

Creativity in Jazz Improvisation

October 13, 2007

2:30 p.m.

The Philoctetes Center

Levy: Francis Levy

Bloom: Jane Ira Bloom

Porter: Lewis Porter

Audience: Speaker from the audience

Levy: I'm Francis Levy, Co-Director of the Philoctetes Center. Welcome to "Creativity in Jazz Improvisation." This inaugurates a whole new music program we will be having at the Philoctetes Center this year, which is actually rather intense. We are involved with an organization called The Music of the Spheres Society, and we will be doing a lot of work in classical music and in music and mathematics and a whole series of roundtables, discussions, and demonstrations around that. We do hope to have more jazz this year, too.

I'm now proud to introduce our two musicians. Jane Ira Bloom is a soprano saxophonist, composer, and a pioneer in the use of live electronics and movement in jazz. She is the winner of the 2007 Guggenheim Fellowship in music composition, the 2007 Mary Lou Williams Women in Jazz Award for lifetime service to jazz, the Jazz Journalists Association Award and the Downbeat International Critics Poll for soprano saxophone, and the Charlie Parker Fellowship for jazz innovation. Bloom was the first musician commissioned by the NASA Art Program and has an asteroid named in her honor by the International Astronomical Union. We hope that she'll eventually get a planet. She has received numerous commissions composing for the American Composers Orchestra, the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, and Pilobolus Dance Theater, integrating jazz performers in new settings. She has recorded and produced 13 albums of her music and holds degrees from Yale University and the Yale School of Music. Bloom is currently on the faculty of the New School for Jazz & Contemporary Music in NYC.

Dr. Lewis Porter is a jazz pianist, author and educator. He is Professor of Music at Rutgers University in Newark, where he is the founding Director of the Master's Program in Jazz History and Research. He is the author or coauthor of six books, including the acclaimed study *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*. He has written numerous articles and liner notes, and edits a book series and a scholarly journal. He has performed recently with such artists as Wycliffe Gordon, Ravi Coltrane, Joe Morris, and is currently rehearsing Indian-influenced music as part of a new group with Badal Roy, Vic Juris and a veena player from South India. His new CD, recorded live at Siena Jazz, is *Italian Encounter*—available at Altrisuoni.com and iTunes. His full schedule and extended audio clips are available at lewisporter.com.

(Porter and Bloom play an improvisation.)

Porter: The question for the day is: what did we just do, and why? And how?

Bloom: Well, we picked that one—it was a piece called “Dreaming in the Present Tense,” a composition of mine, which I wrote very much inspired by thinking about Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*. I just thought it very appropriate, in the Psychoanalytic Center, to start with that.

Porter: But what did we have to work with, here? What was improvised and what wasn’t? And what was creative about it and what wasn’t creative about it?

Bloom: Well, if I were to show people what was written—and you can see it—a series of voicings that Lewis was playing on the piano.

Porter: So, for example, the first one is: (Porter plays the piano.)

Bloom: However, what I was doing wasn’t written down. It was based on the harmonies that I heard inside those voicings. And although there is a melody that goes through this piece, it’s only that I’m touching on it.

Porter: Okay. A melody as suggested by the chords, you mean?

Bloom: The bass line—

Porter: Oh, in the bass line, right.

Bloom: The bass line is the melody, as slow as it is.

Porter: Right. So the topic for today is improvisation and creativity. Our idea, in terms of a way to address that, is to show you some different kinds of improvisational things that we do. Most of them are not standard jazz improvisation things, but I do have that blues piece, I guess, which is the most standard thing that we’re doing today.

We like to involve you. Is there anything you wanted to know about that piece we just played?

Levy: Why *The Interpretation of Dreams* and how can you possibly translate that? Is there a passage in that, that inspired the piece?

Bloom: Now, this comes to a very difficult place.

Porter: Yes.

Bloom: A question is being asked about a composer’s titles. Jazz musicians are notoriously uncomfortable talking about the very thing that you’re asking about, the same way that poets are about their titles, and I’m one of them. I think John Coltrane was another.

Porter: Yes, that’s right.

Bloom: Is it true?

Porter: He liked to write poems.

Audience: When do you create? In the dream or during the day, does the melody come to you?

Bloom: Often I sit at the piano. Piano is actually my very first instrument and often ideas come to me there. Stravinsky wrote at the piano.

Porter: Right.

Bloom: Some people don't. I am a saxophone player so it is a little bit odd, but I think it's the place where I feel the most relaxed in terms of letting my imagination go.

Porter: Maybe in part because it's not the instrument you perform on, so you can kind of just try different things out. But the piano is—not to be biased—but it's what a lot of people use for composing because you can just kind of find sounds. "Ooh, that sounds good. Let me work with that."

Audience: You said that it was only really the piano part that was written down and that you heard the melody within the piano part and went off from there. To my ear, what you were playing, though, was very complete for a piece of improvisation. It had a lot of depth and continuity to it. My question would be, would someone who really knew music be able to connect what you were playing with the heart of the piano piece that was written down initially?

Bloom: I believe so because we don't talk about it, but we're internalizing harmonic areas that the chords indicate. And you have to remember I wrote them.

Audience: Oh, you wrote the chords?

Porter: So she knows them very well.

Audience: Right. But what you were playing—that wasn't written down.

Bloom: No.

Audience: But if you did it again, would it be played the same way?

Porter: No. We're going to do that with a lot of these.

Bloom: Absolutely.

Porter: Because part of what we want to illustrate today, I guess, is that—well, I like to say it this way: human behavior is not random. People talk about free improvisations sometimes and they go, "Oh, well that's random." And I say, "No, excuse me. If you want something random, program your computer to generate some random numbers." Humans can't even generate random numbers. That's why we don't use humans to do that, because you say one number and then that has an association for the next one, and so on and so forth. Nothing we do is random.

In the same way, when we're improvising, most jazz performances, especially the ones that are more traditional, will have something very specific that the improvising is based on. So even in this case we have this series of chords by Jane. Even if there's not—we could do it if we want to later, just a totally free improvisation. But even that doesn't mean what you think it means. It doesn't mean random. It simply means that depending on which of us starts playing first, the other will respond to that, and this kind of spiraling give-and-take starts to proceed. So that's one of the things we want you to understand today: there is this common perception out there that somehow improvisation is random or that it just comes from the air, but it actually comes from experience. It comes from a lot of experience, really.

Bloom: A lot of shared vocabulary.

Porter: That, too. Yes.

Bloom: In addition to being improvisers, we're composers, as well. I think of myself sometimes as a spontaneous composer. But often, one of the things I'm trying to achieve in my music is that you can't tell the difference between what's written and what's improvised. It's all just coming from here.

Porter: So, let's try it again for them. What do you think?

Bloom: Okay.

(Porter and Bloom play.)

Bloom: This is an interesting experiment because this is exactly what goes on in a recording studio: first take, second take, third take.

Porter: Right.

Bloom: They're like snowflakes. It's interesting: jazz musicians who have spent a lot of time recording have developed, I think, all kinds of techniques for keeping their ideas fresh, for trying to put themselves in the most creative frame of mind. A lot of it has to do with relaxation. Often, the minute you start to think, "I've got to be perfect" or "There's a solo idea that I had that I must do," that's the minute the solo goes down the tank.

Porter: That's right. And it happens in succeeding takes. Like, in the first take, especially if you listen to it back, sometimes you remember, "Oh, I played that one thing and it was really good." If you try to put it in the second time, forget it. You can't find a natural place to put it. It sounds stilted. You didn't play it quite the same way. So you start second-guessing yourself, is what happens sometimes.

Bloom: Another technique that I sometimes use—and I remember this explicitly because recently I performed a piece at City Center. It was a dance piece that involved a jazz quartet and myself playing soprano, and Carmen de Lavallade was dancing. And we had rehearsed this piece over and over and over again, so much so that we were saying, "This thing is over-rehearsed."

When we got to the tech rehearsal before the performance, I remember saying to Carmen, “You know, I’m a jazz—I’m just going to not play. I mean, I’m not going to put any energy into the solo. I’m going to try, as we call it, to ‘save it.’”

Porter: Right.

Bloom: And we went through the tech and a fascinating thing happened. I did make a decision. I decided I was going to try to just play the simplest thing I could without even thinking about it or worrying about where it was going to go or what it was going to do. And lo and behold, that particular take was—according to my husband, who was the director—the absolutely best one.

Porter: Oh my god.

Bloom: I was trying to do nothing. I was actually taking everything in my head that was trying to tell me what I should do—off it went. What felt to him like the most picturesque moment was when I was trying to do nothing.

Porter: But it’s also the one that nobody in the audience heard.

Bloom: No.

Porter: What do you think—did it sound different the second time?

Audience: Oh, yes.

Porter: Much more what?

Audience: More alto-based.

Bloom: Alto, yes. The lower register of the soprano, yes.

Porter: Low key, maybe. Literally low-key.

Audience: Have you recorded this piece?

Porter: Oh, yes.

Bloom: Yes.

Audience: But when you listen to it, do you improvise on what you hear, saying, “Gee, maybe I’ll do it a little differently the next time.” Does your mind work that way?

Bloom: From the recording?

Porter: Are you influenced by your recording of it?

Bloom: You know, sometimes you can't help but be, especially around the time that you're working on a recording and you're listening to the thing over and over and over again. You can't help it. But fortunately, this was two years ago.

Audience: No, I meant post-recording. In other words, did you listen to this piece before you came here today?

Bloom: No.

Audience: Knowing that you were going to be starting off—

Bloom: No. No.

Porter: Not recently.

Bloom: Not recently.

Porter: I did, because I haven't played it before.

Audience: Oh, you played this for the first time?

Porter: Well, we played it to rehearse for this, but it's my first performance of it. Just in the past couple weeks. Yes, sir.

Audience: The second time through you seemed to arpeggiate the chords more and I was wondering if that influenced the way Jane played, the way you responded, the way you played your solo.

Bloom: Absolutely, but it's not a conscious thing.

Porter: It's not.

Bloom: This is a subject for a three-hour discussion about the unconscious processes that are going on between musicians as they're playing. It's not conscious thought like we're talking; it's something else.

Porter: Or it's nonverbal thinking. But I'll tell you something, and this is part of what I think we want to do today. I'll tell you what went on in my mind: I think it was mutual because somehow I just played the first chord and I felt that maybe Jane took a little longer to play on that first chord and some words did come into my mind. A lot of musical thinking, you have to understand, is not verbal. But just for a second some words flashed in my mind. I thought, "Oh, this one's going to be different." And I just kind of got that in my mind and then started to get on an even dreamier kind of approach to it. Somehow it's like a mutual thing. It's not really that I started it or you started it. The rest of the time I don't remember thinking words, particularly, but that did flash in my mind for a second, I thought, "Oh this is going to be different. Dreamier." Or something like that.

Bloom: I think if there's anything that I think of ahead of time—it's from my experience in the studio, performing things one right after the other—it's that it cannot be the same. That's a thought that's there: it cannot be the same. That's the only conscious thing I'm aware of.

Audience: I'm thinking about *Animal Farm* and how all the animals are created equal, but some are created more equal than others. So it's kind of like all improvisation is good, but some seem to be better than others. Are there any objective criteria that you can point to that would establish why one improvisation is considered better than another, and is there a range of any kind?

Bloom: Yes. There is a lot to it. Experience. Think about improvisation as a lot of instantaneous choice making. People who have spent their lifetime doing this, practicing improvising all the time, it becomes—what happens is you seem to hone things about which decisions you make. I mean, the possibilities are endless, but I think as you mature as a musician or as a composer, you start to find the choices that are perhaps more unique to yourself and your own vocabulary. A lot of the shoulds and shouldn'ts start going away. Often, when I talk to young musicians who are studying jazz and are so impatient for the better solo and the improvisation that they wish for, I tell them it's a lifelong journey. It's something that you just get better at the older you get.

Porter: Yes. Very true. But I think you were also saying, how do you decide one take is better than the other? And how do you decide one improviser is better than the other? Because we do have opinions in jazz about who are the really great ones and so forth. I don't like to put that into words because with artistic taste there is a gut thing, and then you find the words, is usually what happens. That gut reaction, I think, is maybe more important, even though people don't believe this because I write books. They say, "Come on, you can find the words. Get out of here." But I don't like to. I'd rather not define that. There are things that feel organic and they work and they move you and you say, "Wow." And then there are times people are improvising and you go, "That was a lot of notes, wasn't it?" So I don't really like to put it into words, but you have touched on an issue there, for sure.

Bloom: There are so many things in it. We could talk forever about this. I mean, musicians, when they compose or when they improvise, are working with a very important sense of expectation that you have. How we set it up and how we zig when you think we're going to zag.

Porter: Right.

Bloom: How that's interesting to you in your mind, how composers do that. Improvisers do that, too. I speak for myself that as I've gotten older, I've found more of myself in what I play, and that feels good.

Porter: Yes. I think that's one of the tricky things, too, though. I like to say jazz musicians have big ears. What I mean is that we're interested in everything. You'll hear some contemporary classical thing and say, "Oh, wow." You'll hear some older classical thing. You'll hear an older jazz thing. You'll hear something in pop music. We're constantly hearing things. Jazz is maybe the most eclectic music there is in that sense. Sincerely we've enjoyed things from classical music and from pop music. So it is kind of a lifelong search to find yourself because you can be

joined too much to something else. There are musicians who are known as the Benny Goodman clone or the Coltrane clone or the Charlie Parker clone and that's not really ideal. It's not what Jane and I are about. That's part of the work, I think, having all those influences and yet having a sense of who you are at the same time.

Bloom: Probably the most valued thing among jazz improvisers is to have a unique voice.

Porter: Right.

Bloom: More than anything else, if you talk to the older musicians. Whether you play fast, whether you play slow, whether you play up or down, it's an intuitive sense that you have found your own voice. That is the thing that's most valued among improvisers.

Porter: And in fact, a lot of times they give the same example: Ben Webster—a famous saxophonist—would play on a record and after two notes you knew who it was.

Bloom: Exactly.

Porter: They always give examples like that. But there is a lot of truth to that and a lot of value to that.

Bloom: Yes. The old drop-the-needle test.

Porter: Exactly. What do you think, do you want to say something, Francis?

Levy: How does it compare to conversation? For instance, if I'm going to go to someone's house, I might think, "What am I going to say when I walk in the door?" And then when I get there, I may try to repeat what I've had in my mind. When you came here today, was it set up? This is sort of a question about process and extemporization. We also have this in academic settings, like there are people who like to give lectures from notes, or read a lecture. Other people will set the whole lecture up but then they'll go off and they do their thing and it's obviously much more enjoyable.

Bloom: Well, the structure that we have rehearsed is usually what we call the head of the tune. It's usually a very small portion. If there's thought about preparation, that's the thought. In terms of the "dialogue" that goes on among musicians when we're playing, I think a good way to reference this word is, it's not dialogue in the sense of you think of it as conversation: "Hi, how are you, Lewis?" "I'm doing fine." No.

Porter: It's not small talk, that's for sure.

Bloom: It's more that improvisers are thinking about the same thing. Imagine there's this idea that we have about this piece. We're thinking about the same thing, and we're doing it simultaneously. Ornette Coleman—perfect example of this.

Audience: How do you know that you're thinking about the same thing?

Bloom: You don't. You have an idea.

Audience: It's intuition.

Bloom: It's an intuition, yes. Of course we can't be the same. But the fact that we have a starting place.

Porter: For example, the sheet music that we start with.

Bloom: Yes.

Audience: Can't you say that it's like the title of an essay, like you say, "This is the topic of conversation—we're going to discuss brain functioning," or something? So you have a conversation about how the brain works. It's a musical conversation on the topic.

Bloom: There's a kind of topic, but try to imagine that it's more like we're talking but we're talking over each other. We're talking at the same time.

Porter: That's true.

Bloom: It's not like, "Hi. How are you?" He and I are playing simultaneously in time.

Porter: Exactly.

Bloom: Yet there is something that's going on between us.

Porter: Yes. And also, it's a topic that we know something about. In other words, we do have this foundation that she wrote and we have experience improvising. So it's not that we're discussing something with no knowledge of it.

Audience: But is it all sweetness and light or do improvisers compete or challenge or set traps for each other? Is there a more dynamic tension?

Porter: Well, I would say sometimes it doesn't go well. I mean, I've had drummers and bass players where I've said to myself, "I will never work with that person again," because I felt that they just went in a different direction from where I was going.

Bloom: In the best group personnel I've ever been with, it's because the other people spark my imagination with ideas all the time. It's like, they're coming at me from every direction—that's what I like. But it's always something going on like that. And you're right—it's not always sweet and nice.

Porter: And there are cats who don't listen. You're playing and you say, "Gee, I don't feel that he or she is listening to me at all." And it will really bother you. There's such a thing as people

who do listen but have an idea of how to respond to you—it doesn't work for you or whatever. So yes, it's complicated.

Audience: Is there a time when there's a block or you do the same thing over and over because you sort of lose your ideas. Does that ever happen?

Bloom: Yes, after take three. After take three, it's all downhill. But when you run out of ideas—let me think about that for a minute. There are times when you really feel like you don't want to play.

Audience: Or the other person, just based on what they're playing, you just can't go there.

Porter: Yes. For me, if I play a tune too much, that happens. If I play it at every engagement for a month, I say, "You know what, I better not play that tune for a while." It's not exciting me. I can't find anything new to improvise on it. That'll happen to me. And people always ask me to play tunes from my first CD. But I say I don't want to anymore. I'm sick of them. I'm great at publicizing my work, as you can tell. There's nothing wrong with them, though. I'm just sick of them. I've played them too much.

Audience: I have sort of the opposite question. Have you played a song once, so well, that there's no reason to ever do it again?

Bloom: You know, sometimes you might think that, but you always do play it again. I can think of instances—a recording of a ballad I did—where I said, "Yep. That said it. It's done." But I do perform the same ballad in performance, and something else always happens. So you're right. Interesting question.

Porter: Should we try a ballad now or do my other thing for our next example?

Bloom: What do you feel like?

Audience: Ballad.

Bloom: A ballad it is.

Porter: Since you just mentioned it, she has an arrangement of a ballad. Do you want to tell them anything about it?

Bloom: Oh, I think they'll know it.

Porter: Okay.

(Porter and Bloom play.)

Bloom: That was a ballad that I recorded on an album called "The Red Quartets." It's one of the CDs out there. Remember this performance and check that one out. See what you think.

Porter: It's got to be different.

Bloom: It's very different.

Porter: And what was the name of that?

Bloom: "Time After Time."

Audience: Who wrote that?

Bloom: Jule Styne.

Porter: That's an example of taking a familiar song—in jazz we call them standards. A lot of jazz from about 1930 is still going on. A lot of jazz is based on what we call standards, which now are really older tunes for the most part. But how did you come up with that arrangement? Because this isn't in Jule Styne's music. Where did that come from?

Bloom: Well, this is me, the composer. You know, the American Songbook and those songs written in the '30s and '40s have a very special place in my heart, in my music. It's been my point of view that it's really important to try to say something about why I'm playing this song in the year 2007 and not 1940. Often I'll write an introduction that's a little piece of an idea that I feel almost is like a co-composition that was inspired by "Time After Time." Somehow they come together and they make sense together. That's kind of how it happens.

Porter: Okay. It frames it. You play it at the beginning, you hear it at the end, and it frames it and gives it a whole different mood.

Audience: In terms of the balance of improvisation between the two instruments, my sense was that Dr. Porter, in the first part, was doing most of the improvising, rather than having it written down.

Porter: I'm not sure what you mean. There was a part when I was playing by myself—

Audience: Yes.

Porter: That was improvised.

Audience: You were improvising. And then my question was: how did you make your decision about when to come in after his solo? Was that something that was part of your arrangement or something you did just then? It was very good, but I'm wondering whether or not you could have chosen to do it earlier, later, and how you made that decision.

Bloom: Often, it's tradition that the improviser will take a full chorus of the song. A lot of time, though, I'll come in before the form has concluded. He was still playing the end of the song and I'm merging into my improvisation.

Porter: There's some overlap. But when you're playing on the foundation of a popular song, the song has a certain length and it's really kind of tradition that you go once, twice, however many times, through the form, but you do observe the form of the song.

Audience: Right. But again, in this case, that was a choice that you made as to when to come in.

Bloom: Yes, at that moment, it felt right.

Porter: Yes, that's right.

Bloom: Interestingly enough, sometimes when I'm improvising on a ballad, I almost feel like I'm not doing a thing. In my mind is that melody. There is a template of this melody that's going on in my mind as I'm recreating and creating other melodies or whatever it is I'm doing. And it feels to me, when it's happening, like I'm not doing anything. I don't know how else to describe that to you. When I'm in the zone, I'm not thinking about if I'm putting the right keys down. I'm not thinking about the fact that I'm playing a soprano saxophone. I'm not thinking any of those technical things that you hear. When things are happening right, and that felt good to me, it's feels as if the instrument is disappearing and the voice that's in here is just coming through.

Audience: Is that the same for other types of music? You follow a template?

Porter: Other types of jazz, you mean?

Audience: Yes, other types of jazz. Do you follow a template?

Bloom: Sometimes. Sometimes, it's a harmonic progression that's in your head.

Porter: Like in the first one, it was just a series of chords without an assigned timing. That didn't have an assigned timing to it, whereas this one we're thinking: one, two, three, four. So that's the difference. There are a lot of different ways. This is the most common way to improvise jazz. If you were to look at every jazz recording ever made and do a kind of statistical thing, you'd find that a high percentage of them have a steady beat and they're based on the chords of the song. But there are a lot of other things to do. We like to do some different kinds of things.

Audience: Do you find that sometimes you're thinking of colors or shapes, or that any particular memories get triggered by something, or other areas of thinking get activated by the songs?

Bloom: I am a visual thinker, so I can't be specific enough to tell you I'm thinking of this or I'm thinking of that. But I know I do think of sound in a very sculptural way. I don't think I could be any more specific—

Audience: What shapes?

Bloom: I'll demonstrate this in that other piece.

Porter: Okay. Which one?

Bloom: The Pollock.

Porter: Okay.

Audience: So you always start with the bass. Or do you sometimes start with your improvisation and then have the bass come in later?

Bloom: Perfect question for the next piece that we're going to play.

Porter: Okay, let's do it.

Bloom: Let me just make some adjustments.

Porter: So we're doing the Pollock?

Bloom: Why not? It seems like a good lead-in.

Porter: Let me just hear my sound for a second. I changed it just a little—I want to see how that sounds.

(Porter and Bloom play.)

Porter: We were thinking fast on that one. We had to think quick.

Bloom: This was a piece called "Jackson Pollock." This isn't the exact canvas that I remember being inspired by. I think it was "Autumn Rhythm" that I was looking at when I wrote this piece, years ago.

Porter: Interesting.

Bloom: But I did write a series of music inspired by Pollock and recorded it. It's called "Chasing Paint." And when the improvisers in the quartet would play this music, everybody got a reproduction. Each of the pieces was based on a different painting, so people had different images, and the musicians really got into it.

Porter: But it's tricky because music is a sound art, you know? So you can't be inspired by it in as specific a way as sometimes people imagine. So, for example, I was joking before when I looked at that picture, when Jane showed it to me. I said, "I can't tell if that's a B flat or C." Because it's neither. That's the thing about music. Now, for me it's interesting because when you ask about shapes and colors, I can't remember thinking colors. But shapes, yes. But maybe for a reason you wouldn't think of. It's because the piano is a very visual instrument and I visualize keys and how my hands are on the keys. What they call "sharp keys"—D and E major—I think of as having sharp corners because you can see a line; you can see square-ish kind of lines between the notes in here. When I do a key like D flat, if you actually measured it maybe the

lines are still square, but in my mind, those are more rounded. There's more of a circular line to it. So I actually do think shapes, but they're kind of like hand shapes.

Bloom: It's not synesthesia. It's not that. It's something else. It's not that you can think of that and only that.

Porter: Right. And there's a book—I don't know if you know this—by a cultural anthropologist. I think that's what he is.

Bloom: *Tasting Shapes?*

Porter: Oh, that's on synesthesia. This one is about the hand and the way the hand fits on the piano. It's called *Ways of the Hand* by David Sudnow. You may know this. He never did get a job in academia with his doctorate, so he actually teaches piano. The book is all about the feeling of the piano in the hand. It's interesting.

Audience: What are your thoughts about your actual physicality and how it relates to what you're playing in the moment? Because you're talking about the way you image the instrument that you're playing, but Jane has a very strong physical relationship to the music and to her instrument. How does it relate to the instrument that you're playing on?

Bloom: Well, I can speak for myself. I always moved when I played, before I even knew that I did. It's something I don't even think about. It's intuitive, completely intuitive. But over the years, I became more aware of it, especially with the help of some choreographers and people in dance that I work with, and this went simultaneously with an interest I've always had in how sound changes when it moves. This Doppler effect is doing things like that. In a room like this, if it had more reverberation, it could be sonically kind of interesting.

Porter: It really works.

Bloom: It interests me to think about that. As time went on and I became more conscious of it, I started to integrate it more into my compositions and into more of my thinking as an improviser. So the movement has actually become kind of a signature part of my vocabulary now. I'm interested in those Doppleresque kinds of pitch shifts. Then I enhance it with some of these live electronics that you're hearing today.

Audience: It's interesting because there were moments when I could really see that you're moving the music. You're using your physicality to move the music in a certain way and then there are other moments when it seems like you're being moved by the music, you're kind of feeling it.

Bloom: There's a constant feeling of initiating and responding that's going on all the time. I think that's what you're sensing.

Porter: Yes. For me, I don't have much of a sense of what I look like when I play the piano. I will see afterwards on the DVD. I'm sure I'll be appalled. I know that I move around. I move my

torso a lot, maybe more than a lot of piano players do. I'm mostly self-taught and I always say, "As long as I get the note, I'm satisfied." I don't have to necessarily do anything the perfect way. But you do find that you respond. For example, there is a chord in that first one, just to go back to that for a second. It was one of these kinds of sounds. And I remember I felt it like this, though, when I played it. That's how it felt to me.

Bloom: There are musicians who are like sphinxes.

Porter: It's true.

Bloom: Charlie Parker, if you've ever seen footage of him, didn't move a muscle.

Porter: That's right.

Bloom: And yet the expression of the sound.

Porter: Exactly. It doesn't mean that you're lacking in any kind of expressivity.

Bloom: No.

Audience: Just to go back to the issue of the visual component of our experience of music, which is to say that when you listen to a piece of music, somehow the rising and the falling and following the melody leads to shapes in the mind—just as part of the experience. I'm wondering if from a musician's point of view that is credible, that there is that visual component. Do musicians have that same visualization of the rising and falling and the movement of the music?

Bloom: Absolutely. Because with this melody—I remember being very conscious—it's not that I'm writing a series of regular eighth notes: bo-be-do-be-do-be-dooga. I was writing a melody where things slowed up and slowed down, sped up. Also the directionality of where the melodies go, up and down. All those things are guiding your ear. I think you caught it.

Porter: Yes, I think so. It's interesting because when you're improvising, it's different for the player than for the audience member because we also have to know where to put our fingers, if you're a piano player. So there are technical things that come from experience. I don't really know everything that's going on in my mind. As I say, it's mostly nonverbal, but I know that I do think in shapes of melodies, but I'll also zero in on a specific note to actualize that shape. I may know, for example, after playing a certain line, that it needs to be balanced by a descending line, but that's not enough to get my finger to the right note. Sometimes that will come into my mind, a picture, a kind of dramatic shape. This has to do with what you were asking before, too, in terms of why we like certain improvisation artists. A certain dramatic shape will come into my mind. But there's another aspect, too. We talked about this just a little—Jane, what do you think about a setting like this where we're talking about what we're doing?

Bloom: This is very un-jazz-like. Most jazz musicians are not talkers. Or not verbal people, in my experience. And even the act of us talking to you is altering the music.

Porter: Yes, absolutely.

Bloom: In fact, if we had not engaged in this dialogue with words with you, something else would have happened—I don't know what.

Porter: It doesn't mean it's worse—don't worry—but it does affect it. For me it's funny, because we both teach, so it's not like I'm not used to talking. I lecture at Lincoln Center. But when I give an actual concert-concert, they say, "Would you talk a little before each tune?" The truth is I'm terrible at concerts. I usually don't even announce the tunes. Those of you who have seen me know that. It's because I find that actually talking can be distracting or even disruptive in a way. So it's a different experience. Plus, if you're just playing for an hour, there's a feeling of warming up and of getting to the next tune. There's a whole other thing here. We're kind of stopping in between. So Jane and I wanted to bring that up. We thought it was an interesting point, that even this setting is something a little different. It affects the playing.

Bloom: Yes.

Audience: It would seem to me, the tune you just played is a very specific example. Listening to it, one could have an extraordinarily different experience of the piece, depending on whether or not you showed that image before. Would you talk about that?

Bloom: That's the way, I think, it should be. Although we write music, we can never dictate what you're thinking. Titles are only like titles of poems. They're only springboards for your imagination, in whatever direction your imagination goes. But you can tell somebody, "This is what this piece is about and this is what you must think."

Audience: The title is almost programmatic. If you announce the title, you're predisposing the audience to hear it in a certain way.

Porter: I think his question is would it be okay if they didn't know that it was about Jackson Pollock.

Bloom: Yes, it would be fine.

Porter: I think that's what she's getting at. A famous example: John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme," one of the famous jazz albums of all time. The last movement of it is based syllable by syllable on the poem that's in the liner notes. Nobody knew this for years. I published about it in my book. But part of the reason they didn't know was that he was asked in an interview and they said, "I notice there's a poem in the liner notes. Would it be good for people to know that?" He said, "No—whatever you want. It doesn't matter." He could have said, "What are you talking about, that's based on—you better know it!" He didn't say that. He said, "Whatever. You can know it or not. It doesn't matter."

Audience: What was the name of that album?

Porter: That's "A Love Supreme."

Audience: In the modern visual culture that we live in, don't you think that our experience of that song would have been totally different—I know I feel it would be—had you shown us the picture before you played the song?

Porter: You mean if she hadn't shown it.

Bloom: If I had?

Audience: Well, you didn't show it until it was over.

Bloom: Right.

Porter: Oh, is that right? I forgot already.

Audience: Had I seen that in the beginning or had the picture been on the wall, my experience of the music would have been highly enriched because, the way my mind works, I would have had a modern master painter as a reference point for sitting in a room and listening to two people that have extraordinary reputations in the jazz field interpret that picture. To me, it doesn't get much better than that.

Porter: Well, that's interesting.

Audience: Unless you could have brought Jackson back, smiling, in an image.

Audience: You mean a modern mistress composer wasn't enough?

Porter: But there's a value judgment in there.

Audience: You can always make it better and that would have made it better for me.

Porter: There's a value judgment in there. He's saying that it would be "better."

Bloom: Well, better or worse—I think your mind organizes it differently. I would agree to that.

Audience: I can only speak for myself.

Bloom: Yes, sure.

Porter: But again, remember the relationship of music to any non-sound world is not very specific, really. So it may be that that would have helped you, but I think what Jane was saying before is why is that better? It's just other.

Audience: Let me just ask a quick question. Based on the song "Time After Time" and the fact that I now know that you both teach, do you ever advise your students—obviously not to plagiarize—but to take songs that have become standards, or have become famous? That song

was familiar to me; the other two weren't. I got my own personal entertainment value during your version of it. Do you advise students to listen to certain standards that have obviously made their mark on the world of music?

Bloom: Absolutely.

Porter: That's a traditional part of jazz education.

Audience: So that's not like, out of line.

Porter: I'd be astounded to meet somebody who studied jazz in school and wasn't told, "These are some tunes everybody really should know."

Bloom: I actually have a course where I teach students how to play ballads from the American Songbook, of this very period.

Porter: That's great.

Audience: Well, that's playing the ballads. I'm talking about using the ballads to create their own version—

Porter: That's clearly what she means.

Bloom: Yes. That's what they do.

Porter: In jazz we say playing it, but we're always doing our thing with it.

Bloom: No, that's indeed the direction of the course.

Porter: Exactly. But we also use different types of foundations. I'm sure Jane does, too, but I happen to love Indian music and Asian music and as was mentioned in my bio, I'm working with an Indian tabla player right now. There's an Indian scale that goes like this. I love it. It so happens they use this same scale—and I pointed this out to the tabla player—in the gamelan music of Indonesia. So I'm going to put this on a gamelan sound. We play it with hammers. It's like a metal, almost like a little xylophone or something like that. And we'll play this little theme I wrote. I just call it "Gamelan," because I'm not great with names. I'm going to have Jane name all my tunes from now on. I'm just going to give her my CD and say, "Name everything. And quick, because I'm in a hurry. I need it by tomorrow." But let's try this. I just call it "Gamelan."

(Porter and Bloom play.)

Porter: That's take one. I don't know if we need a take two.

Audience: What kind of other attitudes towards playing music have you discovered by working with people from different countries?

Porter: Well, there are a lot of different attitudes. First of all, everybody thinks that their tradition is the greatest one. But I guess you've noticed that about human culture, anyway. I'm always astounded by human culture because it's such a powerful force and it's so different—even in the United States, which are not as united as we like to think. You can travel a few hundred miles and you're in a different culture. Or you can travel a few blocks in Brooklyn and you're in a different culture. Culture is so powerful and yet, when you think what is culture based on, it's based on "somebody told me." Why do you believe that if you blow yourself up you'll go wherever—"Well, somebody told me that." That's the only reason. Culture is based on "somebody told you." It's an oral culture. It's really oral at its base. So everybody thinks theirs is the best, but the great thing about music is that we're dealing with nice stuff. We're not dealing with suicide bombers and things like that. We're dealing with one of the lovely things about culture. There's a lot of pride. This is the other thing I find. For example, people who play traditional Indian music—in 1972, I was living out in the San Francisco area and I played in a group—I put the group together with faculty members of the Ali Akbar College of Indian Music. And they were great. They were very open. As soon as I said I'm a jazz pianist and I'd like to play with you, it was like, "Ooh, great. Let's do it." I said, "Oh. Okay." I didn't have to convince them. On the other hand, they were very proud of what they played and how they played it. "Let me show you what we do and this is how we do it." So it's fascinating. I love being involved in different kinds of music traditions.

Audience: I have a second question. Have you taught people who have come to you about inhibitions or who have psychiatric disorders? Have you had the experience where it's been very therapeutic to somebody, or that someone had changed from studying improvisation?

Bloom: Well, not in the technical sense. I don't know if you're a psychologist, but in the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music, where I teach, often I find a lot of young people are drawn to this music and often mistake a lot of things that are inside the improvisation tradition for things that they have problems with mentally. The nonverbal thing is something we talked about. A lot of times self-esteem and confidence have an enormous amount to do with the growth of a beginning improviser. It's interesting, as a music teacher you see it come out in all kinds of ways. But we only talk in the language of music. I have to say, in all honesty, I have observed it. Yes.

Porter: Yes. That's a good point.

Audience: I think Dr. Porter said that the scale of the piece you just played on really wasn't a scale of Western music. It was a scale of Eastern music.

Porter: That's right.

Audience: So my question is whether or not, by way of improvisation, that requires you to both mentally and technically adjust, as opposed to just another piece of jazz or an improvisation of a piece of American music.

Bloom: Absolutely. An improviser uses a composition as a springboard for the imagination. Someone asked before, "Can you play anything?" The written music informs the choices you

make and the compositional choices that you make, even as a spontaneous composer, inform them.

Porter: There would be things that would be inappropriate or just might not sound good. In the middle of that piece, if we went (Porter plays), it could be fine or it could be, “Wait a second. It’s not very gamelan,” you know. But it raises another issue because there is the issue of the connection between emotions and music. This is kind of a big one, but I have a thing about that, Jane, because jazz musicians always like to say, “Hey man, I play the way I feel. I play the way I feel. You can come one night and I’m going to play that piece. And you can come the next night, it’ll be totally different.” Well, then you actually go see the person and one night they play (Porter plays) and then next night they play (Porter plays). It’s like, “Wait a second. That wasn’t so different.” That wasn’t so different, and they just gave this whole lecture—“You can tell if my baby left me. You’ll be able to tell.” I couldn’t tell if a baby left you, a dog left you, I don’t know what—I couldn’t tell if you got a new dog. I don’t know what you’re talking about. I raise this for a reason because it’s a very simplistic idea about the relationship between emotion and reason. The actual relationship has something to do with what Jane said. It’s like an actor with a script. If you are so overwhelmed by your emotions that you really have to play only whatever happened to you that day, you’d never be able to go through a list of tunes at the gig. There would be one tune that you’d be in the mood to play. Seriously, think about it. That’s a misconception that the common person has. Nobody here is common, of course. But that’s a misconception that they have. There’s this idea that you come to the gig with one mood and that’s the mood you play all night because your baby left you. No. No matter what happened to you that day, when Jane says we’re going to play this particular piece, I said, “Okay. Let me think now. That’s where I’m going to go now.” It’s really like an actor with a script.

Audience: What about channeling the emotional content of the piece itself as opposed to putting your own emotional statement to it?

Porter: Well, what do you think? That’s a good question. I would say yes, very much so, because like this gamelan one, the minute you think of it, it puts you in a certain mood. You say, okay, there’s kind of a mood to it that you want to get into.

Audience: Is there anything intellectual about it?

Porter: Well, everything about it is intellectual.

Bloom: Learning to play these instruments is—to make it sound like it’s not a big deal is a big deal.

Porter: Your mind is working very hard to hold time. I always like to say that people don’t get it because there’s some discussion that you don’t think anything when you’re improvising. To the layperson, thinking means words. If there are no words in your mind, you’re not thinking. Nonverbal thinking is very intense thinking, I guarantee you from experience. So there’s a lot of thinking going on. It’s a highly intellectual process and of course practicing is very intellectual. To practice you really have to break things down.

Bloom: A lot of great jazz musicians are very, very thoughtful people.

Porter: Yes.

Bloom: There's one personality that you may see in public, but if you actually work with them, you'll find that musicians are often very much the kind of people who are interested in ideas. Everybody has a different thing that they're interested in, but it's not entirely what you think.

Porter: Yes. We have another piece. I just want to get to it because it might relate to this. Then we'll have another ten minutes for questions, I think. But it might relate to this because we have a prerecording that we need to play against it, and that brings a mood with it. So we'll tell Miguel to put this on once we give him the signal.

Bloom: Yes, we need Miguel to put on a tape.

Levy: Lewis, I just wanted to say that the last piece you did was far out. Wow. Talk about emotions. There's something explosive about doing something like that. It just happened, this last thing you just did.

Porter: You really like it, that's what you're telling me? Okay. You'd love this group I'm playing with. It's really something.

(Porter and Bloom play, with pre-recorded backup.)

Bloom: That was a duet version of a piece called "Most Distant Galaxy." This was a little portion of a piece of music that I was commissioned to write for NASA.

Audience: That was sensational.

Porter: So was there a picture with that? This gentleman wants to know.

Bloom: Not a picture, but you know what—

Audience: Another small step for mankind, one giant leap for music.

Bloom: When I was part of the NASA art program, the head of the art program used to send me press releases of new interplanetary, intergalactic findings. I got a press release at that time—it was like 1988-'89—of one of the most distant galaxies ever detected. I guess it must have been the Hubble. But that spurred this to happen.

Porter: Interesting.

Audience: When you play a piece without any improvisation at all, how much is that like—or not like—improvising? When you interpret a piece, but don't improvise.

Porter: Way different for me. For example, I love classical music. I play it for myself. I'm not going to trouble you. But I did when I was in college—when I say “mostly self-taught,” I had three years of piano lessons and at the end of each year you had to play a little recital in college. I found, for me—this is interesting because I'm an improviser—it was much more nerve-wracking to play written music because I'm not choosing the pitches. I'm not choosing the notes and I could actually hear the wrong note. But when you're improvising, you're in control of the choices. It's not that you never hit a note that you regret, but you're in control of it. It's just a different feeling. For me, it's nerve-wracking. I would describe it that way. Obviously not for classical musicians, I hope.

Bloom: I think I've found, in playing completely notated music, that one of the things over time that happens, just like the improvising, is that even though I'm interpreting somebody else's music, that it becomes more my own. Even in the interpretation, I could not be anything but the voice that I am. In other words, your individuality can't help itself. And even if you tried to sound like somebody else, you couldn't do it.

Porter: Yes, that's important, too. You should bring yourself to it.

Bloom: I remember back on that conversation about what goes on in your mind, the verbal and the musical. Often it's very common—I've talked to a lot of musicians and improvisers—when you step off the bandstand after you've had a particularly energetic set of music, nobody can remember anybody's name. I can step off the bandstand, I'll look at somebody I know very well, and I know this person like the back of my hand, and I cannot think of their name.

Porter: It's true.

Bloom: I'm sure many artists experience this in different contexts.

Audience: Why is that?

Bloom: I don't know. We have to get the neurologists in here.

Porter: For me, it's a kind of very healthy-feeling exhaustion, because it's intellectual, too. You've just used your brain at its most—you've been thinking so hard and so fast and using your physicality and your experience and your creativity. That's one thing I love about improvising music—it really uses everything. There's a state of healthy exhaustion, that's the way I think of it.

Bloom: There's also something about being in an alpha state. You know, a completely concentrated place. I think athletes could relate to this. Other performers could talk to you about this. There's something that goes on in this nonverbal process of making music—

Audience: I've heard writers describe it, too, when they're in the zone of writing.

Porter: I could see that. Yes. I'm sure.

Bloom: Very hard to switch modalities.

Porter: Yes. That's right.

Audience: So it's not Alzheimer's.

Porter: Not yet.

Bloom: No.

Porter: Thanks anyway. I feel great now. Thanks.

Audience: You said before that jazz musicians tend to be verbal, thoughtful people, but you also have said that jazz listeners usually are not very verbal. I think you said that.

Porter: No, she's talking about musicians.

Bloom: The musicians, I was talking about.

Audience: No, but you said the musicians are very verbal.

Bloom: No.

Porter: No. Let's review.

Audience: Well, they're interested in ideas, whether that's verbal or not—

Porter: I love the jazz community. I love jazz people. Most of my friends are jazz musicians. I find that they're very bright, very interesting, thoughtful people. They vary, as Jane was saying before, in terms of how much they want to talk specifically about how music is made. Some are like, "Oh, I don't want to ruin it" or "I don't even know how to talk about it." Others like to get very specific. One way you see the difference is in terms of feedback. Some musicians, you can have one of those great experiences and you get off the stage, "Yeah, man. See you next time." And others will say, "I really liked it when you did that and when I played this." People vary in terms of how much feedback they give you, too.

Bloom: If you're on the road with most musicians, they love talking about all of their other interests other than music when they're back stage. They don't want to talk about music. Whether it's sports, whether it's archeology—Bobby Previte likes to talk about the Renaissance.

Audience: This is very different from classical musicians today. I don't know if they've been forced into this mode of lecturing and talking about music all the time to audiences. They never used to it in the 19th century or 18th century, but now they do it all the time.

Porter: Well, your point is well taken. I was thinking about that because Anton Rubinstein, one of the famous classical pianists of all time, was asked in an interview that's on a DVD

somewhere, “So you’re a Chopin specialist. You probably know more about Chopin than anybody. So what can you tell us about Chopin’s music?” He said, “Oh, it’s like perfume.” I said, “I could’ve done that.” So that was more like a jazz musician. It was not really so verbally helpful.

Bloom: Lots of abstractions in jazz language—things that don’t have a lot of specificity.

Porter: Exactly. But maybe the Classical Conservatory training—I know, for example, I’ve sat in on chamber music rehearsals. When you work with chamber musicians, you find they say, “Oh, wait a second. On the third beat of measure 3—”

Bloom: “The errata on page 4.”

Porter: Exactly. They’ll really get into like, “The third beat—don’t you think that third beat should be a little louder?” And I say, “That beat was over by the time you finished talking about it. What is going on here?”

Bloom: But in all fairness, Lewis, the focus of the attention on notation and where it goes is a world. It’s a symphony to itself in classical music.

Porter: Exactly. Yes.

Bloom: It’s a different world.

Porter: Yes, it really is. They rehearse a lot more than jazz musicians.

Bloom: Yes.

Porter: It’s really true. Jazz people are like, “Are we going to rehearse for this gig?” I’m serious! I’m serious.

Bloom: One rehearsal at most. Most professionals—one rehearsal.

Porter: “Are we going to rehearse for this gig?” And I’m not big on rehearsal, so I’m like, “Hmm, maybe. Doesn’t matter. What the hell. We’re improvising.”

Audience: So, touching on what you’ve been describing in terms of the difference between classical and jazz and the fact that some of the students and colleagues you improvise with are coming from a rigid training background, how do you bring them across or break through that? Because they’re coming to you and they’re desirable to you because of what they actually do, but you want to bring them into an environment of improvisation—

Bloom: From classical music training.

Audience: Yes. What is your strategy or exercise to bring them across?

Bloom: I've seen it mostly in terms of a lot of Asian students, particularly pianists, who come to the school to study improvisation. Often their training has been as classical pianists. But you know what the first thing must be, before anything can happen? They must want to.

Porter: Absolutely.

Bloom: It's the desire. When you feel that desire from them, it's often one of the first things. The idea of improvising is so exciting to them because they have felt restricted in the classical world. That's the jumping off place. Can't begin without that.

Porter: It's a very good point, because very often I've run into classically trained musicians who say, "Yeah, I think it would be kind of fun to improvise." That's not enough of a motivation because it's not so easy. That's what they don't realize. It's actually very hard for classical people, partly because they assume that learning the Beethoven is the hard part and the improvisation is going to be the easy part. Guess what, Itzhak Perlman has tried improvising on the violin. Here's one of the great classical musicians—have you ever heard him improvise? He's okay. That's all. He'd be okay in one of our classes. It's not because he doesn't have musical ability; it's because improvisation is its own discipline, and it's not easy. I'm thrilled that he's doing it. I'm thrilled when I see classical people do that. But it's extremely difficult, I find.

Audience: Well, the great classical composers were great improvisers.

Bloom: They were improvisers.

Porter: Yes. That's not the training.

Audience: They'd improvise for hours.

Porter: But that's not the training they're getting anymore. That's the problem. They're not getting that training.

Audience: Also, I'm not sure how that is related to the jazz improvisation. I think it's a different kind of approach.

Porter: Yes, it's a different kind, but it would help if they had that. They're not getting the training and I think it's a shame. I'm talking about the 1800s—it's a little before my time—but it used to be expected that for your recital at the end of this year you would play some pieces but we're also going to give you a theme and you'll do a set of variations on it. So that kind of training is great. It's not done anymore, which is a real shame, I think.

Audience: The players of early music are getting that training. The players of baroque music are playing *continuo*, particularly the keyboard. But the 19th century composers—and you pointed this out—were also doing it. Supposedly, Chopin's friend said he was a much better improviser than he was a note-taker, that his variations were far superior.

Porter: He was known to be great at that.

Audience: So we have to cry about that, I guess.

Porter: Are we out of time?

Bloom: We have until 4:30. Great.

Porter: Well, we can play more music. We have one other piece, which is fairly traditional. It's just a blues—I call it a blues. The blues, as you probably know, is an African American type of song and it's a very important focus of jazz improvisation, to take a blues chord sequence and improvise on it. I told you I'm not good at naming my pieces. I've written a bunch of blues over the years and they all have the same name. They're all called "Lew's Blues." So this is the latest Lew's Blues, I guess you could say.

(Porter and Bloom play.)

Porter: So that one does a repeated sequence of chords, like in "Time After Time." You know, you have this (Porter plays.) You've heard me do that a lot—a repeating sequence underneath it. So in that sense, it's the same kind of structure as the standard song because you have this sequence of chords that goes around and around.

Bloom: And a melody that's just based on a few notes.

Porter: Yes.

Bloom: Like Wayne Shorter said, "It's how you scramble them." There are a lot of eggs, but it's how you scramble them.

Porter: That's great. And the blues, as I say, is a big part of jazz. An awful lot of jazz is based on some variation of that blues idea.

Bloom: It's part of the common vocabulary. There's an enormous amount of vocabulary that jazz musicians share with one another. Part of your training, just like learning to play your instrument, is knowledge of music, reference points to other great musicians before you, to things that are—what would you call them?

Porter: Clichés?

Bloom: Not exactly licks, but conventions. We didn't do them, but there's something called "trading fours," where you play four, I play four.

Porter: Four measures, back and forth.

Bloom: Four measures. Again, this is part of your common knowledge.

Porter: In fact, there's blues in that "Most Distant Galaxy" piece that we played, because while she's playing, one of the written ideas is (Porter plays). Which isn't so different from my theme: (Porter plays). So blues shows up everywhere. It's a very important part of the jazz vocabulary. Since the beginning—jazz started in the early 1900s and the early repertoire included blues songs. That was there in the beginning. Ragtime was another big chunk of it, and popular songs.

Bloom: Well, being a saxophone player, the composer Percy Granger used to say it was the saxophone that he loved—he was an American composer—because it came closest to the human voice. Some cellists like to say that, too.

Porter: That's true.

Bloom: But being a saxophone player, I've always felt that this instrument was my voice. I played alto, and once I made a foray into baritone, but it just physically wasn't my instrument. The alto, I was never able to get. I didn't feel as if my voice could come through that instrument. Somehow it came through this one. It's interesting how the instrument finds you.

Audience: Does Wynton Marsalis improvise?

Porter: Wynton? Oh, yes. You have to, to be a jazz musician. You have to. Yes, he improvises a lot. I mean, he plays classical music, as well. But he plays plenty of jazz.

Bloom: Yes.

Audience: A gender question, or are we beyond that? Is there still a lot of prejudice in terms of who's playing what instrument, in terms of men versus women playing certain instruments?

Bloom: Succinctly, yes.

Porter: Yes. There is.

Bloom: And if there were a profession where I could say that, in terms of the direction of women and what they have achieved, the jazz world and its reception to women I would call absolutely Neanderthal.

Porter: Unfortunately, it's true. If you look in the classical world—symphony orchestras, conservatories, students—maybe half are women now.

Bloom: Look at the New York Philharmonic.

Porter: Yes.

Bloom: I mean, look at the pictures of the New York Philharmonic.

Porter: Not that it was always that way. Symphony orchestras weren't open to women being members of the orchestra until roughly—well, I know that Stokowski, who was a great leader in

so many things, had an orchestra in the late '60s that he called the American Symphony. It included women and that was considered way out, that he had women in his orchestra. So it's a fairly recent thing. But in jazz—I have about eight or nine new graduate students every year and some years there are no women and some years there are one or two women. That's very typical of jazz programs. It's some combination of things.

Bloom: In my career I have seen it get better. If you had asked me in 1976, when I was coming out of college, if women would still be having the trouble getting work, playing all the instruments in the year 2007, I never would have believed that it wouldn't be completely a non-issue by now. And yet it still is.

Audience: How come the symphony orchestra is so much more liberated?

Porter: Except for Vienna.

Audience: No, I think they have finally started accepting them, but very few.

Audience: They play behind a screen.

Audience: That's a good point.

Audience: What jazz instrument is off limits to you?

Bloom: Brass. Drums. Bass.

Audience: There are only a few of those in the field, too.

Porter: I'm sure it's very complicated. I'm sure there are social, cultural issues, because as I was saying, it's even the number of young women who are going into jazz. But there is something about the jazz field that hasn't been so welcoming for women. I don't know how much of the work, but Jane, isn't still at least a chunk of the work that women do at these festivals for women where they say, "Look, we're featuring women today."

Bloom: It's true. The fact that Billy Taylor is still running an annual Women of Jazz festival in D.C.—the reason he's doing it is because he believes in these women and these women are not getting enough opportunities to perform. This is a way to call attention to them. So the problem still exists, yes.

Porter: Yes, very much so.

Audience: Do you have any thoughts about why jazz culture—the music form and the culture that surrounds it—engenders or attracts people of certain personalities so that it's actually historically been closely linked to drug culture. Obviously, you'd probably not say that about classical music, but so many of the jazz greats have been known to have some kind of really strong relationship to drug culture.

Bloom: We've got to get the neuroscientists in here because it may be that there are chemicals that get released in the brain that have to do with a high of creativity, a high of invention and imagination, that's very similar to the area where drug enjoyment is.

Porter: Also think about the other cultures that are drug-oriented. The Beat poets, rock musicians, it's not only jazz. Not that we're involved in this. We do know people and in the past, there was a lot more, in my experience, but it still does go on. But there are other cultures where you see that, too.

Audience: It seems like the relationship with the audience is kind of more intimate and that it's more emotion-based music, in some way, relative to classical music, where there's a little bit more distance. I wonder if it's the intimacy that stirs up something in the musician.

Porter: I see what you mean.

Bloom: It's a thought. It never occurred to me.

Porter: It's possible.

Audience: Chamber music is very intimate.

Porter: Chamber music is very intimate, yes. Absolutely.

Audience: I think a lot of classical musicians would argue that point strongly, that it's absent emotion.

Bloom: The physical proximity—

Audience: But you also can't ignore the social and cultural milieu in which jazz developed.

Bloom: In the clubs.

Porter: A lot of the African American musicians came from communities where drug use was a problem already, so that's part of it. There's economics, politics, everything's tied up in that.

Bloom: Interestingly enough, for some of the older black musicians I've worked with, playing music for them was a way to get out of poverty.

Porter: Oh, absolutely.

Bloom: And it may be that the drugs still pulled on them, but it was really music that was their way out of it.

Audience: Was Handy the originator that people credit for starting the blues?

Porter: W.C. Handy was one of the first people to publish blues sheet music. So he wasn't the originator. He did say himself he got it from listening to folk performers, African American folk performers. We now know that there were a few blues pieces—not many, but a few—printed and published before Handy. But he actually thought, and legitimately thought during his own day, that he was the first. It's only through research that we found out there were these obscure publications that go back to about 1904. That's before Handy.

Audience: Is there greater drug use among people who are composers rather than performers? In jazz, of course, it would probably be both of those—the performer is also the composer, whereas in classical music, very few of the performers are actually composers.

Bloom: Interesting thought. I never thought about it.

Audience: There's more intensity involved when you're worrying about your compositions than when you're worrying about someone else's composition that you're interpreting. I don't know. I'll just throw that out.

Porter: On a gut level, I'd say if anything it's the other way around, because most of the jazz people that I can think of who are primarily composers have not been drug oriented.

Audience: Yes, it is an assumption that in the jazz field there are more drug users versus classical. It's just something that we assume.

Bloom: There was a book out recently that debunks that idea. It shows a great deal of drug misuse in the classical world.

Audience: Contemporary?

Bloom: Yes.

Porter: It could be something that's just not as known.

Audience: Most people use drugs responsibly. So jazz has a reputation for the few famous ones who didn't.

Bloom: The ones that are alive today are the ones who found their way through it, from that generation. You have to admire them.

Audience: In terms of personality types, though, the classical is more structured and more rigid. With jazz, someone chooses jazz because there is that freedom involved.

Bloom: Absolutely. No question about it.

Porter: Yes. Most jazz people would say that. They love the freedom involved. Even though you may be working with a certain structure, you have so much freedom to do something with that. Or you can work without a structure. Should we do that for a second and then call it a day?

Bloom: Okay.

Porter: We'll just make something up and then call it a day.

(Porter and Bloom play.)