

# REDEFINING THE 'OTHER': TEACHING DELIGHT IN CULTURAL VARIETY

by

MICHAEL CAIN

I first moved to New York in 1990 as a young jazz pianist hoping to get an opportunity to play with some of my heroes. Through a sequence of lucky events I found myself with the opportunity to audition for two musicians with whom I greatly wanted to work, Robin Eubanks and Jack DeJohnette. I went on to work with Robin for over eight years and Jack for over nine, and I learned a great deal about being a performing, touring, recording, traveling, jazz musician in the New York jazz community. As opportunities often bring still more opportunities, I found myself meeting and working with many other very talented and influential musicians in the community. When I talk about my process of moving into that community, I call it an *initiation*, because that is the pedagogical framework that best describes the experience as I knew it. That initiation included a fair amount of time deconstructing my previous ideas and concepts of jazz. In short, I found that jazz pedagogy in the academy and jazz pedagogy among practitioners, as I came to know it, often had very little in common.

Before this initiation, I'd had a fairly extensive jazz background. My father was a jazz musician, and I'd studied jazz most of my life with various teachers, went to college as a jazz performance major, and did a fair amount of gigging at an early age. However, my audition with Robin was unlike anything I'd experienced in the academy. One night very late I received a call from Robin asking me if I could come and audition for him. Right then. Already a little thrown off by this request, I went to his house, into his music room, and found that the audition was to be played on a Casio mini keyboard, about two and a half octaves in size. Further, the audition was to be played duo, just trombone and Casio mini keyboard, and involved playing some very difficult and intricate music.

I was shocked, angry, and confused, but remained quiet. I began to wonder if there was a larger test at work and became concerned that I would blow this opportunity simply by not understanding what was really happening. But I played as best as I could, then after a while gave up. Robin didn't push it, just said that was fine. Then without any explanation, he asked me to do the gig. Somehow, I'd passed the audition.

My audition with Jack was similar in its "unorthodox" approach. We sat at his house and discussed politics and mythology for about two hours. Finally, we went to his music room, where we continued talking about random issues for a while, until at last Jack quietly proceeded to the drums, sat down, and just started playing. I had no idea if he was playing something specific, improvising, or demonstrating something. What did he want me to do? Did he want me to listen, or to play with him? If I just jumped in, would that be rude?

I decided to sit and listen. I sat for twenty-five minutes and listened and watched Jack play solo drums. Once again, I found myself wondering if there were a larger test at work, and whether I could make a "wrong" decision. Finally, I decided to play keyboards with him and, making the assumption that he was improvising at that point, slowly started to improvise along with him. We went on to play duo like that for about three hours without a break, nonstop improvising. We played things that sounded like Reggae, we played swing-like things, funk-like grooves, and other kinds of things that would be hard to



PIANIST/COMPOSER MICHAEL CAIN HAS PERFORMED WITH WITH FLUTIST JAMES NEWTON, MARLENA SHAW, BILLY HIGGINS, ALONG WITH JACK DEJOHNETTE'S SPECIAL EDITION, DAVE HOLLAND'S QUARTET, STEPS AHEAD, BOBBY MCFERRIN, STANLEY TURRENTINE, AND MESHELL N'DEGEOCELLO. HE HAS ALSO RECORDED SEVERAL RECORDS AS A LEADER, INCLUDING *CIRCA*, A 1996 ECM/BMG CLASSICS RELEASE. HE HAS TAUGHT AT THE EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND IS CURRENTLY ON THE FACULTY OF THE NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC.

MICHAEL HAS WORKED IN SCHOOLS IN BOSTON, CHICAGO AND LOS ANGELES ON A COURSE CALLED DIGITAL PLAYGROUND, AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTS LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CENTERED AROUND MUSIC AND MUSIC PRODUCTION.

describe. During all this music-making, never a word was said between the two of us.

Afterwards, Jack got up and said "Yeah, you'll be cool," then we went back upstairs and I met his family. We discussed a recording project that was coming up and some touring, mostly technical issues, and that was the beginning of countless tours, performances, and recordings all over the world. He and I never spoke about that audition until about seven years later, when I brought Jack to the Eastman School of Music to give a workshop. Several students asked how we met, and Jack smiled and had me tell the story. I was happy for the opportunity to describe my audition and what it meant to me, and all the thoughts I'd had about it since. Then Jack revealed that that was what Miles Davis did too, which surprised me even though it shouldn't have. Jack went on to describe how there is a methodology in auditioning young players in jazz where you just start playing, and don't tell them what you are playing. It's a codified way of checking for a lot of

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factors in that musician—flexibility of mind, listening ability, sense of vision, and a whole host of basic musicianship issues. I'm sure that Robin Eubanks would be able to give a similar rationale for his auditioning technique.

So now when I tell these stories to my students at NEC, I ask them what would they think if they came to NEC and we auditioned that way, and most agree they would be outraged. I find this interesting, because even though we could give all kinds of explanations for such auditioning techniques and their foundations in jazz practice, history, and pedagogy, the auditioning student is *already* trained in such a way that he or she would not accept the validity of the methodology. But more to the point, no jazz school would consider auditioning students the way Jack DeJohnette and Robin Eubanks audition their players, and yet they are two musicians most jazz schools would want their graduates to work with.

All of this speaks to notions of music and multiculturalism. In "Music and Multiculturalism: Dimensions, Difficulties, and Delights" in the inaugural issue of *The New England Conservatory Journal for Learning Through Music* (Spring 2000), Warren Senders and Lyle Davidson do an excellent job of outlining many of the musical and cultural issues involved in our approach to teaching and learning music. The opening paragraph clearly defines their central concerns:

World cultures provide a fabulous variety of musical expressions, each of which offers particular combinations of values, structural principles, and opportunities for innovation. Similarly, each musical tradition we encounter is inseparable from its pedagogical methodology; the variety of teaching/learning strategies represented throughout world culture is extraordinarily rich. While some are better suited to the American grade-school classroom than others, all have demonstrated long-term effectiveness within their cultural milieu. All are valid cultural expressions. If we regard any musical idiom as a self-contained system of perception, performance,

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and pedagogy, then idioms with ineffective pedagogical components are fatally unbalanced; they do not survive.

I very much agree. Mr. Senders and Mr. Davidson go on to accurately describe pedagogical practices typical of nonwestern musical traditions, relating these practices to the current educational concepts of situated knowledge, peripheral participation, multiple entry points, distributed knowledge, and multiple intelligence. Then they present four central concepts (gesture, texture, drone, and groove) that are useful tools for organizing and teaching music from a multi-cultural approach. To illustrate some of these non-western musical approaches, Mr. Senders

and Mr. Davidson reference Patricia Sheehan-Campbell citing Colin McPhee's description of a Balinese teacher:

The method of the teacher is strange. He says nothing, does not even look at the children. Dreamily he plays through the first movement. He plays it again. He then plays the first phrase alone, with more emphasis. He now indicates that the children are to commence. Two or three make a tentative attempt, following him, and watching every movement. The phrase is repeated, and they try again. Another joins in... Bit by bit the children who are learning the melody go from phrase to phrase, forgetting, remembering, gaining assurance. The teacher remains silent, unless to point out a repeated mistake; generally he is gazing off into space. At the end of an hour, however, several can play through the whole melody.

Similarly, Warren Senders describes his experience learning music in India:

While living in India, I studied singing with a master teacher for over five years of rigorous apprenticeship. During this time, he taught me every note, every variation, every word of over four hundred elaborate songs—entirely by ear, drilling me with multiple repetitions and challenging me with increasingly complex elaborations. While he did not discourage my attempts at transcription, it was clear to both of us that the activity of music-writing was entirely ancillary to the real task of learning by doing. Similarly, my eight years studying Ghanaian music in America were spent drumming, singing, and dancing—not in reading notation, discussing structure, or transcription.

In graduate school at the California Institute of the Arts, I spent a great deal of time in the World Music program studying—that is, playing drums, singing or performing on an assortment of instruments related to the various musical traditions of Indonesia, Africa, and India—in ways that were very similar to the descriptions above. When one is studying a



Michael Cain worked with both students and New England Conservatory Music-In-Education interns through the Digital Playground Music Project collaborations between CAPE and Boston public schools.

tradition that is wholly outside of his or her own, the categories of gesture, texture, drone, and groove become very important. The student is putting the basic vocabulary together to begin thinking about understanding the music, learning what to listen for, asking what the inherent structure of the music is, etc. As the rise of World Music Programs indicate—at NEC, for example, there are African ensembles, Afro-Cuban ensembles, and a World Music Institute, among others—over the last several decades we have seen a willingness on the part of the academy to recognize that the range of world music traditions, pedagogy, methodology, and aesthetics needs to be explored. The pedagogical rationale for having African music, Indian Music, or Indonesian Music is being framed very well, and the musical principles defining the music are more or less enthusiastically embraced.

However, as I travel and experience different music programs, some inconsistencies become apparent. Most schools have Jazz programs but not, say, Blues programs, or Funk programs. How many

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Rhythm and Blues majors have you met? Likewise, Hip Hop, which is a culture by all accounts, and which is the culture that generated Rap and Break Dancing among other things, rarely seems accepted by the academy. In other words, why are black people from Africa, and the music that those people produce, so much more worthy of study than the music of black people from the Bronx? Why are poor Cubans playing heavily syncopated, rhythmically oriented music so much more valid to the academy than poor people from Atlanta playing heavily syncopated, rhythmically oriented music? Why is an African Griot exotic, while a rapper from Harlem, working within the exact same cultural and pedagogical framework, is something less?

One time when I was a student at CalArts studying African music, the teacher, a man from Ghana, started to teach us a song called *Agahu*. I repeated that name in my head over and over again: *Agahu, Agahu*. It sounded somehow profound. I approached the song accordingly, thinking of it as deeply spiritual. Whenever we did it, I would give a silent inner thanks to the “*Agahu God*,” whoever that was. Finally, after a few months passed and I felt I’d learned the song, I asked the teacher what *Agahu* was, and he said it was the word for airplane. During parts of the song, in fact, the dancer raises one’s hands to the sky. You can imagine my feeling when I realized my hands weren’t going to some great African God, but were waving at an airplane going overhead!

For me, this is a humorous, if humbling example of the artificial constructs of the western mind, the blind spots, as it were. One time during a class at Eastman I asked a group of Jazz students if they liked the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and they said no; they didn’t like that “outside” kind of jazz. Then I asked them if they liked traditional African music, and they all said yes, of course! So then I split the class in half and played an Art Ensemble recording that almost sounded like traditional African music. I told one half what they were listening to, but not the other. Naturally, the students who knew the piece was by the Art Ensemble didn’t like it because they interpreted the sounds they were hearing



Michael Cain working with students involved in the Digital Playground Music Project, as part of the Music-In-Education National Consortium school collaboration projects.

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as coming from Chicago musicians; therefore it was free jazz, and they didn’t like free jazz. Meanwhile, the students who didn’t know who it was loved it because

they thought they were hearing some traditional and profound African music; therefore they were being exposed to something challenging and exotic.

The point is, there is a complicated and delicate dance America does with the “Other,” whether that other is comprised of the African Americans or the Native Americans or any number of “Other Americans.” When you are from a culture that is defined as the “Other,” you will typically find yourself in one of two camps: either you are exotic, or you are frightening. And usually a combination of both.

This inconsistency is exactly what we find in the academy now. There is a narrow band of acceptable “other” music, especially when it comes to black music. Jazz is acceptable, Rhythm and Blues isn’t. Blues is acceptable because it’s viewed as having historical roots to jazz, but it’s not really acceptable as performance practice. Likewise, Drone is a beautiful and profound musical concept when found in Indian music, but in Rock and Roll it’s considerably less valid. Groove in African music is sacred, while groove in funk is just kind of fun. Notions of trance and ecstasy are spiritual in Moroccan and Turkish music, but in Techno or Electronica they are often merely examples of sonic wallpaper.

In all of these cases, the same or similar musical principles, pedagogy, and methodologies are at play, and yet in all cases, there is an acceptable form and a non-acceptable form. And one of the more interesting dynamics involved in these distinctions is that the more American the music is, the closer it gets to home, the less acceptable it is. Institutions of higher education will look to Africa before it will look to African Americans for methodology and pedagogy, even though the musical principles that unite these musical forms are clear. Most schools will have an Afro-Cuban Ensemble long before a James Brown ensemble, even though James Brown is an American, dealing with American music,

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and yet clearly working within a continuation of African musical principles.

Given the technological changes that are occurring in music-making and dissemination, it is appropriate that the academy is looking to the world for examples of musical expression and methodology; however, that means the whole world, not just a few people or groups who happen to fit neatly within the accepted frame. When he was about to become the President of NEC in 1997, Dr. Robert Freeman told me that what most excited him about the position was that the front door to NEC opened to Huntington Avenue, and the back door opened to Roxbury. In other words, one side of NEC looks toward one side of cultural Boston, with Symphony Hall right across the street and several world famous museums nearby, and the other side opens to Roxbury, which is a predominantly black community housing many people who fall under the “at risk” definition. Dr. Freeman always thought

that this was the best place for a music conservatory to be positioned—academically, culturally, artistically, and functionally. This is because, as Senders and Davidson point out at the end of their article, we are not simply teaching and honing remarkable musical skills but developing, through music, more far-reaching cultural attitudes:

If we wish our students to shed their ethnocentrism and xenophobias, we teachers, parents, administrators and community members must actively seek delight in cultural variety, finding as many different and ongoing ways as we can to bring it into our schools, our homes, our towns, and our lives.

I completely agree. I would only add that “seeking delight in cultural variety” must include a careful and respectful examination of our neighbors’ ways of doing things, not just the way of the idealized tribal person from afar. ¶

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## Nurturing ‘Otherness’ When Approaching Music-Making With Students

BY NICK JAFFE

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**INNOVATION IS GOOD IN ITSELF AND NEEDS TO BE TAUGHT AND PRACTICED IN SCHOOLS; IT MIGHT EVEN BE AN IMPORTANT PART OF WHAT MAKES “GOOD” MUSIC GOOD. INNOVATION IN ANY FIELD—MUSIC, ART, SCIENCE—RELIES NOT ONLY ON DOUBT BUT ALSO, PARADOXICALLY, ON CONVENTION AS AN INDISPENSABLE LAUNCHING PAD. AN ADVANTAGE KIDS OFTEN HAVE AS INNOVATORS IS THEIR MANIFEST ABILITY TO SUBVERT CONVENTION WITHOUT TALKING OR THINKING MUCH ABOUT IT.**

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The issues Michael Cain raises in these two pieces are borne out every day in the studio “classrooms” I have the pleasure of working in. What Michael powerfully illuminates is that study and action around the question of “Otherness” in music yields insights that go far beyond the immediate and specific context. And this too is evident in the music and poetry of young musicians who often are able to generalize their individual experiences in shockingly powerful ways.

Innovation is good in itself and needs to be taught and practiced in schools; it might even be an important part of what makes “good” music good. Innovation in any field—music, art, science—relies not only on doubt but also, paradoxically, on convention as an indispensable launching pad. An advantage kids often have as innovators is their manifest ability to subvert convention without talking or thinking much about it. By “subvert” I don’t mean simply “react against,” but to rethink and recombine elements, reinterpret genre and transcend it. To me, the amazing audition stories Michael recounts here point to this elusive and essential aspect of musicianship. The earlier kids can begin to refine this faculty, the better musicians and thinkers they will become. I’ve noticed in our school music studio that in spite of the present sterility of much of commercial hip hop, the music continues to predispose kids of all colors to take the porosity and elasticity of genre for granted. By demystifying some of the tools and exposing and erasing the false distinctions between the “art” and (increasingly technological-scientific) craft of music-making, hip hop has led even very young children to view themselves as composers and experimentalists and to approach all music, sound, and word, regardless of genre, as potential raw material.

Michael’s emphasis on approaching the music of students as music is critical. I’ve had the privilege of experiencing first hand

just how central this is to his teaching practice, as I’ve watched him talk with students and, perhaps more importantly, play music with and respond to children who have had no initiation into formal training as musicians. What passes for arts education in many schools sometimes involves handing the student an algorithm and cheering as they complete the steps. The algorithm pre-determines the outcome, and there’s never any honest acknowledgement of the controlling role the teacher’s aesthetic is playing. Often there’s never any real response by anyone to the student’s work as art, literature or music. At best, the work is viewed merely as an artifact of the student’s psychology or the teacher’s practice.

Music composition, improvisation, and production work in schools offers us an opportunity to go beyond that approach. As teachers, we shouldn’t like all our students’ music; if we do, it’s likely that the students are in fact doing our work, not their own. We should, however, “read” and respond to all student work as work—music as music. That will go a long way toward helping us get the new music and ideas that we so desperately need. ¶

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*Nick Jaffe, is a teaching artist, writer, musician, audio engineer, a certified K-8 teacher and the Chief Editor of The Teaching Artist Journal. As a teaching artist Nick’s focus has been the development of student-run recording studios in elementary schools. He received a BA in History from Yale University and an MS in Education and Social Policy from Northwestern University. Nick is the guitarist for the band Soul People and has performed with a wide variety of artists including Jaguar Wright, Renee Neufville (Zhané, Roy Hargrove), and Grammy Nominee Syleena Johnson.*

## Reflections on 'Initiation,' the 'Other' and the Evolving Role of Music and Musicians in Schools

*How does the role of music and musicians in schools need to evolve in order to support the important concepts of 'Initiation' and the 'Other?'*

I think that music is one of the fields left today that can still maintain a tradition of Initiation or even apprenticeships, although my feeling is that's declining there as well. If we look back over the last 100 plus years of industrial revolution, one could argue that the concept and role of Initiation itself has declined. Rather than offering our young people a time-honored tradition that involves direct contact with a 'master' in order to learn a craft, we have schools now that give us systems of learning aimed at doing the same thing. One could call it the age of the 'how to' notion, whether that comes from a book, a school, or whatever: *How to learn to play the piano in just 10 days!* We move fast these days, like our 'information'—we don't want to waste time. It has become the same with learning; schools sell themselves today partly by their ability to teach students faster, as well as better.

But true Initiation takes time, thought, work, and patience. Initiation requires that we come into balance and accordance with our actual rate of growth, not an idealized light-speed approach. One way I've seen this need addressed at schools is through the

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efforts of teachers who have themselves been initiated into some kind of tradition. I believe that one important role of the musician is to point to and suggest the path of Initiation itself.

Regarding the concept of the 'Other,' I believe that it is the responsibility of any institution of learning to build its practice upon a sensibility that reaches out to and embraces *all* that is considered the Other, in the same way we value not discriminating against minorities. And it's important to say that the Other is not a fixed style of music, but rather a constantly changing set of ideas, most of which have more to do with institutions than the practitioners of Other music. At one point jazz was very Other music, yet now it's very classical and institutionalized. The same will be true of other forms; hip hop could very well become an institutionalized form within several years.

*Is the medium of digital technology an example of the 'Other?'*

I do not make a differentiation between Digital Technology and other technologies; I'm more interested in how technology itself is woven into the music-making experience. I teach about it, talk about it, and share it with students, because I feel that technology is a part of the package—all technologies, including basic sound physics, electricity, phonograph recording, etc.

We live in a digital age, and the new technologies have pervaded all life and music. A friend of mine who records a lot recently told me that BASF stopped making audio tape for studios. It's all hard drive recording now, meaning digital recording. Apparently, you can't even buy tape anymore. This is very important, because it impacts the sound of music itself. I think students should be aware of things like that.

*What is the nature of the Initiation you provide to your kids in the school program?*

I try to recreate much of the professional music environment at the charter school, even though the kids are often beginners. I decided that I would approach the students' music with the same kind of focus and openness as I would approach Jack DeJohnette's music, or that of any professional that I play with. I want the students to feel that they are working with a world-class musician who is genuinely interested in their music.

I want them to experience music not as an academic construct, but as something they play and learn in reality. The environment at the charter school is much like a music think-tank or discussion group, as well as an ensemble and music class. We tend to touch on all sides of the process—creation, improvisation, form, structure, recording, mixing, mastering, packaging, and disseminating the

music—much like in the real music world where all these stages have to be thought through. I try to help initiate them into that process.

*What is the 'Other' artistry that emerged from the Digital Playground work with your kids?*

I wouldn't say it emerged but rather was/is always there. The students at the charter school tend to be from a socioeconomic group where they are often considered the 'Other.' I allow them to work musically within that framework, and so their Other music becomes something that merges with their institutional experience. This is something I try to consciously do—bridge what is their music, from their community and time, with their academic and institutional experience. In order to do that, I have to work with both the students and the school. The students need to trust that I authentically hear and understand their music, and that's not easy. I have to be a true student of their music; that's the only way I can genuinely interact with it. The school has to trust that I have the academic and professional background to adhere to its standards. Often I have to spend some time translating between these two poles.

*You also mentor Conservatory students in guided internships in your Digital Playground Course at NEC. What is the nature of 'Initiation' that they experience? How do the Conservatory students work with the 'Other' side of music-making in your class, or in interaction with students at the Renaissance School?*

For the MIE class and the guided internships, I try to bring NEC students into a larger understanding of these issues. I would call that in itself an Initiation. One way I do that is by creating environments that are similar to the charter school work I've been doing. Last year the MIE class worked with a third grade class from the Boston Renaissance School. The 3rd graders came to NEC, and we provided some music-making tools—microphones plugged into delay sound effects units so that the kids could speak or sing into a microphone and manipulate their voices, drums, piano, etc. We created large musical improvisations where the NEC students and the 3rd graders made up music together.

Again, even though this was a class at NEC, the environment was essentially the same you would find at a recording studio. There was a group of people, some very experienced musically and some not; but everybody had to try to find a way to talk about and create music together. The experience was very real for the students, and the CD they ended up with afterwards was real as well.

The MIE class also spent time at Zumix, a Boston-based nonprofit organization that is doing some things that are similar to what I do at the charter school. They were particularly helpful in that they made their entire curriculum open to our NEC students to come, visit, and observe, as well as to let us work with their entire studio set up. The MIE class could see firsthand a modern recording environment which is structured to work with kids, but which also allowed them access to state of the art technology.

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In Digital Playground, sponsored by Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, we did the same thing, just on a more extended level. And we had Jarrett Cherner, an NEC student, come to Chicago as an intern. Jarrett worked with the kids there for several days, playing with them, talking to them, sharing—seeing what they liked and what they didn't, showing them what he liked. All of this is designed to create an experience where both the teacher and the student can become as real as possible, where real sharing is happening and learning is going on for both.

*So in some ways the purpose of Initiation is to break down the traditional barriers and hierarchies that inhibit learning?*

Yes, that's essential. Obviously the teacher has valuable information to pass on, but so does the student. The cultural wall between them has to come down, or there can be no meaningful exchange. One thing interns hear me say a lot is Stop teaching, stop acting a part, stop trying to 'be' something, stop trying to do the 'teacher show.' Find out who you are talking to, find out the person who you are in front of, find out the musician you are encountering in that student. And one thing that always happens when the intern stops trying to teach is that they find that there are several things that the students are better at than they are musically, and that there is plenty to learn from this student—usually rhythm. True rhythmic study has still been slow to find its way into the academy; often it is rhythm that defines a music as 'Other.' It is common for the kids to have found very natural ways to understand rhythm, while it is equally common for many NEC students not to have found it.

*continued*

So an exchange has to occur where the information the intern has is shared successfully with the student, and where the information that student has is shared successfully with teacher/intern. Given our cultural adherence to traditional hierarchies, this exchange is often difficult to create. But even then, that difficulty can be instructive. For example, the first day we had the Renaissance class come to NEC, their teacher was a little concerned about her students' behavior. She was fairly strict in what she allowed the kids to do, and I could tell that, initially, the MIE class was put off by it. She seemed a bit concerned about our judgment of her as a teacher as well. I was stepping back a bit and was having the MIE interns guide the session, but things were stagnant; there was very little communication happening, and very little music-making.

Fortunately I had warned the interns about this kind of situation. I'd told them that often the real work you do with students can't happen until the adults have been made happy, for better or worse. In cases like this it is often valuable to work through it a bit, let the adults work out the emotions and ideas they need to, and set aside time after that where there is considerable freedom for the kids to play and make music, where they can't be in trouble for making noise, or loud sounds, or things like that. You're aiming your teaching, in other words, at both the teacher and the students.

Sure enough, this particular day the interns did just that. We worked through the process in ways the teacher wanted, then we asked if we could have some play time. At that point the kids became very animated, started playing and exploring the different instruments, and the whole room lit up. They didn't become more rowdy, but rather more interested; they started asking a lot of questions, starting bringing breath and joy and life to the process. The last fifteen minutes of this session were, by all accounts, infinitely more productive than the first two hours.

*So the interns' Initiation in this case was into the value of patience, of respecting the partnership and having faith in the process.*

Exactly. Most of the MIE students and interns had experienced the first half of this equation, the stagnation, but they hadn't always found ways out of it to the second part, because it hadn't often dawned on them that the process itself was what could be leading to the stagnation.

It reminds me of a story Jack DeJohnette told me regarding Miles Davis. One time Jack asked me if I liked some of the more famous records he was playing on with Miles, *Bitches Brew*, etc., and I said Yes, very much. We talked about the pieces I liked and why, and I described how cohesive they were, how focused, how free and yet structured they were.

Jack picked one of those pieces I liked and said that the ten-minute version that ended up on the recording, sounding so good, so profound, was a ten-minute segment from a three-hour improv, as were many of those pieces at that time in Miles' career.

Jack said that Miles himself did not like the first three hours of that improv, nor did many of the musicians. But by investing in the process over the product, they had the ability to work through the hard or clumsy part of the improv in order to find the gold. Miles loved where the improv finally got to, but didn't always love the sounds getting there.

Jack went on to talk about how misunderstood much of that music is. One hears the records and makes decisions on musicianship, etc., without hearing what led to the final selections. And Jack would always talk about how over the years musicians are increasingly less able to invest in that process. They can't stand it; a few bad sounds and it's "We suck. Why aren't we like Miles?!" Typically, then, they'll stop and try to fix it. Maybe they'll try writing different musical ideas, or describing different kinds of sounds, or they might try different players—and often none of it will work, because they never just let the process go. Or rather, they have misunderstood the process and then built bad ideas on that misunderstanding.

The point is, to be told about the importance of a process like Miles' has some value, but really to be *initiated* into a process like that is where the deeper value lies. Musicians have to be taken through that a few times, and by doing so they learn to trust the process and themselves.

And these are the kinds of Initiations I try to bring to the MIE course and to the charter school. There have been times at the charter school where I've come in, sat down with hardly a word, and played with the students all day long, without saying a word—much like Jack and others did with me at times. I'm showing them what lies past the surface, and showing them a way of approaching music that transcends words.

Other times I have talked all day without playing a note, like musicians have also done with me, and in that am showing them what lies beyond the surface as well. I can talk about why I'm doing that all day, but that isn't the real teaching. I can ultimately only show, directly, based on my ability and comfort with the process, which acts as an anchor. That's Initiation, or at least a semblance of it. Once shown, however, over time, the student and

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**OBVIOUSLY THE TEACHER HAS VALUABLE INFORMATION TO PASS ON, BUT SO DOES THE STUDENT. THE CULTURAL WALL BETWEEN THEM HAS TO COME DOWN, OR THERE CAN BE NO MEANINGFUL EXCHANGE.**

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I can then talk about it because we are more on the same field now, working from similar understandings.

*That kind of Initiation seems more common in the practice of the music of the 'Other,' as you described it in your article.*

Yes, I find that many kinds of music that fall in the category of the 'Other' will often place a premium on this kind of teaching—for example, rhythmically based music. Most African drumming groups, especially those taught by Africans, will give you very little by way of explanation early on, but as you become more initiated into the language and framework, more dialogue can occur.

This is almost the inverse of what is common at many schools of music, where clear understanding is seen as being able to be had right up front, and where the students should never be confused, etc. Again, we move too fast now for the slow, patient, kind of learning involved in the process of Initiation, but I think as we consider the evolving role of music and musicians in schools, we need seriously to ask the question, "At what cost?" ¶

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**WE MOVE TOO FAST NOW FOR THE SLOW, PATIENT, KIND OF LEARNING INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS OF INITIATION, BUT I THINK AS WE CONSIDER THE EVOLVING ROLE OF MUSIC AND MUSICIANS IN SCHOOLS, WE NEED SERIOUSLY TO ASK THE QUESTION, "AT WHAT COST?"**

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#### SIDEBAR

### *Comments on Michael Cain's Concept of Initiation and the 'Other'*

BY MICHAEL GANDOLFI

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**THROUGH MY OWN EXPERIENCES...IT IS CLEAR THAT MUSICIANS WHO ARE VERSED IN THE VARIOUS MUSICAL CULTURES THAT ABOUND TODAY WILL FLOURISH IN THE MUSICAL ARTS OF OUR TIME.**

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Michael Cain's remarkable case for infusing the classroom with multi-cultural as well as locally vibrant sources, points to a future in music education that promises a richly diverse learning environment. As is evident from his essay "Redefining the 'Other': Teaching Delight in Cultural Variety," it is precisely this diversity and multicultural musical education that best prepared him for the unique demands of professional musical life; his initiation into the professional world of jazz was in stark contrast to the academic studies in which he was also steeped.

Mr. Cain stresses the importance of acknowledging today's music, Rhythm and Blues, Rap, Hip-hop, etc., in concentrated study alongside the established canon to insure that the academy remains informed by the full range of cultures that define our time. In so doing, Mr. Cain implores us to cite those

among us who have been major contributors to this field of diverse music as well as those from more exotic backgrounds: a practice that is not often favored in academia.

I share Mr. Cain's beliefs. Through my own experiences in the musical academy and the concert hall, it is clear that musicians who are versed in the various musical cultures that abound today will flourish in the musical arts of our time. ¶

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*Michael Gandolfi's earliest musical involvement was in rock and jazz improvisation. Soon thereafter he began composing for the concert hall, resulting in a substantial catalogue of orchestral and chamber works. He is on the Composition faculty at the New England Conservatory of Music and the Tanglewood Music Center.*