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THE GOOD BOOK

*The market is flooded with jazz education tomes.
What makes one successful?*

In a recent collection called *The Future of Jazz* (A Cappella), former *New York Times* jazz critic Peter Watrous makes an arresting claim. Mainstream jazz, he writes, “is a perfect game system, like baseball or chess.” As an amateur guitarist, Watrous has spent time surveying an ever-growing literature devoted to the “rules” of this “game system.” “There are small hills of books on just how to apply to pentatonic scale, books on playing outside, books on blues, books on comping, books on the melodic minor scale, books on the harmonic minor scale,” he notes. “And most of the thousands of books are roughly the same. They treat the same material...in roughly the same way.

All indications...[are] that all jazz players must work through a uniform system to arrive at improvisational fluidity.”

How things change.

The idea of jazz as a music worthy of serious study was once considered outlandish. Miles Davis’ autobiographical account of his student days at Juilliard in the ’40s makes that point clear. Davis, along with friends and protégés like Jackie McLean, lived the jazz life not in the classroom, but on the bandstand (and, more haz- ardously, on the streets).

Now jazz has become institutionalized and codified to a degree scarcely imaginable half a century ago. In fact, McLean runs the jazz studies program

at the Hartt School of Music, in Hartford, Conn.

It is reasonable to argue with Watrous’ assertion that “the average jazz musician, stumbling with the weight of a hundred years of genius, is just too concerned about making sure the grammar is correct.” But one could also argue that codified jazz education has proved essential to the music’s survival, at least in the short term. Jazz has lost much of its popularity with young people. Mentorship bands, once run by the likes of Art Blakey and Betty Carter, are vanishing. For the relative few who do become exposed and dedicated to jazz, books and college programs are some of the only avenues left,

in study and career terms.

The challenge, then, is to ensure the quality and vibrancy of the instructional aides on the market. More than that, it is to emphasize—as Jackie McLean surely does in his curriculum—that jazz is music of the heart and to point students toward jazz truths never to be found on the printed page.

“WHEN I STARTED WRITING books, there were no books,” says Dr. David Baker of Indiana University, past president of the International Association of Jazz Educators (IAJE). The dawn of jazz instructional publishing as we know it came in the early 1960s. Gradually a canon was

BY DAVID ADLER



born, thanks to “the ABCs” of jazz education: Aebersold, Baker and Coker. Jamey Aebersold became famous for his *Play-A-Long* series, enabling students to practice with world-class rhythm sections; he also continues to publish stand-alone volumes by many different authors. Baker, who got his first break with a series of columns in *Down Beat*, has gone on to publish more than 70 books. Tenor saxophonist and Woody Herman alum Jerry Coker put himself on the map with *Improvising Jazz*, one of the first systematic explanations of jazz theory.

Decades later, with countless books flooding the market, Baker says, “The daunting task is to find a void, a place where there’s something that doesn’t exist.” Finding a void, however, is just one of several book-writing motivations that Baker identifies. Authors may want to improve upon what exists, or correct outright misinformation, or consolidate far-flung information under one cover. In extremely rare instances, an author might even put forth a book of “wholly original thought,” such as George Russell’s *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*.

What frustrates the search for original book ideas?

According to saxophonist and educator Dave Liebman, “There’s just a finite amount of material to talk about in this music. It’s not rocket science.” But pianist Hal Galper maintains, “There’s plenty that hasn’t been done.” Galper’s unique,

self-published e-book, *Forward Motion From Bach to Bebop: A Corrective Approach to Jazz Phrasing*, would seem to prove his point. (Liebman, incidentally, wrote the book’s foreword.)

“It’s easy to make up something in this educational business,” Galper says. “You can make up your own terminology, your own systems. That’s cool, as long as students realize that they need their own approach. If you take any book as *the* way to do something, you’re on the wrong track.”

Liebman seems to agree: “The problem is that we can’t really talk, in a technical book, about what jazz is really about: individuality, spirit, expression. We can only tell you here are the tools, here’s the alphabet, here are ways others and I have done it. But books, especially in jazz, are less than half of what it’s about.”

Given this perhaps discouraging message, how should the novice author proceed?

“There’s an adage I always follow,” says David Baker. “It’s easy to make a simple thing complex, but it takes genius to make a complex thing simple.” Clarity and sensible organization are therefore the paramount virtues in an instructional book. New York-based guitarist Adam Rafferty, author of two self-published books and also the designer of

Galper’s *Forward Motion* Web site (forwardmotionpdf.com), says that “you’ve got to be willing not to skimp, to write things very slowly, very obviously. It’s almost like, ‘Take your car keys, put them in your pocket, go out the front door, get in your car....’ That’s a painful part of writing for me, making sure it’s idiot-proof.”

Liebman adds another, seldom-discussed point: “You do have to know language. You have to have studied grammar somewhere along the line.” Citing Strunk & White’s *The Elements of Style* as a worthwhile investment, Liebman states: “Writing is no different than playing. You get better at it the more you do it. You have to be ready to make constant revisions, more than in music, because in music we still only have 12 notes. With writing, there is always another way to describe something, a better way, a shorter way.”

Liebman’s point-blank conclusion: “It’s extremely difficult to write a book.” Galper recalls that writing *Forward Motion* was “like giving birth. There were 300 musical examples. I was doing it all on my iMac with Microsoft Word. It kept quitting on me, and I kept losing examples. It was just a horror show. I hated it.”

When it was done, Galper resolved never to write another book.

He is currently at work on his next one.

Everyone in the jazz book business has had to find and maintain a niche.

THE AVAILABILITY OF PUBLISHING AND NOTATION SOFTWARE and online sales mechanisms has made self-production of books a viable option for many authors. But David Baker sounds a cautionary note: “The danger with this, and with publishing in general for years, is that jazz books were not subjected to refereed analysis and approbation. None of us is omniscient. Only God knows everything. It seems to me when you don’t have the benefit of running it past people who have been in the field and have been through the trial and error of method, you run the risk of saying something that’s already been said 100 times.”

There are qualified, imaginative teachers, like Galper, who have delved into self-publishing and managed to avoid these pitfalls. But Galper had been teaching the *Forward Motion* concept for over a decade, privately and in classrooms. His teaching process was also a vetting process, an incubation period.

Guitarist Adam Rafferty has embraced self-publishing (his two books are available at adamrafferty.com). “I wanted to write [my books] the way I wanted, unfiltered, here’s exactly what I think,” he says. But Rafferty, too, tested his ideas before committing them to paper. “I focused on stuff I found myself telling people over and over again.” His students also offered their own opinions on what would make a strong jazz guitar book. When it came time to write, Rafferty says, “I aimed it right at the people who wanted it.”

Economics are another part of the self-publishing picture. According to Rafferty, “With publishers, authors get a flat rate and a very small percentage. It goes against my grain.” Liebman, citing the limited sales figures of most jazz books, says, “There’s not much reward. Even if you get your book out, like a record, you get 10 percent of what?” But tenor saxophonist Walt Weiskopf, author of the Aebersold books *Intervallic Improvisation* and *Around the Horn*, has a more positive view: “A record dies in six months. A book has more staying power. If I sold records like I sold books, I’d be really happy.”

There are two factors, above all others, that propel a book’s sales, according to Liebman. “Great paper and beautiful graphics will not make a difference, really,” he says. What matters instead is the reputation of the author, and whether the book is part of a curriculum or required course. Liebman has parlayed his own innovative treatise, *A Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody*, into an advanced seminar at the Manhattan School of Music. His rationale is that students get far more from a book if the author is in the room to motivate them. “The problem,” he explains, “is that when somebody sees a book, they say, ‘Well, it’s all here and I’ll get to it when I can,’ but I don’t know how many people get past page 10 in most books. It’s almost too available. To really get my book you have to read every sentence and you’ve got to do what I say, and really immerse yourself in it. That’s one of the reasons I decided to teach my course.”

FEW KNOW MORE ABOUT THE VALUE OF TEACHER FOLLOW-THROUGH than the people of Berklee Media. But much has changed there under the stewardship of Dave Kusek (vice president of Berklee Media) and Debbie Cavalier (dean of Berklee’s continuing education division). While Berklee Press was responsible simply for keeping the Berklee College of Music’s curricular materials in print, Berklee Media is looking well beyond the school’s walls, running online courses at berkleemusic.com and producing Berklee Press books and DVDs that aren’t necessarily tied to specific Berklee courses. All these materials, however, bear the Berklee stamp in terms of pedagogical method and quality control. “We’re packing up bits of Berklee’s curriculum and sending it around the world,” says Cavalier. Proceeds from book sales are funneled back into Berklee student scholarships.

Berklee’s books are distributed by the Hal Leonard Corporation, the industry leader in music print publishing. Hal Leonard, in turn, is intimately involved in the vetting of Berklee book proposals, most of which come from Berklee faculty members. In addition to Berklee’s own education review committee, says Cavalier, “I work closely with Jennifer Rassler D’Angora, Berklee Press’s marketing manager, and several people at Hal Leonard who have a wealth of knowledge. They distribute through the music education channel, the musical instrument channel and the book trade channel—online and brick-and-mortar stores. I’ll run new book proposals by the people in charge of these channels, and they provide up-front advice to steer product.”

According to Chairman and CEO Keith Mardak, Hal Leonard was the first publisher to introduce audio supplements (at first cassettes, then CDs), which now come standard with virtually every book on the market. “We were [also] the first to invent a computer music [notation] system, in 1976,” adds Mardak. “We spent a lot of money. Later, we met with Leland Smith, who created [the notation program] Score. We liked his program, so we asked him for some changes to make it more commercially viable. He agreed, and Score became our platform. Today, we use both Sibelius and Finale.”

It has become common for prospective authors to lay out their proposals and book drafts themselves, using these and other software applications. Not surprisingly, Mardak and others agree that a clean, professional presentation greatly increases the odds of a proposal’s acceptance. It is also easy for publishers to distinguish authors who have done their homework, researching not just the marketplace as a whole, but the specific profile of the publisher in question.

Mardak separates Hal Leonard’s business into “school” and “over-the-counter” components. The “school” track focuses on scores for student ensembles of all different levels and types, from jazz bands to choral groups. The “over-the-counter” track

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is “kind of a free-for-all,” Mardak says; it ranges from solo transcriptions to play-alongs to what Mardak calls “true instructional books.” Some of these materials are commissioned, while others “walk in the door,” as Mardak puts it. Many houses seem to strike a balance between what Berklee’s Debbie Cavalier calls “proactive” and “reactive” book development.

Everyone in the jazz book business has had to find and maintain a niche. Mel Bay, for instance, is famous for its guitar books (most recently its *Private Lessons* series, with entries by Vic Juris, Mimi Fox and others). Kendor Music Inc., not unlike Hal Leonard, publishes a wide variety of jazz scores, concert band and orchestra arrangements and the like. Sher Music is best known for its *New Real Books*, which are particularly vulnerable to piracy, according to Chuck Sher, owner of the company and also a jazz bassist.

All these publishers must contend with the prevailing economic climate—and in particular, the dwindling resources of school music departments. “The school movement has changed,” says Keith Mardak. “It used to be huge; now it’s a very small business.” Jeff Jarvis, CEO of Kendor, notes that band directors are buying fewer scores per year. “As the student changes, the industry adjusts,” Jarvis observes. “It’s no reflection at all on the quality of educators; it has to do with administrative decisions outside the music departments. It’s like a salmon swimming upstream for band directors. They’re running against a heavy wind, and I truly respect them—they’re not getting the support and the contact hours [with students] that they need.”

It’s also far from clear that students are getting what they need once they finish school. Promising young players used to earn their wings through apprenticeships with jazz masters, but that system isn’t nearly as robust today. “A lot of knowledge is getting lost,” rues Hal Galper. “The most serious blow to jazz education is that everybody’s learning from books and records, second-hand. It’s showing up in our students.” But the fact that Galper writes books himself must signify some optimism, however tempered. “I’m trying to preserve whatever knowledge I can,” he says.

Certainly, there are limits to what even the best books can accomplish. As Mick Goodrick wrote in the introduction to his influential tome *The Advancing Guitarist*, “By itself, a book has no value; it’s a dead thing.” But if the student has clear goals and the will to get past page 10, a lot can happen.

According to Hal Galper, a book worth its salt should change one’s behavior. “Playing is behavior, and education is behavior modification,” he explains. “You have to define what a learned event is. It’s when your brain is changed physically. That’s when something is learned and never forgotten. If someone doesn’t leave a lesson physically changed, I haven’t done my job. And if a book doesn’t change the way you play, what good is it? That’s the final test of everything.” **JT**