

A Blog Supreme

Crashing On Couches To Talk To Musicians

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by PATRICK JARENWATTANANON



Courtesy of Jason Crane

Jason Crane.

Usually, it's the musicians who go on tour, and the journalists who write about them for local publications. But one journalist is taking to the road to talk to musicians where they live.

As of today, Jason Crane has produced 374 episodes of *The Jazz Session*, a podcast of interviews with top jazz musicians. Last week, he announced he was going on a "World Tour."

Starting June 1, he'll be interviewing musicians in cities large and small throughout the eastern and southeastern United States, all the while reading and writing original poetry. (He hopes to eventually make the tour actually international, or at least to go west of the Mississippi River.) He has only a loose itinerary; he plans to buy a Greyhound bus pass and eventually end up in New Orleans, crashing on couches of friends, acquaintances and strangers. He's seeking crowdfunding and logistical support at *The Jazz Session* [website](#).

Crane, 38, once supported himself as a working soprano saxophonist and later, as the station manager at Jazz90.1 in Rochester, N.Y. He recently moved to New York City in part to be closer to the jazz scene. So why is he taking to the road again? Over e-mail last week, I sent him a few questions to find out, and he was happy to respond:

Patrick Jarenwattananon: These days, with phone and Skype and so forth it's possible to interview musicians from nearly anywhere for pretty cheap. So why, as a journalist, should one go everywhere?

Jason Crane: I spent nearly 10 years interviewing people by phone and had a lot of good conversations during that time. But I've always preferred to be in the same room, seeing people's facial expressions and body language and making a more personal connection. *The Jazz Session's* interviews are usually conducted in the artist's home, and that brings yet another level of human contact to the conversation. I'd like to have those same experiences outside of New York City. And I'd like to see first-hand what's happening in the jazz world in places I've never been.

PJ: Are there any big questions you want to get a consensus answer on? Like, "how is it possible to be a jazz musician in somewhere like Asheville, N.C.?" or "what are the major infrastructural challenges to touring as a jazz musician in 2012?"

JC: So much of the conversation in the mainstream jazz press and blogosphere these days is about the future of jazz, the death of jazz, the relevance of jazz. As someone who once made my living playing jazz and Latin music far removed from a major entertainment hub, I know that the conversation is often very different when the press isn't paying attention to you. It's about booking the next gig, keeping a band together, building an audience in your local area or figuring out what the existing audience wants to hear. Plus, I'd be willing to bet that there's a ton of exciting, creative music being made that I know nothing about because it just hasn't been found by the press yet. I'm hoping to find some of those folks.

PJ: You relocated within the last two years from upstate to Brooklyn, N.Y. I presume a lot of that has had to do with following the jazz community, yes? What has being in New York City taught you so far?

JC: I came to New York to try to expand what I was doing with *The Jazz Session*. I started doing jazz interviews in Rochester, N.Y., in 2001 and continued in Albany, N.Y., until I moved here last year. I did a fair number of in-person interviews with touring players, but nothing like what's been possible since I moved to New York. I feel much more a part of the scene now, and I've realized just how paradoxically large and small that scene is. There's an incredible range of music being made, yet it's possible to know most of the people making it personally. I find that very exciting. It really feels like a community.

PJ: Since reading your original poetry is also a part of this tour, it seems fair to ask: Do you see a connection between poetry and jazz? Are they linked by some aesthetic quality, or perhaps through an odd cultural standing in this

modern age? Or are the two activities largely separate?

JC: I always joke that I became a poet because I wanted to see if there was any profession less lucrative than interviewing jazz musicians. (Answer: yes.) Jazz and poetry have been linked for decades, going back at least as far as the Beats — the most obvious connection — but also in the poetry of folks like Hayden Carruth, Philip Larkin, Yusef Komunyakaa, Amiri Baraka and many others. I think both art forms are very much about sound and about live performance. I love writing poetry, but reading it is a truly magical experience for me, providing a very visceral and emotionally available connection with my listeners, much in the way I found saxophone playing to be. My poetry is at jasoncrane.org, and I imagine I'll be writing a lot of poems during the tour.

PJ: Can you predict a few highlights — places you've never been, people you're most excited to talk to? Might one of the answers be: "talking to the people I didn't already know about"?

JC: For me, the biggest highlight of the first leg of the trip will be New Orleans, which to me is like traveling to Mecca. I've never been there, despite loving so much of the music that's made in New Orleans and having so many friends and colleagues there. So I'm beyond thrilled to be headed there. After that, the next most exciting part of the trip is to meet musicians in all the places I've never been. Music happens everywhere. It's such a core part of the human experience. I think it can be a little too easy to see it as a commodity or a trend and forget that it's also an integral part of being alive. I want to be reminded of that and to see improvised music in settings other than New York clubs. (Not that I don't love those, too.)