



PROVIDING JAZZ RESOURCES FOR IOWA'S EDUCATORS

President's Message Kelly Weber

"Welcome Back".

Words that will mark the return to the 2021-2022 school year with more significance than ever before. When the world turned upside-down in 2020, I swore I would never again take for granted the ability to teach a rehearsal. And while it would be easy to compartmentalize the frustrations of teaching in a pandemic, I truly believe we can all learn from the experience. How will you use the experiences of last year to elevate your teaching this year? What will you look forward to bringing back?

In this article you will hear from Nolan Hauta and Dean Sorenson on the role of collaboration in their pandemic teaching experience. There are also fabulous articles including how to best prepare our students for the collegiate scene (Chris Merz) as well as words of wisdom about warm up routines from a small school perspective (Bruce Peiffer). There is also information on Sammy Miller's "Playbook"- a fabulous new web-based tool that combines play-along charts and individual instruction.

It is my hope as I step into the role of President that JEI can provide resources and support to all of you as you navigate your "return to normal"- whatever that may be.

JEI BOARD

PRESIDENT
KELLY WEBER

PRESIDENT-ELECT
KELLI SWEHLA

PAST PRESIDENT
DENNIS GREEN

VICE-PRESIDENT
STEVE SHANLEY

SECRETARY
JENNIFER TIEDE

TREASURER
JEFF ROBILLIARD

[Join us on](#)

facebook

[Listen to Jazz](#)



Collaborative Commissions – You Can Do It!

Dean Sorenson and Nolan Hauta



Dean Sorenson and Nolan Hauta completed a collaborative commission experience in the spring of 2021. The piece “Farther Down the Bank” was composed over the course of a semester and was premiered by the University of Dubuque Jazz Ensemble on April 14, 2021. This article will share elements of that project from the perspectives of the composer, director, and student musicians.

Of all the takeaways that will inevitably come out of this pandemic once it is over, one of the most prominent is the idea that distance collaboration can be done in a meaningful way. Distance work has many positives. No travel to worry about, more flexible scheduling, and access to anyone is possible literally around the world. To be clear, the gold standard for collaborative work is of the in-person variety. However, we can use some of the positive elements of distance collaboration as an enhancement to in-person work to create something even more meaningful for students.

The Director Perspective

In the fall of 2020 I was searching for flexible repertoire for the spring semester. I noticed that Dean Sorenson has several Flex Jazz compositions published by Kjos. I did some more looking and found something interesting on his website; a description of a commission project that didn't look like a typical commission.

This commission was designed to begin with student input, include student feedback of drafts/revisions, help students better understand what composers do, and improve their grasp of how music theory works. I knew this was a very rare opportunity so I contacted Dean immediately. We quickly went from emailing, to calling, to signing a contract. He and I have met before and of course he has a great reputation so I felt comfortable trying something new. The 2020-2021 school year was already full of uncertainty, why not take on a new project?

The best part of the project was frequently interacting with Dean via Zoom. On the other hand, finding time for all of these meeting sessions in rehearsals was the most challenging part for me as a director. Since the project would span two concert cycles, I invested a lot of time mapping out the semester and each rehearsal. I recommend that directors spend time developing a plan and that they stay organized.

I thought that I had adequately prepared students to understand the purpose of this project: explaining how it works, their role, and advising them to ask questions and offer input. Some of the students were fully on board from day one, others were unsure of what we were doing, and most fell somewhere in between. Looking back, I see that I could have done more to explain the project to them ahead of time or find ways to get more of their input earlier in the process.

Provide yourself with rehearsal time between the project completion date and the performance/recording. Students will spend time throughout the project playing various drafts and providing feedback. They will develop an overall sense of the piece but actually rehearsing the finished product won't occur until later. Rehearsing the drafts is important, but as the piece evolves students need to be made aware of any harmful habits they picked up earlier in the project (e.g., a unison rhythm which is now presented canonically, a change of key, a swing feel which is now straight). Students may also not be self-aware of their own potential or limitations when influencing the construction of the piece. Some ensembles may need a composition that relies heavily on repetition (i.e., a formal structure similar to ternary form) whereas others are capable of less repetitive forms and more intricate development of themes. One sure way to invite stress into this endeavor is to "bite off more than you can chew." Consider deliberate under-programming of the other concerts during the semester in which you tackle this project. A project like this may even be downright uncomfortable at times: it is a new mindset for directors and students to focus less on the product (the performance) and focus more on the process (collaborating with a composer).

Whether it be Zoom, Teams, or any other video conference technology, practice using it ahead of time to avoid user error. Time with the composer is limited and the revision process does take time out of rehearsals. Sometimes technology in the classroom operates differently than it does at home so try to have everything ready early if you can. Have a backup plan and have the composer's phone number on hand. For my purposes, beginning rehearsals with a Zoom call with Dean was helpful in that we never ran out of time to speak with him. A downside was that Dean would often end up hearing our sight reading attempts of each new draft of the piece instead of a rehearsed version. Keep in mind that performing over video conference technology will have its own limitations anyway.

Our project concluded with a world premiere performance in front of a live audience. I had intended to also have students record their parts individually. Unfortunately, I did not budget enough rehearsal time at the end of the semester to accomplish this goal. If I had it to do over, I would have been more specific in my expectations and my plan for students to record their individual parts.

During the semester of our project, Dean and I faced snow days without rehearsals, a flat tire, and other unforeseen hiccups. Work together to compromise and make things work as best you can. Having a contract at the onset is useful, but the unexpected can happen. Again, part of having backup plans is to be ready to pivot to a new idea if something unfortunate springs up. A snow day could become a Zoom listening day with the composer instead of a live reading of the latest draft, for example. Dean and I knew each other at the onset of this project, and since we debriefed after each Zoom session, we understood each other's ability to be flexible. That provided critical for this project to be so successful.

The Student Perspective

Some of the students were quite hands-on and enjoyed being involved at every step along the way whereas others preferred to be observers. Naturally, those most knowledgeable about music theory took more of a leadership role. As the director, I took a backseat to allow the students to do all the decision-making with Dean.

Even at the first meeting with Dean, the students surprised me: they requested that the commission explore less-common key signatures than is often found in band music. They had several other ideas to experiment with and set this piece apart from other jazz compositions they had encountered: a tempo change, alternating between a swing feel and a straight feel, etc.

Student names on each part was a fun little perk that Dean added (e.g., Zach vs. Tenor Saxophone). A little thing like that can help with the student buy-in or investment into the piece. Initially, students may not realize how uncommon this type of opportunity is and that it truly is something special to experience.

These Zoom sessions with Dean emboldened me as the director to discuss music theory and form more in rehearsals and in my Jazz History lecture course. I also began comparing elements of our commission with other repertoire from the spring concert cycles and from the previous semester. When students began to draw parallels between the commission and other music, their excitement level increased. At times, we as directors can run the risk of "teaching to the test" (i.e., teaching repertoire) rather than providing knowledge and skills that are transferable to other music - whether that be inside or outside of the classroom. I observed students learning new things, considering new perspectives, and contributing to a new composition while still having multiple performances that semester. I count that as a win. I hope other directors try this approach too.

[Continue Reading on the JEI Resources Blog](#)

Warm Ups From a Small School Setting

Bruce Peiffer

As I'm sure it is with all young band directors, we go into teaching with a quiet confidence that we've got this. But also admitting to ourselves that we have a lot to learn along the way. We try to balance the unknown with the known and keep pushing forward hoping that no one will notice our inadequacies.

I had several outstanding directors (Prof. Jerry Tolson, Dr. David Evans, Prof. Ron Lipka, Prof. Rolaine Hetherington) to name a few. They all had their special ways of getting the ensemble ready for rehearsal. But as a student you really don't pay attention to the why or how things might take place on a daily basis. So, as an adult, what you do know, is that you don't know. And that's when you ask for help.

Probably my second year with the Sigourney Jazz Band, (1993 - 98) I took the band over to Oskaloosa where Barnhouse Composer Andy Clark was part of a small team of clinicians who would listen to us and help me/us with developing authentic jazz articulations, rhythmic stylings and the usual jazz clinician stuff. My band (for my young, inexperienced ears) was sounding pretty good and swinging hard. I was going to knock this team of clinician's socks off. To my surprise, Andy talked about one thing. (toss in Andy Clark's Oklahoma accent here) "You know what your band needs to do, is warm up to a series of long tones." I'm like, what?? But, but, but.... He didn't mince words. "Your band can play the chart but the tone quality needs some real work."

Thankfully, I was not afraid to seek help and take heed on other's recommendations. This is how we grow. Andy recommended his Five Minutes A Day Jazz Warm Up compilation which starts with, you guessed it, long tones. Holy Cow! Forget about the articulation section, the chorale section, the tuning section. The long tones blown over a 12 bar Bb Blues progression made an immediate difference. After witnessing the quick and impressive progress in tone production, I began to realize that there were a thousand ways to improve on this basic warm up of blowing long tones.

[Continue reading on the JEI Resources Blog](#)

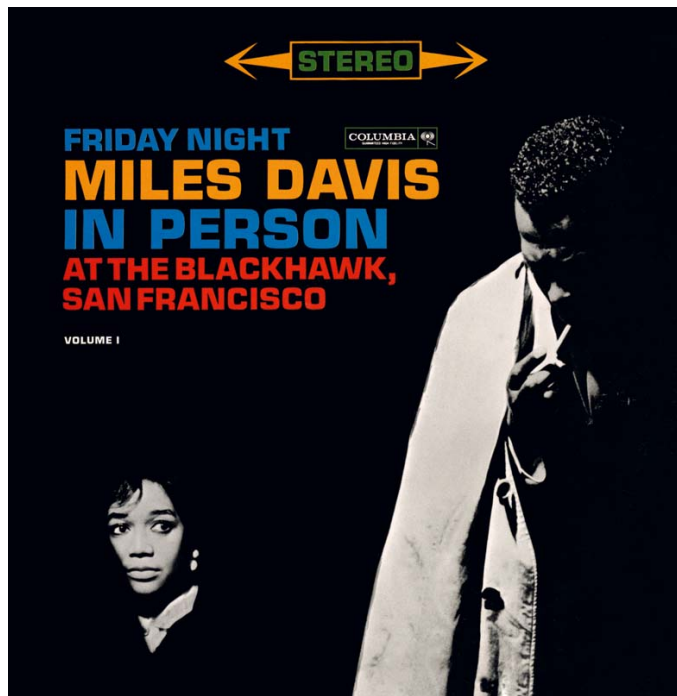
A Note on Preparing Students for Collegiate Level

Chris Merz

In my capacity as a jazz professor at UNI, I meet or email with prospective students on a more or less weekly basis throughout the school year. One question that arises again and again is some variation of “How can I best prepare myself for success in jazz in college?” Most of the first-year college students I encounter have received first-rate instruction in reading notation and ensemble playing, but lag in jazz vocabulary (think line construction) and deep stylistic knowledge. The very best way to acquire those skills is through spending time with recordings. This should take two forms: focused listening and learning by ear.

It has never been easier to access the entirety of recorded jazz history. So much music is now available, free of charge, on platforms such as Spotify and YouTube, as well as “pay what you wish” sites like Band Camp and subscription services such as Tidal, Qobuz and Deezer. On one hand, this is great news! When your teacher tells you to listen to the recording of “If I Were a Bell” from set three of *Friday Night, Miles Davis in Person at the Blackhawk, San Francisco*, it’s actually possible to find that exact recording (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS8Tr5xdUfc>), and even to compare it to the version from set one from the following night (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpaMLjbfR2s>). For those of us who grew up in rural Iowa in the 1970s, this is an unimaginable paradise. I can still recall visiting BJ Records in Iowa City (30 miles north of my hometown of Washington) once a month with the money I had saved from mowing lawns, hoping to find a record I had heard about from my teacher. I remember the day I found Mel Lewis and the Jazz Orchestra’s *Bob Brookmeyer, Composer/Arranger* in the cutout bin for 99 cents! I still have that record, and I can sing along with all of the Dick Oatts solos on it. Portions of those solos come out in my playing without my having to think about it.

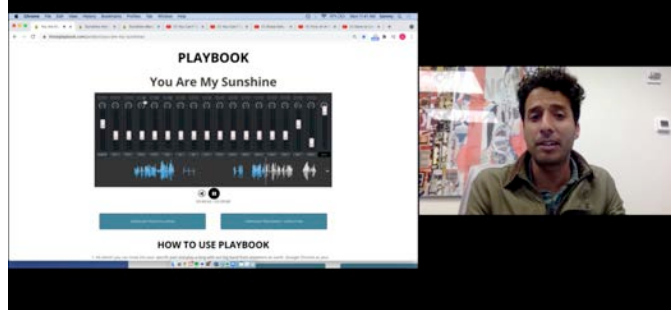
It has never been easier to
access the entirety of recorded
jazz history.



As exciting as it is to have immediate, free access to so much music, there are potential pitfalls. When I make a listening assignment, I typically have something specific I want the student to get from the recommended recording. For example, Miles Davis recorded “On Green Dolphin Street” many times in his career, but something unique happens in the exchange between Wayne Shorter’s and Herbie Hancock’s solos in the version found on *The Complete Live at the Plugged Nickel*, second set from December 23, 1965 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xO2wouv4xpA>, around 10:40). This particular moment doesn’t happen on any of Miles’s other recordings of this tune. Listening to every version of that song (or putting the entire recorded output of Miles Davis on shuffle play) is not likely to yield the desired result. Nor is hearing that moment only once likely to cement it in your memory. Repetition is how we learn language, and the language of jazz is no different. How often do we listen to a single track (or even a single solo) multiple times in a row for several days running? Try this experiment—select a brief solo you really like. Listen to that solo 5 times in a row every day for a month. At the end of the month, see how much of the solo you can sing without the recording. You almost can’t avoid absorbing the material.

This leads to my second suggestion for preparing for jazz in college—

[Continue reading on the JEI Resources Blog](#)



“The Tool I Wish I’d Had in High School”

Playbook aims to bring the conservatory experience to every student

[Watch Sammy Miller demonstrate Playbook on the JEI YouTube channel.](#)

Sammy Miller is a Julliard-trained and GRAMMY nominated drummer whose band Sammy Miller and The Congregation has headlined at the Newport and Umbria Jazz Festivals, and opened for diverse performers ranging from One Republic to The Blind Boys of Alabama. Sammy spent the long months of the COVID quarantine thinking about the work in schools that had always been a part of his tours.

“In every city we’d go to, we’d spend about an hour in a school, as much time as we could before performing. But then we would leave and deuces, like now you’re on your own. And so we dreamt of coming up with a way to bring the conservatory training that we all got at places like Julliard and Oberlin for K-12 students.”

When gigs dried up during the pandemic, Sammy and his band had the time to develop something they’d been talking about ever since they’d first gone on the road: an application that would provide mentorship and training long after the band left town. The result is Playbook, a web-based tool that combines play-along charts and individual instruction, tailored to a variety of skill and experience levels.

Playbook begins with a screen that provides a big band arrangement and charts for a standard, such as “You Are My Sunshine.” The student or director can use the online mixing console to listen to each part, or to fill in instruments not present in class. Charts are provided, along with the full concert and transposed scores. Sammy recruited friends from both inside and outside his band to provide individualized instruction.

“Grace Kelly is here teaching alto saxophone, Alphonso Horne teaching the trumpets,” Sammy explains. “These are incredible musicians that students may have seen on YouTube or Instagram.”



John Rapson performs “Hot Tamale Louie” at the 2018 Iowa City Jazz Festival (photo courtesy of George Dorman, KCCCK radio)

Remembering John Rapson

JEI Hall of Fame member Ira “John” Rapson, former chair of the University of Iowa Jazz Studies department and a prolific educator, composer, and performer, passed away July 21, 2021 after a long bout with cancer.

John joined the UI music faculty in 1993. He established both the BA and MA programs in jazz studies and passionately developed and advocated for the program during his twenty-six year career as head of the department.

Fellow UI faculty member and 2020 JEI Hall of Fame inductee Jim Dreier wrote the following remembrance:

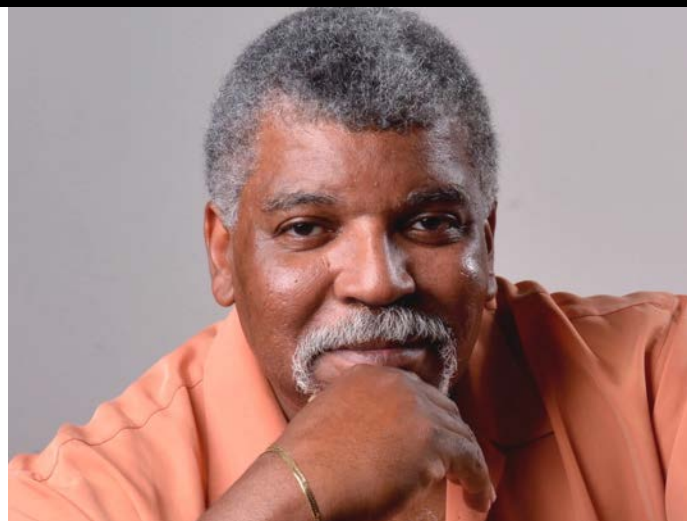
John began teaching at Iowa in 1993 as the only jazz faculty instructor. When he retired in 2019, he left a department with 4 full time faculty (one part time), M.M and B.M. degrees in jazz studies and a career full of remarkable accomplishments. He was a hall of fame educator and the recipient of numerous awards. As a prolific composer and collaborator, he created a unique catalog of music (much of it based on improvisations) and music/spoken word productions (Hot Tamale Louie).

As the jazz area head, John built foundations that the department is now building and expanding on. He could negotiate the halls of academia and was a warrior in the trenches when needed. All of this while keeping the heart and soul of a creative jazz musician. A rare blend.

The outpouring from all of John's former students, fellow musicians, and friends is evidence of his true impact. Yet, few mention any of the accomplishments listed above. Instead, they write that he was “welcoming,” “generous,” “a role model,” “a teacher and a friend,” “a mentor,” and this one has been repeated often; “John taught me how to be a good musician and a good person.”

[Continue reading on the JEI Resources Blog](#)

Jerry Tolson Named to JEI Hall of Fame

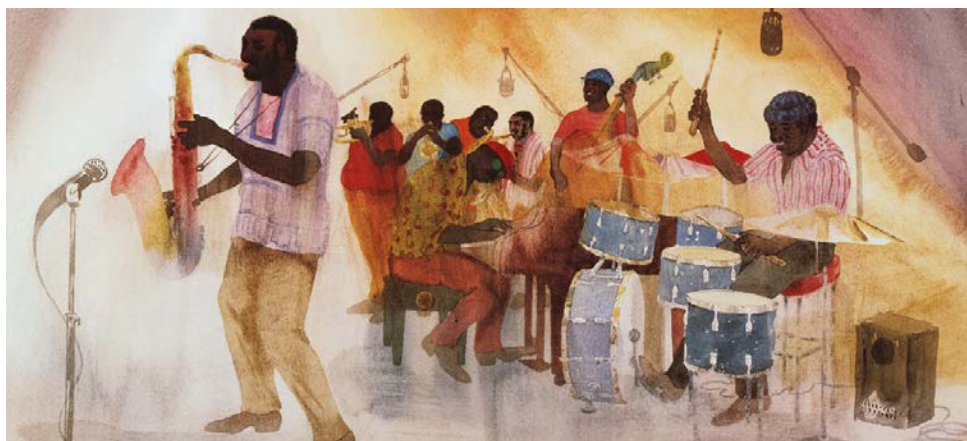


Jerry Tolson, Professor of Music Education and Jazz Studies and Chair of the Academic and Professional Studies Department in the School of Music at the University of Louisville, has been named the 2021 inductee to the Jazz Educators of Iowa (JEI) Hall of Fame. The JEI Hall of Fame recognizes individuals who have created new directions and curricular innovations in regards to jazz education in the state of Iowa.

Tolson will receive his award at the Iowa Jazz Championships in April 2022.

A Mt. Pleasant, Iowa native, Tolson taught in Iowa at Sigourney, Des Moines Dowling, and Des Moines Hoover, as well as Central College and the University of Nebraska-Omaha before receiving his appointment at Louisville.

“There are a few names that people keep mentioning as having a huge impact on jazz education in our state, and Jerry Tolson is one that comes up again and again,” said Dennis Green, JEI past-President. “One of Iowa’s first Black music educators, Jerry was a role model to students and other teachers across the state. Many of the things he put into place as a young band director are hallmarks of jazz teaching in Iowa today. And he continues to be a positive impact on Iowa jazz education, through the many students who followed him into teaching as well as returning home to serve as an adjudicator and clinician.”



Six Year All-State Jazz Trends by Class:														
Class	Alto Sax	Tenor Sax	Bari Sax	Lead Tpt	Sect. Tpt	Lead Bone	Sect. Bone	Bass Bone	Piano	Guitar	Vibes	Bass	Drums	Total:
1A/2A 2021	4	1	3	6	1	4	2	0	1	1	4	4	2	33
1A/2A 2020	6	4	3	7	8	3	0	0	0	1	4	5	5	46
1A/2A 2019	10	6	1	8	2	5	2	2	3	1	2	2	5	49
Class	Alto Sax	Tenor Sax	Bari Sax	Lead Tpt	Sect. Tpt	Lead Bone	Sect. Bone	Bass Bone	Piano	Guitar	Vibes	Bass	Drums	Total:
3A 2021	15	9	6	4	13	3	6	3	6	4	4	5	6	84
3A 2020	7	8	3	3	11	3	6	6	6	4	5	8	7	77
3A 2019	13	13	6	5	11	5	8	3	4	2	3	5	6	84
Class	Alto Sax	Tenor Sax	Bari Sax	Lead Tpt	Sect. Tpt	Lead Bone	Sect. Bone	Bass Bone	Piano	Guitar	Vibes	Bass	Drums	Total:
4A 2021	14	10	4	4	13	4	5	1	2	2	3	3	8	73
4A 2020	7	13	4	2	12	6	7	3	6	3	4	7	11	85
4A 2019	14	14	6	4	20	5	7	1	6	4	3	4	6	94
												Totals		
												2021	190	
												2020	208	
												2019	224	



JAZZ EDUCATORS OF IOWA

www.jeiowa.org

[Listen to Jazz](#)



[Join us on](#)

facebook

Renew your membership today:

- **Renew online at this link** (<https://jazz-educators-of-iowa.square.site>)
- **Download membership form and mail a check at this link**
(https://www.jeiowa.org/uploads/home/registration_pdf/1/JEIRegForm_New.pdf)

“One of the things I like about jazz, kid, is I don’t know what’s going to happen next.”

Bix Beiderbecke

The JEI Newsletter is
edited by
Michael Omarzu