THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE

The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation

FYS 129

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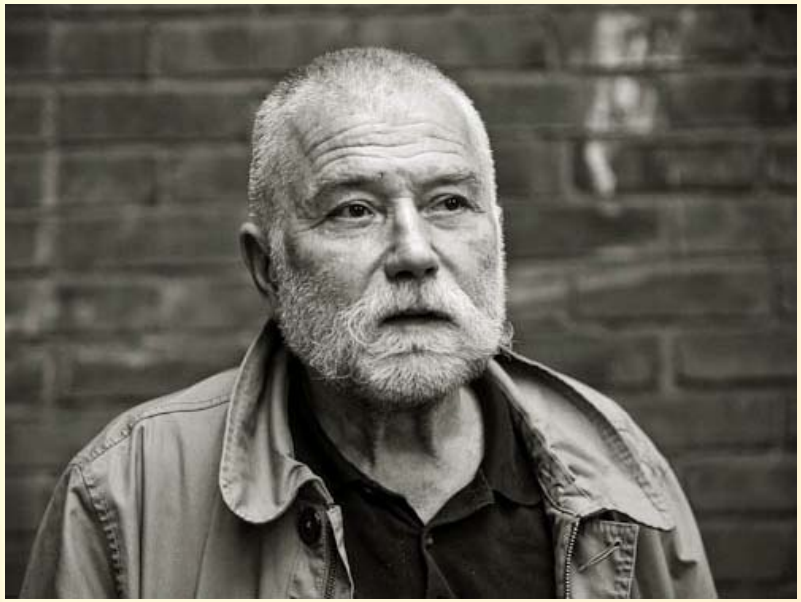
Various Quotes

These slides contain a collection of some of the quotes largely from the musicians that are studied during the course.

The idea is to present “musicians in their own words”.



Peter Brötzmann

German saxophonist
(March 6, 1941–)

Brötzmann on Technique

Vandermark: Many times it seems like Thelonious Monk or Pee Wee Russell or Albert Ayler or Frank Wright or maybe even yourself get criticized for having bad technique, when in fact, it seems to me, you're working with technique very outside the convention or conventional knowledge. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about this issue at all.

Brotzmann: Yes of course, because all throughout my career I was confronted with that question. "Hey you don't have any technique at all," from the beginning on and it still is happening. Maybe these people are right, I don't have very much of the conventional technique. Like, for example, our friends we just have heard, Louis Sclavis and Evan Parker. I never had a teacher for the horn, so I experienced everything myself, and I think that's what the interesting part in the arts, whatever arts it is, is about. And if you look at people like Frank Wright or Albert Ayler, they didn't have much technique in the sense of modern time's saxophone playing. They had roots somewhere in the blues, in gospel, in their own peoples' music and they tried to work with that. I think that's a much more interesting and much more important part of being creative in a way. I don't think, for example, Thelonious Monk had great technique, but for me, he's one of the greatest piano players of all times, if not the greatest! So technique doesn't mean anything. If you listen to very early blues recordings, I mean where the guy didn't even have strings on the guitar, what he was doing with that one string that was left, maybe what he was telling you, that was the essence of his life. And, I'll tell you, the older I'm getting, the more this matter is my interest, to get us as close as possible to what is it about. And you don't need technique for that. You need certain tools to express what you want to say, and if you don't have the tools, you have to work on them until they are there and then you can say what you want to say. And it's happened all my life and I think it's happening in everybody's life, in a way. I'm lucky to have started very early to discover that, and I'm still far away from my target, but I'm on my way. We will see.

Interview, 2001. http://www.kenvandermark.com/perspectives.php?persp_id=12

Brötzmann on his Musical Vision

LP: Are there specific things that you are trying to do with your music today?

Brötzmann: I see things a little bit more concrete and I want to express my experiences and sounds more clear and make it simpler than it was twenty years agao. It's loving the horn and loving to create things together with other musicians. That's my vision and what I want to continue to do—to continue to find out the possibilities.

Peter Brötzmann, interview.
From Music and the Creative Spirit: Innovators in Jazz, Improvisation and the Avant-Garde by Lloyd Peterson, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2006.

Brötzmann on the future of creative music

LP: What do you envision for the future of creative music?

Brötzmann: I'm still convinced that what we learn from each other is most important that comes from being on the road together. That's where the important lessons take place. It's getting together, taking risks and it's a process—not a product. This is important and needs to be very clear.

Peter Brötzmann, interview.
From Music and the Creative Spirit: Innovators in Jazz, Improvisation and the Avant-Garde by Lloyd Peterson, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2006.

Brötzmann on Inspiration

LP: What inspires you?

Brötzmann:After over thirty years, it may look and sound a little bit different, but in the end, I think my inspiration still comes from the same place. When I was a young man, I thought I could change the world. I was angry. AN now, after all of these years and all htat we may have done to try and make things better, it has done nothing! We are just as foolish as we have always been. But that shouldn't be a resignation. We have reason to be optimistic and we must try to make a difference.

Peter Brötzmann, interview.
From Music and the Creative Spirit: Innovators in Jazz, Improvisation and the Avant-Garde by Lloyd Peterson, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2006.

Brötzmann on Ensemble Size

Vandermark: [laughs] That may be true! I think that based on your history that's something you've been interested in. There are obvious reasons, for example, having a larger palette of sounds, but is there anything in particular about large groups that you keep coming back to them. Why would that be?

Brotzmann: I think there are a couple of reasons. I think one reason for all kinds of music, and especially jazz music, is I see a very strong social function in working the way we do. If it's a small group from duo to quartet to quintet, I think the social connections between one another are very important. That doesn't mean that we all agree all the time to everything, and everybody has his own way of life of course, but the way we work together, we hopefully talk together too. I mean, we have to be open for everything. If we talk about politics, art, or girls, or music we have to be honest to each other. I think that's one point.

In the smaller groups, you develop your own style. You develop sounds. You have an idea about how it should sound. And then, of course, it's always a big experience to have not only one horn, but to have four saxophones and maybe a couple of trombones around and what you can do with that sound is always a great, great pleasure to find out. Being on the road with the tentet, for example, and since I played with Machine Gun, in '68, I always tried to put bands together, mostly ten, eleven piece bands. It's a question of money of course. Nowadays you can't go on the road with twenty people. Nobody's going to pay for that if you don't have friends at the Lincoln Center . . . [both chuckle]. But, you know, there's always chances. I'm so happy that the tentet started here in Chicago. In between, we have played a lot . . . not a lot, always can be more, should be more . . . but we have chances, possibilities in Europe, we might have chances here in the country, in Canada, wherever they want us we go.

And it's nice, because as you travel and work with these people you learn to know them very well. Not only musicwise. You learn the human being, which is, for me, always a part of jazz music too. I think all the great bands, whatever they did to each other, necessarily had that connection. I could never sit in a big band just coming to work and going home. That I can't imagine. I never could.

(Interview 2001 - http://www.kenvandermark.com/perspectives.php?persp_id=12)

Brötzmann on Egalitarianism

JOHN CORBETT: I have a feeling that interactions with people like you is helping shape the way that younger American musicians do business. They observe your egalitarian philosophy, the way you treat everyone equally when it comes to payment even though in America often you're the big marquee name.

BRÖTZMANN: That was always my policy. I never had a guy in any of my bands who got paid more than the others, for any reason. He wouldn't be in my band, whatever his name was. Ironically, there are some Europeans who seem to have learned from Americans how to comport themselves, to try to get the most they can and screw everyone else, even their bandmates. That's not exclusively an American attribute, I'm sure, but I think in this business we're especially well-schooled in that attitude. At base, it's a question of assuming that you're more important than someone else.
Yeah, but that is independent from continents, cultures. That's really a human being thing. You'll find everywhere someone who thinks he's worth more than the others. We have to calm down, and some of us have to come back to the ground and be a bit more modest about the terms we're thinking in. It's really incredible what kind of theater people make. If you deal with pop music, the entertainment industry, that's another world. The music we are talking about, people involved in it, if you start to think you're better than anybody else, it's already the first mistake. And if you start that way, it never will grow. It always falls back. When Carla [Bley] asked us to play with her [in 1966], it was shitty enough money anyway, but then she came to Wuppertal, we rehearsed, then she said okay, Michael [Mantler] and I, we get 50-percent, Aldo - who was a little bit more well-known, gets 20-percent, and you get 18-percent, and Kowald gets 12-percent. Some kind of scale. And I said no. I understood that it was a fair deal that they get a bit more, especially Carla, so we didn't argue about that, but then I said we will split the rest of the money. That was my first experience and at that moment I didn't understand it, or I didn't want to understand it. My idea was that whoever works, there is money in the pot, the money will be split.

Interview by John Corbett – 2002.

Brötzmann on Machine Gun

DD: Did you feel you'd made an important statement when you made Machine Gun?

Brotzmann: At the moment we did it, I think we didn't think about that, but looking back you can see that it was a very important statement. The energy… all of us put in whatever we had, in those days we could stay together. I think it was a feeling you don't have so often in your lifetime… I think everyone wanted to give 100% or more if possible. But it had very much to do with the whole political situation in Western Europe and the whole world actually, what was happening in Washington DC, in Detroit, in the (American) South – it was hell. It was really a kind of steaming point where we young guys thought we would be able – even with music – to change the world.

Interview by David Dacks – 2007, Exclaim! Magazine.