

The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation

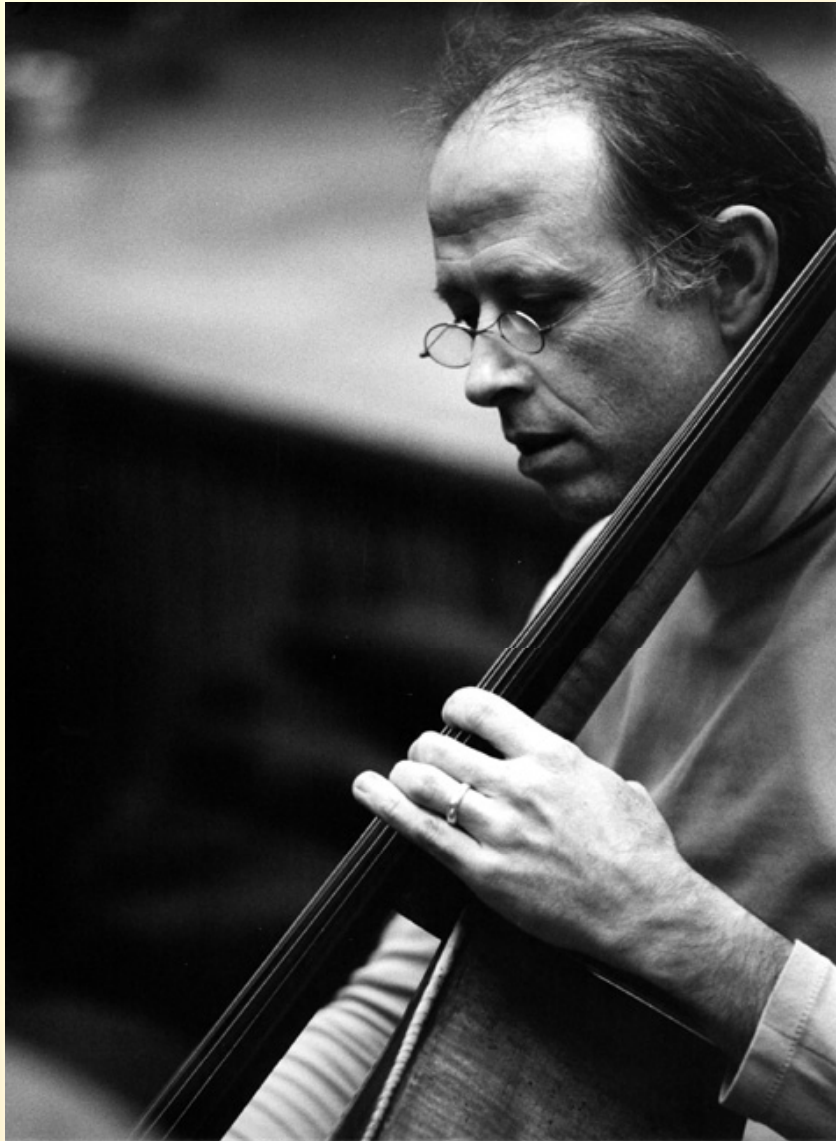
FYS 129

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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”.



**Barre
Phillips**

**American bassist
(October 27, 1934—)**

Phillips on the Influence of Ornette Coleman

FJ: Let's start from the beginning.

PHILLIPS: I grew up playing jazz, starting with Dixieland and classical music and I was always so excited playing those music, I kind of played my own thing. At the end of the Fifties, when Ornette Coleman came on the scene and said that that is what we're supposed to be doing, is playing our own thing and that was the message for me.

FJ: So Ornette was pivotal in your early development?

PHILLIPS: Yes, it wasn't so much the music, which I loved very much. It wasn't a big discovery, the music itself. It was what he was talking. It was what he was saying with his words when you would talk with Ornette because I met Ornette in 1958, I mean, personally. It was actually four years later when I re-met him after he had made all those initial records and everything. I met him again and he gave me the message and I was ready for it (laughing).

Barre Phillips, interview Fred Jung, 200X? published in Jazz Weekly.

Phillips on Being Chosen by the Bass

FJ: Why did you decide to pick up the bass?

PHILLIPS: It's a long story, Fred. Actually, the bass chose me. I have to say it like that. I started at thirteen years old in public school, in junior high school. When they were going around looking for people to fill up the orchestra and they said the bass, I had a vision and my hand just flew up and that's how I started playing the bass.

FJ: A vision?

PHILLIPS: The vision I had, if you are interested, the vision was I saw my name on a theater marquee. It was so strong that my hand just automatically flew up and I saw the actual, real life theater marquee in 1980 in Milan, in Italy. I'd saved that memory all those years, not looking for it, but it was there (laughing).

Barre Phillips, interview Fred Jung, 200X? published in Jazz Weekly.

Phillips on Manfred Eicher

PHILLIPS: ...What is so fantastic about Manfred Eicher is his integrity to himself. He started this label, found the backers so he could start, all on doing what his version of what a record company should be and not his version of how to make a lot of money.

FJ: A forgotten theme, it seems, these days when money has become a drug.

PHILLIPS: The money is there. To keep alive, you have to keep growing. I'm sure that there is money that flows through that thing, but he's recorded so many records like, I don't earn money for ECM overall. I must be on sixteen, seventeen, maybe eighteen albums for ECM through the years, whether they're my records or collaborating with somebody else. I'm not making money for ECM, but Manfred Eicher has been supporting my music and my playing all these years by recording me. That is what I mean by supporting, not sending me a monthly check, I don't mean that. By recording my music, he's been supporting me on what I do, which is fantastic. Unfortunately, you don't see that happening in the States.

Barre Phillips, interview Fred Jung, 200X? published in Jazz Weekly.

Phillips on the Support for the Arts in Europe vs US

FJ: Having been in Europe for a considerable length of time, what are the not so subtle differences between the two shores?

PHILLIPS: Well, there are two main, big differences. One is funding. All over Europe, from country to country, it is different and from region to region inside the country, it is different, but there is public money for art, for creative art, for new art. There is public money for a lot of other kinds of art like keeping up the old art, keeping the museums together and all that and the orchestras alive and everything. There is a lot of public money. That is one big differences. The other big difference, we are talking in the European union now, which is like central, the center of Europe, ten or eleven or twelve countries that you could stick the whole thing in the United States with no problem at all and there is still a lot of United States left over. The country of France is the same size and population as California. So you have all these markets in a small geographical area, compared to what you have in the States. So every country has got its own national market and its own regional markets inside and when you multiply that by ten, plus you look at a climate, which is helped by public money, there is just a lot more opportunities to perform new music that has no commercial value. There is quite a few of us over here that are living as improvising musicians, that is to say that we can have a family and a home and keep warm and healthy and earn enough money to live that way. Nobody is getting rich. That's for sure, but you can figure out how to do this to exist. I eat a good dinner every night.

Barre Phillips, interview Fred Jung, 200X? published in Jazz Weekly.

Phillips on Playing Solo vs in a Group

AAJ: Is your playing different solo than in a group?

Phillips: It's a matter of playing by ear rather than with a game plan or some kind of intellectual approach from a point of view of ideas, intellectual ideas. In playing improvised music it's a matter of what the ear is telling me to play and that my job, my discipline in that, is to be able to play what I'm hearing in my head. A good example in recent years is with [Paul] Bley and Evan Parker. I really hear as a bassist, I really hear that stuff as a bassist, I hear what they're doing, or if it's a duo moment, in the old polyphonic contrapuntal way so I recognize it in myself. I had a lot of years in improvisation to work on that playing with John Surman who improvised 99% of the time with notes using intervals playing polyphonically, two-voice counterpoint. Which I love to do and he loved to do and we did quite well together...to get into that kind of playing was wonderful, to develop, to get your ear chops together, to get the correspondence of what you're hearing and what's coming out of your instrument, is it the same thing? That's about the best you can hope, that you can play what you're hearing, that's to me the highest part of the art. After that to be able to evaluate it, is it worth something or not, that you can do listening back to it years later... The ear always seems to be going a lot further and faster than what your body can do in terms of technique.

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Barre Phillips, interview Andrey Henkins, 2004 published in All About Jazz.

Phillips on Playing Solo vs in a Group

AAJ: Is your playing different solo than in a group?

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Phillips: In terms of playing solo I do exactly the same thing. I start listening to what I'm playing about five minutes before I'm supposed to go on. I start listening to what's going on in the room so when I walk out I'm already hearing what's going on rather than say 'I'll start with #6' or something (laughs) or make a program. And I have had enough positive public acceptance with this process to allow me to go on, to continue to work in this way.