‘DEED I DO:
NARRATING EXPERT VOCAL JAZZ IMPROVISERS’ EXPERIENCES OF THE PIANO

A thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Research on jazz improvisation has almost exclusively focussed on the experiences of instrumentalists, leaving singers’ experiences of improvisation veiled in mystery. Inside the jazz scene there is a perception that singers are “improvisational underachievers” in comparison to instrumentalists. However, a growing body of research has demonstrated the ways in which singers are a distinct subset of improvising jazz musicians, with unique skills and experiences of improvisation. Due to the physiological nature of the voice as an instrument, singers face unique challenges in learning to improvise, and to actually improvise with the voice. Vocal jazz pedagogy, method books, and “how-to-guides” commonly cite a correlation between playing piano and the ability to improvise with the voice. Many expert vocal jazz improvisers are also known to play piano. Whilst playing piano is advised in the literature, little is known about the experiences of singers who engage in such behaviours, and if the claimed benefits are experienced in practice.

Situated within a narrative inquiry framework, this study employs narrative approaches to investigate expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano. The participants are limited to a small group of expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play piano—Kristin Berardi, Brenda Earle Stokes, Michelle Nicolle, Sharny Russell, and Anita Wardell. Data is collected via semi-structured interviews and observation, with additional reflections drawn from the researcher’s journal. A “narrative analysis” of the dataset is undertaken to produce re-storied narratives that explored the participants’ experiences of the piano. A subsequent “analysis of narratives” is undertaken to develop “resonant threads” across narratives to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature of expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano, and how those experiences are meaningful for them.

Findings in this study advances the extant literature in a number of ways. They provide an in-depth exploration of jazz singers’ experiences of the piano and extend understanding of the embodied nature of the voice as an instrument. Findings demonstrate the ways in which playing piano is meaningful in building vocal jazz improvisational agency. Singers’ experiences in this study present implications for jazz performance and education, reinforcing that vocal jazz improvisation is worthy of research attention and further investigation.

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CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

This thesis is entirely the work of Courtney Feldman except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Dr Melissa Forbes
Principal Supervisor

Dr Rebecca Scollen
Associate Supervisor

Student’s and supervisors’ signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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For my dad, Gary Bruce Feldman (1955 – 2010)
in memory of the love and jazz we shared.
I know you’d be immensely proud.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS

The following acronyms and terms are applied to terminology throughout the study.

AmusA	Associate in Music Australia; a diploma awarded by examination to outstanding candidates in music performance by the Australian Music Examinations Board.
audiation	To internally hear musical material without external sound; inner hearing; internal conceptualisation of music.
bebop	A style of jazz characterised by complex (altered and extended) chords and chord progressions, fast tempo, virtuosic playing or singing, and improvisation based on the harmonic structure of the tune.
CCM	Contemporary commercial music; non-classical music styles.
changes	An abbreviation for chord changes; the harmonic progression of a jazz tune upon which the melody is based.
chart	A pre-composed jazz tune, usually in lead sheet notation.
chorus	One complete cycle through the form of a jazz tune.
colla voce	Follow the voice; the singer leads.
comping	An abbreviation for accompaniment; a style of rhythmic chordal accompaniment used to support an improvised solo, or melodic line.
COVID-19	Novel coronavirus disease.

fake book	A collected volume of jazz standards in lead sheet notion.
feel	The rhythmic style of a jazz performance, also referred to as groove.
flow	The holistic sensation of having played music with total involvement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990); flow state.
form	The structure of a jazz tune, including all sections in their predetermined sequence (e.g. AABA) which is repeated. Each repetition is called the chorus.
gig	A jazz performance; gigging.
guide tones	The 3rd and 7th notes of a chord which determine the quality of the chord (e.g. Major 7th, minor 7th, Dominant 7th); sing the guide tones.
great American songbook	Significant early twentieth century American popular songs, many of which are adopted as “standards”.
head	The thematic/original melody of a pre-composed jazz tune, including its harmonic progression, and form. The first and last repetitions are referred to as the head in and head out.
improvisation	A term derived from the Latin word “improviso” meaning something that is unforeseen, unexpected, or conceived in the moment (Lewis, 2012; Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Montouri, 2003; Weick, 1998). Contemporary definitions describe a spontaneous, unplanned, or free-ranging type of creativity or performance (Bresnahan, 2015; Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). In cognitive terms: a form of high-level divergent thinking and explorative inner sense making, that results from the cooperation of large-scale brain

networks that are associated with cognitive control and spontaneous thought (Alperson, 2010; Beaty, 2015; Berkowitz, 2010; Sovansky, et al., 2014; Torrance & Schumann, 2018).

In musical terms: a form of spontaneous composition and immediate musical performance in the moment (Alperson, 2010; Dobbins, 1980; Swayer, 1992, 2000; Torrance & Schumann, 2018); a creation in the moment, spurred by the moment (Torrance & Schumann, 2018).

In jazz: a spontaneous performance over the underlying form and harmonic structure of a jazz tune, such as a 32-bar jazz standard in AABA form (Berendt, 2009; Coker, 1964; Gabbard, 1995; Love, 2016; Torrance & Schumann, 2018; Wadsworth Walker, 2005). Jazz improvisation can range from conservative (e.g. limited variations along the melodic, harmonic, tonal, and rhythmic parameters of a tune), to more radical (e.g. more extreme musical explorations) in style (Torrance & Schumann, 2018).

intro — Abbreviation of introduction; the beginning of a jazz tune.

larynx — The larynx is a complex muscular and cartilaginous structure of the throat (voice), located at the upper part of the trachea, which houses the vocal folds (McCoy, 2012; Shapiro, 2016).

lead sheet — A standard form of jazz notation that includes the melody, chord symbols, rhythmic feel indications, and sometimes lyrics.

lick — A short melodic series of notes (e.g. a stock pattern, melody, or phrase) that is used in jazz improvisation.

NI — Narrative inquiry methodology.

outro — The ending of a jazz tune.

phonation	Making sound with the voice (McCoy, 2012).
physiological instrument	The voice; an instrument housed within the body that can only be controlled through indirect means of neurological impulse (McCoy, 2012; LoVetri, 2016, 2018).
perfect pitch	The ability to identify or reproduce absolute pitch accurately without reference (Hargreaves, 2014b).
pitch	A specific tone frequency, measured in cycles per second or Herz (McCoy, 2012; LoVetri, 2016, 2018).
pitch accuracy	To sing or play with accurate pitch.
R&B	Rhythm and blues.
range	The breadth of pitches that can be sung by each individual singer.
referent	A musician’s collected musical skills and knowledge that serve as a frame for musical performance, and actively reduce his or her cognitive load in performance (Hargreaves, 2014b; Monson, 2008; Wopereis, et al., 2013; Pressing, 1998).
register	A group of pitches with a unified tonal quality or texture; produced in the voice by a particular mechanical principle (Garcia, 1894; LoVetri, 2016, 2018).
re-harm	Abbreviation for reharmonization; replacing a chord (or multiple chords) in a jazz tune with suitable substitutes that function like the original chord/s. Typically, substituted chords possess two pitches in common with the original chord.

resonance	Vocal acoustics; the amplification of specific pitches in the voice to enhance certain features of its vibration, overtones, and harmonics (LoVetri, 2016; 2018).
scat	A style of vocal improvisation that uses syllables instead of written lyrics (text); scat singing; scatting.
semi-occluded vocal tract exercises	Vocal exercises (e.g. straw phonation, lip trills, lip bubbles, humming) in which the front of the vocal tract is semi-occluded (partially closed). Such exercises heighten the interaction between the source (vocal folds) and the filter (vocal tract) of the voice to increase vocal intensity, efficiency, and economy (Titze, 2006).
solo	Improvisation in jazz; to take a solo; soloing.
Somatic Voicework™ the LoVetri Method	A method of CCM vocal training that embraces physical (somatic) engagement and aural discernment, created by Jeannette (Jeanie) LoVetri (LoVetri, 2018).
standard	A jazz standard; tunes that form an important part of the jazz repertoire, many of which are derived from the “Great American Songbook”, and included in “Fake Books”.
swing feel	A division of the beat in jazz; the rounding of quavers (eighth notes) to give a forward projection and movement in the beat; an underlying triplet feel.
time	A musician’s overall sense of rhythm.
tone	The musical and/or acoustic quality of a sound.
trading	Two or more solo musicians exchanging (alternating) phrases, usually of varying lengths; trading fours; trading eights; trading licks.

transcribe	To notate a jazz performance; to transcribe a solo.
USQ	The University of Southern Queensland (Toowoomba, QLD, Australia).
vocalese	Adding lyrics to pre-existing instrumental solos, as opposed to scatting the melody.
vocal folds	The vocal folds form the main vibratory component of the voice. The name refers to the true physical characteristics of the vocal folds, that is, two small folds that are comprised of fold-like layers of gelatinous tissue and mucus membrane. The vocal folds are housed within the larynx at the top of the airway. Physiologically, the vocal folds serve as a sphincter valve that close off the airway to prevent foreign objects entering the lungs. When firmly closed, the vocal folds increase abdominal pressure, which aids strenuous activity (e.g. lifting heavy objects). When gently closed during exhalation (breathing out) the vocal folds vibrate and produce sound (phonate) for speech and singing (McCoy, 2012; LoVetri, 2018; Shapiro, 2016).
vocal fold nodules	Callous-like lesions located on the vibrating margin of the vocal folds that create a physical obstacle between the vocal folds and impair normal phonation. Nodules are predominantly caused by misuse, overuse, or abuse of the voice; nodules (McCoy, 2012).
vocal tract	The area between the vocal folds and the lips, including the mouth and throat (LoVetri, 2018).

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS RELEVANT TO THE STUDY

Feldman, C. (2019, June). *Storied lives and relational research: Using narrative inquiry methodology in jazz and jazz improvisation studies* [Paper presentation]. 3rd Annual Conference of the Australasian Jazz and Improvisation Research Network, Melbourne, VIC, Australia. https://www.ajirn.com

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I thank God for the opportunity and the capacity to complete this study, and for sustaining me each step of the way. “With His power working in us, God can do much more than anything we can ask or imagine… You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power” (Ephesians 3:20; Revelation 4:11).

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As an improviser what helped me was my five years with the piano.

Carmen McRae[1]

Do I want you? Oh my, do I
Honey, ‘deed I do

Do I need you? Oh my, do I
Honey, ‘deed I do

I’m glad that I’m the one who found you
That’s why I’m always hangin’ ‘round you

Do I love you? Oh my, do I
Honey, ‘deed I do

‘Deed I Do[2]

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[1] Cited in Crowther, B., & Pinfold, M. (1997). *Singing jazz: The singers and their styles.* Miller Freeman.
[2] Rose, F., & Hirsch, F. (1926). *‘Deed I do* [Song]. [Music by Fred Rose; Lyrics by Walter Hirsch].

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PROLOGUE

It’s the morning of Saturday 24th February 2018. I’ve just arrived in Brisbane (Queensland, Australia). My day began before the dawn, with a journey from my home in Toowoomba (approximately one hundred and twenty-five kilometres west of Brisbane). With each stretch of the journey, I was chasing an ever-more-vibrant mandarin skyline. Now, the sun has risen, revealing a new day full of possibilities. This weekend, I’m attending a jazz voice workshop led by two of Australia’s preeminent jazz singers, Anita Wardell, and Michelle Nicolle; I’m energised with a mixture of nerves and excitement for what lies ahead. Turning the corner of Brisbane’s bustling Edward St, I’m greeted by the bright and brassy façade of the “Doo Bop Jazz Bar”; the space gives a nod to Brisbane’s rich art deco design heritage. To the right of the main entrance are a set of large polished wooden chevron doors finished with brass pull handles. A sign welcomes the workshop attendees to enter. Opening the heavy doors, I make my way down a carpet-covered staircase, as the brightness of the morning light gradually disappears into the darkness of the venue’s basement. At the base of the stairs, my eyes are drawn to an illuminated red sign that hangs above the stage—“Doo Bop Jazz Bar”—which casts a glow of warmth across the plush red velvet stage curtains. Scattered spotlights along the walls reveal moody shades of forest green and merlot. In the beams of light, I see signed posters, framed photographs, and illustrations of the jazz greats. The atmosphere feels like what I’ve always imagined a downtown New York jazz club in the 1950s would be.

Stepping out of the stairwell and into the room, I’m greeted by a smiling and bubbly Anita; her friendly demeanour makes me feel immediately welcome. Next, I meet Michelle; her confidence gives me the distinct impression that she is serious about her craft. I’m one of the first to arrive so I choose a seat in the front and centre—close to the action; I don’t want to miss a beat. Placing my belongings on the round marble table before me, I’m joined by a couple more singers. Introducing ourselves to each other, I learn that some (like me) have travelled a distance to be here; others are Brisbane locals. Regardless of our geographical differences, we are all united by our passion for jazz singing, and eager to learn from the experts. The in-house barista takes our coffee orders, and we’re instructed to find our seats. Soon thereafter, Anita and Michelle make their way to the stage; the magic begins.

* * *

Over the two days that followed in the “Doo Bop” workshop, Anita and Michelle demonstrated aspects of their practice and performance techniques, imparting their tried and tested wisdom in matters of style, technique, stagecraft, theory, transcription, arrangement, and improvisation. The duo worked with each of the participants on jazz repertoire, in preparation for a final public concert—I chose two of my favourite standards, “Tangerine” and “I’m Old Fashioned”. In the final concert, Anita and Michelle also took to the stage, expertly singing a selection of up-tempo tunes, medium-tempo standards, ballads, and of course, improvised solos. The duo even joined forces in a couple of tunes, trading improvised solos over lightning-fast changes. When it came time for my slot in the gig, I recall feeling as if my heart was going to beat right out of my chest with nerves (but you’d never have known—my cool and calm exterior gave nothing away). As I sang through the head in and out for each tune, I pushed the bar by trying out some new techniques that I’d learned over the weekend, but even then, I knew that my improvisation was markedly “safe” in comparison to Anita and Michelle’s expertise. Nevertheless, it felt so good to be collaborating with the band, in this venue, and on this stage that so many acclaimed artists had graced before me; if this stage could talk, oh the stories it could tell. The concert continued late into the evening. When I eventually made my exit, I thanked Anita and Michelle for the time and wisdom they’d invested in our group over the weekend and expressed how meaningful it was to me (both personally and musically). We took some photos and exchanged contact details, and then all too soon, I was on my way back home. The weekend was over, but I had the sense that something bigger had just begun.

A couple of days after the workshop, I recall sitting at my piano and reflecting on what had transpired. Still buzzing from the experience, I was eager to learn from Anita and Michelle’s example, and to meaningfully apply their advice into my own performance practice. I laid out the resources I collected from the workshop on the music rack of my piano and began to read through my notes. It was then that I had a realisation which intrigued me. Throughout the workshop, I observed that Anita and Michelle both worked from the piano (e.g. in demonstration, workshopping tunes, self-accompaniment, accompaniment of others, and in group

singing facilitation). However, in the final concert, neither performed from the piano; both were accompanied by the rhythm section. At the time I wasn’t fazed by this choice. As a singer and pianist, I too have performed both at and away from the piano, depending on the performance setting, the band configuration, or the style of repertoire. However, as I more intently considered the apparent schism between Anita and Michelle’s interaction with the piano in practice/learning, and the lack thereof in their performance, a spark of curiosity ignited within me. Why was it that the piano featured so *prominently* in one aspect of their performance practice and seemingly so *little* in another?

As a jazz singer, I’d heard the advice that playing the piano is advantageous in developing improvisational expertise. Yet for me, the piano was already a part of my performance practice—second nature to me—and so I tended to skim over those passages in the method books and other publications I read, focussing my attention to other aspects of the craft. I had always intuitively sensed a connection between the two instruments but hadn’t (at that point) given conscious thought as to the nature of this connection, and how it was meaningful in the context of my broader musicianship. In some ways, it felt as if my experiences were like a tapestry; the wooden frame was fixed with a mesh canvas, and coloured threads were woven across. Some of the threads were my experiences as a singer, and other threads were my experiences as a pianist. At many places, these threads connected and entwined, forming the beginnings of shapes; some of which were familiar to me, and others were less defined. I wondered if I continued to tease out and weave these threads, what image might emerge in my tapestry? I wondered what images would feature in the tapestries of singers like Anita and Michelle—expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play piano? I wondered what insight I could gain from teasing out the threads of *their* experiences, and exploring the way those threads are woven together? I wondered if such a venture might impact upon my understanding of my own experiences? I wondered if this understanding might enable me to more strategically approach my own performance practice in future? I wondered if this insight would be impactful for other jazz performers and educators?

This thesis narrates my journey in exploring the tapestry of my experiences as a jazz singer and pianist, and those of expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play the piano.

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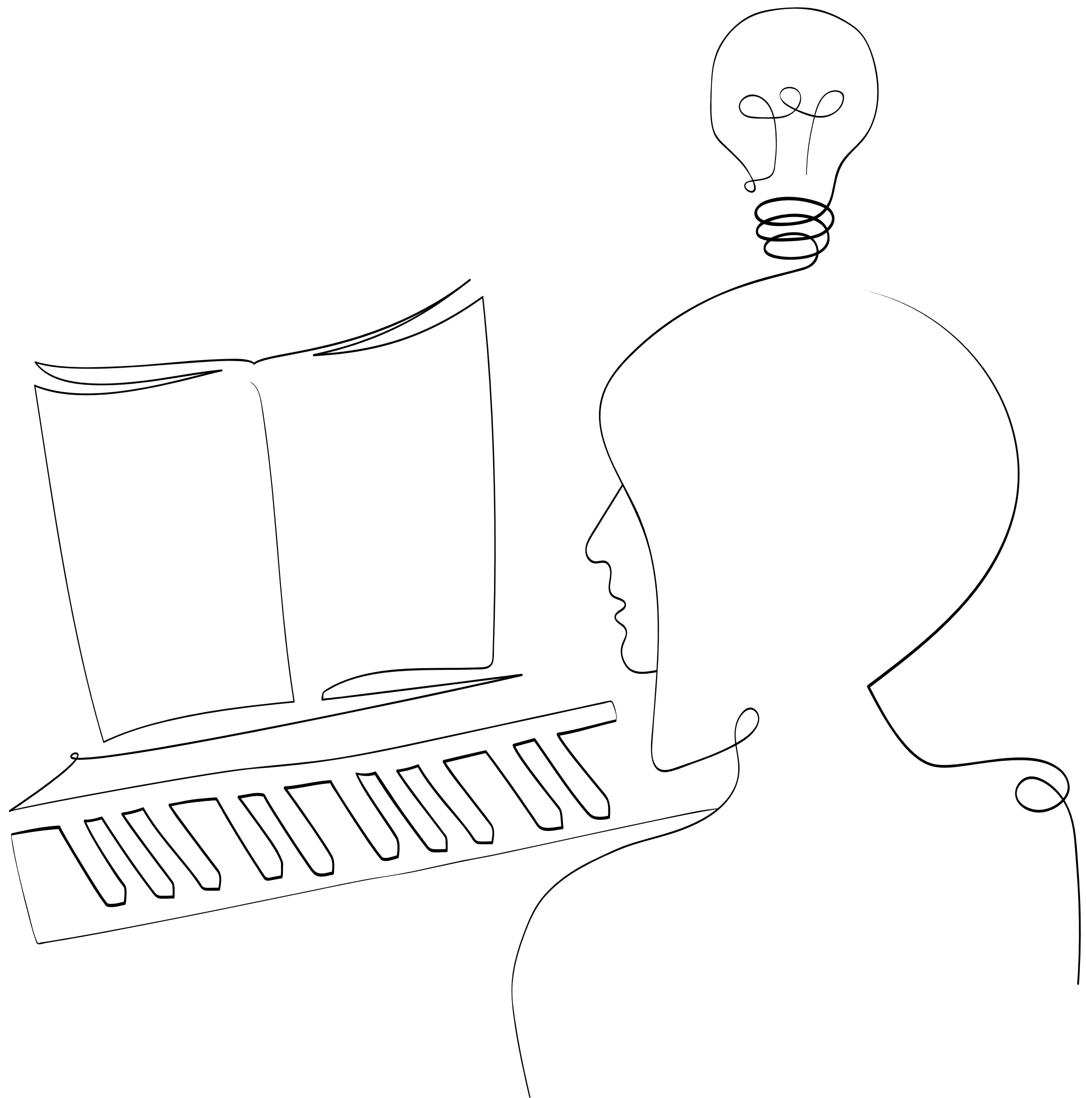

“Wonderings”

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting the Scene: Contextualising the Study

Research on jazz improvisation has developed appreciably since the 1980s (Biasutti, 2015). As researchers have sought to find answers to the “riddle of improvisation” (Johnson-Laird, 2002, p. 417) an array of theoretical models have been proposed in the literature (e.g. Kratus, 1991; Pressing, 1984, 1988), and empirical studies undertaken (e.g. de Bruin, 2015; Hannaford, 2017; Pike, 1974; Sudnow, 1978, 2001), across a range of different disciplines and perspectives including musicology (e.g. Givan, 2014), psychology (e.g. Johnson-Laird, 2002; Kenny & Gellrich, 2002; Pressing, 1984; Sawyer, 2011), neuroscience (e.g. Beaty, 2015; Landau & Limb, 2017; Torrance & Schumann, 2018), and with a focus on novice to expert levels of performance (Biasutti, 2015). Alongside these studies, improvisation is also a prominent feature in the historical and biographical writings of jazz (e.g. Berliner, 1994; Sales, 1984; Nicholson, 2004; Tirro, 1993), jazz theory and method books (e.g. Coker, 1964; Levine, 1995), and in the analysed transcriptions of improvised solos (e.g. Preponis, 2009). For all its many merits, this body of literature has largely been informed by the experiences of jazz instrumentalists. As a result, there is little empirical evidence about vocal jazz improvisation (Madura, 1995, 1996); jazz singers’ experiences are “largely shrouded in mystery” (Forbes, 2021, p. 789).

The lack of research into jazz singers’ experiences of improvisation arguably stems from a perception inside the jazz scene that singers are improvisational underachievers in comparison to instrumentalists (Hargreaves, 2013; cf Coker & Baker, 1981; Weir, 2001). Several factors may have fuelled this perception, beginning with views toward the “inborn traits” of the voice (Pellegrinelli, 2005, p. 77), that is, “its universality among human beings and unique sound production, including the capacity for speech” (p. 367). Yet, jazz insiders can “routinely conflate these qualities with others that are thought to be innate” (Pellegrinelli, 2005, p. 367). For example, “the notion that ‘everyone can sing’ contributes to the dominant image of the singer as untutored and instinctual, rather than skilled, intellectual, or hardworking” (Pellegrinelli, 2005, p. 367). This perception maps onto the historical positioning of singers as the “originators” of the jazz tradition (Pellegrinelli, 2005, p. 125), who are linked with the maternal parentage of jazz (e.g. slave songs, spirituals,

work songs, and the blues), predominantly gendered female (e.g. “blueswomen”, “girl singers”), and tied to images of the “sexual icon” (Pellegrinelli, 2005). In contrast, jazz history positions instrumentalists as “the leaders and the innovators” (Pellegrinelli, 2005, p. 125) of jazz, who are predominantly gendered masculine (e.g. “jazzmen”) and associated with “technical skill” (Pellegrinelli, 2005, p. 372; cf Sella, 2015). Where jazz instrumentalists were considered masterful innovators capable of improvisational complexity, jazz singers were considered to lack complexity and innovation, being fixated on the “Great American Songbook”, and thus, were limited to diatonic improvisation at best (Pellegrinelli, 2005; Sella, 2015). Fundamentally, where playing instruments was aligned with notions of technical and improvisational proficiency, singing spoke to the untrained voice and body (Pellegrinelli, 2005).

The conflict between jazz singing and commerciality presents another factor of relevance to consider. Jazz singers can encounter a “dual popular-yet marginalised status” (Pellegrinelli, 2005, p. 290). For example, Pellegrinelli (2005) explains that in American culture, jazz singers can be deemed “more visible” (p. 290) and “more popular than instrumentalists” (p. 290), and yet, rather “ironically, many jazz insiders marginalise singers in part because they represent the mainstream” (p. 290). Said in different terms, singers bearing the “taint of commercialism rather than the purity of high art” (Pellegrinelli, 20015, p. 290), can be dismissed as “not jazz” (p. 290). Jazz singers encounter further resistance owing to the weight of their success as determined by extramusical factors such as industry trends, visual appearance, boundaries between jazz and popular music, and the hybridisation of the term “crossover” (Pellegrinelli, 2005; cf Crowther & Pinfold, 1997). It is pertinent to note that while the “iconic jazz singer” was often considered to be in that position due to natural ability, rather than skill borne of hard work, conversely, jazz instrumentalists (while highly regarded by afficionados) were often less well known than jazz singers or revered primarily amongst the general population of jazz afficionados. Underlying these positions are assumptions about the high value of “hard work” and the lower value of “natural ability”.

An ever-growing body of research has sought to confront the misconception about singers’ underachievement in improvisation, by demonstrating the ways in which singers are differentiated as a distinct subset of improvising jazz musicians, who have difference experiences and skills in relation to improvisation (e.g. Hargreaves, 2014b, Pellegrinelli, 2005; Sella, 2015). Perhaps the most significant

aspect to consider is the nature of the voice as an embodied instrument. Where other instruments are external, inanimate objects, constructed from natural and/or manufactured materials, the voice is entirely embodied (Hargreaves, 2014b; Pellegrinelli, 2005)—an instrument housed within the body that can only be controlled through indirect means of neurological impulse (LoVetri, 2018; McCoy, 2012). Because the voice has “no strings to pluck or keys to play” (Neimack, 2004), it offers no clear connection between a particular pitch and a physical position in the voice. As such, singers must carefully and consciously conceptualise each sung pitch to ensure pitch accuracy (Aitken & Aebersold, 1983; Bell, 2013). In other words, where instrumentalists have varying degrees of aural, visual, proprioceptive, and tactile feedback from their instruments, singers have only aural and proprioceptive feedback (Pressing, 1984; cf Hargreaves, 2014b). To this challenge is added the fluctuations of the physical state of the body, including matters related to physical health and fitness, postural disorders and muscular tension, illness, surgery, the impact of medications and hormones, physical voice changes during puberty, ageing, pregnancy, nervousness, stress, and tiredness (e.g. LoVetri, 2018; McCoy, 2012; Sundberg, 2012). Negotiating these qualities makes sophisticated improvisation markedly more challenging for singers in comparison to other instrumentalists (Pressing, 1984). As Jazz singer Mel Tormé explains

> [improvising singers] will tell you that the hardest aspect of that kind of singing is to stay in tune. You are wandering all over the scales, the notes coming out of your mouth a millisecond after you think of them... A singer has to work doubly hard to emit those random notes in [improvisation] with perfect intonation. (Tormé, 1988; cited in Nicholson, 2004, p. 89)

Instrumentalists also, however, face unique challenges when learning to improvise. The way in which a jazz musician approaches improvisation is significantly affected by the instrument he or she plays, and the affordances that instrument implies (Gibson, 2006). Every instrument has its own identifiable characteristics, peculiarities of construction and norms of usage (Gibson, 2006). Put simply, some things are more difficult to do on one instrument than on another (Bell, 2013; Gibson, 2006). While the challenges faced by singers are in many ways more fundamental than those of instrumentalists, and indeed to some degree, separate from instrumentalists (e.g. no external mechanical assistance), other challenges are experienced, at least in part, by other instrumentalists. For example, for the

trombonist, there are little more external physical or mechanical markers than the manipulation of the embouchure and an unmarked slide position to aid in the accurate pitching of notes. Like the singer, the trombonist must mentally conceive a desired sound before they play it. The relative differences between instruments can be usefully illustrated as being along a continuum. At one extreme are singers (who lack external mechanical instrumental features). At the other extreme are instruments like the piano (which offers an array of external mechanical instrumental features). Other instruments would naturally reside at varying places along the continuum between these two extremes, depending on the features of the instrument, and the affordances those features imply.

Conversely, it could also be argued that in some ways, singers are placed at an advantage to other instrumentalists. For example, singers have the advantage of transferring aural input to sound output with a greater sense of immediacy, and likewise to transition between keys more easily due to recalled relative key relationships (e.g. rather than specific pitch frequencies or mechanical playing configurations). The tactile nature of some elements of pitch production for instrumentalists may be of long-term advantage, however, this may not be true in the foundational stages of learning. For example, the memorisation of various button, key, and valve positions of playing require considerable time and constant reinforcement to develop in the foundational stages of learning, in order to achieve the desired outcome of pitch accuracy and playing fluency.

It is logical to also consider that the challenges of mastering certain aspects of musicianship are shared by all jazz musicians equally. For example, specific musicianship techniques (e.g. the ability to consistently and fluently outline or arpeggiate a secondary dominant on scale degree III in all twelve keys) present an equal challenge to all musicians, regardless of their instrument. Additionally, the mastering of certain skills at a novice versus expert level of ability is a principle that applies to all musicians, regardless of their instrument.

A further difference between singers’ skills and experiences of improvisation in comparison to instrumentalists, rests upon the speech (language) capacity of the voice (Hargreaves, 2014b; Pellegrinelli, 2005). With the freedom to use elements of both music and lyrics, jazz singers have a rich array of creative choices in improvisation (Dahl, 1984; Shapiro, 2016). Typically, improvisation requires singers to relinquish lyrics, and to adopt scat syllables—an act that introduces additional

variables for singers that are largely superfluous to instrumentalists (Hargreaves, 2014b). For example, when transitioning from singing lyrics to scat syllables, some singers can feel as if they are giving up a “handle” (Hargreaves, 2014b, p. 143) or “security blanket” (p. 143) which they would normally rely upon in making their musical decisions. For some singers, these feelings of loss are counterbalanced by feelings of liberation (Hargreaves, 2014b; cf Forbes, 2021), as the perceived responsibilities of verbally communicating with an audience through lyrics are released (Hargreaves, 2014b), and the singer can “access something deeper” (Forbes, 2021, p. 11) and feel closer to “free expression” (p. 11) of their musical ideas. To this is added an emphasis on the role of singers as “performers”, and the corresponding de-emphasis on their role as “improvisers” (Hargreaves, 2014b).

Singers’ identification as the “front person” of a jazz ensemble (e.g. the main audience focus), can stem from aspects like visual appeal (often gendered), as well as the individual communication skills of the singer, the role that lyrics play in the audience-ensemble interface, and the expectation of more direct communication from the musician who holds the vocal microphone. In any case, as the “front person” of the jazz ensemble, there can be a greater expectation placed on singers than instrumentalists regarding entertaining, connecting, and interacting with an audience in performance (Hargreaves, 2014b). To maintain their connection with an audience, singers may feel an underlying need to perform in a lyric-based style of singing (Hargreaves, 2014b). While lyric-based singing does offer a unique communicative opportunity with an audience, it also can be perceived as detracting from “real” jazz (Pellegrinelli, 2005) (e.g. reflecting the perception that singing does not require the same level of knowledge or skills that are associated with improvised performance). However, if a singer does choose to improvise, their efforts may be received with “mixed views” (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 133) from audiences, being perceived as self-indulgent, unlikeable, unrelatable, unexpected, redundant, or even optional in comparison to the improvisation of instrumentalists (Hargreaves, 2014b)—factors that are largely arbitrary for instrumentalists.

Based upon the aforementioned factors, it is evident why singers have been cast as “outsiders” in the predominantly instrumental and male jazz tradition, and excluded from associations with improvisational expertise (Pellegrinelli, 2005). This in turn, may provide some indication as to why singers’ experiences of improvisation are largely “silent” in jazz improvisation research. However, it is also evident that

singers’ experiences and skills of improvisation bare differences to those of instrumentalists. Such notions support the identification of singers as a distinct subset of improvising jazz musicians, who have unique experiences of improvisation in comparison to instrumentalists.

To overcome the challenges of the voice as an embodied instrument, singers must engage with alternative means to support their learning and performance practice as improvisers. One of the most cited strategies is playing the piano. Many jazz singing method books and “how-to-guides” advise that playing the piano is advantageous in developing expertise as a jazz singer and improviser (e.g. Berkman, 2009; Deutsch, 2009; Shapiro, 2016; Weir, 2015). Likewise, leading jazz educators agree on the correlation between playing piano and the ability to improvise with the voice (Wadsworth Walker, 2005). Indeed, some have even developed entire piano methods or courses tailored specifically to the needs of singers (e.g. Earle Stokes, 2020; S. Russell, 2019b). Research echoes these views, revealing that singing and playing an instrument positively influences improvisational achievement (Palmer, 2016; cf Heil, 2005; McPherson, 1993). This understanding is corroborated by examining the performance practice of expert vocal jazz improvisers—the majority of whom are known to have played (or play) an instrument other than the voice (Berendt, 1975; Preponis, 2009). Whilst playing the piano is advised in the literature, there is a dearth of research about what this behaviour looks like in practice, and if indeed this behaviour brings forth the claimed benefits.

Instruments have long been considered to influence jazz singers; many of the great jazz singers have styles and techniques that include elements of instrumentality, or which have been compared to instruments (e.g. voices that sound “like a horn”) (Dahl, 1984). The same principle also applies in reverse; jazz instrumentalists have also felt the influence of vocality, particularly in the context of learning to play through singing, and in imitation of the expressive qualities of the voice (Berliner, 1994; Crowther & Pinfold, 1997; Dahl, 1989; Sella, 2015)—“cries, growls, moans, slurs, shouts, whispers, wails” (Dahl, 1984, p. 98). Indeed, “the creative cycle of jazz music embraces both the singer as player, with an instrumental approach to vocalising, and the player as singer, with a vocalising approach to playing” (Dahl, 1984, p. 98). Here, an image of jazz musicality is presented in which singers and instrumentalists craft their sounds in attentiveness to each other; neither voice nor instrument is mutually exclusive, nor is one completely defined through

the other (Sella, 2015). Contemporary thinking about vocal jazz improvisation echoes this understanding indicating that singers have rich and embodied experiences of improvising with the voice—experiences that extend beyond scatting, to expand the possibilities of the voice’s “instrumentality” (Norris, 2008; Sella; 2015). For example, contemporary jazz singers such as Gretchen Parlato and Esperanza Spalding have styles that assert clear instrumental markers—"repertoire that is typically associated with instrumentalists, manoeuvres deemed more musically complex (odd meters, complicated chord changes, non-diatonic improvisations), increased improvisation, and [with a movement] away from lyrics and language” (Sella, 2015, para 11), and yet, their improvisations are entirely embodied (Sella, 2015). Fundamentally, these singers do not seek to imitate other instruments, but rather, to expand the full expressive capacities of the voice as a “musicking” instrument (Sella, 2015). In other words, these singers fully embrace the embodied nature of the voice as an instrument; vocality and instrumentality are entwined (Sella, 2015).

Given the unique characteristics, qualities, and expressive capabilities of the voice as an improvising jazz instrument, the scant research into jazz singers’ experiences of improvisation is incongruous. Furthermore, the growing body of literature that suggests the ways in which playing the piano may support singers to improvise with the voice, presents an intriguing direction for further research. My “wonderings” as a researcher (J. Barrett, 2009, p. 196) are to venture into the largely unexplored domain of vocal jazz improvisation, to investigate expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

This study aimed to better understand expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano. In response to this aim, two overarching research questions were posed:

1. How do expert vocal jazz improvisers, who also play piano, experience the piano?
2. What do expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano mean to them?

To interrogate these questions, a constructivist approach was adopted within a narrative inquiry (NI) framework. Data were generated using one-on-one semi-structured interviews with five expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play piano,

namely, Kristin Berardi, Brenda Earle Stokes, Michelle Nicolle, Sharny Russell, and Anita Wardell. Researcher’s observations and reflective notes were used to bring further insight to the verbatim interview data. Data were interpreted through Polkinghorne’s (1988) “narrative analysis”, to narrate the participants’ experiences of the piano through five individual stories. A subsequent “analysis of narratives” (Polkinghorne, 1988) led to the generation of the “resonant narrative threads” or themes (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) which spoke to the resonances across the participants’ collective experiences, as presented in the narratives. These resonant narrative threads informed the discussion and overall findings of the study.

1.3 Scope

The scope of this study is limited to an emphasis on the contextually bound experiences of the study participants, as expressed in their lived and told stories. The participant pool for the study was comprised of a small group of female expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play piano, drawn from my established network of musicians in Australia, the UK, and the USA (Participant Selection is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.5.1). An exclusively female participant group is not unreasonable for this study given that most jazz singers are female (Dahl, 1984; Pellegrinelli, 2008). To this end, considerations of gender are excluded from the scope of this study.

This study is not intended to be a “how-to-guide” for singers’ engagement with the piano, nor to present a judgment or evaluation of the effectiveness of the participants’ experiences in relation to the piano. Rather, it is an in-depth examination of practice, contextualised within the participants’ experiences in relation with the piano. Additionally, I acknowledge that this study presents my unique interpretation of the participants’ stories, offering one possible understanding of the research focus. Whilst the focussed exploration on the participants’ experiences, through my own interpretation as the researcher, narrows the scope of the study to a particular context, reading the findings of the study with the relevant literature enables a broader reflection about expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano, and how those experiences are meaningful to them.

1.4 Significance

This study is significant because it presents conceptual advances in our understanding of jazz singers’ experiences of the piano. These advances make an

original contribution to the field, having implications for jazz performance, education, and research.

1.4.1 Significance of the Participant Pool

The “expert” participant pool of this study holds significance. Music education has long recognised the value of learning from expert performers (Duke & Simmons, 2006; Long, et al., 2014; Gaunt, 2008), that is, performers “who have reached the highest level in their chosen field” (Holmes & Holmes, 2013, p. 79). This trend extends to jazz singing, where expert performers are increasingly found teaching in universities and conducting masterclasses, passing on their “hard earned knowledge” to other aspiring singers (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 114). In-depth inquiries into the experiences of experts have several significant advantages. First, expert performers have an organised, focussed, efficient and automated capacity in the cognitive and motor demands of music (Gray, 2004; Holmes & Holmes, 2013; Milton, et al., 2007). As such, they have a more global artistic perspective, being able to focus on wider music demands (Holmes & Holmes, 2013). For example, expert performers are more effortless in the execution of motor programs, are adept at filtering relevant from irrelevant information, and have a greater consistency in motor performance (Milton, et al., 2007). To this end, by studying expert performers, researchers are, in effect, “studying what works” (Woody, 2004, p. 18), gaining access to the musician’s vivid “artistic concepts, emotional landscape and embodied experience[s] of music” (Holmes & Holmes, 2013, p. 79). Second, expert performers are less distracted by issues related to their perceived deficiencies (Holmes & Holmes, 2013). This means that they can more confidently focus on the music, which allows for as rich as possible a representation of their conscious experiences of performance (Holmes & Holmes, 2013; Waterman, 1996). Third, expert performers’ verifications of their experiences are all-encompassing, vivid, reliable, strongly held, and consistent (Holmes & Holmes, 2013; cf Jorgensen, 2009; Pike, 1970). Likewise, expert performers’ reflections on their working practices (both from the level of thought and engagement that characterises this level of performance) are clear to the point where thinking and experience are refined and intensified over time (Holmes, 2005, 2012; Holmes & Holmes, 2013).

Expert performers also bring new revelation to studies of learning. In the context of learning, expert performers can master skills and knowledge in a way that distinguishes them from novices (Stobart, 2016). For example, experts can: (i)

choose appropriate strategies to implement; (ii) generate best solutions faster and more accurately; (iii) use superior detection and recognition to see patterns and deep structures within a problem; (iv) accurately monitor their own performance; (v) retrieve relevant domain knowledge and information more effectively; and (vi) exhibit more opportunism in using available resources (Chi, 2006; Stobart, 2014). Recent studies in music education philosophy have highlighted the value of adopting the perspective of the learner’s experience (Karlsen, 2011; Westerlund, 2008) and the performer’s experience (Holmes & Holmes, 2013) as a means to gain insight into the rich and multifaceted experiences and learning that can be found in formal and informal settings of music (Karlsen, 2011). To this end, empirical research that is grounded in the lived experiences of expert vocal jazz improvisers, who also play piano, serves to provide rich insight into the subjective meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Gaus, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) that these singers ascribe to their experiences in relation to the piano, and how those experiences contribute to their ability to learn, perform, and improvise with the voice.

1.4.2 Significance of the Study for Jazz Performance and Education

This study advances on the existing literature regarding the embodied nature of the voice as an instrument and the unique challenges faced by singers in learning, performance, and improvisation (Hargreaves, 2014b; Madura, 1995, 1996; Madura Ward-Steinman, 2008, 2014; Pellegrinelli, 2005), and the possible benefits that playing piano can provide to jazz singers (Berkman, 2009; Deutsch, 2009; Earle Stokes, 2020; Preponis, 2009; S. Russell, 2019b; Shapiro, 2016; Wadsworth Walker, 2005; Weir, 2015). Additionally, this study highlights the relationship between piano skills and vocal agency in developing and supporting improvisational ability. Such understandings may inspire singers, pianists, and educators of the voice and piano to consider adopting similar approaches in their own performance practice.

1.4.3 Significance of the Study for Jazz Research

This study directly responds to the need for research on vocal jazz improvisation (Forbes, 2021; Madura, 1995, 1996) by providing an in-depth investigation into the lived experiences of improvising jazz singers, and highlighting the inherent value of the same. This study also highlights the ways in which singing and playing are connected in the jazz tradition. Such an understanding presents a case for jazz musicianship that extends beyond the boundaries of particular

instruments, to instead reinforce what is improvisationally possible on a “musicking” instrument.

1.4.4 Methodological Significance of the Study

Within the context of expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences, the methodology of this study also holds significance. This study presents the first in-depth inquiry into expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences specifically in relation to the piano. NI provided an ideal frame for investigating and narrating the experiences of the study participants in thick, rich detail (Polkinghorne, 1995), in order to develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which the participants view, understand, interpret and make sense of their experiences, thoughts, and emotions (Chase, 2005; de Vries, 2014), and how the same are expressed through their stories (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Josselson, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). By embracing “the power of the particular” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 24), NI also provided a means for attending to “tensions below the surface” (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009b, p. 223) of the lived experiences of the participants. To this end, this study offers a unique perspective on the lived experience of vocal jazz improvisation.

1.5 Outline of the Study

Following the current chapter, Chapter 2 considers the broader context of the research. The aim and research questions of the study are situated within the relevant literature that informs the study. Following this, key theoretical frames that inform the analysis of the data are introduced, namely, embodied cognition (the 4E framework) and Karlsen’s (2011) “musical agency lens”.

Chapter 3 outlines and justifies the research approaches adopted in this NI study. The philosophical assumptions that I espouse as a researcher are discussed, followed by the methods of data collection and analysis, the format and presentation of the research findings, and key ethical considerations. A credibility framework for the study is also proposed, namely the evaluation of NI in music research as “resonant work” (M. Barrett, 2009), and through reflecting upon the “twelve touchstones for narrative inquiry” (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012).

Chapters 4 through 8 present the findings of the first phase of analysis via Polkinghorne’s (1988) “narrative analysis”, namely, the narratives of the study participants: Kristin Berardi, Brenda Earle Stokes, Michelle Nicolle, Sharny Russell,

and Anita Wardell. These narratives explore the participants’ individual experiences as expert vocal jazz improvisers who play the piano.

Chapter 9 presents the findings from the second phase of analysis via Polkinghorne’s (1988) “analysis of narratives”, namely the “resonant narrative threads” or themes (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that were identified from the participants’ narratives. Each of the resonant narrative threads speaks to a different aspect of the participants’ experiences in relation to the piano, responding to the research aims and questions, and advancing on the relevant existing literature.

Chapter 10 concludes the study by asserting the ways in which the findings “trouble certainty” (M. Barrett, 2009), that is, to question, disturb, and trouble the clearly established and assured knowledge (Clandinin, 2009) that we have about the nature of expert vocal jazz improvisers experiences with the piano. Key implications of this knowledge for pedagogy and practice are stated, along with the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

1.6 Visual Storyline

A visual storyline maps the narrative of this thesis. This storyline was developed in collaboration with my friend and colleague, graphic designer, Jessica Mengel. Each illustration in the storyline offers a glimpse into a significant aspect of my journey in this study and represents a thread in the tapestry of my experiences as a narrative inquirer. The illustrations adopt a continuous line design, symbolically reflecting the continuity of experience that is adopted in the NI perspective, and which I embraced in this study and beyond (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938). Additionally, the continuous line design is symbolic of the threads of the participants’ experiences that are teased out in the findings of the study (Clandinin, 2013), and likewise, the threads in the tapestry of my own experiences.

As a narrative researcher, my positioning “in the midst” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 100) of the study enabled me to think narratively about my own experiences, those of the participants, and the contextually and socially bound experiences that arose through our relationship in the inquiry (Clandinin, 2006; 2013; Clandinin & Huber, 2002). To this end, each of the illustrations provide a representation of my identity as a jazz musician, educator, and researcher, my personality, style, and creativity, and my deep respect for the five singers who so

generously took part in my research and lived alongside me within the narrative inquiry.

As a passionate creative arts practitioner, I greatly value collaboration and the opportunity to support the work of my fellow artists. Therefore, it is fitting that the thread of artistic collaboration is woven throughout this study in the visual storyline.

Table 1 provides an overview and description of the visual story illustrations.

Table 1

Overview of Visual Storyline Illustrations

Illustration	Location	Description
“Wonderings”	Chapter 1: Introduction	My interest in the research area arose through my own experience of being a jazz singer, pianist, educator, and researcher. This image depicts me seated at my piano, in my home music studio, where my “wonderings” for the “research puzzle” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) were illuminated (the light bulb).
“Puzzle”	Chapter 2: Literature Review	My “wonderings” about the “research puzzle” became even more pronounced as I deconstructed and reconstructed the literature, observing it from different perspectives, and the ways in which the pieces could fit together cohesively into the structural form of the literature review chapter as it now presented. This image depicts me seated at my desk as I critically engage with the literature; a 3D resin puzzle sculpture sits atop my desk. The puzzle sculpture was designed by Stephen Ormandy and Louise Olsen of “Dinosaur Designs” (an Australian label renowned for their sculptural handcrafted resin jewellery and homewares). Ormandy explains that “this puzzle has a sculptural playfulness that everyone can participate in. Some people immediately want to return it to its cube shape, while others enjoy the opportunity to create their own sculptural form” (Olsen & Ormandy, 2016, p. 86). The process of deconstructing and reconstructing the resin puzzle had many parallels to my process in deconstructing and reconstructing the literature in Chapter 2.

“Ink”	Chapter 3: Methodology	This image depicts my hands in the research design phase of the study. I am wearing a sculptural “Dinosaur Designs Flower Ring” and writing with a fountain pen; both objects are distinctive of my style.
“Kristin”	Chapter 4: Kristin Berardi	This image depicts my conversations with Kristin Berardi which informed the re-storying of her experiences into a narrative. Although we met via Skype, it felt as though we merely sat across the table from one another; there was intimacy in our distance. The same is true for my conversations with the other participants.
“Brenda”	Chapter 5: Brenda Earle Stokes	This image depicts my conversations with Brenda Earle Stokes which informed the re-storying of her experiences into a narrative.
“Michelle”	Chapter 6: Michelle Nicolle	This image depicts my conversations with Michelle Nicolle which informed the re-storying of her experiences into a narrative.
“Sharny”	Chapter 7: Sharny Russell	This image depicts my conversations with Sharny Russell which informed the re-storying of her experiences into a narrative.
“Anita”	Chapter 8: Anita Wardell	This image depicts my conversations with Anita Wardell which informed the re-storying of her experiences into a narrative.
“Improvise”	Chapter 9: Resonant Narrative Threads	This image depicts an expert vocal jazz improviser playing a piano. The image represents the experiences of the study participants that were explored in the narratives and teased out as the resonant narrative threads. The singer is connected to the piano in a single continuous line, representing the deeply embodied nature of the participants’ relationship with the piano.

“New horizons”	Chapter 10: Conclusion	This image depicts me sharing the findings and conclusions of the study. My “wonderings” as a researcher (the light bulb) have transformed into a deeper and richer understanding of the “research puzzle” (the illuminated light bulb) which launches into new horizons of possibility as it is shared with other jazz singers, pianists, educators, researchers, and readers with an interest in the subject (the launch).

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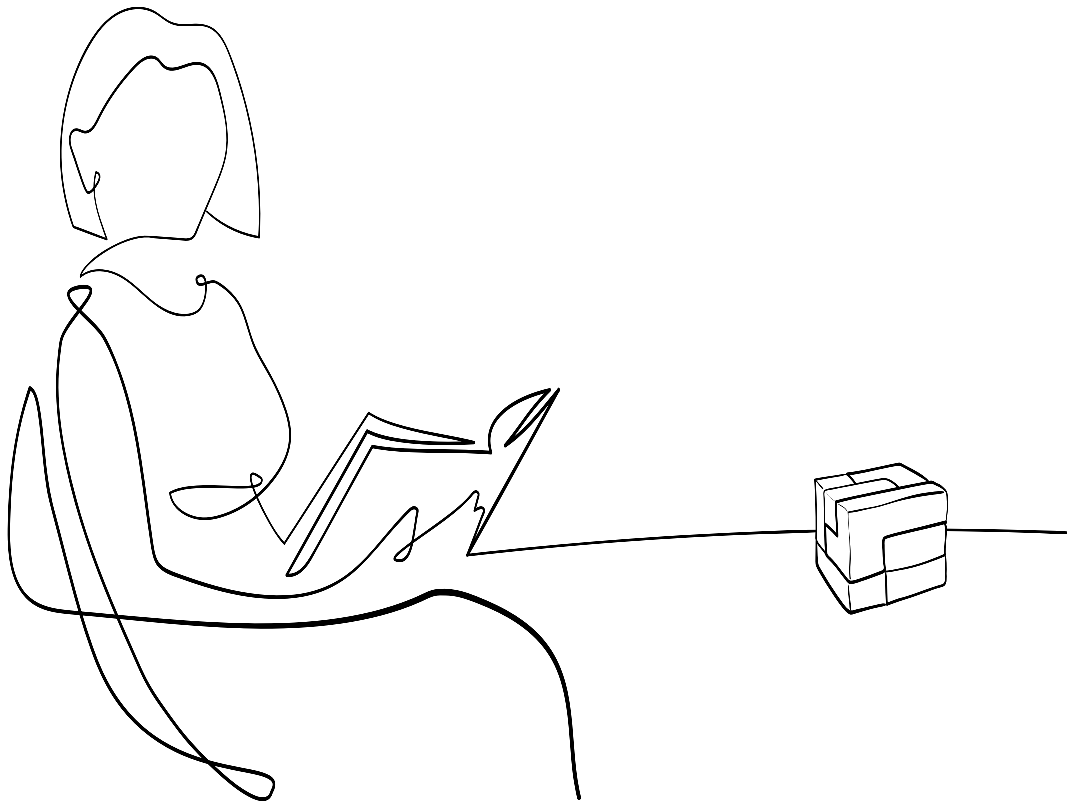


“Puzzle”

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This study aimed to investigate expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano. This chapter situates the study aim within the relevant literature and introduces key theoretical frames that inform the research. The chapter is divided into two sections. Section one provides a contextualisation of vocal jazz improvisation, presenting the foundational concepts that underpin the narrative inquiry. This portion of the chapter begins with an investigation of the elements and instrumental affordances of jazz improvisation. This leads to a critical examination of the ways in which singers are differentiated from instrumentalists as a distinct subset of improvising musicians. Following this, the notion of “singers who play” in jazz is explored, including the possible pedagogical implications and practical applications of playing piano for vocal jazz improvisers. It is this premise, along with the emphasised dearth of literature regarding singers’ experiences of improvisation, that leads to the investigation of expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of playing the piano in this study.

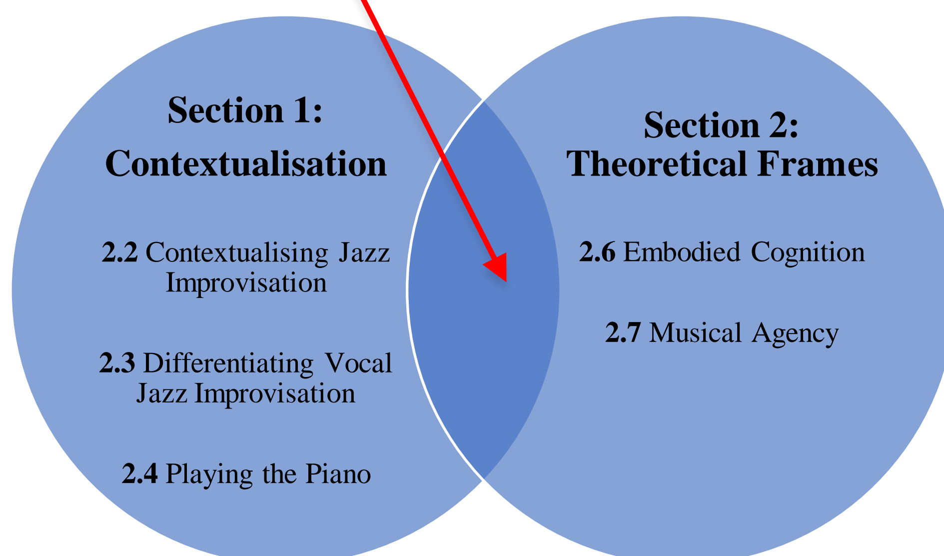
Section Two of the chapter presents the theoretical frames that inform the research, namely, embodied cognition (the 4E framework) and Karlsen’s (2011) musical agency lens. Each frame is critically examined and positioned within the study as a lens through which particular aspects of expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano can be illuminated. Section Two concludes with a summary, and an introduction to the next chapter (Chapter 3: Methodology).

The structure of Chapter 2 is summarised in Figure 1; the research questions are located at the centre of the figure where the literature themes and theoretical frames overlap.

Figure 1

A Summary of the Structure of Chapter 2

1. How do expert vocal jazz improvisers, who also play piano, experience the piano?
2. What do expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano mean to them?



2.2 Contextualising Jazz Improvisation

2.2.1 Introducing Improvisation

The term improvisation derives from the Latin word “improviso”, meaning something that is unforeseen, unexpected, or conceived in the moment (Lewis, 2012; Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Montuori, 2003; Weick, 1998). Contemporary definitions of the term echo these earlier meanings, describing a spontaneous, unplanned, or otherwise free-ranging type of creativity or performance (Bresnahan, 2015; Oxford University Press, n.d.). In cognitive terms, improvisation can be conceived as a form of high-level divergent thinking and explorative inner sense making that results from a complex cooperation between large-scale brain networks that are associated with cognitive control and spontaneous thought (Alperson, 2010; Beaty, 2015, Berkowitz, 2010; Sovansky, et al., 2014; Torrance & Schumann, 2018). In musical terms, where conventional genres of musical composition generate music that is composed, edited, prescribed, and performed at a later stage (Johnson-Laird, 2002; Hargreaves, 2014b;

Wopereis, et al., 2013) improvisation is a form of instantaneous composition and immediate musical performance (Alperson, 2010; Dobbins, 1980; Sawyer, 1992, 2000; Torrance & Schumann, 2018). In other words, musical improvisation is a creation in the moment, that is also spurred by the moment (Torrance & Schumann, 2018); it is both a product and a process of spontaneous creativity (Alperson, 2010; Bresnahan, 2015; Sawyer, 2000). Improvisation is an ancient and important element in many styles of traditional (folk) and classical (art) music throughout the world (Azzara, 2002; Berkowitz, 2010; Burkholder, Grout & Palisca, 2010; Dobbins, 1980; Madura, 1999; Mills, 2010; Nettl, 2009; Nettl & M. Russell, 1998; Tirro, 1993). Indeed, there is scarcely a single field, technique or compositional form in music that has not felt the influence of improvisation to some degree (Ferand, 1961). However, for more than a century jazz has stood virtually alone in the utilisation of improvisation as a focal point (Azzara, 2002; Berkowitz, 2010; Berliner, 1994; Coker, 1975). Jazz is “an improviser’s art” (Sales, 1984, p. 11).

2.2.2 Elements of Jazz Improvisation

Traditionally, jazz improvisation involves a spontaneous performance over the underlying form and harmonic structure of a jazz tune, such as a song from the “Great American Songbook” (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997). The majority of these songs are thirty-two bars in length, standardised into four sections of eight-bars, often with the third section (the bridge) being rhythmically and melodically different from the others; this form is designated AABA (Berendt, 2009; Coker, 1964; Crowther & Pinfold, 1997; Gabbard, 1995; Love, 2016; Torrance & Schumann, 2018; Wadsworth Walker, 2005). Following this form, each improvised performance typically includes: (i) a performance of the composer’s original melody, followed by (ii) improvised solos over the pre-composed harmonic chord changes, and concluding with (iii) a return to the composer’s original melody (Berliner, 1994). At the more conservative end of the improvisational continuum, the musician may present a relatively limited set of variations along the melodic, harmonic, tonal and rhythmic parameters of a tune (Torrance & Schumann, 2018). At the more radical end of the continuum, more extreme musical explorations may be presented, even to the extent of renouncing “any constraints during the timeframe of the performance itself” (Torrance & Schumann, 2018, p. 7). In either scenario, jazz improvisation unfolds in linear time (Brown, 2000; Hargreaves, 2014b; Mendonça & Wallace, 2004). This means that once a performance has commenced, the musician is under a

“real-time restriction” (Hargreaves, 2014b, p. 15) and is unable to retrospectively re-work, re-write or erase his or her ideas (Hargreaves, 2014b; Mendonça & Wallace, 2004; Sarath, 1996). Renowned American ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner (1994) describes this temporal aspect of improvisation:

> From the outset of each performance, improvisers enter an artificial world of time in which reactions to the unfolding events of their tales must be immediate. Furthermore, the consequences of their actions are irreversible. Amid the dynamic display of imagined fleeting images and impulses… improvisers extend the logic of previous phrases, as ever-emerging figures on the periphery of their vision encroach upon and supplant those in performance. Soloists reflect on past events with breathtaking speed, while constantly pushing forward to explore the implications of new outgrowths of ideas that demand their attention. (p. 220)

Within the temporal (real-time) restriction of improvisation, the jazz musician must manage a range of musical factors including rhythm and feel, harmonic and melodic structures, form, motif development, the absorption and use of musical ideas heard in the accompaniment, and expressive nuances (Coker, 1975; Dobbins, 1980; May, 2003; Palmer, 2016). The requirements of this process bring the musician into a heightened state of physical, intellectual, and emotional exertion—a state that can become even more taxing if the musician decides to manipulate more complex musical materials after improvising an extended phrase (Berliner, 1994). In this instance, the musician must conceptualise what *is* to be articulated, in light of what he or she remembers has *already* been articulated (Berliner, 1994; Mendonça & Wallace, 2004). Furthermore, the musician must rely on muscular memory to ensure that he or she is able to instantly and accurately play the desired pitches within the motor model of the phrase (Berliner, 1994). As a result, the musician has little time to devote to the technical or mechanical aspects of playing, and therefore must be “as one” with his or her instrument (Coker, 1975).

The element of the unknown or unplanned is an important dimension of improvisation (Hargreaves, 1999; Lockford & Pelias, 2004; Sawyer, 2008). However, this does not indicate that improvisation is devoid of structure. To the contrary, improvisation is a balance between elements of structure and freedom; it is unplanned yet not without constraints. During improvisation, a musician’s pre-existing musical knowledge and skills will influence his or her performance, serving

as an underlying frame that aids in the production of novel musical materials (Berkowitz, 2010; Coker, 1964; Hargreaves, 2014b; Johnson-Laird, 2002; Pressing, 1984). This knowledge is both declarative (e.g. knowledge that is recalled and stated such as harmonic progressions and song form), and procedural (e.g. action that is demonstrated without conscious attention such as muscle memory, feel and flow of perming, and use of subconscious processes) (Palmer, 2016). This body of knowledge and collected skills is also known as referents (Hargreaves, 2014b; Kenny & Gellrich, 2002; Monson, 2003; Wopereis, et al., 2013). Musical referents can encompass “musical materials and excerpts, repertoire, subskills, perceptual strategies, problem-solving routines, hierarchical memory structures and schemas [and] generalised motor programs” (Pressing, 1998, p. 53); within jazz specifically, skills of rhythm, feel, tonality, style, melody, and the harmonic structure of a tune constitute referents (Hargreaves, 2014b). In addition to serving as a frame for improvisation, referents actively work to reduce the cognitive load of performance, freeing up the musician’s processing resources for perception, control, and interaction with other musicians (Pressing, 1998). In this sense, the improvising musician’s referents both prepare and enable them for improvisation, heightening their ability to intuitively act and respond in spontaneous performance.

In the jazz community, the term “solo” is reserved for improvisation (e.g. Berliner, 1994; Hargreaves, 2014b), whereas terms like “embellishment”, “interpretation” and “paraphrasing” are associated with the first and last presentations of the pre-composed chorus of a tune (e.g. Berliner, 1994; Coker, 1964; Hargreaves, 2014b). This language reinforces the idea that a movement away from melody to harmony as the primary referent marks a point of departure in traditional jazz performance (Hargreaves, 2014b). In other words, harmonically complex solos are synonymous with improvisation (Hargreaves, 2014b), and improvisation is ubiquitous with jazz expertise (Madura, 1996). However, the challenge of improvisation can be adjusted according to the level of expertise of the musician—an attribute that is known for positively building and sustaining creative interest (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Wadsworth Walker, 2005).

2.3 Differentiating Vocal Jazz Improvisation

2.3.1 Vocal Jazz Improvisation: A Brief History

In the context of improvisation, the principal difference between jazz singers and instrumentalists relates to the physiological nature of the voice as an instrument,

including its ability to deal with words as well as music (Dahl, 1984; Pellegrinelli, 2005; Hargreaves, 2014b). With the freedom to improvise using both elements, jazz singers may choose to remain close to the original melody and lyrics of a tune, or alternatively, to depart from the original melody entirely, or eliminate words all together (Dahl, 1984). The manner of resolution between these two extremes (e.g. the tension between music and lyrics) has been one of the most creative and disputed aspects of jazz singing (Dahl, 1984). One stylistic approach to jazz singing is exemplified by Ethel Waters, an artist who sang blues material early in her career, but later developed her style into a more sophisticated singing of popular songs with a jazz flavour (Dahl, 1984). Water’s style helped to establish the basis of “modern, jazz-and-blues-influenced popular singing” (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 31). Another approach was advanced by a contemporary of Waters, Bessie Smith. Although Smith was known as the “Empress of the Blues” (Dahl, 1984), and is remembered as “*the* great blues singer” (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997), she was also widely considered to be a master of improvisation. As bandleader Humphrey Lyttleton wrote of Smith, “Bessie’s way… was to restrict the range of a song to no more than five or six notes and to construct her phrases so economically that a change in direction of just one note could have a startling dramatic or emotive effect” (Lyttleton, 1979, p. 78, 83; cf Dahl, 1984, p. 100). Like the best instrumental improvisers, Smith could “fashion a compelling solo from the absolute minimum of musical raw material… In her work, instrumentalists recognised the sort of individuality they tried to express on their own horns and strings” (Hadlock, 1965, p. 224; cf Dahl, 1984, p. 100).

The first great jazz soloist was arguably Louis Armstrong (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997). Although celebrated for his “breathtakingly innovative and dazzling trumpet technique” (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 31), Armstrong actually began as a singer—“a member of an informal urchin group singing on the streets of New Orleans for nickels and dimes” (p. 31). Singing would remain an inherent part of Armstrong’s musical greatness:

> [Armstrong’s] trumpet playing and his singing were extensions of one another. The beautiful solos performed on his horn, he continued in his vocalizing; the fractured phrases he sang, he extended to his trumpet playing… He created his own concept, his was the first truly great and total jazz voice. He led the way. (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 31)

Through Armstrong's influence, jazz and jazz singing would never be the same (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997). Singing contemporaries who adopted the rhythmic implications proposed by Armstrong included Ethel Waters, Bing Crosby, and Cab Calloway, although the latter tended toward more obviously superficial imitation (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997). Armstrong's influence on jazz became obvious in his ground-breaking "Hot Fives" recordings between 1925 and 1928 (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997; Friedwald, 1990). These recordings are "by general consensus the most influential of Armstrong's accomplishments and quite likely the most significant body of work in all jazz" (Friedwald, 1990, p. 27). Armstrong's innovation in the "Hot Fives" changed the face of jazz on "every conceivable level" (Friedwald, 1990, p. 27).

> Rhythmically [Armstrong] establishes the soon-to-be standard 4/4 "swing" tempo; structurally, he solidifies the use of the theme-solos-theme format; conceptually, he defines the idea of jazz itself with the melodic embellishments to fully improvised chord-based solos of a whole chorus or longer. And in the strategy he describes as professing from the melody to routine-ing the melody to routine-ing the routine, he sets down the basic model as well as the vocabulary most, if not all, jazz soloists would use from then on. (Friedwald, 1990, p. 27)

However, it was Armstrong's 1926 recording, "Heebie Jeebies" that became his best seller, and most famous example of scat (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997; Dahl, 1984). Armstrong reported that his sheet music accidentally fell to the floor during this recording (Nicholson, 2004), but rather than interrupting the session to recover his music, Armstrong continued singing what words he could recall, supplementing those he had forgotten with an onomatopoeic-style melody that sounded something like, "Rip-bip-bee-doo-dee-doot-doo, Roo-dee-doot-duh-dee-dut-doo, Skeep-skam-skip-bo-dee-dah" (Mezzrow, 1934, p. 19-20; cf Nicholson, 2004). In a 1951 broadcast on Bing Crosby's radio show, Armstrong and Crosby discussed this event (cited in Friedwald, 1990, p. 24):

> BING: Heebie Jeebies! That's the record where you dropped the music and you had to scat.
>
> LOUIS: We had to keep goin' yeah.
>
> BING: Scattin' first started there, wasn't it 1926?

LOUIS: Scattin’ started right there, because we dropped the music and the man in the booth said [falsetto] “Go ahead! Go ahead!”

BING: So you made with the re-bops huh?

LOUIS: Yeah!

However, this fact is of little significance in comparison to the legacy of the “Heebie Jeebies” recording, which “developed generations of singers who have since used scat” (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 32). Although scatting “pre-dated Armstrong by a long way in both black and white music traditions” (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 32)—(e.g. early jazz recordings show numerous examples of singers who strived for instrumental sounds) (Dahl, 1984; Nicholson, 2004)—it is from Armstrong’s first recorded example of the medium that scat surely evolved.

> In place of the lyrics [Armstrong] scat-sings phrases that he might just as easily have played on his horn. He merges the lyric with the scat, moving between the two and making it all seem amazingly natural and totally unselfconscious. (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 32)

Although it is generally accepted that Armstrong created scat singing (Crowther 7 pinfold, 1997; Dahl, 1984; Nicholson, 2004), and he is documented using scat singing in almost every performance, he did not subscribe to the notion of employing scat as an entity unto itself (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997). To the contrary, Armstrong used scat sparingly, employing it as a vocal tool to enhance his interpretation—to craft a style that was entirely his own, and to add a further musical dimension to complement both the lyric and melody of a tune; he never allowed scat to take over completely (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997). Following Armstrong, the popularity of scat continued to rise through the influence of singers like Sarah Vaughan, Sheila Jordan, Betty Carter, Anita O’Day and Ella Fitzgerald (Binek, 2017; Dahl, 1984; Weir, 2015).

2.3.2 Vocal Jazz Improvisation: Contemporary Views

Contemporary thinking about vocal jazz improvisation has indicated a shift away from scatting toward a broader, richer, and embodied notion of improvising with the voice—one that expands the possibilities of the voice’s instrumentality (Norris, 2008; Sella; 2015). Contemporary jazz singer Gretchen Parlato exemplifies this style.

> [Parlato’s] vocality is often intertwined with her rhythmic decisions. She often uses repetition, riffs and vamps. These reframe her voice as percussion,

> but they also direct focus to her tone, orienting ears to the timbre of her voice and the physicality of her sound production, perhaps more than the melodic content of her lines. This combined attention to tone and repetition also relates to modal improvisation. Parlato often improvises in the midst of complex harmonies, and this stylistic and rhythmic orientation mean that she can do so without marking a lot of chord changes. (Sella, 2015, paras 11-13)

Parlato’s style of improvisation is innovative, in the sense that she draws attention to the physicality of her instrument. In other words, Parlato is not trying to sound like another instrument (e.g. a horn), but rather, to expand upon the full expressive capacities of the voice as an instrument—a radical departure from scatting. Parlato demonstrates improvisational innovation by moving beyond scat, to expand the possibilities of instrumentality in her voice, including during improvisation (Sella, 2015). Similarly, contemporary jazz singer and bass player Esperanza Spalding expands the element of instrumentality with her voice; she is described as a jazz singer who “vocalises in fast, non-lyric based style, as if she were voicing the horn melodies” (Norris, 2008; cf Sella, 2015). The musical styles of Parlato and Spalding assert clear instrumental markers—"repertoire that is typically associated with instrumentalists, manoeuvres deemed more musically complex (odd meters, complicated chord changes, non-diatonic improvisations), increased improvisation, and a move away from lyrics and language” (Sella, 2015, para 11), and yet, their improvisations are entirely embodied; their vocality is intertwined with their instrumentality (Sella, 2015). In other words, these singers fully embrace the embodied nature of the voice as an instrument.

Instruments have long been considered to influence jazz singers; many of the great jazz singers have styles and techniques that include elements of instrumentality. For example, (to name but a few), Sheila Jordan’s voice has been described as a “trumpet”, “flugelhorn” and “saxophone” (Dahl, 1984), Sarah Vaughan’s voice has been described as a “black baritone” (Sella, 2015), and Betty Carter’s voice has been described as “so hornlike as to crumble the distinction between vocal and nonvocal jazz” (Dahl, 1984, p. 147). This tradition has continued with contemporary jazz singers like Esperanza Spalding whose voice has been described as “a delicate violin” (Berlanga-Ryan, 2011; Sella, 2015), and likewise, Gretchen Parlato’s voice has been likened to a “cello”, “muted trumpet”, “trombone”, and “alto saxophone” (Greenlee, 2009; Sella, 2015). These singers have

also described the way in which instruments inform their singing. For example, Sarah Vaughan is quoted as saying “horns always influenced me more than voices… as soon as I hear an arrangement, I get ideas, kind of blowing a horn” (Gold, 1957; cf Dahl, 1984, p. 140).

The same principle applies in reverse. Jazz instrumentalists have also been known to feel the influence of vocality, particularly in matters of learning to play through singing, and in imitation of the expressive qualities of the voice (Berliner, 1994; Crowther & Pinfold, 1997; Dahl, 1989; Sella, 2015)—“cries, growls, moans, slurs, shouts, whispers, wails” (Dahl, 1984, p. 98). Berliner (1994) quotes a musician who stated that trumpeter Miles Davis “transformed the character of his instrument with such a variety of inflection that “at times he didn’t even sound like he was playing a trumpet. It was just the sound of his own voice” (p. 126; cf Sella, 2015). In either scenario, it is clear that “the creative cycle of jazz music embraces both the singer as player, with an instrumental approach to vocalising, and the player as singer, with a vocalising approach to playing” (Dahl, 1984, p. 98). Indeed, we see presented here an image of musicality in which singers and instrumentalists craft their sounds in constant attentiveness to each other; neither voice nor instrument is mutually exclusive, nor is one completely defined through the other; both act on each other (Sella, 2015). Despite this apparent mutuality, aesthetic validation in jazz continues to be given to instruments (Sella, 2015).

In the jazz scene jazz singers can be perceived as underachievers in improvisation in comparison to instrumentalists. For example, instrumentalists may be identified by their “mechanical tools of great speed and range” (Sella, 2015, para 9), gendered masculine (e.g. “jazzmen”), and known for their ability to masterfully innovate, create new styles, and craft elaborate improvisations that are both rhythmically and harmonically complex (cf Pellegrinelli, 2005). In contrast, singers may be identified as the “historical originators and entertainers” (Sella, 2015, para 9) of jazz, gendered female (e.g. “blueswomen”, “girl singers”), known for their fixation on the Great American Songbook, and are thus, lacking in complexity and innovation and “limited by diatonic improvising or no improvising at all” (para 9; cf Pellegrinelli, 2005). Forbes (2021) and Madura (1995, 1996) indicate that research on jazz improvisation is predominantly informed by the experiences of instrumentalists. Indeed, some researchers have even specifically excluded singers from their studies of jazz improvisation based upon the conviction that they have “a

less improvisatory musical role” (MacDonald & Wilson, 2005, p. 399; cf Forbes, 2021) in comparison to instrumentalists. Views of this nature fail to recognise the fundamental role that improvisation plays in many jazz singers’ identity and performance practices (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997; Forbes, 2021; Yanow, 2008), and indeed, the abundance of contemporary jazz singers who improvise in a diversity of ways and musical contexts (Forbes, 2021). For example, Esperanza Spalding confronts the purported disparity between the technical facility of singers and instrumentalists by explaining that she as a bass player cannot achieve what she as a singer can:

> I really love the way Ella Fitzgerald would scat and the way Betty Carter would scat… I thought they were really good doing a vocal solo. So when I started doing that, there were ideas that I couldn’t play on the bass. I didn’t have the technical facility [on my bass] to do certain melodies, certain ideas that I wanted to try to do. (Vitro, 2013, para 15; cf Sella, 2015)

Spalding and Parlato present a case for jazz musicality that is entwined in both instrumentality and vocality (Sella, 2015). Additionally, both singers frequently adopt extended periods of “wordless singing” in lieu of lyrics (e.g. vocalising the head, interludes, back-up harmony)—a choice that further reinforces the separation between the voice as a “spoken or sung” instrument, to a “musicking” instrument (Sella, 2015). However, even in the context of wordless singing, vocality intervenes; wordless singing lies alongside lyric-based singing, both of which singers are deeply invested in, further reinforcing the expressive capacities of the voice as an embodied instrument (Sella, 2015). This suggests that the voice is an equally, if not more, significant improvising jazz instrument, deserving of recognition alongside other instruments. Indeed, the singers who have strived for “self-expression in the exacting discipline of improvisatory singing have contributed to the music we call jazz” (Dahl, 1984, p. 101) in numerous ways. To this end, the scant research about jazz singers’ experiences of improvisation is incongruous; further investigation of jazz singers’ experiences of improvisation is not only warranted, but necessary. This study directly responds to that need.

The following section examines the challenges of the voice as an embodied instrument, further reinforcing the rightful differentiation of singers as a distinct subset of improvising jazz musicians, worthy of research attention.

2.3.3 Challenges of the Embodied Instrument

Where other instruments are made from natural or manufactured materials, the voice is a wholly organic structure—unique, complex, and located within the living human body (Hargreaves, 2014b). Due to the physiological (embodied) nature of the voice as an instrument, singers have unique experiences in comparison to instrumentalists. For example, the voice is susceptible to the fluctuations of the physical state of the body including matters related to physical health and fitness, postural disorders and muscular tension, illness, surgery, the impact of medications and hormones, physical voice changes during puberty, ageing and pregnancy, nervousness and tiredness (e.g. LoVetri, 2018; McCoy, 2012; Sundberg, 2012). Dahl (1984) describes the physically taxing nature of jazz singing through an anecdote about the late jazz singer Betty Carter:

> In concert [Carter] carefully builds her delivery of superfast up-tempo tunes, medium-tempo standards and ballads, pouring herself out on stage like a fine actress or athlete. By the end of the set [Carter] usually has her audience on its feet. The performance over, the intense body still, she stands at rest, spent like a runner after the race. (p. 147)

Said in different terms, the variable pitch and timbre of the voice (e.g. lacking a manual tuning mechanism and with natural nuances) can impact upon singers' ability to perform consistently in comparison to other static instruments such as the piano (Hargreaves, 2014b) which offer an array of external mechanical instrumental features.

A further challenge of the voice as an embodied instrument relates to the language capacity of the voice. Lyrics and music are communicative systems in jazz that have far reaching consequences in both vocal and instrumental domains (Pellegrinelli, 2005). For example, when the voice is viewed as a shared product of the human body that has a heightened ability to communicate with audiences, sung lyrics can create fertile grounds for communal experiences in music (Pellegrinelli, 2005). However, the perception that lyrics make communication between singers and audience easier (e.g. based upon shared semantic meaning) is false (Pellegrinelli, 2005). Indeed, the presence of lyrics can also be seen to detract from "real" jazz (e.g. singing does not require knowledge or skills, and therefore, singers are unskilled and in conflict with modernist ideals of jazz) (Pellegrinelli, 2005). Debating the dominance of music or text is even more significant in the context of fundamental

issues of expression. To jazz insiders, improvisation doesn’t merely *approximate* speech, it *is* speech—a metalanguage that contains truths which real language cannot express (Pellegrinelli, 2005).

In jazz improvisation, singers typically relinquish lyrics to adopt scat syllables. The implementation of scat syllables introduces a range of variables for improvising singers that are largely superfluous to instrumentalists (Hargreaves, 2014b). For example, a singer’s choice to implement scat syllables may potentially impact his or her interpersonal relationship with an audience and bring conflict to his or her perceived role as storyteller (Hargreaves, 2014b). The emphasis on singers’ roles as “performers”, corresponds with a de-emphasis on their role as “improvisers” (Hargreaves, 2014b). As the “front person” of the jazz ensemble (e.g. the main audience focus), there is a greater expectation placed on singers than instrumentalists regarding entertaining, connecting, and interacting with an audience in performance (Hargreaves, 2014b). Arguably, singers’ identification as “front person” (which includes inherent—and sometimes gendered—aspects of visual appeal) may also be due to singers’ individual communication skills, the role that lyrics play in the audience-ensemble interface, and the expectation of more direct communication from the performer with the vocal microphone. Nevertheless, with the pressure to communicate with an audience, singers can feel a need to focus on lyric-based singing, thus reducing the extent to which they can freely improvise in comparison to instrumentalists (Hargreaves, 2014b). Additionally, singers’ improvisation can be received with “mixed views” (Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 133) from an audience. For example, it may be seen as a disruption to the singer-audience relationship, perceived as self-indulgent, unlikeable, unrelatable, unexpected, redundant, or even optional, in comparison to the improvisation of instrumentalists (Hargreaves, 2014b). An example of this is found in an anecdote about the late jazz singer Betty Carter who (when criticised for her choice to adopt scat syllables) asserted that if she thought the words of a song were “negligible” (Dahl, 1984, p. 146), she wouldn’t “hesitate to sacrifice them to the music” (p. 146) during improvisation.

The act of relinquishing lyrics, and adopting scat syllables, can bring forth a sense of loss and liberation alike to the singer (Hargreaves, 2014b). For example, when transitioning from singing lyrics to scat syllables, some singers can feel as if they are giving up a “handle” (Hargreaves, 2014b, p. 143) or “security blanket” (p. 143) which they would normally rely upon in making their musical decisions. For

some singers, these feelings of loss are counterbalanced by feelings of liberation (Hargreaves, 2014b; cf Forbes, 2021), as the perceived responsibilities of verbally communicating with an audience through lyrics are released (Hargreaves, 2014b), and the singer can “access something deeper” (Forbes, 2021, p. 11) and feel closer to “free expression” (p. 11) of their musical ideas.

Further challenges of the voice as an embodied instrument arise with notions of persona, that is, a singer’s performance output being associated with representing their persona (Hargreaves, 2014b). In one sense, a singer may desire to have authenticity with (and congruency between) his or her personal experiences and artistic products (Hargreaves, 2014b). In another sense, singers may feel a heightened sense of vulnerability, personal exposure, judgment, and risk when performing and improvising; fearing that mistakes may be perceived to reflect personal flaws and incapability (Hargreaves, 2014b). However, such experiences are more likely to be felt by novice singers (Hargreaves, 2014b); these findings can be contrasted with those of Forbes (2021) who found that expert jazz singers were able to reconceptualize errors as further opportunities for improvisation. Singers may also feel an additional layer of burden in the context of their relationship to the songs they perform, that is, the notion of “singing what they feel” as an innate product of their personal emotion and individual experiences (Pellegrinelli, 2005). To this end, singers’ personal history weighs much more heavily in the assessment of their work in comparison to instrumentalists (Pellegrinelli, 2005).

Due to the embodied nature of the voice as an instrument, singers lack categorical visual, proprioceptive, or tactile feedback from their instrument (Hargreaves, 2014b; cf Pressing, 1988). Without an ability to naturally produce absolute pitch, or to hear it externally on their instrument, singers must draw upon their internal conceptualisation of music to produce accurate pitch (Hargreaves, 2014b). It is relevant to note that many people can sing and “hold a tune” through the intuitive manipulation of their voice, as it indirectly responds to its own internal audiation, and subsequent auditory output (e.g. having a “in-built” feedback loop). However, the ability to mindfully conceive (audiate) and subsequently produce a certain set of prescribed pitches that have not been previously heard or prescribed (e.g. played on another instrument, or heard externally by some other means), is profoundly different and arguably (for most people, at least) a more challenging task than singing a set of pre-defined pitches. Audiation is an acute form of relative pitch

perception that brings an internalised sense of tonality and awareness of pitch, and how that pitch relates to the broader harmonic structure of a tune or song (H. Russell, 2016). This inner conceptualisation of music enables the improviser to become proficient in the domain of melodic imitation and harmonic comprehension, as well as acutely “aware, on the first hearing, of the exact pitches used by other performers” (H. Russell, 2016, p. 37). The ability to audiate a chosen musical action, without the need for memory or subsequent auditory feedback, is a critical aspect of jazz improvisation musicianship (cf Dobbins, 1980; Pressing, 1984) and is of vital importance to successful improvisation with the voice. For singers, engaging in visualisation (seeing the stave in your mind) and hand movement (moving hands while singing to assist with pitch placement) can provide a means for mentally reinforcing and supporting the learning and processing of auditory information (Hargreaves, 2014b). Additionally, engaging in behaviours such as learning another instrument can provide a means for establishing more precise kinaesthetic information, providing tactile and visual feedback which is missing from the voice as an instrument (Hargreaves, 2014b), and enriching vocal jazz improvisational ability more broadly. The following section examines the pedagogical implications and practical applications that playing piano may provide to improvising jazz singers.

2.4 Playing the Piano

2.4.1 The Tradition: Singers Who Play

The notion of “singers who play” (piano) has a long history in jazz. Many of the great jazz singers are known to have also played the piano (to name but a few: Blossom Dearie, Shirley Horn, Nat King Cole, Carmen McRae, Mark Murphy, Mel Tormé, Sarah Vaughan). Likewise, many contemporary jazz singers are also known play the piano (to name but a few: Karrin Allyson, Kristin Berardi, Harry Connick Jr., Brenda Earle Stokes, Champian Fulton, Stacey Kent, Diana Krall, Frances Madden, Sarah McKenzie, Michelle Nicolle, Aimee Nolte, Sharny Russell, Anita Wardell). When observing these artists in performance, it is evident that each interacts with the piano in a variety of ways, and to varying degrees. For example, some frequently perform from the piano (e.g. Horn, Connick Jr, Earle Stokes, Madden, McKenzie) while others rarely do (e.g. Allyson, Berardi, Kent, Wardell). Some play with a more functional (comping-based) approach (e.g. Allyson), and others with a more artistic (solo-based) approach (e.g. Connick Jr, Dearie, Earle Stokes, Horn, Krall, McRae). This begs the question as to where these singers would

identify on the continuum of singer-pianist (e.g. singers who play, players who sing, singer/pianists)—a venture that appears to be complicated. For example, Diana Krall expresses some uncertainty with her identification as a pianist, or singer, or both:

> I’m a singer, whether I’m a jazz singer or not, and a piano player. I’m definitely a jazz piano player—I improvise, no question. I sing songs, but I’m not going to try to be a horn player with my vocals. I’m trying to be an interpreter of lyrics. But I choose not to scat sing. I choose to focus on the lyric. (Enstice & Stockhouse, 2004, p. 185; cf Hargreaves, 2014b)

Krall’s confidence in her identity as a “jazz pianist” is seemingly undergirded by her improvisational output at the piano (Hargreaves, 2014b). Likewise, Krall’s uncertainty in identifying as a “jazz singer” arguably results from her lack of improvisational output as a singer, namely, her choice to focus on the lyric rather than scatting (Hargreaves, 2014b). It is, however, relevant to note that while Krall does not self-identify as an improvising jazz singer, she nonetheless has an improvisational vocabulary that is highly artistically advanced. It could be argued that Krall’s ability as an improvising pianist, and her overall harmonic sense, have informed her ability to improvise with her voice more skilfully.

Francesca Preponis’ (2009) Master’s thesis “The Effect of Instrumental Proficiency on Jazz Vocal Improvisation” analysed selected excerpts of the improvised solos of six jazz singers, namely, Sarah Vaughan, Mel Tormé, Mark Murphy, Ella Fitzgerald, Jon Hendricks, and Anita O’Day. The first three singers were identified to be proficient pianists, whereas the latter three had minimal instrumental training and were not proficient pianists (Preponis, 2009). Preponis (2009) found that while all of six of the singers were successful vocal improvisers, the singers who played piano as another instrument had greater facility in vocal improvisation, specifically, regarding the ability to bring forth more complex melodic ideas in improvisation. However, this study does not indicate *how* these singers actually interacted with the piano (e.g. the process of their performance practice), and *how* that interaction influenced their ability to improvise with the voice.

Jazz singer Carmen McRae described that being able to play the piano directly contributed to her ability to improvise with the voice:

> As an improviser what helped me was my five years with the piano… I believe that all singers should have a little bit of piano, knowing that when

> you hit a note, that it is in tune and not sharp or flat. It’s just that if I am improvising I know the structure of the chord—I know my limitations. If you’re being accompanied by just chords you only hit notes that will be right for that particular chord that’s being played—or the next chord that it leads to. (cited in Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 46)

What McRae describes here is that the piano enhances her ability to embody pitch, to get deeper inside the harmony of music, and to enrich her creative choices in improvisation with the voice. Jazz singer Sue Kibbey offers similar remarks, explaining that playing the piano enables her to independently learn new songs and “know about arrangements, it gives you a language to speak to musicians with. They tend to respect you if you know what you’re talking about” (cited in Crowther & Pinfold, 1997, p. 46). Here, Kibbey indicates that through the piano, she can be self-sufficient as a singer in terms of practice and learning, and in conceptualising jazz theory. Additionally, she ascribes that her skills (built at the piano) enable her to become fluent in the shared language of jazz, in order that she can collaborate with other musicians, and earn respect from the same.

Examination of practice reveals that there is a correlation between playing the piano and vocal jazz improvisational ability. However, there is little indication of how jazz singers who also play the piano actually interact with the piano, and if indeed, this behaviour does inform their performance practice. Vocal jazz pedagogy has begun to explore this largely uncharted domain.

2.4.2 Playing Piano: Pedagogical Perspectives

In the contemporary landscape, a growing number of master vocal jazz pedagogues and performers have agreed on the correlation between piano skills and the ability to improvise with the voice. Most method books or “how-to-guides” for jazz singing share the same standard advice: playing piano is advantageous in developing expertise as a jazz singer and improviser (e.g. Berkman, 2009; Deutsch, 2009; Earle Stokes, 2020; Preponis, 2009; S. Russell, 2019b; Shapiro, 2016; Wadsworth Walker, 2005; Weir, 2015).

Wadsworth Walker’s PhD thesis “Pedagogical Practices in Vocal Jazz Improvisation” (2005) surveyed and interviewed American vocal jazz educators, performers, and ensemble directors regarding their views on pedagogical techniques for vocal improvisation. Of the many themes uncovered in her research, Wadsworth Walker (2005) found that playing the piano was highly valued among master

pedagogues as a technique for developing skills in vocal jazz improvisation. Several key benefits were identified in playing the piano. First, the piano provides a visual and kinaesthetic reinforcement of harmonic understanding, which enables and encourages singers to directly examine chords and other theoretical constructs through the senses of sight, hearing, and touch (Wadsworth Walker, 2005). This ability also enhances singers’ aural comprehension, and their ability to accurately audiate harmonic structures (Wadsworth Walker, 2005). Second, playing the piano was also seen to aid singers in gaining a sense of, and connection with, the vertical and linear perspective of music, which in turn brings a more thorough awareness of pitch relationships (Wadsworth Walker, 2005). In addition to the benefits of playing the piano, Wadsworth Walker (2005) also found several practical applications of playing the piano including facilitating singers’ ability to self-accompany, learn melodies, refine improvisational ideas prior to performance, have more efficient practice sessions, connect aural concepts visually, and prepare lead sheets and write music.

Similar ideas are echoed by Australian pianist, vocalist, composer, educator, and producer Sharny Russell who developed a comprehensive and progressive piano method tailored to singers “Piano Method for Jazz Singers: Easy, Stylish Self-Accompaniment” (2019b). In the introduction to her method Russell (2019b) notes,

> The need for more skills at the keyboard became increasingly clear, as I realized that hearing the chords clearly and understanding the structure of those chords were a great adjunct to training the ear of the singer, which encouraged better pitch placement, as well as improvised interpretive and improvisation vocal skills. Implementing a musical approach to the keyboard also helped to quickly develop a stronger base of harmonic knowledge, chord changes, and the resulting ability to arrange and write charts for the accompanying musicians. (p. 7)

Russell’s (2019b) method advocates that by playing piano, singers can enhance their broader musicianship (e.g. improvising with the ear, reading scores, understanding jazz harmony, arranging, and writing jazz charts) and support their vocal practice and performance by learning to self-accompany.

New York based pianist, singer, educator, and composer Brenda Earle Stokes is also an advocate for the importance of piano skills for singers.

> In my experience as a professional pianist, vocalist, and educator, I have found that one of the weakest links in the vocalist community is a lack of functional keyboard skills. This deficiency creates a huge handicap for singers and educators. (Earle Stokes, 2021, para 1)

Earle Stokes (2020) has also developed an online piano course tailored specifically to singers, “Piano Skills for Singers”. Earle Stokes’ (2020) course provides functionally tailored, and piano-directed learning materials for singers to build their skills in broader jazz musicianship from the piano (e.g. in matters of notation, rhythm, scale construction, harmonic structure and ear development, practice, performance, self-accompaniment, and teaching).

This literature indicates that playing the piano has several pedagogical implications and practical benefits for jazz singers. Much of the evidence that supports this premise is derived directly from the experiences of expert improvising jazz singers, and yet, beyond short testimonials, and statements of personal convictions (e.g. practice routines at the piano—“follow my advice”), little is known about how these singers actually interact with (relate to) the piano, and how this interaction bring forth the claimed benefits.

2.4.3 Musician-Instrument Relationship

Research into instrumentalists’ experiences has revealed that over time a musician can become “as one” with his or her instrument. In other words, the instrument becomes an extension of the musician’s body, integrated into his or her bodily coordination systems, to the extent that the instrument feels as transparent as the body itself (Nijs, 2017; Nijs, et al., 2013). As the instrument disappears from the musician’s level of consciousness, he or she can be completely focussed on the external environment (Nijs, 2017), operating within a wider musical reality which would otherwise be inaccessible (Leman, et al., 2010). The “merging” of musician and instrument occurs through a gradual and dialectic process as the instrument is transformed from a mere tool or object, into a functionally integrated, goal-oriented configuration of internal and external resources (Kaptelinin, 1996; cf Nijs, 2017). Feeling “as one” with an instrument can also be grounded in “flow” experiences (Nijs, 2017)—the holistic sensation of having played music with total involvement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Repeated flow experiences permanently embed the mental schemes that accompany the feeling of having merged with an instrument in the musician’s mind (Nijs, 2017). This in turn “results in a long-term intuition, even

when the instrument is not at hand” (Nijs, 2017, p. 51). Feeling “as one” with an instrument has been proposed as a necessary condition for the flexible and spontaneous expression of artistic ideas (Nijs, et al., 2013). Additionally, it has been proven to positively impact a musician’s wellbeing by reducing performance anxiety and feelings of vulnerability, and conversely, increasing feelings of confidence and pleasure in and from performance, facilitating a greater freedom of expression, and increasing the frequency at which a flow state of performance can be entered (Simoens & Tervaniemi, 2013).

This intriguing research direction has yet to be applied to singers’ experiences in relation with another instrument. Given the unique attributes and challenges of the voice as an embodied instrument, research of this nature serves to enrich our understanding of: (i) the ways in which singers relate with other instruments; (ii) how, and in what ways, such behaviours may impact singers’ broader musicianship; (iii) whether such behaviours might counteract the challenges of the voice; and (iv) if such behaviours impact singers’ ability to improvise with the voice. This study directly responds to that need.

2.5 Summary of Section One

Examination of the literature surrounding vocal jazz improvisation has revealed that the voice is a uniquely embodied instrument, capable of improvisational expertise, and worthy of classification as a distinct improvising jazz instrument. However, the literature also indicates that singers face many disadvantages and challenges in comparison to instrumentalists, which impact upon their ability to reach improvisational expertise. From the literature a possible solution to this conundrum arises, namely, playing the piano. By playing the piano singers may be able to counteract the challenges of the voice, better supporting their ability to learn to improvise, and actually improvise with the voice. However, without in-depth examination of the experiences of singers who engage in this behaviour, it is unclear exactly what this behaviour looks like in practice, the specific ways in which this behaviour may prove impactful to the performance practice of jazz singers, and if such behaviours do indeed aid singers to counteract the challenges of the voice as an embodied instrument. To this end, further investigation of singers’ embodied experiences of music, and their interactions with the piano is warranted.

In response to the issues identified in the literature, two overarching research questions are posed in the study:

1. How do expert vocal jazz improvisers, who also play piano, experience the piano?
2. What do expert vocal jazz improvisers' experiences of the piano mean to them?

The next section of the chapter proposes two theoretical frames that may be applied as a lens through which expert vocal jazz improvisers' experiences of the piano can be interrogated, namely, the embodied cognition (the 4E framework), and Karlsen's (2011) musical agency lens. These frames facilitate the answering of the research questions and inform the analysis of the study. Specifically, in light of singers' embodied instrument, embodied cognition (the 4E framework) presents as a means to investigate singers' embodied experiences with the piano (Research Question 1). The musical agency lens (Karlsen, 2011) presents as a means to investigate the ways in which singers' embodied experiences of the piano are meaningful to them (Research Question 2).

2.6 Embodied Cognition: The 4E Framework

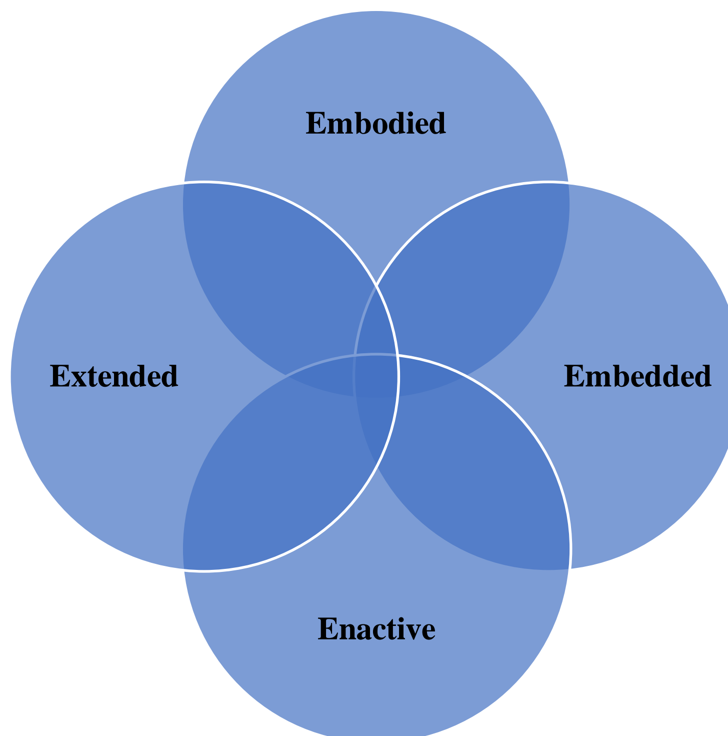
Traditionally, cognitive science was grounded in a "Representational and Computational Model of Cognition" (RCC). In this model, cognitive processes were abstract and isolated brain states that could only be understood and explained through higher-order brain processes (Rowlands, 2010); perception and motor systems were peripheral tools—mere input and output devices (Menary, 2010). More recent directions in the cognitive sciences have challenged this homogenous framework, adopting a multi-dimensional view of cognition in which an individual's mind, body, and external environment act as a united entity (Menary, 2010). This cutting-edge approach is called embodied cognition (Menary, 2010).

The embodied perspective demonstrates the complexity of cognitive phenomena, and the rich and varied nature of our cognitive lives (Menary, 2010). It questions the extent to which cognitive processes are embodied or disembodied, how they are embodied, and whether or not there are many kinds of embodiment (Dove, 2016; cf Gallagher, 2011). Research in embodied cognition continues to grow in leaps and bounds (Menary, 2010). Many of the new studies in this field fall under the umbrella term 4E cognition—a theoretical gestalt in which cognition is viewed as being embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended (Menary, 2010; van der Schyff,

et al., 2018). Each of these four dimensions overlap and scaffold one another (Hayes, 2019), offering new perspectives on the nature of cognition (van der Schyff, et al., 2018), and thereby, radically reconfiguring or rejecting traditional ideas about cognitivism (Menary, 2010). Figure 2 shows the 4E framework visualised as a lens.

Figure 2

The 4E Framework Visualised as a Lens



Within the musical domain, the 4E framework serves to illuminate the capacity for musicians to self-organise, maintain adaptive stability and flourish as autonomous musical beings, in a dynamic, interconnected, and overlapping network of musical, social, and cultural parameters (van der Schyff, et al., 2018). Furthermore, this framework provides a way to “understand and encourage the creative and world-making possibilities of musical learners” (van der Schyff, et al., 2018, p. 12), and likewise, to examine and discuss the relevant dimensions of creativity from situated first-person perspectives (van der Schyff, et al., 2018). In the following sections each dimension of the 4E framework will be explained and contextualised against expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano.

2.6.1 Embodied

The embodied dimension of the 4E framework asserts that cognition involves the larger network of the entire body and brain, including the nervous system and sensorimotor capacities of the individual (Gallagher, 2011). From this perspective, a musician’s improvisation is not merely considered to be an isolated process in the brain, but rather, it is a skilful and thoughtful activity and perceptual experience of the whole body; an example of “action in perception” (Nöe, 2004) or perceptually guided action. In other words, a musician’s skills of action are derived from skills of using instruments (Gibson, 2006); a process which brings forth new possibilities for musical sounds and motor possibilities to be explored (van der Schyff, et al., 2018). van der Schyff, et al. (2018) provide the following illustration of embodied cognition within a musical context

> If a bass player is given a novel instrument and is asked to improvise with it, he or she will not start only by “thinking” about what notes, phrases, dynamic and timbral configurations, and rhythmical patterns will be developed. That is, the process arguably does not first involve the generation of “mental maps” and explicit representations about the different possibilities offered by, for example, the new electric bass provided. Rather, improvising is intrinsically related to the actual ways the fingers hit the strings and how the instrument “responds” to the performer’s intentions (i.e., what it “affords” in real time, as the improvisation unfolds), and how the entire body “feels”—how it facilitates and resonates with such activity, dynamically. (p. 5)

A further example of embodied cognition is implied in the writing of jazz pianist David Sudnow (1978, 2001). To borrow Sudnow’s term, the “hand” of the pianist is highly embodied, not only due to the interactive and unified way in which the pianist is linked to his or her instrument, but also by virtue of the pianist’s (and listener’s) responsiveness to the music (Sudnow, 1978, 2001; cf Torrance & Schumann, 2017). Said in different terms, the musician’s generation of musical ideas, and the act of producing these ideas, are not a case of cause and effect, but rather, a conversation between bodily perception and sensation, internal and external auditory creation, and feedback.

It could be hypothesised that the embodied dimension of the 4E framework serves to illuminate how the piano is embodied within a singer. Specifically, it could be argued that a singer’s interaction with the piano impacts upon his or her cognitive

processes, increasing the variety of motor possibilities and sounds that he or she can achieve, which in turn, brings forth richer improvisational experiences with the voice.

2.6.2 Embedded

The embedded dimension of the 4E framework asserts that cognition is dependent upon (and driven by) an individual’s interaction with his or her external physical, social, and cultural environment (Roselli, 2018; van der Schyff, et al., 2018). Embedded cognition resonates with Merleau-Pontian thought, which emphasises an individual’s agency and his or her dynamic and interactive coping within a world (van de Laar & de Regt, 2008). van der Schyff, et al. (2018) note that the understanding of “perception as ‘affordances’ for action” (p. 6) that is embraced within embedded cognition, reveals much about how a musician negotiates meaning with his or her immediate environment in creative ways. The authors continue, that in “a situation where an experienced trumpet performer and a beginner are both given a trumpet to look at [t]he expert player will be able to individuate a far richer variety of possibilities for action (affordances) than the amateur” (p. 6). Said in different terms, the possibilities arising in the expert’s action would be understood to eventuate from his or her dynamic relationship with the trumpet, and his or her established history of action-as-perception with that instrument (van der Schyff, et al., 2018).

It could be hypothesised that the embedded dimension of the 4E framework serves to illuminate how the piano is embedded in a singer’s external environment. Specifically, it could be argued that a singer’s interaction with the piano influences his or her cognitive processes in improvisation, thereby enabling his or her possible behaviours and creative outputs in improvisation.

2.6.3 Enactive

The enactive dimension of the 4E framework highlights the ways in which an individual’s relationship with his or her environment is active, adaptive, and mutually shaped (van der Schyff, et al., 2018). The enactive perspective asserts that all dimensions of the body contribute to the mind, including the viscera, circulatory, immune, and endocrine systems, and likewise affective phenomena like moods and emotions (Colombetti, 2014). The relationship between an individual (subject) and his or her environment (world) is eloquently articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1945/1958) who notes that

> We do not say that the *notion* of the world is inseparable from that of the subject, or that the subject *thinks himself* inseparable from the idea of his body and the idea of the world; for, if it were a matter of no more than a conceived relationship, it would *ipso facto* leave the absolute independence of the subject as thinker intact, and the subject would not be in a situation. If the subject *is* in a situation, even if he is no more than a possibility of situations, this is because he forces his ipseity into reality only by actually being a body, and entering the world through that body. (pp. 474-475)

It could be hypothesised that the enactive dimension of the 4E framework serves to illuminate how the piano is a part of a singer’s enactive relationship with the world. Specifically, it could be argued that a singer does not passively receive information from the piano, rather he or she actively generates musical meaning through interaction with the piano.

2.6.4 Extended

The extended dimension of the 4E framework asserts that an individual’s cognition can extend in various ways into the external environment (Hayes, 2019; Kersten, 2014; Rowlands, 2010). In other words, an individual’s cognitive load can be distributed onto external “agents of action” (Gibson, 2006) which serve a variety of functions that would otherwise be difficult or impossible for an individual to achieve by relying on their internal cognition alone (Hayes, 2019; Hutto & Myin, 2013; van der Schyff, et al., 2018). These external agents can include the body (e.g. corresponding to embodied mechanisms); the physical environment (e.g. sensory-motor feedback); the informational environment (e.g. technological tools such as smartphones); and the social environment (Lyre, 2018). Within the musical domain, engaging with musical objects (e.g. instruments and technologies) can greatly contribute to how musical ideas develop (van der Schyff, et al., 2018). For example, van der Schyff et al. (2018) explain that if a percussionist was improvising on a particular arrangement of instruments, he or she would be “offloading” (p. 7) his or her musical expertise to those instruments, in ways that are “functionally coupled” (p. 7) with the broader musical environment. This means that when required, “tools and objects from the environment can become integrative parts of mental life and the creative processes that go along with it” (van der Schyff, et al., 2018, p. 7). Extended cognition can also encompass group and social coordination (Teske, 2013; Varga, 2016; Wilson, 2005). The social aspect of extendedness becomes apparent in the

social contexts of collaborative musical action. For example, groups of musicians who share a musical environment also share in participatory forms of sense-making, "offloading and taking on various tasks that are required by the extended cognitive ecology (e.g., by entraining with a beat provided by a drummer)" (van der Schyff, et al., 2018, p. 7).

It could be hypothesised that the extended dimension of the 4E framework serves to illuminate how the piano extends a singer's cognition. Specifically, it could be argued that the piano is an "agent of action" upon which a singer can distribute his or her cognitive load, thereby, extending the possibilities of his or her cognition to more easily perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult through internal cognition alone.

2.6.5 Summary: Through the 4E Lens

Embodied cognition (the 4E framework) serves to provide a means for exploring the nature of expert vocal jazz improvisers' embodied experiences of the piano. Specifically, by adopting the perspective that the piano is an embodied, embedded, enactive and extended aspect of a singer's musical identity and environment, it could be seen to enrich his or her cognitive possibilities and musical behaviours, thereby bringing forth richer improvisational experiences and creative outputs. This theoretical perspective will be used to answer the first research question of the study:

1. How do expert vocal jazz improvisers, who also play piano, experience the piano?

The next section of the chapter proposes a second lens for examining expert vocal jazz improvisers' experiences of the piano, namely Karlsen's (2011) musical agency lens. The musical agency lens (Karlsen, 2011) presents as a means to investigate the ways in which singers' embodied experiences of the piano are meaningful to them.

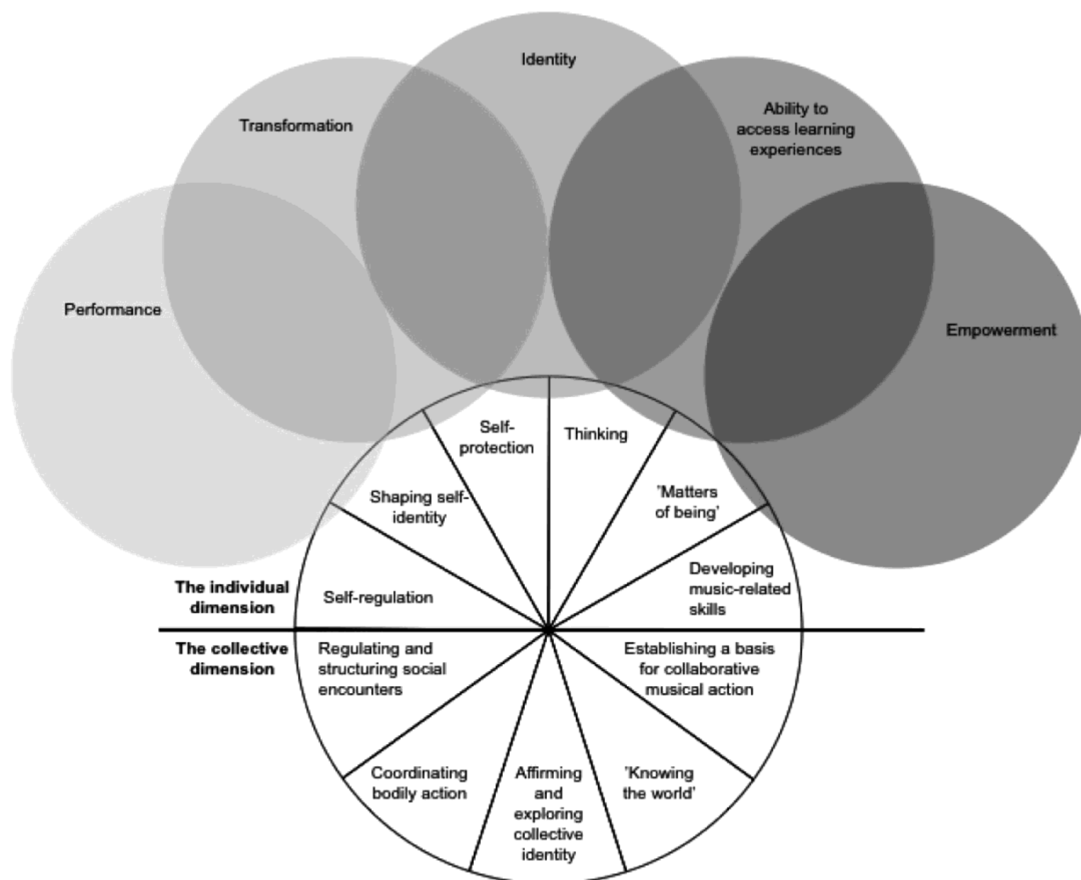
2.7 Musical Agency

In broad terms, agency can be conceived as a form of "process freedom" (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007) that allows an individual to freely do and achieve whatever goals or values he or she conceives to be important (Sen, 1985). Every individual has experiences of agency in relation to the different activities, aspects, and contexts of his or her life (Rikandi, 2012). As such, agency is "domain specific" (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007, p. 5), that is, "experienced with respect to different tasks" (p. 5). Agency is not a fixed goal (e.g. something to be reached and sustained), nor is it a

quality that can be either possessed or not (Rikandi, 2012). Rather, agency can be nourished and developed (Rikandi, 2012). The notion of agency is used widely in music education as a way to conceptualise individuals’ capacity for action in relation to music or music-related settings (Karlsen, 2011). One of the key researchers of musical agency is Sidsel Karlsen. Karlsen’s work (2011) draws upon various discourses from music education philosophy, psychology and sociology, and the works of Small (1998), DeNora (2000), and Batt-Rawden and DeNora (2005) to develop an understanding of musical agency visualised as a lens (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

A Sociologically-Inspired Understanding of Musical Agency Visualised as a Lens[3]



3 From “Using musical agency as a lens: Researching music education from the angle of experience,” by S. Karlsen, 2011, *Research Studies in Music Education, 33*(2), p. 118 (https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X11422005). Copyright 2011 by the author. Reprinted with permission.

Karlsen’s (2011) musical agency lens extends from traditional views of musical agency (e.g. those that are principally connected to physically engaging with an instrument, or instrumental music making) to instead, adopt a broader view of musical agency that recognises the potential for music to facilitate “transformational agency” (p. 109) and “identity transformation” (p. 109). Karlsen’s (2011) lens encompasses both an individual and a collective dimension of agency and can be used by the researcher as both a theoretical and practical tool for investigating music from the perspective of experience.

2.7.1 The Individual Dimension

At the “individual dimension”, Karlsen’s (2011) lens outlines six ways in which music can be used for “structuration and negotiating one’s position in the world” (p. 111). These include: (i) self-regulation; (ii) the shaping of self-identity; (iii) self-protection; (iv) thinking; (v) matters of being; and (vi) developing music-related skills (Karlsen, 2011).

2.7.1.1 Self-Regulation. Karlsen (2011) outlines that music can be used as a tool for “regulating, adjusting, enhancing and bringing together different aspects of the psychological and physical self” (p. 112). This overarching aspect of agency manifests in three interrelated but distinct practices, namely, using music for (i) “emotional work”, (ii) “memory work” and (iii) for “regulating bodily comportment” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 112). Music can be used in a range of emotional and mood focussed work, including the recollection of emotions, the shifting, enhancing, and working through moods, and constituting particular emotional states (DeNora, 2000; Karlsen, 2011). Music can also be used for memory work, including bringing back past events, recalling and processing past experiences (DeNora, 2000; Karlsen, 2011). The use of music for bodily comportment can include practices such as “shifting energy levels, achieving embodied security, letting the music get ‘into the body’ for the enhancement of strength, endurance and coordination, recalibrating energy, and dancing” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 112).

2.7.1.2 Shaping Self Identity. Karlsen (2011) outlines that music “plays an important role in individuals’ efforts to shape and clarify their self-identity, either to themselves or others” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 112; cf DeNora, 2000; MacDonald, et al., 2002; Ruud, 1997). Music-related identity work can occur in “outer modes”, that is, being concerned with using particular types of music to affirm identity, past, present, and future (DeNora, 2000; Green, 1999; Karlsen, 2011), as well as “inner modes”,

namely, reconnecting with the inner self and affirming one’s self-identity (Karlsen, 2007; 2011).

2.7.1.3 Self-Protection. At a most basic level, music can be used for blocking out environmental sounds, namely, creating a less overwhelming sonic space, or an environment that aids concentration, which thereby constitutes a form of self-protection (DeNora, 2000; Karlsen, 2011). Additionally, music can be used to produce environments that promote concentration (DeNora, 2000; Karlsen, 2011).

2.7.1.4 Thinking. Music is a medium for thinking—cognition, perception, and reflection (Karlsen, 2011). Thinking in and through music encompasses pure music, as well as an individual’s wider knowledge (e.g. all the extra-musical meanings that partial music brings) (Karlsen, 2011), or in other words, an individual’s “personal music maps, within [their] semiotic web of music and extra-musical associations” (DeNora, 2000, p. 61; cf Karlsen, 2011).

2.7.1.5 Matters of Being. Using music for matters of being concerns “employing music to sharpen one’s awareness, increase sensibility, enhance imagination, fulfil spiritual needs, and [to] arrive at states of ontological security” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 114). Music can be used to “evoke awareness, images, sensations, and feelings” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 114), spiritual experiences (Karlsen, 2007), and in aspects of self-care (DeNora, 2000) such as creating and sustaining a sense of a “protective cocoon” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 114; cf Giddens, 1991).

2.7.1.6 Developing Music Related Skills. The last category of the individual dimension of musical agency concerns the most common areas of musical action (Rikandi, 2012; cf De Nora, 2000; Karlsen, 2011), namely “developing or executing music-related skills through playing an instrument or singing” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 114). The development of music related skills can arise through musical activities including rehearsal, performance, improvisation, composition, arranging or producing (Karlsen, 2011). A special feature of this category lies in its ability to make all other aspects of the individual dimension of musical agency accessible (Karlsen, 2011; Rikandi, 2012). For example, it is possible to engage in music (e.g. singing or playing) for the purpose of expressing and shifting emotions and moods, and likewise, to affect and shape self-identity in numerous ways (Karlsen, 2011). Through the act of developing music related skills, an individual can “negotiate and enhance their opportunities for participating in the world as well as in further musical interaction” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 114).

2.7.2 The Collective Dimension

The collective dimension of the musical agency lens outlines five ways in which music can be used for: (i) regulating and structuring social encounters; (ii) coordinating bodily action; (iii) affirming and exploring collective identity; (iv) knowing the world: (v) establishing a basis for collaborative musical action.

2.7.2.1 Regulating and Structuring Social Encounters. In daily life, music may be used to regulate and structure social encounters in ways such as clarifying social orders, structuring social events, and setting the dynamics of inter-personal relationship styles (Batt-Rawden & DeNora, 2005; Karlsen, 2011). This aspect of musical agency can also imply negotiations of power, in the sense that the individual who oversees the soundtrack of a situation, may also be considered as the one in charge of the organisation of social agency in the situation (DeNora, 2000; Karlsen, 2011). Different musical styles can be employed to create different social atmospheres and decide the frames of occurrent for a particular event, for example, in choosing the type of music that would be most appropriate for a romantic evening, or alternatively, an extended car-trip with children (Karlsen, 2011). When skilfully executed in this way, music holds the potential to influence not only mood, but also social relationships and encounters (Karlsen, 2011).

2.7.2.2 Coordinating Bodily Action. In the same way that music can be used for regulating bodily comportment on an individual level, so too can music be connected to the coordination of bodily action on a collective level (Karlsen, 2011). For example, wordless yet joint ordering of bodies around a collectively agreed pattern of behaviour (e.g. a military unit engaged in a march) exemplifies this type of action (Barnes, 2000; Karlsen, 2011). In this way, music can be conceived as a device for collectively ordering and coordinating people’s actions (DeNora, 2000; Karlsen, 2011). This coordination requires “a joint understanding of what music affords in terms of movement or, in other words, how music can govern specific, music-related ‘cultures of embodiment’” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 115).

2.7.2.3 Affirming and Exploring Collective Identity. Just as music can shape self-identity, so to can it be used to affirm and explore identity on a collective level (Karlsen, 2011). This process can facilitate the building of a sense of community and collective identity, facilitating the “telling and retelling of existing and potential community narratives in and through music, and thereby the creation of joint self-images” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 116).

2.7.2.4 Knowing the World. On an individual level, music can be used for taking care of the self, and likewise, on a collective level it can be used to engage in joint and social explorations, as well as attending to, and expanding on, what it means to be on the collective level (Karlsen, 2011). In other words, music can “provide a platform for exploring what it means to interact socially in the world and to engage in meaningful relationships” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 116) as well as “ways of knowing the world” (Small, 1998, p. 50).

2.7.2.5 Establishing a Basis for Collaborative Musical Action. As with the individual dimension of the musical agency lens, the last category of the collective dimension of the lens can make all other categories of the collective dimension accessible (Karlsen, 2011; Rikandi, 2012). The strongest way to establish and maintain a basis for collaborative musical action is through engaging with joint musical activities such as playing or singing in a group, collaborative composition or improvisation, music production or musical play (Karlsen, 2011). However, such collaborative musical actions must be prefaced with a collective understanding of what has musically been done in the past, to develop a shared sense of “where we are going” (Karlsen, 2011, pp. 116-117). Likewise, there must also be a coordination of actions in order that the group can coherently organise themselves “in accordance with collectively-agreed musical goals” (p. 117).

2.7.3 Agentive Shades

In summing up the individual and collective dimensions of the musical agency lens, Karlsen (2011) asserts the efficacy of this lens as a broad entry point for researchers to analyse and understand music practice, use, and experience, and likewise, music-related experiences of learning. The lens provides a means for conceptualising how people understand their daily musical life (Karlsen, 2011), how they describe the world in which they live (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006), and “how they, in and through making music in so many different ways, learn while doing so” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 117). The lens also encompasses five agentive shades or layers that overlap through the different discursive understandings of musical agency that are found within the sub-divisions of the lens, namely: (i) performance; (ii) transformation; (iii) identity; (iv) ability to access learning experiences; and (v) empowerment (Karlsen, 2011). These shades or layers allow the researcher to emphasise, for example, “the ‘agentic’ powers needed for, or developed through, musical performance; the transformational aspect of people’s engagement with

music; the close connection between identity and agency; how the musical agent is able to access experiences of learning—or not; and in which ways engagement with music may lead to empowerment” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 117).

In all, Karlsen’s (2011) musical agency lens “allows the researcher to focus on a very wide range of a person’s encounters with music, no matter in which contexts they take place” (p. 117), thereby, it “holds the potential to capture the musical as well as non-musical outcomes of interactions with music and, perhaps even more importantly, it may help to bridge the worlds of formal and informal learning situations” (p. 117) related to music. Karlsen’s (2011) musical agency lens is predominantly focussed upon the learner’s experience, however, it also demonstrates efficacy for exploring the performer’s experience; this approach can be compared with my study (Feldman, 2017) of the experiences of a group of singing teachers in a professional development scenario.

2.7.4 Summary: Through the Agency Lens

In the context of this study, Karlsen’s (2011) musical agency lens serves to provide a means for exploring the ways in which singers’ experiences in relation with the piano are meaningful. Specifically, it could be argued that by playing the piano, expert vocal jazz improvisers experience “transformational agency” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 109) and “identity transformation” (p. 109) in music and non-music domains, and on an individual and collective level. To this end, by playing the piano, expert vocal jazz improvisers may be able to have richer improvisational experiences, which in turns, enables them to bring forth more creative ideas in improvisation. This theoretical perspective will be used to answer the second research question of the study:

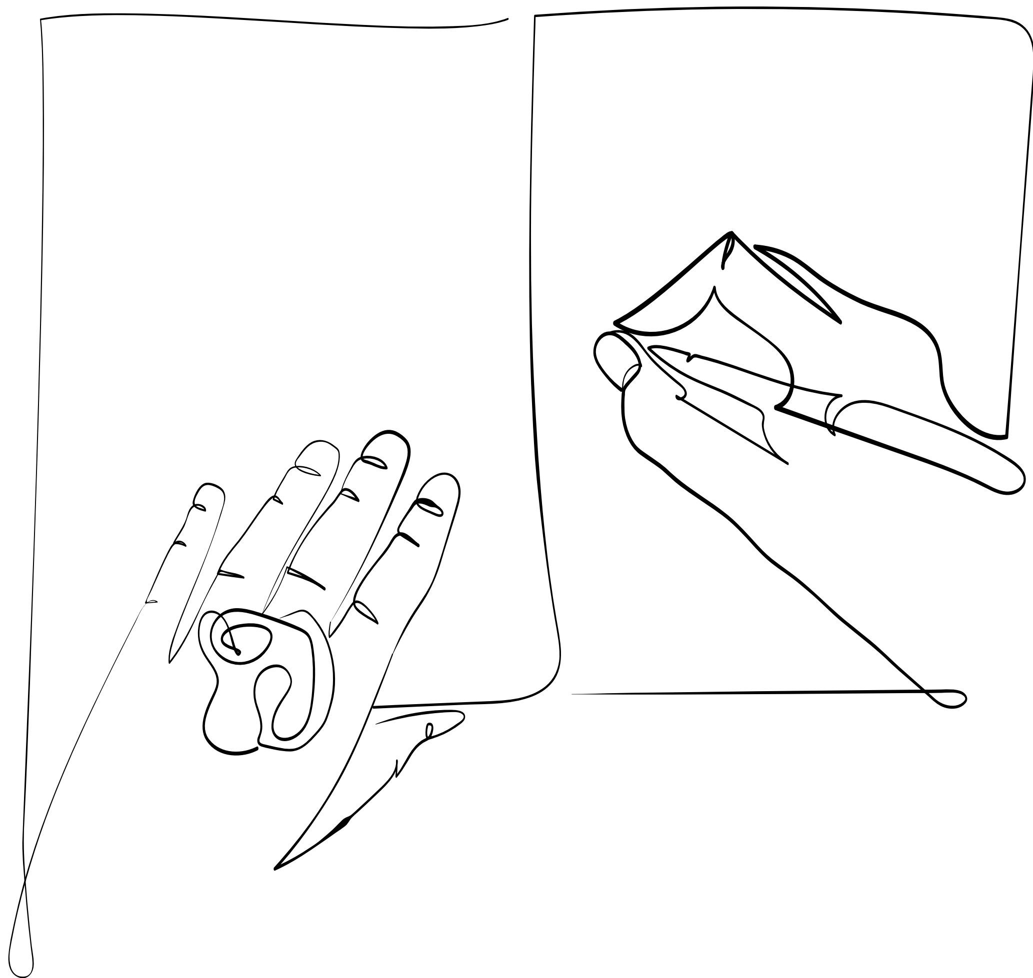
2. What do expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano mean to them?

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined a range of literature relating to vocal jazz improvisation including the elements of jazz improvisation; the instrumental affordances of improvisation; the ways in which singers are differentiated as a unique subset of improvising jazz musicians; the relationship between vocality and instrumentality in jazz improvisation; and the possible benefits that playing piano can bring to expert vocal jazz improvisers. The context of the investigation revealed an opportunity for interrogating expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the

piano. Embodied cognition (the 4E framework) and Karlsen’s (2011) musical agency lens were presented as useful and appropriate theoretical frames to illuminate aspects of vocal jazz improvisers experiences of the piano. These frames will inform the analysis of this study. By adopting these theoretical perspectives, this study serves to make an original contribution to the field by narrating expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of playing the piano, and interrogating the ways in which engaging in these behaviours are impactful to the embodied musical experiences and agency of these singers.

The next chapter outlines the research design and approaches adopted in the study.



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CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter positioned the study within the literature and introduced key theoretical frames that inform the research. This chapter outlines and justifies the research approaches adopted in this study. Structurally, the chapter consists of six key sections. Section 3.2 outlines the interpretative framework of the study, stating the researcher’s philosophical assumptions, and framing constructivism as the paradigmatic foundation upon which the study is grounded. Section 3.3 introduces narrative inquiry (NI) as the methodological approach adopted in this study. Following this, Section 3.4, offers a credibility framework for the study, namely, judging the valuation of NI as “resonant work” (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a) and through the “twelve touchstones of narrative inquiry” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). In Section 3.5 the design and approaches adopted in the study are described, including the methods of data collection. Section 3.6 outlines the analysis of the data, and the format of presentation of the research findings. Section 3.7 provides a statement of the central ethical considerations of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary in Section 3.8, followed by an introduction to the next chapters in Section 3.9 (the participant narratives).

Table 2 provides an overview of the research design, and key terminology.

Table 2

Overview of Research Design

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">Reflexivity</td></tr>
<tr><th>Interpretative Framework</th><th>Methodology</th><th>Data Collection Methods</th><th>Data Format</th><th>Analysis Phase 1</th><th>Analysis Phase 2</th></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter 3.2</td><td>Chapter 3.3</td><td colspan="2">Chapter 3.5</td><td colspan="2">Chapter 3.6</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Constructivist paradigm</td><td rowspan="3">Narrative inquiry</td><td>Semi-structured interviews</td><td>Rendered verbatim interview transcripts</td><td rowspan="3">“Narrative analysis” (Polkinghorne, 1988) of field texts to produce the narratives (presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)</td><td rowspan="3">“Analysis of narratives” (Polkinghorne, 1988) to produce the resonant narrative threads (presented in Chapter 9)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Field notes</td><td>Observational notes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Researcher’s journal</td><td>Reflective notes</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3"></td><td>Field texts</td><td>Research text 1</td><td>Research text 2</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3"></td><td>Data</td><td>Findings (part 1)</td><td>Findings (part 2)</td></tr>
</table>

3.2 Interpretative Framework

3.2.1 Researcher’s Philosophical Position

As a researcher, I acknowledge that my underlying philosophical assumptions shape my worldview, and the way in which I approach my action as a researcher (Creswell, 2013; J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018). My philosophical orientation impacts all aspects of the design and practice of my research (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018), including the way I formulate my research questions, go about answering those questions, and interpret the research findings (Creswell, 2013). In the following sections, I explicitly define my paradigmatic stance as a researcher, discussing my position on ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, and how the same are exemplified in this study (Creswell, 2013).

3.2.2 The Constructivist Paradigm

A research paradigm or worldview is a philosophical orientation about the world and the essence of research that a researcher brings to his or her study (J. W.

Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018). Paradigms provide an interpretative framework that encompass assumptions about ontology (the nature of reality); epistemology (the nature of knowledge, and the relationship between the inquirer and knowledge); axiology (the role of values); and methodology (how knowledge is gathered, and understanding gleaned) (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Guba, 1990). Paradigms reveal a researcher’s stance in relation to his or her research, while also governing his or her mode and method of inquiry (Sipe & Constable, 1996). At a most basic level, five key paradigms guide the contemporary qualitative research process: positivist and post-positivist; critical; feminist; post-modern; and constructivist (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Sipe & Constable). As a researcher, I identify with the constructivist paradigm.

The constructivist paradigm is interchangeably identified as the social constructivist or interpretivist paradigm (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Constructivism originated from the sociological writings of Mannheim along with key works including “The Social Construction of Reality” (Berger & Luckman, 1967) and “Naturalistic Inquiry” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; cf J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018; Stehr, 2018). Constructivism aligns with a Vygotskian perspective, in the sense that it recognises the intersubjective and social nature of reality (Kim, 2014). To this end, constructivism assumes a relativist ontology (multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (co-constructed meaning), an axiology in which individuals’ values are honoured, and the use of naturalistic methodological procedures (inductive and socially interactive methods) (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

3.2.3 Ontological Assumptions

As a constructivist researcher, I believe that there are many truths, and that the distinction between the knower and what is known is not “airtight” (Sipe & Constable, 1996, p. 158). In assuming a relativist stance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Sipe & Constable, 1996), I understand that knowledge is both pluralistic (expressed in a variety of ways) and plastic (purposefully and intentionally shaped by individuals) (Schwandt, 1994). I recognise that my own experiences, along with my historical and cultural background, will ultimately shape my interpretation and understanding of the world (Creswell, 2009; Sipe & Constable, 1996). Likewise, I understand that my research participants will each have a unique interpretative position (Creswell, 2009; Sipe & Constable, 1996). These multiple

perspectives may sometimes conflict, overlap, or even change "as their constructors become more informed and sophisticated" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111).

3.2.4 Epistemological Assumptions

As a constructivist researcher, I recognise that knowledge is integrated into the social context in which it is co-constructed (Gaus, 2017). I see truth as being subjective, socially integrated, and socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Gaus, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In adopting this perspective, I surmise that to explore a social phenomenon, I must study the lived experiences of people, through developing an understanding of their social world (Gaus, 2017). By taking an emic approach, I can collaborate with my research participants (Creswell, 2013; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007) to be actively involved in the construction of meaning (Kim, 2014). This enables me to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon.

3.2.5 Axiological Assumptions

As a constructivist researcher, I recognise the value-laden nature of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). I am alert to the possible underlying values and biases of a study, as well as the value-laden nature of the information that I gather in the field (Creswell, 2013). I understand that these values and biases have implications for how the study is carried out in practice (Creswell, 2013). To this end, I identify my position in the study in order that I can acknowledge the ways in which my interpretations flow from my personal, cultural, and historical background and experiences (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018). Likewise, I honour the values and interpretations of each individual participant of the study (Creswell, 2013).

3.2.6 Methodological Assumptions

As a constructivist researcher, I seek to understand human experience and how it is lived, felt, and undergone by individuals within their contextually, historically, and culturally bound social environment (Schwandt, 1994; Creswell 2013; J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018; Gaus, 2017). I understand that the generation of meaning is always socially bound (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018), and therefore use naturalistic (in the natural world), inductive and conversational methods and analysis tools to gather emergent ideas, and generate meaning from them (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2013; J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kim, 2014; Sipe & Constable, 1996).

Knowledge that is generated within constructivist studies is well suited to presentation in the form of rich narratives (Hatch, 2002), a style of presentation that is adopted in NI.

3.3 Narrative Inquiry

Fundamentally, NI is “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20); a way of inquiring into and understanding experience as it is expressed through the lived and told stories of individuals (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Josselson, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). NI assumes that individuals make sense of their lives through stories (Hatch, 2002), finding connection by listening to and for each other’s stories (M. Barrett, 2009). The narrative researcher moves beyond merely listening to stories, to also listen for, in, and through stories (M. Barrett, 2009). Through this process, the researcher can consider connection and consonance, as well as alternative perspectives, voices, and experiences (M. Barrett, 2009, p. 2) to “trouble certainty” (p. 2) about what is known, and “the many ways in which we know and come to know” (p. 2). It is in the moments of disquiet, the instances of unsettling, and the recognitions of certainties troubled where insight can take root (M. Barrett, 2009). Without troubling certainty, we can only have sympathetic vibration—a kind of resonance in which we only experience agreement, at the expense of confronting real issues; “the ultimate rose-coloured-glasses… at least for those wearing the glasses” (M. Barrett, 2009, p. 3).

NI adopts narrative as both method (stories) and phenomena (the study of experience) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Liamputtong, 2013). As method, NI attends to theoretical considerations (methodological frame), practical considerations (construction of data), and interpretative-analytic considerations (the composition, analysis, and interpretation of findings) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As phenomena, NI does not seek to define a problem, and provide a solution, but rather to engage in a continuous process of searching, researching and reformulation of the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124).

NI is an inherently relational methodology (Caine, Estafan & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin, 2013). It positions the researcher “in the midst” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 100) of the study, in order that he or she can collaborate with the study participants over time, in a place or series of places, and through a social

interaction within milieus (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Through this “collaborative conjoining of lifeworld experience” (Cleaver, 2009, p. 36) the researcher and participants “live in each other’s storied accounts” (p. 36), generating data through the intersection and interweaving of their experiences. This allows the researcher to think narratively about his or her own experiences, as well as those of the participants, and the contextually and socially bound experiences that arise through their relationship in the study (Clandinin, 2006; 2013; Clandinin & Huber, 2002). Narrative accounts (stories) encapsulate complex meanings, by including the voices (words) of the individuals involved in the study. This invites the reader to vicariously experience these happenings, and to draw their own conclusions about the same (Stake, 2005). Additionally, narrative accounts “prick the consciences of readers” (Barone, 2000, p. 193) by inviting them to re-examine “the values and interests undergirding certain discourses, practices, and institutional arrangements” (Barone, 2000, p. 193) captured within the study.

NI draws from a Deweyan theory of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013) which embraces the transactional nature of experience, and the ways in which individuals’ embodied interaction with the social world influences their experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Johnson, 1987). Drawing upon Dewey’s (1938) notions of “continuity” and “interaction”, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) created a metaphorical “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space”. This framework is broadly conceived as a metaphorical space in which the narrative inquirer can understand the narrative qualities of experience. The three dimensions consist of: (i) interaction (the personal and social dimension); (ii) continuity (the temporal dimension); and (iii) situation (notions of place). Further to this, narrative inquiries can progress in four directions: inward feelings, hopes, reactions and moral stances); outward (existential conditions and the external environment); backward and forward (between past, present, and future) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space captures the “openness of experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 89), opening up the “imaginative possibilities for inquirers, possibilities that might not as easily have been seen without the idea” (p. 89). Additionally, the ambiguity of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, reminds the narrative inquirer to be alert to where he or she, and the participants, are “placed at any particular moment—temporally, spatially, and in terms of the personal and social” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 89).

The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space is of particular relevance in consideration of understanding the experiences of the participants in this study. Such experiences may be best understood through the stories of the participants' experiences with the piano, over time, in a variety of places and in a variety of social contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These stories may encompass notions of the inner-self and the outer world, including the participants' social interactions with others, and their experiences in the past, present and imagined future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These stories may express the participants' reflections of their "personal state of mind as connected to the contrast between the milieu [they observe] and the milieu [they know]" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 89).

The next section offers the reader a framework through which to assess the credibility of the study. This framework is comprised of conceptualising credible or quality NI as "resonant work" (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a), and as research that aligns with the "twelve touchstones of narrative inquiry" (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012).

3.4 Credibility Framework

Like many other qualitative methodologies, NI relies on criteria other than standard notions of validity, reliability, and generalisability (Connelly, & Clandinin, 1990). For this reason, "it is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 7). Since NI first emerged as a distinct methodology, several criteria for judging the value of narrative work have emerged in the literature, including the evaluation of NI in music research as "resonant work" (M. Barrett, 2009).

3.4.1 Narrative Inquiry: Resonant Work

NI is resonant work; a deep, rich, and lasting research that is marked by four distinct qualities: it is "respectful to all those involved, responsible to the public good, rigorous procedurally and in presentation, and resilient in its ability to speak not only of here and now, but also across time and place and to varying constituencies" (M. Barrett, 2009, p. 3). In the following sections, I outline how I addressed the four qualities of NI as resonant work in this study.

3.4.1.1 Respect. As a narrative inquirer, I understand that respect is more than mere consideration and thoughtfulness; it is a dynamic, transactional, and negotiated quality that exists in the relational space between and among all the individuals who are involved in the inquiry (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a). I

recognise that “what and how each person knows has worth, merits space and time, and has the potential to inform” (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a, p. 22). I recognise that all individuals involved in the research are “fully human” (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a, p. 21) and thus, may potentially be impacted by the research process on multiple levels (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a). In this study, I enacted respect through deep, active listening and prolonged engagement with my participants, showing humility and perseverance in my approaches to avoid disempowering individuals, or trivialising their experiences (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a).

3.4.1.2 Responsibility. As a narrative inquirer, I understand that responsibility is a conscious ethic that I enact and embody (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a). My responsibility is to myself, my participants, and the public (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a). In this study, I enacted responsibility by creating a relational space during the inquiry process which facilitated the open telling, re-telling, living, and re-living of stories (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a). In so doing, I hoped that the study participants would be able to make evident to themselves (as well as those who listened to and read their stories) their interpretations of their lived experience and their situated constructions of reality (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a).

3.4.1.3 Rigour. Rigour is the means through which respect and responsibility are enacted in resonant work (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a). The spirit of rigour in NI encompasses the fine details of the inquiry process, as well as the moral and ethical implications of the work (Eisner, 1991; Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a). Matters of rigour confront the narrative inquirer as they move between field to field texts, interim research texts and research texts (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a). This process is slow, recursive, organic, and dynamic (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a), as well as layered and complex (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this study, I accepted the epistemological complexity of the work, and adopted a posture of ethical respect of—and responsibility towards—the multiple individual perspectives, interpretations, ways of knowing and understanding knowledge that I encountered during the inquiry (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009b). I hoped that this would enable the readers of the study to “see and hear what they might otherwise have missed” (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009, p. 26).

3.4.1.4 Resilient. Narrative inquiries that are resilient speak to multiple audiences and are open to multiple interpretations (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a, p. 26). The honest and critical storytelling of a narrative inquiry retains an appeal and

persuasiveness through time and varying contexts (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a). Resilient narrative work brings forth worthwhile stories (Barone, 1992). These stories build autonomy and independence for those who participate in the inquiry, as well as those who read the inquiry, inspiring them to take on resonant work themselves (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a). In this study, I enacted resilience by crafting stories that I hoped would resonate with many individuals, including the participants and readers, as well as performers, educators, and music researchers who might encounter the research findings.

3.4.2 The Twelve Touchstones of Narrative Inquiry

A possible criterion for judging the value of NI studies is through reflecting upon the twelve touchstones for narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Clandinin and Caine (2012) define a touchstone as a “quality or example that is used to test the excellence or genuineness of others” (p. 169). When applied to NI studies, the concept of a touchstone can be an effective means for the narrative inquirer to reflect upon the quality of his or her study, and its methodological and relational commitments (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012).

Table 3 provides an overview of the twelve touchstones. My reflections on the twelve touchstones in relation to this study are briefly discussed in the subsequent sections.

Table 3

The Twelve Touchstones of Narrative Inquiry[4]

Touchstone	Description
1	Relational responsibilities
2	In the midst
3	Negotiation of relationships
4	Narrative beginnings
5	Negotiating entry to the field
6	Moving from field to field texts
7	Moving from field texts to interim and final research texts
8	Representing narratives of experience in ways that show temporality, sociality, and place
9	Relational response communities
10	Justifications: Personal, practical, social
11	Attentive to multiple audiences
12	Commitment to understanding lives in motion

3.4.2.1 Touchstone 1: Relational Responsibilities. Through all stages of the study, I was alongside the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As such, I maintained a reflexive stance toward my conduct as a researcher, to ensure that I was attentive to the dynamics of my interactions with the participants (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). I sought to model and embrace an attitude of openness, reciprocity, care, responsiveness, and vulnerability (Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Huber, 2006), and consistently reinforced the importance of our collaboration, and the way in which the data and findings were a co-construction (Clandinin & Caine, 2012).

3.4.2.2 Touchstone 2: In the Midst. I recognised that I, and the participants, entered the inquiry in the midst of living our stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Our lives did not begin and end with the research, but rather, they extended as far back as the pre-reflective landscapes of our childhoods, and as far forward into the

[4] Adapted from Clandinin (2013); Clandinin and Caine (2012).

future of the remainder of our lives (Clandinin, 2013). My recognition of the continuous nature of our experiences was reflected in my attentiveness to working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

3.4.2.3 Touchstone 3: Negotiation of Relationships. Throughout the study, I was in a constant state of negotiating my relationships with the participants, as well as the research (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). I discovered that I needed to be both a topic and an administrative expert. I needed to exist in the moment as I engaged with my participants, while also simultaneously keeping all aspects of the research running smoothly. Additionally, I actively considered the ways in which I could be helpful to the participants during the research, and sensitive to their needs (Clandinin & Caine, 2012), open to adjusting my practice or approach as a researcher if required.

3.4.2.4 Touchstone 4: Narrative Beginnings. I began this study by inquiring into my own story of experience as a jazz singer and pianist (Clandinin & Caine, 2012), and documenting my reflections in a researcher’s journal. The most significant aspects of these reflections were included in the presentation of the thesis (e.g. in the prologue) and established a foundation for the shape of the entire study.

3.4.2.5 Touchstone 5: Negotiating Entry to the Field. My entry to the field was marked by my communication with the participants, and my listening to the participants tell their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In so doing, I entered places that held importance to the participants, and likewise, entered the social milieus in which the participants exist (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 171). Likewise, I existed in the spaces of importance that I share with the participants as a jazz musician, educator, and researcher.

3.4.2.6 Touchstone 6: Moving from Field to Field Texts. As I lived alongside the participants in the field, I began to co-construct stories that became data for the study (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Field texts (data) were generated from three sources: semi-structured interviews, observation, and my own reflective journal entries (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Chapter 3.5.2 discusses these methods in detail.

3.4.2.7 Touchstone 7: Moving from Field Texts to Interim and Final Research Texts. To produce the research texts (the findings), I moved from field texts (raw data) to interim research texts (working drafts of the findings). This process involved continuous reading and re-reading, examination, and re-

examination of the field texts, to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). The final research texts were presented as the narratives (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) and the resonant narrative threads (Chapter 9); Chapter 3.6 discusses the presentation of the findings in detail.

3.4.2.8 Touchstone 8: Representing Narratives of Experience in ways that show Temporality, Sociality and Place.

Throughout the iterative research process (Clandinin & Caine, 2012) I consistently operated within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In producing the findings, my aim was not to craft smoothed over texts or “cover stories” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 173), nor to provide answers to the research problem. Rather, I sought to co-construct a text that would engage the reader in rethinking, retelling, and inquiring into the layered and complex experiences of the participants. I hoped that readers would be inspired to “lay their own experiences alongside the inquiry, to wonder alongside [the] participants and researcher who were part of the inquiry” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 173), feeling a sense of resonance with the work (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a).

3.4.2.9 Touchstone 9: Relational Response Communities. Throughout the research, I participated in a response community, sharing, and discussing critical elements of the inquiry with my supervisors (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). I also engaged with the broader community of practicing narrative inquirers at my institution, discussing NI in more general (methodological) terms. These response communities provided insights into my research, and supported me through the research journey, sustaining me, and providing a place where I could celebrate my achievements (Clandinin & Caine, 2012) and grow from the shared wisdom about NI, research, and doctoral studies.

3.4.2.10 Touchstone 10: Justifications. As a narrative inquirer, I needed to be able to justify my approach on a personal, practical, and social level (Clandin & Caine, 2012). On the personal level, my journey as a narrative inquirer began in my own experience as a jazz pianist and singer. Reflecting upon my experiences helped me to consider the “so what?” question about my research, bringing me closer to the experiences and social contexts in which the study was positioned (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). On the practical level, I considered issues of justice and equity, as well as the practical significance of my work (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). I wondered how my experiences, and the participants' experiences might be shaped differently into

the future. The social level of my justification encompassed theoretical justification (my methodological contributions) and social action (my contributions to the public views on the research problem, including the identification of complexities, contradictions, and inconsistencies inherent in those existing views) (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

3.4.2.11 Touchstone 11: Attentive to Multiple Audiences. Throughout the study, I strived to balance “voice”, “signature” and “audience” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Grounded in my stance as a constructivist researcher, I sought to represent a diversity of voices, including those of the participants, and the other researchers whose writings informed the study in varying ways. Likewise, I also ensured that my own signature as a researcher was distinctively present. As I constructed the thesis, I was mindful of the possible audience of my research, including those directly involved with the research, our network of colleagues, and broader public readership of artists, educators, and researchers with an interest in the research topic. I enacted my responsibility to the participants by co-composing accounts that were true to their experiences and respectful of their wishes. Likewise, I enacted responsibility to the broader scholarly community by seeking to answer the questions of “so what?” and “who cares?” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012) in relation to the inquiry in a way that would bring forth findings of significance to the research area and field.

3.4.2.12 Touchstone 12: Commitment to Understanding Lives in Motion. Throughout the study, I recognized the many ways in which my life, and the lives of the participants were in motion (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I knew that each story and experience that I encountered along the landscape of the inquiry would be forever retold and relived, each time becoming an aspect of a new story and experience (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). By understanding the continuous state of becoming in my life as a researcher, I opened myself to the possibility of continuously inquiring into the fabric of experience (Clandinin & Caine, 2012), and indeed, the fabric of this research.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

3.5.1 Participant Selection and Recruitment: Finding the Storytellers

The participant pool for this study comprised of a small group of expert female vocal jazz improvisers, who also play piano (see Chapter 1.3 for further discussion of the gendered considerations of the study and its scope). The term “expert” is adopted in the literature to identify performers who have reached the

highest level in their discipline (Gray, 2004; Holmes & Holmes, 2013; Milton et al., 2007); terms such as “artist level” (Norgaard, 2011) and “elite” (Holmes & Holmes, 2013) have similar connotations. Within the context of this study, participants were deemed as expert by: (i) having an active and well-established professional career; (ii) having recordings, and/or awards, and/or teaching positions at University Faculty; and (iii) being known to take improvised vocal solos on recordings and in live performance. The participants were required to have English as a first or competent language, however their age, gender, nationality, and race were not a condition of their selection. Given the expertise of these performers, it was likely that they had undertaken higher education study in their craft, however, this was not a condition of their selection, merely an aspect of their expertise. Following the Ethical Clearance for the study (see Chapter 3.7.1) I began recruiting participants. Participants were contacted by email and provided with a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A2) and Participant Consent Form (see Appendix A3). Five of the seven prospective participants that I initially contacted elected to take part in the research, namely, Kristin Berardi (AUS), Brenda Earle Stokes (USA), Michelle Nicolle (AUS), Sharny Russell (AUS) and Anita Wardell (AUS/UK). The nature of my pre-existing relationships with these participants were educational-based, performance-based, or of a social nature (Chapter 3.7.3 explains how I managed these pre-existing relationships). Each of the participants agreed to be identified in the study (participant identifiability is discussed further in Chapter 3.7.2).

3.5.2 Data Collection Methods: Composing the Field Texts

Field texts (data) for the study were gathered using three methods: semi-structured interviews, field notes, and excerpts from my reflective researcher’s journal.

3.5.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews. Interviews are one of the most well-established methods of data collection in the social sciences (e.g. Andrews, et al., 2013; Czarniawska, 2004; Josselson, 2010; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 2008; Squire, et al., 2014). Interviews can be entirely structured or unstructured, or in the case of a semi-structured approach, may adopt elements of both structure and flexibility in design and enactment (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews adopt a conversational style of communication (Holmes & Holmes, 2013) which allows the researcher and participant to collaborate (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016;

Beuthin, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Hannaford, 2017; Josselson, 2010; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 2008). For this reason, semi-structured interviews are ideally suited to, and favoured in, NI (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). During a semi-structured interview, the researcher may use a prepared interview guide (Patton, 2002), whilst also maintaining an openness to deviating from pre-conceived questions, to explore unanticipated directions in the conversation, or elicit further explanation from a participant if required (Holmes & Holmes, 2013). As neither the participants’, nor the researcher’s responses can be predicted in advance, an element of improvisation is present (Wengraf, 2001). In this way, the semi-structured approach is reflective of the improvisatory nature of live music performance (Bresler & Stake, 2006; Holmes & Holmes, 2013), such as jazz improvisation, thus identifying an underlying parallel with the research topic. Above all, semi-structured interviews glean contextually sensitive knowledge (Paget, 1983) by adopting a format that is responsive to the interview aims and dynamics (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Within the context of this study, I chose to prepare an interview protocol (see Appendix B) which detailed several guiding principles and procedures for my conduct as a researcher, as well as the interview questions and supplementary prompts. The interview questions (see Appendix B) were derived from the research aims and questions, and in reflection of the relevant literature that informed the study. Each participant was interviewed twice, during the period of July to November 2019, with each interview ranging between forty-five- and ninety-minutes duration. Due to the varied geographical locations, time zones, and availabilities of the participants and myself, nine of the interviews were conducted via Zoom or Skype video conferencing software, and one was conducted in person.

Tables 4 and 5 provide an outline of the interviews including dates, format, duration, and length of transcription (words).

Table 4

Overview of Interview One

Participant	Date	Format	Duration	Words
Kristin Berardi	16 August 2019	Skype	[00:51:16]	6039
Brenda Earle Stokes	18 July 2019	Zoom	[00:44:27]	5916
Michelle Nicolle	12 July 2019	Skype	[01:13:52]	10,648
Sharny Russell	4 July 2019	In-Person	[01:10:43]	11,094
Anita Wardell	17 August 2019	Skype	[01:12:21]	9962

Table 5

Overview of Interview Two

Participant	Date	Format	Duration	Words
Kristin Berardi	22 November 2019	Skype	[01:11:44]	8025
Brenda Earle Stokes	8 October 2019	Skype	[00:53:58]	6613
Michelle Nicolle	17 August 2019	Skype	[00:53:09]	6397
Sharny Russell	18 July 2019	Zoom	[01:44:06]	12,041
Anita Wardell	9 October 2019	Skype	[01:21:51]	9280

In conducting the interviews, I understood that my actions, questions, and responses could shape the dynamics of the interview conversation, and therefore the ways in which the participants conversed with me and gave an account of their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To this end, I sought to make each interview a space where each participant would feel at ease, and comfortable to share her story. Although I wanted to maintain a natural conversational dialogue, my overarching priority was to listen actively and attentively to the participants, giving each participant the opportunity to speak with as little interruption as possible. I hoped that by conducting two interviews, each participant would have a greater opportunity to reflect upon their experience before, between, and after the first and second interviews.

3.5.2.2 Field Notes. During each interview, I engaged with my five senses to observe aspects including the physical interview setting, the participants’ improvised demonstrations, and the non-verbal communications and behaviours of the participants and myself (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990). These observations formed my field notes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The field notes enriched the verbatim interview transcripts with my own nuanced observations, as well as providing me with a “memory outline” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 104) to reference throughout the duration of the study. As I took notes during the interviews, I was careful to remain present in the moment, and attuned to the nuances of my interaction with the participants (and my relational responsibilities therein) (Patton, 1990).

3.5.2.3 Reflective Researcher’s Journal. Throughout the study I maintained a reflective researcher’s journal. I also engaged in reflective practice during the interviews (reflection *in* action) and after the interviews (reflection *on* action) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Schön, 1991). To this end, certain entries in my journal overlapped with key stages or events in the research journey, and thus, further enriched the field texts.

3.5.3 Data Collation: From Field Texts to Interim Research Texts

Following each interview, I personally transcribed the conversation to ensure an accurate record of the verbatim dialogue. These transcriptions were shared with the participants; each participant was invited to share their feedback and welcomed to provide changes wherever she saw fit. By personally managing the transcription process, I ensured that the data would not be seen or reviewed by any persons lacking intimate understanding with the research setting and processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Riessman, 2008), or any persons who lacked the appropriate ethical clearance. Furthermore, listening back to the interviews provided an additional point of familiarisation with my conversation with each participant, allowing me to review and enrich my field notes and my reflective researcher’s notes.

Initially, I took a more exacting approach to the transcription, producing an exact record of all words and speech mannerisms as spoken during the interview, including any instances of repetition, informal language, and changes of train of thought. Table 6 presents an excerpt of an exact verbatim transcription.

Table 6

Excerpt of Exact Verbatim Interview Transcription

Speaker	Exact Verbatim Transcription
Researcher	Does playing and hearing a pitch externally on the piano help you to embody that pitch with your voice?
Participant	I think so. Yeah. Yeah, it does. So, and it’s not just one pitch, but then it’s that pitch in relation to another pitch.

Upon reviewing one such of these transcripts, a participant conveyed her shock to me at seeing the style of her natural speech. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) make note of this phenomenon, and of the potential for participants to experience “shock as a consequence of reading their own interviews” (p. 187) and their “incoherent and confused speech” (p. 187). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that incoherent speech can be perceived as an indicator of “a lower level of intellectual function” (p. 187), and as such, recommend a more fluent rendering (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Having been presented with this situation during the early stages of my data collection, I reflexively assessed my transcription style to discern the most suitable approach for my subsequent interview transcriptions. I deduced that the participant transcripts of this study were used to record the participants’ reflections about their experiences. As such, their natural speech mannerisms, including any unintentional changes of thought or repetition, were of little consequence. I deemed that a rendered transcript would more successfully highlight the nuances and meanings of the participants’ words (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Thereafter I continued with a rendered approach to my transcription, eliminating instances of repetition, informal speech mannerisms, changes of thought, and by clarifying any incomplete or fragmented descriptions, abbreviations, or colloquialism; I also applied this same rendering process to the pre-existing transcripts. The rendered verbatim transcripts were positively received by the participants. Table 7 presents an excerpt of a rendered verbatim transcription.

Table 7

Excerpt of Rendered Verbatim Interview Transcription

Speaker	Rendered Verbatim Transcription
Researcher	Does playing and hearing a pitch externally on the piano help you to embody that pitch with your voice?
Participant	I think so. Yeah, it does. And it’s not just one pitch; it’s that pitch in relation to another pitch.

After incorporating the participants’ feedback to their transcripts, I had two field texts for each participant: (i) a rendered verbatim transcript with (ii) accompanying observational field notes. These field texts represented a diverse collection of storied data. To a degree, each of these field texts formed an individual and isolated text, with its own unique narrative qualities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Some of the field texts were “more storied than others” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 139), and in others, the story quality was “more implied than expressed” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 139). Because each of the field texts were collected and positioned with the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, the collated field texts collectively had “the potential to represent a more complete sense of the narrative of the inquiry field” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 139). This narrative picture was further supported by my own researcher’s reflections. Once the data were collated, my task as the narrative inquirer was to re-story the field texts for each participant into a narrative text. The composing of the narrative text marked my entry into the analysis phase of the research.

3.6 Data Analysis: From Field Texts to Research Texts

The moment of beginning to write a research text is a transitory time for the narrative inquirer, laden with moments of tension and uncertainty (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In part, this tension and uncertainty arises because of the relational dynamics of the inquiry, namely “the knowing, and caring for, specific participants” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 145). Prior to the research, abstract theoretical categories might be of prime importance, however, by the time the research text is being composed, the key focus settles on the participants, and the researcher’s relationship to them:

> The researcher learns that people are never only (nor even a close approximation to) any particular set of isolated theoretical notions, categories, or terms. They are people in all their complexity. They are people living storied lives on storied landscapes. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 145)

As I considered how best to progress with the analysis phase of research, I kept my relational responsibilities as a narrative inquirer forefront in my mind, including my need to conduct respectful, responsible, rigorous, and resilient work (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a; see Chapter 3.4.1). I saw that my challenge as a narrative inquirer was to develop research texts that would extend beyond mere retellings of the participants’ stories, or a documentation of my own reflections, to instead bring forth significant analytical and interpretative findings that would: (i) honour the stories of the participants; (ii) respond to the research aims, objectives, and questions; (iii) serve the thesis text; (iv) advance from the extant literature to make an original contribution to the field; (v) meaningfully resonate with readers; and (vi) trouble the certainty (M. Barrett, 2009) that we have come to know about expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano.

As I looked back to my time in the field, and across the collection of field texts, I recalled that each of the interviews touched on many different elements beyond the questions, moving backward and forward between those elements to varying degrees, and at varying times. The seemingly convenient organisation of the fields texts around the interview questions was of little assistance in shaping the narratives. My journey towards preparing the research texts involved countless hours of “reading and rereading” (Clandinin & Connelly, 200, p. 131) the field texts, through the lens of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In these hours and readings, I gave much consideration to how I could meaningfully shape the field texts into research texts that would respond to the research aims, objectives and questions, reflect my significant findings from the literature, and above all, honour the stories of the participants. As was to be expected, there was “no one bringing together of the field texts into research texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133). Much of my writing occurred in the spaces between the field texts and the research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To aid the shaping of my ideas in this space, I created an interim research text—a working draft of the research text that continually evolved and changed, undergoing

numerous revisions, and ongoing experimentation until I settled on the approach that best served the study and the thesis presentation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The interim research texts were shared and negotiated with my supervisors, forming part of the ongoing research defined by the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this sense, as a narrative inquirer, I lived out narrative as both the *phenomena* and the *method* of my study, experiencing the fullness of the complexities, wonderings, and tensions therein (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 20020; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Liamputtong, 2013). The findings of the study resulted from two phases of analysis:

1. “Narrative analysis” (Polkinghorne, 1988) to produce the narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988).
2. “Analysis of narratives” (Polkinghorne, 1988) to produce the resonant narrative threads (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

3.6.1 Analysis Phase 1: Narrative Analysis

In the first phase of analysis, I employed narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1988) to produce the narratives (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8). Narrative analysis moves away from common themes towards focussing on particular stories (Polkinghorne, 1988). In this initial phase of analysis, I read and re-read the field texts to uncover salient narrative elements (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) including “character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context and tone” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). In thinking about the future audience of the narratives, and the social and personal impact of the work (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) I wanted to ensure that the participants’ voices would be most prominent. Therefore, I decided to use verbatim quotations as extensively as possible. I selected portions of the participants’ words from the field texts that resonated to me as salient narrative elements and organised them into the interim research texts. From here, I was able to advance a plot and craft a re-storied narrative for each participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988).

To weave between the narratives in a way that flowed coherently and meaningfully, I adopted a unifying metaphor that I felt was symbolic to each participant, and the stories they shared with me. As M. Barrett and Stauffer (2019) explain, metaphors can be essential tools “to explain music as a phenomenon, to explain other phenomena through music, and to communicate in and through music” (p. 76), providing “a means of ‘voicing’ experience that is inaccessible by any other

means” (p. 86). In the context of this study, metaphors served as “a tool for opening and deepening understanding” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 16), allowing me to see “reality in terms of potential rather than actuality” (Farquar & Fitzpatrick, 2019, p. 6). Additionally, metaphors allowed me to explain abstract concepts in a clear, concise, accessible manner that was “devoid of overly technical phraseology” (Findlay, 2018, p. 80).

To enhance the narrative flow and reflect the ongoing nature of my conversation with each participant across both interviews, each narrative was presented as if it were a single conversation between the participant and myself; details and discussion from both interviews were combined as one. This choice also reflects my commitment as a narrative inquirer to understanding the many ways in which my life, and the participants’ lives are in motion (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In each narrative I assumed the role of narrator (de Vries, 2014), presenting my voice alongside, overlapping and intersecting with the voices of the participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Once a draft of each narrative was completed, I sent a copy of each participant’s individual narrative to her, with instructions to provide feedback and make any changes, additions, or subtractions that she saw fit. I asserted the importance that the narratives would be a co-construction which respectfully and accurately honoured the experiences of all involved. The feedback I received on the narratives was positive; each participant expressed delight at reading her narrative, including the way which I honoured her story, and our shaped conversation into a story. I received no substantive changes from the participants; only a couple of minor edits were requested.

3.6.2 Analysis Phase 2: Analysis of Narratives

For the second phase of analysis, I employed “analysis of narratives” (Polkinghorne, 1988) to produce the resonant narrative threads (Chapter 9). Analysis of narratives moves away from individual stories to produce common themes across a data set (Polkinghorne, 1995). To produce the resonant narrative threads, I read and re-read the participants’ narratives to uncover significant plotlines that thread or wove over time and place across the participants’ stories (Clandinin, 2013) including names gaps, silences, tensions, continuities, or discontinuities that appeared (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The process of identifying the resonant narrative threads was an experience akin to “listening for the melody of a song, rather than following the story’s content and becoming attached to it as a narrative” (Rogers,

2007, p. 110). The threads sometimes disappeared or re-emerged, leaving a subtle trace, and in other instances, ran through the entirety of a narrative, or across multiple narratives (Rogers, 2007). In this way, the threads began to play “against one another, creating particular effects through their associative positioning” (Rogers, 2007, p. 110).

To initially map out the resonant narrative threads, I created an interim research text in the form of an excel spreadsheet. I created a separate sheet for each of the (then tentative) narrative codes (or themes), copying and pasting significant excerpts of the participants’ words from the narratives that seemed to resonate around a particular theme. Once I felt that the resonant narrative threads had begun to take shape, I began to form the ideas into prose for the research text. As a narrative inquirer, I was cautious to ensure that the resonant narrative threads would not reduce the participants experiences into “meta-themes”. Narrative data is not intended to be generalised, however theoretical propositions are possible with NI (Riessman, 2008). These propositions provide a means for the inquirer to attend to the personal, social, theoretical, and practical justifications of their work (Clandin & Connelly, 2000). In crafting the resonant narrative threads, I also considered the theoretical frames that were explored in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), namely, embodied cognition (the 4E framework) and Karlsen’s (2011) musical agency lens. Each frame was aligned with one research question, attending to a different aspect relating to the participants’ experiences: embodied cognition (RQ1: the nature of the participants’ experiences) and musical agency (RQ2: the meaning of the participants’ experiences. In idiographic terms, the resonant narrative threads confirmed the hypothesis that I had posed from the extant literature, indicating the true nature of expert vocal jazz improvisers’ lived experiences of the piano, advancing on the extant literature to make an original contribution to the field. The resonant narrative threads (Chapter 9) together with the narratives (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) form the research texts of the study (the study findings).

I viewed the analysis phases of the study as merely one of the ways in which I was able to creatively explore my wonderings about the research problem (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Indeed, through all phases of the research, I constantly returned to the question of “what?” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124)—“what is your narrative inquiry about?” (p. 124) and “what is the experience of interest to you as a narrative inquirer” (p. 124). My answers to these questions

experienced many changes as my understanding of the research puzzle deepened and evolved. For this reason, my choice to keep a reflective journal was of great use in documenting the evolution, progression, and fine-tuning of these ideas, and my growth as a researcher, alongside the thesis itself and its many drafts until completion.

3.7 Ethics

3.7.1 Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance was granted for this study (see Appendix A1).

3.7.2 Participant Identifiability

In narrative research, the issue of identifiability can be complex (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), presenting an array of ethical implications, and the need for consent. Within this study, I considered the merits of de-identifying or identifying the participants in the research findings. If a participant had elected to be de-identified, they would have been given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym (Josselson, 2007), and fictionalising methods would have been employed to alter distinctive details in their stories such as dates, names, and geographical locations. However, as the participants are well known in their field, it is likely that even with de-identifying measures, certain details of their lives would have been identifiable. Had this situation eventuated, the conditions of the participants’ informed consent and right to privacy would have been impacted, increasing the likelihood of social damage to one or both parties. With no assurance that the anonymity of the participants could be preserved, it became apparent that intentionally identifying the participants was of integral importance. By identifying the participants, I opened the opportunity for the readers to seek out the participants’ own recorded works, performances, and writings, and likewise, to engage with the provided discography and narrative listening guide that I provided for each participant (see Appendix C and D) to gain a stronger impression of the participants’ expertise, and to enrich their experience in engaging with the study, including forming their own thoughts, observations and understandings about the study. Additionally, by associating the research with individuals who are deemed as experts in the jazz community, I knew that the study would have a higher level of reputational credibility, and potentially, a wider readership. Furthermore, by closely collaborating with the participants throughout all stages of the research, it was hoped that they would feel more comfortable to freely share their stories with me, and to be identified in the findings.

3.7.3 Social Risk

As all potential participants of the study were known to me, the potential for social risk was acknowledged. To address this risk, I maintained a critical reflexive stance throughout all stages of the research, as well as an ongoing consultation with my supervisors to ensure scrutiny of my research practice. I recognised the possibility that unanticipated issues may arise throughout the research journey, including those that may affect myself, the participants, or the research outcomes. As such, I sought to maintain a flexible approach to the research and kept an open mind to reconsidering and adjusting any research practices where the need arose (Hydén, 2014), as evidenced in the change of approach made regarding the verbatim transcription process (see Section 3.5.3). Above all, I maintained an ongoing attentiveness to my relational responsibilities (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012), ensuring that my conduct was respectful, responsible, rigorous, and resilient (Stauffer & M. Barrett, 2009a, p. 20).

3.7.4 Emotional Risk

As this study involved the sharing of, and reflection on, experiences through storytelling, the potential for emotional risk was acknowledged. To address this risk, I maintained a critically reflexive stance towards my interviewing, including careful planning of questions and prompts, and reflections of my own performance as an interviewer before, during and after each interview. A range of support services and avenues of feedback were listed on the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A2). Several procedures for managing distress were listed in the Interview Protocols (see Appendix B).

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined and justified the research approaches adopted in this study. The chapter began with a statement of the researcher’s philosophical assumptions, namely, that knowledge is a human construction, encompassing many truths, arising through social interactions, and is inherently value laden. Constructivism was identified as the paradigmatic foundation upon which the study is grounded, and the interpretative framework through which the study progresses. Following this, NI was introduced as the methodological approach adopted in the study, to facilitate the in-depth narrative examination of expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano. The focus then turned to the research design. I discussed the selection of the participants (expert vocal jazz improvisers who also

play piano) and their recruitment for the study. Following this, I outlined the methods of data collection (semi-structured interviews and observational field notes). I described how the data (the field texts) were gathered and collated as the rendered verbatim interview transcripts with researcher’s field notes (interim research texts). I described two phases of analysis: (i) narrative analysis to produce the narratives and (ii) analysis of narratives to produce the resonant narrative threads. I clarified that together, the narratives (Chapters 4 through 8) and the resonant narrative threads (Chapter 9) form the final research texts of the study (the findings). Finally, I provided a brief statement of the key ethical considerations of the study.

3.9 Introduction to the Following Chapters

Chapters 4 through 8 present the narratives of the study participants: Kristin Berardi, Brenda Earle Stokes, Michelle Nicolle, Sharny Russell, and Anita Wardell. These narratives explore the participants’ experiences as expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play the piano. Together, the narratives form Part One of the study findings.

Structurally, each narrative begins with the participant’s name, and the metaphor I chose in reflection of the stories shared with me; this metaphor continues throughout the narrative with associated references in the sub-headings. From here, a brief biography (prelude) is provided to introduce each participant to the reader. The narrative prose begins with an introduction (in my words), to set the scene for the reader. My voice continues as the narrator; some verbatim excerpts from the transcripts are included (demarcated by double quotation marks). The participants’ words are included alongside my own, demarcated by double quotation marks, or as standalone sections of text (for longer excerpts). Temporal changes in the narrative prose are indicated by asterisks between sections of text. Where relevant to the metaphor and narrative, lyrics of songs that were recorded or performed by the participants are included as blocks of standalone text, and also, woven into the narrative prose (demarcated by double quotation marks). Citations for these songs are included as footnotes within the narratives. A listening guide for the narratives is included in Appendix D. I encourage the reader to listen to the songs in conjunction with reading the text of the narratives. Each narrative concludes with a postlude, containing my “wonderings” as a researcher about the “research puzzle”.

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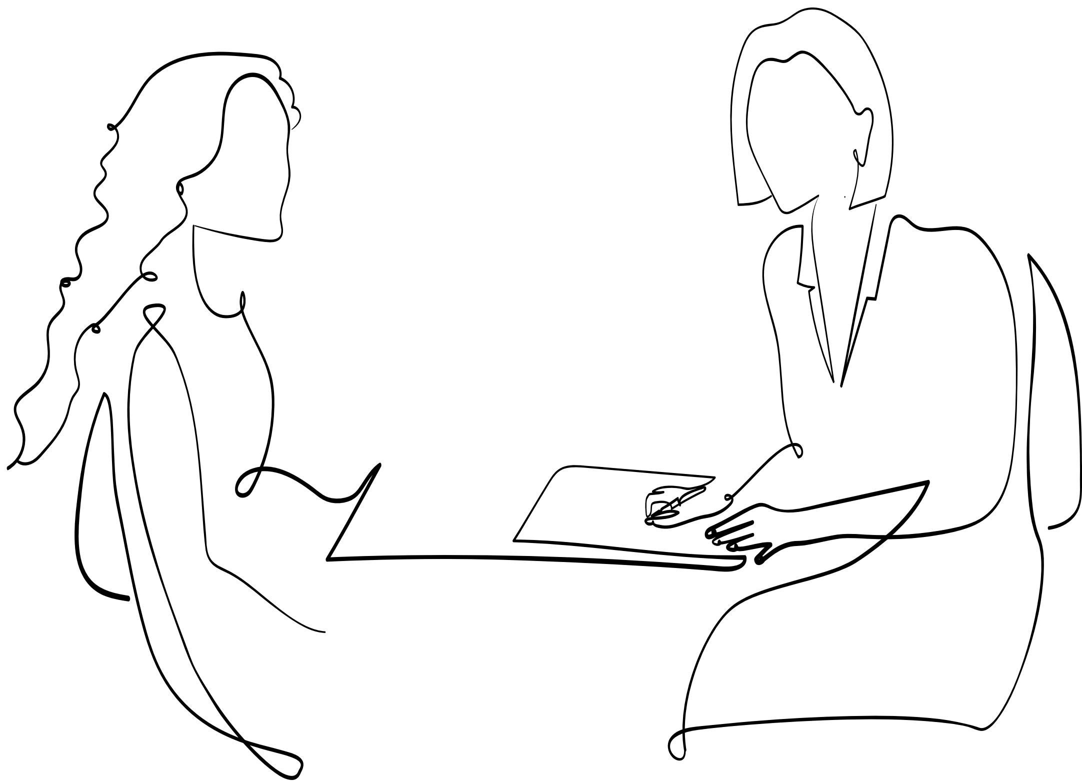

“Kristin”

CHAPTER 4: KRISTIN BERARDI

“Colour”

Prelude

Kristin Berardi is an Australian musician, composer, and educator; one of Australia’s preeminent jazz singers and best jazz vocal exports.

Born in Koumala (QLD, Australia), Kristin completed her undergraduate musical studies at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music (Brisbane, Australia), where she gained a Bachelor of Music (jazz voice). Kristin also holds an AmusA (classical violin) and is currently completing a Master of Music (vocal pedagogy) at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music.

Kristin’s accolades include winner of the Montreux Jazz Festival International Jazz Vocal Competition (2006); winner of the Music Council of Australia/National Freedman Fellowship (2007)—the first vocalist to win in the jazz category; winner of the National Bell Award for The Best Jazz Vocal album (2010, 2013, 2016); winner of the Wangaratta Jazz Festival National Jazz Award in the voice category (2012); nominated for an ARIA award (2013); performing at the Closing Ceremony of the Commonwealth Games (2018); National Tour of JONI:Both Sides Now (2018); and recipient of The Churchill Fellowship (2020).

As a performing artist, Kristin’s warmth and vocal control have made her a favourite with Australian and international audiences. She has worked in jazz, contemporary, and experimental music styles, alongside an array of acclaimed musicians including Al Jarreau, George Benson, Kenny Werner, Ingrid Jensen, Thomas Morgan, Chris Walker, Dan Tepfer, Jerome Jennings, Dan Weiss, Florian Ross, Jim Pugh, Matthew Halpin, Sam Anning, Pascal Schumacher, Andrea Keller, James Muller, James Sherlock, Katie Noonan, Mike Nock, Miro Sprague, Wendy Matthews, Kate Miller-Heidke, Orlando Fleming, Phil Slater, Barney McAll, Julien Wilson, Jamie Oehlers, Hannah Macklin, Carl Morgan, Zac Hurren, Katie Whighton, and Emma Dean. A discography of Kristin’s recorded works is included in Appendix C.

As an educator, Kristin has taught jazz voice at the Australian National University (Canberra, ACT, Australia), the Central Queensland University of Music (Mackay, QLD, Australia), the Queensland Conservatorium of Music and the Jazz Music Institute (both in Brisbane, QLD, Australia). In 2021, Kristin moved to

Luzern (Switzerland) to take up a position at Luzern University of Applied Sciences and Arts. She now looks forward to sharing her passion for music with a wider audience in Europe. To discover more about Kristin, visit kristinberardi.com.

* * *

Tangerine

It’s a sunny August afternoon in Toowoomba; the first hints of Spring are in the air. Shortly I will be Skype calling Kristin. Today, I hope to discover more about Kristin’s journey in life and jazz, and the nature of her experiences with the piano as an expert vocal improviser. In preparation for our conversation, I have gathered my collection of Kristin’s award-winning albums and placed them in a row on my desk. (Call me a traditionalist, but in an age of music streaming there’s nothing like having a hard copy album in your hands!) As I glance across the covers of Kristin’s albums, it’s clear to me that each one offers a different expression of colour in both sight and sound. “Guess I’ll Hang My Tears Out” (2012) shows an illustration of Kristin and her collaborator on the album, Australian guitarist James Sherlock, seated beneath a quintessentially Australian “Hills Hoist” clothesline. Droplets of sky-blue tears are pegged on the line above the duo (a nod to the title track); the scene is framed with verdant vine covered with vibrant yellow and orange flowers (a hint to the second track on the album, “Tangerine”). With a couple of minutes to spare before our call begins, I brew myself a black coffee, whilst listening to “Tangerine”.

> Tangerine, she is all they claim
> With her eyes of light and lips as bright as flame
>
> Tangerine, when she dances by
> Senoritas stare and caballeros sigh
>
> And I’ve seen toasts made to Tangerine
> Made in every bar across the Argentine
>
> Yes, she has them all on the run
> But her heart belongs to just one
> Her heart belongs to Tangerine
>
> (Tangerine)[5]

[5] Berardi, K. (2013). Tangerine [Song]. On *Guess I’ll hang my tears out* [Music by Victor Schertzinger; Lyrics by Johnny Mercer]. ABC Jazz.

Kristin’s voice begins “Tangerine” in her trademark warm and clear tone. Her words are steeped with storytelling, and her musical choices seem just right; the arrangement is a dance between voice and guitar. As the tune finishes playing, I sit back at my desk and dial Kristin’s Skype contact; moments later she joins me from her home in Brisbane (Australia).

“Hi Kristin! Oh it’s so lovely to see you! How are you?” I say with a beaming smile and a wave. Kristin responds in a bright and bubbly manner, “Hey Courtney, it’s great to see you too! I’m good thanks, how about you?” In the background I see an eclectic, yet cohesive, collection of artwork and colourful homewares placed throughout the room. As Kristin takes a sip of her coffee, I notice that she is wearing a selection of “Dinosaur Designs” jewellery (an Australian label renowned for their sculptural handcrafted resin jewellery and homewares, of which I am also an avid fan). We share some thoughts over our love of all things “art” and “colour”, and naturally settle into a conversational rhythm. I feel at ease in Kristin’s presence, and sense that she feels the same in return.

I ask Kristin to fill me in on her current work and creative projects. Kristin shares that she is teaching voice in Brisbane at JMI (the Jazz Music Institute) and QCON (the Queensland Conservatorium of Music). She is also in the process of completing a Masters of Vocal Pedagogy at QCON. Kristin recently visited the USA. One of the highlights of her trip was performing a set of her original tunes at the legendary Birdland Jazz Club (NYC, USA). While visiting “the Big Apple” Kristin also recorded an album, which she hopes to finish mastering for release in the near future. In a couple of months, Kristin is due to travel again, this time to Europe, where she is presenting at the 2019 “International Jazz Voice Conference” in Helsinki (Finland). Around her conference dates, Kristin has lined up several gigs at various locations throughout Europe. In the meantime, Kristin has a busy schedule of performance dates lined up throughout Australia. Hearing Kristin describe her array of projects I say, “You’re a superwoman! When do you find time to do all these things?” Kristin responds in a manner steeped with humility,

> I feel like I just juggle things. I’ve worked really hard, but I’ve also had a lot of blessing in my life, in that I do get to do exactly what I want. I feel very lucky. It’s nice when I am doing what I love, doing a concert, or recording, but I also like it when I have a day where I can just pick up the kids and hang with them in the afternoon. I love that too. It’s just a different focus, I guess.

Kristin’s deep love for both her family and her music is clearly evident to me.

Born to be Blue

Growing up in the town of Koumala (Queensland, Australia), Kristin was immersed in music from an early age. She explains,

> I started on piano, and then I moved to organ, because my mum taught both. And then early on, I started the violin. I thought that was going to be my thing, I thought I was going to be a classical violinist. I’ve got my AmusA on classical violin, and I played alto saxophone for a good ten years.

Alongside her instrumental training, Kristin also had a steadfast passion for singing.

> Voice was always the thing that was a bit of a constant, and also the thing that felt more natural for me to get to communicate what I was aiming for; everything else, no matter how much I practiced, and tried so hard, it wasn’t as close as what I could get to in terms of emotional connection, that I could with the voice.

Pausing for a moment, Kristin notes her thankfulness for having begun her music journey as an instrumentalist.

> I’m so glad that I started off on instruments, because that gave me a real sense of, “If you practice, you will get better, you will see results”, whereas singers that may never have dabbled with another instrument might think, “Oh, this is inside me, it’s not an instrument, it’s just what I do”.

Like most children, Kristin grew up listening to the music that her parents enjoyed. For the Berardi household, artists including Cliff Richard, John Denver, and Linda Ronstadt (to name a few) were on frequent rotation. As Kristin reached her teenage years, artists like Whitney Houston, Celine Dion, Boyz II Men, and those who featured on “Rage” (an Australian television music video program) began to draw her creative interest. Kristin’s love for jazz music was also added to the mix when she was introduced to the vocal stylings of Australian jazz singer Vince Jones.

> Vince had a contemporary sound, and that got me engaged in the beautiful repertoire. He gave it a bit of flavour like Donny Hathaway and that R&B kind of stuff. That was my in.

When Kristin was fifteen years old, she began to attend lectures at the Conservatorium of Music in Mackay (a coastal city located approximately fifty kilometres North-East of her hometown). On her weekends, Kristin also began to gig as a contemporary singer, turning to music as her “expression” and her “safe place”. As Kristin’s singing experience continued, she began to realise that her natural choices in phrasing, and her way of interacting with a band were the norm in jazz. From there, her foray into jazz was organic, and the rest, so they say, is history.

Looking at how all the pieces aligned for Kristin, and how her natural giftings for jazz emerged, it seems to me that Kristin was made for jazz; she was "born to be blue".

Some folks were meant to live in clover
But they are such a chosen few, chosen few
And clover being green
Is something I've never seen
Cause I was born to be blue

When there's a yellow moon above me
They say there's moonbeams I should view
But moonbeams being gold
Are something I can't behold
Cause I was born to be blue

When I met you
The world was bright and sunny
When you left the curtain fell
I'd like to laugh
But nothing strikes me funny
Now my world's a faded pastel, oh well

I guess I'm luckier than some folks
I've known the thrill of lovin' you, lovin' you
And that alone is more than I was created for
Cause I was born to be blue

(Born to be Blue)[6]

Having learnt a little about where the journey began for Kristin, I'm keen to see her skills in action; I ask Kristin to share a tune with me at the piano, with some improvisation. Kristin happily agrees, and heads over to sit at her piano. After a quick soundcheck, Kristin elects to sing one of her original tunes called "Take Me to the Wilderness"—a tune that has yet to be recorded. Kristin lifts her hands to the keys, and begins to play and sing, seamlessly transitioning from her relaxed conversational mode, into a focussed performance frame.

Take me to the wilderness
Let me lay down by the stream that offers rest
I can hear the mountains they are calling me
And they're saying go and lay down by my stream. Stay still.

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[6] Berardi, K. (2015). Born to Be Blue [Song]. On *Where or when* [Music by Mel Tormé; Lyrics by Robert Wells]. ABC Jazz.

I don’t know where I belong
But out here I seem to sing a wilder song
It is though I’m free to roam and free to be
All my inhibitions flow into the stream

Freedom from the fear to carry on
Standing in the stillness of the mountains and the sky
I hear a song that feels like home

Take me to the wilderness
I just need to be alone with emptiness
And yet all the birds and leaves they sing to me
Maybe when I am alone then I am free

Oh free to open my heart to feel
Free to let my tears wash my face and wash my feet
And allow myself to heal

Take me to the wilderness
Let me lay down by the stream that offers rest
I can hear the mountains they are calling me
And they’re saying go my dear lay by my streams. Stay still

(Take Me to the Wilderness)[7]

As Kristin performs, I am transported to a place of calm and quiet, where time seems to stand “still”. I am struck by the warmth and clarity in her vocal delivery, and the security in her pitch; Kristin has perfect pitch, and this ability is evidenced by her performance. I notice that Kristin’s voice works in tandem with her piano playing; both of her instruments seem to frame, anticipate, echo, and harmonise with each other in various ways. As Kristin’s tune finishes, I applaud and thank her for sharing the song with me; she graciously thanks me. I then ask Kristin to reflect on how her two instruments (voice and piano) interacted as she performed.

> I am very aware of the fact that sometimes I want my voice to sit on top of the piano sounds, and then at other times I want my voice to blend with the piano, to be in tune with the piano. I can be a bit clunky on piano, whereas I can be smoother with my voice. I guess it’s just trying to be creative about how you layer or shape things. I get frustrated when I try to do something vocally and my hands get stuck [on the piano], so I’m not at the point where I’m free on both instruments, but I do try.

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[7] Berardi, K. (2019). *Take me to the wilderness* [Song: Live Performance]. [Music and Lyrics by Kristin Berardi].

As an improvising jazz singer, Kristin never wanted to be a “scatter”, rather, she wanted to be a singer who could “make sounds, and think of articulations… to make music that moves someone”.

> Hopefully when I’m singing a melody, it’s not rigid, I want for it to be able to flow; to be present with it, and move it around in the moment.

Kristin’s performance certainly moved me, and it was clearly in the “flow”, so I have no hesitation in concluding that she’s achieved her goal.

White Flag

When Kristin improvises with her voice, it appears that she enters a “flow” state of surrendering to the music, somewhat like a “white flag” freely “waving” in response to the “wind”.

> Holding onto the air,
> Not set in here or there.
> Not hoping,
> Not feeling.
> Holding onto the words,
> Not convinced of the verb.
> White flag waves in the wind.
>
> (White Flag)[8]

In her flow state, Kristin often seems to play an invisible keyboard in the air. Looking more closely at the gestures of her hands and fingers, it becomes clear that her movements are often mirroring the rhythmic and melodic contours of her vocal line. It appears that even when Kristin isn’t playing the piano, she still retains a tangible connection to the piano in her vocal performance. I ask Kristin to tell me more about this connection.

> I’ve always thought that it would help if singers played another instrument, because you need a kinaesthetic connection to something else that is making pitches. As a singer, you have to build that connection over time, and that might take a while. Unless you have perfect pitch, or some kind of instrument locking you in and keeping everything a bit more focused, you’re going in blind. But the piano can keep you on track. It helps to build muscle memory, and the right neural pathways, locking you in, and keeping everything more focussed. I think if every singer did learn piano it would help them a whole lot. Piano is the obvious choice because it’s a chordal instrument; you can use

[8] Berardi, K. (2016). White Flag [Song]. On *Just as you are* [Music and Lyrics by Kristin Berardi]. Self-Release; Distribution by MGM.

> it for your own practice. You don’t have to make the pitch, you press down the key and there is the note, which is a nice problem to have.

Kristin continues,

> Because I do a lot of my prep at the piano, I feel more secure in knowing that I’ve done the work, more confident about the pieces that I will be singing. If doubt comes in, the piano is like a security blanket, a safety net. If I’m a bit unsure the piano provides a reference point. With the piano you’re not just picking things out of the air. The piano is all set out, it repeats.

I ask Kristin to tell me more about the piano-based preparation that she mentioned; she shares that her vocal practice is usually done at the piano.

> I’ve just started putting a lot of semi-occluded vocal tract exercises in. So I’m sitting at the piano doing different parts of pieces with my straw and my water bottle, and going from chest to head, trying to smooth that out. Another part of practice that is a regular thing for me, is singing through songs, playing the chords, playing the root note of the chord and then singing the thirds all the way through, getting that comfortable. And then same thing, but with the sevenths of the chords. It’s training; internalising both the pitch itself, and the changes as a whole set, so that I can make new melodies. That’s how I frame improvisation to myself. If I can hear the changes through as a whole set, then hopefully I can shape my improvisation in a way that makes more sense holistically, and to seem like it’s going somewhere. That’s part of the practice that I do. Without the piano, all of that would be a whole stack harder.

It is clear to me that whether Kristin is working on style or technique, her vocal practice is directed and facilitated by her facility at the piano. Likewise, the piano plays an important role in Kristin’s performance ability as a vocalist.

> I think of the piano a lot when I’m soloing. That helps me to feel more confident. I feel more secure if I’m thinking about the keyboard, and how I would perhaps play what I’m singing.

In addition to informing her personal performance practice as a singer, Kristin’s ability to internally conceptualise music also contributes to her confidence and capacity in communicating her musical ideas to (and with) other performers.

> I’ll often be playing with a pianist, or a chordal player, so it’s a familiar setting. Most singers have come across times where you feel quite separate to the band, or things are said, and it’s assumed that you don’t know. I’m a singer but I try to hold that space of “I’m not separate to you, I need you just as much as you need me. I’m not doing this gig without you”. And in small ways, it’s letting the musicians know that you want them to stretch out. And I think that shows them that you want to hear what they have to say over the whole form of a tune. And I think in little ways, it builds up that rapport between everyone. Hopefully you find those people who are on the same page about your intent, in terms of why you’re doing the music, and then you

> hopefully surround yourself with people who have the same kind of motivation in the creation of the music, and in the flow as well.

I ask Kristin to tell me more about how she interacts with other musicians.

> I think a big part of it is listening on stage, listening all the time. Sometimes it’s by leaving space and letting them finish that line. And then sometimes it’s interacting with what they’ve done and trying to support it. And I think that goes a long, long way.

Kristin’s responsive, supportive, and fully present way of interacting with other musicians is something that features prominently in her most recent album release, “Our Songs, Not Songs” (2019) with Australian bassist Sam Anning. As a duo project, this album was entirely based upon the interaction between Kristin and Sam, and the exploration of their shared groove in both music and life. The title of the album was borrowed from the sentiments of a poem by the Japanese Soto Zen poet Ryōkan Taigu:

> Who says my poems are poems?
> These poems are not poems.
> When you realize that my poems are not poems,
> Then we can talk of poetry![9]

Which Kristin and Sam translated to:

> Who said our songs are songs?
> Our songs are not songs.
> When you know that our songs are not songs,
> Then we can begin to discuss song.[10]

The songs on this album are songs, but not songs at mere face value. Indeed, these songs embody something more tangible than words, notes, or chords on a page, inviting the listener to “go deeper” into the music[11]. This notion has parallels with Kristin’s ability to “go deeper” in the embodiment of the music she sings. Indeed, Kristin’s audiation skills are so acutely developed that she can clearly hear the inner workings of a tune (e.g. the melody and harmony), even if they aren’t being played externally by another musician—an ability that she believes grew from her

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[9] Meng-hu. (2006). Zen poetics of Ryōkan. *Simply Haiku: A Quarterly Journal of Japanese Short Form Poetry, 4*(2).

[10] Earshift Music. (n.d.). *Kristin Berardi & Sam Anning: Our songs, not songs*. Earshift Music. https://www.earshift.com/kristin-berardi-sam-anning-our-songs-not-songs

[11] Zolin, M. (2020, January 25). Sam Anning & Kristin Berardi: Our songs, not songs [Audio podcast episode]. In *Table 19*. https://www.table19radio.com/2-sam-anning-kristin-berardi-our-songs-not-songs

experiences with the piano. Kristin shares an example of this skill in action, recounting an experience that she had while recording this most recent album. Kristin was able to clearly hear the harmony that both she (with her voice) and Sam (with his double bass) were implying, but which neither were supplying; the harmony was embodied within her.

> I think that’s because I’ve trained myself on the piano. Even though I may not have a piano all the time, I don’t feel like anything’s missing, because I have been working with that harmony. I’m still hearing it in my head.

One of my favourite tunes on this album is “Sweethearts”—a tune that demonstrates Kristin’s innate ability to embody the harmony of a tune, and to allow her interpretation to flow as she sensitively collaborates with the other musicians (in this instance, with Sam on the bass). The tune also exemplifies Kristin’s warmth and control as a singer in both lyric-based singing and wordless improvisation.

> Softly goes the sweetheart
> Only in a whisper
> As pale as forgotten
>
> Have we sense to hear it
> Or follow as the compass
> For we lost our way in this storm
>
> Trust in dreams delivered us here
> On the shore
> Safe to be, arms open
> Together we’ll bring all the sweethearts
>
> (Sweethearts)[12]

Marvelling at Kristin’s expertise in this tune, I can’t help but think about the many ways in which the piano has set her up for success, and the way in which it continues to inform her performance practice as an improvising jazz singer.

She is the Colour Red

Time has flown. It’s almost 3pm, and Kristin will soon have to pick her children up from school; the life of a working mother never stops. To end our time together, I pose one final question to Kristin.

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[12] Berardi, K., & Anning, S. (2019). Sweethearts [Song]. On *Our songs, not songs* [Music and Lyrics by Sam Anning]. Earshift Music.

“Kristin, is there any advice that you would offer to aspiring jazz singers?” Kristin pauses for a moment, before responding in a manner of conviction that suggests the depth of her tried and tested wisdom.

> I think it’s really important to get a hold of the technical side of your instrument. Because if you have that, you’ll be able to do what you hear, and what you feel. Work really hard on your technique, and figure out why you sing, and what your intention is about that. Sometimes it’s hard. You have those moments of, “Why am I doing this thing?” Those unhelpful kind of existential crisis moments of, “What have I done with my life?” In those moments, you’re able to think, “Wait a minute, I get to sing for a living, and people come, and they leave relatively happy”. You’ve got to hold onto why you got into it. It’s kind of a childlike place of vulnerability and connection to what you do, that will carry you through, and it keeps you practicing, even when you don’t feel like it.

Kristin’s mention of the technical and stylistic aspects of singing, alongside the psychological, emotional, and philosophical aspects reveal the breadth and richness of her musicianship. It’s clear to me a deeper purpose undergirds all that Kristin does in and through music—a notion reinforces my beliefs about her expertise. Although I could happily continue chatting with Kristin all day, I thank her for so generously spending the afternoon with me, and for sharing her story so willingly and openly. Kristin smiles and responds,

> It’s totally cool. I love talking about music. I like sharing about these things. Because I feel like, just like in life, if we all share a bit more, then we help one another through. Improvised music, specifically jazz, is not a popular form. If we don’t share about it, there’ll be even less people who are really into it.

I couldn’t agree with Kristin more, and I’m so glad to think that our conversation today is a part of something bigger. As the clock turns 3pm, we exchange our final goodbyes and well wishes, before I end our Skype call.

Reflecting back on our conversation, one of Kristin’s statements continues to pop up in my mind: “I’m in it for the music, not the ego… If I can make music that moves someone, then I’ve achieved my goal”. In my opinion, what makes Kristin so remarkable as a musician is not only her expertise, but also her warmth, humility, and genuineness, both on- and off-stage. It seems to me that Kristin’s music is a vehicle for connection (with herself and others, and a higher purpose), and her experiences with the piano have undoubtedly played a role in facilitating that connection.

One of Kristin’s most requested songs is her original, “She is the Colour Red”. Kristin wrote this song about her daughter, but I also see Kristin portrayed through the lyrics. She is “warmth and light”. Her music “shares hope for another day”, “giving life” to those who hear it. She is “passionate”, “strong” and “effervescent”; “she is the colour red to me”.

> She is the colour red to me
> Like the blood in my veins
> Giving life to me
> Sharing hope for another day
>
> Red like the passion in her heart
> Newfound living in the present
> Not just walking through
> She is strong and effervescent
>
> She is the colour red to me
> She bleeds, I bleed
> She is like the sun to me
> The warmth and light in all I see
>
> (She is the Colour Red)[13]

* * *

Postlude

Kristin’s experiences with the piano have shaped and supported her performance practice as an improvising jazz singer in numerous ways. Kristin identifies as a “singer who plays”; she feels more naturally able to communicate her musical aims, and connect with her emotional expression, with the voice. When performing at the piano, Kristin can feel “stuck” (with her hands) at times, and yet, she is able to draw upon the strengths of the piano in other ways in her performance practice as a singer. The piano provides Kristin with a tangible kinaesthetic connection to pitch, which allows her to get “inside” the harmony of jazz, and to deeply embody the music that she sings. The piano helps Kristin to build her vocal technique, providing a “safety net” that gives her confidence and reassurance as a singer. Because of the piano, Kristin is no longer “going in blind” as a singer—she has full sight and flight.

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[13] Kristin Berardi and Sam Anning. (2019). She is the Colour Red [Song]. On *Our songs, not songs* [Music and Lyrics by Kristin Berardi]. Earshift Music.

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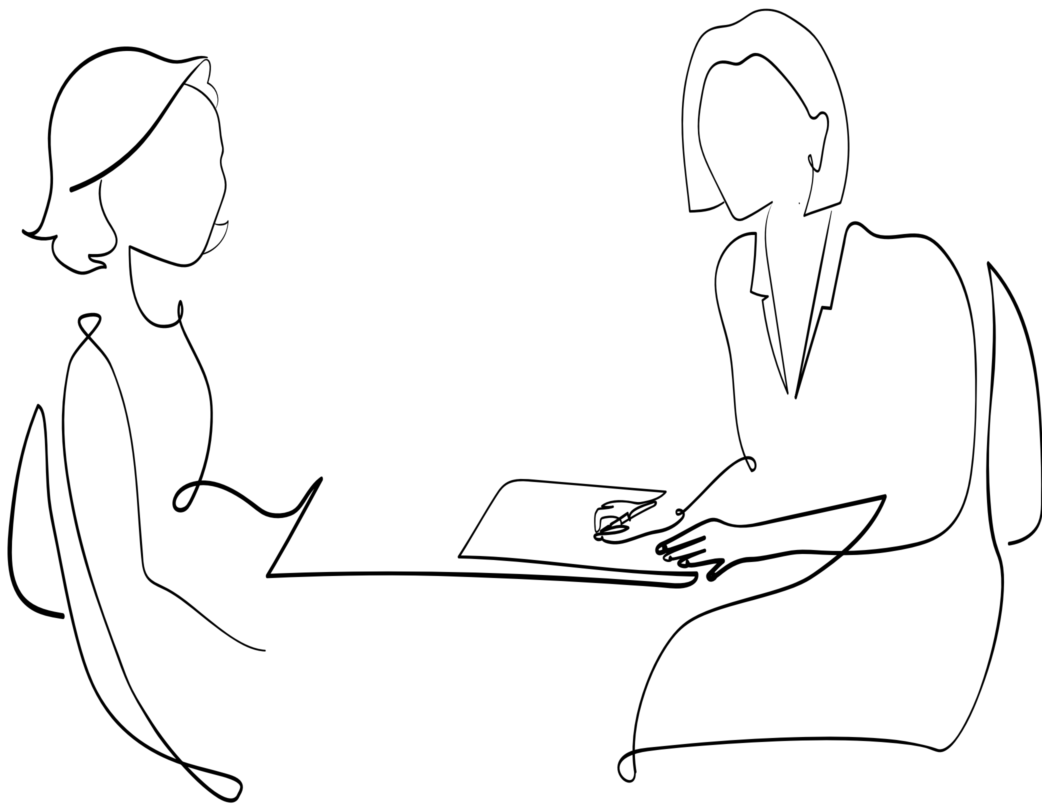

“Brenda”

CHAPTER 5: BRENDA EARLE STOKES

“Empowered”

Prelude

Brenda Earle Stokes is a Canadian pianist, vocalist, composer, and educator, who is currently based in New York City (USA). Brenda is a multifaceted musician who has been identified as one of the top emerging jazz artists of her generation.

Brenda’s musical journey began at age four, when her parents enrolled her in classical piano lessons. At the age of fifteen, Brenda heard Oscar Peterson play for the first time—an experience that prompted her to shift to jazz. After earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts (piano) from York University (Ontario, Canada), Brenda ventured to the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (Alberta, Canada) for a month-long jazz residency. It was there that she first performed as a vocalist. After gigging in Toronto (Ontario, Canada) for several years, Brenda sought adventure working in a singalong piano bar on cruise ships in the Caribbean. As Brenda took nightly requests from her audience, she added hundreds of tunes to her repertoire, and developed her ability to engage with an audience. Seeking a change of direction, Brenda then moved to New York City to study and immerse herself in the jazz scene. It was here that she completed a Master of Music (jazz piano and voice) at the Manhattan School of Music. Brenda also holds Grade 9 (classical piano) from the Royal College of Music; Level I, II, III Somatic Voicework™ the LoVetri Method; and has completed post-graduate training in choral conducting, early childhood music, and composition.

As a performing artist, Brenda has worked internationally as a pianist, singer, bandleader, and side-person, alongside many acclaimed artists including John Riley, Dick Oatts, Joel Frahm, Roxy Coss, Wycliffe Gordon, Maurice Hines, the Desoff Symphonic Chorus, the DIVA Jazz Orchestra, and Duran Duran. She has held residences at the Kennedy Centre, and the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Brenda was a finalist of the Mary Lou Williams Jazz Piano Competition and was a winner of the International Association for Jazz Education Sisters in Jazz competition. As a bandleader, Brenda has toured clubs and festivals across the USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, and as a conductor, Brenda spent several years directing the New York Summer Music Festivals Jazz Choir. She was also the Artistic Director of the Rutgers University Queen’s Chorale, as well as an Episcopal

Music Director and organist for several years. Brenda has released six albums on her own label; a discography of Brenda’s recorded works is included in Appendix C.

As an educator, Brenda works extensively as a voice and piano teacher, a guest clinician, adjudicator, and speaker. Brenda’s students range from professional and pre-professional performers, to children, teenagers, and adults who learn for fun and personal development. Brenda has served on the faculties of Fordham University, City College, the Grammy-winning Brooklyn Youth Chorus, and the Diller-Quaile School of Music. She has also developed curricular for the New York Pops Orchestra. In addition to these positions, Brenda runs a busy private studio in New York City, and has an ever-growing number of online courses including “Crash Course in Solfege”, “Piano Skills for Singers”, “Jazz Piano Accompaniment”, and “Piano Improvisation for Everyone!” with hundreds of students currently enrolled worldwide. Brenda’s students have sung on Broadway, in national commercials, recorded solo albums, and been accepted into top conservatories in the United States and Canada.

Brenda is also active in outreach, having developed educational programming for the Midori and Friends Foundation, The New York Pops Kids in the Balcony program, and holding a ten-year residency at the Ronald McDonald House (New York City). Brenda is passionate about activism; as a member of the Women in Jazz Organization, she empowers women in the wider jazz community.

Brenda’s musical curiosity has enabled her to develop a diverse skillset, versatility, and fluency as both a pianist and singer. While jazz is her “first love”, she is passionate about making music in many different styles of music. To discover more about Brenda, visit brendaearle.com.

* * *

Self-Assured

It’s a wintery July morning in Toowoomba. A misty veil of fog permeates the air outside, and a frost lingers on the grass; it feels like a scene from the pages of a Brontë novel. A freshly brewed pot of Earl Grey tea wafts billows of silken steam around my face, enveloping me in the invigorating aroma of Bergamot. Soon I’ll be catching up with Brenda via Skype. For a moment I marvel at my ability to have a trans-continental video call; a feat that was once an impossibility. I first met Brenda

in 2015 while she was touring Australia and New Zealand. One of her stops on the “Aussie-end” of the tour was at the University of Southern Queensland (Toowoomba, Australia). Hearing Brenda’s sound echoing through the corridors of “A-Block” (the award winning mid-1970s architectural arts building of USQ) I remember thinking that she was the real deal. In January 2017, Brenda returned to Australia to serve as a faculty member for the Australian institute of Somatic Voicework™ the LoVetri Method (hosted at USQ)—a method of CCM vocal training that embraces physical (somatic) engagement and aural discernment, created by Jeannette (Jeanie) LoVetri. As an attendee of the eight-day course, I completed accreditation in Levels 1, 2, and 3 of Somatic Voicework™ the LoVetri Method, learning from Jeanie and her supporting faculty members (Brenda included). I also had the opportunity to have a private jazz voice lesson with Brenda after hours. During my lesson, Brenda insightfully diagnosed my voice and walked me through a series of targeted and functional exercises that would strengthen my voice for singing jazz style. Brenda’s direct but encouraging approach connected the dots for my singing in a new way, unearthing a sound that was free, clear, and authentically my own. As I left my lesson with Brenda, I knew that there was a higher purpose in my journey to this point, and likewise, in my burgeoning interest to delve deeper into jazz performance, pedagogy, and research. I knew I was “where I should be”.

> I’m here and I’m dreaming
> I’m surrounded by the sound
> Music all around me
> And my feet don’t touch the ground
>
> I feel like I’ve won the race
> I have made my mark in this crazy place
> I feel like I’m where I should be
>
> I’m here, I’m alone now
> And I feel like I can fly
> No fear, I am free now
> And my fingers touch the sky
> I can’t believe this is happening to me
>
> (Happening)[14]

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[14] Earle Stokes, B. (2005a). Happening [Song]. On *Happening* [Music and Lyrics by Brenda Earle Stokes]. Allsheneeds Music.

Glancing at my watch I see that it’s almost time to start my call with Brenda. I take a moment to get my thoughts in order; my recording devices and interview guide are at the ready, along with a selection of Brenda’s CDs (just in case I need to refer to them during our conversation). Today as Brenda shares about her journey and experiences in music, I hope to uncover some insight into the way her experiences with the piano impact her performance practice as a singer. I start our zoom call, and soon thereafter Brenda joins me from her home in Manhattan (NYC, USA) in the midst of a drenching summer rainstorm.

“Hi Brenda! Oh, it’s so great to see you! How are you?” I say exuberantly. Brenda responds in her trademark bright and friendly manner, “Oh hey Courtney! It’s great to see you too! How are things?” We spend a few minutes catching up, and then (conscious of the lateness of the hour—8pm her time, 10am mine) I get straight to the first of my questions.

“Brenda, can you fill me in on your work and projects at the moment?” Brenda shares that she is currently dividing her time as a performer between gigs as a singer/pianist and gigs as a bandleader. Her next upcoming gig is a piano-based one with “The Birdland Big Band” (a sixteen-piece jazz orchestra that performs at the “Birdland Jazz Club” in New York City). As a recording artist, Brenda recently finished her album “Solo Sessions Volume One”, her fifth album release to date, and is in preparation to release another album in the Spring—a trio project. As a composer, Brenda will soon be travelling to Banff (Alberta, Canada) for a two-week artist residency, where she plans to write a song cycle. Somehow amid her busy performing and recording schedule, Brenda also finds time to teach, working with between five and ten regular students each week.

A recent addition to Brenda’s educational portfolio is her online piano course, “Piano Skills for Singers”, a program of piano training tailored specifically to the needs of singers. She is also putting the finishing touches on a further online piano course tailored to singers, “Jazz Piano Accompaniment”, which is due for release in the near future. Hearing Brenda describe her diverse array of projects I’m not surprised in the slightest. In the time that I have known Brenda, I have observed that her creative prowess is matched by her work ethic; she takes her art very seriously and seems to be ever-expanding her professional portfolio with new skills, ventures, and accomplishments. Brenda’s original tune “High Time”, the opening track from her 2014 album “Right About Now”, speaks to these qualities. The tune

feels like an anthem that showcases Brenda’s command of the piano and voice and her skills as a jazz composer, as well as her self-assurance in music and in life and her determination to work hard. For me personally, the song is a call to action, a reminder that it’s sometimes necessary to “adjust my boundaries”, and to be open to “changing direction”. It reminds me to back myself and believe “that I can really go the distance”. It heralds the mantra: “to mine own self be true”.

> It’s high time I paid a little more attention
> It’s high time I thought about trying to change direction
> High time I took into consideration all the chances for my elevation
> And the simple thought that maybe I could take a chance for once
> And really go the distance
>
> It’s high time I started to adjust my boundaries
> It’s high time I started seeing what’s around me
> High time I stopped myself from doing things for everybody else
> And started living for myself
> And looking out for number one and having fun
>
> While I do it please don’t give me your opinions
> I can make my own decisions
> I’m forgiving all this happenstance
> Give me a chance
> And I will surely learn a thing or two
> I’ve had enough I can’t continue
>
> It’s high time I put the focus back on me
> It’s high time I put a little thought into my journey
> High time I started living in the present not the past
> My life is moving way too fast
> And all I do is give myself away to you
> To mine own self be true
>
> (It’s High Time)[15]

Self-Sufficient

Brenda has a commanding presence as a performer. It appears to me that she is equally at home with her voice and the piano; she can express her musical ideas with clarity and conviction on both instruments. I’m curious to learn if Brenda would identify more closely with one instrument over the other; I ask where she would identify along a continuum from pianist to singer.

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[15] Earle Stokes, B. (2014b). It’s High Time [Song]. On *Right about now* [Music and Lyrics by Brenda Earle Stokes]. Allsheneeds Music.

> I'm really right in the middle, maybe leaning slightly more to piano. Piano was my first instrument, so I think that will always be the case. I hear music and I conceptualise it in a piano way. I really was a piano player first; I've been playing forever. I've played with some pretty heavy musicians, just as a piano player, where I never sang once. So I think any situation that I go to, I'm never going there as a singer, I'm always going there as a piano player.

Our discussion quickly moves onto the idea of being a "player who sings" or a "singer who plays". Brenda discusses,

> Shirley Horn is a singer who plays; she plays very well. Sarah Vaughan is a singer who plays. But I'm a pianist who sings. That's the different situation, and that goes everywhere with me. Wherever I go, I'm carrying my bag that says "piano" on it.

I ask Brenda to explain further what she means by the "piano bag" that she carries. She explains that this term is metaphorical—expressing the way that she primarily conceptualises music.

> The way that I read music, the way that I interpret music, the way that I see notes on the page, or the note that I'm supposed to sing, and how I conceptualise it, is in a piano-directed way.

When Brenda first began singing, she struggled to find a teacher who deeply understood the voice, and the unique learning requirements of jazz singers. However, in her usual self-sufficient fashion, Brenda didn't let this stand in her way, she became her own teacher.

> I learned everything sitting at the piano. I would take a song, for example, "I Thought About You", and I would sing it. And then I would do it up half a step, and up half a step, and up half a step. I would do it until I'd played it in all the keys. And then depending on where it sat in my voice, I would sing it down the octave, or I would split the octave. It was a very piano directed way of looking at things. And then once I started learning the technical aspects of singing, I spent most of my energy on that. The piano gave me the ability to self-administer what I wanted to learn… being able to find the answers and quantify them, was really helpful. Anytime I feel like my sight reading or my scat singing isn't very good, or I'm having a hard time making a change, or finding a certain harmonic movement, I go right back to the piano and conceptualise it in theoretical terms on the piano. I see the notes on the piano in front of me while I'm singing.

Brenda's auto-didactic approach to her vocal learning is a theme which continues to her practice as a performer and educator to this day. Indeed, Brenda's recent online piano courses are a prime example of her pioneering vision in recognising an educational need and meeting it with a functionally tailored response. Her

educational materials, and the format in which they are delivered, speak to the wisdom of her own personal experiences. I’m reminded of the words of the late Toni Morrison, African American author and educator, who said, “If there’s a book you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it”. Without a doubt, Brenda exemplifies this principle.

Having heard how the piano aids Brenda in the theoretical aspects of music, I ask if she feels the same in terms of its role for her skills of audiation.

> Yes. I think it may be actually pretty impossible for a singer to be able to sing the finer parts of harmony if they don’t have the capacity on an instrument. Because if they have no way of finding those notes, where are they going to get it from? The voice has no buttons, and there’s no visual patterning. If you’re going to sing something and land on the sharp 11 of the chord, how are you going to do that, if you don’t know what that is?

I then turn our conversation to the idea of performing, asking Brenda to describe how the piano helps her performance as a singer. Given our conversation up until this point, I’m anticipating that Brenda will discuss ideas about the visual, aural, and kinaesthetic reinforcement that the piano provides, however, to my surprise, she takes our discussion in an unexpected direction. Brenda recounts an experience from her Master’s studies at the Manhattan School of Music, when her combo director (Brazilian singer Luciana Souza) asked her to sing for an entire semester, away from the piano.

> My relationship with the piano is a very co-dependent one, because I need it! I need to know! Singing was a lot more difficult when I couldn’t give myself my first note, or look at my hands and know what the top of the voicing sounded like so I could find inspiration. I really needed the piano to be there. That was a really useful experience for me, to live in that space a little bit. I’m a better singer now, and a better musician. I don’t require very much from the rhythm section, from whoever’s accompanying me. This year I’ve spent a lot more time away from the piano so that I can really develop my singing, in a deeper way. To challenge myself to be able to sing harmony, when I’m improvising without needing a reference from the chords.

It seems that while the piano positively informs Brenda’s practice as a singer, the very act of stepping away from the keyboard also challenges and develops her in a different way. I’ve experienced a similar phenomenon in my own practice as a singer and pianist. The very act of stepping away from the piano can be exhilarating and daunting; it’s as if there’s “not a soul, not a sound, no one around, it’s just me” and my voice.

Tell me one more time that this is real

Maybe this time I'll believe
Finding things out
Trusting the life of experience that I've had

One last chance to let slip through my hands
Opportunity to waste
This time I have both the strength and the hope
And I know that it's not too late

Standing
Not a soul
Not a sound
No one around
It's just me

(Standing)[16]

Empowered

Reflecting on all that Brenda has shared about how the piano contributes to her performance practice as a singer, I ask if she feels that learning piano should play a role in vocal jazz education broadly. She quickly and decisively responds, "Yes! Every singer needs to play piano, period. That's it!" She then says with a cheeky grin, "I have a course called Piano Skills for Singers!" We share a laugh a together in response, but of course, we both know the deeper implications of this statement.

The standard advice given to jazz singers is that playing the piano is advantageous. Through conversations with musicians like Brenda, I am coming to know more profoundly how, and to what extent, playing the piano can be meaningful to jazz singers. It seems that this wisdom is not just a "passing fancy", but rather, a tried-and tested glimmer of "old fashioned" wisdom.

I'm old fashioned
I love the moonlight
I love the old fashioned things

The sound of rain
Upon a windowpane
The starry song that April sings

This year's fancies
Are passing fancies
But sighing sighs and holding hands

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[16] Earle Stokes, B. (2009). Standing [Song]. On *Songs for a new day* [Music and Lyrics by Brenda Earle Stokes]. Allsheneeds Music.

These my heart understands

I’m old fashioned
But I don’t mind it
That’s how my heart would be
As long as you agree
To stay old fashioned with me

(I’m Old Fashioned)[17]

The proof is in the pudding, so they say; it’s clear that Brenda’s experiences with the piano have informed her approach as an educator and the way she seeks to equip and empower other musicians. With that thought in mind, I ask Brenda if she has any particular advice that she would share with aspiring jazz vocalists. She again reinforces her beliefs about the importance of playing piano, by emphatically saying, “Play piano!” She continues,

> We live and we learn, it’s a journey. Find a mentor. Don’t get caught up in the drama. Find a way to be empowered as a collective of female jazz musicians. It’s the community building and being able to be around other successful women in music and jazz, who can help you and will help you. The idea of Credibility is garbage, because there’s no accountability in the music industry, and there isn’t a fairness factor to any of this. So it’s really about, how can you be empowered in your own work, so that you can write your own music, and make your own charts, and make your own choices.

Pausing for a moment, Brenda then approaches the question from a different angle.

> The topic of the discussion is more about, “How do we empower singers to be able to more accurately compose their own music, and accompany their students?” Empowerment means that you have the skills to be able to do things. I think of the piano as an empowerment tool.

I love what Brenda shares here. The notion of empowerment is bigger than a self-centric notion of “me”, it also embraces a socio-centric notion of “we”, and highlights the importance of community, and of being surrounded by a network of likeminded artists to inspire and encourage one another’s success. For Brenda, the piano, is an important tool in this journey of empowerment.

Thinking over Brenda’s collection of recorded tunes, I’m reminded of “Baiao Em Minha Cabeca”[18] from her 2014 album “Right About Now”. This tune

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[17] Earle Stokes, B. (2005b). I’m Old Fashioned [Song]. On *Happening* [Music by Jerome Kern; Lyrics by Johnny Mercer]. Allsheneeds Music.

[18] Earle Stokes, B. (2014a). Baiao Em Minha Cabeca [Song]. On *Right about now* [Music and Lyrics by Brenda Earle Stokes]. Allsheneeds Music.

showcases another aspect of empowerment that I associate with Brenda—a bold and joyous freedom of expression, that has an infectious quality to the listener. This tune is a little over three minutes in length, and yet, it is packed to the brim with Brenda’s vibrant, clear, consistent, and confident mastery of the piano and voice—wordless improvisation (on both instruments) that speaks in multitudes.

With the lateness of the hour upon us, I thank Brenda for sharing her time, her story, and her wisdom with me. “Oh no prob! It’s been my pleasure; I’ll see you soon!” she says in her bright Canadian accent. I offer my own goodbyes in return, before ending our call.

Standing up for a stretch, I see that a glimmer of sunlight now peeks through the foggy atmosphere outside. This sight brings another adage to my mind: “As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously encourage others to do the same”. If these words were a person, I think Brenda would fit the bill. Like a glimmer of sunlight peeking through a foggy morning, Brenda boldly showcases an empowered confidence that spreads to those around her.

* * *

My birthday was a little over a week ago, and in rather cliché fashion, I formed a playlist of birthday tunes to serenade me through the day. Brenda’s tune “The Birthday Song”, from her 2014 album “Right About Now”, was on the list. This song is one of my favourites of Brenda’s originals. It always seems to bring me to a place of self-reflection where I can take stock of who I am, what I’ve achieved, and the choices I’ve made (sentiments that extend to every day of the year, not just my birthday!) I smile contentedly, thinking about the season I’m in, “It’s all you ever wanted!” In so many ways I’ve finally been able to “surrender”; I’m “finally free” to run my own race with confidence. With women like Brenda in my corner, I feel inspired to continue pursuing my calling. I feel a tinge of excitement for the inherent possibilities of tomorrow and have a sense that the best is yet to come.

> A smile on your face
> Friends gathered round
> You’re never too old to be wearing a crown
> Thirty-three candles oh make no mistake
> Smile for the camera it’s never too late
>
> All the people you’ve met and the places you’ve gone

All the girls you grew up with have married and moved on
At last you’ve surrendered
Who cares what they think
You’ve put down the worry you put down the drink
So blow out your candles you’re finally free
Happy birthday to me

Haunted by hostages and seeds that were sowed
The bodies you left by the side of the road
Surrender your demons
Release your regrets
Make amends to all the people that you’ve ever met

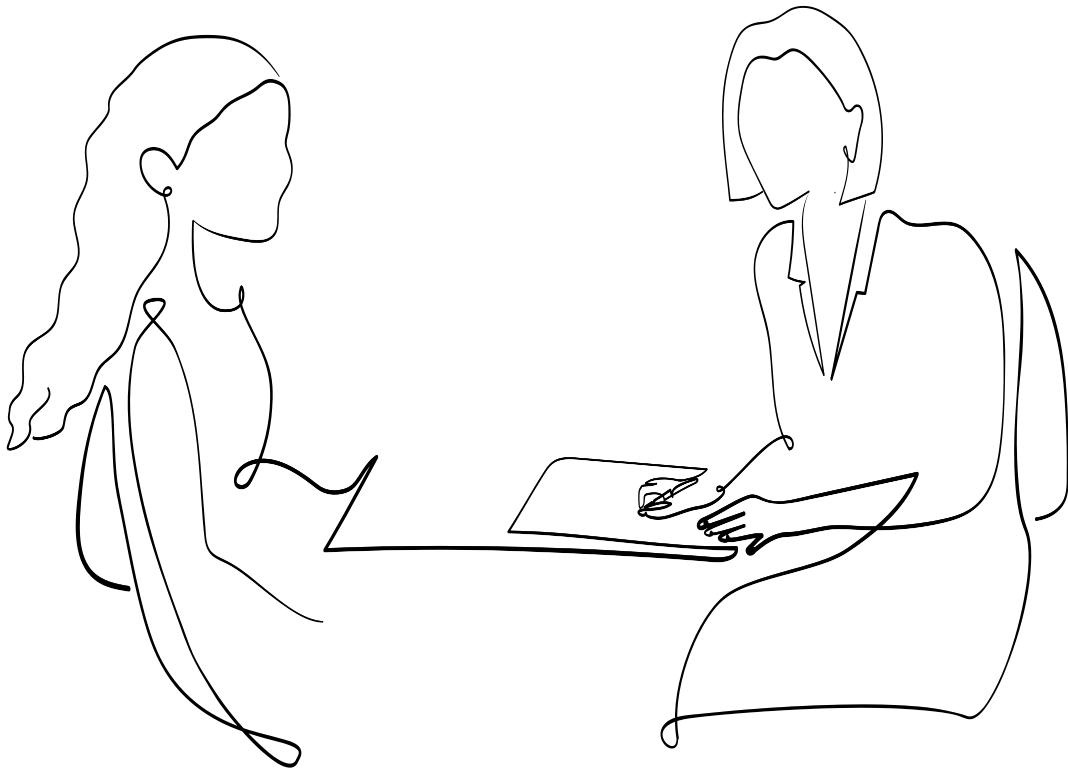
You’ve taken the actions you’ve gathered the facts
You’ve built up a stash of esteem-able acts
It’s all you ever wanted can’t you see
Happy birthday to me.
You’re a big girl now

(The Birthday Song)[19]

Postlude

For Brenda, the piano is a significant component in her musicianship. The piano is an extension to her voice, a part of her embodied instrument, and an integral aspect to the way she conceptualises music. Brenda’s relationship with the piano is “co-dependent”; she relies on the piano to understand theory, and to “see” the notes that she wants to sing and play. She uses the piano to facilitate her practice, and to work with other musicians (her students included). It is evident that Brenda instinctively knows the impact that playing piano can have on the voice, and broader musicianship. She considers the piano to be a “tool for empowerment” and is actively equipping and encouraging other singers to glean these benefits in their own performance practices.

[19] Earle Stokes, B. (2014c). The Birthday Song [Song]. On *Right about now* [Music and Lyrics by Brenda Earle Stokes]. Allsheneeds Music.



“Michelle”

CHAPTER 6: MICHELLE NICOLLE

“Mosaic”

Prelude

Michelle Nicolle is an award-winning Australian jazz vocalist, arranger, band leader, and educator; celebrated as one of Australia’s finest jazz singers.

Michelle started her musical journey when she began the violin at the age of eight in the Barossa Valley (South Australia). Michelle listened to pop music, and old movie tunes, and taught herself to play piano using the Angaston Town Hall’s grand piano (whilst her father worked, polishing the dance floor). Michelle played violin in the Barossa Valley Schools Orchestra, an endeavour that continued throughout her teenage years. Throughout her secondary school education, music continued to dominate her world; Michelle moved up in the ranks of her orchestra, kept “nutting out” pop tunes on the piano, played 3rd cornet in a local marching band, and sang in every choir on offer. In 1985, Michelle was accepted into Adelaide University (South Australia) where she studied a Bachelor of Education (majoring in violin).

Michelle’s interest in jazz began in 1986, when she began to sing with the university choir, The Adelaide Connection Jazz Choir. Hearing about Billie Holliday, Ella Fitzgerald, and Chet Baker, Michelle immersed herself in their music, and decided that jazz was the direction she wanted to pursue. In 1987, Michelle swapped her major to jazz voice. She began transcribing the great horn players—Miles Davis, Freddie Hubbard, Charlie Parker, and Dizzy Gillespie—learning the language of improvisation through chord changes. After she completed her teaching degree, Michelle went on to study for her Associate Diploma of Jazz at the University of Adelaide (South Australia), where she truly immersed in bebop. These two years of study laid the foundation for her desire to make a career in jazz. After her studies, Michelle was engaged in several music ventures including the five-piece vocal group “Vo-Cool” and her own quintet. In 1995, Michelle moved to Melbourne (Victoria, Australia), where she continues to reside with her family.

In 1998, Michelle won the prestigious National Jazz Award at the Wangaratta International Jazz Festival; the judges for this event included the legendary bebop singer Sheila Jordan, and Blue Note star Kurt Elling. Her accolades also include winner of the Australian Jazz Awards Bells Award (2017), Australian Entertainment

Industry Mo Award (2001, 2003, 2004), winner and finalist Australian Recording Industry ARIA Award (2001, 2004).

As a performing artist, Michelle regularly performs at Melbourne's top jazz venues including The Paris Cat, The Lido, and Uptown. She has also held an eleven-year residency at The Brunswick Green. Her other projects include What Reason Trio (with guitarist Stephen Magnusson), and MN Fretet (featuring four guitarists), as well as free-lance work for various recording session work.

Michelle and her quartet (comprised of Geoff Hughes on guitar, Tom Lee on double bass, and Ronny Ferella on drums) have been together for more than twenty years. The quartet is known for their "contemporary and forward-thinking approach", that is also, steeped in the tradition of jazz, storytelling, and the magic of live performance. Highlights for the quartet include tours to South Korea, Finland, and the Czech Republic (2015), Asia Pacific Festival in Russia (2012), Tokyo Jazz Festival (2009), North Sea Jazz Festival in Holland (2005). Other international tours to date have included New Zealand, Turkey, Estonia, Finland, and Singapore (2007), Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand (2004), Australia (2003, 2006), London (2016) JEN Conference, New Orleans USA (2017), Seattle JazzVox Series (2017). The quartet has performed extensively at jazz festivals and venues across the world including the North Sea Jazz Festival (Netherlands), Penang Island Jazz Festival Jakjazz (Indonesia), Jazzkaar International Jazz Festival (Estonia), April Jazz International (Finland), Jarasum International (South Korea), Java Jazz Festival (Indonesia), Thailand International Festival of Music & Dance (Thailand), Christchurch International Jazz Festival (NZ), Wellington International (NZ), Fontanonestate (Italy), The Emporium (Kuala Lumpur), Once in a Blue Moon (South Korea), CHUNNYUN Jazz Club (South Korea), Shannon's (Taiwan), Arts House, Southbridge Jazz Club (Singapore), Babylon Jazz Club (Istanbul), Ankara Swissotel (Turkey), The Schlot (Germany), Jazz Dock and Reduta Jazz Club (Czech Republic), Koko (Finland), Spice Of Life and Bulls Head (UK), Bedford Arms (UK), and JazzVox (USA). The quartet has also performed at several Australian venues including Foundry 616, 505, Live at The Village, Starfish Club, Wine Banc, The Basement, The Governor Hindmarsh, Perth Jazz Society, and Brisbane Jazz Club.

As an educator, Michelle teaches vocal studies at Monash University (Melbourne, VIC, Australia), Victorian College of the Arts (Melbourne, VIC,

Australia), St Mary’s College (Melbourne, VIC, Australia), and is a regular vocal clinician around Australia.

Michelle is a jazz singer in the true jazz tradition; a creative and masterful improviser with the technique to match any instrumentalist. To discover more about Michelle, visit michellenicolle.com.

* * *

Mosaic

In December 2019 a new form of novel Coronavirus was reported in Wuhan City, China, a virus that would later be identified as the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organisation, n.d.). In the strange and unsettling months that followed, the world was confronted with a pandemic of proportions unmatched for over one hundred years. As I write these words (21 September 2020) a total of 30,055,710 confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been recorded, across 150 countries, including a staggering 943,433 deaths (World Health Organisation, n.d.). These numbers continue to rise with each day. In many ways, 2020 has been an “annus horribilis”—a year of uncertainty, social dislocation, and grief. COVID-19 has been deeply etched into our lives and our stories, and likewise, it is also woven into the life and story of this research, and my experience of completing a PhD during a pandemic.

Despite the many challenges that this virus has presented, there have also been some glimmers of hope shining through the clouds. With the grounding of air and road traffic, the closure of factories, and the reduction of fossil fuel refining, global atmospheric emissions of greenhouse gases have seen a marked drop (Fedunik-Hofman, 2020; Lenzen, et. Al., 2020). Much like the environment, humanity has also been offered a breath of fresh air; a chance to reset the rhythms of work and life to embrace a renewed sense of wellbeing, creativity, and community connection. Through these times we have also seen afresh the way in which music can inspire, uplift, and unite. The overnight closure of music venues inspired musicians across the world to join as a community to “keep the music playing” through specialised live streamed performances and recording projects. Through this process, new ways of connecting with audiences have been forged (Ratcliffe, 2020).

One of the many artists who joined the tour-de-force of homegrown music makers is Michelle Nicolle.

Before the onset of COVID-19 Michelle maintained a busy performance schedule, with up to three gigs per week consistently secured in her calendar. With the sudden cessation of her live performance schedule, and with little indication of when normal life would resume, Michelle saw an opportunity to reimagine her performing. On 9 April 2020 Michelle embarked on a new project, live streaming a solo jazz gig on Facebook from her home music studio. Every Thursday night since then, Michelle has continued her live-streamed gigs, and each week she has a constantly growing number of followers who tune in live, or stream recordings of her gigs. Reading through the many comments on Michelle’s streamed gigs, it’s evident that her music making has brought joy and hope to many (to quote but a few: “I just needed that song Michelle!”… “Thanks for bringing smiles and laughter to Thursday nights!... “You lift us, we’re very grateful!”… “We are tearing up!”). It’s clear to me that amid a “dark” and uncertain time, Michelle has “kept our spirits soaring” by “singing the shadows away”.

Often I think this sad old world is whistling in the dark
Just like a child who late from school
Walks bravely home through the park
To keep their spirits soaring
And keep the night at bay
Never quite knowing which way they are going
They sing the shadows away

Often I think my sad old heart has given up for good
That’s when I see a brand new face
I glimpse a new neighbourhood
So walk me back home my darling
Tell me dreams really come true
Whistling
Here in the dark with you

(Whistling Away the Dark)[20]

Outside of jazz, one of Michelle’s creative passions is making mosaic artworks. Before each of her live streamed gigs, Michelle checks-in with her Facebook followers through a short video, usually filmed from her home mosaic

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[20] Michelle Nicolle Quartet. (2012). Whistling Away the Dark [Song]. On *Mancini* [Music by Henry Mancini; Lyrics by Johnny Mercer]. Newmarket Music.

studio. In these check-ins Michelle calls for song requests and shares a weekly update on “life in a pandemic”, while also proudly showcasing the progress on her current mosaic project.

When I think of a mosaic, I think of an artwork that is both a process and a product. Up close, a mosaic is an abstract array of fragments and colours. Through a time-intensive creative labour, these elements form a complex and detailed artwork that can be appreciated by the artist and viewer alike. Mosaics also exemplify the principle of beauty from brokenness. In some ways the practice of expert jazz singers like Michelle has parallels with these qualities. Up close, the artistry of an expert jazz singer is comprised of many individual elements, which are developed into a professional skill-base through creative labour. From a distance, these elements seamlessly come together in the singer’s expert performance, which can be appreciated by the performer and listener alike. The product of the jazz singer’s performance is also a sum of the many experiences that he or she has encountered along the journey of life.

Rewinding to July 2019 (before face masks, sanitiser, social distancing, and self-isolation were a daily reality) I caught up with Michelle via Skype, to learn more about her journey as an expert vocal jazz improviser, and her experiences with the piano.

* * *

From a Distance

“Hi Michelle, it’s so great to see you! How are you?” I say with a beaming smile. “Hey Courtney, great to see you too!” Michelle responds in her direct but friendly manner. Michelle joins me from a typically cold, grey, and drizzly Melbourne (Victoria, Australia) winter morning. She is rugged up in a cosy jumper, with a hot cup of tea at the ready. Michelle and I spend a few moments catching up, checking our sound levels and lighting, before settling into the rhythm of our conversation. For my first question, I ask Michelle to fill me in on her work at present, and any projects that she has on the go. Michelle shares that she is currently teaching at two Melbourne universities, “Monash University” and “Victorian College of the Arts”—also known as the “University of Melbourne”. At these institutions, she leads vocal ensembles and works with private voice students.

Michelle also teaches voice to high-school students at the “Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School”, also in Melbourne. In addition, she travels twice a term to Adelaide (South Australia), where she works with a secondary-school jazz choir. As a performer, Michelle’s schedule typically averages between two or three gigs per week, one of which is her long-standing regular gig at the “Brunny G” (the “Brunswick Green”)—a live jazz venue and bar in Melbourne (Victoria, Australia). In addition to her gigs at “Brunny G”, Michelle alternates between gigs at other Melbourne jazz venues including the “Paris Cat Jazz Club”, the “Bird’s Basement” and the “Lido”. Michelle recently returned from a tour in the USA, where she conducted workshops and performed several gigs across the country. Soon her band, the Michelle Nicolle Quartet, will be touring to select locations throughout Australia. The quartet (comprised of Michelle on vocals, Tom Lee on double bass, Geoff Hughes on guitar and Michelle’s husband Ronny Ferella on drums) will soon be celebrating their twenty-first year of music making. In addition to the quartet’s regular performance and recording engagements, they have recently been working on another creative project—“The Bach Project”—performing Michelle’s arrangements of J.S. Bach’s music. “Wow, Michelle, you sound like a very busy lady!” I exclaim. Michelle is quick to brush off this idea, in her usual down to earth manner.

> I could be busier, but to be honest, in Melbourne, there’s only so many gigs you can do without being everywhere, and people getting sick of you. The good thing is you can rotate, and not feel like you’re saturating. A regular gig is different though. Having a regular jazz gig, that is a really good gig where you can play whatever we want, run it however you want, that’s the best thing. I’ve worked hard to actually keep my regular gig going, and I think it’s paid off, so I feel really lucky.

* * *

Michelle’s down to earth manner is something that I have witnessed in her live-streamed gigs. In the times when something hasn’t quite gone to plan (as it inevitably does for us all, from time to time), Michelle has masterfully weaved a light-hearted commentary into her scat solos. It reminds me of Ella Fitzgerald singing “Mack the Knife” (live in Berlin 1960 with the Paul Smith Quartet). Halfway through the tune, Ella forgets her lyrics, and is quick to respond with a clever improvisation over the form, staying in her trademark “swingin’ style” all the

way. Michelle’s authenticity, much like Ella’s, is so refreshing to me. It is an ever-present reminder to not take life (or ourselves) too seriously.

Prior to COVID-19, Michelle rarely performed from the piano. Earlier in her career she often sang one or two tunes from the piano during her gigs, but never to the extent of self-accompanying an entire set (as has been the case in her recent live-streamed gigs). I asked Michelle to discuss this very topic in our Skype call.

* * *

“Michelle, how has your experience with the piano evolved over the years, in terms of your performance style?” I ask. Michelle answers,

> Years ago, I did a lot of piano bar work, because I had to; solo piano bar gigs, singing all pop songs, sneaking in as many jazz tunes as I could. On my early albums, there would always be one token “Michelle playing the piano” track. And when we did the European touring, I’d always play a couple of tunes on the piano. But I’ve stopped doing that now, because it’s so much hassle. You’ve gotta have a piano for a start. And to be honest, if there’s a bass player, I can’t play properly anyway because I’m always playing root notes in my left hand. Whenever I have done those gigs, where I’m playing on a big stage, and my band is playing as well, if you look closely, I’m kind of just pretending to do stuff with my left hand, or I literally sit on my hand, and just play right hand. I’m not a piano player. I mean, I play piano, but I don’t count myself as a piano player. I can accompany students, I can accompany myself, but I wouldn’t go out and say, “I’m a piano player, you can book me as a piano player” ever. I know exactly what my piano facility is, it’s functional. It does the job.

As Michelle speaks, I immediately understand where she is coming from. Last year I attended a jazz voice workshop hosted by Michelle (and her long-time friend and colleague, Anita Wardell). During this workshop, I saw Michelle perform at the piano (self-accompanying) and away from the piano (supported by a band). Michelle can certainly accompany herself in a stylistic and functional way, but the minute she begins to sing, it’s clear where the magic resides. Michelle’s crystal-clear vocal tone, pitch accuracy and wide range are attributes of her musicianship that have earned her the reputation as one of Australia’s foremost jazz signers. She is a master, and I for one, am always contented to “drift” and “dream” in the “azure mood” that she creates.

> Driftin’ dreamin’
> In an azure mood
> Stardust gleamin’

Thru my solitude
Here in my seclusion,
You’re a big blue illusion
While I’m in this azure interlude
I’m not wanted I’m so all alone
Always haunted
By the dreams I own
But though I’m tormented
I must be contented
Driftin’ dreamin’
In an azure mood

(Azure)[21]

Creative Labour

Growing up in Adelaide (South Australia), Michelle’s first instrument was the violin. She shares that she played predominantly by ear—a fact that remained largely undetected until she was studying at university. As a child, Michelle would often sit at the piano, and use her keen musical ear to teach herself to play the songs she heard on the radio.

> Playing piano is something I did organically. I did that way before I was thinking of singing. I never thought I would be a singer in a million years. I taught myself to play by sitting down and playing songs off the radio and “telly” (television), songs that I loved.

Even though singing wasn’t the immediate focus of Michelle’s musical aspirations, it was an ever-present passion for her. Michelle describes singing along to artists like Tina Arena, sometimes with her hairbrush as a makeshift microphone; “Didn’t we all Michelle!” I say with a cheeky grin, and we both laugh in agreement, reflecting on the innocence of our youth. At school Michelle sang in choirs and musical productions, but it wasn’t until she was mid-way through her Bachelor of Music degree at Adelaide University (South Australia) that her singing really took flight.

> I didn’t start singing until second- or third-year uni. I was in a jazz choir at Adelaide University called “The Adelaide Connection”. It was the first jazz choir in Australia. One night, one of my friends who had an improv solo on one of the concert tunes wasn’t able to come to the concert. The music director pointed to me to do the solo. So I had to step forward and I had never improvised ever before. And I did this solo on the tune 52nd Street, and the director said to me, “Oh my gosh, okay, well I want you to do more”. He gave me more solos, and then eventually I swapped my major from violin

[21] Michelle Nicolle Quartet. (2013). Azure [Song]. On *A flower is a lonesome thing* [Music by Duke Ellington; Lyrics by Irving Mills]. ABC Jazz.

> over to voice; I didn’t love violin. I loved playing in orchestras. I loved being part of an ensemble; being part of that ‘big sound’. But as far as standing up and playing violin in front of people, that was just terrifying. But standing up and singing, that was easy.

From that point, Michelle’s vocal career continued to evolve organically.

> I don’t actually think there was ever a point where I went, “Okay, this is what I want to do”. I think it was gradual, and just kind of evolved. You just start doing gigs, it starts being this organic thing, and it just builds. When I was younger, things kind of came to me, and it was probably because not many people were doing what I was doing in Adelaide, so I kind of stood out. It was pretty easy to get noticed doing what I thought was pretty easy anyway. I just started doing gigs, like doing backing vocal gigs and piano bar gigs, to support myself as a student. It was all very organic.

I’m curious to discover how Michelle built upon those early experiences to hone her craft and become the expert improviser that she is today. I’m especially curious to discover how the piano played a role in this process.

Up Close

Michelle has an electric presence on stage (a notion that is reinforced by her style; always wearing a hint of her signature colour, purple). Michelle is known for her ability to go to the extremes of her vocal range, and yet, no matter how far she ventures, she never loses focus or connection with a tune or her band; she is confident and skilled in expressing her musical ideas. I ask Michelle from where she draws her confidence as a performer.

> When it comes to performing, I gain my confidence from knowing what I’m doing musically. As a vocalist, you can hear it and replicate it straight away. Easy, big deal, anyone can do that. But to be able to understand what you’re doing, you have to have some sort of tangible thing. For me, it’s the piano; there it is, all laid out. The piano helps me to know the working of the chords, better than if I was doing it all purely by ear. It just means you get into the theory of the harmony a bit deeper. And I guess you can practice more efficiently, it’s less guesswork. When you’re out there on a gig, I’m not thinking, “Okay this is an F Major 7, I’m going to start on the A, and then make my way up to the E”. I’m not necessarily thinking in those terms. But having spent the time at the piano going, “Right, these are the chords, I know where they are, I’m going to aim for that”. Without the piano that would be very hard. It informs the language a lot better.

My ears prick with interest as Michelle begins to describe her practice. I’ve always been drawn to behind the scenes glimpses into the practice of experts, so it’s no surprise that this theme found its way into the very heart of my research in this

project. In some respects, “I’m always chasing rainbows”, trying to unearth the tricks of a trade, or the secrets to success. Sometimes the pursuit of knowledge can feel as if it is in vain, abstract and beyond comprehension, but at other times, I encounter a piece of the puzzle that demystifies an aspect of an expert’s practice, giving me a “winning” solution.

> I’m always chasing rainbows
> Watching clouds drifting by
> My schemes are just like all my dreams
> Ending in the sky
>
> Some fellows look and find the sunshine
> I always look and find the rain
> Some fellows make a winning sometime
> But I never even make a gain, believe me
>
> I’m always chasing rainbows
> Waiting to find a little bluebird in vain.
>
> (I’m Always Chasing Rainbows)[22]

Michelle continues with her discussion about practice, remarking on the ways in which the piano acts as a facilitator for her vocal practice.

> I never practise away from the piano, never. I might find myself doing a few exercises in another room. As for the mental practice of hearing a phrase that’s really hard, or working on a chord progression, hearing the changes, I might be hearing that away from the piano, but I will go to the piano to practise. When I’m sitting at the piano, and I’m working on improv, just actually sitting at the piano, not even touching the keyboard I know where the notes are much quicker. So if I’m thinking, “Right, now I’m going to work on singing the thirds of this song”, just even being at the piano, I just feel like that connection brings me closer to it.

She then explains how the piano provides useful visual referencing in her practice.

> I’m a very visual person. I see the keyboard or the stave in my mind while I’m singing. And then of course, you’ve got the muscle memory, of knowing roughly where you are pitch wise. The piano is really helpful for me; it makes a big difference. Connecting your singing to something concrete is really important. The piano is purely an external part of your voice. I think if you have that connection to the physical piano you can relate to the theory of things. It gives you a deeper understanding, and of course, it comes back to understanding the piano and the theory. They’re definitely wrapped up together.

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[22] Nicolle, M. (2001). I’m Always Chasing Rainbows [Song]. On *After the rain* [Music by Henry Carroll; Lyrics by Joseph McCarthy]. ABC Jazz.

Moving beyond the context of solo practice and performance, I ask Michelle to consider how the piano impacts her ability to interact with other musicians.

> I hear stuff and think, “How do they play that? I’ve got the same chord changes, I’m dealing with the same set of chords, but I can’t hear that?” It makes me think, “Oh, what was that?”, and prompts me to see if I can work out the extensions and the way they turn phrases inside out and all that stuff. Being able to recognise those things, and then being able to maybe try them out on the piano does help. It’s gotta be something that you can touch, something tangible. At the end of the day, when you’re performing you’re not just rattling off a whole bunch of stuff that you’ve practiced, it’s a conversation between you and the other musicians. Being confident in the language means that you can have that conversation, you hear something and you respond to it, and they respond to you, and then it’s a group conversation. It’s being in the language. Without the piano, I would have found it much harder to have built that language.

I love the way that Michelle frames collaborative performance as a conversation, and likewise, the way that she describes the piano as a tool that aids the development of the vocabulary for that conversation. It seems to me that one of the marks of an expert jazz performer lies with their ability to listen deeply, and to respond reflexively and intuitively to what they hear. It’s clear to me that Michelle has this skill, and that she ascribes the piano—in part—for aiding her development of that skill. All this thinking about conversations brings to mind Michelle’s recording of “Everybody’s Talking” (on her 2003 album “The Crying Game”). The intro of this tune provides a great example of Michelle’s ability to converse with other musicians; her voice works in a close harmony with the guitar.

> Everybody’s talking at me
> I don’t hear a word they’re saying
> Only the echoes of my mind
> People stop and stare
> I can’t see their faces
> Only the shadows of their eyes
>
> I’m going where the sun keeps shining
> Through the pouring rain
> Going where the weather suits my clothes
> Banking off of the northeast winds
> Sailing on a summer breeze
> And skipping over the ocean like a stone
>
> Everybody’s talking at me
> I don’t hear a word they’re saying
> Only the echoes of my mind

> I won't let you leave my love behind
> No, I won't let you leave my love behind
>
> (Everybody's Talking)[23]

All too quickly, the time has come for my conversation with Michelle to come to an end. I thank Michelle for so generously sharing her time and her story with me, "Michelle, you're an absolute gem!" She responds, "Oh thank you, you are very easy to talk with, so it's my pleasure!" I'm chuffed; the feeling is mutual. We say our final goodbyes, and I wish Michelle all the very best for her quartet's upcoming twenty-first anniversary gig, before ending our Skype call.

* * *

Appreciated

Prior to COVID-19, Michelle would always conclude her beloved sets at the "Brunny G" with the same standard, "You Are My Sunshine". In this tune, Michelle would encourage her audience to sing along in the refrain. This tradition is one that Michelle has carried through to her live-streamed gigs, only this time, she sings along with her followers not from a stage, but through a camera lens. Michelle's Thursday night live-streamed gigs have become a regular event in my calendar through this year; for an hour, Michelle transports me away from the realities of life in a pandemic, into the vibrant world of jazz. Gathering with other listeners to tune in for Michelle's gigs reminds me of the community of practice in which I am immersed. COVID-19 may have prevented us from gathering in person and performing together (for the most part) but in a way, it has also enabled us to connect with a larger community of music lovers across the world. To borrow the words of the great Rogers and Hammerstein II, I may be a "cockeyed optimist", but it is my hope that the positive gains we have experienced and embraced during this season, will endure in the post-pandemic age. Perhaps on the other side of COVID-19 we will experience an "annus mirabilis"—a time of renewed responsiveness and responsibility to self and others. The "skies" of 2020 may have been "grey", but

[23] Nicolle, M. (2003). Everybody's Talking [Song]. On *The crying game* [Music and Lyrics by Fred Neil]. ABC Jazz/Universal.

artists like Michelle have found a way to bring “sunshine” into our lives through music.

> The other night dear, as I lay sleeping
> I dreamed I held you in my arms
> But when I woke, dear, I was mistaken
> So I hung my head down and I cried
>
> You are my sunshine, my only sunshine
> You make me happy when skies are grey
> You’ll never know dear, how much I love you
> So please don’t take my sunshine away.
>
> You told me once dear, you really loved me
> And no one else could come between
> But now you’ve left me and you love another
> You have shattered all of my dreams
>
> In all my dreams, dear, you seem to leave me
> And when I awake how my poor heart pains
> So when you come back and make me happy
> I’ll forgive you dear, I’ll take all the blame
>
> You are my sunshine, my only sunshine
> You make me happy when the skies are grey
> You’ll never know dear, how much I love you
> So please don’t take my sunshine away
>
> (You Are My Sunshine)[24]

* * *

December 2020

After a temporary easing of COVID-19 restrictions in Melbourne (VIC, Australia) during November 2020, Michelle announced that she would be bringing her live-streamed home-gigs to an end. Her thirty-first and final live-streamed gig was held on 5 November 2020. A couple of weeks later, Michelle was delighted to resume her long-standing weekly gig at the “Brunny G” with Paul (Williamson) and Frank (DiSario), albeit with limited audience numbers, and strict social distancing measures in place. This gig was a time of celebration for all, and much to the delight of her loyal lockdown-listeners, Michelle live-streamed the gig. It seems to me that

[24] Nicolle, M. (2009). You Are My Sunshine [Song]. On *The loveliest night* [Music and Lyrics by Jimmie Davis]. ABC Jazz.

this gesture was the perfect way for Michelle to bring together all her listeners, both near and far.

* * *

Postlude

Michelle doesn’t “count herself” as a piano player, and yet, her “functional piano facility” significantly supports her performance practice as a singer. For Michelle, the piano is “purely an external part of [her] voice”—an integral aspect in her musicianship, and the way she conceptualises music. The piano offers her a “tangible”, “concrete” way of getting inside “the theory of harmony” and building a “muscle memory” of pitch in her voice. Using the piano, Michelle can “see the keyboard or stave” in her mind, and “practise more efficiently”, thus reducing the “guesswork” that is inherent in the voice as a physiological instrument. Because of her experiences with the piano, Michelle is more “confident in the language” of jazz; this confidence facilitates her ability to collaborate (and musically converse) with other musicians.

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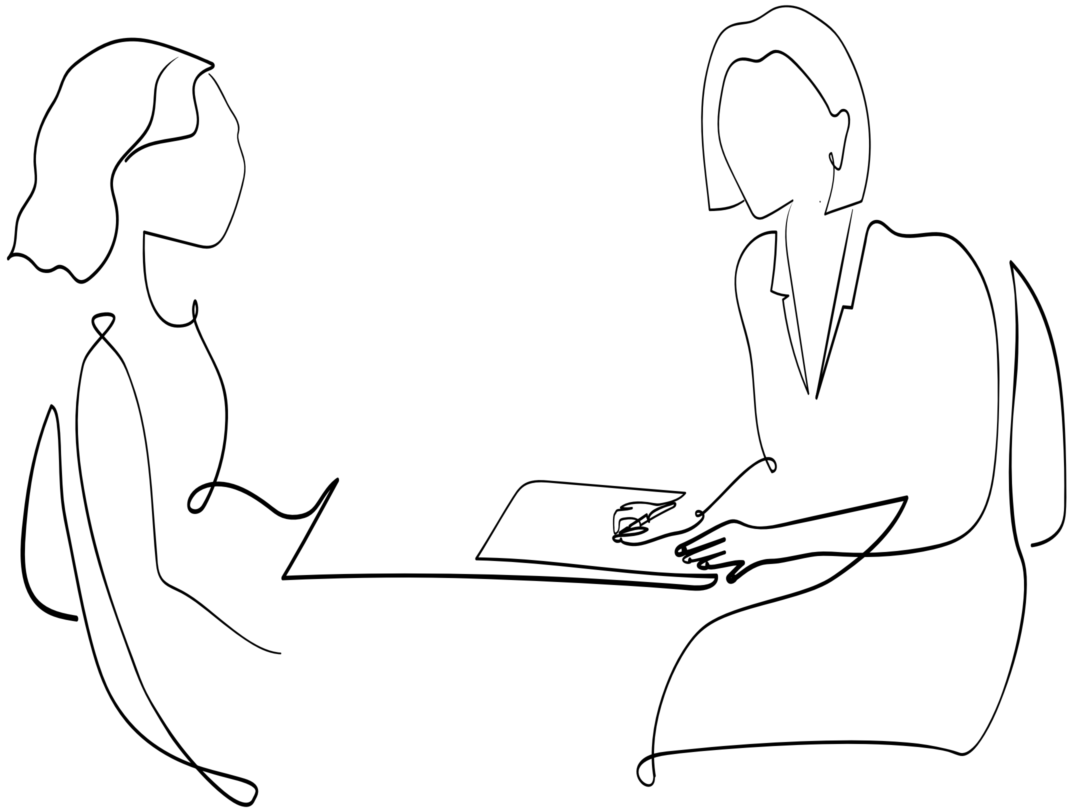

“Sharny”

CHAPTER 7: SHARNY RUSSELL

“Stars”

Prelude

Sharny Russell is a pianist, vocalist, composer, educator, and producer; a seasoned jazz artist, who is known and respected throughout the Australian music industry.

Sharny grew up in Toowoomba (QLD, Australia) learning the language of music from her mother, the late Peg Russell, playing piano by ear, finding harmonies, learning to accompany, playing spontaneous duets, and taking piano lessons, performing in eisteddfods (both singing and playing), and doing music exams from the ages four to seventeen. After finishing secondary-school, Sharny enrolled in a three-year undergraduate music course at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, (Brisbane, Australia) where she studied piano under Nancy Weir. In the years that followed, Sharny earned an extensive and diverse range of professional accolades, traversing several musical styles.

As a performer and recording artist, Sharny’s vocal and pianistic talents are recognised throughout the Australian music (especially jazz) community. She is widely known for her vocal scat ability, which she often performs in unison with the piano. Sharny has won an APRA award and has numerous recordings to her name including one on the ABC Jazz label; a selected discography of Sharny’s recorded works is included in Appendix C. Sharny has recorded with George Golla and shared the stage with many acclaimed musicians including James Morrison, George Golla, Emma Pask, The Idea of North, Darren Percival, Katie Noonan, Galapagos Duck, and George Washingmachine. She has supported Vince Jones and Martin Taylor and toured with Grace Knight (to name but a few). Sharny was the musical director for the iconic Australian children’s television program “Here’s Humphrey!”, and she is currently the Artistic Director for the Byron Bay Carols (NSW, Australia)—an event that has drawn performers including Mirusia Louwerse.

As a composer, Sharny writes songs that go “straight to the heart and mind” of listeners and musicians alike. Sharny has written, produced and recorded several albums including jazz albums, gospel albums, four musicals, and songs for children. She written one hundred and sixty songs, four completed musicals, and has songs

published in “The Australian Hymn Book”, and “The Australian Jazz Real Book”. Sharny has won an Australian Songwriting Competition Award (Gospel category).

As an educator, Sharny pioneered the “Yamaha Music Courses” in Adelaide (South Australia). She studied early childhood development, and techniques for building musicianship in children. This has influenced Sharny’s attitude toward teaching for her entire life, namely, to “build the musician”. Sharny has taught and workshopped in composition, piano, voice, arranging, and improvisation at universities throughout the eastern side of Australia. She has also adjudicated at many performing arts festivals and eisteddfods. Sharny has developed educational resources for jazz singers including her piano method for jazz singers “Piano Method for Jazz Singers: Easy, Stylish Self-Accompaniment”, a collection of twelve warm-up exercises for singers, and six exercises for jazz singers. Sharny was on the teaching staff at Queensland Conservatorium of Music (Brisbane, QLD, Australia) for many years, and is now principal vocal teacher at the Jazz Music Institute (Brisbane, QLD, Australia). Sharny’s students include Australian X-Factor winner Dami Im, Aria winning indie-pop artist Megan Washington, and Montreux Jazz Award winner Kristin Berardi.

Sharny is a woman of substance, known for miraculously surviving an horrific car accident early in her career. While her family and friends were struggling in disbelief at her plight, Sharny was inspiring them with her courageous resilience, cheerfulness, and miraculous healing. What may have looked like adversity to some, became an even greater reason for Sharny to rise up and shine in her unique way. Whether it be leading worship services, raising her four children as compassionate loving people in challenging circumstances, or learning to live with a long-term auto-immune disorder, Sharny is powered by her faith and determination. Sharny is frequently asked to speak at retreats and other Christian events and has shared the stage with many of Australia’s leading gospel artists and worship leaders.

Sharny now resides in the Byron Shire (New South Wales, Australia), where she continues to impact and touch others’ lives through her music, faith, mentoring, and friendship. To discover more about Sharny, visit sharnyrussell.com.

* * *

Stars

Australia has been in a drought for some years now. Happily, I find myself looking out the window to see a hint of green after a recent sprinkling of rain. I know this burst of colour will be short lived, but for now, I take a moment to breathe in the fresh, clean air, and appreciate the beauty and resilience of my beloved Australian landscape. This afternoon I’m catching up with Sharny for afternoon tea. During our time together, I hope to discover more about Sharny’s journey in music, and the nature of her experience with the piano.

My doorbell rings, and I greet a smiling Sharny at my front door. Welcoming her inside, we give each other a big hug, and spend some time catching up as I arrange our afternoon tea on the table before us. Settling into our chairs I notice that Sharny is wearing a particularly stylish pair of shoes—pewter sneakers clad with sparkling graphite stars. My family and friends have often joked that I own more shoes than Imelda Marcos (in reality, that’s a slight exaggeration, but I am certainly convinced that good shoes take you to great places!) Alongside our afternoon tea spread (on the table before us) I have placed my copy of Sharny’s recently released book, “Piano Method for Jazz Singers: Easy, Stylish Self-Accompaniment”. This method is the product of Sharny’s lifetime of musical experience, and the formalisation of her teaching approach. Over the last couple of weeks, Sharny has been busily recording and mastering videos to accompany the written components of her method. I congratulate Sharny on the much-anticipated release of her method and share my delight in how she has brought the material together. Sharny graciously responds,

> Thank you! I’m pretty proud of it. I think it’s a bit revolutionary; different from anything else that’s out there, because believe me, I have looked. I’ve looked, and looked, trying to find texts that students could use to help them with playing piano, and it’s usually either way too simple, or way too hard. So, I wanted to write something that got jazz singers and instrumentalists, and non-jazz playing pianists from the very simple (without feeling discouraged and defeated and bamboozled), through to actually playing something that sounds decent, without having scrambled the brains too much. I believe it’s very do-able. If someone sticks at it, they will achieve that.

Reading through Sharny’s book, it’s clear that her intention to craft a clear, progressive, and stylistic approach to jazz piano accompaniment has been successful. Woven alongside the technical, theoretical, and stylistic pedagogy of her method is Sharny’s distinctively kind and encouraging voice as an educator, packaged in her

tried-and-tested advice. Given Sharny’s jazz expertise, it’s hard to believe that at one point in her early career Sharny had little desire to pursue music teaching or jazz performance; thankfully, life had other plans for her.

The Stars Aligned

Growing up in Toowoomba (Queensland, Australia), Sharny was immersed in music from an early age. Her parents, the late Noel and Peg Russell, were both well-known musicians in the Toowoomba region, and through their influence, Sharny and her two siblings were exposed to a wealth of music in both classical and jazz styles.

> Music was a second language in our house. I was whistling in tune when I was nine months old; my parents both were whistlers. I could actually make a whistling sound, and I could emulate their notes, and their pitch. I was picking up tunes by the time I was two on the piano, and I was three years and ten months old when I started learning piano formally.

As a child Sharny was shy, but musically gifted. She played the piano, sang, and had an exceptional ear for music. Sharny was encouraged by her mother to enter singing competitions and to perform in church concerts. She was often the “designated singer” in the Russell family ensemble, but never really thought of herself as a singer. To the contrary, Sharny originally identified herself as a pianist. This love for the piano led Sharny to complete classical piano degree, in hopes of eventually launching her career as a functional pianist. Not long after finishing her studies, Sharny moved to Adelaide (South Australia) with her first husband. At the time, Sharny’s husband was the musical director of a children’s music program on “ABC Radio” (the “Australian Broadcasting Corporation” national radio station) and through this connection, Sharny was invited to record some children’s songs for the program. Sharny remembers the experience as one of her biggest lessons in singing.

> Having to go and sing in a studio was a huge learning curve for me, and it had to be quick, because if I wanted them to hire me for the next session, I had to get it right that day.

Sharny recalls one recording experience when she was happy with her voice (as she heard it in the studio headphones), but upon hearing the recorded track in the control room, she realised that her singing was a little flat.

> I couldn’t go and have lessons with a singing teacher to work it out, I just had to get it right, straight away. I had to listen from a different perspective. I had to imagine myself on the other side, listening.

Around that time, Sharny secured a gig every Saturday night, playing in a cocktail jazz trio at a local restaurant. Sharny was a little apprehensive at the prospect of performing as a jazz pianist. With her first gig a mere couple of weeks away, Sharny knew that she needed to promptly put together multiple set lists, and ready herself to perform. Sharny contacted her mother to request that she send some jazz tapes to listen to, and then aided by her exceptional musical ear and her wide musicianship, Sharny began to work out the tunes for herself.

> I worked out a way to play, that sounded very cool, very quickly. But when it came to my piano solos, I’d hum along with my solo, or I’d sing a little bit quietly without a microphone. My first husband (on the bass), and the drummer kept saying, “That sounds great… we should get a microphone, you should sing!” I said, “No, I’m not singing it, I’m not a singer” I fought with them for about three months, until they talked me into it, and finally we got a microphone. So, I started learning a few jazz songs. I knew a lot of the tunes already because I’d grown up in a jazz household listening to Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Andre Previn, Peter Nero and artists like that. I just started singing jazz by default really, and I began to quite enjoy it. I just became a singer. And I sang everything in the written key, which meant that I was singing quite high in my range all the time. And people started telling me I sound like Blossom Dearie, and I said, “Who on earth is Blossom Dearie?” So, I came across some of her recordings and just fell in love with what she was doing. Beautiful piano playing, lovely singing, incredible songs, and so eminently musical. So I began to learn a bunch of her songs.

It seems to me that Sharny’s decision to “do it afraid” ended up “setting her free”, opening a new and exciting chapter in her music career.

> No more excuses, it’s time to set yourself free,
> Well it’s hard to believe, but it’s possible you could be wrong.
> You know the truth now, the writing’s there on the wall,
> Though your face may be red it can’t hurt to admit you were wrong.
>
> Couldn’t make it any plainer,
> Your best friend just gave you the tip and you want to jump ship,
> Close the door, run away, move to another country!
>
> You know you want this, it’s time to do it afraid.
> You are worth it you know, so come on, have a go
> Take a breath, feel your feet on the ground,
> You’ll astound yourself, and you’ll set yourself free!
>
> (Set Yourself Free)[25]

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[25] Russell, S. (2016b). Set Yourself Free [Song]. On *Comes a time* [Music and Lyrics by Sharny Russell]. Treasure House Music.

Sharny’s beginning in jazz education was serendipitous. When visiting a local music store in Adelaide (South Australia), and playing all the pianos on site, Sharny’s talents were recognised by the resident piano salesman, who “hounded” her to audition the next day for a job with the famed “Yamaha Music Foundation” music courses for children, which were to be held in a beautifully refurbished “little house” across the road from the store. The classes were the first of their kind to be held in South Australia. Sharny knew a little about the Yamaha method through her mother Peg, who had taught Yamaha organ, but she wasn’t initially drawn to the prospect of following down the same path for herself. The salesman persisted, and Sharny eventually agreed to meet the national director and watch a newly released video of the Yamaha program being delivered in both Japan and Melbourne (Victoria, Australia). Upon watching this video, the stars aligned for Sharny, and she fell completely in love with the method: “I thought, ‘Well if you’re going to teach music, that’s the way to do it!’ I was thrilled”, Sharny recounts with a smile. It seems to me that even though Sharny wasn’t “looking for” this method, when it “came into view” she found “reason” that impacted her views on music education—it was a “keeper”.

> Colour me red, colour me breathless
> Making my heart stop, for a while.
> Feeling the earth move, watching the sky fall,
> Making my heart melt, with a smile.
>
> I didn’t know I was looking for you,
> Till I parted the clouds and you came into view.
> Had I a notion of how it would be,
> I’d have come here before,
> Now I know you’re a keeper.
>
> Colour me blue, swimming in heaven
> Look for your sweet face, every day
> Hearing your voice now, giving me reason
> Making my heart sing, come what may.
>
> (Colour Me)[26]

Captivated by the Yamaha approach, Sharny decided she would “give it a go”. Her interview was successful, and she was enthusiastically offered the job.

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[26] Russell, S. (2016a). Colour Me [Song]. On *Comes a time* [Music and Lyrics by Sharny Russell]. Treasure House Music.

> I didn’t think I’d get it! It probably helped that there were things I could do that people who just came out of a piano degree can’t necessarily do. I could improvise a bit, and I could play tunes off the top of my head in two or three different keys. So I became that teacher. I eventually ran two Yamaha music schools, and auditioned and trained other teachers. It was just a life of joy for me teaching those courses, and that has very much moulded who I am as an educator. “Build the musician”. That’s my educational mantra. “Build the musician”, not just someone who can sit and read music and play an instrument.

Sharny’s approach to teaching certainly does “build the musician”. Later in our conversation, Sharny even borrows a building metaphor to describe her “bottom up” teaching philosophy—a philosophy that is exemplified in her piano method.

> It builds vertically rather than in a linear fashion, it’s a whole different way of the brain working. I think if you can just keep building, you know, do a wall from the bottom row of bricks, then you add the next row, then you add the next row, that’s how chords are built, from the bottom up, just like having a good musical foundation.

Hearing Sharny discuss her educational philosophy, I’m intrigued to discover more about her beliefs regarding the role of the piano in building a strong musical foundation for singers.

Seeing Stars

In the jazz scene, singers can often be confronted with the perception that they are inferior musicians in comparison to instrumentalists; a phenomenon that Sharny knows all too well. She explains,

> The difficulty that I often hear other singers talk about, where the band doesn’t show them respect and doesn’t treat them with the same approach that they take with others in the band. Instrumentalists actually love to work with a singer who is a musician, because they feel like there’s a barrier down straight away, and they don’t have to keep explaining themselves, asking a million questions to get the answers they want, to find out what the singer wants them to do, they get straight to it.

This perception is one of the many reasons why Sharny believes that jazz singers should be self-sufficient as performers.

> I often tell my students, that you need to be at a point as a singer, where if you’re on stage, and your whole band all suddenly stopped playing you can keep going. You have to have the music in you, not just your vocal line, you have to have the music in you, you have to have the band in your head. You have to be the band, so that you can actually hear everything that will, or should, be going on, so that when you keep singing, it’s as if they’re all still there. And you have to add things, and you have to improvise in between the

> notes if they're not going to play them. So you get the band, feel and hear the band in your head, and have it in your being, so that every song and every performance you've studied through the harmony, and you know exactly what's going on from start to finish.

I couldn't agree more with Sharny's thoughts. Improvising jazz singers must have keen skills of audiation, and the ability to hear every aspect of the music even while away from their instrument. However, the physiological nature of the voice makes building these skills acutely more difficult; singers must be able to see what they cannot touch. As I share these thoughts with Sharny, she nods heartily in agreement and goes on to assert her belief that the piano can be a tool to fill this gap.

> The piano is so straightforward to look at. It's a visual instrument. You can actually see the geography of music. You can see the intervals, the shape of a chord, and can break that up, and hear those notes. It's really the most remarkable tool for aural training. I think the remarkable thing about the piano keyboard is that you've got the geography of music right in front of you, you can actually see how everything fits together. And when you're following a melody on the keyboard, and you're playing those notes, and you can actually locate those notes in your voice, it's just completely undergirding your ability to place notes and hear what's coming. It definitely helps the ear to form. And then it helps the whole journey into singing passages, because it cross-connects with a visual image.

She continues,

> Trying to learn songs just by listening over and over to a recording is okay if your ear is good, and plenty of people do it. But to actually be able to sit down and just play it while you're singing it through, it just deepens the whole experience. And it just entrenches the song, harmonically, rhythmically, physically. Even when I'm getting my tertiary students to practice singing the technical work, the scales and arpeggios acapella, I encourage them to play it a couple of times on the piano and sing it, then try without playing. It helps to brick in all the gaps in what you're hearing, and what you can apply with your voice.

In a way, it seems that singers who play the piano, have "the world on a string"—a wealth of possibilities right at their fingertips.

> I've got the world on a string
> I'm sittin' on a rainbow
> Got the string around my finger
> What a world, what a life, I'm in love
>
> I've got a song that I sing
> I can make the rain go
> Anytime I move my finger
> Lucky me can't you see that I'm in love

Life is a beautiful thing as long as I hold the string
I’d be a silly so and so if I should ever let go

I’ve got the world on a string
I’m sittin’ on a rainbow
Got the string around my finger
Lucky me, can’t you see I’m in love

(I’ve Got the World on a String)[27]

Reaching for the Stars

I ask Sharny to consider where she would identify along a continuum of pianist to singer. She responds,

> I think of myself as a musician. And that has been very much undergirded by having a very good knowledge of piano, and being able to play the piano. And having solid classical repertoire, as well. I think that helps someone to be a more well-rounded musician. I think of myself as a musician, and one of my instruments is the voice, and the other one is the piano.

Hearing Sharny describe her two instruments, I’d love to see her demonstrate how those instruments work in tandem. I ask Sharny if she could perform a tune at the piano, so that we can delve deeper into her performance experience. Sharny gladly accepts my invitation and elects to sing the standard, “If I Were a Bell”.

Ask me how do I feel
Now that we’re cosy and clinging
Well sir all I can say
Is if I were a bell I’d be ringing
From the moment we kissed tonight
That’s the way I’ve just gotta behave
Boy if I were a lamp I’d light
And if I were a banner I’d wave

Ask me how do I feel
Little me with my quiet upbringing
Well sir all I can say
Is if I were a gate I’d be swinging
And if I were a season I’d surely be spring
Or if I were a bell I’d go ding dong ding dong ding

(If I Were a Bell)[28]

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[27] Sharny Russell and George Golla. (2010). I’ve Got the World on a String [Song]. On *Velvet live* [Music by Harold Arlen; Lyrics by Ted Koehler]. Treasure House Music.
[28] Russell, S. (2019). *If I were a bell* [Song; Live Performance]. [Music and Lyrics by Frank Loesser].

Sharny glides through the tune with ease, demonstrating her expertise as a performer. As she plays the final chords, I can’t help but to start applauding, “Wow Sharny! That was amazing! You make it look easy, effortless! How did it feel to perform?” Still buzzing from her performance, Sharny beams with a smile and responds,

> Thank you! Well, I felt great, it always feels great! I feel like I’m bird let out of the cage and I’m just flying. That passion for music and for jazz is always there. And so immediately, I’m doing the thing that gives me joy, and that I feel like I do quite easily. I love to tell a story with a song, and I love to improvise. So, for me it’s like it’s when you step off the cliff, and you start floating, like a paraglider. I feel excited every time I embark on improvisation because I think, “Ooh, where am I going to go next? Ooh, where will I take this one? Ooh, I’ll just land on that note”. In that split second, you have to make a decision about where you want to go, from that little moment, from that note. I feel excited and exhilarated. And at the same time, you’re having to think fairly fast.

“It’s like an adrenaline sport, isn’t it?” I suggest, and Sharny agrees, “It is, absolutely it is!” Keeping mindful of the time (Sharny has another engagement to attend later in the afternoon) I ask one final question. “Sharny, do you have any advice that you would offer to aspiring jazz singers?” Sharny pauses for a moment, and then responds with a gentle and calm conviction,

> Listen, so that it becomes the new language that you’re learning. It needs to be a new language. Because jazz singing, in a sense—especially if you’re going to improvise—is another language. You’re only going to learn it by being immersed in it, and being drenched in it, and having it around you all the time. And try to work out new things by transcribing things that you like, and actually learning to sing them yourself. The second thing, as an adjunct to all that listening, is to learn an instrument. And for me, the primary instrument, the best instrument is the piano, because of all the reasons we’ve already talked about, so that the singer can become a self-reliant, independent musician, that doesn’t have to rely on other musicians to help them along. There’s another component to that answer too which is to transcribe. So after listening, keep transcribing heads and solos that you like, and learn to sing it exactly the way the performer sings it. Because just in doing that, you’re developing new things to your stylistic vocabulary, you’re enhancing your own understanding of phrasing and style, and rhythm. But then apply it to solos and all the rest. Find a solo that really appeals to you, just listen to it until you can sing the whole thing.

It’s clear from Sharny’s response that she intimately understands the essential ingredients for jazz musicianship, and how to functionally and meaningfully learn and apply those skills in practice.

Rounding off our conversation, I thank Sharny for so generously sharing her story and her time with me, “It’s been magic talking to you today Sharny, just magic! You and I are the brains trust, we think out loud together really well!” Sharny nods in agreement, and responds, “Yes! It’s been lovely talking to you Courtney! We came up with some interesting things today!... Some great food for thought!” Standing up, we exchange our goodbyes. Then, Sharny gathers her belongings, and with a hug and a wave, she heads out the door and off to her next engagement.

* * *

Reflecting on my conversation with Sharny, it’s wonderful to think that her musical journey began here in Toowoomba (QLD, Australia)—the place that I also call home. As I write these words, Toowoomba is in her springtime prime. Every September since 1949, the city has hosted an award-winning “Carnival of Flowers”. The event originally began as a means for post-war recovery in the region, but now continues as a celebration of the region’s natural beauty and community spirit. For two weeks in September, the city is awash with floral displays, food and wine events, and of course, live music. In the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, the 2020 carnival has been a little different. Although, even with border closures preventing visitors from interstate and abroad, and social distancing measures restricting certain aspects of the event, Toowoomba has put on a memorable show of community spirit and floral beauty. Every year when carnival season arrives, I can’t help but feel swept into the spirit, and find myself thinking of my favourite carnival-themed tunes. At the top of the list is “Manhã De Carnaval”—a tune that speaks of the magic of carnival season, and likewise, the magic of singing, be that “singing to the sun in the sky”, “singing ‘till the sun rises high”, or “singing to dreams from afar”. One of my favourite covers of this standard happens to be Sharny’s recording from her 2001 album “Velvet Live” with Australian guitarist, George Golla. While George “plays his guitar”, Sharny “sings” with the light, bright, and nuanced sophistication for which she is known.

> I’ll sing to the sun in the sky,
> I’ll sing ‘till the sun rises high,
> Carnival time is here
> Magical time of year
> And as the time draws near

Dreams lift my heart

I’ll sing while you play your guitar
I’ll sing to this dream from afar
Will love come my way on this carnival day
Or stay here in my heart?

(Manhã De Carnaval)[29]

* * *

Postlude

Sharny considers herself a musician; her instruments are the piano and the voice. For her, the piano is the “musical foundation” upon which she is able to “build” her musicianship, and likewise, that of her students. The piano enables Sharny to “see the geography of music” and to deconstruct it into its components (e.g. pitches, intervals, melodies, harmony). Additionally, the aural and visual reinforcement of the piano combined, facilitates Sharny’s ability to “locate” and “place” notes in her voice, thereby strengthening her skills of audiation. The ability to play and sing melodies simultaneously “deepens the whole experience” of Sharny’s learning, enabling her to embody the songs that she sings in the fullest sense—"harmonically, rhythmically, physically”. It’s clear that Sharny’s knowledge of the piano has “undergirded” her wide, diverse, and flexible musicianship broadly.

[29] Sharny Russell and George Golla. (2001). Manhã De Carnaval [Song]. On *Velvet live* [Music by Luiz Bonfá; English Lyrics by George David Weiss, Hugo Peretti & Luigi Creatore]. Treasure House Music.

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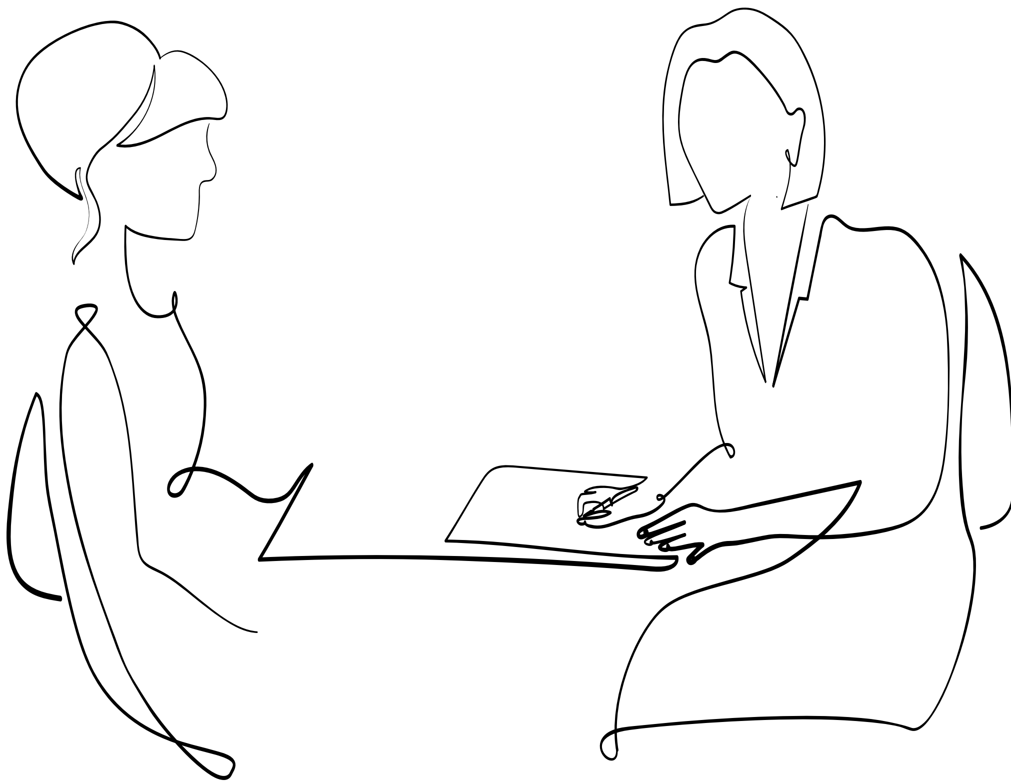

“Anita”

CHAPTER 8: ANITA WARDELL

“Travel”

Prelude

Anita Wardell is an award-winning and internationally renowned jazz singer and educator. Best known as an outstanding scat singer, Anita is also a skilled writer and performer of vocalese, and a sensitive interpreter of standards and jazz originals.

Born in Guildford (UK), Anita emigrated to Adelaide (South Australia) with her family as a child. In her formative years Anita gained an appreciation for the “Great American Songbook” by listening to her parents’ collection of movie soundtracks, cast albums, and big band records. Anita’s passion for jazz deepened in her teenage years, where she discovered a passion for improvisation, listening to modern jazz exponents including Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Clifford Brown, and Cannonball Adderley. Inspired by the harmonic acumen of these great players, Anita used the same methods adopted by improvising instrumentalists to develop her scatting technique. Through this experience, Anita developed an extensive knowledge of bebop harmony and jazz scales, enabling her to craft intricate, and harmonically rich, vocal improvisations. At the same time, she immersed in the craft of jazz singing by listening to great jazz singers including Ella Fitzgerald, Carmen McRae, Betty Carter, Mark Murphy, Jon Hendricks, and Eddie Jefferson.

Anita completed undergraduate music studies at Adelaide University (South Australia), and in 1990 relocated back to the UK where she undertook further studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and soon thereafter, launched her recording career; a discography of Anita’s recorded works is included in Appendix C. Anita’s first album “Why do you cry?” was released in 1995, alongside pianist Liam Noble. This was followed in 1998 by Anita’s second album, “Straight Ahead”, featuring internationally acclaimed pianist Jason Rebello. In 2001, Anita released “Until the Stars Fade” with her long-time collaborator, pianist Robin Aspland, drummer Gene Calderazzo, and bassist Jeremy Brown. Anita then teamed up with tenor saxophonist Benn Clatworthy to record “If You Never Come to Me”, which was released in 2004. Soon thereafter, Anita won the prestigious BBC Jazz Award for Best of Jazz category (2006), and in the same year, she signed to Proper Records, where she recorded “Noted”. With the same label, Anita recorded “Kinda Blue”

(2008). Anita's latest album "The Road" was released in 2013, the same year in which she won the Best Vocalist category in the British Jazz Awards.

Throughout her performance career, Anita has continuously extended her use of scat singing, demonstrating her precise, deliberate, and harmonically astute abilities as a singer. However, alongside her scat and vocalese, Anita has retained a great love for the standards, recording and performing many classics from the "Great American Songbook", displaying precision and agility, mixed with heartfelt emotional expression.

Anita travels extensively, performing, and leading jazz vocal masterclasses in Australia, Europe, and the UK. She currently teaches jazz voice at the Elder Conservatorium Adelaide University (South Australia) and has private students in Australia and internationally. To discover more about Anita, visit anitawardell.com.

* * *

Travel

In February 2018, I attended a two-day jazz voice workshop at the "Doo Bop Jazz Bar" in Brisbane (QLD, Australia), hosted by Anita (along with her long-time friend and collaborator Michelle Nicolle). Prior to the "Doo Bop" weekend, I knew that Anita was a highly decorated and award-winning jazz singer, renowned for her masterful scat abilities, her sensitive interpretation of standards and originals, and her skills as writer and performer of vocalese. Her long list of accolades includes winner of the 2006 "BBC Jazz Award" for "Best of Jazz" category, as well as winner of the 2013 "British Jazz Award" for "Best Vocalist" category. One could easily presume that a reputation of such impressive proportions would go hand in hand with an ego to match, however, Anita is the antithesis of such a notion. Throughout the "Doo Bop" workshop, what struck me the most about Anita was her kindness, her humility, her genuine warmth, and her joyfulness. I very quickly discovered that Anita's passion for performance is matched by her passion for championing aspiring jazz singers. As my friendship with Anita has continued in the years since, I've grown to respect her more and more in both music and life. In August 2019, I caught up with Anita via Skype for a chat about life, jazz, and of course, the piano—a topic close to both of our hearts.

* * *

It’s a Saturday evening; I’m eased into a weekend mode. In a couple of minutes, I will be calling Anita via Skype. I am looking forward to the catch up and hope to discover more about Anita’s experiences as a jazz singer, and her journey with the piano in particular. With all my interview materials at the ready, I dial the Skype call, and moments later Anita joins me from her home in Adelaide (South Australia).

“Hi Anita! Long-time no see! How are you?” I say bubbling with excitement. Anita responds in her warm English accent with a big smile, “Hi Courtney, it’s lovely to see you! I’m well, and you?” We spend a few minutes catching up, while checking the quality of our audio and video connection, and then begin our chat.

Anita has not long returned from a trip to the UK. Travel is a big part of Anita’s life; for eight months of the year she resides in Adelaide, where she teaches jazz voice at the “Elder Conservatorium” (Adelaide University, South Australia), and gigs as often as she’s able. For the other four months of the year, between the university semesters, Anita resides in the UK, where she maintains a busy performance schedule throughout Europe and the UK. At present, Anita is settling back into the swing of her teaching semester. Anita lights up when she speaks about her teaching; it’s clear that she values and enjoys sharing her love and passion for jazz with her students.

> Teaching is a very important part of my life, because I’ve learned a lot about myself, and my approach to the music that I sing, through teaching. I find learning absolutely fascinating, which is why I like to teach. I think a lot about all my years of asking questions when I was a student: “How do people learn this?... How do you get a good groove? How do you get good pitch?” And now I want to help my students understand how to approach those same questions. All those things that I had to learn, I now teach my students how to understand them. That’s what I do, and I love it.

Take off

Born in Guilford (UK) Anita immigrated to Adelaide (South Australia) with her family as child. She describes her younger self as being somewhat shy and sensitive, but also “happy go lucky [and] fun loving”. From an early age, Anita had a dream to become an actress; she had a love for music theatre and would often record

the musicals and old films that were broadcast on the television. Anita recalls racing home from school each day, eager to sing along to her favourite recorded tunes.

> I was the sort of child who, instead of listening to what my sister was listening to—like David Bowie and Adam Ant—I was listening to Frank Sinatra, Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald, which my siblings all ribbed me for, it was funny! “Oh mum, Anita’s sitting at the TV again, recording films, she’s such a drongo!” my sister would say. I realise now that I was paving the way for myself to know all the songs, and I think that’s been a great help to me, all these years. I loved it, it really did help.

Though she didn’t realise it, at the time, Anita’s lifetime of jazz was beginning to take off through these early experiences; they were her first “lessons” on the way to “learnin’ the blues”.

> The tables are empty, the dance floor’s deserted
> You play the same love song, it’s the tenth time you’ve heard it
> Now that’s the beginning, it’s just one of the clues
> You’ve had your first lesson at learnin’ the blues
>
> The cigarettes you light one after another
> Won’t help you forget him and the way that you love him
> You’re only burnin’ a torch you can’t lose
> But you’re on the right track for learnin’ the blues
>
> When you’re at home alone
> The blues will taunt you constantly
> When you’re out in a crowd
> The blues will taunt your memory
>
> The nights when you don’t sleep
> The whole night you’re crying
> But you can’t forget him, soon you’ll even stop trying
> You’ll walk the floor and wear out your shoes
> When you feel your heart break, you’re learnin’ the blues
>
> (Learnin’ the Blues)[30]

As a teenager, Anita’s love for music continued. She performed in a variety of musical productions and immersed herself in the “great music department” of her school. At home, Anita threw all her energy into singing and the piano. Anita would spend hours at the piano, playing through any kind of sheet music that she could

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[30] Wardell, A. (2008). Learnin’ the Blues [Song]. On *Kinda blue* [Music and Lyrics by Dolores Silvers]. The Last Music Company.

find, including a “Jap Book” (a simplified busker’s book that contained hundreds of songs in lead-sheet notation, which was a gift from her high-school music teacher).

> The Jap Book became like a Bible to me. By the time of was fifteen, I think knew about five-hundred standards. By the time I was twenty-two, I knew fifteen hundred. That book sat with me at the piano, and I’d play all the chords, even if it was just in root position. I’d pick up any sort of sheet music, from the Carpenters, ABBA, everything, and just learn how to play the chords on the piano, and force myself to accompany myself while I while I sang. And it was pretty terrible. I didn’t really understand upper extensions until pre-college at university. So that’s the sort of person I was. I could tell you all the musicals that I’ve watched. That’s how I learned my repertoire, from watching those old films. A lot of them were “B Movies” that you probably won’t get on TV anymore. Doris Day, all those stars. That’s the kind of person I was. I was very, very driven.

For Anita, music gave her a purpose, as well as a creative and therapeutic outlet.

> Lots of things happened to me, because of the fact that I was sensitive. And music, and playing the piano was a lifesaver. It was an absolute life saver. I had a purpose when I found music, when I found jazz especially. I had an outlet to be creative, and to get all my crap out, which was really good.

After finishing high school, Anita went on to study music education at “Adelaide University”, which was then known as the “Salisbury College of Advanced Education”.

> While I was there, I’d heard some girls scatting in the room next door. I told my teacher that I wanted to be a jazz singer, so he gave me lots of things to listen to. That’s when I found out about bebop, and started to hear anything from Jobim to Charlie Parker and Duke Ellington.

Halfway through the first year of her course, Anita’s teachers recognised her growing passion for jazz singing, and encouraged her to audition for the jazz voice specialisation at the university. Anita’s audition was a success, and she gladly switched into the vocal program.

> Once I started this path, my mind was made up. I know I wanted to do this for the rest of my life. I’ve never looked back, and I just love it so much.

After completing her studies at “Salisbury College”, Anita returned to the UK to study jazz at the “Guildhall School of Music and Drama”. Her journey as a jazz singer was about to take full flight; it was “her shining hour”.

> This will be my shining hour
> Calm and happy and bright
> In my dreams, your face will flower
> Through the darkness of the night

> Like the light of home before me
> Or an angel watching o’er me
> This will be my shining hour
> ‘Til I’m with you again
>
> (My Shining Hour)[31]

Journey

Knowing of Anita’s love for singing and the piano, I ask her where she would identify on the continuum between singer and pianist.

> Mostly I’m a singer. I would place myself probably 80% singer and 20% pianist. Singing is my first instrument. I’m much more of a singer than a pianist, but I need the piano, because I can see it. I use the piano all the time. I can play chords, and I can accompany, but I don’t think I would ever call myself a pianist.

She continues,

> I work everything out on the piano, in terms of chords and re-harms. I can get myself around on the piano no problem. And I could play a blues with a band, or a rhythm section, and I could probably improvise. But I’m a bit thumpy at the piano. At the moment my practise consists of transcribing solos and working out what makes a great solo. How the artist builds the solo, and how it’s connected to the original tune, to improve what I do even more. If I’m learning something complex, then I practice it ‘intervalically’, and I need the piano to do that. Say if you’re transcribing someone’s solo, and you want to learn that solo. If you can’t sight-sing, you can’t look at that music and just sing it. So you need the piano. Then you can play the notes on the piano, and then the piano relates back to the voice. That’s where I love what I do for a living, because if I want to learn something, I use that intervallic practice. It’s extremely important to me. And the piano is a big part of that. All of those pitch exercises that you can do with the piano, it solidifies those things.

As Anita mentions using “intervallic practice” for “learning something complex”, I’m reminded of the vocalese tune “Twisted” that is featured on her 1995 album “Why Do You Cry?” This tune is a fine example of Anita’s ability to negotiate lyrics and melodies (and intervallic leaps) in lighting fast pace, and with absolute pitch accuracy—a skill that she has built and reinforced at and through the piano.

> My analyst told me
> I was right out of my head
> The way he described it

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[31] Wardell, A. (2001). My Shining Hour [Song]. On *Until the stars fade* [Music by Harold Arlen; Lyrics by Johnny Mercer]. Symbol.

He said I’d be better dead than alive
I didn’t listen to his jive
I knew all along
That he was all wrong
And I knew that he thought
That I was crazy but I’m not, oh no

My analyst told me
That I was right out of my head
He said I need treatment
But I’m not that easily led
He said I was the type
That was most inclined
When out of his sight
To be out of my mind
And he thought I was nuts
No more ifs or ands or buts, oh no

They say as a child
I appeared a little bit wild
With all my crazy ideas
But I knew what was happening
I knew I was a genius
What’s so strange when you know
That you’re a wizard at three
I knew that this was meant to be

Well I heard little children
Were supposed to sleep tight
That’s why I got into the vodka one night
My parents got frantic
Didn’t know what to do
But I saw some crazy scenes
Before I came to
Now do you think I was crazy
I may have been only three
But I was swinging

They all laughed at angry young men
They all laughed at Edison
Also at Einstein
So why should I be sorry
If they just didn’t understand
The riffing and logic
That went on in my head
I had a brain
It was insane
Oh how they laughed at me
When I refused to ride

On those double decker buses
Because there was no driver on the top
My analyst told me
That I was right out of my head
But I said dear doctor
I think that it’s you instead
Because I got a thing
Unique and new
It proves that I got
The last laugh on you
‘Cause instead of one head I got two
And you know two heads are better than one.

(Twisted)[32]

In her vocal practice, Anita feels a strong connection between the visual and aural aspects of the piano, and the theorisation of music. She explains,

> The piano is all there in front of you. One octave is the same, at the top or the bottom, although, obviously, the timbre and the tunings are different. For me, looking at the keys I see where a semitone is, and where a tone is, I see the intervals. When I’m working stuff out and I’m practising, as I play the piano I can see and watch the visualisation of what I’m singing. And then I test it. Same for chromatic exercises or a diminished scale exercise. I can see the distance between the semitones and the tones. And it helps so much. It really does, just looking at it. And then singing an arpeggio over two octaves, and looking at the span. It’s interesting, because it’s like a series, isn’t it? So the 1 3 5 7 9 11 13. The 9 and 11 and 13, it’s like the tone up from the root note, and you’ve done another triad. C7, and then you play D, right over the top. That’s a C13 sharp 11. It’s got two chords, and two parts, and I can see those spanning across the keyboard. I think that’s incredible. Absolutely amazing!

Anita then describes another connection that she feels between the kinaesthetic and aural aspects of the piano and her voice, noting the ways in which the piano helps her counteract the challenges of the voice as a physiological instrument.

> The touch that is related to the sound is what I find phenomenal. I know I’m going to play C, but if I play a note in relation to that C, touch that C, and know that if I touch an E, I’m going to get a particular sound, that is so satisfying to me. To hear that major 3rd, to hear the dominant 7th interval, the touch is interesting, because I think it solidifies the sound so much more. You can’t touch that with the voice. You can’t press buttons with the voice. We don’t know pitch for sure. I find it easier to hear it first on the piano, then it’s almost like you can relate it to a pitch memory or something like that, which I find quite fascinating.

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[32] Wardell, A. (1995). Twisted [Song]. On *Why do you cry?* [Music by Wardell Gray; Lyrics by Annie Ross]. Ultimate Groove.

Having heard about the way Anita interacts with the piano in her practice, I ask her to consider how the piano impacts the way she improvises with her voice; the topic is one that Anita is very passionate about.

> Oh we could talk about that for an hour probably! Well, to me, it’s vital. I don’t think I could do it without it. I tried in the beginning to listen, and to copy saxophones. I transcribed trumpet, sax, piano, guitar, everything, but I never really knew what I was singing. I knew I was singing bebop, and the more I got deeper into it, I would come more and more to the piano. I think it’s impacted my singing probably more than I will ever know. Because I rely on it so much. I rely on the piano. Most people say that they listen to the bass when they’re singing, but I listen to the piano, because also, the range of my voice is slightly higher. I sing a lot in my head voice, so I hear those upper structures of the chord voicing, and I find I relate to them. I hone-in on those, I get them. So it impacts on me regarding tuning and intonation. I hear the intonation on the piano much easier than I can hear it on a sax or a trumpet. Because the intonation of the piano is fixed, it’s much more defined. It’s helped me so much more. Plus I can hear clearly all the fast runs. So the articulation on the piano is really clean, whereas perhaps on another instrument, it’s slurred. You cannot fake on the piano for doing it properly. Unless you play glissandi all the time. On a piano, you’ve got to have correct fingering. And you’ve got to really know where you’re taking the line, the dynamic of the line, the articulation, where is it accented, and where is it not. If I slow down on the piano, I’m much more likely to be in tune, in time, and more correct. So it impacts on me a lot. But also just practicing scatting. Because I’m playing chords, I don’t have just one note to tune to, I can tune to the whole range of the chord, the whole realm. If I’m singing over C7 sharp 11, I can play that on the piano and make sure I’m singing all the right notes. I can see the major and minor scales that goes with it, I can see the major and minor arpeggios that go with it, I can see the intervals. There is more than just one thing. I see everything.

Anita’s love for improvisation is contagious; I’m itching to see her demonstrate those masterful skills in action. I ask if she could sing and play me a tune–with some improvisation. Anita heartily obliges and heads over to her keyboard. “How about a standard, because that’s the thing that I love the most… what about a blues… ‘It Could Happen to You?’” she suggests. I respond, “That sounds perfect Anita, my own private concert!” Selecting her favourite Rhodes sound on the keyboard, Anita briefly plays through the changes of the tune while humming the melody, to refresh her memory. Anita then tells me that she’ll sing through a head in and out, with a couple of solos in the middle.

> Hide your heart from sight
> Lock your dreams at night
> It could happen to you

> Don’t count stars or you might stumble
> Someone drops a sigh and down you tumble
> Keep an eye on spring
> Run when church bells ring
> It could happen to you
>
> All I did was wonder how your arms would be
> And it happened to me
>
> Keep an eye on spring
> Run when church bells ring
> It could happen to you
>
> All I did was wonder how your arms would be
> And it happened to me
>
> (It Could Happen to You)[33]

As Anita finishes her tune, I clap, and exclaim “Woohoo!” Anita thanks me in her usual gracious way. She shares that the tune is one that she absolutely loves—a fact that is evident from her performance. As Anita sang and played, she made it look effortless—the true mark of an expert, in my opinion. Anita sang through the original melody of the tune, and then in her solos, she broke into lighting fast “bebop-esque” lines (one of her trademarks as a singer). All the while, Anita sustained a steady groove and self-accompaniment on the piano. I ask Anita to walk me through her thoughts and feelings as she performed the tune.

> I always think about what I can do to make this performance, in this situation, the best or the highest musical good. I don’t put on any sounds in my voice. I just keep my voice really honest, and very me. I like singing as if I’m talking to you.

Hearing how Anita approaches her performance, I ask her to describe how she approaches her preparation, and what she aims to cover in her practice sessions.

> First of all, I’d say voice—warm up first. And then your tuning and your resonances are there. Try to be as musical as possible all the time, and try to spell out the chord changes. But when you spell out the chord changes, you want to be musical as well. You don’t just want to fill up every bar. You could hear that there were some spaces in my performance. I like to have a bit of space. Timing, so to make sure your fast lines are in time. You know, all those fast double-time licks, and making sure the slower swinging licks are in the right place too, and that they swing and they say something. It’s

[33] Wardell, A. (2019). *It Could Happen to You* [Song: Live Performance]. [Music by Jimmy Van Heusen; Lyrics by Johnny Burke]. Unpublished.

> about a conversation, so you’re trying to chat to somebody whilst you’re singing.

Anita’s singing certainly does have a conversational quality, and it’s clear to me that her intention in this regard is realised.

> I just love to create something special with music, but I can create much better if someone’s playing the piano, because then I can 100% think about the song. When I’m playing, a lot of the time I’m thinking about the chords, “Am I playing the right chords?” My voice talks very nicely to the piano but the piano doesn’t talk very nicely to me, because of my lack of technique on the piano. However, one thing I always think is being in time, and having a good feel. I was trying to walk a bass line for myself, so that made it a bit easier. So I then locked into the walking bass line, because I need some kind of solid time to dig into. So because I was the only person supplying the time, I was digging into my time. And it’s funny, because the way that I feel the swing feel, I actually try to play it like that on the piano, even despite the ‘technical disabilities’ that I might have, I still feel the groove. To me, the most important thing about this is time and groove. To me, it’s the sensation, how it feels, and that’s what I tap into. The feeling of it. Groove is attached to emotion, but time, it’s either correct or incorrect.

I begin to detect a difference in Anita’s experience with the piano in practice in comparison to performance. It seems that although her love for the piano is deep, Anita feels more comfortable to perform away from the piano. Nevertheless, she continues to explain exactly why she loves the piano so much.

> The piano is by far, the most elite instrument. The piano is like an orchestra. You don’t need to be accompanied by anything else. It’s the violins, it’s the trombone section, the trumpet section, the sax player, the rhythm section, it’s everything encompassed. It’s wonderful really, when you think about the things that you can do on a on a piano, it’s never ending. You can make sounds like strings in orchestra, single line, bass line. You’ve got all the dynamics, you’ve got the sustain pedals, you could be percussive on it. And the dampening of the chords. The range is incredible, it’s so easy to respond to the piano, it seems to me, because you’ve got a single line as well. The colour is maybe one dimensional with melodic instruments, but with the piano there’s definitely more colour. It makes you want to respond to it. That’s the strength that the piano has, and the hold; it’s got a draw. I love it so much. The piano is incredible. I would not be the singer I am without the piano, and that’s the God honest truth!

At times, the distinction between voice and piano can be blurred for Anita—she wonders where one instrument ends, and the other begins.

> I wonder whether my singing is informed by the piano, or is the piano informed by my singing? That’s the question I’m battling with now. I don’t know what comes first. There isn’t much written down about any of this.

> Maybe we’d all be much more informed if it were. Once you start talking about it, you realise the importance of it, and the depth.

As I nod in agreement, I’m reminded of my conviction in the power of telling stories; the very act of sharing our thoughts and experiences facilitates our ability to glean knowledge from our own experiences. Anita’s experiences of the piano are deep and complex. To her, the piano is so much more than an instrument, it is an integral part of her musical fabric, the catalyst for her musical sense-making, a tool, a partner, and a companion.

> Can you imagine what life would be like without the piano? I don’t think anything would be the same. I sometimes sit at the piano and I stare at it, for ages and think, “God you’re phenomenal, you’re absolutely amazing”. I’m so grateful that I have the opportunity to look into it, and see it looking back at me. And I ask it questions. It doesn’t talk to me, but all you’ve gotta do is play it, and then it talks to you. And then you find things out that way. It’s an amazing thing, it really is.

Destination

To the onlooker, Anita appears to be at the peak of her career. She is a highly accomplished and successful performer, with a long list of recordings, accolades, teaching positions, and a busy touring schedule. One could say that she has arrived at her destination. When I raise the idea of her apparent success, Anita finds the notion a little troubling.

> I find the idea of success quite confronting. How do you measure success? Do I measure my success on the fact that I’ve achieved a good knowledge of bebop? Because if so, then I feel successful. I feel successful in that I’ve continued to do what I set out to do, I’ve continued to give my heart and soul, my life and all my time, basically, I’m married to the music. So I call that successful, because it’s a longevity, and I’ve been in it for a long time. I’ve made a couple of albums, that’s successful. I’ve won a couple of awards, that’s successful. However, those awards, and the albums, the success of those doesn’t mean as much to me as the success of getting something right, and being accurate and being really technically able to facilitate all the things that you want to facilitate in the music. I consider that success in oneself. I measure success on having a great gig with my musicians, and feeling that that was a successful night, and that the audience loved it. Success to me is success in the moment, doing a good gig, and then that escalates, and the next gig hopefully will be good. And then so on and so forth. I’d rather have 150 successful gigs that I’ve done, than try to barter for success by getting attention in other ways. There are so many other things in life that are important, like being happy with your family, and being happy with the people that you share your environment with. To have a little bit of success is very nice. It’s the icing on the cake. If you don’t forget that there’s still other things that are important, that’s the way that success grows.

Anita’s thoughts form a perfect segue to my last question. I ask, “Anita, do you have any advice, encouragement or warnings that you’d give to aspiring jazz singers?” Anita first considers the personal more human aspects of jazz singing.

> All I would say is that I think being a jazz singer is accessible to anyone. Nobody should feel like they can’t go down that path. Nobody should feel undermined by anybody. And if anybody tries to undermine you, or make you feel bad, just be strong in yourself, don’t fight back, just know where you’re at, not just musically, but also in your head and heart, so that if anybody undermines you, you’re not affected by it. So you’re going down your path, you’re polite and respectful to everybody, but do not ever feel like someone’s making you feel like you can’t do this. And seek out mentors, because there’s people out there who love to help.

She then reframes the focus of her answer to consider the craft of jazz singing; her advice is drenched with wisdom drawn from her own experiences in life and jazz.

> The other thing is to practice a lot, and listen a lot, and transcribe a lot. And delve into the music; make a study of it so that you know it inside and out, back to front, like the back of your hand. Know all the options that are open to you. Check everything out. And if you think, “Oh, I only like this style”, instead think, “Well I like this style the most, but I’m gonna check these other things out as well”. Leave no stone unturned. Learn your theory and your harmony so that you can do your own arrangements, and be familiar with all the areas of being a musician, theoretically, harmonically, improvisationally. As singers, we tell stories, so we want to be as honest with that as possible. [By focussing] on all those beautiful things, honesty, knowing where you’re at, and working hard, you will get there.

All too soon, the time has come to round off our conversation (although we both agree that we could talk at length about the topic!) I thank Anita for sharing her thoughts with me, and for squeezing me into her busy schedule. Anita responds, “Oh it was so great. I’ve really enjoyed every minute of it. Thank you so much for asking me!” We exchange our final well-wishes, promising to catch up again soon, and then wave goodbye as I end our Skype call.

Reflecting on our conversation, it’s clear to me that Anita considers life to be a “gift”. She graciously shares her time, passion, and knowledge with others, imparting wisdom from the “lessons she has learned” along her “journey”. The “moments” we have spent together are times that I have “savoured”, and now consider to be “precious memories”. In music and in life, Anita is a remarkable woman, and I am so thankful that our paths have crossed on this “golden highway”.

> The road I travel seems so long
> To wondrous lands I make a journey
> The gift of life, and the lessons to be learned

Have become my very best companions
Every step I take is savoured
And gather treasures for my dreams

Roads full of twists and turnings
I stop at each and every crossroad
Toward the sun sorry shadows fall behind
Winding streams
A rainbow’s many colours
These are precious little moments
Making precious memories

And over oceans so wide
The turning of the tide
Where does my path lead?
The moon will light and beckon me tonight
And take me on to where I need to be

It’s beauty that surrounds me
As I travel golden highways
Wise hands of time guide me back to where I’ve been
The long, long road
Holds my one and only secret
It’s the longing to be home, where my spirit can be free

(Travels / The Road)[34]

* * *

Postlude

For Anita, the piano has a “draw” and a “hold” on her; she “loves it”, “relies” upon it, and couldn’t imagine her life “without” it. She is grateful for the piano, and the way it is transformational in her performance practice as a singer. Anita uses the piano to delve deeper with music theory and harmony—visualising, feeling, and hearing music on the piano, to “solidify” the same in her voice. Anita uses the piano to direct and shape her practice and transcription, to lock in with a “groove” in performance, and also considers it to be a “vital” aspect in her ability to improvise with the voice. For Anita, it seems that the piano is so much more than a mere tool, it is a deeply embodied, valued, appreciated, and relied-upon aspect of her musicianship.

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[34] Wardell, A. (2013). Travels / The Road [Song]. On *The road* [Music and Lyrics by Anita Wardell]. The Last Music Company.

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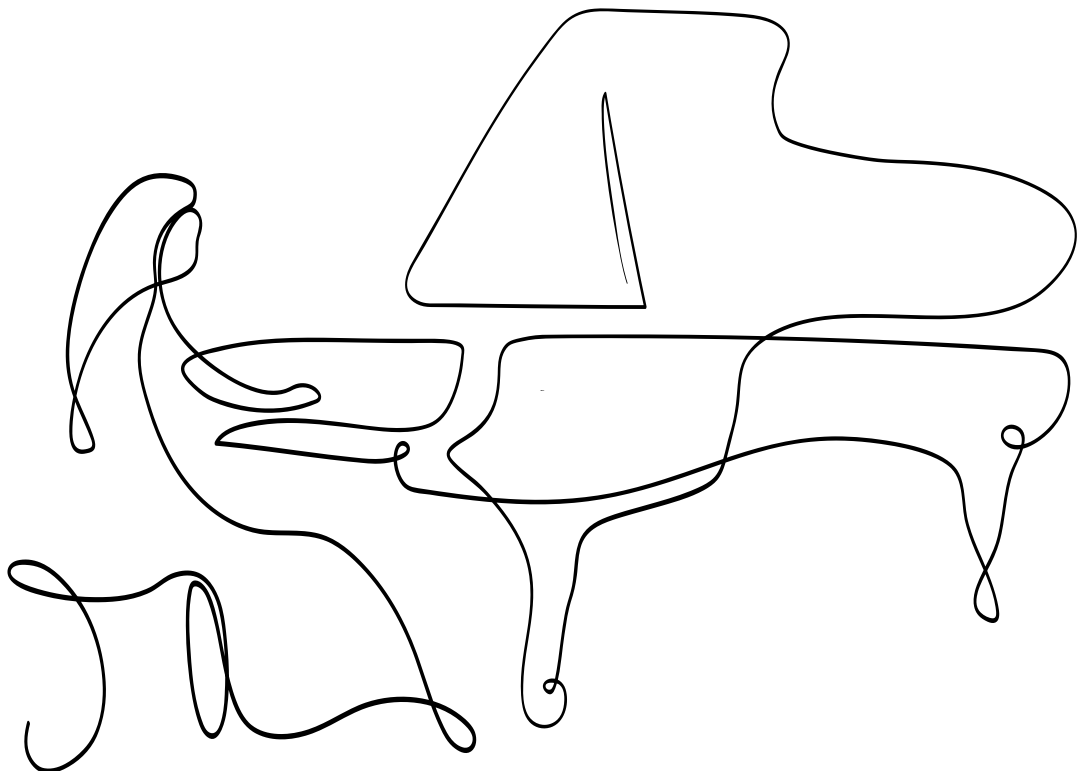

“Improvise”

CHAPTER 9: RESONANT NARRATIVE THREADS

9.1 Chapter Introduction

This study aimed to investigate expert vocal jazz improvisers' experiences of the piano. In response to this aim, two research questions framed the study:

1. How do expert vocal jazz improvisers, who also play piano, experience the piano?
2. What do expert vocal jazz improvisers' experiences of the piano mean to them?

Chapters 4 to 8 presented Part One of the findings, namely, the narratives of the study participants—Kristin Berardi, Brenda Earle Stokes, Michelle Nicolle, Sharny Russell, and Anita Wardell. Chapter 9 presents Part Two of the findings, namely, the resonant narrative threads that were identified across the participants' narratives, along with the discussion of the study findings.

The chapter is structured according to the two research questions. For each research question, overall findings are presented, followed by a more detailed discussion. Each resonant narrative thread is discussed and supported with verbatim quotations from the participants' narratives (as presented in Chapters 4 to 8). The findings of each resonant narrative thread are then interrogated against the relevant extant literature, and examined through the lens of the theoretical frames, namely the "4E framework" (embodied cognition) and the "musical agency lens" (Karlsen, 2011). Each section concludes with a summary of the findings through the theoretical frames, followed by a summary of the key findings. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings for both research questions.

As discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 6.2), to produce the resonant narrative threads I employed "analysis of narratives" (Polkinghorne, 1988). This form of analysis involved reading and re-reading the participant narratives to uncover significant plotlines (e.g. names gaps, silences, tensions, continuities, or discontinuities) that wove over time and place across the participants' stories (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These plotlines became the resonant narrative threads. In teasing out the resonant narrative threads I sought to narrate the participants' individual experiences, while also highlighting significant resonances that exist across their experiences collectively. For this reason, some of the threads are longer and more detailed, while others are shorter and more particular, however

all are equally significant and worthy of reporting and “teasing out” in the research findings.

Within narrative inquiry (NI), it is understood that substantive differences can exist between dominant accounts of what things like music can mean (or of their supposed significance) and the ways in which these things are personally experienced by individuals (Bowman, 2006). For this reason, NI places an emphasis on the uniqueness of individuals’ stories, and the divergence of ways in which people experience what may appear to be—on a surface level—the same events and circumstances (Bowman, 2006). Individual narratives have the capacity to make marginal and disempowered voices heard (Bowman, 2009). They contest official discourses or “one-size-fits-all” accounts, presenting *a* story rather than *the* story (Bowman, 2009), which can question, disturb, and trouble clearly established and assured knowledge (Clandinin, 2009).

The same principle applies in the context of the resonant narrative threads presented in this chapter. The threads place an emphasis on the participants’ unique experiences as expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play the piano. By also considering both resonant aspects of the participants’ experiences collectively, the threads seek to present a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences in relation to the piano, and the way in which those experiences are meaningful. At this point, I re-emphasise the contextually bound nature of the study, both in terms of the particular focus on the participants’ experiences as expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play the piano, and in terms of my particular interpretation of the participants’ experiences as a narrative researcher.

9.1.1 Introduction to Research Question 1

The following section presents the findings for the first research question. To answer this research question, the section begins with an outline of key findings that were revealed through singers’ experiences of the piano. These findings are supported with verbatim quotations from the participants’ narratives (as presented in Chapters 4 to 8), and with a contextualisation against the relevant literature (as explored in Chapter 2: Literature Review). Following this, the three resonant narrative threads that I identified across the participants’ narratives, in response to the first research question, are introduced: “hands”, “eyes”, “ears”. Each thread is critically examined, with the support of verbatim quotations from the participants’ narratives (as presented in Chapters 4 to 8), and with a contextualisation against the

relevant literature (as explored in Chapter 2: Literature Review). From here, the findings are examined and summarised through the 4E framework (embodied cognition). The section concludes with a summary, and an introduction to the findings for the second research question.

9.2 Research Question 1: How do expert vocal jazz improvisers, who also play piano, experience the piano?

This study found that the study participants (expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play the piano) expressed having deeply embodied experiences with the piano. Specifically, these singers experiences reveal that when coupled with the piano, the vocal instrument is no longer constrained by its fundamental, organic, physiological embodiment (that is, embodied in the literal sense—“in body”). Rather, the voice becomes an instrument that encompasses all the faculties, systems, and senses of the body and external environment. In other words, through the piano, singers experience a form of “hyper-embodiment” of the voice, to the point where the voice paradoxically transcends its fundamentally embodied nature.

All the singers in this study shared stories about the ways in which they conceive of themselves as being “in relationship with the piano”. This relationship has developed and changed in nature over time. During the formative stages of this relationship, the piano was an external instrument “in the world” that these singers *played*; it was something to be *learned*; it was a *tool* for hearing music.

Kristin: I started on piano.

Brenda: Piano was my first instrument… I’ve been playing forever.

Michelle: Playing piano is something I did organically… way before I was thinking of singing… I taught myself to play by sitting down and playing songs off the radio and “telly” (television), songs that I loved.

Sharny: I was picking up tunes by the time I was two on the piano… I was three years and ten months old when I started learning piano formally.

Anita: I'd pick up any sort of sheet music, from the Carpenters, ABBA, everything, and just learn how to play the chords on the piano, and force myself to accompany myself while I sang.

However, over time as the singers aged and their musicianship matured, their experiences with the piano deepened to the extent that the piano became an integrated aspect of their vocal instrument, and an integral component in their conceptualisation of music. In other words, the piano became an extension of these singers' voice; it became an "external part" of their embodied vocal instrument.

Michelle: The piano is purely an external part of your voice.

Anita went further to explain that the piano is so deeply embodied within her voice, that she is unsure where each instrument begins and ends:

Anita: I wonder whether my singing is informed by the piano, or is the piano informed by my singing? That's the question I'm battling with now. I don't know what comes first.

Both Michelle and Anita speak of the type of "merging" with an instrument that is described in the literature. Specifically, over time, an instrument can be gradually transformed from a mere "tool" or "object", into a functionally integrated aspect of the musician's body (Kaptelinin, 1996; cf Nijs, 2017), to the extent that the instrument feels as transparent as the body itself (Nijs, 207; Nijs, et al., 2013). In other words, the instrument becomes an embodied part of the musician. Brenda also spoke to this kind of convergence with the piano:

Brenda: My relationship with the piano is a very co-dependent one, because I need it! I need to know!... I hear music and I conceptualise it in a piano way… the way that I read music, the way that I interpret music, the way that I see notes on the page, or the note that I'm supposed to sing, and how I conceptualise it is in a piano-directed way… Singing was a lot more difficult when I couldn't give myself my first note, or look at my hands and know what

the top of the voicing sounded like so I could find inspiration. I really needed the piano to be there.

For Brenda, the piano has become a part of who she is as a musician and a singer; the piano is an embodied aspect of her voice. She “needs” the piano to approach and conceptualise music; she “needs” the piano to read and interpret music so that she can connect her voice with the same. Without the piano, Brenda loses the ability to approach music in the way that she has become accustomed; it is as if she is “missing a limb”; her embodied instrument is missing a vital component. Without the piano, Brenda loses the ability to securely reinforce her vocal pitch on the piano, which makes it acutely more “difficult” for her to accurately locate absolute pitches in her voice. Additionally, she loses the “inspiration” that the piano provides in shaping the melodies that she sings against the underlying harmony of a tune.

These singers’ experiences also revealed that the absence of the piano does not necessarily indicate a complete break in the merging between singer and instrument. Rather, this merging continues to exist, even when the singer is not physically touching the piano:

Michelle: Just actually sitting at the piano, not even touching the keyboard I know where the notes are much quicker.

Michelle feels a connection with the piano without needing to touch (play) it. Kristin went further to explain that she continues to experience a connection with the piano even when she isn’t physically present with the piano:

Kristin: Even though I may not have a piano all the time, I don’t feel like anything’s missing, because I have been working with that harmony. I’m still hearing it in my head… I think of the piano a lot when I'm soloing. That helps me to feel more confident… the piano can keep you on track. It helps to build muscle memory, and the right neural pathways, locking you in, and keeping everything more focussed.

Because Kristin has spent time with the piano, the harmony of music is embodied within her; she *sees* the piano and *feels* the piano, even when she isn’t physically

present with the piano. Visualising the piano and drawing upon her muscle memory of action built at the piano, helps her to “feel more confident”; it keeps her voice “on track” and “focussed”, so that she feels “locked in” with the music in a more tangible way. Michelle described similar concepts:

Michelle: I’m a very visual person. I see the keyboard or the stave in my mind while I’m singing. And then of course, you’ve got the muscle memory, of knowing roughly where you are pitch wise. The piano is really helpful for me; it makes a big difference. Connecting your singing to something concrete is really important… I think if you have that connection to the physical piano you can relate to the theory of things. It gives you a deeper understanding.

Michelle is a self-proclaimed “visual person”; she visualises the keyboard in her mind while she is singing. Likewise, she also describes having built a stronger “muscle memory” in her voice through the kinaesthetic connection she has with the piano. This connection gives her something “concrete” to grasp onto when she is singing; a *feeling* that can be associated with a physical position and “pitch” in her voice. This “connection” opens up a gateway for her to connect with the theoretical aspects of music as she sings; her connection with the piano “deepens” her understanding of music.

Michelle and Kristin’s stories reveal a new dimension of the merging that can occur between a musician and instrument (singer and piano), namely, that this merging or connectedness with the piano can continue to operate even when the singer is physically absent from the piano. In other words, the piano becomes a “phantom limb”; even when the piano is not physically present, these singers continue to *sense* the presence of the piano and draw upon it to support and direct their voice. Fundamentally, with this merging of singer and instrument (in presence and absence), the piano brings a new realm of possibilities to the voice beyond phonation; it facilitates a form of “hyper-embodiment” that enables singers to find a deeper connection with music in their voice. This connection encompasses all the faculties, systems, and senses of the body and external environment.

As I reflected on the notion of “hyper-embodiment”, it resonated with me that the piano enables these singers to metaphorically *see*, in the fullest sense of the word. For example, seeing can equate with sense making, understanding, and knowing. Seeing can represent both sight and visualisation. Seeing can be multi-sensory (encompassing all the senses of the body). Seeing can be a form of heightened sensory awareness of the body itself, as well as the external environment. Seeing can speak to a heightened state of self-awareness and self-reflection; of seeing oneself in the abstract. Likewise, seeing can speak to a connection with others, and the world; of being seen and understood by others. Seeing in music can indicate a kind of “going deeper” inside the music, a richer, broader, and more holistic way of experiencing music.

As I continued to read, and re-read Kristin, Brenda, Michelle, Sharny and Anita’s narratives, I began to see numerous instances where they spoke about their experiences of the piano in metaphorical language. This corroborates M. Barrett and Stauffer’s (2019) assertions about metaphors, namely, that metaphors can provide a means for “voicing experience” (p. 86) about music that would be inaccessible by any other means. Metaphors have a “framing effect” (Moran, 1989). They constitute reality by means of representation (Polkinghorne, 1988), thereby facilitating a level of abstraction in which meaning can be made in terms of what is “possible” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; p. 18; cf Bruner, 1986). With this understanding in mind, I considered how my attentiveness to the participants’ metaphorical language could open a wealth of imaginative possibilities about their experiences of the piano. This direction was not one that I had anticipated would arise in teasing out the resonant narrative threads, however, it presented an intriguing way of “going deeper” into the interrogation of the participants’ experiences, in response to my “wonderings” as a researcher about the “research puzzle”. Indeed, the very concept of a “research puzzle” that I adopted within this study is itself, a metaphor, as are the terms “thread” and “tapestry”, and corresponding references to “teasing out”, “weaving”, or “stitching” that are adopted accordingly.

In the following sections I introduce the three resonant narrative threads that I identified across the participants’ narratives, in response to the first research question: “hands”, “eyes”, and “ears”.

9.2.1 Hands

As a physiological instrument, the voice provides little kinaesthetic or tactical feedback to the singer (Hargreaves, 2014b; cf Pressing, 1988); singers have very limited feelings or sensations in the throat. Said in different terms, where instrumentalists have a degree of aural, visual, proprioceptive, and tactile feedback from their instruments, singers have only aural and proprioceptive feedback (Pressing, 1984; cf Hargreaves, 2014b). Brenda and Anita spoke about the limitations of the voice as a physiological instrument in the context of the inability of the voice to externally and directly access pitch:

Brenda: The voice has no buttons… if [singers] have no way of finding those notes, where are they going to get it from?

Anita: You can't press buttons with the voice.

These statements align with the work of Bell (2013), Hargreaves, (2014b), Neimack (2004), Pressing (1988) and Weir (2015) who describe the inability of the voice to directly access pitch through external means, such as the pressing of “buttons” or keys. It is important to clarify that singers can intuitively produce pitch with the voice (e.g. “hold a tune”) by drawing upon the “in-built” feedback loop of the voice (e.g. the indirectly response loop of internal audiation and auditory output). However, extending this behaviour to accurately produce pitches spontaneously (e.g. pitches that have not been prescribed), and to subsequently produce those pitches accurately is acutely more difficult for singers, due to the lack of external or direct means of accessing pitch with the voice. Although some singers are fortunate to have the ability of perfect pitch, for the majority, the ability to connect with pitch (and to subsequently produce accurate pitch) must be built over time.

Kristin explained that she uses the piano to counteract this challenge of the voice, in order to build a connection with pitch:

Kristin: I’ve always thought that it would help if singers played another instrument, because you need a kinaesthetic connection to something else that is making pitches. As a singer, you have to build that connection over time, and that might take a while. Unless you have perfect pitch, or some kind of instrument locking

you in and keeping everything a bit more focussed, you’re going in blind. But the piano can keep you on track. It helps to build muscle memory, and the right neural pathways, locking you in, and keeping everything more focussed… You don’t have to make the pitch, you press down the key and there is the note, which is a nice problem to have.

Our hands are one of the main ways that we experience *touch* in this world. Ordinarily, the hands are of no use to the voice in and of themselves, however, the piano changes this. The singers in this study shared stories about how the piano gives their voice the ability to *touch*; the piano gives the voice “hands”; a metaphorical type of extended kinaesthesia. Here, Kristin alludes to this type of touch. For Kristin, by “pressing down” the piano keys, that is, physically touching and playing the piano, she can build a sense of pitch-connection into her “muscle memory”. The piano “locks her in” with pitch, and provides some parameters that keeps her pitch “focussed” and “on track”.

Anita also spoke about the “touch” that is related to the piano:

Anita: The touch that is related to the sound is what I find phenomenal… it solidifies the sound so much more. You can't touch that with the voice.

For Anita, the “touch” that is related to pitch is something that she finds “phenomenal”. Being able to “touch” pitch on the piano, and to relate that sensation back to the voice, enables Anita to “solidify sound”; through the piano, the “hands” of Anita’s voice can *touch* pitch.

Michelle also described that being able to externally connect with pitch via the piano is immensely helpful for her performance practice as a singer:

Michelle: The piano is really helpful for me; it makes a big difference. Connecting your singing to something concrete is really important. The piano is purely an external part of your voice. I think if you have that connection to the physical piano you can relate to the theory of things. It gives you a deeper understanding, and of course, it comes

back to understanding the piano and the theory. They’re definitely wrapped up together.

For Michelle, the piano provides a way for her to connect with pitch in a tangible “concrete” way. The connection that she feels with the piano is so deep that the piano feels as if it is an “external part” of her voice. Having a “physical” connection to the piano enables Michelle to find a “deeper” understanding of the theory of music, which relates back to the piano and to her voice.

9.2.2 Eyes

As an instrument that is entirely housed within the body (e.g. having no external keys, buttons, valves, or strings) the voice cannot provide visual feedback to the singer (Hargreaves, 2014b; Pressing, 1988). Singers cannot directly see their instrument, rather, they can only observe the indirect (or proprioceptive) responses of the instrument (e.g. the expansion and contraction of the ribcage with breath, the mouth, lips, tongue, and jaw moving in articulation). The principal way that we experience *sight* in this world is through the eyes. Ordinarily, the eyes in and of themselves provide little use to the voice, however, with the piano, this changes. The singers in this study shared stories about how the piano gives their voice the ability to *see*; because of the piano, the voice has “eyes”; a metaphorical type of extended *sight*.

Brenda explained that she uses the piano to support and reinforce singing; she “sees” the notes on the piano that she sings with her voice:

Brenda: Anytime I feel like my sight reading or my scat singing isn’t very good, or I’m having a hard time making a change, or finding a certain harmonic movement, I go right back to the piano and conceptualise it in theoretical terms on the piano. I see the notes on the piano in front of me while I’m singing.

For Brenda, the piano is a problem-solving tool for her voice. Being able to “see” notes on the piano strengthens her ability to sight read, improvise, and connect with harmony.

Sharny shared similar thoughts, describing the piano as a “visual instrument” that offers a means for connecting her voice with various elements of music:

Sharny: The piano is so straightforward to look at. It’s a visual instrument. You can actually see the geography of music. You can see the intervals, the shape of a chord, and can break that up, and hear those notes… you can actually see how everything fits together. And when you’re following a melody on the keyboard, and you’re playing those notes, and you can actually locate those notes in your voice, it’s just completely undergirding your ability to place notes and hear what’s coming. It definitely helps the ear to form. And then it helps the whole journey into singing passages, because it cross-connects with a visual image.

For Sharny, the construction of the piano is “straightforward” because it provides a way for her to see individual elements of music (e.g. pitch, intervals, harmony); to see the elements of music “broken up” into their constituent parts. The piano also provides a way for Sharny to see these elements together as a whole; to see how the elements of music “fit together” in organised cohesion. But the visual aspects do not work in isolation, rather, they “cross-connect” with the aural aspect of music. In other words, the piano provides a means for Sharny to see and hear pitches, and to then connect those same aspects with her voice. This aural-visual connection supports and shapes Sharny’s skills of audiation, and her ability to create and sing “passages” or melodies with the voice.

Anita described a similar connection with the visual aspects of the piano. The piano enables her to “see everything” that she sings, and this, as was the case for Sharny, cross-connects with the aural reinforcement of the piano:

Anita: The piano is all there in front of you… looking at the keys I see where a semitone is, and where a tone is, I see the intervals. When I'm working stuff out and I'm practicing, as I play the piano I can see and watch the visualisation of what I'm singing. And then I test it… it helps so much. It really does, just looking at it… Because I'm playing

chords, I don’t have just one note to tune to, I can tune to the whole range of the chord, the whole realm… There is more than just one thing. I see everything… I think that's incredible. Absolutely amazing.

For Anita, the visual reinforcement of the piano is something that she considers to be “incredible” and “amazing”. Looking at the piano provides a way for Anita to “see everything” that she sings; she can “see” the intervals, melodies, chords, and scales that she plays. The same principle applies in reverse; the piano provides a way for Anita to “sing” everything that she “sees”; she can “sing” the intervals, melodies, chords, and scales that she “sees” at the piano—“testing” her voice against the same. Put simply, the piano widens the creative and expressive potentials of Anita’s voice across a “whole realm” of wider musical possibilities.

Michelle expressed that she doesn’t need to be directly observing the piano keyboard to glean the same benefits in her voice—she can “visualise” the keyboard in her mind:

Michelle: I’m a very visual person. I see the keyboard or the stave in my mind while I’m singing.

These singers’ stories support the work of Wadsworth Walker (2005) who asserted that the piano provides a visual reinforcement of harmonic understanding, namely, by enabling and encouraging singers to directly examine chords and other theoretical constructs through the sense of sight (Wadsworth Walker, 2005). This ability also enhances singers’ aural comprehension, specifically in regard to accurately audiating harmonic structures (Wadsworth Walker, 2005). In other words, being able to *see* the harmonic structures of music (e.g. intervals and chords) supports singers’ ability to connect with the same, to mentally conceptualise (audiate), and vocally reproduce the same with their voice. Hargreaves (2014b) also notes this visual-aural cross-connection of the piano, which can support singers to mentally reinforce the learning and processing of auditory information (Hargreaves, 2014b). Said in other terms, being able to see aspects of music assists singers with aurally processing the same information.

9.2.3 Ears

Audiation is a usual process of singing; a critical aspect of jazz musicianship (cf Dobbins, 1980; Pressing, 1984), that supports singers' ability to improvise with the voice. Indeed, without the ability to access pitch directly or externally with the voice, singers must audiate intended pitches prior to phonation (Hargreaves; 2014b). Singers rely on their "inner hearing" to develop an internalised sense of tonality and pitch awareness, as well as the ability to imitate melody and comprehend harmony, to understand how pitch relates to the broader harmonic structure of a tune, and to be aware of the exact pitches that are produced by other musicians (H. Russell, 2016). To this end, singers' "ears" are already a very active component in their musicianship. However, with the piano, singers' "ears" gain superior hearing ability. The singers in this study shared stories about how the piano gives their voice an enhanced *hearing* ability; because of the piano, the voice has "ears"; a metaphorical type of extended *hearing*.

Anita described that she "hones-in" on the pitch of the piano and relates this back to her voice:

> Anita: I listen to the piano… I hear those upper structures of the chord voicing, and I find I relate to them. I hone-in on those, I get them. So it impacts on me regarding tuning and intonation. I hear the intonation on the piano much easier… Because the intonation of the piano is fixed, it's much more defined. It's helped me so much more. Plus I can hear clearly all the fast runs. So the articulation on the piano is really clean.

For Anita, the piano is an essential component in developing her intonation and pitch accuracy. When she hears the piano, she "hones-in" on the pitches she hears, "gets-them" (understands them) and then "relates" those same pitches back to her voice. The fixed tuning of the piano also enables Anita to hear "articulation" more clearly—the precise articulation that she relies upon in her improvisation and vocalese.

The singers in this study described an array of ways in which the piano builds their ability to hear harmony, and therefore, to create music more effectively within a harmonic framework within their improvisation. Specifically, the piano provides a

means for these singers to hear and process the melodic and harmonic structures of music, and to subsequently connect and reproduce the same in their voice.

> Michelle: The piano helps me to know the working of the chords, better than if I was doing it all purely by ear. It just means you get into the theory of the harmony a bit deeper… you can practice more efficiently, it’s less guesswork.

For Michelle, hearing chords played on the piano helps her to get inside “the theory of the harmony” in a “deeper” way. It cuts out the “guesswork” of the voice, providing a fixed pitch with which she can connect—a stronger sense of pitch than if she were relying on her inner “ears” alone.

Sharny also described how the piano helps her to get inside harmony:

> Sharny: You can see the intervals, the shape of a chord, and can break that up, and hear those notes. It’s really the most remarkable tool for aural training… And when you’re following a melody on the keyboard, and you’re playing those notes, and you can actually locate those notes in your voice, it’s just completely undergirding your ability to place notes and hear what’s coming. It definitely helps the ear to form.

For Sharny, the piano is an integral “tool” in her “aural training”. Being able to hear pitches played externally on the piano, and to locate those same notes in her voice, is a process that undergirds her ability to audiate “place” notes. Not only can Sharny hear single pitches played by the piano, but she can also hear intervals and chords, and break them up into their constituent components. Having internally connected with these elements (played externally by the piano), Sharny is better able to anticipate what may be “coming” next in the broader structure of a tune. In other words, the piano helps Sharny’s “ear to form”; the piano supports and reinforces her skills of audiation.

Anita describes that she finds it easier to connect with pitch in her voice after hearing it played externally on the piano:

Anita: We don't know pitch for sure. I find it easier to hear it first on the piano, then it’s almost like you can relate it to a pitch memory or something like that, which I find quite fascinating.

Anita explains a challenge that all singers face, namely, to sing in absolute pitch, without the ability to naturally produce absolute pitch, or to hear it externally on their instrument (Hargreaves, 2014b). For Anita, hearing pitch played externally on the piano helps her to connect with (and internalise) pitch with the voice. In other words, by hearing pitch externally on the piano, Anita is able to compensate for the inability of her voice to produce absolute pitch without supporting reference. This sense of internalised pitch becomes a pitch memory, subsequently supporting her skills of audiation, and her capability in reproducing more accurate pitches.

9.2.4 Summary of Findings Through the 4E Framework

The above analyses and discussions can be summarised through the 4E framework (embodied cognition) as follows.

Findings reveal that through the piano singers experience a form of “hyper-embodiment” of the voice, whereby the embodied voice gains extra faculties (or senses) of touch, sight, and superior hearing. The impact of this on singers’ abilities, including their cognitive capacities, can be viewed, and explained through all four dimensions of the 4E cognition framework: “embodied”, “embedded”, “enactive”, and “extended”.

The piano is an “embodied” aspect of these singers’ voice (Torrance & Schumann, 2017). Singers’ interaction with the piano impacts upon their cognitive processes, increasing the variety of motor possibilities and sounds that they can achieve with the voice (van der Schyff, et al., 2018). In other words, singers’ skills of action—derived from their experiences of using the piano (Gibson, 2006) (e.g. touching, seeing, hearing pitches, intervals, melodies, and chords through the piano)—influence the way in which they can connect with and reproduce the same elements of music in their voice. These enhanced capabilities then enable singers to bring forth richer ideas in improvisation (van der Schyff, et al., 2018).

Singers’ experiences indicated that the piano is also an “embedded” aspect of their cognition. Specifically, singers’ cognition is influenced by their interaction with the piano—an external aspect of their musical environment (Roselli, 2018; van der

Schyff, et al., 2018). The piano is an integral component in singers’ agency, and their dynamic and interactive coping within the world (van de Laar & de Regt, 2008). The possibilities arising in singers’ improvisation eventuates from their dynamic interaction with the piano, and their established history of action-as-perception with the piano (van der Schyff, et al., 2018). Said in different terms, through their creative interaction and negotiation of the piano, singers are better enabled to produce a richer variety of musical possibilities in improvisation (Menin & Schiavio, 2012).

The piano is also an “enactive” aspect of singers’ cognition. Specifically, singers do not passively receive information from the piano, rather they actively generate musical meaning through their interaction with the piano. In this sense, singers’ relationship with their musical environment is active, adaptive, and mutually shaped by their multi-sensory interaction with the piano (Colombetti, 2014; van der Schyff, et al., 2018).

Singers’ experiences also revealed that the piano is an “extended” aspect of their cognition. Specifically, the piano is an external “agent of action” upon which these singers can distribute their cognitive load (Gibson, 2006; Hayes, 2019; Kersten, 2014; Rowlands, 2010). This distribution extends the affordances of the singers’ cognition, thereby enabling them to more easily perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult or impossible through internal cognition alone (Hayes, 2019; Hutto & Myin, 2013; van der Schyff, et al., 2018). Although the piano is physically external to these singers’ bodies, it has become functionally integrated into their cognitive life and creative processes in relation to music (van der Schyff, et al., 2018) in such a way that it provides their voice with additional sensory-motor feedback (Lyre, 2018). The extended feedback from the piano gives singers’ voice a metaphorical type of kinaesthesia through *touch* (the voice has “hands”), *sight* (the voice has “eyes”), and *hearing* (the voice has “ears”), thereby, supporting and directing their ability to connect with pitch, melody, and harmony in the voice, and to subsequently reproduce the same in their voice.

9.2.5 Summary of Research Question 1 Findings

This study found that through the piano, expert vocal jazz improvisers experience a form of “hyper-embodiment” of the voice, to the extent that the voice paradoxically transcends many of the limitations of its fundamentally embodied nature. When coupled with the piano, the voice is no longer constrained by its fundamental, organic, physiological embodiment (that is, embodied in the literal

sense—“in body”). Rather, the voice becomes an instrument that encompasses all the faculties, systems, and senses of the body and external environment. The piano gives the voice a metaphorical type of kinaesthesia through *touch* (the voice has “hands”), *sight* (the voice has “eyes”), and *hearing* (the voice has “ears”); a kinaesthesia that continues even when singers are not physically present with the piano. This connection is a form of “embodied”, “embedded”, “enactive”, and “extended” cognition, which enhances singers’ ability to internalise external aspects of music with their voice (e.g. through reinforcement on the piano), and likewise, to externalise internal aspects of their voice (e.g. through testing on the piano). Fundamentally, through their experiences with the piano, singers’ creative musical processes are enhanced, and their expressive capacities are enriched, enabling them to bring forth a richer variety of creative and expressive possibilities in improvisation. These findings advance from existing literature to provide a deeper understanding of the embodied nature of the voice as an instrument, and the ways in which singers can “merge” with an instrument. Likewise, these findings “trouble certainty” about the nature of the voice as an embodied instrument. Despite the limitations of the embodied voice, particularly in relation to improvisation, the coupling of singer and piano transcends these limitations through singers’ experience of the “hyper-embodied” voice.

9.2.6 Introduction to Research Question 2

The following section presents the findings for the second research question. To answer this research question, the section begins with an outline of key findings that were revealed through singers’ experiences of the piano. These findings are supported with verbatim quotations from the participants’ narratives (as presented in Chapters 4 to 8), and with a contextualisation against the relevant literature (as explored in Chapter 2: Literature Review), including key aspects of the theoretical frame, namely, the musical agency lens (Karlsen, 2011). Following this, the resonant narrative thread that I identified across the participants’ narratives, in response to the second research question, is introduced: “map”. The thread is critically examined, with the support of verbatim quotations from the participants’ narratives (as presented in Chapters 4 to 8), and with a contextualisation against the relevant literature (as explored in Chapter 2: Literature Review), and key aspects of the musical agency lens (Karlsen, 2011). From here, the findings are summarised

through the musical agency lens (Karlsen, 2011). The section concludes with a summary.

9.3 Research Question 2: What do expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano mean to them?

This study found that the participants’ experiences of the piano are meaningful in building and supporting vocal agency and musicianship. Specifically, the experiences of the singers in this study—expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play the piano—reveal that in most cases, the piano is an invaluable tool that offers kinaesthetic, visual, and aural feedback to the voice, thereby directly addressing the challenges of the voice as a physiological instrument. With the piano, singers can independently develop and maintain musical skills for practice and performance, which operate at both an individual and a collective level (e.g. in collaborative music situations). The piano provides a medium for problem solving in music; to approach and conceptualise music in theoretical (analytical) terms at the keyboard. With the piano, singers can “internalise the external”; to connect their embodied (internal) instrument with external aspects of music, including absolute pitch. The same is true in reverse; the piano also provides a way for singers to “externalise the internal”; to externally test and reinforce their singing against an instrument that has absolute pitch. With the piano, singers’ identity as “musicians” is reinforced (e.g. to be considered a musician of equal calibre to other instrumentalists).

Said in other terms, through their experiences of the piano, the singers in this study have expressed increased “agency” (Karlsen, 2011). Singers’ agency can be conceived as a kind of process freedom (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007); a freedom in doing and achieving musical goals and values (Sen, 1985). Agency speaks to singers’ capacity for action in relation to music or music-related settings (Karlsen, 2011)—a capacity that can be nourished and developed (Rikandi, 2012). Agency operates on an individual and collective level, and in music and music-related domains (Karlsen, 2011).

Sharny provided an intriguing illustration of what she considers to be the pinnacle of agency as an improvising jazz singer:

Sharny: … you need to be at a point as a singer, where if you’re on stage, and your whole band all suddenly stopped playing you can keep going. You have to have the music in you,

not just your vocal line… you have to have the band in your head. You have to be the band, so that you can actually hear everything that will, or should, be going on, so that when you keep singing, it’s as if they’re all still there. And you have to add things, and you have to improvise in between the notes if they’re not going to play them. So you get the band, feel and hear the band in your head, and have it in your being, so that every song and every performance you’ve studied through the harmony, and you know exactly what’s going on from start to finish.

For Sharny, agency means having the music “in your being”, to the extent that you can “hear everything” in the music, even if it’s not there. Singers must be able to “feel and hear the band”; they must be able to conceptualise all the colours, tones, melodies, harmonies, and rhythms that a band can create; they must have superior skills of audiation. Singers must also be able to harness those audiated ideas in order to “add things” and “improvise between” things in performance; with their voice, they must be able to enact every aspect of the music they mentally conceive, with technical and expressive fluency and pitch accuracy. Singers must “be the band” in both theory and practice.

Due to the challenges of the voice as a physiological instrument, building the skills of agency is acutely more difficult for singers in comparison to other instruments. Specifically, where other instrumentalists have the benefit of receiving a degree of aural, visual, proprioceptive, and tactile feedback from their instruments, singers have only aural and proprioceptive feedback (Pressing, 1984; cf Hargreaves, 2014b). This means that singers lack a clear or direct connection between a particular pitch and a physical position in the voice (e.g. through touching or seeing keys, buttons, or valves). To this end, singers must find an alternative means to build an understanding of pitch and harmony, and to connect the same with their voice. Brenda spoke to this challenge:

Brenda: I think it may be actually pretty impossible for a singer to be able to sing the finer parts of harmony if they don’t have the capacity on an instrument. Because if they have

> no way of finding those notes, where are they going to get it from? The voice has no buttons, and there's no visual patterning. If you're going to sing something and land on the sharp 11 of the chord, how are you going to do that, if you don't know what that is?

It is important to clarify that many people can sing and "hold a tune" through the intuitive manipulation of their voice, as it indirectly responds to its own internal audiation, and subsequent auditory output (e.g. having an "in-built" feedback loop). However, the ability to mindfully conceive (audiate) and subsequently produce with the voice (phonate) a certain set of prescribed pitches, that have not been previously heard or provided (e.g. played on another instrument, or heard externally by some other means), is a profoundly different skill. This is the type of pitch production that Brenda alludes to. Arguably, the ability to find "difficult" notes (e.g. altered notes in harmonic progressions, chromaticisms, intervallic patterns) when improvising with the voice, is supremely more difficult than the more general singing of melodic materials from rehearsed or remembered melodies. Said in other terms, although singers can intuitively produce pitch with the voice, extending this behaviour to "find notes" (audiate pitches), and to subsequently produce those notes with the voice (e.g. to sing/"land on the sharp 11 of the chord") is "pretty impossible" due to the fact that singers have "no buttons" or "visual patterning" to touch and see on their instrument. Unless a singer has an internalised knowledge of pitch (to "know" what pitch is), built through action on another instrument (to "have the capacity on an instrument"), it is acutely more difficult to "find" and sing notes in absolute pitch (to "do" it) with their voice alone.

These findings support the work of Aitken and Aebersold (1983) and Bell (2013) who explain that singers must find alternative means to connect with pitch. Hargreaves (2014b) explained that engaging in behaviours such as learning an instrument can provide a means for singers to gain more precise kinaesthetic information (e.g. to receive the tactile and visual feedback that is missing from the voice as an instrument). Wadsworth Walker (2005) explained that the *piano* provides an ideal means for singers to gain visual and kinaesthetic reinforcement. Additionally, the piano can enhance singers' aural comprehension and ability to accurately audiate harmonic structures, to build their stronger sense of (and

connection with) the vertical and linear perspectives of music, and in turn, to gain a more thorough awareness of pitch relationships (Wadsworth Walker, 2005).

Brenda explained that with the piano, she gains a level of self-sufficiency as a musician; she feels a sense of “empowerment” (Karlsen, 2011) through her independence:

> Brenda: The piano gave me the ability to self-administer what I wanted to learn… being able to find the answers and quantify them, was really helpful… Empowerment means that you have the skills to be able to do things. I think of the piano as an empowerment tool.

Here, Brenda describes the piano as an “empowerment tool”—a tool that enables her to be self-sufficient as a singer. The piano helps Brenda to problem solve and “find answers” to her musical questions and curiosities. The piano provides a reliable and verifiable source of information that she can draw upon to “self-administer” what she wants to learn. The piano equips Brenda with practical skills that make her feel more capable as a musician.

Sharny also spoke to the information source of the piano, describing the piano as a “visual instrument” that outlines the “geography of music”:

> Sharny: The piano is so straightforward to look at. It’s a visual instrument. You can actually see the geography of music. You can see the intervals, the shape of a chord, and can break that up, and hear those notes… you can actually see how everything fits together. And when you’re following a melody on the keyboard, and you’re playing those notes, and you can actually locate those notes in your voice, it’s just completely undergirding your ability to place notes and hear what’s coming. It definitely helps the ear to form. And then it helps the whole journey into singing passages, because it cross-connects with a visual image.

For Sharny, the piano enables her to “see”, “hear”, and directly “play” elements of music on the piano (e.g. “intervals”, “chords”, and “melodies”). She can then analyse

those elements in isolation, or alternatively, “see how everything fits together”. She can also connect what she sees, hears, and plays on the piano with voice directly—to “locate those notes in [her] voice”. In this sense, the piano enables Sharny to *internalise* music in her embodied instrument. The ability to internalise (embody) external elements of music supports Sharny’s skills of audiation; the piano helps her “ear to form”, enhancing her ability to “place notes” and “hear what’s coming” in the music. With these skills, Sharny can then more confidently conceive the melodies (“passages”) that she sings. For Sharny, the aural “cross-connects” with the visual and kinaesthetic; through the piano Sharny’s voice can *hear*, *see*, and *touch* music.

The reinforcement of the piano increases singers’ “confidence”. The piano is a “security blanket” and a “safety net” that eliminates the need for singers to “pick things out of the air” with their voice; the piano provides a “reference point”:

> Kristin: If doubt comes in, the piano is like a security blanket, a safety net. If I’m a bit unsure the piano provides a reference point. With the piano you’re not just picking things out of the air. The piano is all set out, it repeats… I think of the piano a lot when I'm soloing. That helps me to
> feel more confident. I feel more secure if I’m thinking about the keyboard, and how I would perhaps play what I’m singing.

For Kristin, the piano makes her feel more confident with her voice, even when it isn’t there (e.g. when she is “soloing” with her voice in performance, away from the piano). With the piano, Kristin is no longer “picking things out of the air” with her voice, rather, she gains a “reference point”, that can guide and support her singing through the journey of music. She also draws upon the logical construction of the keyboard (“the piano is all set out, it repeats”) to help find her way through music in a familiar fashion. “Thinking” (Karlsen, 2011) in a “piano directed” way informs Kristin’s ability to improvise with her voice; she feels more secure as an improvising singer by “thinking about the keyboard”, and how she would “play” what she is “singing”. In this sense, the piano provides an “ability to access learning experiences” (Karlsen, 2011).

Singers’ experiences reveal that the piano can also “establish a basis for collaborative musical action” (Karlsen, 2011). Michelle drew a correlation between her experiences of the piano and her ability to “converse” with other musicians:

Michelle: When you’re performing you’re not just rattling off a whole bunch of stuff that you’ve practiced, it’s a conversation between you and the other musicians. Being confident in the language means that you can have that conversation, you hear something and you respond to it, and they respond to you, and then it’s a group conversation. It’s being in the language. Without the piano, I would have found it much harder to have built that language.

For Michelle, her experiences of the piano have helped her to “build” the language of music, and to “feel confident” in the same, to the extent that she is better able to have a “conversation” with other musicians. Through the piano, Michelle can “hear” (recognise, identify, process, understand) the musical ideas that other musicians play or sing, and to subsequently “respond” with her own musical ideas (with the voice) in return. The piano made it easier for Michelle to be “in the language” in both a practical and theoretical sense. In other words, the piano is integral in “establishing a basis for collaborative musical action” (Karlsen, 2011).

All the singers in this study had clear ideas about their musical “identity” (Karlsen, 2011) in relation to the piano. When asked where she would place herself along the continuum of singer-pianist, Brenda identified herself as a “pianist who sings”:

Brenda: Piano was my first instrument, so I think that will always be the case… any situation that I go to, I’m never going there as a singer. I’m always going there as a piano player.

When asked the same question, Sharny explained that she prefers to identify as “musician who sings and plays”:

Sharny: I think of myself as a musician, and one of my instruments is the voice, and the other one is the piano.

Kristin, Michelle, and Anita all identify themselves as a “singer who plays”:

Kristin: I would put myself closer to the singer. I do have some piano skills, but they are limited.

Michelle: I'm not a piano player. I mean, I play piano, but I don't count myself as a piano player.

Anita: Mostly I'm a singer. I would place myself probably 80% singer and 20% pianist. Singing is my first instrument. I'm much more of a singer than a pianist. I use the piano all the time, but I don't think I would ever call myself a pianist.

Kristin, Michelle, and Anita all referred to the "technical limitations" of their piano playing; each described their piano facility in "functional" rather than "artistic" terms:

Michelle: I know exactly what my piano facility is, it's functional. It does the job…Years ago, I did a lot of piano bar work… On my early albums, there would always be one token "Michelle playing the piano" track. And when we did the European touring, I'd always play a couple of tunes on the piano. But I've stopped doing that now, because it's so much hassle. You've gotta have a piano for a start. And to be honest, if there's a bass player, I can't play properly anyway because I'm always playing root notes in my left hand.

For Michelle, her piano facility is "functional"; it "does the job" of aiding her in practice, and in informal self-accompaniment. However, Michelle prefers not to perform from the piano, due to her tendency toward playing root notes in her left hand. She does not have an artistic (e.g. solo based) facility at the piano.

Anita went further to state that she although she could "play a blues with a band or a rhythm section" she still feels as if her piano facility is a "bit thumpy":

Anita: I use the piano all the time. I can play chords, and I can accompany… I can get myself around on the piano no

problem. And I could play a blues with a band, or a rhythm section, and I could probably improvise. But I'm a bit thumpy at the piano… I just love to create something special with music, but I can create much better if someone’s playing the piano, because then I can 100% think about the song. When I’m playing, a lot of the time I’m thinking about the chords, “Am I playing the right chords?” My voice talks very nicely to the piano but the piano doesn’t talk very nicely to me, because of my lack of technique on the piano.

Anta can play “chords” and “accompany” herself at the piano with relative ease, however, due to her “lack of technique on the piano” she is not able to fully concentrate on singing while she is playing; at the piano, Anita’s attention is pulled away from her voice, to instead focus on the mechanics of her playing. For this reason, Anita prefers to be accompanied by a pianist, rather than to self-accompany at the piano.

Kristin shared similar thoughts in explaining that when she does self-accompany in performance, she can get “stuck” with the motions of her piano playing:

Kristin: I get frustrated when I try to do something vocally and my hands get stuck, so I’m not at the point where I’m free on both instruments, but I do try.

Kristin feels “frustrated” when her facility at the piano does not match her facility with the voice; she is not as “free” on the piano as she is with her voice. When self-accompanying, Kristin is not able to simultaneously manage an “artistic” level of performance with both voice and piano.

These findings “trouble certainty” in the sense that negative experiences with the piano were not originally a part of my “wonderings” about the “research puzzle”. Kristin, Michelle, and Anita all have deeply embodied experiences with the piano. They rely on the piano in their practice and carry many of the skills they build at the piano in practice into their voice in performance. However, because their piano

facility is “functional”, not “artistic” they are not able to freely express their musical ideas in performance on the piano to the same extent as they are with the voice. Additionally, performing at the piano can reduce the ability that they are freely able to improvise with the voice; their attention is divided.

It could be deduced that Kristin, Michelle, and Anita’s *improvisational* facility as singers shapes their primary musical identity (Karlsen, 2011) as “singers”. In contrast, their “functional” facility at the piano (e.g. lack of artistic improvisation) precludes their “identity” (Karlsen, 2011) as “pianists”. In other words, a musician’s primary “identity” (Karlsen, 2011) (e.g. of being a “singer” or “player”) resides in the level of improvisation they achieve on their instrument (Hargreaves, 2014b).

These findings have parallels with the work of Enstice and Stockhouse (2004) who described the way in which jazz singer and pianist Diana Krall’s confidence in identifying as a pianist is undergirded by her improvisational output at the piano, and conversely, that her hesitancy in identifying as a singer arguably results from her lack of improvisational output as a singer (cf Hargreaves, 2014). These findings may also corroborate why many expert vocal jazz improvisers who also *play* the piano, are rarely known to *perform* at the piano (see Chapter 2.4.1 for an outline of such singers).

Further complications to this finding arise in reflection of Anita’s assessments of her live (self-accompanied) performance during the interview. Although Anita felt some limitation owing to her “functional” facility as a pianist during this performance, she also found some benefit from her ability to “supply” and “tap into time and groove” through the piano:

Anita: Because I was the only person supplying the time, I was digging into my time. And it's funny, because the way that I feel the swing feel, I actually try to play it like that on the piano, even despite the technical disabilities that I might have, I still feel the groove. To me, the most important thing about this is time and groove. To me, it's the sensation, how it feels, and that's what I tap into. The feeling of it. Groove is attached to emotion, but time, it’s either correct or incorrect.

For Anita, playing the piano enables another facet of her embodiment of music, namely, to connect with groove. Despite her “technical disabilities” at the piano, Anita is able to connect with “groove (e.g. “swing feel”) through the piano. In other words, the piano provides a way for Anita to connect with rhythm/groove in a tangible manner; through her motions at the piano, she can “touch” rhythm and groove.

These findings indicate that singers who self-identify as only having a “functional” piano facility may be able to find a “middle ground” in the context of their self-accompanied performance. In other words, despite their technical limitations, singers may glean some benefits from the piano in matters of embodying “groove”. Further benefits are also identified in singers’ “shaping self-identity” (Karlsen, 2011) as “musicians”.

Sharny described that her experiences of the piano have supported the way in which she views herself as a capable musician:

Sharny: I think of myself as a musician. And that has been very much undergirded by having a very good knowledge of piano, and being able to play the piano… I think of myself as a musician, and one of my instruments is the voice, and the other one is the piano.

Sharny’s experiences of the piano have shaped the way she views herself as a “musician”—a capable singer and pianist with a broad working musicianship. In other words, the piano has played an integral role in “shaping self-identity” (Karlsen, 2011). Sharny went further to describe how playing the piano can also positively impact the way in which singers are perceived by other instrumentalists:

Sharny: Instrumentalists actually love to work with a singer who is a musician, because they feel like there’s a barrier down straight away, and they don’t have to keep explaining themselves, asking a million questions to get the answers they want, to find out what the singer wants them to do, they get straight to it.

Sharny explains that singers who are “musicians” are perceived in a positive light by instrumentalists—seen to be capable musicians who are ready and able to collaborate on equal terms. In this sense, the piano breaks down the “barrier” (and provides a “bridge”) between singers and instrumentalists. Sharny equates playing the piano with being a musician—a singer who is accepted and treated as an equal to other instrumentalists. In this way, the piano can be conceived as a tool that helps to affirm her “identity” (Karlsen, 2011) as a capable musician in collaborative musical scenarios, facilitating her sense of belonging in the musical community. In other words, the piano is integral in “regulating and structuring social encounters” (Karlsen, 2011). Kristin described similar ideas:

Kristin: And in small ways, it’s letting the musicians know that you want them to stretch out. And I think that shows them that you want to hear what they have to say over the whole form of a tune. And I think in little ways, it builds up that rapport between everyone.

For Kristin, being fluent in the language of music enables her to collaborate on equal terms with other musicians. Specifically, because of her experiences at the piano, and the way in which those experiences have supported her agency as a singer, Kristin is able to indicate her interest in “stretching out” other musicians, and “hearing what they have to say” musically. This applies over the “whole form of a tune”, including improvisation. In other words, the piano is useful in “affirming and exploring collective identity” (Karlsen, 2011).

Sharny and Kristin’s stories reveal that the piano not only supports singers in building their “self-identity” (Karlsen, 2011) as capable musicians, but it also undergirds the way in which singers are viewed as being capable by other musicians (specifically, instrumentalists); the piano shapes their “identity” (Karlsen, 2011) in a collaborative sense. To this end, playing the piano aids singers to confront misconceptions about their “underachievement” or “incapacity” as improvisers in comparison to instrumentalists, by supporting their capability as a distinct subset of improvising jazz musicians (Hargreaves, 2014b; Pellegrinelli, 2005).

Reflecting on the deeper meaning of these singers’ experiences of the piano, it resonated with me that in many ways, the piano is a “map” for these singers. The piano assists singers to *plan and navigate their journey through music* confidently and capably. The piano provides a way for singers to identify *musical landmarks* up

close, and to observe the broader *musical landscape* from a wider vantage point; to see where the *landmarks connect*. The piano provides *direction* to singers, keeping them *on course*, and helping them to find their way in moments of *navigational uncertainty*. With the piano these singers are equipped to explore *new terrains*, and to confidently *stake their claims* when they arrive. The piano connects these singers with a broader community of *navigators* who are also *travelling* through music; the piano provides a *common ground* upon which singers can stand with other musicians (particularly, instrumentalists).

In the following section I further unpack “map”—the resonant narrative thread that I identified across the participants’ narratives, in response to the second research question. Findings are supported with verbatim quotations from the participants’ narratives (as presented in Chapters 4 to 8), against the relevant literature (as explored in Chapter 2: Literature Review), and with a contextualisation through relevant dimensions of the musical agency lens (Karlsen, 2011).

9.3.1 Map

The singers in this study shared stories about the ways in which they use the piano to support their performance practice as singers. Kristin explained that she uses the piano to isolate, strengthen and develop her vocal technique:

> Kristin: I've just started putting a lot of semi-occluded vocal tract exercises in… So I'm sitting at the piano doing different parts of pieces with my straw and my water bottle and going from chest to head, trying to smooth that out.

For Kristin, the piano provides a means for her to strengthen the mechanics of her vocal instrument. She uses the piano to exercise her voice and enhance the efficiency and clarity of her vocal production (“semi-occluded vocal tract exercises” with a “straw and water bottle”). She also uses the piano to isolate and strengthen her registration (“going from chest to head”) and to “smooth out” the way in which she can move between registers.

Singers’ experiences also revealed that the piano provides a means for isolating, strengthening, and developing aspects of jazz style and vocal technique. Each of the singers in this study explained the piano-based procedures that they use in practising jazz style and technique:

Brenda: I learned everything sitting at the piano. I would take a song… and I would [sing] it until I’d played it in all the keys. And then depending on where it sat in my voice, I would sing it down the octave, or I would split the octave. It was a very piano directed way of looking at things… Anytime I feel like my sight reading or my scat singing isn’t very good, or I’m having a hard time making a change, or finding a certain harmonic movement, I go right back to the piano and conceptualise it in theoretical terms on the piano.

For Brenda, the way she approaches improvisation and harmony is “piano directed”. In other words, the way she thinks about improvisation and harmony is through the lens of the piano. She draws upon the construction of the piano keyboard to “conceptualise” music in “theoretical terms”. She uses the piano to learn songs in all the “keys”, and to place songs in an appropriate position in her vocal range, be that “down the octave” or “split” across octaves. The piano gives Brenda the ability to explore and reinforce the flexibility and strength of the full range of her voice.

Anita also approaches her practice in a “piano directed” way:

Anita: I work everything out on the piano, in terms of chords and re-harms… If I slow down on the piano, I'm much more likely to be in tune, in time, and more correct… But also just practising scatting. Because I'm playing chords, I don’t have just one note to tune to, I can tune to the whole range of the chord… I can play that on the piano and make sure I'm singing all the right notes.

For Anita, the piano is integral in her practice. She uses the piano for working out “everything”, including (but not limited to) theory, harmony, re-harmonisation, improvisation, melody, pitch, and intonation. Playing chords on the piano, enables Anita to explore “the whole range” of a chord (e.g. all the notes that are possible within a given chord, and its associated scales). The piano helps her to build and construct new configurations in harmony. Anita also uses the piano to consciously

“slow down” her practice so that she can facilitate a deeper focus on the details. Doing so, increases the likelihood that she will sing “in tune, in time, and more correct”.

Sharny also describes the ways in which the piano “deepens” her practice:

Sharny: … to sit down and just play [a song] while you’re singing it through, it just deepens the whole experience. And it just entrenches the song, harmonically, rhythmically, physically.

For Sharny, being able to play and sing simultaneously enables her to “entrench” songs “harmonically, rhythmically, physically”. In other words, the piano “deepens the whole experience” of Sharny’s practice; the piano helps Sharny to internalise and embody music on a much deeper level than if she were only practising with the voice alone.

Kristin describes an array of piano-based strategies that she employs in her practice of jazz style and technique:

Kristin: Another part of practice that is a regular thing for me, is singing through songs, playing the chords, playing the root note of the chord and then singing the thirds all the way through, getting that comfortable. And then same thing, but with the sevenths of the chords. It’s training; internalising both the pitch itself, and the changes as a whole set, so that I can make new melodies. That’s how I frame improvisation to myself.

Kristin uses the piano in her practice on several different levels—it is a versatile tool for supporting her musicianship. Kristin uses the piano to sing through “songs” (melodies), to “play chords” (hear and familiarise with harmony), to “play root notes” and “sing the thirds and sevenths” against those root notes (gets inside the harmony of chords); these things are like *landmarks* on her *map*. She plays chords in isolation, and as a whole set of changes—thereby, placing harmony in the broader context of a tune. The whole process “internalises pitch” as well as “harmony”, enabling Kristin to delve deeper inside the music so that she can “comfortably make new melodies” in her improvisation with those same ingredients. In other words,

Kristin’s piano-based practice informs her ability to “frame improvisation”; to compose in real-time using the ingredients of music that she intimately knows and understands.

Michelle describes that she “never practises away from the piano”:

Michelle: I never practise away from the piano, never… The piano helps me to know the working of the chords, better than if I was doing it all purely by ear. It just means you get into the theory of the harmony a bit deeper… you can practise more efficiently, it’s less guesswork.

For Michelle, the piano is indispensable to her practice; she “never” practises without it, or “away” from it. The piano provides an *anchor* and certainty to Michelle’s practice, particularly in terms of theoretical and aural understanding, and likewise with “harmony”; the piano provides *anchors* that Michelle’s voice alone lacks.

Michelle also described that the piano enables her to connect with the ideas that other musicians play, and to subsequently, reproduce those same sounds with her voice:

Michelle: Being able to recognise [what other musician’s play or sing] and then being able to maybe try them out on the piano does help.

For Michelle, the piano provides a *common ground* with other instrumentalists, because it facilitates her ability to “hear what they play”. In other words, the piano provides a way for Michelle to “recognise” and connect with (link-in, learn, and build and understanding of) what other musicians play. Through this process, and because of the piano, Michelle can (with her voice) become a part of what other musicians are doing; she becomes fluent in the language of music; a part of the shared conversation of music.

These findings support the work of Wadsworth Walker (2005) who explained that the piano provides a range of practical benefits to singers including facilitating greater efficiency in practice, connecting aural concepts visually, facilitating singers’ ability to self-accompany, learn melodies, and refine ideas that can be used in

improvisation. Likewise, S. Russell (2019b) explained that by playing piano, singers can enhance their broader musicianship (e.g. improvising with the ear, reading scores, understanding jazz harmony, arranging, and writing jazz charts) and support their vocal practice and performance by learning to self-accompany. Earle Stokes (2021) describes these skills as “functional keyboard skills”—skills that if lacked, can be a “weak link” and a “huge handicap” for singers (para 1).

These findings also indicate that the piano strengthens singers’ skills of audiation, specifically, in relation to be “aware, on the first hearing, of the exact pitches used by other performers” (H. Russell, 2016, p. 37). The ability to audiate a chosen musical action, without the need for memory or subsequent auditory feedback, is as a critical aspect of jazz musicianship (cf Dobbins, 1980; Pressing, 1984), and likewise, of improvisational expertise.

Kristin described that the piano provides a “reference point”, which serves as a “security blanket” or “safety net” for her voice, helping her to feel “more secure” when she is singing:

> Kristin: If doubt comes in, the piano is like a security blanket, a safety net. If I’m a bit unsure the piano provides a reference point. With the piano you’re not just picking things out of the air. The piano is all set out, it repeats… I think of the piano a lot when I'm soloing. That helps me to feel more confident. I feel more secure if I’m thinking about the keyboard, and how I would perhaps play what I’m singing.

For Kristin, the piano provides a useful and logical “reference point” that helps her to connect more securely with what she sings. Even when Kristin isn’t physically at a piano (e.g. when she is performing and improvising as a singer—away from the piano) Kristin continues to visualise the piano keyboard—how it’s “set out” and “repeats”. Doing so, enhances her ability to shape her improvised ideas in reflection of how she would “perhaps play” the same ideas at the piano.

These findings support the work of Simoens and Tervaniemi (2013) who explained that merging with an instrument can reduce feelings of vulnerability or anxiety in performance, and conversely, can increase feelings of confidence and freedom of expression in and from performance.

Although the piano can provide a useful “reference point” for the voice, thereby serving as a “safety net” or “security blanket” for singers (as Kristin indicated), the piano can also become a “crutch” for singers. Brenda spoke to this:

Brenda: Singing was a lot more difficult when I couldn’t give myself my first note, or look at my hands and know what the top of the voicing sounded like so I could find inspiration. I really needed the piano to be there.

Without the piano, Brenda discovered that she had come to rely on the piano to “give her first note”. She was used to “looking at her hands” to audiate the “top of the voicing” of the chords she played to “find inspiration” for what she could sing with her voice. In other words, Brenda had become over-reliant on the reinforcement of the piano, to the extent that she had lost vocal independence.

These findings “trouble certainty” in the sense that singers’ embodied experiences with the piano, can be seen to both *support* and, to a much lesser degree, *inhibit* vocal agency. In other words, singers can use the piano to build and support their vocal agency, however, if they are overly reliant on the piano, their vocal agency may be inhibited. However, it is also possible that singers can use their reliance upon the piano in a way that produces positive results for the voice. For example, Brenda also described that she turned her reliance on the piano (and the associated insecurities of her voice) into a strength, by intentionally strengthening the independence of her voice *away* from the piano:

Brenda: This year [2019] I’ve spent a lot more time away from the piano so that I can really develop my singing, in a deeper way. To challenge myself to be able to sing harmony when I’m improvising without needing a reference from the chords.

Brenda now strives to *use* the piano but to not *rely* upon it. She draws upon the piano to “develop her singing in a deeper way”, “challenging” her ability to “sing harmony” in improvisation, “without needing a reference from the chords” at the piano. In other words, Brenda continues to use the piano in building her vocal

agency in a practice scenario but has trained herself to work independently of the piano in a performance scenario.

These findings suggest that singers may be able to use their deeply embodied experiences of the piano as a way of further strengthening their agency as singers. By applying the skills they have learnt *at* the piano (in settings where they are *independent* from the piano), singers can increase their vocal independence.

9.3.2 Summary of Findings Through the Agency Lens

The above analyses and discussions can be summarised through the musical agency lens (Karlsen, 2011) as follows.

The experiences of the singers in this study reveal that in most cases, the piano is an invaluable tool that supports the voice and strengthens singers' ability to independently develop and maintain skills for practice and performance. These findings resonate with the broad consensus of music pedagogues and performers that playing the piano offers several practical applications to singers (Earle Stokes, 2020; Hargreaves, 2014b; S. Russell, 2019; Wadsworth Walker, 2005), thus, demonstrating that it is indeed beneficial in developing expertise as a jazz singer (e.g. Berkman, 2009; Deutsch, 2009; Shapiro, 2016; Weir, 2015). Said in other terms, the piano aids singers to build musical referents (Hargreaves, 2014b; Pressing, 1984). These referents contribute to singers' ability to bring forth more complex ideas in improvisation.

These findings align with multiple dimensions of the musical agency lens (Karlsen, 2011). Singers' experiences indicate that the piano is a tool that provides an "ability to access learning experiences" in music (Karlsen, 2011). Having access to these learning experiences, singers can "develop music-related skills" (Karlsen, 2011) which are vital to their practice as improvising jazz musicians. The piano enables these singers to touch, see, and hear pitch, melody, harmony, chords, changes, articulations, and to reinforce the same in their voice; the piano helps these singers to internalise external aspects of music. The piano also provides a way for these singers to support their vocal independence, in testing their ability to reproduce the same aspects in their voice, in both practice and performance.

The piano acts as an agent of "transformation" in singers' "thinking" in and through music (Karlsen, 2011). Specifically, the piano enables singers to conceptualise music in theoretical terms, to conduct a real-time analysis of intervals, melodies, and harmonic music structures, to solve musical problems, and mentally

conceive (frame) their improvisations. This “thinking” in turn brings a “transformation” to the way in which singers have an “ability to access learning experiences” to “develop music-related skills” (Karlsen, 2011). In other words, the piano extends singers’ cognitive processes of music, enhancing their capacity for musical action, in a way that develops their agency, and their ability to bring forth ideas in improvisation.

The singers in this study did not discuss using the piano to perfect improvisational language (e.g. repetitively playing and memorising licks at the piano, such as a pianist would do). Rather, they discussed how the piano supports them to explore and extend the creative and expressive potentials of their voice—to build the “tools” in their “toolkit” that can be drawn upon in improvisation. In other words, by playing the piano these singers are not trying to learn how to improvise to be like a pianist, but rather, to deepen, enrich, enhance, and inform the way that they are able to improvise with the voice. This further suggests that they may have a far more organic approach of learning to hear music in a holistic way, and learning to respond reflexively with their voice. Such an understanding indicates the ability for these singers to “think” in and through music in “performance”, whereby they are actively drawing upon the “music related skills” that they have developed (in practice) at the piano in response to the spontaneous characteristics of a given “performance” scenario (Karlsen, 2011).

Singers’ experiences also indicate that the piano is a tool for “empowerment” (Karlsen, 2011). Specifically, the piano enables singers to independently and self-sufficiently “think” in and through music, and to direct their “learning experiences”, to “develop music-related skills” for practice and “performance” (Karlsen, 2011). These skills directly contribute to singers’ “shaping self-identity”; shaping the way they can view themselves as capable musicians, skilled to a level that is commensurate to other instrumentalists (Karlsen, 2011).

Singers’ experiences of the piano also contribute to the shaping of the “identity” in a collective sense (Karlsen, 2011). Specifically, singers’ experiences of the piano “establish a basis for collaborative musical action” with other musicians (Karlsen, 2011). Through their experiences of the piano, singers can “develop music-related skills” that inform their ability to capably collaborate with other musicians; to converse in the shared language of music (Karlsen, 2011). This participation reinforces singers’ sense of belonging in their musical community, providing a

means for “affirming and exploring collective identity” (Karlsen, 2011). Furthermore, the piano is integral in “regulating and structuring social encounters” in singers’ collaborative music scenarios (Karlsen, 2011). Singers’ experiences of the piano build their capability as musicians, thereby enabling them to collaborate on equal terms with other instrumentalists; to feel as if they are *equals*.

9.3.3 Summary of Research Question 2 Findings

The findings reveal that singers’ experiences with the piano increase their musical agency. The piano provides a means for singers to counteract the challenges of the voice as a physiological instrument, by providing kinaesthetic, visual, and aural feedback that the voice alone lacks. The piano is a tool for empowerment which singers can draw upon to self-sufficiently and independently develop music related skills which correlate to practice and performance. The piano is transformational to the way in which singers think in and through music; the piano provides a means to think about, conceptualise, and analyse music in theoretical terms. Singers’ experiences of the piano support the shaping of their self-identity as capable musicians, and likewise, reinforces their identity in a collaborative music scenario. Singers who have experiences with the piano are better enabled to participate in the shared language of music, collaborating with other musicians (specifically, instrumentalists) on equal terms. To this end, singers’ experiences of the piano also provide a means for regulating and structuring their collaborative musical encounters—shaping the way in which they are perceived by other musicians.

The singers in this study did not discuss using the piano to perfect improvisational language (e.g. repeatedly learning “licks” by rote, as is standard practice for instrumentalists). To the contrary, they use the piano to support the development of the voice as an improvising instrument. In other words, they do not use the piano to learn how to improvise like a pianist, they use the piano to develop the unique expressive and creative capacities of the voice as an improvising instrument.

Singers’ experiences of the piano can also have some negative implications. Specifically, singers’ embodied experiences with the piano (which can be seen to actively support and build vocal agency), can also prove detrimental to singers’ vocal agency (limiting the independence of their voice when *away* from the piano). Additionally, singers who have only a functional (rather than artistic) facility at the

piano, may be unable to freely improvise with the voice in the context of self-accompanied performance; their focus in improvisation is divided because of their technical limitations at the piano. This notion also correlates with singers’ identity as in relation to the piano; musicians’ identity as “singer” or “player” is driven by their level of improvisational fluency on their instrument. These findings “trouble certainty” about the benefits of playing piano for jazz singers, indicating that the piano can both enhance and inhibit singers’ agency.

9.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented Part Two of the findings of this study, namely, the resonant narrative threads that were identified across the participants’ narratives, along with a discussion of the study findings in total. These findings advanced from the existing literature to reveal the ways in which expert vocal jazz improvisers have deeply embodied experiences with the piano, resulting in an experience of the jazz singing voice as “hyper-embodied”. These experiences are meaningful in terms of increasing singers’ agency on an individual and collective level. These findings make an original and significant research contribution, presenting a complex picture of the nature of expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano, and how those experiences are meaningful to them. These findings also “trouble certainty” in revealing new dimensions to the nature of the voice as an embodied instrument, and the ways in which playing the piano can be seen to have positive and negative implications for singers.

The next chapter presents the conclusions of the study.

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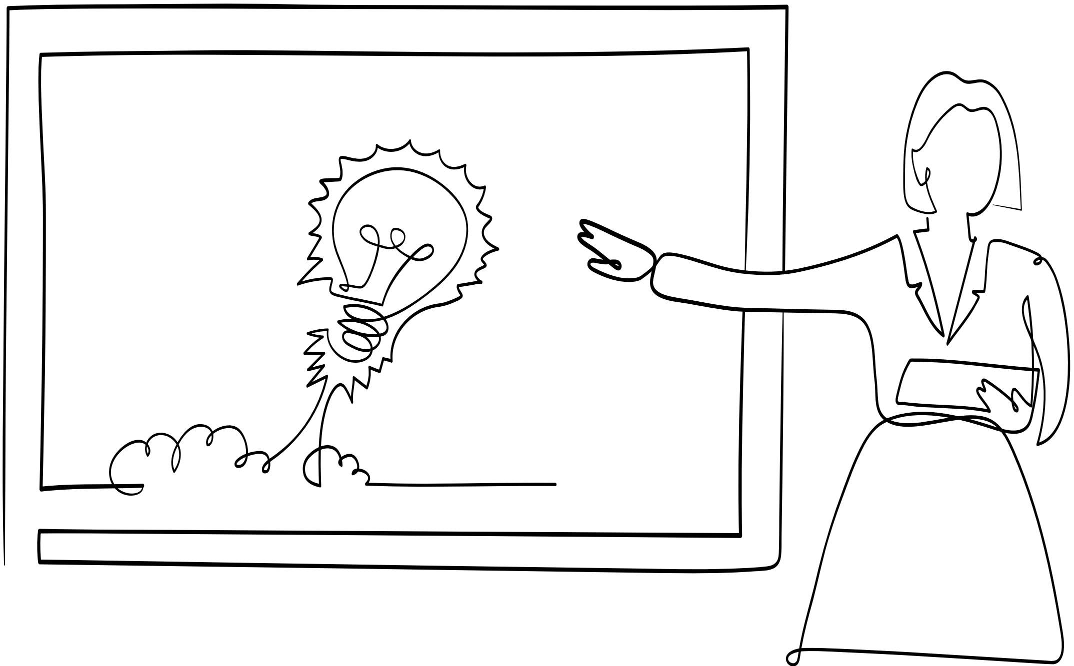

“New horizons”

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

This study aimed to better understand expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano. This final chapter completes that process by considering the broader implications of the study findings, its limitations, and the possible directions for future research.

10.1 Troubling Certainty

Being positioned “in the midst” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 100) of this study with Kristin, Brenda, Michelle, Sharny and Anita, allowed me the opportunity to think deeply and narratively about my own experiences, the experiences of the participants, and the experiences I encountered along the broader landscape of the inquiry. Situated within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I constantly looked “inward” and “outward”, “backward” and “forward” throughout the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As the study drew to a close, I sought to share what I had learned from the stories I encountered along the narrative journey, reflecting on the “imaginative possibilities” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 89) of the study findings, and their implications to vocal jazz performance practice and pedagogy.

If I had posed a hypothesis at the outset of this study, it would likely have been that playing the piano is beneficial for singers. Whilst this is undoubtedly the case based on the singers’ experiences, the findings of this study revealed that expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences with the piano are more complex than they first seem. The experiences of the singers in this study—Kristin Berardi, Brenda Earle Stokes, Michelle Nicolle, Sharny Russell, and Anita Wardell—revealed that when coupled with the piano, the voice is no longer constrained by its fundamental, organic, physiological embodiment (that is, embodied in the literal sense—“in body”). Rather, the voice becomes an instrument that encompasses all the faculties, systems, and senses of the body and external environment. In other words, through the piano, singers experience a form of “hyper-embodiment” of the voice, to the extent that the voice can paradoxically transcend the limitations of its fundamentally embodied nature. Singers’ connection with the piano can continue to operate even when the piano is not physically present; the piano becomes a “phantom limb” which singers continue to sense the presence of, and draw benefit from, even when they are not physically present at the piano or playing the piano. Through this state of “hyper-

embodiment” singers bring forth richer outcomes in improvisation, that would otherwise be difficult or impossible through the voice alone; the piano extends singers’ cognition, expressive and creative capacity.

These findings “trouble certainty” about the true nature of the voice as an embodied instrument, and the ways in which singers can merge with an external instrument. In some ways, singers are jazz “chameleons”—musicians who are able to draw upon, engage with, and use aspects of their external environment (other instruments included) to their advantage; all the while, they are reinforcing the unique expressive capabilities and creative potentials of the voice as a “hyper-embodied” instrument.

Singers’ experiences revealed that when coupled with the piano, singers have increased “musical agency” on an “individual” level (Karlsen, 2011). Through the piano, singers can counteract the challenges of the voice as a physiological instrument, finding the kinaesthetic, visual, and aural feedback that the voice alone lacks. The piano provides singers with an “ability to access learning experiences” (Karlsen, 2011) which supports them in “developing music-related skills” (Karlsen, 2011) that are vital to their practice as improvising jazz musicians. To this end, the piano is a tool for “empowerment” (Karlsen, 2011) that enables singers to be self-sufficient and independent musicians. The piano also provides a form of reassurance that increases singers’ confidence in the voice. This reassurance continues even when singers are not physically present with the piano; the skills they have embodied through action on the piano in practice extend to performance; singers continue to sense the piano as a “phantom limb”. The piano is also “transformational” (Karlsen, 2011) to singers’ “thinking” (Karlsen, 2011) in and through music, providing a means for singers to conceptualise and analyse music in theoretical terms. Singers’ experiences of the piano facilitate “shaping self-identity” (Karlsen, 2011) as capable musicians, who have skills that are commensurate to instrumentalists.

Singers’ experiences also revealed that when coupled with the piano, singers have increased “musical agency” on a “collective” level (Karlsen, 2011). Specifically, singers’ experiences of the piano contribute to their “identity” (Karlsen, 2011) as “musician”. This means that singers experience a sense of being part of the “collective” (Karlsen, 2011) environment of improvising jazz musicians. Indeed, the very skills that singers establish through the piano, provide a gateway for them to develop fluency in the shared language of music, which is used in collaboration with

other musicians (specifically, instrumentalists). To this end, the piano “establishing a basis for collaborative musical action” (Karlsen, 2011). These skills also impact the way in which singers are perceived as “capable musicians” by other instrumentalists, thereby confronting the misconception of their underachievement in improvisation in comparison to instrumentalists, and supporting their identification as a distinct, and equally skilled subset of improvising jazz musicians. To this end, the piano is useful in “affirming and exploring collective identity” (Karlsen, 2011), and likewise, in “regulating and structuring social encounters” (Karlsen, 2011).

An unanticipated finding of the study was revealed in the context of singers’ experiences of the piano in learning jazz language. The singers in this study did not use the piano to learn to improvise like a *pianist* (e.g. learning “licks” by rote to use in performance or running repetitive patterns on the piano). Rather, the singers use the piano to deepen, enrich, enhance, and inform the way that they are able improvise with the *voice*.

A further unanticipated finding from the study was revealed in relation to the possible negative implications of singers’ deeply embodied experiences with the piano. Specifically, singers’ experiences of the piano (which can be seen to actively support and build vocal agency), can also limit singers’ vocal independence when *away* from the piano, thus being seen to also limit vocal agency. This occurs when singers have an over-reliance on the piano. Additionally, singers who have only a functional (rather than artistic) facility at the piano, may face “technical limitations” when trying to perform in a self-accompanied scenario. Without an artistic facility in both voice and piano, singers’ attention is divided, and their freedom to improvise (and arguably, enter a “flow” state in performance) is reduced. This notion also correlates with singers’ identity in relation to the piano; musicians’ identity as being a “singer” or “player” is driven by their level of improvisational fluency on their instrument. These findings “trouble certainty” about the benefits of playing piano for jazz singers, indicating that the piano can both enhance and, to a lesser degree, inhibit singers’ agency, depending upon their level of facility at the piano.

10.2 Implications

10.2.1 Implications for Jazz Singers and Educators of the Voice

The findings of this study present implications for jazz singers and educators of the voice. Having understood the range of *benefits* that playing the piano can provide to the voice, and how these benefits *build* musical agency and broader

musicianship (both individually and collectively), jazz singers can more confidently engage with similar behaviours to strategically support their own performance practice. Additionally, from these findings, jazz singers can better understand how playing the piano facilitates and enhances singers’ identity as being capable musicians, and how this identification contributes to singers’ ability to collaborate with other musicians, and to be identified as “musicians”, who have skills commensurate with other instrumentalists. Likewise, educators of the voice can provide a clear rationale for the benefits of playing the piano, strategically encouraging and equipping their students to engage in such behaviours in their own performance practices.

Conversely, having been presented with the possible *negative implications* of playing the piano, and how the same can *limit* musical agency, jazz singers will have no false pretences about the piano as being *purely beneficial* for the voice. To this end, jazz singers can be alert to monitoring the way that they engage with the piano in their own performance practice. Specifically, jazz singers can ensure that they are *using* the piano to support and develop their vocal agency, and their ability to improvise with the voice, but not to the extent of *relying* upon it in such a way that their voice becomes “complacent”. This understanding also correlates with singers’ ability to monitor their piano facility as being “functional” versus “artistic” and how either extreme can positively and/or negatively impact their ability to improvise with the voice. Likewise, educators of the voice can be alert to monitoring the way in which their students engage with the piano in practice and performance scenarios, strategically testing, and proactively advocating for, their students’ ability to be vocally independent at and away from the piano.

10.2.2 Implications for Jazz Pianists and Educators of the Piano

The findings of this study also present implications for jazz pianists and educators of the piano. Reflecting upon these findings, jazz pianists may learn to approach improvisation in a “vocal way”, which in turn, may fuel their creativity to improvise differently, and explore the creative potentials of the piano as a “musicking” instrument. In other words, pianists may take a more organic approach in learning (e.g. hearing and responding to music in a more holistic way), in order that they can respond reflexively with the piano, and thereby, deepen, enrich, enhance, and inform the way that they are able to improvise with the piano. Additionally, jazz pianists may draw upon the convergence that can exist between

the piano and voice, to more deeply embody aspects of music that would otherwise be impossible through the piano alone; using the voice as an “agent of action” to extend the creative and expressive possibilities of the piano. Educators of the piano may use such understandings to provide a clear rationale to their students about the benefits of using the voice in conjunction with the piano. Likewise, educators of the piano may be able to use such understandings to reinforce the benefits of adopting procedures for improvisation that more closely resemble those of singers. Thereby, educators of the piano can more proactively and strategically encourage their students to engage in such behaviours in their own performance practices.

10.2.3 Implications for Jazz Researchers

The findings of this study reinforce the identification of singers as a distinct subset of improvising jazz musicians, who have unique experiences of, and skills for, improvisation. Indeed, the findings reveal that the embodied nature of voice as an instrument, including its verbal capacity, means that the voice is an equally, if not more significant improvising jazz instrument, worthy of research attention and further investigation.

Additionally, the findings of this study reveal the mutuality of voice and instrument in jazz (e.g. "singer as player” and “player as singer”). Such an understanding “troubles certainty” about jazz improvisation, by presenting a case for what is improvisationally possible on a “musicking” instrument. Researchers may use such a notion to more deeply investigate improvisational expertise by moving beyond instrumental-markers or classifications, to instead consider individuals’ unique improvisational outputs, regardless of their chosen instrument or instruments.

10.3 Limitations

The study was limited to an emphasis on the contextually bound experiences of the study participants, as expressed in their lived and told stories. Furthermore, this study represents my unique interpretation of the participants’ stories, as told to me in a specific context, and thus, my interpretation offers one possible understanding of the research puzzle. I do not attempt to suggest that the findings of this study are universal, nor do I seek to make generalisations from the findings. Rather, I offer the findings as a point of reflection on the specific and broader contexts of the research focus. As such, it is possible that the findings may be transferable to other similar contexts.

This study does not seek to judge or evaluate the effectiveness of the participants’ experiences in relation to the piano, nor do the findings seek to constitute a “how-to-guide” for jazz singing, or how to approach the piano in relation to jazz singing. Rather, this study seeks to illuminate the complexities within the participants’ contextually bound individual experiences, and likewise, the resonances that exist across their experiences, resulting from the contextually similar conditions of their experiences as a group (Clandinin, 2013). The findings seek to trouble certainty (M. Barrett, 2009) about the ways in which playing piano may prove impactful to vocal jazz improvisers.

A further limitation in this study relates to the focus on the capabilities of the participants as experts. Studies that focus on the ways in which experts excel, can be at risk of failing to consider the ways in which experts’ knowledge can also be limiting (Chi, 2006). For example, experts: (i) have domain-limited expertise; (ii) can be prone to mis-calibrating their capabilities by being overly confident; (iii) may gloss over surface features and overlook details; (iv) may have context-dependant skills that rely on contextual cues; (v) can be inflexible; (vi) can be inaccurate in their prediction, judgment and advice of novice level performance; and (vii) can be biased or functionally fixed (Chi, 2006). To this end, investigations of novice or developing vocal jazz improvisers may have brought forth different findings, which potentially may have been comparable with the experiences of the expert participants in this study.

A further limitation exists in relation to the narrowed focus of this study on the relationship between singer and piano. This study did not consider singers’ experiences with instruments other than the piano, or indeed, consider the possible differences in relation to singers’ experiences with melodic versus chordal instruments.

By the conclusion of this study, I had developed a richer understanding of the research focus. With this deeper understanding, I wondered if I may have approached earlier stages of the study differently, and if the differences in my approach may have impacted the findings in some way. For example, I wondered if I could have “dug deeper” with some of my questions during the interviews, and if that may have brought forth deeper understandings about certain aspects of the participants’ experiences. Additionally, aside from one in-person interview, there was no opportunity for me to meet with the participants in-person, or to engage in

protracted observation. However, even if I were in closer proximity to the participants, or if I were able to travel nationally and/or internationally to meet with the participants, the unfolding state of COVID-19 would have prevented this from occurring.

By the conclusion of this study, I had developed an understanding of the continuous and constantly “in motion” nature of the inquiry, which had evolved as I also evolved as a researcher. As such, I accepted that this study was “perfectly imperfect”, just as I am also “perfectly imperfect”. Reflecting on my own limitations continues to drive my desire to challenge and extend myself as a musician, educator, and researcher, so that I may always make original, innovative, transformative, and meaningful contributions to the world, the people around me, my community, my craft, and my field of research and professional practice.

10.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Reflecting on the findings of the study reveals a need for further research in several areas. First, it is unclear whether the age in which a jazz singer commences playing piano contributes to their ability to develop a deeply embodied relationship with the piano. Further studies of this nature may inform the direction of vocal jazz education in the future, specifically regarding the implications of commencing piano study at different ages or stages of learning, and the point at which studying the piano should (ideally) commence.

Second, future studies that consider the ways in which the voice and piano could be taught in tandem would positively inform future vocal jazz education directions, enabling for the development of streamlined and tailored pedagogical approaches and methods for singer/pianists at all stages.

Third, future studies that consider pianists’ experiences of singing may provide a useful point of reference in approaching this research focus from a different vantage point. Studies of this nature may enrich and extend upon the existing understanding of the connectedness between vocality and instrumentality in embodied musical cognition, and in turn, inform future piano pedagogy directions.

Fourth, future studies that consider the singers’ experiences with instruments other than the piano may prove illuminating. Likewise, studies that consider the differences between singers’ experiences with melodic versus chordal instruments may extend from this research to provide further insight into the embodied nature of singer-instrument relationships.

Finally, future studies that examine the teaching styles of expert vocal jazz improvisers who also play the piano, in comparison to their own practice and performance approaches, would be illuminating. Such findings may “trouble certainty” about vocal jazz education, to discern if experts teach others to learn and perform in the way that they themselves learn and perform.

10.5 Concluding Remarks

To ask for certain whether the piano definitively impacts the agency of expert vocal jazz improvisers is, it seems, the wrong question. Vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano are contextually bound—largely dependent upon the unique nature of each individual’s relationship with the piano, and the way in which they engage with the piano in practice and performance. To this end, “there can be no certainty, only the certainty of uncertainty” (Clandinin, 2009, p. 208). As the dominant narratives of vocal jazz improvisation begin to shift and change with the narrative “living, telling, re-telling, and re-living of individual’s experiences” (Clandinin, 2009, p. 208), we must “remind ourselves that what works ‘for now’ depends on each of us remaining open to the possibilities that things can be otherwise” (p. 208). As music researchers, educators, and performers, we must remain “wide awake” (Clandinin, 2009, p. 208), to the lives of those who are being shaped in and through vocal jazz improvisation, and indeed, through playing the piano, in order that we can make sense, find understanding, and develop meaning from the uncertainty that faces us all (Clandinin, 2009). Together, we must work toward composing spaces that help us all to stay “open to the mystery, open to the wonder, open to the questions” (Greene, 2001, p. 146) that we encounter along the “shifting, changing landscape” (Clandinin, 2009, p. 208) of vocal jazz improvisation.

Along the landscape of this inquiry, I wove together many threads to compose a new tapestry about expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano. Although this study is finalised for the purpose of the thesis, in reality it will never be a finished product; this thesis and this research is a continuous story in motion (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) intuitively foreshadowed, no one can leave a narrative inquiry unchanged; this is true for my experience. This study has challenged and enlightened me as a musician, educator, researcher, and person in countless ways. Leaving this inquiry, I carry with me the stories that I co-composed with Kristin, Brenda, Michelle, Sharny, and Anita along

the landscape of the inquiry. I continue to be inspired by these women, and ever more deeply value the special and unique relationships that we have forged.

Returning to the tapestry of my experiences as a jazz singer and pianist, I now see a clearer image woven within the threads. My tapestry shows in rich, bold, colourful, and detailed stitches the ways in which my experiences as a singer and pianist connect, and how those experiences impact my agency and musicianship broadly. The piano is a part of my voice, and a part of my identity as a musician. If I were to rhetorically ask of my piano, “Do I want you?... Do I need you?... Do I love you?”, I would knowingly answer with an emphatic, “‘Deed I do!”—a response that I know Kristin, Brenda, Michelle, Sharny, and Anita would echo.

> Do I want you? Oh my, do I
> Honey, 'deed I do
>
> Do I need you? Oh my, do I
> Honey, 'deed I do
>
> I'm glad that I'm the one who found you
> That's why I'm always hangin' 'round you
>
> Do I love you? Oh my, do I
> Honey, 'deed I do
>
> (‘Deed I Do)[35]

[35] Rose, F., & Hirsch, F. (1926). ‘*Deed I do* [Song]. [Music by Fred Rose; Lyrics by Walter Hirsch].

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APPENDIX A: ETHICS

A1: Ethics Approval

Subject: [RIMS] USQ HRE Application - H19REA070 - Expedited review outcome -Approved
Date: Friday, 12 April 2019 at 3:43:13 pm Australian Eastern Standard Time
From: human.Ethics@usq.edu.au
To: Courtney Feldman
CC: Rebecca Scollen

Dear Courtney

I am pleased to confirm your Human Research Ethics (HRE) application has now been reviewed by the University's Expedited Review process. As your research proposal has been deemed to meet the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007),
ethical approval is granted as follows:

USQ HREC ID: H19REA070
Project title: Examining the connection between piano skills and high-level vocal jazz improvisational ability.
Approval date: 12/04/2019
Expiry date: 12/04/2022
USQ HREC status: Approved

The standard conditions of this approval are:

a) responsibly conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal;.

(b) advise the University (email:ResearchIntegrity@usq.edu.au) immediately of any complaint pertaining to the conduct of the research or any other issues in relation to the project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of the project;

(c) promptly report any adverse events or unexpected outcomes to the University
(email: ResearchIntegrity@usq.edu.au) and take prompt action to deal with any unexpected risks;

(d) make submission for any amendments to the project and obtain approval prior to implementing such changes;

(e) provide a progress ‘milestone report' when requested and at least for every year of approval.

(f) provide a final ‘milestone report' when the project is complete;

(g) promptly advise the University if the project has been discontinued, using a final ‘milestone report'.

The additional conditionals of approval for this project are:

(a) Nil.

Please note that failure to comply with the conditions of this approval or requirements of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018, and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007 may result in withdrawal of approval for the project.
Congratulations on your ethical approval! Wishing you all the best for success!

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to make contact with an Ethics Officer.

Kind regards

Human Research Ethics

University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba – Queensland – 4350 – Australia
Phone: (07) 4631 2690
Email: human.ethics@usq.edu.au

A2: Participant Information Sheet

University of Southern Queensland

Participant Information for USQ Research Project Interview

Project Details

Title of Project:	Examining the connection between piano skills and high-level vocal jazz improvisational ability.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	18004138

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details

Miss Courtney Feldman
Email: courtney.feldman@usq.edu.au

Principal Supervisor Details

Dr Rebecca Scollen
Email: rebecca.scollen@usq.edu.au

Associate Supervisor Details

Dr Melissa Forbes
Email: melissa.forbes@usq.edu.au

Description

This study is being undertaken as part of a doctoral research project, which aims to examine the connection between piano skills, and high-level vocal jazz improvisational ability.

It is hoped that this study, and its findings, will provide an original and valuable research contribution to the field of vocal jazz improvisation and education by: (i) demonstrating the ways in which piano skills can impact the agency of vocal jazz improvisers; (ii) assisting educators of vocal jazz improvisers to design functional educational practices that will strengthen the agency of their students; and (iii) assisting aspiring vocal jazz improvisers to better understand how piano skills have contributed to the success of vocal jazz improvisers at a high level.

The Principal Investigator requests your assistance because you are identified as a high-level vocal jazz improviser, with an active and well-established performance career who also: (i) has past and/or present recordings, awards, or teaching positions at University Faculty; (ii) is known to take improvised vocal solos on recordings and in live performance; and (iii) plays piano.

Participation

Your participation in this study will involve participating in a series of two interviews with the Principal Investigator. During these interviews, you will be asked reflect upon how the piano impacts your

learning and performance experiences and practice, and your improvisational abilities. You will be asked to demonstrate your practice as a vocal jazz improviser who also plays piano, and welcomed to sing and play throughout the discussion.

Both interviews will be an open and fluid discussion between the researcher and yourself, and an opportunity for you to share your experiences in a one-on-one research scenario. It is anticipated that each interview will take between 1 and 2 hours of your time, with the second interview scheduled no more than a month after the first. During each interview, the Principal Investigator will be taking observational data, including notes, of the visual aspects of the interview. The interviews will be recorded, in both an audio and visual format, to allow the researcher to review the data during transcription.

The interview will be conducted either in person, or online, through zoom video conferencing software. If in person, the interview location will be confirmed in consultation with the Principal Investigator. Every effort will be made to secure a location either of your choosing, or that is mutually agreeable.

Questions in the interview may reflect upon the following (this list is provided by way of example only and is not exhaustive nor prescriptive):

*how does playing piano help your skills in audiation?
*how does playing piano aid your ability to learn new repertoire?
*how have your early learning experiences impacted your identity and ability as a performer?
*how does the piano transform the way you improvise with your voice?

Your discussion during the interviews will be used by the researcher to create a re-storied narrative, that is, a representation of your story in the words of the researcher. Verbatim quotations or paraphrased excerpts from your interview responses will be used by the researcher in these narratives. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of both your interviews, and the re-storied narratives. It is anticipated that the results of this study will also form the basis for future publications including, but not limited to, journal articles, educational materials, presentations and academic texts.

You will be provided with a copy of your interview transcript to review. All feedback must be returned to the Principal Investigator within 14 days of receipt.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. Your decision whether you take part, do not take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. However, please note that if you wish to withdraw from the project after you have approved your interview transcript, the Research Team is unable to remove your data from the project. If you do wish to withdraw from this project, please contact the Research Team directly (contact details at the top of this form).

Expected Benefits

It is anticipated that this project will directly benefit you, as reflective practice has been shown to provide deeper insight into your own practice. Furthermore, the interview conversation will provide an engaging platform for you to reflect upon your own experiences, and for the collaborative sharing of ideas between the Principal Investigator and yourself.

It is anticipated that by open sharing your experiences of learning and performance, you will make a significant contribution to the research area. The data collected from your contributions will form pedagogy and practice in the field of vocal jazz improvisation, proving impactful to researchers, educators and performers within the field.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this project.

Sometimes your personal reflection, and reflecting about the sorts of issues raised in the survey, can trigger some uncomfortable or distressing emotions and feelings. If you need to talk to someone about this immediately please contact Lifeline on 13 11 14. You may also wish to consider consulting your General Practitioner (GP) for additional support.

Privacy and Confidentiality

During the project, your data will be stored securely as per University of Southern Queensland's Research Data Management policy, in an identifiable form.

You are welcome to contact one of the Research Team via email or phone at the completion of the project if you wish to receive a summary of the results.

Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely as per University of Southern Queensland's Research Data Management policy. Research data will be retained for a period of 5 years after research action has been completed. Signed informed consent documents will be retained for 15 years after the research action has been completed.

Data from this project will be embargoed from open sharing until the final publication of the thesis. Requests for data sharing that come either before or after the embargo period will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the principal investigator. Any data shared in these instances will be in an analysed format, to ensure the privacy of the research participants is upheld.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will inform future publications including, but not limited to, journal articles, educational materials, conference papers and presentations. Any data shared in future publications will be de-identified to ensure the privacy of the research participants.

Consent to Participate

Your signature on the accompanying Consent Form provides indication of your consent to participate in the interviews, and the study.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research Team Contact Details at the top of the form to have any questions answered, or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project, you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics on +61 7 4631 1839 or email researchintegrity@usq.edu.au. The Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project.

Please keep this sheet for your information.

A3: Participant Consent Form

University of Southern Queensland

Consent Form for USQ Research Project Interview

Project Details

Title of Project: Examining the connection between piano skills and high-level vocal jazz improvisational ability.

Human Research Ethics Approval Number: 18004138

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details
Miss Courtney Feldman
Email: courtney.feldman@usq.edu.au

Principal Supervisor Details
Dr Rebecca Scollen
Email: rebecca.scollen@usq.edu.au

Associate Supervisor Details
Dr Melissa Forbes
Email: melissa.forbes@usq.edu.au

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- ☐ Have read and understood the participant information document regarding this project.
- ☐ Are over 18 years of age and agree to participate in the project.
- ☐ Are comfortable with speaking openly about your experiences in a one-on-one research scenario.
- ☐ Consent to be identified by name in the study and the presentation of the research findings.
- ☐ Consent to have your interview recorded (both audio and visual formats) for the purpose of reviewing during transcription.
- ☐ Are available to participate in the study, and understand the time that will be required to participate in both interviews, and in reviewing your transcription.
- ☐ Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction, and understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team at any time.
- ☐ Understand your right to withdraw from the study at any time, and the implications and conditions of that withdrawal, and how it relates to the data gathered during your participation.
- ☐ Understand that your decision to take part, or not take part in the research will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland, or the research team.

Page **1** of **2**

- ☐ Understand that an identifiable dataset will be retained for as long as practicably possible.
- ☐ Understand that you are consenting specifically to the current study and to any future studies which are generally related to the current study (an identifiable data set will be stored for possible reuse by other researchers in the future).

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

Please return a copy of this form to the Principal Investigator via email, prior to participating in the interview.

Please retain a copy of this sheet for your information.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

B1: Interview 1 Protocol

Project Title: 'Deed I do: Narrating expert vocal jazz improvisers' experiences of the piano (H19REA070)

Interview Date:
Interview Location:
Interviewer: Courtney Feldman (Principal Investigator)
Interviewee:

Project Description: This study aims to examine the connection between piano skills and high-level vocal jazz improvisational ability.

Emergency Contacts
Emergency Services: 000
USQ's Psychology & Counselling: +61 7 4631 1763; psychclinic@usq.edu.au
Lifeline: 13 11 14

Interview Procedures
- Stay to questions (be prepared to jump between)
- Stay to time (clock in line of sight)
- Respectful and courteous (active listening)

Prompt Phrases
- Why?
- How?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- Can you give me some more detail around that?
- What were you thinking when…?
- How did it feel when…?

Solution Phrases
- What to do if… participant becomes distressed
  - Should this occur while an interview is in progress, the interview will be stopped, and either cancelled, rescheduled for another time, or renegotiated entirely, according to the conditions of their consent to participate
  - Remind of their ability to access support services
- What to do if… signal is poor or disconnected
  - Back up contact: mobile (AUS); messenger (USA/UK)
  - Back up zoom link

Pre-Interview Discussion
- Thank you
- Interview format

- Answering questions: Your story to share, in your own words
- Recording and confidentiality of data
- Feedback
- Housekeeping (length, break)
- Questions before beginning?

Number	Question	Prompts
Ice-breaker	So to get started, can you tell me about your work at the moment?	Teaching Performing Projects
1	On the continuum of singer-pianist, where would you place yourself? For instance, would you identify more as: (i) a singer who plays (ii) a pianist who sings (iii) a singer and a pianist	Would you have identified differently at other stages of your journey? Do you feel more “at home” or confident with one instrument than the other? Have you found one instrument easier to master than the other? Do they feel like separate instruments, or one and the same?
2	In the earlier stages of your journey, how did your ability to play piano impact the way you were able to learn as a vocalist? (For the purpose of this question, learning = experiencing a new skill or new repertoire)	How does the piano impact the way you *learn* as a vocalist now? Has much changed? What has helped you to embody pitch (*audiation/inner hearing*)? For instance: Do you find it easier to sing things that you’ve heard at the piano first? Or do you produce the sound vocally, and then reinforce and check that at the piano? How do the two instruments interact? Seeing (visual referencing tool) Feeling (kinaesthetic) Processing tool (theory) Self-sufficiency

3	In the earlier stages of your journey, how did your ability to play piano impact the way you were able to practise as a vocalist? (For the purpose of this question, practise = honing new skills or repertoire)	How does the piano impact the way you *practise* as a vocalist now? Has much changed? Do you have any routines? Self-sufficiency Hearing (audiation/inner hearing) Seeing (visual referencing tool) Feeling (kinaesthetic) Processing tool (theory) How do your two instruments interact?
4	In the earlier stages of your journey, how did your ability to play piano impact the way you were able to perform as a vocalist?	How does the piano impact the way you *perform* as a vocalist now? Has much changed? Communication (collaboration) Confidence Risk taking Response
5	How does your ability to play piano impact the way you improvise with your voice?	Do you pre-conceive your improvisations/improvisational ideas at the piano? Have you been in a habit of singing along to what you play? Or playing along to what you sing? Do you find it easier to hear and replicate (echo) what other instruments play?

Post Interview

- **Debrief**: Reflecting on our time together today, how did it feel to be talking with me, and talking about your experiences?
- **Closing**: As we end our time together today, do you have any questions for me, or is there anything that you’d like to add?
- Thank you
- What’s next (transcription; feedback format and due date)
- Scheduling of interview 2

B2: Interview 2 Protocol

Project Title: ‘Deed I do: Narrating expert vocal jazz improvisers’ experiences of the piano (H19REA070)

Interview Date:
Interview Location:
Interviewer: Courtney Feldman (Principal Investigator)
Interviewee:

Project Description: This study aims to examine the connection between piano skills and high-level vocal jazz improvisational ability.

Emergency Contacts
Emergency Services: 000
USQ's Psychology & Counselling: +61 7 4631 1763; psychclinic@usq.edu.au
Lifeline: 13 11 14

Interview Procedures
- Stay to questions (be prepared to jump between)
- Stay to time (clock in line of sight)
- Respectful and courteous (active listening)

Prompt Phrases
- Why?
- How?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- Can you give me some more detail around that?
- What were you thinking when…?
- How did it feel when…?

Solution Phrases
- What to do if… participant becomes distressed
  - Should this occur while an interview is in progress, the interview will be stopped, and either cancelled, rescheduled for another time, or renegotiated entirely, according to the conditions of their consent to participate
  - Remind of their ability to access support services
- What to do if… signal is poor or disconnected
  - Back up contact: mobile (AUS); messenger (USA/UK)
  - Back up zoom link

Pre-Interview Discussion
- Thank you
- Interview format
- Answering questions: Your story to share, in your own words
- Recording and confidentiality of data
- Feedback

- Housekeeping (length, break)
- Questions before beginning?

Number	Question	Prompts
Ice-breaker	Let’s rewind to the early stages of your journey, to a time before you could do what you’re doing now. Who were you, and how would you have described yourself?	What were your aspirations? Did you have any pivotal teachers, or learning experiences at that time, that have been integral to your practice now? Can you recognise the roots of your practice as it is now emerging at that time? Have you changed much since that time? Personally? Professionally? Musically?
1	What goes through your mind when you’re performing? What do you usually think about or visualise?	Is it different at the piano, or with the voice? Is it different for repertoire and improvisation? How do you decide what to sing in the moment? What inspires or directs you? From where do you take your cues?
2	I’d love to spend some time seeing and hearing you in action! Could you sit at the piano, pick a standard, and sing/play through the head, and then improvise over a chorus or two?	How did that feel? What were you thinking in the moment? How did you feel the piano and voice related?
3	Do you think there have been any special reasons for your success?	Any “aha” moments? Which instrument did you learn first? And do you think that has been impactful in your journey?
4	Based upon your own learning experiences, do you think that learning piano should play a role in vocal jazz education?	Do you feel that it gives credibility to vocalists? Do you feel that it increases the agency of vocalists?

5	Do you have any advice, encouragement, or warnings that you would give to aspiring jazz vocalists?	Is there anything you know now that you wish you’d known earlier in your career?

Post Interview

- **Debrief**: Reflecting on our time together today, how did it feel to be talking with me, and talking about your experiences?
- **Closing**: As we end our time together today, do you have any questions for me, or is there anything that you’d like to add?
- Thank you
- What’s next (transcription; feedback format and due date)

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT DISCOGRAPHY

Recorded works are listed in order of most recent release date

C1: Kristin Berardi

Berardi, K., Foran, S., & Karlen, R. (2020). *Haven*. [Album]. Self-Release.

Berardi, K., Foran, S., & Karlen, R. (2020). *Ripple*. [Album]. Earshift Music.

Berardi, K., & Anning, S. (2019). *Our songs, not songs*. [Album]. Earshift Music.

Berardi, K., Foran, S., & Karlen, R. (2019). *No shepherds live here*. [Album]. Earshift Music.

Berardi, K., & Sherlock, J. (2017). *I’m glad there is you*. [Album]. Self-Release.

The Kristin Berardi Band. (2016). *Just as you are*. [Album]. Self-Release; Distribution by MGM.

Berardi, K., Foran, S., & Karlen, R. (2015). *Hope in my pocket*. [Album]. Earshift Music.

Berardi, K. (2015). *Where or when.* [Album]. ABC Jazz.

Berardi, K., & Sherlock, J. (2013). *Guess I’ll hang my tears out*. [Album]. ABC Jazz.

Spike Mason Rilke Project. (2012). *Widening circles*. [Album]. Self-Release.

Galaxstare. (2012). *A time, times and half a time*. [Album]. JazzHead.

KB & the Jazzgroove Mothership Orchestra. (2011). *Kristin Berardi meets the Jazzgroove Mothership Orchestra*. [Album]. JazzHead.

Jon Gordon Nonet. (2010). *Evolution*. [Album]. Artist Share.

The Richard Maegraith Band. (2009). *Free running*. [Album]. Jazzgroove.

Berardi, K., & Sherlock, J. (2009). *If you were there*. [Album]. Pinnacles.

The Kristin Berardi Band. (2008). *The Kristin Berardi band*. [Album]. JazzHead.

Berardi, K., & Sherlock, J. (2006). *Kristin Berardi & James Sherlock*. [Album]. Pinnacles.

McFadden, L., & Berardi, K. (2005). *Up til now.* [Album]. Pinnacles.

geman’i. (2004). *geman’i*. [Album]. Pinnacles.

West End Composers Collective. (2003). *Downstream.* [Album]. Pinnacles.

C2: Brenda Earle Stokes

Earle Stokes, B. (2019). *Solo sessions volume 1*. [Digital Album]. Allsheneeds Music.

Earle Stokes, B. (2014). *Right about now*. [Album]. Allsheneeds Music.

Earle, B. (2009). *Songs for a new day.* [Album]. Allsheneeds Music.

Earle, B. (2005). *Happening*. [Album]. Allsheneeds Music.

Earle, B. (2002). *All she needs*. Allsheneeds Music.

C3: Michelle Nicolle

Michelle Nicolle Quartet. (2016). *A flower is a lonesome thing*. ABC Jazz Digital/Self-Release.

Michelle Nicolle Quartet. (2012). *Mancini*. [Album]. Newmarket.

Nicolle, M. (2009). *The loveliest night*. [Album]. ABC Jazz.

Nicolle, M. (2005). *What kind of fool*. [Album]. Newmarket Music.

Nicolle, M. (2003). *The crying game*. [Album]. ABC Jazz/Universal.

Nicolle, M. (2002). *Keep your heart right*. [Album]. Newmarket.

Nicolle, M. (2001). *After the rain*. [Album]. ABC Jazz/Universal.

Nicolle, M. (1998). *Misterioso*. [Album]. Newmarket.

C4: Sharny Russell

Russell, S. (2016). *Comes a time*. [Album]. Treasure House Music.

Russell, S. (2013). *One little baby*. [Single]. Treasure House Music.

Russell, S. (2011). *Let my song be of you*. [Album]. Treasure House Music.

Russell, S. (2011). *Not my own*. [Album]. Treasure House Music.

Russell, S., & Golla, G. (2010). *Velvet live*. [Album]. Treasure House Music.

Russell, S. (2010). *Six exercises for jazz singers*. [Album and Booklet]. Treasure House Music.

Russell, S. (2010). *12 warm-ups & exercises for singers*. [Album and Booklet]. Treasure House Music.

Russell, S. (2003). *A good thing on hold*. [Album]. Treasure House Music.

Russell, S., & Golla, G. (1994). *Velvet jazz*. [Album]. Treasure House Music.

C5: Anita Wardell

Wardell, A. (2013). *The road.* [Album]. The Last Music Company.

Wardell, A. (2008). *Kinda blue*. [Album]. The Last Music Company.

Wardell, A. (2005). *Noted*. [Album]. The Last Music Company.

Wardell, A. (2004). *If you never come to me*. [Album]. Ultimate Groove.

Wardell, A. (2001). *Until the stars fade*. [Album]. Symbol.

Wardell, A., Rebello, J., Somogyi, A., & Meader, M. (1998). *Straight ahead*. [Album]. 33 Records.

Bentley, A., Fox, M., Wardell, A., & Kent, S. (1997). *Women with standards*. [Album]. Slam Productions.

Wardell, A. (1995). *Why do you cry*. [Album]. Ultimate Groove.

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APPENDIX D: NARRATIVE LISTENING GUIDES

Details are correct at time of publication

D1: Kristin Berardi

Song	Details		Recordings	
Tangerine	Album:	Guess I’ll Hang My Tears Out	Apple Music:	https://music.apple.com/au/album/guess-ill-hang-my-tears-out/1442782824
	Music:	Victor Schertzinger	Spotify:	https://open.spotify.com/track/3Kq2AQNwk7r86N2LCsEF2f
	Lyrics:	Johnny Mercer	YouTube:	https://youtu.be/7D3wurkRW8A
Born to Be Blue	Album:	Where or When	Apple Music:	https://music.apple.com/au/album/where-or-when/1443225680
	Music:	Mel Tormé	Spotify:	https://open.spotify.com/track/2OldO891FiqEqYLttsHMyQ
	Lyrics:	Robert Wells	YouTube:	https://youtu.be/Ra-LN5AoQfA
Take Me to the Wilderness	Album:	(Live Performance)	Apple Music:	NA
	Music:	Kristin Berardi	Spotify:	NA
	Lyrics:	Kristin Berardi	YouTube:	NA

White Flag	Album: Just as You Are Music: Kristin Berardi Lyrics: Kristin Beradi	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/just-as-you-are/1091168120 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/3z6fZlWytxWSbpuDTjb1DA YouTube: https://youtu.be/UnJQmrSHqgE
Sweethearts	Album: Our Songs, Not Songs Music: Sam Anning Lyrics: Sam Anning	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/our-songs-not-songs/1478984398 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/34yJ8I58SHR5p7oScGWmAb YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPWKurmUyWg
She is the Colour Red	Album: Our Songs, Not Songs Music: Kristin Berardi Lyrics: Kristin Berardi	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/our-songs-not-songs/1478984398 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/34yJ8I58SHR5p7oScGWmAb YouTube: https://youtu.be/AA91LCyRBWk

D2: Brenda Earle Stokes

Song	Details	Recordings
Happening	Album: Happening Music: Brenda Earle Stokes Lyrics: Brenda Earle Stokes	Website: https://brendaearle.com/music/ Bandcamp: https://brendaearlestokes.bandcamp.com/album/happening
High Time	Album: Right About Now Music: Brenda Earle Stokes Lyrics: Brenda Earle Stokes	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/right-about-now/1219828647 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/7aXyio5WqG0YD20pUTsAf7 YouTube: https://youtu.be/c9Wz5oJmYlg
Standing	Album: Songs for a New Day Music: Brenda Earle Stokes Lyrics: Brenda Earle Stokes	Website: https://brendaearle.com/music/ Bandcamp: https://brendaearlestokes.bandcamp.com/album/songs-for-a-new-day
I’m Old Fashioned	Album: Happening Music: Jerome Kern Lyrics: Johnny Mercer	Website: https://brendaearle.com/music/ Bandcamp: https://brendaearlestokes.bandcamp.com/album/happening
Baiao Em Minha Cabeca	Album: Right About Now Music: Brenda Earle Stokes Lyrics: Brenda Earle Stokes	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/right-about-now/1219828647 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/1p7cEGmdMdB0kqYj

		xCz5E1?si=ae93c4fd9b0a48e4 YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ_OTmCMu04
The Birthday Song	Album: Right About Now Music: Brenda Earle Stokes Lyrics: Brenda Earle Stokes	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/right-about-now/1219828647 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/3cl7ZgOzy4SPbDOqb7eMMl YouTube: https://youtu.be/uGx8OePIsl4

D3: Michelle Nicolle

Song	Details	Recordings
Whistling Away the Dark	Album: Mancini Music: Henry Mancini Lyrics: Johnny Mercer	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/mancini-feat-geoff-hughes-tom-lee-ronny-ferella/858505269 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/36LRolveEkTeIqCXswjzTf YouTube: https://youtu.be/mkEFLneFVGY
Azure	Album: A Flower is a Lonesome Thing Music: Duke Ellington Lyrics: Irving Mills	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/a-flower-is-lovesome-thing/1442915997 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/24Ga5efzSyMdRFF2gLJ3xJ YouTube: https://youtu.be/pf0PwoWgETI
I’m Always Chasing Rainbows	Album: After the Rain Music: Henry Carroll Lyrics: Joseph McCarthy	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/after-the-rain/1442277522 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/0azaWZlgpVuaf5J0aXeyfJ YouTube: https://youtu.be/KgtA_wCQGYs

Everybody’s Talking	Album: The Crying Game Music: Fred Neil Lyrics: Fred Neil	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/the-crying-game/1443786934 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/6ZkLH5Fgt0A9uofWZsDx5f?si=a4ec331b1a6a4c5b YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llNoNDlWzNs
You Are My Sunshine	Album: The Loveliest Night Music: Jimmie Davis Lyrics: Jimmie Davis	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/the-loveliest-night/1443276359 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/5gvs5FEeSteP7qe6irGama YouTube: https://youtu.be/XhU82ru6Zz0

D4: Sharny Russell

Song Title	Details	Recordings
Set Yourself Free	Album: Comes a Time Music: Sharny Russell Lyrics: Sharny Russell	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/comes-a-time/1221817030 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/4XA0gbACkqrpqALCeCcYwM YouTube: https://youtu.be/S6CoXXdlkQY
Colour Me	Album: Comes a Time Music: Sharny Russell Lyrics: Sharny Russell	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/comes-a-time/1221817030 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/56yXuQ4LjLHsEtGeoidEoe YouTube: https://youtu.be/BOtGYitFtIk
I’ve Got the World on a String	Album: Velvet Live Music: Harold Arlen Lyrics: Ted Koehler	Website: https://sharnyrussell.com/product/velvet-live-cd/ YouTube: https://youtu.be/A1-lZUxPjxg
If I Were a Bell	(Live Performance) Music: Frank Loesser Lyrics: Frank Loesser	Apple Music: NA Spotify: NA YouTube: NA

Manhã De Carnaval	Album: Velvet Live Music: Luiz Bonfá Lyrics: George David Weiss, Hugo Peretti & Luigi Creatore (English Lyrics)	Website: https://sharnyrussell.com/product/velvet-live-cd/ YouTube: https://youtu.be/iZUxfM1XlTw

D5: Anita Wardell

Song Title	Details	Recordings
Learnin’ the Blues	Album: Kinda Blue Music: Dolores Silver Lyrics: Dolores Silver	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/kinda-blue/1464075284 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/35p4MkuLD78J1tZ0qyYFYH YouTube: https://youtu.be/rkK_wP1RBLE
My Shining Hour	Album: Until the Stars Fade Music: Harold Arlen Lyrics: Johnny Mercer	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/until-the-stars-fade/280010018 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/1fYQyy9JiT2Bq5RbjScaEr YouTube: https://youtu.be/0sb1W31J6WU
Twisted	Album: Why Do You Cry? Music: Wardell Gray Lyrics: Annie Ross	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/why-do-you-cry/279893311 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/2GxMTKII7dzrwAdHTwLRd2?si=219b7a24d4194fc3 YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wjz3yciG2b0
It Could Happen to You	(Live Performance) Music: Jimmy Van Heusen Lyrics: Johnny Burke	Apple Music: NA Spotify: NA YouTube: NA

Travels / The Road	Album: The Road Music: Anita Wardell Lyrics: Anita Wardell	Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/au/album/the-road/1467168891 Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/2vdEIiwrFZ8OOSk30bxod5 YouTube: https://youtu.be/x1ZMbGKhvN0