

Sabbatical Report Fall 2012

Ron Bertucci

Music - Music, Dance & Theater Arts

Jazz Studies: Composition, Arranging and Trombone.

Once again, as in 2009, my fall 2012 sabbatical experience was inspiring and successful.

In my sabbatical proposal and justification, (see below), I explain that though I continue to develop as a performing jazz and classical trombonist, music composition and arranging have been sorely lacking in my musical diet for some 30-years.

My 2009 sabbatical activities helped me create and deepen connections with a number of active jazz musicians and educators around the country, (Northwest, Colorado, Kansas & New York primarily), and it was to many of these colleagues and friends that I turned for guidance and mentorship as I began pursuing 'composition' as an artistic outlet. Everyone in my now closer circle of 'jazz heroes' is a prolific composer with numerous solo, small group and even big-band albums (CD's) to their credit.

These five musician/educator/composers all gave freely and generously of their time and for that I am deeply grateful.

Steve Owen - *(Director of Jazz Studies, University of Oregon)*

Dave Glenn - *(Director of Jazz & Composition, Whitman College – retired)*

Dan Gailey - *(Director of Jazz Studies & Composition, Kansas University)*

Jesse Lewis - *(jazz guitarist and NY free-lance musician)*

Luis Bonilla - Renowned jazz trombonist and one of the most inspirational teachers I've ever met. *(Trombone & Jazz instructor at New England Conservatory, Manhattan School of Music and formerly Temple University)*

Each of my chosen mentors agreed to spend time with me to share their compositions and arrangements and allowed me to engage them in meaningful discussions about their process(es), their motivation, their technique and the challenges that they have encountered over the years.

I began by meeting with Steve Owen to talk about his process and compositional techniques. Steve is a master teacher and was quick to share several techniques that he teaches in his jazz arranging classes at UO.

Jesse Lewis takes a very organic and free approach when writing and brings any number of influences to his music, often reaching outside and ‘box’ or paradigm that we might associate with ‘jazz’ or any given genre.

Dan Gailey (KU), invited me into his program granting open access to classes, composition lessons, rehearsals and performances providing access to a number of perspectives regarding jazz composition and performance. Dan has a ‘Mozartian’ type of mind that allows him to assemble complete compositions or arrangements in his mind before he ever puts pencil to paper.

Luis Bonilla, now a dear friend, basically gave me the ‘key to the city’ while I spent 6-days with him in New York. I was granted access to jazz clubs and jazz musicians, (many of whom I’ve admired for decades), as if I’d been living and playing in NY for decades myself. Together we attended performance beginning with “All Nite Soul”, an annual all-night concert at St. Peter’s (The Jazz Church). Jesse Lewis was very involved in that concert as well. We followed, the same night, with sets by The Arturo O’Farrell Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra at “Birdland”. Then it was The Mingus Big Band at “The Jazz Standard, then The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra (formerly the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis band) at “The Village Vanguard” and finally Bill Charlap Trio, again at the Village Vanguard.

Wedged in between our evening jazz activities Luis and I spent the days playing together, working on improvisation and ‘talking trombone’. Inspiring? Yes, and beyond anything I could imagine!

All of the ‘New York experience’ was terrific but the real nugget was the time Luis and I spent going over the music of his last two albums, “I Talking Now” & “Twilight”. Both have received great acclaim.

In his apartment, between practice & jam sessions, we discussed each work, one by one, and Luis shared everything about his motivation, process, method...the entire story. He even gave me scores and parts for all of these pieces – sixteen in all!

Finally, Dave Glenn – prolific composer in both orchestral and jazz genre’s – came to Eugene and spend 3-days with me going over some of my compositions and coaching me on my improvisation as a trombonist. Dave’s approach to composition is much more “classical” in nature so he brought that perspective to my process.

When I began my work in August, I wasn't really sure just how much to bite off or just how much I could actually accomplish as a composer, I did however know that I had the support of my chosen mentors to guide me and give advice that would challenge motivate me to achieve something.

The biggest concern going into this project was, "Do I have anything to say, to write, as a composer? And if so; would any of it be interesting to anyone else?". Seeking clear answers to these questions early on in the process was critical, at least in my mind, if I were to end up with viable, musical works that I'd be proud to share. Much thanks is due to my Lane music colleagues for their assistance throughout my sabbatical work as they also gave freely of their time. As our "Lane Faculty Jazz Sextet", we met weekly throughout the fall creating a 'lab' situation in which we rehearsed and played my works, problem solved, made edits and refined what would eventually be the compositions chosen and performed on the faculty recital presented here on campus, February 5, 2013.

The Lane Faculty Sextet: Olem Alves – guitar, Dave Bender – trumpet, Matt Svoboda – piano, Randy Rollofson – drums & Nathan Waddell – bass, Ron Bertucci – trombone/composer/arranger.

The goals laid out in my sabbatical proposal (as seen below) are clear but really only provided a basis or platform for the musical and personal growth that I experienced last fall and continue to enjoy today. I now perform with a confidence and fluency that I only imagined a few years ago. I perform as a jazz trombonist at least twice monthly and often more frequently than that. The impact of my sabbatical experience has also enhanced my effect in the classroom to the benefit of our students. I simply have more to offer as an expert. As for composition; I am just now preparing to embark on a new project to write 4-5 more tunes for our faculty jazz concert next spring. And our faculty group is planning a recording session this fall. My compositions will be among those recorded.

In the end, I was able to accomplish almost all of the work I had set out to do as outlined in my sabbatical proposal. I spent a good deal of time studying recordings and resources on "Latin & Afro-Latin" rhythm and music but not to the extent I had imagined I might. At the outset I thought that I would be able to complete 5-8 compositions or arrangements and I actually completed five pieces. (There are lots of themes and concepts on my digital recorder that just never made it to the page or the stage.

I also spent a good deal of time of composing 'contrafacts'.

A 'contrafact' is a new melody overlaid on an existing harmonic or chord progression.

This technique was used to a great extent by Charlie Parker and other composers of the 'Be-bop' era and remains a viable device for writing a jazz melody. On three occasions, I performed three-hours of nothing but my own contrafacts with Olem Alves and various bass players assisting.

Writing and playing contrafacts really helps solidify and internalize harmonic progressions and harmonic structure.

"Beginnings" is a straight-8th contemporary work with extended harmonies and a West African "Bembe" section as the coda.

"Tennessee Waltz" is a gutsy, bluesy arrangement of this 'western' tune. Both Beginnings and Tennessee Waltz were arranged for big-band by another new NY friend, John Yao. Lane Jazz Ensemble performed these works in June.

"As of Now" – brooding ballad

"Salsa de Bembe" - fun Latin tune with a Montuno/Tumbao groove and a Bembe open section before the recap.

"Have You Met Miss Jones" - Contemporary compositional elements arranged into the beginning and ending of this jazz standard.

Many thanks to Rick Williams, Dean of the Arts, my MDTA colleagues for their continued support and to our Lane Faculty Professional Development Faculty Committee and Bargaining Team for the work they do to maintain the sabbatical program for all of us.

Recordings Studied:

Latin –

David Sanchez, Christian Scott, Stefan Harris: "Ninety Miles"

Eddie Palmieri: "Arete", "Listen Here", "The Son of Latin Music",
"Unfinished Masterpiece"

Brian Lynch w/Eddie Palmieri: "Simpatico"

Jazz/Latin –

Horace Silver, "Horace-Scope"

Jesse Lewis, "Atticus"

Dave Glenn, "National Passtime"

Dan Gailey, "What Did You Dream"

Luis Bonilla, "I Talking Now", "Twilight"

Thad Jones, "Mean What You Say"

Curtis Fuller, "Smokin'"

Slide Hampton, "Roots"

Books, Manuals & Texts:

“The Conga Drummer’s Guidebook”, Michael Spiro

“Afro-Cuban Rhythms for Drumset”, Frank Malabe & Bob Weiner

“The Jazz Theory Book”, Mark Levine

“The Jazz Piano Book”, Mark Levine

“Jazz Improvisation”, Jamie Aebersold – selected volumes.

Below: I have compiled excerpts from my sabbatical proposal outlining the specifics of my sabbatical project, goals, professional mentors, travel details and desired outcomes as they relate to my sabbatical leave and subsequent request for FPD Activities funding.

Sabbatical Project Title: ***Jazz Studies – Composition, Arranging & Trombone:***

Compose 5-8 original works and arrange them for a small jazz group of 5-8 players, (quintet, octet, etc.). Emphasis of study will be on the creative process as I work with noted Jazz musicians/composers: Luis Bonilla, Jesse Lewis, Dan Gailey, Dave Glenn and Steve Owen. Special emphasis will be in the area of Afro-Cuban and Latin music/rhythm as the basis and inspiration for jazz composition and arranging. Key to my study will be the time I spend in New York City listening to and absorbing ‘live jazz’ and the most current styles and approaches by leading jazz artists. Extensive study and practice at both the Trombone and the piano keyboard will be fundamental throughout the process of composition and arranging. Throughout the sixteen-week process of composition & arranging I will be committed to a daily routine of practice on the trombone and at the piano studying jazz harmony and learning the compositions of noted jazz musicians. Additionally, I will be devoting 10-15 hours per week to listening to recordings prescribed by my mentors. Combined, my weekly load of listening, practicing and writing will consume 40-50 hours. Additionally, several rehearsals/readings and editing sessions will take place here in Eugene with the aid of our Lane Faculty Jazz Combo. Upon completion of the project I will present a concert recital performing these new works before completing a recording and CD of these and other works. The recording and editing process is expected to take several months following the sabbatical composition and arranging project.

Rationale for my sabbatical and request for funding:

I am a full-time music instructor now in my twentieth year at Lane. I am Lead Faculty for Instrumental Music and Performance Ensembles, Director of The Oregon Jazz Festival at Lane Community College. My duties: Director/Instructor – Lane Jazz Ensemble, Director/Instructor – Lane Symphonic Band, Coordinator – Individual Lessons: Instrumental, Instructor – Jazz Improvisation.

I am a professional trombonist with the Eugene Symphony Orchestra and other professional music groups in our area and since my sabbatical in 2009 I have become active as a jazz trombonist performing fifteen to twenty times yearly. Additionally I maintain an active trombone studio working with college, high school and middle school

trombone students.

Taking a sabbatical in fall of 2009 was life changing. For the first time in my professional career I had time to think, time to focus, time to practice the craft of being a trombonist, time to develop skills specific to performance as a trombonist and time to envision myself as a jazz player!

In my 2009 post-sabbatical report I wrote,

“My sabbatical experience was a complete and overwhelming success. Never in my professional life have I had five months (August – December) to focus on my own personal/professional growth and development without distraction. The teachers and experiences I sought out and the schedule I developed for the body of my sabbatical work combined to create a platform from which I not only gained during the sabbatical but one from which I continue to work and grow today...”

Now it is time for me to take the next step in my journey as a jazz musician, trombonist and educator. Writing music or ‘composition’ is the perhaps the most profound and powerful act of creativity that any musician can undertake. The process of writing demands a journey that is ‘inward’ and extremely personal and yet inspiration is sought by searching outward; listening, studying, learning the works of great musicians and writers. Every great jazz musician I know has been a writer as well as a performer. Of special interest is the rhythmic and harmonic influence of Latin and Afro-Cuban music in Jazz. Here in Eugene and throughout the Northwest; we simply do not have access to the richness and abundance of Latin and Afro-Cuban music. I really want to study these influences and bring those influences into my writing.

While at Lane these twenty-years I have never had the opportunity to focus my energy and attention on writing. And honestly, until completing my last sabbatical, I would not have had the confidence or the background to do so. Music is language. Learning ‘Jazz’ is about learning the language of jazz. Phrasing, harmony, rhythm, melody, texture, are all part of the language. I’ve gained some fluency in the language of jazz but there is much, much more to do! I need to again have the time to focus and to further develop my knowledge of this music.

I hunger for the opportunity to write and I know that I have the potential to create something of value and meaning as a jazz musician and composer.

The focus of my study will be:

Lessons with Instructors/Mentors: Visiting each Mentor and follow up

I am very fortunate to have the support of my chosen musician/composer mentors. I know each as a brilliant musician, performer and composer and each has the background and connections that I need to achieve my goals of studying Latin & Afro-Cuban influences on Jazz and creating 5-8 jazz compositions/arrangements.

Luis Bonilla, Jesse Lewis, Dan Gailey, Dave Glenn and Steve Owen.

My interaction with each mentor will be unique as each has a different background,

different biases, unique perspectives, varying ages and experience.

With Luis and Dave (both trombonists) the trombone is certain to be central to our work. Luis is deeply imbedded in the Latin and Afro-Cuban music scene in NYC and will be invaluable to my project.

Jesse Lewis is a fabulous guitarist with roots in New Orleans, Boston and New York. His style crosses genres and incorporates technology and electronics more so than the others and he is active in the newest jazz projects happening in NYC.

Dan and Steve both teach jazz arranging and composition at Kansas University and University of Oregon respectively.

Dan is an expert on the music of Vince Mendoza and Steve has recently done research in Latin America. Both have recently finished composition and recording projects and are considered to be two of the leading jazz educators in the country. They will be able to assist me with formulas and accepted conventions used in modern jazz writing. Steve, being here in Eugene, has agreed to help me finalize my project and to help with any 'major snags' that may occur as I prepare my compositions for performance and recording.

My initial contact with each mentor will be via email and phone in early August to compile a listening list. I will be traveling to work with Luis, Jesse, Dan and Dave and will meet with each 3-4 times over a 5-day period.

As Steve Owen is here in Eugene I will spread my meetings with Steve over the entire scope of the sabbatical. I will meet with Steve 5 or 6 times and as needed throughout the fall. *Each of my mentors has agreed to engage in dialogue and feedback prior to and after our meetings/lessons, etc.

Manhattan School of Music, New York: Luis Bonilla*

- 6 days of study, researching current trends and styles in modern jazz and seeking exposure to Latin and Afro-Cuban jazz and influences. Dialogue & coaching from mentor(s) with follow up and correspondence.

New York: Jesse Lewis

- 6 days of dialogue, study and writing with exposure to some of the newest and most exciting styles just developing in the NYC jazz scene. Dialogue with and feedback from mentor(s). Follow up and correspondence.

Kansas University, Lawrence Kansas: Dan Gailey

- 4-5 days of study and writing. Focus on the music of Vince Mendoza with follow up and correspondence.

Walla Walla, Washington: Dave Glenn

- 4-5 days of study on trombone, jazz improvisation and writing with follow up and correspondence. Emphasis on arranging/orchestration and presentation of compositions through performance and recording.

University of Oregon, Eugene: Steve Owen

- 5-7 one-on-one sessions to discuss and review works in progress and seek guidance as I move into final preparation before performance and recording of the works. Emphasis on organization and logistics of presenting melodic, rhythmic and harmonic material in each composition.

**Luis Bonilla: In early August it became clear that Luis would indeed be in New York and have time to work with me in October – but for only a limited window of five or six days. Luis is in extremely high demand around the world and is leaving on a three-week concert and teaching tour October 11th where will be in Austria and Croatia. He contacted me in August to say that he had scheduled time for me October 5-10 thus my schedule began to take shape based on this development.*

While in New York I am working with both Bonilla and Jesse Lewis.

Focused Listening: Selected recordings & Artists

Beginning early in August I will compile a collection of recordings by jazz artists recommended by each of my mentors/instructors. My goal is not to listen to hundreds or thousands of recordings but to listen to perhaps 40-50 carefully selected songs/works. I will listen to each work dozens of times learning intimately the style, character, nuance and unique qualities of each work. This aspect of my project will occupy 1-2 hours daily throughout the entire sabbatical.

Writing: Concept development, sketches, crafting the finished product

I will dedicate at minimum one 60-90 minute sessions to writing/composing daily. Certainly there will be periods of inspiration throughout the fall when more time will be spent writing and developing musical ideas; but being organized and dedicating time daily will be crucial to the process. Just having time designated for writing will allow me to work out much of the ‘nuts and bolts’ of each composition: instrumentation, notation, pagination, dynamics, repeats, solo sections, etc.

Piano Keyboard: Jazz Theory and Jazz Harmony

Daily study at the piano using the texts written by Mark Levine, “The Jazz Piano Book” and “The Jazz Theory Book”. *Currently my piano skills are horribly lacking. My initial work at the piano will be focused on basic skill development allowing me to work toward the fluency needed for my composition work.

New York: Being there!

Perhaps the most valuable experience of my last sabbatical was being in New York and getting to hear some of the best jazz musicians in the world live in several jazz clubs. The Village Vanguard, The Blue Note, The Jazz Standard, Fat Cat, Birdland: this is where jazz is happening and being there is unlike any experience you can get. I will be in New York for as many as 9-days depending on Luis Bonilla’s schedule. If Luis is in Puerto Rico in the fall (though he would be commuting to NY and Boston – New England Conservatory), I would be joining him there for 5-7 days. The expense of traveling to Puerto Rico could limit me to only 4-5 days in New York to work with guitarist Jesse Lewis.

Trombone Performance: I will increase my personal practice time as I did during my 2009 sabbatical. A daily routine of 2-3 hours will allow me to develop technical and musical fluency (currently fading) needed to achieve a level of performance required to

access the compositions studied.

Rehearsal and Performance: Lab time with Lane Jazz Faculty

Beginning in October I will be meeting with members of our Lane Faculty Jazz Combo to rehearse and review each of my compositions as they develop. Through rehearsals we will be able to make edits and refinements throughout the process. Rehearsals will be scheduled on a weekly basis (typically Thursday mornings from 10-11:30) except during those times that I am away from town for study. The Lane Faculty Jazz group will perform my compositions in a concert at Lane during the winter term 2013.

Instructors and Schools (see biographies attached)

August – November:

Steve Owen – University of Oregon

Sessions scheduled as needed: 5-7 meetings throughout the fall.

September 24-28:

Dan Gailey – Jazz Studies, Kansas University

October 5-11:

Luis Bonilla* –Manhattan School of Music, New England Conservatory

Village Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Charles Mingus Big Band

Jesse Lewis –Manhattan School of Music – Pre College

October: 16-19

Dave Glenn –(Walla Walla, Washington). Study taking place here in Eugene.

Goals: Personal/Professional Growth as a Musician, Composer, Trombonist, Jazz Artist, and Music Educator.

I have selected some of the nations leading Jazz artists/educators/composers as my chosen mentor/instructors. Each has invited me to not only study with them individually but they have also invited me to take part in and observe all aspects of their musical lives during the time we have together. As I have developed a collegial relationship with each of these instructors over the years, I have been offered the exceptional opportunity to study with them while also being accepted as a ‘visiting colleague’ and fellow professional.

The nature of my study in each case and with each instructor will be in the form of private lessons. The instructor and I will meet several times over a five-day period for sessions of an hour to an hour and a half per session. During these ‘lessons’ I will present my materials, play music with the instructor, engage in dialogue about the artistic process and get critical feedback on my work and my progress. Essential to our dialogue will be the discussion of significant musical influences, philosophy of music and performance and approaches to composition. The instructor will provide feedback throughout the lesson suggesting changes to technique, orchestration, or perhaps suggesting a particular path of study related to Rhythm, Harmony, Melodic Interpretation, Phrasing or even suggesting specific exercises, readings or listening assignments to further enhance my

ability to interpret and execute particular musical or technical material directing me toward avenues that will lead to greater creative freedom or understanding.

This type of instruction and learning is extremely intense and intimate and the outcome(s) of each session can only be determined after I've had several days of reflective study and personal practice to work on the concepts and techniques and assimilate the material studied.

While visiting mentors away from Eugene my schedule will be similar to my regular daily routine while at home except for the days I meet for lessons with mentors. Typically I will spend two-three hours each day practicing trombone, one-two hours at the piano working on keyboard skills and harmony, one-two hours per day listening to selected recordings and devote one-two hours a day to actively composing and arranging.

Evenings will be dedicated to seeking out jazz venues and concerts.

Sabbatical Outcomes:

- Exposure to current concepts related to jazz performance, composition and trombone performance.
- Development of concepts, strategies and techniques related to jazz improvisation.
- Exposure to Latin and Afro-Cuban influences on jazz: NYC
- Exposure to recordings of and by selected jazz musicians.
- Gained awareness of current trends in jazz composition.
- Awareness and knowledge of upper-division music programs: building collegiality across programs - (relative to our transfer students).
- Confidence building: confidence in my ability to perform as a trombonist and jazz musician.
- Innovation applicable to my teaching: Jazz Composition, Jazz Improvisation, Jazz Ensemble.
- Achieve a higher level of performance as a trombonist with local professional orchestras enhancing the overall brass section sound in these groups.
- Contributing to our local jazz community as a composer and performing artist.
- Increased competence and relevance as a music coach, conductor, director and adjudicator.

Sabbatical Calendar: Bertucci Fall 2012

(Attached separately)