



TAKE FIVE – EDITION XII – 2017

By Hilary Robertson

The world of jazz – like every musical genre today and through time – is evolving. Part of that evolution is in very safe hands, based on the collaborations and creativity visible and audible this spring. Eight British jazz musicians took time out of their successful careers at Take Five. They met in the depths of Kent in the beautiful setting of Bore Place to make sense of the industry behind the creativity. And, of course, the music was extraordinary.

Take Five gives musicians working in the UK time away from creating music to focus on building their careers. Finding new audiences and introducing them to what you're creating is never easy. Keeping your existing audience informed about what you're doing has never been more of a challenge, with so many social and anti-social media available. By hearing advice from some industry leaders, these musicians shift their focus for just a few days, take stock and make plans.

The eight musicians gathered together this March made a formidable band – some of the 'ones to watch' in British jazz. Working as they are all over the UK, it's unlikely they would ever appear together in any other context and they complemented each other brilliantly. Bassist Olie Brice, drummer Corrie Dick, pianists Rebecca Nash and Paul Edis, guitarist Shirley Tetteh, sax player Duncan Eagles, trumpeter Kim Macari and trombonist Richard Foote all brought skills and charts along in a remarkable example of musical collaboration. Each one had submitted a potential project as part of the Take Five application process – there are big plans afoot.

The idea of the Take Five experience took flight in 2004, at the instigation of some committed supporters of talent development at Jerwood Charitable Foundation and PRS for Music Foundation, who were the founding funding partners of this programme, that is devised and delivered annually by music producers Serious, latterly with further financial assistance from Help Musicians UK, Arts Council England and the Serious Trust. This twelfth edition brings the total of musicians involved to nearly 100.

Practical workshops

Convening the musical element of Take Five is composer, arranger and legendary baritone saxophone player John Surman. Like most of the participants involved in Take Five, he's so much more than an expert on one instrument, with an impressive history going back to the early 1960s, skilled as a performer on soprano saxophone, bass clarinet and electronic instruments.

Surman has been an integral part of the process since the early years and he's seen it change as the business has changed. "We started by asking each musician to bring a piece to be performed and recorded by the ensemble," he explained. "Over the years, home recording and creating your own CDs has become simpler, so there was no mystery any more. The emphasis changed and we moved from recording back to the music creation process, so everyone makes a contribution to each person's own composition. We still record a final performance, but these musicians are used to the techniques of recording and producing their music, so it's the collaboration that we focus on.

"The challenge is that they begin the week as eight strangers, often from different musical backgrounds. But that challenge is one they all rise to. They're all immensely talented and most have been through music colleges and performed with a range of different ensembles, so working with them is exciting."



One of the evening sessions was a Q&A session with Surman, and the musicians learned about his background and how he managed his own musical career and found the people to guide and manage him along the way. “It’s the path I chose. I’ve trusted my belief in the music I play and the people around me.”

Another dimension was work the participants did through the week with Mary McCusker on warming up and preparing for performance. They were all open to new ideas and keen to develop new routines to improve how they come across on stage. An impressive actress, Mary also works as a communicator and performance consultant, engaging with businesses and government bodies to help people develop presenting skills. She helped each artist create and perfect their elevator pitch – that important speech when you might, for just a few short moments, have the ear of someone influential.

Creativity, concentration and collaboration

The musical sessions were true collaboration in action. These eight musicians put their keenest eyes to navigating around charts, perfecting arrangements. There was an air of concentration as chords were discussed before the freedom of improvisation took over in producing outstanding musical results. They listened to each other and embraced the individuality of styles, creating sometimes jaw-droppingly beautiful music.

Business perspectives

A wide range of industry professionals passed through Bore Place, sharing their experiences. Each one brought a different perspective on the business of jazz – reflecting the realities of creativity and making a living.

So the musicians learned about funding applications and how the process works with Naomi Belshaw (PRS for Music Foundation). They received insights from Joe Townsend (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance) and agent Matt Fripp (JazzFuel), which shares tips and career advice with jazz musicians around the world.

Scott Cohen (The Orchard) gave an insight into digital media and how musicians can use different streams. “The problem now is that you’re competing directly against Louis Armstrong and inane YouTube videos at the same time,” he said. “The game has changed and you have to change with it. You have to understand how to create specific content for specific services and use the huge variety of marketing opportunities open to you for your own benefit. You have to be as creative in your marketing as you are in your music making. The only thing that always works is great content, so take advantage of the changing world in an ever-changing world.”

Amelia Ideh (Put Me On It) is a digital marketing expert in the music industry. “It’s never been easier to use the tools available to present yourself effectively and creatively,” she said. “As musicians, you have to work out who can help you and how you can use your contacts and digital media to achieve your goals. Bring your music to life and be aware that your competition is all the arts – photography, fine art, literature, film and everything else – not just other musicians.”

Through the week, other speakers included Emily Jones (Cheltenham Festival), Amy Sibley-Allen (Kings Place), Kenneth Killeen (Improvised Music Company and the festival, 12 points), talking about performance opportunities and how to make the most of them. The legal and financial



aspects of the business were taken care of by Tony Morris (Marriott Harrison LLP) and Ope Igbinyemi (Serious).

Miles Evans (media and communications consultant) and Piers Mason (Serious) gave advice on how to get attention. “Your Electronic Press Kit (EPK) has to be complete and up to date all the time,” Piers reminded the musicians. “Make sure the information is formatted so venues and promoters can use it effectively. You need videos and photos with all the background information. You must take advantage of the different ways jazz is being presented and consider what you can offer a festival or a venue.”

Consumers’ changing habits

Paulette Long (Westbury Music) talked about publishing and Dave Stapleton (Edition Records) gave an insight into the recording and producing process. How you own and then distribute your music is changing as consumers’ habits are changing. Chris Phillips (Jazz FM) already knew the music and the projects the eight Take Five musicians were involved in and he encouraged them to contact the station regularly. “Jazz FM is more than a radio station,” he said. “It’s a portal through many different media. You need to create the story and we can reach audiences around the world.”

Stapleton said: “You have to consider building a fan base and then producing the material in a format that they can listen to it, whether that’s physical or streamed. The number one source of music listening is YouTube. That’s the changing world of listening to music – out and about, or in the home.”

The week included several opportunities to create film to promote their projects, working with Nick Hillel from Yeast Culture. Nick’s impressive portfolio includes work with Courtney Pine, Jamie Cullum and the Philharmonia Orchestra, so even those less familiar with the practicalities of filming knew they were in safe hands. From an overview session on day one to practical sessions, Nick guided the musicians through what can be an uncomfortable – but immensely rewarding – process. Already, some of those films have appeared on social media and websites.

Participants’ projects – taking it forward

For most of the participants in Take Five, their social media channels showed rapidly in the days following the course how much they’d taken on board. For pianist Paul Edis, the week helped him thinking about his priorities and ambitions. “So far I’ve done a fair bit of work on my social media side of things, and I have some clear ideas about what to do next to advance my current projects,” he said. “I performed live on Jazz Record Requests and I’m heavily involved in the Gateshead International Jazz Festival, so it feels like I’ve hit the ground running (though there’s a lot to do yet!).”

Paul hopes his next project will take him into the concert hall with orchestras across the UK and beyond. Fellow pianist Rebecca Nash is also active as a composer and her sights are also set on international tours. Her focus is on cymatics – the effect of sound vibration on matter to create visual effects. A similarly ambitious project is the vision of Shirley Tetteh, who wants to explore the use of sound effects with bass strings added to a guitar, as well as use of a vocal harmonizer. There’s a tour in the making.

Trombonist Richard Foote quickly followed up contacts made during the week to find gigs, including for his masterful Young Pilgrims, while saxophonist Duncan Eagles took time out from



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releasing the new Partikel album a few weeks later to use video made during the week to promote his jazz night – ‘Inventions and Dimensions’. Bassist Olie Brice’s proposed project was to combine his existing trio (including Tobias Delius and Mark Sanders) to work with New York cornet player Kirk Knuffke. Corrie Dick came to Take Five with a project in mind to release singles more suited to the playlist culture. He’s a drummer with an impressive repertoire with other jazz stars including Laura Jurd’s Dinosaur. That’s a lot of ambitious and exciting projects which were conceived as part of the pre-Take Five process, which were honed during the week and now will begin to take shape.

Trumpeter Kim Macari said: “What I didn't fully realise was that I was coming into Take Five with my creative tank almost at empty. Although I'd had a busy year running a touring programme and making music I was passionate about, at some point I'd pushed too far and I couldn't find the space in the busy real world to take time to re-fill my tank and look toward the future.

“Take Five was a life-changing experience for me. Serious created a warm, positive, safe space for all of us to be artists, to be vulnerable and open enough to take on huge amounts of information and make big changes in the way we want to work, present ourselves and think about the world.

“For me, perhaps the biggest lesson was that there doesn't have to be a divide between the music and the business. As creative people, we can tell our story and reach people in creative ways; promotion and marketing doesn't have to be a chore, it can be another form of your creative expression. That was the biggest surprise for me - each session we had which dealt with industry actually inspired me creatively too. I left the Take Five residency renewed, absolutely full of ideas and with my creative tank fit to burst!”