

DEEP LISTENING AT THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE: Music Improvisation & Co-creation In The Social Field Of Presencing

Abstract

Utilizing a musical improvisation performance perspective, this paper seeks to address a range of challenges which typically inhibit Presencing practitioners in their development of Presencing capabilities to mastery level. The paper describes the music-improvisational mindset, a quality of "knowing-in-not-knowing" which masterful musicians bring to the generative field, as well as improvising musicians' "ease of access" to this field. The paper also examines how masterful, improvising musicians interact during performance utilizing "Deep Listening" presencing to inform co-creative action resulting in artful outcomes, and how Deep Listening itself provides a rich opportunity for learning. Furthermore, the author hypothesizes in regard to the concept of "Temporal Orientation", suggesting that an ability to sustain (horizontal time) consciousness in the present allows one to explore a (vertical) deepening of consciousness in that present moment. Finally, the author seeks to connect these skills to the development of Presencing mastery by exploring complexity through the practice of intuitive music listening. The ideas put forth highlight an element of inclusiveness, via a standpoint that improvisation is a generative capacity which all humans possess, music listening expertise is a skill which does not need to be taught, and expertise or mastery in a domain can be achieved in manageable increments over time.

Introduction: How Does What Happen?

This writing will examine various phenomena observed in the performances of masterful, artist-level musical improvisors, as well as relate intimate musical experience from the subjective, personal perspective of the author. The observed phenomena seem to indicate that masterful, artist-level musical improvisors exhibit an ability to maintain, sustain, and deepen conscious awareness "in the moment", utilizing Deep Listening as a means to inform generative action through which real-time, artful co-creations emerge. It is intended that the discussion may serve to inspire further inquiry regarding alternative inroads to Presencing and the Generative Field, for Theory U practitioners in particular.

Via my work, spanning nearly four decades of immersion in the musical domain, I have observed that masterful music improvisors demonstrate a fluid ease of access to the generative field of co-creation (i.e. Theory U Field 4) with an agility which, e.g. for (non-music) organizational cultures seems atypical. Furthermore, within this generative social field, and at the threshold to an emerging, uncertain future, masterful music improvisors seem consistently able to co-create artful outcomes in real-time; the real-time aspect of co-creation being a phenomenon which also seems atypical for (non-music) organizational cultures. For these reasons, and in that improvisation is a generative capacity possessed by all humans, I would like to take the initial steps on a personal endeavor to introduce the music improvisational mindset, hereunder the relevant habits, practices, and "ways of being" of masterful musical improvisors, to the field of Presencing.

It is also my proposition that masterful music improvisors' ability to direct and control consciousness relative to a rhythmic time orientation (Temporal Orientation), provides them a microcosmic space within which to explore a deeper, sustained attentional listening awareness, i.e. "Deep Listening", a felt-sense which informs action during the process of real-time, artful co-creation.

Finally, I suggest that studies within the area of skill acquisition, expertise and mastery might be applied toward development of Presencing mastery; that Deep Listening provides rich opportunities for learning; and that non-musicians are able to develop Deep Listening expertise via the practice of intuitive music listening. The sum implication being that the incremental techniques of skill mastery, adoption of an improvisational mindset, as well as consciously and temporally-oriented intuitive listening expertise, may serve to expand, develop, or extend Presencing ability.

In reality, what I am seeking to convey, via a musical improvisation perspective, is that there is a "what" to pay attention to, which has led me to thinking about "how" that happens. In other words, I am inviting you the reader, hopefully stimulated by my personal expression, to explore your personal expression. Have you ever tried to describe your Presencing experience in writing, or attempted to deconstruct it as minutely as possible? Perhaps in doing so, you will discover your own way forward.

To the improvisational mindset, any framework is merely a point of departure.

Emergence Through Coincidence

"Extended engagement in domain-related activities is necessary to attain expert performance in that domain. Most masters across domains emphasize the role of motivation, concentration, and the willingness to work hard on improving performance, as a factor in achieving mastery."¹

In retrospect, I see my life in music as progressing through three stages: Education, Application, and Emergence - although continuing education and extension of musical skills and abilities has remained a pillar in my development during the past four decades, via reflection and self-study, deliberate practice within a variety of skill sets, and at a later stage in life, enrollment in graduate school to study transformative processes more closely.

Stage 1 (Education) was characterized by studying music at college after a period of success as an award-winning high school musician; while in college I also worked as a freelance musician, often under the tutelage of my teachers, mentors, and older, more experienced musicians. It was an extended period of paying dues, learning the ropes, and allowing the rich legacy of musical icons before me to guide my aspirations. Vocational training during this period of my life took place, initially, at private entertainment functions for weddings and bar mitzvahs around the Greater Boston, MA area from my late teens on. With experience came opportunity, and the more-coveted engagements in jazz clubs, concert performances with various music groups, and, after re-locating to Copenhagen, Denmark, continued club and concert

¹ Ericsson, K. Anders. (2002). *Attaining Excellence Through Deliberate Practice: Insights From the Study of Expert Performance.*

engagements throughout the Scandinavian region, plus musical theater engagements as an orchestra pit musician, studio recording sessions, and performance engagements in television house bands.

Stage 2 (Application) ensued about ten years later, as I began to apply everything I had learned up until that point more purposefully, and as an entrepreneurial musician and independent business owner, began to take control over, and responsibility for, my career path and its outcomes. During this period, I served as a musical director and production executive for television, as a music producer with my own recording studio, fulfilling the needs of numerous clients by composing and producing television, documentary, and corporate presentation soundtracks. I also became a record label owner. This stage of my life was very much characterized by deeper research and inquiry into music and the business of music, trial & error, increased risk-taking, and a more outward focus in life, searching for inspirational sources outside the realm of music.

Stage 3 (Emergence), which began roughly fifteen years later (or, about ten years ago), was all about freedom and emergence. It was if I was utilizing the wide range of experiences and influences to which I had been exposed, to zero in on a higher musical purpose. I returned once again to composing, recording, and performing my own material, something that hadn't previously been a primary pursuit, was able to cultivate an international audience for my music, and began touring the world as a solo artist. This was an intense, highly rewarding period of life lessons, realizing the dreams of my youth, and personal transformation from referring to what "they" say, to having a strong, personal, independent frame of reference regarding the world and my place in it. This stage of emergence became characterized by personal growth and life experience from the bizarre to the beautiful; knowledge of, and learning from, world cultures beyond the western-oriented, plus increased spiritual and social awareness, self-discipline, and focus. I became stronger and more proficient as an instrumentalist than I had ever been at any point in my life, as my ability for musical improvisation became more intuitive.

These longitudinal developments were more coincidental than conscious, a result of immersion and constant activity in the music domain, however, there is an equally coincidental correlation here to the three phases in traditional theories of skill acquisition, i.e. (1) an initial "cognitive" phase of learning the underlying structure of an activity, and clear feedback regarding what aspects must be attended to, (2) an "associative" phase where an acceptable (in this case, professional) level of performance is attained, and (3) a third, "autonomous" phase, where the goal is typically to achieve effortless performance, and where expert performance continues to improve as a function of increased experience and deliberate practice.²

Perhaps of particular significance within the context of this writing, is a personal observation that mastery level seems to inspire a concern for the greater "We", through the search for a connection between artistic expression and the human condition. This is a foundational shift which affects outcomes both onstage as well as offstage. Saxophonist John Coltrane's work, for example, became increasingly more

² Ericsson, K. Anders. (2002). *Attaining Excellence Through Deliberate Practice: Insights From the Study of Expert Performance.*

spiritual in its nature as he, through his development and musical expression as an artist, sought a more intimate personal relationship with God and humanity.

It was during my emergent third stage that I began to notice, and eventually sought to explore, the beneficial powers of transformation which music holds. The more deeply I explored music performance mastery with the objective of achieving profound interpersonal connections with the audiences and musicians I encountered throughout my travels across the U.S.A., Europe, Japan, and East and West Africa, the more I began to realize that there are no boundaries between music and life. The more I engaged and interacted with attendees of the numerous master classes and seminars I was called upon to conduct in conjunction with performance tours, the more I became drawn toward facilitating cultural and social change via a musical and/or music improvisational perspective. Perhaps this represents the advent of a fourth stage, beyond what I can imagine or perceive from my present vantage point. As such, an exploration into the expansion of Presencing capabilities as a means to engage the emerging future is as much a deeply invested personal journey, as it is a mission to share and exchange ideas with others.

Jazz Leadership & Learning

Jazz music as a genre, with its inherent components of improvisation and collaboration, has been recognized and leveraged as an effective tool for international diplomacy (e.g. through promoting understanding, tolerance, and collaboration between nations – which arguably, are beneficial, co-creative social outcomes) by the U.S. State Dept. since 1956; as an Arts Envoy of the U.S. State Dept. from 2010 – 2017, I've had numerous opportunities to design and facilitate programs whose ultimate goal has been to promote cultural understanding between nations.

Eminent jazz creators have provided a model of mastery comprised of positive musical habits, practices, and ways of being which are ingrained in the culture shared by improvising musicians. Throughout the history of jazz music, such eminent creators in the domain have pointed to a deeper capacity for listening as a driver for the artful outcomes produced. Ear training courses are a core component of musical training at the higher education level. Furthermore, participation in music ensemble performance activities in general seems to foster a heightened capacity for collaboration and teamwork.³

Michael Jones (*Artful Leadership; From Performance to Presence*), Frank J. Barrett (*Leadership Lessons from Jazz*), Karl E. Weick (*Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*) et al. observe organizational leadership through a jazz improvisation lens; indeed, there are a myriad of scholars or writers examining just about any aspect of human life through a musical, jazz, or improvisational lens. Until further, my research as not led me to anyone examining Theory U from a musical improvisation perspective.

³ Keller, Peter E. (2013). "Musical Ensemble Performance : A Theoretical Framework and Empirical Findings on Interpersonal Coordination." *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Performance Science 2013*. pp. 271–285.

Accordingly, the novel or original in my ideas relative to the work of others may be that I am correlating my views with the Theory U framework itself (which Michael Jones seems inspired by although he doesn't mention Theory U directly); the unique aspect is, the ideas conveyed for the most part are my personal perspectives drawn from extensive practice and action research within the music domain. Scharmer's own incorporation of descriptive musical terminology in Theory U, such as 'play', 'listen', 'flow', 'in-tune', 'performing', et al. invites parallels to be drawn between Theory U and the music domain.

Judging from political policies enacted upon K-12 (western) education from the latter part of the twentieth century on, there may be factions who disagree that any area of the humanities might provide perspectives which are useful or valuable to organizational (business) culture, or for that matter, national socioeconomic growth. However, in the customarily forward-thinking Nordic region (i.e. Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland) where I am based, both a growing curiosity and an increasingly widespread application of artistic (especially musical) perspectives within higher education and corporate governance are observed, currently centered around keywords such as startups, artificial intelligence, robotics, innovation, disruption, and agile systems/operations. It is also in areas such as these that I see utilization value for applied musical improvisation interventions.

From The Inside Out

My position that masterful improvising musicians command a fluid ease of access to the generative field, are able to co-create artful outcomes in real-time, and that they cultivate certain habits, practices, and ways of being which facilitate collaborative, artful co-creation in real time, is both a result of observation and lived experience. The perspectives put forth in this writing, although non-scientific, are nonetheless based on a rather expansive, international, multi-cultural sample of experience. After roughly eight thousand engagements over a span of forty years, interacting with world-class musicians on five continents in the process, noticeable patterns do emerge for the inquisitive eye and ear. Over the past ten years, I've entered reflections upon a number of experiences in a personal journal, with particular attention focused during the past two years on a correlation between the "U" journey and the improvising musician's co-creative journey.

As a point of departure in this writing, I've chosen to begin at the core of the matter, so to speak, with an endeavor to deconstruct personal experience and observation, focusing on how a particular attentional quality in listening, which I refer to as Deep Listening, is both a significant factor in enabling artful, co-creative outcomes, and an ability which may be accessible as a means to facilitate beneficial outcomes in non-musical, social presencing contexts.

Accordingly, this writing will not address the entire Theory U framework, but instead focus on a sub-section of the "U" movement where I observe (experience, perceive) Deep Listening taking place, i.e. from "the eye of the needle" and beyond; with possible consideration given to how parallels drawn from a musical improvisation perspective may serve to expand, clarify, or elucidate inroads to the phenomenon of Presencing which takes place in the Theory U framework's generative Field 4.

The Social Technology Context

Experienced Theory U and Presencing practitioners for whom this writing is intended, will of course be familiar with the dynamics of Otto Scharmer's entire framework. Nonetheless, I'd like to highlight certain features of the social technology as being relevant to this discussion, particularly (in Otto Scharmer's words):

- The Theory U proposition that the quality of outcomes is a result of the quality of awareness, attention or consciousness from which the participants in a socioeconomic system operate;
- Theory U's differentiation between four levels of awareness, suggesting that learning from the emerging future requires an intimate relationship with the fourth level, a deeper source of knowing called "Presencing";
- "Presencing" which combines the words "sensing" and "presence" to signify a state of being in the present moment, sensing and actualizing one's highest future possibility. A distinction exists between sensing - acting from the current whole - and "presencing". i.e. operating from the emerging future whole;
- The Generative Field, i.e. the social field where Presencing takes place, and from which a profound sense of connection and collective creation emerge, signified by two long-term outcomes: a unique, deep bond among those who participated; and often significant accomplishments by both entire groups and individuals.

In addition, there are four principles of Presencing:

- *Letting Go and Surrendering*, i.e. letting go of the past in order to connect with and learn from emerging future possibilities;
- *Inversion: Going Through the Eye of the Needle*, i.e. crossing the threshold at the bottom of the U to step into our real power, the power of operating from our highest future Self, with a connection to a deeper state of being that can become present within us and through us, both individually and collectively;
- *The Coming into Being of a Higher (Authentic) Presence and Self*, i.e. connecting our current self with our authentic self; moving toward our real self from the future; entering a deeper state of being where we, as individuals and as communities, experience a fundamental freedom and capacity to create;
- *The Power of Place: Creating a Holding Space of Deep Listening*, i.e. the common factor of presencing journeys taking place within a "container" or "holding space".

And finally, of relevance to this discussion is Scharmer's concept of four levels of listening, i.e. downloading, object-based/factual, empathic, and, in particular, generative listening, or listening from the emerging field of the future – the fourth level of listening, which requires accessing the open heart, an open will, and a capacity to connect to the highest future possibility that wants to emerge.⁴ In musical improvisation, this level of listening is of highest interest.

⁴ Scharmer, C. Otto. (2009). *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges*.

Practitioner Challenges At The Eye Of The Needle

According to the work of researchers and scholars in the field, Theory U and Presencing practitioners typically encounter a range of challenges which inhibit the development of their presencing capabilities to a level of mastery. A consensus of observations regarding the experiences of practitioners, and the obstacles (and objectives) they seek to address might appear as follows⁵:

- the Theory U framework does not seem to have been designed to help practitioners deepen, develop and sustain their overall presencing capacity;
- the phenomenon of reaching a plateau in one's presencing practice has become quite commonplace, if not inevitable;
- in general, practitioners are at a loss regarding how to develop and refine presencing capacities;
- practitioners are perhaps in search of an immersive set of trainings that help build and develop presencing mastery;
- an objective that presencing becomes available as a primary way of engaging our experience, regardless of the situation we are in;
- an assessment of core capacities for engaging presencing which may be deployed as a viable leadership approach for thriving in one's day to day work and life.

Theory U addresses the core question that underlies its theory and methodology: What is required in order to learn and act from the future as it emerges? Perhaps the practitioner challenges encountered are due to the extreme subtleties of a Presencing experience taking place in a generative field which, while rich with untapped possibility, can also be rife with unique, uncertain and complex circumstances. One might summarize the above to a general consensus amongst practitioners, that something "more" or "different" is needed to take presencing to the next level,⁶ and whichever new approaches or new perspectives are introduced, that they be effective in diverse fractals of society where people, co-workers or citizens will not need to "develop" to a certain action logic, but can work with the means at hand.⁷

Musical Improvisation & Theory U

I perceive musical improvisation as a non-verbal, interpersonal dialogue which unfolds moment for moment in real-time, as the future emerges. The quality of musical interaction taking place is inherently generative in nature, particularly when engaged in by masterful musicians, who, as evidenced by the vast body of documented, recorded works available, in the jazz genre especially, have been and still seem to be consistently driven by an endeavor to co-create unique, artful outcomes.

The word improvisation itself is rooted in the word "proviso" which means to make a stipulation beforehand, to provide for something in advance, or to do something that is premeditated. By adding the prefix "im" to the word proviso, as when the prefix

⁵ Gunnlaugson, Olen. (2018). *Dynamic Presencing*.

⁶ Gunnlaugson, Olen. (2018). *Dynamic Presencing*.

⁷ Caspari, Anne. (2017). *Presencing and the Scaling Problem*.

"im" is added to the word mobile to create immobile, improvise means the opposite of proviso. Thus improvisation deals with the unforeseen, it works without a prior stipulation, it works with the unexpected. Improvisation is about the unforeseen and unprovided-for which means it "is the negation of foresight, of planned-for, of doing provided for by knowing, and of the control of the past over the present and future".⁸

Improvisation as an aspect of human behavior can be witnessed in a number of contexts beyond the musical, for example, as a means of adaptation to changing environments, in problem solving, or in the use of natural language, all of which are unscripted behaviors that capitalize on the generative capacity of the brain.⁹ The implication here is that although this discussion seeks to emphasize various facets of masterful or artist-level musical improvisation, the act of improvisation itself, in many other contexts does not require a need to develop to a certain action logic. (Caspari)

Musical improvisation, although a key identifying component of the jazz genre, occurs in other musical genres as well. Therefore, the reader may encounter that I fluctuate between usage of the phrase "jazz improvisation" and "musical improvisation". In general, the principles of improvisation remain similar regardless of genre, however, interjection of the term "jazz" may be used whenever it serves a purpose to further understanding, notably in reference to a specific range of musical vocabulary which is typically considered as unique to the jazz genre of music.

Within this discussion, the relevance of musical improvisation in the context of Theory U centers around the following:

- musical improvisation (as well as musical performance, in general) can be viewed as taking place in a *container* or *holding space*, e.g. the stage, the recording studio, or the rehearsal studio;
- ensemble musical improvisation (as well as ensemble musical performance, in general) is a co-creative activity;
- musical improvisation (particularly as observed in the performances of masterful or artist-level musicians) seems to involve a deeper quality of attention, consciousness, or awareness, and finally,
- artful outcomes produced via musical improvisation begin to reveal themselves immediately (and thus provide immediate feedback) via action initiated at threshold of convergence between the present moment and the emerging future.

The implication, expressed as follows utilizing Theory U terminology, is that the inception of masterful, artist-level, ensemble musical improvisation takes place in the generative field as co-presencing at the "eye of the needle", and moves up the right side of the "U". Thus, the "U" movements this writing seeks to describe, begin at the bottom of the "U" with Co-presencing, shifting into Co-creating, and Co-evolving.

⁸ Weick, Karl E. (1998). Introductory Essay Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis.

⁹ Limb CJ, Braun AR. (2008). Neural Substrates of Spontaneous Musical Performance: An fMRI Study of Jazz Improvisation.

"By the end of the music performance, the greater We - i.e. musicians, crew, venue personnel and audience – may walk away with the feeling that something inside us has changed, and as a result we are not the same individuals as before. The effect can be momentary, or last a lifetime."¹⁰

What I hope will emerge through the sharing of subjective, personal experience is that the Theory U framework's nuances and subtleties - i.e. overcoming the voices of judgment, cynicism, and fear; accessing open mind, open heart, and open will; being present and sensing, i.e. "presencing" and "co-presencing", connecting to, and operating from the source, both interpersonally and intrapersonally; "letting go to let come"; crystallizing, prototyping, and performing, and, the feeling of significant accomplishments being achieved, and unique bonds being forged – will all come to life in a manner which inspires further personal, reflective analysis by the reader.

There are certainly plenty of circumstances under which social, conversational and/or co-creative dynamics fail in musical contexts (i.e. "Absencing"), and when they do, the resulting outcomes are not particularly extraordinary. However, when considering various means for intervention within failing or dysfunctional musical scenarios, there exists a veritable plethora of successful contexts from which to draw inspiration regarding appropriate action. As such, my focus will be on co-creative, improvisational music performance at mastery level, in the interest that doing so may contribute beneficially to the conversation regarding how Presencing practitioners engage the Theory U framework.

"Knowing In Not-knowing" As A Way Of Being

As a creative music professional, I have participated in - indeed, it has often been my work to seek out - projects where the objective was to bring together musicians of varying nationalities and cultures¹¹, and where the ensemble members often lacked a common speaking language. It is possible, and quite literally so, to assemble a group of masterful musicians in the "holding space" of a rehearsal or onstage venue, without prior instruction or communication regarding repertoire or musical direction, and expect them to artfully perform co-created works of music on the spot. And create they will, warmly, openly, and generously. Naturally, each individual has engaged in thousands of hours of deliberate practice beforehand¹², which allows them to confidently and joyfully achieve this objective, and perhaps it would be an interesting exercise in the future to explore which creative, musical habits and practices help facilitate a capacity to masterfully engage "uncertain and complex circumstances".¹³

However for now, let us note that when the characteristics of masterful musical improvisation are inserted into the Presencing experience, there's a level of comfort in

¹⁰ Ricketts, Bobby. (2016). Deep Listening. www.bobbyricketts.com/#deep-listening

¹¹ E.g. the "One Song" Project (1996-1998) Københavns Amts Musikudvalg, Copenhagen Denmark.

¹² Ericsson, K. Anders. (2008). "Deliberate Practice and Acquisition of Expert Performance: A General Overview." *Academic Emergency Medicine*, vol. 15, no. 11. pp. 988–994.

¹³ Pohjannoro, Ulla. (2016). "Capitalising on Intuition and Reflection: Making Sense of a Composer's Creative Process." *Musicae Scientiae*, vol. 20, no. 2.

evidence regarding the unforeseen and the unexpected – a “knowing in not-knowing” as a way of being, a negation of the past having control over the present and future, and an intrinsic motivation to co-create from what is. Such is the mindset of the master musical improviser prior to engaging the social field of presencing: a preparedness for, and perhaps even a savoring of the unknown, with an openness to what might emerge within a fertile holding space rich with undefined possibility, via utilization of the same human generative capacity possessed by all of us.

This last thought is important enough to bear repetition: the ability to improvise – i.e., creating or performing something spontaneously or without preparation, or making something from whatever is available - is a generative capacity possessed by all humans. The connection I would like for the reader to make is that it would seem to follow, that such a generative capacity – an ability to creatively engage the unforeseen and unexpected - is something that might be highly useful when engaging an emerging, uncertain future, whether in the generative field, or throughout life itself. And finally, to get to my point, improvisation is a skill which is mastered by significant numbers of musicians, worldwide, which means, improvisation is a skill which *can* be mastered, by all who possess this natural, human generative capacity. I find that the vital importance of this particular adaptive skill as a means with which to engage uncertainty, is overlooked in Theory U.

Deep Listening: Discerning The Will Of The Spirit Of The Group

Masterful music improvisors (and music educators) agree that a deeper attentional quality of listening is a significant driver of the live, musical co-creation which literally takes form as the future emerges moment by moment. Equally significant is the ease with which masterful improvising musicians, in the holding space of musical interaction, access this level of deeper attentional quality, or what Scharmer also terms as a deeper source of knowing called "presencing", and the dynamics of crystallization, prototyping, and performance output which take place instantaneously in the collective music-improvisational space. I would maintain that, at masterful, peak performance level, and due to a primed mindset (quite possibly the result of a range of acquired skill sets, abilities, and capacities), and a “way of being” which reveals itself even before entering the social field of presencing, the improvising musician's and ensemble's journey toward producing artful outcomes begins at the bottom of the “U”. In other words, for such musicians, the “U” may quite conceivably be a “J”.

“The mix of a musician with a sound that they love, that they are pursuing and aspiring to is a recipe for a certain kind of intensity. When this intensity gets applied to a spontaneous act such as improvisation, in the right hands, with the right material and the right kindred spirits, the result can be basically the highest level of human achievement manifest, i.e. the Coltrane quartet, the Miles quintet of the 60's ... In this endeavor, the listening part of you is really the leader.”¹⁴ - *Jazz Guitarist Pat Metheny*

¹⁴ Peterson, Lloyd. (2006). Interview with Pat Metheny, "Music and the Creative Spirit: Innovators in Jazz, Improvisation, and the Avant Garde". Scarecrow Press.

The phrase “Deep Listening” has been circulating in the contexts of contemplative education, psychotherapy, pastoral care, and the arts. In Theory U, Scharmer refers to the term “Deep Listening” numerous times, e.g. in the context of dialogue interviews, in relation to “Places and cocoons of deep reflection and silence that facilitate deep listening and connection to the source of authentic presence and creativity, both individually and collectively (co-presencing)”, and as Open Mind, Open Heart, and Open Will being the three conditions for Deep Listening and Holding.¹⁵ Deep Listening also has a specific context as one of the “Five Mindfulness Trainings” proposed by Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, where deep listening as a practice in this context would be training to respond with calmness and clarity of mind.¹⁶

I have a personal preference for an understanding of the term Deep Listening which is inspired by the Quaker communal meeting concept of listening in silence to discern “the will of the spirit of the group”. The Quaker belief is that conversation may be “Spirit-led”, i.e. informed by a dimension of direct, lived experience of transcendence, or deeper knowing and awareness.¹⁷ Deep Listening practice within this context implies a lack of personal agenda, the existence of a collective intelligence in the “We”, and that this collective intelligence will emerge, through the group allowing it to emerge, or “let come” – not in due time, but in its own frame of time.

As a musician, the concept resonates within. Part of the maturation process for musical improvisors involves learning to “discern the will of the spirit of the group” by listening attentively and seeking to “play what’s not there”. Years ago, my Berklee College of Music mentor Herb Pomeroy often instructed us, my co-student musicians and I, to “interrupt the silence”, as a manner of articulating when and how to initiate musical expression, reminding us that when doing so, silence, or the space between the notes, is equally as important as, if not more so, than the notes themselves. In both cases, a focused quality of listening and attunement to one’s surroundings is requisite, with an underlying implication that perhaps there may already be an emergence (of music) underway, and that honoring this emergence takes precedence over any egocentric action to make one’s presence known. It’s the difference between joining a gathering with respect for the proceedings, or kicking the door open upon entry.

Presencing, Deep Listening, and a concern regarding socioeconomic systems operating from a higher quality of attention, consciousness, or awareness in the present moment, are all related to the psychological process of Mindfulness, a practice which quite possibly is less about simply paying attention to whatever is occurring in the present, and more about carrying forth (co-creative) intention into the present sphere of operation.¹⁸

¹⁵ Scharmer, C. Otto. (2009). *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges*. p. 44.

¹⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh. (2009). *Happiness: Essential Mindfulness Practices*.

¹⁷ Gunnlaugson, Olen. (2016 lecture, University of Massachusetts, Boston). *Portrait Of The Dialogue Artist*.

¹⁸ Kudesia, Ravi S. (2015). *Mindfulness and Creativity in the Workplace*.

Oneness and the Fifth Player

Flamingo The Arusha Jazz Club, Osaka, Japan

I was performing at the top of my game, completely at one with the saxophone - propelling air through the instrument which had become an extension of my body, simultaneously channeling impulses of creative expression as if through divine inspiration. The band was on fire, our communication was intuitive, telepathic even. My eyes were closed, but I could see – patterns, shapes, flashes of light. I was in the moment, co-creating with my bandmates each fresh nanosecond of future as it emerged. I felt a spiritual clarity.

And then suddenly I didn't. We were jamming hard on an open vamp, and I was ready to go to the bridge of the tune. But at center stage facing the audience, my back to the band, I couldn't signal any of my co-creators, both hands being actively in play on the saxophone. The main priority was to sustain the level of energy that had engulfed the jazz club during the improvised passage. As the lead, I literally felt our collective destinies - the band, the audience and myself – were in my hands as they worked the saxophone. Such is the urgency of our musical mission. Risking a breakdown in the energy by trying to signal the band or by diluting my focus of attention worrying about how, was not an option.

I let go of this extraneous train of thought, re-focused attention, and continued surging forward with my performance. It's all about trust. We're in this together, and IF we're in this together, I wouldn't have to tell the band anything, we'd simply know by speaking to each other through the music. Jamming on, I began to listen deeply, discerning the will of the group. It didn't matter that I was ready to go to the bridge. The bridge wasn't yet ready to come to us.

Perhaps first-person narratives portray improvisation as being more of a singular, “ego” pursuit than a collective one. There are however, additional subtleties taking place in the co-creative, Deep Listening musical “We” space:

Utilizing Kantor's “4-Player Model”¹⁹ (i.e. “mover”, “follower”, “opposer”, “bystander”) as an illustration, the first-person perspective above might insinuate my saxophone as the “lead”, and therefore one might assume I'm playing the role of “Mover” according to Kantor's model. The actual role however, needs to be perceived in the context of the music preceding my soloistic offering. A dive into the improvisational waters might possibly constitute an introduction of a completely new idea or direction, support or carry a preceding motif further, provide contrast, e.g. by countering a high-register wail with a low-register moan, or by contributing new perspective via reflection on all preceding musical events. I might initiate a phrase with my saxophone which evokes a contrapuntal response from another musician who in turn opens up new territory for all to explore. Who is to say then, that the initial “mover” hasn't now become the “follower” of the contrapuntal “opposer”, whom at

¹⁹ Isaacs, William N. (1999). “Dialogic Leadership.” *The Systems Thinker*, Pegasus Communications, vol. 10, No. 1.

present has placed themselves into a “bystander” role – all within a single captured moment of continual, fluid role shifts?

It may well be that through it all, my instrument might from an audience perspective be perceived as the “voice” in the spotlight, but in reality, at peak performance, the “hats” worn may be constantly, discreetly, and non-algorithmically shifted between all the musicians involved. And so, perhaps through this perspective of Kantor’s “4-Player Model” in action, we can sense a vital fifth-player role emerge: the role of the “whole”, which essentially is the emerging musical message, an intricately interwoven co-creation greater than the sum of its parts, that the entire ensemble seeks to “let come” and be carried forth at all times. The above events may register as co-creative dynamics of the move up the right side of the “U”, but they are all guided by the attentional quality of Deep Listening co-presencing taking place within the group, at the eye of the needle.

In contrast to levels or types of listening such as downloading, object-based/factual, empathic, active, appreciative listening, or dialogic listening, Deep Listening in musical contexts enables access to collective, intuitive intelligence. Or, quite possibly, an intelligence extending beyond the separateness of a collection of individuals who unite and comprise a “collective”. A “beyond” state which at its best, in my experience, feels more like the “oneness” of a single, living, breathing, intuitive, sometimes prescient metaphysical organism, where each appendage knows how the other appendages are currently engaged, and also, that they are about to engage the next stimulus event approaching from the emerging future.

Temporal Orientation: It’s All In The Groove

While attempting to deconstruct personal presencing experiences of Deep Listening in musical contexts, and in the interest of uncovering any novel aspects, I had to ask the question, “In terms of quality of awareness, attention or consciousness from which the participants in a socioeconomic system operate - what might be “different” or unique about the improvisational music ensemble performance experience, in contrast to other “mindful” pursuits?” When I asked myself *how* do I know that I’m “in the moment”, or more importantly, how do I know that I’m *not* in the moment - it suddenly struck me: it’s all in the “groove”. Musical rhythm provides a feedback loop for orientation in the realm of time.

Everything has rhythm – seasons, days, people, flowers, the ocean, and at closer hand, conversations, personal interaction, our movements – everything. Picture a time-lapse video of a city: it breathes, pulsing inward and outward as the city awakens, the sun becomes visible on the horizon, people and traffic appear, the city swarms with activity like a beehive, the sun moves across the sky, as the earth, with its own rhythm, revolves around its axis, the sun disappears behind the horizon, people leave the streets for their homes, lights are turned on, the moon rises, darkness falls – and then it all begins again at the dawn of a new day. And if we were to focus on any one component in that image, we would see a rhythm within the rhythm. Even those of us for whom no day is the same, we have a rhythm as well. A similar microcosm of active potential extends to a single beat of music, teeming with collective co-presencing intelligence which emerges as a phrase, sentence, paragraph, or page in the chapter of a story, eventually converging into an epic musical tale.

The Royal Theatre, Gamle Scene, Copenhagen, Denmark

The sheet music for first tenor saxophone in Count Basie's "Jumpin' At The Woodside" designated the tempo as being two-hundred eighty beats per minute. "Actually, we're playing at three hundred bpm," Jonas, the drummer, informed me. It wasn't good news. Three hundred beats per minute is about as fast as jazz tempos get, and placed me at the absolute threshold of my abilities as a saxophonist. After a four-measure a cappella break, I was expected to spit out seven choruses of masterful jazz improvisation in front of a full house of thirteen hundred people, while the big band wailed behind me – night after night.

Each note I'd be playing would be spaced roughly sixty-six to one hundred milliseconds apart, over the space of what for me sometimes felt like a life-threatening three or so minutes. I often relied upon a repertoire of four or five different a cappella breaks to get a good jump out of the starting gate; these were often played with variations to keep things interesting for the rest of the band. But once we hit the first beat of the first improvised chorus, the field was open: just drums, piano, upright bass, guitar, and my tenor saxophone in the spotlight. Forty-plus performances, and never once did I have a chance to look up and see the Royal Danish Ballet performing Twyla Tharp's "Come Fly Away" choreography during this segment of the show. I was fully immersed in each nano-moment of music, working the saxophone to keep my notes locked in to the ting-ting-ting-a-ling of Jonas' ride cymbal. It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing.

The future can be thought of as something distant, an abstract notion of a few years from now, or perhaps next week, tomorrow, or five minutes from now. At three hundred beats per minute – or, five beats per second, with a distance of roughly one hundred milliseconds between the beginnings of each eighth note – it's a simple task to picture the threshold of an emerging future located at the tail end of the present note being played, and just before the articulation of the next, as-yet-unplayed future note. For me, an improvising musician of arguably considerable ability, yet nonetheless perched in a balancing act at the cusp of the limits of his ability to - at breakneck speed - execute a skilled, improvisational performance in public, the emerging future and all that it holds of possibility for artistic success or bumbling failure, ceases to be an abstract, metaphorical concept from a theoretical framework, and feels intensely, urgently real.

Many of us who have been taught to play a musical instrument have been, from the very beginning, subjected to a music teacher tapping a pencil on a note stand to keep time for us, or we have practiced various etudes using a metronome as a timekeeping device. Establishing an awareness of time and tempo is an important step in musical training before we begin to learn to play music with others in an ensemble setting. For young musicians, the concept of "time" as it reveals itself through tempo designations notated in various musical works gains increasing importance, regardless of genre. As we progress musically, we discover *largo*, *adagio*, *andante*, *moderato*, *allegro*, and *vivace* – all of these being classical tempo markings progressing from slow, through medium, to lively and fast – along with many more designations (also in French, German, and English language) for all ranges of tempi, including terms utilized for

increasing or decreasing in tempo, as well as indications for the absence of tempo, such as *rubato*.

As a result, developing musicians gradually become adept at intentionally directing consciousness toward a specific point in time when striving to play a certain note, for example, on the first beat of a measure or wherever else specified via the music notation of a compositional work. Furthermore, we musicians develop an inner awareness of tempo. For example, a tempo of sixty beats per minute denotes a musical pulse of one beat per second. With practice, musicians are able to maintain an inner awareness of such a tempo (or any tempo) more or less accurately, sometimes gradually deviating ever so slightly, over a period of time. Drummers and percussionists especially are expected to maintain accurate tempos without fluctuation during performance, and therefore devote many practice hours toward “keeping steady time”, although an ability to do so is not unique to these instrument groups.

A musical piece, or a song for that matter, can be viewed as being comprised of a series of events. In a non-improvisational performance of that music piece or song, the performing musicians are all well aware of, not only what’s coming, but when – even before the event takes place. During improvisational performance, unless the work in progress is completely devoid of tempo, i.e. played *rubato* or completely in “free time”, the musicians know *when* something will happen, but they don’t necessarily know *what*.²⁰ In this limited sense, improvising musicians are not separate from the listener in the audience.

In musical contexts, the concept of time also includes rhythm. A rhythm might be comprised of various subdivisions within the tempo pulse being emphasized or not. The point here is not to embark upon a lesson in music theory, but merely to point out that utilization of the space in between beats contributes to creating and communicating musical meaning. In addition, there may be room for human interpretation within the quite mathematical divisions and subdivisions of each beat in a piece of music. For example, when seeking to placing a note on say, “one” (the first beat) of a measure, I might intentionally play the note more heavily on the beat, if I “feel” doing so will express a particular, desired quality of meaning. In other words, I can be “late” without being late.

The implication here is that a beat – which, essentially, consists of a mere moment – can be conceived of as not just a fleeting speck of time, but an organic, living entity to be explored. If we then consider the idea of “being in the moment”, then one beat of music - in the instant it occurs - represents that very moment, where we musicians find ourselves, present, sensing, and consciously able to make the most of that entity of time – musically, creatively, and emotionally, for as long as it lasts, until the next moment arises.

Indeed, orientational feedback via rhythm enables masterful musicians to experience “the present” as a universal microcosm within which there is space to operate. From a musical-temporal perspective, one can be in the present; in the present “leaning”

²⁰ Sridharan, Devarajan, et al. (2007). Article Neural Dynamics of Event Segmentation in Music : Converging Evidence for Dissociable Ventral and Dorsal Networks. pp. 521–532.

toward the future; or in the present, “laid back” toward the past; or any increment in between. The masterful improvising musician’s ability to direct conscious attention toward any chosen increment (or sub-division) in the space of time is both audible to the listener when it occurs, and has an audibly detectable influence on the co-creative musical outcome as well. Masterful musicians, improvisors as well as non-improvisors, are not only able to direct and focus deeply conscious attention on the present moment, they are also capable of taking intentional musical action in any sub-increment of the present moment, while being fully aware of how their action might affect the future outcome. In music, as in life, actions have consequences.

The Theory U framework indicates Presencing as something clearly taking place within the construct of time, e.g. while presencing, we are “present and sensing” *in the moment*, at the threshold of where the *present* meets the emerging *future*, with a desire as practitioners to sustain, or prolong the presencing state. However, although much Presencing practitioner focus seems to be directed toward cultivating a richness in the intimate relationship with attention, awareness or consciousness – typically depicted vertically, i.e. as something that moves downward, or “deeper”, little focus seems to be directed toward the significance of cultivating an intimate relationship with time itself (typically depicted horizontally). Via the element of rhythm, and from novice level on, musicians cultivate an intimate relationship with time which eventually extends into daily life.

In hypothesis, the deeper quality of awareness that is Deep Listening, from which the participants (i.e. musicians) in a socioeconomic system (i.e. music ensemble) operate, is perhaps facilitated via an enhanced ability to first direct and sustain consciousness in the present moment, utilizing what I'm calling "Time-Rhythm orientation" - or perhaps “Temporal Orientation” might be a more useful designation, thereby allowing masterful, musical improvisors to explore a deepening of consciousness within that present microcosmic moment, tapping into the available collective intelligence at hand. There seems to be something to the thought: further pursuance into this line of inquiry reveals a study investigating the significance of the human capacity to synchronize, or co-process, time. Researchers have found a connection between the ability to synchronize within a music ensemble setting, and cognitive characteristics - particularly the ability to focus and maintain attention.²¹

For masterful music improvisors, time doesn’t pass, it happens. Or perhaps time just is. The idea of realms of time just “being” touches upon theoretical concepts such as synchronic time perception (versus sequential time perception), or perhaps even more interesting, the theory of eternalism, a.k.a. the "block universe" theory of time, which states that the past, present, and future are all equally in existence, and our consciousness is present at a specific point in time. But just as places do not cease to exist when one leaves them, the past and future are not lost or imaginary simply because we are located in the present.²² The theory provides at the very least, a useful metaphor in Theory U context. Consider, for example, these passages via Scharmer:

²¹ Khalil, By Alexander. (2010). *The Gamelan Project : Teaching , Playing with , and Learning from American Schoolchildren Playing Balinese Gamelan.*

²² Skow, Bradford. (2009). *Relativity and the Moving Spotlight.*

"When our "self" and our (best/highest) "Self" begin to communicate, we establish a subtle but very real link to our highest future possibility that can then begin to help and guide us in situations in which the past can't offer us useful advice."

"When these two "selves" talk to each other, you experience the essence of presencing."²³

Both the concept of Temporal Orientation and the theory of eternalism help bring the idea of a highest future Self closer, as in, "the future exists, right now". For me, this connection leads full circle *back* to my musical way of knowing, which is that I, or we, are not only able to direct and focus deeply conscious attention on the present moment, we are also capable of initiating intentional action in any increment of the present moment, while being fully aware of how our action might affect a future outcome.

It strikes me, as I sit here without saxophone in hand, how the last sentence becomes an even more powerful realization when placed in non-musical context. How awareness and intentionality in relationship to a connection between action and consequence emerge through Deep Listening.

Deep Listening & Learning

The week before the making of his celebrated "80/81" album, jazz guitarist Pat Metheny brought most of the band he'd hired to record the project - Mike Brecker, Charlie Haden, and Jack DeJohnette, sans saxophonist Dewey Redman, to Ryles Jazz Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts. (One internet database incorrectly lists the personnel for this engagement as Pat Metheny, Michael Brecker, Rufus Reid, and Dan Gottlieb). The group would "rehearse" before a live audience over the course of ten shows. I was on the guest list as a personal guest of Michael Brecker - literally one of the greatest saxophonists to ever walk the face of the earth. Mike was a warm, humble, generous giant, and an inspiring mentor for a number of saxophonists around the world.

I sat front row middle, two shows per night, during all five nights of the engagement, Monday through Friday. The bell of Mike's horn pointed directly at me. Witnessing the process of this music taking shape, powered by these gifted musicians - with particular focus on Mike's improvisational journey from Monday evening's cautious, tentative sight-reading of Metheny's scribbled lead sheets, to Friday night's glorious, virtuous, exuberant, winged flight of soulful tenor saxophone mastery continues to be one of the greatest lessons I've ever had.

This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for an immersive Deep Listening learning experience at the hands of four of the foremost masters in the history of jazz music, which took place entirely from my perspective and role as an attentive, focused, participatory member of the audience was, mildly put, an epiphany for me. My (at the

²³ Scharmer, C. Otto. (2009). *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges*. p. 41.

time) rather basic, theoretic, scale/arpeggio relationship to, understanding of, and approach to jazz improvisation was forever transformed.

The music was complex, and as of Monday's initial show, unrehearsed and clearly unfamiliar to all of the musicians except Pat. Each performance was a display of open mind, open heart, and open will, especially from all of us assembled in the room as the audience. Open mind in the sense of trusting that the musicians would find each other within the sparsely notated framework presented, and lead us somewhere meaningful. Open heart in the sense that all present truly wished for the musicians to succeed, and we enthusiastically supported the endeavor from tentative beginning until consummate manifestation. Open will in the sense, for me personally, that this music thing was, at age twenty-one, my chosen vocation, and I desperately wanted to understand what was happening before my ears and eyes, but at first, could fathom very little of it. There was so much searching, probing, and exploration underway on the bandstand, and very little fundament. Jack DeJohnette's drumming teased at an insinuation of steady time, Charlie Haden's acoustic bass reflected his roots performing the free jazz of Ornette Coleman, and was often non-committal in relation to rhythmic or harmonic core. Mike Brecker had clearly given up on reading what there was of sheet music, and embraced uncertainty, relying upon his ears to guide him.

I came to the realization that Mike wasn't just performing, he was learning – and often failing in the most musical of ways, with Coltranesque sheets of sound laying forth harmonic and melodic possibilities which moved him closer to the truth with each attempt. An iterative cycle of crystallization, prototyping, and actualization; working and re-working passages; reflection-in-action while I sat before him reflecting-on-action.²⁴ Watching Mike's face, it was clear when he knew he was wrong, but he was never deterred. And through it all, Pat Metheny beamed. He literally smiled like the happiest man on earth, leading the proceedings in a non-judgmental container of trust and openness. As if he knew everything was going to be alright. And so I too, refused to give up - after all, as a musician, not as the musician I was, but the best future musician Self I wanted to be - I *had* to understand, I *had* to know. Something beyond my comprehension was clearly underway, and I refused to remain in the darkness of ignorance. Each night I left the club exhausted, returning early next evening to stand out of the way backstage, where I listened to the group's friendly, often comical banter before securing my usual seat, front row center. The performing musicians never talked about the music, as far as I knew. Backstage, there was no discussion about what had happened, what was about to happen, or what could happen. They simply enjoyed each other's company.

"There is a parallel between music and life, and I also believe that there must be a balance. One should try to get the most out of life, otherwise you won't have much to say through your instrument."²⁵ - *Saxophonist Michael Brecker*

On Wednesday night during the second show, suddenly it all clicked. What I mean is, it all clicked for me. First, I was reminded of how much practicing I'd have to do, but

²⁴ Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action.*

²⁵ Ricketts, Bobby. (1987). Interview with Michael Brecker, "Jazz Har Det Godt". *Musikmagasinet MM* Vol. 10.

I already knew that. More importantly, what I began to understand was that in musical improvisation, beyond scale patterns and technical facility, there's a certain energy that exists at the threshold of the present moment and the uncertain, emerging future. It's the energy from a co-creative flame that is fed as a group of musicians come together, with their path of action informed through Deep Listening. It's the same type of energy I would not forsake, many years later, during that evening in Osaka, Japan.

One way I picture the threshold is as a massive, yet permeable wall of bright light. Before I began to picture it this way, I would often fail at this threshold, by giving up as if I wasn't worthy or didn't have what it takes to pass through. A confrontation took place here, not with the wall of light, but with myself. Walking through required a leap of faith, and I, myself, didn't believe. My Self, however, has always believed—this is why I have practiced deliberately for four decades – the two just had to be connected. The energy at the threshold is sacred, and it takes commitment to keep the flame burning. This is “the eye of the needle”. As an improvising musician, I have to commit to what feels like not a leap of faith - it's more deliberate than that: it's a simple step forward without judgment, without cynicism, without fearing, for example, that I lack whatever it takes to execute that simple step forward. Perhaps the voice of fear whispers more quietly than we think. I have to leave that kind of baggage behind, every time I perform.

What I learned that Wednesday evening of May 29, 1980 is, an authentic Self is not a perfect Self. You bring what you have that is essential and shed everything non-essential. In music, the most essential part is the story all of us have to tell. My particular story may, at times, not be as polished as I'd like it to be, but it is authentic, and when lifted, carried, or born by the combined, authentic stories of my co-creators, it becomes woven into a musical tapestry. Perhaps my bandmates experience a struggle similar to mine at the eye of the needle, but I wouldn't know. As we bare our souls in this generative, musical field of social presencing, I perceive them as the best version of their Selves. Thirty-seven years have passed since that defining musical and life lesson at Ryles Jazz Club, yet the insight which emerged during that week in May 1980 continues to inform my evolvment as a musician and as a human being.

Note: Check out the Pat Metheny podcast, “The Stories Behind 80/81” - Mike Brecker’s playing on my favorite “80/81” track entitled “Every Day (I Thank You)” is absolutely breathtaking, ditto for Pat Metheny’s performance and composition.

Skill Acquisition, Expertise & Mastery

Addressing the Presencing practitioner query regarding what is needed to take presencing to the “next”, or mastery level - and perhaps in indirect response to the core question that underlies Theory U and methodology, “What is required in order to learn and act from the future as it emerges?”, one might conceivably contemplate the inclusion of a discussion on expertise in the Presencing mastery conversation.

Continual references to mastery-level musical improvisation performance seem to call upon a parallel drawn to the performance dynamic in the social field of presencing, at the “U” movement from co-presencing to co-creation and beyond. According to K.

Anders Ericsson, whose work has had a major impact on the trajectory of research regarding expert performance,

“Most people find it inconceivable that the dramatic differences between expert and novice performance can be explained by a series of incremental improvements starting at the novice level. It is common belief that most of the benefits of learning are attained rapidly within weeks or months as is the case for most everyday skills and leisure activities. People are generally surprised to hear that it takes years, even decades, of gradual improvements for even the most ‘talented’ to reach the highest levels of performance. Even then, the attainment of expert performance requires an extended period of high level deliberate practice, where the duration of practice is limited by the ability to sustain concentration, a capacity that appears to increase as a function of years of practice in the domain. Given that very few individuals sustain commitment to newly acquired skill for more than a few months, much less years, most individuals will never know the upper limit of their performance.”

“Research on expertise shows that for everyday performance (e.g. skiing, playing tennis, driving a car, et al.) participants will after some limited period of training and experience, reach an acceptable standard of performance which can be generated without much need for effortful attention. At this point, execution of the everyday activity will attain the characteristics of automated performance. From this point, without conscious effort directed toward maintaining and extending skill, performance levels will taper off and begin to decrease as individuals lose conscious control over intentionally modifying and changing their level of performance. A desire to attain some level of mastery in a domain of expertise is not by itself enough to reach the desired level. Master practitioners across several domains of expertise all describe the critical role played by motivation and willingness to continue work.”²⁶

Taking these findings into consideration, perhaps it should come as no surprise then, if it seems commonplace amongst practitioners that they perceive reaching a plateau fairly early on in their Presencing experience. The period of time required to attain expertise or mastery level varies across domains, in some cases anywhere from ten years to several decades; therefore, considering the 2005 publishing date of Scharmer's "Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society", and the 2009 publishing date of "Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges", one might ask, is it too early to expect the emergence of Presencing mastery amongst Theory U practitioners nine years later, on the cusp of 2018?

Notably, Hambrick et al. (2014) dispute the degree to which deliberate practice is as significant a factor in expert performance as argued by Ericsson; Ericsson rejects the arguments presented by Hambrick et al., who offer no alternative theory, but merely wish to debate significance percentages.²⁷ In my experience as an expert practitioner, deliberate practice is and has always been a significant factor (long before my

²⁶ Ericsson, K. Anders. (2002). *Attaining Excellence Through Deliberate Practice: Insights From the Study of Expert Performance*.

²⁷ Hambrick, David Z., et al. (2014). “Accounting for Expert Performance: The Devil Is in the Details.” *Intelligence*, vol. 45, no. 1, Elsevier Inc. pp. 112–114.

knowledge of Ericsson's research) in both my emergence as a professional musician and ongoing development as an artist, and is something I would continue to recommend to whomever will listen. Furthermore, much of the discussion between my international colleagues and I, across various social media platforms, or via blogs maintained by respected music professionals, revolves precisely around how deliberately we practice.

The common-sense message here for serious practitioners seems to be, achievement of Presencing mastery requires active effort, commitment, motivation, deliberate practice, and subsequent reflective analysis. If the reader should take anything away from the accounts herein regarding my personal experiences in the music domain, perhaps it might be that an ability to operate from a deeper quality of attention, consciousness, or awareness is not to be taken for granted, and that the challenges in doing so remain ever present, even after decades of immersive experience, achievement of mastery level, and sustained deliberate practice. An additional thought comes to mind: perhaps the shift to a truly distributed, more deeply connected sense of being in the world may take place in a later phase of Presencing mastery, as was the case during my Stage 3 phase of Emergence, where musical improvisation abilities also became more intuitive.²⁸

Experienced Presencing practitioners point to meditation and mindfulness as essential foundational practices.²⁹ If meditation and mindfulness are to be perceived as skills in which expertise or mastery is attainable, then research on expertise may be applicable here as well, indicating a necessity for deliberate practice, in that even prolonged experience within a particular discipline may not lead to expertise or mastery, without considerable effort being invested in conscious control over intentionally modifying and changing the level of performance. Buddhist monks undergo years of training under the guidance of a mentor; in the music domain, we have several hundred years of model musicianship to emulate, an established system of higher education institutions, as well as vast libraries of recordings and published works which enable us to pursue mastery under direct or indirect, even virtual, mentorship.

In the interest of facilitating accessibility to the development and extension of Presencing skill with the means at hand, I propose the idea that practitioners interested in tackling complex societal problems via utilization of the Theory U framework, might, as an exercise in deliberate practice, incorporate conscious exploration of complexity alongside their foundational (and deliberate) practice of meditation and mindfulness. One highly accessible way to explore complexity is through intuitive music listening.

“A listener does more than passively experience the music. The listener co-creates the experience along with the performers, making the experience come to life for themselves. Intuitive listening involves experiencing-in-action—that is, perceiving the music as it happens, creating expectations of what may happen, reflecting on what has happened, and interacting affectively with these perceptions. The individual listener is the arbiter of where to pay

²⁸ Taylor, Peter J. (2017). Faculty advisor comments to Bobby Ricketts, University of Massachusetts Boston CCT Graduate Program.

²⁹ Gunnlaugson, Olen. (2018). *Dynamic Presencing*.

attention and how much, consciously or unconsciously. This flux of experiencing is constant and inseparable from other aspects of noticing and responding.”³⁰

“I’m not a musician, so I don’t really get it.”

But you could.

A research team from the Stanford University School of Medicine has gained valuable insight into how the brain sorts out the chaotic world around it. The study suggests one possible adaptive evolutionary purpose of music, this being that music engages the brain over a period of time, and the process of listening to music could be a way that the brain sharpens its ability to anticipate events and sustain attention.

According to the study, even non-musicians are actively engaged, at least subconsciously, in tracking the ongoing development of a musical piece, and forming predictions about what will come next. Typically in music (*and as discussed under “Temporal Orientation”*), *when* something will come next is known, because of the music's underlying pulse or rhythm, but *what* will occur next is less known.³¹ Perhaps an enhanced or improved ability to direct, sustain, and deepen one’s level of conscious awareness and action through Deep Listening and “Temporal Orientation” might be achieved via the deliberate practice of intuitive music listening facilitated by a curated “curriculum” of complex music selections, or perhaps even purposefully-designed “music games”?

While an undergraduate at Berklee College of Music, I was tasked with studying Part I, Episode 2 (“Les Augures Printaniers”) from Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre Du Printemps* – known for its experiments in tonality, meter, rhythm, stress and dissonance. This was for a conducting class exam - the expectation was that I be able to cue the entrance of every instrument group, as well as shifts in tempo, meter, and dynamics, using my conductor’s baton while a recorded version of the work blared away on the classroom’s sound system. It was a complicated task, even with the full symphonic score in front of me, and having practiced using an identical, recorded version of the work. Regardless of my intensive focus, furrowed brow, and bombastic arm movements, I would swear the orchestra refused to play the piece in exactly the same manner for each time I replayed the vinyl record. Of course this was impossible, which made my incorrect cues, flailing appendages, and general lack of expertise all the more blatantly and painfully obvious to my classmates, as well as the professor, who never once cracked a smile the entire semester. I’m convinced he was bored by mediocrity.

In this case, several weeks of listening preparation wasn’t enough. I had grown up performing classical music, yet this particular work of Stravinsky is, even today, radically different from anything I have ever heard, and without having yet figured out why, I still find the piece deeply disturbing on an emotional level, for all its

³⁰ Dunn, Robert E. (2006). *Teaching for Lifelong, Intuitive Listening*.

³¹ Sridharan, Devarajan, et al. (2007). Article *Neural Dynamics of Event Segmentation in Music : Converging Evidence for Dissociable Ventral and Dorsal Networks*. pp. 521–532.

eerily-masked artistry, beauty, and genius. This isn't Gangsta Rap, Punk, Death Metal, or whatever else you might love to hate – this is a composition by Stravinsky which is considered to be one of the most influential musical works of the twentieth century. It's like an important piece of literature which one hasn't yet read, but really should. I'd challenge anyone to simply maintain steady, diaphragmatic breathing while listening to this piece of music. I've just had a fresh listen while writing these words, and my stomach is now tied up in knots. Or, for the more courageous, simulate engaging the future as it emerges, and using a finger, tap gently on a surface, as you attempt to anticipate the pulse of the music. Register the quality of attention required to do so. Intuitive listening of this nature presents to the listener a manageable form of complexity that can be paused, re-played, re-visited, and with commitment, eventually mastered. Of course, one might also begin on a less ambitious level than Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring".

Studies published over the past twenty years have suggested that music listening expertise does not need to be taught; in fact, the knowledge gained through formal musical training may be rather tangential to the skills required to be an expert listener. Other studies suggest listening expertise can, for non-performers, instill a sense of co-creation on the music work in progress, whether live or recorded.³² The implication here is that certain of the skills associated with music performers in this writing, and which seem to facilitate their Deep Listening/Presencing ease, are conceivably scalable to non-musicians, hereunder Presencing practitioners in non-musical contexts.

Conclusion

Music is an ubiquitous presence in all our lives, and plays an important role in literally all world cultures. From a historical perspective, music reveals itself to be a significant element in religious ceremonies, rites of passage rituals, political and social movements, as well as in various aspects of culture from community choirs to the arts.³³ Here in the twenty-first century, most everyone, whether adult or child, has an emotional connection to music, and there's a place for music in every facet of life - oftentimes purely functional as a break in the monotony of daily routines, or, sometimes we encounter musical performances which are representative of the highest achievements humanity has ever attained. Plus everything in between the two extremes. Music as art is a reflection of the human condition, and in my view, as it is in Music, so it is in Life.

During this glance at Theory U and Presencing from a musical perspective, I have sought to illustrate qualities of the music-improvisational mindset, e.g. a "knowing-in-not-knowing" which masterful musicians bring to the generative field, as well as these musicians' "ease of access" to the field; I've examined how masterful, improvising musicians may interact during performance, utilizing Deep Listening to inform co-creative action resulting in artful outcomes, and how Deep Listening itself provides an opportunity for learning. Furthermore, I have hypothesized in regard to "Temporal Orientation", suggesting that an ability to sustain (a "horizontally-oriented" time) consciousness in the present allows one to explore a ("vertically-oriented") deepening

³² Dunn, Robert E. (2006). *Teaching for Lifelong, Intuitive Listening*.

³³ Garfias, Robert. (2004). *Music : The Cultural Context*.

of consciousness in that present moment. Finally, I have proposed that such listening-oriented skills exhibited by masterful musicians may be acquired and mastered incrementally by non-musicians via intuitive music listening and deliberate practice, and that doing so may serve beneficially in the development of Presencing capabilities.

With the objective of bringing Presencing to diverse fractals of society via “the means at hand”, I have highlighted an element of inclusiveness, in that improvisation is a generative capacity which all humans possess; music listening expertise is a skill that does not need to be taught; and expertise or mastery in a domain can be achieved in manageable increments over time.

Future research directions might therefore include (1) further inquiry into how the generative capacity of improvisation may be integrated with the social field of Presencing; (2) how utilizing models for incremental, deliberate practice may impact development of Presencing expertise from novice level to mastery; (3) an investigation regarding the significance of the human capacity to collectively synchronize, or co-process, time (Temporal Orientation), and how this capacity, through simulated musical activity, may increase an ability to focus and maintain attention; (4) continued exploration with regard to Deep Listening and the idea of engaging "complexity" via intuitive music listening, as two additional techniques for extending Presencing abilities; and finally, (5) a comprehensive study regarding how habits, practices, and "ways of being" of masterful music improvisors which seem to facilitate fluid access to the generative field, may serve to expand, elucidate, or develop new inroads to the Presencing experience.

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