

CONSERVATORY

1959

Tappan to be Enhanced, 'Walled' by Conservatory

April 10, 1959

Minoru Yamasaki, architect for the new Conservatory and the King Humanities Building, demonstrated how these structures were designed to form a "wall" around Tappan Square which would enhance the square's beauty.

At a press conference yesterday afternoon, he pointed out that Tappan was the heart of the College and lost some of its beauty because it tended to "leak" through openings along its sides, Yamasaki explained how the white, three-story face of the Conservatory teaching unit would help "contain" the square and contrast with the green of the trees.

Symbolic Center

While discussing Tappan Square, Yamasaki stated that it might be desirable if the square could eventually be surrounded by College buildings, as if it were the symbolic center of the College. The downtown area could then be re-developed a little farther away from the College.

When asked how the new buildings would fit in with the general

pattern of architecture here, Yamasaki said that although it might be more natural to build in stone like Peters Hall and the Library, there was "something wonderful" about having many different types of buildings surrounding the square. They reflect the many different ideas on campus and show the historical development of the school, he pointed out.

Conservatory Interior

Yamasaki also explained how he used his idea of having buildings "enhance the human experience" of those using it in designing the interior of the Conservatory. This will be accomplished by the outdoor feeling of the teaching unit's three story lobby, and by placing the lobby, the student lounge, and the connecting walkways between the various units of the Conservatory in the view of the garden in the center of the buildings.

The Humanities building, Yamasaki said, would be built as a complement to the Conservatory. Final plans for this building, he added, would be finished in a few weeks, and the models will be ready three weeks after the completion of the plans.



Photo courtesy of the Oberlin College Archives

1982

Oberlin Jazz: a long uphill struggle for acceptance

R. Brent K. Wolff
Contributing Editor
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Jazz does exist in the Oberlin Conservatory, but you won't find it in the course catalog. It's not that jazz isn't there, they just don't call it that. The music most of us would identify as jazz is studied in the Afro-American Music Department.

The terminology is more than just an exercise in trivial semantics. First, the word jazz originated as a demeaning term used by whites to describe black music. Second, the name jazz fails to include much of the related work that is being done in the Conservatory, even as it fails to represent the significant evolution and diversification of the music which finds its roots in jazz.

The jazz idiom has evolved outside the American academic music establishment. Acknowledgement of this rich musical form in the classical conservatories has been only a recent development. It was not until the '70s that Oberlin first offered courses in Afro-American music. Before that, student interest in jazz had always existed, but study and performance remained informal. Even as recently as the early '50s, Conservatory students could be expelled if they were heard playing jazz music in the practice rooms. Nevertheless, a number of Oberlin graduates have gone on to play jazz professionally, including seminal figure in be-bop Al Haig ('44) and Stanley Cowell ('62) now with The Heath Brothers.

Times have changed, and while the Oberlin Conservatory may not have wholly embraced jazz, it now offers a small but respected program in the discipline. At the urging of Emil Danenberg, when he was dean of the Conservatory, Wendell Logan was appointed as associate professor of Afro-American music. In 1977, the Conservatory approved Afro-American and Jazz studies as part of a double major. The department now offers courses in jazz composition, music history, and a number of jazz ensembles.

Present Dean of the Conservatory David Boe sees a shift on the part of traditional conservatories, which are beginning to feel an ob-

ligation to include jazz into their curricula.

"Jazz is part of our musical culture," Boe said. "I think more and more, musicians are realizing that in order to be truly versatile, they need an understanding of jazz."

Director of External Affairs for the Conservatory Henry Duckham agrees that jazz studies deserve a place in the Conservatory curriculum. Duckham attaches the vocal and improvisational characteristics in jazz to early European music.

"Oberlin has a strong and well-deserved reputation for its early music program," Duckham commented. "I hope that jazz will be looked at not as a separate area but as a dialectic, a language which people should be familiar with, just as they are familiar with early music."

However, jazz and related studies still play at best a peripheral role in the mainstream Conservatory education. The focus here remains on European classical music. In order to gain admission to the Conservatory, students must pass a classical audition. And Afro-American Music studies may be taken only as a second major with one of the core offerings.

The small size of the department (created, directed, and run by Wendell Logan, with the help of a part-time instructor) effectively limits the growth of a major jazz program on the scale offered by the Berklee School of Music or Eastman. The freeze on faculty hiring and tight budget policies at present have shelved expectations for an expansion of the program in the foreseeable future.

The role, if not the legitimacy of jazz education in traditional conservatories, is still an openly debated issue in Oberlin and around the country. By consensus of faculty and students interviewed, a jazz education takes a fundamentally different focus than classical education. Both disciplines obviously require tonal literacy and technical mastery of one's instrument. But from the point of technical competence, a jazz approach to music departs from the classical format in its emphasis on improvisation. Jazz musicians don't work from a set repertoire of written music. They must know their scales and

"changes" or chord patterns for a piece of music, but jazz performance relies on the spontaneity of the performer.

"Jazz musicians generally have to be more versatile," noted junior Piano and Afro-American Music major Ted Baker. "There are no rules of theories on how to play jazz. There is no 'this way' or 'that way' to play. It's a question of spontaneity and improvisation," he said.

Despite the limited nature of Oberlin's jazz offerings, both Conservatory and College students are enthusiastic about the program and Wendell Logan's direction of it. "He's an amazing cat," says Jeff Lederer, a College Religion major and the hottest saxophone this side of Lorain Street. "He teaches you to teach yourself, which is really essential for a jazz musician."

The majority of jazz musicians involved in the Conservatory program are College students. Since its inception in 1977, the Afro-American Music Department has graduated only two majors. Next year, the total will rise to four. For Lederer, studying in the Conservatory as a College student has made no difference in the quality of his musical education. "Most of us work as hard as Connies," he said. "So much of jazz is political and social, it helps to come at the music from another perspective."

This raised the question of just where the Jazz program fits in with the rest of the Conservatory curriculum. The foci of classical and the more improvisational approaches to music differ substantially enough to obscure any direct overlap between the two.

Piano and Afro-American Music Major Allen Farnham values his exposure to both classical and jazz performance. "If anything, the jazz improvisational style has helped me more with interpreting classical music than the other way around," Farnham said.

If the traditionalists feel uncomfortable with the adoption of jazz studies into the curriculum, jazz musicians often feel equally uneasy in the formal setting. "You get the feeling that our existence here is tentative at best," remarked Lederer. Yet, with apologies for the terminology, it seems certain that jazz is here to stay.

1964

Students Sack Warner

Stefanie Gutieri
October 13, 1964

Amid the cheers and hisses of a gathering horde of students, the tower of old Warner Hall tumbled down with thundering finality last Friday afternoon, adding its share to the ever-growing pile of debris on the corner of West College and Professor.

Prompted mostly by sentiment and not just vandalistic tendencies, resourceful students have driven to the depth of the building to salvage such useful articles as stain-glass windows, door knobs, hinges, key hole fixtures,

all-purpose bricks, and memories of the spirit of old Warner. The small items presented only minor problems for thieving students.

One freshman commenting on her friend's door-knob snatching escapade, said, "The policeman never saw them enter the building, but when they tried to sneak away he cornered them. They hid all the stuff behind their backs while he bawled them out." Carting away bricks demanded more skill and more strength.

One foresighted Conservatory student, relating his brief encounter with crime, said that last May he pried up some beau-

tifully carved door hinges from Warner which he had often admired. These he replaced with pieces of wire coat hanger. He believes his trophies are real collectors items anyone would be proud to possess.

Remains of the Conservatory too heavy even for clever students to spirit away such as the concrete name plaque, will grace the rock garden of the new Warner. The corner-stones will also be added to the garden as soon as they are found. Buildings and grounds officials are confident, however, that they will be discovered sometime in the near future.



Memories come tumbling down as old Warner Hall succumbs to the onslaught of wrecking machines. Laid bare to inquisitive and nostalgic viewers, the dormer habitation of musicians-in-training offers up its time-worn innards to the light of day before being laid rest in heaps of rubble.

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