Take Five Europe: January 28-February 2, 2013



By JOHN KELMAN

While solid jazz education for aspiring musicians is increasingly accessible, few programs tackle the harsh realities facing the emerging musician of the 21st century. With the dissolution of major labels, and a shift in revenue that often makes having a publicist and/or manager a luxury few can afford, today's jazz musicians are truly being forced to become small business owners, with their product being their music. But like any small business, success is not strictly measured on how good the product is; a myriad of business concerns enter the picture, ranging from how the product is presented to how it's funded.

Some artists find the transition to a multi-tasked career as musician, booking agent, manager and publicist an easy one, but for many, these are skills for which they are either completely unprepared or, even worse, thoroughly disinterested.

For a number of years now, Serious—one of the UK's leading producers and curators of live jazz, including the London Jazz Festival—in collaboration with a number of other sponsors and producing partners, has been hosting an annual initiative called Take Five. First focusing solely on the UK, it's an artist retreat that each year provides eight British musicians a timeout period from the daily grind, where they can focus on not just music-making but on networking and business skill development. The UK edition has already helped further the careers of a number of notable young UK musicians, including pianists Dave Stapleton (co-founder of Edition Records), Soweto Kinch and Alexander Hawkins, saxophonists Trish Clowes and Pete Wareham, and drummer Seb Rochford.

Looking at that roster, it's clear that the artists invited to participate were not fresh out of school or lacking some prior experience; instead, all in relatively early stages of their careers—with some recording and touring under their belt as well as some leadership opportunities—these were somewhat established players having already achieved a measure of success, but largely in the UK alone. In every case, these were artists in need of assistance to reach the next level in their careers by acquiring the business skills necessary to ultimately find a broader, international audience. And that's where Take Five came in.

After seven successful UK editions, Take Five expanded its reach in 2012, creating a parallel program, Take Five Europe. Ten musicians—two each from the UK, Netherlands, Norway, Poland and France—are chosen to participate. Taken to a relatively removed location where they are forced to forget their day-to-day routines, it gives each musician an opportunity to not just network with peers from other countries—and exposure to music that may well be out of their comfort zones—but to also connect with people from other parts of the music industry, ranging from festival and club presenters, record label owners and artist managers to journalists, photographers and more, for a series of lectures and discussions, all leading to a better understanding that, in today's environment, being a good musician—even a superlative musician—simply isn't enough. Subjects range from project funding, getting the gig, attracting audiences and contracts/copyrights/publishing to gaining a writer's attention, agency and management and more. (continues)



The practical music sessions are hosted by renowned saxophonist/clarinetist John Surman, a longtime bandleader with experience across the broadest possible spectrum of jazz. His role, as composer-in-residence, is to guide and facilitate the building of a repertoire in the short space of one week, to which each musician contributes one original composition or improvisational context, leading not just to a performance on the morning of the program's final day, but to a series of live

performances at festivals hosted by some of Take Five Europe's producing partners once the week is over.

The event's purpose and curriculum has been honed and improved, year after year—a good example being the more recent recruitment of Mary McCusker to help better focus the artists on performance and presentation. Matters of language are addressed by ensuring that there are professional translators available throughout the week for those who need it. And the program couldn't take place at a better location than Bore Place, a charming eco-friendly retreat near Sevenoaks Weald in Kent that's a still-functioning farm now also used for educational purposes—and which provides a comfortable barn rehearsal space, pleasant lodging and unexpectedly outstanding food, all from organic sources. Attending the three final days of Take Five Europe's 2013 edition—participating in the educational program and sitting in on rehearsals, auditing The Dragon's Den (more about that later) and attending the final day performance of the group's entire repertoire—was an exhilarating and educational experience.

But before making the trek to Sevenoaks, a few days in London acted as a reminder of why the UK scene is so vital and, returning to UK capital after nearly 30 years, just how much has changed. It was an opportunity to connect with some friends, meet up with fellow *All About Jazz* contributors Chris May, Bruce Lindsay and John Eyles in person for the first time (after working with them for as much as nine years), catch a little music here and there, and, thanks to BBC Radio 3 host Fiona Talkington, get a chance to sit in on the recording of an installment of her popular *Late Junction* program.

A Few Days in London: Little Radio and The Vortex

The first full day in London brought a rare opportunity to hear British saxophonist lain Ballamy and Norwegian multi-instrumentalist Stian Carstensen—who work together as Little Radio—deliver an opening set at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in the heart of Soho, opening for pianist Michel Legrand. It was part of a small UK tour that also celebrated the reissue of the duo's long out-of-print debut, *The Little Radio* (Sound Recordings, 2004) on Ballamy's own Feral imprint. It's a welcome reissue, to be sure, as the album demonstrates the profound simpatico shared by these two broadminded musicians, as they wind their way through a repertoire ranging from standards like "Body and Soul" and originals like "Last Tango in Paradise" to seemingly curious but ultimately wonderful choices like the children's song "Teddy Bears' Picnic." The duo's performance at Ronnie's was short but sweet, as they used song forms as a basic premise, but approached the material in a completely free, fluid and open-ended fashion.



It's not uncommon to say, in the context of jazz, that every performance is different, but with some artists and groups, it's a matter of smaller degrees. With Ballamy and Carstensen, however, it's clear that what happens each time they sit down to play is as much a surprise to them as it is their audience. They don't exactly solo; instead, they *collaborate*, extemporizing together with one or the other rising to the surface occasionally, but more often than not, coming together as they twist, turn and skew songs into at times near-unrecognizable shapes, but always managing to find their way back.

It's all about trust, something the duo touched upon earlier that same day in a workshop at the Royal Academy of Music. The duo played first, and then opened up for questions from a group of students so large that many had to stand in the relatively small rehearsal room. With Ballamy's dry humor and Carstensen's rapid-fire, razor-sharp wit (characteristics mirrored in his playing), the workshop was as entertaining as it was instructional; still, there was plenty to learn, with Carstensen a virtual encyclopedia of music and how various cultures shape it. One of the most important moments came, before the two split off to speak to individual groups (jazzers and accordionists), when Carstensen illustrated how different cultures ornament the music, as he played the same song on button accordion but, one after the other, demonstrating how a classical musician might approach it, how someone from Bulgaria would interpret it, and how coming from Serbia would create a very different result. Carstensen and Ballamy also touched upon a most important aspect of music that's often lost: music is played by people *for* people, and so it doesn't always come from academia; sometimes it comes from live events where people get drunk, get happy, get aggressive and just plain get *down*.

Carstensen's virtuosity, both at the workshop and Ronnie's, was staggering; a musical mind that's always searching, it seemed reflected in the way he often looked off to the distance and up to the sky when he played. His other group, Farmers Market, put out its best record yet last year with Slav to the Rhythm (Division Records, 2012), and whether he's playing pedal steel, guitar, banjo, kaval or accordion, he's not just mastered his instruments, he's become absolutely credible and culturally authentic on them, regardless of their backgrounds.

Ballamy's strengths were considerably subtler, as he was clearly disinterested in overt demonstrations of virtuosity, both here and in one of his other major groups, Food—another Anglo-Norwegian collaboration, this time with percussionist Thomas Strønen, and whose latest release, *Mercurial Balm* (ECM, 2013), may be its best yet. But Ballamy, who focused solely on tenor saxophone with Carstensen (who only brought his MIDI-capable button accordion to the date), clearly has it all, as he proved on occasion with unexpected bursts of serpentine lines. It's rare enough an opportunity to see these two musicians together once, but to see them twice in once day was an even more unexpected treat.

Another opportunity that was just as much a matter of luck and timing was finding saxophonist Evan Parker conducting his now-annual *Might I Suggest* festival series at The Vortex Jazz Club, in London's east end. It was a terrific chance to pay a first visit the increasingly well-known and influential club, now celebrating its 25th year; a feat in itself, given its volunteer-driven, not-for-profit status.

For Parker's 2013 series, he recruited the Dutch ICP Orchestra for a series of performances that broke the 10-piece ensemble into a series of subsets augmented by some local guest players, exploring all manner of permutations and combinations, leading to a full-on performance on February 2 that was a bittersweet and, by all accounts, memorable show where pianist and ICP cofounder Misha Mengelberg—sadly, suffering from the increasing ravages of Alzheimer's disease—managed to perform for longer than anyone had thought possible.



Mengelberg was also seated near the front of the house for the series' opening night on January 28, where a trio featuring cellist Tristan Honsinger, guitarist John Russell and violinist {Mary Oliver delivered an angular set, highlighted by Honsinger's startling vocalizations and, very briefly, some soft whistling from Mengelberg. A second set was more grounded, with saxophonist/clarinetist Tobias Delius, trumpeter Claude Deppa and trombonist Gail Brand improvising freely, supported by bassist Ernst Glerum and drummer Steve Noble, surprising the audience (or, perhaps, not so much a surprise for those familiar with ICP) by following their relatively brief free piece with an unexpectedly swinging standard—played, of course, with predictable unpredictability and verve.

After a final day wandering London, from the British Museum to Royal Festival Hall, a lengthy tube and train trip from Reading to Sevenoaks on the morning of January 31 meant arriving at Take Five Europe in full swing, its ten musicians wrapping up a morning of music rehearsals, only to break for lunch before diving into an afternoon of discussion from The Orchard's Scott Cohen, who spoke about the challenges of communications, digital distribution and media, and yours truly, providing some insight into how a musician might attract the attention of a writer at a time when more music is being produced than ever before.

Take Five Europe: An Interview With Producer Martel Ollerenshaw

Serious Associate Director Martel Ollerenshaw is the producer of Take Five Europe, and seemed to be in near-constant motion throughout the time spent at Bore Place, ensuring everything ran properly and on time. So it was no inconsiderable feat to nail her down for a few minutes, in order to get some additional background on Take Five UK and Take Five Europe.



"Even before we started Take Five, Serious had a reputation and desire to work with emerging musicians in various ways, both formally and informally," said Ollerenshaw. "A precursor to the Take Five program took place in 2000, supported by Arts Council England, with five artists. It was a series of sessions, concentrating on just the business. One of the artists went to [who would become] one of the long-term funders of Take Five, and said how useful this had been, and how more musicians would appreciate something like this on a more formal basis. So two foundations—PRS for Music Foundation and Jerwood Charitable Foundation—got together and put a tender out for a professional scheme for emerging jazz musicians.

"We were invited to apply, so we put together a program, applied, and that's what we've got now. The first edition was slightly—but not markedly—different from the current program. The fundamentals are a combination of music and business in a residential place where the musicians have this timeout period from their daily life.

"The first edition in 2004-5—it always spans a calendar year—was a pilot program, and we had a really interesting lineup; in fact, a lot of those people are still active on the scene. We had eight musicians: three women and five men, including [pianist] Matthew Bourne; [drummer] Seb Rochford and [saxophonist] Pete Wareham, who both had, concurrent at the time, Acoustic Ladyland and Polar Bear; Laura Macdonald, a Scottish saxophonist; and [pianist] Dave Milligan, another Scot, as well as composer Max De Wardener adn two amazing vocalists, Seaming To and Eska Mtungwazi. So that was the first group—and it was a pretty interesting one.

"We had done seven consecutive editions of Take Five in the UK before we started Take Five Europe, but by edition four or five we saw the potential for doing it in other places—partly because it's a

really good model that you can transfer, modify and adapt to different situations, but also because we'd been inviting our international peers since edition two. So we'd brought Sander Grande, from North Sea Jazz Festival, and he could see how it would work for Dutch artists; Jan Ole Otnæs from the Molde Jazz Festival, could see how it would work for Norwegian artists; Piotr Turkiewicz [of Poland's Jazztopad Festival], could see how it would work for Polish artists; and Xavier Lemettre [of France's Banlieues Bleues], could see how it would work for French artists. They're all people who we work with in other instances in Serious' live programming, and they saw what exceptional experiences these musicians were having. It wasn't very difficult to work out who the partners would be, when we decided to do an international version."

The second edition of Take Five Europe, with a residential running from January 28 to February 2, 2013, collected together a particularly special group of musicians. "With this group, it's been really interesting, because even from the very first day, the very first session—very few of them knew each other—what was very clear was that they had a common purpose for being here and they were very interested in working together," Martel explained. "They're very harmonious group; it's uncanny, actually.

"The music workshops are exercises in leadership as much as anything else. And that's what John [Surman] really does provide; he's been a bandleader for a very long time. I suppose there are ways that musicians can get that experience, if they have been leading their own bands and they have that trait in them anyway. But this mentoring is very empowering; the musicians know John's there, he's got their backs and he's there as a touchstone for them to do their work. He's really fantastic for this."

Take Five—both European and UK editions—continues to evolve and challenge its participants in ways they might never have considered. During the afternoon seminars, it was clear that, for some musicians, the necessity of having an active Facebook page, a strong biography and compelling EPK were against their natural instincts; for some, even cultural aspects came into play, as both Polish artists expressed discomfort at the idea of writing biographies and press releases about themselves which employed effusive promotional language. Even the concept of performance—how they look onstage and how they address their audience—was foreign to those who really didn't want to be about anything but the music. Still, arriving towards the end of the week it was clear that the message was getting through to all of them—though, for some, with a little more difficulty.

"Recently we've introduced Mary [McCusker], because the musicians themselves are very comfortable with John, and they are very comfortable playing—and you have to have the playing element, because that's what it's all about—but the concentration here has to be on the business," says Ollerenshaw. "They need to be informed about that, so they can move forward and sustain their careers. They're not necessarily as comfortable in those sessions as they are in the playing sessions, but it's important, because this is about someone's *entire* musical life. They're running a

small business, whether they want to consider it that way or not—whether they want to acknowledge it or not. That's the reality of the situation.



"There is a very fluid and sometimes patchy infrastructure across Europe for jazz musicians, but it's not good enough to be just an amazing player; it doesn't mean you're going to have a long career or you're going to have a lucrative career. You've got to interact with the business. So that's what Take Five's about, and hopefully it demystifies the fact that, really, it's just people. Everybody has expertise, and an interest—a desire—to see not even just these musicians but the genre in general continue. Part of Take Five is that the networking is *very* important. And that's tied in with confidence and all sorts of stuff, aside from performance; it's tied in with performing when you're *not* playing.

"We'd been trying, for a long time, to find someone who would be able to work with the artists on that aspect. We brought in dancers and directors, and they did some interesting things, but they didn't do what I wanted. What I wanted was someone who would take care of the fact that the minute you step out of your house you are in the public eye; you may not be playing, but you could very potentially be in the public eye. How you behave in public platforms—in interviews and networking situations—is important. Walking onstage and talking about what your audience will be seeing. All these kinds of things. Mary has made a marked difference, and the musicians are often very uncomfortable about it, but she's got such a way; she's so thorough with her preparation, and has so much experience and takes no prisoners in the way that she works. They have to engage with her and this morning [when, before the rehearsals began, she conducted a warm-up session to help everyone relax both physically and mentally], you saw how they relax with her, and that's a good thing. It means that they're becoming a very strongly bonded group.

"It's more than just music and it's more than just being away for week. They go through this experience that is not necessarily pleasant, but is essential. It pushes them beyond their personal boundaries, and you can sense that even after five days, a bonding amongst them is starting to happen."

The rigorous selection process comes from Serious and Take Five's ever-expanding network. "What we do in the UK (because this is sort of the ground zero for it) is we ask our peers from around the country, from all the funding bodies as well as from other musicians who've been on previous editions, to nominate artists they think would benefit from the experience," Ollerenshaw explained. I call them all, and they have to be proactive in accepting the nomination. They have to provide original audio, and they have to provide a biography which shows a track record of what they're doing, and a statement outlining why they think they would benefit from Take Five—why it would be good for them. We then select the UK version, which is a total of eight artists.

"The nomination process is quite a big undertaking. It's about a three-month cycle. This year we had over 70 nominations, and over 60 who responded; it was a very big uptake. Take Five Europe is done similarly to how Britain operates in that they have a pool of artists. Each country makes a local selection, where they bring in a consortium of people, and they choose eight musicians who are brought to an international selection panel. In the UK you have to have been on Take Five UK to be eligible for Take Five Europe, so we've got a pool of artists who've been on Take Five UK and we extended an invitation to them, asking if they want to be involved with Take Five Europe and then they apply."

But how is a program like Take Five measured? Are the funders—which, for the 2013 edition, included producing partners Banleues Bleues, Jazz sous les Pommier, Music Center Netherlands, North Sea Jazz Festival, Jazztopad Festival, National Forum of Music and Molde International Jazz Festival, and funding partners Culture Programme of the European Union, Arts Council England, Adam Mickiewicz Institute, SACEM, Jerwood Charitable Foundation, PRS for Music Foundation and MusicXport.nl—looking for something tangible in return for their investments?

"Yes and no," Ollerenshaw replied. "They do want tangible results. Because of funding in the UK, PRS for Music Foundation and Jerwood Charitable Foundation are very interested in the creation of new works. So having John Surman here to do the [musical] work in the barn is key. Each musician brings a new piece of work that they share with group, so it's the creation and work-shopping of new work. The musicians can do that however they like and in their own style, whether it's pure improvisation or written music; that's why John is so good because he can cope with any eventuality.

"So, the creation of new work is one measure. Then, since about edition three or four [of Take Five UK] we've been tracking musicians, and last year we decided to survey the musicians who've been through Take Five and ask where they are, what they're doing etcetera. A good example is Dave Stapleton, who was here this week talking about his record label, Edition, and Dave was a participant

in the second edition of Take Five UK, before his record label existed. So it's been really nice to follow him. He was already quite precocious back then, but Take Five definitely helped to expand his network."

As for the future of Take Five Europe, Ollerenshaw sees the possibility of even further expansion into other countries. "We're very interested in a lot of different countries," she says, "but we have to have the funding, so we've got to have eyes out and ears out in a variety of ways: who would be interested in doing it—who would be a good partner to work with—but also where the money would come from, because it's an expensive program and there isn't any box office attached to it, so it's all funded by grant income.

"At the moment, we've been talking to Ken Pickering from Canada [of the TD Vancouver Jazz Festival], about a possible opportunity including Canadian artists. Ken already does a lot of professional of development, so it sort of fits in with his philosophy, the way he is and the way he thinks. We're also talking to a range of countries in Europe. We're talking to Germany, Estonia, Finland, Denmark and a few others."



And, speaking of measuring success, the relationships established amongst the Take Five participants don't stop at Bore Place. "Rainer Kern [who attended earlier in the week], from Germany's Enjoy Jazz Festival, invited the artists from this edition to perform at his festival," Ollerenshaw said. "So [in addition to Enjoy Jazz] they're going to do five performances after this week, one at each of the partner festivals. It's up to the musicians how they want to play—as a tenpiece or broken down into smaller groups; this group has not yet declared its hand, so we'll see how that goes. But they may play as a ten-piece. The majority of them, if they're free, will go to France [for Banlieues Bleues]. They're playing in Wroclaw, under the auspices of Jazztopad, on UNESCO

international Jazz day on April 30th, and they'll play North Sea, Molde and Manchester Jazz Festival in July."

There are no more performances after that, but who knows? The close connection already shared by the participants of this year's Take Five Europe would certainly suggest that some, if not all, relationships forged will continue on past not just the week, but the program's entire cycle.

Take Five Europe: Network, Network and More Network

This year's group was certainly a diverse one, but coming in partway through the fourth day of the program, it was clear just how well this group was working together, dropping baggage off in the accommodation building and moving straight to the barn, where they were working their way through French saxophonist Guillaume Perret's buoyant, second line-driven "2000 XIII."



Along with Perret—whose Tzadik debut, *Guillaume Perret & The Electric Epic* (2012), is an electrifying, groove-laden album that spotlights his expansive electronic experimentation—the other participants in Take Five Europe's second edition were:

From England: guitarist Chris Sharkey, a member of the Anglo-Norwegian group The Geordie Approach and the sadly now-defunct TrioVD, whose *Maze* (Naim Edge) was released in 2012; and Arun Ghosh, a clarinetist whose most recent recording, *Primal Odyssey* (Camoci, 2011), has been similarly well-received.

From Norway: bassist Per Zanussi, whose Zanussi Five is approaching its tenth anniversary, and whose expanded Zanussi Thirteen can be heard on the recent *Live* (Moserobie, 2012); and tubaist Daniel Herskedal, whose duo recording with saxophonist Marius Neset, *Neck of the Woods* (Edition, 2012), challenges all preconceptions about his seemingly unwieldy (but, in Herskedal's hands, often stunningly beautiful) instrument.

From The Netherlands: Argentinean expat Marcos Baggiani, a busy drummer whose 2010 dOeK
Festival performance with The Ambush Party set an early high bar for the entire evening at
Amsterdam's Bimhuis; and saxophonist/clarinetist David Kweksilber, whose experience ranges from intimate duo recordings with pianist Guus Janssen to his own freewheeling David Kweksilber Big
Band, which opened Dutch Jazz & World Meeting 2012 in Amsterdam last October;

From Poland: trumpeter Piotr Damasiewicz, whose *Hadrons* (Ars Cameralis, 2011) is a dark album that marries form and freedom; and keyboardist Marcin Masecki, another player as comfortable in the world of contemporary classical composition as he is more freely improvised terrain;

And, from France: in addition to Perret, trumpeter Airelle Besson, whose lyrical duet work with guitarist Nelson Veras is only one aspect of her broader purview, and whose compositional contribution to Take Five Europe, "Estudio Trabajo y Fusile" was a particularly lovely and melancholy piece of writing.

What became quickly apparent was just how different each of these players was; some came to the table with lengthy scores; others came with the barest of sketches; and some came with virtually nothing at all but a handful of ideas to be articulated. But in every case these young musicians had a clear vision of what their music was, and directed their peers with confidence and clarity. Surman's role ranged from band member—offering the kinds of suggestions that, from a seasoned player, helped these younger players not just explain what they wanted from the group, but actually get it—to relatively passive bystander, largely letting the players work things out for themselves and only stepping in when truly necessary. Sometimes the best leadership is to simply be there, with a presence that provides focus without the use of a heavy hand, and Surman—amiable, enthusiastic and supportive—was the perfect choice to oversee the musical aspect of Take Five Europe.

That said, Surman, McClusker, Ollerenshaw and Take Five Europe chairperson Anna Umbima ran a tight ship. These were long days, with work starting at 9:00am but often extending well into the late evening and early morning. Sleep was largely a luxury, and by the end of the week people were beginning to get a little tired, something perhaps a tad evident in the Saturday morning run-through of the repertoire—absolutely well-played and, given how quickly this group had to come together and work in contexts that were often well outside their comfort zones, still quite remarkable—but with a little less energy, at times, than during the rehearsals. Still, the engagement of the participants, the guest speakers and the team running the program was so constant, and in many ways so constantly exciting and energizing, that everyone managed to transcend a little bit of fatigue.

That there was a certain amount of levity, despite the serious work at hand, also made the more difficult aspects of Take Five Europe work for the musicians. The afternoons were the toughest, as the various invitees discussed aspects of the business side of being a musician. How prepared the musicians were to face these harder realities varied significantly and was quickly reflected by asking a simple question: how many had active Facebook pages? Over the course of these final three days,

the musicians participated in activities including short sessions to assess their biographies, websites and press sheets and, on the final evening, "The Dragon's Den," where five pairs entered had to pitch their project ideas to Turkiewicz, Otnæs and Pickering (playing fictitious funding sources), in the hopes of obtaining financial support. It was clear that the comfort levels at doing presentations varied significantly—something made more difficult, at times, because of language barriers—but every group delivered a strong (and, oftentimes, humorous) presentation that made clear just how much they'd learned over the course of the week.



Before everyone departed for home on Saturday, February 2, in addition to the complete performance of all ten compositions, Umbima held a session dedicated to reflecting on the week's activities. To further cement the practical nature of Take Five Europe, each musician was asked to come up with five action items to help move their career forward. And this was not simply theory; these action items were given to Ollerenshaw, and they will ultimately be followed up to find out just how well the artists are coming along in actually implementing these action plans.

Beyond the chance to play the music as a full set, where the musicians were able to display the fruits of their labor, there was still instruction to be had. The musicians had to introduce their composition to the small audience in attendance, bringing in the aspect of *performance*, and there was definitely a clock ticking. These pieces, after all, will be performed live at a number of festivals later in the year, where there's often little flexibility to the time allotted for each show, so considerations such as set list sequence and length—of both the performances themselves and the time spent *between* them—were some of the final lessons to be learned as Take Five Europe came to a close.

As vans were filled with musicians and other participants heading for London and Heathrow Airport, what was also clear was that it was not just the musicians who had benefited and established new relationships; *everyone* who participated in Take Five Europe had broadened their network, whether

they were there for a day, a couple of days, or the whole week. And they were all richer for the experience.

The original article is online here: http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=43942