

# PART I – OVERVIEW

## CHAPTER I – HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

There are two things that must be recognized in order to make the best use of this book. The first thing you have to do is look yourself squarely in your mind's eye and ask yourself what you *really* want out of your music. Is it to be the best artist your abilities allow in pursuit of the glorious traditions of John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Art Tatum, Miles Davis, George Russell, Charlie Parker and all of the other immortals who placed the music above all else? Is it to embrace the sheer joy, excitement and satisfaction of sharing in the creative process with a group of like-minded artists? Is it to travel the world, meeting new people, enjoying new experiences while bringing whatever you can to the musical vision of a fine leader?

Maybe it's something more mundane. Maybe it's just some romantic notion, like a troubadour going from place to place, hanging out, getting high, making new sexual conquests, receiving applause, gaining notoriety and having fun without any responsibility other than what's contractually dictated.

Possibly it's just digging the music so much that you just have a need to participate and the inevitable first step is to try to be a musician. It might even be some combination or permutation of all of the above. Depending upon your own stage of development as you read this book, the answer to that question may change by the time you finish it. For those of you who don't know the answer yet, this book should help you choose a path. But even if you *don't* know the answer you should ask the question; and it should be asked every day until you truly realize the answer. Nobody can answer it correctly but you.

The second item is to firmly understand that *things don't just happen*. They must be *made* to happen. Overnight fame and fortune, the Big Break, the powerful manager who will hand you stardom, the record deal that will guarantee your future, that mysterious force that will deliver your inevitable destiny are all plot lines for movies and novels, not reality. Don't be misled by the occasional occurrence of somebody receiving that kind of good fortune. The odds are too heavily stacked against it. Embracing an attitude like that is like picking up your horn every morning to see whether you got better overnight. The path to fine musicianship is hard work and commitment followed by *even more* hard work and commitment. The road to a successful career requires a similar mindset.

Don't try to fool yourself by projecting such random wishes onto this book. This is not a step-by-step guide to undeniable success any more than footprints painted on the floor will teach you to tango. *Straight Ahead* gives you all the information you need to understand the business you're in, and to formulate a sensible strategy to navigate it. But there are no magic formulas for success and I'm not pretending to give you any. Your success depends primarily on what you bring to the battle in its pursuit. Most of your predecessors entered the fray without a plan or any real level of understanding as to what they were facing. After reading this book – whether on its own or in connection with a specific curriculum – you'll have a much greater advantage than any of them had.

Another warning – don't get too hung up on the negative aspects, the anger or the edginess in some of the content. Chapter 2 of this *Part* and much of *Part III* sometimes get downright nasty. There are good reasons for this content. It's not just the writer indulging in the attack mode for its own sake. Unless you understand the troublesome, difficult and often treacherous environment in which you're trying to make your living, you won't be properly prepared for the challenge. *Parts II* and *IV* are designed to both uplift the spirit and provide you with substantial resources for financial and artistic success and satisfaction. However, it would be somewhat pointless and even irresponsible to give such advice without establishing the overall context in which it must be applied. It would be like creating a guide for hiking in the desert by writing about its beauty and profound spirituality without considering its natural threats of dehydration, sunstroke, disorientation, dangerous cacti and poisonous critters.

Case in point: the very next Chapter, *Ten Disturbing Facts That Must Be Understood About The Jazz Business* is a hardcore portrait of an ugly, uncaring and abusive business. I'll admit it's cynical, unforgiving and extremely harsh in its appraisal of the business and those who are in it. But I stand by every word of it and can back up every opinion with facts, figures and logic. Furthermore, I'll gladly take on any and all comers who wish to debate its content in any meaningful public forum they may wish. The information contained in that chapter clearly describes the entire environment you'll be in professionally, without any soft-focus cushioning or hedging around the cold realities. If you're reading this book you've already chosen a difficult path. Therefore, it's incumbent upon me to respect you enough to give you the straight skinny in as clear-cut and unflinching a manner as possible. You don't have to try to read between the lines. That space is all filled in.

The book is designed for both straight reading as well as repeated reference. For some of you, many of the circumstances described and information provided will not be terribly pertinent until later in your careers. Depending on how those careers develop, some of it may *never* be pertinent. But if and when you need it, it's good to know where you can find it.

Most of the information is important and highly pertinent for anyone who will be participating in this business in any manner. Even if the extensive information on non-profit in *Part IV*, or the *Part III* content about contracts with major labels may never become necessary, the opportunities, pitfalls, advantages or disadvantages portrayed will help you handle or simply consider these options in your overall outlook.

The information that's contained here about business relationships, the roles of the various business personnel, the assorted methodologies and mechanisms, the materials needed (contracts, forms, letters of agreement, etc.), the overriding philosophy and so forth will inevitably be revisited and referenced often and for various reasons throughout your career.

Remember, *Straight Ahead* has been conceived especially for the artist to whom artistic integrity and personal dignity are essential components of the pursuit. That doesn't mean it's irrelevant to those who are more willing to compromise. The information contained here is important for *anyone* looking to pursue a career in the jazz business. But for those whose priorities are artistry and dignity, this book is absolutely essential. Unless you're willing to heavily factor in luck, there really is no other way than what's delineated here.

*Straight Ahead* is structured to be read straight through and I advise that strongly. Although it may be tempting to jump to certain sections or specific questions that may seem more immediately intriguing, it's not the best approach. There may be information laid out earlier in the book that might be necessary to fully understand a particular question. I've tried to make all answers as explicit and comprehensive as possible, but doing so with every new question would cause far too much repetition.

A great deal of the book (most of *Part II* and the non-profit Chapter in *Part IV*) is in a question/answer format. This is to make sure that every important element in these areas is covered, as well as providing an easy context for future reference. You'll notice that there's no Index. It simply doesn't seem to be an efficient mechanism for this book. Instead, the questions answered directly are all listed under their appropriate headings and page numbers in the Appendix, along with other items that could require regular reference. These include samples of certain materials (performance contracts, stage plots, letters of agreement/understanding, etc.) and specific situations (ending relationships, collecting moneys due, etc.) that are likely to arise regularly in the normal course of doing business.

I'm guessing that you've probably skimmed through the Glossary contained in the *Introductory* Section. I suggest that you go back and read it more closely before continuing on. The Glossary contains several words that are used often throughout the book. Many of them may have a different meaning in everyday use than as used in this book. Some are slang terms; others are common business terms whose context may be unfamiliar to you. Common words like *door*, *rider*, *deposit*, *binder* and *unit* have totally different meanings here than in general usage. This book will read more easily if you're familiar with the terms as I use them.

I also suggest putting aside your preconceptions and personal expectations. "I'm planning on being a composer and teaching at a university," or "I'm going to have my own record label and manage my own business, so I only need to read those sections that tell me what I need to know about that" is the wrong approach. Unless you have some extraordinary gift of ESP you have no idea what the future will bring. Your ideas, aspirations, hopes and needs may alter radically in the years to come. You may find the demands of musicianship too difficult or economically infeasible in the light of other life circumstances, but you may still want to be involved in music (*much* more on that later on). That could make the material on Managers, Agents or Other Professionals substantially more meaningful to you in the future.

Although *Straight Ahead* is primarily focused on the aspiring musician and to a lesser degree on the dedicated professional, there's a strong possibility that your future reality may *not* be what you're intending as you read the book. Even if it does follow through as planned, the material on those other roles can only help the musician to gain a better understanding of all the other players from an objective point of view. That in itself will give you a substantial advantage over at least 90% of all the professional jazz musicians working today.

Furthermore, there's considerable overlap in many areas contained in the book. Communication issues with managers and agents are often the same issues that can crop up with sidemen and promoters. Dealing with personnel at a record label, club or concert hall may demand similar conduct in dealing with staff personnel at a school where you'll be teaching or even at the copy shop where you make copies of your written music.

*Part II* is called *The Artist's Team*, not the Management Team or the Corporate Team. The artist is not the star pitcher, the quarterback or the leading scorer. The artist's role is more akin to the baseball manager or head coach. The manager may have a pitching coach, a batting coach and field coaches, but that doesn't mean he can be ignorant about pitching, hitting or what's happening on the field.

Even if the artist has a full staff of quality professionals on the team with every position properly filled, *nobody* has as much vested in the operation as the artist. Jobs and positions come and go, but the musician and his or her music are inseparable. They rise together and they fall together. You owe it to yourself to gain as much understanding and empowerment as possible in each situation.

The information in *Part II* not only provides an understanding of the various personnel, their jobs and how to deal with them, but also whether or not they're essential to the individual artist's needs and goals. Maybe you don't need a road manager or record producer even if you can afford them. You'll certainly need to understand their jobs if you're going to take them on yourself.

Once you understand the team approach laid out in *Part II*, you'll be better prepared to confront the challenges that are delineated in *Part III – The Business*. Again, the hard-nosed tone that permeates *Part III* is simply to clarify what you're up against in pursuing gigs and record deals through the standard sources. The information contained in the *Contracts* chapter is nothing but straightforward facts and basic arithmetic.

*Part III* essentially portrays the circumstances created by a *buyer's market* (See *Glossary*) where opportunities are *way* out of proportion to the number of people who need them. A simple calculation of the odds will clearly indicate the need for alternative solutions. *Part IV* focuses heavily on those alternatives, along with many other aspects of plain good sense and sensible business. In fact, *Part IV* is really what *Straight Ahead* is all about. *Parts I* and *III* explain the reasons why the concepts in *Part IV* are viable, and often the *only* methods for productivity and empowerment. *Part II* identifies and explains how to use your resources in the methods and materials described in *Part IV*.

Chapter 1 of *Part IV* focuses on the use of the 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, a vehicle that is as fundamental to the creative artist as the jump shot is to a basketball team. This chapter delves into every pertinent aspect of the 501(c)(3) and has been reviewed and partially edited by one of the foremost non-profit attorneys, Leonard D. Easter, a professor at New School University. Unquestionably, this is complex and often difficult territory, but so is playing *Confirmation* at its normal up-tempo. The material contained here *does not* have to be understood and absorbed to be able to understand the rest of *Part IV* or any other *Parts* of the book. However, since I refer to non-profits throughout the book, and since it *is* such a commonly used vehicle in arts and education, this chapter is essential to this book. Feel free to back-burner this chapter or refer to it if and when it's needed.

The rest of *Part IV* contains enormously valuable information and advice. From the simple examples of a basic performance contract to the complexities of operating cooperative ensembles and artist collectives, *Part IV* contains reference material that will be useful to you throughout your entire career in comprehensive fashion.

I'll admit that the philosophy put forth in *Part IV* is somewhat Utopian and grounded in thinking typical of the 1960s. Clearly that era was an extraordinary period that profoundly affected all of us who lived through it. The qualities of human potential, spirit, community, awareness and love that this era offered are clearly reflected in the music that was created during those years. All of the self-centeredness, greed, cynicism and narrow-mindedness that have obscured those qualities over the years do not diminish their value or potential. They are not obsolete or unrealistic. Embracing them can only lead to good results, especially for those of you who still hold to the true spirit and essence of the music that is jazz.

Many dedicated and committed professionals believe that the survival of this music lies entirely in the hands of those who have not yet arrived on the scene. If even a small percentage of you adopt and adhere to the concepts and values expressed in *Straight Ahead*, the future of jazz will be in good hands.