Ruminations

of a Music Presenter

by Prentice "Pete" Douglas, Founder
Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society

For those in the music world, my comments may be obvious, and to others, controversial. We welcome an email from the public in general. info@bachddsoc.org.

Over the years, I've come to realize that . . .

1. Before Rock, the cool audiences of Jazz tended to listen to the music in small clubs following the Swinging dance era of the 30's and 40's.
2. Listening to contemporary Jazz does not preclude a joyful response, especially in small clubs.
3. You don't have to have attended college to enjoy the listening music of Classical music and Jazz.
4. No sound system, no matter how sophisticated can compensate for bad mixing from people with little knowledge or ear for the music being presented.
5. Electrically produced sound does not replace the subtlety and dynamics of acoustic instruments. However, electric music at its best can create new ambient sounds.
6. A well-behaved audience member – who does not snap their fingers or nod their heads in time to the music – is not really at rest; they're performing a kind of work: the silent, internal work of muscular inhibition. (quote, Barbara Ehrenreich from book "Dancing in the Streets."
7. Hanging out around live music is not a waste of time, as one might have a serendipitous experience.
8. One does not need to be a music student to appreciate more sophisticated music. Great talent will communicate their musical language.
9. A good music venue, its characteristics and ambiance, may often be as important to the music performance as the musicians performing in it.
10. There is little Jazz effort left today in most so-called Jazz festivals. The expenses of promoting a festival with sufficient crowds require the music to have a more popular appeal.
11. People's taste in music is extremely varied depending on their need for collective or individual response.
12. Music plays many roles in society. It can be ceremonial, spiritual, joyful and danceable. It would be well if more people understood what to expect or how to react. Do we sit quietly, stand, dance, or just physically shake and shout?
13. No matter how complex the music or improvisational its content, it is not a Jazz effort if it doesn't Swing.
14. New large performance halls being built today may be fine for musicals and orchestras, but are they including small comfortable rooms for a personal experience with a certain music.
15. There are no older styles of Jazz, as all styles are open to interpretation by improvisational, creative talent.
16. Jazz is somewhat past creating new styles in the music, yet young emerging players with their superior technique can bring new elements to the music.

17. Though artistry and musicianship is important in a Jazz performance, the performers should not forsake joy, enthusiasm and freedom to make mistakes in their efforts. It's not just programmed music.

18. Artistry is a subjective thing to describe, but you are usually certain when you witness it. (quote, drummer Jeff Tain Watts)

19. Swing is more than just keeping a certain beat.

20. The best Jazz is art and entertainment going on at the same time.

21. Most people don't know the difference between music for entertainment and listening music that expresses the deeper emotions of mankind.

22. Recorded music can seldom replace the live experience; live music being a visual as well as an audible experience

23. Popular audiences prefer a vocalist with the music to verbalize their feelings.

24. There is no bad audience – only an audience seldom in attendance.

25. Real artists can take the most familiar music to another level of experience.

26. Most people are wary of attending a music venue for the first time unless brought by friends -- word of mouth or super-marketing is necessary.

27. Most Americans do not grow in their interest in music beyond the music of their formative years.

28. Pop musicians often limit their current songs to a three-note melody with few or no chord changes.

29. The one universal truth that applies to all mankind, "Everybody wants to be in show business."

30. Jazz is not dead, only the present cultural conditions that support it.

31. Quality by definition is in limited supply, especially in the performing arts.

32. A good intimate venue pulls one right into the music, whether they intend to be or not.

33. "Great art is thinking clearly about mixed feelings." (quote by poet, Auden)

34. Live music is ecologically friendly. It engages only the mind and emotions, using little earthly materials (except for the auto to get there.)

35. All music forms and styles arose out of a certain culture, and current efforts to fuse different music forms are not necessarily successful.

36. Youth today appear very eclectic in their taste in popular music, seemingly unable to create sounds reflecting their own generation.

37. If one is seeking an audience and recognition from major media, don't do it in the 'burbs, aka, Half Moon Bay.

38. Most people will not attend a live music program that does not include their generation.

39. Older Jazz audiences feel the best of the music ended with their generation, often not seeking emerging young players with a different take on the music.

40. There has been a dumbing down of American experience and taste in music; what with Punk Rock for pre-teens, Rock limited to three or less chord changes, and Ghetto Rap limited to one beat.

41. Jazz is essentially an instrumental music, as is Classical, leaving the audience to interpret their feelings about what's being played.

42. Classical musicians in an informal setting may physically act out their performance and have more verbal rapport with audiences than Jazz musicians.

43. Music is a fundamental part of the human experience, reflecting individual feelings and the culture to which it belongs – it's not just a commercial product for entertainment.

44. Many people do not realize they are emotionally ready for a more enriched music experience – if they were ever to give it a chance.

45. No other medium can so transport one into the atmosphere and feelings of a foreign culture.

46. To paraphrase writer William James, "The possible advantage of a college education is the ability to recognize a good man when you meet one." This might describe the role of presenters of the performing arts.

47. A good music presenter or promoter would benefit from a liberal education. We have enough techies and engineers listening to the current mediocre Pop tunes at their workstations.

48. The finest musicians are usually generous with their talent, not just putting a price on it.

49. Only in Hollywood would they call music a "product".

50. Good music management and bookers try to have a better knowledge of presenters -- their facilities, philosophy and support for the music in question.

51. The business of Jazz has been late in appreciating the value of a small community, non-profit presentations of the music.

52. Jazz has been used to market many products. The only thing it can't sell is itself. So, Jazz means whatever we want it to mean.

53. Jazz evolved out of the early part of the 20th Century when with much less population, the US society stressed more personal freedom, both individual and economic.

54. Rock music is about physically rocking, inseparable from free form, beat driven motion. (quote, Barbara Ehrenreich from the book "Dancing in the Streets.")

55. Audiences attending a Jazz program may often bring limited experience to the music. However pro talent who have found their voice, will move people emotionally and appeal to feelings they didn't know they had.

56. The wheelers and dealers in the music business know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

57. Praising a music Venue may garner some attention, but not from those who never experienced a program there.

58. At a recent Pop festival in San Francisco, Joel Selvin, Chronicle music writer, was amazed by reverential audiences – "they don't dance."

59. Most live music programs are essentially a social affair – music being the focus, but not necessarily the primary reason for the gathering.

60. With more sophisticated sound equipment, most people want a bigger sound presence, even while listening to acoustic instruments.

61. Quality Alternative music, even though not currently popular or in fashion, is still performed in many small places not known to the general public or media.

62. Corporate (junk music) continues to drown out qualities of musicianship and creativity in the current music scene.

63. Louie Armstrong was more than just an early Jazz musician. He liberated the time in music, influencing all subsequent American music.

64. .Far too many bands using plug-in instruments do not mix the music well.

65. Jazz Music is now a World music, and will continue much like Classical Chamber music has over the past three centuries.

66. Technology has made available a confusing, superfluous amount of music, while lessening the former community around it.

67. In a democracy people feel their taste in music is a good as anyone's, discouraging intelligence and creativity in the arts.

68. To quote Black Panther, Eldridge Cleaver, "White rock fans of the 60's were simply trying to reclaim their bodies again after generations of an alienated and disembodied existence. They were swinging, gyrating and shaking their asses like petrified zombies trying to regain the warmth of life – to rekindle their dead limbs, cold asses and the stiff mechanical disused joints, with a spark of life."

69. For centuries, the elite bourgeois of Europe expected audiences to be still and seated while listening to the Music. However, their early music

was often festive, with the audiences drinking and moving about, albeit in smaller crowds.

70. Most Afro-Americans want Blues or Soul music they can hear clearly but clap, move and respond to. If Jazz loses its more informal way of listening to it, then it might just become an exercise in "New and Unusual Music."

71. Though Classical chamber music requires more quiet attention, it too, in an informal setting, can bring an intense response and standing ovations from audiences (who no longer can inhibit their physical, emotional response.)

72. Jazz is not ordinarily a concert music. It's a participatory music, allowing an audience to physically or verbally react to the proceedings or Swing dance to older more popular forms of the Music.

73. The Swing era of popular and Jazz music was the Golden Age of Jazz when the players, critics and audiences all agreed on what was good Jazz and who was performing it.

74. People have a poor historical sense of American music over the past 100 years. Besides the music itself, the social history of its development is a fascinating story.

75. Most people hear only recorded music, not usually attending live music programs.

76. The age of frequent festivals, including Jazz, are often distracting people from the best musical efforts and from a more personal connection with the artist.

77. "Institutions [jazz festivals] have taken over and re-tailored Jazz into a malleable craft and fixed repertory." (Gary Giddins' book, Visions of Jazz).

78. Both the casual or experienced Classical audience will clap between movements if so moved.

79. Music is not well served when purchased by food & beverage managers.

80. A real Jazz vocalist is part of the instrumental ensemble.

81. For those who want company, "build a beach house, and they will come."

82. Technology (iPods) is a knack of so arranging the music that we don't experience it.

83. The business of Jazz is both amateurish and dysfunctional, not usually able to promote it as either an art or entertainment.

84. Though economically difficult, a good listening venue should have no more than 300 seating capacity and will need a subsidy over and above ticket sales.

85. Most venues are partially supported by drink and food sales that often are a distraction from the Music. As for the Bach, our subsidy was renting the facilities for receptions, etc. for over 35 years.

86. Presenters are often the grunts of the music world, trying to satisfy bookers, musicians, audiences and creditors—if not schlepping equipment around or cleaning up after the program.

87. Flash Bulletin – Nordstrom is discontinuing live piano music in their stores, claiming customers prefer canned music. What's lost, claims the music agency, is the ambiance with human presence and touch.

88. No matter how corrupt, greedy and heartless our government or corporations become, "the music will still be wonderful."

89. The only proof one might need for the existence of God is music.

90. Adolescents need Pop music to express their frustrations and lack of control.

91. Most venues are partially supported by drink and food sales that are often a distraction from the music, such as outdoor parks and festivals.

92. Science and the Arts are not usually compatible, the musical arts being too subjective for science to describe.

93. Today without government and corporate sponsorship, there would be no festivals. The days of individually owned clubs or mom and pop stores in entertainment are almost gone.

94. Music at its best has become our secular religion.

95. Only affluent people can afford serious talent in their spacious homes. (The Douglas Beach House being the exception.)

96. Respectability now accorded Jazz will eventually bore future audiences.

97. Jazz musicians in a more formal concert are usually not free to be more expressive or improvisational in their playing.

98. Presenting a Jazz program as a 1 1/2 hour show can often be tiring for both audiences and musicians. Two shorter sets give everybody a chance to relax and reorient their feeling for further listening.

99. Good dancers care about musical content, not just moving to the rhythm.

100. Those too restless to listen to the music should learn to dance. It's a serious way to participate with the music.

101. Professional dancing has discouraged amateur, social dancing that was a part of America's past. We are now largely spectators of our popular entertainment.

102. In America, most white men can't dance, but they can hold a mortgage.

103. DJ's and their recordings did create a new wave of dancing in the 70's. However, we're back to being a spectator of it on TV.

104. "When I play Jazz at the Bach I give you a music program. When I do a festival, I give them a show." (extended melody lines with a funk dance beat.) Quote: Tenorman, Ernie Watts

105. The electric bass has become the dominant sound in popular music, including Jazz, often drowning out other musical qualities in the performance. (We threaten to shoot every third bass player that turns up the amps.)

106. Those who feel they don't like Jazz are those who seldom, if ever, listen to it – or even realize they're hearing it on various media programs.

107. The Art of Jazz may be in trouble if it has to depend on vocalists, aka Diana Krall or Nora Jones.

108. Smooth Jazz is not Jazz. It is our current popular instrumental music.

109. Foreign students from Europe appear more knowledgeable about music in general.

110. Be-Bop is still the Classical Music of Jazz and Pop.

111. There is Traditional World music from other cultures and current World Beat music, a fusion of many different styles and rhythms.

112. Current Popular music is primarily a big beat or groove with little melody.

113. Music education has suffered in our schools since 1980 from a political and business culture that feels music is an unproductive activity, and only a commercial product to make money.

114. The only thing that saves live music from extinction is that people need to get out of the house occasionally.

115. Listening to music with ear phones may provide privacy and a certain clarity, however, it's not a natural way of hearing sound (like in the middle of your head.)

116. Classical musicians are less defensive than Jazz about their music. They play music of composers with proven reputations, while Jazz musicians compose on their feet with mixed results.

117. Communication now between people in the music business appears to be limited mostly to email. The telephone may be too personal for them when discussing money or feelings about music.

118. Upon facing their demise, what will people remember – their favorite tune or a day in the cubicle?

119. Modern society, with its more numerous activities and pressures, is unable to allot much time for serious musical listening, live or recorded.

120. The selling of music CD's as a product has been very successful, even though most people spend little time listening to them.

121. New music trends do not usually happen in suburbia, only in the inner parts of the city. It becomes popular when suburban kids start

purchasing it, seeking an identity they lost in the suburbs.

122. Our culture is visually, not audibly oriented, having a shorter attention span to hear inside the music.

123. As much as any other single factor, a person's life is shaped by their initial exposure to a live music performance.

124. The trouble with this world is there's not enough dancing in the streets or serendipity in American life.

125. Today's Pop music, with its sophisticated marketing and Internet, can shift public thinking and taste as fast as a Brittany Spears news cycle. – quote, NY Times.

126. Advice to new Jazz listeners: It's okay to tap your feet to the music and make short remarks to friends. Just keep your volume under that currently on stage. If that's not possible, drink more.

127. Music presenters who attend their own programs may have a broader appreciation of various music forms than musicians who are committed to their own style of music making.

128. Afternoon music events have become more trendy, as most people are home by 10 PM, including seniors who didn't get their afternoon nap.

129. In New York City, with your computer on, one may virtually visit many clubs, avoiding the messy face-to-face contract with real people.

130. I never understood why people go to a Jazz concert and sit there like at a bank waiting for someone to validate their parking ticket. (quote, Carlos Santana.)

131. In recent decades it has been politically incorrect to express one's opinions or feelings about music in general. If you don't like the music, say so!

132. The music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free, and good men (musicians) die like dogs. There's also the negative side. – quote, Hunter S. Thompson.

133. In life, as in music, the challenge is not so much to figure out how to best play the game. The challenge is to figure out what game you're playing.

134. Jazz continues to survive in restaurant/bar operations, as it can be played more softly than Rock, with subtle variations on the melody.

135. The musicians, their lives and careers are much discussed and shown in the media or trade magazines. The experience and motives of presenters of the music get little attention. Is anybody curious about who pays them money? (Most musicians make their income from touring, not CD sales.)

136. An arts presenter of music is not unlike a dance choreographer, managing all elements that go into the program. Eventually they might have the satisfaction that music is a basic need of all people as long as our species exists.

137. Presenters of music bring many personal motives to their work: organizing a live program, the desire to exercise business skills for profit, for status among their peers, or to socialize with people in general. However, care, if not the love for music being presented, is the greatest motive for all good programming.

138. Instead of generating their own collective pleasures, most Americans are going to large commercial spectacles for entertainment, i.e. arena concerts or Las Vegas.

139. Americans appear caught up in their personal ambitions, unable to imagine a larger more personal sense of community around music. Goodbye Grateful Dead, and ye old Jazz fans.

140. Traditional forms of Jazz was not concert music, it was centered around small joyful groups drinking and often dancing.

141. Most Americans appear to seek the anonymity of large venues while listening to live music – arenas, concert halls – seeking to be part of a crowd reaction to the event or feeling nobody will notice their acting out or displeasure.

142. Concertizing Jazz, no matter how contemporary the sound in formal facilities will eventually kill its

spirit, turning off popular audiences and boring the initiated.

143. The limited commercial value of Jazz has allowed more musical integrity from the players, as opposed to overwhelming commercialization and repetition of Pop music.

144. In the past Jazz in many styles spoke to popular audiences. More modern, sophisticated Jazz has alienated Pop audiences that need a loud wall of sound to get off.

145. Jazz/Rock Fusion music turned off the Classical Jazz audiences. Yet players of that music did not forgo good musicianship and clear, improvisational playing. They just wanted to use electric instrumentation that has the sound presence of Pop/Rock.

146. With powerful sound systems, youth prefer a collective response to music. But how many grow to listen to alternative music? I guess there's always Folk or Country music.

147. We are now in a Retro period of American music, listening mostly to music of the past century.

148. For many people under 40, Jazz is Grandfather Music, not having listened to it from recordings or at social gatherings.

149. With loud electronically produced music, audiences tend to stand so they can react physically and collectively to the music.

150. When you pray, move your feet. –African Proverb

151. Only in America do so many people and the media consider Jazz as yesterday's popular music, not realizing its art as well as its entertainment value.

152. In today's world, Pop musicians are considered to be artists as well as entertainers – so what is the difference?

153. There is often pleasure in just watching the expressions and joy of dancers, whether they're very good or mediocre in their efforts.

Summation

As one might conclude from my ruminations, I'm partial to small venues – venues best able to provide the very personal expressions of musicians, with close, direct audience involvement. To hear and see pro instrumental talent at their best, is to know the full potential of great music.

Though large concert facilities are necessary for orchestras and celebrity talent, the small venue with less sound requirements can draw the listener into the subtleties of the music and its full potential.

Whatever people may want or expect from music is beyond my intuitive powers. I do know that my life's difficulties would have been intolerable without the sounds and community around music.

Prentice (Pete) Douglas, 2008

The Beginnings . . **Nobody planned its beginnings. It just evolved from the first private jam sessions at home in the summer of 1958.**

Growing up on the beaches of Manhattan and Hermosa in LA, I hung out in jazz clubs hearing Swing and early Be Bop and the cool sounds of West Coast Jazz of Shorty Rogers, Art Pepper, Shelly Mann, Chet Baker at the Lighthouse Café. Graduating from Santa Barbara College in 1955, I had no thoughts of operating a conventional jazz club, and eventually was hired as an Adult Probation Officer in San Mateo County just below San Francisco. Needing to get back to the beach, I purchased an abandoned beer joint on the ocean, proceeding to live in it like a refugee from the Beat Hipster scene of the 50's. I was later to be canned from the Probation Dept. for leading an undesirable life for a County official.

I was, and still am, on a musical adventure that needs a live, not virtual audience to enjoy and support it.

The oceanfront cottage attracted the usual dysfunctional youth seeking action at the beach. From the beginning when my wife and I and our first child moved into the seven-stool beer joint in November 1957, open spontaneous gatherings evolved. Regular drop-ins included hard-core Beats, artists, gays and SF show people.

In the early 60's, during one of these weekend soirees, a few drop—ins decided to set off dynamite on the beach while others were swing dancing to JS Bach, thus the name, Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society – the name being a put on, as we thought of ourselves somewhat Bohemian, hardly a "society."

However, the first of many Jazz jam sessions began in the summer of 1958. After becoming a registered non—profit for the musical arts in 1964, regular Jazz, Classical and some Folk Rock programs began, open to the public. After 50 years, the rest is history.

I was, and still am, on a musical adventure that needs a live, not virtual audience to enjoy and support it so that the Bach, as well as other smaller venues will continue to give people an authentic experience and human touch with live talent. PERHAPS NEW "BOUTIQUE" VENUES WILL EMERGE FOR FUTURE DISCERNING AUDIENCES WHO WILL BE PREPARED TO PAY THE PRICE TO "BE THERE," NOT IN AN IMPERSONAL CROWD.

The Bach Society may be an anachronism from the past that presented many now deceased jazz musicians. We hope, however, it will continue as a good example for future presenters and a comfort to musicians.

Yours, Pete Douglas, Founder and Music Director

The Douglas Beach House today
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The Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization for the musical arts founded in 1964 and supported by Members, Contributors and Co-Sponsors. Sunday afternoon performances are open to the public and presented at the Douglas Beach House, directly on Miramar Beach, Half Moon Bay, California. Please visit www.bachddsoc.org for current calendar. Pete Douglas is available by phone at 650 726-4143.