

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”.

Tyshawn Sorey

**American Drummer, Pianist, Trombonist &
Composer
(b. July 8, 1980)**



Sorey on Not Knowing

NPR: Sorey doesn't want listeners to pick apart what he does — what's composed, what's improvised, what genre it all supposedly falls into.

Sorey: "Deal with the mystery of it all," he advises, "because sometimes it's best not to know. Go with how the music makes you feel."

From "Tyshawn Sorey, A Musical Shapeshifter, Wins MacArthur 'Genius' Prize", Anastasia Tsioulcas, October 11, 2017, National Public Radio.

Sorey on Drums as a Sound Instrument

NPR: He says that creating his own ensembles, and writing for a variety of types of groups, was crucial to exploring sonic possibilities as a drummer.

Sorey: "For me," he explains, "it just made perfect sense, in terms of my interest in exploring timbre and texture and that kind of thing. In a lot of groups that I played in, when I'm playing more rhythmically busy music, such as — well, I don't like using terms like 'jazz' or whatever, but for sake of the argument, we'll say styles like jazz, R&B, funk, stuff like that — I'm used to playing a lot of very rhythmic music, and a lot of very rhythmically busy music. And while I totally respect the people who play in these genres, and all of the people who I've played with who do this type of work, there were no situations for me to really get to explore the instrument the way I wanted to — which is as a sound instrument, and not as a rhythmic instrument."

From "Tyshawn Sorey, A Musical Shapeshifter, Wins MacArthur 'Genius' Prize", Anastasia Tsioulcas, October 11, 2017, National Public Radio.

Sorey on Music as a Manifestation of Life Experiences

NPR: Much the way an abstract painter is interested in color, shape and form, Sorey says he was always interested in sound.

Sorey: "I wasn't necessarily only interested in rhythm, melody and harmony," he says. "Music is really a manifestation of our life experiences, expressed in sound — melody, rhythm, harmony, all of these things exist together."

From "Tyshawn Sorey, A Musical Shapeshifter, Wins MacArthur 'Genius' Prize", Anastasia Tsioulcas, October 11, 2017, National Public Radio.

Sorey on the Influence of Anthony Braxton

NYT: Mr. Braxton, a longtime academic, has used writing to delineate and defend his own practice, and encouraged Mr. Sorey to embrace his talents as a scholar.

Sorey: “He was saying it’s O.K. to be a black composer in your own way, and to develop your own language, and to also write about it,” Mr. Sorey said. The idea was “to find a way to communicate it to the public, so that you won’t go down in history as being defined by someone else.”

From “Is It Jazz? Improvisation? Tyshawn Sorey Is Obliterating the Lines”, Giovanni Russonello, August 2, 2017, New York Times.

Sorey on the Influence of Tri-Axium Writings

ANW: If teaching a course on a single critical theory text chosen for its practical value for composers and improvisers, what would the text be and why?

Sorey: It would be the Tri-Axium Writings, a three-volume series of texts on music by Anthony Braxton. These books discuss many of the common misconceptions inside and outside of the marketplace that surround creativity in manifold ways based on gender, and race, as well as the reality of what has been going on in the music business during the past several decades. Here we are in 2011, nearly 30 years after these books were published, and amazingly (and perhaps unsurprisingly) enough, these misconceptions remain with us, for the most part, anyway. As far as I am concerned, this collection of books is very relevant to what is going on today, which is what I think the music itself is about anyway.

From Interview with Tyshawn Sorey, Ars Nova Workshop, March, 2011,
<https://www.arsnovaworkshop.com/blog/interview-tyshawn-sorey>

Sorey on His Music as Free Music

Sorey: To put it simply, I like to compose music in the moment – in the way that I imagine and hear it. That is not to say, however, that there is no room for one to analyze my work in theoretical terms. In this sense, my music is no different from any other form of creative improvised music. All of my works employ an expansive range of compositional techniques ranging from twelve-tone theory to so-called “jazz” harmony – and nearly all of my works allow for performers to improvise (sonically expressed life experience shared in a given context) within varying contexts. So “free music” would be the best term for me to describe my work: composed and improvised elements in a composition are unified (this makes up for the “music” part). The “free” in free music would define the flexibility pertaining to contextual dynamics in the music; the music can function anywhere from a “jazz club” setting to a concert hall and can be performed by anyone. In my mind, there is no necessity for the venue, the type of musician, or the context to define how the work should be appreciated anyway.

From Interview with Tyshawn Sorey, Ars Nova Workshop, March, 2011,
<https://www.arsnovaworkshop.com/blog/interview-tyshawn-sorey>

Sorey on Composition and Improvisation

The Jazz Gallery: One of the notable things about the music on your record is that all of it is through-composed to one degree or another. How do you conceive of integrating improvisation into these larger preconceived structures?

Sorey: I might go out on a limb by saying this, but I don't really see those two worlds as very distinct from one another. I've always thought of improvisation as spontaneous composition, really. What each of these pieces defines is the space in which spontaneous composition can happen. As long as it's functioning within the same language, the piece as a whole can maintain its identity. That's essentially what I aim to do in all of my works that contain improvisation. The line between what's improvised and what's composed is completely obliterated. While each piece has its own identity, it's also malleable. Depending on the venue and depending on the performance dynamic, the piece can come out differently every time we play it.

From "On Musical Multiplicity: Tyshawn Sorey Speaks", Kevin Laskey, The Jazz Gallery, October, 2012, <http://www.jazzspeaks.org/tyshawn-sorey-speaks-on-musical-multiplicity/>

Sorey on the Listening Experience

The Jazz Gallery: Do you think that understanding this collaborative music-making process is important to getting how the music itself works?

Sorey: TS: I think more about what the product ends up being. My main interest in the end is communication. I'm interested in taking the listener through an experience that is personal and meaningful on every level. I like to give the listener some kind of cleansing experience.

From "On Musical Multiplicity: Tyshawn Sorey Speaks", Kevin Laskey, The Jazz Gallery, October, 2012, <http://www.jazzspeaks.org/tyshawn-sorey-speaks-on-musical-multiplicity/>

Sorey on Listening Without Listening

Sorey: It became apparent to me that I was listening to music in one “way”; that it was time for me to eliminate the idea of taste, likes, and dislikes and take from whatever I listened to and let it be a part of my musical makeup. I believe that every listener of music listens in their own way, and I did not want to listen in ANY WAY...but to JUST listen – no feelings that “something sucks” or “something is catchy”, etc. then, my tastes would not let me fully experience what was happening in the moment. To listen to something without “listening”.

From “Ten Questions with Tyshawn Sorey”, Glowing Realm, May, 2009,
<https://glowsinthedark.wordpress.com/2009/05/05/ten-questions-with-tyshawn-sorey/>