

Careers in Jazz

By Bill Anschell

www.billanschell.com

Every year, university programs spit out thousands of jazz musicians sporting hard-earned diplomas and high hopes. But when these graduates hit the first formal rite of jazz passage – a desperate trip to the local pawn shop – they learn that the diploma is literally not worth the paper it's printed on. Entering school, their dream was simple: To perform music they love for attentive audiences in jazz clubs, concert halls, and festivals, and to earn a fair wage for their efforts¹. But set loose from the nurturing womb of the campus, they quickly experience the shock of an indifferent and often hostile new reality.

The world doesn't take kindly to jazz artists, and before long these graduates find their ideals displaced by bitter cynicism. At best, one percent of them will eventually realize their dreams, and only after years of paying dues. These are the **Chosen Ones**, whose success results from a rare combination of often freakish talent, perseverance, good looks, personality, ambition, geography and an ability to skillfully navigate unpredictably changing public tastes.

Why so few Chosen Ones? Simple economics: People who want to play jazz actually outnumber those who enjoy or even tolerate it, let alone pay to hear it. Consequently, in the microscopic jazz economy, there isn't nearly enough to go around, though competition for the crumbs is relentless and sometimes brutal. This simple financial reality underlies virtually all of the infighting, backbiting, and doomsaying that define the jazz condition.

But when the jazz bug bites, it's hard to shake. Of the remaining 99%, the vast majority continues the battle, even in the face of shattered dreams and personal defeat. How do they survive? By compromising their music, their lifestyle, their self-respect, or any combination of the three.

What, then, are the paths to survival? Whether through free choice or fate, hopeless devotion or clinical insanity, jazz musicians eventually sort themselves out into the following subtypes:

1 Additionally, a declining but still significant subgroup of males enter the jazz world motivated by the idea that, as artists, they might somehow have special appeal to women. Their miscalculation is gross, in that: 1) Women prefer men who aren't broke; 2) Women prefer men who bathe regularly; 3) Women prefer men whose music isn't antiquated and irrelevant; 4) Women can grow tired, after spending another lonely night on a barstool in a deserted jazz club, of assuring men that the first two measures of their second chorus in the fourth

tune of the last set didn't really suck – in fact, were pretty good, actually very good – especially knowing that the singer's charts were lame, the drummer was rushing maniacally, the bassist was drunk and near comatose, the piano was painfully out of tune, and the sound coming from the stage monitors was like a chamber of horrors; really, in light of all that, the whole solo was practically super-human, the work of a great artist overcoming adversity to make a powerful, transcendent statement.

Jazz Classes, in Detail

Gig Whores

Gig Whores are the largest class within the jazz community, and are the easiest to find. They ply their wares in hotel lobbies, restaurants, private parties of all types, and anywhere else that jazz is degraded to an artless commodity and sold to the highest bidder. This is done knowingly and willfully, but not without self-awareness and – at times – self-pity. While a Gig Whore may claim to be working “in the trenches,” the jazz musician within knows that he’s really plumbing untreated musical sewage.

Even outside the jazz arena, jazz Gig Whores, working undercover, populate the music world’s ample underbelly: the pianist wearily accompanying a tone-deaf vocalist in a community musical theater production, the bugler announcing post parade at a horse racing track (slyly inserting a Charlie Parker lick disguised as a flourish), the off-camera bassist backing American Idol contestants, the herald trumpeters – dressed in renaissance costumes – serenading department store shoppers at Christmas time, the wedding band leader cajoling guests into a conga line for “Hot, Hot, Hot” (and the six accomplices to his musical crime, barely hiding their disgust and self-loathing), the drummer making “punch-line” sounds for a would-be comedian ... each banking part of his pay to subsidize the day when he might dare to take the jazz plunge, holding his nose with one hand as the other gratefully palms the ample paycheck.

Yet there is room for heroism in the Gig Whore’s world. That same pianist might acrobatically shift keys and drop beats in tandem with the vocalist, magically masking her every misstep. The bassist might find mistakes in the vapid Idol charts and fix them on the fly with improvisational prowess. The wedding band members might “fake” the bride’s favorite song, a last-minute obscure request they all just happen to know by ear. More often than not, jazz Gig Whores make up in talent what they lack in pride, taste or integrity.

While money motivates the Gig Whore’s musical lifestyle, fear motivates his more immediate actions. Gig Whores have an intense phobia of open spaces – on their calendars – which can elicit sudden adrenaline-fueled outbreaks of cold-calls to contractors, restaurateurs and wedding planners. Between calls, they sit by their phones with the desperation of dateless adolescents. They’re also terrified of their booking agents, clients and contracts, and compensate by overworking – shortening their breaks and prolonging their sets. You’ll often find a Gig Whore (and his unfortunate band) playing in an empty room long after the clients and guests have left, a lone custodian angrily mopping the floor, his iPod unable to fully drown out the tired music emanating from the bandstand.

Identifying Signs

- Tuxedo
- Bad toupee or comb-over
- Tie emblazoned with stylized jazz instrument
- Overzealous handshake

Survival Techniques

- Advertising in Bridal Magazines
- Moving abroad for hotel gigs in exotic countries, only to play the worst in American pop music for drunk American businessmen
- Alcoholism

Epiphytes

Named after “air plants,” which live without need for soil, these are the true heroes of the jazz world. They eat only out of necessity, seemingly nourished by the music they play, including their hours of daily practicing. Most varieties of Epiphytes thrive in subterranean environments, such as dank basement apartments, with little apparent need for sunlight. They move frequently from hovel to hovel after seemingly exhausting the available air that sustains them. Their skin is wan, and they blink uncomfortably in daylight, preferring to wear sunglasses around the clock.

Epiphytes are the trendsetters in the jazz community, admired and emulated by their peers. Their speech is heavily peppered with cutting-edge jazz lingo, and they are often innovators in jazz vocabulary. Although they are the elite class of the working musicians (short of Chosen Ones, who live in a separate musical universe), they are the least likely to reproduce, finding economic advantage in a more streamlined lifestyle. In this sense, an adverse Darwinian effect works against the forward movement of jazz, as natural selection favors gene propagation from the less talented, more whorish players.

Caucasian Epiphytes often live their lives as modern-day extensions of the Beat Generation. African-American Epiphytes are frequently motivated by a mandate to explore and perpetuate the roots of contemporary black culture and identity. Regardless of race, Epiphytes can be highly temperamental, and many are gifted with a special ability to make the other musicians on the bandstand hate one another.

The relationship between Epiphytes and Gig Whores is particularly intriguing: Epiphytes live on the fringes of mainstream society in order to stake their place in jazz music; Gig Whores work on the fringes of the jazz world in order to stake their place in mainstream society. Yet between them is a quiet understanding, a shared realization that there is no perfect solution to the Jazz Problem. Both are driven by a Buddhist sensibility: Epiphytes believe that material objects are impermanent and of no value; Gig Whores embrace the notion that life is suffering.

Identifying Signs:

- Low body mass
- Self-cut hair
- Unmatched shoes

Survival Techniques

- Migratory movement among communities and countries that are briefly tolerant of jazz
- Supplementary income earned from plasma banks and focus groups
- Narcotics addiction

Silver Spoons

The clearest path to survival in jazz is simply to have no need for money. And while many jazz artists create their music with little regard for listeners, those who are independently wealthy have the luxury of disregarding their audience entirely. As a general rule, the wealthier the artist, the less accessible his music and the loftier his rhetoric about musical freedom and innovation.

Many of these artists purchase their own concert spaces, where they book themselves, joined by their fellow moneyed, avant peers or by Epiphytes with avant leanings. Although anger is often a central element of their musical aesthetic (inspired, as they are still, by the spirit of 1960s rebellion), in the largest sense, no harm is done.

Their audience consists of the same four to eight people for each concert. Because so few people will pay to hear the music, it is often supported by grants from arts agencies.

Silver Spoons spend their abundant free time thinking about, and writing descriptions of, the deep philosophical underpinnings of their work. These descriptions are then adapted to serve as the narratives of their grant proposals. The grants panelists, who know nothing about jazz, equate the artists' impressive discourse with depth of musicality, and reward them accordingly.

It should be noted that not all independently wealthy artists are drawn to the avant-garde. Some take part in the mainstream jazz arena, where they play out a conflicted relationship with their money. The most callous ones offer to perform in jazz venues for free, undercutting their working peers and driving down the already meager local pay scale. Others carefully pick their spots, accepting only the most flattering gigs, thereby earning an artificially exalted reputation among audiences and the media. And some, uncomfortable with the seeming oxymoron of being a "moneyed jazz artist," live Spartan lifestyles that enable them to "pass" among their less privileged colleagues.

Subset

- Artists living on disability following psychotic episodes

Identifying Signs

- Carefully chosen frayed second-hand clothing
- "Street" jazz nickname (replacing embarrassingly aristocratic given name)

Survival Techniques

- None needed

Career Professionals

Like Silver Spoons, Career Professionals have no shortage of money; the difference is that they work for it. Although they take their "straight gig" seriously – often earning advanced college degrees and struggling to climb the corporate ladder – they still self-identify primarily as jazz artists. This creates an inevitable disconnect between their day-to-day and stage personae.

In their suburban neighborhoods they're accepted as hard-working citizens, lent an air of the exotic by their occasional late-night jazz gigs. Among their jazz peers, they spin their personal narratives along these lines: By making a living outside the workaday jazz world, they're able to keep their music "unpolluted" by artistically compromising gigs. The reality beneath the spin – that they and/or their spouse simply don't want to forgo the creature comforts that a jazz income can't buy – goes unstated, but is silently understood by all.

Career Professionals have tremendous admiration for Epiphytes, but are reluctant to take the corresponding vow of poverty. On the other hand, they view Gig Whores with outright disdain; ugly cousins who have chosen the musical low road.

The biggest challenge faced by Career Professionals is maintaining their chops. Working nine to five makes it difficult to keep up any sort of practice regimen, and insisting on playing only meaningful gigs minimizes their time on stage. They compensate with intensive bursts of practice before each performance, shutting themselves off from their families and shortening their sleep habits. At the same time, they insist that mere chops are irrelevant to any music of significance, which is, by definition, the only music they play.

Identifying Signs

- Air of dignity
- Chronic fatigue
- Normal friends

Survival Techniques

- None needed

Survivalists

Unlike the more highly trained and thoroughly moneyed Career Professionals, Survivalists typically bounce among unskilled jobs, taking them mainly out of desperation as their gigging income falls short. More often than not this sets off a perpetual cycle of gigging, falling into debt, washing dishes or working at a music store to get back ahead, quitting to gig full-time again, then falling back into debt. Few have the wisdom to leave the jazz world altogether; many are trombonists.

Artists in this group are envious of Gig Whores, who more successfully troll the depths of the music world for scraps. They view Epiphytes with ambivalence, being reluctant to admit that they are separated from them only by a lack of talent.

Identifying Signs

- Air of desperation
- Bad teeth
- Domino's car-tops

Survival Techniques

- Pyramid schemes
- Selling cell phones and sunglasses in makeshift mall kiosks
- Drug-dealing

Working Wives²

Jazz musicians with working wives may be nearly as fortunate as the Silver Spoons, and freed to lead similarly privileged lifestyles. Or they may discover over time that their jazz career and the terms of their marital relationship are virtually incompatible. It all depends on a complex formula that charts the timing of an artist's marriage against the progress of his career to that point. The results of this equation can be distilled into two subsets, with highly divergent outcomes.

A jazz artist who marries young, when his bride shares his delusion that he might become a Chosen One, eventually develops an inevitable air of failure and defeat. His once idealistic wife, hardened by the burden of becoming the family provider, constantly reminds him that his career choice has proven to be a selfish indulgence. Though she once bought into the jazz community's inflated sense of self-importance, she quickly loses interest in her husband's gigs, considering them – as does the rest of the outside world – trivial and irrelevant. Forced to carry his weight, he becomes unavailable for rehearsals, instead preparing family meals or driving his kids to soccer games. He may cancel gigs at the last minute because his wife needs “a night out with the girls,” and he can't find a sitter. Deemed unreliable and uncommitted by his jazz peers, he gets fewer and fewer calls. Under pressure – especially if his wife can't fully pay the bills – he gradually morphs into a Gig Whore of the most desperate variety, eventually landing in a high-paying, soul-crushing variety band. In the worst-case scenario, the wife at that point discovers that her husband – who if nothing else was at least once an idealistic artist – has lost all appeal. She leaves him for a successful businessman who has a clear concept of self, doesn't work nights, and listens to music that isn't all crazy. The artist's life continues its downward spiral until he hits bottom as a bitter Survivalist.

By contrast, the jazz artist who is already an established Epiphyte by the time he meets his future wife has found his salvation. The wife-to-be understands the realities of the jazz world, perceives her future husband's devotion to his financially unviable art form as romantic, and marries the husband and his music alike. Such women are the angels of mercy in the jazz world; the sole counter-

2 A more gender-neutral report might recognize the growing number of female instrumentalists by referring to “working spouses” rather than “working wives.” However, the sample of female players hasn't been large enough, for long enough, to yield statistically significant

results. It is hoped that they will be more grateful than resentful for being excluded from this admittedly phallogocentric document. Female vocalists – as has been documented extensively outside this report – are a different species altogether.

evidence to cosmic indifference. Their fortunate husbands become, in a sense, quasi-Chosen Ones, minus the true Chosen Ones' fame and (modest) fortune.

Identifying Signs, Survival Techniques

- Artists supported by their spouses are better dressed, better fed, and better mannered than most of their peers. They have no survival techniques, as their fate is fully in the hands of another.

Jazz Educators³

Jazz music, like philosophy, ancient literature, and other insular fields with limited real-world application, has created its own cozy home in the educational system. In secondary schools, it gives young musicians a relatively harmless introduction to a music they'll later discard as outdated and irrelevant. But at the college level, jazz majors are irretrievably immersed in the music's history, theory and – above all -- performance. Once the real world shatters their performing aspirations, many flee right back to the university or conservatory where, safely ensconced in a tenured position, they perpetuate the vicious cycle.

Tenured university teaching posts are probably the most coveted positions in the jazz field (other than the exclusive province of the Chosen Ones). Ironically, the personality traits that make for success in the academic world have nothing in common with jazz artistry. Jazz professorships require advanced degrees, and those who pursue them are by nature practical, career-minded and – with their orientation to future security rather than present artistic expression – far from spontaneous.

Perhaps that's why university professors have pioneered their own form of jazz. As they'll explain to their Jazz History classes, jazz music has evolved since its inception to reflect the lives and times of its practitioners. From bebop through free jazz, the music has been the artists' vehicle for reacting to their social, political and cultural environment. No surprise then, that jazz enables these same professors to express their own unique academic milieu: their music is the sound of personal ambition and scholarly thought. Performance and composition alike are theory-driven, and the ability to athletically navigate complex written chord changes is paramount. Rather than relying on their ears, faculty performers are glued to their scores, negotiating obtuse chords by calculating scale choices with mathematical efficiency. Unfortunately, the music's intellectual underpinnings render it inaccessible to all but fellow professors and advanced students. Undereducated audiences are left behind, even those who recognize that appreciation of such intricate music could only be a mark of personal sophistication.

Although jazz professors rarely overlap in style with the Chosen Ones, most still aspire to join their ranks. Toward that end, they book Chosen Ones for concerts, often finding ways to share the

3 While this discussion of "Jazz Educators" focuses on university professors, jazz is also taught in the secondary schools and through private instruction. These lower-level teachers have one commonality with university faculty: They'd really rather be gigging. Beyond that, though, they have their own unique profiles:

Secondary school teachers: Although these teachers rank beneath university teachers in the jazz pecking order and in societal standing, theirs is the more noble calling. While university professors are largely responsible for the flooding of the market with aspiring professionals – highly trained and largely generic -- secondary school teachers are more interested in building the future jazz

audience. Their focus is on instilling an understanding of and appreciation for jazz among their students; unfortunately, this appreciation quickly fades with the students' maturity.

Private instructors: Whether teaching in the back rooms of music stores or out of their own homes, these are individuals who tried and failed to make it as Gig Whores. Although most other musicians consider private instruction the final stop before suicide, society is kinder to these unfortunates, allowing them to hide their indignity behind "the importance of arts education," "passing knowledge from generation to generation," and "keeping youth off the streets."

stage with them, sometimes composing a special tune for the occasion (and typically naming the tune after the Chosen One, thereby marking their relationship for eternity). They wine and dine them, take joint photos, and if possible book them on the side for personal recording projects. Interestingly, although Chosen Ones are the subject of great envy among jazz professors, many aging Chosen Ones who neglected to plan for retirement eventually seek and easily land university posts. There they are allowed to bypass normal hiring procedures in exchange for lending their credibility and doing virtually nothing.

Like other tenured faculty, jazz professors are required to publish, and as the number of jazz PhDs increases, so does the obscurity of their topics. Jazz Educators' conferences are full of presentations – scheduled early in the morning and sparsely attended – on subjects ranging from “The Scalar Implications of Minor Seventh Flat Nine Chords in Mid-period Bill Evans Voicings” to “A Study of Coltrane’s Reed and Mouthpiece Choices in Relationship to His Late Career Dental Work” to “Post-Chromatic Stress Disorder in the Neo-Lydian Landscape.”

If you, Reader, were to try to look like a jazz artist, you would wind up looking like the jazz professor, who tries far harder to look like a jazz artist than an actual jazz artist does. Goatees, berets, tinted glasses, African skull caps, ponytails, and earrings are standard fare. By contrast the committed jazz artist, especially the Epiphyte, doesn't much care what he looks like and doesn't have the money to try anyway.

Identifying Signs

- The aforementioned jazz disguise

Survival Techniques

- The university professor is fully bilingual, equally at home with the pinched, grammatically correct language of the academic, and the jargon-laced, “street” banter of the jazz artist. By necessity, he has multiple personalities to complement his linguistics: entering a music department meeting, he can readily swap out his loose jazz cool for the requisite constipated classical clench.

“The Industry”

We've all known the awkward kid taunted throughout his school years. He's the first to be bullied, the last to be picked for sports teams, and the least likely to land a date; his only recourse is to plan his eventual revenge. Entering adulthood, he channels his rage into his career, fighting his way, dog-eat-dog, to the top. Whether a greedy CEO, an evil slumlord, or a powerful politician, underlying his every move is the subconscious desire to exact payback on his early enemies and redeem his tormented youth.

So it is with the child who is drawn to music, but simply has no talent for it. No matter how much he practices, he never makes it past third chair in band, never gets to play in rock bands with his friends, and is never picked to solo in stage band. Undaunted, he pursues a music degree, majoring in jazz – the most challenging and hopeless musical form. He gets called for a few scattered gigs at first, then never called back, shunned once again for his tin ear.

It doesn't take him long to discover that there's only one path to success; best of all, by taking it, he'll be able to wield devastating power over those who have rejected him. Without looking back, he joins “The Industry” or its periphery: label executives, radio programmers and promoters, critics, arts administrators, booking agents, soundmen, and recording engineers. Collectively, they ruthlessly bully working musicians and ensure that the jazz world will forever be a career cesspool.

Describing the industry's destructiveness could be a full story in itself, but for the sake of brevity, here are single examples of how each of its component parts might suppress an artist. In reality, the examples are endless, and the whole – the machinery's ability to demolish aspiring musicians -- is far greater than the sum of its parts.

Booking Agent: Promises the client a polka band; books three jazz artists and a french accordian player, omits all details until the day of the gig, then assigns the artists a complete setlist for the evening – all authentic polkas – and insists they wear lederhosen and pretend to be German.

Critic: In a race against his peers to discover and give birth to the next Chosen One, finds the least accessible new artist on the scene and writes a review glorifying his music as simply too sophisticated for less enlightened ears, provoking the other critics, in the spirit of competition, to trash the young artist as “utterly without talent,” destroying his career before it has even begun.

Soundman: Working with an acoustic jazz trio in a small hall, uses the concert as an opportunity to show off massive new gear. Tapping into finely honed heavy metal sensibilities, mixes the kick drum and bass above all else, rocking the house with his thunderous, state-of-the-art subwoofers.

Recording Engineer: In the middle of a sensitive song where the band members are interacting at an artistic level previously unknown to them, accidentally hits a button that not only destroys the take, but sends a deafening, ear-piercing squeal through the headphones.

Arts Administrator⁴: Diverts and sucks dry the scant dollars that governmental agencies and charitable foundations earmark for jazz artists.

Club Owner: Books a jazz artist for a weeklong stint, persuading him to cancel several lesser gigs already on his calendar. Shortly before the week begins, dumps him for a better-known Smooth Jazz⁵ act.

Radio Programmer: Conducts focus groups to determine which new jazz CDs are least likely to distract “listeners” in their office environments. Broadcasts these discs exclusively, rejecting any music that is remotely assertive or interesting, thereby convincing the station's audience that jazz is, indeed, dead.

Radio Promoter: Charges artists exorbitant fees in exchange for pestering radio programmers to play the artists' new recordings. Easily gets compliance of the radio programmers, who are happy to be relieved of the task of sorting through hundreds of new CDs that arrive every week from other hopeful, but less wealthy, musicians. Thereby ensures that airplay goes to the artists with the most money, rather than to those who make the best music.

Record Label: Signs an artist to an exclusive deal, does nothing to promote his music, then discards him as used goods, yesterday's news, tomorrow's Gig Whore.

These disparate industry segments don't lend themselves to generalization, beyond their destructive effect on the jazz environment. However, those who reach the top of their

4 This well-fed, parasitic middleman -- typically a jealous amateur musician formally trained in non-profit business administration -- may work either directly for the government or for a government-funded non-profit presenting agency. Either way, he or she enjoys a salary and accompanying benefits unthinkable for a working jazz artist.

5 Smooth Jazz is, of course, not jazz at all. Apart from the fact that its bass and drum parts are actually repetitive pop patterns and its harmonies are simple pop progressions, its practitioners are entirely unlike jazz artists. They are well-paid, well-balanced, enjoy normal hobbies, have many fans, appreciate their audiences, and seem to harbor minimal disdain for mankind as a whole.

profession – particularly the more highly paid record label executives – may share certain characteristics:

Identifying Signs

- Blood on their hands
- Blatant displays of excess, including expensive cars, single-malt scotches, cigars, and professionally reconstructed women

Survival Techniques

- The industry itself is a survival method for those drawn to jazz, money and power, which are otherwise never found in the same place.
- When times get tough, label executives stay afloat by moving from bankrupt company to soon-to-be-bankrupt company. Recently they've discovered a more sure-fire survival technique, stacking their supposed jazz rosters with artists who actually have nothing whatsoever to do with jazz. This fires up a "jazz revival," wherein the public – now fed a diet of pop music labeled as jazz – suddenly discovers that it likes jazz after all.

UPDATE: The jazz industry in the digital age

The industry, as described above, still exists, but breakthroughs in digital technology have created promising new opportunities for better exploiting naïve jazz artists. Digitally enabled predators include jazz-specific web-hosting sites (charging more than double the typical web-hosting fee in exchange for burying the artist's information among hundreds of his peers), database companies selling lists of email contacts (primarily addresses of festivals that don't accept unsolicited materials), and international "promoters" who request CDs from artists looking to perform at festivals abroad, then sell them on eBay. All have in common that – in a field where there's not nearly enough to go around – they siphon money directly from artists, further reducing their minimal incomes by preying on desperate, false hope.

The Classes at Play, and at War

The jazz class system is both hierarchical and pliable. This enables an artist not only to interact with artists from other classes, but also to move from one class to others below it as his career inevitably declines.

Jazz Class Hierarchy

Chosen Ones
Epiphytes
Jazz Educators
Silver Spoons
Gig Whores
Working Spouses
Career Professionals
Survivalists
Industry

Sample Interactions Among Classes

When musicians from two or more classes interact professionally, the results are both predictable and entertaining.

Example One: A bandleader, knowing an Epiphyte has fallen on hard times, invites him to play a wedding gig, along with the leader's usual assemblage of Gig Whores. What happens?

The Epiphyte shows up for the tux gig wearing black jeans, black tennis shoes, white tee-shirt, dark navy blazer, and bow tie. He begins the gig playing in a correctly subdued, unswinging style. During each break, he eats frantically off the buffet, then stuffs more food – cocktail shrimp, brie cheese, spanakopita, and swedish meatballs – into his pockets. He also drinks furiously from the open bar. Each subsequent set, his playing becomes louder and more adventurous, and before long he's embarking on long, angular, ear-bending solos, even as he's swearing at the drummer for not digging in hard enough. The rest of the Gig Whores, caught between wanting to please the leader and emulate the Epiphyte, choose the latter and begin to similarly stretch. The bride's mother complains, the Epiphyte storms off the bandstand, and the leader silently vows to replace his entire band.

Example Two: A record label, impressed by a Gig Whore's resourcefulness, invites him to join its staff. Now, instead of wearing a clown nose and playing "Pop Goes the Weasel" for toddlers' birthday parties, he can have a dignified day job oppressing his fellow jazz artists. What is his response?

"How much does it pay?"

Career Trajectories

Jazz career trajectories conform directly to the law of gravitational forces: Any and all movement is downward. One Gig Whore might marry a woman who financially supports but personally belittles him; another, when times get lean, might be forced to take a low-level day job for survival. An Epiphyte, finding his available oxygen supply running low, might compromise his musical ideals by becoming a Gig Whore, or stand on principle and join the Survivalists. A Silver Spoon, tired of playing inaccessible music for audiences of four to eight people, might instead enter the industry, founding a new record label that documents, for eternity, the same inaccessible music.

Full Circle #1

A label A&R man hears a standout young soloist at a New York club one night and quickly signs him to a deal. The thusly anointed Chosen One puts out several critically acclaimed releases and tours internationally for a number of years before falling out of favor with changing public tastes. Moving back to his hometown, staying rent-free at his parents' house, he becomes an Epiphyte, playing with the best local musicians, but – with gigs far from plentiful in a relatively small city – barely making enough money to cover his living expenses. Memories of his glory days make it hard for him to accept this austere lifestyle, and he gradually lowers the bar, earning more money and retaining less dignity as he becomes a Gig Whore. The demeaning gigs eventually drive him to drink, and he becomes notoriously unreliable. Before long, his calendar starts to empty, and he's forced to look for non-playing work. He holds a series of meaningless part-time day jobs while gradually building a roster of untalented private students. One day, having hit rock-bottom, he is seemingly rescued when his old label calls, looking for a new A&R man, hoping to cash in on his name recognition. He relocates to New York where, his first week on the job, he hears a standout young soloist at a club....

Full Circle #2

An impressionable young jazz pianist is booked by an agent for a solo gig in a hotel lobby. He quickly discovers that the clientele hate it when he plays Coltrane tunes, but love it when he sings Sinatra songs, no matter how badly. Soon, he parlays his vocal success into a steady gig with a bassist and drummer, and before long begins to get lucrative work playing corporate receptions. He hires more band members, and expands the repertoire to include pop favorites. He stops playing piano, preferring instead to front the band on vocals, adding dance steps, shaking his ever-widening butt. One night while singing "Mustang Sally" at a wedding reception, he coaxes the drunken crowd to yell "Ride, Sally, Ride," and discovers the euphoria of audience participation. From there, his life as an entertainer becomes an unquenchable thirst for affirmation. When he occasionally encounters a quiet audience, attentive to the music, it frightens him, sweat flowing from his brow as he tries ever harder to get them dancing and singing. His eventual midlife crisis points him toward the more lucrative, less stressful life of an agent, and the day he books his first job he will have successfully matured from whore to pimp, sending an innocent young pianist into the very lobby where he got his own start.

The variations are endless.