

2007

## Getting it right: A story of truth in music performance

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Getting It Right:  
A Story of Truth in Music Performance

by

Christopher McRae

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Communication  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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Date of Approval:  
April 3, 2007

Keywords: Music, Performance, Performativity, Truth, Narrative

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For the people in my life who love me

## Acknowledgements

Putting this project together has been a challenging and incredibly valuable learning experience. The guidance and support of my teachers has made this process both meaningful and enjoyable. I would like to especially acknowledge my committee, Stacy Holman Jones, Carolyn Ellis, and Elizabeth Bell. As mentors and teachers they have motivated, challenged, and enabled me to be a better student and writer. I would like to give special thanks to Stacy Holman Jones whose endless pushing and encouragement throughout the writing of this thesis has been one of the most difficult and significant educational experiences I have ever had.

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ABSTRACT

This project looks at the relationship between music performance and truth in narrative. Music performance is a fluid and dynamic process with complex and multiple relationships among musician, audience, text, and production. The five sections of this thesis discuss five different musical performances that address different aspects of this dynamic process. I look at the relationship between music performance and Performance Studies, issues of personae and presence, questions of identity and masculinity, pedagogy and performance, and the intersections of writing and performance. The five musical performances in this project are written to not only discuss important aspects of music and performance, but also frame my arguments about truth in narrative. I argue truth should be carefully considered because it is an idea that has a great deal of power. Truth exists in complex relationships among reader and writer, genre and text, and experience and story. Like music, approaching truth as a concept that is fluid opens up possibilities for understanding the implications truth has on the stories we live and tell.

## Intermezzo I

### The Show

Standing in the line at the box office, there are thirty minutes before the concert starts. The line for tickets is moving slowly, but we have plenty of time. The people behind us in line are talking, rather loudly, about the concert, how the pleasant the evening is, and why the line for tickets is so long. We purchase two tickets in the eighth row, center section. If we sat further back from the stage we would be able to see more of the instrumentalists, but with our seats we'll be able to hear everything quite well.

We hand our tickets to the usher and she shows us to our seats. We ask her for programs, and she tells us they are sitting on a table in the lobby. After getting programs we return to our seats. The lights are up in the concert hall. Some of the musicians are on stage warming up. A violinist is playing arpeggios. A trumpet player works through a difficult passage in the opening piece. Other musicians take their seats and position the music on their stands. A flute player warms up on a scale in the upper register of the instrument.

The seats in the hall are about three quarters full. There is a low murmur coming from the audience. The people already in their seats are busy talking to each other about various things. Some of them are trying to keep their voices low, others whisper, and some people are laughing loudly. As a whole, the audience has not yet recognized the musicians on stage and the musicians have not recognized their audience. We look on

stage to see if our friend is playing trumpet this evening. The rest of the musicians finish taking the stage and we see our friend, but our attempts to make eye contact with him go unnoticed.

Once all of the musicians have taken their seats, the lights go down in the hall and the audience becomes quiet and still. The concertmaster walks on stage and we applaud. He turns and faces the ensemble. The oboe player plays the first tuning note and the winds tune to his pitch. The oboe plays another tuning note and the low strings tune. A third tuning note is played and the high strings tune to the pitch. The concertmaster sits and the orchestra and the audience become still in their seats. The conductor walks quickly on stage, shakes hands with the concertmaster, and steps onto his podium. We applaud and the musicians on stage shuffle their feet. He raises his arms and the musicians hold their instruments in the ready position. We sit in anticipation of the downbeat. The conductor lifts his baton ever so slightly and time seems to slow as he brings the baton down to signal the beginning of the piece.



## Chapter One

### *Pictures at an Exhibition*

The first notes of the trumpet solo fill the stadium with the sounds from “Promenade,” the introductory theme from Modest Musorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The theme from “Promenade” represents the beginning of the composer’s journey through an art exhibition, and this theme reappears as an interlude in between the movements as the composer figuratively walks from picture to picture. This journey through the exhibition is one part of the story told in this suite. Each of the ten pictures, which are Musorgsky’s musical representations of paintings created by architect Victor Hartman, also tells stories. Toward the end of the suite, the theme from “Promenade” is no longer separate from the movements, but appears as a theme layered into and found in the pictures. The main character of this story (the composer, the performers, the audience) has now entered the paintings themselves, and has become a part of the exhibition.

Ten yards in front of me, I watch enviously as the soloist finishes playing the theme to open the marching band’s final piece. Our condensed arrangement of *Pictures* is unlike the original arrangement for piano or the common orchestral arrangements and unlike other arrangements, the marching band’s performance provides the audience with a visual interpretation of the piece. As a freshman in high school I am envious of the trumpet player who has earned the privilege to break rank, step forward, and play the solo

to this powerful composition. In my passion and desire to become a better trumpet player, I am also envious of the confidence and beautiful sound of the soloist. The warmth and fullness of his tone reverberate in the stands and in my memory.

In our performance of *Pictures* the marching band physically plays with ideas of the exhibition, paintings, and movement. During the opening notes of the trumpet solo, the color guard brings out giant wooden picture frames and props them upright in various locations on the field. Throughout the piece the band marches in front of and around the frames, and in the last movement, when the theme from “Promenade” is interwoven, the band marches through the picture frames. There is no longer a clear distinction about what the frame separates or contains. The marching band has become part of the exhibition. Visually the band is no longer walking around the artwork, but now *inside* the artwork. As the marching band holds out the final chord, canvas paintings are unraveled from the back of the frames revealing giant paintings.

Just as my high school marching band took inspiration from *Pictures* and in turn performed our own interpretation of this 19<sup>th</sup> century masterpiece, I am inspired by and look to the form and structure of *Pictures* as a way of telling my own stories about music, narrative, performance, and truth. Truth is important because it works to structure the ways we understand the stories we live and tell. In music performance the approach to truth as fluid and changing becomes clear because of the relationships between structure and performance. The marching band’s interpretation was one possible way of performing *Pictures* in which we literally enacted the idea of walking through an exhibition while playing the music. However, in my interpretation of Musorgsky’s most famous work, the music will be replaced by words, the listener will be replaced by the

reader, and the pictures will be replaced by my own collection of songs and music. I will mirror Musorgsky's "Promenade" by layering shorter pieces or intermezzi between the stories of the various musical selections in my own exhibition.

The first piece in my exhibition is *Pictures*. This piece is significant for considering questions of form, author, and performance. It is helpful to situate my understanding and use of *Pictures* historically in order to consider the various implications my analogy has with regard to form. Looking to the history of the piece will help me detail the opportunities made available by using this particular musical structure as a model for writing and storytelling. I am also interested in understanding the aspects of music that may not be fully realized by mirroring the structure of a piece. Music is a powerful artform, and one of my major arguments in writing about music is that language fails to fully and clearly capture that which music is capable of doing.

First, I would like to consider the time in which the piece was composed. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Modest Musorgsky was considered to be the musical representative of the realist movement in Russia. This movement was concerned with linking artistic depictions with real life and social justice (Russ 11). Musorgsky felt representing everyday life in his music was more useful than the approach found in German music of the time, which he believed to be interested primarily in using art to think about an idealistic world in abstract ways (9). *Pictures*, as musical realism, works then in each of the movements to create true to life representations of everyday life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia based on Hartman's pictures (9-12). These artistic implications are significant because they provide a possible way of thinking about the story the piece tells. The

underlying concept is that art provides a useful way of approaching and thinking about everyday life in a directly applicable and accessible form.

The works of art in Musorgsky's exhibition are musical scenes or sketches of characters in the pictures (31). Musorgsky tells stories about each of Hartman's pictures in the music, giving another layer of interpretation to the scenes Hartman created. Hartman's watercolor costume sketches for the ballet *Tribi* are canary chicks wearing their shells as armor. Musorgsky writes this picture in the piece "Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks" in which the music depicts baby chicks hatching (41). Another of Hartman's watercolors is of himself, a guide, and one other person viewing the inside of a catacomb. Musorgsky tells this story in "The Catacombs" (45). The final movement is "The Great Gate of Kiev," and this is based on Hartman's sketch of a gate or entrance into the city of Kiev (48). Each picture or sketch works as a starting place for Musorgsky's musical stories and depictions.

The narrative of the composer walking from picture to picture in an exhibition is only one story of how these pictures fit together. Russ points out that understanding how these pictures fit together in a larger narrative can be done by analyzing the moods of the pieces or the keys and themes of the pieces (32). Trying to make sense of the ways in which these pictures fit and work together has multiple possibilities much like the happenings of everyday life. The description of the narrative structure I find most useful is best articulated by Russ:

In many ways, the structure of *Pictures* is rather like the structure of an art exhibition: there are stronger and weaker ways of arranging the materials, but no ideal way. Indeed just as an exhibition is held together by the style of the artist

who is being exhibited, so this work is held together by the style of its composer (32).

This understanding of the structure of *Pictures* points to the importance and impact of the author/composer on the piece over the importance of how the pieces fit together. Even the realist art of Musorgsky is subject to the bias of the author.

The pictures/movements of *Pictures* are presented as connected in one piece, but whereas each picture presents a sketch or scene of life, the pictures as a whole do not necessarily tell a single, unified story. Roland Barthes employs a similar strategy in *A Lover's Discourse* in which a series of figures are presented to evoke moments in the experience of multiple lovers without implying a single love story. Musorgsky leaves his fingerprint on this piece in the way in which he has chosen to arrange and connect the pictures, but I feel it is important to recognize the narrative that these pictures do not inevitably work to tell a single, linear story. Similarly, my project is a set of sketches or figures based on different music performances and they work as well individually as they do in the order in which I have chosen to exhibit them. The intermezzi work like the “Promenade” sections in *Pictures* as a connective meta-narrative that offer a possible frame for viewing the pieces as connected.

Another reason *Pictures* is interesting for my project are the implications of the author/composer in the performance of the piece. The piece begins with the “Promenade” in which the composer is heard walking from picture to picture. In the final movements this theme is layered into the pictures themselves. The distinction between the composer/author and the stories of the pictures become inseparable. The listener/reader is also implicated by this structure. The listener/reader may be walking

from picture to picture and will eventually find her/himself inside the pictures or the stories of the pictures. In the marching band's interpretation of *Pictures*, the performers physically enacted this blurring between the viewer and the picture by actually walking through the picture frames. As in *Pictures*, this story is just as much the story of the author as it is the story of the reader.

This idea of author and reader working together in the story to tell and interpret what is happening brings forth questions of truth in narrative, and the impact of the idea of truth on a narrative. By truth I am referring to the idea of that which really happened or, in other words, a reality that can be known and told objectively. The author is only capable of telling the story because the reader engages with the story. When we hear the theme from the "Promenade" in the last movement, Musorgsky the viewer has become Musorgsky the viewer/author. He is both viewing Hartman's painting and telling the story of the work. In interpreting *Pictures* for my own project I am listener turned listener/author as I begin to interpret the piece for myself. Similarly, you the reader have the opportunity to engage with the written piece, and by engaging with the text you also enable the story to happen.

I am not suggesting the author has no responsibility for adhering to expectations of genre or of representing truth (depending on the genre), but what I do wish to suggest is these expectations can get in the way of how a reader approaches and understands the narrative(s) being told. For example, the genre of a piece generally works like a contract to set expectations for the work. Judith Barrington explains: "when you name what you write memoir or fiction, you enter into a contract with the reader. You say 'this really happened,' or you say 'this is imaginary'" (27). This point is important especially in

considering ethics and the responsibility of an author, but I do not want to forget the reader's responsibility in approaching and understanding any narrative. I feel it is important for the reader to be aware of and recognize the limitations of the contract they enter into with the author. I also feel it is important the reader and the author should not let these contractual limitations get in the way of the story being told, especially when the contract or genre is not clear. *Pictures* reminds us the author and reader are closely connected and work together to tell and experience the narrative(s) of the piece.

I will continue to address and expand upon these ideas about the relationship between author and reader throughout this project, but it is also interesting to note some of the more literal questions of authorship with regard to *Pictures*. Although Musorgsky composed the suite for piano, the original manuscript underwent several changes. After Musorgsky's death, the score for *Pictures* was edited by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and it was this edited and altered version of *Pictures* was first published in 1886 (the piece was completed by Musorgsky in 1874) (Russ 22). The editorial alterations to Musorgsky's manuscript raise questions of authenticity in terms of the original because some of Rimsky-Korsakov's editorial interpretations are viewed to be considerably different from Musorgsky's manuscript (21-24). *Pictures* was also originally written for piano, but the piece is best known as an orchestral arrangement. The most popular arrangement of *Pictures* is by the French composer, Maurice Ravel (26). A French composer arranging *Pictures*, a piano suite written by a Russian composer for orchestra, changes the texture and sound of the piece considerably.

Russ notes that "musicologists and performers take faithfulness to the original text and the use of performance practices from the composer's day as benchmarks of

good musical practice” (21). Authenticity in this approach is closely related to authorial intent. Walter Benjamin argues that “the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (220). This is a similar approach to authenticity, and these orientations towards authenticity are problematized by the editorial alterations to Musorgsky’s original manuscript. This is interesting because the changes to the original are also changes to the intentions of the author, and the authenticity of *Pictures* as we know it today is then questionable. This approach to authenticity as related to intent and originality offers a singular way of thinking about *Pictures* as authentic, and it does not necessarily work to consider the ways in which the listener or performers approach the piece as it is today.

It is at this point in which I will turn to a discussion of performance. This is in part because I am not familiar with, nor have I ever performed the original manuscript of *Pictures*, and also because I am interested in talking and thinking about the performance of this piece, including its complicated history. I am not particularly interested in debating authorial intent because we may never know the intentions of the author or composer, but it is useful to recognize the history of changes this piece has gone through in thinking about the performance of the piece because it brings me to thinking about the interpretations of the performers and audiences. At the moment the trumpet solo ends and the marching band begins moving around the giant picture frames on the football field, the realistic impressions of Musorgsky’s 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia are not the central focus of the performance. Nor does my written performance exclusively work to capture the narrative of that performance because each performance of the piece is filtered through interpretations of the performers, and is therefore changed or different. I can



only discuss my interpretation of the performance as one possible interpretation in my writing.

The performance of *Pictures* and the performance of writing are significant because my approach to this and each of the following stories is through an embodied experience of *performing*. I understand and contemplate the social and historical meanings of *Pictures* and each of the musical pieces through my participation in the performance. I methodologically situate my arguments in Performance Studies in which performance is seen as “a social act relying upon emergent principles and cultural conventions for enactment” (Pelias and VanOosting 224). However, instead of taking the traditional Performance Studies approach of using theatrical conceptions of performance to discuss performance as an everyday social act, I am interested in considering musical notions of performance as a way of understanding everyday social performance and communication. My approach to performance in terms of music performance is twofold: 1) as a musician I am familiar with music performance, and 2) music performance offers different possibilities for thinking about performance. I am interested in particular in the embodied performance and listening to music, the structures of music, and the relationship between music and meanings. By writing in the structure and form of *Pictures*, and in writing about different musical performances, I also consider this a project a work of performative writing. This writing works to perform the ideas and feelings of the musical performances being described. In other words, the performance of my writing works to involve you the reader in the creation of knowledge and understanding of these performances (Pollock 78-80). This is important because it is the doing or performing that informs and is informed by my ideas about performance, and I

want the reader to be *actively* involved with these ideas about performance through an experience of performance in my writing.

The experience of performing and listening to music are useful for considering many ideas including questions of truth. Truth is particularly interesting because the question of truth in music goes beyond language. Truth in music can be thought of in its physical and embodied relationship between the performer and listener. Robert Albrecht offers one way of thinking about the material element of music:

The essence of music is sound; the essence of sound is vibration; the essence of vibration is energy. Music by its very nature is vibrational and, therefore, a moving experience. We know that sound can reconfigure hills of sand, shatter glass, and rattle the brittle nerves of an enemy in battle. Music can bring large bodies of men and women under the sway of its rhythm and the spell of its song. It can restore composure, awaken the dormant, and synchronize the words, actions, breathing, and heartbeats of large disparate groups who have nothing in common but sound (20-21).

The ways in which music resonates with the body are important for thinking about the truth of a piece because of the ways in which different understandings of truth shape the understandings of different stories/performances. Similarly, with the written word, the truth of the story has to do with the impact of the story on the reader. Albrecht has described the ways in which music does things, and I am similarly interested in what the written word does.

The possibilities in listening to and performing music reflect my position on truth in writing. By following the structural format of *Pictures* this project also works to

emphasize my argument for using music performance as a way of understanding and approaching ideas of truth. The multiple relationships that exist among musician, audience, text, and production create a complex understanding of performance. Approaching performance, and specifically music performance, as a fluid and changing process opens the possibility for understanding the effects and affects of these experiences. I argue that truth must be approached in a similar fashion. The idea of truth exists in complex relationships between reader and writer, genre and text, and experience and story. Approaching truth as a concept that is fluid opens up the possibilities for understanding the various implications of truth in narrative. By approaching the idea of truth in terms of music performance I hope to open the space for asking questions such as, why is truth important, and more importantly, how is truth important?

This discussion of truth in narrative as fluid and complex also offers a perspective on music performance and the way music works to communicate. If my story of truth in narrative works to argue for complex and fluid understandings of truth, then I would argue music performance also works to communicate in these complex and fluid ways. In looking at truth in narrative I understand truth as a concept that informs our understandings of narrative, and this is also how I would approach the relationship between communication and music. If and when music communicates, it does so in complex relationships between performer and listener, genre and text, and experience and story. Approaching the relationship between communication and music performance as complex and fluid allows for multiple possibilities in thinking of the ways in which music can work to communicate.

## Intermezzo II

### The Place

It's the kind of place where the floor is already sticky when the doors open. The walls and ceiling are painted black and the floor is concrete. For some reason there's a disco ball above the stage, but it's clearly not the kind of place that would ever play disco. Stickers with the names and logos from various bands that have played here before cover the walls and the bar. There are posters and flyers for upcoming shows covering the windows. We sit at the bar and turn in our chairs to face the stage. The members of the band slowly make their way to the stage and the sound guy (who is also the bartender, doorman, and club owner) says something to the drummer and then lights a cigarette as he shuffles off the stage. We look around the room at the other people and at the posters on the windows. We don't make eye contact with each other, and we don't talk because we are each caught up in our own thoughts about the place and the show we are there to listen to. The lead singer steps up to the microphone and taps his finger against the head of the mic and says, "Is this thing on?"

## Chapter Two

### *I Will Survive*

I'm not sure when my fascination with "I Will Survive" began. There is no precise moment when the song became important, there is no one part of the song that is particularly significant, and there is no one performance of the song that I can separate out as the *definitive* performance. The importance of this song is constantly changing as it weaves in and out of my own story. Defining a contained, fixed, or finite performance of "I Will Survive" would make certain limited perspectives available. However, an analysis of "I Will Survive" in *relational* terms would open new possibilities and different perspectives. The meaning of this song, like any relationship, has changed and taken on various meanings for me over time and in different contexts. My analysis of the song exists in these changing contexts, which in turn shape and define the performance as a *process*. Now, as I sit here at my desk listening to "I Will Survive" I am in a progression of ideas and meanings that will become my story of the song.

Throughout this story, I argue for an evolving and revolving analysis of music performance in which listener, performer, and performance are connected. First, this is a story of the relationship between listener and recorded music in response to Phillip Auslander's call to consider recorded music in the analysis of music performance (5). My life experiences provide a context for my relationship to the song, and my

performance of listening is contingent on these contexts and experiences (Simon Frith 203).

Second, this is a story of a relationship between listener and listener—turned—performer that is built in the context of changing sounds and music. My relationship with the song becomes one between listener and song, performer and song, and listener and recorded performer. These relationships are complexly intertwined in the music and sound of “I Will Survive” as well as with the song’s lyrics. Different musical versions/performances of “I Will Survive” provide opportunities for different meanings both in the listening and performing.

Finally, this is a story of the listener-turned-performer. As a performer, I consider Auslander’s three identities of the musician: performer as real person, as star persona, and as character, as I negotiate my relationship with the song (6). These identities come from Simon Frith’s discussion of the popular music performer and the process of double enactment, a process of enacting a “star personality” or image and a “song personality” or some character in a song simultaneously (211-212). This is a way of breaking down and accounting for the multiple possible identities enacted by a performer in a performance. For Auslander, the performers (real people) perform their image (star persona) as performers, and perform the character of the song. The ongoing performance in this analysis is the story of my relationship with and experience of listening, performing, emulating, living, analyzing, and writing “I Will Survive.”

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I take the gray Realistic Solid State Automatic Stereo with detachable Realistic Stereophonic Speakers out of the closet and set it on the living room floor. Next to the

portable record player, I place the leather box filled with Mom's 45s. She and I begin taking the small 45 rpm records and the yellow plastic inserts out of the box and setting them on the floor.

It is my job to go through the records and hand them to Mom to play. Just listening to the A sides can take all afternoon. Her collection has everything: 70s pop, rock n' roll, Motown, and disco. More importantly, each record has a story. "This song was a big hit when I was growing up." Or, "I bought this one my senior year of high school and taught myself the melody on the clarinet." After she tells me the story of how she acquired the record or why she liked the song, we listen and sing along.

I hand her a 45 with a red Polydor label. This one is the 1978 hit written by Dino Fekaris and Freddie Perren for disco queen Gloria Gaynor: "I Will Survive." "This song is about having strength," Mom says, "and about how you don't need anybody to make you strong. This was my anthem. I used to sing it before I met your father, and you'll learn it too. Because you don't need anybody to walk over you. Ever." I'll say. Granted, I was about eight years old and heartbreak wasn't on the top of my list of concerns, but the lesson in self-esteem was unforgettable. My mother's story stuck with me because every time I heard the song I thought of her and her story, and because it represented a value she felt was important for me, it was something I knew I should try to apply.

Mom fixes one of the plastic inserts into the center of the record and places it on her record player. She slides the lever to play and the record falls down and starts spinning. The arm swings over and the needle makes contact with the vinyl. The scratchy sounds of a piano come through the speakers and then Gloria Gaynor's soprano voice sings the slow introduction to her 1978 disco hit. "At first I was afraid, I was

petrified. I kept thinking I could never live without you by my side...” We start to sing along.

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The needle reaches the end of the grooves in the record. The automatic arm lifts and swings the stylus back to the cradle. The record continues revolving. My experience changes every time I place the needle on the edge of the record. Just as there is no beginning or end to the record, there is no beginning or end to the performance. The record keeps revolving and my relationship with the performance keeps evolving as time and experience give me new contexts for thinking about the song.

The recording of “I Will Survive” has even changed and evolved. Originally, “I Will Survive” was released as the B-side in 1978. “Substitute” was the A-side. However “Substitute” did not survive on the A-side and the decision to switch the songs was made. Twelve weeks after being re-released as the A-side in 1979, “I Will Survive” became the number one song in the country (“I Will Survive”).

I am first exposed to “I Will Survive” listening to my Mother’s record. It is my listening to the record that enables this recorded music to be considered a performance. Auslander suggests the recorded music should be considered a performance, stating, “[r]egardless of the ontological status of recorded music, its phenomenological status for listeners is that of a performance unfolding at the time and in the place of listening” (Auslander 5). Listening is as important to the performance as the record itself in that both enable the recorded music to become a performance. As a listener, I am the audience physically hearing the performance of the record. The first performance of the song that I experience is through the tiny speakers of the record player, and the meaning



of the song is situated in my Mother's story. Meanings do not exist in the vinyl rather they exist in the experience of the listener. I create meanings with the music, and each time I listen to the song new meanings evolve. I set the needle back down on the record and listen to the song again.

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My best friend picks me up at 6:50 in the morning every day my senior year of high school. I wake up at 6:40, put on some clean clothes, put my lunch in my backpack, and wait in the living room for the sound of his car. Everyday, like clockwork, I hear the low rumble of the '96 Mustang GT and I go outside and get into his car. He revs the engine one last time as a goodbye to my family. With the windows down, we back out of the driveway and head for school.

"How you doin' man?"

"Tired. How about you?" I ask.

"Tired. And I have to work an eight-hour shift after school."

"That sucks."

"Alright, now you have to check this out. Ever heard of Cake?"

"Nope."

"Well this is their album *Fashion Nugget*. You'll know this song."

He puts in the CD and forwards the disc to track 7. The sound of a guitar comes through the speakers on the doors of the car. Then the vocals come in with the bass and drums. The progression is funky and different, and I recognize the words but I'm not sure why. The melody is unfamiliar. My friend sings along with the low voice of the lead singer. What is this song? The singer proclaims, "Just turn around now, you're not

welcome anymore,” and I am able to make the connection between the melody and the words at the chorus of the song, It’s a slowed down and funky remake of “I Will Survive.” We pull in to the parking lot of the school singing the chorus to the remade disco song. He backs the Mustang into his usual parking spot and revs the engine one last time for good measure. We roll the windows up as the song ends

Throughout the day I try to recall the strange melody, but it is lost. I can only remember the original melody as sung by Gloria Gaynor. The next day when my friend pulls into the driveway to pick me up, I request Cake and “I Will Survive.” Slowly, I begin to familiarize myself with the contemporary and changed version of the song.

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The narrator of “I Will Survive” finds strength in a moment of heartbreak and despair, realizing that he/she will survive and is better off without the person/thing that has caused him/her pain. The lyrics themselves do not directly indicate or implicate a gender for the narrator or the antagonist, and because the wording and story of the song is so applicable to a variety of experiences, Gloria Gaynor’s performance of the song has become an anthem for many. It is the only surviving hit of the disco era to win a Grammy Award. The winning category, Best Disco Recording, did not survive, and no other song has had the opportunity to even earn the award (Prato).

Cake’s version of the song is different than what I first heard on the portable turntable as a child. The lyrics are for the most part unchanged, but the sound is different; the trumpet and electric guitar are not reminiscent of the late 70s polyester leisure suits, bell bottom pants, and lit dance floors. The tempo has been slowed down and the rhythm of the song has changed. John McCrea’s deep baritone somehow changes

the perspective of the narrator of the song. The lyrics are a first person narrative and the singer acts as the narrator. Because the lyrics do not explicitly indicate gender when Gloria Gaynor sings it is easy to imagine the narrator is a woman. When John McCrea sings the narrator is clearly a man. Having known this song from the perspective of a woman from listening to Gloria Gaynor's version, Cake's version opens up a different perspective for the meanings of the song. Even though the lyrics do not explicitly suggest a specific gender, when Cake covers the song it becomes more obvious that this song could be the story of a man. He also sings in an octave that is easier for me to sing along with. It is in this version that I first realize how unfixed gender is in the song. This is a song of survival in all relationships.

By not remaining true to the original recording, Cake has given a fresh new meaning to the song. The song no longer falls into the genre of disco, but rather some genre of alternative rock, a genre for my generation. It is this new sound that changes the context of the song providing the opportunity for different meanings (John Shepherd and Peter Wicke 116-117). Listening to the recording of Cake performing "I Will Survive" enables my own imagined performance of the song because of its new cultural meaning. These sounds enable and restrict the production of different meanings, and I identify these meanings with my peers and my own musical interests. I associate Gloria Gaynor's version of the song with my Mother, and even though I have my own experience of Gloria Gaynor's record the sound of this new record by Cake represents the possibility for new meanings.

My friend and I find Cake's version of "I Will Survive" easier to access. We identify with the music and the lyrics are understandable. And yet, is this not the same

song that resonated with my Mother her senior year of high school? For her the song was about survival. I find myself still trying to live the story that my Mother told me would happen, but I am not in a place where I can call this song my anthem.

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I'm sitting at my computer in my dorm room the first week of my freshman year of college, struggling to get over the high school romance that ended in heartbreak a few months earlier. The world has not, as I suspected it might, come to a screeching halt. I'm trying to keep my mind off of the heartbreak by downloading music on my computer. It is almost a competition between me and my new friends here in the dorm to see who can download the most songs or even better, the most obscure songs.

In my search for new music I come across Cake's version of "I Will Survive." It's the perfect soundtrack for my melancholy. And for the first time since I was eight years old the song really makes sense for me. I think about the girl who broke my heart, and I remember my Mom telling me that nobody should ever walk over me. I hear the words of the song and realize how useful they are.

Lately I haven't been convinced that I will survive, and then John McCrea sings, "I grew strong, and I learned how to get along." I think to myself, I am getting along. I have moved on and I am surviving without my ex-girlfriend. I listen to the song one more time and then I save it on a CD with a few other songs I have found that evening. It is, I suppose, an anthem. Now it is mine.

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Gloria Gaynor's personal story of survival has led her to a strengthened faith as a born again Christian. "I Will Survive" has religious implications for the Disco Queen. In

the early 80s she changed a line in the song to directly reference the strength she found in her Christian faith (“Gloria Gaynor”). The song and her experience with performing the song are shaped by her own life experiences.

My experience with heartbreak gives “I Will Survive” a new relevance for me. I am attaching meanings from my personal experience to the song in order to validate my own strength and ability to survive amidst my feelings of loss and sadness. Christopher Small argues that, “Whatever form of music making or listening we care to engage in, we may be sure that we are taking part in some way in a ritual which affirms the values we ourselves hold” (31). This ritual is created by both listener and performer in the sounds and lyrics, if there any, of the music. The music enables the performer and listener to create multiple rituals with the music performance. These rituals and experiences give meaning to the performance. For example, listening to Gloria Gaynor’s record of “I Will Survive” was a ritual I participated in with my Mother. Together we came to share certain meanings and stories with the song. Listening to Cake’s remake of “I Will Survive” with my best friend in the Mustang was part of our ritual and routine of getting ready for another day at school. Later, during my breakup with my high school sweetheart, I listened to the song by myself and it became a song of empowerment. Instead of looking at a single meaning of the song I look at the process of listening as a relationship, and as a listener I perform with the song in creating my own meanings and experiences.

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It’s Thursday night and my friend and I are heading to the Irish Pub in South Tampa. I’ve become friends with the duet that plays at the pub. They even let me sit in

and play trumpet every now and then. They play swing and blues covers, and the possibility of getting to play is what brings me out every week. Eddie, the lead singer of the group, also has a six piece swing band that plays weddings, restaurants, and private parties. He has talked about eventually letting me join the swing band.

The pub is crowded for a Thursday night. A group of middle-aged men are gathered around the electronic dartboard drinking light beer. The bar is crowded and nobody seems to be paying any attention to the musicians in the corner. My friend and I sit down at an empty table facing the band. We are probably the only two people in the place watching the musicians. Everyone else seems interested in trying to set up a date for Friday night.

The group finishes playing and Eddie acknowledges me. “Hey Kid, you feel like singing?”

“Singing? But I brought my trumpet...”

“Yeah, you can play some later, but do you want to sing that Gloria Gaynor tune you showed me a few weeks ago?”

He is referring to “I Will Survive.” It is the first song I successfully taught myself to play on guitar. After finding the chord progression for the song on the internet, I learned how to play the chords on an old guitar a co-worker who was also a musician had given to me as a going away present when I left for college. I played and sang the song for Eddie in the style of Cake a few weeks ago when I stopped by his house to discuss playing more with his band.

I look around at the pub and realize that the central focus is the two for one beer specials at the bar. “Sure, why not?”

He plays the opening chords to the song and I feel naked standing in front of the microphone without an instrument. My public singing experience is limited to an Elvis impersonation I once did at karaoke night. He nods at me giving the cue for me to start the lyrics. I tap my hand against my thigh to keep the time that I am used to keeping by strumming the chords on my acoustic guitar. It took me months to learn to play and sing this song at the same time and now I feel strange performing without the guitar.

My voice comes out deep and strong through the microphone. I adjust to hearing myself over the speakers. The out of body experience is surreal. The voice coming out over the speakers sounds powerful. I try not to think about the fact that I am responsible for the voice and instead focus on the back wall of the bar. If only my ex-girlfriend could see me now. "I've got all my life to live and I've got all my love to give..." A smile comes to my face. This one is for you, sweetheart. A few people at the bar turn around as they begin to recognize the song. Even one of the cooks comes out of the back to listen. I get to the chorus and realize this isn't for her at all. "I will survive, hey, hey." No, this one is for me.

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I have crossed the line from listener to performer, from audience member to singer. I have taken my musical interpretations of "I Will Survive" and applied them to my performance. I have also attached my own meanings to the song to help shape my performance. I stand before the microphone and create my own musical performance, extending my analysis of the song as a listener into my performance.

Auslander's manifesto for analysis of music performance looks at the performer on three levels, "The real person, the performance persona, and the character" (6). These

distinctions work to give insight into music performance, particularly popular music, by exploring the musician as performer. How does this analysis approach apply to my experience as listener turned performer?

I first consider Auslander's distinction of lyrical character. I have brought my reading of the first person narrator in "I Will Survive" to the stage. Singing the words literally gives voice to my interpretation of the song musically and lyrically. And each performance is informed by the previous performance and I continually create and recreate a new character. I sing the narrator as a man, like John McCrea of Cake, which is unlike Gloria Gaynor's strong female version of the narrator, and when I take the stage the song is not disco, but some version of rock n' roll and swing. All of this genre and gender bending creates a new performance of an old song. This is my song.

The character is no single character in a single performance. I make the song and I make the character of the song my own. My autobiographical reading of the narrator as a listener has evolved into my performance. The pain of the narrator has become my pain, and the will to survive is my will. I sing of my experience. And at once I am the character of the narrator, the listener, and the performer.

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I'm playing trumpet with Eddie's full swing band. Three to four gigs a week and making a living wage. I'm the youngest member of the band by at least fifteen years, and I am having an incredible time. This weekend we are playing a wedding reception at a woman's club in Tallahassee.

I get back to the stage after our break and Eddie slowly strums the opening chords to a song without calling the tune. Instantly I recognize the chord progression. I set my



trumpet down on the stage and step towards the replica Shure 55 silver microphone. The banjo player whispers to me, “Hey, Kid...what are the chords again?”

I turn to face him and just as I finish explaining the progression I receive my cue from the guitar. I step up to the microphone and begin, “At first I was afraid...” The dance floor is empty. The wedding party is gathered around the cash bar and the bride and groom’s table. A few of the bridesmaids turn and look at the stage. We swing the disco hit, but it is clearly different from any of the Frank Sinatra or Dean Martin songs you would expect a swing band to play at a wedding.

As I finish the first verse of the song, the bride makes her way to the dance floor. I half expect her to scold me for singing this breakup anthem at her wedding, but instead she slips her feet out of her uncomfortable heels and begins dancing and singing along. The bridesmaids and other women at the reception join her on the floor. The best man even stumbles out onto the dance floor, champagne in hand, and joins in the singing.

I begin the second verse to the song and I am no longer singing this song by myself. I now have the help of the entire wedding party. The 27-year-old song is the hit of the night. I stop singing and turn the microphone towards the bride and her girlfriends for the beginning of the chorus, “Did you think I’d lay down and die?” I smile and turn the microphone back towards my mouth. I give the band the signal to keep going as I sing the chorus with the wedding party one more time.

Maybe they are singing along because the song is on the soundtrack for so many movies. Maybe they are singing along because the booze has finally started to take its toll. Maybe they are singing along because they are tired of eating cake and making small talk with strangers. And yet there is a look of sincerity on the bride’s face as she

sings the words to the song. The song may be considered kitschy and overdone by some because of its frequent use in movie soundtracks and as a parody, but the lyrics seem to connect with people. I think of the day that I threw out two and a half years worth of photographs and love letters and wonder if the bride has had a similar experience. It was a day that I can clearly identify as a day when I realized my own strength and ability to survive. Maybe this wedding is the culmination of her survival. “I *will* survive.”

The song ends and I step to the front of the stage and take a dramatic bow. Eddie says, “Ladies and gentleman, Mr. Gloria Gaynor!” I step to the microphone and in my best Elvis Presley imitation say, “Thank ya, thank ya vera much.” The wedding party applauds and the band goes into a slow ballad.

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Adrenaline helps get me through the performance and to turn on my performance persona. The idea of persona is the character of the performer and not the lyrical character of the song. Auslander notes that the distinction between performer as real person and performer persona is not necessarily clear (7). The distinction between performance character and the performance of the character in the song is also often vague.

As I create my performance of “I Will Survive” the distinction between the performed song and the song I listened to is also unclear. I am performing the song that as a listener I have attached meaning to. I have remade the performances of Gloria Gaynor and Cake as my performance. As a listener, their performances became my performance and their personae became my personae. I defined their personae to fit my interpretation of the song.

Auslander positions the audience outside of the performance in relation to performer. “Part of the audience’s pleasure in pop music comes from experiencing and consuming the personae of favorite artists in all their many forms and this experience is inseparable from the experience of the music itself and of the artists as musicians” (9). The audience is separate from the performance in Auslander’s explanation, and they are not responsible for creating the performance; rather, they consume the performance. I want to position the audience inside the performance and as part of the performance. The audience may consume a performance in some ways, but I believe the audience is involved in an active process in which they enable the performance and the personae. In the experience of the performance as autobiographical the listener makes the personae possible by engaging with the story in a way that makes the story of the performer real. By engaging with the story of the performance and personae as *real* they help to create the very thing being consumed. Part of the audience’s relationship to pop comes from their involvement with the performance of the stories of the personae.

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James played drums in the swing band, but eventually he stopped taking gigs. A few months later I let Eddie know that I would no longer be available. I needed a different creative outlet, and the swing band was no longer providing me with the same enjoyment as it once had. Two days after leaving the swing band I received a call from James about a funk band he was now playing with in St. Petersburg that he wanted me to check out. I brought my trumpet and sat in on their rehearsal and was asked to join the band. I quickly fell in love with the original music and the positive creative energy of the musicians in the band.

Sitting on the moldy patio furniture on the loading dock outside of the rehearsal studio, we discuss our set list for our upcoming show.

“We need to come up with another song, just something different. Maybe even a cover.” The lead singer, Dave, sits back down on the swivel chair.

“Hey, James. What about the Gloria Gaynor song?” I ask.

“Oh, the one we used to swing? Sure. Do you know how to teach these guys the chords?”

“Yeah, it’s really simple.”

“Wait, what song is it?” Dave asks.

“‘I Will Survive’.”

“And you sing it?”

“Yeah, but you can sing it. I mean, I can get you the lyrics.”

“No, no you can sing it. I won’t mind taking a break from singing and it’s good for all of us to showcase our different talents.”

We walk back into the studio. The room is lit by a single light bulb in the center of the room and air conditioned by a small wall unit. I step over a tangle of wires and search for a scratch piece of paper in my trumpet case to write the chords down for the two guitar players to work out. I explain the strumming pattern and we start running through the song. James stops us before we get to the chorus.

“Can we do it funky?”

“Instead of swingin’ it?”

“Yeah, that worked with the swing band, but not for this.”

“You’re right. It needs to be faster,” I agree.

“Okay, so I’ll give the cue on the snare drum.”

The band picks up the song without a problem. It’s a simple song, recognizable, and something that people are guaranteed to dance to. When the song ends my ears are ringing. The acoustics in the six hundred dollar a month studio are not the best and it is hard to hear vocals over two electric guitars and drums. But at this point I’m so familiar with the song I don’t have to think too hard about my performance. This familiarity and comfort with which I perform is my newest orientation to the song.

“That one’s a keeper,” Dave says.

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My real relationship with “I Will Survive” is a blend of my experience as a listener and as a musician. Listening to the 45rpm as a child gave me a context for the next reiteration of the song. With a broken heart I heard my story in the words and music. At weddings and bars I perform the song for the people listening. And now I write the music as my autobiography. My own story is tangled up in the multiple performances and experiences of this one song.

Where is the performer as real person? I am in the vinyl grooves of the 45. I am in the electric guitar and trumpet. I am behind the microphone singing. I am in the words on the page. Without you reading my story, I am gone. Where is the performer’s persona? I am in the worn down needle on the record player. I am at the bar listening. I am in the blank space on the page. Without you listening to my performance, I can not exist. Without the audience, the performance cannot happen and Auslander’s three identities of the musician, as real person, as star persona, and as song character, do not exist. The audience and the relationship between the audience and the performance in the

creation of meanings and identities in music are central to thinking about and analyzing recorded music as performance.

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At the end of a long day, I pick up my acoustic guitar. The black paint is worn off on most of the fret board from hours of practice and exercises. I sit down on the floor next to my bed, and the fingers on my left hand move around the neck of the guitar forming various chords. I close my eyes and feel the steel strings of the guitar press into my hardened fingertips.

I am relaxed by the repetitive shaping and reshaping of chord forms on the guitar. My left index finger slides down to the fifth fret and my fingers fall into the shape of an A minor chord. I strum the strings several times without thinking. For some reason, this chord sounds the best to me. I begin to hum the notes of the chord and I realize that this is the opening chord for “I will survive.” I haven’t played this song in months.

With nobody else around, I begin to play the song that I first learned on guitar. There are no sounds from any accompanying instruments. Nobody counted the song off for me, and nobody asked for me to tell them the chords. There is no dance floor, no audience, and nobody around to sing along. My voice is not amplified. I am under no pressure to perform for anyone but myself.

For the first time in months, I take the time to consciously think about the song. This is the song that resonated with both my mother and me in our respective moments of heartbreak. This is the song that I have learned to perform and made my own. This is the song that I have learned to sing instinctively. As I sing and play for myself I am able to recapture the significance the song had when I first learned it, for a moment. When the

chord progression comes to an end and I let the final chord ring. I set the guitar down as the final vibrations of the last chord fade away.

### Intermezzo III

#### In Stereo

CD cases are scattered across the floor. Combined, we easily have over a thousand albums here. You hand me another stack of CDs to look at and I push a stack your way. We've both had a long day, and now we want to find some music to listen to. It's a good a way to relax, and it's a good way to become involved in a process that requires a different kind of attention and focus then our everyday routines. You stand and put a disc in the player and adjust the volume. I stop looking through the albums because I want to give my full attention to the sounds coming from the stereo. You sit back down and we wait for the music to start.

The stereo cabinet is in the front of the room, but the speakers are positioned in the corners. We sit in the middle of the room on the floor facing the stereo cabinet ready to be surrounded by the sounds from the speakers. We wait for the CD to start playing, but there appears to be some technical difficulty. I stand and look at the stereo and push a few buttons. Suddenly the music starts. I sit back down on the floor and together we start listening.



## Chapter Three

### *Stompin' at the Savoy*

Sitting at the high-top table in the back of the bar I am trying to understand what is happening on the stage. Charles, a man who I met two weeks ago, sits down next to me.

“Hey, man.”

“Hey, Charles.”

“Where’s your trumpet?”

“It’s in my car.”

“Well, go get it man. This is a jam session. You *gonna* play.” Charles gives me a stern look that lets me know he is my friend, and also that he expects me to play tonight. I habitually put my trumpet in the trunk of my car no matter where I am going; I bring my horn if I am going to church, the grocery store, or the movies because you never know when you may encounter other musicians playing or even be asked to play. I give up my seat at the high-top table and walk out to Central Avenue where my car is parked. A man stops me on the sidewalk, “You got fifty cent? I need to catch a bus.”

“No man, I don’t have any change. Sorry.”

I quicken my pace as I walk to my car to get my trumpet. I hate turning people down, but I really don’t have any change. In fact, I don’t remember the last time I had cash. I get to my car and open the trunk. I reach towards the back for my brown suede

trumpet case. It has seen better days, but the horn inside works fine. I'm proud of the case and the trumpet. When I was in middle school, I babysat for a kid down the street, and saved up the money I earned to buy the horn from a guy my neighbor knew. My neighbor was also a trumpet player, and he seemed to have an infinite amount of connections in the music world. A friend of his was selling the silver plated trumpet because his son was getting a new horn. The trumpet, a Blessing, became my most prized possession. I walk back to the bar, where on Tuesday nights from 9pm to at least 1 in the morning and sometimes until as late as 2 or 3 there is an "open jam" jazz session.

I've been playing trumpet for almost thirteen years. Eleven of those years were spent studying classical music and the appropriate techniques of the style. I learned how to play by studying with band directors in school bands and with private instructors. I was taught to read music, to blend in with other musicians in an ensemble, and to take direction from a conductor. In other words, I am a classically trained musician. In this training there was always a focus on instruction and the correct way to play. For example, knowing how to read music is an important skill because not only does the notation signify which sounds to produce, but there are markings for tempo, dynamics, phrasing, and other ideas provided by the composer for the performer about how to play. The technique or skill of reading music is much like elocution or oral interpretation. There is a content to be read and there are guidelines or rules for reading aloud appropriately.

My training as a trumpet player is grounded in this disciplined approach to music. This is about doing things correctly and consistently. When my middle school band director felt I was not holding the trumpet correctly (a skill I thought I had mastered after

three years of holding the trumpet) he threatened to tape my fingers to the horn to keep them in the “right” places. This classical training was based on a modernist way of thinking about music making where there was almost always a preferred, singular, right way to doing things. However, there was one aspect of learning to play for which the instructions were vague. This was in the instruction—or challenge—to play “musically.” This was the one aspect of performance in which the “right way” was not clearly written. The freedom and mystery of working to understand what it means to play “musically” is one of my first encounters with learning about subjectivity. The subjective aspect of music performance is characterized by the inability of language or explicit instruction to explain or define its function. This was my opportunity to make some decisions about what sounds or feels *right*. I like the order and organization of classical techniques, but joining this with the personal aspect of playing musically makes music performance particularly interesting both epistemologically and ontologically.

Philip Bohlman has suggested that it is useful to think of multiple ontologies of music that exist not exclusively but together, including music as an object, music as embedded, music as adumbration and music as process (18-19). When music is ontologically approached as an object, it is thought to be a tangible thing which can then be analyzed and known. As embedded, music is connected to other activities and is inseparable from these activities. Music can be embedded systemically or arbitrarily. For example, in my use of musical structure in organizing the chapters of this project music is embedded systemically in the project. The musical structure is both connected to the project and inseparable from the project. Music could also be seen as arbitrarily

embedded in my project by talking about my use of language in terms of rhythm or melody.

By adumbration, Bohlman is referring to the shadow cast by the effects of music. He explains, “[a]dumbration functions frequently as a border-crossing mechanism, allowing one to conceptualize the music of the other through shadows evident in one’s own” (19). This works as a way of making sense of the music of other cultures through one’s own ideas and understandings of what music is. Lastly, music can be ontologically conceptualized as a process. Music as a process considers the fluid and open nature of music, and this is the ontological position from which I frequently frame my understandings and discussions of music. Ontologically I have been trained to approach music as a process organized by a specific set of symbols and structures, and I come to view music as object, as embedded, or as adumbration in connection with my understanding of music as process.

Bohlman suggests these multiple ontologies of music often exist together and are not independent from music; they are “instantiated only through musical practices” (19). It is through the subjective act of music performance or the performance of listening to music that we can begin to consider Bohlman’s ontological categories. For Bohlman, it is important to consider the *multiple* ontological approaches to music as a way of rethinking rather than thinking music:

“Thinking” music privileges one way of understanding music, the cognitive; it proceeds with the assurance that self is ultimately knowable. “Rethinking music” proceeds only nervously, lacking conviction that any ontological process is ultimately knowable; we rethink music on the belief that we missed something the

first time round. Rethinking music undermines thinking music, and moves beyond it. (34).

Bohlman's approach suggests music exists in multiple ways and can be understood through the various subjective practices that inform the ways in which music is brought into existence. I would add that the relationship between musical practices and the existence of music are inseparable insofar as practices bring music into existence and the existence of music informs the practices. It is here that I locate my argument for an ontoepistemological approach to music or a move to conceptualizing understandings of what music is and what can be known through music as connected in the embodied performances of music. Through embodied musical practices such as performance and listening, Bohlman's multiple ontologies of music can be realized and it is through multiple ontologies of music that musical practices are informed.

In my training as a classical musician, my orientation towards music ontologically is music as process. Playing music is a process of playing correctly and musically, but understanding how to play musically is a subjective way in which I come to know what the music means. Epistemologically, the knowing in and by music happens for me in the process of playing. I bring to the written music and technique my own personal interpretations to the performance. Music philosopher Bennett Reimer suggests that music functions subjectively as a sense of feeling or sense of the way in which "life feels as it is lived" (46-49). For me this is how playing musically works. The performance becomes an opportunity for me to express my own sense of how life feels within a given musical structure. Reimer also finds the aesthetic value of music in the ability for music performance to explore subjective experiences in ways not available in and by language

alone (49-50). If language is a way of knowing or making sense of life, music then works as a way of knowing about life through the subjective experiences.

Reimer makes the claim that “[t]he growth process which is the essential characteristic of artistic creation is a process of *exploration*. It is a searching out and discovering of expressiveness” (59). For Reimer, artistic creation is a question of coming to know about expressiveness through process. The process of playing musically, then, is a way of knowing through exploring subjective expression. I agree that this is one way of knowing in music, but I would argue that this is only *one* way of knowing and that there are other ways of knowing in music that exist beyond this search for expressiveness. Given my training as a classical musician, I would argue that because this exploration of expressiveness is framed in extensive rules of technique and structure, the ways of knowing are inextricably connected to certain ontological approaches to music such as music as a process. In other words, the way I come to know by playing musically is deeply connected to what music is or is thought to be by me. By approaching music as an ontoepistemological question, I can begin to understand and interpret the instruction to play musically in a way that considers the structure and my own subjective feelings as connected because the way I know is then situated in what I understand music to be.

Listening to music is also informed by assumptions regarding the ontology of music and ways of coming to know through listening to music. By arguing for an ontoepistemological approach to understanding music, I am suggesting that the embodied practices of music including listening also shape the ontologies of music. Nicholas Cook makes a similar argument in which he wishes to consider performance as a source of

musical meaning that should be seen as part of and not separate from musical analysis (247). Robert Walser also argues for an understanding of the body in the music, in which social and cultural meanings are embodied in music performance and therefore epistemologically meanings of music can be realized through embodied musical practices (121-126). Both of these perspectives fit with my own ideas about the ways in which performance as a way of knowing *and* being is useful for thinking about music as both listener and performer.

It has only been in the last year that I have attempted to understand jazz as a performer. I have listened to and enjoyed jazz for quite some time, but it has only been recently that I have tried to study, analyze, and attempt to learn by performing in this complex musical style and culture. As a performer, I am engaging with the music as process, but now, not only am I learning a new musical style I am also learning in a new way. I don't have a scheduled class time, a formal teacher, and there is no end of the year competition or concert. Tuesday night jam sessions are the class, and concert, and the musicians are the teachers, private instructors, and members of the ensemble. This different way of learning challenges my previous conceptions of the *right way* of doing things, and opens up new ways for thinking about music, teaching, and performing. I approach the music as process and it is in performing that this process is realized as a way of learning and being taught.

The session is hosted by an alto saxophone player named JT. JT's combo includes Charles on bass, George on drums, and Kenny on the keyboard. JT runs the PA system and the sound board. He sets up the microphones and sound system, introduces musicians and tunes, and reminds the audience to tip the bartenders. He also sits in and

plays on many of the tunes. Ultimately the session is his responsibility in that he makes sure things go smoothly and that there is music happening throughout the evening.

This is an open jam session, which means the players in the combo are constantly changing. Different players come in and sit in on different instruments throughout the night. There are older musicians who have been around and know a thing or two. They have been playing for a while, and it is easy to romanticize their wisdom about jazz and improvisation. There's even rumor that some of these old school guys used to play in New York in the 40s and 50s with some of the big names in jazz. There are also a fair share of younger musicians. Some are in college or high school, and others have graduated from music conservatories. The range of musical skill is as varied as the age range. I am one of the younger musicians at the session, and I am also one of the most inexperienced.

I open the door to the bar and walk back into the crowded, smoke-filled room and set my case next to the other cases lined up at the edge of the stage. This is just one of the many unspoken rituals that happen during the session. Musicians come and go throughout the evening and everybody seems to know to set their cases against the stage. I knew from sitting and watching musicians come and go throughout the evening that this is what I was supposed to do. I work my way towards a table in the back of the bar where I can sit and listen to the music. I don't really want to play tonight, I just want to listen and learn. I focus my attention on the musicians and the sounds that they are producing on the dimly lit stage towards the front of the bar. Other musicians are sitting at the tables talking and laughing with each other. For the most part the people sitting at the bar are not musicians. These are the regulars, and they may or may not be there for



the music. Their primary concern seems to be with getting the attention of the bartenders.

JT starts playing “Stompin’ at the Savoy,” a jazz standard. I recognize the tune because it is coincidentally one I have been working on for the past few weeks. By repeatedly working on the same tune I begin to know the tune, both in playing and in listening because the song becomes embedded in my mind and body. I have a recording of Clifford Brown playing the tune, and I also have the sheet music. Listening to recordings of other trumpet players is an important part of learning to improvise and play jazz. Not only does it help you learn the tune, but it is a way to learn different solos and styles. I listen and play with the recording over and over again, which helps me to develop my ear for what sounds right as far as notes are concerned, but I also listen and play to match my style of playing with the style of music. I listen to classical trumpet players for many of the same reasons. Learning to emulate different styles helps me better understand the feel of the music. Again this is an approach to music ontologically as a process in which I engage and learn in the process by listening and practicing. By surrounding and immersing myself with and in examples I can begin to embody the musical style and performance through repetition.

The song follows the 32-bar format of most jazz tunes. The melody or the “head” of the tune is played over the first 32 bars of the chord progression in the format of AABA. The same chord progression that is played during the melody is then repeated while solos are played in place of the melody. The structure of the song allows for more interpretation than a fully notated classical piece of music, but the organization still exists. In a way, each soloist composes their own melody for the 32 bar chord

progression. The soloists play through the progression as many times as necessary for their ideas to be stated. If a rigid structure suggests a modernist notion of a stable “right” way of playing, then this open structure suggests a post modernist conception of multiple “right” ways of playing based on context and circumstance. At the open jam, many musicians take only one or two rounds of the progression, but occasionally there will be players who take the progression several times around as they extend their solo. By extending their solo the musician extends, works through, and develops their musical ideas. The solo becomes a way of coming to knowledge about the notes and structure of the music as well as feelings and expression made possible by the music. The possibilities for improvisation are endless within and through the confines of this structure.

JT takes the solo on the first chorus after the melody. Off to the side of the stage, there are two musicians getting their horns out and preparing to play. The tenor saxophone player, Lee, walks onto the stage and nods his head in approval of JT’s solo. JT finishes his solo just as the 32 bar progression comes to the end and leaves the stage making Lee the central focus of the performance. The progression is repeated and Lee begins his solo. The rhythm section leaves space for Lee to work within his playing. Kenny is accenting the chords at the beginning of each bar on the keyboard and Charles is playing as few notes as possible on the bass. The drummer is keeping time on the ride cymbal, and is no longer playing as many fills on the other drums. Lee weaves his solo in and around the syncopated rhythms with complex melodic phrases. Several people in the bar applaud. At the turnaround, right before the progression repeats, Lee quotes the

first few bars of the Flintstones theme song, ends his solo, and walks off the stage, giving another musician the opportunity to solo.

A few more horn players take solos during the song and then JT walks back on stage to repeat the head. Repeating the head signifies the end of the song and several other horn players join in on the head adding different harmonies. There is a crowd of musicians gathering to the side of the stage and when the song is over, Charles makes eye contact with an older guy who walks up and takes the upright bass. Charles steps aside for the man to take the bass and then shakes his hand and walks off the stage. At the same time, Kenny has given over the keyboard to another guy who had been sitting at a table towards the front of the stage. Lee and JT start the next tune and the modified rhythm section settles into the new groove.

As a novice jazz student I find myself faced with a familiar predicament: I don't know the song. There are so many songs to keep up with and I'm at least seventy-five years behind the learning curve. This one follows the standard AABA form but I don't know the chord changes. I look toward the stage and see Charles coming towards me. He is a firm believer in baptism by fire, and he's been encouraging me to get up and play for the past few weeks. I know what is coming, and I don't see a way out of it. My case is sitting next to the stage.

Charles knows I'm a trumpet player, though I'm not quite sure what he thinks of me as a player. He's seen me out playing a few times. I first met him at a gig I was on with another band and he invited me to the Tuesday night sessions. I sat in with him at this session several weeks ago on a blues. I actually felt okay after playing because the blues are not as complex as some of the 32 bar progressions of the standards. That night

was my first time at the session, and since then Charles, along with several of the older musicians, has been looking out for me and wants me to improve.

He walks up behind me and leans down, “Go get that horn and play.”

I look up at him nervously and before I can say anything he walks to the back of the room and leans against the bar, watching. I walk to the stage and get my horn out of the case. I finger the valves and I blow warm air through the cold brass. I stand on the side of the stage with a group of musicians waiting to take solos. There’s a guy with a trombone who looks about my age, an older man with a harmonica, a tenor saxophone player, and another trumpet player.

“What key is this?” I ask the trumpet player, who I’ve met before and has provided me with explanations on several occasions.

“That’s D concert,” he says.

I finger my valves going through the D scale in my head. It’s not too bad, but I wish I knew what the song is. I feel too embarrassed to ask because I’ve already asked what key we’re in and I don’t want to admit how little I know. The sax player that is on stage finishes his solo. The trumpet player nods at me and then looks at the stage. I walk on to the stage, nervous and not wanting to play anything terrible. The lights are surprisingly bright and I’m thankful because they prevent me from seeing anybody in the room. For extra protection I close my eyes and begin playing.

The tune has a moderate tempo and I begin working my way through the scale feeling surprisingly comfortable. I make it through the two “A” sections and I’m starting to feel more confident about my abilities. And then the “B” section happens. The B section is generally a bridge, and the chord progression is sometimes dramatically

different from the A section. This B section is a monster. Not only am I now playing in the wrong key I'm also starting to fall behind the beat. I close my eyes tighter. The final A section comes around and I am saved.

The progression repeats and I start fitting back into the groove. My new concern is how I'm going to get out of this. I still haven't figured out how to end solos at the right place. I'm still struggling to make it through the chord changes. The B section comes around again and this time I lay back, leaving more space in my solo. This way I run less of a chance of sounding terrible. During the final A section I try desperately to create a phrase that will signal the end of the solo, and it doesn't quite happen. The chorus repeats for a third time and I am out of musical ideas. I'm struggling, my eyes are tightly closed, and then I hear an alto saxophone. I look over and JT has started playing over my solo in the middle of the progression. He takes center stage and I walk off.

I'm relieved that it's over, and I'm also taken aback. I've just been played off the stage. It was a not-so-subtle way of saying, "Don't come back on this stage until you know what you are talking about." At least, that's what I imagine his playing over my solo meant, and I feel like that is what it should mean because I admittedly wasn't doing too well. I had no idea how else the solo would have ended. I put my horn in its case and walk back to the wall where Charles is standing. A few of my non-musician friends at the bar stop me.

"That sounded awesome!"

"Really? It felt pretty awful to me, but thanks." I keep walking towards the back of the bar not sure if my friends had actually heard my performance. I stand next to Charles.

“How’d that feel?” He asks.

“I’m glad it’s over,” I say.

“That’s right man. That’s how you gonna learn. Next time it’ll be better.”

I nod my head and we shake hands as if we are making a deal. I have just been given a lesson, and now I have my homework assignment. I need to keep working on learning tunes, and I need to learn how to end my solos. I walk back to the front and take my case and leave for the evening.

This experience of being played off the stage by another musician at the open jam acts as a lesson in my learning about this different style of playing. I am the student and the other musicians are my mentors. As teachers, my mentors give no explicit instruction; however, there are correct ways of playing. Otherwise I could have presumably stood on stage and played indefinitely. I recognize the move to play over my solo as a moment of teaching not because I am sure of the other musician’s intentions, but because it is a useful way for me to make sense of the experience. Paul Berliner notes that often “there is no music for improvisers to prepare for performance,” and that many times improvisation is defined by explanations of what it is not (2). Learning to improvise and play jazz is bounded by certain rules and understandings of musical structure and chord progression, but the rules and structures are secondary to the subjective act and process of improvising.

Improvising jazz requires the knowledge of a piece of music or the structure of the music so a musician can then come to think about the piece differently. Berliner describes the process of improvising as learning the rough sketch of a road map and filling in the details along the way (93). Learning to improvise has to do with

understanding and knowing the structure of a piece of music, which can include the melody, rhythm, and chord progressions, well enough so that solos can be created based off of these guidelines. Combining knowledge of a piece with a musical vocabulary or what Berliner explains as “things you can do” or play on an instrument creates at a basic level the opportunity for improvisation (102). This vocabulary is an embodied set of knowledge about the instrument and about music that the musician can perform. Improvisation can be understood then as an ontoepistemological practice, or a way of connecting ideas about what music is and what can be learned from music in an embodied performance.

In thinking about my jazz improv experience as a pedagogical moment, my arguments for an ontoepistemological approach to music are also applicable. In my experience of learning and playing classical music the rules and structures were explicit. Learning to play musically and or expressively was secondary to my learning to play correctly, but learning to play musically happened in and through the embodied practice of playing. In my lesson on improv, the focus of my teachers and mentors was on getting me to play. The musicians at the jam session spent little to no time explaining the rules or correct ways of playing, and instead encouraged me to take the stage as a way of learning by doing. By taking the stage, I made distinctions about what was and wasn't right in my playing based on what felt and/or sounded right. I also had some help from the musician who played me off the stage. In my perspective of music as an ontoepistemological process, the embodied nature of playing shapes both the process and my understanding of the process.

This approach to learning as embodied is important in thinking about the connected relationship between ontology and epistemology and in thinking about the practice of teaching. This is a teaching of showing and not telling, leaving the relationship of learning between the student and teacher open. Instead of using the rules of structure and form to shape my experience of learning improvisation, the musicians at the jam session created an educational situation in which I would come to know the rules based on my own experimentation through performance. Instead of music as a process based only on set rules and structures, music is an open space of multiple possibilities.

This ontoepistemological ambiguity was uncomfortable for me initially because I had to reframe my understanding of what music is, and change from thinking of music as one specific thing, to no one specific thing, to not a “thing” at all. This vagueness also allows me to put more emphasis on the embodied practice of playing. The right or true way to play is no longer determined primarily by the structure or a predetermined set of rules; rather it is determined primarily by the playing or doing within a less explicit structure. Instead of thinking about what is right or wrong I am challenged to *do*, and to learn what is right or wrong through playing. I argue that ontology and epistemology are connected, but by placing more emphasis on the performance as a way of learning the connection between ontology and epistemology becomes even more apparent.

In my car, I turn on 89.7 WUSF which at this time of night is playing jazz. Listening to the radio is an extension of my lesson. I find myself thinking about the music as not being right or wrong, but instead as a series of possibilities. In thinking about performing, the songs on the radio program are possibilities for learning how to play. They are also possibilities for learning about me, my feelings, or even the world



around me. They are possibilities for learning about rules and structures, and they are possibilities for learning to play within and through rules and structures. And just as in my performance it is the embodied practice of listening that shapes my understanding of what the music is and what can be learned from the music. I actively engage with the songs on the radio now as a means of extending my learning experience from playing this evening. By surrounding myself in the active process of listening I mirror the active process of playing this evening, and the learning continues.

## Intermezzo IV

### One More Time

The conductor gives the final cutoff signaling the end of the final chord of the piece. The vibrations from the chord continue to resonate through the hall, and then fade away ever so slightly. Eventually the sound of the vibrations will become completely inaudible, even though the note will still be resonating throughout the hall. The conductor continues to hold his arms in the position of his final cutoff, and stands as if he is frozen in time. The musicians also appear as if they are frozen in time, holding their bodies and instruments still as they wait for the conductor to bring his arms down. We also sit, with the rest of the audience, frozen in this moment, stuck in between listening and applause.

As the chord fades away, a thick, heavy silence fills the concert hall. After what feels like an eternity the conductor drops his arms to his side suddenly. We applaud with the rest of the audience and the musicians relax in their seats. The conductor turns and bows. We turn in our program to see what we will hear next. I look up and the conductor has already returned to the podium and is facing the orchestra. He raises his arms and the musicians hold their instruments in the ready position. We sit in anticipation of the downbeat. The conductor lifts his baton ever so slightly and time seems to slow as he brings the baton back down to signal the beginning of the next piece.

## Chapter Four

### *Four*

The best way to learn to play jazz is for him to jump right into the fire. He started showing up at the jam sessions a few weeks ago, and now the kid needs to start *playing*. This session brings out a good number of musicians every week, but it isn't so competitive that new musicians can't get in on a set. The session is an opportunity for everyone to try out new tunes, interact with other musicians, and learn from each other. This is what he needs if he really wants to get serious about jazz because jazz is about taking risks. For him it's a question of courage, and the older, more experienced musicians are giving him encouragement. Tonight he has to take the stage and perform. It's a jam session, not a concert. Besides, he won't get to be a better player by sitting at the table in the back.

The bass player walks over to the table and says something to the kid who then gets up and walks out of the bar. A few minutes later, he comes back in with his trumpet case, which he sets next to the stage. The next tune is a Miles Davis number, *Four*, and the bass player makes eye contact with the kid. The kid walks toward the stage and takes his horn out of its case. The bass player hands the upright off to another musician and as he walks off the stage he whispers something to the kid and pats him on the shoulder.

The bass player stands in the back of the room next to a drummer who has also been encouraging the kid to take the stage. The two men lean against the wall and talk

about upcoming gigs as each horn player lined up on the side of the stage takes his turn. When the kid finally walks on stage the two men stop talking and listen. The first notes are hesitant, but he is playing in the right key. At the bridge, he starts playing some wrong notes, and instead of playing through the wrong notes he gets stuck and his nervousness becomes more apparent. It takes confidence and experience to know how to let a solo develop, and he isn't there yet. At the end of the progression, when the solo should come to an end, he keeps playing. The two men look at each other and shake their heads. He doesn't know how to end his solo. Then, in the middle of the chord progression, the leader of the session walks out on stage playing saxophone. He aims his horn directly into the microphone, drowning out the sound of the kid's trumpet. The kid looks up, nods at the saxophone player, and walks off the stage.

Being played off the stage by another musician is an embarrassing, humbling experience. It is also an experience that is full of love and caring. This jam session, like jazz culture, is dominated by men and the performance of masculinity in and by these men works to define the way teaching and learning happens in this space. The kid was being told to get off the stage before he hurt himself, but it was not meant to discourage him from ever playing again. Instead he is encouraged and challenged to get better, and to come back ready to play. This was not the bloody knock out punch of a singular correct answer, but the forceful shove back into the corner of the better question.

This way of teaching and learning is a part of jazz culture that points to questions about the ways in which masculinity is performed and produced. Like the story of the kid at the jam session, the story of Miles Davis in *Miles: The Autobiography* (1989) also provides a space for thinking about and rethinking the ways in which masculinity is

performed because his story provides examples and lessons about performing masculinity as a jazz musician.

The first time I sat in with a group of musicians, I discovered that the members of the band considered the autobiography of Davis to be *The Bible* for musicians. Four years later, my own copy of *Miles* sits on the top of my bookshelf, tattered and well read. The straightforward attitude and sometimes abrasive commentary of Davis provides a space for me to enter into the story of the jazz musician. I now consult the text as a way of supplementing my own knowledge about what it means to perform *as* a jazz musician.

Understanding and thinking about the performance of masculinity in *Miles* and in the teaching and learning of jazz is important because this performance can be used to think of the relationship between masculinity, power, and authority *differently*. If *Miles* works as a learning opportunity, then it teaches me about my desire for a masculinity that challenges me to take risks, pushes me off stage when I make mistakes, encourages improvement, and operates with and not against women.

Ideas of masculinity are constructed in *Miles* only insofar as this text is viewed as a performance for which the readers are the audience. Judith Butler argues that meanings of gender are performed through the body and that the body constitutes meaning (521). This is an embodied process of creating meanings comparable to my approach to thinking about learning to play musically. The meanings happen in the doing. Similarly, *Miles* works to constitute meanings about his masculinity and these meanings are performed through my reading of the text. Davis does not create the representations of masculinity by himself; they happen in the reading of the text where the reader and Davis work together to create ideas about masculinity. The importance and usefulness of viewing

masculinity as performance is in considering the process of this performance (523). How then, is masculinity performed by Miles Davis in his autobiographical representation?

How is masculinity performed and produced in my reading of this autobiography?

I am learning about the performance of masculinity in *Miles* to develop new understandings of how masculinity can be performed as a jazz musician because the story and performance of masculinity is an important part of doing jazz. The performance of masculinity in *Miles* is a story that I use as a lesson for rethinking the ways in which masculinity can be performed. I also consider this story of masculinity in thinking about the ways in which considering stories to be true can impact the possibilities for new, different, and better stories. A performance perspective makes possible what Jill Dolan refers to as utopian performatives or moments when a different and better future can be realized in performance (5). Dolan explains her way of understanding utopia:

Thinking of utopia as processual, as an index to the possible, to the “what if,” rather than a more restrictive, finite image of the “what should be,” allows performance a hopeful cast, one that can experiment with the possibilities of the future in ways that shine back usefully on a present that’s always, itself, in process. Such a view of utopia prevents it from settling into prescription, into the kind of fascism that inevitably attends a fully drawn idea of a better world (13).

My exploration of the autobiographical text, *Miles*, is driven by my interest in envisioning different ways to understand masculinity. I am looking for the “what if” moments of this text to learn about different ways of telling and performing the story of masculinity.

I have chosen to view the autobiography of Davis because it makes available a different perspective into his performance as a musician than my recordings of his music do. Listening to music is an important and useful way for learning how to play different styles. By constantly listening to different recordings with trumpet parts, I can begin to emulate these styles and the styles become embedded in my mind and body. Similarly, reading offers an experience of learning about styles. This learning is different from the practice of emulating recorded music in that in learning about the styles I am not necessarily trying to emulate them. In reading *Miles* I hoped to better understand the style of this great musician in to make sense of what it means to play jazz. Miles Davis is my teacher, and the text allows me to enter into the story of his performance. Holly Farrington argues that, “Jazz autobiographies are representations not only of individual lives, but also of wider issues which come together in the unique blend of jazz, blackness, and self representation which is the jazz autobiography” (385). I look at *Miles* to consider specifically how the representations of masculinity are produced and performed. In other words, *Miles* is a case study for thinking about the performance of masculinity.

Quincy Troupe, coauthor of *Miles*, in his own account of working with Davis describes him as unpredictable (41). Troupe explains, “At times, he was extremely funny; at others, unbelievably mean” (56). This unpredictable character is apparent in the autobiography and makes many interpretations of Davis available because his personality is constantly changing. The autobiography develops an inclusive representation of the complexity of Davis’ character. Troupe discusses Davis’ reaction to the book:

Miles accepted the book as it was because, as he told me, “it was the truth.” He did worry some over the way the book portrayed his treatment of women, but

when I reminded him that this portrait was accurate, he didn't protest. The only changes he made were when he disagreed with a date or fact (92).

It is from this complex depiction of Miles Davis that the personal life and musician's persona become accessible for analysis and examination, specifically with regard to understanding representations of masculinity in the story. Because the story of Davis is presented as truthful the representations of masculinity can also be viewed as truthful. However, the idea of a true masculinity or right way of doing masculinity does not have to mean that there is only one way of doing masculinity.

What are the representations of masculinity in *Miles*? The most significant representation is that Miles Davis is violent towards women. He admits to abusive actions against his wife, Cicely Tyson, in his autobiography. Davis explains, "One time we argued about one friend in particular, and I just slapped the shit out of her" (366). Pearl Cleage struggles with Davis' unapologetic description of his violent actions towards his wife in her essay "Mad at Miles" (1987). She argues the personal actions confessed by Davis in his autobiography cannot be separated from his musical genius. Cleage uses this example as an opportunity to ask important questions about violent crimes against women. "How can they hit us and still be our leaders? Our husbands? Our lovers? Our geniuses? Our friends? And the answer is...they can't. Can they?" (43). These questions are important not only in thinking about Davis, but also in thinking about how masculinity is being enacted. These kinds of actions do not have to define masculinity but if and when they do masculinity should be rethought.

Hazel Carby argues that this autobiography is an important exploration of the ways in which Davis shapes his own definitions of masculinity (136). Carby recognizes



Davis' desire for a freedom in jazz music in his story. This is a "freedom from a confinement associated with women, and freedom to escape to a world defined by the creativity of men" (138). Davis' masculinity is both expressed in his creative relationships with his male jazz mentors and is shaped by his distant relationships with the women in his life. The masculinity of Davis is developed in its opposition to women. Carby argues that the musical genius of Davis and his violence towards women should not be seen as separate functions of his character (144). The autobiography does not allow for a complete separation of the public life of Davis as musician from his private life, and his enactment of masculinity is connected in both his personal and public life.

Davis' assertive and cool (in every sense of the word) behaviors are other common themes in discussions of his autobiography and personality (Monsoon 87). Cool is seen as a function of black masculinity that represents control, strength, survival, and pride (Majors and Billson 27-35). Miles Davis is cool. His performance of cool is also argued to be one way in which he challenges dominant assumptions of white masculinity and whiteness while maintaining aspects of a heterosexual masculinity. Davis' coolness is seen as a rejection of dominant white masculinity because his style did not fit into the expected social roles. Herman Gray explains, "[d]rugs, sexism, pleasure, excess, nihilism, defiance, pride and the cool pose of disengagement were all a part of the style" (401). Davis' coolness is then part of black masculinities that are counter to hegemonic white masculinities (Majors and Billson 7). However, his masculinity still operated within the dominant heterosexual masculinity in his hierarchical relationship to women.

Robin Kelley locates Davis as part of a masculine culture that aspires to what he calls the "pimp aesthetic" (2001). This aesthetic is a combination of violence,

detachment, romanticism, style, and storytelling ability (1). Kelley argues this aesthetic informs and offers a way for understanding the reasons Davis is loved and hated. His detached coolness and violence towards women are a part of the same pimp aesthetic as his romantic and sensual musicianship. Kelley does not claim that this is good or bad; but he does argue that the despicable characteristics of Davis are important and related to his admirable characteristics as a function of the pimp aesthetic. By not asserting Davis' enactment of this pimp aesthetic as good or bad, Kelley opens up the possibility for rethinking masculinity because no single *right* way of doing masculinity has been identified. Making a claim about this representation of masculinity as good or bad would imply the story is either true/correct; or that there is a true/correct way of doing masculinity.

Kelley, Cleage, and Carby all argue that Davis' violent actions towards women and his musical talent are characteristics that are interrelated. *Miles* enables an understanding of Davis extending beyond the public display of his music that includes his private relationships with women. This masculine dominance over women is what Patricia Hill Collins calls hegemonic masculinity. This is a masculinity that hierarchically locates men in dominant positions over women, and has significant impact and importance in non-white racial and ethnic groups because it functions as marker of male power and strength (188-193). This masculinity is defined by authority and oppression over women, and this dominance is representative of control and of being a "real" man (189). In *Miles* this relationship of power over women and coolness as a musician shape the performance of masculinity Davis embodies.

The autobiographical account provides insight into the relationships between Davis' personal life and his music, and the representation of Davis in his autobiography powerfully draws attention to his personal actions and character in his performance of masculinity. Instead of just hearing the cool sounds of Davis' trumpet the autobiography challenges the reader to listen carefully to this story of masculinity. The representation of masculinity in *Miles* is important because it is a story of masculinity that could be viewed as the right way of performing masculinity. However, I argue this story of masculinity works to challenge the way we define what masculinity is and can be in that it is not *the* right way. This is also applicable in thinking about truth in narrative because truth is important in that it impacts what we do. This is not to say that there is only one true story, but instead that it is important to recognize how the truth impacts what we do.

I enter the conversation about *Miles* with an interest in thinking differently about masculinity and the performance of masculinity by Davis. Another important theme in the discussions about masculinity and Davis to consider is his relationship with boxing. Quincy Troupe, co-author of Davis' autobiography, notes that Davis had a presence and an attitude that was like a boxer (10-17). Davis says, "Boxing was and is my heart" (18). Gerald Early notes the importance boxing played in Davis' music particularly his admiration for Sugar Ray Robinson, the cultural relationship between jazz musicians and boxers, and Davis' own training as a boxer (6-7). Early makes the analogy between jazz musicians and boxers clear:

Jazz musicians were like fighters in the sense that they were an itinerant breed; they worked in an arena that spotlighted their individualism and that was a merciless meritocracy; and they were largely an enclosed cult that outsiders found

difficult to penetrate. It was the closest thing—being a boxer or a jazz musician—to being a knight, an urban paladin (8).

Miles Davis was boxer both metaphorically and literally. He literally trained as a boxer, but he was also figuratively boxing in his music by dancing with and challenging the listener to hear music differently. As a musical innovator he was fighting against what was expected.

If Davis is thought of as a musician/boxer, he can also be seen as metaphorically challenging and fighting dominant, white masculinity in his own productions of black masculinity. In thinking about the idea that jazz music challenges the ways in which we listen to music in its different structures, tensions, harmonies, and improvised performances as a way of approaching the performance of Davis in his autobiography. Miles Davis also challenges the reader in the stories he tells about himself to think differently about the ideas he presents. I am particularly interested in addressing the challenges in the story about masculinity that is told in this autobiography as I try to make sense of my own performances as a jazz musician.

I would like to consider Davis' performance of a masculinity that is informed by both his detached coolness and his treatment of women in the context of the motivation or challenge Davis struggles with throughout the story, which is found in his musical aspirations. This is illustrated in the opening chapter of the book as Davis talks about his unending search for a feeling that he experienced as an eighteen year old listening to Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker play:

I've come close to matching the feeling of that night in 1944 in music, when I first heard Diz and Bird, but I've never quite got there. I've gotten close, but not

all the way there. I'm always looking for it, listening and feeling for it, though, trying to always feel it in and through the music I play every day. I still remember when I was just a kid, still wet behind the ears, hanging out with all these great musicians, my idols even until this day. Sucking in everything. Man, it was something (10).

This elusive feeling created in the musical performance is a feeling I too find myself searching for in my music. This is a feeling of possibility: possibility for musical greatness, possibility for identity, and possibility for new ideas. This is why I play.

Farrington notes that in *Miles* there is a certain lack of personal fulfillment shaping the story (377). Davis never finds what he is looking for, but this is the story of a searching for the feeling in the music. This feeling is central to Davis' story, and it is his goal to find this feeling again. When I first asked another musician how to improvise I was told that it is all about a feeling. You play what you feel. Now I turn to *Miles* to better understand what this means. I enter into the masculine jazz culture of Davis' story to learn about the feeling in the music. This is a masculinity of teaching and learning, of creativity and experimentation, of mentors and students.

I see the authority of the older musicians at the jam session as a function of the masculinity of this jazz culture. They are in positions of power because they have experience and knowledge about the feeling I am seeking as a musician, and they encourage me to take the risk of getting on the stage and making mistakes. Theirs is a forceful but not oppressive teaching strategy. In order for me to learn from these teachers, I have to take the risk of getting into the ring and dancing with the music.

*Miles* functions in a similar way. The book is the authority on Davis and Davis is the ultimate teacher, challenging me to look and play for the elusive feeling he himself is searching for. Davis shares his philosophy, “See, if you put a musician in a place where he has to do something different from what he does all the time, then he can do that—but he’s got to think differently in order to do it. He has to use his imagination, be more creative, more innovative; he’s got to take more risks” (220). This challenge to take risks is an invitation to think about masculinity in a way that does not operate as oppressive and against women.

The constant changes and alterations Davis makes in his music and style throughout his story are examples of what it means to search for the feeling. Troupe says Davis was, “always dealing with the present and the future, instead of the past” (44). Being on the stage, in the moment, taking risks is the way to learn. This is a masculinity that encourages learning by doing. Not taking risks is not acceptable, but making mistakes is important. Being played off of the stage is an important part of learning how to improvise and play jazz because getting on stage and making mistakes is part of the learning process. Also, in thinking about the representations of masculinity in *Miles* it is the mistakes that reveal the areas in need of improvement or change.

The next and most difficult challenge in this fight is in regards to Davis’ violent actions towards women. I am haunted by the refrain in Cleage’s essay about Davis in which she repeatedly states:

He is guilty of self-confessed violent crimes against women such that we should break his albums, burn his tapes and scratch up his CDs until he acknowledges and apologizes and agrees to rethink his position on The Woman Question (36).

His actions towards the women in his life are not cool, respectable, or acceptable. They are violent and oppressive. The autobiography draws attention to personal actions that cannot be ignored. These actions are an important element in considering Davis' music and other performances. However, it is not necessary for this masculinity to be in opposition of women; and his oppression of women is definitely not a necessary function of this masculinity. Davis may as an authority on jazz music challenge me to play differently and better; but authority and oppression do not necessarily go hand in hand.

At the heart of *Miles* and the story of masculinity is a question of teaching. The stories of Davis' masculinity, coolness, and musicianship are learning opportunities. It is important to have a fearless attitude when taking risks in music. It is also important to be critical of the lessons we receive from our teachers and the stories we consider to be true. Taking risks in thinking about masculinity or any story or performance that could be read as true is important because what may be thought to be the right way is not always the only way. By getting on stage without full knowledge of the tune or the right way to play, mistakes will be made, but this a way of learning about what can work through doing. Likewise, it is useful to enter into stories without being limited to learning one singular or right way of thinking.

As I listen for a different performance in *Miles*, I am working to open up new and different possibilities for thinking about masculinity. The *writing* of this listening is an important performance, and as Jill Dolan says:

Writing, like performance, is always only an experiment, an audition, always only another place to practice what might be an unreachable goal that's imperative to imagine nonetheless. Writing, like performance, lets me try on, try out,

experiment with another site of anticipation, which is the moment of intersubjective relation between word and eye, between writer and reader, all based on the exchange of empathy, respect, and desire ( 168).

The writing of this attempt to hear new ideas in *Miles* is my own challenge to the ways in which we listen/read/approach stories about masculinity, and ideas about truth in narrative.

The stories in *Miles*, and the lessons that can be learned from these stories are multiple. Miles Davis the trumpet player. Miles Davis the jazz innovator. Miles Davis the cultural icon. Miles Davis the political figure. Miles Davis the masculine ideal. Miles Davis the wife beater. Miles Davis the boxer. These are some of the labels associated with Miles Davis, some of the ways in which his identity is constructed. But looking at construction is not the same as talking about production. I think of Miles Davis the boxer, and see a challenge. In reading his autobiography I have stepped on stage with Miles and I am challenged to think differently about music, masculinity, and my relationship with Miles. He challenges me to look with him for the elusive feeling of possibility produced by music, and to look for better ways of performing masculinity by playing and writing.



## Chapter Five

### *Trumpet Concerto*

Sitting in the practice room, looking in the mirror at myself, trumpet in hand, I am ready to begin practicing. The door is closed and the room is quiet. I like to practice in a space with as few distractions as possible because it allows me to focus more clearly on my playing. I also try to practice the way I will perform because practice and performance so closely mirror each other, so today I will practice while standing. The practice is reflected in the performance and the performance shapes the practice. In practicing for the performance, I am working on *getting it right* and I prepare my body and mind through repetition, discipline, and training.

I'm trying to get the music right, not because I believe there is a singular, right, or correct way to get or play the music, but because I want to improve in my playing. Getting it right does not mean that I will play the music perfectly (or that the music could ever be played perfectly), but it is a way of working towards a *better* performance. On one level, it means playing the right notes and playing in the right style, but more importantly it has to do with improving my ability to play *musically*. Getting it right in practicing music is similar to getting it right in writing. I'm trying to get my ideas right in writing about music performance and practice and the repetition of my ideas in this writing works to demonstrate the same process that happens in practice. With each repetition, the ideas or music develops and grows into new ideas. In this chapter, you the

listener/reader are invited into my practice as I work on getting my music and writing right.

I practice so I will be ready to perform. I practice the trumpet solo for *Pictures at an Exhibition*. I practice the guitar and singing for *I Will Survive*. I work on my improvisation for *Stompin' at the Savoy* and *Four*. And now, I am working on the solo from Johann Nepomuk Hummel's *Trumpet Concerto*. Practice is a way of learning new music and of working on fixing mistakes so the performance will be as close to right as possible. The preparation of practice is also the best way I know to avoid being nervous about making mistakes during a performance because through the repetition of practice I can eliminate many potential mistakes. Practicing doesn't remove all nervousness that comes with performance, but being prepared and knowing that I am prepared gives me some comfort when I move from the privacy of my practice room to the public performance space of the concert hall, bar, or club. The biggest difference between the private and public space is the audience, and the audience is my driving motivation for working to get things right in my performance. I am working to present my audience with well developed musical ideas

My story of practice as preparation and as performance is about the fluidity in which music, story, and truth work to create and communicate meanings among author, text, and reader. This story is for you. This is the chapter I have been practicing for and now you read and bring life to its performance. In the final movement of *Pictures*, Mussorgsky locates the protagonist (composer, performer, or audience member) in the musical narrative of the final picture. The viewer of the painting is implicated and located inside the picture with the layering of the theme from "Promenade" in the final

movements, and it is with this idea in mind that I welcome you as “listener” to “read” my final piece.

Before playing the solo, I will begin my practice session by warming-up. I start by playing a series of long tones which allow me to work on my breathing and tone and to loosen the muscles in and around my lips. Playing sustained pitches requires breath control, muscle control, and a mental concentration. I inhale, focusing on taking a controlled deep breath that fills my lungs. I play the first tone, paying close attention to the way the note starts. How I am attacking the note? Where does my tongue hit the back of my teeth? Am I keeping a consistent flow of air as I play the note? As I play I am listening for and trying to play a consistent and warm tone. I change the muscles around my lips and the flow of air to adjust the tone I am producing. I play the first note and hold it for 8 counts. When I stop playing I pay close attention to how I am ending the note. How is my release? How am I stopping the airflow? Is it too abrupt? I rest for 8 counts before playing another tone. I try to rest as much as I play. Practicing exercises the muscles in and around my lips and rest is just as important as work in this repetitive training. Starting with a foundational exercise like playing long tones requires mental and physical focus.

This focus of mind and body is one I work to maintain throughout the practice session. It is important because both my mind and body are needed to learn how to play well. I need my mind to think about and focus on what and how my body is doing, and I need my body to focus on what and how my mind is doing. After playing the long sustained pitches, I work on a series of repetitive scale patterns. I start in the middle register of my trumpet and work my way chromatically higher and lower from this pitch,

again resting as often as I am playing. As I play the scale patterns I am listening for consistency in my tone. Am I keeping a steady flow of air throughout the pattern? Am I forcing any of the notes? I start having trouble with some of the notes in my upper register, and I am unable to play some of the higher notes. In order to hit these notes, I need to develop a memory for what it feels like to play them. I focus my breathing and air as if I were about to play in the lower register because getting the high notes to sound is all about breathing. I try the scale run again and this time I am successful. I will develop the memory of how it feels to play these higher notes by practicing this routine consistently for the next several days.

Each time I practice I start with this warm-up routine for my practice session because it helps me to organize my thoughts and actions as I develop my feeling for the music I am playing. In practicing, my body is learning how to play and how it feels to play different music. The exercise of practicing then is just as much about knowing and learning how to play a piece of music as it is about knowing and learning how it *feels* to play a piece of music. The repetition and discipline of a routine gives structure to this process of learning, and organizes what my body learns in a way that is consistent so my body can develop a memory for how it feels to play. Consistency in my routine allows me to work on specific aspects of my playing and monitor any changes I may need to make. By repeating and following the same routine, my playing becomes more natural. The feeling of playing becomes embodied, and in the same way that I no longer have to think about how to physically operate the trumpet the feeling of playing the music becomes embodied.

In his phenomenological account of learning to play jazz piano, David Sudnow explains that when he first started taking lessons, he was more concerned with *where* his teacher's hands were going and not *how* they were moving (18). Sudnow knows how to move his hands along the keyboard and so at first he is interested in learning about which notes to play, but his knowledge of the process of *how* to move his hands is never separate from his learning about *where* to move his hands. In my practice session, I do not have to think explicitly about how to play the trumpet because this knowledge has been learned and embodied. In the same way that Sudnow did not need to think about how to move his hands along the keyboard, I do not have to think about which valves I need to press to play different notes on the trumpet. Through the repetition of practice, my body has learned how to incorporate the technology of the trumpet into the practice of playing music.

In trying to learn what his teacher was playing, Sudnow could not understand how it felt to do what was being played. His teacher couldn't explain everything he was doing, and Sudnow had to develop his own "feel" for improvising (28). This feeling for playing is similar to Sudnow knowing how to play the instrument. In practicing I work for this feeling of playing to come as naturally as how it feels for me to play the trumpet. Practicing is a way of learning in and through the body about how it feels to play musically.

I adjust my music stand and open the music for Johann Nepomuk Hummel's *Trumpet Concerto*. Hummel was a pianist and a student of Mozart. He composed several pieces in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and his *Trumpet Concerto* is a common solo piece for classically trained trumpet players because of its technical difficulty and interesting

melody (Rasmussen 3-5). This is a piece I first learned as a senior in high school for a solo competition. I like to practice the piece because it helps me to maintain and work on my technical skills and abilities in playing the trumpet, and because I find its difficulty enjoyable. Working on and developing the ability to play a difficult piece gives me a sense of accomplishment when I finally learn and am able to play the piece.

I would like to first consider my relationship to this piece of music as Elisabeth Le Guin does in thinking about her relationship as performer to the music of the Italian cellist and composer Luigi Boccherini. She argues that in her performance of the music of Boccherini she has developed a relationship with the composer, and as a performer she has developed a “carnal” or embodied knowledge of the composer’s ideas (14). I am interested in understanding and making sense of what it means to perform or engage with the written work of another person because it is by engaging with a piece of music or with a written text that the ideas of the composer are put into practice. This embodiment of ideas is important for thinking about truth in the stories we engage with because meanings are made through this physical embodiment and practice.

Le Guin explains her understanding of her physical relationship with Boccherini as reciprocal and living:

My role constitutes itself as follows: as living performer of Boccherini’s sonata, a work which he wrote for himself to play, I am aware of acting the connection between parts of someone who cannot be here in the flesh. I have become not just his hands, but his binding agent, the continuity, the consciousness; it is only a step over from the work of maintaining my own person as some kind of unitary thing, the necessary daily fiction of establishing and keeping a hold on identity (24).

In the performance of a composition, the composer and his ideas are brought to life because they are physically embodied by the performer, and it is this embodiment of the work that constitutes a real or true relationship between composer and performer. The reality of this relationship exists in the doing or performing of the music, just as identities are created in and by doing. The story of the relationship between composer and performer is also a way of understanding how truth in narrative is performed and embodied. The truth or reality of the ideas in these musical pieces is realized by practicing and putting into practice the composition. Likewise, in narrative, the truth is put into practice by being read as *true*. But what seems more important to me than the ideas of the composer, is the relationship that comes to exist between the performer and composer and the performance that this relationship enables.

I enter into my relationship with Hummel by playing his *Trumpet Concerto*. I bring to life his musical ideas and I come to know his ideas through my practice of the piece. I am working on the second movement which is the slowest movement of the three in the solo. It is also less technically difficult than the other two movements. For me, the challenge in this section is learning how to expressively develop the phrases because I am trying to play as musically as possible. I first try to play the song as an expression of sadness, and then of loss, and then of love, and all of these feelings fit the music for me. This subjective element of interpreting this movement leads me to think that getting this section right is not about me understanding what emotion or feeling Hummel intended for me to play. There is not one right way to interpret this music. Rather this is about learning how to be expressive in playing the music. For me the truth or reality of this story of being expressive is not that expressiveness is directly

representative of a single feeling or emotion, but that it is a way of expressing many feelings and emotions. It is an opportunity for me to apply my own subjectivity to the written music, and this can happen in different ways each I time I play the piece.

Similarly, in narrative, the truth is not about singular, correct, or right ideas in a story. Rather, truth functions as a story that structures the way we think about ideas in narratives. For Le Guin, the relationship she enacts with Boccherini is real, and this truth is what enables her to make sense of her playing as a physical embodiment of the composer's ideas. For me, Hummel's *Trumpet Concerto* is a story about learning to play both technically and expressively challenging music. Likewise, Mussorgsky's *Pictures* works to structure my ideas about different aspects of music performance. For me, the truth of the story about *Pictures* is not necessarily in its representations of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia; instead it is about organizing different thoughts and images in one place. My relationship to and with the composer is brought to life as my interpretations of their work creates new ways of thinking about our ideas.

The story of the relationship between practice and the body is about how learning happens in the mind and body. There is an idea or a passage in a piece of music that can be learned or understood. There is also a feeling or physical action of the idea that the body learns and understands how it feels to play. The mind and body work together to put these ideas into practice. This is important for thinking about truth in narrative because in this story ideas are developed in and by the reader and the author. If truth works to structure the ideas in a narrative and ideas in stories are learned and embodied, then truth has an impact not only on the way we think about things but on how we do and



feel things. So, truth not only shapes the stories we live and tell, but it also shapes the embodied ways in which we know and perform these stories.

In preparing the music, I am also preparing my body for performance. In addition to practicing the physical act of playing my instrument, this also means thinking about the physical ways in which I practice. For example, it is important for me to stand while practicing for a performance that will be given while standing because practicing is a way teaching and learning located in the body. In practice I return to my ideas about ontoepistemological ways of learning in and thinking about music. Ontoepistemology puts knowing and being in connection, and argues that we come to knowledge through the mind *and* the body. The mind and body are not separate, but instead are inextricably connected through practice and performance. Susan Cusick argues that “the practices of bodies as well as the practices of minds” are important in thinking about how performing bodies work to create and enact meanings, especially in music performance (17). I approach music performance as an embodied practice, as “a radically material condition of human being that necessarily entails both the body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity in an *irreducible ensemble*” (Sobchack 4). As I watch myself in the mirror and listen to my playing; I constantly monitor and make adjustments to match my ideas about playing musically. Like playing in an ensemble with other musicians, my mind and body have to work together in order to perform the music.

Technology also works with the mind and body in my practice. I practice with and on the technologies I use in music performance. The trumpet and the guitar are instruments—technologies—that shape the way I use my body in practice and performance. As a musician, the trumpet is my primary instrument, and it is the musical

technology with which my body is most familiar. Similarly, the pen is the technology my body is most familiar with in writing (although the computer keyboard is a close second), and thinking about the relationship between my body and technologies of writing is where I connect my story of practicing music to a story of writing as practice.

The relationship between writing and the body is also similar to the performance of music in the use of technologies such as musical instruments or writing instruments such as the pen or the keyboard. Sobchack recognizes writing as a thing and as an activity, but she also draws attention to the impact of the technology we use when writing. Writing is an embodied process, but there is also a relationship between the body and technologies. She explains:

This is not to say that we all have the same experience of the use of a particular writing instrument, nor is it to say that our experience of a particular writing instrument is constant and may not vary with our task or our mood, nor is it to deny that our valuation of writing instruments and practices is always constituted in history and culture. It is to say, however, that our carnal use of particular and material writing instruments informs and contributes to the structure of our thought and its concrete expression (111).

Technologies work with the body as the body engages in practice. The pen or the computer keyboard helps to shape and develop my ideas just as the body does. For Sobchack, these technologies are not separate from, but are instead a part of the experience of the body because they also work to shape ideas and meanings.

I bring the trumpet to my lips, breathe, push down the first valve and then play the opening note for the second movement of the concerto. The dynamic marking on the

page is for me to play the note softly, and so I adjust my airflow to sustain the pitch on the instrument as softly as possible. I play through the first few lines of music and then rest. I will repeat these lines of music again, but this next time I try to start the note as softly as possible instead of adjusting my volume after I've begun playing. Not only is my practice an embodied process of making music that happens with mind and body, but it also happens with the technology that is my trumpet. The instrument works with my mind and my body in the process of creating musical ideas. Like my mind and body, the trumpet works to enable and constrain certain ideas. For example, I can produce sounds with the trumpet that are not physically possible with just my body, and I am also limited in what I can create by the physical limitations of the trumpet. I cannot, for example, adjust the volume on my trumpet like the controls on a radio, it is something I have to work at and the trumpet works to train and teach my body how to play in the way I want.

The trumpet also works with my mind in that it enables a certain way of thinking about music for me. My thinking about music with the trumpet is connected to what I physically can and cannot do on the horn, but it is also a process of learning about the music through playing. Ideas begin to make sense for me as I play them. I am working on a particularly difficult phrase with a challenging interval, a jump from a high note to a low note, in the concerto. I play the phrase and first identify the notes that I am having trouble playing. I play these two notes independent from the phrase, and then I sing them. I then play the entire phrase again, and this time I am able to play both of the notes but they still are not blending in with the rest of the phrase. I put my trumpet down and sing the phrase so I can hear how the notes will flow together. I bring my trumpet back

up to my lips and play the phrase again. This time the notes blend with the phrase better, but I am still not satisfied with how it sounds.

As I practice this phrase over and over, my body learns how it feels to play the interval with the horn, and as I adjust my physical approach to the passage, I am able to adjust my way of thinking about the passage and can move from thinking about what I need to do to play the notes to thinking about playing the notes expressively. In trying to break this process down I am attempting to show the connection between mind, body, and technology in my practicing. However, the process happens in such a fluid way that breaking out the individual components becomes difficult, if not impossible.

Working through this passage in the music is similar to the way in which writing helps me to organize and make sense of my thoughts. The technology I am using is connected to my thought process in such a way that it becomes almost taken for granted. The keyboard or the pen helps me to shape my ideas, but it also works to shape my ideas. I am able to write down my ideas and the writing technology enables me to then work with these ideas as they appear on the page. Just as repeatedly working on the interval enables me to think about the musical phrase, writing my ideas allows me the opportunity to think through my ideas in ways not possible without the technology. All of this is to say that the process of practicing, be it writing or music happens in a complex relationship among body, mind, and technology.

Writing, like practicing music, is a story about getting things right. It's important for me to get things right because I want my ideas to be right. For me, being right has to do with being good, and even though I may never reach a point or a moment when my ideas are right, this is my goal in writing and playing. I want to have and share good

ideas with you. Practice is rehearsal and preparation but practice is also a performance. Just as I prepare by practicing trumpet for a performance, I will edit what I have prepared for the final draft or final performance, and you will read the result of my practice just as a listening audience will hear the result of my practicing music. By writing about practice, I want to put into practice my ideas about the body and embodied ways of coming to know and learn about the story of getting things right.

The relationship between practice and the body can also be found in the practice of writing. Writing works like practicing music in that it is a way of learning by thinking and doing. In writing, my ideas are both thought about and physically written down. The act of physically writing my ideas is like physically playing the notes on the trumpet. As I hear the notes or see the words I think about what I am doing and adjust and make changes, but I cannot separate the thinking from the doing or the doing from the thinking. The practice of writing is an embodied process of developing and shaping my ideas. These ideas then become available for you, the reader, and you can engage with my ideas in the embodied process of reading.

My story of writing is also a story of trying to get my ideas right. Writing is where I practice my ideas before I put them into practice. I am trying to perfect my thoughts so that you will read and be able to engage with my ideas. The “final” performance or final draft is reflective of my practice. In practicing I edit, draw arrows indicating new locations of words, scratch out words, add commas, parenthesis, and constantly question my ability to spell. Getting it right is the focus of this writing practice. Writing, like practice, is a way for the body and mind to develop and get ideas

right. My ideas and thoughts make more sense to me in ink and it is these ideas that you will then see and have the opportunity to consider.

The story of getting things right is also a story about truth in narratives. Getting things right suggests that there is a right way for things to be. In music there are right ways to play, right ways to practice, and right ways to perform. These right or correct ways of doing things are a kind of true way of doing. But that there are right ways of doing is suggestive of a larger story or narrative, a story about truth being the right way. In this story, truth and getting it right become synonymous; however, because there are multiple right ways of doing there are also multiple truths. This story of getting things right, like the story of truth as the right way, directs the way in which we practice and perform, but it also directs our expectations about the stories we live and tell. I want to recognize this story of truth and getting things right because of the impact the story has on what we do. This is not to say that there is no truth, but because truth works in complex ways to shape the way we practice and perform, it is important to consider how truth and getting it right work to shape the ways we practice.

The idea of truth in narrative works in a similar way as technology. Just as the technology shapes and structures the practice of writing or music, the truth shapes and structures narratives. For example, truth shapes and structures my story of practice as I try to get things right. If I understand truth as being a singular right way of doing things, then this means there is one right way for me to get the music. If I understand truth as a fluid and complex way of structuring my story of practice, then other possibilities for what it means to get things right become available. Like technology, the function of truth can be easily taken for granted, but it also can make new stories possible. By rethinking

my story of truth as singular to a story of truth as fluid and complex I enable new and multiple possibilities for getting things right.

After finishing my work on the second movement for today, I play a few more long tones to warm-down. I am ready to present the work of my practice in performance for a listening audience. With a listener the practice becomes a performance, but the performance is not necessarily the end of my practice. In fact, this is just another step in my process of learning to get things right because in the performance I will come to realize how my ideas work when they are put into practice. Getting things right is about developing creating the possibilities for new ideas. Writing the story of practice in music is also a way for me to work on new ideas. New ideas about truth, new ideas about writing, and new ideas about the use of music as a way of understanding how the body and mind work with technologies to perform the stories we live and tell.

Practicing my ideas about music performance in the structure of *Pictures* has enabled me to tell multiple and different stories about music in one organized story. This structure has enabled a wide range of stories and ideas about the relationships between music, performer, and audience, and it has not necessarily enabled me to tell these stories in great depth. Just as each picture in an art exhibition could be considered by itself, each of my stories could be considered individually, but by putting them together in one “exhibition” I have presented the reader with several opportunities for connecting with my ideas and developing their own ideas about music performance.

By specifically considering the complex relationship between listener and performer in my experiences of performing and listening to “I Will Survive” I show the relationship between music and performer and listener/audience as connected. This is a

story about the necessity of the audience in the performance of music and the telling of stories. Just as you, the reader, are necessary for the telling of my story, the listener is necessary for the performance of music. In thinking about music performance the ideas and stories presented in a performance are just as much about the audience as they are about the music and the performer. By refusing to separate these three entities from each other, I put into practice a story of music performance that is always changing and is never completely my own.

In thinking about the learning and teaching of jazz music and masculinity in the jazz culture I am practicing ideas about what music is and what it means to get music right. My story of learning music as a classically trained musician is grounded in lessons about the right way of playing, but I have also been pushed to think beyond playing correctly. In learning to play jazz in particular, the focus shifts from playing correct notes to getting the *feeling* right. There is no answer or instruction as to how to get it right because getting it right is a way of challenging and pushing yourself to get it better. My reading of the performance of masculinity in *Miles* is a story of me pushing myself to perform masculinity in ways that are better than the masculinity of Miles Davis. The stories of getting it right in learning to play jazz music and about masculinity in *Miles* are stories about practicing new possibilities.

By practicing as if there is a right way to get music, I'm training myself to get better. Through the discipline of repetition I make ideas familiar to my body and my mind so that I can expand upon these practices. When musical ideas or routines become familiar, I can begin to push these ideas in new ways to create new possibilities for different musical ideas. This creation of new possibilities and new ideas is what getting it



right is about for me. Similarly, truth in narrative works to structure and organize our stories. The truth works in complex relationships among story, reader, and author. And the truth becomes the right or correct way, but when it becomes familiar we can begin to practice new ways of thinking about and telling our stories. Getting it right in music or in narrative is not about getting stuck in one way of doing or thinking, rather it is about creating possibilities for doing and thinking differently and better.

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