

COLLEGE JAZZ

A Brighter Future In Sight

By Mike Tracy

When educators consider the inevitability of declining enrollments at colleges and universities, the non-vocational disciplines, such as music, will be particularly threatened. Music schools have felt the impact of declining enrollments for years and have become aware of the need for creative ways to deal with this situation (Rees, 1983). At a recent national convention of the College Music Society, "music educators from all parts of the country related the same story, a decline in enrollments, less money, and faculty and staff reductions" (Cochran, 1982, p. 74). Faced with budget cuts that have reduced faculty and staff size and that hamper recruiting and scholarship funds, music school administrators have been searching for course offerings that would increase enrollment, enhance community visibility, be educationally sound, and yet not place an additional financial burden on existing programs. One innovative possibility that many music school administrators strongly consider, and usually implement, is the adding of jazz courses or a jazz degree to their program. In his article, **Jazz Education: Its Utilization Into The Existing College/University Music Programs**, Cochran (1982) observes:

One of the most serious problems encountered today centers around not only the decline in overall student population at many institutions, but also the shift in student interest away from Arts and Science degree programs. These decreasing numbers relate directly to faculty and staff reductions that so effectively devastate existing music programs. . . . Can jazz education help reverse this trend? The answer is a resounding YES! (p. 75-75)

While jazz ensembles and related classes were available in colleges and universities as early as the late 1940's (Suber, 1979; Kuzmich & Bash, 1984),

jazz today is basically an untapped resource in the college music curriculum. The overwhelming majority of music educators are not fully aware of the educational potential inherent in the teaching and performance of jazz and improvised music. Very few music administrators have had any experience in the jazz idiom and therefore have little insight as to how a well-taught jazz ensemble/class could aid in developing young musicians, gain additional visibility for the music department, and, in turn, help increase student enrollment.

The number of jazz ensembles at the middle school, high school, and college level has grown at a phenomenal pace during the past twenty-five years. Well over one-half million students participated in jazz ensembles by 1979 and over 70% of the 30,000 middle and high schools in the United States had at least one jazz ensemble (Suber, 1979).

College music departments that offer jazz courses can certainly benefit from the increased interest in jazz at the high school level. A quality jazz program can be an important asset in attracting both new and transfer music majors. Many of the graduating seniors that participated in high school jazz ensembles will want to continue studying and performing jazz music. Having jazz classes available for music and non-music majors would allow for student involvement from outside the music department. Johnson's dissertation on the **Qualifications of Jazz Faculty** (1985) relates:

Ross reported that the outstanding jazz program at the University of Northern Iowa was and is primarily responsible for attracting a large portion of their transfer music majors. Fowler explained that after a jazz major program was introduced into the music curriculum at the University of Utah, the school exper-



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ience a substantial increase in the number of students enrolling in both choral and instrumental non-jazz performance groups, music theory, appreciation, and private lessons. Gene Aiken's experience at the University of Northern Colorado has been similar. In response to the question, "Has UNC's jazz program been a measurable drawing card for both the music department and the school at large?", Aiken's response was, "Definitely, in fact many non-music majors come here specifically because of their desire to participate in our jazz program while pursuing other fields of study." (p. 21-22)

Brown (1977) comments:

Jazz programs traditionally create high interest and are surprisingly cheap to run. In many music departments in the United States, jazz programs probably compensate for low enrollments in more traditional courses and thereby allow them to continue. (p.4-5)

An excellent example of how the addition of jazz courses can affect a college music department can be witnessed at the University of Louisville. Jazz classes had not been offered at the music school since 1981. At the time when jazz classes were discontinued, over 80 students were involved in the jazz performance ensembles. From fall 1981 until fall 1985, jazz was not an element in the music curriculum and interested students had to attend classes at other universities for jazz

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instruction. When jazz classes were offered again during the fall 1985 semester, 58 students registered: 17 music majors, 13 non-music majors but full-time students at the university, 10 registered through continuing education, and 18 high school students. The 1986-87 figures are even more impressive: 75 students, 24 music majors, 14 non-music majors, 14 continuing education, and 23 high school. The expense to the music department consisted of approximately \$2,500 — 1985/86 and \$1,250 — 1986/87 for music and equipment and the salary of one part-time faculty member (Tracy, 1986).

The jazz offerings continued to experience dramatic growth at the University of Louisville in the following years. The 1990-91 school year finds the School of Music offering two university jazz ensembles, a community jazz ensemble, a senior citizens rehearsal band, 6 small groups, jazz theory, jazz history and private lessons. In addition, there now is a full time position on the faculty to teach and supervise these courses. Jazz education has had a major impact on the School of Music (Tracy, 1990).

Band directors are becoming aware of their deficiencies and of the need for jazz education courses for themselves and future music education majors. In two current surveys (Fisher, 1981; Tracy, 1986), over 90% of the public school band directors questioned (100 directors from Pennsylvania and 25 directors from Jefferson County Kentucky) felt that jazz education courses should be available to music education majors. Approximately 60% had experienced directing a jazz group but not one individual had any undergraduate course dealing with the direction of a jazz ensemble. Fisher (1981) feels that "one of the most serious problems facing quality jazz education today is that most public school teachers are not formally prepared to teach jazz" (p.46). College music departments should offer classes, workshops, and special clinics on the development and teaching of jazz and improvised music. Offering jazz courses on the graduate level and through continuing education may be of great service to area band directors, help the school's image, and boost enrollment.

While colleges and universities have encountered an increased interest in jazz and improvised music, they have been slow in reacting to the urgent need for jazz education courses and ensembles. Ricci (1982) comments

"many schools are finally and fortunately waking up to a great love for the music itself, but rather due to the belated recognition that many of the students are interested in jazz and warm bodies mean good enrollments which in turn means better budget projections" (p.115).

The majority of colleges, 76% (Carter, 1986) to 81% (Barr, 1983), offer some type of jazz course as an elective. In a survey of 575 accredited schools of music with 303 responding (52.6%), Barr (1983) found that 15 colleges offered an undergraduate degree in jazz studies in 1972. By 1982, undergraduate and graduate degrees in jazz studies were offered by 72 schools. While the nearly 480% growth of degree programs is impressive, it is misleading. Barr (1983) discovered that only four colleges coordinated their undergraduate, three their masters, and one their Ph.D. music education offerings with their jazz studies program. Most colleges encourage their music education majors to take jazz electives, but only 16% (Barr, 1983) require a jazz related course for fulfillment of a music education degree. Due to degree requirements, many future music educators never get the opportunity to experience even the minimum jazz experience (Newman, 1982). Obviously, the acceptance of jazz as a major contingent in the college music curriculum has been a long struggle.

There are many reasons for this lack of involvement. As with the public schools, there is a shortage of qualified teachers. "Presently, most jazz educators come from one of three basic backgrounds: (1) jazz performers with little or no teaching background; (2) teachers with little or no jazz performance background; (3) classical performers/educators with little or no jazz background" (Baker, 1979, p.viii). Colleges will have to strongly consider experience and background in the jazz idiom as equivalents to a college degree when selecting jazz instructors (Baker, 1979).

Another problem has been the negative attitudes or "myths" concerning jazz by the music establishment (Baker, 1979). Until recently many college music administrators did not view jazz as musically valid, "in many schools the more classically-inclined faculty still regard jazz as a somewhat tainted idiom" (Ricci, 1982, p.115). Others believed that jazz could not be taught. Racism even played a large part in the acceptance of jazz as a legitimate art form (Baker, 1979; Fisher, 1982). All of these myths have been shown to be ill-conceived. In Brown's (1981) study of jazz as aesthetic education, he found the elements of performing, creating, and analyzing central to the study of jazz and all music. Sessions' (1981) research on how the study of jazz affects college students discovered that "bias against jazz in the classroom may be unfounded and that in the hands of trained music educators, jazz can be a viable, effective idiom through which to teach basic concepts in music" (p.79).

In addition to the positive educational and enrollment benefits, an active jazz program can help a music department increase community visibility and interest in its other programs. The National Jazz Service Organization recently published findings on The American Jazz Music Audience. The report said that about the same number of adults "like" jazz music as classical/chamber music (approx. 26% of the adult population) and that there is a "positive correlation and crossover between the audiences" (Horowitz, 1986, p.3). The jazz audience is concentrated in younger age groups (18-34) and they tend to be better educated. Horowitz suggests that an interest and demand for jazz music "may persist for a long time" and that "the four leading barriers to increased attendance mentioned were: 'not enough time,' 'cost,' 'not available,' and 'too far to go'" (p.4).

The size and type of audience the National Jazz Service Organization's report describes is precisely what most college music departments want and need to become involved in their activities. A large, young, and educated audience that might become interested in other music programs would be welcomed by

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any university music administrator. A college jazz program could certainly help relieve three of the four attendance barriers: college concerts are free, they would be in the community, and each would be available to all interested individuals.

Music school administrators must look for creative solutions that can aid them in dealing with their unique situations. Fisher (1982) quoted La Cerra's opinion that "music has a centuries-old reputation for often being the slowest of the arts to reflect the ever-changing world in which we live" (p.82). If administrators hesitate or fail to look for innovative possibilities, their students and faculty will suffer. All of the problems experienced by college music departments will not be cured solely by the addition of jazz courses or a jazz degree, but jazz most certainly can help.

The inclusion of jazz in a music program has been shown to have had a very positive effect in increasing student enrollment and involvement with minimal expense to the university. The performing and teaching of jazz and improvised music is educationally sound and can enhance the understanding of music at all levels. There is definitely a need for jazz education and an audience for faculty and student performances. A quality jazz program should be a positive experience for all parties concerned and would allow students and faculty to grow together creatively.

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