



**Jazz Education Network Annual Conference
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Plenary Address by Alan Brown, principal, WolfBrown

It's truly an honor to be with you here today to celebrate jazz and the people who devote their lives to teaching and performing jazz.

As a consultant, I work mostly with professional theatres, opera companies, orchestras, performing arts presenters and their funders. I've heard about the strong levels of participatory engagement in jazz, but being here today and witnessing the energy and commitment at this conference brings my understanding of the jazz field to a whole new level.

Most people know me as a researcher, but at heart I am a musician. When I was 17 years old, I used to listen to Manhattan Transfer records over and over again, and transcribe the vocal parts onto staff paper, and then re-arrange them for different voices. Choral singing was my first love, which led me to attend the University of Michigan School of Music, where I studied vocal performance and served as the student manager of the choruses. The only problem was that I couldn't sing very well. My favorite course in college was Schenkerian Analysis of Atonal Music, taught by professor Richmond Browne. I just loved music theory.

Through sheer luck, I got a job running the Ann Arbor Summer Festival, and learned the ropes of the presenting field. The highlight of my time in Ann Arbor was presenting Ella Fitzgerald in concert in 1988. She arrived at Detroit Metro Airport three days early in order to adjust to the three-hour time change from Los Angeles. Of course, everyone recognized her, and everyone asked for an autograph, and she obliged every request, and thanked him or her for asking. I asked her... "Miss Fitzgerald, don't you grow weary of all the attention?" And she replied, "My mommy taught me to be nice to everyone down here, because you never know who you're going to run into 'up there'."

Her humility and grace were overwhelming. I will never, ever forget the moment she took the stage and 4,167 people leapt to their feet in an outpouring of love, respect and gratitude that I can still feel in my bones today.

It took me ten years after graduating from college to realize that I enjoy statistics and data analysis, so that is how I make my living now, studying audience behaviors and patterns of cultural participation in the American population.

Background on Jazz Audiences Initiative:

I'm here today to share with you some highlights from a recent study of jazz audiences, and to reflect on the future of the jazz field.

The Jazz Arts Group (JAG) of Columbus, Ohio commissioned the Jazz Audiences Initiative (JAI). Bob Briethaupt, former Executive Director, and his team secured funding to reach a deeper understanding of jazz audiences, their level of involvement with jazz, their preferences for artists and venues, what motivates them to attend, and what they seek out of their jazz experiences. I'd like to thank the



Columbus Foundation, the Ohio Arts Council, the Greater Columbus Arts Council, The Ohio State University Extension, Jazz Education Network, AllAboutJazz.com, and especially Ben Cameron from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, for supporting this work.

Partners in the multi-site study of jazz ticket buyers, in addition to the Jazz Arts Group, included Jazz at Lincoln Center, Jazz St. Louis, San Francisco Jazz, the Monterey Jazz Festival, Sculler's Jazz Club in Boston, and Major University Presenters, a consortium of 13 university presenters with a long history of presenting jazz artists. In total, nearly 5,000 jazz ticket buyers completed a lengthy survey about their relationship with jazz.

Despite the large sample size, this was not a random sample of all jazz-goers nationally, and represents only a cross-section of jazz buyers with skew towards those who attend jazz concerts in large halls. I regret not being able to study more audiences for jazz in smaller venues, or audiences for student and community presentations.

We also conducted a music listening study led by Dr. Joe Heimlich of The Ohio State University Extension, and a survey of music lovers who do not attend jazz, to better understand the prospect base for jazz and the different pathways into the art form.

To our knowledge, this was the one of the largest quantitative studies of jazz audiences ever conducted, and one of the first studies focusing exclusively on the behaviors and attitudes of jazz audiences.

You can access all of the study materials from the Jazz Arts Group website, which is www.jazzartsgroup.org/jai.

Summary of Key Research Findings:

I'd like to share with you just a few of the key findings.

- The jazz audience is still relatively **diverse** compared to other types of arts audiences. Much has been written about the aging of the jazz audience, and the shrinking of the jazz audience according to figures from the National Endowment for the Arts. But rumors of the death of jazz are greatly exaggerated. Jazz has many constituencies beyond audiences for live concerts by professional artists. Jazz has a constituency of listeners who may not attend live concerts, and, as demonstrated by the incredible turnout here today, jazz has a constituency of music-makers that is alive and well.
- So, if you think about all the different constituencies for jazz, it's difficult to say whether jazz is declining or, in fact, regenerating. All we know for sure is that the landscape of jazz participation is changing, and will continue to change.
- What is perhaps most interesting to me is that jazz audiences are heavily skewed towards males..., which is the opposite of what we find for dance, theatre and classical music. No offence to the ladies... but...
- In an environment where children and youth are pulled away from the arts by shifting academic priorities, an oppressive focus on test-taking and negative social norms around creativity, jazz is one of the few socially acceptable creative outlets for boys and young men. In this sense, jazz plays a unique role in the creative development of America's youth, and deserves essential public support.

- The study found that there are many **musical pathways** into jazz. Jazz occupies a unique space at the crossroads of the constellation of music preferences. The breaking down of the definitional boundaries around styles of music is one of the most important, and most overlooked, trends in arts participation. As you all know too well, jazz sounds have infused so many other genres of music, and I'm not just talking about smooth jazz, but everything from contemporary classical music to electronic dance music and film scores.
- You can define jazz any way that you want to. I had a spirited debate a few years ago with Wynton Marsalis about the definition of "jazz". I lost. But the point I'm making is that no one owns jazz, the public will make of jazz what it wants to, and definitions matter less and less to the public.
- To many young people, the labels used for many years to describe certain kinds of music don't matter any more. This was another theme of the study – that younger people have categorically **more eclectic tastes** than older people.
- Meanwhile, we have whole institutions – whole fields, in fact – constructed around narrow definitions of art that don't matter any more. I'm thinking especially of the orchestra field here.
- My favorite example of this comes from the NEA's Survey of Public Participation in the Arts back in the 1990s...
- In the prospect study we found four segments of potential jazz-goers, each with a different set of music preferences. Some come to jazz from country music and bluegrass. Some come to jazz from classical music. And others come to jazz from rock, R&B and, yes, Hip Hop. We call them **Social Rockers**, and they are a very interested in jazz, and a very attractive segment of potential jazz buyers.
- All of this suggests to me that jazz has an unusual resilience in its ability to meld with, and attract, listeners from other genres of music.
- There's so much energy now at the intersections of musical styles, and the intersections of different art forms. It's no different in dance, if you think about the styles of dance that people are watching on the reality television shows.
- While this fluidity of tastes around music and other art forms may seem obvious to you, it is profoundly challenging to the people who run large arts organizations. And I'm sure it is also challenging to some of the people who run music schools and conservatories.
- The study also sheds light on one of the most vexing questions facing the arts industry today, which is, "**How do people learn to like unfamiliar styles of music?**" Every individual has a unique and idiosyncratic arc of involvement with each of the art forms, including jazz. But, how do tastes change over a lifetime? What are the milestones along the way? More specifically, how do adults change their mind about what music they like?
- We found that **tastes in music are socially transmitted**. Friends introduce friends to new music.
- Some people try out new music in a process of trial and error, either through file sharing or streaming audio from services like Pandora and Spotify, but especially through YouTube, which offers an added visual element so necessary and appealing to younger consumers. But few people choose to attend live concerts by artists they're not sure they'll like. Concert going, therefore, is typically not about taste acquisition, but more about taste validation.
- Taste acquisition, more typically, happens in a social context. When you share music with friends and family members, you are transmitting not only the music, but also a social imprimatur – a social validation of taste. It helps if you're not the parent of the person whose musical tastes you're trying to change. Peer-based recommendations carry a lot of weight: "If you like me, you'll really like my music!"

- Passing along music preferences is one of the oldest forms of acculturation known to man. What can we all do to nurture and facilitate the transmission of taste? In a sense, that's what jazz educators do – but I'm afraid that jazz presenters have a lot to learn about taste acquisition and social reinforcement of desired behaviors.
- One strategy for transmission of taste is mutual recommendation between artists – artists recommending other artists' work. Another strategy is opening acts or double bills; to introduce audiences to artists they may not know about. Or sharing playlists, or even just recommending stations on iTunes radio. Most people won't step outside of their comfort zone without a lot of encouragement.
- The study also found that **consumption of jazz is artist-driven**. This is a serious dilemma for the field, at least for jazz presenters, in part because there are fewer and fewer big name artists who can fill a large hall. It becomes more difficult to market jazz shows when people are picking and choosing artists and not buying into the larger mission of jazz.
- We tried desperately in our survey design to ask about preference for sub-categories of jazz – Latin jazz, bebop, hard jazz, acid jazz, cool jazz, fusion, etc., etc.... and when we tested the protocol in focus groups, the average ticket buyer had little sense of what these categories mean. But they sure as hell know if they like Keith Jarrett, or Diana Krall. So, we wound up running a list of 17 individual jazz artists representing a wide cross-section of styles, and asked people which artists they'd heard of, and how much they liked their music.
- By analyzing this data, we found three underlying dimensions or factors of preference: 1) a preference factor around **Jazz Standards and Masters** – artists, both living and dead, who represent the "canon" of jazz masters, such as Charlie Parker, Stan Getz and Roy Hargrove; and 2) a preference factor around **Pop Crossover** artists with more mainstream appeal, such as B.B. King and Kenny G., and 3) a preference factor we call "**Eclectic and World**" – a combination of cross-genre artists like John Zorn, Lionel Loueke and Robert Glasper.
- These three preference factors are not mutually exclusive – some people associate with two of them, but they tend to hold together.
- It is impossible to fight the construction of tastes around specific artists, and it would be counterproductive to do so. People really enjoy following the work of an artist over a period of years, as much as artists enjoy having a dedicated base of fans. As Lou Fischer, Jazz Education Network President, pointed out, "some young people aren't even artist-driven, they're track-driven." This is what I call the atomization of musical tastes, driven by digital media. We have much to thank Steve Jobs for, God Rest his Soul, but the atomization of musical tastes is not one of them, at least in my opinion.
- So we must encourage people to connect with the artists whose music speaks to them the most. But at the same time we also need to build value around the larger idea of music as something that is not always selfish and personal, but something larger – something that holds us together as families, as families of friends, and as communities. Sustaining a vibrant music scene is more important than following Lady Gaga on Twitter, as much as I love her. Actually, Lady Gaga has created an amazing community around her music, and I especially love and recommend her new duet with Tony Bennett, *The Lady is a Tramp*, if you're not one of the 10 million people who've already watched it on YouTube. Now if she would only start recommending jazz artists to her little monsters...
- Building community around music a challenge we all face, and a challenge we all have to own as educators, performers, composers, publishers and presenters. No matter how focused and dedicated you are to your own ensemble or your own style of music, each of you can play a pivotal

role in the musical development of your friends, your students, your audiences, and your community.

- I think this is potentially the paramount challenge for young artists - to learn to communicate about their passion to others, and to learn to awaken the creative potential in other people. Some day, I dream that all artists will be teaching artists.
- The study also told us that **different audience members want different outcomes from their jazz experiences**. Some audience members want jazz that challenges them intellectually, some audiences want jazz that they can sing along to, some want music that tugs at their heartstrings, some want music that takes them back to another time and place, and some want music that they can move to. We have to be careful about making value judgments about what people want from their music listening experiences.
- I call your attention particularly to the **kinetic aspect of jazz**. I've always wondered why some people are naturally attracted to some art forms, but not others. My parents, for example, are life-long devotees of classical music, but would never in a million years darken the door of a contemporary theatre. In a study several years ago, I explored whether Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences might explain some part of arts attendance. Sure enough, music attendance correlated with musical intelligence, dance attendance correlated with both kinetic intelligence and visual-spatial intelligence, theatre attendance correlated with narrative intelligence... and jazz attendance correlated with both musical intelligence and kinetic intelligence. In other words, jazz audiences are genetically predisposed to move. This needs a lot more research. But I think there's a grain of truth here, and I ask you all to think about how you might allow and encourage people to move at concerts.
- The last major finding of the study that I'll share with you is that jazz audiences strongly prefer **informal, club-like settings** over larger settings like theatres and concert halls. It makes perfect sense. I mean, who doesn't want a more intimate relationship with their favorite jazz artist?
- I think a lot of us are on autopilot when it comes to settings where we perform. Think about where you perform, and what kinds of people relate to that space. How might you re-shape your audience by changing the setting where you perform? Last season, the University Musical Society in Ann Arbor converted an abandoned brewery into a temporary jazz venue, in order to re-contextualize jazz for a different audience.
- For the long-term survival of the jazz field, we need to give people more things to identify with above and beyond artists and tracks. For starters, we can give them places to identify with, like jazz lounges with guest DJs and mobile jazz pavilions that pop up in unexpected places. And, we can give them formats to identify with, from all-night jam sessions to collage formats and thematic formats.
- In short, I would say that jazz presenters have a venue problem. The economic pressures to use larger and larger venues to generate higher and higher revenues to pay artists higher and higher fees are not going away. More important than that, a lot of young people simply don't want to spend two hours sitting in the dark, in uncomfortable seats, not being able to talk to the people they came with.
- Sooner or later, this business model is going to break, if it hasn't already.
- So, the urgent task at hand for presenters and artists is figuring out a new business model for presenting jazz in small, more intimate spaces where people can drop in without knowing in advance what's going on.



- More and more artists will self-present, bypassing the whole system of intermediaries – agents and presenters – book rooms for themselves, market themselves and develop audiences for themselves. I think this is already starting to happen, and it's going to turn the industry upside down in many ways. So we are talking with presenters about how they can create opportunities for artists in their communities to self-present, with only minimal assistance. And, there are some wonderful new projects afoot to create online marketplaces where artists and audiences can learn more about each other.

Closing:

Music is as essential, or more essential to Americans than it's ever been. Music brings people and communities together, and helps people find meaning in life. But the ways that Americans fit music into their lives has forever changed, and will continue to change. I ask all of you, using whatever talents and tools that you may have, to be cultural leaders within your communities. Not only to share your passion for jazz, but also to embrace the inevitable change and confront the challenges that stand between jazz and its future audiences.

As you think about your work, I ask you to consider:

- Where can you perform, so as to engage new audiences and create new connections to jazz?
- What program formats might you offer that would engage the new eclecticism of the next generation of music consumers?
- How can you allow and encourage audiences to move to your music?
- And, how can you use your influence and abundant creative talents to broaden people's tastes and awaken them to new sounds?

I am so inspired by your dedication and enthusiasm. Thank you so much.