching and listening to jazz musicians (Berliner 1994:36-59).

This last method, listening and watching, is the method which I wish to put emphasis on in this paper. Students of jazz, especially those studying in the years before written notations for jazz pieces became popular, have often learned primarily by oral/aural means. Even today, students often treat recordings of their favorite artists as “formal educational tools (Berliner 1994:58)” which enable them to memorize and “play along” with their idol’s solos.

“Eventually, students anticipate and recreate the solo’s every nuance, blending their performance of the solo inextricably with all the other parts on the recording. Breathing together, following the same line of musical thought, and experiencing the same sense of urgency and shades of feeling that motivated the soloist’s initial expression, young performers become engaged in an intimate union with their idols (Berliner 1994:97).”

After such an “intimate union” jazz musicians are not likely to forget the solo. Berliner remarks on the “phenomenal long-term memories” which allow some performers to recall their favorite solos note-for-note (perhaps in some case, “blow-by-blow”) even after thirty years and more (Berliner 1994:111).

Watching jazz musicians at clubs or informal jam sessions is another way in which students learn by imitation. Calling upon the research of ethnomusicologist John Blacking, John

Murphy hypothesizes that the influence of one's musical idols "might work as much through motor memory as it does through musical memory (1990:18)." Memory works in other mysterious ways as well. Berliner recounts one incident in which he was practicing a line on trumpet repeatedly, when suddenly "I found myself playing another phrase altogether, one that I had practiced months earlier and then abandoned (1994:208)." The reason for this was that the inadvertent phrase and the intended phrase both began with the same fingering pattern; this resulted in the intended phrase triggering the previously "abandoned" phrase. In another instance, a tenor saxophonist interviewed by Berliner commented on how at times he plays a pattern that seems new and original to him, realizing later that it was something he heard on a record somewhere (1994:196). In other cases, jazz musicians purposely make reference to other musicians through musical quotation or imitation. This reference could be made for a variety of subjective reasons discussed later in this paper, but in John Murphy's analysis of a solo by Joe Henderson (Murphy actually consulted the tenor saxophonist) which quoted a Charlie Parker melody, it is frequently out of admiration for one's influences (1990:13).

At times pupils may even go to the extreme of imitating their idol's personal (as opposed to musical) style, manner of dress, etc., teetering on the "verge of idolatry (Berliner 1994:40)." The jazz community frown upon excessive musical and personal imitation, however, as one of the essential "rites of passage" for the up-and-coming jazz musician is to find his or her own "voice" both musically and personally. "On a grand scale of judging the overall contribution of the artist to jazz, a fundamental criterion for evaluation is originality (Berliner 1994:273)." Pianist Walter Bishop, Jr. sees the career of the jazz musician as being composed of imitation, assimilation, and finally innovation (Berliner 1994:273). This reflects Beeson's conception of the tradition/innovation paradox quite well. Jazz musicians must learn the ways of the past, and for much of their formative years, they play jazz in the shadow of those who have come before them. Yet at some point during their lives, in order to truly contribute to the art form, they must invent something new while paying reverence to their precursors at the same time, for "the identity of the genre is continually rejuvenated and metamorphosed through its *opposition* to social boundaries and stagnant forms (Beeson 1990:13 - original emphasis)

Memory and Storytelling in Jazz

Paul Berliner refers to Jazz improvisation as "storytelling" both in the sense of structure many improvisers impose upon their creations as well as in the sense of developing a unique voice in order to tell a "new" story. Unfortunately, there is not much in the way of analysis regarding this storytelling metaphor in *Thinking Jazz*. I believe that this concept of storytelling could be further expanded upon with beneficial results. In this section, I propose two analogies which, in my opinion, enable Berliner's storytelling metaphor to become more potent. In order to discuss these analogies, however, I find it necessary to expand on Beeson's view of semantics and semiotics as applied to jazz.

Though in the past attempts at applying semantic and semiotic theories and methodologies to music have been a very confusing matter fraught with various entanglements, Ann Beeson has taken a very simple, straightforward approach to the application of these theories and methodologies to jazz. Though perhaps many would refer to it as lacking originality, evasive and avoiding the question of “what music means” altogether (for example see Swain 1996:136), Beeson states “jazz ‘tells a story’ about itself; self-reflectivity is an integral part of the genre (1990:1).” This concept of the self-referentiality of jazz, although it could be seen as too simplistic by some, provides a topic for the “storytellers” to tell a story about. Granted, all jazz musicians when they improvise are likely attempting to communicate more than simply “I’m playing jazz” to the listener, but the meaning created by the listener could be (and I would venture usually is) quite different from the intended message. Hence, Miles Davis could very well have been thinking of “autumn time, the falling leaves, the end of something, remembrance, and pathos (Chuck Israels as quoted in Berliner 1994:414)” when he played “Autumn Leaves,” and the music may have actually provoked some of the same thoughts in the audience. For the majority of the participants in the musical event, however, the music surely evoked other unrelated subjective thoughts.

One thing “Autumn Leaves” does evoke in the minds of the participants is memories of performances heard previously. For those who are familiar with “Autumn Leaves,” the music most likely evokes other musicians’ rendition of the piece, both inside and outside the jazz genre; the song’s lyrics; one’s state of mind or environment during the last listening period; and/or many other possibilities. For those who have not heard the song previously, perhaps, the music reminds them of similar melodic lines within other pieces, abstract emotions, and/or other ideas and feelings. The main point is that by interacting with the memories of all participants in the activity, jazz does indeed recount its history with each performance. It does this by referring to musical and extra musical contexts of past musical events both inside and outside the “category” of jazz (Monson 1994:292-293; Walser 1993:350-351; Beeson 1990:4-6).

I consider the work of Mary Nooter Roberts and Allen Roberts regarding the mnemonic systems of the Luba peoples of southeastern Zaire (Republic of Congo) as a useful aid in conceptualizing the role memory plays in jazz improvisation. The Luba weave art and memory into mnemonic devices which are encoded with symbolic signs referring to narratives about the past (Vansina 1996:12). Foremost among these mnemonic devices is the *lukasa*, a small wooden board upon which beads and/or incised lines are embedded in the symbolic ways mentioned above. During certain Luba rituals, the *lukasa* is utilized “to teach neophytes about sacred lore, about culture heroes, clan migrations, and the introduction of sacred rule” as well as a multitude of other aspects which construct the history of Luba culture (Roberts 1996a:37).

Obviously for people other than musicians. “Sacred” is probably not a word that comes into mind when jazz “lore” is mentioned, nor do migrations and the like compose a very large part of this lore. Nevertheless, the knowledge passed on from the elder to the younger jazz musician is deeply rooted in the collective memory of the jazz community. By collective memory I mean the total sum of the subjective memories possessed by individuals sharing a common musical heritage. In many cases, important past musical event may “overlap” in the

subjective memories of many people. Though these “overlapping” memories may vary slightly in detail from person to person, they do form a sense of shared history which may assist in binding a group together. When a teacher demands that a novice memorize every nuance of an “important” Charlie Parker solo in order to achieve that “intimate union” with one’s precursors, that solo may become incorporated into his or her style and etched into his or her memory forever. What may not be quite as evident is that the influence of Lester Young, whom Charlie Parker idolized as a youth, is also etched into the mind of the novice. Lester Young’s idols too, are there - if only faintly. If the novice then successfully negotiates the tradition/innovation paradox and creates something he is remembered for in the collective memory of jazz community, perhaps someone will someday memorize his or her solos. With these solos, those of Charlie Parker and Lester Young will be carried on as well.

This line of influences is also recognized by the jazz audience. If someone hears “a little bit of John Coltrane” in Branford Marsalis, it is due to the self-referentiality of jazz that such connections are made. Writing about the dream narratives performed by the Xavante of central Brazil, anthropologist Laura Graham states: “through movements and sounds of these expressive forms, participants create and affirm their links to those who have performed them in the past. Performance thus engenders a subjective sense of continuity (1995:6).” In this same manner, jazz musicians’ improvisations created in the real-time of the present maintain a sense of continuity with the past.

Despite this continuity with the past, the Luba and the Xavante refuse to allow their performances - be they memory or dream - to stagnate in past traditions. The tradition/innovation paradox seems to be quite common as an evaluative criteria for performance. “Memory is active, always in the present, and a construction, transaction, and negotiation, as opposed to a reproduction (Roberts 1996a:29).”

Mnemonics also play a role in jazz improvisation. “Mnemonic devices organize and encode information to make it more memorable (Roberts 1996a:86),” and thus it is easy to understand why such a device may be valuable to the jazz musician. In jazz, mnemonic devices take form in the musicians’ instruments themselves. Studying their instruments, “students conceptualize the successive sound clusters of harmonic forms as mapped out in particular positions on instruments and as visual images of abstract designs whose colors and tints may represent different shadings of harmonic tension (Berliner 1994:72).” As would follow, the traditional solos and pieces of music young musicians’ attempt to memorize “verbatim” are applied to these harmonic “maps” and abstract designs.

As was demonstrated by an earlier example, this action of musical recall may be either voluntary or involuntary for the performer. Berliner’s anecdote of inserting an unanticipated phrase into a solo he was practicing is an example of involuntary “quoting” from a past musical event. The fingerings for the intended an involuntary phrases landed closely together on Berliner’s harmonic map, and therefore the attempt to perform one phrase involuntarily triggered memories of the other.

The remembrance of past musical occurrence, however, does not have to be involuntary. At times the improviser may be “toying” with ideas and making connections between the “visual images...that mediate between the subject of memory and the person who wishes to remember (Roberts 1996b:86).” Berliner has found

“The experience of negotiating through the ever-changing patterns [chords, contexts, etc.] around them from the perspective of their personal structural maps is a rich and dynamic one for improvisers. It potentially involves the imaginative play of sounds, physical gestures, colorful shapes, and abstract symbols, whose gestalt creates the impression of perpetual movement through a multidimensional realm (1994:93).”

As an addition to Berliner’s list of phenomena that influence the improviser’s imaginative play, I would add language - specifically the titles and lyrics of songs. I think it very likely that Berliner would grant this due to the many examples in his book (see for example page 176, 233, 312, 427) which focus on the way musical quotations are used to convey meaning to the listener. These quotations achieve this communication by indexically referring to the titles, lyrics, previous performers, and other ideas dependent upon the context of past performances. For example, George Coleman once concluded a solo in the song “You Don’t Know What Love Is” by quoting the theme from John Coltrane’s “A Love Supreme” (Berliner 1994:195). Obviously, Coleman was making a connection between the concepts of love each song evoked in his mind.

Each jazz musician’s mnemonic conception of his or her instrument undoubtedly varies from individual to individual. Because of the very subjective memories and mnemonic systems of each performer, the audience can hardly be expected to follow the connections being made in the same way the improviser conceives them. In order for the improviser’s use of mnemonics and jazz self-referentiality to past musical events as meaningful to others, there must be a common heritage shared musically. “Theoretically almost any musical detail or composite thereof could convey a reference, so long as a community of interpreters [including both performers and audience] can recognize the continuity...For a sonic detail becomes socially meaningful and actionable only in an at least partially shared context of use (Monson 1994:305).” In other words, without a group sharing common memories of past musical events, the improviser’s “stories” will fall upon ears which cannot comprehend them because the listener cannot relate to past performances.

Up to this point I have considered much regarding “tradition” and very little on “innovation.” Nevertheless, “memory is always now (Roberts 1996:29),” and by placing bits and pieces of the past into the context of the present, something new is indeed created. It is in this way that the improviser creates along the fine line between tradition and innovation, and clearly it must be a difficult path to follow. Extremely innovative jazz “can never be truly popular with a mass audience (Salamone 1988:100),” because it is considered as making a leap which breaks the continuity of the tradition. Similarly, as was mentioned earlier, the jazz community frowns upon those who only reproduce the past and allows jazz to stagnate. Therefore, an important component of remembering is *forgetting* (Roberts 1996a:44).

The pressures of the tradition/innovation paradox during improvisatory performances in jazz create a very collage-like, personal recollection of the genre’s history. Considering the combination of the processes that entail creating something considered “new”, voluntary or involuntary remembering and inserting parts of “old” musical material; forgetting other musical material; and making connections between all of these things while perpetually moving through the “multidimensional music realm” mentioned above; it is easy to understand how the improviser’s recounting of past musical events is such a subjective, surrealistic one.

Despite the surrealism, if the “community of interpreters” is able to either pick out even a few of the references the improviser makes, make their own, and understand how their references might relate to the completely innovative portions of the improvisation; then even though the audience’s understanding may differ from the improviser’s intention, the “solo” becomes socially meaningful. Continuity with the past is established while something entirely new is created.

Collective Memory and Collective Improvisation

Though the comparisons I have made between jazz musicians and both the Luba and Xavante are hopefully enlightening, there are differences between all three peoples, as one would very well expect there should be. Having established the analogies which illustrate my ideas on how anthropological conceptions of performance and memory relate to jazz, I will now depart from these comparisons in order to focus on some of the unique characteristics of jazz.

In the previous section, I demonstrated how the individual performance which utilizes the subjective memory of the “soloist” is able to stimulate the collective memory of the jazz community by achieving a sense of continuity with the past. Jazz improvisation, however, is not the performance of one individual, it is a very interactive performance between or among the participants in the event. The participants include all members of the group performing as well as the audience. Due to this process in which “performers and audiences mutually share and create meaning (Salamone 1988:99),” jazz is a “collective improvisation” in the broadest sense.

Audiences influence the directions improvisations take with their behavior. Applause, shouts of praise, swaying, nodding, dancing, etc. greatly encourage performers while silent indifference, talking, and general acts of disrespect hinder performers (Berliner 1994:456-458). The “vibe” of the venue in which the performance occurs depends mainly upon audience, although performers’ attitudes do certainly have an effect on the atmosphere of the performance.

In the topics addressed in this paper, the way in which performers collectively create music together is slightly more significant than the audience’s contribution, and therefore I shall discuss these at greater length. Although the word “solo” is used very frequently in jazz, the “soloist” is actually always the entire group - at least those playing at any given moment. In a study done on group jazz performances, communication studies researchers David Bastien and Todd Hostager analyzed the organizational structure and forms of communication used by a quartet playing together for the first time. The researchers concluded that “individual invention is embedded in a collective context and is inseparable from the inventive and integrative activity of the entire group...greatness [of certain musicians] in jazz resulted from a constellation of cooperatively improvising artists (1988:599-600).”

Taking this study into account, the subjective improvisation of the individual “soloist” is not independent of the “accompanist” providing the cyclical foundation for the solo.

Furthermore, the accompanists, too, are influenced by the soloist as well as other accompanists. For the individual performer, this interdependency creates a web of references not only to memories of the past, but also to musicians playing alongside the individual in the present. These musicians, though, are prey to the tradition/innovation paradox as well, and therefore they may be referring to past musical events while creating new ideas. Monson terms this concept of collective interplay “intermusicality (1994:307),” and give an excellent example of group intermusicality. In a performance by drummer Ralph Peterson, Jr.’s Trio, the pianist played the beginning of a motif which reminded Peterson of a phrase frequently played by legendary jazzman Art Blakey. Peterson then rhythmically finished the phrase as he remembered it. Peterson’s response then evoked the riff from Dizzy Gillespie’s “Salt Peanuts” in the mind of the pianist who began to work that melody into his improvisation/accompaniment (Monson 1994:307-308). Peterson remarked to Monson:

A lot of times when you get into a musical conversation, one person in the group will state an idea or the beginning of an idea and another person will complete the idea or their interpretation of the same idea, how they hear it. So the conversation happens in fragments and comes from different parts, different voices (ibid. 308).

In a way then, the performing musicians’ memories taken together collectively, influence the individual improvisations created through each participant’s own melodies, mnemonic system, and “the imaginative play” within personal structural maps (Berliner 1994:93).” - all of which are constantly called upon as the individual negotiates between tradition and innovation. The individual improvisations then, together with the collective improvisation of the group, allow a chain of associations to be set off “that engage[s] the listener and unite[s] him or her with a community of other individuals who share a similar musical point of view (Monson 1994:303).” I would suggest that this “similar musical point of view” is fueled by a collective memory of past musical events. Thus the collective memory of the jazz community is kept “alive” through the genre’s self-referentiality manifested in the improvisatory performances of the present.

Conclusion

The subtitle of Paul Berliner’s *Thinking in Jazz* is “The Infinite Art of Improvisation” and I find this phrase very fitting for the issues discussed in this paper as well. The infinite cycle I have describe may be too similar to the question of the chicken and the egg to be explained with any sort of starting point. Nevertheless, perhaps it can be summarized as follows: an individual musician negotiating the tradition/innovation paradox contributes in some way (or ways) to jazz; these contributions are subsequently assimilates into the collective memory of the jazz community; the important aspects of the community’s collective memory are then imparted to young musicians who use these past musical events to shape their contributions to jazz, and so on.

Every young musician carries his or her own notions of the past, yet during improvisation, young musicians are influenced by other musicians’ subjective ideas and memories which are made known in the “musical conversations” of group performances. These musical

conversations could be seen as small portions of the collective memory made manifest during musical events to both performers and audience. Granted, these are the memories which constitute less than the total collective memory, yet more than that of a single individual. Hence, part of the collective memory (albeit a minute part) is constantly creating “new” past musical events that may find a place in the larger community’s memory along with other well-known past events which “overlap” in the minds of many people. Other events may be forgotten. Whatever the case may be, improvisation is the process by which the cycle both retains its continuity and rolls onward, infinitely.

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