

University of Guelph Study and Development Fellowship Final Report

Ted Warren

In my initial proposal for this fellowship, I stated that my role as sessional instructor for my jazz ensemble had morphed in that I realized I would have to teach improvisation as well as repertoire. Therefore, my goal was to hone my skills as a pianist and improviser (my first and main instrument is drums) to better meet the needs of the students playing in my ensemble. In the early stages of my leading the University of Guelph ensemble, we focused on standard repertoire, but needed more time spent on how to navigate the chords, melodies, baselines, etc. associated with the songs we were performing. Thanks to the university's generous fellowship, I am much more able to serve the students this way, and I will explain how in the following report.

As stated in my proposal I planned to study improvisation/harmony/chords with five expert improvisors. I was to take a ninety minute lesson each with Mark Eisenman, Pat Collins, Mike Murley, Ted Quinlan, and Brian Dickinson and bring back the knowledge gained to my future ensembles. Although it was quite illuminating how many principles these representatives of University of Toronto, York University, Humber College, and Mohawk College agreed upon, I will go over their approaches individually to highlight their varying perspectives.

Pianist and York professor Mark Eisenman was the first person I met with. He stressed various approaches to chord voicing for piano and guitar, as well as anticipating said chords rhythmically (e.g. The +s of 2 and 4). He also mentioned playing the melodies to standard tunes vibrantly and learning them by ear, if possible.

Bassist and Mohawk College professor Pat Collins talked about singing everything one plays. Melodies, basslines, guide tones, and solos can all be used to develop one's ear and make the music "vocal" even if one isn't a singer. He also has a great but simple exercise of playing only half notes over the chords of a standard composition and moving them by only a tone or semitone, both ascending and descending. This exercise also develops the ears in that it gets the student used to note choices that they won't normally go for.

Mike Murley, a saxist and University of Toronto professor, emphasized learning classic Jazz solos, preferably by ear, particularly those of Lester Young. These solos aren't necessarily super challenging technically, but highlight great note

choices and powerful rhymes feel.. He also demonstrated creating linear material over chords using one scale over a ii-v-I progression.

Humber College head of guitar Ted Quinlan demonstrated using the blues scale for a beginning improviser, as it works over a variety of chords and leaves them able to concentrate on rhythm rather than obsessing over pitch choices. He also emphasized learning idiomatic phrases ("licks", if you will) as a way to develop vocabulary.

Finally, Humber's piano department head Brian Dickinson stressed getting past using only the blues scale on the 12 bar blues and moving on to the 3 mixolydian scales that would fit that particular structure. Conversely, he also recommended working on just small segments of a particular tune, and not feeling compelled to tackle a whole song form in one go.

In conclusion, I feel that I have more than achieved my goals with this fellowship. I feel incredibly more equipped with, as well way less intimidated by, the harmonic and melodic aspects of Jazz. I look forward to passing this new knowledge along to my students and would like to thank University of Guelph for this opportunity.