

O'Meally, Robert G., Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin, eds. 2004. *Uptown Conversations: The New Jazz Studies*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Fischlin, Daniel and Ajay Heble, eds. 2004. *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Reviewed by Niko Higgins

What is the “New Jazz Studies?” *Uptown Conversations* and *The Other Side of Nowhere* contain a diverse array of scholarship that approaches the broad fields of jazz studies and musical improvisation through various perspectives and methodologies. Krin Gabbard’s two volume collection, *Representing Jazz* (1995a) and *Jazz Among the Discourses* (1995b), is the clear precedent for these new anthologies.¹ *Uptown Conversations* and *The Other Side of Nowhere* continue this trajectory by moving away from jazz as a static object to be stylistically described, explained, and celebrated through the heroic and larger-than-life individual towards an understanding of jazz as a music in continual dialogue with the historical, social, political, racial, and gendered processes governing its creation.²

No article in either collection articulates these goals more clearly than George Lipsitz’s essay, “Songs of the Unsung: The Darby Hicks History of Jazz,” which appears in *Uptown Conversations*. In it, Lipsitz argues that Ken Burns’ documentary *Jazz* is intended to emphasize African Americans’ contribution to the history of modernism. But such a “partial, perspectival” approach, Lipsitz argues, is problematic:

In telling its own truths about time, place, and subjectivity, the film directs our attention away from the many other temporalities, spaces, and subject positions that are central to the story of jazz . . . In the version of modernity described in *Jazz*, art becomes a specialized and autonomous activity detached from tradition, something created by alienated individuals rather than historical communities. Modernist aesthetics place the value of a work of art in the work itself, not in the broader social relations and practices that shape artistic creation and reception. The aestheticization of alienation is seen as an end in itself, as an episode in the history of art rather than as an individual and collective strategy for living better in the world by calling new realities into being through performance. (12–13)

Broadly speaking, both *Uptown Conversations* and *The Other Side of No-*

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where are correctives to Burns' approach, focusing less on individual narratives and more on the "social relations and practices that shape artistic creation." Appropriately, both anthologies stem from collaborative musical and academic gatherings: the former from the Jazz Study Group that convenes semi-annually at Columbia University and the latter from the annual Guelph Jazz Festival. The anthologies overlap in their emphasis on the importance of community in shaping improvisational practice; on the mobility of jazz and improvisation across national borders; and in their use of a broad methodological palette to expand our understanding of how jazz and improvisation are a part of our lives.

One risk for such collections—and for the new jazz studies in general—can be overemphasis on contextual meaning at the expense of actual musicians' experiences. The issue of how to negotiate the search for new, relevant ways of discussing jazz and improvisation while remaining attentive to the actual experiences of musicians and audience members who constitute the practice of this music remains a provocative one, and one that these two anthologies implicitly address.

Uptown Conversations

The larger mission of *Uptown Conversations* can be understood as not only a challenge to the canonical jazz narrative exemplified by Burns' documentary, but also a reinterpretation of what we understand jazz to be. This collection situates jazz within broader fields of expressive culture, exploring jazz "across the curriculum." In their introduction, the editors ask,

What is a jazz painting? A jazz novel? What is jazz poetry? What is jazz dance? What is a jazz film? What are the sources of jazz as an art form? What are the sources and meanings of art? What work does music do for the whole community? (2–3)

Working against the idea of jazz as a self-contained genre, the anthology shows a vast interdisciplinary, and to a lesser extent a transnational, movement that identifies how and where jazz is actually practiced.

Part 1 offers seven examples of jazz historiography, from a reconsideration of individual musicians' histories to an investigation of larger musical movements. It includes both a rethinking of canonical figures such as Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk, and Miles Davis, as well as essays about less familiar experimental movements, such as the Union of God's Musicians and Artists Ascension (UGMAA) in Los Angeles and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) in Chicago. Part 2 explores two themes: the international circulation of jazz and the intersection of jazz

with other media. The first theme—the movement of music across national borders—is explored in essays by Penny Von Eschen, Timothy Mangin, and Kevin Gaines. Part 2 then turns to jazz’s influence on other art forms. There are articles on improvisation in Romare Bearden’s paintings, Louis Armstrong’s photo collages, the 1961 film *Paris Blues* (which included music by Duke Ellington and acting by Louis Armstrong), and contemporary turntablism. By placing these two different themes together in part 2, it is possible that the editors are suggesting some affinity between these categories, but the juxtaposition isn’t wholly convincing; the section on the transnational movement of jazz has little in common with the section on interdisciplinary approaches.

George Lipsitz and George Lewis’s essays represent the historiographical project of the new jazz studies in different but related ways. Their discussions of the UGMAA and AACM force us to recognize not just the individual success stories reinforced by journalism and previous jazz scholarship, but also alterior modes of musical production. UGMAA and AACM members found both financial and aesthetic security and autonomy in numbers, forming musician-run organizations to provide venues for performance, forums for collegial critique, and educational programs to stimulate community involvement. Lipsitz reveals the larger implications of excluding such communal histories from Ken Burns’ widely-viewed documentary *Jazz*. He writes, “At stake here is not just an issue of a comprehensive mainstream narrative versus the eccentric tales told by imaginative outsiders. Our entire understanding of music may hinge on what histories we valorize” (21–22).

Thus, Lipsitz shows that the Burns narrative is complicit in a particular production of knowledge about music, one that seems to stop short of recognizing the important role of collectives. Burns overemphasizes the role of individuals, which reduces music to a mere vehicle for entertainment, despite its connections to social history. He shows how certain individuals are capable of cultural transformation without showing how larger jazz communities are complicit in this kind of transformation.

In his essay “Experimental Music in Black and White: The AACM in New York, 1970–1985,” Lewis counters the Burns approach by providing a window into the workings of one collective. Lewis discusses the organization’s history, from its 1965 founding in Chicago to its presence on the 1980s new music scene in New York. Referencing transcripts of early AACM meetings, Lewis notes that the organization always emphasized “original” music over any particular style or genre. Set free from the restraints of a racist recording industry, AACM musicians could draw on any number of different musical forms from around the world to spark their creativity. Lewis’s ar-

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ticle stresses the importance of this genre-crossing in the AACM's self-conception, and shows how such organizations help disseminate new music as well as broaden our often too-limited understanding of genre. "The example of the AACM," he writes, "has been central to the coming canonization not of a new musical aesthetic with defined musical borders but of a new kind of musician who works across genres with fluidity, grace, discernment, and trenchancy" (91).

Another section of the anthology directly addresses the crossing of musical borders by looking both at the transnational movement of jazz and at black diaspora musicians. Timothy Mangin's essay "Notes on Jazz in Senegal" is particularly striking. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, Mangin uses Senegal as a case study for exploring the historical, social, and political forces set in motion by jazz's widespread acceptance in "the modern black Atlantic."³ Mangin claims that the Senegalese view jazz as an expression of their history and heritage, as well as a means of asserting their culture's modernity. His essay is revealing, exploring both the country's jazz-influenced popular music and the Caribbean and French musical influences that shaped jazz reception in Senegal. In so doing, he demonstrates how jazz can be borrowed and reinterpreted to serve myriad agendas.

As Mangin's essay reminds us, other cultures may view jazz as just another form of world music:

Jazz for Senegalese becomes an international music that can be appropriated, commodified, and used to express their modern voice among Francophone countries as well as a pan-African imaginary that includes French West Africa, America, and Europe. For Senegalese, then, jazz is "world music," an international phenomenon that provides a nexus in which to participate in the global sphere. (235)

This unflinching appropriation of jazz abroad illuminates a key problem underlying jazz studies's most important mission: to institutionalize jazz as "America's Classical Music."⁴ By exploring the international circulation of jazz—its manipulation and commodification for foreign markets—scholars might realize that jazz is subject to the same market forces as other forms of popular music. It might also help us answer the question, what is it about jazz's symbolic power that prevents its widespread dissemination and manipulation here in the U.S.? Given the potential value of transnational jazz research, it is a shame that only Mangin's essay ventures outside the familiar terrain of New Orleans, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

Another overlooked issue—interdisciplinary collaboration in jazz improvisation—is the subject of Travis Jackson's essay, "Always New and Centuries Old': Jazz, Poetry, and Tradition as Creative Adaption." He traces the

concept of tradition in a recording made by poet Amiri Baraka, saxophonist David Murray, and drummer Steve McCall. Jackson shows that both this project and its inspiration, a 1979 recording by alto saxophonist Arthur Blythe entitled *In the Tradition*, imagine tradition as “a malleable source for creativity, rather than as a foil to innovation” (359). Jackson astutely criticizes the vague descriptor “jazz poetry” (360) by showing how it fails to distinguish between jazz musicians reciting poetry, poems about jazz or jazz musicians, poems intended to be read by jazz musicians, or poems that draw on jazz performance practice. By doing so, he reveals one example of scholars’ inability to address interdisciplinary collaboration, and calls for analyses not only of jazz’s influence on other art forms, but also of multimedia collaborations involving jazz. This type of cooperation demands another form of analysis, since critical efforts to discuss collaborative art frequently focus exclusively on jazz. Jackson’s essay provides a model for such analysis by emphasizing what he believes is the main purpose of the Baraka/Murray/McCall and Blythe albums: a reformulation of tradition “as a process, an act of struggle and creative adaptation” (369). It is likely that valorizing research on jazz abroad will radically alter the types of histories already in place, and could transform our own histories of jazz.

Keeping our attention on broader social and historical issues while focusing on musical sound, Vijay Iyer discusses the process of improvisation. He looks for new ways to think about improvisation by offering helpful suggestions for moving past a Gunther Schuller-style of formal analysis which combines the intention to “tell a story” with melodic and harmonic analysis imported from Western musicology.⁵ Iyer “explodes the narrative” by arguing that the actual story being told can be interpreted not just on the level of one improvised solo, but through a range of time frames, from a single note to an entire lifetime of improvisation. Most importantly, he sees embodiment as crucial to understanding the meaning of an improvisation: “Kinesthetics, performativity, personal sound, temporality—all these traces of embodiment generate, reflect, and refract stories into innumerable splinters and shards. Each one of these fragments is ‘saying something’” (402).⁶ Thus, he advocates being attuned to the many non-linear, fragmented narratives that exist in the act of improvisation and encourages us to “hear” the narrative beyond the exclusively sonic limits of a single improvisation. Iyer’s article stands out in this collection as an exemplar of how jazz studies can welcome other modes of analysis while still focusing on musicians. Iyer’s main point—that music is as culturally situated and embodied as the people creating it—is very much in keeping with this anthology’s ideological orientation.

The Other Side of Nowhere

The Other Side of Nowhere embarks on a trajectory similar to *Uptown Conversations*. But instead of the alternate histories, transnational sites, and interdisciplinary forms that together articulate a type of “jazz culture” (O’Meally, Edwards, and Griffin 2004:2), *The Other Side* uses the process of musical improvisation as a lens for viewing a type of “improvisation culture.” Sherrie Tucker succinctly encapsulates the collection’s central theme when she asks, “Can improvising communities improvise new kinds of communities?” (Fischlin and Heble 2004:249).

The essays are organized in four parts. Part 1, “Performers Improvise,” includes essays by musicians Michael Snow, Pauline Oliveros, and Dana Reason, and addresses issues such as women and improvisation, embodiment, and improvisation as a tool for exploring a community’s social practices. Part 2, “Between and Across Cultures,” contains the collection’s freshest approach to the study of improvisation. This portion contains two essays by George Lewis, the first an updated version of “Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives” and the second a concise articulation of the present state of improvisation studies. This section also includes research by Michael Dessen and Jason Stanyek, who each focus on improvisation as a site for intercultural collaboration. Part 3, “Social Practice and Identity,” addresses the realm of identity politics in musical improvisation. Highlights include Mark Anthony Neal’s essay “...A Way Out of No Way’: Jazz, Hip-Hop and Black Social Improvisation,” in which he persuasively traces musical and social improvisation through elements of bebop and hip-hop, and Julie Dawn Smith and Sherrie Tucker’s essays addressing the under- and misrepresentation of women improvisers in conventional jazz histories. Part 4, “Collaborative Dissonances,” features essays by Eddie Prévost and Nathaniel Mackey. A well-known member of the influential ensemble AMM, Prévost provides important perspective on issues such as the European/American divide in improvised music and the musical and social implications of dissonance. Mackey further explores his idea of the “discrepant engagement” and its usefulness in bringing together different expressive disciplines. The anthology ends with a valuable bibliography and webography that spans a remarkably diverse disciplinary range.

Perhaps as a result of the continuous presence of musicians in this conversation, the thematic foundation of *The Other Side* extends beyond the jazz-related practices of free improvisation and free jazz to embrace other forms of musical improvisation. Fischlin and Heble qualify their orientation by drawing a line of inclusion around community-building forms of improvisational practice:

We recognize that we have not been able to address all forms of global improvisation and all the cultural sites in which improvisation occurs. Moreover, we are well aware that many of these other practices (classical Indian music, for example, in which improvisation plays a crucial role) do not necessarily align themselves with antihegemonic resistance or critical strategies of alternative community building. Neither do all minority communities in which improvisation is practiced necessarily exist in opposition to dominant social structures, nor is all musical improvisation necessarily rooted in alternative communities and activist practices. Nonetheless, with all these qualifications in place and in particular relation to significant (if underrecognized) strains of jazz musickings, we would argue there to be an identifiable and radical form of improvisational practices in which concepts of alternative community formation, social activism, rehistoricization of minority cultures, and critical modes of resistance and dialogue are in evidence and worthy of the kind of attention they get in this book. (2)

In their conclusion, Fischlin and Heble return to this theme, suggesting that “some of the most exciting areas of future research in improvisatory practices lie in intercultural and transdisciplinary studies” (397). Though they do not substantiate this observation, I suspect that such research will extend past this anthology’s overarching theme of community-building to topics that use improvisation to shed light on postcolonialism, thus continuing the work of Laudan Nooshin (2003) and, indirectly, Robin Moore (1993).

The highlight of *The Other Side* is part 2, which explores the movement of improvisation across borders and cultures. Michael Dessen’s article on the collaboration between Steve Coleman and AfroCuba de Matanzas, which resulted in a series of performances and a 1996 CD entitled *The Sign and the Seal*, uncovers issues common to intercultural collaboration. Dessen shows how this project differs from other “world music” collaborations by foregrounding human agency and creativity in “global systems of commodification” (187), rather than pointing out their absence. Dessen’s discussion of musical form is refreshing, as is his focus on the interpersonal dynamics of this project’s rehearsal. His most valuable contribution, however, is his insistence that the first encounter between musicians constitutes a site where cultural and musical difference are constructed and negotiated.

Continuing in a similar direction, Jason Stanyek pursues intercultural improvisation in the African diaspora, and provides a convincing argument for the study of improvisation as a musical and social process:

Improvisation, especially as manifested within the discourse of bebop, needs to be understood as a kind of space in which diverse participants are able to enact multiple viewpoints through understanding, a giving

over of control, trust. Improvisation has as its concomitant heterogeneity and together they become a kind of moral imperative; it is this, perhaps, that allows for the strong connection between musical Pan-Africanism and social movements . . . Musical Pan-Africanism can be seen as providing a paradigm for the building of local forms of resistance and communication that, simultaneously, have global relevance. (117–18)

Both Stanyek and Dessen seem to be interested in the transformative potential of intercultural improvisation, but never lose sight of influential power dynamics that can shape these interactions; moreover, they are aware that not all examples of intercultural improvisation can transcend these dynamics.

Stanyek is also interested in moving past discussions of intercultural improvisation's "hybridity" since he argues that our attention must be focused on the face-to-face embodied practices of music-making as opposed to the appropriation and sampling techniques afforded by recording technologies.⁷ In this respect, Stanyek and Dessen's articles seem to point most fruitfully toward future research on improvisation. Such face-to-face collaboration seems best explored by musician/scholars who can research these moments of intercultural contact and write first-hand about the issues faced by musicians during musical and social interaction.

George Lewis's "Improvised Music after 1950," published previously in 1996, is the anthology's centerpiece for three reasons: its important survey and critique of post-war American experimentalism; its commonly-cited definition/theorization of improvisation (149); and its introduction of the concepts "Afrological" and "Eurological." Written almost a decade later, Lewis's afterword revisits earlier themes and suggests some important directions for improvisational studies. He critiques the second edition of Michael Nyman's book *Experimental Music* (1999), arguing that it ethnocentrically privileges American and British experimentalist practices to the exclusion of all others (164). In a call for "a hard look at race" in experimental music (164–65), Lewis mentions the work of Leo Smith (1973; 1974) and Anthony Braxton (1985) as early examples of improvisational theories that create "a new musical order (that) will necessarily involve some degree of code-switching across traditions and genres" (165). Most pointedly, Lewis pushes American experimentalism "to grow up and assert its character as multicultural and multiethnic, with a variety of perspectives, histories, traditions, and methods," a push that I would argue this collection of essays achieves (170).

After Traveling Uptown and to the Other Side, Where Next?

One walks away from these two collections with different senses of the new

jazz studies. *Uptown Conversations* offers a much-needed expansion of what jazz is and what jazz does—as opposed to Ken Burns’ *Jazz*, which as Lipsitz points out, seems to create a jazz to be merely honored and purchased. As is evidenced by this collection, the breadth of sites where elements of jazz can be found are truly inspiring, and have significant implications for the historiographical project exemplified by Lipsitz and Lewis. Yet it is precisely this interdisciplinarity that detracts from a sense of coherence in *Uptown Conversations*. In her essay “Revisiting Romare Bearden’s Art of Improvisation,” for example, Diedra Harris-Kelley does not explain how her analysis of improvisation in Bearden’s collage technique can help us move past a superficial aesthetic comparison between music-making and other creative processes. John Szwed’s article “The Man” similarly falls short. In discussing the truly extraordinary life of Miles Davis, Szwed relates many compelling anecdotes, identifying the larger social need for perpetuating the Davis mythology without interrogating it.

Thus, despite several forward-reaching essays, the anthology ironically ends up being more canon-affirming than canon-expanding, since the authors do not agree on what the editors refer to as a “jazz culture.” The editors’ own definition of “culture” seems vague; perhaps this was an intentional choice, allowing room for the multiple perspectives and methodologies that comprise the anthology. But the overall effect is a re-establishment of jazz as a “thing,” since the editors never offer an in-depth, anthropologically-informed argument for *how* jazz is a culture.

Such a failing is symptomatic of the new jazz studies, and stems from the faulty question at its heart: what does an interdisciplinary approach to the expressive arts have to offer jazz studies? To be sure, this approach reveals unexplored avenues of interdisciplinary artistic expression and makes relevant connections between jazz and social, political, and historical forces. But this approach has a serious drawback: we are left grappling with the meaning of interdisciplinarity. Does “interdisciplinary” mean grounding jazz studies in cultural practices (taking its cue from African American and American Studies), or does it mean incorporating aesthetic theory into jazz analysis by drawing on the visual arts, dance, film, and literature? If jazz is really “a set of cultural products and *processes*” as Salim Washington suggests (28), then shouldn’t our methods take the study of culture as our common base? Perhaps we should turn the question around and ask, what do jazz practices in the visual arts, literature, dance, and film have to offer the study of culture? This line of investigation could provide a solid theoretical grounding for jazz studies while opening up the field to a wider audience.

In contrast to *Uptown Conversations*, *The Other Side* articulates a more unified vision of jazz and improvisation, focusing less on a specific kind of

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music and more on the actual process of music-making. Of the twenty contributors in *Uptown Conversations*, only three describe themselves as musicians, whereas *The Other Side*'s nineteen contributors include eleven musicians, and one poet who has collaborated with musicians. These authors help blur the lines between subject and informant (Robinson 2004), and I sense a stronger urgency among *The Other Side*'s contributors to represent concerns of musicians. While certainly not a prerequisite for being a jazz scholar, being engaged in both the musical *and* the writing processes offers valuable perspectives on improvisation.

Not surprisingly, the large number of musician-contributors ensures that the *sound* of improvisation is discussed throughout the anthology. This emphasis honors the spirit of Mark Tucker's assertion that "eliminating sound from the study of jazz" is comparable to "avoiding reference to words and texts in literary criticisms, or ignoring visual images in studies of film and painting" (1998:140). I disagree with Tucker, however, and feel strongly that music scholarship should not be obligated to discuss musical sound. The ways in which people discuss music seldom have anything to do with sound, yet these approaches still offer important insights into musical meaning.

On the other hand, I do agree with Tucker that there is "a widening rift" that "threatens to cut off musicologists from others working in jazz" if musicologists fail to embrace the insights of scholars working in other fields (1998:148). At its best, the new jazz studies attempts to fill a void of everyday relevance that previous jazz scholarship has failed to address. It is evident, however, that scholars must find a way to analyze musical sound to realize the full implications of the new jazz studies' already-provocative research agenda. It is in this space that I believe ethnomusicology can help—it is a field of study that, despite a few influential texts, has yet to shape the project of jazz and improvisation studies.⁸ In the introduction to *Uptown Conversations*, for example, the editors state that their collection "is strongly influenced by a variety of developments in the academy: by African American Studies, cultural studies, literary studies, the new musicology, and by insights of poststructuralism" (O'Meally, Edwards and Griffith 2004:6). Omitting ethnomusicology from this list seems curious, since what is missing from the new jazz studies is what is missing from jazz scholarship in general—that is, an ethnographic approach that explores how musicians theorize the world through their music. It is my hope that the new jazz studies will address *why* ethnography has been set aside as a methodological tool.

The transnational movement and reception of jazz seems to be an area that would benefit from such an ethnographic approach. E. Taylor Atkins

provides a helpful beginning in *Jazz Planet* (2003), a series of essays documenting local jazz scenes in India, China, Japan, South Africa, Russia, Sweden, and other countries. Mangin's work in *Uptown Conversation* creates a space for a more in-depth look at the assimilation of jazz into local scenes around the world. Moving the focus of study from the U.S. to jazz scenes abroad forces researchers to ask the fundamental questions of what jazz and improvisation *do* in a particular place, questions that are often assumed when writing for a jazz audience here in the U.S.

Ultimately, there are multiple ways of thinking and writing about music. However, both of these texts ignite important and much-needed debates over the future of this decidedly interdisciplinary field. Gabbard's aggressive programmatic statement from *Jazz Among the Discourses* still holds true for these two volumes: "jazz scholarship now faces two significant choices: it may continue developing and protecting its canon, or it may take the consequences of letting in some fresh, if chilling, air" (Gabbard 1995b:22). *Uptown Conversations* and *The Other Side of Nowhere* together will no doubt keep that fresh, cold air blowing.

Notes

1. See DeVaux (1991), Gennari (1991), Lewis (1996), Porter (2002), Sherri Tucker (2000), and Zorn (2000), to list a few of these recent influential monographs. For a pointed critique of the dismissal of jazz writers such as Gunther Schuller, Andre Hodier, and Martin Williams, see Mark Tucker (1998). He argues that, for better or worse, these writers have had a profound influence on today's institutionalization of jazz as "America's classical music."
2. By "processes," I'm referring to a range of socially-influenced interactions in everyday life. Listening and performing, for example, contain within themselves actions that are culturally complicit in shaping such categories as race, gender, and class. Drawing attention to processes allows scholars to draw attention away from finished musical products; in so doing, we can view music as an ongoing series of creative events.
3. See Gilroy (1993).
4. See Taylor (1986).
5. See Schuller ([1958] 1986).
6. Embodiment is generally understood as the relationship between the physical capabilities and limits of our bodies and our ability to both perceive and create music.
7. Stanyek's argument is indebted to Slobin (1993).
8. See Monson (1996) and Berliner (1994).

Recordings

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