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Musings from the Jazz Festival Adjudication Table

Jazz Festivals are the best. Audiences filled with jazz lovers, families, students, and teachers. Kids excitedly sharing their learning with people who care. Educational clinics with culture bearers are an authentic way to propel student learning and to link them to a history and future of American music. There is often a lunchtime concert that highlights excellence and strives to show stakeholders something aspirational.

As I sit at my first jazz festival in almost 3 years, pencil in hand, adjudication form ready to fill out, I still appreciate and value these things. But I'm also noticing some places where we can improve as an educational jazz community. Maybe I didn't notice before because I am a product of this system. Maybe covid changed me more than I thought it had.

Either way, jazz music and what it stands for isn't in this space. And it isn't just **this** festival. I think we can make some huge positive changes for our students if we embrace a few ideas, but institute them as policy. I'm serious. Festival organizers, you can do this with two hours of editing work and by making intentional decisions. Let's put the festive back in festival!

Why are we teaching jazz music?

This is an honest question. Let's not miss the opportunity to **educate**.

"Jazz is a Black American art form shared by every culture - using improvisation and individual interpretation as a powerful means of expression...."

A music born of struggle and resiliency, striving for freedom and peace."
(Seattle JazzED)

Programming is our power. Control the agenda.

The Industrial Jazz Complex has created a world where most of our accessible song choices belong in the compost bin. If you must use "educational arrangements", make sure they are jazz standards, leaning heavily on the blues. **The song guides the learning**. You teach about what influenced the composer; about who they were, and about the time and place in which they lived. You teach about how the song has evolved over time, using primary sources (original recordings) to inform your creative choices.

"Jazzy" isn't jazz

Stop with the fedoras and sunglasses. It's performative. Jazz music does not require a costume. There is room for personal expression within concert black, and then we aren't alienating our nonbinary students. Further, jazz is not meant to be "conducted". If the band needs you to conduct, then they aren't grooving and we're missing the point. **We aren't swinging**. We aren't honoring the music if it doesn't **feel** good.

Work that stage.

Announcements are your chance to make a massive impact. Educate your audience and reinforce jazz values. Avoid the rubric (okay fine, use the J@LC Essentially Ellington rubric if you must). Host clinics on stage. Invite everyone to observe the educational process. Honor what the band played and then incorporate culture bearers (clinicians) to teach the kids, the other teachers, and the audience how we can strive for more depth of understanding. **Jazz demands it.**