CHAPTER 15

The Jazz of a Black Ethnographer

A Memoir of Pedagogy, Improvisation, and Reflexivity at a Liberal Arts College

Whitney Slaten

This chapter considers how students' engagement with reflexivity and improvisation offer new pedagogies for ethnographic research within the liberal arts classroom and a graduate seminar. Improvisation, central to jazz performance, enables students to acknowledge their own being and becoming, amid their analyses of how people theorize the social contexts of music. To swing in such ways, to syncopate between times of studying oneself and others, suggests a paradigm of research that honors the social sciences of musicians, audiences, and their allies who have negotiated jazz in ways that have formed specific ontological, epistemological, and hegemonic understandings and assertions. Through the example of leading the ethnomusicology program at Bard, the author details the curriculum, examples of student work, and the importance of the relationship between teaching and research when teaching difficult topics. This chapter calls for a disciplinary reawakening, enabling music studies to respond to the contemporary moment through connecting ethnographic learning with student agency.

FINDING ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

Donald Byrd was the only one to ask who I was and listen to the answer. He was among the most important jazz musicians and trumpet players of his generation. I was an undergraduate student of jazz performance and sound engineering at William Paterson University when he was a visiting artist-in-residence in 2004. Byrd had seen me walking on the campus and he invited me to talk in his office, which was at some distance from the music building. He told me that he was on his way to Teterboro Airport, where his plane was. After establishing that he was among the few of his contemporaries to have

an earned doctorate as a jazz musician, he wanted to know about what led me to college, and to talk about my future.

I told him about my father's sound engineering business, the strength of my high school jazz program, and my matriculation at Hampton University, a historically Black university in Virginia, where I had hoped to study jazz performance. As I began to describe my involvement in the marching band from the summer through the fall of my first year, and the turn toward classical training in music throughout the spring semester, his head started to nod slowly, as if to gesture that he knew where my story was heading. I told him that in addition to me, roughly a dozen of my classmates who could improvise decided to transfer to music programs throughout the country that offered a degree in jazz. These classmates and I recorded audition tapes in secret, not wanting to tell anyone our plans, and we all eventually admitted that we felt some level of guilt about the decision to leave Hampton. Some amount of guilt and regret for leaving stayed with me not only at that moment talking with Byrd, but would also extend into the future. However, I did not have to characterize those feelings to him. He then told me about what seemed to be his evangelical mission to establish jazz studies in the curricula of a number of historically Black colleges and universities since the 1970s. He seemed to know about specific aspects of this at Hampton, but never detailed them to me. Byrd helped me understand how certain Black colleges discouraged the curricular study of jazz as a protective measure to guard students against economic investments in the industrially exploitative negotiations with popular culture, even though he and I, in our different times, wished there could be some engagement with the music and its intellectual legacy. Then our conversation became future facing. Byrd wanted to know what I wanted to find in jazz. It took some time for my 20-year-old self to articulate my answer to this, but I eventually characterized my desire to study the processes of jazz and its Africanist intellectual foundations, particularly in what would contribute to an anti-essentialist discourse about Black expressive culture. The example I had been working with at the time was a research project about harmonic systems in pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa. This piqued his interest. He recommended that I read works by Kwabena Nketia and Kofi Agawu, and to eventually meet them someday. Donald Byrd was the first to recommend that I study ethnomusicology in graduate school.

During my time at William Paterson, I had the privilege to learn from James Williams about his insistence on the exploration of Black spiritualism within the inner voices of tonal harmony. Donald Braden possessed and taught me vertical and horizontal melodic virtuosity. Kenny Garrett

impressed upon me the import of developing vibrato. Clark Terry's theorizations of linguistics in phrasing fundamentally changed my improvisations. Babatunde Olatunji taught me the power of the voice within the context of modes and polyrhythms, and he led me to feel even closer to John Coltrane than I thought I was beforehand. These experiences, as well as the singular act of mentorship by Donald Byrd, brought me to study ethnomusicology at Columbia University.

Heeding the lesson of protection by Hampton University, while also considering the paradigmatic aspirations of the Columbia ethnomusicology program at that time, I thought strategically about my selection of a research topic. Through my background in sound engineering, I pursued ethnographic research on practices of live sound reinforcement engineering at world music, jazz, and music theater concerts and productions in New York City. This work responded to a sound studies discourse that emerged from perpetuations of mediation as a framework rooted in linguistic analysis. Studies of mediation sought to de-essentialize the ontology of music within post-structuralist discourses in cultural anthropology and ethnomusicology. However, ethnographic fieldwork continually reminded me of how strategic my choice to use the discourses of sound and technology in music was. Here was a way to gain expertise as a researcher while protecting the cherished intellectual foundations of Black processes in the making of expressive culture that wield both craft and art, and everything between techne and episteme.

I belong to a small, disparate, and dispersed group of black people, following Zora Neale Hurston, who trained as ethnographers at Columbia University. Questioned in different ways by our white contemporaries, who famously fought white supremacy, ever since such advocacy by Franz Boas, many of us always felt and knew of the dangerous intimacies of this supremacy; nevertheless, we have each conducted serious fieldwork, wielding method and concept with rigor, care and protection. Hurston was watchful of science. She witnessed the shift of consensus about the culture concept in Boas's anthropology, as well as the tenuous notion that such scientific racism would not persist in the ethnographic method. At some distance from anthropology, her pursuit of narrative, and its revelations, predate the discipline's eventual realizations of "ethnoscience" in the 1970s, or the partial embrace of reflexivity and thick description in the "writing cultures" turn in the 1980s.

Throughout graduate school, I realized a greater freedom to develop these ideas of method and concept in my teaching as an adjunct or a term professor. I develop syllabi dedicated to considering the cross-talk between ethnography, technology, and improvisation. In my roles as a professor of music

history, music technology, music theory, and ethnomusicology, the needs and the talents of my students at Columbia, William Paterson University, Seton Hall University, and The New School not only honed productive course work over the years, but ways to develop important colloquia set within a number of important campus events. In particular, the progression of such events that had been developed in fieldwork and in the classroom, from Columbia University to Bard College, has helped to converge my earlier experiences, the operations on jazz by Black life in Harlem, and the contemporary paradigmatic aspirations of sound studies, on how I have shaped ethnomusicology at Bard College.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ON CAMPUS

I have found most success teaching difficult topics when research and public engagement inform my pedagogy. Thinking and connecting with the Bard community, the surrounding campus community, and intellectual communities throughout the academy have been crucial in remaining attuned to how scholarship can speak to the stakes of the moment, and how to best engage and teach students foundations in ethnomusicology with an immediacy about contemporary social life. Below are a few examples of how public work impacts the pedagogical, conceptual, and methodological approaches that I will discuss in the subsequent sections.

In the podcast titled "A Discussion on the influence of Military Music on the American Sound, from Reconstruction to the Roaring Twenties" with the West Point Music Research Center, including Jonathan Crane and Kristina Teuschler, I drew from my work on early American music, early jazz, and my experience as a band performer, discussing the concept of military music in the United States and introducing the centers of influence during the reconstruction period following the Civil War. This flowed into addressing the relationships between religious and military ritual practices to detail how movement, both physical and spiritual, is a critical part of these musical engagements. We concluded with a discussion about the imbalance between the study of musics that influence American culture, particularly related to Wiley Hitchcock's "cultivated" versus "vernacular" debate and the association of bands to "high" and "low" culture.

During the 2020 Bard Music Festival "Out of the Silence," I wrote program notes for two concerts featuring the works of Edward Duke Ellington and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, drawing on my work on historic performance

style. Within a virtual discussion, "The Life of Joseph Bolonge," by invitation of Boston's *A Far Cry* Chamber Orchestra, I contextualized this historic figure in the contemporary climate of reckoning with black male life, mapping my research about the presence of the African Diaspora in Europe and the cultural contributions therein. In a pre-performance conversation about the emergence of black composers in the 21st century, considering Florence Price's Symphony No. 1 in E minor, I detailed "The Juba like the Scherzo: The Social Commentary of a Symphony's Third Movement," framing form as central in understanding cultural significance in symphonic music.

"A Conversation with Marcus Roberts" in October 2020, an online, public event that introduced him to the Bard community and engaged Roberts's biography, jazz history, and his performance practice provided space for students to connect material from my *Jazz Histories of Sound and Communication* course to the artistry of a leading contemporary jazz musician. The event also constructed a broader interdisciplinary point of contact for music studies across programs and divisions of the College. Students of history and American studies were interested in the role of migrations between the southern and northern United States in shaping musical aesthetics. Anthropology students were fascinated to know about the practices of observation that jazz musicians enact in performance. Philosophy students explored matters of dependency and generosity in practices of improvisation. Literature students inquired about the ways that jazz improvisers form narrative. Conservatory students were interested in how performance practices represent histories of style.

In fall 2019, I produced "1619: A Commemoration in Sound," at the Bard Fisher Center, convening students, faculty, and administrators from across the College as well as convening residents of the Hudson Valley. The event was a remembrance marking the 400th anniversary of the first arrival of enslaved people from Africa in the North American British Colonies—the beginning of slavery in dominant histories of the United States of America. I invited jazz artist T.K. Blue, choreographer Souleymane Badolo, and illustrator James Ransome to participate in the program that offered an exploration of history, memory, legacy, and gestures between the U.S. and Africa. I share the details of the event's development to trace how producing this public event gave me tools in teaching difficult topics in *Jazz Histories of Sound and Communication*. Fielding questions from students, faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders revealed the terrain of reception to Nikole Hannah-Jones's *1619 Project*,[1] as well as ways to connect it to Black performing arts.

In conjunction with the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University

and Jazzmobile, Inc., I organized an event entitled "Jazzmobile, Community, and the Harlem Soundscape" to engage how Jazzmobile constructs community and the soundscape in the midst of Harlem's changing milieu. Jazzmobile has presented free, live jazz concerts continuously for over fifty years, through which audiences, production teams, organizers and musicians sound and listen to amplified jazz at historical sites in Harlem's outdoors. The program featured performances by Jazzmobile all-stars, my keynote address interrogating Jazzmobile as cultural repatriation, and a roundtable discussion with Jazzmobile audience members. Students in attendance were able to see the interrelation among scholarship, musicianship, and ethnography between their own community at Columbia and a historically underrepresented, though geographically adjacent one in Harlem.

Most recently, I hosted a private seminar of senior scholars affiliated with the Columbia University Center for Jazz Studies Study Group. Literary theorists, art historians, musicologists, and musicians from across the American and European academies comprise this group that meets annually to explore and develop new approaches in the study of jazz music and culture. The session centered on my work with jazz and technology and expanded the discourse about jazz and science, a central theme in my approach to teaching difficult topics that fuses the humanities and the sciences.

Producing public events not only distributes my ideas, but also feeds back into my scholarship and teaching at Bard. In the course design of a graduate seminar about Black composers and an upper level undergraduate course, *Musicology Among Enslaved Americans*, for example, as well as reinforcing my approach to teaching courses like *Jazz Histories of Sound and Communication* and *Improvisation as Social Science*, I drew on the lessons from these public events in my approach to pedagogy. Additionally, these events generated fora for my students to engage their coursework beyond the classroom, which is a key component to the ethnomusicology concentration at Bard, where I prioritize ethnographic fieldwork and music ethnography.

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY CONCENTRATION AT BARD

Both my teaching and research focus on how the social positions of musicians and audiences shift, in moments when sound becomes music. This analysis of time and resonance in music and society contributes to the discourses of ethnomusicology, jazz studies, technology studies, the philosophy of music, and the sociology of art. The relationship between my teaching and

research guides my pedagogical approach when teaching difficult topics. To detail this approach, I overview the ethnomusicology concentration at Bard College, the coursework offered, and examples of student work to show how reflexivity and improvisation guide ethnomusicological pedagogy at a liberal arts college. By teaching students the intellectual history of poststructuralism in ethnography since the 1980s, as led by James Clifford and George Marcus (1986), I raise awareness about reflexivity through contextualizing the social milieu of our readings and problematizing the transparency and opacity of power that ethnographers and interlocutors negotiate. Students engage scholarship about improvisation while considering examples that reveal the collective choices of individuals and groups who pursue various opportunities in time. I guide each student to acknowledge the interactive improvisivity of both social actors and structures.[2]

I have ensured that new ethnomusicology students at Bard College consider ethnographic fieldwork in terms much less accepted by their graduate student counterparts at research universities: it is as much a chance to experiment with their own being and becoming, as it is a time to explore how people theorize their lifeworlds in the social contexts of music. Bard's participation in the liberal arts model encourages interdisciplinary course readings that students ethnographically engage. However, their analytical juxtapositions of such scholarship with theory from the field frame their ethnographic writing such that it becomes not only a *bildungsroman* for themselves but also one about the experience of their fellow students. Beyond the introductory course, students pursue special topics courses in ethnomusicology that often emphasize critical improvisation studies, jazz, and American musics. The ways in which musical and extramusical improvisation suggest a social science of comparable potentials for social agents and structures, as well as how the confluence of oppression, cultural generosities, and tactics of resistance associated with becoming and being free in the United States equally inform new frameworks through which students encounter the field again. I posit that improvisation and ethnographic reflexivity can construct a specific liberal arts pedagogical model for college students.

The concentration in ethnomusicology encourages students to pursue coursework across social science and humanities divisions across the College, in addition to their studies within the Music Program. Core courses such as *Introduction to Ethnomusicology*, *Ethnographies of Music and Sound*, and *Field Methods in Ethnomusicology* grounds these interdisciplinary experiences. In addition, Bard ethnomusicology students take a range of special topics courses. These include *The Social Life of Loudspeakers*, *Sound Studies*

and Critical Listening, *Improvisation as Social Science*, *Musicology Among Enslaved Americans*, as well as *Jazz Histories of Sound and Communication*. This coursework directly informs Moderation, a Bard tradition in which second-year students present projects to a board of three faculty members for consideration of a student's acceptance to the Upper College. This work also informs their senior ethnographic fieldwork projects.

CORE COURSES

The core courses introduce students to the intellectual history of ethnomusicology, focusing on the emergence, disappearances, and perpetuation of key concepts and methods across the field. In anticipation of students' final paper, Moderation, and senior project ethnography, the core courses often depict modern cosmological realms in which their interlocutors might encounter the individual, the group, as well as usual sites of structure and agency. These are helpful to students who seek methods of first producing imagery (Becker 1998) for the projects they propose;[3] however, class discussions also regularly problematize the efficacy of such depictions in representing the fluidity and complexities of social positions in practices of producing, circulating, and consuming music. These pictures also stimulate class conversations about the students' reflexive engagements in their projects, further developing their expectations of field encounters based on the consideration of their emic or etic (insider or outsider) perspectives, from moment to moment during their ethnographic inquiry. In the transitions from fieldwork to write-up, students realize a more musical and rhythmic experience of a reflexivity than the Writing Culture Turn in anthropology may have originally imagined.[4]

Working on final paper projects that normally describe campus-based musical gatherings, students often engage in participant-observations of the activities and friends with whom they are familiar. During my office hours, students comment on how these matters of balancing representations of themselves and their friends can be a gratifying challenge, and how it provides them a space to grapple with difficult topics in their everyday life.

SPECIAL TOPICS COURSES

I also design special topics courses that foreground examples of how musical people negotiate comparable dynamics in their representations of self

and other. My design is done in close conjunction with my own research and public expressions to the campus community about jazz, music, culture, and African American life. These courses suggest that there are ethnographers everywhere, reminding students to appreciate this as they grow to become increasingly collaborative with friends in the field who already theorize their cultural context.

All of the collective engagement in the field encounter anticipates reflexive ethnographic representation, and students' collaborations foreground such interactionism. As they are doing fieldwork on campus, the matter of subject position becomes complex. Bard students are conducting ethnographic research where they have already become participants—in clubs, as leaders of student organizations, members of bands, rappers, producers, and influencers. For as much as core courses work to show the various positions of ethnographer and interlocutor, what many students encounter are intimacies and shifts between the researcher and the researched. This is the substance of the Bard field encounter, and it overdetermines a richness in the description of the ethnographer's expression in the writing encouraged by special topics courses. Students often tell me that they find solace within the special topics courses. The juxtaposition of their seeking to understand musical culture on and off campus to these courses' acknowledgment that musicians and audiences of the past had negotiated a similar practice, strengthens and affirms students' resolve in their work as they pursue larger projects in ethnomusicology.

Improvisation as Social Science

One such course is *Improvisation as Social Science*. It asks the following questions: How does improvisation operate as social research? What does it mean to improvise? How do not only musicians, but also people in everyday life, and broader social structures, improvise with one another? How can critical improvisation studies shift our recognition of the phrase "jazz studies" from a noun to a declarative statement? This course provides an introduction to improvisation studies both within and beyond music. Students read, present, and discuss scholarship about improvisation while considering examples that reveal the collective choices of individuals and groups who pursue various opportunities over time. Lectures and demonstrations focus on how such examples outline "new" methodologies for qualitative social research, culminating in a paper that explores how improvisational techniques in music can

inform poststructural ethnographic research and outline "new" methodologies for qualitative social research.

One important course text is Tracy McMullen's "The Improvisative" in the *Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*. An anthropology major enrolled in the course identified the following feature:

> McMullen writes about the improvisative as a conceptual framework missing from contemporary cultural theory. She points out the ways in which Butler, Derrida, and Hegel's concepts of performativity emphasize a distinct self/other binary that inherently leans towards prioritizing the other. While with McMullen's concept of the improvisative 'one focuses on how to give to the situation without a concern for how one is read or if one is legible.'[5] As a responsive rather than reactive mode of performance, focus is shifted towards a different form of 'other' that exists in a single isolated moment. McMullen presents various forms of situating the self in time, identifying modes through which our understanding of time has the capacity to influence the relationship to self.[6]

This improvisative function for a student of ethnography begins to reveal the epistemological expectations between the interlocutor and the ethnographer, as well as the temporality of these expectations. This course culminates in a paper that explores how improvisational techniques in music can inform ethnographic research.

Jazz Histories of Sound and Communication

Another special topics course is *Jazz Histories of Sound and Communication*. It asserts that Jazz history is plural. Beginning as histories of expressions by African descendants in the New World, their sounds and social positions have both attracted and resisted the participation of allies and oppressors in the construction of jazz as American culture. Histories such as these foreground assertions of jazz as both an American sound and the sound of something broader. The various lifeworlds of jazz—local and global, past and present—lead to questions about the music's folk, popular, and art music categorization. Through a framework of exploring the history of jazz through specific sounds and surrogate communications, this course surveys the development of musical aesthetics set within specific social contexts that reveal how improvisation wields the production and reception of sounds and

communications within and beyond the bandstand. Students in the survey course read, present, and discuss writing about jazz and its periods. Lectures situate specific media examples of performances across folk, popular, and art contexts, in ways that also foreground the significance of individual and group agency. Examples of race, gender, class, nationality, generation, and their intersections in jazz music are the focus of the final research paper assignment.

One text that explores the multi-modal agency of a jazz musician is Robert O'Meally's "Checking Our Balances: Louis Armstrong, Ralph Ellison, and Betty Boop" in *Uptown Conversation*. In response to it, an ethnomusicology major noted the discussion of how some African American performers hide with the use of humor as masks. The student cited O'Meally's reference of Armstrong and Boop cartoons, where this kind of masking held power over racist oppressors. For Armstrong, the student noted, the use of performative smiling subverted his oppressor's power. Through a framework of exploring the history of jazz through specific sounds and surrogate communications like Armstrong's smile, this course surveys the development of musical aesthetics set within specific social contexts that reveal how improvisation wields the production and reception of sounds and communications within and beyond the bandstand.

After years of success, this course led to the development of *Musicology Among Enslaved Americans*. In this seminar, we study the music of African Americans as foundational to musical culture within the United States, and continually symbolic of notions of American exceptionalism around the world. Negotiating a gruesome exploitation that would fund the wealth of the nation, enslaved Americans of African descent expressed features of what this music would become, with great care. Scholars frequently categorize the musicality of the enslaved into sacred and secular forms, mainly the blues and the spirituals. They debate matters of authenticity, meaning, survival, and beauty. However, this course asks the following question: What was the hermeneutical music discourse among enslaved African Americans? This question marks the beginning of a proper ethnomusicological inquiry, as it expects an assertion of a people's own theorizations of music's social and cultural contexts to challenge or confirm the extant literature of related scholarship. How would they respond to the contrast between W. E. B. DuBois and Zora Neale Hurston regarding what she called "neo-spirituals?" How could their expressions about precursors to blues and jazz differently engage Amiri Baraka and Gunther Schuller? Led directly by examples of slave narratives, other course readings include autobiography, as well as the accounts of abo-

litionists and Union officers. Lectures and demonstrations focus on how such examples relate to twentieth and twenty-first century discourses.

One example that we examined in both *Jazz Histories of Sound and Communication* and *Musicology Among Enslaved Americans* was the work of saxophonist Kenny Garrett and his ensemble. Garrett, one of the important saxophonists of John Coltrane's lineage, asserts forms of African cultural retentions through his improvisations. In his music, such as the album *Standard of Language*, one might hear the near vocal expressions of pentatonic and diatonic scales in ways that both put forward a linguistic example of a modal and impressionistic speech surrogacy, as well as an almost dramatic portrayal of an African descendant's virtuosic negotiations with Western tonality. Amid the driving and dialogic syncopations inserted by the members of the ensemble, the often richly complex harmonic accompaniment of Garrett's melodies further emotionally contextualizes the listener's encounter with the challenges and triumphs that his improvisations conjure. For example, moments of extended repetition and exclamation evoke the practice of the ring shout that took place in settings such as the Jamestown Settlement extending late into the period of the American Civil War. These choreographed circular movements and repeated musical accompaniment were a practice by which Africans experimented with transitions from polytheism or Islam to Protestant Christianity in the Americas. Garrett's example of improvisation and human agency form a significant facet of social life in contemporary jazz.

SENIOR PROJECT EXAMPLES

Students have incorporated approaches that they learned in core and special topics courses into their required senior projects, and I offer examples from the spring 2019, 2020, and 2021 semesters to exemplify students' varied engagements with concept and method in their independent work. All senior projects at Bard are cataloged within the College's library, which is available to the public. The excerpts below are taken from three students' published projects, and used with their permission. I mean to portray how teaching difficult topics during these semesters of intense, wide-ranging global reckonings inspired this student research. I have observed that the ethnographic work of ethnomusicology students map values for reflexivity and improvisation from their coursework in distinct ways.

Maia Kamil, Spring 2019

Maia Kamil drew from her coursework in shaping her senior project. In "Why The Scared Sing: 'Stage-Fright' as a Rite of Passage," Kamil studied stage fright in indie rock performance to ". . . begin deconstructing the cultural structures that define and perpetuate fear on stage in [an] attempt to avoid its elimination. Through reframing our understanding of stage-fright and looking at new shared understandings of what musical performance is, fear no longer has to be seen as crippling but a crucial phenomenon in the process of performance and life." Her analysis goes on to consider the following:

> In conversing with my interlocutors, it has become evident that—recalling Arthur van Gennep's framework—the majority of them have yet to fully cross through either the separation, or in some cases, the liminal stages of their individual rites of passage. Although each encompasses a sincere urge to sing and exhibit their musical talent—in varying ways—they have found themselves almost trapped within overwhelming feelings of alienation whereby as a result they delegitimize themselves as singers. It seems as though the participants, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, are consumed in the whirlwind of performance-based fears and have as of yet to share their truest musicality—by which I mean the musical self most representative of themselves—with others. This sense of panic and foreboding become amplified to the point of no longer being mere hindrances, but full-on obstructions that cyclically perpetuate their reluctances to perform. Many of the informants I have spoken to who experience stage-fright find themselves almost incapable of piercing through the walls of the second and third stage of van Gennep's model: (a) they remain in either the separation phase, where they undergo an alienation from their social body, or (b) embody this sense of liminality and thus are never entirely steadfast and confident in their musical capabilities.[7]

Kamil's analysis of stage fright ethnographically juxtaposes Arnold van Gennep's studies of rites of passage and Victor Turner's liminality in relation to Thomas Turino's consideration of Bourdieu's habitus and De Certeau's tactics. These were topics that we discussed in the Bard ethnomusicology core course *Ethnography: Music and Sound*.

Zoë Peterschild Ford, Spring 2020

Zoë Peterschild Ford's senior project showcases concepts and methods from Improvisation as Social Science. In "The Ethos of the Blues: An Ethnography of Blues Singers and Writers" Peterschild Ford studied a blues singer based in Montreal, tracing what she theorizes as a "blues ethos." She wrote, "What I call the 'ethos of the blues' refers to a blues spirit that exists not only in music, but in literature, and in everyday life," and Peterschild Ford argues that this singer's ". . . practice reveals that blues is a music that values protective, generous, and exploratory narrative." Her extended overview is as follows:

> This paper addresses, through the example of Dawn Tyler Watson, the symbiosis of literature and music, structural constraints and agentive outlets in the popular music industry, and the construction of musical narratives, both improvised and not. In the first chapter I will describe the trip I took to Montreal during which I first encountered Dawn, and I will discuss Tracy McMullen's themes of improvisation and generosity in jazz. In the second chapter I will address the second concert, a disco-oriented dance music set, as it relates to Phillip Auslander and expressions of personhood. In the third chapter I will talk about the third concert, a performance of Dawn's original music with an eight piece blues band, and Robert O'Meally's work on the connection between music and literature.
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> When I first engaged this project the only thing I knew for sure was that it would connect with the blues. And it could have gone many ways. The first time I went to Montreal explicitly for this project, I had no idea of what I would find and what I would and could make of it. But Dawn and a highfalutin' handful of scholars and writers and professors helped me along the way. This is how it unfolded. My project itself is an improvisation within a world of improvisation—the world of the blues.[8]

As Peterschild Ford's project developed, I observed how she discussed reflexivity and improvisation in her analysis. For example, she wrote:

> As I consider Dawn and the ways in which a blues singer must wrestle with the frustrations of structure, I wonder about the way I'm writing this ethnography, too. The negotiations of structure and agency, as a blues singer in Quebec or as an ethnomusicology student in New York, are as opaque as genre or improvisation. What of this writing is fabrication for the sake of satisfying the institution and the reader and what are the words that I really can't keep

> off the page. How could anyone (even me) parse it out? Part of the irony of performance is that no one person can ever truly know which permutation of a performer exists at any given time on a stage or a page.[9]

The importance of agency emerged in Peterschild Ford's ethnographic study of improvisation. Among people in the music industry, artists, and journalists, she articulated how blues performance constructed a way for this artist to navigate industry and assert her autonomy.

Matice Maino, Spring 2021

Matice Maino's senior project, "Hip-Hopping Over the Great Firewall of China" explores how Chinese students studying at Bard interact with and participate in Chinese Hip Hop and what this participation reveals about ". . . class, race and regionalization in the age of digitized communication." He reflected:

> Up until writing this paper, I had blindly embraced the benefits of a technology that had irrefutably changed the social fabrics of my generation. . . . I am thus resolved to study ways in which the Internet serves as a pathway for the increasing globalization we are witnessing, and how younger generations' connections to the outside world have changed. . . . I decided to focus on the rise of Hip Hop within China, an ongoing phenomenon that has skyrocketed since 2017. As an avid musician and Hip Hop lover, I strongly gravitated to the area of study of Global Hip Hop and how culture has left its U.S. original home to serve as a platform of expression for youth around the world. Through the lenses of Hip Hop, we can trace ways in which youth around the world interact with global trends, and how senses of locality and globalization are navigated with the assistance of the Internet.[10]

This project followed Maino's coursework in *Ethnography: Music and Sound*, and our conversations about James Reese Europe and the globalization of jazz in Paris during World War I. Maino ethnographically observed how international Chinese students at Bard experience Chinese Hip Hop amid the genre's global popularity, especially how it relates to "marginalized youth identity" and digital censorship.[11]

THE ORCHESTRA NOW (TŌN) GRADUATE SEMINAR

My pedagogy also encourages graduate students to consider the autodidactic practices of the AACM. In addition to senior projects, my experiences teaching The Orchestra Now (TŌN) graduate seminar offered similar opportunities to draw upon reflexivity and improvisation. Members of *The Orchestra Now*, or TŌN, are professional orchestral musicians at Bard who earn a Master's degree through the development of projects that express curatorial engagements with music, history, performance life, contemporary practices of self-promotion, and social media representation. I encouraged students to consider the autodidactic approaches to the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, as historicized by George Lewis in *A Power Stronger Than Itself*. The AACM's collective of musicians have never sought to conform to a singular style. They have maintained a community discourse that privileges and encourages its members and groups to define their own identities, paying special attention to tactics of avoiding constrictive industrial categorization.

Though TŌN is an entirely different ensemble with an entirely different set of goals and values, the course provided an opportunity to introduce TŌN musicians to groups like the AACM. The seminar encouraged independent research and communal discourse with a guiding principle to embrace interdisciplinarity. Students learned how the AACM members regard improvisation that engages musical and extramusical practices of self-representation, particularly in expressive contexts where AACM members seek to distinguish themselves.

This approach of TŌN calls attention to the growing matriculations of contemporary undergraduates into graduate programs. The ways that social generation or birth cohorts progress from elite liberal arts settings into advanced graduate study, and the collective experience of the Internet and new media lifeworlds, have a role in shaping intimacy between reflexivity and improvisation. Any sense of a collective sensibility about this intimacy will progress into the research institution setting where a similar pedagogical approach may be needed in ethnomusicological futures.

CONCLUSION

I continue to build upon this intellectual foundation, fusing undergraduate and graduate teaching and research. While my teaching is centered in music, its scope reaches throughout the humanities and social sciences. I have been

able to both appeal to students' interests in popular culture and attract them to classic paradigms and recent scholarship. At Bard, I have been intentional about not training future ethnomusicologists per se, but basing my pedagogical approach in a liberal arts exploration of paradigmatic tensions with academic studies of music's social context. My developments in critical pedagogy are in conversation with the current international racial reckoning. Facilitating studies of the rich intellectual foundations of expressive culture for Bard meets students where they are, and guides their intellectual growth, through reflexivity and improvisation.

Notes

1. Nikole Hannah-Jones, "1619 Project," *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html

2. This is informed by expressions of George Lewis and the ways that they are additionally explored in George Lewis and Benjamin Piekut, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies, Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

3. Howard Becker, *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about your Research While You're Doing It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008 [1998]).

4. The Writing Culture volume challenged anthropology and related fields to consider the motivation, bias, and literary voice in ethnographic analysis. See James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

5. Tracy McMullen, "The Improvisative" in *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies* Volume 1, edited by George E. Lewis and Benjamin Piekut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 123.

6. Anonymous student paper.

7. Maia Kamil, "Why The Scared Sing: 'Stage-Fright' as a Rite of Passage" (Senior Projects Spring 2019), 30 https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2019/2

8. Zoë Emilie Peterschild Ford, 2020. "The Ethos of the Blues: An Ethnography of Blues Singers and Writers" (Senior Projects Spring 2020), 9. https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2020/218

9. Ford, "The Ethos of the Blues," 21.

10. Matice F. Maino, "Hip-Hopping Over the Great Firewall of China: Authenticity, Language and Race in the Global Hip Hop Nation" (Senior Projects Spring 2021), 1–2. https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2021/81

11. Maino, "Hip-Hopping Over the Great Firewall of China," 5.

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