

**Jazz, Pop, Improvisation, National Identity and the  
Role of the Jazz Drummer**

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**CD recordings of the performance projects and DVD recordings of live performances are attached to the inside of the back cover of this thesis.**

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## **Abstract**

This research is focused on the interrelationship between three themes: the identity of contemporary jazz, the relation between contemporary jazz and popular music, and thirdly, jazz and national identity. Using this triangulation, I examine the constructed nature of musical practice, interrogating the notion that the distinctions between music, whether it is genre specific or geographically determined, are natural and innate. Linking theory to practice, I examine how the areas of my research described above, feed into my role as a professional, contemporary jazz drummer.

The restricting effect of defining the role of the contemporary jazz musician in rigid, genre-centred definitions is questioned through examining jazz's relationship with popular music and the music's standing in the hi-art vs. popular culture debate. This area is practically explored in the performance projects through the juxtaposition of both popular repertoire and technical approaches to popular styles with contemporary jazz performance conventions. The notion of jazz and national identity is examined through reflecting on the personal experiences of my role as an arranger and performer operating in Norway and the UK. Specifically, this research will seek to enhance our understanding of the roles the drummer has to play in negotiating the codes and rules used in this area of creative music making.

My research is based on a practice-led methodology pursued through two sets of comparative performance projects that have evolved over the last three and a half years. This work utilizes the process of creating the music, live performances and recordings as case studies for comparison and analysis. The content of each performance project provides a platform for me to engage with the specific areas outlined in the thesis and I use practice as a means of raising and exploring questions and explaining codes and conventions.

## **Introduction**

This thesis is focused on the interrelationship between three themes: the identity of contemporary jazz, the relation between contemporary jazz and popular music, and thirdly, jazz and national identity. Using this triangulation, I will examine the constructed nature of musical practice, interrogating the notion that the distinctions between music, whether genre specific or geographically determined, are natural and innate. Specifically, this research will seek to enhance our understanding of the roles the drummer has to play in negotiating the codes and conventions used in this area of creative music making.

My research is based on a practice-led methodology pursued through two large scale, comparative performance projects. The work uses both the creative process and recordings as case studies for comparison and analysis. The content of each project provides a platform for me to engage with the specific areas outlined in the first chapter and I use practice as a means of raising and exploring questions and explaining codes and conventions.

In Chapter 1, I give an overview of the current debates and texts surrounding the three areas outlined above. This also functions as my literature review. I highlight the specific issues that have initially informed the various areas of my research in the performance projects and also establish the areas that the performance projects will question and investigate further.

In Chapter 2, my focus switches to the two performance projects and the wider relations between contemporary jazz and contemporary pop. This chapter looks in depth at the process of creating both performance projects, describing and evaluating their formation, development, and the music created.

In Chapter 3, I build on the discussion of the performance projects in chapter 2, revisiting the issues of contemporary jazz, popular music, national identity and the role of the jazz drummer. I examine how my findings affect the perceived identity of the contemporary jazz drummer, proposing an alternative view to the dominating and

restrictive representations of genre and nation that musicians have to contend with when working in contemporary jazz today.

## **Chapter 1. Contemporary Jazz, Popular Music and National Identity: The debates surrounding the role of the contemporary jazz drummer**

In this chapter I will examine the key issues and debates surrounding my research into contemporary jazz, popular music, national identity and the role of the jazz drummer. Drawing on relevant literature and recordings, this chapter will set the scene for both the performance projects and the following chapters.

### **Constructions of jazz history**

The attendant fragmentation of the jazz community has led to a lack of cohesion among practitioners, an absence of institutions for preserving and passing on the music's traditions, and, perhaps worst of all, a steady erosion of generally accepted critical standards which define what is good and bad in the music (Gioia, 1998, p. 87).

As I will discuss in this chapter, the dominant narrative of jazz describes an ordered progression through individual eras, each with their own distinctive, defining characteristics that in some way can be perceived to contain some of the necessary, essential ingredients of jazz. Each individual style and era has its own iconic figures, which are commonly perceived to have propelled jazz forward into a new stylistic area at the same time as being grounded in the tradition. The idea of a straightforward history of jazz with clearly definable styles, backed up by canonical performers and recordings, is the dominant perspective adopted in both the teaching of jazz performance techniques and the marketing of recordings and performances of jazz music. It is understandable why this ordered, evolutionary narrative of the jazz tradition is so appealing; it makes the music more suitable to promote as a distinct musical style and helps to foster a model for ascribing what good and bad jazz is, as Gioia states above. The problems arise when this narrative is perceived to directly restrict the choices musicians and listeners make. As Scott DeVaux describes:

I am increasingly aware of this narrative's limitations, especially its tendency to impose a kind of deadening uniformity of cultural meaning on the music, and jazz history's patent inability to explain current trends in any cogent form (DeVaux, 1991, p. 553).

A quick examination of Mark Gridley's *Jazz Styles and Analysis* (1999), a popular text book in use across all levels of jazz education, reveals the history of jazz presented as a kind of musical 'family tree', with each generation represented as a style and with each new style being an evolution from the last. This supposedly natural progression reads like this: an original mix of African and European influences, New Orleans jazz, swing era, bebop, cool jazz, free jazz, and fusion. The problems arise when we examine how the advocates of the official history of jazz deal with recent developments in contemporary jazz.<sup>1</sup> Would it be possible to bracket together Wynton Marsalis and John Zorn to create a cohesive title that successfully describes jazz of the 1980s?<sup>2</sup> Whilst this structured view of a homogenous jazz tradition has, for a number of years, been challenged by the growth of the so-called 'new jazz studies' in academia in the 1990s, it remains a powerful presence.<sup>3</sup> Many critics, writers and musicians see the presentation of this ordered history to be symptomatic of jazz's struggle to be accepted as a high art form, it comes with the territory of the canonization of jazz. The ordered historical narrative, canon of recordings and styles and the celebration of lone genius figures, all point to an alignment with classical music and the trappings that accompany it. This aspiration is overtly celebrated with comparisons such as 'jazz's Mozart' and the often used

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<sup>1</sup> In his landmark television series *Jazz* (2001), director Ken Burns simply stops at the advent of fusion, setting in stone the view of jazz as a specific sound from a specific time. For more information on the problems with the Ken Burns series and the 'perceived' jazz tradition, see Stanbridge (2004).

<sup>2</sup> In *Jazz Cultures*, David Ake has a chapter centred on this issue. Chapter six, 'Jazz traditioning', takes two albums from the 1980s (Bill Frisell, *Have a Little Faith* and Wynton Marsalis, *Standard Time*) and uses them as an example to highlight the problems with defining jazz music from this period (Ake, 2002, pp. 146-176).

<sup>3</sup> This change in approach to understanding the cultural issues surrounding jazz in the 1990s is perceived as a seminal moment and is widely accepted as the start of what is now known as 'new jazz studies'. See Whyton, (2012, pp. vi-xxiii).

description of jazz being ‘Americas’ classical music’ (see Sales, 1992) consistently appearing where the ‘jazz tradition’ is discussed, as Krin Gabbard argues:<sup>4</sup>

All jazz writers are richly aware of the various strains of prejudice that place classical music in a loftier position in the cultural hierarchy. A great deal of jazz writing implicitly or explicitly expressed the demand that jazz musicians be given the same legitimacy as practitioners of the canonical arts (Gabbard, 1995, p. 2).

The reasons for wanting to align jazz with classical music are clearly understandable and beneficial on many levels. The struggle for acceptance is not only about artistic credibility, it is also about money; as Christopher Washburne writes, ‘this position opens access to large portions of public funds previously reserved for Western Art music traditions’ (Washburne, 2004, p. 138).

This selective process inevitably leads to value judgments regarding what is and what is not included in the jazz canon. This process appears to narrow down periods of jazz history into individual artists and recordings that exist in a vacuum,<sup>5</sup> where, as John Gennari writes, individual artists and their works become:

Self-contained, self-defining objects to be elucidated as autonomous aesthetic works rather than understood as documents created in specific socio-historical contexts (Gennari, 2000, p. 14).

In *The Rise of a Jazz Art World* Paul Lopes (2002) discusses the relationship between the producers of the product (musicians) and the product itself (music). He describes

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<sup>4</sup> Ted Gioia attempts to align the jazz greats with canonic classical composers, claiming that Bach, Beethoven and Mozart improvised, and would be considered jazz musicians today - attempting to claim the validity of jazz by drawing comparisons to classical music (Gioia, 1988, pp. 56-57). Gary Giddins (2000, p. 158) discusses how Wynton Marsalis is the first musician to be signed to a major record company as both classical and jazz musician, implying his value as a jazz musician is heightened because of his acceptance as a legitimate classical musician.

<sup>5</sup> For an example of this approach to writing about jazz see Martin Williams *The Jazz Tradition* (1993). Williams’ traces the development of jazz through a number of key performers, who are each promoted as individually propelling jazz forward. As he puts it: ‘No music depends so much on the individual as jazz’ (Williams, 1993, p. 263).

how the product does not exist in a vacuum and cannot be judged in isolation or, put another way, the social climate that the product is produced in ultimately shapes the nature of the product. In describing this theory, he states:

The basic premise of this perspective is that the relationship between art, artists, and consumers is not a direct relationship, but a relationship mediated through the social organization of production, distribution, exhibition, and consumption of art forms. The relationship also is influenced by the activities of other important factors in art, besides artists and consumers, whether producers, critics, or patrons of the arts (2002, p. 275).

This is not a claim for a utopian world, where contemporary jazz music is able to be free from the forces of cultural hierarchy and commercialization that Lopes describes. What is more important is to understand the forces that are at work and debunk the myth that jazz is autonomous and free from the changing whims of the recording industry.

In his analysis of Miles Davis's 1965 recording of 'My Funny Valentine', Robert Walser (1995) consciously sets out to present an alternative to the view of the autonomous work of art, delivering a different take on the version of the traditionally important jazz artefact: the solo transcription. Walser sets out to explain the signification of the 'smears' and 'misses' in Davis's solo, and focuses on the real-life issues and broader contexts behind the choice of notes rather than the notes themselves. Walser argues that by using the established methods of analysis developed to analyze classical music, a whole host of influencing factors that 'make music meaningful to people' are overlooked (1995, p. 165). The solo transcription or 'how to' book is obviously a useful learning aid for the aspiring instrumentalist, but Walser perceives the continued focus on the documenting of chords and melody, dates and places, and the work of the lone genius to be just one aspect that needs to be incorporated alongside the various approaches developed in the area of 'new jazz studies'.

Tony Whyton (2010) has described how jazz appears to be in a unique position, caught between two fundamental opposing ideologies, one that sees the music as 'social text' and the other that perceives the music to be an autonomous high art form that contains universal meaning. He goes on to describe how these opposing

views play out in various settings. It is the divide between performer and academic, or as Whyton describes ‘practitioner’ and ‘thinker’ (2010, p. 162) that I feel is most pertinent in my research into the way the role of the drummer in contemporary jazz is perceived and theorized. The ‘dots’ on the page and the recordings are presented by the practitioner as all the evidence that is needed to understand music and is beyond argument, but as Walser points out, musical approaches, techniques and styles are never autonomous (1995, p. 169).

### **The identity of contemporary jazz**

In the vast majority of cases, the study of instrumental techniques and practices has been aligned with the traditional narrative of clearly defined styles and the ordered succession of eras. Players are pigeonholed, and styles and eras are studied in isolation, each with its own technical and stylistic challenges. One only has to look at the way instrumental tutor books are marketed to observe that they are predominantly genre-specific or technique-based and focus on trying to emulate specific players with transcriptions of recordings and solos which unproblematically confirm the idea of the lone genius. What we might even think of as idolization through the ‘how to’ instrumental tutor books is backed up by key texts that look to promote jazz as serious art music through this channel. Writers such as Gunther Schuller (1989), Martin Williams (1989) and Ted Gioia (1998) focused their writing on the idolization of the individual, aligning jazz musicians with the romantic notions of artistic genius.

When read in the context of new jazz studies, the views of these writers can appear rather archaic. However, it is important to remember the dominance of the idea of the *jazz hero* being an underlying narrative to the way jazz is still written about by many critics and academics, promoted by tutors, and accepted as the norm by aspiring jazz musicians. Tony Whyton describes the effect of perceiving a jazz tradition led by iconic figures:



Icons carry out a symbolic role that removes them from their historical and social context so that, today, they can be used to promote the values and ideals of the jazz mainstream; in effect, they come to stand for what is to be considered authentic in jazz (2010, p. 16).

Continuing on from this perspective of the ‘lone genius’, individual musicians are perceived to be the leading figure of a style or genre, and their approach to the instrument and performances are upheld as the authentic approach for the style. Subsequently, aspiring musicians traditionally find themselves placed into a genre and then, in most music types, including jazz, sub genres that will always be related back to a specific style and key performer. For example, a drummer could be described as a jazz drummer specializing in a specific area (such as bebop, swing, or Dixieland). Within these subgenres there is a set of rules, regulations, techniques and methods that drummers and other instrumentalists are expected to adhere to in order to be considered stylistically correct. Both the technical and artistic choices made by the performer are consciously and subconsciously informed by the expectations of the genre and the style they are operating in. Patterns used, practice methods, physical limitations etc., of the performer all go hand in hand with the stylistic area. For example, you would not study the extended techniques used by Tony Oxley if you aspired to play in the traditional swing style of Jeff Hamilton.<sup>6</sup>

What might be thought of as a practice of pigeonholing players into a specific genre or identifiable box appears to contradict the recent academic writing on jazz past and present which points to a much more complex and blurred relationship between genres, sub genres and how music is perceived by performers working in contemporary music (see Ake et al, 2012). Performers subconsciously find themselves adhering to the expectations of a style or genre, even when aware of its generalizations, as Kevin Fellezs describes:

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<sup>6</sup> Tony Oxley is a free jazz drummer working mainly in the area of extended techniques on an unorthodox drum-set. Jeff Hamilton is a bebop/swing drummer whose playing is based on conventional jazz drum-set techniques.

Even when genre categories are mobilized with an awareness of their textual or factual shortcomings, they guide musicians' and audiences' participation in the precise rituals that the "proper" consumption of a particular musical act demands, as well as the terms through which the rules for participation are often inscribed (2011, p. 21).

I have firsthand experience of the effect of this type of musical pigeonholing. As a drummer, my main area of interest, practice and study for the vast majority of my playing career has been focused on 'groove' playing, mainly rock/pop and contemporary fusion-based jazz music. If I were to try and label my style I would say it was 'groove' or backbeat-based. Through the fact that my most prominent work as a performer and band member has been with an ensemble labelled with the 'free' improvisation-based sticker (even though it is far from freely improvised music) I am, by players and listeners, placed firmly in the 'free jazz' genre bracket and would not be considered as a player of other, ironically more suitable, musical options and opportunities. It is understandable that these kinds of value and stylistic judgments are, to a certain extent, inevitable, subconscious, and made by all on a daily basis. But discrepancies in perception are clear to see when we judge this narrow, prescriptive view of jazz performance with the way contemporary jazz is both discussed in academia and dealt with practically by performers in the rehearsal room and on the bandstand. Musicians operating in contemporary jazz predominantly, do not have, as Fabian Holt describes, 'a genre-centred identity', and indeed 'prefer not to define jazz' (2007, pp. 105-129).

What are the reasons behind this stylistically restrictive and prescriptive view of the musician's role in contemporary jazz? Why, in this postmodern, post-styles era, are the distinct boundaries between styles, techniques, the-popular-and-serious and academics and practitioners, still a prominent issue? It is clear to see why it is more practical to keep the comfortable and established roles of distinct styles in place; it makes jazz music more easily promotable both as a product and legitimate pedagogical subject. This perception lends itself well to how jazz is taught practically. The tutor book system is built upon there being specific, defined roles for musicians to play in specific styles of music. (For example: jazz drums require time played on the ride cymbal, and the trading of fours, whereas rock drumming has a straight backbeat, and employs melodic fills.) A brief overview of the current tutor books aimed at

the higher education or conservatoire drummer demonstrates that the vast majority are focused on a specific style of the past or a set of studies and exercises derived from the transcriptions of a famous player.<sup>7</sup>

My research investigates whether it is possible to challenge this essentialist view of the drummer's role being genre and stylistically specific. I have specifically explored areas of contemporary drumming techniques where the approach and choices made by performers are not clearly defined or identifiable as belonging to a definite style and cannot be learnt in a prescriptive set of exercises. It is clearly evident why there are no practical tutor books aimed at developing a contemporary, improvisation-based sound on the instrument. The area can, on face value, appear to be at best a complex organism and at worst, an indefinable sound world. What is most apparent when examining the current section of jazz drumming tutor books is that very few deal with contemporary jazz from the perspective of its being a hybrid music, subject to huge stylistic leaps, not just between styles within the defined history of jazz, but across the vast landscape of musical genres.

If we take a brief overview of drummers operating at the forefront of contemporary jazz drumming, the eclecticism and ambiguity of the drummer's role soon becomes apparent.<sup>8</sup> The approach adopted by these leading contemporary jazz drummers clearly points to a stylistically ambiguous operating space. It also presents some serious questions about the validity of both the way contemporary musicians are still placed into stylistic boxes and the subsequent 'how to' methods that perform an

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<sup>7</sup> For a selection of examples of these tutor books see: Rick Mattingly (ed) *The Jack DeJohnette Collection* (1999), Jim Nesbitt: *Buddy, Inside Buddy Rich* (1984), Jane Peterer, (ed) *Bernard Pretty Purdie: Drummers Textbook Plus* (1983), Bill Bruford, *When in Doubt, Roll!* (1988), Marc Atkinson, *The UnReel Drum Book: Featuring the Music of Randy Waldman and the Drumming of Vinnie Colaiuta* (2003).

<sup>8</sup> For examples of the stylistically ambiguous role of the contemporary jazz drummer listen to Paal Nilssen-Love (drums), Neneh Cherry & The Thing, *The Cherry Thing* (2012), Jim Black (drums), Dave Binney, *Balance* (2002), Chris Bussey, (drums) Trio VD, *Maze* (2012), Joey Baron (drums), Naked City, *Naked City* (1990), Kenny Wollesen, (drums), Sexmob, *Din of Inequity* (1998). I will discuss these and other recorded performances in greater detail in chapters two and three.

important role in the teaching of contemporary jazz techniques. This is not, by any means, a suggestion of the need for a definitive, rule-ridden ‘how to’ method for free/contemporary jazz drumming, it is more that this approach to the kit, combining various styles and free techniques, which has been developing since the mid 1960s, still appears to be clouded in mystery or thought of in old, romanticised, clichéd terms of ‘this has to be felt, it can’t be taught’. The difficulty is evident when examining the few texts that do attempt to describe the effect and approach of the contemporary improvising jazz drummer. The writings tend to fall back on either rigid and prescriptive technical frameworks or metaphorical descriptions of technical effects, as this graphic view by Jack DeJohnette on his approach to time playing demonstrates:

Visualize it like this, on a washing machine you have windows through which you can see the moving clothes, the motion is caused by the clothes being moved by the regular motion of the machines inner chamber, but the clothes never fall to the bottom of the chamber at the same point in the rotation. One time the clothes will be carried 1/4 of a revolution and then they will fall to the bottom. Another time they may travel 5/8s of the way round before they drop...Your ideas can fall anywhere in a phrase, just as the clothes can fall at any point in the machine’s rotation without disrupting the musical flow (DeJohnette, cited in Riley, 1997, p. 21).

Although the sound world DeJohnette is attempting to describe here will make sense to drummers familiar with his playing, it continues to use a romantic vision of something that could potentially be explained technically. This perpetuates the idea that these effects are beyond technical description and can only be viewed as personal expression. In *The Drum Perspective*, drummer Peter Erskine (1998) advocates an approach similar to the one expressed by DeJohnette above. Erskine attempts a variation on the stylistically specific tutor book, with the chapters focusing on the various roles the drummer has to play, regardless of style or genre. Topics range from timekeeping and orchestration to motivic development. Erskine presents advice and exercises that are to be interpreted and adapted to suit various styles of jazz. There is a short chapter, entitled ‘Free playing’ in which Erskine attempts to discuss his approach to this area of drumming. The chapter has none of the notated exercises or transcriptions that the other chapters have. Instead, Erskine, like DeJohnette, falls back on metaphysical descriptions that have come to dominate the vast majority of information on the techniques used by musicians operating in this area of contemporary jazz/music. For example, he writes:

Trust your ears, mind and heart to play this, or any other kind of music. Listen to everything that the other musicians are playing and respond appropriately, as your taste and experience can determine. Summon up patience and courage. Experiment. Discover the hidden architecture in spontaneously composed music.... There's a lot to be learnt about drumming from life (1998, p. 67).

Erskine does hint at there being a more structured and tangible approach to this area of music making, encouraging the search for the 'architecture' hidden in improvised music. However, the chapter offers little in the way of guidance in how to start to think physically about approaching contemporary improvised based drumming from this structured basis. This kind of advice acts in a similar way to the anecdote, which has come to play a huge part in the narrative of the jazz tradition. These accounts by DeJohnette and Erskine confirm the perception of the autonomous jazz musician, whose performance is only explainable as a natural act of self-expression.<sup>9</sup> As with other instruments used in jazz, the drums have been affected by the power of the myth and anecdote, for example the unexplainable truths of variations in individual approaches to expressing time. Words such as 'groove' and 'feel' are used on a daily basis by musicians (I myself used 'groove' above, to define my musical identity), without ever being clearly defined.<sup>10</sup> Then there is the issue of the mystery of the 'swing' rhythm, with the notion that it is impossible to notate it as a rhythmic figure still subconsciously accepted in certain circles.<sup>11</sup>

Other writers have tried to describe, in technical language, how the drummer functions in improvisation-based music. John Corbett attempts to describe Milford Graves' approach to the instrument, coming up with the term 'un-meter-effect'. Here he describes the approach:

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the power of the anecdote in jazz writing see, Krin Gabbard, (1995, pp. 1-28), and: Tony Whyton, (2004 pp. 115-130).

<sup>10</sup> Ingrid Monson's book, *Saying Something* has a chapter titled 'Grooving and feeling' (1996, pp. 26-72).

<sup>11</sup> For more on the nature of rhythm and the drummers' role see: Keil & Feld, (2005, pp. 53-76).

Let us assume that it means that the four basic jazz-drum voices (right arm/right/leg/left arm/left leg) no longer necessarily refer to one constant pulse (which is distributed into a series of accents, which constitute its time signature) instead, the limbs have been redisciplined to speak at different speeds, sometimes relating to each other (maybe even metrically, for some period), sometimes not (Corbett, 1994, pp. 77-78).

Although this description, like DeJohnette's, is totally understandable to drummers working in this area of performance, it is, once again too much of a generalization and an over-simplified view of a style and approach to the instrument that is beyond description in a single technical method or a graphic description. Corbett does offer a more satisfactory description when summing up Graves's approach:

Given these observations it is now possible to see Milford Graves as more than a "free" drummer, but as an assemblage which refuses to accept the role of guardian of unitary jazz-time (1994, p. 80).

Here Corbett still expresses the visual idea of the drummer's limbs as an 'assemblage', each limb having a mind of its own, working independently to create a collective sound. But it is the simple statement of the drummer being 'free' of the time keeping role, which, rather naively, adequately describes the role of the drummer working in this creative area. As a way of understanding how contemporary free jazz drummers (and other instrumentalists) function, it is beneficial to begin with the starting point of there being no rules, no visualizations of washing machines or octopus-like drummers. This leaves the freedom of choice, which befits a musician operating in the 'post styles era' of today.

In *The Freedom Principle: Jazz after 1958* John Litweiler (1985) comes up with a similar conclusion to Corbett. Rather than declaring the new role of the drummer as simply not to keep time, allowing freedom to do what he chooses, Litweiler sees the role as being all encompassing, with the drummer becoming a musical 'jack of all trades.' He writes:

How does the completely liberated drummer play? He interacts with soloists on the complex levels of Elvin Jones without Jones's distracted timekeeping. Or he plays responses to horns' lines, so dense and intimate that he moves far away from the horns' directions. Or he plays pure sound thus creating an essential element of ensemble atmosphere without motivating the

performance rhythmically. From passage to passage, his playing is any of these, whether it is rhythmic, a-rhythmic or polyrhythmic (1985, p. 158).

While Corbett's view of the drummer liberated from his timekeeping role to a life of freedom and Litweiler's image of the contemporary drummer schooled in all the rhythmic effects and styles could be perceived as opposites, to me, they appear to be two satisfactory descriptions of the same sound world and would both be practical approaches to this style of playing.

As was highlighted at the start of this chapter, the creation of a jazz tradition, which focuses on canonical works and individuals who created art that was universal and timeless does little to explain the indefinable, unpredictable and ambiguous musical-world in which contemporary jazz musicians find themselves operating today. The developments in 'new jazz studies' point to jazz culture being a complex entity, where the social dynamics of music are just as important as the recording or performance itself. One of the most divisive areas between advocates of the canonical jazz tradition and new jazz studies is jazz's relationship with popular music. The traditionalists have focused on aligning jazz with the European, high-art tradition, in the process, breaking the ties with popular music and culture. But jazz writers operating within the area of new jazz studies propose an interdisciplinary approach, where jazz does not exist in a vacuum and is the result of a complex cultural mix. When the methodologies of new jazz studies are applied to performance practice, it produces a greater understanding of the codes, conventions and roles that music plays in different cultural contexts.

### **Popular music and contemporary jazz**

Jazz when viewed from the process position, inherently feeds off a productive migration of styles and derives much of its innovation from these borrowings. Throughout its history, popular music styles have served as fertile sources for absorption into jazz, reinvigorating the style (Washburne, 2004, p. 139).

The relationship between jazz and popular music has long held a prominent position in discussions about jazz history, and I want now to turn and discuss that in greater detail. The original role the music played in people's lives as a form of entertainment

is accepted as a key part of the music's heritage. The post-war separation from dance-hall music to serious, art music with the advent of bebop, has become part of the official history of jazz. This narrative appears to take the form of a rags-to-riches story.

But there are critical implications that come with the acceptance of jazz as high-art. As was previously discussed, the rise of the 'official history of jazz' and the narrowing of the definition of what 'real jazz' is and the 'how to' books defining how to play it, can all be seen to be part-and-parcel of the music's acceptance as a high-art form. Jazz's relationship with popular music has also been re-evaluated and jazz is now discussed as music once used for entertainment. As Scott DeVaux comments:

The narratives we have inherited to describe the history of jazz retain the patterns of out-moded forms of thought, especially the assumption that the progress of jazz as art necessitates increased distance from the popular (DeVaux, 1991, p. 553).

Whilst DeVaux points out the flaws in defining high and low culture in this way, this distancing from the popular has come to be considered a prerequisite when promoting jazz as a high-art form. It is bebop, with its anti-popular, anti-commercial stance that is commonly cited as being the decisive point in changing jazz's perception from popular entertainment to serious art music. Its break-neck speed, use of advanced harmony, dissonance and complex melodies are portrayed as factors that were consciously employed in an attempt to transform jazz from a music for the masses to dance to, to a music that only a select few would understand (see Ross, 1989, p. 78). What is implied in this section of the official history of jazz is that in order for jazz to be accepted as a serious, high-art form, it needed to distance itself from the popular, in effect, by becoming marginal and oppositional.<sup>12</sup>

John Storey presents a number of ways that judgments about what is and what is not popular culture are made. These range from notions that 'popular culture is simply the culture which is widely favoured or well liked by many people' to 'popular

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<sup>12</sup> For more on the effect of bebop on the perception of jazz, see: Brian Priestley, *Chasin' the Bird: The Life and Legacy of Charlie Parker* (2007).



culture is mass culture' and popular culture being culture 'which is left over when we have decided what is high culture' (Storey, 2009a, pp. 6-15). For many, popular culture has become associated with mass culture, a term which has become loaded with negative connotations. The idea that popular culture is culture that is left over after we have decided what is high culture appears to apply to the misguided approach adopted by the constructors of the jazz canon and tradition. What is implied in this view of popular culture is that there is a criteria that culture must be subjected to in order for it to be considered either high culture or popular culture, thus implying that popular culture is of a lesser value than high culture. These value judgments are predominantly based around complexity, virtuosity, and ethical principles. All of these factors can be perceived to be ways of ensuring exclusivity of certain groups, in turn, making the association with specific cultures a signifier of class (Storey, 2009a, p. 6). In *Performing Rites*, Simon Frith (1996) traces the development of these distinctions between high and popular culture, demonstrating how they were bound-up with the rise of class-conscious America. Quoting Paul Di Maggio, he states:

The distinction between high and popular culture emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century out of efforts of urban elites to build organizational forms that, first, isolated high culture and, second differentiated it from popular culture (1996, pp. 29-30).

Each of these definitions of popular culture involve the creation of a clear divide between what is popular culture and what is high culture, once the divide is in place the position is indisputable, as Storey points out '[...] not only does the division have to be clear, it is transhistorical – fixed for all time' (2009a, p. 7).

This clear distinction between high-art and popular culture presents certain problems for those who choose to align jazz within the high-art bracket. As music initially performed as entertainment, for people to dance to in mass social contexts, jazz fits firmly into the area of popular culture. More recently, the fusion movement of the late 1960-70s and smooth jazz of the 1980s have borrowed heavily from popular styles of their day, blurring the fixed, transhistorical boundaries Storey describes.<sup>13</sup> Storey goes on to demonstrate how this distinction has, throughout

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that these two periods of jazz history have caused so much contestation about jazz's identity. Is it by chance that they are perceived to be

history, been a dynamic distinction, changing with the passing of time. He cites works ranging from the writings of Charles Dickens to Pavarotti's recording of Puccini's '*Nessun Dorma*' as examples of culture that has operated as both high culture and low (popular) culture at various times in their existence (2009a, p. 7).

The complex nature of the construction of a work of art, its relationship with the outside world, its numerous perspectives and its re-evaluation through time, demonstrate how the binary oppositions of complex/simple, exclusive/mass-produced and esoteric/popular used in defining high and popular culture deliver, at best, a simplistic starting point for further investigation and are at worst, totally irrelevant categories. In "'Moldy Figs" and Modernists', Bernard Gendron (1995) highlights how these binary oppositions have long been a part of jazz's history. The so-called 'Dixieland War' of the late 1930s which pitted New Orleans jazz against swing and then subsequently against the bebop-revolution, was fought along binary principles of: 'Authenticity – artificiality, folk culture – refined culture, technique – affect, modern – traditional and black – white' (Gendron, 1995, p. 50).

Gendron demonstrates that these binary oppositions can be viewed as part of the legitimizing process of jazz as serious art music and were based on the European avant-garde and modernist debate (Gendron, 1995, p. 50). The nature of jazz performance does not lend itself well to being described in a single definition or a binary opposition. Drawing on other jazz scholars, Peter Townsend (2000) points out the contradictions these types of arguments present when trying to describe jazz in this way:

It becomes clear how frequently the categories that are available do not fit the specific case of jazz. For Charles Nanry, the instances in which jazz fails to be easily accommodated to these antinomies are evidence of its cultural marginality. He gives an example: 'jazz defies the stereotyped notion of folk art because of its complexity; yet it does not fit into the equally stereotyped notion of "high" art as formalistic'. Other writers use the same kind of argument when confronted with the need to locate jazz in the familiar binary framework. Peter Wollen shows how, during its vogue in the 1920's, jazz was linked with the contradictory values of both

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'popular' music styles? Why hasn't jazz's collaboration with classical music (third stream) or the avant-garde (free jazz) caused the same kind of reaction?

absolute primitivism and the machine age. Krin Gabbard writes of the 'precarious' positioning of jazz between a 'hegemonic monoculture' and a 'polyglot diaspora'. Nanry uses the same phrase 'on the cusp' to state the position of jazz between 'serious and 'popular' music (Townsend, 2000, p. 168).

By examining these dualities of the past, it becomes apparent how this binary framework still appears to dominate the current discourses that surround the issue of jazz and identity. For example, the neoclassicists, who have adapted the position of defining jazz by a set list of rules and regulations, in opposition to the view of a jazz tradition or identity that has no boundaries or definite, fixed characteristics.<sup>14</sup> Alternatively, in the recent 'nationalistic' debate the duality has been centred on the claim that European jazz is more expressive, natural and organic than American jazz, which is contrived, governed by rules and regulations and just a recreation of the past (see Nicholson, 2005).

What becomes clear in this brief examination of the way popular culture has been defined and constructed is that it is a constantly evolving challenge to define a culture as a specific type, whether that be, as a musical style, of a specific nationality or as high or low. This has never been more prominent an issue than in the 'global village' environment of today, where culture is produced, consumed and reinterpreted at such a rapid rate. As Paul Gilroy stresses:

How are we to think critically about artistic products and aesthetic codes which, though they may be traceable back to one distinct location, have been changed either by the passage of time or by their displacement, relocation, or dissemination through networks of communication and cultural exchange? (Gilroy 1993, cited by Hutnyk, 2000, p. 40).

With the ability to instantly disseminate a piece of music via contemporary mass media, one could, quite possibly, experience a live streaming of a concert from downtown New York, in Beijing or Oslo at the same time as the people in the club in New York experience it live. It is unlikely that the listeners in the various locations would agree on an inherent value of the performance.

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<sup>14</sup> For an example of this binary argument see: Eric Nisenson, *Blue: The Murder of Jazz* (1997). For a critique of binary formations of jazz, see Tony Whyton, *Beyond A Love Supreme: John Coltrane and the Legacy of an Album* (2013).

John Fiske (2006) describes the nature of popular culture as ‘contradictory to its core’ (p. 23). He dismisses the idea that ‘mass culture’ is thrust upon us without our knowledge. He states that the idea of the production of culture being left to an industry, whose only interest is to make money and the consumers, inertly accepting what is presented to them is false. Fiske sees it more as a symbiotic relationship between producers and consumers (2006, p. 23). If one takes an overview of contemporary jazz today, with all its various strands, contradictions and significations, one would have to consider jazz to be a music that is thought of in the terms of being postmodern. Thinking of jazz as postmodern can be rather simplistically perceived to render all the arguments of authenticity, ownership and purity redundant. What is offered in its place is cultural diversity with a plurality of approaches and meanings with no distinction between high and low culture (see Storey, 2009b, pp. 405-408). Postmodernism can be viewed as a reaction against the prescriptive, elitist and canonizing approach to defining jazz previously described. Storey presents a view of postmodernism as ‘[a] rejection of all overarching or totalizing modes of thought that tell universal stories’ (Storey, 2009b, p. 406).

Postmodernism can be seen to symbolize a free-for-all, or, as described by Dick Hebdige (2009b, p. 429) as ‘the implosion of meaning’, but as a musician practically dealing with music to earn a living (performing or teaching), the concepts of heterogeneity, plurality and a borderless musical landscape can appear rather abstract or utopian. Fabian Holt argues that the postmodern values of hybridity and inclusivity can be perceived to have hampered the examination of the role of genre and boundaries within musical styles (Holt, 2007, pp. 5-6). The idea of contemporary jazz being free from genre restrictions does appear to me to offer a useful framework for understanding contemporary jazz; however, as Holt goes on to describe, an all encompassing ‘master theory’ can, sometimes mask over the subtleties that an investigation into specific genres can reveal (Holt, 2007 p. 6). In his discussion of the complexities of the postmodern principles of openness and unaccountability, Ajay Heble (2000, pp. 201-227) examines the inherent contradictions that present themselves when trying to apply the openness that postmodernism implies. Using as an example the work of controversial free jazz saxophonist Charles Gayle, who fuses free jazz performance with spoken-word sections espousing his rigid religious views,

Heble describes the problems in staying 'open' in the postmodern sense in this situation:

How do we understand the openness of such music when our ethics tells us that we must counter Gayle's single truth with our own requisite moral choices and decisions, with our own need to reassert normative claims? Are there times, that is, when, even in the face of our leanings toward open-endedness, we need to insist on closure? (Heble, 2000, p. 210).

Taken at face value, postmodernism would appear to be the perfect vehicle for the contemporary, improvising musician. A world of total freedom, with no distinction between genres, styles, techniques and low and high culture, should lead the 'free' improvising musician to be 'free' in the truest sense. But, to be considered 'free' on contemporary jazz terms does not always equate with the postmodern concept of free. For many the term 'free' is a loaded term which has become as clichéd and rule-ridden as hard bop or trad-jazz, and denotes an austere and esoteric sound world that has more in common with modernism. George McKay, in his writings on the 1960-70s British 'free' scene, describes this counterintuitive effect:

There is a politics of scale in the music produced through improvisation. Here we see musicians addressing the "failure" of their music as a low-key, minor scene. The celebration of a minority culture can be interpreted as a fear of the masses, or as a call to elitism (2005, p. 205).

Put very simplistically, an association with the postmodern would, in effect, put 'free' music into potential contact with popular music, severing the elitist, distinction of jazz as high art.<sup>15</sup>

A suspicion, even rejection, of anything popular or successful appears implicit in many areas of contemporary, improvised music. I have first-hand experience of working with some improvisers who have explicitly expressed a list of 'no-go' areas which, on the whole, consist of popular stylistic feels (back-beats and grooves) and in some cases, no sense of pulse or time. Just how much this anti-popular stance governs

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<sup>15</sup> Simon Frith (1998) describes how this search for exclusivity is not just limited to jazz or high-art music. Pop music is just as vulnerable to these aesthetic distinctions that play out in the areas of 'select and mainstream, the radical and the conservative' (1998, pp. 66-67).

the decisions the musicians working in this area make when performing music is interesting to consider. I feel that there is a definite conscious effort amongst many contemporary, improvising musicians to make music that is a hard-listen. In his essay ‘The discourse of a dysfunctional drummer’, British free jazz pioneer, Eddie Prévost (2004) offers an overview of his philosophy and approach to music. He perceives improvised music as more than just a musical style or genre of jazz; for Prévost, both social and musical dissonance are key factors of the music he produces. While he does not go as far as producing a set of musical dos-and-don’ts, his anti-popular stance is clearly evident.

The most powerful signifiers in the current cultural climate are linked to indicators of “success” and “styles” all of which are maintained by marketers. To adhere to this, even in an unthinking way, is the moral cop-out (Prévost, 2004, p. 354).

The underlying sentiment in the writings of Prévost hint at the life of a free jazz musician being intrinsically linked with struggle, misunderstanding and a constant battle against the powers of commercialization, embracing a world in which, as trumpeter and jazz author Ian Carr put it in 1973, ‘if one was ignored, then that was proof of one’s quality’ (cited in McKay, 2005, p. 209).

Such a perspective has become synonymous with a large proportion of the free jazz movement and the music they make. Are these just perceptions that feed into mythologies of performance practice, for example, that free jazz is ‘out-there’ and immune to the pressures of the external forces that shape our perception and value judgments? This position is strengthened with the common perception of pop musicians and their music as being of lesser value, lacking in creativity and technical skills.<sup>16</sup> McKay points out how this formative period in free jazz’s history was not focused on defining one style of music with a specific criterion. He describes how the music produced in this period (1960s, early 70s) embraced a vast array of styles, ensembles and performance places:

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the difference in perception and value judgments made between jazz music (musicians) and pop see Frith (1998, pp. 47-95).

This was a time of extremes in cultural production, as well as a bewildering and inspiring variety of cultural activity and strategy. For example, the introduction of the seemingly austere solo work of a Derek Bailey or the duo work of Eddie Prévost and Keith Rowe contrasts with Mike Westbrook's half tamed Cosmic Circus (twenty-five-performers) and Keith Tippett's sprawling Centipede (fifty musicians). The fetish-ized, semi-autonomous, enclosed small space of the *Little Theatre Club* or the Old Place (post-Ronnie Scott's) contrast with a poetry and jazz event attracting three thousand at the Royal Festival Hall in June 1961 and with the environmental explorations in the open air to accidental audience of some Scratch Orchestra performances in the early 1970s (McKay, 2005, pp. 193-194).

The musicians working in this innovative period in Britain appear to have prided themselves on the eclectic nature of their music making. The music straddled both the stylistic boundaries and the divisions between the arts. To them, freedom in their playing represented the freedom to choose from anything and not a specific sound world with its own set of rules and regulations. McKay visualizes this period and these developments as a point of departure where 'the recognizable practice of jazz music as such is being left behind, or widened out' (McKay, 2005, p. 194).

In his essay, 'Does Kenny G play bad jazz?' Christopher Washburne (2004, pp. 123-143) uses the music of Kenny G, a virtually universally derided figure in contemporary jazz, and the smooth jazz genre as a case study to explore questions about authenticity, commercialization, high-art vs. pop culture, and canonization. He suggests that we can view the achievements of Kenny G and the smooth jazz movement in producing a marketable, and commercially successful product as another innovation that fits within jazz's history; it is just the music doing what it has always done, collaborating, amalgamating and innovating to suit its time. Instead, Kenny G has become a figure of hate, attacked by almost all denominations under the jazz umbrella, written out of the history books and perceived by most as a purveyor of 'bad' jazz. The essay is designed to be provocative. Washburne could not have picked a more contentious figure, but in using Kenny G as a case study, he neatly ties together many of the issues examined in this chapter. Washburne demonstrates how the simple descriptions of 'good' and 'bad' are not simply based on aesthetic preferences; they are tightly entwined with a whole host of influencing social factors (Washburne, 2004, p. 142). The fact that Kenny G has been attacked from all sides of the spectrum of jazz, including the most inclusive of musicians demonstrates just how

ingrained the idea of genre (what is jazz and what is not) is bound up with values and beliefs (high/low, popular/esoteric, simple/complex, and so on). Most importantly for the purpose of this research, Washburne explores and critiques how the popular is viewed, by almost all sides of the jazz debate, as a corrupting influence.

Taking into account the development of ‘new jazz studies’, the questioning of tradition and the openness of postmodernism, should Kenny G be considered alongside Wynton Marsalis, John Zorn and Keith Jarrett, as a leading figure in jazz today? The question reveals the complexities that exist when attempting to define the role of the contemporary jazz/popular musician. For Simon Frith:

Whether we are looking at a composition student in a conservatory, a session player on a cruise ship, or a would-be rapper in the Bronx, we’re looking at musicians faced with the same problems in deciding whether their music is any good or not. The issues considered—the position of the artist in the marketplace, the relations of class and community, the tensions between technology and tradition, the shaping of race and nation, the distinction of the public and private—are not confined to any one social group, to any one musical practice. Whether they become pressing or not depends on circumstances, not ideology (Frith, 1998, p. 46).

Frith highlights the issues underpinning the choices that musicians, working across all areas of music making, consciously or subconsciously, have to deal with through the commodification of their music. The circumstances and environments that contemporary jazz musicians find themselves operating in, shape how the music they make is perceived. With this in mind, I will now move on, to consider how contemporary jazz is perceived in different national settings.

### **Jazz and national identity**

Having surveyed and interrogated both the identity of contemporary jazz, and the relation between jazz and popular music, I want now to consider my third set of questions, around issues of national identity. In order for the view of a fixed and ordered jazz tradition to be established, the narrative of the origins of the jazz tradition needs to be clearly defined, and nothing is more clear in jazz’s ‘official’ history than the music’s birthplace and, subsequently, its ‘natural’ home. Jazz has always been synonymous with America, and the music has become part of the



soundtrack to America's position as world super power of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Examining this traditional view of the birth of jazz, the music is presented as being a product of multiculturalism, which created a hybrid music that could not have developed anywhere else. This is the view put by Gunther Schuller:

It seems in retrospect almost inevitable that America, the great ethnic melting pot, would procreate a music compounded of African rhythmic, formal sonoric and expressive elements and European rhythmic and harmonic practices (Schuller, 1968, p. 3).

The image of a variety of musical traditions converging to create jazz has been adopted to represent both the inclusive nature of 'the land of the free' and the African American's struggle for equality. These two separate views demonstrate how the concept of a hybrid music has been, and still is, a site of struggle, which, instead of producing the harmony and equality that hybridity implies, it presents the opportunity for claims of authenticity. John Hutnyk describes how the consequence of describing something as 'hybrid' implies '[...] a bogus notion of the prior and the pure – pre-hybrid' (2000, p. 33). In his discussion on the nature of hip-hop, Paul Gilroy highlights a similar consequence, which is just as applicable to jazz:

Hybridity, which is formally intrinsic to hip-hop has not been able to prevent that style from being used as an especially potent sign and symbol of racial authenticity (Gilroy, cited in Hutnyk, 2000, p. 107).

George McKay wrestles with the problems of defining jazz in this way. He describes the negative connotations of the word hybrid but at the same time points out that we have to find new ways of addressing the issues of cultural exchange, influence and cross-fertilization that are at the heart of both debates of jazz's beginnings and jazz today (McKay, 2005, pp. 5-11).

The view of jazz being a unifying music, a universal language, a global culture, which can be seen to undercut more fixed views of national and racial identities, appears to be a view glimpsed through rose-tinted spectacles. Just as jazz today is still defined in the generalizing and prescriptive terms of a specific style or belonging to a certain era, the idea of a natural home of jazz or unique national sounds still plays a prominent role in the debates surrounding contemporary jazz. The

questions about authenticity of style, what is and what is not jazz, are mirrored in the questions about geographical authenticity, with terms such as ‘Balkan jazz’, ‘English improvisation’, ‘the Nordic Tone’, and ‘American swing’ being frequently used. These definitions are not solely used to define specific musical characteristics; they are used as a form of cultural capital that, in some cases, can come to be seen to be representative of a nation’s ideology.

In *Is Jazz Dead? Or Has It Moved To A New Address* Stuart Nicholson (2005) promotes the idea that Europe (and specifically Scandinavia) has superseded America as the driving force of contemporary, creative jazz. In a contradictory manner, Nicholson both promotes the positive effects of globalization on jazz and seeks to establish some geographical distinctions. Here is just one of the generalizations he makes:

The Nordic Tone avoids the “external” the patterns, the favourite licks, the quotations and extroverted technical display of much of contemporary jazz and instead, zooms in close to deeply felt melody, exposing tone, space and intensity (Nicholson, 2005, p. 198).

This is just one example amongst many of Nicholson’s efforts to argue that one musical approach or style is of a superior quality than another. Here, he implies that Scandinavian jazz is more expressive, pure and organic than American jazz, which is contrived and bound up with regulations. He goes as far as to assign a specific, distinctive characteristic to the music of Scandinavia, which he describes as ‘the Nordic tone’ (2005, pp. 195–222). While his quest is to overthrow the dominance of formulaic American jazz, problematically, he replaces it with an essentialist view of Scandinavian jazz. In his attempt to promote the Nordic tone as the way forward, Nicholson relies on the same limiting modes of signification used by American mainstream jazz, the kind of music he labels as being too prescriptive. His method of placing all the various approaches, sounds and meanings into one homogenized, coherent whole—in effect, creating something localized out of a product considered globalized—appears to contradict the way we experience contemporary culture, and reinforces the binary oppositions of authentic/inauthentic and inclusive/exclusive.

George McKay sees the appropriation of jazz to represent the ‘local’ as potentially, an alternative form of globalization, one where the idea of national differences are allowed to surface in a globalized context (glocalization) he writes:

Is it possible that jazz is already one historic form of such an alternative construction of globalization? One whose trajectory moved through national popular to global popular, and maintained the option of localized reinscription? (2005, p. 12).

From a neutral perspective, it appears that this may be the best way to understand Nicholson’s view of a localized approach to jazz, or a ‘national sound’. It can be perceived to be the product of localized responses to something that is globally shared. But Nicholson’s claims of authenticity and superiority appear to suggest a form of globalization that comes with stipulations, which appear to be centred on nationalistic stereotypes and rules and regulations that govern what contemporary jazz is and is not.

Another example of the promotion of national sound being adopted to place one style of jazz above another can be found in Ben Watson’s biography of the guitarist, writer and free jazz pioneer, Derek Bailey. In his review of the Spontaneous Music Ensemble album *So What Do You Think?*, which features Bailey, Watson writes ‘*So What Do You Think?* is a near perfect statement of the courteous collectivity that distinguishes English improvisation from American jazz’ (2004, p. 156). In this statement, Watson appears to agree with Nicholson’s view of the concept of national sounds, not only implying that the music of the Spontaneous Music Ensemble is of a higher quality than its American counterparts, but also stating that it should be considered as a genre of its own, described as ‘English improvisation’. It is interesting to think about the motivation of promoting jazz in this way. It goes beyond accentuating the ‘perceived’ subconscious or ‘natural’ approaches to performance that are inherent in a geographically determined area. The issue that underpins both Watson’s and Nicholson’s views is a desire to break free from the dominance of American culture. From this perspective, globalization has become synonymous with mass culture and, in turn, mass culture has become synonymous with America. When examining this argument, the parallels between globalization and postmodernism become ever clearer. As John Storey argues, ‘postmodernism is more than just a

particular cultural style; it is above all ‘the cultural dominant’ of late or multinational capitalism’ (2009, p. 407).

As previously discussed, the vision of a postmodern world with its plurality of meanings and boundary-less terrain between high and low culture and nations and traditions, in the form of globalization, may just be a theoretical ideal. McKay points out that in order for the globalized, postmodern system to function properly, it has to be from an ‘equal playing field’ where all culture is considered to be of the same value (2005, pp. 12-13). John Hutnyk sees this as unrealistic expectation, which:

would require turning away from the complexity of social, economic and political relationships by elevating cultural practices to an autonomous and self-sufficient realm [...] Authenticity is bound up here as the unavoidable secret nemesis of hybridity theorists – caught in a dialogue which separates, they must then posit difference and its bridge, and offer an understanding of this process as the crucial site of cultural politics (Hutnyk, 2000, p. 125).

Taking these views into account, Nicholson and Watson’s concept of a superior and unique national style of jazz can possibly be viewed as an attempt to create a sense of order and acquire cultural capital or a specific identity from the disorientating ‘free for all’ that is postmodernism/globalization. More importantly, by attaching jazz to a national identity, writers such as Nicholson and Watson have a position from which they can base a counterattack against the global, hegemonic power that became associated with American culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Mike Heffley (2005) certainly perceives the European free jazz movement, which started in the 1960s, as being a conscious reaction against the domination of America. Writing in his book with the give-away title: *Northern Sun, Southern Moon: Europe’s Reinvention of Jazz*, he describes the developments in improvised music making at that time as Europe’s emancipation from American jazz (2005, p. 26). Further, Heffley claims this was a seminal period in jazz’s history, a point when the various European free ‘scenes’ converged and ‘explicated what their free jazz precursors had, by comparison, only implied, however effectively’ (2005, p. 12). Presenting a reverse argument to the neoclassicists, who seek to centre jazz on Afro-American terms, Heffley attempts to reify the concept of European free jazz further by portraying this as a moment when the ties were severed between African American

and Europeans. Heffley rather absurdly, presents a view that visualizes this period as jazz coming home. He describes the emerging European free jazz scene of the 1960s as a moment where:

The syncretism between African-American and European traditions that finally led to the full individuation of the latter from the former, and to a pan-European syncretism of previously separate scenes (2005, p. 172).

Heffley argues that the success of European improvised music (implying the failure of its American counterpart) is built on its ability to draw on the history of western art and literature, a history that he perceives as being purely academic for Americans (2005, p. 15). In the process, Heffley sidesteps the issue of a jazz tradition and canon which is centred on America, by aligning European jazz with the western classical tradition, once again, inverting the neoclassicists' essentialist Afro-American jazz tradition. But in this argument, Heffley can be seen to reinforce another essentialist narrative of jazz by creating another binary opposition that does little to explain a music that performs a variety of functions in a variety of national settings.

The most pertinent question to arise from Nicholson's, Watson's and Heffley's views on national/continental identities within jazz is not whether one perceived style is more valid than the other, or whether it is more authentic, natural and confirmatory of the music's original ethos. The overarching question is why, in this postmodern, interconnected and globalized world, questions about national and stylistic authenticity continue to be such a contested issue for jazz musicians and critics? In 'Europe and the new jazz studies', Tony Whyton (2012) discusses the issues surrounding jazz and new European identities, questioning the notion of an identity being fixed, innate and representative of a race or national consciousness. Whyton argues that the notion of the essentialist subject, whether that be a black Briton, or a Scandinavian jazz musician, being more able to naturally and innately express the music that they choose to perform, fails to address the complexity of the influences of their cultural background or lived experience on the formation of identity (2012, p. 371). Instead, boundaries are created around those who are portrayed to possess an authentic voice, which in turn are utilized to reinforce specific values and beliefs. Whyton points out that:

[T]he assumption that musical codes and conventions represent some kind of deep-rooted national consciousness is deeply flawed and ignores the complexity of identity formation today (2012, p. 376).

Whyton goes on to describe how we need to be aware, in the discourse of the national, of characteristics and approaches that are the product of the social, cultural and political environment being interpreted as natural and innate skills, unique to a specific region, nation or race (2012, p. 376). I would argue that it is possible to see the idea of a national sound or identity, being, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm (1983) an ‘invented tradition’ utilized as a part of social engineering; in turn, this imagined tradition is reinvented and reinterpreted to suit various roles (1983, p. 13). Jazz, in this sense, has been adopted and promoted to demonstrate a whole host of meanings and purposes, ranging from upper-class status and refinement when used as an advertisement soundtrack for Mercedes-Benz cars and American Express Credit Cards (Gabbard, 1995, p. 1), to a music of protest and rebellion, existing on the margins, adopted by civil rights campaigners and political activists, functioning as, in the words of E. Taylor Atkins ‘the music of a tormented people’ (Atkins 2003, xvii), to a representation of a nation’s uniqueness, whether that be in the puritanical ‘Nordic chastity’ described by Nicholson (2005, p. 197) or Watson’s idyllic-sounding British ‘courteous collectivity’ (2004, p. 156). Relating this back to the main focus of my research, examining the role of the contemporary jazz drummer, what I find interesting is that all these perceptions of a jazz tradition, or ‘imagined’ authenticities, coexist (are co-imagined) and have to be negotiated practically by musicians working in jazz today.

If we accept that the idea of a tradition or a national identity/characteristic is a construct, the term ‘jazz’ can be seen to have become a symbol with multiple interpretations and multiple functions. The usefulness of a symbol rests in part on its vagueness, as Anthony P. Cohen notes:

The symbol can function quite effectively as a means of communication without its meanings being rigorously tested [...] Symbols are effective because they are imprecise. Though obviously not contentless, part of their meaning is subjective (2010, p. 21).

In the context of jazz as symbol, one could view this as a disorientating position, where jazz has become a nothing term, with, in the words of Wynton Marsalis, musicians ‘*bullshittin*’, espousing a ‘philosophy that celebrates imitating pop music’s or the classical music avant-garde as jazz’ (Marsalis & Stewart, 1994, p. 141) or, as Whyton describes, more favourably, an opportunity for musicians to ‘try on’ different identities and explore different subject positions’ (2012, p. 376). Building on this, Acacio Tadeu de Camargo Piedade (2003) has written in his discussion on Brazilian jazz’s attempt to break free of American stereotypes that there ‘always was and always is cultural change and exchange, and a veiling of what is to be elected as the ‘authentic’ or the ‘roots’ of culture’ (Camargo Piedade, 2003, p. 57). He sees the globalised, transnational world of contemporary jazz as an intensification of a process that has been in action a long time.

If we are to accept the idea of innate, regionally specific musical skills being nothing more than ‘imagined’, one has to question why they still continue to hold currency in the debate surrounding the defining of jazz today. The idea of a national sound can be seen to be a construct that serves varying purposes. E. Taylor Atkins (2003) argues that the pervasive view of jazz’s evolution from ‘local subaltern expression to cosmopolitan art form’ (p. xix) has tended to rely upon a narrative of success based around a ubiquitous acceptance of the music’s natural charm and has done very little to address the significance of the political and social factors that have shaped the music’s perception (Atkins, 2003, p. xix). Whilst focusing on this from the perspective of jazz as a tool of American globalization, Atkins highlights how this effect was inverted, with jazz being adapted and used by other nations to demonstrate their values and beliefs, he writes:

We must also recognize the ways in which various nations’ jazz cultures deployed the music to assert a defiant transnational imaginary (2003, p. xix).

Philip V. Bohlman (2011) appears to agree with Atkins’ view of jazz as vehicle of change, adaptable to many causes. In *Music, Nationalism and the Making of the New Europe*, Bohlman describes how the reinterpretation of jazz as a symbol of local/national identity can be seen to be the product of communities utilizing the music to symbolize a broad range of localized, resistive strategies (2011, pp. 234-

235). Aligning jazz with hip-hop and other styles, Bohlman describes how, in turn ‘[t]he African American, therefore, became a code for specific forms of European Nationalism’ (2011, p. 234).

While Atkins and Bohlman point out how jazz music has been adapted to represent various sights of struggle throughout Europe, each fails to discuss how jazz music has been appropriated as a legitimate vehicle for the promotion of a nation’s ideals and ethos. Operating as a flip side to the notion of jazz as universal voice of rebellion, some European countries (specifically Scandinavia/Norway) have actively sought to align themselves, through government subsidy and cultural policies, with contemporary jazz. In this sense, jazz came to be seen as a way of highlighting a nation’s progressive nature. As Nicholson describes it, jazz is harnessed to ‘project an image of how they [nations] see themselves in the world: as upbeat, modern, and cosmopolitan’ (Nicholson, 2005, p. 230). In his discussion on the reception of early Swedish jazz, Johan Fornas (2003) describes how, from its early introduction, the music functioned as:

[a] cultural form engaged in aesthetically expressing modern urban life experiences [...] Jazz was a kind of key metaphor for the modern, the new, attracting and integrating a series of other dimensions of alterity (Fornas, 2003, p. 208).

In Norway, where contemporary jazz is seen as a key marketing tool for the country, jazz has been successfully linked to the idea of a national sound, identifiable by specific musical characteristics (Nordic Tone) and modern metaphors. The music is perceived as a product capable of portraying Norway both as a contemporary, progressive and forward thinking nation and Norway as mystical, rugged and at one with nature. Synonymous with Norwegian jazz is the ECM label, which both constructs and confirms these two images.<sup>17</sup> ECM recordings are a tightly controlled product, which are centred on a homogenized and stylized sound world, which is open and meditative. The packaging portrays a Scandinavian, contemporary functionality and imagery of the ruggedness of its nature and landscape. The ECM concept, which

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<sup>17</sup> Although the ECM record label is based in Munich (Manfred Eicher is German), their main recording studio (Rainbow studios) is based in Oslo.



promotes the Nordic Tone, is a seductive narrative that has proved to be a lucrative and artistically vibrant venture across the globe, but there is a side effect to this success. For example, in their discussion on jazz and national consciousness in Norway, Petter Frost Fadnes and Christophe De Bezenac (2014) argue that:

The spatially aware, slightly dreamy aspects of the ECM aesthetics have set up both an internal school of thinking [...] as well as external expectations of what Norwegian jazz 'should sound like' (Frost Fadnes and De Bezenac, 2014, p. 63).

For them it is entirely plausible to see how the vast, open spaces and dramatic landscapes that typify rural Norway can be perceived to inspire the music Norwegian musicians create, but, as Frost Fadnes and De Bezenac go on to argue:

The marketing loop between artistic output and commercial branding is almost inseparable, with academics, jazz critics and press agents sometimes seeing past and present musical projects through the eyes of the brand's established characteristics rather than considering the dynamic and often complex, discourses at play in Norway's current jazz scene (Frost Fadnes and De Bezenac, 2014, p. 64).

The idea of the Nordic tone being unique to one country or an expression of a shared nationalistic characteristic implies a sense of ownership and possession, and these factors are key if a music type is to be utilized to represent the symbolic 'imagined communities' that help form our perception of a nation (see Anderson, 1983, and Whyton, 2012, p. 37). We do have to 'live in the real world' and take into account the influence of the market economy on the promotion and consumption of jazz. The concept of Norwegian jazz is a successful promotional tool, which provides an income for many in a notoriously difficult industry. The undermining of this illusion could be perceived as 'biting that hand that feeds it'. From my experience working professionally, both as a performer and lecturer intermittently for the past 10 years in Norway, I feel that the new generation of Norwegian jazz musicians are beginning to perceive the concept of the Nordic tone and the ECM brand and sound as restrictive rather than liberating, and are actively seeking different directions in their playing. Whether the Nordic tone exists as a tangible set of characteristics or as a construct, adopted to promote jazz nationally and internationally, musicians in Norway and abroad, have to deal with the ramifications of its success.

## **Chapter 2. The Smiths Project (UK) and The a-ha Project (Norway): The wider relations between contemporary jazz and popular music**

Jazz is in a funny place...[Today] when you say something is jazz it's supposed to fit into some classic idea. But jazz is not just Miles Davis in 1956; it's a whole attitude about feeling and ideas and what's going on around you (Bill Frisell cited in Ake, 2002, pp. 164-165).

As discussed in chapter one, the perceived transformation of jazz from music used for entertainment to serious, cerebral art has been well documented (see Lopes, 2002 and Schuller, 1989). The developments in jazz, around the post-war years and its gradual trajectory into the concert hall and conservatoire are, as David Ake describes, symptomatic of 'the serious-izing of jazz' (2010, p. 64). This transformation involved jazz distancing itself from popular music and the trappings that accompany commercial music making. However, musical developments in both contemporary jazz and contemporary pop point to a future where the two genres are able to function in a more stylistically open environment. Musicians working in this area are borrowing ideas, techniques and materials from each other to create music which, unlike some pastiche products of past collaborations, work as valid amalgamations, pushing the music forward into new areas of discovery that reflect the fragmented and dynamic nature of a post-styles era (see Lewis, 2008, pp. 507–514 and Ake, 2002, pp.146–176). In this chapter, I will examine the wider developments in the relationship between popular music and contemporary jazz, before giving a detailed description of the process of creating the two performance projects that are at the centre of my research.

### **Contemporary relations between jazz and pop**

The evidence of pop's influence on contemporary jazz can be found across a breadth of current jazz music. At one end of the spectrum, musicians such as Herbie Hancock (*The New Standard*, 1996, and *River: The Joni Letters*, 2007) and Cassandra Wilson (*Glamoured*, 2003), have reworked the music of Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, Sting, Stevie Wonder and Peter Gabriel into the standard jazz format (e.g. using complex reharmonizations, swing rhythms embellished melodies and head-solo-head

arrangements), to create ‘jazz does pop’ style recordings. At the other end of the spectrum, groups such as Bilbao Syndrome (*Bilbao Syndrome I-VI*, 2013) and Trio VD (*Fill It Up With Ghosts*, 2009, and *Maze*, 2012), mix contemporary jazz with extreme thrash metal, noise and techno to create an unclassifiable sound. These bands draw on the musical and visual effects used by pop, rock and electronic artists as well as the ethos underlying the pop/rock and DIY scenes to produce music that appeals to both fans of contemporary jazz and contemporary pop and rock music.<sup>1</sup>

Sandwiched between these are a number of pioneering artists and groups who have employed popular music in a contemporary jazz setting to produce interesting results. Groups such as The Bad Plus (*Give*, 2004), Farmers Market (*Musikk Fra Hybridene*, 1997), Sex Mob (*Din of Inequity*, 1998) and Led Bib (*Sizewell Tea*, 2006) reinterpret popular tracks by fusing contemporary jazz-based techniques with well known songs, using structures, effects, and approaches traditionally restricted to popular music styles. A good example of this is The Bad Plus’s version of Nirvana’s ‘Lithium’ (*For All I Care*, 2008). Reinterpreting a tune that is considered a grunge anthem with acoustic instruments in a contemporary jazz setting can, on face value, appear to be an impossible task. However, The Bad Plus manage to successfully keep the structure and the emotional intent of the original recording intact by replacing the angst-ridden vocals and distorted guitar that characterize the original recording with atonal and arrhythmic free jazz-based sounds, achieving the effect of the original via very different approaches. I am highlighting this approach to reinterpreting popular songs in contrast to reinterpretations that take the melody from pop and rock songs and use it as a standard, jazz tune in the traditional ‘head - solo’s - head’ format.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In his essay ‘Is jazz popular music?’ Simon Frith (2007) sees the relationship between avant-garde rock and avant-garde jazz as an important factor in contemporary jazz retaining some relevance to popular music making practice (pp. 19-20).

<sup>2</sup> For examples of this format listen to: Gary McFarland and Co. *Does the Sun Really Shine on the Moon?* (2007), and keyboardist and arranger Randy Waldman’s albums: *Wigged Out* (1998) and *Unreel* (2000) in which Waldman ‘jazzes-up’ well known classical pieces and TV themes.

The Bad Plus's version of 'Lithium' is only 30 seconds longer than the original and substitutes the traditional jazz format of chorus after chorus of solos for improvised effects within the original structure of the tune. This has the effect of presenting a viewpoint of the well-known material that would never be perceived through the original recording. Although the timbre of The Bad Plus's acoustic version is radically altered, the emotional effect of the tune is still felt. The chorus is the defining feature of the track and The Bad Plus replace the immediacy and tension achieved by the distorted guitar and screaming vocals of the original with the unpredictability of free-form groove playing and harmonic ambiguity, which, in themselves, create their own sense of immediacy.

The music created by bands such as The Bad Plus has the necessary character traits that would place it firmly (in conventional terms) within the jazz genre. The use of acoustic instruments, syncopated rhythms, advanced harmonies, instrumental virtuosity, the standard piano trio format, individual and group improvisation and the way the performances are presented, display clear evidence of a jazz identity. These signifiers are matched by the use of devices and characteristics (repertoire and rock/pop grooves and feels) that place the music and the ethos in which it is created and performed within the popular/rock genre. The musicians appear to be equally at home in numerous popular styles and, more importantly, the styles never sound like a pastiche. The musicians clearly have an affinity with these popular styles and the majority are, or have been involved in playing rock and popular music at professional level. As a result they are able to exploit these various popular styles in their arrangements and improvisations, much in the same way as the standard jazz approach of practiced phrases, licks and harmonic alteration are employed in the conventional jazz format.<sup>3</sup> Whilst the assimilation of popular tunes and techniques of the day by jazz musicians is established practice, this relationship is often overlooked in the discussion of key performers and important events in jazz history (see Priestley, 2009).

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<sup>3</sup> A good example of the stylistic versatility of the bands operating in this area is Sex Mob's version of 'Sign of the Times' by Prince (*Din of Inequity*, 1998). One only has to hear the drummer and guitarist lock in together on the break-beat like groove and riff to see that they are totally at home in this genre of music making.

The live performances of bands operating in this area of contemporary jazz mirror the eclectic nature of the music produced. A number of musicians working in this area have adopted performance skills that have more in common with rock and popular music than the normal, understated delivery of contemporary jazz. They utilize a diverse set of subject positions, appropriating different identities to produce stylistically schizophrenic performances that appeal to a wide-ranging audience. These include Sex Mob's anarchic, ambiguous, and serious art vs. tongue in cheek approach, described by David Ake as 'carnavalesque' (2010, p. 54), and the direct 'in your face' DIY inspired, hardcore punk, thrash metal stage antics of The Hub (see The Hub, 2005) and Trio VD (see Trio VD, 2012). In similar style, the genre-defying Bilbao Syndrome are promoted by their own label as an unclassifiable mix of 'Ritalin-addled Meshuggah' and the 'melancholic unease of Scott Walker's later style', who perform 'clad in white, skin tight outfits, mirrored aviator sunglasses and powerfully lit with only UV lights' to deliver an experience that combines 'Wagnerian grandeur and hackle-raising bombast' (Babel-Label, 2012). Watching a performance or listening to a Bilbao Syndrome recording without prior knowledge of the way the music was created or the individual band members' pedigree, one would place them firmly in the hardcore metal genre. They would not easily be placed in the jazz category. It is interesting to note that the band's appeal seems to be based on their stylistic ambiguity, an area that Bilbao Syndrome have clearly set out to exploit. The band have performed in a variety of settings; ranging from jazz clubs to indie rock venues; appearing alongside both relatively conventional free jazz acts and alternative rock bands. They are perceived by some to be a cult, underground DIY band but at the same time lauded in the mainstream jazz press.<sup>4</sup> Groups such as Bilbao Syndrome, Trio VD and The Hub, highlight the contradictions at play when working within and across genres. This simultaneous blurring and reinforcing of boundaries feeds into the

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<sup>4</sup> Bilbao Syndrome have performed gigs at the 'traditional' free jazz venue, The Vortex, on a double bill with Acoustic Ladyland as well as the sit-down, theatre style venue, Seven-Arts Centre in Leeds, which is mostly associated with more mainstream jazz. They have headlined at the Gasworks in Bradford, which is a rock and metal venue, performing as part of a 'New-Metal' night. They have also appeared at the DIY venue, The Brudenell Social Club in Leeds with 'avant-bang' group, Hot Head Show and experimental noise band, Kayo Dot. A full-page spread in the mainstream jazz magazine *Jazzwise* (May, 2012, issue 163) is further evidence of the band's recognition as a contemporary jazz ensemble.

way in which music can be popular and avant-garde, and high and low in cultural terms.

Turning the spotlight onto the influence of contemporary jazz on popular music, one is faced with a more subtle relationship. The affect does manage to find a way through, even if, on the whole, it appears as an effect (the ‘out there’ sax solo or the arrhythmic drum track) within a more familiar structure. Artists and bands such as Tom Waits, Radiohead, Robert Wyatt, David Bowie and Björk have all utilized contemporary jazz musicians in their recordings and performances. Waits employs a whole host of musicians that are associated primarily with the downtown, New York contemporary jazz scene, including bass player Greg Cohen (*Swordfishtrombones*, 1983 and *Rain Dog*, 1985), saxophonist Colin Stetson (*Blood Money*, 2002), and guitarist Marc Ribot (*Real Gone*, 2004 and *Rain Dogs*, 1985), to create his genre-defying music. Björk and Bowie have utilized the playing of contemporary, free-improvising drummers Chris Corsano (Björk’s *Voltaic*, 2009) and Joey Barron (David Bowie’s *Outside*, 2007) in both the studio and live settings.

### **Performing jazz and pop**

On face value, the music that I have utilized as repertoire for my performance projects, the music of 1980s pop acts The Smiths and a-ha, could not be more detached from the world of contemporary jazz. The physical sound and ethos of the genres appear to render a musical partnership between contemporary jazz and the music of these two groups, at best, unlikely. This view of incompatibility comes primarily from the dominance of the traditional image of jazz as a fixed identity or defined sound world, as Chris Jonz describes ‘many people hear the word jazz and think of John Coltrane or Louis Armstrong’ (Jonz, cited in Washburne and Derno (eds), 2004, p. 137). It also comes from the perceived view of popular music being commercial, ephemeral and generally of a lesser artistic value than jazz. The issues that the performance projects address are not only focused on highlighting the practicalities of the increasing influence of popular techniques on the role of the contemporary jazz drummer. Through working with various styles within the context of the performance projects, genre will be employed to highlight how, as Keith Negus

(1999) argues, it can be used as a conduit to transfer musical techniques and approaches into ‘codified rules, conventions and expectations, not only as melodies, timbres and rhythms but also in terms of audience expectations, market categories and habits of consumption’ (Negus, 1999, p. 28).

Before I move onto discussing the individual projects, it is important to briefly describe my personal musical background and my own relationship with pop and jazz music, since these have informed the areas I am researching through the performance projects. My starting position as a professional musician working mainly, but not exclusively, in contemporary jazz and improvised music has always been to approach the music I make with no restrictions and pre-determined genre boundaries. Of course, there are issues of taste, stylistic awareness, ensemble interaction, ability and musical appropriateness that govern the choices I make as a performer, and I am aware of how these are perceived by listeners when presented in a specific musical setting. However, I have consciously avoided the restrictions of limiting myself to a specific role when working within various contemporary jazz settings.

I understand the role genre has to play in the identity formation of music and how we learn about various approaches to performing a specific style from identifying with it. Fabian Holt (2007) argues that another possible way to view genre is as a collection of shared values shaped by formative moments (p. 23). As an example, Holt describes how the values of contemporary jazz ‘were defined in the context of African American modernism’ (p. 23). However, I want to practically engage with what I, and the performers that I have collaborated with on the projects identify with as contemporary jazz musicians working within the music today. The way the genre is taught through the tutor/study books, in the institutions that teach jazz and promoted by mainstream record labels does very little to take into account how a boundary-less approach to genre underpins a large section of the music created by today’s contemporary jazz musicians.

When I consider how my own development as a musician has shaped these views, it soon becomes apparent why I feel very little affinity with the idea of a ‘jazz tradition’. Rather worryingly from a career perspective, I am probably not, and never have been a jazz musician in the conventional sense. As a child, I was brought up in a

family that never actively listened to jazz. My elder brothers were all rock and metal fans and I gravitated towards listening to this genre of music. My interest in music grew in my mid-teens when I started to identify with the alternative metal-rock scene that was flourishing around the late 1980s.<sup>5</sup> I did not start playing the drums until I was sixteen (1989) when I started taking lessons with a local music teacher. Until going to university six years later, I had never performed in any institutionally organized-ensemble (school/college jazz-band community brass band etc.). Subsequently, I had not been exposed to the concept of the conventional role of the jazz drummer that appears to be the common introduction to the genre, taken by many of my musical peers.

My interest in jazz grew from two different strands. Firstly, as I started to become more focused on progressing as a drummer, I became obsessed with listening to, studying the techniques of, and reading interviews with, drummers who were considered the best players of that time; many of whom played jazz, or if they were not directly involved in contemporary jazz, they talked about how important it was in their development. Secondly, I became aware of the music being created on the downtown, contemporary New York jazz scene, via the collaborative recordings of alternative rock and metal artists and downtown jazz musicians (for example, listen to Mr. Bungle (1991) and Fantômas (1999)). This acted as a bridge into the experimental side of contemporary jazz.

After spending my first two years as an undergraduate jazz student trying to accommodate myself to the bebop-centred teaching that governed the ethos of the course, I was lucky to find three other students who shared the same disillusionment as I was feeling with recreating pre-1960s jazz. I feel that it is important to highlight my own pathway into jazz, described above, because I have subsequently found that this development was by no means unique. It is a route that a large proportion of the musicians I work with have taken and it is also a route that has led many of my students to work in this area of contemporary music making.

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<sup>5</sup> The bands I was listening to at the time were: Living Colour, Soundgarden, Jane's Addiction, Faith No More and Alice in Chains.



Whilst I certainly have a sense of pride in being classified as a jazz musician, I have never felt that the music I create satisfactorily fits into the jazz bracket. I recognize that if we insist on categorizing for practical purposes (promotion/marketing, venues/festivals and journalism), the music has to be categorized by its most common traits. However, to what extent any generalizations about style, genre and musical material, consciously or sub consciously inform what musicians play, educators teach and audiences expect, is interesting to consider.

Along with the challenging of stylistic and genre boundaries discussed above, my performance projects have also enabled me to examine the subtle differences and similarities that come into to play when working in contemporary jazz music in various national and transnational settings. The projects have allowed me to ask questions about the development of national sounds in contemporary jazz (see Nicholson, 2005 and Heffley, 2005) and examine how the politics of the popular and contemporary jazz play out in both national settings. I have specifically chosen repertoire that the musicians, working in each ensemble, could relate to in some form as popular British or Norwegian music. In this setting, the music of The Smiths and a-ha can be perceived to function as almost a ‘national’ folk music for the musicians involved in the project, as Peter Wade states:

Popular music is an integral component of the processes though which cultural identities are formed, both at personal and collective levels; moreover, the way people think about identity and music is tied to the way people think about places (Wade cited in: John Connell and Chris Gibson, 2003, p. 117).

Considering Wade’s view of the connected nature of identity, place and music, the songs of The Smiths were a logical choice when deciding on repertoire for the UK-based performance project. Growing up in the north of England, I identified with both the dark humour of the lyrics of The Smiths and recognized the bleak imagery used on the album covers and in the videos. This personal ‘baggage’ attached to the music of The Smiths enabled me to feel confident that the original material would provide me with numerous ideas for reinterpreting their music in a contemporary jazz setting. Whilst the music of the Norwegian pop band a-ha did not personally resonate with myself or the other band members as specifically Norwegian in character, a-ha are

one of the few internationally recognized success stories of the popular music scene in Norway and the musicians understood the position the band and their music held in Norwegian popular culture.<sup>6</sup>

### **The performance projects**

It was in the December of 2010, three months into my PhD research, that I started to think about the make-up of the performance projects. I had initially considered creating a number of relatively small projects that would place me in various settings and situations, allowing me to practically engage with the research areas set out in chapter one. It was envisaged that I would be able to use the access to various European jazz scenes that was available to me through the Rhythm Changes project research team to collaborate with musicians from a number of European countries. After some deliberation with my supervisors, it soon became apparent that the scope of my research would need to be narrowed down. The idea of two larger comparative projects, in two European countries, appeared more manageable and focused.

I had previously formed a working relationship with a group of Norwegian musicians based in Stavanger and I had been visiting Norway to perform professionally over the previous ten years, so the scene was not completely alien to me. I also had worked on several projects with the Norwegian principal investigator for the Rhythm Changes project, Dr. Petter Frost Fadnes and it was envisaged that this existing connection with both the project and country would aid the logistics of creating new music in this setting, with local musicians.

I proceeded with the two projects; one based in UK working with locally based professional musicians, and a comparative project based in Norway. The projects allowed me to situate myself in a setting where, as a drummer and band leader, I was able to examine the constructed nature of musical practice, questioning

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<sup>6</sup> The worldwide success of a-ha is something that still reverberates in Norway. Although it is nearly 25 years since the band were at the peak of their fame, the members frequently appear in the national press and their music still plays a part in Norwegian life.

the mythology that the distinctions between music, whether genre specific or geographically determined, are natural and innate.

The following description of the process of developing the two performance projects is intended to help demystify both the method and the practicalities of creating new, semi-improvised music with a group of individuals. Whilst there are a number of texts that analyze, after the event, performances of semi-improvised music from a technical perspective (see Jost, 1994, and Dean, 1992), there is little information about the real-time issues and processes at play that inform how and why the music was created.<sup>7</sup> As an undergraduate student interested in this area of music making, the creative process of improvised music remained a risky, unquantifiable area of jazz that was surrounded in mystery. Whilst the experimental techniques used in the music could be imitated via recordings and transcriptions, the practical methods of developing the necessary skills both as a soloist and as a group were based totally on trial and error.

In describing the journey that myself and the musicians undertook in creating the music in the performance projects, it is hoped that it will inform others encountering similar issues about where their own music fits within the process of creating and performing contemporary jazz.

### **The Smiths Project, UK**

In the summer of 2011, I assembled a group of Leeds based-musicians to work on preliminary ideas that I had for my UK based performance project. The musicians I had chosen were all active members on the local Leeds music scene. They worked professionally in a variety of musical settings and were chosen for their ability, versatility and musical-openness. Although I had known several of the musicians socially for a number of years, I had only ever worked professionally with the bass

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<sup>7</sup> It was not until I was a postgraduate student that a tutor introduced myself, and the ensemble that I was working with at the time, to exercises and methods that focused on developing freely improvised approaches to performance. Until this point, freely improvised music remained a purely personal expression, played out in a group setting. Further confirmation of defined methods and approaches to improvised based music was found in the workshop-based books of David Liebman (1978) and John Stevens (2007).

player. This was, on the whole, a new project and experience for all of us. The group consisted of Russell Henderson (saxophones), Ben Fletcher (guitar and electronics), Colin Sutton (bass and electronics), and myself on drums.

The initial weekly rehearsals with the group were more like a musical get-together. Whilst I had a specific style of repertoire in my mind as a final goal, I consciously wanted to start my relationship with these musicians with no fixed sound in mind. It was important for me to see how the musicians would react when faced with just improvising together. This is always an awkward moment for any ensemble, even when working with experienced improvisers, the first rehearsals tend to be somewhat of a leap of faith. The initial focus was on getting together and playing, reacting to each other's ideas and musically 'feeling out' where each of us wanted to go.

Listening back to what was produced in these initial rehearsals, it is interesting to hear how, already in these first steps, the collective sound of the group was starting to take a specific direction. Although the improvisations did not sound like the product of a stereotypical free jazz ensemble, we were all familiar with that sound world and, intuitively, we would start the majority of the improvisations by using abstract noise and extended techniques.<sup>8</sup> In effect, as we had assumed that we were performing free jazz, we instinctively attempted to recreate the sound world that we predominantly associated with this area of music making. The majority of the improvised pieces the group created were intuitively developed in this way:

**Start - abstract noise (quiet)** - noise effects, extended techniques, no harmony, melody or distinguishable rhythm.



**Increasing intensity** – both texture and volume would become gradually more intense.



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<sup>8</sup> The sound world I associate with a stereotypical free jazz ensemble is a sound based on abstract noise, with no sense of harmony, melody, or recognizable sense of groove or repeating rhythm.

**Collective groove/feel** – we would arrive at a groove, repeating harmonic/melodic phrase or some sense of structure.



**Break down of groove** – gradual movement away from groove/feel, increasingly abstract, decreasing in volume and intensity.



**Abstract noise to end (quiet)** - as start.

What we spontaneously settled into was a sense of structure or form, a form that, in my experience, is common when musicians start out improvising together. Assessing my personal reasons for subconsciously creating a sense of structure in these situations, I feel it stems from a sense of dissatisfaction with the purely improvised, abstract, noised-based form. In discussions with the band members they all admitted to having the urge to move the pieces on and there was a collective feeling of dissatisfaction with the progression of the improvised structures if they were static, and focused purely on abstract sounds. However, attempting to work within this approach was an important part of the process. The form of structuring the free improvisations, described above, has repeatedly surfaced and found its way, in a more concise and focused form, onto the final studio recordings.<sup>9</sup>

By the third week of rehearsals I had already started to consider possible repertoire that would allow me to address the three areas of my research as well as being musically appropriate for the various characters in the band. I started with a very literal idea; I wanted the musicians to find a way of capturing the essence of, what for me personally, is the genre defining sound of European free jazz (atonal, arrhythmic, abstract noise and extended techniques), and juxtaposing it with musically ‘straight’ sections of devices used in pop and rock music (repeating riffs, backbeats and harmonic sequences).<sup>10</sup> It was envisaged that by combining the two

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<sup>9</sup> A good example of this approach can be heard in the performance by the rhythm section in the track, ‘Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me’ (The Smiths Project, **CD 1 track 3**).

<sup>10</sup> That sound world that I had in mind can be heard on a vast array of recordings by artists such as Evan Parker, Derek Bailey and Barry Guy. For example, listen to:

styles directly in this manner, the group would be taking the first steps in engineering an amalgam of the two genres.

After experimenting with original riffs and chord sequences for the straight sections it was felt that something more memorable, or familiar was needed to make the stylistically 'straight' section work as a contrast to its abstract noise-based counterpart. I searched through recordings for suitable material and decided to experiment with incorporating a version of the piece 'Poptones' by British post-punk/dub pioneers, PIL (1979). Whilst this tune is very distinct in character, harmonically it is quite static, with very little melody at all. The main feature of the track is the dub bass line and the arpeggiated guitar riff. The introduction of a recognizable tune and feel had the effect of not only making the straight sections more memorable, it also, unexpectedly, had the effect of focusing the improvised sections; they became more distinct and appeared to have a direction.

Revisiting these initial steps in creating the performance projects it seems rather naive to attempt to juxtapose the two genres in this way and expect a result. It soon became apparent that this contrived approach was not going to work as a basis for creating an original project. The problems lie, not in the juxtaposition of material, or improvising the straight, groove-based section, the difficulties lie in maintaining focus in the long sections of free, abstract noise-based improvisation.

Considering an alternative approach for the ensemble, I started to analyze what music I personally identified with when considering the three areas of contemporary jazz, popular music, and national identity. The abstract sound world of free jazz was what I considered, theoretically, the stereotypical approach to contemporary jazz and the zenith of contemporary improvisation. However, it was not what I, or the rest of the group felt contemporary jazz represented to us. The contemporary jazz that I initially connected with, as a young student of the drums, was the cut and paste compositions of American saxophonist and composer John Zorn and the music of the downtown New York contemporary jazz scene. The total

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Parker, Guy, Lytton Trio, 2007, *Breaths and Heartbeats*, Bailey & Noble, 2009, *Out Of The Past*, and Tony Oxley & Derek Bailey, 2008, *Quartet*.

freedom of choice that is open to the players working on this scene, in terms of genre, style and physical sound, symbolized to me, the role of the free-jazz musician. It was only latterly, as an undergraduate student, that I became aware that the term free jazz represented a specific sound world, with its own set of musical rules that produce a very specific individual and group sound.

In these initial rehearsals, the only link with popular music was being established through the use of repeating riffs, regular backbeats and standard song formats. The experiment with combining ‘Poptones’ with free, abstract improvisation was just an initial device to get the musicians to deal creatively with the areas of my research; it did very little to address ways of successfully representing the piece in a contemporary jazz setting. In discussions with the musicians we clearly shared similar initial, mainly rock and pop-based musical interests and it appeared logical that if the project were to be musically valid and resonate personally with the band members, it would be beneficial to primarily focus on discovering repertoire that we could relate to.

The search for suitable material was based on three key factors:

- **Adaptability** – it had to be a good vehicle to be manipulated in a contemporary jazz setting.
- **Inspirational** – the musicians would feel a desire to work creatively with the repertoire.
- **Rooted in a particular geographical setting** – the music would represent, in whatever shape or form, a ‘national’ identity.

Clearly obvious things sprung to mind. The Beatles did not really mean anything to myself or the other members of the group. Their music seemed omnipresent and numerous musicians and groups had already given it the ‘jazz-treatment’.<sup>11</sup> Current British popular music (chart music) was an unknown area and would not have had the

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<sup>11</sup> For examples of various jazz versions of Beatles recordings listen to: *The Beatles Tribute: An All Star Celebration*, (2004), *I Got No Kick Against Modern Jazz: A GRP Celebration of the Songs of the Beatles*, (1993), *Blue Note Plays The Beatles*, (2004).

same significance to myself and the other musicians in the ensemble, or offer the shared-experience to the group as some other form of popular music. The idea of using the music of The Smiths as repertoire first arose from a search for popular music that I personally identified with as displaying a sense of ‘Britishness’. The sound-world their music purveyed and the imagery of their stage persona felt real and something I could relate to myself, growing up in the north of England in the 1980s. I also felt there was a strange symmetry between the ‘tongue in cheek’ dark humour created by Morrissey’s lyrics, and the absurdity that characterizes some aspects of freely improvised contemporary jazz music.<sup>12</sup>

In September 2011, the group started to focus entirely on reinterpretations of the music of The Smiths. Over the following months a rehearsal schedule became established, and there developed a routine process to creating the repertoire that has stayed with the group throughout the subsequent two years of working on the project. I searched The Smiths’ back catalogue and choose suitable repertoire, one tune at a time. I then asked the group to familiarize themselves with the original. Time would be spent transcribing a basic lead sheet from the recording and developing preliminary arrangement ideas. The arrangement process was an important element in the success of this project. The music would have to convey elements of the original, contain some form of modification and manipulation that highlighted various stylistic approaches whilst, at the same time, present the music in an altered cultural setting. The ultimate aim was to challenge the listener to experience the music of The Smiths in a different light. The way a piece was arranged could take various forms. Some pieces started as fully notated arrangements that contained through-composed sections and had very specific directions for improvising; for example, ‘Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now’ (**CD 1 track 5**) started out, structurally, as a specific arrangement that was given to the musicians (**See appendix D, p. 123**). Others arrangements were based on feels or specific textural effects which would be described via verbal directions to the rest of the group. For example, the tune ‘Panic’ (**CD 1 track 7**) is comprised of just two contrasting feels - bass and drums playing an up-tempo bebop

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<sup>12</sup> I have always felt that there is a comedic element contained within large amounts of freely improvised music. This effect is highlighted further when the music is presented as being totally serious.



feel and guitar and sax playing a slow version of the melody in a metrically unrelated tempo. This effect was achieved entirely through describing to the musicians the sound I had in my mind and working together, to create the effect.

### **Overview of a selection of tracks from CD 1: The Smiths Project**

In this section I will give a detailed overview of four of the tracks on CD1: The Smiths Project, and a brief overview of the remaining tracks. I will highlight the arranging and rehearsal process involved in creating the music and the final effect of the track.

#### **Last Night I Dreamt Somebody Loved Me (CD 1 track 3)**

When considering using this piece, my initial thoughts centred on presenting it as some form of ballad. The melancholic nature of the original melody had the potential to be highlighted in a more open spacious ‘ECM’-like setting. The piece was transcribed and some reharmonization was developed as a way of signposting the emotional intent of the track (**See appendix D, p. 124**). In the first rehearsal, the musicians were directed to keep the feel of the track rhythmically open but still follow the harmonic and melodic structure, a form of changes-no-time. The solo sections were to be relatively open but staying stylistically within the established atmospheric sound world. After a period of time it soon became apparent that the piece lacked a sense of direction, the melody did not have enough identity to shape the piece by itself and the free improvisation sections were sounding stifled and restricted.

After some experimentation, we attempted to find a way of contrasting the rubato, ballad-like melody with free, abstract noise. I had in mind the sound-image of two distinct duos operating simultaneously, but independently, gradually morphing, over the duration of the piece, into one. The group was split in two; the bass, drums and guitar would start with an angular, abstract soundscape, created from using extended techniques. The saxophone joins (**at 2 min**), first as a solo instrument, then accompanied by the guitar playing pad-chords on the first repeat (**2min 34sec**). The saxophone and guitar play a slightly rubato version of the original melody. Following

another repeat of the head, the bass and drums work towards a more regular time feel (**4min**) which becomes established in the bass solo. The group finally comes together in unison for the return to the tune (**5min 58sec**), which forms the ending of the track.

### **The Queen is Dead** (CD 1 track 2)

The group had worked on this piece in various guises for 18 months before arriving at the final version on the recording. There were numerous arrangements created from the original transcription, these included a straight cover of the original, a post punk interpretation and a complex rearrangement of the rhythm of the main melody. The opening of the recorded version starts with an electronically manipulated version of the original sample of Cicely Courtneidge singing ‘Take Me Back To Dear Old Blighty’ (Forbes, 1962). This leads into a dense, frantic and prolonged noise burst (**starting at 21sec**), which is based around the floor tom rhythm of the original recording, played as fast as possible around the kit. The other instruments are directed to match the intensity of the drums. The length of the intense noise burst was consciously elongated to form a rather awkward and oppressive effect. The direction to the musicians was to play both physically and mentally beyond their comfort zone.

The release from the tension comes in the form of a dub groove that the drums and bass drop-into (**2min 6 sec**), cutting across the improvising sax and guitar. The guitar and saxophone then join the bass and drums (**2min 30 sec**), stating fragments of the melody in the established dub feel. Although vastly altered in style, there are strong symmetries between this version and the original recording. The two sections (intro and verse) that form the basis of the original are replicated in the contrast between the ‘noise’ and dub-style sections. The tension and unease created from the static harmonic and textural structure in the original have become magnified and intensified in this version.

### **Vicar in a Tutu** (CD 1 track 4) **and Girlfriend in a Coma** (CD 1 track 8)

‘Vicar in a Tutu’ and ‘Girlfriend in a Coma’ are two ‘straight’ covers of original tracks that were created to form somewhat of a respite, or a brief glimpse of the original sound world for the listener. These tracks were employed to function in

several ways. Firstly, I wanted to experiment with the direct juxtaposition of straight pop repertoire against contemporary jazz repertoire. The majority of the tracks created are focused on the juxtaposition of styles within the structure of the traditional song format. In these examples, the original is presented in its entirety, as a separate tune; the whole tune functions as a stylistic contrast to the tracks before and after. Secondly, presenting a tune in this context has the potential to present multiple interpretations to the listener. The reaction of the audience to the straight covers in our live performances is often based on confusion and ranges from serious appreciation to laughter. Presented in this manner and context, these interpretations can be viewed from varying perspectives and they play with the stylistic expectations of working within the two genres of popular music and contemporary jazz.<sup>13</sup>

### **Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now** (CD1 track 5)

This was the first of The Smiths arrangements that the group started working on in the later part of 2011. I had transcribed and rearranged the original melody, incorporating some rhythmic alterations and stylistic variations (see **appendix D, p. 123**). The structure of the piece became a vehicle to present various stylistic approaches to improvisation that the group had been practicing. The intro is based on a seamless transition from open and abstract improvisation to a Latin-samba groove (**established at 2min 49sec**). This sets the tempo for the statement of the introduction and verse (**3min 46sec**), which is kept relatively straight and similar to the original except for some rhythmic alterations. In contrast to the intro, the drop into the guitar solo (**5min 9sec**) was designed to sever any notion of a relationship with the main melody. For the solo sections, we continued to work with genre-centred improvisation as a basis for the variations. Gradually, over time, the guitar solo became established as a jazz fusion solo, which then breaks down to a contrasting free form saxophone and bass duo (**9min 23sec**) before the drums bring in a slow back beat for the closing fragmented statement of the original melody (**11min 35sec**).

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the potential for multiple meanings and responses when presenting repertoire in this way see, David Ake (2010, pp. 54-77).

Whilst the main structure of this piece is based on the juxtaposition of various styles of improvisation, it soon developed into a set structure. In hindsight, the improvisations became a fixed identity, even in the freely improvised sections, a repetitive sound world developed that was consistent between rehearsals. This can be viewed from either a positive perspective of the group developing a unique, unison and consistent sound or, from a negative perspective of the group being happy to repeat tried and tested approaches to the form.

### **Remaining tracks**

The tracks ‘This Charming Man’ (CD 1 track 10) and ‘Stop Me If You Think That You’ve Heard This One Before’ (CD 1 track 6) were both created using specific stylistic approaches as a basis for the arrangements. ‘This Charming Man’ was reinterpreted using a drum & bass-like approach to the song. This has the effect of intensifying the original recording by speeding up the tempo and tightening the intonation of the melody. As a contrast, ‘Stop Me If You Think That You’ve Heard This One Before’ is based around the rhythm section utilizing the repetitive and hypnotic effect of the original recording by creating a static, rhythmical texture, similar to the organic and evocative sound associated with ECM recordings. The saxophone works independently, embellishing the melody rather than stretching away from the structure and tonality of the piece.

The use of established genres and styles to create contrast within a piece formed the basis of the reinterpretation of ‘How Soon Is Now’ (CD 1 track 9). The key feature of the original recording is the contrast between the multilayered guitar track and the delivery of the vocal line. The introduction in the original recording was a key characteristic of the track and I wanted to stretch this section in the arrangement and make it more of a feature of the piece. The guitarist (Ben Fletcher) experimented with several approaches to creating a similar, multilayered effect to the original in a ‘live’ setting, finally settling on using ‘live’ sampling to produce an organic but ‘glitched’ sound. This introduction is interrupted by the rest of the ensemble coming in with a slow ‘bluesy’ interpretation of the original melody. A more abrupt use of genre change was utilized in ‘Frankly Mr. Shankly’ (CD 1 track 1). The arrangement is based on juxtaposing a Latin inspired verse with a high energy, punk rock-like chorus.

The energetic and chaotic punk rock feel gradually takes over, cumulating in the punk groove being pushed over the edge and descending into chaos. The use of rhythmically distinct, upbeat feels was inspired by the ‘jaunty’ nature of the original recording.

For the reinterpretation of ‘Panic’ (CD 1 track 7) the ensemble worked with the established sound world of up-tempo bebop as a basis for the piece. The musicians were pushed to play on the ragged edge of their technique in an attempt to keep up with the fast tempo, leading to a frantic and unsettled feel to the piece. I wanted the musicians to work within the confines of the more traditional roles of the hard-bop and free jazz styles. The use of noise bursts (**intro and at 4min 52 sec**) and the car alarm effect on guitar (**starting at 4min 35 sec**) were employed as way of capturing the intent of both the lyrics of the song and title of the piece. The arrangement was centred on creating a sense of panic in the listener.

### **The a-ha Project, Norway**

My initial visit to Norway to start work on what was to become the a-ha project was at the start of April 2011. I had contacted a number of Stavanger based jazz musicians about the possibility of creating a project that would involve myself leading a group of Norwegian musicians, performing repertoire that would have both a connection to the notion of a Norwegian ‘national sound’ and also be a vehicle to challenge the stylistic and genre boundaries related to contemporary jazz and popular music.

As I had already worked on several projects in Norway on a number of occasions over the previous ten years, I had built a relationship with several musicians working on the contemporary jazz scene in Stavanger. However, for this project, I wanted to work, on the whole, with musicians that I had previously not played with. This would allow me to approach the material from a new perspective, with very little ‘baggage’ or pre-conceptions of how musicians would react to the material that I would be presenting to them. The only exception to this was the inclusion of Petter Frost Fadnes in the ensemble. I had collaborated with Petter on numerous projects both in the UK and Norway over the previous fifteen years and it was important that I

had an established contact in Stavanger to help with both the musical aspects of the project and the practical logistics of running it.

The musicians involved in the project were Dominique Brackeva (trombone), John Lilja (electric bass), and Petter Frost Fadnes (saxophones) and myself on drums. The instrumental line-up of the band meant that there was no traditionally functioning chordal instrument in the ensemble.<sup>14</sup> This proved to be problematic at the start of the project as it involved a different approach when arranging material and thinking about how the group, as a whole, would sound. I had spent a long time working with electric guitarists and keyboard players in an improvised setting, who were comfortable experimenting with effects and samples and incorporating them into improvisations. The first challenge of arranging for this ensemble would be dealing with the ‘clean’ sound of the frontline instruments.

In contrast to The Smiths Project in the UK, I knew that the practicalities of forming a new ensemble, transcribing and arranging appropriate material, developing a group sound and recording one hour’s worth of material in the allotted periods that I would have in Norway, meant that I would have to be focused and more proactive in the initial planning of possible pieces to perform. I wanted to start the rehearsal process with specific repertoire for the musicians to play, allowing the group to have at least one common-goal to work towards right from the start. My initial ideas about suitable material centred on the use of Norwegian folk tunes. Although this music held no emotional and nationalistic connection to myself as a UK based musician, I was familiar with a number of recordings by several Norwegian and other Scandinavian artists that used this approach as concept for a recording project.<sup>15</sup> I felt that there was enough potential in the repertoire for it to be adapted and reinterpreted to suit my research needs. I envisaged the musicians in the band contributing to the repertoire by suggesting familiar songs.

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<sup>14</sup> Although the bass can function as a chordal instrument, and does at times in this ensemble, this is not its predominant and conventional role in this setting.

<sup>15</sup> The albums that I was familiar with that utilized Norwegian folk music in various jazz settings were: Dag Arnesen, *Norwegian Song*, (2007), Farmers Market, *Speed-Balkan-Boogie*, (1995), Circulazione Totale Orchestra, *Recycling Grieg* (1996).

From the start of the rehearsal process, it became apparent that the use of traditional, Norwegian folk music was going to be problematic. The musicians understood the implications of working with this repertoire and they were aware of the concepts that I wanted to investigate, however, they felt that this material was, musically, a ‘well trodden path’ in contemporary Norwegian jazz. Frost Fadnes was adamant that this was the wrong material for the project, stating that it would play-up to the popular, stereotyped view of Norwegian jazz, (e.g. ‘Nordic Tone’ and ‘Mountain jazz’).<sup>16</sup> More importantly, the musicians did not personally empathize with the notion of folk music representing a concept of Norwegian nationalism. In terms of music, the common or shared experiences between the group members, centred on popular music. All the conversations with the musicians about both aesthetic and technical choices in these initial rehearsals were focused on contemporary jazz or rock and pop music. It was the bass player in the ensemble, John Lilja that first put forward the idea of using the music of the 1980s group, a-ha as repertoire for the project. In hindsight, this was the only choice available if we were going to utilize Norwegian popular music, as they are the country’s single global success story when it comes to this genre of music.

Whilst reconsidering the choice of repertoire, the group did start playing together, working entirely on purely improvised pieces. The collective sound of the group was distinct; the two frontline horn players gave the music a classic free jazz sound, sonically similar to early Ornette Coleman recordings (such as *Shape of Jazz to Come* (1959) and *Change of the Century* (1959)). The music created in these initial rehearsals centred on textural-based playing, characterized by long sections of abstract free noise, extended techniques and sound effects. Listening back to the recordings of the initial rehearsals, it is clear that the Norwegian musicians were comfortable operating in this area of abstract improvisation; this was the style that they mostly professionally played in. This was partly a new experience for me; it wasn’t that I was not used to playing improvised music, but rather that most of the

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<sup>16</sup> In writings focused on contemporary Norwegian jazz, there is a heavy emphasis on the relationship between this area and local folk music by academics and journalists discussing the contemporary, Scandinavian jazz scene. For example, see: James W Dickenson, 2011, Stuart Nicholson, 2005, Steve Lake & Paul Griffiths (eds) 2007.

musicians I had worked with in the past operated predominantly in the area of thematic improvisation. I was constantly drawn into establishing a sense of form by imposing some kind of rhythm, groove and feel in the improvisations, whilst the other musicians appeared comfortable and settled in the abstract sound world. In hindsight, this imbalance, or variation in perspective created a distinct approach and sound within the ensemble that would, in time, develop to be the characteristic sound of the group. Whether this difference in approach was subconsciously symptomatic of my perception of the Norwegian musicians being more open and comfortable with more ‘freer’ and experimental approaches to jazz performance is hard to tell.<sup>17</sup> The Norwegian musicians never once suggested that I adopt a more abstract ‘freer’ role on the drum kit, in fact the opposite occurred and I was actively encouraged to pursue more groove-based approaches in the arrangements I was creating.

The approach adopted for the initial arrangements of the music of a-ha experimented with the effect of contrasting a straight groove on drums and bass with a free interpretation of the melody, which was consciously ‘out’, both rhythmically and melodically, against the feel of the bass and drums. Using the two contrasting effects in this manner was another method designed to literally engineer an amalgam of pop and contemporary jazz which would develop into more sophisticated approaches once the group established a working pattern. The focused periods of time I had with the musicians in Norway left very little space to work from the original recordings of the tracks. We rarely referred to them during rehearsals and I was the only one who had actively engaged with listening to the material in-depth during the transcription and arrangement process. This led to the musicians basing their interpretations on either a distant memory or a ‘blind’ interpretation of the transcription. I would have the tune established and an arrangement, in various forms, to take to the group but the music that was created from my arrangements would, quiet often, be taken in a different direction. In hindsight, I should have expected this reaction to occur; I was working with three independent improvising musicians who

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<sup>17</sup> It is possible that I approached these initial rehearsals with the stereotyped view of the Norwegian musicians being more ‘in tune’ with the open, ‘ECM-like’ sound world, which is in keeping with idea of the ‘Nordic tone’ or ‘mountain jazz’ (see Nicholson, 2005). I possibly envisaged being expected to operate, sonically, in this area on the drum kit.



all had definite views on their own sound and how it would fit within an ensemble. For me to get the best from the musicians, I needed to make this open and collaborative approach to repertoire a feature and I had to adapt, not in how I played, but what I presented to the musicians in the form of material.

What gradually occurred over the rehearsal period was more of a collaborative process. I would choose a tune from the a-ha back catalogue; transcribe it and develop a basic arrangement, which mainly consisted of altered stylistic and genre centred ideas, but consciously very little specific detail. It then was a matter of attempting to find a middle ground between my vision and the unique sound and approach of the other instrumentalists. In contrast to the way that I normally work on new material in this setting, the group never played 'straight' versions of the original piece to establish a departure point. The emphasis was on developing the repertoire right from the outset.

## **Overview of a selection of tracks from CD 2: The a-ha Project**

### **Hunting High and Low (CD 2 track 8)**

The initial arrangement of this piece centred on presenting the main melody in a mid-tempo, plodding, 'bluesy' feel. The idea being, to take the minor/modal sound of the original track and overly emphasis the implied haunting quality. This was one of the few tunes that the band, as a whole, was familiar with. This fact, coupled with the initial simplistic arrangement, led to somewhat of an organic group development of this piece.

Throughout my time creating music with the group, we worked mainly from transcribed melodies and verbal stylistic descriptions and the opening verse and chorus (**starting at 50sec**) of this reinterpretation quickly came together as a stylistically clear statement of a 'shuffling blues' sound. With such a distinct version of the melody, there were numerous options for further arrangement of this piece. Solos (**from 2min 30sec**) were initially tried both in the original feel and in a contrasting 'free' and abstract manner. Stylistically straight solos were not the strong point of the frontline musicians, so the group gradually arrived at a compromise of the

two approaches. This achieved the effect of the original groove and pulse gradually breaking down into free noise. This was an approach to improvising that I had been working on in my own playing for a number of years, the idea being to start with a fixed structure (a drum groove) and gradually remove sections until the original structure has completely changed into ‘free’ abstract phrasing.

In attempting to avoid the clichéd ‘head-solo-head’ format, I did not want to return to a restatement of the opening melody in the same style. With this in mind, the group tried the tune in several different contrasting feels until we accidentally came across the idea of lifting the tempo and feel, transforming where the return to the melody should be into a Klezmer style - new section. This transition is signalled by the introduction of the trombone (**3min 54sec**), which can be heard to physically drag the music back before the introduction of the bass line (**4min 11sec**), which sets the feel and tempo for the ending Klezmer style section.

#### **You Are The One** (CD 2 track 4)

This was the final track that the group created and recorded. By this time, the a-ha back catalogue had almost been exhausted of recordings that I could recollect, and it was proving to be difficult to attempt new arrangements from the B-sides and album fillers that were left. My thoughts about a possible reinterpretation of this piece were focused on attempting to capture and possibly intensify the hackneyed, melody and ‘cheesy’ synthesizer sounds and lyrics, which, for me, characterize the original recording. Initial attempts included a relatively straightforward rendition in a rock-ballad style and a cut-and-paste approach, which jumped stylistically between a bossa-nova feel and a post-punk attack every four bars of the verse. It was whilst the group worked on transferring the original, legato vocal line into a more aggressive, percussive and rhythmically strict delivery to fit the style change, that we discovered the idea of presenting the melody totally in unison.

This approach did start out being ‘in-time’, with the original melody of the tune played in its original rhythmic form.<sup>18</sup> This gradually changed over the rehearsal process as we sought a ‘dirtier’ and disjointed sound. The musicians were instructed to relax the rhythmic shape of the phrases and consciously ‘play slightly out’ to create the effect of attempting to perform in unison but not being able to quite manage it. The effect of this approach led to a different version of varying quality with each rehearsal. Sometimes it worked well and other times it felt like the message of the song (melody) was not cutting through. For the recorded version, rather than leaving how the melody was structured to chance, we experimented with a unison interpretation of the melody line that was delivered note-by-note, on cue (visually), from the bass player - John Lilja. The interesting outcome of this approach was that although the intent of the ‘cued’ melody was a tight-unison delivery of the tune, each player anticipated the cues at different points, leading to false entries, missed cues, and the overall effect of a naïve, disjointed and under-rehearsed sound. The perceived comedic effect of musicians struggling to play together became a key aspect of the live performances of this piece. Highlighting this effect, Lilja developed the role of frustrated conductor, failing to coordinate a wayward ensemble.

### **The Sun Always Shines on TV (CD 2 track 2)**

The final recorded version of ‘The Sun Always Shines on TV’ is, on the whole how, I envisaged it to sound when I initially transcribed and arranged it. The basic premise of the track was to deliver the tune in two contrasting feels and tempos (slow statement of the melody and rhythm section playing quick swing). The free-form slow sections form an intro (**start - up to 1min**) and the outro of the piece (**from 3min 41sec to the end**), which is based on a rubato, atmospheric interpretation of the verse.

The main difficulty in performing this track is the statement of the head by the saxophone in the up-tempo section (**from 1min 25sec**). The effect I wanted to create was one of two unrelated tempos, that when placed together, form an ‘edgy’ sounding

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<sup>18</sup> I wanted the group to experiment with the unison-melody approach, often utilized by Ornette Coleman in various quartet recordings. For example, listen to the tracks: ‘Civilization Day’ and ‘The Jungle is a Skyscraper’ from the album: *The Complete Science Fiction Sessions*, Ornette Coleman Quartet (1972).

but cohesive whole. The bass guitar and drums are playing in a very fast traditional swing feel (walking bass line – jazz ride pattern), with the trombone constantly soloing quietly underneath, supporting the rhythm section. The alto-sax starts out this section by restating the melody in a much slower, unrelated time, gradually moving to match the main tempo for the solos (**1min 45sec**). In getting the two unrelated time feels to work together, the group had to practise the counter intuitive effect of operating as two separate units at the same time. We initially tried to think of the mechanical relationship between the two feels, working out mathematically how the two pulses work in conjunction and then internalizing this relationship. Whilst theoretically this worked, it was not a reliable means of achieving the effect I wanted. Therefore, a more organic approach was adopted where the saxophone stated the melody in an unrelated tempo, consciously operating in isolation from the pulse and feel that the other musicians were purveying.

### **The Living Daylights** (CD 2 track 1)

Originally used as the theme tune to the 1987 James Bond film of the same name, this tune has the feel of being a ‘show-stopper’ and we always used this piece as an opening tune in our live performances. My initial thoughts on rearranging this into a contemporary jazz format were focused on finding a way of maintaining the directness of the piece whilst presenting it in a new light. The central feel of this reinterpretation is a driving rock groove with various stylistic ‘cut and paste’ sections, positioned to highlight and contrast specific aspects of the tune. The piece developed into a vehicle for the drums to experiment with improvising in various styles and genres.

The tune opens with a strong and direct introduction, almost a straight cover of the original orchestral opening, the direction to the group was to attempt to create a big-band sound. The tune stays in the straight feel but drops down in volume for the first verse (**at 22sec**). The first stylistic change appears in the initial statement of the bridge section leading to the chorus (**1min 7sec**). The drums cue into the bridge, which is played by trombone, in a clichéd swing feel and in an unrelated tempo. The short burst of conventional jazz is soon disrupted by the introduction of the saxophone at the start of the chorus (**1min 32sec**). The sax, trombone and bass then state the

melody of the chorus over the top of textural, free form noise created by the drums (**from 1min 7 sec, to 1min 50sec**). The solo section (**from 1min 50sec**) is centred on the whole band developing a slow build up of tension. This is created through the use of freely improvised dialogue, which gradually became more and more frantic over the rhythmically static bass and drum groove. The tune returns to the original feel for a restatement of the verse, which is accompanied by a drop in volume and intensity. This feeling of familiarity is short-lived and instead of a return to the swing-style bridge section, used in the opening, the bass and drums improvise various stylistic variations underneath the melody, stated by the trombone (**at 5min 24sec**). This gives the effect of the bass and drums sabotaging the statement of the straight melody. The whole group joins together for a final statement of the chorus to end.

### **Remaining tracks**

The reinterpretations of ‘Manhattan Skyline’ (CD 2 track 7) and ‘Crying In The Rain’ (CD 1 track 3) were created with similar principles in mind. Original versions of both tunes are based around a melancholic feel and, lyrically, the sentiments expressed centre on conveying a sense of sadness and loss. The use of slower tempos, space and specific sound effects (extended techniques on drums, reverb and delay on bass in ‘Crying In The Rain’ and repetitive straight rhythms in ‘Manhattan Skyline’) were all employed to highlight and enhance the emotional intent of the original recordings.

Abrupt changes in genre and feel in the reinterpretation of ‘Cry Wolf’ (CD 2 track 9) are used to highlight the movement between sections of the original recording. The contrast between abstract, atmospheric noise (verse) and hard driving rock (chorus) forms the basis of the arrangement. The use of spoken word in place of the melody of the verse was incorporated as a way of highlighting and intensifying the dramatic, narrative-like effect of the original lyrics.

The original, upbeat nature of ‘Touchy’ (CD 2 track 10), ‘Take On Me’ (CD 2 track 6) and ‘I’ve Been Losing You’ (CD 2 track 5), was the key characteristic that I wanted to capture in these reinterpretations. The make-up of the ensemble (two front line players, no chordal instrument) led to a group sound that, at times, was reminiscent of both a traditional New Orleans jazz ensemble and the classic, late

1950s free jazz sound and all three of these tracks use these characteristics as key effects. The stated Latin feel of 'Touchy' is the dominating feature of the track, with the only change in feel being a chorus that develops into a trombone solo which utilizes comedic effects on the instrument (a nod to a 'trad-jazz' sound and in-keeping with the 'party band' like feel of the tune). A similar effect is used in 'I've Been Loosing You'. The lack of improvisation or deviation from the original structure in this arrangement led to the tune developing into a trombone feature. Being the most widely known a-ha track, 'Take On Me' could potentially be reinterpreted in a number of abstract ways whilst still being recognisable to the listener/audience. The statement of the melody of the piece is very similar to the original with a few rhythmic alterations added. The departure into a 'freer', improvised sound world appears abruptly after the statement of the head of the tune. Whilst the arrangement hints at a return to a statement of the main melody, it never materializes, instead, a free interpretation of the chorus concludes the piece.

## **Evaluation of the performance projects**

### **My personal approach to the drum kit in the performance projects**

The aim with both performance projects was to highlight approaches to the drum kit that I had been developing over the last 15 years of working in contemporary jazz. This approach centres on mixing traditional beat patterns ('grooves' and drumming 'feels') with 'free' and abstract improvisation. My interest in this area of drumming was initially sparked through the discovery of the drumming of Vinnie Colaiuta on Frank Zappa's album *'Joes Garage'* (1979), specifically on the track 'A Little Green Rosetta'. In this track Colaiuta juxtaposes straight rock beats with long, arhythmic fills (mostly 2 bar) which are out of time with the feel of the preceding, and following rock beat pattern. This has the effect of the fixed time 'feel' disappearing for a number of bars, only to reappear and continue the beat from where it had left off. This track sparked a long held interest in studying ways of utilizing advanced rhythmic techniques on the drum kit.

Rhythmic approaches examined in working on this area of drumming included subdivisions, implied-time effects, polymetric approaches, odd note groupings and

metric modulation.<sup>19</sup> Along with the systematic approach to rhythmic effects listed above, I spent a large amount of time working on more organic approaches to playing ‘rhythmically out’. These approaches included creating textural effects; for example, a fast-dense, rhythmically free texture or light-bright, open texture on cymbals, with a lot of time spent consciously trying to play out of time. Using a click track, I would work on gradually speeding up and slowing down grooves, beats, sticking patterns and rhythmic phrases against the static pulse before returning to playing in time with the click.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst the aural effect of this approach is similar to the mathematical rhythmic manipulations of implied time and metric modulation, this organic approach is more in keeping with, and useful when performing in a freely improvised based setting. Working on these exercises enabled me to develop the ability to play freely (out of time) whilst still retaining a sense of pulse and rhythm. The main element in executing these rhythmic effects in an ensemble setting is having the confidence in your fellow group members to cope with the stated time and feel being altered or even disappearing. The effects are a challenge to play over as they contradict traditional drummers’ roles of keeping good time and setting the feel of the track that instrumentalists are familiar with.

The emphasis on the manipulation of jazz and popular based ‘grooves’ and ‘feels’ was at the centre of the way I approached the drum kit in both performance projects. Whilst I did touch on other, contemporary jazz-based approaches to the instrument, I consciously avoided experimenting with areas of contemporary jazz drumming that I was not totally comfortable with. It was essential that my personal approach to the instrument is at the centre of the performances as I wanted to examine the factors that had influenced the creation of this style and approach. For this reason, the utilization of extended techniques on the instrument was minimal and there was no use of music technology (e.g. drum triggers, sample pads, or drum loops) in the recording and live

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<sup>19</sup> The texts that I found useful for working on these advanced rhythmic concepts were: *Rhythmic Illusions* (1996) and *Rhythmic Perspectives* (1999) by Gavin Harrison and *Advanced Rhythmic Studies* (1975) by Jørgen Jersild.

<sup>20</sup> A good example of the use of this effect can be heard in the ending of How Soon Is Now (CD 1 track 9), from 7min till the end of the track.

performance of the music. Whilst I understand that this is an evolving area for today's contemporary jazz drummer, my focus was on the manipulation and assimilation of established approaches to contemporary pop/rock and jazz drumming.

The different drum kits used in both the rehearsal process and the recording of the two performance projects did have an effect on how I approached the music. For most drummers, recording or performing in another country involves playing on a 'house' kit or rented instrument. This presents the possibility of having to perform on an 'awkward' instrument. For the Norway-based a-ha Project I was very grateful to be loaned a 1960s round badge Gretsch drum kit for all the rehearsals, live performances and recordings. This was a well-maintained, classic jazz kit, highly sought after by many conventional and 'free' contemporary jazz drummers. However, right from the start of rehearsing on this kit I knew I was not going to be able to get along with the instrument. The initial problems centred on getting the set up correct, the lack of tom-mount meant that the rack tom had to be held in a snare stand, leading to the tom being very difficult to angle over the bass drum in the position I am used to. Whilst this is a typical problem that most drummers will encounter when not playing on their own instrument, I knew that this would restrict my flow on the drum kit. The tone of the kit was very different to my usual, drum kit sound; the dimensions of the drums (20x14 bass drum, 12x8 and 14x14 toms) produced a drier, more 'earthy' tone than I desired. When faced with this situation, I have learnt to switch off from the negative aspects, from the things that I cannot control (the physical limitations the instrument imposes on me) and focus on exploring the new sounds at my disposal.

For the UK-based The Smiths project, I used my own Yamaha Maple Custom drum kit throughout all rehearsals, recordings and live performances. I have owned this kit for over 15 years and it was purchased when I was playing more rock and jazz-fusion than improvised music. The power tom sizes (10x9 - 12x10 rack toms and 14x12 floor tom) 22inch bass drum and modern drum kit technology help give the kit a more 'punchy' direct sound that is more direct than the Gretsch kit I used in the a-ha project. Although the configuration and the sound of this kit is not in keeping with standard jazz kits, I feel that it is a more appropriate instrument for working across stylistic boundaries and genres.



## **Repertoire**

The initial concerns with finding music that was familiar and relevant to the musicians involved in the projects turned out not to be as important as I envisaged. Most tracks that we worked on developed into a new piece, only connected to the original by one or two key aspects that were presented in a vastly altered state. The music and the identity of The Smiths and a-ha, that both projects set out to capture in some way, soon developed into a vehicle for the musicians to improvise, both in the arranging and real time performance of the repertoire.

The material that these reinterpretations were based upon acted as a stimulus to create new music. Whilst in the initial stages, this was a concern, latterly, I grew to relax and trust in the process of allowing a balance between my own arrangements and allowing the musicians to find a way of reinterpreting the repertoire presented to them. The repertoire was important in both instigating improvisation and giving the musicians an established identity to play with. The pieces became a device that enabled the players to avoid the debilitating effect that a 'blank-canvas' can often have.

Whilst the reinterpretations of the tracks can be perceived to have developed into independent structures, the repertoire and band-identity of a-ha and The Smiths was key in creating a distinct identity for the performances, making the projects easier to pitch and promote to potential audiences. On several occasions, at concert performances in both Norway and the UK, I have talked to audience members who have attended because they are fans of The Smiths or a-ha. The use of the music of a single band as repertoire for reinterpretation and improvisation allowed the music to be promoted in a different way to other contemporary jazz projects that I had previously been involved in. Whilst the music was equally as challenging as other contemporary jazz performances, the fact that sections of the audience already had a connection with the repertoire, led to a different relationship between performer and audience. The reinterpretations that we presented signify on established readings of this music.

## **Approaches to arranging and performing the material**

Both the process of how I initially presented the repertoire to the ensembles and how the groups created a performance from it gradually altered over the two years of working on the projects. Whilst I transcribed and arranged almost all the repertoire that I presented to the two groups, the amount of arranging prior to rehearsals altered vastly as I got to know the way the individual musicians worked. For example, the first piece that The Smiths project worked on as a group ('Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now', CD 1 track 5) was arranged prior to the rehearsals of this piece starting. The arrangement of the head was scored out and I had an outline of the styles of improvisation I wanted to be utilized and their placement within the structure of the tune (see **appendix D, p. 123**).

In contrast, the final piece that the group worked on ('Frankly Mr. Shankly', CD 1 track 1) in the week prior to the final recording was created entirely by the musicians working together from recordings in the rehearsal room. The basic outline that I presented to the group centred on finding a way of mixing the rhythmic feel and texture of the track 'Dirty Boys' by David Bowie (2013) with the melody and harmony of 'Frankly Mr. Shankly'. We listened to the two recordings, discussed approaches, worked out how to play sections and selected what we, as a group, thought worked best. The musicians in the group had developed an understanding of each individual members approach to their instrument as well as the way the group worked best.

Because of the limited amount of time I had in Norway, the rehearsal and recording process had to be more focused on the end result. In general, the repertoire that I wanted to work on with the musicians was always fully transcribed and presented to the musicians with an outline of a possible interpretation. Whilst the pieces consistently developed into something completely different to the arrangement, the focus on learning the pieces and getting a functioning reinterpretation took precedent over learning new styles from recordings and developing a more integrated group sound. The musicians excelled in free improvisation and, over time, I learned to find ways of making this the key focus in the pieces that I presented to the group.

The instrumentation of the group and the style and sound world that the Norwegian musicians predominantly operated in was a new experience for myself and a lot of my personal focus was on getting to grips with my own role in this area of music making. The final performances on the recording deliver an interesting mix of performance styles. There is some tension and unease in some of the stylistically 'straight' sections, which are possibly symptomatic of the musicians' playing styles. Conversely, I also feel that the group manages to express a greater range of dynamics, textures, colours and emotions in the improvised sections.

Throughout the process of creating and rehearsing the music with the two groups of musicians, recordings of improvisations and pieces in development were utilized as a way of finding out what did and did not work. Using a portable digital recorder (Zoom H4n), I was able to document numerous approaches to the material, which I would listen back to, deciding what was worth pursuing further. The recording of the purely improvised sessions with the musicians proved to be the most productive in gaining ideas for reinterpreting the tracks. Whilst this process can be rather time consuming, approaches to the arrangements quite often surfaced from listening back to effects that randomly occurred in the 'free' group improvisations. The edited recordings of the rehearsals were used as compositional sketches that I could take to the group to listen to and ask them to recreate.

The studio recordings that form the basis of this research can also be seen as documentation of the music at that time and are not to be considered the final product. Just like with the recordings of the rehearsals, the music presented has already been altered and adapted following their recording. Recent performances with The Smiths Project have been with a keyboard/piano player replacing the guitarist (see the performance on DVD 1). This has led to the music adjusting to suit the change in the nature of both instrument and performer. It is my intention to continue this project beyond the life of this research and I envisage that the repertoire and performances will be constantly changing and evolving.

## **The utilization of various drumming styles and techniques within the performance projects**

Whilst the application of various drumming styles in the music created was never explicitly discussed in the rehearsal process, this area of my research constantly informed the construction and performance of the music. The way that the repertoire was arranged mostly grew from a specific feel or drum groove. Apart from the obvious cut-and-paste sections in the recordings (listen to ‘The Queen is Dead’, CD 1 track 2 and ‘The Living Daylights’, CD 2 track 1), I attempted to use the various stylistic approaches in an organic manner, blending specific conventional techniques and feels with more open, ‘freer’ textual playing. An example of this approach can be heard in the opening section of ‘Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now’ (**CD 1, track 5 start to 2min 45sec**), in the transition from free, abstract improvisation to the Latin-samba feel. This effect was created by initially getting the band comfortable with playing the samba section. We then attempted to improvise freely whilst making random, sporadic references to the samba groove. These references would gradually join up until the samba feel became the dominant feature.

The use of this effect will be well known to listeners of contemporary jazz. The process involves a great deal of awareness of two contrasting styles of jazz that would rarely come into contact with each other. The Latin samba feel is a key style in the conventional jazz drummer’s repertoire, a style which undergraduate jazz drummers would be expected to be comfortable playing and improvising within. Conversely, as was discussed in Chapter 1, approaches to free, abstract improvisation are rarely discussed or thought of as a style in the same way. Although it is possible to approach them in a methodical way, from a technical perspective, it remains a grey area for many students with an interest in this style of playing.

The drums in this setting have the most power in signifying the groove or stylistic feel of the music; thus, the drummer has the option of implying a style change at will.<sup>21</sup> Whether the style change becomes stated and developed upon, or is

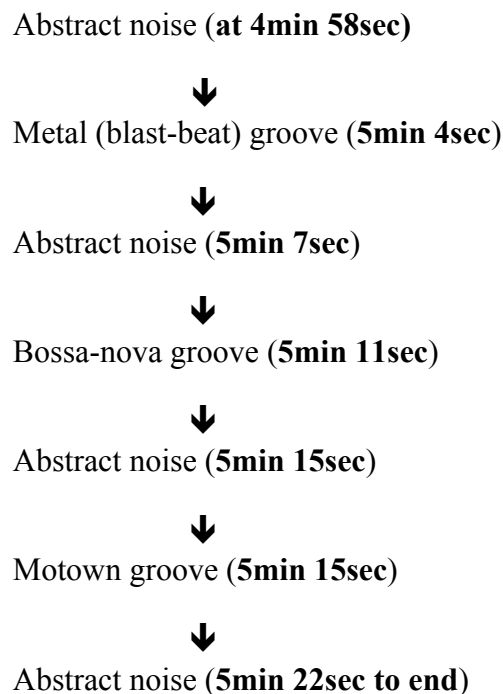
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<sup>21</sup> For more on the concept of groove and its function as both a characteristic of a specific genre and its ability to cross genres and still maintain an identity, see: Fabian Holt (2007) pp. 137-140.

introduced as a counter feel or groove is dependent on the context. For example the pre-planned use of a stylistic change from free form noise (guitar and sax) to dubstep feel (introduced by drums and bass together) in ‘The Queen is Dead’ (**CD 1, Track 2 from 2min 6sec**) has the effect of drawing the saxophone and guitar over into the new stylistic feel. This new groove develops and is adopted as the main style for the rest of the track.

In contrast, the ending of ‘Panic’ (**CD 1, Track 7, from 4min 58sec to the end**) uses drumming grooves and styles as a counter-feel or contrast to what the rest of the group are playing. In this example, the drums improvise using various, random stylistic approaches, underneath the repeated statement of the chorus of the tune. Whilst the effect that I wanted the drums to achieve in this section was predetermined, I did not know what styles, feels and drumming techniques I would employ in this improvised segment and it will vary each time the piece is performed. This section, lasting 50-seconds, is constructed from these stylistic approaches:

#### **Panic – final chorus (from 4min 58sec)**



In this example, styles and feels are employed in short bursts and used in a similar way to how practiced patterns and phrases are utilized in more conventional playing.

Their length is too brief for any notion of a style to be established, however, the effect is felt more as one continuous phrase.

It is this notion of improvising with and within styles that underpins the areas that I have explored in my performance projects. Rather than thinking about the contemporary jazz drummer being restricted to specific approaches to the music, the projects have highlighted how it is possible to employ techniques and approaches used in other styles of music-making to expand the options of the contemporary jazz drummer.

### **Chapter 3. Defining Contemporary Jazz**

Building on the discussion of the performance projects in chapter two, this chapter assesses how the role of the contemporary jazz drummer has developed to incorporate multiple influences from various music genres. I examine how this affects the perceived identity of the contemporary jazz drummer, proposing an alternative view to the dominating and restricted representations of genre and nation that musicians have to contend with when working within contemporary jazz today. I draw directly on the issues I faced in creating, rehearsing, and recording the performance projects and reference specific sections of my own recordings and those of others to highlight key points in my argument.

#### **The role of the contemporary jazz drummer**

The common focus by those who attempt to define jazz by what it does and does not contain appears to be centred squarely on the music of the past, on what jazz used to be, not what is happening in the here and now.<sup>1</sup> Whilst it is accepted that it is not possible to be informed of all current innovations and developments happening in contemporary jazz, performers and academics would benefit from an awareness of the inherent problems of a single narrow narrative when attempting to define contemporary jazz. In his discussion on this problematic area, David Ake (2010) wrestles with the music's ambiguous nature, he states:

Like all music (and every other human activity), jazz always relates to cultural senses of “you” or “them” as much as it helps to express and celebrate notions of “me” or “us”. Indeed, one reason that jazz continues to fascinate and to make for such a rich area of study is that it so often serves as a crowded, even contentious, forum for what are widely called issues of identity (2010, p. 3).

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<sup>1</sup> In his writing on genre in popular music Fabian Holt (2007) argues that ‘definitions and categories serve practical purposes and tell us something about how people understand music. But we should be suspicious because they create boundaries, because they have a static nature and because they have political ramifications and draw attention away from more important matters’ (p. 9). For a good example of a text that looks to define jazz using strict definitions see: Marslalis (1998).

Relating Ake's argument to my own experiences of practically dealing with my identity as a contemporary musician, jazz appeared to be an ideal vehicle for my own expression and celebration of 'me' whilst at the same time belonging to a wider community of 'us'. I understood and felt the power of the tradition, but it was a tradition centred on constant innovation and resistance against all attempts of unification into a single definition that attracted me. Eric Nisenson (1997) describes how jazz is in a constant state of flux and it has thrived on this ever-evolving, changing character:

The challenge of jazz has never been to play it adequately. The real challenge has been creating a mode of expression that reflects the lives that both the musicians and their audience are living in the here and now (1997, p. 220).

Whilst the approach described by Nisenson underpins the ethos that governs the choices I make as a contemporary jazz musician, I also understand that in order to discuss the role of (in the case of this study) the contemporary jazz drummer, one needs to present an argument that is framed by a practical and tangible approach that deals with how the different factors are confronted and dealt with by today's jazz performers. An approach to contemporary jazz or improvised music that is based on 'you have the freedom to do what you want' is an oversimplification of the process of working as a drummer in this area. Conversely, a clearly defined role or a 'you have to do this' approach is equally inappropriate. Whilst I am aware that I may, to a certain extent, be 'sitting on the fence', I do feel that the term jazz has a definition and a role to play within contemporary music. I do have views on what counts for jazz in today's musical context, but they are not clearly defined by a set list of stylistic descriptions or musical devices. I am also conscious that others have alternative views on what jazz represents to them that are equally as valid.

As was discussed in chapter one, the focus on the abstract and arrhythmic elements of approaches used by the contemporary improvising jazz drummer is understandable. The effect of this change in role was, and still is to the uninitiated, revolutionary. Not only does this require the drummer to deal with a whole host of new technical and coordination issues, it also contradicts the basis of the drummer's role in all other areas of music making. The idea of the drummer being the timekeeper in the band appears



to be a fixed identity. This role implies a sense of responsibility; of sacrificing one's own identity and expression in favour of the greater good of the ensemble as a whole. Ingrid Monson argues, 'More than bassists and pianists, drummers tend to stress their coordinating and psychological function in the ensemble' (1996, p. 63). Some of the most rhythmically adventurous players, associated with pioneering 'freer' aspects of the drummer's role, appear to centre their approach on this very basic principle. Elvin Jones for example expressed that 'the role of the drummer is primarily to keep time' (Jones cited in Wilmer, 1977, p.157). Even players associated with more experimental and abstract free jazz still perceive their role to be framed by these basic principles.<sup>2</sup> Free jazz drumming pioneer Marc Edwards states:

There really is no free music. It is not possible in this dimension. Music is based on melody, harmony and rhythm. A musician can never get away from those elements completely (Edwards, 2006).

With the drummer's identity being so strongly related to the role of band timekeeper, it is understandable how the metrically open and abstract approach of free-jazz drummers such as Tony Oxley, Paul Lytton and Milford Graves has developed to be the defining characteristic when discussing contemporary free-jazz drumming. This approach is such a departure from the traditional drummer's role, it has developed to become the focal point of the style. However, if we examine the techniques of and approaches to contemporary improvised jazz used by current jazz drummers, it soon becomes apparent that this approach is just one amongst many of a whole arsenal of styles, genres, and technical approaches to the instrument utilized by today's players. The view of the contemporary 'free' jazz drummer operating in this narrow abstract and arrhythmic framework has become somewhat of an outdated stereotype which has, in effect, steered the focus away from the more open and

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note how, in the early pioneering free jazz recordings of Ornette Coleman (*Shape of Jazz to Come*, 1959) and The Cecil Taylor Quartet (*Jazz Advance*, 1956), the drummers (Billy Higgins and Denis Charles) appear to be clinging on to the timekeepers role, underpinning the atonal and arrhythmic playing of the frontline musicians with standard grooves and swing feels; you can almost hear them as functioning separately from the frontline players. Whilst the music sounds 'edgy' and contemporary the rhythm section is firmly rooted in the bebop and hard-bop tradition.

stylistically 'freer' areas of improvising with styles and genre mixing that is happening in contemporary drumming today.

### **Popular music and contemporary jazz: The blurring of boundaries**

With contemporary improvised jazz being predominantly associated with radical, alternative culture, and perceived as a music of protest against the status quo, it is understandable that the spotlight should fall on the more radical aspects of its nature, whilst the techniques and methods appropriated from other, more popular genres are overlooked.<sup>3</sup> Whilst academics writing about contemporary jazz have, for a long time, striven to move away from the traditional genre-centred jazz narrative, the methods adopted in the teaching of practical approaches to contemporary jazz performance techniques still focus on defining the role in this genre centred way.<sup>4</sup>

In his examination of the Chicago underground-improvised music scene, Fabian Holt (2007) describes how genre mixing is the key aspect in the ideology of the musicians working in this area. Focusing on a number of the scene's leading figures, Holt argues that these musicians have embraced a multifaceted approach to genre and have subsequently avoided defining their music, and, to a certain extent, avoided the restrictive consequence of being labelled a jazz musician (2007, pp. 133-135). Holt continues, claiming the Chicago underground-improvised music scene has become 'a metaphor for a jazz culture influenced by certain attitudes, ideologies and styles of expression that run through a broader field of popular music' (p. 134). The most pertinent point to arise from Holt's research into genre mixing in this scene is how narrow and restrictive the term jazz has become for the musicians operating

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the historical relationship between improvised music and protest see: Prevost, 2004, pp. 353-366, and McKay, 2005, pp. 23-24).

<sup>4</sup> Ajay Heble (2004) describes how contemporary improvised music functions in many ways and in many different settings. Discussing various approaches to improvisation, he writes: 'we are well aware that many of these other practices 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' (Heble & Fischlin (eds), 2004, p. 2).

within it. The musicians Holt focuses on in his case studies are working professionally across numerous genres and musical settings. They see each situation as being equally musically and artistically valid and all the influences are incorporated when performing in a contemporary improvised-based jazz setting. Holt sees the idea of attempting to describe the music created in this scene, in a genre-centred way, as futile; he writes:

If we consider the complexity that we face when studying in detail an urban music culture such as this, it does not make sense to think of generic categories as self-contained entities in a single-layered space (Holt, 2007, p. 137).

Holt's findings in this examination of the Chicago underground contemporary music scene reflects the situations I have encountered in the various scenes that I, as a professional drummer, have been involved with over the last fifteen years. It is this 'post style's' creative environment that I have set out to highlight in the two performance projects at the heart of this research. Transferring Holt's idea of genre mixing over to the central aims of this thesis (gaining a better understanding of the role of the contemporary jazz drummer), a whole host of stylistic and technical approaches to the drum kit from various styles and genres come into play that are currently not identified, or practically dealt with in the labelling and teaching of the role of the contemporary jazz drummer. Highlighting practical examples of genre mixing in action in contemporary jazz is not difficult. In many forms of current, contemporary, improvised jazz music, you will find a whole range of techniques and approaches from various genres being employed to create new music. There are numerous examples of drummers utilizing techniques from other genres within a contemporary, semi-improvised jazz setting. For example, listen to Jim Blacks' use of percussion and extended techniques mixed with pop and rock back-beats to create a world music meets free jazz sound in Dave Douglas (1998), *Songs for Wandering Souls*. Zach Danziger uses electronics and contemporary dance music beats within a jazz setting to create an interesting reinterpretation of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* in Uri Cane's Ensemble (2000), *The Goldberg Variations*. New York drummer Mark Guiliana's mixes drum 'n' bass beats, free improvisation and bebop techniques to produce an interesting hybrid sound in Brad Mehldau and Mark Guiliana (2014), *Mehliana: Taming The Dragon*.

The music of American composer and saxophonist John Zorn is a good example of genre mixing in action. Zorn is a pioneer of this open approach to jazz performance and composition; just a brief examination of Zorn's back catalogue demonstrates the eclectic nature of his approach to contemporary music. His recordings span an impressive range of genres, including 'easy-listening' jazz-pop, found on albums such as *Alhambra Love Songs* (2009) and *The Gift: Music Romance Volume III* (2001), extreme death metal and hardcore dub found on the Painkiller albums *Buried Secrets* (1992) and *Guts of a Virgin* (1991), and the contemporary, avant-garde, chamber music of *Music and its Double* (2012).

It is Zorn's work as leader of the Naked City group that stands out as a turning point in the blurring of the boundaries of genre in contemporary jazz (albums: *Torture Garden* (1989), *Naked City* (1990), *Grand Guignol* (1992) and *Black Box* (1997)). As a 23-year-old undergraduate jazz student, the discovery (in the jazz section of a local HMV store) of the self-titled *Naked City* album revolutionized my thinking about what contemporary jazz was and how I could fit into that world.<sup>5</sup> The album is a mish-mash of styles, genres, noise, textures and emotions. It juxtaposes 'straight', through-composed covers of the film music of Ennio Morricone ('The Sicilian Clan', (track 2)) and Henry Mancini ('A Shot in the Dark' (track 5)) with intense bursts of noise ('Blood Duster' (track 11) and 'Hammerhead' (track 12)). The personal stand out track of this extremely eclectic recording is the tune 'Snagglepuss'

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<sup>5</sup> Looking back at the effect of Zorn's music on other musicians and writers in that period of time, it is interesting to note that I was not alone in perceiving these recordings as a key event in my personal future involvement in contemporary jazz. In his review of the release of the complete recordings of *Naked City*, Mark Corroto (2005) evaluates the effect of the music at that time, describing how Zorn presented an alternative to the neoclassicists' dominance of contemporary jazz. He argues: 'His [John Zorn's] band defined an era in jazz, inviting a new generation of listeners to call themselves jazz fans and fuelling the reactionary conservative response to his downtown sounds as anti-jazz and blasphemy' (Corroto, 2005).

In his review of the *Naked City* project in the *New York Times*, reviewer, Peter Watrous (1989) wrote that the *Naked City* project 'mirrors a typically modern sensibility, in which the culture of our grandparents – whether it's defined by race, religion or nationality – is abandoned, or at least tempered, in favour of the possibilities of endless information. Eclecticism isn't simply a position for some composers: it's the only position. It's the culture that makes sense to them, that they can depend on - a culture of musical literacy' (Watrous, cited in Lewis, 2008, p. 508).

(track 7). Lasting just under two and a half minutes, ‘Snagglepuss’ takes the listener (and the performer) on a roller-coaster ride through an array of musical styles, feels, and effects. Employing a cut-and-paste approach to composition, Zorn manages to tie together numerous approaches from the worlds of contemporary classical, free-improvised jazz, conventional jazz, and popular music into one short composition, signalling a ‘post-styles’ way forward for contemporary jazz. Listening to the recording, the challenges of performing this piece are clearly evident. The stylistic variations, the sudden switches between improvised and arranged sections and sudden dynamic shifts present difficult technical challenges for even the most accomplished of drummers.

It is when ‘Snagglepuss’ is listened to with the original score (see **appendix B, p. 115**) that it reveals even further the hybrid nature of the piece and the challenges it presents to the performer. These challenges include improvisation skills in many genres and the interpretation of various types of music notation. In this setting, the contemporary jazz musician is required to be able to interpret a broad range of stylistic techniques and approaches to contemporary performance and assimilate them into improvisations. These include directions comprised of text-based references to popular stylistic approaches or ‘feels’: ‘Curtis Mayfield funk - 4 bars’ (**line 1, bar 2**) and ‘C boogie blues band’ (**line 1, bar 7**). Text based descriptions of sound effects: ‘drunk falling upstairs’ (**line 4, final bar**) and ‘sax and guitar freak’ (**line 2, bar 2**). Contemporary classical ‘type’ graphic notation: (**line 2, bar 1** and **line 3, bar 5**) and traditional music notation and chord symbol/sequence directions: (**line 3, bar 4** and **line 4, bar 4** (chord sequence)). Whilst ‘Snagglepuss’ is very specific (through composed), almost all of the performance directions are open to interpretation, and are to be improvised.

‘Snagglepuss’ is an extreme example of genre mixing in action. The disorientating rapid cut-and-paste effect used in this recording is the key aspect of its character. The piece could easily function as a technical study for both contemporary performers and composers working in this area of contemporary music.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The ‘John Zorn effect’ can be heard in many recordings that followed on from the release of the Naked City albums. For example, listen to Django Bates, 1995, *Winter*

Whether ‘Snagglepuss’ is considered to be jazz depends on whether you see jazz as a music containing specific, set musical techniques and approaches, or as an evolving style, constantly subject to change, reinvention and reinterpretation. Zorn certainly appears to advocate an all-inclusive approach to contemporary jazz, one that gives him the freedom to choose from the broad spectrum of musical styles available. He argues:

We should take advantage of all the great musicians in the world without fear of musical barriers, which sometimes are ever stronger than racial or religious ones. That’s the strength of pop music today, its universal (Zorn, 1987, cited in liner notes of CD: *Spillane*).

Whilst I, from the practical perspective of the contemporary jazz drummer, agree with Zorn’s view of eradicating the ‘fear of musical barriers’ I also understand that adopting this philosophical approach is very much a utopian ideal that overlooks how music functions on different levels. However, I have never felt the need to restrict myself by regarding specific musical material off-limits. Other performer-researchers have dealt with this issue differently, arguing that the music cannot be separated from its original function. For example, in his chapter on the politics of hybridity, Adam Fairhall (2008) focuses on the social and political implications of hybrid music on non-western, traditional music. Fairhall views Zorn’s approach as being ‘symptomatic of the culture of the western media freak’ (p. 122). Commenting on the quote above from Zorn, Fairhall goes onto argue that:

Zorn seems to overlook the way music is often intertwined with racial and religious issues, and often to deal with one, is, in some way, to deal with the other. Zorn may simply mean that pop music is ubiquitous, but if it is assumed that the meanings of music are universal, then he is in danger of subscribing to a grand type of essentialism (Fairhall, 2008, p. 115).

I agree with Fairhall’s view of Zorn’s approach to contemporary jazz being symptomatic of growing up in a mass-media environment and I would suggest that

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*Truce (and Home Blaze)* (specifically track 4: ‘New York, New York’). Farmers Market, (1997), *Musikk Fra Hybridene*.

Zorn would too.<sup>7</sup> However, I would argue that the way Zorn, in his assimilations of music from various musical genres and cultures, plays with genre boundaries indicates that he himself understands that these distinctions exist and are, in a sense ‘real’ to some people. However, this factor should not place them ‘off limits’ for the contemporary composer and performer. In this example, Zorn (1987) describes how he thinks in styles and genres:

There’s a lot of jazz in me, but there is also a lot of rock, a lot of classical, a lot of ethnic music, a lot of blues, a lot of movie soundtracks. I’m a mixture of all those things (Zorn, 1987, liner notes of CD: *Spillane*).

Zorn does not question the ‘traditions’ of the genres, promote one genre as being of more value than another, or profess to be an expert in any genre. He merely utilizes them as musical effects. Whether this is disrespectful to traditions or symptomatic of the ‘mass-media’ age where we are constantly exposed to music of every style, is simply a point of view.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst Zorn’s music may be problematic to those who insist on utilizing genre distinctions or to those who perceive musical tradition to be something sacrosanct and ‘set in stone’, his music, and the New York downtown scene that has developed around him, has evolved into its own genre. To some extent, this has become part of the tradition, highlighting the problematic nature of genre classification and jazz’s ‘perceived’ tradition. Contemporary jazz musicians are likely to discuss approaching a piece in a ‘Zorn-like’ way and Zorn himself has become somewhat of an ‘elder-

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<sup>7</sup> Discussing the influences on his eclectic approach to music-making; Zorn states that ‘A lot of the composers of my generation were introduced to many, many different kinds of music as they were growing up because so much music is available on disc [...] This is different from a hundred years ago. Now anything that’s been performed is basically available to be heard, in some form or another, and a composer is usually voracious about hearing things’ (Zorn, cited in Mandel, 1999, p. 171).

<sup>8</sup> Zorn appears to revel in the idea of his music being difficult and challenging, both from a listeners perspective and, as he describes the ‘thinkers’ perspective. He argues: ‘Perhaps it is due to the fact that the music [his music] explicitly and violently resists the classifications that these so-called thinkers have so desperately tried to impose on it: from the ludicrous comprovisation to the ambiguous postmodernism to the meaningless totalism’ (Zorn, 2000, p.v).

statesman' in the fight against the neoclassicists and their 'perceived' jazz agenda (see Edwards, 2006).

To what extent the blurring of genre boundaries creates problems in the promotion and marketability of contemporary jazz music as a valid art form, is a complex question. I would argue that the majority of musicians operating at the forefront of contemporary jazz do not adhere to strict genre boundaries when making music. However, I still feel the way the instrumental techniques and the accompanying stylistic study methods that attempt to deal with contemporary jazz, are still focused on defining the music in this narrow and restrictive way. In his essay, 'Is Jazz Popular Music?' Simon Frith (2007) suggests there is an alternative to the polarized argument between those who perceive jazz as either being defined by a set criteria and those who perceive jazz as being in a constant state of flux, open to influences from all sources (pp. 19-21).<sup>9</sup> He states that:

One could argue that for all music since the emergence of industrial capitalism the key dynamic is not evolutionary, from folk to commerce to art, but dialectical, between an ever-changing mainstream and avant-garde (Frith, 2007, p. 19).

I would argue that this statement by Frith, neatly ties in with Fabian Holt's findings, centred on the genre mixing at the heart of the Chicago underground contemporary jazz scene (Holt, 2007, pp.105-128); John Zorn's genre defying 'cut-and-paste' constructions and all the other numerous musical examples previously discussed that employ popular based styles in a contemporary jazz setting. Frith sees this as being a key part of jazz's identity. He writes:

[J]azz is music whose vitality, invention and influence have depended on keeping its mainstream and avant-garde expression in tension in the same field (2007, p. 19).

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<sup>9</sup> Frith (2007) sums-up this argument well, he writes: 'is jazz best understood canonically, by reference to its history, its great names, its established sonic and stylistic conventions? Or is it best understood as a process, by reference to principles of composition and performance rooted in improvisation and experimentation, with unpredictable and unexpected outcomes? Where once jazz as an institution seemed characterized by its ability to hold these approaches in tension, as it were, as part of the same field of activity, now the different accounts of jazz seem to refer to quite distinct music worlds' (Frith, 2007, p. 17).



As a jazz musician who also enjoys listening and playing popular music, playing with these ‘tensions’ has always come quite naturally to me and I would argue that this is the case for the vast majority of musicians who I collaborate with in the various contemporary jazz scenes. The majority of these musicians developed an interest in jazz after initially being fans of pop music and most had their first music-making experience in a pop-rock ensemble. Popular music styles are perceived to be a valid source material, just as applicable as the traditional ‘legitimized’ approaches to jazz performance. The conflict between, as David Ake (2002) describes, ‘highbrow and low-brow’ (p. 170) does not exist when working within these circles. The musically open approach, adopted by the musicians working in this area of contemporary jazz, is mirrored in the listening habits of the music’s audience. The eclectic nature of the music produced in this area of music making creates an appeal to listeners of other, related genres of music. This is leading to both new performance opportunities and greater interaction with other areas of performance practice.<sup>10</sup>

Jazz’s relationship with popular music styles and techniques can be viewed as problematic on various levels. If there is one issue that unites the neoclassicists and the free, avant-garde improvisers, it is their disdain of any notion of a connection with popular music.<sup>11</sup> David Ake states how an association with commercial music threatens the view of jazz as America’s classical music. Subsequently, the monetary and cultural privileges that come with this position will be threatened if jazz is perceived as popular music (Ake, 2002, pp. 45-46). At the other end of the spectrum, many of those perceived to be on the cutting edge of the free jazz/noise movement can be seen to actively take a stance against even the most tenuous link with the mainstream. The music they make is intended as a statement against commercialisation and all the trappings that go with it.<sup>12</sup> Scott DeVaux (1991)

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<sup>10</sup> The cross-genre appeal of bands like Trio VD, Bilbao Syndrome and The Hub was discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> Washburne (2004) discusses this issue, demonstrating how the disdain for the music of Kenny G and the smooth jazz genre has managed to unite all sides of the jazz tradition argument (Washburne & Maiken (eds), 2004, pp. 123-147).

<sup>12</sup> Writing about the emerging British free jazz scene of the 1960s, George McKay (2005) describes how this movement was initially politically and socially motivated,

describes this stance as fitting within ‘the inflexible dialect of “commercial” versus “artistic”, with all the virtue centred in the latter’ (DeVeaux, 1991, p. 530). Whilst Ake’s and DeVeaux’s arguments are centred on the idea of jazz musicians imitating popular styles for perceived monetary gain, for some musicians, even the idea of utilizing musical techniques and approaches associated with popular music into a more experimental contemporary jazz setting is frowned upon. I have practical experience of playing improvised music with traditional ‘free’ jazz musicians who have explicitly stated that there can be no reference to straight jazz or popular based styles or even a regular pulse or a recognisable melody within the improvisations.

These views can be seen to directly transfer over to the perceived role of the contemporary jazz drummer and the choices they make. I have over ten years of experience as a one-to-one drum kit tutor at one of the UK’s leading conservatoires for jazz and popular music, Leeds College of Music. I teach undergraduate and postgraduate students on both the popular music and jazz courses. In discussions with students, they repeatedly express similar attitudes and value judgements about the contrasting role of the contemporary pop and jazz drummer. The jazz students understandably see their priority to be centred on developing the instrumental techniques and methods associated with the bebop period of jazz drumming.<sup>13</sup> Popular and rock based techniques are often perceived by the jazz students to be something that they used to do and something that is simplistic and inferior to their new role and focus. The pop drummers have a tendency to see jazz as both ‘iconic’ and a style beyond their ability and thus feel inferior to the jazz drummers. Alternatively, they view jazz as a kind of historical, stylistic artefact, which does not relate to them, rather similar to classical music.

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stating: ‘the move towards aesthetic freedom was a critique of class structures and power networks embedded in European music and society’ (2005, p. 208).

<sup>13</sup> For most drummers, approaching standard jazz drumming techniques is a new challenge that needs to be seriously focused on. It is understandable that an undergraduate student, wrestling with this new vocabulary, should concentrate on the traditional, bebop centred techniques. Much of the teaching is focused on comping based exercises found in standard tutor books such as: Jim Chapins’, *Advance Techniques for the Modern Drummer*, 2005, and John Riley, *The Art of Bop Drumming*, 2005.

There are a number of contributing factors that come into play when understanding reasons for the prevalence of this perception of autonomous, stylistic approaches to the drum kit. The traditional centred curriculum on the jazz course, which focuses on the jazz canon and the study of the performance techniques of ‘the greats’, is one factor; the allure of the exotic ‘new’ approach to the instrument that the students are faced with is another. The curriculum on the pop course is, rather surprisingly, more open and proactive than the jazz pathway in challenging students to be more contemporary and original. However, drummers see their role as more focused on accompanying vocalists in a short-song format. They perceive very little room for development or improvisation; the music tends to be through-composed. I do understand that the ‘shaping’ of these value judgements and their subsequent influence on the music that the students create are formed at an early stage in a musician’s life, not just at undergraduate level (see Ake, 2010, pp. 102-120, and Borgo, 2007, p. 68). However, what is cause for concern is how this genre centred identity still dominates the approach to teaching at this level and how the idea of genre mixing is not actively promoted.<sup>14</sup>

### **Contemporary jazz and national identity**

The view of jazz’s progression from a localized folk music to globally acclaimed high-art has developed hand-in-hand with America’s role as the hegemonic power of the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Atkins, 2003, pp. xi-xxvii). In this period, jazz has been employed to portray America as both the ‘land of the free’ and highlighted as an image of America as dominating cultural behemoth. As a musical style, jazz developed alongside the birth and development of mass media and communication. Subsequently the music has become associated with both the negatives and positives of so called ‘globalization’, which is perceived to be powered by America (Nicholson, 2005, pp. 163-194). Highlighting globalization in a positive light, jazz music is often spoken of as an agent of ‘international unity’, with

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<sup>14</sup> This would potentially lead to a re-evaluation of how music genres are thought of and taught throughout all tiers of music education. Whilst I personally think that, in relation to contemporary music, this may be a good thing, it is not an issue that I feel I can examine within the remit of this research.

descriptions such as ‘universal language’ and ‘musical Esperanto’ (McKay, 2005, p. 10), being used to promote contemporary jazz as a vehicle for bridging cultural and national differences. The UNESCO International Jazz Day is a good example of how jazz has been utilized and promoted as a unifying force for good (see UNESCO, 2014). Focusing on this perception, E Taylor Atkins presents an optimistic view of jazz in this globalized setting as:

a postmodern utopia, where cultural globalization renders national identities, prejudice and concomitant authenticities moot and anachronistic (Atkins, 2001, p. 276).

The opposing, negative view of globalization, presents the argument that jazz has become just another tool in America’s cultural dominance, with some writers equating the ubiquitous spread of jazz, and the jazz canon with the dominance of Western (read American) market forces (Nicholson, 2005, pp. 163-194). This is a view promoted along the lines of mass-produced products being forced on individuals via mass media, which has led to the homogenization of different cultures, an effect described by George Ritzer (2013) as: ‘The McDonaldization of Society’.

It is accepted that the two descriptions above create a simplistic, binary argument focused on globalization, and it does not have to be an ‘either-or’ choice. Placed somewhere in-between these two views, globalization can be perceived to have led to a softening of boundaries and the opening up of borders through the interconnected nature of mass media. The international contemporary jazz scene is highlighted as a positive example of this effect and there is currently a large amount of interest in academia focused on the study of how groups and nations have managed to express a sense of their own personal identity through the ethos of jazz music (see, Ake, 2010, pp. 121-139, and Bohlman, 2011, pp. 233-235). The current debates about jazz can be seen to have moved on from the positives and negatives of globalization and the dominance of American culture to focus on how nations have reinterpreted jazz music as a representation of their own sense of national identity (see Atkins, 2003, p. xix).

Several writers have described the effect of this as almost a reinvention of jazz, in which (mainly) Europeans have managed to take over the music’s creative

reigns from America by fusing elements of jazz with localized approaches to performance (see Heffley, 2005, Nicholson, 2005 and Watson, 2004). As was previously discussed in chapter one, we do have to be aware of how these arguments have a tendency to revisit the essentialist debates of the past by replacing one dominating nation with another (see Whyton, 2012, pp. 366-378). Atkins goes on to argue this point, writing:

[I]n other words, globalization simultaneously subverts and solidifies older forms of identification (nationality, gender, race, locality, etc. ). The “local” thereby reasserts itself in relation (or opposition) to the “global”; they are indeed mutually constitutive categories in that each depends on the other for its discursive coherence (Atkins, 2003, p. xx).

Once again, the argument that Atkins presents mirrors the arguments about the influence of other genres on the role of the contemporary jazz drummer. However, what is surprising, for a music that has already been reinterpreted, is that this argument centres on authenticity and the insistence on the musicians in different nations expressing the ‘real’ meaning of jazz or having a collective, innate ability to push jazz music forward in the right direction. Those arguing for this view appear to be, once again, placing the music into cultural and stylistic boundaries in order to justify the music’s artistic value. I would argue that contemporary jazz musicians, operating in this ‘technological’ age, are not governed by these categories. Tony Whyton (2012) sees this as a problem that needs to be dealt with if we are to get a better understanding of how jazz functions today. He states:

The challenge moving forward is to understand the way in which jazz continues to develop amid changing social, cultural, and political conditions without our readings of the music, and the expressions of the musicians themselves, being contained by those conditions (Whyton, 2012, p. 377).

The Norway-based a-ha project, discussed in chapter two, has allowed me to situate myself, as a musician and band leader, in a different national setting. This has given me the opportunity to practically engage with these questions and issues about the variations in national approaches to contemporary jazz. Choosing Norway for the setting of one of my performance projects was purely for practical purposes. I had previously established connections with musicians working on the local scene in the

city of Stavanger and I have undertaken several short tours of the country with a UK based jazz quartet. Norway was also one of the five countries involved in the Rhythm Changes project which my research is part of. The fact that the jazz and national identity debate had recently focused on Norway (see Nicholson, 2005 and Medbøe, 2013) was not initially taken into consideration.

Before starting this research, I was a fan of Scandinavian/ECM jazz; the music had been very influential on my own playing. I associated Norway with a specific sound world and approach to contemporary jazz, just as I associated the downtown, New York jazz scene and the British free jazz scene with a certain, set sound world. As a drummer, I was interested in what I perceived to be a Scandinavian approach to the drum kit, with players such as Jon Christensen, Edward Vesala and Jarle Vespestad demonstrating an open approach to time playing which utilizes lots of space and textures on the drum kit. Whilst these drummers performed in ‘freer’ settings, their approach appeared to still be centred on purveying a sense of time and pulse, contrasting the more abrasive approach of their British counterparts.<sup>15</sup> Reassessing these initial stages of my interest in Norwegian jazz, it is difficult to draw a line between an actual set of drumming techniques that characterize the music as specifically Scandinavian, the folkloric notion of the imagery of both the ECM production techniques and packaging, and my own ‘imagined’ romanticism of the country and its musicians, which fit with Nicholson’s (2005) description of Norwegian jazz as an ‘existentially open, angst-ridden’ music (p. 197).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A good example of what I perceived as a Scandinavian/ECM approach to the drum kit is Jon Christensen’s performance on the piece, ‘Piscean Dance’ by American guitarist Ralph Towner (2008). Christensen approaches this track using a rhythmic framework constructed almost entirely from constant semiquavers; phrasing in various sub divisions to create polyrhythms and various implied metric modulations. The track certainly grooves and, at times, feels like disjointed funk, whilst at the same time being grounded in the free jazz style.

<sup>16</sup> Listening to the playing of American drummers such as Paul Motion and Billy Higgins who were playing with ECM artists at the same time as Christensen et al., it would be difficult (in a blind fold test) to distinguish them from their Scandinavian counterparts. For examples of this listen to: Marilyn Crispell, Gary Peacock, Paul Motion, 1997, *Nothing Ever Was Anyway: The Music of Anette Peacock* and Charles Lloyd, Billy Higgins, 2004, *Which Way is East*).

I accept the idea that the defined Norwegian brand that has become established from this area of jazz has proven to be musically and financially productive (see Frost Fadnes, 2014). However, I felt that the idea of framing, in some way in my research, a specific Norwegian approach to contemporary jazz drumming would ‘buy into’ the simplistic, national and stylistic stereotyping espoused by Nicholson et al (see Whyton, 2012, p. 370), that promotes the idea of artists existing in a national setting, free from the corrupting influence of other(s) music. Adopting this approach would have reinforced a concept of contemporary jazz bound by stylistic and geographical boundaries.<sup>17</sup>

The idea of a sound being definable as belonging to a nation becomes even more problematic when framed in the context of my own experiences of working with Norwegian musicians on the a-ha project. Whilst all three of the musicians involved in creating the music have lived in Stavanger for a number of years, their personal and professional backgrounds reveal a complex web of diverse cultural and national influences that would be impossible to unravel or define in a single geographically based description. Bass player, John Lilja was born in the USA to Norwegian parents, moving back to Stavanger in his early twenties after studying at Berklee College of Music. Trombonist, Dominique Brackava, was born in Belgium and studied at the Amsterdam conservatoire before moving to Norway over five years ago. Petter Frost Fadnes was born in Stavanger, studied jazz in the UK, where he subsequently lived and worked for over ten years, before returning to Stavanger. The backgrounds of these musicians are by no means unique within the Stavanger contemporary jazz scene. The professional playing opportunities for contemporary jazz musicians within the local area attracts many foreign musicians and the funding available for Norwegian musicians wanting to study and perform abroad has produced an

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<sup>17</sup> Discussing the idea of a nation-wide, collective approach to music making in Norway, Haftor Medbøe (2013, citing Dybo) comes to a rather interesting conclusion about the national sound debate. Sitting on the fence to a certain extent, he describes the Nordic tone as ‘a phenomenon created in the image of its originators and their successors, informed only in part by their nationality and habitat, and is arguably defined more in terms of “personal mentalities than significations of a national sphere”’ (Medbøe, 2013, p. 58).

interesting mix of cosmopolitan local and expatriate musicians working within Stavanger.

Whilst the individual musicians backgrounds can be seen to be problematic in defining the way they play in terms of a 'national sound', what is interesting is that, in discussions with the musicians I worked with, it soon became evident that we all share very similar musical influences and identity forming experiences. These influences are centred on American and British rock and pop music, experimental jazz and contemporary classical music as well as Norwegian jazz and the ECM aesthetic. If there was any sense of a 'shared identity' between the musicians that I worked with in Norway, it was their openness to various musical styles and genres. The musicians did not differentiate or make value judgments between 'types' of music and there were never any questions posed about authenticity or betraying either the 'jazz tradition' or their own musical roots by performing the repertoire I presented to them. I never felt that I had to adapt the way that I play the drum kit to fit into a different sound-world to suit the Norwegian players, who had a shared vision of contemporary jazz. In fact I was constantly challenged to introduce various stylistic approaches from other genres when rehearsing the pieces.<sup>18</sup>

Comparing the Norwegian a-ha project to my experiences working on The Smiths project in the UK, it is interesting to note subtle differences in approaches to utilizing genres and styles in a contemporary jazz setting. The musicians I worked with in Norway were involved almost entirely in professionally performing contemporary jazz, whilst the UK based musicians involved in The Smiths Project, had to find paying work in other, more commercial areas of music making. These ranged from performing in local function/dance bands, straight traditional jazz groups, high profile tribute bands and nationally touring pit orchestras (see musicians biographies, **appendix C, pp. 116-119**). This led to a slightly different technical and philosophical relationship with the repertoire that I presented to them.

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<sup>18</sup> The reinterpretation of a-ha's 'I've Been Losing You' (**CD 2 track 5**) is one example of a tune that I originally arranged in an open, 'ECM' style. After spending a number of rehearsals attempting to perform the piece in this manner, it was suggested by John Lilja, that we should try the arrangement in a 'Tom Waits style', this then evolved to incorporate a straight driving, almost 'fusion' like Sax solo.



The UK-based musicians, on the whole, were more adept at assimilating styles and genres than their Norwegian counterparts. The musicians working on the a-ha project relied heavily on reading the charts throughout the rehearsal process and in performances. In comparison, the UK based musicians worked equally from charts and actual recordings, and they never used written music when performing the material live. There are a number of possible reasons for this difference in approach. Firstly, the limited amount of time I had to work with the Norwegian musicians over the last two years led to the rehearsals being extremely focused for a relatively short period of time. Consequently, the musicians possibly did not feel totally comfortable, or did not have the time to fully get to grips with the repertoire. Secondly, and more pertinent in this research, was the understandable difference in focus between the UK and Norwegian based musicians. The Norwegian musicians creative energy is focused on developing an improvised-based approach to contemporary jazz performance, where as the UK musicians are heavily involved in recreating like for like reinterpretations to earn a living. The repertoire at the heart of the Norwegian project can be seen to have got in the way of the musicians improvising. In discussions with the Norwegian musicians about their experiences working as contemporary jazz musicians in various national settings (UK, America and Holland), they expressed the opinion that the lack of emphasis on more conventional spheres of music making in Norwegian jazz (standard jazz tunes, function and ‘party-band’ repertoire etc.), afforded local musicians the time and space to develop their own personal idiom. The focus was not so much on recreating or imitating; the expectations were focused on innovation and individuality.

Instead of citing this difference as an innate, national trait, common amongst Norwegian artists (see Nicholson, 2005, pp. 195-222), the musicians felt that this approach to contemporary jazz performance is possibly symptomatic of the heavily subsidized Norwegian jazz scene, which affords musicians more time to construct a personal voice and identity on the instrument.<sup>19</sup> However, it appears that, bound up

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<sup>19</sup> Nicholson (2005) does sight government subsidy as key aspect in the development of the ‘Nordic tone’ (2005, pp. 223-241); however, the subsidy is sighted as helping to nurture the innate and intuitive national sound.

with this funding there are certain expectations connected with presenting Norwegian jazz as cutting-edge and modernistic that the musicians are expected to adhere to if they are to be recognized by the Norwegian jazz industries (see Frost Fadnes and De Bezenac, 2014, p. 66). Unpacking this issue a little further, to be cutting-edge, modernistic and innovative can be perceived to be key elements of the mainstream in Norwegian jazz, contrasting the more traditional, bebop-centred UK jazz mainstream. This inevitably leads to both sets of musicians having a different relationship with the more challenging, contemporary repertoire that the two groups were working on.<sup>20</sup>

The musicians involved with The Smiths project had to fit rehearsals and performances around their other function and dance band based professional work. This, and other experimental jazz projects that they were involved in, can be viewed as something of a creative outlet, allowing the musicians the space to open up and experiment with their sound, contrasting their normal, 'day-job' role. For the musicians involved in The Smiths Project, performing more experimental repertoire is still somewhat of a statement of rebellion and resistance, which, in the words of Val Wilmer, 'places them outside the norm' (1977, p. 27). Whilst I am aware of the romantic notion of Wilmer's statement, I do recognize that being involved in this area of jazz in the UK is still somewhat of a statement of rebellion against the mainstream.

If I analyze my own relationship with this area of music making, the initial appeal was the shock factor and the music's seemingly rebellious nature. I liked the fact that, by associating with this area of music making, it did place me 'outside of the norm' and I would say that, to a certain extent, this is still the case for both myself and the other UK based musicians involved in The Smiths project. Taking into account the contrasting nature of the more mainstream music making activities that these musicians were engaged with against the sound world and ethos of The Smiths project, it is understandable that the musicians would approach the music from a

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<sup>20</sup> In the experiences that I have had teaching students at the conservatoire in Stavanger, Norway, I have always been struck by the contrast in 'sounds' that are being created in the various rehearsal rooms in comparison to the Leeds College of Music. Whilst this evidence is anecdotal, I cannot remember hearing, what I would consider, a 'straight-ahead' jazz band practicing in the Stavanger Conservatoire, alternatively, in Leeds College of Music, hearing a jazz group freely improvising or blurring genres, would be a rarity.

different technical and philosophical position to their Norwegian counterparts who were professionally, almost entirely involved in contemporary, improvised based music making.

I am not suggesting that contemporary, improvised jazz is popular music in Norway, nor am I suggesting that the musicians are not aware that, by aligning themselves with this area of music making, it places them 'outside the norm'. However, there is possibly a difference in how contemporary jazz is generally perceived and utilized by state cultural agencies and promoted both nationally and internationally to represent a modern, forward looking nation. As Frost Fadnes and De Bezenac (2014) point out; '[t]his external brand was and still is a successful promoter' (p. 63).

This perception of Norwegian jazz as experimental, modernistic and organic is another demonstration of how jazz, or rather the ethos of jazz has been appropriated and adapted to promote various identities that serve numerous purposes. The increasingly fragmented distinctions between genres and styles, enabled by globalization and modern technological advances, can be perceived to have led to a contradictory situation, where, on one hand, the boundaries between genres and styles have never been as open, and on the other, this blurring can be perceived to have opened the door to jazz being reinterpreted or re-imagined to represent a number of essentialist identities in numerous settings (see Whyton, 2012, p. 376). Through this essentialist perception, the view of Norwegian jazz representing experimentation, development and modernity can potentially be seen to be as limiting as the Marsalis and neoclassicist view of a sonically specific and rule-ridden jazz identity. Continuing this thought process, it is possible to imagine young Norwegian musicians who are eager to 'go against the grain' and make a statement against the national canon, rejecting the abstract and 'open' sound world of the ECM aesthetic in favour of recreating, for example, the classic, late 1950s hard bop sound of the recordings of Art Blakey or Miles Davis, as way of placing themselves outside the norm.

Discussing the challenges facing the contemporary improvising musician operating in this 'post-styles' environment of today, George Lewis argues:

The emerging, globalized community of new music would need to draw upon the widest range of traditions, while not being tied to any one (Lewis, 2009, p. 509).

Whilst I agree with the sentiment expressed by Lewis that today's improvising musician should be free to draw inspiration from any genre or style of music, again, it does not have to be this way for all contemporary jazz musicians. I think the idea of being 'tied' to one style is quite an admirable quality. For example, to be dedicated fully to Afro-Cuban jazz drumming or big-band swing playing requires total immersion in that stylistic area and dedication to developing the required techniques for that genre. However, it is when that approach to the instrument becomes elevated and takes on the role of being the 'real' and superior, or natural and innate, that questions about authenticity, genre and stylistic boundaries become problematic. Tradition can play a role within contemporary jazz but it has to be on open terms if we are to avoid essentialist statements and claims of ownership.

## Conclusion

Taking into account the issues about national identity and genre mixing in contemporary jazz discussed previously, and the music presented in the performance projects, it leaves the question of defining what the role of the contemporary jazz drummer is in a rather confused state. I understand that by discussing this as ‘a role’, I am still thinking of a designated genre and thus a specific approach, or function for the drummer in that genre. Whilst I have argued against defining the contemporary drummer’s role as being based on either traditional bebop techniques, free, abstract and arrhythmic techniques or a national style, I do realize that the boundary-less alternatives that I have presented are not easy to define or present in the form of a tutor book or a series of exercises that can be taught, but that is exactly the issue at stake here – it is not possible to define the role in that clear-cut way.

If we are to get to grips with understanding the drummer’s role, we have to recognize that the boundaries of jazz are malleable and change to suit the situation. The implications of viewing contemporary jazz in this manner are much broader than the role of the jazz drummer, they present overarching questions about the ontology of music and prompt a challenge to an understanding of jazz based on a formalistic set of rules, ignorant of occurrences and events that shape our identity forming experiences as both a performer and listener. Contemporary jazz can no longer be perceived to be either avant-garde or hard bop, national or transnational, local or ‘glocal’, it is discursive and can be all of these things concurrently. We must consider the ecology of music, examining how jazz interacts with history, plays a role in established cultural narratives and is subject to particular values at play within a given context at a given time. Replacing one ideology with another, even if it is an ideology based on total freedom, is a pointless exercise that just leads to greater sacralisation and formalization (see Frith, 2007, p. 20). This does lead to questions about just how useful the term ‘jazz’ is in the discussion about the role of the contemporary jazz drummer.

In his writing on the music of John Zorn and the downtown scene, George Lewis (2008) wrestles with how this ‘stylistically ambiguous’ area of contemporary music making fits within the traditional definitions of jazz. Coming up with the term

‘postjazz’, Lewis suggests that the future of jazz music lies in greater collaboration between genres and styles, he argues that there are:

outlines of an already emerging postjazz, post-new music network for improvised music that moves beyond gatekeeping authorities, aiming toward the creation of an environment where canonizing pronouncements are both powerless and meaningless (Lewis, 2008, p. 509).

Lewis goes on to describe how there appears to be a definite split between the avant-garde and jazz, describing how jazz can be seen to have been left behind, clinging to its past relationship with avant-garde music making practices (p. 509). Lewis himself clearly still sees the phrase ‘jazz’ as having some relevance, using the term ‘postjazz’ to define this new area of contemporary music making. For me, the term does still hold currency, admittedly, it is very difficult (and pointless) to pin down what I consider jazz to be to specific characteristics or approaches to the music. That said, I find it the most appropriate genre to frame the music that I create. Operating as a contemporary improvising jazz musician allows me a certain approach to the music that, for example, operating as a contemporary, improvising classical musician would not. Whilst it is possible to perceive the sound-worlds of contemporary classical and jazz as being similar, it is the variations in creation and performance rituals, or ‘traditions’ that shape the differences, as Fabian Holt argues:

Music and genre cannot be perceived only in terms of “content,” of what is played, but also of how music is created, performed, and perceived (Holt, 2007, p. 24).

No matter how free from the ‘shackles’ of genre and stylistic conventions the role of the contemporary jazz drummer is perceived to be, we cannot escape the fact that music is created, performed, and consumed in environments that are shaped by what has gone before (See Holt, 2007, p. 23). If we are to grasp the role of the contemporary jazz drummer, we have to neutralize binary understandings of jazz, based around a series of disputes or areas of tensions that play out as high-art vs. popular, national vs. transnational or traditional vs. avant-garde and recognize that jazz can be all of these things at the same time. Jazz is not a fixed set of stylistic guidelines, it is a methodology or a process by which music is made.

## **Reflection and further research**

As this study draws to a close, I want to briefly reflect on what I feel I have gained from undertaking this performance based research and suggest possible areas of further research that could build on my findings. As both a professional contemporary jazz drummer and educator working in the area of jazz performance, the frustrations that I have experienced about the way perceptions of tradition, nation, genre and the relationship between hi-art and popular culture have governed how contemporary jazz was perceived, were frustrations that I had consciously and subconsciously been dealing with for a number of years.

These issues initially manifested themselves as an undergraduate student in the feeling of not fitting in to the bebop-centred ideology that governed the teaching of contemporary jazz performance techniques in the institution. As a performer, these issues came to the fore in practically dealing with the way venues, promoters, festivals and record labels perceive genres and styles in contemporary jazz and subsequently, how, the music I made fitted into these perceived styles and genres. Latterly, as an educator, the issue of defining the role of the contemporary jazz drummer has reappeared. Nearly fifteen years later, I see my students grappling with similar issues of how their role in the music they make relates to the jazz canon, equates with value judgments of serious versus commercial music making, and fits within the genre-centred view of the role of the contemporary jazz drummer. Even though half a century has passed since the development of abstract and arrhythmic approaches to the instrument, the notion of the ‘undefined role’ of the contemporary jazz drummer is, on the whole, still not acknowledged by either the tutor/study books, dealing with instrumental techniques, or the institutions, teaching contemporary jazz performance.

Conducting this study has allowed me to examine these interconnected issues in several ways. Being primarily a practitioner, this research has enabled me to have a ‘foot in both camps’ of performer and academic. Consequently, I am more aware of the perceived divide between ‘doer and thinker’ that exists between some practitioners performing contemporary jazz, and academics who perceive music as a social and political text (see Whyton, 2010, p. 160). By practically highlighting and

challenging the unquestionable mythologies and canonical hierarchies that surround approaches to both the performing and teaching of contemporary jazz, I hope that other practitioners, confused by how their music fits within the perceived boundaries of a 'jazz tradition' or concerned with the value of the music they create (hi-art vs. low art), will be encouraged to look beyond the limiting view of jazz as an autonomous and universal art form to consider how the broader issues at play have an effect on the music they create.

On a practical level, by documenting the method of creating and realizing the performance projects, I have been forced to examine processes that have, up until now, been predominantly verbally expressed between the musicians and students that I work with. Whilst the approaches and techniques that I have utilized are ones that are in use across similar areas of contemporary jazz and are available to all via recordings, I feel that documenting them in this way contributes to demystifications, helping to legitimize approaches to 'free' improvised music making practices that incorporate a broader use of styles and genres. By challenging the genre narratives of both contemporary jazz and popular music in this way, my research may help others to consider where the music they make fits into these established narratives. Reflecting back on the time when I was an undergraduate student, attempting my first steps into this area of music making, I would have found having recordings accompanied by a written account of both the social issues at play and the practical approaches to creating the music extremely beneficial.

Reflecting back on what I feel musically did and did not work in both of the projects, there are several issues that come to the fore. Starting with the positive aspects of undertaking the research and the recorded performances, I feel satisfied that the national settings of both projects, the repertoire chosen and the disregard of genre stereotypes were combined successfully to answer my research questions whilst also providing me with a vehicle to create some good music. Once it was decided to use the music of The Smiths and a-ha I felt confident that I could work on the music in the two settings with a common cause in mind without being overly concerned with the questions of national identity and genre. The choice of repertoire and national setting forced myself and the other musicians to deal with these issues consciously and subconsciously through working with the repertoire. The repertoire yielded



enough material for the reinterpretations to work as independent structures, whilst still maintaining key aspects for the listener to identify and associate with the original.

When considering which repertoire (The Smiths – a-ha) of the two projects was the best material to work with, counterintuitively, the sparse, static and textural-based compositions of The Smiths proved to be more fruitful than the more melodic, complex song structures of a-ha. There are several possible reasons for this, as was previously discussed I personally identified with the music of The Smiths and my relationship with their repertoire was much deeper than practically transcribing the melodies and chords and arranging the material. Thus, I was able to relate emotionally to each piece. In contrast, the music of a-ha was, on the whole, not personally relevant in the same way. From a technical perspective, it is possible that the static, textural compositions of The Smiths were easier to manipulate into a new form because of their use of simple structures and repetitive melodies. I did feel that the musicians working on the a-ha project got a little ‘bogged-down’ in learning the notes on the page rather than dealing with the emotional intent of the track.

The practical and logistical differences between the two projects have enabled me to understand and appreciate the benefit of working consistently with a group of musicians in a freely improvised musical setting. For some improvisers, the idea of rehearsing ‘playing free’ together defeats the object of this approach to creating music by removing the spontaneity and element of surprise at the heart of free improvisation. Conversely, I found the more time spent improvising with specific players lead to a greater understanding of the individual musicians preferences, idiosyncrasies, weaknesses and strengths. The Smiths project was a much more rewarding experience for this reason and, rather than stifling the improvisations through familiarity, the more we played together the more confident and ‘free’ I felt improvising in the pieces.

The area of national identity proved to be the most problematic and the focus on this subject shifted quite early in my research. Initial thoughts about national identity concentrated on highlighting an approach to the drum kit and contemporary jazz that could be labelled as ‘Norwegian’ or ‘British’. It soon became apparent that this approach would fall into the clichéd and stereotyped view of the indigenous

performer, whose innate skills were perceived to be a product of their geographical setting, a view that this research aimed to challenge. There were initial misgivings about using the musicians that I chose for the a-ha project as they would not be considered ‘authentic’ Norwegians, however, the cosmopolitan nature of the musicians working in Stavanger turned out to be representative of ever increasing interconnectedness that is typical of the way contemporary jazz is being created and presented. The focus then switched from identifying variations in national traits and approaches to the instrument to looking at the various operating spaces that the musicians have to negotiate in working in the two countries.

Finding repertoire of equal standing in both national settings was also problematic. Comparing the music of The Smiths in the UK and a-ha in Norway, there appears to be discrepancy between the standing of the two groups. Whilst it is accepted that the music of a-ha has not attained the same cultural status or level of acceptance as a seminal pop group as The Smiths, the worldwide success of a-ha is something that is celebrated in Norwegian culture and their music appeared to be the only option available if I was to find a recognisable pop band in Norway, whose music I was a vaguely familiar with.

There are a number of issues surrounding the area of jazz, pop, national identity and the role of the contemporary jazz drummer that I feel warrant further investigation. Whilst I have argued against the idea of a form of ‘how-to’ instructional guide for contemporary jazz drummers/musicians, the process of analyzing both the practical approaches and social issues that come into play when dealing with this area, has led me to think that there is a need and possibly a way of presenting practical approaches for musicians interested in this area of music making. The approach of utilizing, repertoire, styles and techniques from various genres of music making within a contemporary jazz setting can possibly be presented in a non-formulaic way and could be aligned with questions and debates about perceived traditions and value judgments that can govern the musical choices performers make.

I have already had the opportunity to put into practice some of the methods and approaches to performance discussed in this thesis in a number of teaching projects that I have taken part in over the past two years. In April 2012 I was involved in

delivering the Erasmus-funded ‘Arena Project’ in Stavanger, Norway. This project brought together thirteen postgraduate students from across Europe to work on various, improvised-based approaches to contemporary jazz performance.<sup>1</sup> The findings from my own work formed the basis of the teaching sessions that I conducted and I was able to transfer my research into exercises and methods for utilizing various genres and approaches to improvisation within a contemporary jazz setting.

In March 2014, as part of the International Festival for Artistic Innovation, I worked with a group of thirty undergraduate students from Leeds College of Music on a project that was focused on reinterpreting the music of the Canadian alternative rock collective, Arcade Fire through the use of experimental techniques, various approaches to improvisation, and stylistic juxtapositions.<sup>2</sup> Working with students studying on all four pathways at the college (jazz, classical, pop and production) towards a final, concert performance, I was able to use my research as a blueprint for the delivery of both the seminars and practical sessions.

This area of study leads further into the broader debate about the value of genre classifications that continue to form the basis of how music is taught, promoted and subconsciously perceived. In my role as a lecturer on both popular music and jazz pathways at the Leeds College of Music, I am constantly faced with having to practically define the difference between contemporary jazz and contemporary popular music. Attempting to express an opinion on this subject always leads to contradictions, frustrations and more questions than answers. I hope this research has contributed in some way to encouraging other performers, researchers and educators, to look beyond the boundaries of authenticity, hi-art, popular culture, national stereotyping and fixed genre definitions, to a future where these ‘perceived’ boundaries and differences are presented as stylistic, borderless options rather than restricting definitions.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Arena Project see: *The Arena Project at Rhythm Changes* (2012).

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the IFAI, see: *IFAI* (2014).

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## Appendix A: CD liner notes

### CD 1: The Smiths Project

#### Track listing

1. Frankly Mr. Shankly.....	[3:42]
2. The Queen Is Dead.....	[8:22]
3. Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me.....	[7:24]
4. Vicar In A Tutu.....	[2:25]
5. Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now.....	[16:04]
6. Stop Me If You Think That You've Heard This One Before.....	[6:17]
7. Panic.....	[5:48]
8. Girlfriend In A Coma.....	[1:57]
9. How Soon Is Now.....	[8:10]
10. This Charming Man.....	[6:52]
<b>Total Running Time.....</b>	<b>[64:01]</b>

#### Performed by:

- **Russell Henderson:** tenor and soprano saxophones
  - **Ben Fletcher:** electric guitar and electronic effects.
  - **Colin Sutton:** five string electric bass and electronic effects.
  - **Nicholas Katuszonek:** drum kit
- 
- Recorded by Barkley McKay on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29th March 2013 at the Crypt, St James Church, Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire.
  - Mixed and mastered by Barkley McKay at Valley Wood studio, Leeds.
  - All original music by Morrissey and Johnny Marr. © Warner Music U.K. Ltd.

## CD 2: The a-ha Project

### Track listing

1. The Living Daylights.....	[6:12]
2. The Sun Always Shines On TV.....	[5:39]
3. Crying In The Rain.....	[8:46]
4. You Are The One.....	[5:28]
5. I've Been Loosing You.....	[5:12]
6. Take On Me.....	[5:40]
7. Manhattan Skyline.....	[6:37]
8. Hunting High And Low.....	[6:30]
9. Cry Wolf.....	[5:50]
10. Touchy.....	[5:08]
<b>Total running time.....</b>	<b>[66:02]</b>

### Performed by:

- **Petter Frost Fadnes:** alto and C melody saxophones
  - **Dominique Brackeva:** trombone
  - **John Lilja:** electric bass and electronic effects
  - **Nicholas Katuszonek:** drum kit
- 
- All tracks (except track 9 and 4) recorded by Ashley Stubbert on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of October, 2012 at 'Room With a View' Studio, Stavanger, Norway. Ashley Stubbert recorded tracks 9 and 4 on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013 live at the *Ny Musikk* festival, Tou Scene, Stavanger, Norway.

- Mixed by Ashley Stubbert and Nicholas Katuszonek at ‘Room With a View’ Studio, Stavanger, Norway.
- All original compositions by Pål Waaktaar-Savoy, Magne Furuholmen and Morten Harket, except track 1 - John Barry and Pål Waaktaar-Savoy and track 3 - Howard Greenfield and Carole King. © Warner Bros. UK.



## **Appendix B**

### **Snagglepuss (score)**

**Composed by John Zorn, performed by Naked City**

SNAGLEPOSS

Carte Blanche Disk 4hrs

6/8

LOUD NOISE

DRINK FALLS DOWNSTAIRS

6/8

SAX

FAST THROUGH TRIO 3 bars

PIANO SOLO

C BOSSA NOVA BLUES BAND (arrange)

6/8

DRINK FALLS DOWNSTAIRS

SAX + WIND FREAK

JAZZ BAND TRIO (improvised comp)

(F)

ALL LOUD

ALL LOUD

DRUMS

DRUMS

3 EVENTS EACH

THROUGH OUT

6/8

6/8

SAX

6/8

6/8

DRUMS

DRUMS

SAY SOLO VERY FAST CHANG

6/8

KEYS DUO

DRUM : DRUM

HAND : SOLO

ALL CORN/FREAK

C7 B7 C7 B7 Eb7 Ab7 D7 G7 Bb7 Bb9

DRUM FALLING STAIRS

## **Appendix C: Performers biographies and a list of live performances of The Smiths project and The a-ha project.**

### **Russell Henderson**

Originally from the Highlands, Russell Henderson gained many years experience working as a saxophonist on the Scottish jazz scene before relocating to Leeds to study jazz at Leeds College of Music. Russell has since gone on to work professionally in a broad range of musical settings. These range from, 'straight' jazz in the duo: 'Intimacy of the Blues' with guitarist James Taylor, contemporary big-band jazz with Jamil Sheriff's contemporary jazz orchestra, easy listening pop with the leading 'The Carpenters' tribute act: 'The Karpenters' and contemporary hip-hop meets-jazz with the 'Abstract Hip Hop Orchestra'.

### **Ben Fletcher**

Ben Fletcher is a Leeds based guitarist who works in various genres and musical settings. Originally from Gloucestershire, Ben was initially inspired to take up the guitar after becoming interested in bands such as Living Colour, Alice in Chains and Smashing Pumpkins. After completing his studies at Leeds College of Music, Ben has gone on to work as a professional guitarist in various settings. He has worked as a guitarist on a number of cruise ships, performed in various original pop and jazz combos, and also worked as a pit musician in a number of West End shows. Ben is currently on a national tour with a production of 'Blood Brothers'. Apart from his 'paid-work', Ben has various, contemporary jazz, side projects that focus on a number of forms of improvisation, specifically utilizing effects and electronics.

### **Colin Sutton**

Electric bassist, Colin Sutton has lived in Leeds for over 15 years. Originally from Colchester, Colin was introduced to jazz whilst studying with versatile bassist, Tim Harries, and through performing as a member of the Essex Youth Jazz Orchestra. Colin has gone on to work in a wide range of genres and musical settings. These

include electronica/pop with 'Black Diamond Bay', extreme 'metal' with 'Sweet Suzie' and classic-pop with 'The Karpenters' tribute show. Colin is also active on the national contemporary jazz scene. He is an original member of the experimental jazz group 'Metropolis', founder of progressive jazz band, 'Minghe Morte' and the bass player with 'Bilbao Syndrome'.

## **Dominique Brackeva**

Originally from Belgium, Dominique Brackeva studied jazz at the Conservatory of Rotterdam before moving to Stavanger, Norway in 2008 to study composition and arranging at the University of Stavanger. Now a resident of Stavanger, Dominique currently plays in a variety of contemporary jazz settings including Didrick Ingvladsens' ensemble: 'Pocket Corner', the Jacques Brel/Edith Piaf inspired; 'Café Avec' and the Stavanger-based free-jazz big band 'Kitchen Orchestra'. Dominique also teaches trombone at the conservatory in Stavanger.

## **John Lilja**

Born in New York, John moved to Norway in 1997 after studying jazz composition at Berklee College of Music. John has worked as a high school instrumental and composition tutor in Stavanger and as an administrator at the Institute for Music and Dance before concentrating on his career as a professional musician. John is an 'in demand' multi instrumentalist on the national, contemporary music scene in Norway. He currently performs in a variety of settings, these include the Balkan inspired punk band 'Wunderkammer', Gunhild Seim's band: 'Time Jungle', which mixes together classical, free-jazz and 'jungle' styles, and his own, 'third stream, stoner rock' project: 'Robblerobble'.

## **Petter Frost Fadnes**

Saxophonist, Petter Frost Fadnes is a Stavanger based musician and academic specializing in contemporary jazz performance. Born in Stavanger, Petter studied jazz

performance, in the UK at Leeds College of Music and Leeds University. Based in the UK for over 10 years, Petter has gone on to work with a large number of leading figures in both Norwegian and British contemporary jazz, including, Matthew Bourne, Dave Kane, Steve Beresford and Keith Tippett in the UK, and Didrik Ingvaldsen, Paal Nilssen-Love and Frode Gjerstad in Norway. Now resident in Stavanger, Petter divides his time between his own projects (The Geordie Approach, Thin Red Line and Metropolis), and performing in various contemporary jazz groups (Kitchen Orchestra, Robblerobble and Gunhild Seim's 'Story Water').

## **Live Performances of The Smiths Project and the a-ha Project**

### **The Smiths Project**

**7<sup>th</sup> March 2012** .....Leeds College of Music, Leeds, UK.

**14<sup>th</sup> March 2012**.....The Storey, Lancaster, UK.

**26<sup>th</sup> October 2012**.....The Fox and Newt (Fusebox event), Leeds, UK.

**12<sup>th</sup> March 2014**.....The Venue, Leeds, UK.

### **The a-ha Project**

**14<sup>th</sup> April 2012** .....Cementen, Stavanger, Norway.

**6<sup>th</sup> April 2013**.....Ny Musikk festival, Tou Scene, Stavanger, Norway.

**13<sup>th</sup> April 2013**.....Rhythm Changes Conference, Media City, Salford, UK

## **Appendix D: Transcriptions and Scores.**

Contained within this appendix is a selection of transcriptions, arrangements and reharmonized scores that were used at various points in the process of creating the music of The Smiths Project and The a-ha Project.

- **I've Been Loosing You** (a-ha) transcription.....(pp. 119-120)
- **Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now** (The Smiths) transcription and arrangement.....(p. 121)
- **Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me** (The Smiths) Transcription and arrangement.....(p. 122)
- **Take On Me** (a-ha) transcription and arrangement.....(p. 123)

C

# I've Been Losing You

A-Ha

Intro

Dm<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup>

8 It was-n't rain

9 Dm<sup>7</sup> G/D Dm<sup>7</sup> C

13 F C Dm<sup>7</sup> G

17 Dm<sup>7</sup> G/D Dm<sup>7</sup> C

21 F C Dm<sup>7</sup> **To Coda** G A

26 Fmaj<sup>7</sup> Fmaj<sup>7</sup> G C G D

31 Fmaj<sup>7</sup> C G D Fmaj<sup>7</sup>

36 C Em Dm<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup> Dm<sup>7</sup> **D.S. al Coda**

**CODA** 42 G Fmaj<sup>7</sup> Fmaj<sup>7</sup> G C G

47 D Fmaj<sup>7</sup> C G



51 D Fmaj7 C Em  
 I have lost my way — I've been lo - sing

55 Am7 D7 Am7 D7  
 you (Instrumental)

59 Am7 D7 Am7 Am7/G Fmaj7 Em  
 Please now\_ talk to me tell me\_ things I could find\_ help - ful\_

63 D Fmaj7 C G D  
 How can I stop now? Is there no-thing I\_ can do? Please now Talk to me

68 Fmaj7 C G D Fmaj7  
 tell me\_ tell me what to do Help - ful How can I stop now? Is there

73 C G D Fmaj7 C  
 no-thing I\_ can do? I have lost my way\_ I've been lo - sing

78 G D(omit3) E(omit3) Fmaj7 C Em  
 you You I've been lo - sing you You

83 Dm(b6) Dm(b6) Dm(b6)/C Dm(b6)/C Dm(b6)/G Dm(b6)/G Dm(b6)/Bb  
 rit. Drum fill

90 Dm(b6)/Bb Dm Dm7 Dm7  
 I've been lo - sing you -

95 Dm7 Dm7 Dm7 Dm7 Dm7 Dm7  
 Fade out with vocal ad. libs



INTRO

HEAVEN KNOWS I'M MISERABLE NOW.

SAX

ALL FREE IMPROV -  
SPARSE (PP) → BUILDING INTENSITY → INTO SAMBA

ESTABLISH SAMBA - (C - D) - ON CUE DRUMS INTRO

Guitar Chords: Cmaj7, Ebmaj7, Dm7, C

GUITAR

VERSE

3/4 FEEL / METRIC MOD

SOLOS

GUITAR - ATMOSPHERIC → BUILD

DRUMS -

BASS.

BASS + SAX DUO → DRUMS IN SLOW GROOVE → OUTRO R.I.A. SAX SOLO

# Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me C

## Original Chords

Em C Cm Bm B7

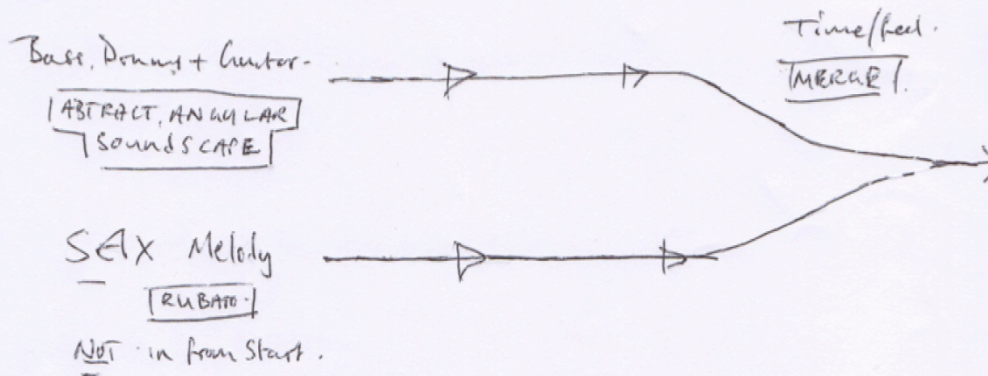
5 Em C Cm Bm B7

## Alternative Chords

9 Em<sup>9</sup> Bbmaj7 Ebmaj9 C7(#11) F7(#11)

13 Em<sup>9</sup> Bbmaj7 G7(b13sus4) Dmaj7/F# F7(#11)

## STRUCTURE





TAE ON ME. (a-HA.)

INTRO.

VERSE

CHORUS

## Appendix E: DVD liner notes

### Recorded Live Performances (DVDs)

The quality of both sound and visuals of this footage is not high. I have included them as evidence of the dissemination of the work as well as giving the reader/listener some idea of how the music works in a 'live' setting.

#### DVD 1: The Smiths Project

	<b>start time</b>
1) <b>Frankly Mr. Shankly</b> .....	(0:00)
2) <b>Vicar in a Tutu</b> .....	(6:12)
3) <b>Panic</b> .....	(9:15)
4) <b>Stop Me If You Think That You've Heard This One Before</b> .....	(15:17)
5) <b>How Soon Is Now</b> .....	(24:30)
	<b>Total:(32:50)</b>

#### Performed by:

- **Russell Henderson:** tenor and soprano saxophones
- **Johnny Richards:** Keyboard and Piano
- **Colin Sutton:** five string electric bass and electronic effects
- **Nicholas Katuszonek:** drum kit

Recorded live, at The Venue, Leeds on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2014 by Adam Martin.

## DVD 2: The a-ha Project

	<b>Start time</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	(0:00)
<b>1) The Living Daylights</b> .....	(1:50)
<b>2) The Sun Always Shines On TV</b> .....	(7:27)
<b>3) Manhattan Skyline</b> .....	(13:00)
<b>4) Take On Me</b> .....	(19:23)
<b>5) You Are The One</b> .....	(24:53)
<b>6) I've Been Loosing You</b> .....	(29:28)
<b>7) Hunting High And Low</b> .....	(35:18)
	<b>Total: (43:42)</b>

### Performed by:

- **Petter Frost Fadnes:** alto and C melody saxophones
- **Dominique Brackeva:** trombone
- **John Lilja:** electric bass
- **Nicholas Katuszonek:** drum kit

Recorded live at The Rhythm Changes Conference, Media City, Salford on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2013 by Mike Polshaw.