

### Take Five: UK Edition X – by Ian Patterson

Nestled in the heart of the Kent countryside is Bore Place, an organic farm that dates to the seventeenth century. Here, the mobile phone signal is unreliable and internet connection is dicky at best. The only sound is the tenor and baritone lowing of cows. It's the perfect place to plonk eight young jazz/improvising musicians for a week.

The musicians in question aren't here to detox though. After all, hedonism among hard-working jazz musicians is largely--like smoke-filled black and white jazz photographs--a thing of the past. Nor are they here to get their chops together, despite music being an important component of the six-day residency.

The overarching purpose of the Take Five UK programme run by Serious, the UK's largest producer of jazz, world and international contemporary music is another. "The main idea," says Serious' Associate Director Martel Ollerenshaw, "is to demystify the business side of jazz."

The money side of jazz is one that many jazz musicians are uncomfortable with and often, by their own admission, inept at. This may have a lot to do with the by now deeply rooted notions held in many quarters that jazz is art and not commerce. As the recent selling of Paul Gauguin's oil painting *When Will You Marry?* (1892) for \$300 million emphatically underlines, art can be very big business indeed.

It would be disingenuous to ignore jazz's relationship with daily commerce. "Even though, unlike pop, jazz is considered a non-commercial music it doesn't mean money is not involved," says Ollerenshaw. "It's most definitely involved." Though impossible to estimate with any accuracy, the jazz industry generates colossal sums of money.

The staging and promotion of the Montreal International Jazz Festival, for example - the artists' fees involved, tickets sales, transport and accommodation, food and beverage, merchandising and so on, moves many millions of dollars. Multiply that by the thousands of jazz festivals around the world, add the huge number of live venues of all shapes and sizes that promote jazz globally every night and the hundreds of institutions offering jazz courses to aspiring musicians and a rough figure begins to emerge. Jazz in the twenty first century is a billion dollar industry.

Admittedly jazz can't hold a candle to pop, rock or hip-hop when it comes to record sales, but if jazz musicians weren't concerned on some level with money then why would they go to the considerable trouble of making CDs in the first place? Or play gigs to a paying public? Or apply for funding?

Commercial success in jazz is often equated with "selling out" or associated with "inferior" music. However, Dave Brubeck, Ahmad Jamal, Charles Lloyd and Miles Davis all enjoyed million-sellers without compromising their artistic integrity.

Few young jazz musicians pursue a career in the music expecting to emulate such success stories but at the very least to make a dignified living is surely the goal of the majority.

A common denominator linking the eight musicians participating in the tenth edition of Take Five UK is ambition; all without exception talk of their desire to play the main stage at major festivals, to

receive commissions to compose, to lead their own bands on international tours and to record their original music consistently.

Realising such aims entails a multitude of considerations beyond the music-making process itself: “You need to be good at everything,” says singer Lauren Kinsella, whose striking originality is apparent on releases such as *All This Talk About* (WideEar Records, 2012), *My Guess* (Diatribes Records, 2012) and *Blue Eyed Hawk* (Edition Records, 2014). “Rehearsals, meetings, gigging, and marketing – it’s endless,” says the London-based Irish artist.

Self-promotion, financial management, planning and the development of inter-personal skills are of paramount importance for all ambitious jazz/improvising musicians. To that end, the Take Five UK residency at Bore Place offers the eight musicians a rare opportunity to connect with a wide cross-section of experts involved in all aspects of the music business.

The number and quality of guest speakers around which Take Five UK’s programme revolves is truly impressive.

Day one offers Q&A sessions with Scott Cohen, founder of The Orchard, the world’s largest digital distribution company; Deborah King, Director of the creative music organisation Brighter Sound, which produces events and commissions; Ben Mandelson, producer and co-founder of WOMEX –the world’s largest world music trade fair/showcase event; David Porter, Director of Creative Arts Promotion and the Hull Jazz Festival; Roger Wright, Chief Executive of Aldeburgh Music and former Controller of BBC Radio 3.

On day two, the Q&A sessions involve Mike Bartlett, Director of April Seven Music Ltd., a marketing, management and consultancy company; Paulette Long, publisher at Westbury Music and PR specialist; Simon Frith, Tovey Professor of Music, University of Edinburgh, author and renowned music journalist; Piers Mason, Associate Director of Communications at Serious and marketing expert; Vanessa Reed, Executive Director of PRS for Music Foundation, the UK’s leading charitable funder of music; Peggy Sutton, Producer of the influential radio programme Jazz on 3, which emanates from the independent production company Somethin’ Else.

And if the eight musicians’ brains aren’t yet going into meltdown, day three serves up even more food for thought from Frank Bolder, Program Manager for the North Sea Jazz Festival and music venue Lantaren Venster; Simon Drake, Director of the award-winning Naim Label Group; Miles Evans, Head of Media Relations at Serpentine Galleries; Ameila Ideh, founder of Put Me On It, a communications consultancy; Graeme Leak, an independent composer, performer and musical director.

On the final full day of the program the lone guest speaker is James Hannam, Senior Grants Manager at PRS for Music Foundation, though Ollerenshaw herself conducts a post-lunch session on budgeting. All told it’s an intense week, by any yardstick.

Serious leaves no stone unturned in its bid to sharpen the career focus of the eight musicians. It’s what sets Take Five UK apart from numerous other schemes that are perhaps more geared to musical creativity and skills development.

“Most of the musicians who come to Take Five UK don’t need that sort of skills development,” explains Ollerenshaw, “because, usually, they’ve been through a university course and they’re very highly skilled.”

What many are not so skilled in are marketing and self-promotion. They also tend to lack knowledge of the workings of the music business, in all its complexities. Take Five UK offers a rare insight into the nuts and bolts of the business side of the industry and importantly puts the musicians in direct contact with the movers and shakers.

“It’s not an opportunity that comes along very often to meet and network with a lot of industry contacts in a relaxed setting with no time pressure,” acknowledges trombonist/composer Tom Green. “Usually you’re catching people in a spare two minutes when they’re thinking about other things, so to engage them over a cup of tea was very useful.”

Green is a rising figure on the UK jazz scene, with his debut as leader, *Skyline* (Spark, 2015), garnering positive mainstream media coverage. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in London and winner of the 2013 Dankworth Prize for Jazz Composition, Green, like all the participants in Take Five UK, already has a foot on the ladder.

“I wish this kind of thing could be rolled out across the board to younger players,” says Green, “to give us all a deeper understanding of the music industry. I feel very lucky to have got the opportunity.”

Just how do these musicians come to participate in Take Five UK? As Ollerenshaw explains there is a nomination and selection process: “We’re looking for creative musicians with long term potential, and to access these musicians, we ask our peers around the country to nominate artists that they think would benefit. We ask the Take Five UK edition that’s just been to nominate as well.

That process throws around 70 hats into the ring each year. Apart from Serious, the selection procedure involves the Take Five UK funders and three industry professionals – always one musician and typically two festival directors. “It’s quite a complicated process,” Ollerenshaw admits. “When we’ve chosen the eight, [Serious Director] John Cumming and I interview them to see what makes them tick, what they know, what they don’t know and what they want to know, their concerns and so on. We use that information to inform the programme for the week.”

What the musicians invariably do know about is music and on Take Five UK they make music in harness under the mentorship of saxophonist/composer John Surman. Each musician brings a composition of their own to the ensemble. The music is rehearsed in a beautifully reconverted barn, with everyone pitching in ideas as and when. When the music is more or less polished it’s then recorded by Surman’s longstanding sound engineer Bill Strode.

“The recording is secondary to the process of the work,” explains Surman. “The cross-fertilisation of all these people, finding ways of solving problems that are presented in the music making. That’s the key thing.”

Surman’s is clearly impressed by this bunch of musicians: “They’ve been very, very co-operative,” he acknowledges. “They’ve swallowed their egos and just got stuck in and helped each other. All I bring is 50 years of doing it and the occasional word to prod them in the right direction, perhaps. My way

is laissez-faire; these are all creative people. I just keep it together so that we generally leave on time for lunch.”

The food at Bore Place nearly all comes from the organic farm. Head Chef Sparky and his dedicated team serve up mouth-watering fare day after day: creamy risotto, al dente pasta, fresh-leaf salads, warm, rustic breads, cheeses and heavenly trifles. It’s energy-giving soul food that revives the musicians and lifts their spirits. It’s all part of Serious’ holistic approach, one that considers all the musicians’ needs.

Over lunch, Surman shares his thoughts on Take Five UK: “The really important stuff is all the interaction with the business side of it,” he ventures, “which is what they wouldn’t get elsewhere. The musical side really needs to be a release because otherwise you might lose your identity in the midst of all the talks, the advice on all the things you should do. It can make you quite insecure.”

Surman, who started out as a professional musician in the 1960s, sees plenty of similarities between the task facing young jazz musicians back then compared with now. “In many ways I don’t think there’s a lot of difference. Most of the musicians here are on a similar level to me when I started out. We’re all working musicians who have bands and we’re trying to make our way in the world.”

Plenty has changed though, as Surman recognises in recalling the mid-1960s when he took his first professional steps alongside Mike Westbrook and Graham Collier. “Then there were no agents and it was strange to have management. Even taking a sound engineer with you was rare. Bill [Strode] and I were in the pioneering group doing it in the 1980s. It didn’t become a norm until well into the 2000s.”

Surman, who has been a fixture of Take Five UK for nine years has seen the programme evolve. “It’s changed. Serious has learned over the years that some ideas are more useful than others.”

The music too, Surman feels, has also changed, though he sees this as quite normal. “It would change, it’s a decade,” he notes simply. “In the earlier years it was a bit closer to the jazz tradition in that there would generally be a bass player and some kind of percussionist and a keyboard player. So there was a rhythm section with horns which is very different to now. The nature of the music covers a broader spectrum. “

Something that has remained constant over the years, Surman relates, is the value of sound advice from people in a position to know. “I got a good bit of advice from [trombonist/educator] Eddie Harvey when I was making the first records, and he said: ‘You should join PRS [now PRS for Music, the collecting society for composers and songwriters, [www.prsformusic.com](http://www.prsformusic.com)] because if one of your tunes is played on the radio you get some money.’ Boy was that ever good advice! I would maybe have gone on for years without thinking of that.”

One thing that all the musicians are acutely aware of is the challenge of making ends meet. “As jazz musicians we’re involved in so many projects to make a living,” says Emilia Mårtensson, whose album *Ana* (Babel Label, 2014) marries Swedish folk with jazz and pop elements. “It’s difficult,” concurs Green. “It feels like creative projects often lose money and so are subsidised by sessions and teaching.”

Teaching/education is practically a necessity for professional musicians and as such partly explains the significant growth industry of jazz programmes in the past 40 years. Many jazz musicians also play in functions bands, which can be the difference between eating and starving. Balancing art and commerce is not easy, but as Graeme Leak said during his one-on-one interview with Take Five's Chair Person, Anna Umbima: "You need to pay your rent. You need to have a cash cow."

In a career spanning several decades Leak has premiered over 100 solo and ensemble pieces and has worked in theatre, comedy and instrument making. One of his most durable installations has been a musical fence in outback Australia that's become a tourist attraction. Yet for 20 years Leak humped his colourful array of percussive instruments--including amplified cactus--around schools to deliver performance shows and workshops.

Leak stressed the need for an artist to understand their own processes and the importance of change, renovation and innovation. "Confidence comes with work experience and bad experiences are essential. Work on your weaknesses," he urged. "If I need to sit down and edit video for three days that's no different to my music. I call it all my work."

What Leak describes is perhaps commonly referred to as 'taking care of business.' It's an area of weakness common to a lot of young jazz/improvising musicians. "Unlike Graeme Leak, most young musicians don't see administration as a creative pursuit," says Ollerenshaw. "They begrudge the time that they spend doing their administration because it takes them away from their music."

Some turn to agents and managers as a solution. Good ones can make a big difference to a musician's career. Ollerenshaw, however, advocates a slightly more hands-on learning approach: "A lot of musicians don't understand employing an agent or a manager as fully as they might. They think a manager is a panacea for all the things they don't really want to do. I'm firmly of the opinion that everybody should know the mechanics of it to know what outcome they want to achieve so that they can work towards it."

In another afternoon session, Amelia Ideh poses the question: "Why don't jazz musicians make videos?" Unattractive websites with information that's several years out of date, poor quality or unimaginative publicity photos and waffly, rambling bios/press releases were all "jazz crimes" that Ideh identified. "These are your assets," Ideh said and encouraged musicians to "take control of your own narrative."

Interestingly, a couple of the musicians use the term "façade" when referring to personal websites or embracing social media, revealing deeply ingrained discomfort with the whole self-marketing, commercial aspect of jazz. I suggest afterwards to Ideh that I'd be surprised if any of her pop clients used such terminology. "No chance" she replies, laughing.

Other speakers echo Ideh's ideas. Frank Bolder, who receives thousands of applications and CDs annually from artists and bands keen to play the North Sea Jazz Festival or in the live venue he programmes said: "As a programmer, a video is the best thing to receive. You see what you're going to get."

Jazz musicians who don't see the need to produce one quality video perhaps just don't see the bigger picture. It's precisely the bigger picture that Take Five UK puts under the microscope.

On the subject of musicians writing their bios and press releases, Miles Evans, an expert in shaping festivals' media campaigns, advises: "Absolutely nail what it is you do." This is not always easy, particularly as so many musicians these days wear multiple hats. Evans is the first to recognise this: "The landscape is shifting," he observes with regard to the increasing tendency among jazz musicians to work in inter-disciplinary art.

Apart from leading their own bands the eight musicians on this edition of Take Five UK are also variously involved in projects as diverse as sound-art installation, running independent record labels, music and poetry, improvised musical theatre, running courses for younger musicians and working with chamber ensembles and choirs. Their individual ambitions for future projects point to even greater diversity.

Knowing who to approach for advice on how best to produce a record or to help in organising an extended tour, knowing who to apply to for funding, having the awareness of how to grab the attention of media, club owners and festival programmers--in short, the skills needed to forge a rewarding career--all require the kind of focus, marketing and networking skills that Take Five UK delivers.

Something that is rarely factored into the equation is the matter of confidence. It's one thing for a musician to know who they should approach for help but if they lack the right interpersonal skills then they're at a distinct disadvantage. Serious has thought of that too, and has brought in Mary McCusker, an actress trained to deliver workshops on communication techniques and public speaking.

"Mary's worked with us since 2009 and has made a really big difference to the way this programme runs," says Ollerenshaw. "The musicians are confident when they work with John [Surman] making music but not necessarily so confident when they come to talk to the various industry people. What Mary does is pull them so far out of their comfort zone that they've got to take a leap of faith to do it.

"She's so skillful, so deft in the way she deals with people and makes them communicate with each other. I've seen less gregarious groups where, even after one session with Mary, their backs get straighter and they are much more confident with the way they speak and the way they interact during the week."

For Green, McCusker's practical sessions are an eye-opener: "Mary dealt with presenting ourselves on stage - one thing that often as musicians we aren't that great at but which is a really important skill. As a musician you're a performer, and sometimes we focus entirely on the sound that's coming out of the instruments and not what we look like while playing, or how we talk and engage an audience. Mary's sessions really helped with that, as well as skills to improve our pitching for funding and other things."

Percy Pursglove, bassist, composer and arranger describes McCusker's sessions as "enormously beneficial". That a musician capable of composing and performing a 90-minute, nine-movement work for a chamber ensemble of contemporary classical and improvising musicians and choir based on the writings and speeches of Aung San Su Kyi, Malala Yousafzai and Charles Darwin--amongst others--admits to confidence issues only underscores the relevance of Take Five UK's initiatives.

Looking back on the week, Pursglove realises that he may just have turned an important corner: “I certainly feel a bit more confident in the realisation that I have something to offer as a musician and an artist and that people are interested. I now realise that there's no need to feel shy about telling people what I'm working on.”

If Pursglove's new-found confidence helps steer him closer to his ambition of realising a recording of the entire 90 minutes of his *Far Reaching Dreams of Mortal Souls*, and touring the music, then the week in Bore Place will have been a week extremely well spent.

For vocalist/guitarist/percussionist Heidi Heidelberg, one half of experimental duo Bitch 'n' Monk, the week with Take Five UK has been as challenging as it has been useful: “It's forced me to address some profound issues of self-confidence,” she says openly. “Being asked to describe and explain your music to strangers numerous times a day is quite a task. And yet it's a useful task because it forces you to find some way, however metaphorical or nebulous, of sincerely conveying your intentions and beliefs as an artist.

“That process,” Heidelberg expands, “builds your own sense of confidence and clarity. It may also help you sell it better without meaning to, simply because, in life as in music, passion and honesty are compelling to the right kinds of people.”

Listening to Heidelberg's summing up it's easy to see what Ollerenshaw means when she describes the Take Five UK sessions as “talking therapy.”

“The more the musicians can talk to people who can help them the better it is for everybody,” Ollerenshaw states. “Once they can articulate their vision and their ambitions people are more likely to help them or direct them to somebody who might be able to help them. It encourages trust and a continuity and longevity in the art form too. Everybody who works in jazz wants that to be the case.”

If the eight musicians have gained in confidence during the week then it's job well done for the Serious team: “We want the artists to be more confident in speaking to people who aren't their peers,” explains Ollerenshaw, “and understand what they do and engage more fully with their life because if they're just going to deal with their music then they're not giving themselves the best possible chance of success.”

It's people who are at the center of all the ideas that Serious promotes through Take Five UK. If there's a common thread that links all the talks it's understanding the value of relationships with people across the business – the business of recording, promoting, disseminating and staging jazz, or whatever interdisciplinary art the musicians are immersed in.

The eight musicians on Take Five UK are doubtless more aware now than they were a week ago that the PR people, the publishers, the media, the consultants, the events programmers, the festival directors, the funders, and of course Serious, are all at the service of the music.

“We are all audiences, of different kinds,” says Ollerenshaw, “and it's important the musicians realise that they need to communicate effectively to those audiences.”

There are multiple audiences: the companies that print promotional posters; the radio stations that play the music; the magazines that review the CDs; the record label Directors; photographers; the

taxi drivers who shuttle musicians between gigs and hotels. And they're all commercially oriented. So too, to a greater or lesser degree, is the music that drives all this commerce.

At the end of the week there's an informal round-up and individual debriefing sessions where the musicians are encouraged to give their feedback and to talk about what their plans might be over the coming three to five years. There are also "little pots of money", as Ollerenshaw puts, it for the musicians on leaving Bore Place. These funds are designed to enable the musicians to undertake more specialised, or individual mentoring with music industry experts.

All the participants without exception are uniformly impressed by their Take Five UK experience. Kinsella describes the week as "informative, intense, inspiring and inclusive." Mårtensson agrees: "It was a fantastic week in every way. I feel as though I have a clearer picture of how the whole industry is linked."

The bigger picture also presented itself to Green: "Sometimes it's easy to lose sight of the fact that there are real and often very nice people behind the roles of management, PR, distribution, funding and many other things. To know that these people have real passion for the music is really inspiring."

Alongside 'inspiration' and 'the bigger picture', 'focus' is another theme that comes up repeatedly among the musicians in summing up Take Five UK. Says Heidelberg: "It was a week to ask myself some deep and important questions about how to forge my foundations for the future. The music sessions too were hugely useful in understanding my own musical methods, and giving me the opportunity to understand others' too."

It will be fascinating to observe not only how these eight musicians progress in their careers, but also to see how Take Five UK itself continues to evolve over the next decade.

Ten years ago, some of the participants of the first Take Five UK edition didn't have email addresses. In the intervening years the music industry has seen the complete digitisation of everything. And just as technology and the music industry evolves, so too does the music. As the music evolves, so too do audiences.

Musicians who wish to establish a career have to be savvy enough to work the mechanisms of the music industry's multiple branches and learn to speak the right lingo. Take Five UK will hopefully be there for many years to empower many more of the UK's most promising young jazz musicians and help steer them towards fulfilling their dreams.