

**CONSTRUCTING THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS:
INDIVIDUAL PLAYER IDENTITY WITHIN THE COLLECTIVE
JAZZ ENSEMBLE**

PAUL WILLIAMSON

Master of Music Performance (by Research)

The Faculty of the VCA and Music

The University of Melbourne

November 2009

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Music Performance by Research

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of the individual improviser within the ensemble context as a means of observing the interplay of the ‘creative language’ between individuals and its manifestation within a group dynamic. Criteria as exemplified by the Miles Davis Quintet were used as a means to ascertain the quality, level of interaction, elasticity of compositions, ensemble ecology, musicianship, playfulness, role-play, and other relevant factors in an improvised music setting. The attributes of the Miles Davis Quintet were used to examine the individual and collective identities within the *By a Thread* ensemble, with the prime intention being to facilitate the construction and development of a collective consciousness within the ensemble.

The research topic arose from the author’s aspiration to obtain a deeper connection and sense of community with other practitioners in which to undertake a collective musical journey. The purpose of approaching the research from a practitioner led perspective was to obtain a greater understanding of the author’s art, to achieve insight into the processes of improvisation, and to create contemporary jazz that was inventive in structure and detail.

A review was conducted on current literature pertaining to collective creativity, collaboration and improvisation; additionally, the interaction, creativity, and individual and collective identities within the Miles Davis Quintet. An in-depth examination of this distinguished modern jazz ensemble was undertaken to elucidate their relevance to this research.

The preparation, processes and development of the *By a Thread* ensemble were analysed to establish outcomes for this study. This included an examination of the ensemble’s common language, compositions, rehearsals, cues, co-creation, live performances, elasticizing of the musical parameters, role-play, ecology, exploration and risk taking, simultaneous improvisation, contrasting voices, repertoire variety, performance environments and recording.

The process of identifying key attributes of interaction, play, identity, and creativity of the Davis quintet as a model for *By a Thread* resulted in tangible strategies and outcomes. The strategies facilitated the development of *By a Thread’s* identity, collective consciousness, cues, co-created language, elasticity of compositional parameters and approach to performance.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This dissertation contains no material that has been accepted for an award of any other degree or diploma in any other university and, to the best of my belief, this dissertation contains no material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the text. This dissertation is 12,271 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of references and appendices.

SIGNATURE

21/10/2009

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Dr Robert Vincs, Dr Barry Bignell, Dr John Whiteoak, Dr Timothy Stevens, Dr Kate Morris, Dr Donna Coleman, Steve Magnusson, Kate McKibbon, and Eugene Ball for their time, insight, and wisdom.

Thanks to Geoff Hughes and James Mclean for their generous time, energy, and artistic contributions to the *By a Thread* ensemble.

A special thanks to Linda and Bijou for their encouragement and patience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page	
i	ABSTRACT
ii	DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY
iii	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
iv	TABLE OF CONTENTS
1	CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
1	Aims of the Research
2	Background to the Study
3	Terms and Concepts
6	Synopsis of Content
7	CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW
7	Methodology
10	Literature Review
16	CHAPTER 3: EXISTING MODELS
16	Miles Davis Quintet
18	Summary
21	CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF THE <i>BY A THREAD</i> PROJECT
21	Common Language: The Individual and the Ensemble
22	Compositions
24	Rehearsals
25	Cues
26	Co-Creation
26	Live Performances
27	Elasticising Musical Parameters
27	The Unbroken Continuum: Facilitating Flow
28	Changing Roles: Bandleader, Soloist and Accompanist
28	Fostering Ecology Within the Ensemble
29	Exploration: Stretching Out, Taking Chances and Embracing Risks
30	Combining <i>Free Jazz</i> and Post-bop
30	Keeping It Fresh

31	Simultaneous Improvisation: Building a Sense of Ensemble
31	Contrasting Voices: Individuality Within the Ensemble
32	Variety Within Set Repertoire
32	Refining the Compositions and the Processes of Improvisation
32	Different Settings: Jazz Club and Concert Settings
33	Recording
34	Summary
35	CONCLUSION
36	Limits to the Research
37	Suggestions for Further Research
38	REFERENCES
42	DISCOGRAPHY
I	Appendix One: <i>By a Thread</i> CD
II	Appendix Two: <i>By a Thread</i> Scores