

# Stay Tuned: Confessions of a Multi-Tasker

*By Local 802 member Eve Zanni (vocalist, author, composer, lyricist, choral director, voice teacher, music educator, piano tuner, concert curator)*

I am a lifelong singer/instrumentalist who jumped lanes at age 50 to become a full-time music teacher and then the author of *Jazz Superheroes*. I should say I “expanded my lanes,” because I have never stopped doing gigs as a singer or side musician. I continue to tune pianos, compose, arrange, lead a choir, teach voice, run a music rehearsal space and organize concerts - all things that comprise “generating income in music.” I juggle hats often; some transitions are easier than others.

Probably many of you do more than just perform as a musician either by choice or necessity. Do certain activities seem to propel you forward in a surge of groovy flow? Do other activities feel like an uphill struggle, draining and frustrating? What does it mean for a singer to teach? Or to write?

Some of our vocations may charge or drain our batteries depending on our personality types. In our mission to create beauty and harmony, find fulfillment and make a living, we might do well to ask ourselves if we are we juggling different hats or different heads?

I hope that my story will provide some happy, healthy resources for all your music journeys.

Ask yourself; do you play life *by ear* or design a plan then follow it? Do you *find* your way or *make* your way?

Here is why it matters.

In a college program, I did the MBTI Personality Testing based on the work of Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung. (I highly recommend doing the personality test if you haven't, because it's an invaluable tool for understanding yourself and others and a lot of fun. See : <https://mbti-notes.tumblr.com/theory>)

The study of personality types provides skills to understand yourself and to 'read' other people so that you can create positive ways to flow and interact as you move toward your goals. It is important to learn what kinds of activities and people provide energy; and to steer away from people and activities that may vampirize your vitality. I was told that I had the highest Right Brain score the professor had ever seen. Right brain is the intuitive, creative side and Left Brain is the analytical, planning side.

Carl Jung spoke about superior and inferior aspects of our personalities. It's crucial for optimum health to spend most of your time and energy in your superior function. If you spend more than 40% of your time in your inferior function, your health can suffer. Even if it's something you love or think you should be doing, you need to check in with your inner tuning.

With the expansion of time during Co-VID 19, I have been scanning back over my life. It has always felt like I was improvising life without a score to follow or a GPS. I had no idea about where to go or how to get there, which was stressful. As you know, constant tuning is essential for instruments and your body is your first and best axe. Optimum health of one's whole being – physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual – is like tuning a chord to its best vibrational frequencies. I call it *Life Tuning*, but more on that later.

I began to suspect that I was not exactly like other people one morning when I was around 2 ½. I heard the toilet flush and smiled knowingly at my mother and said “Oh, there’s that song again!” She stared at me, puzzled, trying to figure out what I was talking about. I was referring to the huge, symphonic sound explosion of instruments, melody and lyrics that I heard frequently in our home whenever someone flushed the toilet. I thought everyone heard it but suddenly realized that it was only me.

In my music studies in elementary school, my different brain function continued to emerge. I had no time for music theory and reading music. I only wanted to be free of mental confines. My cello stared at me with abandoned eyes, our piano silently accused. In music class and orchestra rehearsals, my ear continued to grow and my ability to read music foundered. I only had to hear a passage once and I could reproduce it perfectly so my secret was safe. Always a vocalist, I drifted to guitars, banjos, dulcimers, violin as I made my Right Brain journey through school. My school hours were mostly spent day-dreaming out the classroom window while inwardly composing songs, lyrics, stories, plays and counting the moments till I could run free, climb a tree, ride a horse, swim in the sea.

When I was 18, I left the US in search of music and adventure. This evolved into a 9- year exploration, living in different parts of Europe, busking, performing in cities, learning traditional songs and music in Ireland, through Greece to Romania and Turkey, learning, playing, and writing songs. In the early 80’s I moved to New York City to make a career as a jazz vocalist.

Singing in and around NYC while raising a child by myself was often musically exciting but I wasn’t able to afford health care and make enough money. I thought about teaching, health benefits and a PENSION! But the problem was, teaching was never my dream. As a

young person I was many teachers' worst nightmare. I thought of teachers as reductionist control freaks who lived 'by the book', blindly following rules, regulations, and hierarchies. Left Brain dominant types. By this time, I knew this about myself: Eve is happiest and healthiest in a purely improv and intuition mode – when my full spirit and creative being soars, expands. I felt like my head would explode around planning, intractable rules, institutions, systems, schedules. So how could I possibly become a teacher?

I think it was the rich resonant woody tones of the rosewood xylophones, acoustic drums, percussion all tuned in modal scales – right up my jazz / world music and improvisational alley that drew me to Orff music education, a teaching methodology that my right dominant brain could relate to! Orff xylophones are often tuned to modal pentatonic scales so there are no wrong notes. Students get to hear rhythm, harmony, feel it in their bodies, build confidence in improvising with good technique and tone, plus have a great ensemble experience.

But the Orff courses were expensive and as a single mom, I couldn't afford them.

I went to Local 802 asked them if they could do anything for me, after all those dues I paid with very few union gigs, and they sent me to The Actor's Work Program. I met with a counselor there (shout out to Patch!) who helped me write a proposal about how certifying in Orff education would land me teaching work. I secured a grant through AWP to study both Orff and Kodály (a vocal program based on folk and world music repertoire) and in a very short time I became an assistant teacher at Third Street Music Settlement House which has a fantastic Orff program as well as many other great programs. I was able to observe, experience and teach. I did residencies in many different kinds of schools, public, private, parochial in every borough.

I obtained many teaching artist gigs for various organisations such as The Metropolitan Opera Guild, Midori Foundation, Young Audiences, Greenwich House and I loved all of these. I had flexibility so I could also perform often and do some touring. I was paying the rent, there was a pleasant balance in my life but there were no health benefits or stability.

I resisted full-time teaching for as long as possible, then made that big leap with the help of Local 802 and The Actor's Work Program, I had worked for short residencies in many schools so I thought...*how different could it be, to go from 3 or 4 days a week to 5?*

I landed my first full-time teaching gig and was soon drowning under copious amounts of Left brain activities, excessive planning, analyzing, organizing, justifying. A full time teaching job in a school also brought encounters with some intense power tripping, racism, sexism, ageism, classism, adultism. And that's just the grownups. My life became mostly Left brain dominant stuff which was a one-way drain on my body and soul. I was out of tune.

However, teaching itself was total delight because every class was *showtime!* As a performer-who-teaches I had countless euphoric magical experiences with young people of all ages in classrooms, auditorium stages, outdoor festivals, with choirs, jazz and world music ensembles in the many venues we performed in all over the city.



But a giant source of frustration for me was the lack of good teaching materials for music teachers, especially in African American music, which is the soul of all popular American music. I compared the Eurocentric classical music lesson resources available – good biographies and music presented as essential for the DOE Blueprint standards for American music education. But where were the Duke Ellington, Lester Young, Mary Lou Williams lesson plans? Where was the Blues? Why were the music accomplishments and heroic tales of struggle and musical brilliance of our music heroes of color completely left out of American education?



## **Eve Zanni's Jazz Superheroes**

Impelled by conscience, necessity and a Master's thesis for my degree in Jazz Education, I wrote a full jazz curriculum: 8 biographies of jazz heroes – 4 women, 4 men – each followed by amazing lesson plans that are historically and musically accurate, and succeeded in getting students excited and engaged. Through this incredible music, I could also teach about racial injustice and the heroic stories of my music heroes. I was on a mission.

Remember the personality types? Writing turned out to be a balancing, nourishing and positive energy current for me. In spite of the challenges of full-time teaching and all those other activities that are too exhausting to recount, I came out on the other side, with a brand-new Right Brain passport to new realms of creativity! And I discovered that teaching, in

spite of all its Left Brain challenges, was a vital and natural fit for me when fueled by passion. But I was still out of tune.

Musicians are inside-out people: we live with an inner world of sound, like a soundtrack playing while the world turns...or the call of that inner drummer...constantly riffing, composing, arranging, lyricizing, processing and experiencing the world of sound within. With so much inner activity to engage us, is it any wonder that our 'outside' lives sometimes look less than perfect to others? Try to imagine what the inside of Bird, Monk or Beethoven's mind looked or sounded like. With our focus within, our external selves are left undefended. A strong 'outer' or 'street' persona, is the suit of armour that helps us survive in the world. Hence, we are 'inside-out'; our feelings, nerve endings are always exposed to the Fates and Furies. This is how I make sense of the historic connection of drugs and alcohol in the jazz and blues communities. Now that I have read Blair Tindall's 'Mozart in the Jungle' I know that our classical brothers and sisters (just as 'inside-out' as the rest of us) have also leaned on substances to fortify their courage in the world.

When I think about the racial injustice and economic exploitation that our great jazz and blues progenitors were up against, I wonder that any one of them survived those times *without* drugs and alcohol. How do you drown out continuous cultural oppression, discord and chaos?

But I digress...I was teaching my jazz and world music curriculum, leading a 100-voice choir before school, after-school jazz band *The GrooveCats*, raising a son, doing gigs, tuning pianos, organizing big concerts such as "To Prez with Love – The Annual Lester Young Memorial Celebration" with Pastor Gensel and The Jazz Ministry at Saint Peter's, curating and performing in music festivals and concerts. Suddenly it all fell apart. I had a heart attack followed by a triple-bypass



and had to retire from the Board of Ed before I had reached my full pension age. I was way out of tune!

Oddly enough, I recalled (too late!) that the MBTI professor had mentioned that Right Brain – creative types needed to keep healthy by including physical exercise in their lives because they tend to lose touch with their physical bodies as they age. But such a full throttle physical breakdown, well,... *It never entered my mind...*(Bb)

I had not been tuning my *Root Tone* – the Body, or paying much attention to my emotions. My mind was overworked and Spirit was on the outside looking in.

Fast forward to 2020, I'm in the best health of my life and feeling vibrant on each chord tone. And I'm grateful to have a small pension from the DOE, unlike many of my friends who are suffering economically right now. I enjoy exercise most days and generally walk around blissed out on Serotonin. I'm getting into a habit of tuning myself and listening with love.

I developed a vocal teaching method called Bliss Singing with breathing and vocal exercises done with movement to live jazz accompaniment, vocal sounds imitating nature, animals, instruments, improvisation, song study, dash of theory, all of which help me to balance my Right-Left brain and all my chord tones at once: body, emotions, mind and spirit.

## **Life Tuning**

Human beings are instruments that require constant tuning; body, emotions, mind, spirit are all chord tones to be tuned separately, then together. The key to our best life is a magnificent chord with each Life chord tone vibrating in tune simultaneously with the other tones. Tuning each life chord tone feeds all the others.

**The Root Tone** is the Body. Healthy foods and exercise contribute to tuning this essential plane of life. Spending time to tune the physical body instrument feeds creativity and increases levels of joy energy hormones by releasing serotonin. Arthur Taylor's *Notes and Tones* explores the essential Body – Music connection through interviews with many jazz greats from Miles to Ornette.

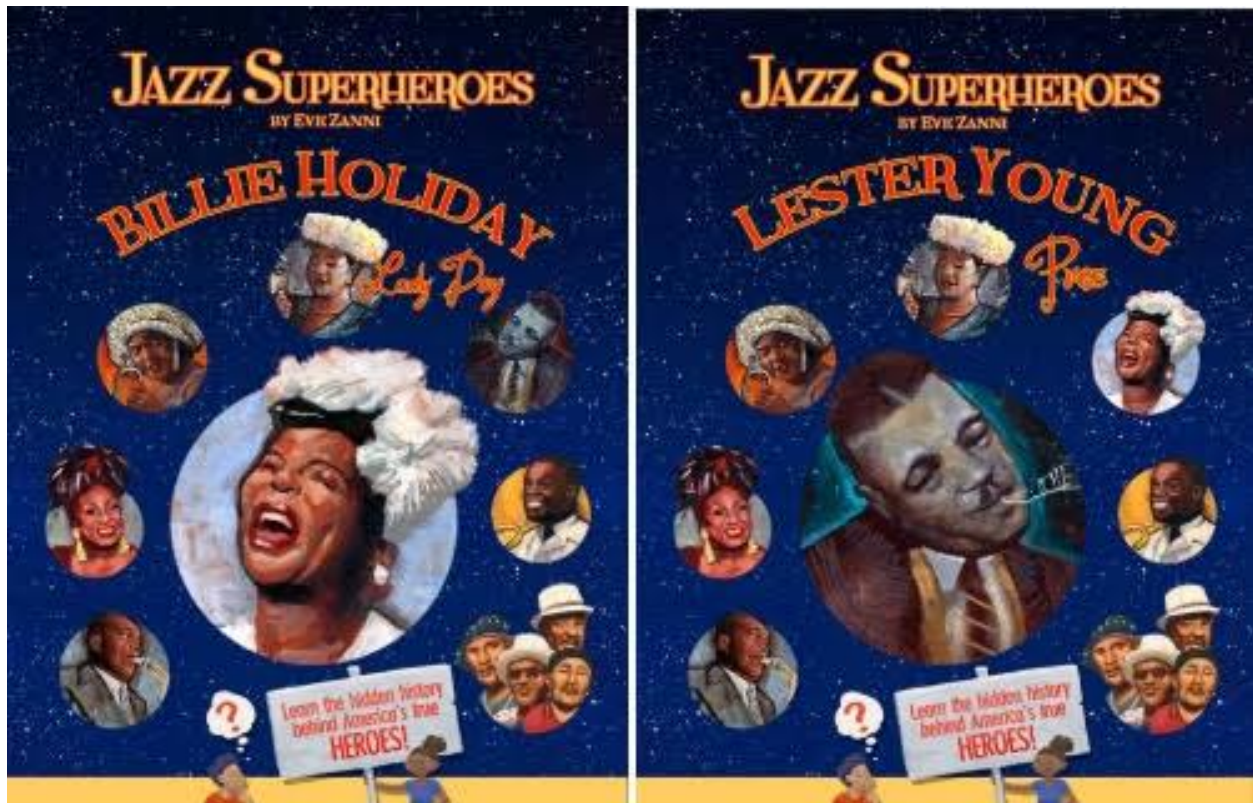
**The Emotion Tone – the 3<sup>rd</sup>:** This is the tone that most people avoid. Emotional work is challenging. It takes courage to unlock our old hurts and imprints, but it is such a rewarding journey. When we begin to understand that so many of our actions are coming from reactivity to old hurts, we can start to let go of them; live in present time and move forward. It is truly an act of compassion towards ourselves to look within for answers, and this door of compassion activates compassion towards others. Plus what is the sound of a chord without the defining 3<sup>rd</sup>? Pretty hollow.

**The Mental Tone – the 5<sup>th</sup>:** This is the mind tone. Tuning the mind means taking on mental pursuits and activities that engage and challenge us and keep our brains sharp. Learning music, languages, mathematics, cross-word puzzles, technology are a few examples.

**The Extensions – Spirit Tones:** The 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 13, flat, sharp, augmented, demented, unlimited possibilities of the metaphysical plane or Spirit. Tuning into Spirit is about listening within, meditation, prayer, being in Nature, whatever brings you to a quiet, peaceful place inside, where you can hear your inner presence.

Musician, know thyself. Keep a close and loving ear on your instrument. Make sure all your tones are vibrating at their optimum frequencies. Stay tuned!

Jazz musicians are real American heroes: but their true stories have not been told. Find out how they created an original American art form while battling discrimination, poverty, violence, defying death to create an original music of the American people. Jazz is America's greatest gift to World Culture.



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