Technology and Jazz Education in High Gear:
An interview with Bart Marantz & Bob Sinicrope

By John Kuzmich, Jr.

J azz education is uniquely positioned to take advantage of a wave of technological innovations due to small ensemble size and the improvisational creativity at its core. Jazz directors are innovators at heart, and are often swift to incorporate technology that meets the unique demands of their students.

To explore the impact of technology on jazz scholarship, I recently spoke with two model educators. Bart Marantz has been the studies director at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas, Texas for 29 years and Bob Sinicrope has taught at Milton Academy in Milton, Massachusetts for 38 years. Both have been awarded the John La-

Bob Sinicrope

Porta Jazz Educator of the Year Award, the most distinguished national honor for a jazz teacher created by the Berklee College of Music in association first with IAJE and now with the Jazz Educators Network (JEN). Their performances at major national and international jazz festivals and conferences are significant and frequent. Many of their alumni have gone on to the professional ranks, and both use technology to help guide their jazz programs towards musical excellence.

John Kuzmich: How did you initially incorporate technology into your program?

Bart: About 15 years ago, I started using the *ProTools* system. I was using a PalmPilot and other related technology to help me get through the very fast pace of our Magnet curriculum. But earlier than *ProTools*, we were using the MIDI Ensemble electric keyboards with patches, MiniMoogs, digital drums, and digital violins, as well as turntables with scratch effects. So the technology was used with those ensembles in the early and mid-'80s right up to today.

I remember one piece that was composed and performed on a very

Bart Marantz

early Mac at IAJE incorporating technology with our acoustic Jazz Combo I ensemble. Because we were so close to University of North Texas (UNT), we were influenced by Dan Haerle's arrangements and the UNT Zebra Ensemble, a technology-based group. But the uniqueness of our program was that the students were writing their own compositions and entering into competitions.

Bob: I had zero music technology training in college. Having bachelor's and master's degrees in math, I was interested in and enjoyed technology to the extent that it could help my students learn to improvise and play in

small jazz groups. Years ago I would make my own play-alongs playing piano onto a cassette tape. Of course, I also used Jamey Aebersold play-alongs. I started using *Finale* in the early 1990s and still use it daily. As technology grew more complex, I took summer courses and attended workshops to learn.

We started making recordings of concerts for parents and students. I began recording their parts on cassette tapes, then mini-discs, then CDs and now on websites, so they can hear themselves. We don't have a feeder system, so when students enter the program, their performance chops may not be developed (especially guitar players, since they don't read well), so I create their parts in *Finale* and save them as audio files, so the students can hear the pitches and rhythms.

JK: What technology applications do you use today?

Bob: We use *Finale, SmartMusic, Transcribe!* (a fabulous program)*, NotePad, Band-in-a-Box, iTunes, GarageBand, Audacity, Excel, FileMaker Pro,* and *PowerPoint.*

Finale became important to me in the early '90s by creating parts for instruments such as cellos, violin, flute, harmonics, and so on. The nice thing about *Finale* is that it is easy to change keys. I can isolate the parts to make sure the students can understand their parts and practice them in *SmartMusic*. And then *SmartMusic* can assess the individual parts for each student within an ensemble chart, which is very important. I create play-alongs, as well, although they don't sound as authentic as Jamey's play-alongs, but the exercises I create serve a purpose.

My advanced jazz students do an exam transcription project in January using *Transcribe*! and *Finale NotePad*. They choose a jazz solo on their instrument that inspires them.

I have final approval and if I nix their proposal it is usually because I feel they have chosen something too difficult. The goal is to perform 60 seconds of the solo, without reading it, in front of the class at 50 percent, 70 percent, 85 percent, 100 percent, and possibly 110 percent. They play this with the original recording using *Transcribe!* software. They also have to write out 30 seconds of the solo using software to slow down, loop, mark beats and measures on the computer screen, and use a music keyboard reference. Pianists have to notate 15 seconds of left-hand comping, as well. It is a challenging and lengthy process. The students have several months with this and it is remarkably helpful. They learn not only pitches and rhythms, but also phrasing, tone articulation, and style.

I mostly teach from the original recordings. I can't find better examples of how tunes should sound than Miles Davis or Sonny Rollins versions. So when we play many standards such as "Bye, Bye Blackbird," or "Autumn Leaves," we use the classic recordings and role model those. A recent concert had two versions of "Autumn Leaves"

emulating the Chet Baker and the Miles Davies/Cannonball Adderley renditions, respectively.

Bart: We use *Finale, Sibelius,* and *ProTools, Reason* and *Logic* as well as *MS Word, Photoshop, InDesign* and in past years a number of theory based software program for the classroom.

For my Music Business class, we use *Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, MS Word, Adobe InDesign, Quicken, Adobe Acrobat, MS Excel* and net browsers. Another computer lab photo has kids doing compositions in *Sibelius* and *Finale*. There is a technology class in that same Lab using *Logic* and *ProTools* for MIDI writing and compositions as well. The "Sound and Recording Class" uses *ProTools* as the heart of the course. We do recordings, and then mix and master on-going projects throughout the year.

Some students have *ProTools* set ups at their homes and record with their friends. Two have parents who are in the recording business, so they have hands-on opportunities and have become assistants in the classroom during recording projects. Some of our kids

have *Finale* or *Sibelius* and hand their compositions in to us written, ready to go to the publisher. This level of finished product is expected at most of the colleges, universities and conservatories that our students are preparing to go to.

Bob: We only have a few computers in our practice rooms, so most of the students purchase *SmartMusic* and/or *Transcribe!* and *NotePad*. I give them homework based on the tunes or concepts we're studying. With my younger students, I create *SmartMusic* exercises

> "The technology allows 13 and 14-year-old kids to take their place in the music much earlier than we would have imagined just 10 years ago."

that assess the melody of tunes we're playing. I will create a score in *Finale* with more than one horn and students can practice their part of the chart with the other parts.

My advanced students can slow down an original recording that's challenging in *Transcribe!* I might also create a *Finale* chart for them to practice with. Learning to play tunes and/or solos at 50 percent speed is very helpful.

JK: How do you approach recording technology in your respective programs?

Bart: *ProTools* is the heart of the Sound and Recording class and is used on campus for recording our students for audition opportunities, including scholarship auditions for college entrance, summer study, and consideration for jazz opportunities like the Vail Jazz Workshop, the Brubeck Summer Jazz Colony, and the Monterey Jazz Festival, along with many others.

Students do recording projects in the Sound and Recording class. I do the major stuff for auditions and entrance applications always trying to include the student musician being recorded on the final mix. We have a part-time staff member because of the administrative support we now enjoy. Our principal and her administrative team get it!

Bob: I use *Audacity*, which is great, especially since it is freeware, and *GarageBand*, which comes free with the Apple OS.

I usually record our concerts myself, and we do our own recordings in-house. Occasionally, we go to an alumni-owned recording studio, but most of our recordings are done with portable recorders. I often record my students in class, especially when we are nearing a performance. I post their recordings on the class website. I edit them with *Audacity,* so they don't have to listen to my jokes or other chatter. I record concerts with both hardware and software. I'm

like NASA in that I record a backup of the performances. I use a Marantz CD recorder, but I also record with *Garage-Band*. Believe it or not, the iPod works great with the Belkin TuneTalk microphone accessory. I just use the *Voice Memos* app. Within an hour after their performance, students can go on the Internet and listen to the concert. We can also make CDs with photos and liner notes directly printed on the CD with our inkjet printer in our room.

JK: What other materials do you plug into your curriculum?

Bart: I use play-alongs in my improvisation class as a base to play and teach from. That class is all about theory, modes, voice leading, jazz keyboard, performing improvisation, and jazz history. We don't even play a tune until the second six weeks, because it is all about intellectually understanding what we are doing and applying that to what we have listened to. Trying to conceive what voice leading is at

15 years of age – going from one key to another in time with seamless key changes – is very difficult to understand, much less accomplish. Digital CDs have a pristine sound and there is software like *The Amazing Slow Downer* that help you transcribe at your own speed. The technology is just off the charts: it allows 13 and 14-year-old kids to take their place in the music much earlier than we would have imagined just 10 years ago.

We use Aebersold's CD technology. I have also written the course booklet for the class covering the basics of ii V7 I playing and also include basic jazz keyboard materials for the non-pianist. This is the course in booklet form, which is used all year as a visual in the classroom.

Bob: My advanced courses are totally driven by performance. Every fall, we have a theme for our performing groups, such as Art Blakely. Next fall, we are doing Afro-Cuban music. We have done jazz recordings of 1959
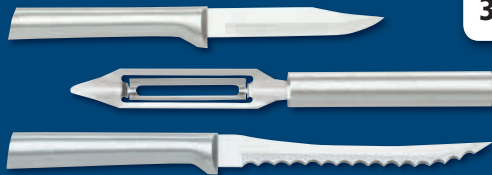
and performed the music of Miles Davis, Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, and Clifford Brown. Students take tunes off the recordings by ear. That's where *Transcribe!* is so helpful in my jazz program.

JK: Building a strong jazz program has it challenges. What are your thoughts and experiences?

Bart: A lot of colleges and high schools don't have the financial support to buy software and hardware. When I was given equipment, it was because someone did us a favor. Donations are now how it usually happens. The school system doesn't usually initiate much for our jazz studies program. I have a room right now that has $35,000 in amplifiers, keyboards that are 20-25 years old, and every one of them has some kind of problem. It is very expensive to keep current. I have learned to use band-aids and ask our students to bring their personal gear to gigs and concert performances.

Our stuff gets used to death with concerts, gigs, and rehearsals and, well,

you know the daily drill; that's the reason we need new equipment. It is sad because there isn't any system in place to get us new – and very needed – amps, keyboards, and sound support. One of my priorities right now is to somehow getting new equipment for our jazz and commercial music program.

In the early days, we were a desegregation school. We sometimes had unusually small classes with four students per class during my first seven years. That was awesome – it was incredible to be able to concentrate on the individual. My Theory class right now has 31 students and only 16 chairs! They sit on the floor, and it is what it is. To me, it is all about attitude: I'm having more fun with 31 students now than ever in my 30 years at Booker T. Washington HSPVA.

Bob: Our school is very fortunate compared to public schools about purchasing and maintaining equipment and materials. We don't have a lot of music computers or hardware, but our administration supports us with software and a lot of leeway. For example, recently I completed an online improvisation course with Gary Burton that our school supported. Ten years ago, Milton Academy supported me to take a week-long computer course on *Excel*, *PowerPoint*, et cetera. The outgrowth of this course was a fantastic jazz bass history that I've developed and presented all over the world. It has video and audio, photos, transcribed solos and I've presented at the International Society of Bassists San Francisco conference, at several colleges throughout the country, for Jamey Aebersold workshops, Berklee College of Music, and in South Africa and London.

Closing Comments

Bart Marantz and Bob Sinicrope are examples of exciting, creative music educators who have not let themselves get left behind in the past. They recognize their students' potential and how technology can help lift their programs to greater heights of achievement. Keeping up with technology innovations has enhanced the quality of their instruction and elevated student output to the point where they are now rivaling many college level jazz programs. Technology helps them teach the creativity and excellence found in jazz analysis, performance nuances, style and history, composition, and improvisation. Their students and alumni are richer for this experience. Kudos to Bart and Bob for being the fresh and innovative master teachers they have become. In the web supplement for this article, found at www.kuzmich.com/SBO0612.html, you can get a closer look at why Bart and Bob are model music educators who have created an admirable legacy.

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