

**Legal Name**

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

**Project Title**

To support collaboration with Myra Melford to reimagine YBCA's jazz program, increasing demand for jazz through a series of pilots under four thematic pathways: Mentoring Listeners, Nurturing Jazz Legacy, Women in Jazz, and Curatorial Experimentations

**DDCF Grant Number**

2013029

**Project Progress and Successes**

The collaborations between YBCA and Myra Melford for our DDCF Artist Residency project, called Jazz@YBCA, have been transformative for our organization, moving our initial concept for demand building forward in a way that went well beyond our expectations. In the past, artists have typically been in residence at YBCA for a few days to a few weeks--or, on the rare occasion, up to a few months--giving us a very brief timeframe for residency activities. Having an artist like Myra Melford in residence at YBCA over the course of two years has opened up tremendous possibility, leading to a new artist-in-residence model for our organization.

Our Year 1 Jazz@YBCA experimentations consisted of eight prototyped events organized under the rubric of our four key pathways of Mentoring Listeners (fostering deeper engagement and understanding of the creative process as it relates to jazz), Nurturing Jazz Legacy (establishing YBCA as a place for youth and adults to gather and experiment with jazz, creating a unique niche in the Bay Area Jazz community), Women in Jazz (nurturing female jazz musicians and female jazz audiences), and Curatorial Experimentations (transforming audiences from spectators into actively engaged participants). The eight events we implemented and learned from, listed chronologically, included:

1) November 2013 Smart Night Out 'Jazz Savvy edition' event -- Mentoring Listeners pathway.

We built on the foundation of our existing Smart Night Out program--a dance contextualization workshop piloted as Dance Savvy in 2011/12 and then continued in subsequent years under the title of Smart Night Out--to create a jazz-focused Smart Night Out curriculum piloted on the evening of Myra Melford's "Language of Dreams" performance. For this program, 33 people attended a pre- and post-performance workshop, together experiencing a series of activities led by YBCA staff as well as educator, composer, trumpeter, and singer-songwriter Sarah Wilson, contextualizing that evening's jazz performance through a 'listening moment' in the galleries, translating the deep observation of Visual Thinking Strategies into a technique for deep listening of jazz improvisation; a lecture by Sarah Wilson; dinner and drinks followed by the performance; and then a post-performance facilitated download discussion with wine and dessert.

2) December 2013 Global Jazz on Screen event -- Mentoring Listeners pathway.

In a workshop in our Screening Room attended by 25 people, Myra Melford reviewed a

series of film clips with participants, featuring jazz legends from around the globe, offering aural and visual insight into the lesser known stories of how African-American jazz has migrated across cultures and continents from Latin America to Europe, South Africa, South and Southeast Asia.

3) January 2014 Jazz in the Galleries event -- Curatorial Experimentations pathway. In conjunction with the exhibition "Dissident Futures," we planned an intervention by one of Myra Melford's PhD students and video artist Ian Winters that featured a collaborative, improvised performance using prepared and amplified piano with live video projection in an effort to re-imagine the piano as a 21st century instrument.

4) February 2014 Post-Show Lobby Performance event -- Women in Jazz pathway. After the Young Jean Lee performance "Untitled Feminist Show" in YBCA's theater, the 728 member audience who came to see a theater piece encountered a jazz concert in the theater lobby as they exited, featuring musicians Myra Melford, Miya Masaoka, and Zeena Parkins. While chairs were set up in the lobby for listeners, so many people paused to watch that it became standing room only, with people crowding into the stairwells and hallways so they could remain near the lobby to listen to jazz.

5) April 2014 Family Music-Making Workshop with Marcus Shelby event -- Nurturing Jazz Legacy pathway. Seventy-two people participated in an afternoon of music-making, exploring the blues as a foundation of American music. Local favorite, bassist Marcus Shelby, led interactive improvisational games, rhythm explorations, ring shouts, poetry, work songs, and more. The workshop, appropriate for all ages and skill levels, invited families to come together to experience jazz as active participants.

6) April 2014 YBCA ConVerge: Jazz & Stitch event --Nurturing Jazz Legacy pathway. During our monthly third Thursday event--which this time featured local embroidery artist Mei-ling Humphrey leading 100 participants in an experience of communal learning, labor, and expression while sitting around a giant embroidery hoop--people also encountered a performance by the California Jazz Academy's intergenerational sextet. This event also included public talks on activating jazz ecology given by Kevin Chen of Intersection for the Arts, Brent Miller from the Center for New Music, Angela Wellman at Oakland Public Conservatory of Music, Susan Muscarella of Berkeley's Jazzschool, and artist Marcus Shelby.

7) May 2014 Jazz in the 60's and Beyond: An Intensive Workshop for Young Jazz Musicians with Myra Melford, Lisa Mezzacappa and Darren Johnston -- Nurturing Jazz Legacy pathway. Twelve experienced young jazz musicians (ages 15-21), nominated by their teachers, were invited to this hands-on workshop led by musicians Myra Melford, Lisa Mezzacappa, and Darren Johnston, where they explored the ground-breaking legacy of 1960s innovations in jazz and its impact on today's improvisational music. Activities included improvisation games and strategies--which taught the students to use every part of their instruments--followed by a rehearsal for their parents of a composition by a master jazz musician from that era.

8) June 2014 Mentors & Mavericks -- Mentoring Listeners pathway. Attended by 99 people, this event in YBCA's Forum offered an intimate evening with Myra Melford as she reflected on her own musical lineage through solo pieces, interspersed with audio and video clips of her principal mentors, including mavericks like Jaki Byard (and by extension Charles Mingus), Don Pullen, Cecil Taylor, Otis Spann, and Henry Threadgill. Part

two of the evening featured Myra Melford in a duo performance with renowned clarinetist Ben Goldberg.

We consider the evaluation process for Jazz@YBCA to be one of the project's major success. Throughout the year we have collected a wealth of data, which has allowed us to quickly react to observations and feedback from participants and partners, continually analyzing, course-correcting, and improving for the next program. With this approach, we have been able to ensure program rigor, developing a constantly evolving, immersive, high caliber Jazz@YBCA model for people from all levels of experience with jazz. Some of the key successes identified through these evaluations of Jazz@YBCA, which were gleaned from conversations, surveys, and focus groups with 37 study subjects who attended multiple experimentations, include:

- The personal interaction with Myra Melford captured the attention and enthusiasm of participants, and the study subjects appreciated the insight they gained about jazz from other featured artists like Marcus Shelby and Sarah Wilson, among others. Having an artist in residence was very appealing to participants, with many study subjects saying they value their personal relationship with Myra. Having Myra as the anchor for the program and bringing in other guest artists was very exciting to the group.
- Study subjects said the events that combined multiple artistic disciplines were the most successful. They viewed Jazz@YBCA's niche as being contemporary jazz that is site-specific--work that takes advantage of the variety of multidisciplinary artistic resources available at YBCA.
- So far, from the events implemented to date, Mentoring Listeners has been the most impactful pathway. Events that featured opportunities for participants to actively engage in listening, learning, and doing received the highest ratings from study subjects. The group expressed that all the ways in which they learned about jazz through other artistic disciplines (e.g. film), watched artists mentor others, and talked with artists about their mentors and influences did the most to inspire their future participation in YBCA jazz programs.

### **Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project**

The various challenges we encountered during Year 1, and key areas for improvement we identified from our evaluations, include:

- **Changes in partnership plans**

In our initial proposal for Jazz@YBCA we had planned to partner with Intersection for the Arts, an organization that is known for its jazz program and is located only blocks away from YBCA. However, Intersection recently needed to scale back its programming and staff, and they were no longer able to partner with us on this project. In Year 1 we have developed several new organizational partnerships that expanded resources and opportunity for the growing Jazz@YBCA program, including Jazz in the Neighborhood, the Center for New Music, the Oakland Public Conservatory of Music, and the California Jazz Academy. These organizations have been generous thought partners and collaborators, helping us to shape and implement the various Year 1 experimentations. We look forward to working even more closely with these partners in Year 2.

- **Learnings from our YBCA:You members**

Members of the Jazz@YBCA study subject team who were also in YBCA's adult education

and engagement program YBCA:You rated the programs lower than those who were not Youers, with the one exception of Smart Night Out: Jazz Savvy, which was modeled on the Smart Night Out format that has been a cornerstone of the YBCA:You program for the past three years. Our other experimentations did not meet the expectations of Youers when compared with the highly contextualized and social programs they regularly attend through Smart Night Out.

- Programming for aficionados versus jazz novices

The jazz aficionados in the study subject group gravitated toward the YBCA ConVerge: Jazz & Stitch and the Untitled Feminist Show's Post-Show Lobby Performance programs, finding it easier than novices to make connections between the music they were listening to and the related program activities. The primary target audience for the pilot program however--the jazz novices--commented on a need for more guideposts and contextual materials at events like the Post-Show Lobby Performance, and rated programs like Global Jazz on Screen, Mentors & Mavericks, and the Family Music-Making Workshop with Marcus Shelby higher, since they provided accessible contextual information.

- Keeping Jazz@YBCA event content focused

According to the study subjects, some of the events were perceived as having too many activities going on simultaneously. Participants suggested a preference for more focused events that illuminate the art form through discovery of the artists' creative process, historical context, and active engagement. Events taking place in the lobby were the least successful due to the noise and traffic from other various activities detracting from the experience.

- Employing a multidisciplinary approach to building demand for jazz

Some study subjects questioned why YBCA decided to focus on jazz in such a discrete way. To them, this pilot program was a YBCA artist residency that happened to feature a world class Bay Area jazz musician. When discussing YBCA's place in the Bay Area jazz ecology, they see YBCA as unique in its ability to offer intimate, cross-disciplinary, interactive programs. What would differentiate a jazz performance at YBCA for them is a cross-discipline approach with substantial context that makes full use of YBCA's artistic resources in the visual arts, performing arts, and film.

In addition to the various challenges and lessons described above, in Year 1 we also learned from our evaluation process for Jazz@YBCA. To date, we have focused these evaluations on a select group of study subjects, and while this resulted in significant learnings, many of the people selected for this group were unable to follow through on their commitment of attending multiple events. In Year 2 we plan to conduct a broader evaluation program, expanding our surveys and focus groups to include greater numbers of Jazz@YBCA participants.

### **What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?**

Based on the successes and challenges we have experienced during the first year of Jazz@YBCA, here are some key learnings:

- This artist residency has been a unique opportunity to engage people by developing relationships between repeat Jazz@YBCA participants and resident artist Myra Melford. For the Year 2 experimentations, we plan to structure events so Myra has even greater opportunity to speak with participants and share her experiences, developing one-on-one connections. We will also integrate Myra more deeply into YBCA's programming in all

disciplines, building connections and linkages between her work and the work of our other shorter-term artists in residence in our Visual Arts, Performing Arts, and Community Engagement departments.

- While Jazz@YBCA has a goal of holding jazz-centered events in unexpected and/or interstitial spaces--in our lobbies, hallways, galleries, screening room, plazas, and courtyards--the venue we choose is critical to event success. In the future, we will be more careful around venue and sound, ensuring acoustics are excellent and the space allows us to prevent sound bleed from nearby events. We also need to be sure Jazz@YBCA venues have enough space for people to gather and engage, and when appropriate, to sit.
- It is important to be sure a program like Jazz@YBCA meets participant expectations for our institution. YBCA is known for being cross-disciplinary and participatory, and in Year 2 we will further integrate these values into Jazz@YBCA, having each of these programs go beyond jazz so they offer unique opportunities to experience jazz in the context of these signature YBCA values.
- Jazz@YBCA is evolving into its own ecosystem, with people converging at YBCA for Jazz@YBCA events, then going back out into our community to engage with our various Bay Area jazz partners, and then coming back to YBCA for repeat participation. With this activated ecosystem, engagement in jazz is growing over time, both at YBCA and out in the community.
- Our hypothesis is that jazz and improvisation can be used as a method for approaching other disciplines, affecting the way we see a film, or an exhibition, or any other work of art. Jazz can also inform the many various facets of our lives and affect our styles of learning. Jazz can guide our collaborative nature, our experimental nature, our harmonizing nature, and our strategic dissonance--all elements that together make up good culture. How can we take jazz tradition and make it part of an arts center like YBCA? At the time of this reporting we have only scratched the surface of this hypothesis, and for Year 2 of the grant, we plan to be more intentional about this philosophy in our Jazz@YBCA pedagogical approach.

**Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.**

YBCA and Myra Melford introduced Jazz@YBCA to the community through an online video, which can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/1nzd8FW>.

**If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N**

If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).

For additional information on Jazz@YBCA, please contact Isabel Yrigoyen, YBCA's Associate Director of Performing Arts, at [iyrigoyen@ybca.org](mailto:iyrigoyen@ybca.org).