

## **4th Year Miller Arts Scholars Award Outcome Presentation**

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### **Why study jazz?**

For my Arts Scholars project this year, I decided to study jazz flute. Before college, I had only worked on classical music in my private lessons. I've explored more contemporary pieces with my flute teacher in college, including some pieces that incorporate jazz elements. However, all of these contemporary pieces had sheet music that was fully written out, which is easier for a classically-trained flutist to play but eliminates the necessity of truly understanding the theory and techniques behind jazz. I wanted to learn to improvise like a "real" jazz musician, which would require abandoning the comfort of having every note written out for me and allowing myself to play freely. I explored improvisation a bit at a summer program run by Project Trio, a chamber ensemble that performs contemporary music styles on classical instruments (flute, cello, and string bass). However, as one of the few non-music majors at this camp, I struggled because I didn't feel like I had a solid enough understanding of music theory to feel comfortable improvising over a chord progression. I took some music theory classes the following year and attended some workshops on jazz at the National Flute Association's Annual Convention the following summer. After these experiences, I realized that I wanted to explore jazz further, so I decided to focus my 4th year Arts Scholars project on it.

### **What I proposed and what I did**

I had initially proposed that I would take jazz lessons over the summer, attend the National Flute Convention's Annual Convention again, and record some jazz pieces to document my progress. I also planned to listen to live jazz performances around Charlottesville throughout the year, such as John D'earth's band playing at Miller's (on the downtown mall) and the music department's jazz small groups performance. I was able to do all of these things except attend the flute convention due to a scheduling conflict. Instead, to apply my knowledge of jazz to the flute specifically, I decided to research a jazz flutist in detail. I chose Herbie Mann (1930-2003) and listened to many of his recordings.

I took lessons with John D'earth, a Charlottesville-based jazz trumpeter and U.Va. music professor. Our lessons started out reviewing some basic music theory relevant to jazz, such as the circle of fifths, blues scales, 7th chords, and chord progressions. Instead of simply studying these on paper like I had in my music theory classes, John gave me many exercises to practice to get more comfortable using these scales and chords and moving between different keys. I also learned several jazz standards, such as "Blue Bossa," "So What," "Sophisticated Lady," and "Prelude to a Kiss." Each piece of sheet music had the melody written out as well as the accompanying chords. After I learned the melodies, I practiced improvising over the chord progression of each song.

Improvisation was very difficult for me because, as a classical flutist, I'm used to reading music off a page. Although jazz is certainly based on specific music theory, I tend to overthink what will be "right" and "wrong," which hinders the natural flow of the music. Whenever I tried improvising, I would be afraid of making a "mistake" (playing a note not in the key) and

sounding “bad.” However, the more I practiced improvising, the more I learned to trust myself and to allow myself to keep going even if I didn’t like one note or phrase that I played.

### **Applying jazz knowledge to the flute**

Although my lessons were extremely helpful in learning jazz, my teacher was not a flute player, so I had to seek out other sources to learn more about playing in the jazz style on the flute. Three main areas where classical flute and jazz flute differ are articulation, tone, and vibrato. Jazz articulation tends to be softer, using “du-gu” tongue syllables instead of the normal “ta-ka.” Jazz also requires experimentation with different tone colors and incorporating both centered and airy tones. Vibrato is not used nearly as much in jazz as in classical music, and when it is used, it is usually a very mild intensity vibrato.

I listened to many Herbie Mann recordings to hear a well-known jazz flute player’s style. Mann performed both as a solo artist and in jazz big bands with some other iconic jazz musicians such as Chick Corea, Phil Woods, Cissy Houston, and Donald “Duck” Dunn. He was primarily known for playing bebop (modern jazz) on the flute, but he also experimented with different instruments such as bass clarinet and tenor saxophone as well as different jazz styles such as bossa-nova, Afro-Cuban music, and rhythm & blues. These styles are featured on dozens of albums he recorded, including his most well known *Memphis Underground* (1969) and *Push Push* (1971). After listening to several recordings from these albums, I have tried to emulate Mann’s style in my playing.

### **Recording**

As a culmination of my work, I recorded a jazz standard with my friend James Famulare. James is a jazz pianist, and we’ve played together just for fun plenty of times throughout the past year. We spent an afternoon playing through several tunes to see what we thought sounded best, and we chose “So What” by Miles Davis. The piece has a simple chord progression, which made it easier to improvise over James’ accompaniment. We decided on a general format for our recording, including the melody (as written) as well as solo portions for each of us. It only took us one take to get something we were happy with, but the recording ends with us laughing because we hadn’t discussed how we were going to end the piece before we started playing! In the end, we used non-verbal communication (a very important element of playing in a jazz ensemble) figure out how to end the piece. You can watch the recording on my Youtube channel at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5-5-OjfESs>.