

## Jazz Education and the Jazz Periphery: An Example from Estonia

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In his widely cited article “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” Scott DeVeaux claims that academic jazz training was a part of the jazz tradition and has become one of the ways of defining jazz.<sup>1</sup> Since its inception, jazz has become an integral part of musical academia and needs no self-justification about its presence. The necessity to convince educational authorities of the importance of the field is no longer of interest to jazz educators: every self-respecting and “up-to-date” higher education institution of music includes jazz in its curriculum, to a greater or lesser degree. Even in Estonia, which is an academically conservative country, the Academy of Music opened its doors to courses in jazz in 2004.

Jazz education has reached a point in its history where certain contradictions and mythologies that previously preoccupied the discourse have been significantly reduced. Jazz is not conceptualized in terms of mythical bi-musical perception which portrays jazz performers as instinctive, emotive, and corporeal as opposed to rational, cerebral, and theory-based jazz academics.<sup>2</sup> Nor are the paradigms which emphasize certain biological or inborn qualities which underestimate or even deny the role of formal education in jazz learning supported. Also, the discursive rather than practical tensions related to describing jazz in polar terms like emotive/rational, cerebral/soulful, or to approaching jazz learning by dichotomies like art music/classical music, oral/written, improvisation/composition, formal/informal, system/creativity, mind/body polarity no longer add fuel to the debate. Jazz has firmly established its position in the academic establishment by now and has its own educational paradigms and pedagogical methodologies. Where discursive and pro forma jazz education has established its position, there is a

1. Scott DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz historiography,” *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 525–60.

2. David Ake, “Learning Jazz, Teaching Jazz,” in *Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn, 255–69 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

dichotomy that is more evident than ever before. Having no desire to be provocative, I would like to use the center/periphery divide here in order to make distinctions between two tendencies within the discourse of jazz education. What I have in mind with the central/periphery divide is not only the geographical placement of one or another jazz culture or the well-known opposition between American and European education traditions. Rather, the divide is perceived as a metaphorical distinction at the level of discourse between what we call the canonized or central jazz educational practice and the practices which are more fluid, less specifically determined and which thus stay in the symbolic periphery.<sup>3</sup>

Questions instantly arising in this context concern the relationship of the central educational and pedagogical paradigms that accepts bebop as the *lingua franca* of the jazz tradition. As Tony Whyton puts it, is the A-B-C (Aebersold-Baker-Coker) methodology which considers virtuosity as the highest aesthetical norm the appropriate educational situation in the imaginary periphery?<sup>4</sup> Is the (so called) central model the only possible way to think about jazz education nowadays? To what the extent does this model of jazz education meet the needs of jazz practices in the periphery?

Questions like these have no single (and univocal) answer. One way to respond is to articulate the interdependence of the jazz scene and jazz education. The academic study of jazz history and performance should not be an isolated pedagogical system transmitting certain immutable aesthetical and stylistic paradigms, and educational practices; rather jazz education is an extension of the jazz performance. Since the contemporary jazz scene as a stylistically homogeneous musical setting has lost its relevance, jazz education, in order to maintain its position as a seedbed for the music scene, must also be flexible enough to react to the changing situations. Unfortunately, education is conservative and inert in its (very) nature and tends to be slow in reacting to changes and fails to keep up with developments and shifts in society.

The Estonian jazz periphery is an excellent way to illustrate the idea of a diverse contemporary musical scene. What we find there is a frequent crossing of genre borderlines by jazz musicians and a high level of collaboration between classical and jazz musicians—although the latter is one-sided phenomenon: it is mostly jazz musicians joining the art music projects and not the other way around. The musical versatility of Estonian jazz musicians is not a phenomenon of recent origin. It has been historically emblematic to our

3. See also Kenneth E. Prouty, "Toward Jazz's 'Official' History: The Debates and Discourses of Jazz History Textbooks," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 1, no. 1 (2010): 19–43; <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/4/4>.

4. Tony Whyton, "Birth of the School: Discursive Methodologies in Jazz Education," *Music Education Research* 8, no. 2 (2006): 65–81.

musical tradition—to the tradition where jazz has been a relatively less autonomous musical genre compared to those national styles (such as the United States) located in the center of the jazz tradition. Hence, we can ask what are the implications that this state of affairs has to music education? To provide suitable answers to those questions is not my task here but it is rather an assignment for our recently convened society of jazz educators who will hopefully be the guiding light for the future of our jazz education. That the changes are necessary was shown by my recent small pilot study which demonstrated the relatively high level of students' dissatisfaction with mainstream jazz methodologies. The main reason for their resentment is the irrelevance of bebop and standard-based methods to the local musical practices. This leads to suggestions that maybe the teaching/learning of certain skills and musical knowledge should be placed at the center of jazz pedagogy rather than focusing on one particular style. But are we as educators flexible and skilled enough to replace the old well-developed methods with new untested ones?

I would like to conclude my ruminations by turning once again to Scott DeVeaux.<sup>5</sup> By talking about (American) jazz history he warns us against exclusionary tendencies, grand narratives and canonization. Those thoughts are easily conveyed to the global context and to jazz education. Hence, the future of jazz education relies in inclusion rather than in exclusion, in diversity of methodologies rather than in one orthodox or central approach, and in decanonization rather than in canonization.

5. Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition" (1991) and "Core and Boundaries," *The Source: Challenging Jazz Criticism* 2 (2005): 15–30; <http://www.equinoxpub.com/JAZZ/article/view/1716>.