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Integrating Theory and Practice in Conservatoires:
Formulating Holistic Models for Teaching and Learning Improvisation

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Abstract

Academic study has become a more significant part of a conservatoire education in recent times, but it has not always informed performance as effectively as it might. There is a need for further development of an academic curriculum that is specifically relevant to performers, in which the links between theory and practice are made explicit rather than expecting students to construct these for themselves. This article reports on research into the integration of theory and practice at Leeds College of Music, UK, using jazz improvisation as a case study. Pilot teaching sessions within two modules explored ways in which students can be encouraged to engage actively with an appropriate academic curriculum that is embedded within a holistic learning experience.

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Introduction

... a conservatoire is an ideal environment for researching teaching and learning in music. It is full of students and teachers with a common

passion for music, who meet together because they want to give and/or receive music education and who continually want to learn even more. (Mills, 2003)

Conservatoires in the UK have been required to adopt a more rigorous approach to academic study in recent times. Although what is expected of conservatoire students has changed, arguably students' expectations of conservatoire courses have not. In maintaining a focus on practical activity, the approach of conservatoires to academic study at degree level has not always been fully integrated and balanced within the curriculum. A combination of these factors can mean that students may view the practical and theoretical aspects of courses as separate entities, and that the latter may be considered irrelevant. However, professional musicians may increasingly come to expect to develop 'portfolio careers' which may draw upon a much wider range of skills than solely instrumental proficiency. Whilst there are increasing opportunities within the conservatoire curriculum for students to gain professional skills, musicology may seem inappropriate to their goals as practitioners. It might seem, especially to students, that writing about music is a challenge akin to dancing about architecture and they might wish that they could just let the music do the talking.¹ Nevertheless, it is fundamental for professional musicians to be able to identify, articulate and contextualise their aims, objectives and practices, in both oral and written form and for a variety of audiences and purposes. Such skills have practical and vocational relevance for professional musicians, and also contribute to the student's ability to engage critically with their own work and that of others and thereby continue their artistic development outside the conservatoire.

Whilst there has been an increase in research into aspects of the conservatoire curriculum such as instrumental teaching, assessing the performance of soloists and ensembles and vocational relevance, the academic curriculum has yet to receive such scrutiny. As such, this article makes a unique, timely and important contribution to this field. It is right, of course, that elements that are central to the conservatoire training receive attention, but if the curriculum is to pay more than lip service to academic studies there is work to be done here too. Teaching the academic parts of the conservatoire curriculum presents clear and specific challenges, which, if embraced rather than ignored, could contribute to more creative delivery and enhancement of the student experience. This paper reports on a research project undertaken at Leeds College of Music (LCM), which was initially inspired by the authors' reflections on the practicalities of teaching and learning in a conservatoire environment. Whilst previous research in this general area was interesting, it was often found to not be specifically relevant to what the authors felt were pertinent issues. The project involved the implementation of changes within two specific areas of the established curriculum, in order to explore ways in which students can be encouraged to engage actively with an appropriate academic curriculum that is embedded within a holistic learning experience in the conservatoire environment, rather than sidelined as a necessary evil which must be included in conservatoire degrees but has little relevance to the core activities of performing and composing.

The project was focussed through a specific case study of teaching and learning improvisation. The mastery of this skill in any genre requires not only technical facility on the improviser's instrument or voice, well-developed aural and ensemble skills, and a deep understanding of the musical context in which the improvisation is performed; but also creativity and emotional expression. The task of improvisation thus involves many of the fundamental skills contained within a typical music degree and is therefore an appropriate area for the promotion of the integration of theory and practice. Further, improvisation is a core activity within all of the undergraduate performance courses at the host institution (Music, Jazz and Popular Music), but it was decided to restrict the scope of the present study to improvisation within the jazz course. Initial background research was undertaken using scholarly literature on jazz improvisation (Bailey, 1993, Berliner, 1994, Lewis, 2000, Monson, 1996, and Prouty, 2004); jazz in conservatoires (Barratt, 2005, Barratt and Moore, 2005, Griffith, 2003, Purcell, 2002, Whyton, 2006); and the wider conservatoire context (Mills, 2003, Mills, 2004, Odam and Bannan, 2005 and Weber, W. et al). Official documentation was also examined and correspondence and interviews conducted with conservatoire professionals. Following this, pilot teaching sessions were devised, delivered and finally feedback from students and lecturers was evaluated.

It should be emphasised that the primary aim of the project discussed in this paper was to address the fundamental question of the relationship between theory and practice in conservatoires, and jazz improvisation is one example of an appropriate focus for this research. Therefore, the project was primarily concerned with teaching and learning methodologies rather than the content of the curriculum and focussed on two specific modules that were normally delivered by the authors. Although this research is concerned with a small number of students in one particular institution, it is hoped that just as the authors have been inspired by the practices of colleagues from music conservatoires and those educating students in other disciplines, the project will suggest ways forward and contribute to the continued development of education in the performing arts.² Three initial sections will establish the wider contexts and issues that have informed the two case studies which follow.

The UK Conservatoire Sector

The academic study of music was a fairly insignificant part of a conservatoire education for the greater part of the twentieth century, but has been developed over the last twenty years (Weber et al). In the UK, this was undoubtedly due to the introduction of degrees rather than diplomas as the final awards for undergraduate students during the 1990s, which meant that conservatoires had to ensure that their awards met academic criteria. The existence of discrete 'Academic Studies' departments in many conservatoires may testify to relatively rapid 'bolting on' of an academic component to traditional conservatoire courses. At the same time, most universities developed performance as part of music courses, drawing on the conservatoire model. In some instances there appeared to be minimal definition between curricula the two types of institution.

The vocational relevance of conservatoire programmes has received significant attention and funding in recent years, clarifying a key distinction between conservatoire and university education. In addition, the 1998 Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Review of Music Conservatoires defined the relative functions of performance and academic study in the two types of institution:

Performance in universities is intended to inform the academic study of music, whilst academic study at the conservatoires is intended to inform performance. (1998:37)

Formulating an academic curriculum that effectively informs performance demands consideration of two crucial issues: firstly, it must be specifically relevant to performers and secondly, the links between theory and practice must be made explicit within the curriculum rather than expecting students to construct these for themselves.

Jazz Pedagogy in Conservatoires

Jazz continues to present particular challenges to the traditional conservatoire system that are only just beginning to be fully researched and addressed (Whyton, 2006:66). With specific reference to jazz improvisation, Simon Purcell has noted that 'British colleagues, both musicians and teachers, have tended to identify either with the dominant technician pedagogy (stylistically specific and content-based) or with a more liberal, group-composition based approach, reminiscent of the work of Paynter and Aston' (2002:25). These composers promoted a creative approach to music teaching in schools in their book *Sound and Silence* (1970). The 'technician' approach has tended to focus on bebop as the benchmark for teaching and learning, and demand the knowledge of a canonical repertoire of jazz standards. The emphasis is on learning 'correct' note choices over the standard chord progressions, often based on the imitation and replication of clichés, with arguably less emphasis on the development of a coherent musical language and the student's individual voice, features that would be the focus of a more liberal approach. The presence of this simplistic dichotomy in jazz education may be symptomatic of the lack of substantive critical debate on the implications of improvisation pedagogies. Worryingly, the result may be that 'jazz students seem to feel pressured to choose between the paths of individualism and creativity on one hand, and technique and theoretical abstraction on the other' (Prouty, 2004), when a balance of approaches is needed in order to address the needs and aspirations of individual learners.

The need for accountability and reliable assessment in formal learning environments such as conservatoires can contribute to the dominance of a 'technician' pedagogy, the goals of which become ends in themselves. Whilst it is relatively straightforward to develop reliable criteria for measuring a student's technical attainment, it is considerably more difficult to assess other more nebulous creative and interactive skills, which are just as vital in any performance. Recent work by Elisabeth Barratt has quantified the tension between jazz practice and the requirements of conservatoire assessment (Barratt and Moore, 2005:303). Prouty refers to the resulting musical

compromise as 'university jazz', which fuels opposition to the academic study of jazz even from within the jazz community and leads to the perception that the jazz institution is divorced from both 'art' and 'reality' (Whyton, 2006:71).

This is not to say that the technician pedagogy has nothing to offer, as it emphasises competences that are all recognised as important to the development of a skilful jazz musician. However, there are many ideas about what a skilful jazz musician actually sounds like. In the world of jazz pedagogy, the truly tricky part is deciding what particular skills are necessary for the individual student reaching his or her aesthetic 'goal', and moreover, providing students with the means to identify what this 'goal' might be. Thus, jazz pedagogy has to retain space for personal development within its methods if institutions are to educate musicians capable of making a real impact on the art form.

However, the dominance of the 'liberal' over the 'technical' may be just as problematic. Purcell upholds the utopia of 'music about music' as an optimum teaching and learning strategy: 'improvisation combines action, creation and evaluation - as one, distinct from written or even verbal feedback in that it occurs in the same context and material as the subject matter being evaluated. Here, both teaching and learning activity and evaluation are integrated. No other learning or evaluative activity so faithfully resembles both subject and participant it attempts to serve.' (2002:25). Purcell asserts that 'While verbal discussion is of value in the conceptual, psychological and philosophical realms, the actual communication of the act of making music is best achieved within the immediate medium of music itself.' (2002:69). However, avoiding written or verbal communication altogether in the teaching and learning of improvisation may be unrealistic within the context of a degree course. Since Barratt noted 'some correlation between a group's ability to hold a group discussion ... with their ability to perform in an interactive fashion' (Barratt and Moore, 2005: 307) the development of these skills may contribute both directly and indirectly to the success of students' musical performances.

Both Barratt and Purcell advocate greater reliance on students not only to assess their own performances but also develop their own criteria on which to base these assessments (Purcell, 2002:51, Barratt and Moore, 2005:307), in fact necessitating a high degree of self-reflection and verbalisation of musical processes. In both cases, this strategy was developed within the context of student-centred learning, the effectiveness of which is dependent upon 'the student's ability to articulate and interpret their own learning experience' (Purcell, 2002:17). However, the evidence presented in the two studies suggests that students may have been unable, reluctant or inadequately prepared to engage verbally and intellectually with their practical activities:

[some] groups ..., despite encouragement and objections from the working party, chose to be led by a single member, rather than engage in a group discussion.' (Barratt and Moore, 2005:307)

... the skills of some student improvisers contrasted with a reticence to verbalise their process, making discussion and whole-brain learning difficult. (Purcell, 2002:52)

Purcell argues that 'students who switch off in music analysis classes or appear to be *lost for words* reinforce the view [that the actual communication of the act of making music is best achieved within the immediate medium of music itself]' (2002:75). An alternative view is that these students are not adequately prepared by the conservatoire curriculum to engage with music in this way. Instead, they lack the appropriate vocabulary and endure irrelevant music analysis classes. The authors believe that a degree course should actively encourage students to engage with conceptual, psychological and philosophical implications of music, as 'It is surely the successful *integration* of understanding and application that defines the convincing performance, where intellectual and physical responses become a consequence of each other.' (Jackson, 1999:126). Further, if students graduate without the ability to be articulate about their own work, their education has done them a disservice.

The Academic Jazz Curriculum

Jazz studies has developed as a serious field of academic study over roughly the same period as the changes in UK conservatoires outlined above. Arguably, until relatively recently the most exciting jazz research which often sought to critically evaluate the myths and romanticism surrounding the jazz canon was taking place outside conservatoires and university music departments. Without a clear musicological model for jazz studies to follow, and often without the necessary expertise within faculty membership to pursue the prominent scholarly socio-critical approach, the academic study of jazz in conservatoires would tend to follow the traditional 'linear chronology' approach dominated by the jazz canon.

Certainly, the standard periodisation of jazz history and styles produces a neat overview that fits conveniently into limited teaching time allotted for academic studies in the conservatoire curriculum. Although this offers little to the student of jazz performance other than a basic knowledge of repertoire, styles and personnel, this does provide an ideal compliment to the 'technicist' pedagogy of improvisation. For example, Frank Griffith's recent survey of improvisation teaching in six UK HE institutions is revealing as to the limited extent of critical engagement with the music in practical sessions that he observed, exemplifying division and opposition, rather than integration, between practical (performance-based) and theoretical (socio-critical) approaches to the subject (Whyton, 2006:76):

There were occasional mini-lectures given on a particular style, aspect or innovator of jazz that seemed appropriate to the lesson. For instance if a Charlie Parker or Miles Davis piece were to be played the tutor might offer a five minute talk on an aspect of that musician's contribution. This also might include a brief analysis of a transcribed solo, pointing out how the innovator approached the tune rhythmically or harmonically. While too many of these lectures run the risk of

stopping the flow of a practical session, a brief foray can provide a well-deserved rest and allow the student to reflect on the import of these innovator's contributions.

(<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/palatine/dev-awards/griffith-report.htm>)

LCM: Towards an Integrated Curriculum

At LCM in the 1990s, Whyton developed an approach to the 'historical, critical and analytical studies' (HCAS) curriculum of the undergraduate jazz studies course that sought to address the critical issues embedded within jazz and its history: 'As a scholar involved in the development of jazz education programmes, and working in an environment where the performance-based and socio-critical sectors collide, I have tried to bridge the gulf between [performance practice and socio-critical] approaches by demonstrating that they are integrally linked' (2006:76). HCAS is described thus in the BA Jazz Studies course document:

The aim of the [HCAS] module is to explore the role of history and analysis, whilst looking at jazz in the context of twentieth century developments, including other media and art forms. History will be examined as an ongoing cross-fertilization of ideas, rather than as a fixed linear chronology. The course integrates analytical work as a critical/historical process, rather than treating it as a separate strand of study.

Although this model enjoys a high level of popularity amongst learners and has been effective in 'nurturing performers with a more critical approach to music' (Whyton, 2006:77), until recently these sessions have been delivered within a primarily theoretical setting (lectures, seminars and tutorials), and assessed by written assignments. Therefore, HCAS represents an effective combination of historical study, musical analysis and critical evaluation, but the extent to which students perceive it as directly relevant to their development as improvisers could perhaps be greater. Recently, lecturers at LCM have noted that although advanced levels of critical awareness were demonstrated in final year dissertations, this was not always informing students' performance activities to a significant degree. This had become particularly clear when examining the substantial written commentaries that students were required to produce to accompany final year recitals.

At the same time, it seemed obvious that there would be clear benefits in a more integrated curriculum throughout the course. Derek Bailey has argued that 'The learning process in improvisation is invariably difficult to detect. Although a large number of books and courses offering instruction and advice on how to improvise are available it seems impossible to find a musician who has actually learned to improvise from them.' (1993:1). However, by presenting 'packages' of learning material encompassing everything from the C major scale to the theory of Roland Barthes, the individual musician may be more likely to find the particular combination of ideas and methods which will help them to perform a well-structured improvisation. The challenge for educational institutions is to coordinate these 'packages', and for tutors, to prove to students the relevance of knowing, for example, 'the socio-political

circumstances of bebop in 1940s New York' in the context of *their* improvisational performance. Despite the existence of some examples of good practice in the sector, there is a need for further development of innovative teaching methodologies to strengthen the links between performance and academic studies in support of learning outcomes.

Methodology

A project was devised at LCM to investigate how a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching, learning and research involving historical, analytical and critical study of music and other artistic practices can enhance students' skills and understanding of the practice of jazz improvisation. Pilot teaching sessions that exemplified the explicit integration of theory and practice were delivered within two modules of the BA Jazz Studies curriculum. Improvisation (Minor), a level 3 (final year) option, was essentially a practical module; Historical, Critical and Analytical Studies 2, a compulsory level 1 module, was essentially theoretical. It should be noted that these pilot sessions were based around what might be perceived as standard 'technicist' tasks, which have value in their own right, but 'liberal' strategies are also employed to extend the potential learning outcomes.

It was decided not to pursue an empirical approach in the evaluation of these sessions, due both to the relatively limited scope and sample size of the study and our particular interest in the experiences and reactions of individual participants. Hence, the methodology employed was essentially reliant on the largely informal self-reflection by students and tutors that would normally form part of the delivery and evaluation of the module.

Case Study: Improvisation (Minor)

The rationale of the Improvisation (Minor) module is to critically engage students in the construction of improvisational structures (or frameworks), where these structures act as catalysers for individual approaches to improvised music (with musical outcomes ranging from bebop to 'freely' improvised music). Students participate in weekly workshops where they work in groups to explore a particular topic through performance, such as improvising to film or performing a solo improvisation. The outcome of these sessions are performed for an audience of the other students in the group, and then discussed by the whole group. The module was devised to support the development of students into skilful artists capable of aesthetic impact based on a unique individual expression. This would seem to be particularly appropriate at this advanced stage in the students' education.

In the pilot sessions devised for this project, students were set the task of utilising the Coltrane piece 'Naima' as a logical structure for improvisation, with particular emphasis placed upon creative responses. Students were encouraged to 'control' the composition as an improvisational tool, and not let the piece subdue or restrain their ideas. In the course of the allocated sessions the students needed to take the composition apart, research its components, and then decide how this particular piece could work for them in a performance situation. Several different recorded versions were used as part of this research (see discography). Students were expected to

demonstrate a high level of improvisational skill within the parameters of the compositional structure. In other words, as this was not just a theoretical exercise, each student was actually expected to be able to play well within his or her arrangement, and the ultimate outcome of the processes of research, deconstruction and rearrangement was a performance.

In the workshop sessions each individual student within the group of 25 took charge of their particular arrangement, chose personnel and rehearsed the band. When a particular version was ready to be performed and recorded for assessment purposes, their fellow students would either participate as musicians, or they would act as audience/critics, which exposed the students to a great variety of expressive responses, musical and verbal, based on this single piece of music. The results were all well arranged, strong pieces of music of a professional standard and were later performed during the FuseLeeds06 Festival.

In many ways there is nothing new in arranging jazz standards in a distinctive manner, but for an individual student to do it in a workshop situation and performing the outcome to a large group of fellow students puts a different spin on it. Firstly, some of the students had not ever *properly* engaged in re-arranging a pre-composed piece of music in order to achieve a thoroughly idiosyncratic performance outcome. Secondly, through involvement in each other's arrangements (as either fellow musicians or audience), the students had the opportunity to form strong impressions of the other versions being put together, which in turn helped them to define and clarify their own particular artistic angle. The pedagogical value of this became very clear through students' written commentaries - one student pointed out 'the improvisation module gave me a real insight into the approaches and tastes of my fellow students'. Further to this, many of them found enormous value in witnessing the various performance processes of their colleagues with whom they may not have performed with previously. And, last but not least, in creating these pieces in a workshop situation, the sheer peer pressure within the group made them put an enormous amount of effort into the task, more so, than if this had been a mere paper exercise (especially if there was a particularly successful performance, some of them would look quite worried and run off to work on their arrangement for the following week).

One of the main aims of this exercise was to kick start a sense of personal aesthetics for each individual student. Indeed, some of them realised that outside the realms of this assignment 'Naima' was not an effective structure *for them* at all. Others found that 'Naima' provided an untested improvisational route, sparking off fresh musical aesthetics. One student put it quite nicely in his commentary:

I do not acquire vocabulary through chromatic repetition of a transcribed phrase but rather through active listening. Much of what I play is created in the spirit of a particular style or player but not an exact copy. In this way I maintain a strong element of my own style whilst still fulfilling requirements of the piece I am performing.

Therefore, within workshop situations, the educator's task is to present a series of structural options and improvisational techniques, where there is recognition that his or her role is limited to guidance alone. With this in mind, students work on a whole range of ideas throughout the module, and each student might find a (however tiny) useful artistic idea in each of these tasks, ultimately building up a personal improvisational repertoire. As one student, who took a sharp turn from being very traditional player to utilizing much more open structures, wrote in his commentary:

Overall I believe that the most important development I have made through [...] studying improvisational structures is the importance of effective communication. The technical facets, which I heavily relied on previously, are only efficient features when illuminated against a successful communicative backdrop.

It was interesting to see how the students really took these ideas to heart by realising the importance of putting a personal 'stamp' on whatever compositional structure they chose to play. This was evident through their individual final performance examinations, where examiners noticed a much greater level of clever arrangements, with few candidates succumbing to the ultimate crime of merely reading from a lead-sheet in the 'Real Book', which often results in bland and thoughtless performances.

Case Study: HCAS 2

In order to further develop the HCAS strand of the curriculum specifically to enhance its relevance to jazz performers it was decided to pilot the incorporation of some performance-based sessions into this module. This meant that students found themselves singing and playing their instruments in a 'history seminar', perhaps having turned up with some or all of the preconceptions implied by that term. The cohort is split into smaller groups for HCAS seminars, ideal for this sort of work. By the second semester of year 1 when this module is delivered, students had been introduced to the jazz canon, and were therefore aware of the main stylistic developments in the history of jazz and had come into contact with some of the so-called 'classic' recordings. The students were also encouraged to examine the processes by which these recordings have been elevated to canonical status. Therefore, they already had some critical and musical perspective on 'Hotter than That', one of the most celebrated of Louis Armstrong's legendary 'Hot Five' recordings, on which the pilot sessions were based.

Two weeks before the sessions the students listened to the recording of 'Hotter than That' as a class and were given a transcription of the trumpet and vocal solos (see Figure 1) <Insert Figure 1>. Whilst it might be advantageous for students to work on the piece without a written transcription (or produce one of their own), it was decided that this was not the best use of the available time and might not allow such thorough exploration of the critical issues, which is the main aim of the module. Students were asked to memorise the material, working with the recording and transcription, applying it to their respective instruments. At the beginning of the sessions themselves, the students were played the recording once again, and invited to sing along with

it. Immediately after this, the group attempted an *a cappella* vocal rendition of the two solos. Next, the students performed the two solos on their instruments, as a group. Rhythm section players took turns to provide accompaniment, but also took part in the performance of the solos. Individuals then took turns to produce sixteen bar improvisations, including breaks, in a stylistically appropriate fashion. Finally, there was a group discussion during which students were invited to comment on the experience.

Similarly to the exercise in Improvisation (Minor), there was nothing particularly unusual about the task that the students were asked to undertake here. However, the educational context of the exercise focussed students' attention on the implications of their performance of this specific material and also encouraged wider self-reflection. 'Hotter than That' was carefully chosen for these sessions as its musical properties and the task of performing it raise many critical issues for jazz musicians. Indeed, students showed a tremendous willingness not only to perform the music, but also to consider the implications of the experience and the discussion of a practical task led naturally to critical reflection by students on their own learning and performance. Each group produced a remarkable range of insights in the final discussion with minimal input from the tutor. The comments were not restricted to the music itself but were wide ranging, including consideration of Armstrong, early jazz in general and the relative merits of various pedagogical approaches to jazz improvisation.

Armstrong is frequently identified as one of the first great innovators in the jazz genre, but his canonical status could be either justified or challenged. 'Hotter than That' certainly contains examples of his extraordinary musicianship (such as polyrhythm, correlated phrasing, implied substitutions, chromatic extensions on chords). Engagement with the music through performance prompted a number of comments from students that identified aspects of Armstrong's specific influence on the development of jazz (for example, 'You can see some elements of Armstrong's playing in Charlie Parker's music').

Armstrong's canonical status is often substantiated with reference to his trumpet playing rather than his singing or stage persona, the apparent popular appeal of which contradicts the desire to secure the status of jazz as art music. Analysis of Armstrong's trumpet and vocal improvisations reveals that the musical vocabulary employed is almost identical, whether he is singing or playing. This gives significant insight into his improvisational approach, and strongly suggests that he is effectively using the instrument as an extension of his voice. This exercise opens up debates surrounding the relative status of Armstrong's trumpet playing and singing, and further, whether the contributions of vocalists to jazz are sufficiently recognised. The similarity between the vocal and trumpet solos may suggest that Armstrong is 'singing' at all times, and for some students vocalisation is a route to developing their aural awareness, essential for all improvisation. There was much reflection amongst the students on this point, and students identified (directly or indirectly) that Armstrong uses his instrument to express ideas that seem to be already conceived in his inner ear:

You want to emulate the way he sings it.
He plays how he would sing.
His singing is more adventurous than his playing in some ways.
When you improvise, you have to play something you've thought through first.
It's not just major scales.

Perhaps predictably, the exercise caused several students to raise their opinions of Armstrong:

It emphasises Armstrong's influence.
He wasn't just a pop singer.
His personality really comes through.

That such re-evaluations should have been necessary, however, suggests that Armstrong's canonical status, so widely acknowledged amongst critics and historians, may not be recognised amongst younger musicians. This is clearly commensurate with the prevailing trends in jazz pedagogy, which results in the students' perception of early jazz being somewhat marginalised:

This could be a neglected area.
There's usually too much emphasis on late bebop onwards.
You're only considered a jazz musician if you can play like they did in the 1950s!

These reactions are not so surprising when considered in the context of the jazz canon that is often perceived as a progressive evolution from 'primitive' forms of the music via the 'classic' bebop towards 'advanced' contemporary forms. However, whilst sheer ignorance of jazz repertoire could give justifiable cause for concern, it might be considered equally worrying if young musicians have passively accepted Armstrong's oft-stated historical importance without having really engaged with the music itself. The following comments seem to suggest that in the students' previous encounters with early jazz (be it live, or on record) something had been lost in translation, due to the nature of early recordings and the fact that the music is now rarely performed within the learners' peer group:

Recordings are often quite bad.
Hearing it live is different.
It's good to actually see what people are doing when they're playing this music.
I used to think it was old, grey pensioners playing this music.

Therefore, it was significant that the exercise required students to engage with early jazz as musicians, provoking comments such as 'It's given me a much higher opinion of early jazz' and 'Learning to play it makes you appreciate it more'. Potentially, the exercise allowed students to deconstruct the linear narrative of jazz history and associated value judgements for themselves

through performance. The students repeatedly commented on what could be termed the 'deceptive simplicity' of the music:

When you improvise you have to use fewer notes but better.
He doesn't play any double-time – which you can sometimes use as a crutch.
His range is relatively restricted.
It is so difficult to play simple stuff that sounds good over not many chords.
It's difficult to improvise when there's a long time on one chord.

Meanwhile, some of the rhythmic content proved more problematic than might have been expected:

The endings of the second and third lines were tricky.
The last two quavers of bar eight were difficult.

Both cases involve the same rhythm, and this may indicate that some students may be more at ease with the rhythmic conventions of later styles. Armstrong frequently starts his phrases with this rhythm; by contrast, he often ends his phrases on the beat, where later musicians might tend to syncopate (see, for example, bar 43). This also caused problems, with one student commenting that 'putting things back onto beat one can be difficult'.

The exercise deliberately embraced recordings and transcriptions, sources that are so pervasive in jazz education. Students were invited to consider these materials more critically, as this in turn encourages informed independent study. The given transcription was assessed by the participants, not only in terms of accuracy, but also in terms of its value to the development of improvisers. Whilst some students felt that the visual cues provided by the notation were analytically helpful ('How he shapes it is clearer in the transcription', 'It's good to be able to see what notes are being used'), others were alive to the danger of becoming over-reliant on visual representations of the music:

I learnt it but I didn't listen (then I realised I should have!)
It's easier to learn by listening.

Others identified the usefulness of the process of transcribing a solo:

Transcription improves your ear.
It would be nice to do a transcription ourselves.

Recording may also be understood as a form of transcription; as if we had actually been there the music would have sounded very different. The experience of re-performing recorded music may help students to view the testimony of sound recording in its proper perspective and may usefully inform the study of jazz which draws heavily on recordings.

There was much favourable reaction to the introduction of a practical elements into what was perceived as an 'academic module'. There was a strong view amongst learners that they prefer to engage in tasks that are (at least partly) practical, regarding them as more valuable overall. Apparently some students were totally unaware that they had been simultaneously engaging in some profoundly critical analysis:

Actually, it's quite fun.

[This type of task is] more engaging.

You can't understand music any other way.

The best way of learning is to do.

Playing it together brings it closer to home.

Conclusion

The teaching and learning described above demonstrates that it is possible for the links between theory and practice to be made more explicit even within existent curriculum structures that would seem to render them mutually exclusive. The tutor of the HCAS module commented that the pilot sessions amounted to some of the most enjoyable teaching that he could remember, and that he felt that the majority of students found the exercise similarly engaging. These strategies of integration present implications and challenges in relation to the host institution and the pedagogy of jazz improvisation, but also more generally for conservatoires and their role within the HE sector.

LCM

This research has already influenced the development of the curriculum and further integration of theory and practice within modules at LCM. In level two of the newly validated jazz course, students will have a choice of project modules drawing on staff specialisms. Flexibility within this area of the curriculum will allow projects to include a wide range of theoretical and practical teaching and learning activities and assessment methodologies. At level three, following the example that is well established in other creative disciplines and in the LCM Music Production degree, a negotiated project has been introduced as the major unit of assessment. Projects could range from a traditional recital or dissertation, but also allow for lecture recitals and performances of own compositions to be submitted. In these cases, students in collaboration with tutors will develop the nature of the task and its assessment. Clearly, the integration of theory and practice from the outset of level one in modules such as HCAS will be necessary to support students in identifying and articulating their particular goals as they progress through the course.

Jazz Improvisation Pedagogy

The integration of theory and practice in teaching and learning jazz improvisation presents clear challenges to perceived dichotomies of the jazz world (technicist/liberal, academy/'real world', canonisation/deconstruction, tradition/avant garde). The use of canonised material as structures for improvisation is not necessarily detrimental to the creative processes (in other words, the jazz standard is not necessarily the idiomatic dictator contemporary musicians claim it to be). The requirement for individual

responses demanded depth in the students' engagement with the material, moving beyond replication and imitation to explore the conceptual, psychological and philosophical implications of the music. In this way, students were active in constructing critical responses to the jazz canon, in line with current socio-critical jazz scholarship, but in ways that were relevant to them as musicians. The ultimate outcomes for the students were creative ones, and the inclusion of performance as an outcome ensured that academic study was not distanced from 'real world' artistic practice.

Whilst there were opportunities for 'music about music' in the course of both modules, verbalising provided an important strategy for links between theory and practice to be made. Students were specifically asked to critique live (their own and others') performances as well as recordings, developing aural skills, vocabulary and critical awareness. Alongside this, students engaged with the strengths and weaknesses of various pedagogies. Such skills are vital for students to be able to set and articulate their own academic and artistic goals, and further, to develop self-sufficiency necessary to sustain careers as professional musicians.

Purcell and Barratt both highlighted the importance of students being involved in developing the criteria against which they were assessed. A consequence of integrated teaching is that it may be possible for *individual* students to set their own criteria, as they will have the skills to articulate a coherent rationale for their performance. Written commentaries (or a viva voce), potentially the embodiment of irrelevant but necessary academic work in conservatoires, can provide an important indication of intent against which a student's performance may be more accurately assessed. This removes the element of guesswork, both on the part of the student, who may be tempted to 'play it safe' and conform to what he/she believes that the examiners want to hear; and also the examiners, who may find it difficult to judge the authenticity of the performer's intent across the wide spectrum of music that may be presented in a 'jazz recital'. It may be argued that musical performances should be able to stand on their own merit without explanation, and of course this is possible. However, commentaries can provide the student with the opportunity to demonstrate the intellectual engagement that lies behind all good performances anyway, and would seem to be appropriate for a performance that constitutes the final examination of a degree. Rather than constraining performers, this strategy may encourage a wider range of musical responses to the task of the 'final recital', since theoretically, given a free choice, it would be possible for a student to present anything from Cage's 4'33" to a programme of Dixieland standards, which could be assessed against his or her stated aims.

The UK Conservatoire Sector

Encouraging students to engage critically with the curriculum and to set the standards against which they are assessed may seem like a risky strategy at a time where HE institutions are coming under greater pressure from their 'customers'. Furthermore, a critical approach to traditional pedagogies and established canons may be seen to undermine the very foundations of the conservatoire education (to 'conserve' musical traditions). The relatively

recent addition of 'theoretical' areas such as academic studies and pedagogy to the conservatoire curriculum may be viewed as distractions from the main business of performance. However, as the case studies above have demonstrated, the explicit integration of theory and practice actually helps to break down this conflict and ultimately to funnel all subjects and skills into performance outcomes. Further to this, as a result of the integration of theory and practice within modules, students will also develop the ability to apply ideas across the curriculum for themselves. In this holistic model, the student is active in constructing the 'packages' of learning materials that correspond to their individual goals as performers.

In reality then, the canon, approached primarily through the one-to-one instrumental lesson, remains at the heart of the curriculum of the contemporary conservatoire. This central activity is strengthened through improved support from other areas of study and the promotion of student-centred learning. The development of critical awareness and self-reflection, which enables modern conservatoire students to enter into their education actively and intelligently, rather than passively yield to its demands, should serve them better as graduates. These factors are also vital in ensuring that conservatoires continue to develop a distinctive approach to academic study which is relevant to performers. This has implications beyond degree curriculum, as it contributes to defining the distinctive role that conservatoires have to play within the study of music in the HE sector, now and in the future.

The integration of theory and practice ought to be well served by the current and future generations of lecturers who have backgrounds and portfolios of activity that demolish traditional boundaries between performer, composer, researcher, producer and other roles. At LCM, staff are active professionally in multiple roles and are encouraged to draw on these experiences in their teaching. This is reflected in comments from the tutors of the modules discussed above:

The main instigator for development [of the conservatoire curriculum] is that a majority of teaching staff are now conservatoire educated themselves, and have the luxury of personal hindsight to correct the wrongs of their own HE learning experience.

One of the chief institutional benefits of this type of cross-curricular exercise is that I was able to hear students perform, even though my usual contact with them may be restricted to classroom teaching situations. This was certainly the case here, and I very much enjoyed witnessing the playing and singing of students that I had previously encountered only academically, so to speak. I felt that I had gained a wider knowledge of them as learners; one could be advantageous in an entirely different teaching scenario. It would also be nice to think that, since I also participated in the practical exercise, this benefit may have been reciprocal in some way.

Conservatoires should be prepared to lead the way in supporting the creative delivery of an integrated curriculum, which will contribute to producing the

next generation of interested and interesting musicians. As a spur for development and innovation, conservatoire professionals should recall unattractive stereotypes of the 'bedroom guitarist' and 'Charlie Parker Omnibook alto player'; musicians who might harbour appropriate technical skills, but are unable to engage in the 'social act' of music making. It is the role of the conservatoire to provide an environment where creative interaction can take place. The tutor may then facilitate a gathering of minds where learners come together to discuss performance in 'seminars' which privilege musical and social interaction, especially between students, a situation eloquently described by Roland Barthes:

[...] I do not say what I know, I set forth what I am doing; I am not draped in interminable discourse of absolute knowledge, I am not lurking in the terrifying silence of the Examiner (every teacher – and this is the vice of the system – is a potential examiner); I am neither a sacred (consecrated) subject nor a buddy, only a manager, an operator, a regulator: the one who gives rules, protocols, not laws. My role (if I have one) is to clear the stage on which horizontal transferences will be established: what matters, in such a seminar (the site of its success), is not the relation of the members to the director but the relation of the members to each other. That is what must be said [...]: the famous 'teaching relation' is not the relation of teacher to taught, but the relation of those taught to each other. (Barthes, 1989:333)

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Notes:

¹ The quotation 'Writing about music is like dancing about architecture - it's a really stupid thing to want to do' is attributed to Elvis Costello. See <http://home.pacifier.com/~ascott/they/tamildaa.htm>

² As part of this project, a Study Day on Improvisation Pedagogy was held at Leeds College of Music in May 2006. Participants were drawn from the fields of classical and contemporary dance, theatre, jazz and classical music.