

Greg Chako Statement About Research/Artistic Interests

My main area of research and artistic interest involves recording, producing, and distributing my music. Each compact disc (CD) recording project begins with an idea. The process that takes place from its conception to its fruition involves years of painstaking planning and persistent effort, not unlike publishing a book or overseeing the design and building of a public structure. Constructing a compelling musical composition is like writing only the first chapter of a good book; it is just an initial step to completing a much longer and involved process. Once all the musical material for a CD is composed, orchestrated, and assembled into a cohesive collection, there is still much to do before a marketable product is fully realized. For instance, the performing musicians must be contracted and directed; the audio recording, mixing, and mastering must be executed; the design (cover art) and liner notes must be conceptualized and authored; then its manufacture, printing, copyright, marketing, promotion, and distribution must also be carefully considered.

20 years ago, I produced my first audio CD. I published nine more since then and finished the tenth just last year. Some artists seem fully satisfied solely by sustaining their live performance career, but live performances are fleeting by nature while recording and publishing produces a more permanent record of one's creative work. My CDs represent and document particular artistic achievements and specific periods of my personal development, and they can serve as a useful model for students who look to create their own individual legacies through books, paintings, music, or whatever their creative works may be.

The following four CD recording projects are ready for funding and can be released, one per year, within the next four years if I find myself in a work environment that will support their completion. Much of the music has been composed and I have already chosen the artists I want involved and have had preliminary discussions with all of the key players. Historically, each of my CDs highlights either a new interest path for me or builds upon a recent development in my creative endeavors, and the four recording concepts listed below are no different in that respect.

Words and Bossa involves my interest in writing original song lyrics, essentially fusing my desire for constructing *both* words and music. It will feature three Brazilian musicians I met in New York City in a septet or octet format of two vocalists, one male and one female; bass; guitar; drums; flute doubling on sax; trombone; and handheld percussion. The music has a distinct Brazilian flavor, and although I have recorded Latin-fused music and vocal tunes before, this CD will be unique in that it will present primarily vocal and not instrumental music. Hence, it might garner more commercial interest than former offerings of mine.

Back to School was conceived of in 2009 when I returned to America from Asia to attend graduate school. It comprises original instrumental jazz in a new format for me: an octet of vibraphone; tenor sax doubling on alto flute; tenor sax doubling on bass clarinet; alto sax doubling on soprano sax; trombone; bass; drums; and guitar.

Big Band Chako is the working title for my very first CD of 17-piece big band music. I have wanted to lead my own big band for years because of the increased musical color, presence, and variety of sounds and textures that format offers. Fulfilling that

desire will further establish me as an artist capable of leading an unusually wide variety of musical group formats.

My World on Six Strings II is a sequel to my 2013 solo-guitar CD release that featured original arrangements of standard songs from “The Great American Songbook.” The sequel may include some original compositions as well as standards.

Although I have many ideas for new projects, I cannot realistically anticipate from where or what my next creative inspiration will spring. Art is a reflection of what we perceive around us; people, places, or events inspire virtually all of my music, and collaboration and interaction with others are what prod me to try new things. For instance, only after making friends with some professional dancers who used to dance during my musical performances did I imagine collaborating professionally with dancers on an audio-video recording project; only after a percussionist “sat in” with me repeatedly, playing the Australian aboriginal instrument commonly called the “didjeridoo,” did I ever dream of writing music for and recording with the didjeridoo; only after getting a duet gig in which a bassist was not allowed did I ever consider recording a CD with my accompanists and without a bassist (my seventh CD titled, *Two’s Company, Three’s a Crowd*).

Working with other artists exposes me to myriad ideas, talents, and opinions I need to define and challenge myself sufficiently enough to maximize my creative level at a given moment in time. I continue to seek new experiences. I know that I will respond positively and creatively to whatever stimuli surrounds me. How might living there affect my artistic sensibilities? What people will I meet there and how will they inspire me? What will I learn of the music and culture there and how will I fuse that knowledge into my artistic work? Perhaps more importantly, how will my own persona and what I bring to the table affect my students and colleagues? It is thrilling to imagine the answer to those rhetorical questions. I am certain there will be brand new artistic heights to climb and additional publishing projects to realize if I have the privilege of accepting the position to which I am applying.

Ethnomusicology

I was introduced to formal studies in ethnomusicology in graduate school and, somewhat to my surprise; I also discovered a love for academic writing and research there that parallels my fondness for making music. My graduate professors have encouraged me to seek publication for my writing and I whole-heartedly embrace that relatively new enlargement of my creative palette and publishing potential.

As a global traveler and all around lifelong student of peoples and their cultures, ethnomusicology fascinates me because it explores the relationship between music, identity, and culture within societies. I am keen to investigate the ways in which music is understood as a social and spiritual (or religious) process, combined with the way culture shapes that musical expression across societies. There is no real consensus as to what the differences are between being spiritual and being religious, but I am interested in both as they inform what constitutes human psychology.

My graduate school research has shown me that, as a musician or artist, being the best person we can be and finding our own inner spiritual solace is far more important than being the most technically proficient or knowledgeable. I believe Hazrat Inayat Khan sums it up well by stating

in his book, *The Mysticism of Music, Sound, and Word: The Sufi Message Volume II*, that “the power of music depends on the grade of spiritual evolution that person has touched.” Exploring the meaning and application of Khan’s argument is a natural extension of my intellectual and scholarly interests. In my recent research project, *A Study of Bhajan Ensembles at Spiritual Programs of Mata Amritanandamayi Devi*, I learned that most Indian musicians, whether Hindu or Muslim, believe that after silence, music is what brings us closest to god, and that the purpose of music is to “purify the mind.” The connection of one’s art to one’s inner spiritual journey has intrigued and inspired numerous notable artists, affecting not only their art, but also the public reception of their art. My continued research and attempts to publish it could shed more light on how this connection manifests and how it may influence or increase an artists’ ability to communicate with his or her audience.

The Indian bhajans (a type of devotional music) that were the subject of my paper are like the Hindu kirtan, the Islamic qawwali, and the Sikh gurbani, in that they sprang from the bhakti movement of medieval India in the 6th century. Singing bhajans opened an otherwise closed door for women to actively partake in religious rituals reserved for men and this aspect of participation in music as a means to equalize the genders is also of interest to me. Additionally, in stark contrast to what is required of a traditional Indian classical musician, the social singing of bhajans does not require one to have formal training in music. This open and informal accessibility of bhajan playing and singing popularized and spread that musical form well beyond the borders of India and makes it a particularly worthy source of further research and study.

As a jazz musician, I also desire to publish an ethnographic study about jazz. I imagine my research taking two potential tracks: one is to further develop a research paper that I wrote about a jazz musician called, *Horace Silver: A New Definition of Greatness*. It posited that Silver was marginalized by the media, exposing a gap of perception and understanding between the media-informed public at large and the feelings and opinions of the musicians that actually played with Silver, who were informed not by the media but through their “insider” experience as sidemen in Silvers’ band. I would like to expand that paper to reveal more of the jazz insiders’ point of view and to garner more attention on relatively unsung jazz heroes. The second idea track stems from my experiences as a jazz musician in America and Asia. It will examine how American jazz traditions are assimilated in other cultures. Potential questions to explore are: how different are Japanese jazz artists to American ones? How has the racial prejudice and double standards prevalent in America affected what it means to be a jazz artist in Japan?

I am in a unique position as a researcher and ethnographer to investigate jazz because I am a musician first and a scholar second. I am a jazz artist who also relishes academic research, and not merely a scholar who also happens to play an instrument. Hence, my “entry to the field” and ability to establish quick rapport with research subjects could be easier to achieve. Both musical forms, the Indian bhajan and American jazz, have spread beyond the boundaries of the country and culture from which they sprang, and they both have the potential to unite people of different nations or races. Ultimately, that is why they are excellent topics of study for a budding ethnographer like me.

Pedagogy

Pedagogical studies appeal to me because of their potential to help people achieve their creative and professional aspirations. Through my study of jazz arrangement, my research of jazz guitarists, and the interaction I have had with innovative guitarists and lecturers, I have come to the conclusion that many jazz artists lack the skills or the desire to effectively communicate to others what they do with their instrument. All too often, rather than a well- organized analytical description of their musical process and prowess, they demonstrate by example, by simply playing and perhaps saying, “. . . like this! See?”

My DMA lecture-recital, *Arranging Topics for Solo Jazz Guitar: How to Write for the Guitar Instead of Just Playing What You Know*, demonstrated that I can effectively communicate complex techniques in simple language to both guitar experts and laymen. The solo guitar CD that was the subject of my lecture, and the live performance I did after the spoken presentation, was my way of demonstrating by example. However, the lecture itself, along with the printed musical notation and written notes that accompanied my talk, was the basis for an effective, easy-to-understand, advanced-level pedagogy designed for all composers, arrangers and instrumentalists. By all accounts from the published educators who were in the audience for my DMA lecture-recital, it could easily evolve it into a book or a presentation at Jazz Education Network (JEN) and Society of Music Theory (SMT) conferences.

Additionally, I have always desired to codify my musical process by authoring a guitar method book that would offer something unique and relatively easy for students to assimilate. My working title for such a book is, *Learning the Language of Jazz Improvisation*. Though geared primarily to guitarists, it would offer musical techniques that any singer or instrumentalist could utilize to learn how to improvise and, ultimately, compose music. Working regularly as an entrepreneurial mentor and teacher at a music college would provide the right intellectual environment for me to pursue my goal of pedagogical publication, and I cannot wait to begin the necessary work to fulfill that desire.