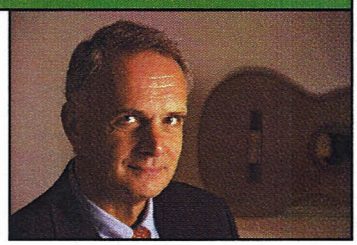

The four sides of the coin.

A few years ago I promised myself I would travel less to meetings, conferences and conventions. Skype was installed on my computer, and with my headset on I almost looked like a pilot of an airplane myself. However, nothing much has changed and I have no regrets. From every meeting, conference or convention I bring home something that sticks with me forever; widens my views, opens up my mind.

A good example is the IASJ Jazz Meeting in Sao Paulo in June 2011. It is the rhythmic pattern of the 'choro' that has stayed in my head and body ever since. With that pattern comes everything Brazilian music stands for, the Brazil experience, rooted in Africa. It is something you can only really understand if you have been to Brazil.

What felt contradictory at first but turned out to be complimentary to the Brazil experience, is what happened to me during the speech of Mrs. Gretchen Amussen. I was at the World Forum on Music in Tallinn, Estonia, in October 2011, and I heard her speaking about the musician of today. Gretchen Amussen is the deputy director of the National Conservatory in Paris and vice-president of the AEC, the Association of European Conservatories. The coin no has longer two sides but four sides. The musician of today is a performer, an educator, but also an entrepreneur and a researcher. 'Nothing new under the sun', is what crossed my mind at first. During the IASJ Ongoing Dialogues in Lucerne for example, we, the highly esteemed IASJ representatives, came to similar conclusions: stating that the musician of today is the new 'Renaissance' man. What impressed me was the way Gretchen Amussen had worked out in great detail what it means to be a performer, a teacher, a researcher and a businessman. Pages and pages on her PowerPoint showed that she had analysed these four sides of the coin thoroughly. Everything was broken down into smaller jobs and activities, all of them made sense.

The four-sided coin analysis of Gretchen Amussen made clear that the jazz musician of today is versatile, highly skilled, intelligent, outspoken, socially and psychologically well balanced – just to start with. The jazz musician of today is no less than superhuman.

Yes, great, but what's the problem? The problem today is no longer the school or the curriculum. The quantity of information available and the quality of its teaching in the schools of jazz has never been so high and effective. Studying at any of the schools of jazz associated with the IASJ really gives you value for money.

The real problem is the lack of time for a student in the 4-year Bachelor and 2-year Master programmes. What once was the hardest part has now become the easiest part: becoming an excellent player. Also acquiring the ability to teach, and thereby earning a partially secure income is however a requirement that is far less easy to meet for the student of today. Not only are excellent teaching skills and a natural inclination to teach needed, but also a lot of experience and time. Additionally, academies and conservatories in Europe in the last decade have become music universities in which research plays an important role. It is not enough to present a thin paper on a rainy afternoon with a couple of footnotes, pictures and a transcription or two. The music student of today has to have a 'research attitude', has to be an academic specialist in at least one if not a number of topics on which he can speak and communicate with others with authority. Being an outstanding performer, a seasoned educator and a respected scientific authority is still not enough if you cannot sell all of that in the fast and ever-changing markets. A flex-portfolio, a website with e-commerce, up and running social media, an international network, a company or label or association to keep alive: these are the minimum requirements to stay in the music business and not become drowned in too many distracting jobs on the side. The student who meets with all of these standards in these categories is four-dimensional, is ultra-super-mega-extra human!

The everyday reality tells us that the students in our schools of jazz have a personal mix of these four categories. The individual partial combination of these skills, attitudes and abilities is what counts, not the impossible full quantity of it.

On a day-to-day basis in the schools of jazz and in the IASJ as an international platform, the balancing of four sides of the coin, the performer, teacher, researcher and entrepreneur, is the main concern. How to do this is an ongoing and difficult task, but also a challenging and highly interesting one. Trying to find the right balance is a quest that will go on forever, just like the development of jazz itself.

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