SAIF SUMMARY REPORT for Joe Caploe

Developing the jazz language through transcriptions of the masters.

Project Abstract

Jazz improvisation is a language. The most effective way to learn this language is by transcribing the improvisations of master jazz musicians. Through the study of these improvisations the language becomes clear. The relationship between chords and scales choices are revealed. Rhythmic characteristics and patterns that are idiomatic to the jazz tradition also reveal the essence of the jazz language. Notes are letters in the alphabet, phrases are words, rhythms provide cadences and patterns that form the language. Only by notation all of these elements of the language can it be studied in the detail necessary to build the skills to improvise (speak) the language in the correct style. The repeated listening of the solos that is required to transcribe them accurately is a challenge. Many fast passages need to be transcribed at half speed to hear all the notes and rhythms. Study of transcriptions of master jazz improvisers is an unending source improving a professional jazz musician’s / educator’s vocabulary and provides inspiration to develop one’s own voice as a improvising musician. Unlike music that is entirely notated, jazz musicians are given only a chord progression to work with. The demands placed upon any jazz improviser to speak the language clearly are severe. Transcriptions have and always will be the most effective means of mastering the jazz language.

Project Objectives and Methodology

The objective of this proposal was to improve my knowledge of the jazz language to assist in teaching and personal performance of jazz improvisation. Although a professional jazz musician / educator, I feel the need to continue master the jazz language as a means of self improvement and inspiration.

Four acknowledged jazz masters solos were transcribed by repeated listening. In fast passages during solos I used a Reed Kotler Music TR-400 Digital Music Study Recorder to slow down the passages so I could hear all the notes clearly and make sure they were notated correctly. The TR-400 slows down the music without changing the pitch. Repeated corrections followed until all the notes, chord structure, articulations, and rhythms were accurately notated. All the improvised solos are transposed for Bb, Eb, concert and bass clef instruments enabling students and faculty to the opportunity to study all the improvisations regardless of instrument. The solos transcribed are:

#1) Milt Jackson’s vibraphone solo from the song Statement from the CD Statements: Milt Jackson Quartet, Impulse! A-14, AS-14

#2) Miles Davis’s trumpet solo from the song Freedie Freeloader from the CD Kind of Blue: Miles Davis, Columbia, CK 40579

#3) Junior Cook’s tenor sax solo from the song Sister Sadie from the CD Blowin’ the Blues Away, Horace Silver - Blue Note 1999

#4) Curtis Fuller’s trombone solo from the song Caravan from the CD The Artistry of Freedie Hubbard: Impulse! A-27
Project Benefits

The benefits to my artistic development are invaluable as an educator and professional performer. Studying these artists playing traditional instruments used in jazz ensembles has increased my vocabulary in this language immensely, providing continued insight and inspiration into a truly American art form. Students who participate in jazz ensembles at UWP will benefit from my study of these transcriptions enhancing their experience in developing their own jazz improvisations. UWP Pioneer Jazz Ensembles are open to all students who play a musical instrument and are comprised of students from all majors. Students who perform in the groups have the experience of making jazz music which is both multicultural and a truly American art form. Through our pioneer jazz ensemble performances this American art form is kept alive and made accessible to students, faculty, staff, and community members. Through jazz music’s multicultural and multigenerational heritage, the pioneer jazz ensembles link the university to the community.

Sharing of Information

The results of this project were shared in Fall ‘08 with music faculty members who are teaching jazz improvisation in their respective studios. This includes the brass, percussion, guitar / piano and saxophone studios. All of the transcribed improvisations have been copied and given to these faculty members who will have the opportunity use them as a means of personal development and as an aid in teaching jazz improvisation in their respective studios. They will be included in the jazz ensemble library for future study by any and all interested music faculty and students. My jazz combo class studied and played two of the transcribed solos at a concert in the Pioneer Haus in Fall ‘08. I’m planning on studying and playing the other two solos in combo class this semester. I picked compositions and solos that are playable by UWP students. There are many solos and compositions that are too complicated for undergraduate study. These solos and songs are playable and understandable by students in the jazz program at UW-Platteville.

Budget

The 2008 SAIF Grant was fully encumbered.