

If Playing Jazz Is Playin' Wrong Notes - I Don't Wanna' Be Right!

By David Arivett

I totally disagree with the premise (in an hilarious parody/spoof!) that some supposedly old rock'n rollers use for their definition of what jazz music is... They claim that Jazz music is basically a "mistake waiting to happen...a bunch of wrong notes!" This is a great example of the misconceptions about Jazz that exist in the mentality of many people today. These are the types of misconceptions that have to be cleared up! Please first watch the short video clip of members of the Rock Group Spinal Tap discuss jazz here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYSEQImJnNw&feature=share> (In this video the only fear I sense is the fear and intimidation that these musicians feel towards playing jazz music that goes past the conventional " three power chords" structure or in other words "outside their technical" musical abilities!) Below I have outlined several things that I wanted to address in response to this video.

- 1) Not All Jazz Music Is Soft. They even imply in this clip that to play loudly is to "man up"!! Jazz is played at all kinds of different dynamic levels and I wouldn't want it to be any other way. Maybe these guys have never been on a Bandstand with a Big Band and full rhythm section and horns - it can get quite loud! Maybe these guys are talking about soft Kenny G. "Snooze Jazz"??
- 2) Jazz Music Is Not Playing 'Mistakes'. This is a ridiculous statement. Most all Jazz has a form with a chart/musical plan indicating melody, chord changes, tempo, and rhythm. Whoever arranged the charts to play jazz music "live" totally planned it out except for the improv sections!
- 3) Jazz Music Is Not Playing Wrong Notes. Well...in a sense, but only if you use the conventional/traditional rules of music harmony as your criteria. I myself have many times played the wrong note or chord only to later incorporate that mistake into my musical vocabulary! But a jazz musician will woodshed and hone his chops for countless hours every week. He may play a few wrong notes but not normally on purpose will they play mistakes or wrong notes. They study long and hard to obtain their "jazz language". Even when they are improvising most of the time they are blowin'/playing over structured chord changes.
- 4) Jazz Improvisation Is Not An Accident. There is still form and structure within the framework of Jazz. It's a beautiful expressive language where there is plenty of freedom to play how you feel at the moment. But in the video one guy is incredulous that all across the country the "wrong notes"/jazz is being taught in schools, handing out degrees for "playing it wrong"! While their comment that jazz is 'spontaneous' is appreciated, the fact is there are chord changes, scales, and licks that have been learned beforehand that will be a vital part of whatever improv will take place during solos. All I can say is this: If playing/teaching/writing/arranging/recording Jazz is playing the 'wrong notes'...then I don't wanna' be right!!