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and their performative stage presence right then and there. But they also come from a long history of interpreting music, contemporary art, literature and even politics, which the host and the university's public revisit with each new concert experience. There is an imponderable and mysterious air to every jazz concert, and the discussion itself builds on this feeling while also attempting to find meaning in it, translate it into words and break it down into familiar parts.

Usually, these questions seek to uncover the source of creativity, the relationship between musicians and their own lived experience, society at large, their education, as well as the art of others. Yet there is something special about musical creativity, and probably performative creativity in general: it transcends the romantic notion of an overwhelming ego and has the ability to incite dialogue, to compel the audience to listen, absorb and then react to the presence, gestures, message, and music of others. The aim of these discussions is to describe this phenomenon.

What I have also noticed on a few occasions is that the dialogues are not always unidirectional, vertical and repetitive, limited to a question and answer format between host and musicians. They branch out instead, sometimes surprisingly, horizontally, into a conversation between performers who, after days, weeks, even years of communicating through music and establishing authentic artistic rapports, come to discover new and unexpected aspects about one another. Left unchallenged, some underlying ideas are never expressed, perhaps not even consciously acknowledged. The most interesting challenges frequently come from outside the circle, as it were, from profane interrogation.



It's okay to mess up if it helps you find your own voice

BLACKSALT

LUCIAN BAN (RO/USA) – piano

ABRAHAM BURTON (USA) – saxophone

ADRIAN LĂCĂTUȘ, moderator: Abraham, your passion went right through the audience. Can you say a few words about that, because there was such joy in your performance, we could see it on your face, and your music, although sometimes nostalgic, is never dark. How about that?

ABRAHAM BURTON: It's always a pleasure to play for new audiences, especially people abroad because you get the chance to interact and be touched by people as well. I will talk about my passion. You know, I love music and I love art in general. For me it is always a pleasure to create melodies and try to get lost in them in a way. That is probably my favorite thing to do. For me it's truly like love, in a beautiful sense. I love music and it's been a part of my life since I was very young. I was very fortunate to grow up in New York City, literally around the greatest jazz musicians that walked this earth, and I saw how intimate they were with their music and their instruments. It just blew my mind. I hope to convey to others the same feeling that was conveyed to me when I was a child.

AL: Lucian, would you like to say a few words about your connection to Abraham, that goes beyond this group?

LUCIAN BAN: *Mystery*, the first Elevation quartet album, was recorded live in New York at Cornelia Street Café, one of the Big Apple's premier live jazz venues. We wanted to capture the energy of a live concert. It's very intense when we play, because in the quartet we add the voices of other musicians. The second album, *Songs from Afar*, was something new, because we played with a Romanian singer, Gavril Țărmure. The album focused on the idea of melody either as it appears in traditional Transylvanian songs, or in original compositions. Melody is what connects us. We come from different traditions – we both love jazz, but we still come from different traditions. What I first heard in Abraham when we first played, I think 15 years ago, is how he played all the notes, all the original pieces that I brought to the concert. It was jazz, but it was more than jazz. Abraham really has a gift for melody, which is very rare. A lot of people are very technical, but the gift for melody is unique. If I am to give two examples from classical music, Mozart had a true gift for melody, while Beethoven didn't. This is why Abraham and I have such good chemistry.

turned around like “Oh, you play the saxophone” and I said “I have never played it in my life”. It just felt right to me and I was able to play melodies, simple ones from commercials. That is when I first got into the saxophone. From the very first concert I saw, I was so blown away. I was like “this is what I want to do”. I knew it right then, when I was thirteen, I was like bang – this is it. Not “I hope I can do it”, but “Oh, this is it”. And then that was my life.

From the audience: Who has been the most influential jazz musician for you?

AB: I mean they just keep coming, it never ends. I’ve been influenced by almost every musician. Again, when you’re dealing with art, for me, it has nothing to do with like or dislike, it’s an appreciation for what that person brings to the table. I can name a lot of artists off the top of my head, but each one of those individuals gave me something different to think about. I spent a lot of time trying to understand what their concept was, why they played the way they did, what was happening at that time in their lives. I’m very much into history, I love history. History is a very important part of music. I believe you really need to know the history and it is so amazing when you see the evolution and you put everybody in their place and you see why the music changed, because the music changes every five years. It’s an endless circle – the music changes, the ideas change.

Stylistically, we have to investigate the older musicians. The reason why I focus on older musicians is because they’re more concerned with style. If you take anyone from that period, born in the ‘20s, they all have the same information, but none of them sound the same. But why do they sound so different? Because they were stylists, they had a lot of character in their playing. I find that today we are so corrupted with technology. And we do that with instruments as well. Don’t get me wrong, technique it’s extremely important, but how do you convey, how do you find your voice? With my students we often go back, we listen to all these guys from the ‘30s to the ‘50s. They don’t really want to do it, but, when they do, they start to see. They see that it’s okay to mess up if that helps with finding your own voice. They see that these stylists could play all soft, so soft that it can make you stop breathing.

From the audience: I think that when you start playing in a duo or with more people it’s more about intuition. I mean you’re digesting all the knowledge you have and what comes out is basically the product.

LB: But that is always the case. We play this every night and then we see how it changes. And it gets more and more risky because we keep dropping parts. We are getting to the hardest part of what this music actually is. People say that jazz is improvisation. It’s a dialogue, and I think it’s the greatest thing that’s happened with music lately. I actually think that 21st century jazz is the most important development of this music – because it kind of goes back to the basics. How do we approach, how do we *have* music? There is a lot of emotion in it. That’s why I truly believe jazz is so important. It brings a conversation and it’s a communal thing, and this is what makes it different from European music, which

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