

NINE PIECES OF ADVICE FOR MUSICIANS ACCORDING TO LAMONTE YOUNG

1. NEVER BECOME A MUSICIAN BECAUSE YOU WANT TO MAKE MONEY

Back in the '50s, [Billy Higgins] was my drummer. And he's the greatest drummer I ever heard. We used to play at a place called Opus One way downtown. And they offered us a dollar a night and all the beer we could drink. So we were drinking beer constantly, and we never got the dollar. This is a musician's life.

One time we went to pick up John Cotton, who was an incredible blues guitarist, after we had played in a club, and he just sat at the bar, just saying, "I'm not leaving until you give me my money." And the guy behind the cash register was saying, "Oh, I can't open the cash register when the boss isn't here." John said, "I'm not going anywhere." This went on for a while, and finally the guy opened the money and gave him his fifty dollars. Fifty dollars is nothing, but musicians have to play for nothing in order to even eke out a living. It's a hard life, but it's a life of beauty because the musicians are totally involved with music, and they hope to get a little bit of money to buy a sandwich.

2. RECOGNIZE THAT THE SIMPLEST THING IS OFTEN THE BEST THING

You know, there's a story about a white man who went to India early on, and he heard some guy sitting there and playing one note. He said, "How come you're playing one note all the time?" The guy said, "You know, you Westerners are always looking for your notes. I found mine." And I think it's this sense that you don't have to go somewhere, you don't have to impress anyone, but you get involved with the frequencies, and it becomes a vehicle for mediation.

3. FIND A SCHEDULE THAT WORKS FOR YOU

Most people are worried about the time: gotta get here, gotta get there, gotta make an appointment, gotta be at school, gotta get out of school. Well, time is my medium. I did graduate work at Berkeley, and I won some grants, and I left school after two years at Berkeley. I came to New York in 1960, and I never went back to school again, and suddenly, I began to live on my own time. And I found out that I was working longer, and sleeping longer. This built up over a long time until we were maybe awake for twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty-ones hours, and we were sleeping for - well right now, we sleep every other day, the whole day. And we work a long time on the day that we're awake.

But when we met our guru, Pandit Pran Nath, in 1970, he wouldn't allow any of that. We had to live on his schedule. So when we lived with Pandit Pran Nath, I had to get up every day at 3 in the morning, make tea, get my shower, tune the tambura, and be sitting in front of him before 7AM, or he wouldn't teach me, he would say, who's the next student? It was the discipline that he was trying to teach me. Really, the first part of my life was all spent trying to buy time. Some people want to buy cars, some people want to buy drugs, some people want to buy equipment, and some people want to buy time. Maybe I'm the only one who ever wanted to buy time, but there are other people who want to buy time: they want to take a vacation, that's time.

4. DON'T GET MIXED UP IN DRUGS

Terry Jennings was a jazz phenomenon. He's somebody that I discovered in 1960 - he went to the same high school as me. In the tenth grade, he already sounded like Ornette Coleman - he'd been playing his whole life, and when I talked to his mother and father, they said, you know, Jerry was taking his own records out of the collection when he was two years old, he was playing Beethoven's Four Hands with us when he was four years old. He took the John Cage Sonatas And Interludes For Prepared Piano out of the library when he was twelve years old, and when he was thirteen or fourteen, he was writing his own arrangements for the junior high school orchestra.

He was one of the most amazing players I ever heard - an amazing musician. But unfortunately, his life was a tragedy. He got mixed up with drugs too early, and he ended up face-down in a mud

puddle in the '80s. And it was really a great loss. It was a great loss for me because he was one of my most important discoveries, and I presented him in New York at Yoko's loft. How many people have ever heard of Terry Jennings? Oh, one person raised their hand. Incredible. I want to tell you, he's one of the greatest musicians I ever played with, including Billy Higgins and Don Cherry. I recommend don't do drugs, no matter what stories you've heard.

5. FIND A PLACE TO PLAY

Musicians are always looking for a place to play. The Dream House is the place that Billy Higgins and I were always looking for. Once you have a place that's permanent, then you can do very, very creative work. I said to one of my students, when I started the agreement [for the Church Street Dream House], I said, you know, I can do whatever I want here. I can change it in a year if I want. He said, "Change it? That's what everybody does." You know, people that are looking for variation, variety - very few people have the understanding that if you get into something in depth, you have to stick with it. To me, that's a function of time. If you can tune the intervals so that they're more and more perfect over years, decades, centuries, and so on, then you begin to build a different world. And I've always sought a different world.

6. DON'T BE AFRAID TO CONFUSE PEOPLE

How many people have seen my 1960 compositions? In these compositions, I wrote very conceptual narratives - for example, in one composition, we built a fire in front of the audience and let the audience watch it and listen to it. And in another composition, we turned a group of butterflies loose in the audience. Later on, one group of performers recorded it with microphones, recorded the butterflies' wings. [...] In 1960 #6, I invited the audience to come on stage, and let the performers come into the audience and watch the audience.

7. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

How many people know the story of the first time Charlie Parker went to a jam session? This is a very enlightening story. He went to a jam session, and he was just a young guy. They laughed him off the stand and hit him with the cymbal - they threw the cymbal at him. He went home and cried. He practiced for a year. He came back, and he was the great Charlie Parker. You know, he had overlooked something. And whatever it was, that something had to be remedied, and he had to take care of it, and he had to do the practice. Discipline leads to freedom.

Charlie Parker was so great that everybody played like him. And eventually Lee Konitz came along and didn't play like him, and Charlie Parker thanked him, said, "Thank you for not playing the way I play." And Charlie Parker was so great that people thought they had to take the drugs he took, they thought they had to drink the alcohol he drank, they thought they needed to lead the lifestyle he led. It was all wrong. What was right was that Charlie Parker was a genius, and he practiced hard, and that's what they had to do to ever play like Charlie Parker.

8. MAKE UP YOUR OWN RULES

[John] Cage was a great thinker. He was a great writer. He was a great speaker. And he did have musical talent [...] But, you know, okay, you could go through life saying, "Okay, the sounds on the street are the music I want to hear." No problem. But these sounds are not the music I want to hear. I want to hear the sounds that I create. [...] I have the right to create my own system, and write and create my own music.

You have to come out of the orthodoxy of society. You know, the academy is going to tie you down. They're gonna say, "You have to write this harmony, and this kind of chord, and the other." But once you know what you're doing, you should do what you know. And not try to stay there, with what society offers you. You should first learn what society offers you inside and out. You should become a master of what society offers you, and then you can climb.

In Indian classical music, they have a terminology for how you improvise. There are three types of improvising. The introduction of the tones, one. Two: combination permutation. Three: swimming like a fish and flying like a bird.

9. AND REMEMBER, THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS BEING TOO OLD TO BE A MUSICIAN
I hope to die onstage, rather than in a hospital bed waiting for somebody to come visit me who never comes. I think that it's the story of my life just being on stage and dying there - hopefully in a very ecstatic state, rather than, "Oh, I got old, I'm too old to go on stage again, I have to lie around the house."