

Take That and Run

by Jonathon Brown



Take Five: UK and Take Five: Europe Funding Partner - Shonagh Manson, Jerwood Charitable Foundation (UK)

At the of February ten talented emerging jazz musicians participated in [Take Five: Europe](#), at Bore Place in the wilds of Kent, on a week-long residency designed to develop their professional future. Every aspect of their career came under secluded creative scrutiny — not just performance but also how to give interviews, how to network, the whole gamut of modern professional life, packed in a full schedule of workshops, seminars and discussions led by professionals from across the European music ‘industry’.

It sounds like a secret service training, you might think! So, what’s it all about?

Of course, the phrase ‘Take Five’ has at least three connotations. One is to have a break, to take five minutes off, known in the old days as a cigarette break, and another is of course Dave Brubeck’s infectuous tune (did I say ‘tune’?!) of the same name, as perfectly simple, obvious, complex and inventive as Philip Stark’s thing for getting the juice out of a lemon. The third connotation made the basis of Take Five producer Martel Ollerenshaw’s brief in creating the original proposal nearly a decade ago — to take five creative jazz musicians and give them a break, in every sense: to take them from their usual lives a while and equip them better for the musical and commercial development they deserve. “We were asked by the PRS for Music Foundation and the Jerwood Charitable Foundation [two of Britain’s leading arts funders] for a proposal and so, we put in an outline for 5 musicians and we thought this was really nice, we were happy, but they said this was all terrific but they wanted eight!”

The break takes place in the beautiful if inappropriately named [Bore Place](#), a study centre and organic farm lost in the outskirts of Sevenoaks in Kent, whose buildings are often used for business training courses but also for yoga and weddings. It is perfect for a concentrated isolation. “There’s very limited internet access and bad ‘phone coverage; it’s a not-for-profit farm where principally they teach animal husbandry.”

Ollerenshaw’s [journal](#) gives a neat look behind the scenes of what you might see as an unusual exercise in organic musician husbandry. She at least has a good name to start with: the Ollerenshaw part is as old English as Kent, yet she is a Sydneysider of light, coaxing accent, and since working in the arts in Australia (for festivals and organisations in Queensland, Melbourne, Maribyrnong, Sydney, and so on) has for a decade or more been involved ‘over here’ in ambitious and innovative arts projects for a company called [Serious](#) — a good enough name to start with too. Some of these projects have involved working with community and young people’s choirs alongside orchestras such as the London and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras and a thread of her career is to be found in the idea of openness or cross-over, not only in disciplines and art-forms, but also in how artists meet and what they learn when they do.



Take Five: UK artists Christophe de Bezenac, Alexander Hawkins, Chris Sharkey, Andrew McCormack

Hence Take Five: UK, the professional development programme for creative jazz musicians which began in 2004 and which has spawned Take Five: Europe as well as Air Time (a Scottish flourish of the same idea), and Move On Up for creative musicians working in black music. Ollerenshaw also manages to manage the work of various UK musicians such as Andy Sheppard, John Surman, Jules Buckley, Ayanna Witter-Johnson and Jason Yarde; oh, and the music publishing company In all Seriousness Music — yet with time for a relaxed chat on the 'phone about the energetic progress and growth of Take Five: Europe...

“We’ve done seven consecutive editions of Take Five: UK and the musicians have to be creative, they have to be capable of creating their own work and performing it. The PRSF and the Jerwood wanted a ‘bespoke’ programme, so once the musicians have been selected there’s what we call a DNA session — diagnostics, needs, analysis — to make sure that the week gives them the maximum benefit. The programme is shaped round these one-on-one interviews, in which they volunteer their thoughts on the skills and areas they wish to explore through the scheme.”

The old tailor’s word ‘bespoke’ is increasingly stretching its limbs in the arts and media world, to mean the sponsor or funder gets just what they want but what nobody else has quite thought of — and the special cut of this cloth is that the musicians selected must be under 35 but also ‘creative’ as well. If you reckon that much of a jazz musician’s special skill is in improvisation, composition on the hoof after all, you’ll see that this requirement cannot be taken lightly: these are the crème de la crème that are chosen. The 2012 participants were selected in Tallin last September and the 2013s will be chosen in Bremen this autumn. The ‘five’ element is reflected also in the way that they come from five countries, two each from France, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and the UK.

The purpose is not about forming a band or writing a piece, though. Indeed, Take Five: UK has no “imperative to perform”, as Ollerenshaw puts it, “we didn’t want any false marriages”, whereas Take Five: Europe does take this step further. No, the central drift is to achieve an exchange and expansion of all the skills that performing and creative musicians require in today’s world. For instance, a recent innovation is the appointment of a Performance Tutor whose scope is “everything you do when not performing — how you walk on stage, how you deal with interviews, and learning the skills of networking, which is just so important nowadays. This has been very successful.” Nonetheless, Take Five: Europe last year out-did any performance imperative, with the musicians melding so well that they have formed an occasional ensemble that will regroup at the North Sea Jazz Festival in Rotterdam (8th July), the Molde Jazz Festival in Norway (18–19th July), then, in November, at the London Jazz Festival (17th) and at Jazztopad in Wroclaw, Poland (24th).

The question of performance is different for the Scottish off-shoot, originally called Time Out and now called Air Time. “The Scots decided they wanted their own version and in 2009 and 2010 we did two versions of residencies. These were commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council, now called Creative Scotland. This year, after a gap in 2011, we’re going to change the model; we’re going to provide a different opportunity for the ten musicians that have been through already, and they’ll have a week in September at the Tolbooth in Stirling, where they’ll work with classical chamber musicians. It’ll be very intense. It has been interesting because some of the artists are older, they’ve been through

different cycles of work, and the funding situation in Scotland is different from the rest of the UK too; they're much better funded in Scotland as individuals, and you can get funding for recordings which you can't anywhere else in the UK."

It's a pet project of John Cumming, a founding director of Serious and a key figure in all these programmes. Cumming himself is typical of the breadth of experience that we now expect to come together in an arts career. From the late 1960s until the 1980s, he worked mainly in his native country, primarily in theatre, as director, lighting designer and occasional writer, winning awards from Scottish Television and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, as well as launching the Bracknell Jazz Festival; in 1977 he turned freelance with projects in theatre and music nationally and internationally. He co-founded Serious in the mid 1980s with David Jones, initially as an international production management company, later as a producer and commissioner of new work, devising concert series, festivals and touring projects. (A third director of Serious, Claire Whitaker, joined the company in 1996.) Cumming, a founding member of Europe Jazz Network, received the Services to Jazz Award at the 2007 BBC Jazz Awards. Serious is also behind the "BT River of Music", a multi-stage outdoor event at the 2012 Cultural Olympiad.

It's a similar wide range of sources that the money comes from for these intensive sessions. In at the start was the Jerwood Charitable Foundation, dedicated to imaginative and responsible revenue funding of the arts, supporting artists to develop and grow at important stages in their careers, and the PRS for Music Foundation (PRSF), the UK's leading funder of new music across all genres. Then of course comes the Culture Programme of the European Union, designed to "promote trans-national mobility of cultural players, trans-national circulation of artistic and cultural works, and intercultural dialogue and exchanges"; the Arts Council England, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, a Polish state cultural institution to promote Polish culture around the world and finally MusicXport.nl is a program of Music Center the Netherlands to improve the international position of Dutch bands and to enlarge their possibilities abroad.

Well, yes, it takes six...

TAKE FIVE: UK

<http://www.serious.org.uk/pages/take-five>

<http://www.serious.org.uk/pages/take-5-family>

AIR TIME: SCOTLAND

<http://www.serious.org.uk/pages/time-out-jazz-cpd-scotland>

MOVE ON UP

<http://www.serious.org.uk/pages/move-on-up>

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