

## Jazz Is Not a Language: Critical Thinking vs Imitative Learning in Jazz Education.

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By any standard of measurement, the Jazz Education Movement has been wildly successful, and for this we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to its pioneers. The battles that they fought to gain acceptance for Jazz within academic culture were very tough battles. To quantify and qualify Jazz related topics with administrations, curriculum committees and accreditation organizations, they may have needed to veer toward topics and formats which would be more easily quantified and qualified. With the wider acceptance of Jazz and other Black Musical traditions in academia, the time has arrived to examine our effect as educators on the direction of the music itself, and to ask important questions about the nature of our advice to new generations of musicians.

A trope often used in Jazz Education compares the development of improvisational skills to the learning of a language. While “jazz is a language” can be an illustrative metaphor, it is not literally true. Jazz, in its tradition, has always been an art-form highlighting self-expression and a diverse array of individual stylists. The musicians most revered have always been those who are most distinctive, whether they have been innovators or have played within more traditional stylistic frameworks.

The teaching of jazz as a language most often encourages imitation as a means toward proficiency. This has led to some outcomes that stand in direct opposition to the jazz tradition. Students have sometimes been encouraged to develop “jazz vocabulary.” This vocabulary model posits that fine jazz musicians share common phrases, and that in order to be recognized as stylistically appropriate, the student should learn and apply such phrases to their own improvisations. This teaching model looks to transcription and pattern playing as primary methods for acquiring such “vocabulary.”

This presentation challenges both the effectiveness and the validity of teaching jazz through imitation and content memorization. It examines the effects of such methods in the nature of the music produced by students receiving this training. It proposes alternative options, based on more traditional ways of learning jazz, and it applies a cultural lens through which to view the mission of the jazz educator. I wish to raise two important questions for all of us within the jazz community: 1. Do we better honor a cultural legacy by venerating its past or by keeping its traditions alive? and 2. Is it ever appropriate to prescribe content for improvisation?

BG. Thank you everybody for coming it really means a lot to have all of you here. I'd just like to share a little bit of my own thoughts and philosophies with you. Thank you Dr Casey, for that very nice introduction.

For those of you who don't know about my background, maybe just I'll preface the presentation with a short idea of where I'm coming from with all this. My academic music training has been in classical music. So I have an undergraduate degree in classical trumpet, and I have a master's degree classical bass. So, as a person who always wanted nothing but to be a jazz musician, I sought information outside of school, after school, and from experienced professional musicians.

I was a *very lucky* young person. From the time I was a teenager through my 20s, I had *such generosity* bestowed upon me by many fine people in the Jazz Community, and many great mentors, and really I had *quite* an education in the culture of the music, in the values of the music, and in the practice of the music. And so I was very fortunate. We all know that getting that kind of experience outside of school may be harder and harder as the world around us changes.

What I'm really advocating for, is bringing that experience and that set of values into school, rather than trying to bring a cultural tradition and a set of values into a situation whose values must be adapted to accept this other tradition.

So, with that I'd like to begin by sharing some quotes and reading them for you by the musicians who we all acknowledge as many of the greatest improvisers in history of jazz.

The great pianist Hank Jones from Pontiac Michigan said, "If you play somebody else's musical ideas, how can you identify yourself?"

Another Detroit-er, Betty Carter, she said, "I was fortunate at the time I started out, because individualism was very important. We thought about being different because it was like a sin to sound like somebody else."

From Bill Evans in the video many of us have seen where he talks to his brother Harry about why he wouldn't show Harry, who was also a pianist, what he was doing and what his voicings were, and he said, "I felt that in order to motivate yourself further, you should discover things yourself. It's the same way with a student, if you give him too much, you take his motivation away because he hasn't discovered anything."

A radio interview with Freddy Hubbard, he said, "Everybody now, I think the younger kids, they listen to records a lot. So, there's not too many original young cats out here today, and that's the reason. But it's good that they're carrying on the tradition of the music by playing it. It's good to have different styles."

NPR radio interview with great pianist Fred Hersch. "I think a lot of the jazz education that goes on now is sort of paint by numbers. You know... learn this, learn these patterns, put them in here, transcribe what so and so played on such and such recording and then kind of assemble it. It doesn't prepare musicians for the actual act of improvising."

From my hero the great Dizzy Gillespie, "I always try to teach by example and not force my ideas on a young musician. One of the reasons we're here is to be a part of this process of exchange."

And this is something that Eddie Harris said to me. We were on a very long car ride on a tour and he said, "You know, anybody can become a great soloist with hard work, but stylists are born."

So, I thought about that for a few minutes and I said, "Wait a minute man. Are you saying that everybody is doomed to be more or less a kind of run-of-the-mill generic, the same, and there's only a few special talented people who are born to be a stylist?" He said, "No you misunderstood, I am saying the total opposite. Everyone is born to sound like themselves, but you can lose that by trying to sound like somebody else."

In discussions with the Great saxophonist Chico Freeman, over the fall, in talking to him about what I had proposed to JEN, and how a little anxious I was to say this to all of you, Chico said, "Well it's a cultural difference." And I said, "Well maybe, Chico, you can apply to JEN and make that case." *But it is a perspective.* It is a perspective.

I myself, after this wonderful experience of learning jazz the the old fashioned way, I started teaching Jazz. And I entered our world of Jazz Education and I was very confused, because a lot of the things that I had heard weren't being shared and the things I was hearing were things I had never heard. So that's been 30 years ago, and I've been trying to make sense out of that ever since and it's really been bothering me. So thank you for allowing me to address that with you today.

What happens when we follow the advice to copy other players in order to sound like a jazz player?

Well, we know it's easier for us the teachers, and in some ways it's easier for the student who doesn't seem to show the drive or desire, or self motivation to be inquisitive, and to discover their own musical values and ideas; to simply assign something and grade *that* on whether they completed it or not. And if we assign them a ii-V-I lick and tell them to play it in twelve keys, we can certainly tell if they've practiced or not because either they can do it or they can't and we can really justify...and so, a thought... (this is just occurring to me right now)...related as somebody who's taught improvisation classes... I almost think it's impossible to teach an improvisation class... because it's a bunch of people, all at different levels of awareness and experience and interest, hearing the same advice. And that seems super difficult, unless I just give them all the same assignment and grade it. So, it is easier to quantify these things. Of course, our curriculum committees would like to see our syllabi and see what it is we're up to. So if we can show them a certain number of assignments, a certain number of written tests, a certain amount of theory... and it's quantifiable, we can get to go ahead to teach that course. I'm not sure I like that.

When you encourage somebody to sound; to copy somebody else's lines, their sound, their articulation, and you guide them to how close they got to the imitation; you may consciously or unconsciously be leaping to the conclusion that, that student can't glean the value of the artistry, and the person they're listening to, themselves, without copying it. Again, it can be a matter of the student's motivation, but you may be making a presumption about that individual that is not accurate.

This is a big one...

You don't sound like a "jazz player" in the combo concert. Your time is terrible and you don't seem to be understanding the changes, and your lines are a big jumbled confusing mess. So, if I give you some stuff to play and everybody around you says, "yeah man" and your teachers tell you, "now you sound more like a jazz player" that's a pretty good positive reinforcement moment for the student in the immediate. But it may be preventing that student from understanding that *copying is not improvising*. It's just maybe a "social acceptance path" that can be reached more easily. And for you as a teacher, if your student starts sounding more like Clifford Brown on the concert and less like a jumbled mess, that looks pretty good for you too. But is it really the right thing for the student?

Certain people may not have the self-confidence when they enter jazz to consider the validity of their own thoughts or their own style or what Eddie Harris said which is, "We're all born unique." It may be easier to think to oneself, "well, what would Dexter have played here?" and in a way putting on a Dexter costume so that you can feel more appropriate in the music. But it's really *an avoidance of the issue of self-expression*; to hide behind the Persona of another person.

This is a big one...

"*Skill is not Artistry*" So if you are telling a student, "you really need to be able to do this, I need to hear you demonstrate it, you need to be able to do that, I need to hear you clearly playing the vocabulary of bebop and when you play in post-Bop, I need to hear you playing some post-modal evoked vocabulary..." you're giving them tasks and skills, but you are doing what Bill Evans suggested to his brother Harry... *you're depriving them of the opportunity to come up with their own solutions* and you may run the risk of making somebody feel they've achieved a level of improvisation, when all they've actually done is achieved a level of memory.

What are the effects of of teaching people this way... the positive and negative effects?

A student may leave a course of study wondering, "well, now how do I develop my own original voice?" and if I interpret what Eddie was saying to me in a correct way, an original voice is not something one develops. *An original voice is something one has and has the potential to lose* through trying to find one's expression in the guise of other people's voices.

Before the 2020 election, the original big lie was...[laughing]... when you were told, "just transcribe a handful of your favorite group of players and then kind of combine that thing and then you'll make it your own... you'll make it your own."

My question when I started hearing this type of advice was, "how? ...by playing it and then not playing it? So, why would I have played it to begin with?" This type of teaching may lead the young player to become dependent on prepared content.

"You want to get more and more vocabulary, add more and more patterns, add more and more licks, add more and more transcribed passages, and pretty soon, you know, you'll have so much language that you'll be able to take really wonderful solos...but in order to grow and develop as an artist you just need to keep stealing more stuff."

I believe that we may be creating a paradigm, not only in Jazz Education, but as the guardians of the tradition...and the people now tasked with passing this tradition to the next generation of players. It concerns me that when all of our influence come from recordings. A next step is that all of our influence comes from the same recordings. And if we don't have that much time in a course of study, perhaps, you know, I tell you, you're a tenor player and I tell you, "You will have to know Dexter Gordon, you have to know Sonny Rollins, you have to know John Coltrane, you have to know Wayne Shorter, you have to know Michael Brecker, and throw some Joe Henderson in there... well okay... let's concentrate on the "main people first" and then "we'll branch" out and you can find your own other people that inspire you..."

But if I tell you that at the University of Colorado, and Dr. Casey tells you that at the University of Northern Colorado, and Mr Coffin tells you that Vanderbilt

University, and Dr. Dudley tells you that at Belmont University, and we're all telling you to listen to the same people, and you're all learning with the same models, then there becomes a kind of a universal effect of people all playing the same ideas, or variations of the same ideas, and of course it would be confusing to distinguish yourself from somebody else if all of your influences are the same as everyone else's. Things that make you go, "hmm?"

This could be reflecting and even fostering a revivalist trend in the music, or (I looked this up, this is the correct spelling) devolutionary trend in the music. So, if we want the music to move forward, the music must change. If we want the music to stand still and move backwards, the music must stay the same. If we require people to replicate the past in order to appreciate and be influenced by it, that may be slightly different than what I said there, second... then absorb and appreciate and listen... but if you cross that line into saying "and play... *and play what they played*"...um, a stasis can develop. Now, for players to distinguish themselves they'll look *outside* the content *outside* the improvisation, to the *formatting*... "*Maybe if I get my new project, and play my same licks, I'll sound different...*"

Okay, so now I've identified the problems and I should just leave. [laughs]

No. So, what do you do instead?

I believe *that you teach skill as skill*. So skill, apart from art. What is a skill? Having excellent time. What is a skill? Instrumental technique. What is a skill? Being able to groove...playing, learning different types of grooves. What is a skill? Playing in multiple meters. What is a skill? Understanding the workings of harmony. What is a skill? Knowing how melody works with harmony. How would one construct one's own melody line that made sense with the changes? This is also something that can be gathered from analysis of the great transcriptions.

But I think it's important to remember that, *influence and imitation are not synonymous...and they're not mutually exclusive either*.

But we can *appreciate* what Charlie Parker gave us and *appreciate* the beauty of his melody lines, and his harmonic genius, and his phrasing; *without playing his licks in our solos*.

So, learn from the "*how*", rather than replicate the "*what*".

I believe each student should have autonomy as an artist. We have to be careful, we have to tread lightly on this idea. Telling somebody else what they're supposed to listen to or what they should like is different than being excited about what *you* listen to and *why you like it*. I think your own enthusiasm must certainly be an influence, but I think when you say, "You got to get more Freddy in your playing"... you've really crossed the line, infringing on somebody's personal rights.

I think we should *present strategies* for practicing rather than *requiring them*; and again in our systems with grading, this could be fuzzy and it can be hard to resist doing this...

But, I'm happy to explain the benefits of

transcription, the process of transcription that I prefer, and ways other people transcribe, and analysis of transcriptions without telling you, "Next week, I want you to transcribe this solo." Again, I think there's a line... obviously... *one learns to play by playing.*

In my experience as a musician, I've become more solid with my understanding of the elements of music in two ways. One is by playing with people who are more experienced than me, and one is by playing with people who are less experienced with me than me. Because when I play with people who are kicking my butt, I have to raise my level of focus, my level of concentration, my level of attention, my level of energy, and try to meet their accepted standard. When I play with a band that is completely falling apart, I have to strengthen my playing to hold the band together. But whatever it is, *the tradition of jazz is for players of all levels to play together and that's the way the music is passed.* So as teachers, I believe you should play in every group you teach because you should be an influence, you should be a model and the students are going to learn more from playing with you, than they are from you lecturing them about how they should play; or giving them a critique of how their playing just went.

And this is very traditional in the Jazz Community. This is how the aural tradition of the music has been passed. So, by all means play with your students. I go in, in the morning, at my university job and I take my trumpet out and I warm up and then it's in my hand for the rest of the day. Then I put it away at the end of the day and go home. If I don't have it, how am I going to show you?

And of course, *everything is ear training, everything is ear training.* If everything isn't ear training you're not part of the aural tradition.

What is our role as a teacher of jazz? The great Lenny Tristano one of the first people to actually advertise himself as a jazz teacher back in the 1940s, when people believed Jazz was just something you picked up on your own; it wasn't something you could teach...and certainly racism and segregation kept it from being something that was an accepted part of western universities; they asked him (Tristano) in an interview, because he had so many successful students you know, "What is it to teach improvisation? I mean, how do you teach somebody to just be creative?" and he said, "The only way you can teach improvisation is to teach it *as if you yourself are an improviser.* If the subject is improvisation, *improvise your teaching.*"

It's very hard to teach somebody to be an effective improviser by giving them a method; *if not impossible.* So, each student is different, each student comes with their own psychological makeup, their own background, their own cultural background, their own experience with music, their own goals, and certainly their own tastes. And so each student must be taught differently according to what it is they want, what it is they need, and what it is you can help with. So this takes more *personal involvement in getting to know that person* and their musical tendencies. But I believe it's a really important thing, and this is certainly how I was mentored in the Jazz Community. People would take me aside based on what they had just heard and *give me advice in that moment;* not often positive... I certainly heard about what I did wrong a lot more than I heard about what I did right. But they cared enough and I'm grateful for that. They cared enough to say you know, "Hey, first change on the bridge of Stella, that's an augmented chord." So you work with what's happening in the moment, *in the moment with that student and where that student is...* value encouraged, problem solving, critical thinking; I like the Socratic Method. I play something for somebody and ask them, "What did you hear? What did you think? Did you like that? Why didn't you like it?"...have a discussion about it.

*Connect the music to its cultural context and traditions.*

So I'm here to defend tradition, not to murder it. Who are our favorite improvisors in the tradition? Well, I know that for me, it's a list of people from Chicago who didn't even record or didn't record much. Then it's of course the the greats on the records. But what is it we praise about their music? *It's their individuality and their willingness to make a personal statement.* Black American Culture values tradition, but it abhors imitation. So, Michael Jordan is not a carbon copy of Dr J. There's influence, the influence is there, but having your own thing to say, your own approach, your own thoughts, your own music, and *how you distinguish yourself* in the context of a jam session is what's most valued.

Who's the winner of a jam session between Clifford Jordan, Von Freeman, and Joe Henderson? I heard that. Who won? Nobody won!... because you can't compare them, *because they're all completely different, and they all only play like themselves.* Maybe you could say, "Well that was a good day for Joe, or a bad day for Joe" but there's no quantifiable "This is great, this is not great" "...this is you, this was not so much like you".

So, like Chico said, "...part of this is cultural."

By all means, stress individuality in this context. Thank you.

Q. It sounds like part of what you're saying is that you're against the sort of canonization that's led to one half of learning. Is that what you're... is that a big part of what you're saying?

BG. I'm not necessarily against that, but I'm weary of it.

Q. You're wary of it, okay.

BG. ...that's a part of what I'm saying, yes. If we're all listening to the same people, we're all bound to be kind of playing the same thing rather than trying to figure out...

Q1. Okay, and then part of what you're saying is that... imitation doesn't allow for the chance for critical development and thinking of how to play and create within music?

BG. I wouldn't go that far, but I would say that when we teach Jazz if we use imitation as the primary way in, it becomes a trap that's difficult to escape from.

Q2. So, I do teach in addition to my Air Force gig. I've never taught at a school like CU Boulder in fact the uh the small universities I've often taught at, the the kids come in sometimes and I'm their very first private teacher they've ever had and they uh you know maybe just learned last year like which end of the horn to blow into and um their understanding of a lot of musical fundamentals is like well, "What's a harmonic minor scale?" okay well some things you got to work on... um and I have

found myself certainly in that box you described because if I want to... if I feel the need to give some of these students anything less than an "A" for attendance, you know like we could... I could rant for hours on grade padding... um I have to have a legitimate reason you know because students these days will fight it of course, and it has to be something that's black and white like, "Well, I assigned you to do this and you didn't do it. So that's not an "A"... you know so how do you uh reconcile your gig... with what you're doing because you have to assign grades you know... to this the the individualistic approach?

BG. Yeah, I think for improvisation, I think it it could certainly be different for for, you know, term papers and things like that. *But I think when the subject is improvisation, what you're grading them on is their growth.* You know, are they in there? Are they really trying? Are they changing? Something my greatest teacher, my trumpet teacher Vince DiMartino said to me when I was a freshman in college, he said, "*Learning is changing; they're synonymous.*" So if your student is changing and trying and, you know, still doesn't sound like, you know it's perfect, but you know they've given their best effort...that's an "A" . If they skip class and then, "Sorry my dog ate it" and all that, you know... okay, not an "A". You know if you're if you're doing your best; and that's the hard thing about improv class, to go back to this...

Why is improv class so much harder than private lessons? Because everybody's different and they're all there at once. What do I do with that? **Play.** Play and let's talk about what just happened and let's play again. **Let's play.** And we're dealing with what's coming up in the playing. But, with a very accelerated advanced student I'm going over and saying a different thing in her ear than I'm saying to the person who can't keep their place in the form. All these things are going on at the same time. It's like a circus sometimes. You know, right? Try to keep the band together, but you have to deal with improvisation, *improvisationally.*  
*Teach what's happening right now, with what's happening right now.*

I think that, for the subject of improvisation, less: "Go learn these scales and come back and demonstrate more." If we're playing Blue Bossa, did you listen to it? We're playing today, do you sound better today than you did last class? Have you practiced more? You know if they practiced. They know if they practiced. And what does a grade matter anyway? They know if they're making it or they're not making it. *If you don't know that, you're just self-deluded.*

Q3. I um just had a question about the transcription part of it.

BG. Yes

Q3. I teach at a university and I've used...

BG. Which university?

Q3. North Carolina Central

BG. oh, okay.



Q3. I've always felt that um transcriptions were akin to score study for classical writers; it's not a matter having them play the exact same lick, but play it so they get an idea of what technical skills they need to have to produce the same effects that those, uh people had. So, I think um, to your, wholesale denial that that there's some, uh, some benefit to actually using uh transcriptions...I'm not completely on board with that because I think it does have value as long as you don't stress it as what they have to play.

BG. I hope I haven't said that, because I agree with you. But I think what I'm saying, again there's a line. When do you cross the line? You did the transcription and you learned a tremendous amount from that. But do you go on the gig and play that lick?

Q. No.

BG. *That's the line.* But so I'm not speaking against transcription or analysis.

Q. Okay, so we're still friends. [laughing]

Q4. I was going to say something kind of similar, but um...

BG. Say something different.

Q4. I'm a student at the University of North Texas and I guess to kind of go on my point earlier. Before I started doing transcriptions I hated the thought of I have to explore this and make it up myself. I didn't like that I had to do any of that. I just wanted to take the pieces and put it together. I just felt so... not... I don't want to say isolated, but it felt like way too much to do that and I felt that with the transcriptions that's when I started feeling comfortable and having that sort of grasp. I understand that you, obviously, understand the worth of transcriptions and how how they are pivotal to becoming a good jazz musician, but I wonder what you would say to someone who dreads the idea of having to sit in a room and figure out something new; that after however many years of of jazz there's been all this improving and evolving and how am I, someone 80 years later, going to think of something different from these amazing musicians.

BG. I'm sorry what's your name?

Q4. Aiden.

BG. Aiden, what are you playing?

Q4. I'm a tenor saxophone player.

BG. Nobody else is, Aiden. So even though there's been all of those years of you said "improvement" ...I don't know... are today's piano players better than Art Tatum? I'm not sure it's "improvement" ...let's say, "evolution" after all these years of change over time. Right? Nobody has been you, none of those people have your thoughts and your feelings. So, what the Jazz Community needs is for you to access those thoughts and those feelings and put them into music so that you contribute to the tradition and the lineage that you honor, rather than replicating it. [Applause]

Q5. Hey real quick. I was just wondering with your students, do you encourage them to practice it... like in their own practice sessions, if it's different what you ask them to do. or...like what did their practice sessions look like us like more traditional model?

BG. Yeah, well after years of kind of floundering around, I kind of have like a little thing now. Three different types of practicing.

So the first type of practicing is tactical practice. You know, if you're a trumpet player... so, you know, that's alligator wrestling... so, you do that first. You work on your instrumental or vocal ability, you work on those are skills.

**Second Practice Session** is a different practice session. Learn new stuff. Whether that's theory, or maybe you're working on a transcription, maybe you're learning new songs to add to your repertoire, maybe you're working on pieces for your big band concert coming up in a few days... you know, maybe you know, you're trying to understand some other concept you heard another player using or something... But you're engaging your intellectual process to try to change and grow and add new information to your brain.

**Third Practice Session**, here's the one most people skip... *practice not thinking. Practice being intuitive.* Right, so...the best way to do this is to play with other people, and practice being in the flow, and being in the present of the music that's being played at that moment, and how you're a part of that. In the absence of real people, use your imaginary friends... Jamie Abersold recordings. A great thing that John Bishop's doing... I can't remember what it's called... Reality Book? Reality Book. Yeah so, but they're not listening to you, but at least they're not robots. iReal is kind of... you want to get good at swinging with a robot playing? robot time... so you know... you can play play with robots. [laughs] If you want to learn how to how to really fall in the pocket with a great drummer, practice playing with recordings of real drummers. So, they can be Jamie's records or they can just be you know record records and Sonny's improvising and you're improvising a counterpoint. *But you're practicing letting go of your self judgment, and your self-criticism, and your need to apply your studies, and just letting stuff come out of you.* What I found happens with a lot of improvisers, a lot of young students is, they practice and practice and practice, and they're very dedicated, but they go on the bandstand and they feel like they can't get loose and get in the flow, you know, because the first time they tried to do that is when they get on the bandstand. So the solution I believe is *practice getting in the flow, learn how to practice getting in a flow state.*

One of my mentors was the great Ira Sullivan and I remember a very great lesson on the bandstand one time. There was a drummer in Chicago, Wilbur Campo the greatest bebop drummer in Chicago and he could play faster than any other drummer... and boy were those tempos hard for me as a young person. And all these people around me were just blazing through this, and that was just normal for them, and I was just up there... fold, fold, fold; panic, panic attack, panic attack, and nothing...you know, bad. Then I come out of it, and just don't know how they're doing this. One time I was in the middle of folding and panicking and Ira, who was much taller than me, leaned down and very loudly yelled into my ear while I was playing, "Stop Thinking!"... he was right.

So, because you're programming the music in there, in Session One and Session Two; the improvising is *allowing*.

Another Lennie Tristano quote... they asked him, "What is improvisation? Is it instant composition?" he said, "No. We don't compose anything."

He said, "The music is already playing in your mind and the instrument is an amplifier for your thoughts, and the job of the improviser is to allow that music to stream out of you without the interference of the brain."

So, to "stream out"...? what's going to stream out?...what you put in. You're putting it in, in session two. Practice three is *practice allowing*... session three.

Q6. Okay hey so you have already answered this question, but um how would you approach working with like different learning styles, specifically, let's say um somebody with more data driven, they can memorize a bunch of lines, moving lines, licks etc. and can come off as a great improviser... versus someone who's maybe like, a little more spacey. They're always forgetting stuff and all the while cultivating creativity?

BG. Well I think the the only real way is to know them and play with them and listen to them over a long period of time. So you become personally involved with what it is their strengths are, and what it is their areas needing improvement are, so that you know, as you're listening, you say, "I start to see your problem is... you know you're trying to, you know..." and then the advice based on your careful listening to *who they're trying to become as a musician* and what the struggles are that you perceive; so that it comes back to this point of teaching each person differently. But in order to do that, you *have to actually become personally involved in what they're doing musically and get to know them as musicians*. And then I think your instinct will tell you what the right thing to say is at the right time, or sometimes just don't say anything. You know, when I first started teaching at Cincinnati, I came from the Chicago environment, it was a little gruff in Chicago, we... you know, Greg knows... you know, nobody says, "Yeah man that's some New York shit." Chicago you just, if you played great nobody says anything. That's what we expected. If you don't play great, you hear about it. So, when I started teaching improv classes I had college students that would come and say, "Mr good was it okay? What I did, was it okay?" I said, "Of course it was okay. I didn't say anything did I?" So I had to learn, oh they need to hear, "Yeah good". So, I like to do that now, "Yeah that was good. That was it. Great, great...no, you're lost... yeah that's it." So like, in the moment you're like dealing with what's happening.

Q7. You also hand it straight back. "What did you think?" is your most common response to a student experience...

BG. Well, yeah! Don't you think... I'm sorry do you want to say that in the microphone?

Q7. I get to study with Brad a lot. I'm a vocalist in an informal education situation and my experience is that the first thing you say when I'm looking for feedback in my needy little way is, "What did you think?"

BG. Because that's the most important piece... according to what I've learned, because you know, I don't know what you were trying to do. I know what you did. So, I don't know if that met your musical goals or not. We all know when we're connecting with the music and when we're

disconnected. So, ...I think it's often good to ask the person first how they felt about what they did because the answers are more often there; rather than coming from somebody else who just... "Well you didn't sound like Sarah Von, so it wasn't that good..." you know, it's not very helpful.

Q8. Hey Brad, thanks for the talk. I really enjoyed it. My question, you highlighted this as saying one of the roadblocks to this might come from administrators, curriculum, committees, assessment committees, that want us to quantify and justify these things, and I'm wondering how you've handled that issue as you've tried to do more.

BG. Well, okay, first thing...here's a big one...*attempt to detach your ego from how your students sound.* A kind of an old model is that the ensemble is "the ego representation" of the director to the public, or to the school, to the administration. That's the Marching Band model. I know, I was in Marching Band nine years... [Laughter]

BG. Yeah so, um you know if I could make a case to the administration that, "What I'm really concerned with is the education of the students and not the appearance of what's going on to either the public or the curriculum committee"... and I have the trust of the administration, then everything's okay. If I feel like I have to demonstrate my value, you know... not fun. So I understand

But you know, you give them grades. I mean one way to deal with the grading question is, everybody gets an "A". I mean... I know... grade inflation is not my favorite thing but you get an "F" if you didn't try at all and if you kind of tried a little you'll get a "C" and if you tried your hardest you can, but you still aren't very advanced, you still get an "A" because this is music. *This is not math or something, and so what we're dealing with is individual people and their individual personalities and feeling and you can't teach somebody how to be more them, but you can teach somebody how to be less them,* and that's what this presentation is supposed to be about. [Applause]