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POINTS OF VIEW

Taking the Inclusive Approach

WITH Juilliard's relatively new and thriving jazz program, there is a wonderful opportunity for Juilliard's classical and jazz



Photo by Ed Berger

Ted Rosenthal

musicians to learn from each other. Although styles may be quite different, I believe it is important to recognize the commonalities, as well as notice

and understand the differences in the pursuit of becoming a jazz or classical artist. I see a hierarchy of musical topics, creating a musical value system, that come up for students in both disciplines. These topics come up differently, and with different emphasis, depending on the music studied and performed.

Tone/sound, rhythm, improvisation/composition, and listening/aural study are four big topics that are fascinating to contrast, and learn from the differences in the study of jazz and classical music.

Tone and sound are of high importance in both disciplines. But to contrast approaches, classical pianists likely spend much more time in learning how to produce tonal shadings and colors in their chords, as well as creating color and orchestral effects based on balancing of voices, and listening for texture and touch. These "issues" are not the first order of business for jazz pianists, but they would undoubtedly benefit from listening for, and working on, these aspects of piano sound.

On the flip side, a personal, identifiable sound is an important part of the jazz aesthetic. A classical soloist, in addition to striving for beautiful sound, might investigate how to make his or her sound more personal and identifiable.

Rhythmic approaches vary greatly in jazz and classical styles. Playing with a steady pulse, where you hear and feel the beat, is extremely important in jazz. A flexible pulse, with phrase momentum hiding the bar lines, is commonplace and often desirable in classical music. It might be useful for jazz students to try to incorporate flexible pulse and rubato playing in their musical studies and approaches. It would also be useful for the classical musician to learn and absorb jazz rhythmic approaches, and experiment with feeling—not hiding—the rhythm and the pulse. For the classical musician this could lead to better execution in contemporary styles, possible new approaches in standard repertoire, and certainly better preparedness for commercial gigs, which use modern

FACULTY FORUM

by Ted Rosenthal

rhythmic styles. They also might enjoy learning to swing!

Improvisation—composition in real time—is at or near the top of the hierarchy in jazz musical values, and largely does not exist in traditional classical study. The skills developed in studying improvisation are many, including harmonic and rhythmic knowledge, ease in creating melodies, the ability to play what you hear, musically responding on the spot, with instant arranging and pre-

senting of songs. Classical musicians can apply many of these skills and concepts to their playing—an "in-the-moment" approach to performing (not playing the same piece the same way each time), improvising or writing your own concerto cadenza. A deeper analytical knowledge of the pieces you perform along with being able to play what you hear are great antidotes for the fear of memory slips—a fear shared by a good many of my classmates back when I was in conservatory. Finally, the joy of playing music by ear is something I believe

should be cultivated by all musicians, no matter what their specialty.

Listening/aural study is a huge part of jazz study. "The records are the textbooks" is something I've heard from jazz musicians and teachers since I was a teenager, exemplifying the importance of listening to understand, study, and absorb jazz. I have heard a different approach coming from some classical pedagogues discouraging the student from listening to recordings of works they are studying. This is supposed to prevent any one recording from unduly influencing a student's interpretation. I respectfully disagree. Now, with iTunes, iPods, and YouTube, students can listen to not one but numerous versions of the pieces they are studying. For aural studying, they should also listen to other relevant works by the composer in question, as well as by the composer's contemporaries, teachers, and disciples, and pieces of a similar form, character, etc. In this way, they will listen to and absorb musical style and sound, as well as historical context.

I encourage students to use this inclusive approach to studying music. It will help broaden your musical skills, deepen your musical knowledge and understanding, and help you achieve your goals in your chosen musical specialty.

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