Cross-cultural perspectives on high-functioning musicians of advanced age

A comparative search for common traits between two high-functioning musicians of advanced age in cultures on opposite sides of the Pacific. One subject (A), aged 102, is a well-studied pianist for performs for communities of older adults. The other (B), aged 99, is a well-known teacher of music. Subject A currently resides in Northern California. Subject B maintains a studio in the northern part of Vietnam.

In both cases the fluency of retained skills is impressive. Both subjects function well in musical activities that are improvisatory. For this reason, both have potentially unlimited repertories. Both respond skillfully in a musical sense to and among other musicians. Both have notably cheerful personalities. Both seem to have a special gift for defining a simple framework as the basis for their respective styles of improvisation. Yet performance examples and musical interactions demonstrate not only exemplary memories and aural skills but impressive preservation of executive function in the context of coordinating multisensory information.

Dang Vu: Preservation of performance and pedagogical skills in Vietnamese improvised ensembles music: A high-functioning master in his 100th year.

ESF submission

High-performing musicians in their 10th and 11th decades; The role of early training and musical immersion

ME: 102; pianist (+7); vascular dementia; extensive, broad early training; extensive memory loss; superb preservation of memory and improvisational skills; popular, blues, gospel

GL: 94; Alzheimer’s; pianist; extensive early training; extensive, highly diverse professional history; extensive improvisational skill

KR: 97-98; ??; pianist; exceptional early training; intermittent professional history; exceptional performing memory for classical music

VB: 99, none. total life-long immersion in improvised ensemble music

MB: 91, Parkinson’s??; retired high school band teacher; music lessons from age 9 (Midwest); WWII service; great memory generally; leads barbershop quartet (75-101), pickup dance orchestra; good piano skills.

AL (Ambrose LeVan), 105. None?? Organist in NJ: school dropout (as was the norm). Some of the oomph comes from the electronic organ in video from Asbury Park Press.