

**Developing Collective Musical Personae:
A Toronto-Based Study of the Performance Practices of Stable Jazz Groups**

by

Ian Sinclair

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Abstract

Using the analytical lenses and methodologies of jazz studies, ethnomusicology, and cultural studies, this dissertation considers a recent trend among many younger Toronto jazz musicians. While the national reputation of Toronto's jazz scene has long been defined by a "swing-to-bop" mainstream sound, since the late 1990s the scene's economic foundations—e.g., well-paying venues and a thriving studio recording industry—that supported this mainstream have mostly collapsed. Without these economic incentives, many younger Toronto musicians have moved away from the bop-oriented mainstream's usual focus on individual improvising prowess on repertoire with narrow stylistic parameters.

Instead, many younger Toronto musicians have been performing much more highly distinctive original compositions. I argue that this idiosyncratic repertoire, and especially the approaches to improvisation employed when performing it, could only develop through long-term commitment to ensembles with fixed membership. Among the groups that participated in my study, stability allowed for the musicians to foster a multi-layered, collective approach to interaction – not only in how they performed with each other, but in how the composers and players interacted with musical traditions themselves, including jazz. On the one hand, I show how this trend to the long-term group has been influenced by a history of stable group activity in jazz that has been, with only a few exceptions, overlooked in jazz scholarship. On the other hand, I point out how the highly developed sense of group identity in rock bands may also have been influential for these young Toronto musicians.

During my fieldwork, all of these groups performed within a small circuit of venues in and around Toronto. These venues—and the musicians, and the audiences who interacted socially and musically within it—formed an overlapping part within the jazz scene – what I call a subscene. Using four groups as primary examples, I explore how these bands formed and then promoted themselves in this subscene. This sets up my in-

depth analysis of how these musicians composed and improvised in ways that were reliant on their consistent interactions over an extended period of time – practices that helped to solidify their collective musical personae.

Table of Contents

Abstract - i	
Acknowledgements - iii	
Table of Contents - iv	
List of Figures - x	
List of Online Audio Examples - xiii	
Chapter 1: Introduction: My Project and Literature Review.....	1
1.1 What happened to the Toronto jazz scene?	
1.2 Survey of Jazz Performance Scholarship	
1.2.1 The Beginnings of Jazz Performance Scholarship	
1.2.2 The Toward Ethnomusicology in Jazz Studies	
1.2.3 Studying the Jazz Performer Through Psychology and Cognitive Science	
1.2.4 Studying the Relationship of Jazz Performance to the West African Diaspora	
1.2.5 Semiotics and African-American Aesthetics (Including Jazz)	
1.2.6 Signifyin(g) and Audiences	
1.3 Studying Jazz Performance in the Context of a Music Scene	
1.3.1 Life as a Working (Jazz) Musician in a Local Scene	
1.3.2 Academic Constructs that Preceded “Scene”	
1.3.3 “Scene” as Academic Construct and as Term in Common Use	
1.3.4 Subscene	
1.4 The Rock Band’s “Collective Persona” and the Stable Band Phenomenon	
1.5 Methodology	
1.6 Contribution to Scholarly Conversation	
1.7 Overview	

Chapter 2: The Stable Group in Jazz Tradition(s).....	49
2.1 Group Identity and Performance in Jazz Tradition(s)	
2.2 A History of the Stable Group in Jazz	
2.2.1 Early Jazz to the Beginnings of Bebop	
2.2.2 Approaches to the Stable Jazz Group in the 1950s and 1960s	
2.3 The Stable Group in Contemporary Jazz	
2.4 Conclusion	
 Chapter 3: Toronto and a History of its Jazz Scene(s).....	69
3.1 Toronto’s Geography and Recent Demographics	
3.2 A History of Toronto Jazz Scene(s)	
3.2.1 The First Live Jazz in Toronto (1910-1945)	
3.2.2 Establishing a “Mainstream” Toronto Jazz Scene (1945-1990)	
3.2.2.1 Early Developments	
3.2.2.2 The Studio Industry “Boom” and its Relationship to the Emerging Mainstream Scene	
3.2.2.3 The First Wave of Venues for the “Mainstream” Scene	
3.2.3 Alternative (Sub)scenes to the Mainstream in the 1970s and 1980s	
3.2.4 The Second Wave of Mainstream-Scene Venues (1990-2006)	
3.3 Jazz in Post-Secondary Schools in Toronto	
 Chapter 4: The Contemporary Downtown Toronto Jazz Scene (2006-).....	92
4.1 Confirming the Scope of the Subscene	
4.2 Toronto Jazz Venues Apart from the TSGJ Subscene	
4.2.1 Mainstream Venues: Restaurants, Bars, and Clubs	
4.2.2 Non-profit venues	
4.2.2.1 Spectrum Music	
4.2.2.2 The (New) Music Gallery	

4.2.2.3 Array Space and Somewhere There

4.3 Primary venues in the TSGJ Subscene

4.3.1 The Tranzac

4.3.2 The Emmet Ray

4.3.3 The Rex Hotel and Bar

Chapter 5: Introducing the Primary Groups of the Study: The Role of Social Dynamics.....125

5.1 Introduction

5.2 The Role of Social Dynamics and Bandleaders in Jazz Groups

5.3 Introducing Primary Groups: “Origin Stories” and Social Dynamics

5.3.1 Groups with Multiple Compositional Voices

5.3.1.1 Worst Pop Band Ever

5.3.1.2 Drumheller

5.3.2 Groups with the Leader’s Compositional Voice

5.3.2.1 Bloomsday

5.3.2.2 Harley Card Quintet

5.4 Conclusion

Chapter 6: Promoting the Collective Persona of the Stable Jazz Group149

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Developing a Promotional Front

6.3 Promoting the Stable Jazz Group’s Collective Persona

6.3.1 Online Promotion

6.3.1.1 Use of Social Media and Independent Online Music Vendors

6.3.1.2 Band Websites

6.3.2 Press Interviews

6.4	Conclusion	
Chapter 7: How Local Factors Can Affect Performance: Venues and Audiences.....169		
7.1	Introduction	
7.2	Physical Venue	
7.3	The Audiences at Jazz Venues and Their Relationship to Performance Practice	
7.3.1	Types of Audience Members at Jazz Events	
7.3.2	How Musicians Relate to Their Audiences	
7.4	Analysis: Ex's of "Negative" Audience Behaviour Affecting Performance	
7.5	Analysis: Ex's of "Positive" Audience Behaviour Affecting Performance	
Chapter 8: Rationale for Analysis of Jazz Performance Practices in the Toronto "Stable Group Jazz Subscene".....197		
8.1	Introduction	
8.2	Adapting Analytical Tradition(s) for Performance	
8.2.1	Adapting Contemporary Jazz Analysis	
8.2.2	Transitioning From Traditional Musicological Analysis	
8.2.3	The Avoidance of Sound in Popular Music Musicology	
8.3	My Analytical Rationale	
8.3.1	"Rock Band Ethos" as Inspiration for Long-Term Contemporary Jazz Groups	
8.3.2	Common Ground for Jazz Groups in a Jazz Scene	
Chapter 9: Drumheller.....216		
9.1	Introduction	
9.2	Interacting with Jazz Tradition(s) as a Band: "Nifac63Charlie"	
9.2.1	The Compositional Approach of Brodie West	

9.2.2	Performance Analysis	
9.2.2.1	The Finalized Chart: More Conventional...But Still Unconventional	
9.2.2.2	Episode 1: The Prologue	
9.2.2.3	Episode 2: Interacting with Calypso, Interacting with Jazz Tradition(s)	
9.3	Conclusion	
Chapter 10: Bloomsday.....		243
10.1	Introduction	
10.2	David French's Overall Compositional Voice: Interacting with Jazz Tradition(s)	
10.3	Bloomsday's Overall Approach to Interacting with Jazz Tradition(s)	
10.4	"Kool Keith"	
10.4.1	Compositional Voice in "Kool Keith"	
10.4.2	Bloomsday Performance Practice in "Kool Keith"	
10.4.2.1	Melodic Interpretation	
10.4.2.2	Navigating the Two-Drummer Ensemble; Ensemble Groove	
10.4.2.3	Bloomsday's Approach to Improvisation in "Kool Keith"	
10.5	Conclusion	
Chapter 11: Harley Card Quintet.....		267
11.1	Introduction	
11.2	The Group's Relationship to Jazz Tradition(s) Enacted Through Playing Standards	
11.3	Harley Card's Compositional Approach for his Stable Group	
11.4	Compositions that Build on Mainstream Jazz Convention	
11.4.1	Analysis: "Get There"	
11.4.2	Analysis: "Fruition"	

11.5 Breaking Mainstream Jazz Conventions, Building a Group Approach

11.5.1 Analysis: “Crossing the Berg”

11.6 Conclusion

Chapter 12: A Conclusion - Jazz in Toronto Ain’t What It Used To Be.....	289
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Appendices

Appendix A: Details Regarding Non-Primary Groups in the Toronto Stable Group Jazz Subscene	295
Appendix B: Drum Set Notation Key	297
Appendix C: “Nifac63Charlie” by Brodie West for Drumheller	298
Appendix D: “Nifac63Charlie” by Brodie West for Drumheller: Annotated Analysis of “A Section”	300
Appendix E: “Kool Keith” by David French for Bloomsday: Original Sheet Music	305
Appendix F: “Fruition” by Harley Card: Original Sheet Music	308
Appendix G: “Get There” by Harley Card: Annotated Analysis	310
Appendix H: “Crossing the Berg” by Harley Card: Annotated Analysis	315
Bibliography.....	319
Discography.....	338