Grantee Name
Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

Project Title
To support collaboration with Myra Melford to reimage 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

Project Progress and Successes

The collaboration between YBCA and Myra Melford for our Artist Residency project, called Jazz@YBCA, has helped us find new ways to build demand for jazz at YBCA. With artist residencies typically lasting only a few days or weeks, this two-year collaboration with Myra Melford gave us the unique opportunity to develop a profound curatorial relationship with a groundbreaking, award-winning, exceptional musical adventurer and leader in improvisational music. With her guidance, we were able to explore and experiment at a deeper level with traditional and nontraditional ways of building demand, forging new connections and facilitating breakthrough moments among community members. We were most successful by providing insightful, intergenerational and interactive programs related to jazz in small-scale workshop settings.

During the two-year Jazz@YBCA pilot, we organized a total of sixteen events that together reached over 1,800 people. Each particular event was designed around one of four guiding pathways:

• Mentoring Listeners: Fostering deeper understanding of the creative process as it relates to jazz.

• Nurturing Jazz Legacy: Establishing a place for youth and adults to experiment with jazz.

• Women in Jazz: Nurturing female jazz musicians and female jazz audiences.

• Curatorial Experimentations: Transforming audiences from spectators into engaged participants through unconventional venues, program formats, and blending of disciplines.

By giving new listeners the tools to analyze music components through guided listening sessions, our Jazz@YBCA team helped community members find ways of conversing about music and grasp thematic connections to the origins of jazz, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of the creative process. One participant noted that the program helped him/her understand how "Jazz reflects the 20th century," by drawing connections between developments in jazz and cornerstones of American history and culture, touching on issues related to the world wars, politics, race and discrimination. Together with artist in residence Myra Melford, we created platforms for exchange and self-discovery for the nurturing jazz legacy pathway, establishing YBCA as a place where kids, youth, adults and families--from experienced jazz musicians to novices--could dive into playing jazz and learning together. One participant at a family workshop mentioned: "It felt very improvisational, like a group of friends getting together and making music." A particular focus was nurturing a female musician and audience base through our pathway Women in Jazz. Melford's experience as not only a female musician but also an educator and scholar, and her wealth of knowledge--ranging from the migration of African American jazz through cultures and continents to facilitating unconventional ways of playing standard instruments--helped us re-imagine what jazz can be at YBCA. Her contributions came at a critical time: When the SFJazz Center opened its new building on Franklin Street in early

2013, they stopped presenting their programs at YBCA. During the pilot, Melford became a full-fledged member of the YBCA curatorial team--her vision, connections to her personal creative roots and unparalleled expertise as an educator shaped the series of Jazz@YBCA events. This extended residency was a necessary step--not only for building demand, but for more strongly integrating jazz into our multidisciplinary programming here at YBCA.

In year two of the pilot program, we continued with our experimentations as well as other opportunities, as described below, which together offered more exposure and a continuous presence for experimental music on the YBCA campus.

The eight year two Jazz@YBCA experimentations, listed chronologically, were:

1) Jazz Salons during the "Bay Area Now 7" Festival (BAN7), August 2014
Pathways: Curatorial Experimentations and Women in Jazz
Experimenting with new curatorial structures that promote a multidisciplinary celebration of the artistic voices in the Bay Area today, the BAN7 Performance Festival featured intimate lobby performances before each of the main stage events. The four Jazz@YBCA Jazz Salons were attended by 148 people and featured intimate performances with the Bay Area's pre-eminent vocal and instrumental talent, among them the Maria Marquez Trio, the Molly Holm & Trio, Cecilia Engelhart and The Corposonic Trio, and the John Schott Actual Trio.

2) Improvising Community events, September/October/November 2014
Pathways: Mentoring New Listeners and Women in Jazz
This three-part series, hosted by Myra Melford, her colleague Dr. Tamara Roberts, and their students from the University of California at Berkeley, offered participants interactive learning opportunities for contemporary jazz and improvisation. The three events, attended by 182 people, took place in YBCA's forum and theater spaces. The featured musicians and student facilitators presented performance excerpts and led discussions and activities around the impact that the practice of improvisation has had on their own lives. Throughout this series, YBCA's staff worked closely with the professor and students on how jazz can serve as a community building tool in today's society.

3) Jazz in the Neighborhood events, January 2015
Pathway: Nurturing the Jazz Legacy
A series of three offsite events with Jazz@YBCA partner Jazz in the Neighborhood (JitN) brought high quality jazz into satellite areas across the Bay Area and called attention to Jazz@YBCA. 200 people attended the events held in San Francisco's North Beach and Mission district, as well as in North Berkeley. Bay Area jazz luminaries played music with emerging youth musicians who together demystified and celebrated the spirit behind progressive jazz across zip codes and generations. Participating mentors and artists were Lisa Mezzacappa, House of Ramen youth ensemble, Ben Goldberg School, Darren Johnston Trio featuring Myra Melford, and Oakland Future Trio youth ensemble.

4) New Frequencies Listening Lab, January 2015
Pathway: Mentoring Listeners
As a primer to the "New Frequencies Fest: Jazz@YBCA," education consultant and renowned bassist Liza Mezzacappa offered 27 contemporary jazz novices a casual after-work, guided listening session in YBCA's Screening Room. Participants learned how to identify different instruments and roles in an ensemble, listen for ways improvisers create structure and form, and learned to appreciate the sensual qualities of sound, timbre and tone as pathways of connecting with and conversing about music.

5) Mentors and Mavericks, March 2015
Pathways: Mentoring Listeners
In year two, Mentors and Mavericks featured two parts consisting of a lecture demonstration and a film screening attended by 101 people. Guitarist John Schott and his long-time musical partner, bassist Dan Seamans, took audiences on an aural journey through Schott's trajectory as an artist. A duet of films, titled "Rova Channeling Coltrane," featured a legendary contemporary interpretation of Coltrane's groundbreaking piece "Ascension." Community members then participated in a post-screening discussion with filmmaker John Rogers and members of the Rova Saxophone Quartet.

6) The Family that Plays Together, Stays Together -- A Family Workshop with Banjo Player Angela Wellman, April 2015
Pathways: Nurturing the Jazz Legacy and Women in Jazz
Following the huge popularity of the first family workshop with Marcus Shelby in year one, this program brought together generations for an afternoon of playing early American roots music. The 21 participants explored the banjo, an instrument of African origin, and were led by scholar, educator, and music activist Angela Wellman and Guy de Chalis in YBCA's Youth Arts Lounge.

7) Demystifying the Clave: Latin Jazz Youth Workshop, May 2015
Pathway: Nurturing the Jazz Legacy and Women in Jazz
After the success of the first advanced youth jazz musicians workshop in year one, this program explored the central role that clave (rhythm) plays in Latin Jazz and the larger history surrounding this complex genre. The youth workshop led by renowned educators and music historians Rebeca Mauleon of SFJAZZ and Cory Combs of The Nueva School was attended by 9 promising young musicians who received individual attention and tutelage. The youth stayed on campus past the scheduled time, reveling in the electrifying energy generated by improvising with peers they had not met before.

8) Celebrating Jazz in the Present Tense, June 2015
Pathways: All
This celebration was Jazz@YBCA's culminating event, honoring the work accomplished over the course of the two-year pilot. 118 people took their seats center stage in YBCA's theater to enjoy an intimate celebration with performances by Myra Melford as well as featured artists from past programs such as The Oakland Future Trio (Workshop for Advanced Youth Musicians and Jazz in the Neighborhood), Lisa Mezzacappa (Listening Lab, Educational Consultant and New Frequencies), and others. The celebration closed with a Jazz@YBCA community jam led by Marcus Shelby (Family Workshop) and John Schott (BAN7 and Mentors and Mavericks) who invited local artists, programming partners and audience members to jump in and improvise together.

In addition, the Jazz@YBCA team created a website dedicated solely to the jazz experience. Linked to YBCA's main organizational site, the blog-style platform ybcajazz.org was launched in collaboration with education consultant Lisa Mezzacappa and featured playlists of notable contemporary jazz pieces highlighting Jazz@YBCA artists and an event schedule of upcoming programs. Targeted specifically towards Jazz@YBCA program participants, the website was frequented by 250 visitors generating over 800 page views in 2015, with the 'Featured Artist' pages being the most popular subsection of the site. The "Digital Deep Dive" platform will transform into the "Jazz@YBCA Initiative Archives," and will continue to be available to the general public and the field at large.

For the first time ever, the annual "New Frequencies Festival" devoted its entire program to jazz--and more specifically: jazz in the present tense. The three-day festival, curated

through a close collaboration between Myra Melford and YBCA's music curator Isabel Yrigoyen, featured Doris Duke Impact Award winner Henry Threadgill and Grammy-award winner Angélique Kidjo among others and attracted nearly 1,500 people to YBCA for an unforgettable jazz experience.

In an effort to create more cross-departmental programming and offer jazz novices a taster of the genre through the popular medium of film, the Jazz@YBCA team collaborated with the Film/Video department on a five-part series titled Cry of Jazz highlighting documentaries about extraordinary jazz visionaries. One attendee shared: "My aha! experience was watching a performance through the lens of film (...) After this event I was so inspired by this 80 minutes of freedom. It took you on that wave. I learned to be open to that feeling and the experience of the art itself (...) I have been listening to more jazz music. It ignited that sensibility in me for my own improvisation with creative experience."

Throughout the pilot we have collected a wealth of data in collaboration with our evaluation consultant, Surale Phillips. This has allowed us to quickly react to observations and feedback from participants and partners, continually course-correcting, and improving for the next program. With this approach, we have been able to develop a constantly evolving, immersive Jazz@YBCA model for people from all levels of experience with jazz.

Key successes identified by our consultant for the Jazz@YBCA pilot were gleaned from conversations, surveys, and focus groups with a total of 43 study subjects who attended multiple experimentations while additional information was collected from surveys completed by other program participants. These key successes include:

• Jazz@YBCA was exceptionally impactful due to outstanding curation with our artist in residence, the level of artistry, and contextualization. Programs were enjoyed by both jazz aficionados and newcomers to the art form and received high ratings through surveys.

• Personalization and relevant context through the concept of "mentors and mavericks", introducing jazz novices to seasoned artists in an intimate setting, accentuated impact. Programs incorporating close personal contact with the artists and guided listening sessions were particularly popular.

• Overall, there was a high demand for intergenerational programming throughout the pilot.

• Curatorial experimentations provided engaging experiences and are seen as a hallmark of YBCA programming. Events that combined multiple artistic disciplines received positive feedback.

• At YBCA, intentionally delivering a high-quality program that nurtures audience engagement and improvisational music increases demand for jazz more than isolating a discrete pathway to that demand.

• Participants applauded Jazz@YBCA for its focus on women, jazz legacy, and youth. They looked to YBCA for unique experiences of focused, well-executed programming that combined the four pathways.

Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project

One of the major challenges we faced was that the pilot took place at a moment of change for the organization away from discipline-based programming to a more integrated, cross-disciplinary approach to curation and public programs. Going forward, it is unlikely that Jazz@YBCA will continue to exist as a standalone program. However, jazz and experimental music will play an important part at YBCA, and with all of the new insights gained through our DDCF Building Demand grant, we will focus on bringing this pilot's strengths into our cross-disciplinary curatorial programming.

As a busy multidisciplinary arts center, it was sometimes challenging to schedule Jazz@YBCA events in the right spaces on campus. During the pilot, events were often scheduled closely together in order to keep to a very condensed timeline. The Jazz@YBCA team struggled to make all the changes they wanted to make, taking into consideration the breadth of feedback from our community participants with each new iteration. Finding the right venues for the intimate encounters between artists and community members was an important factor of success. Especially in year one, we received negative feedback about distracting background noise in YBCA's Grand Lobby for example. Smaller spaces not generally open to the public, such as the screening room or Youth Arts Lounge, were more popular and there was considerably less negative feedback regarding noise pollution in year two. An added challenge to scheduling was to honor our artist in residence's long-standing commitments. Having Myra Melford at YBCA, a visionary of the art form and renowned educator was a great honor, but with a high-profile artist comes a busy, international travel schedule. Her presence at YBCA and deep involvement in both the planning and implementation phase of each program was of the essence and another important piece to consider when scheduling Jazz@YBCA curatorial meetings and events.

Over the course of the pilot, we worked with many community partner organizations to generate interest in jazz across zip codes. After a key partner, Intersection for the Arts, no longer had the capacity to participate in our project, we continued our efforts to identify new external partners for public programs. A question that kept coming up was how do we collaborate efficiently with outside partner organizations (both on the YBCA campus and offsite), honoring their needs while simultaneously making sure joint public programs meet YBCA's standards? We found that some workshop settings and teaching moments required more planning and rehearsal time to deliver higher quality and match our community's expectation for excellence.

We also learned firsthand that our audience perceives us as a unique place for accessing high quality, cross-disciplinary public programs. Rather than seeing jazz as a niche suited to become an isolated stream of specialist programming at YBCA, community participants generally responded better to events that integrated multiple disciplines and offered an interactive approach to experiencing experimental music. One participant mentioned: "It (the program) was a gateway to experiencing something now. I look to a place like YBCA to experience new things." Another said: "(in) a lot of jazz venues, (...) you feel like you're in a concert hall and you don't want to clap at the wrong time or make a wrong move. It was much more relaxed here (at YBCA)."

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

Based on the successes and challenges we have experienced during the pilot, here are some key factors we discovered helped us build demand for jazz:

• Free events: Many programs were offered free of charge which helped bring in diverse

audiences of all ages and backgrounds--people who otherwise would not have the means to attend a jazz performance or music workshop. A member of the focus group for example made a comment about how hard it is to find affordable art activities her family can enjoy together: "I chose it (Jazz@YBCA family workshop) for my family because we are a big family of six. I like to go to different arts things and it is quite pricey to take six people to a fun event."

• Offsite events: Collaborations with neighborhood organizations in Berkeley and around San Francisco allowed us to bring Jazz@YBCA events to a variety of communities, accessing more small venues and inviting community members in return to attend related events at YBCA. Through our evaluator, we learned that nearly one third of participants of the "Mentors and Mavericks" workshop in March 2015 had previously attended an offsite Jazz in the Neighborhood event.

• Good communication with community partners: At YBCA, we constantly strive to meet our community's expectation of excellence when it comes to delivering insightful and unique public programs. It was essential for our staff to maintain a constant flow of communication with our community partner organizations to set expectations and together deliver the highest quality of programming possible.

• Intimate spaces: Using smaller spaces, such as the Youth Arts Lounge or the screening room, allowed our participants to feel more comfortable and be less distracted by background noise. Jazz@YBCA attendees appreciated the friendly atmosphere and personal interaction with the artists in these settings. One focus group member said: "I like to be sitting close up to the musicians so I can hear the click of the saxophone and hear the musicians talking with one another," another felt like they had entered someone's living room. Events such as the Women in Jazz concert held in conjunction with Young Jean Lee's UNTITLED FEMINIST SHOW performance in the YBCA Theater lobby were especially memorable as opposed to events held in the Grand Lobby, a space that is open to the public year-round and subject to high foot traffic.

• Experimental nature of the programming: For Jazz@YBCA, there was no pressure to be 'the expert' in order to participate in conversation. Hands-on workshops broke down limiting barriers between musicians and community members who together created positive memories as they immersed in experimentation. Many of our participants and focus group members commented on interactivity as especially enticing: "The interactive part really drew me in. It was very inviting and it wasn't just a spectator-performer relationship."

• Intergenerational nature of programming: There was a longing for connection and exchange between jazz novices and aficionados, mentors and students and many commented on realizing that all together we can really drive the art form forward. A beautiful example of how the pilot facilitated connection is The Oakland Future Trio. Made up of three boys in their early teens, the trio initially participated in a youth workshop in year one and continued their involvement in Jazz@YBCA with an appearance at a Jazz in the Neighborhood event. For the pilot's culmination, the three boys shared a stage with jazz visionaries Myra Melford, Lisa Mezzacappa and YBCA Chief of Programs and Pedagogy Marc Bamuthi Joseph. The concert ended in a community jam led by Marcus Shelby and John Schott for which audience members were invited to join the musicians in improvisation--multiple generations sharing the spotlight.

• Film / documentary screenings as a taster: Using a popular medium as a way of introducing jazz has proven to be impactful, drawing film goers to a less familiar discipline.

In year two, YBCA's Film/Video department curated a film series centered on Jazz, integrating experimental music more deeply into the overall organizational programming.

• The importance of contextualization: Our focus group preferred compact events that illuminated the art form through discovery of the artists' creative process, historical context, and active engagement. By providing guideposts and contextual materials, especially jazz novices began to enjoy listening to what sounded unfamiliar at first. One participant mentioned: "I went to one of the experimental bands, and I probably would have walked out after the first 10 minutes had I not had that historical background." The jazz aficionados in the study subject group made the connections between the music they were listening to and the activities more quickly. Striking a balance to keep both groups engaged meant carefully calibrating each workshop and its activities. One focus group member in year two mentioned: "I know quite a lot about jazz. There is so much more to learn about the roots of jazz. This workshop was a great example of that."

• Fascination with the telepathy of improvisation: Community members were surprised and 'hooked' by the instant connection between strangers achieved through improvisation in music making and how it relates not only to finding more creativity as a practicing musician and in art experiences, but how it is relevant in everyday life.

Throughout the pilot, we kept testing our hypothesis 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 and affecting our styles of learning too. One participant wrote about how the program helped him/her reframe expectations surrounding art experiences: "I typically come to art with a lot of expectations -- like, it's going to be good, or bad, or somewhere in between... It just was what it was, and I let go of my preconceived notions of what it might be. I will surely carry that forward in my art experiences."

Another participant described his experience with Jazz@YBCA as an eye-opening journey: "Hearing a wide range of sounds that come from jazz was very inspiring. It really put the music played into perspective and was a safe place to explore this art for people with all backgrounds." With Jazz@YBCA, we taught jazz as a force that guides our collaborative nature, our experimental nature, our harmonizing nature, and the way we approach conflict. We will keep moving this work forward, building on our Jazz@YBCA pilot, retaining successful elements of the experimentations we tested, and finding creative new ways to attract increasing numbers of people to the discipline.

Interactivity and creating a culture of invitation were key factors for success: picking up an instrument and immersing oneself in previously unfamiliar soundscapes broke down barriers and attracted a younger audience, guided listening sessions provided frameworks for conversations and jam sessions opened up channels for intergenerational exchange. While this type of high-touch programming limits us in the amount of people reached, we found that facilitating this direct, personal exchange between jazz artists and community members of all ages truly built demand for the art form. We hope that our peer organizations can learn from these findings and integrate parts of our program model into their own organizational fabric.

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

Jazz@YBCA Initiative Archives: http://ybcajazz.org/

New Frequencies: Improvisation & Youth Mentorship in Jazz: https://vimeo.com/118291266
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.