

# The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation

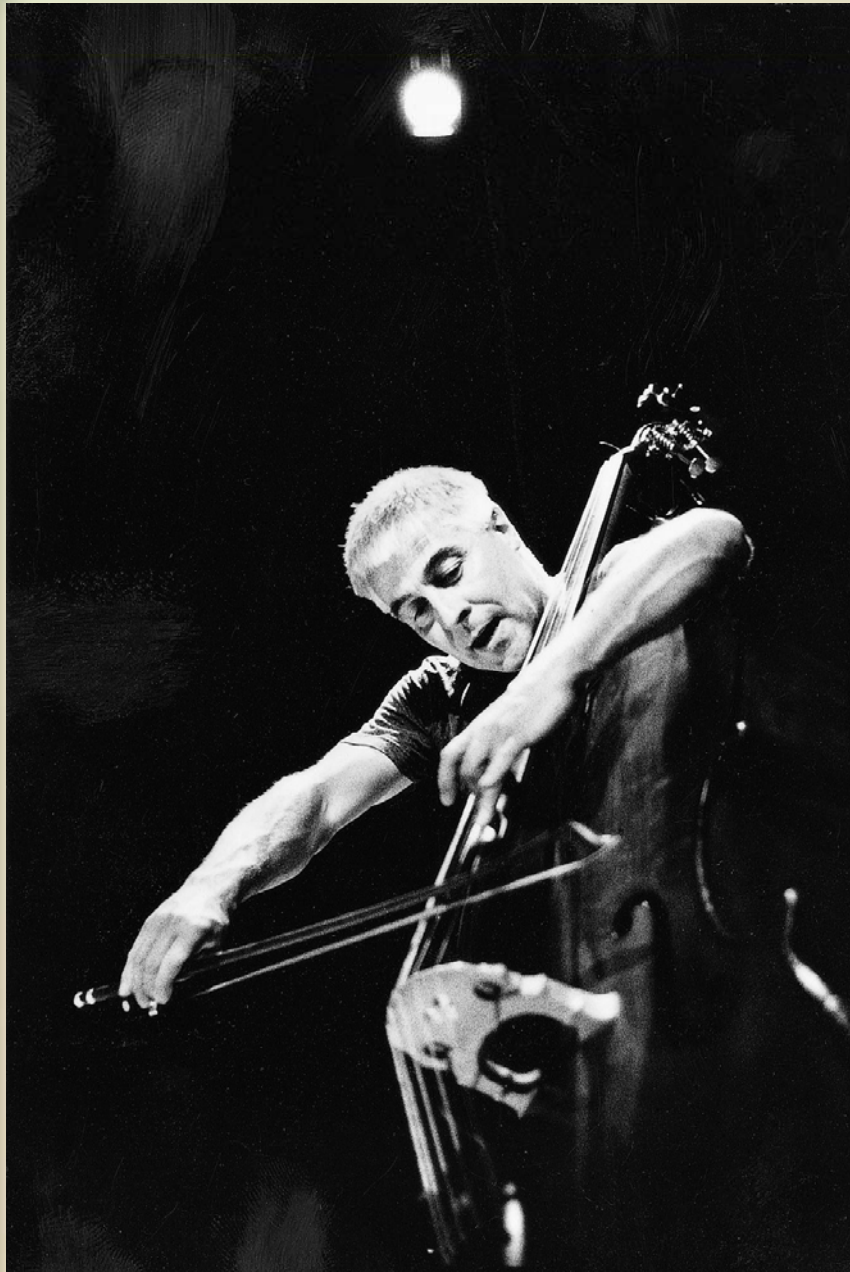
FYS 129

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## Various Quotes

These slides contain a collection of some of the quotes largely from the musicians that are studied during the course.

The idea is to present “musicians in their own words”.



# Barry Guy

**British bassist  
(April 22, 1947–)**

## Guy on Continuity and Invention

LP: Do you have a vision for your work going into the future?

**Guy:** The vision is continuity and invention. Let me give you an example: The trio with Marilyn [Crispell (piano)] and Paul [Lytton (drums)] has just completed a new album (ITHACA) which reflects on the architecture of Daniel Libeskind and Zaha Hadid. I have tried to portray space and encounters derived the work of these architects. The continuity resides in the very special way in which the trio works together, and the invention comes through opening up the conduits of structure and intention.

Barry Guy, interview, from Music and the Creative Spirit: Innovators in Jazz, Improvisation and the Avant-Garde by Lloyd Peterson, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2006.

## Guy on his Perception of the Appreciation of Creativity

LP: Do you think we are currently in a period that has difficulty with forward thinking and creativity?

**Guy:** I think there is a sense of that because it's this whole thing to do with globalizing, marketing and big-money thinking. A lot of it conforms to plans and structures, which are theoretically put together., and it seems that there is no place for the creative arts within this system....

This kind of thing comes and goes according to world situations. But now with the ability to move with the information around this tiny planet of ours so quickly, the idea of creativity doesn't really get in there because it's all to do with boxes and business, and I think we are in a very strange period right now and I'm not quite sure how it's all going to resolve itself....

In some sort of way, when you get these unstable periods, sometimes arts can work in a creative way because it goes underground and people have to find ways and reasons for doing these things despite the big monopolies. Sometimes something can come out of it. *But creativity in general is not seen by the majority as a useful adjunct to their lives.* (emphasis added by instructor)

Barry Guy, interview, from Music and the Creative Spirit: Innovators in Jazz, Improvisation and the Avant-Garde by Lloyd Peterson, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2006.



## Guy on his Philosophy

LP: Is there a common philosophy that you try to impart on young musicians?

**Guy:** I try to get across openness and kindness and try to get them to understand that if you are going to get involved in creative music, you have to open yourself up completely and have some humility as well as developing your particular talents.

And I'm all for an equitable society. When I run my bands, everybody gets paid the same. There isn't this idea of a big star and everyone else picks up the crumbs.

I also tell students to look out for somebody else before yourself. For me, it's been a good philosophy because it means that I can pay attention to the details of the human condition and how people interface with the music or come together in the music. This has worked all my life and the music sounds better for it.

Barry Guy, interview, from Music and the Creative Spirit: Innovators in Jazz, Improvisation and the Avant-Garde by Lloyd Peterson, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2006.

## **Guy: A Childhood Anecdote**

**Guy:** When I was a little kid after the Second World War and food was still relatively hard to come by, we had had one particular fish dinner and my mother put the food out on the plate and I said to her, “Look, I don’t have enough, I want yours as well.” This was a very interesting moment because she said, “Well, you can have it if you want, but it means that I won’t have anything.” The penny dropped right there. It was just a small thing but it has been with me all of my life. It’s the act of taking without thought. Now, before doing anything, I like to think of the consequences in humanitarian terms of the actions and it’s the same with music. My greatest ambition is to make music in a very, very humanitarian way. An organic way so that it grows naturally without tension, and to be honest, I think that’s also the best way to get through life.

Barry Guy, interview, from Music and the Creative Spirit: Innovators in Jazz, Improvisation and the Avant-Garde by Lloyd Peterson, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2006.

## Guy on Osteo-phonic Hearing

**Guy:** One of Maya's favorite subjects, and I have some sympathy for it, is the subject of osteo-phonic hearing, or hearing through the bones and the body. If you are receptive to hearing through the ears, you would be mistaken to think it is the only way you hear. As animals, we hear through different senses. Your bones have availability of transmission of sound through the body. Imagine your body as a scanner and all the information hitting the body is being processed by the brain. The information going in through the ears is a big part of it, but all this information is being taken in somehow. Some things are happening in improvised music which you could never write down. You could not even think about it before it happened. You can be playing along, for example, and the whole thing stops [snaps his fingers] at the right moment, just like that. Because that is the end of the piece. But nobody looked at each other, nobody necessarily prescribed there had to be a particular way of finishing the piece, it just goes along and all your senses lead all of us to that particular moment.

Barry Guy, interview, from 2001 by Laurence Svirchev .



## Guy on Development of Technique

Svirchev: You can play with great velocity, acceleration and deceleration. How did you develop these aspects of articulation?

**Guy:** I think history has done that. It is a mixture of technical ability mixed with need. The technical ability came through my musical education. I had to play a lot of contemporary music that demanded changes and traversing large distances on the bass in order to execute some of the ideas of the composers. While I was studying these modern pieces, I was also playing with people like Evan Parker, Paul Rutherford, Howard Riley, Trevor Watts, Tony Oxley. We were pushing each other to find ways of articulating the gradually expanding language and how we worked together. Very often you were not thinking of yourself as a bassist, but as an instrumentalist, of how you reacted with each other. You would find that each instrument was pushing the others into new areas. Not only was your technique of listening to each other improving but also your technical facility on the instrument had to go beyond the bounds of what is considered normal.

Barry Guy, interview, from 2001 by Laurence Svirchev .

## Guy on Composition vs Improvisation

PL: You are a master of composition, avant-garde playing and improvisation. Wherein lies the fascination of bringing these disciplines together?

**Guy:** The first thing to say about improvising and composing is that the music emanates from the same body the brain and the heart (soul) working at the music in a totally committed way. This fact is indisputable and inescapable. In my case there have been many years of assimilating different musics, so in one sense the marriage between the two does not present a problem. It is just a matter of discipline and being aware of the potential conflicts that may lay ahead for the unwary creator. The act of freely improvising constructing and reacting in real time represents and recognises an absolute in communication. In the right circumstances this embodiment of intention/implementation, process/realisation and receiving/giving provides for an often euphoric sense of being. Performer and composer as one. Composing alone has similar objectives but exists in a different time frame without the obvious physical involvement and (naturally) of course the composer has a singular discourse where the main physical activity is in the mental gymnastics rather than in the body. Creativity is the key. In these days of diminishing liberties and increased surveillance improvising and composing possibly represent one of the last bastions of freedom. Whilst composing and writing down music, I try to preserve that sense of spontaneous creativity and freedom which then (If I achieve my goal) affects and liberates the interpreting musicians.

Barry Guy, interview, from 2003 by Patrik Landolt .

## Guy on Including Conventional Melodies

Over the last few years, as the “third phase” has taken more definite shape, the group [London Jazz Composer’s Orchestra] has moved away from exclusively “abstract and difficult” music to embrace an expressive paintbox that includes sonorous and melodious material it might have shunned at an earlier date. “It’s not a turning back, not a retrogressive thing, but a wisdom about the totality of the music we’re dealing with,” Guy muses. “It’s like visiting other planets and bringing back the good news from each.”

Barry Guy, interview, from *Extended Play: Sounding Off from John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein*, John Corbett, 1994, Duke University Press.