

FLOW THEORY: APPLICATIONS FOR JAZZ EDUCATION AND JAZZ
IMPROVISATION AND PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The issue of flow and its relationship to improvisational jazz practice and jazz education has only recently been addressed by yet few researchers. Much investigation remains to be undertaken regarding the understanding of these relationships. The purpose of this study is to examine how the principles of Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow and optimal experience apply to the nature of jazz improvisation and how such understandings can be applied to the underlying philosophical approaches to jazz performance education. Questions the research will address are: 1) how can the understanding of flow help to focus and guide approaches to jazz improvisation, 2) what conditions facilitate or hinder flow and can they be addressed, and 3) how can the principles of flow be incorporated into jazz performance education. Relevant material will be reviewed to determine themes and philosophical trends in order to synthesize current scholarship on the subject of flow, jazz improvisation, and jazz education philosophy.

Introduction

Although much has been written regarding the topics of jazz, jazz improvisation, jazz education, creativity, and Csikszentmihalyi's theory of *flow* and *optimal experience* separately, until very recently there has been little philosophic scholarship or research available addressing flow particularly with regard to jazz improvisation (whether solo or group) and jazz education. Similarly, little scholarship has been published regarding how improvising musicians make choices concerning how they approach an improvisational performance situation, or how much "information" they attempt to squeeze into an improvisational experience that can facilitate or hinder the likelihood of flow and thus the interest and excitement of the performance. By applying the principles of flow theory, the flow channel, and optimal experience when teaching jazz improvisation, instructors can better address such issues as a balance between the challenges and demands of the moment, and the technical and conceptual capabilities of the student.

Several recent papers address dimensions of jazz improvisation and group communication (e.g., Bauer 2005, Berkowitz 2009, Mell 2010, and Seddon & Biasutti, 2009) as well as relationships between group improvisation, group communication and, flow (e.g., Balara 2000, Campbell 2010, Seddon 2005, and Sawyer 2006). There does not yet appear however, to be a great deal of scholarship specifically addressing issues of flow theory and its relationship to improvisational jazz practice and jazz performance education in particular. This may be because jazz has only begun to gain acceptance in mainstream music education since the 1960s and jazz improvisation as a legitimate musical form of expression is now finally being explored in scholarly research and literature.¹ Additionally, there is no indication that jazz performance

¹ Gary W. Kennedy, "Jazz Education," In *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., edited by Barry Kernfeld, Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/J602300> (accessed May 28,

pedagogy has begun to consider flow even in view of the establishment of a positive correlation between flow and group improvisational experience.² For example, Sawyer defines *group flow* as when an improvising ensemble is performing at its peak; “In group flow, everything seems to come naturally; the performers are in interactional synchrony.”³ Similarly, Biasutti and Frezza (2009) found a positive relationship between flow and the ability of improvisers within group situations to anticipate *musical event clusters* more effectively.⁴ Seddon writes, “Descriptions given by jazz musicians of sensations when ‘striking a groove’ include references to a great sense of relaxation increasing their powers of expression and imagination, being able to handle their instruments with athletic finesse and being able to respond to every impulse.”⁵ Similarly, pianist Bill Evans describes a transcendent moment with his jazz trio that, in view of current research, may indeed be regarded as flow and optimal experience:

By the third and fourth night suddenly we just went into an area that was just far and away above anything we touched...it was really a thrilling thing, but

2011); Michael L. Mark, “The Acceptance of Jazz in the Music Education Curriculum: A Model for Interpreting a Historical Process,” *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 92 (Summer, 1987): 15-21, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40318120> (accessed March 29, 2011); Kenneth E. Prouty, “The History of Jazz Education: A Critical Reassessment,” *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 26, no. 2 (April, 2005): 79-100, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40215303> (accessed March 29, 2011).

² Frasier Campbell, “An Investigation into the Group Process of Jazz Improvisation: A Qualitative Approach”. M.M. diss., The William Paterson University of New Jersey, 2010. In Dissertations & Theses: Full Text [database on-line]; available from <http://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.bu.edu> (publication number AAT 1479488; accessed April 8, 2011); Biasutti, Michele and Luigi Frezza. “Dimensions of Music Improvisation.” *Creativity Research Journal* 21 (2009): 232–242. DOI: 10.1080/10400410902861240 (accessed April 12, 2011); Sawyer, Keith R. “Group Creativity: Musical Performance and Collaboration.” *Psychology of Music* 34, no. 2 (April, 2006): 148-165. DOI: 10.1177/0305735606061850 (accessed April 5, 2011); Seddon, Frederick A. “Modes of Communication during Jazz Improvisation.” *British Journal of Music Education* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 47-61. <http://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/> (accessed April 9, 2011).

³ Keith R. Sawyer, “Group Creativity: Musical Performance and Collaboration,” *Psychology of Music* 34, no. 2 (April, 2006): 148-165. DOI: 10.1177/0305735606061850 (accessed April 5, 2011), 158.

⁴ Michele Biasutti and Luigi Frezza, “Dimensions of Music Improvisation,” *Creativity Research Journal* 21 (2009): 232–242. DOI: 10.1080/10400410902861240 (accessed April 12, 2011), 239.

⁵ Frederick A. Seddon, “Modes of Communication during Jazz Improvisation,” *British Journal of Music Education* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 47-61. <http://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/> (accessed April 9, 2011), 49.

there is no way to try to do it, you can't try to recapture it, all you can do is always look for it and sometimes it happens.⁶

As is suggested by the above passages, flow is not only a mental/emotional state sought and prized by jazz performers, but is indeed shown to be beneficial to the quality of improvisational jazz performance as well. Herein lies the gap in the research this investigation seeks to address. There is evidence that the element of flow and optimal experience is significant and positively linked to high qualities of jazz improvisation, but it has yet to be considered within the philosophical framework of jazz performance pedagogy and curricular design and construction.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the principles of Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow and optimal experience apply to the nature of jazz improvisation and how such understandings can then be applied to the underlying philosophical approaches to jazz performance education. In spite of recent research supporting the significance of flow in creative jazz improvisation, many current jazz education programs still address jazz performance from an incongruent traditional Western classical theory-based approach, as well as simply a reproduction of past jazz genres and styles.⁷ Questions this research will address are: 1) how can the understanding of flow help to focus and guide approaches to jazz improvisation both individual and group, 2) what conditions facilitate or hinder the state of flow and can they be

⁶ Louis Carvell, *The Universal Mind of Bill Evans: The Creative Process and Self-Teaching*. Rhapsody Films. <http://www.rhapsodyproductionsinc.com>, 1991.

⁷ Philip Alperson, "Aristotle on Jazz: Philosophical Reflections on Jazz and Jazz Education," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 95, Research in Jazz Education (Winter, 1987/1988): 39-60, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40318199> (accessed April 8, 2011); Kennedy, "Jazz Education"; Mark, "The Acceptance of Jazz in the Music Education Curriculum: A Model for Interpreting a Historical Process"; Prouty, "The History of Jazz Education: A Critical Reassessment"; Keith R. Sawyer, "Improvised Conversations: Music, Collaboration, and Development," *Psychology of Music* 27, no. 2 (October, 1999):192-205, DOI: 10.1177/0305735699272009 (accessed April 15, 2011).

directly addressed, and 3) how can the principles of flow be incorporated into jazz performance education.

Delimitations

In that a thorough investigation merely into the meaning and implications of the words *jazz*, *spontaneity*, or *creativity* could consume volumes, delimitations of this study will constrain investigation specifically to the scrutiny and clarification of definitions only insofar as they facilitate the exploration of how flow is shown to be involved with jazz improvisation and how such issues can be considered in both jazz performance and jazz pedagogy. Similarly, there is potential for much debate both philosophical and otherwise, regarding the goals and relevance of jazz education as it has developed and come to gain prominence within the secondary and college level educational systems in America. This investigation will be limited only to matters regarding how the current state of jazz education in America has or has not incorporated the principles of flow theory and optimal experience into its underlying philosophical approach and curricula.

Literature Review

Introduction

Published material addressing topics of flow theory, jazz improvisation, creativity, and jazz education can be drawn from a wide range of disciplinary fields including psychology, sociology, education, the arts, history, and philosophy. The reviewed resources have been gathered from a combination of online database searches of peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, trade journals, and library searches. In that understandings of jazz improvisation and flow theory are extremely complex issues, topics from the literature for this study are divided into seven categories: 1) flow theory, 2) Jazz Improvisation / Other Genres of Musical Improvisation, 3) Jazz Improvisation, Creativity, Qualities, and Constraints, 4) Improvisation vs. Composition, 5) Jazz Improvisation and Flow, 6) conditions and hindrances to flow, and 7) teaching and learning jazz improvisation and flow.

Flow Theory

Csikszentmihalyi's theory of optimal experience is based on the concept of flow: "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it".⁸ When we experience flow, we are "in the zone". We lose our self-consciousness but not our sense of self. When an individual is in the *flow channel*, the amount of challenge within an activity is in balance with the level of one's skill so that we are neither bored nor too anxious. As an individual's skill level rises, so too can the level of challenge. When one is in this channel,

⁸ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 4.

it is perceived as a positive experience. In this way, we reduce *psychic entropy*, move into the flow channel, and as a result experience moments of inner harmony and happiness.⁹

Jazz Improvisation vs. Other Genres of Musical Improvisation

Sawyer writes that in Europe “through at least the nineteenth century, performers and composers alike were almost always talented improvisers.”¹⁰ Referring to this tradition, Evans suggests, “jazz is more of a revival in a different form of what went on in classical music before... Jazz in a way has resurrected that process which I call the jazz process... Jazz is not so much a style as a process of making music.”¹¹ In recent years, several studies (e.g., Biasutti & Frezza 2009 and Seddon & Biasutti 2009) have shown that qualities of improvisation and modes of communication are quite similar if not the same between many genres of music, including jazz, rock, and classical music. Sarah notes,

While vast differences in improvised performance practice must be acknowledged from one culture and idiom to another, there may be aspects common to all or much improvised music which use an underlying format. One such aspect may involve the challenge of adhering to the constraints of the format while maintaining spontaneity and interactiveness.¹²

In view of such research, when considering the nature of improvisation within the realm of the jazz idiom, it is both possible and appropriate to consider research and findings regarding improvisation in general, and thus creativity as a window into the nature of jazz improvisation in particular.

⁹ Disorder, referred to as *psychic entropy*, affects consciousness adversely, which can weaken our sense of self. The opposite of psychic entropy is optimal experience where incoming information is congruent with our goals and sense of self, and our psychic energy flows freely. *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰ Keith R. Sawyer, “Improvised Conversations: Music, Collaboration, and Development,” *Psychology of Music* 27, no. 2 (October, 1999), DOI: 10.1177/0305735699272009 (accessed April 15, 2011), 204.

¹¹ Louis Carvell, *The Universal Mind of Bill Evans: The Creative Process and Self-Teaching*. Rhapsody Films. <http://www.rhapsodyproductionsinc.com>, 1991

¹² Ed Sarath, “A New Look at Improvisation,” *Journal of Music Theory* 40, no. 1 (Spring, 1996), Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/843921> (accessed April 5, 2011), 19

Jazz Improvisation, Qualities, and Constraints

While improvisation is often defined as ‘spontaneous composition’, for the majority of jazz improvisers, there are often underlying constraints that serve to shape and define their performance. Addressing the many definitions of improvisation, Berkowitz suggests that while improvisation requires spontaneous creativity, this creativity is constrained and the constraints governing improvised performance fall into two categories: musical (stylistic) constraints and performance/performer (physical/physiological) constraints.¹³ A concise description of improvisation is offered by Azzara: “In much of the research, the definition of improvisation involves an ability to make music spontaneously within specified musical parameters”.¹⁴ Evans describes jazz and jazz improvisation as a process, and is only free “insofar as it has reference to the strictness of the original form, and that's what gives it its strength.”¹⁵ Several authors (Bauer 2005, Biasutti & Frezza 2009, Mell 2010, Sarath 1996, Sawyer 1999, and Seddon 2005) similarly describe jazz improvisation in terms of a combination of structure and process over a *referent* of some kind, and/or a combination of *stock musical knowledge* and *spontaneous musical utterances* (e.g., Davidson & Good 2002, Seddon 2005, and Seddon & Biasutti 2009).¹⁶ Other authors under review categorize improvisation by yet other measures too numerous to chronicle here.

¹³ Aaron Berkowitz, "Cognition in Improvisation: The Art and Science of Spontaneous Musical Performance," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2009. In Dissertations & Theses: Full Text [database on-line]; available from <http://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.bu.edu> (publication number AAT 3365197; accessed April 8, 2011), 15

¹⁴ Christopher D Azzara, “Motivation and Achievement.” In *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning*, edited by R. Colwell & C. Richardson, 171-187. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 171.

¹⁵ Louis Carvell, *The Universal Mind of Bill Evans: The Creative Process and Self-Teaching*

¹⁶ A referent is an underlying structure over which an improvisation may take place. It can be stylistic (e.g., bebop or rock) or structural (e.g., a 12-bar blues, or the chords to the jazz standard “I’ve Got Rhythm” by Irving Berlin).

Improvisation vs. Composition

Several authors challenge the measure of jazz improvisation by Western classical theory and standards as erroneous. In comparing improvisation with composition, Sarath notes that the orientation in music theory towards study of composed-notated works “has engendered a deeply rooted tendency to view all modes of music expression through the formal and architectonic perspective of resultant structure.”¹⁷ Sarath’s definition of improvisation is that of “spontaneous creation and performance of musical materials in a real-time format where the reworking of ideas is not possible.”¹⁸ In this view, improvisation is an activity rather than a resultant structure. Similarly, Evans suggests that jazz is not so much a style, as it is a “process of making music, making one minute's music in one minute's time whereas when you compose you can make one minute’s music and take three months to compose one minute’s music.”¹⁹

Jazz Improvisation and Flow

What is considered in flow theory as *optimal experience* or being in the *flow channel* has sometimes been described by musicians as a transcendent experience, and by research observers as an enhanced sense of self. Identifying three levels of creative awareness, Sarath describes level I (the highest level) as “the union of structure and process culminates in a cognitive synthesis where being and becoming are part of an unbroken wholeness, which we call transcendence.”²⁰ Pianist Keith Jarrett speaks of *transformative moments* and of his improvisational attempts to reveal a state of “surrender to an ongoing harmony in the universe

¹⁷ Sarath, “A New Look at Improvisation,” 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹ Louis Carvell, *The Universal Mind of Bill Evans: The Creative Process and Self-Teaching*

²⁰ Sarath, Edward. “Improvisation and Curriculum Reform,” In *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning: A Project of the Music Educators National Conference*, edited by R. Colwell and C. Richardson, 188-198, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 192.

that exists with or without us.”²¹ Similar accounts by musicians are chronicled in papers by Berkowitz (2009), Campbell (2010), Evans (1964), Seddon (2005), Sawyer (2006), and Werner (1996).

Several studies (Balara 2000, Biasutti & Frezza 2009, Campbell 2010, and Seddon 2005) refer to observations that on one level, the flow state can be an individual experience (e.g., unaccompanied performance), and on another level a collaborative experience, or a combination of the two. Balara found “that an enhanced sense of self due to an experience of flow is a product of each musician’s personal dimensions of creativity and of the group’s social creativity.”²² The flow state can also be dependent on the “alignment between personal goals and group goals, individual and collective skills, individual musical roles, the rules taken from the tradition, and the norms and values of the group.”²³ Musical communication in jazz is at times referred to as analogous to a conversation or language that the improvising musicians must know extremely well. Sawyer refers to the transcendent conversational interaction between musicians as *group flow* and differentiates it from Csikszentmihalyi’s psychological concept of the state of flow. “The group can be in flow even when the members are not; or the group might not be in flow even when the members are.”²⁴ At yet another level, jazz improvisation can be considered a system of community where in a state of flow, the players, the audience, and the environment link to become a unified entity. “Here the awareness of each artist and listener is affected by the collective consciousness, so that the enlivenment of the collective promotes heightened

²¹Keith Jarrett, *Bridge of Light*. ECM 1450 (CD liner notes) 1993.

²² Lawrence M. Balara, "The Personal and Social Dimensions Of Creativity in Collective Jazz Improvisation," Ph.D. diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, 2000. In Dissertations & Theses: Full Text [database on-line]; available from <http://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.bu.edu> (publication number AAT 9972575; accessed April 9, 2011), 311.

²³ *Ibid.*, 312.

²⁴ Keith R. Sawyer, “Group Creativity: Musical Performance and Collaboration,” *Psychology of Music* 34, no. 2 (April, 2006): 148-165. DOI: 10.1177/0305735606061850 (accessed April 5, 2011), 159.

individual consciousness, and vice versa.”²⁵ Similarly, Evans speaks of the *universal mind* and Sarath goes so far as to liken it to Carl Jung’s theorizing of the “collective unconscious”.²⁶

Conditions and Hindrances to Flow

A common theme among several sources reviewed indicates that technical and conceptual mastery of the musical idiom is a significant component to facilitate improvisational flow. Evans describes “a professional level of creativity that I can depend on which is satisfactory for public performance always.”²⁷ Werner suggests, “Mastery is playing whatever you are capable of playing... every time... without thinking.”²⁸ Other common themes regarding the facilitation of flow include self-confidence, trusting and accepting yourself as you are (e.g., Bayles & Orland 1993, Schroeder 2002, Seddon 2005, and Trungpa 1988), and in the spirit of Zen Buddhism, a sense of mindful detachment (e.g., Berkowitz 2009, Stace 1952, and Werner 1996). Regarding group flow, Balara suggests that alignment of personal and group goals facilitates such forms of flow.²⁹ In a more explicit description, Seddon and Biasutti write, “Spontaneous musical utterances can emerge from the interplay of stock and musical knowledge when musicians are empathetically attuned in a group flow state”.³⁰

Conversely, qualities and conditions that can hinder flow may include a lack of technical and conceptual mastery as well as anxiety.³¹ Werner identifies five fear-based musical affects:

²⁵ Sarath, “A New Look at Improvisation,” 29.

²⁶ Louis Carvell, *The Universal Mind of Bill Evans: The Creative Process and Self-Teaching*; Sarath, “A New Look at Improvisation,” 31.

²⁷ Louis Carvell, *The Universal Mind of Bill Evans: The Creative Process and Self-Teaching*

²⁸ Kenny Werner, *Effortless Mastery*, (New Albany, Indiana: Jamie Aebersold Jazz, 1996), 99.

²⁹ Balara, “The Personal and Social Dimensions Of Creativity in Collective Jazz Improvisation”, 312.

³⁰ Fredrick Seddon, and Michele Biasutti. “A Comparison of Modes of Communication between Members of a String Quartet and a Jazz Sextet,” *Psychology of Music* 37 (June, 2009): 395-415. DOI: 10.1177/0305735608100375 (accessed April 8, 2011), 398.

³¹ Louis Carvell, *The Universal Mind of Bill Evans: The Creative Process and Self-Teaching*; Werner, *Effortless Mastery*; Erin Wehr-Flowers, “Differences between Male and Female Students’ Confidence, Anxiety, and

fear-based playing, fear-based practicing, fear-based teaching, fear-based listening, and fear-based composing.³² Similarly, Bayles & Orland identify two types of fear: fear about yourself (that prevents you from doing your best work), and fear about your reception by others (that prevents you from doing your *own* work).³³ Buddhists also describe “five fears” that hinder our freedom to create: fear of loss of life, fear of loss of livelihood, fear of loss of reputation, fear of unusual states of mind, and fear of speaking before an assembly.³⁴ Regarding group flow, some authors (e.g., Balara 2000, Campbell 2010, and Sarath 1996) observe that a musically weaker member of a group experience might hinder the flow of the entire ensemble.

Teaching and Learning Jazz Improvisation and Flow

There are numerous views in the literature regarding the learning and teaching of jazz improvisation, though few regarding their relationship to flow. Humans have been trying to discipline and harness the power of the mind for thousands of years through such methods as meditation and Zen Buddhism. In that flow is a harmonious state of mind achieved through the balance of skill and challenge, the goals of jazz education may be more a matter of creating the proper conditions for flow rather than attempting to teach flow in particular. Watson contends that jazz improvisation is indeed a skill that can be taught and learned successfully although much of the extant supporting investigations have “suffered from flawed research

Attitude toward Learning Jazz Improvisation,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 54, no. 4 (Winter, 2006): 337-349, <http://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/> (accessed March 29, 2011).

³² Werner, *Effortless Mastery*, 51.

³³ David Bayles and Ted Orland, *Art and Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*, (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Image Continuum Press, 1993), 24.

³⁴ Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play: The Power of Improvisation in Life and the Arts*, (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1990), 135.

methodology”.³⁵ Allsup asserts that improvisation can be a transcendent experience although many of the ordinary methods of musical training emphasize traditional approaches so “the experience of transcendence is never attained.”³⁶ Several other authors (e.g., Alperson 1988, Biasutti & Frezza 2009, Kennedy 2010, Sarath 1996, Sawyer 1999, and Werner 1996) refer to the shortcomings of traditional Western classical theory-based teaching methodology as it applies to jazz improvisation. Both Evans and Werner warn of teaching style over process and handing students too much so there is nothing for them to discover on their own. Several sources (Prouty 2005, Schroeder 2002, and Werner 2006) also advocate direct interaction with artists themselves.

Conclusion

It is clear from a review of the literature that the issue of flow and its application to musical improvisation is an immensely complex subject encompassing multitudinous facets of psychology, sociology, music theory, and even spirituality. It is however only in recent years that scholarly research has begun to address jazz improvisation and its relationship to flow theory. Watson and Campbell note a lack of substantial research regarding jazz improvisation and/or flow and jazz improvisation, and Berkowitz asserts a severe lack of research regarding group flow in general. Although improvisation, flow, and education are addressed to varying degrees among the scholarship reviewed, there remains little acknowledgement of the consideration of flow theory with regard to the teaching and learning of jazz improvisation either in institutional settings or in the private sector. The review of the literature thus suggests that indeed more

³⁵ Kevin E. Watson, “Charting Future Directions for Research in Jazz Pedagogy: Implications of the Literature,” *Music Education Research* 12, no. 4 (December, 2010): 383-393. DOI: 10.1080/14613808.2010.519382 (accessed April 3, 2011), 390.

³⁶ Randall E. Allsup, “Activating Self-Transformation through Improvisation in Instrumental Music Teaching,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 5, no. 2 (Fall, 1997): 80-85. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40495428> (accessed March 28, 2011), 81.

research is warranted and necessary regarding the acknowledgment and implementation of flow and optimal experience within the realm of jazz education and group jazz improvisation in particular.

Design and Procedures

In accordance with the method of philosophical research as a process of logical inquiry as suggested by Phillips, the methodology of this investigation will proceed as follows: 1) Purpose of the Study, 2) Statement of the Problem, 3) Research Questions, 4) Collection of Data, and 5) Presentation of Conclusions.³⁷ Phillips further specifies that regarding the collection of data, philosophers look to other writers to provide statements and evidence for or against their thesis. Moreover, statements that lead to a logical conclusion form the basis of the argument.³⁸ Phillips suggests that philosophical researchers “compare and reflect on the ideas of others (and their own) in an attempt to analyze, synthesize, and reach a ‘truthful’ conclusion.”³⁹ Among what she refers to as “symptoms of the philosophical”, Jorgensen suggest that philosophy clarifies its terms as well as exposes and evaluates underlying assumptions.⁴⁰

The above principles and assertions by acknowledged and published authorities in the field will serve as the foundational model for the methodology of this philosophical investigation. Therefore, the prominent considerations of this research will concern the clarification and definition of all related terminology within the confines and delimitations of the study (e.g., flow theory, optimal experience, jazz improvisation, creativity), and the exposition and evaluation of the underlying arguments and assumptions of all collected data in order to form a logical sequence of reasoning to address the topic of the relationship of flow theory to jazz improvisation and jazz education.

³⁷ Kenneth H. Phillips, *Exploring Research in Music Education and Music Therapy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 69.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁰ Estelle R. Jorgensen, “On Philosophical Method,” In *MENC Handbook of Research Methodologies*, ed. Richard Coldwell, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 176.

Collection of Data

Evidence and data in the form of scholarly dissertations, peer-reviewed journal articles, books published by relevant and qualified authors, and judiciously selected material from supplementary trade journals (in the form of interviews and articles from relevant and primary sources) will comprise the essential body of resource material. The material will be collected through searches of online databases (e.g., Boston University online database library including JSTOR, RILM Abstracts, Music Index Online, ProQuest, and Project Muse) as well as personal visits to libraries such as SUNY New Paltz Sojourner Truth Library and the RCLS library system of the Hudson Valley.

Analysis

Analysis of the collected data will take the form of philosophical “critical reasoning” as described by Philips to determine “whether objectives, practices, or views are desirable or should be revised.”⁴¹ As indicated in the accompanying Literature Review, preliminary research indicates extant literature may address any of seven categories of consideration: 1) flow theory, 2) jazz improvisation as compared to other genres of musical improvisation, 3) descriptions and considerations of jazz improvisation, creativity, qualities, and constraints, 4) views concerning improvisation vs. composition, 5) considerations and descriptions of jazz improvisation in terms of flow and optimal experience, 6) conditions and hindrances to flow, and 7) issues concerning the teaching and learning of jazz improvisation and flow.

Data and sources will be set forth, reviewed, evaluated, and cross-referenced in accordance with the above seven categories to determine and derive themes, consensus, as well

⁴¹ Phillips, *Exploring Research in Music Education and Music Therapy*, 69.

as underlying philosophical assumptions and trends through time and across boundaries of scholarly disciplines and focus. Although some sources address only one or a narrow range of concerns (e.g., doctoral dissertations), others may address a much wider range of subject matter although to varying degrees of depth and analysis. Therefore, the relative weight of each source will require consideration as well. The publication date of resource material will also be of concern in that for instance a paper concerning trends in jazz education published in 1980 will clearly not reflect more recent trends in the field, or may even feature outdated or disproved viewpoints and need to be considered accordingly.

Conclusions

Although the emergence of jazz as a unique form of musical expression developed in the early twentieth century, it was not until the 1960s that jazz began to earn a place of legitimacy in the mainstream American educational system.⁴² In that Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow and optimal experience was first brought to public attention with the publication of *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play* in 1975, it is perhaps not surprising that it has only been in recent years that research and scholarship addressing flow in relationship to jazz improvisation has begun to finally emerge. The literature that has now materialized as a result of such inquiry does indeed suggest that the relationship and positive correlation between jazz improvisation and flow deserves not only recognition for further investigation, but likewise consideration in the field of jazz education as well.

Possible Outcomes

It is the intention of this philosophical study to examine the significant relationship between jazz improvisation and flow more thoroughly, through review and scrutiny of current literature, in order to bring such scholarship to the attention of the jazz education community and hopefully apply and integrate such findings to the underlying philosophical approaches to jazz performance education. Possible outcomes of this investigation are expected to be: 1) discovery of further support for the significant and positive relationship between flow and jazz improvisation, 2) evidence that conditions for flow in the realm of jazz improvisation, both

⁴² Kennedy, "Jazz Education"; Mark, "The Acceptance of Jazz in the Music Education Curriculum: A Model for Interpreting a Historical Process"; Prouty, "The History of Jazz Education: A Critical Reassessment".

individually and in group conditions, can be effectively addressed, 3) based on current research, there is a strong indication that the principles of flow theory have not yet been sufficiently incorporated into the philosophy of jazz performance education, and 4) incorporation of flow theory into such programs will enhance their effectiveness and overall success in addressing jazz improvisation as a creative music-making process.

Possible Problems

In the course of this investigation, it is possible first, that regarding some aspects of the study, there will too many conflicting findings or arguments to draw meaningful conclusions. In this case, research and collection of available literature may need to continue beyond the initially supposed parameters and boundaries until enough material is gathered to make a reasonable and informed determination as to the true state of affairs regarding such issues. Second, some sources may exhibit poorly substantiated research or assertions and will need to be carefully reviewed, scrutinized, and cross-referenced in order to insure against erroneous conclusions or perspectives. Finally, it is possible that regarding some aspects of the investigation, there will remain a lack of any or enough extant literature to sufficiently address such issues and reach conclusions with reasonable support and substantiation. Such a situation may therefore become the impetus for yet further investigation, or indeed a separate study altogether.

Final Thoughts

In view of the recent scholarship and research supporting the significant relationship between flow and jazz improvisation (both individually and in group situations), jazz pedagogy must begin to acknowledge and take into account recent findings of flow relationships when creating and reevaluating jazz performance curriculums in schools both on the secondary and

college levels. This investigation seeks to affirm that jazz performance educators must address the inexorable collaborative, social, and emergent nature of jazz improvisation as a process and an activity, not in terms of a resultant structure.

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