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Freedom and Control: Musicians' Autonomy and Record Labels' Influence in Producing the Sound of Contemporary Jazz

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by

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Jiwon Kwon

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Dedicated to my parents.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

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Professor Patrick Burke, Chair

Professor Paul Steinbeck

Professor Lauren Eldridge Stewart

It is easy to find news articles and jazz albums titles that describe jazz musicians as geniuses. The notion that jazz musicians are geniuses gives the misleading impression that a jazz record is the pure outcome of a musician's artistry, without any aesthetic intervention by record labels in the process of making albums. However, my interviews with jazz musicians and record label executives reveal that many jazz records released by labels are the result of collaborative effort between musicians and labels. Labels involve themselves in the album-making process and give artistic input by deciding the concept of an album, the order of the tracks, the tunes that will be included on an album, and the tone and atmosphere of an album. In addition, because some labels pursue specific styles of music, musicians whose style differs from the labels' desired style are not given the chance to become those labels' artists. While at times labels' artistic input might affect an album only slightly, the fact that labels select which artist to sign and decide which music is worth the audience's attention demonstrates that labels have profound impact in forming the sound of jazz and shaping the future direction of jazz.

Introduction

The improvisational nature of jazz cannot be overemphasized. Jazz musicians are expected by audiences to improvise on what they are playing, whether it is a jazz standard or their arrangement of a classical piece or pop music. Considering that "soloing" or "improvisation" is a form of composition, the fact that jazz listeners seek originality and original compositions from jazz musicians is not a surprise. Because of this expectation, some audiences take jazz albums at face value, assuming that a jazz record is the pure outcome of a musician's creative effort and there is not any aesthetic intervention by record labels in the process of making records. One of the practices in the jazz industry that misleads audiences into this impression is describing jazz musicians as geniuses. For example, there are many records that emphasize musicians' genius including *The Genius of Art Tatum* (This is a series of solo albums released between 1953-54), *The Genius of Bud Powell* (1956), *The Genius of Charlie Parker* (1956), *Ornette Coleman – Genesis of Genius* (2022), and Ray Charles's *Genius + Soul = Jazz* (1961). In addition, the *New York Times*,[1] *Rolling Stone*,[2] the *Guardian*,[3] and *NPR*[4] published articles in which they call Miles

[1] Robin Kelley, "Miles Davis: The Chameleon of Cool; a Jazz Genius in the Guise of a Hustler," The New York Times (The New York Times, May 13, 2001), https://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/13/arts/miles-davis-the-chameleon-of-cool-a-jazz-genius-in-the-guise-of-a-hustler.html.

[2] Sunil Sampat, "Jazz Corner: Miles Davis the Enigmatic Genius," Rolling Stone India, May 30, 2019, https://rollingstoneindia.com/jazz-corner-miles-davis-enigmatic-genius/.

[3] Kadish Morris, "Jazz 'Genius' Cécile McLorin Salvant: 'in Periods of Loneliness and Fear, It's Instinctual to Want to Talk about Love'," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, March 7, 2022), https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/mar/07/jazz-genius-cecile-mclorin-salvant-in-periods-of-loneliness-and-fear-its-instinctual-to-want-to-talk-about-love.

[4] Lara Pellegrinelli, "Esperanza Spalding Is the 21st Century's Jazz Genius," NPR (NPR, August 28, 2018), https://www.npr.org/2018/08/28/638896807/esperanza-spalding-is-the-21st-centurys-jazz-genius#:~:text=Esperanza%20Spalding%20Is%20The%2021st%20Century's%20Jazz%20Genius%20%3A%20NPR&text=Esperanza%20Spalding%20Is%20The%2021st%20Century's%20Jazz%20Genius%20The%20ways,challenges%20gender%20norms%20across%20styles.

Davis, Cécile McLorin Salvant, and Esperanza Spalding a genius. It is hard for us to think that "geniuses" are not the only creator of their work and that they need or at least receive artistic input from outside.

Admittedly, I was one of those jazz listeners and my research questions stemmed from this perspective. While I once assumed that any jazz album is a product based solely on the musicians' artistic decisions, as I became familiar with the music released on Dutch label Criss Cross Jazz, which captures the sound of the cutting-edge New York jazz scene,[5] I found that there is a thread of sound that connects Criss Cross Jazz's albums together. I have come to a realization that Criss Cross has a distinct sound, an identity as a jazz label, and that Criss Cross is not alone in this respect. Record labels such as ECM, Blue Note, and Smoke Sessions Records also have a firm identity. That realization led me to question the relationship between jazz musicians and record labels: How does a label create sound that is defined as "their" sound (for example, the "ECM sound")?[6][7][8] Do label owners seek specific sounds and only sign artists who fit their musical preference? Do label owners desire to take an involvement in the creation of their musical products? Furthermore, does a record label's pursuit of profit affect musicians' aesthetic decisions? What compromises do modern jazz artists make in working with labels? In search of answers to these questions, I interviewed professional jazz musicians and independent record label executives such as jazz pianist Aaron Goldberg and François Zalacain, the founder of Sunnyside Records.

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[5] "Criss Cross Jazz - Founder & History," Criss Cross Jazz, accessed April 20, 2022. https://www.crisscrossjazz.com/founder.html

[6] Andrew Gilbert, "ECM and the Silence in the Sound," San Francisco Classical Voice, October 20, 2019, https://www.sfcv.org/articles/feature/ecm-and-silence-sound#:~:text=When%20people%20talk%20about%20an,every%20note%20is%20well%2Ddefined.

[7] Derk Richardson, "The Cutting Edge of ECM," The Absolute Sound, December 22, 2020, https://www.theabsolutesound.com/articles/the-cutting-edge-of-ecm.

[8] Charles Waring, "The Most Beautiful Sound: An Introduction to ECM Records," uDiscover Music, December 2, 2021, https://www.udiscovermusic.com/stories/ecm-records-beginners-guide/.

Most of the jazz records released on a label are a collaboration among many people, including musicians themselves, managers, label owners, A&Rs, and producers. Especially, producers such as Tommy LiPuma, Bruce Lundvall, Arif Mardin, Don Was, and Richard Seidel have demonstrated their influence on albums and the jazz industry throughout their careers. For reasons of space, however, I am unable to consider other collaborators rather than labels. In addition, while the relationships between jazz musicians and labels have changed over the history of jazz, in this thesis I only discuss the relationship between labels and musicians who are active in 2022.

Despite labels' substantial impact on forming the sound of jazz and shaping the genre's future, there has been little scholarly attention placed on the musician–label relationship. In his book *The Jazz Bubble: Neoclassical Jazz in Neoliberal Culture*, Dale Chapman explores the political economy of jazz, which is exemplified in the entertainment conglomerates' acquisition of historically important jazz labels such as Universal Music Group's acquisition of Verve Records. Chapman argues that the shifted environment of Verve, which became answerable to Universal as a subsidiary, has severely affected jazz, as Universal expects the label to "perform as profit centers for the company."[9] To meet Universal's expectation, Verve cut its instrumental jazz roster, while maintaining its vocal jazz roster, which is more profitable than instrumental roster. As Chapman explains how this expectation from Universal led Verve to bring a change in album marketing, he provides readers with examples of the label and producer giving artistic inputs to musicians, such as suggesting concepts for the new album or making an album in which an artist is matched with different side musicians for each track.

[9] Dale Chapman, "Selling the Songbook," in *The Jazz Bubble Neoclassical Jazz in Neoliberal Culture* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), p. 104.

Meanwhile, in his book *Blowin' the Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene*, Travis A. Jackson provides a detailed explanation of the recording industry, specifically, the production process of a jazz record, from the initial stage of brainstorming the album concept to promotion and distribution of the album. He shows how a musician, producer, and engineer make artistic decisions together and collaborate in making albums.[10] Similarly, Marty Khan, a veteran jazz manager, writes in his book *Straight Ahead: A Comprehensive Guide to the Business of Jazz* about various aspects of the jazz industry, from the role of personnel—the artist, managers, attorney to label head, executive assistant, and publicist—to varying degree of artistic influence from the labels.[11]

While Chapman's book gives readers a glimpse of possible artistic input given by the label, his argument is focused on the repercussions of jazz divisions belonging to corporate hierarchies. Similarly, Jackson and Khan suggest that labels give artistic influence to their musicians, but their arguments are less concerned with who are at the helm of forming the sound of jazz and the relationships between jazz musicians and labels. In this study, I bring to light the labels' impact in making the sound of jazz and shaping the future direction of jazz. To do so, I have divided this thesis into three chapters on less interventional record labels, more interventional record labels, and musicians who self-produce albums. I examine the different relationships between musicians and labels, various artistic inputs given by the labels, and differences in contracts between musicians and labels.

[10] Travis A. Jackson, *Blowin' The Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 93.
[11] Marty Khan, *Straight Ahead: A Comprehensive Guide to the Business of Jazz (without Sacrificing Dignity or Artistic Integrity)* (Tucson, AZ: Outward Visions Books, 2004), 125.

In chapter 1, “Less Interventional Record Labels,” I explore record labels Criss Cross Jazz and Sunnyside Records and their musicians David Binney, Misha Tsiganov, Aaron Goldberg, and Luciana Souza. Criss Cross’s founder Gerry Teekens, who was also a producer in his own right, encouraged Misha Tsiganov to select side musicians from the Criss Cross pool to maintain the label’s distinct musical identity. In addition, he was involved in deciding the overall style of the Tsiganov’s albums and the ratio of original compositions to jazz standards. Two Sunnyside Records artists, Aaron Goldberg and Luciana Souza enjoyed almost complete artistic freedom when making their records. However, although these musicians had artistic control, labels are still influential in forming the sound of jazz and shaping its future because they select which musicians to sign.

In chapter 2, “More Interventional Record Labels,” I explore four record labels—ECM Records, Hat Hut Records, Concord Jazz, and Mack Avenue Records—and musicians Shai Maestro, Marc Copland, Taylor Eigsti, as well as Will Wakefield, an A&R at Mack Avenue. These labels play a more active role in the creative process by making rather specific suggestions on album concepts, orchestration, dynamics, and side musicians as well as whether to improvise or not on a certain piece. Shai Maestro and Marc Copland’s examples, in particular, demonstrate that making a record is a collaborative effort between musicians and labels and that label’s participation in making a record can be positive and successful both artistically and commercially.

In chapter 3, “Musicians Who Self-Produce Albums,” I discuss Avishai Cohen and Emmet Cohen. Avishai Cohen launched Razdaz Records with his manager Ray Jefford to gain full control in every aspect of the record production and to give talented young musicians an opportunity to realize their creative vision. Similarly, although he did not register a business, Emmet Cohen makes albums by himself to have complete artistic freedom. While their self-produced albums are

the outcome of their own creativity, they still make half of the albums in their discographies with other labels. Considering that the biggest reason why Avishai and Emmet Cohen self-release their albums is to achieve full artistic control, we can say that their records are in part influenced by labels.

My interviews reveal that the relationships between jazz musicians and record labels are as diverse as the number of musicians working with labels, and there are good relationships as well as bad ones. The fact that labels participate in the record-making process does not necessarily mean that their relationships with musicians are negative. In many situations, labels want to be involved in the creative process as they fund the production, and it is not hard to find artists who are open to musical suggestions. As a result, a high proportion of jazz albums that are made today are results of collaborative effort between musicians and labels. While labels' artistic input might affect an album only slightly, the fact that labels select which artist to sign and decide which music is worth the audience's attention demonstrates that labels have profound impact in forming the sound of jazz and shaping the future direction of jazz.

Chapter 1: Less Interventional Record Labels

My decision to write about the relationship between jazz record labels and jazz musicians grew from the desire to know about the economics of jazz. Do financial constraints affect the direction of jazz, and by extension, the future of jazz? If so, to what extent? I posed this question with jazz record labels in mind, which led me to another question: If record labels give artistic input in the process of making a record, could we say that the sound of jazz is formed by both musicians and record labels? Marty Khan, who has more than thirty years of experience as a manager for jazz artists including The Art Ensemble of Chicago, asserts that "Every major label demands control, input or approval on artistic decisions. . . . While independents make fewer demands contractually, the involvement in the artistic process is often more intrusive."[12] My assumption before conducting interviews was also that most labels would involve themselves in the process of making an album. However, I found multiple musicians who claimed to have total artistic freedom.

In this chapter, I discuss two independent record labels, Criss Cross Jazz and Sunnyside Records, which give greater artistic freedom to their musicians. Although for both labels, there is an essential prerequisite to be signed to the labels, once the artist has done so, then the artist can enjoy considerable artistic freedom in making their albums. As a result, the albums made by these two labels considerably reflect the artists' visions. However, it is record labels, in the end, that decide what is worth the audience's attention and what is not by selecting artists. Hence, I argue that the record labels wield considerable power in shaping and forming the style and future direction of jazz, as well as the sound of jazz.

[12] Marty Khan, *Straight Ahead: A Comprehensive Guide to the Business of Jazz (without Sacrificing Dignity or Artistic Integrity)* (Tucson, AZ: Outward Visions Books, 2004), 125.

In this chapter, I will explore major issues arising when musicians work with record labels. The issues include: whether a label only signs musicians in a specific style or takes a more diverse approach; whether a label produces or only licenses albums; whether a label owns masters; labels' role in distribution and marketing; the label's influence on repertoire; and the label's influence on the selection of side musicians. I argue that labels with a strong stylistic preference, such as Criss Cross Jazz, inevitably find themselves more involved in making aesthetic decisions. On the other hand, labels that are open to various styles, such as Sunnyside Records, could give virtually complete artistic freedom to their artists.

I selected Criss Cross Jazz and Sunnyside Records because they take differing approaches to contracts and their rosters include important figures in the jazz scene today. My interviews reveal that individual jazz musicians have had vastly different experiences, even if they work with the same label. I interviewed two Criss Cross Jazz artists, David Binney and Misha Tsiganov, two Sunnyside artists, Aaron Goldberg and Luciana Souza, and the founder of Sunnyside Records, François Zalacain. In what follows, I will discuss these record labels, their artists, and their relationship, and reveal how each musician's relationship to his/her record label is different and how—even in the case of Sunnyside, which gives musicians virtually complete artistic freedom—labels have a significant influence in forming the sound of jazz.

1.1 Criss Cross Jazz

Criss Cross Jazz, founded in 1981 in Enschede, Netherlands, is one of the leading jazz record labels. The critically acclaimed label has been in the vanguard of documenting cutting-edge jazz in New York and its catalog holds over 400 albums and a roster of over a hundred musicians. Founder Gerry Teekens, who was a professor of German, a professional drummer, and a jazz

enthusiast, was also a talent scout who had a great ear and taste for music. While working as a professor, he brought musicians from the U.S. to the Netherlands and organized tours for them around his vacations. Teekens began recording those musicians, which eventually led him to found the label. Established musicians were not of interest to Teekens. He was mainly interested in discovering younger jazz musicians, who, in his opinion, were talented but under-recorded. That is why on Criss Cross one can find earlier albums of many now well-known artists, which were made when they were lesser-known and working primarily as side musicians. These musicians include Chris Potter, Peter Bernstein, Mark Turner, and Kenny Garrett, among others. Teekens was a believer in consistency. He usually made more than one album with a musician, allowing musicians to be leaders for one session and then side musicians on the next. In addition, once he found the recording studio and recording engineer he liked, he worked with them for many years.[13] Criss Cross Jazz owes its distinctive sound to Teekens's consistency. Unfortunately, Teekens died in 2019. But his son, Jerry Teekens Jr., decided to maintain his father's business to keep his musical legacy alive.[14] Although the label only made one album each year in 2020 and 2021, it succeeded in getting back on the rails, announcing an active and healthy release plan for 2022 with several artists.[15]

[13] C. Andrew Hovan, "Gerry Teekens: At the Helm of Criss Cross Jazz Article @ All about Jazz," All About Jazz, October 29, 2005, https://www.allaboutjazz.com/gerry-teekens-at-the-helm-of-criss-cross-jazz-by-c-andrew-hovan.

[14] DownBeat, "Gerry Teekens, Founder of Criss Cross Jazz Label, Dies at 83," DownBeat Magazine, November 13, 2019, https://downbeat.com/news/detail/criss-crosss-gerry-teekens-dies-at-83#:~:text=Gerry%20Teekens%2C%20who%20in%201981,'%20son%2C%20Jerry%20Teekens%20Jr.

[15] Criss Cross Jazz Records (@crisscrossjazzrecords). 2022. "Excited to announce we will record another new release for Criss Cross Jazz records on April 22, 2022 for our release plan 2022 with Alex Sipiagin, Chris Potter, Matt Brewer, David Kikoski and Johnathan Blake." Instagram, January 31, 2022. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZZaCsNIEk5/

1.1.1 David Binney

Alto saxophonist David Binney is one of those artists included in Criss Cross Jazz's 2022 releasing plan, and his latest album with Criss Cross was released in January 2022. Born in 1961, in Miami, Florida, to parents who were big music fans, Binney was introduced to the music of John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, and Miles Davis. At the age of 19, he moved to New York, where he met his mentors Dave Liebman, George Coleman, Phil Woods, Bob Berg, and Bob Mintzer.[16] In 1991, Binney put out his first album, *Point Game*, with French label Owl Records. Since then, he has released albums with European labels such as ACT Records, Red Records, and Criss Cross Jazz.

With music marked by episodic, long-form compositions, Binney has been one of the most prolific and versatile musicians whose music encompasses jazz, classical, and electronic. Since releasing *Point Game* in 1990, he has recorded more than 20 albums as leader or co-leader, and appeared on more than 300 albums as a side musician. Musicians he has performed with include Aretha Franklin, Chris Potter, Brian Blade, Craig Taborn, Bill Frisell, and Gretchen Parlato, among others. Besides that, he is one of the first musicians to start their own label. In 1998, he founded Mythology Records, through which he puts out music to this day.

I contacted him in November 2021 for an interview not only because I am a fan of his music, but because he is a Criss Cross Jazz artist, founded his own record label, and worked with a number of labels throughout his career. I met him on Zoom and was able to hear his experiences with Criss Cross Jazz as well as other record labels with which he worked.

Binney's first encounter with Criss Cross was as side musician, rather than leader. He played on various Criss Cross albums as side musician, and remembered that "It took a long time for them [Criss Cross] to offer" him anything, "but once they did, he [Gerry Teekens] loved it."

[16] David Binney, "Lessons." David Binney. February, 12, 2022. https://davidbinney.com/lessons.

Explaining the reason why it took so long for the label to offer him a contract as leader, Binney said, "Because I was left of center for him. He was very much more straight ahead at first, and then I wasn't that."[17] However, once he released *Bastion of Sanity* (2005), his first album with Criss Cross as leader, he went on to be the leader on eight more albums for the label. I asked him if any record labels ever had input when he was recording albums. In answer to my question, he shared his experience with AudioQuest, a cable and hi-fi audio company that used to have a label:

> I did one record for them, which had a producer, Joe Harley. . . . He, technically, was listed as producer but he didn't have anything to do with the music. . . . One of the things I've known for in the jazz world or music world, whatever it is, is that I just have stuck to my guns, basically. I've never done something that I didn't want to do. Even if I'm not listed as a producer on all of my records, *musically* I produced all of them. There's been no input from a label or a producer. There's been suggestions, but all the records are exactly the way I've wanted to make them. That's important to me.[18]

As he was able to fully realize his artistic vision with AudioQuest, Gerry Teekens was comfortable with Binney's desire for creative freedom. Binney said,

> He [Teekens] dictated a lot to a lot of people, like what people could do or not do. . . . With me, he never, he would suggest things sometimes, if I take it or not. . . . At the end, he didn't even fly to New York to be at the [recording] sessions, and I did everything. So those were all also just my doing. . . . He didn't really get in my way.[19]

[17] David Binney, interview with the author, November 3, 2021.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

However, Binney confirmed that there are hands-on labels as well. "I've done couple other records for a little labels. One label did try to dictate, then I just completely washed it really quickly. . . . If you do a record for, maybe like Blue Note or one of those, I think they get involved. That's more of a hassle. You have to answer to a lot of people."[20]

On the production level, perhaps the biggest expense is paying side musicians. Travis A. Jackson cites an article confirming that "It costs between 15 to 60,000 to make a recording, depending on how much you pay the sidemen."[21] Similarly, speaking of artistic freedom, Marty Khan wrote in his book that "There were rarely issues on any meaningful level other than the occasional request for 'name' sidemen. The budget was always the primary concern."[22] Thus, even if musicians are given freedom in terms of style or direction of their albums, I thought it might be possible, due to financial constraints, that selecting side musicians is up to labels. I asked Binney if he had freedom to choose side musicians:

> When it comes to music with the label, I have the artistic say or else I wouldn't make the record. So I picked the sidemen, everything. The only thing that you might not pick with the label sometimes maybe is the studio. But Criss Cross just happened to use the studio that I used in New York anyway, so it's the same people I've been working with since the '80s. . . . The label doesn't dictate anything, artistically.[23]

[20] David Binney, interview with the author, November 3, 2021.
[21] Travis A. Jackson, *Blowin' The Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 93.
[22] Marty Khan, *Straight Ahead: A Comprehensive Guide to the Business of Jazz (without Sacrificing Dignity or Artistic Integrity)* (Tucson, AZ: Outward Visions Books, 2004), 125.
[23] David Binney, interview with the author, November 3, 2021.

For his latest album with Criss Cross Jazz, Binney enjoyed greater freedom of using a photo that he wants.

> Even the pictures I took for Criss Cross, I picked the photographer here [in LA]. We went to a location, we took some photographs, and I sent them to them. And they, of course, have the ability to "Oh, we don't like this. Do them again." or whatever. But, you know, they didn't. I have the total artistic control of everything I do.[24]

Binney added, "It should be that way" because "Coltrane's group wouldn't be Coltrane's group, Miles Davis wouldn't be Miles Davis if the labels pick the band."[25] As he mentioned earlier, Binney was resolute about having total artistic freedom when making his albums.

Binney's comments seem to suggest that signing to a record label does not have a downside to musicians. With Criss Cross Jazz, which gives advances to its musicians, musicians can earn income, pursue their artistic vision, and document their musical works. I was curious, then, why some musicians, including Binney, have gone through several record labels, instead of sticking with one, and even founded their own record labels. For Binney, it seemed that changing labels or working with different labels as well as starting his own label happened rather naturally with him. In our interview, Binney recalled that "The first record I ever did came out on a French label called Owl Records [*Point Game* (1990)]. It was hooked up by my mentor at the time, Dave Liebman. He got connected me with this label in France. But I had already made the record. So it was like,

[24] David Binney, interview with the author, November 3, 2021.
[25] Ibid.

they liked the record and decided to put it out."[26] About working with AudioQuest and founding his own label, he mentioned,

> I made two records for a US label called AudioQuest, which is no longer ran [as a record label]. I started my own label because at that time, AudioQuest was [out] of the record business. But I had already made my second record for them, but they were getting out of the record business, so, [it was] just sitting there. I got it back from them, and I decided to put it out myself, which means I had to start a label. So I started a label. And since then, I've just kept it going with, every once in a while making records, putting them out on my label. My label, I mean, a label now is nothing more than, just, basically putting out the record with your label name and it doesn't even have to be a physical copy. So there's not anybody who works for me or anything. It's just, I put out a record and it's on Mythology.[27]

For Binney, starting Mythology Records was rather accidental. He wanted to release his album after AudioQuest went out of business, so he founded his own label. In 1998, he started Mythology Records through which he has been putting out non-jazz or jazz electro music.

However, even after launching Mythology, Binney kept releasing albums on other labels instead of his label. Also, speaking of Owl Records, he observed that he had already made the record, which made me curious, then, what good signing to a label did for him.

> The biggest expense you have making a record is printing a physical copy. For a while it was CDs, now not so much CDs [although the] European labels still make CDs all the time. But now it's LP,

[26] David Binney, interview with the author, November 3, 2021.
[27] Ibid.

> which is *very* expensive. And it takes a long time to even get them. I have a record that's been done for almost two years, we're *still* waiting for the LP, on a different label in LA. So, it's a lot less expensive. I don't have any expense. And with Criss Cross, which is nice, they actually pay us a little bit to do the records, which a lot of labels don't do anymore but Criss Cross does. So I actually make a little bit of money and they pay for all the physical stuff and the distribution of them. Sometimes labels will pay for PR. Criss Cross doesn't. I don't think, really. And that's a huge expense, also. So it's just a lot less expensive. If I do [with] my own record, I [usually] have to hire PR, if I want to print physical, I have to pay for everything myself. PR can be as much as $3-5,000 a *month*. It's ridiculous. It can *be* that much. Making an LP nowadays is, you know, $4-5,000, if you want to make five hundred LPs or whatever it is. So it's expensive. So that's the reason why sometimes you go with a label. But if I release my Mythology records now, sometimes I don't print anything. The last one I printed some CDs but CDs have fallen so much, in price, and you can get them in two days, then it makes it worth it. . . . You know, it's, really that. It's just expense.[28]

Making a record and selling it was a costlier project than I expected, and this realization led me to another question: whether Binney has thought of making non-jazz albums with a record label rather than by himself. Although, to a musician, there is no upfront cost when working with a label, at the same time, that means a musician cannot make a profit until the record breaks even. To Binney, who produces and sometimes plays all instruments used in his tracks, and who, to use his words, makes "self-contained records," releasing an album by himself was a better option. Furthermore, according to Binney, making an album with a record label was not just about music:

[28] David Binney, interview with the author, November 3, 2021.

> Yeah, I have. There are some labels that are in LA. . . . I'm not really connected with them. I don't know what their financial deal is. You know, I kind of would just rather put these things out myself and get all the money that I make on them or whatever, which is not much, but. Anything that comes I don't have to split with anybody. But on the other side, there is a thing like if I came out with *Ariel* and *Ariel 2* on a label that was like, say more electro label, or like, you know, Brainfeeder, something, some of my friends are on, like Louis Cole and Genevieve Artadi, some people. You know, they have a big reach. And that would *really* make the album *way* more popular. But then there's whole other set of things that come into play, which is, how old you are, what you look like, what the fashion is. This whole kind of thing, which is, you know, I'm older. I'm not like really down to do all. I'm not going to be some kind of fashion. I'm just making the music. So I would need a label that would be happy just with that. . . . To be honest with you, a lot of stuff that's made now, you see on labels, it's not about the music. It's about what someone looks like or like a fashion thing or a certain style in the music they think it's going to sell, but it's not really. . . . Probably independent stuff that you find, it's going to be the most honest thing.[29]

Binney's remark that signing to a record label is not just about the music came as a surprise. I thought that might apply only to pop musicians, so I asked him if labels' seeking a particular appearance in musicians happens only in pop musicians or if it applies to jazz musicians as well. His answer was clear:

> No, no, totally with jazz music and still. . . . Some of the bigger labels, there's just, you could, you'll start to see it. Certain kind of fashion and everything and just, it's a kind of marketing thing that people trying to do it, and I never fit into any of those things. I remember the labels like Blue

[29] David Binney, interview with the author, November 3, 2021.

> Note and [those companies], Verve, they used to come to my gigs. And one time, one of the labels came up to me and said, "You know, you are our favorite artist. We wish we can sign you." I was like "Why *can't* you sign me?" I mean, this was years ago, too. "Well, you know, you just don't fit the sellable thing." So basically, he was telling me, it's not just about the music. I would come into my gigs… in jeans and t-shirt and you know, just whatever I could play good music with. . . . So, at a certain point, I was like, 'you know what, I'm just doing it underground. just about the music and that's, that's a whole thing.'[30]

Binney is uncompromising with regard to music, and he maintains this attitude even when his album is financially produced by a label. Therefore, while Gerry Teekens gave influence to some of his artists according to Binney, Binney was free from it. It took a long time for him to record an album with Criss Cross because the label did not like the style of music he played at first. However, Teekens's musical preference changed over time, and after a long waiting, Binney became a Criss Cross artist and continues to be. Binney's expectation of labels is to allow him to fully realize his artistic vision on his albums and to lift the financial burden of album production from him. As long as these are met, he is satisfied. However, another Criss Cross Jazz artist, Misha Tsiganov has different expectations of labels. Contrary to Binney's remark that expense is the only reason he works with a label, Tsiganov wanted to be a Criss Cross Jazz artist because he loves the distinctive style of the label.

[30] David Binney, interview with the author, November 3, 2021.

1.1.2 Misha Tsiganov

Jazz pianist Misha Tsiganov is another artist included in Criss Cross Jazz's 2022 releasing plan, and his latest album with Criss Cross was released in January 2022 along with Binney's new album. Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, Tsiganov grew up in a family of artists, and began playing the piano at the age of six. He graduated from Mussorgsky College of Music and was already an established musician in Russia before he moved to the U.S. in 1991 to attend Berklee College of Music, where he had been offered a scholarship. In 1993, he relocated to New York and performed with Norman Hedman, Chico Freeman, and Joe Chambers. He has recorded more than 100 albums with various artists, including Wynton Marsalis, Clark Terry, Michael Brecker, Randy Brecker, Gary Bartz, and Alex Sipiagin. Since his Criss Cross debut with *The Artistry Of The Standard* in 2014, he released three more albums, including the latest, *Misha's Wishes* (2022).[31]

Although both Tsignov and Binney are Criss Cross Jazz artists, their relationships with the label are rather different. While Binney is uncompromising about music, Tsiganov shows different understanding about the label's investment and position, which allows the label to involve itself in the process of making albums. My interview with Tsiganov reveals how the label exerts leverage in signing the artists, choosing repertoire, and selecting side musicians as well as marketing.

As Binney told me in our interview, and as others wrote elsewhere,[32] it seemed not common for Gerry Teekens, the founder of Criss Cross Jazz, to give considerable artistic freedom to his musicians. To have a more balanced perspective on the label and its founder, I interviewed Misha Tsiganov in January 2022. As Criss Cross artists, both Binney and Tsiganov enjoyed a

[31] "Bio." Misha Tsiganov. February, 21, 2022. https://mishajazz.com/bio.
[32] Sam Newsome, "Gerry Teekens: Record Producer, Drummer, and Lover of the Music (R.I.P.)," Gerry Teekens: Record Producer, Drummer, and Lover of the Music (R.I.P.), November 2, 2019, https://sopranosaxtalk.blogspot.com/2019/11/gerry-teekens-record-producer-drummer.html?m=1.

similar degree of artistic freedom although Tsiganov suggests that Teekens checked to make sure he was at least playing in an appropriate style. Unlike Binney, whose first encounter with the label was as side musician, Tsiganov began to work with Criss Cross as leader. He has been an avid fan of the label because of the style in which it specializes, and so to become a Criss Cross artist was his dream:

> It was my dream to be on Criss Cross because Criss Cross is my favorite label, like, a lot of great musicians recorded for the label. And also, why I like Criss Cross? If you buy Criss Cross production, you know exactly what you buy, because Criss Cross records only specific style. Criss Cross specializes in, today–, modern–, New York–style jazz. . . . Basically, it's just that direction. So even if you close your eyes, and you pick up any Criss Cross records, you know that's going to be music you'll like. I mean, if you like the style. Because a lot of other labels, even Blue Note, I mean, I love Blue Note, too. But basically, mostly I love Blue Note from like '40s, '50s, '60s. [But] last, I would say, ten, maybe twenty years, like, if you buy Blue Note records, it could be anything. It could be jazz, it could be whatever, like, I don't know, like, Norah Jones, for example. It's more like towards, I mean, I love Norah Jones. She's great. . . . But they put out like super modern jazz, and stuff like Norah Jones. . . . Its style-wise, it's everywhere. So like, for example, [when] buying Blue Note CD, you have to check what you are buying. Make sure I like that or I like that, because there's a lot of different styles. And it's not bad. I'm not saying that this is bad. Some record labels, they would like to try different styles of music for different types of listeners and that's good. It's good, but that's their style. That's Blue Note style. Criss Cross style, that's different. . . . Criss Cross, they like only that music, and they just put out only that, specific style. And I respect that.[33]

[33] Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022.

Unlike Blue Note Records, whose records cannot be defined by a single style, Criss Cross Jazz, according to Tsiganov, has been strictly pursuing "today's music in New York,"[34] which made him want to be part of the Criss Cross family. Despite his love for the label, however, to become a Criss Cross artist was not easy. He approached the label by sending emails and records, and he "tried for about ten years to get this deal."[35]

> I knew the owner, Gerry Teekens, and knew him about like ten years before I got my first record deal. And I gave him my records, whatever it [was] back then. And then like, all the time, I was writing him emails and then trying to send him my next record, my next record... But I would never get a deal, you know. I guess because too many people trying. . . . It was actually a surprise, because I remember, once I gave him my last record, I mean, the last one, the one just before I got on the label. And I wasn't already sure if he's going to take me or not, because I've never, I've tried already for ten years and I thought that's, I don't know, probably doesn't work for some reason. And all of a sudden, he called my number and I picked up the phone and he said, "Hello, Misha, this is Gerry Teekens. I love your record. Don't give it to anyone. I would like to sign you for my label." And then, he released it on Criss Cross, and since then, I've released right now my fourth record on Criss Cross.[36]

Thus, it was due to Tisganov's persistence that he received an offer from Teekens, who received a "hundred emails per day."[37]

[34] Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

I asked Tsiganov whether there were musical inputs from the label when he was making albums. Very understanding about Teekens' position, he explained that what the founder asked was reasonable.

> I wouldn't call it like, strict control. I wouldn't call it like this. But I would say, I mean, he was watching what kind of music you would record and with whom. And I understand that, because he pays for this, you know. If I want a control of what I record, I should pay from my pocket. [Then] I can record whatever. Crazy stuff or whatever. But imagine, if you pay for something, and you invest all the money, you want to know what you buy. It's like, if you go to a store, and you buy like whatever, like, fruits, you want to see them, you know. If they are okay or not. Because you pay your money. In this case, *he* pays. He pays me, pays my musicians, he pays for the studio, and I don't spend one penny on this record. And of course, he, I mean, he wants to know what he's paying for.[38]

Acknowledging Teekens' rights, Tsiganov added that he was still able to record what he wanted to record:

> But still, I would never say that, I felt that, like, strict control over my music because he let, actually, he let me do whatever I want to record. But, of course, in that style. He would ask me, "Misha, what style you recording?" I used to tell him, "Gerry, I'm recording, I'm keeping that same direction." Because my first record before he put it on Criss Cross, he heard it before. I gave it to him and he liked it. And the second record I told him, "I'm just doing the same direction," basically. Third records, I also told him, "I'm doing same direction." He just wanted to make sure that I'm

[38] Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022

> not trying to record my third record like, for example, Brazilian music. Because this is not Criss Cross style. . . . But as soon as I told him, "Gerry, the way I'm recording is the same style. Modern style that had jazz, like contemporary." He said, "okay," and that was it. I don't call it like *control*. He just wanted to know what's in my mind. What style I do, you know. If I told him, "you know what Gerry, I'm getting sick of that straight-ahead, modern jazz. My next project is, whatever, like, salsa. Puerto Rican salsa or Cuban salsa," he might say, "oh, Misha, that's great but then you should go to another label." He has rights to do that because this is his label, and he pays for the project. But I never felt that he controls me.[39]

For Tsiganov, the fact that Criss Cross has a specific style was the reason why he wanted to be on the label, and therefore, maintaining that style was not a restriction to him at all. He observed that he and Teekens discussed the ratio of original compositions to jazz standards and approximate direction of an album, but Teekens was never forceful in the process. Tsiganov even went as far as to say that "Whatever I recorded for Criss Cross, that's exactly what I would record, even without Criss Cross. If I had no Criss Cross, that's what I wanted to record *anyway*. Criss Cross hadn't changed my direction at all."[40]

However, the four albums he made for Criss Cross do not portray his artistic vision on the whole, either. He commented that he has "some other projects" such as arrangements for Brazilian music, big band, and string groups.[41] But offering these kinds of projects to Teekens was not even an option for him, because he knows that Criss Cross pursuits a specific style.

[39] Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

> If I offer this to Gerry, he would say no. But that's right. Because it's not Criss Cross style. But I would never offer it to him [in the first place]. I mean, that would be, kind of, stupid to call Gerry and say, "Gerry I would like to record for you like, mixed of jazz and classical music with strings," or, I mean, it would be stupid even if I mention that, because it's not his style. I know that. It's not for Criss Cross. For this project, I would call another record label.[42]

Besides the direction of an album, another thing that Tsiganov had to discuss with Teekens was side musicians. If, for example, he played a gig with a very talented musician and wanted to record with him, he could not bring the musician to Criss Cross, because Teekens "was trying to keep his Criss Cross family together"[43] by rehiring musicians who recorded for Criss Cross. He mentioned that this is not unique to Criss Cross in that a similar practice could be found at Blue Note Records in the '50s and '60s:

> If you go back to the '50s and '60s, who was recorded on a lot of Blue Note records, like Wynton Kelly, Red Garland, Paul Chambers, Jimmy Cobb, you know, kind of like, different records, on the different leadership. You can still [see] pretty much the same names. Same names, same people. It's like a family, kind of. So that was the same story with Gerry Teekens. He was trying to keep kind of the same people who used to record for Criss Cross, and who has a name and reputation.[44]

Thus, when choosing side musicians for his new album, he always had to choose them from the Criss Cross pool and then have permission from Teekens. Ostensibly, this practice would seem to restrict Tsiganov's artistic freedom, but he told me that it supports him, if anything:

[42] Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

> That's how he was trying to support me, too. Because imagine, if I bring, to my record, totally unknown people, like unknown people, like, again, I'm not Herbie Hancock. So I need support from other guys, you know. Herbie Hancock, if he brings totally unknown people, people will be still checking his record because he's got a name. I'm not even close to Herbie Hancock. I'm not a super star. So I need names like Seamus Blake, Alex Sipiagin, Boris Kozlov, like Hans Glawischnig, Donald Edwards, all my guys. Because they've been on Criss Cross, before I got there. And they already got reputations and names. So if someone [is] checking my record, "oh, Misha. Who is Misha? Oh, but he's got Seamus Blake, Alex Sipiagin, so probably I can get his record," you know.[45]

Although he had to choose side musicians among the Criss Cross family, Teekens always let him pick them and made sure that he felt comfortable playing with the chosen musicians.

> I worked with Hans [Glawischnig] before. We did some gigs together, and I always loved his playing, and he recorded for Criss Cross. So I talked to Gerry and I told Gerry, "Gerry, I would love to hire Hans Glawischnig." And he said okay. He just asked me, "Misha, have you played with Hans before? You guys, you know, you have that chemistry together?" I said, "Yeah, of course. We did some gigs. He's great."[46]

Despite the degree of freedom given to Tsiganov, the fact that he should choose musicians only within Criss Cross seemed somewhat restrictive, so I asked him if it wouldn't be better if he could choose musicians regardless of whether they are Criss Cross artists or not. He answered assertively:

[45] Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022
[46] Ibid.

"No. . . . Every record, all musicians, that's my dream team. They're all my dream team. So in this case, whatever I needed, and whatever Gerry needed, we were totally together."[47]

I asked him if, despite his positive relationship with Criss Cross, it is still relevant for jazz musicians to sign to record labels, as streaming services have become prevalent and record labels have become marginalized. He answered that if it is an unknown record label, it could not do much for you, but if a record label is famous, it can be very helpful:

> If you are asking what is better, to put a record as a self-released by yourself or give it to like famous record labels like Mack Avenue, Criss Cross, and Blue Note, like, those some famous record labels, of course, it's much better to put it out on the label, because those labels, they're connected. They have connection, everything. You don't have such connections. I don't have such connections like Criss Cross. Criss Cross got distribution everywhere. And Criss Cross has a name. That's the most important.[48]

In addition to this, he recalled a conversation he had with jazz critics and journalists:

> I know few very famous jazz critics. They write reviews for *Down Beat*, for *JazzTimes*, they've been on this business for like almost fifty years. . . . And I talk to them. They told me that they're receiving CDs, like, I mean, hundred CDs every day. . . . They're not going to even open it. They don't have time. [So] they check the name of the artist, and they check the name of the label. . . . If you are as famous as Herbie Hancock, maybe you don't need a label. But for people like me, label is very important because those jazz journalists, first, they look what label. If this is a famous label,

[47] Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022.
[48] Ibid.

> they put it to the right. And they will listen to it. If it's like, unknown, they just throw it to the garbage, to the left. So [to] be on the good label is good. It's great for your promotion. It's great to bring up your reputation and just to get more work and, I mean, it works for your career.[49]

Therefore, even in the so-called "streaming era," Tsiganov argues that jazz musicians still need record labels. Working with a record label is incomparable to self-releasing albums, so that "just being on Criss Cross, that's already a promotion."[50]

Two Criss Cross artists, David Binney and Misha Tsiganov, enjoyed complete, or, in the case of Tsiganov, nearly complete artistic freedom working with the label. However, it is worth noting that Criss Cross Jazz pursues a specific style, and one of the ways it maintains the style is by rehiring musicians. Although these facts might be seen as a precondition to work with the label, once they are fulfilled, artists are given considerable latitude in making records. Sunnyside Records is similar to Criss Cross Jazz in that it also allows artists to pursue their artistic vision, but while Criss Cross produces albums, Sunnyside no longer produces albums but only makes licensing deals, except for very special cases. In what follows, I will discuss what difference this contractual dissimilarity brings to the relationship between jazz musicians and record labels.

1.2 Sunnyside Records

Based in New York, Sunnyside Records is an American independent jazz record label founded in 1982. Unlike Criss Cross Jazz, which pursues a specific style, "Sunnyside Records is a relaxed label [that] simply releases the music [the label likes]."[51] Sunnyside is passionate in discovering

[49] Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022.
[50] Ibid.
[51] "About Us." Sunnyside Records, accessed February, 28, 2022. https://www.sunnysiderecords.com/site/aboutus.

hidden talents, and its earnest effort produced a massive catalog for an independent label. Its founder, François Zalacain, is a jazz devotee from France. His former employer was IBM, and to found the label was a fortuitous event. His friend pianist Harold Danko, who now holds the rank of professor emeritus of Jazz Studies & Contemporary Media at the Eastman School of Music, came to him with an idea of making a duo album with bassist Rufus Reid. Zalacain tried out the idea and recorded the album. After that, Zalacain recorded pianist Kirk Lightsey's solo piano album, which was followed by Lee Konitz's album *Dovetail* in 1983.[52] Since then, Zalacain steadily worked with various musicians and expanded the label's catalogue. His effort paid off when artist Luciana Souza was nominated for the Best Jazz Vocal Album Grammy for *Brazilian Duos* in 2003. Sunnyside's catalog now holds hundreds of albums and its roster includes high-profile musicians such as Kenny Barron, Paul Bley, Ethan Iverson, Vijay Iyer, Avishai Cohen, Miho Hazama, and Aaron Goldberg. In 2020, Sunnyside Records ranked a respectable 21st place on All That Jazz's readers' poll, which was conducted with the goal of identifying top jazz record labels among 8,500+ record labels listed in their database.[53]

In our interview, David Binney and Misha Tsiganov mentioned that most jazz record labels nowadays do not produce albums; rather, musicians shop around with a finished product to different record labels. I wanted to examine various sides of the record industry and to know more about why contractual differences exist between labels. Then, one day, through an interview with jazz composer Miho Hazama, I noticed that her contract deals differ from those of other musicians I have interviewed. She signed to Sunnyside with an already finished product, and Sunnyside only manufactured and distributed it. She assumed that this is the only type of contract deal Sunnyside

[52] "About Us." Sunnyside Records, accessed February, 28, 2022. https://www.sunnysiderecords.com/site/aboutus.
[53] Michael Ricci, "Best Jazz Record Labels Article @ All about Jazz," All About Jazz, January 4, 2021, https://www.allaboutjazz.com/top-jazz-record-labels-2020.

offers to its artists, saying that that would be the reason that Sunnyside has such a huge catalog. To confirm this, I interviewed François Zalacain, the founder of Sunnyside Records via Zoom, and Zalacain greeted me in his Sunnyside Records office, where hundreds of albums were stacked behind him.

One of the most striking facts that I have learned from interviews, more so than the fact that some musicians do have artistic freedom, was that it is record labels, after all, that decide what is worth being heard by audiences and what is not. For this reason, I asked Zalacain how he selects musicians.

> Like, the music. The quality of the music. That's it. If the music, if I like the music…yes. But now the search, how you search. In New York, it's fairly easy because there's a lot of jazz musicians. And there are many referrals from one artist that is on the label, says, "Oh, I know this one, and this one," and so you become aware of a musician, you go to see him, or you get a…you get to listen to something that they send you. [If] you like it…and sometimes, it's, someone just send an email. An artist send an email, with a link to Soundcloud playlist. I listen to [them], and it happens.[54]

Contrary to the well-known phrase that is easily found on many labels' websites, "We are not able to accept unsolicited demos or musical submissions,"[5556] I was surprised by the fact that both Teekens and Zalacain do listen to unsolicited musical submissions and discover musicians from them. I expressed my astonishment to him, and he answered that it was a matter of course.

[54] François Zalacain, interview with the author, January 27, 2022.
[55] Nonesuch Records, "Contact Nonesuch," Nonesuch Records Official Website, accessed August 17, 2022, https://www.nonesuch.com/contact-us.
[56] Motéma Music, "Motema Music. Artists of Power and Distinction since 2003.," Motema Music, accessed August 17, 2022, https://motema.com/contact/.

> I try to listen to. . . . One of the main thing[s] is listen to music, so. Yeah, I created the label for the music, not for the business, if you want. The main, when you create a business, let's say, if you want to manufacture masks during the pandemic, you don't do that because you love mask[s]. You do that because it's a business opportunity, to make money. It's not the same. It's not the same when you create a label, music label. Especially today, you don't create a jazz label thinking that you are going to make, to become rich doing that.[57]

I was curious if Sunnyside had manufacture-and-distribution-only contracts from the beginning, or if it used to produce albums but now finds it no longer feasible due to the advent of streaming services. I asked this question to him and Zalacain confirmed my theory.

> You are absolutely right. Yes. It changes the way we contract the music. . . . Let's say when we started, and let's say until twenty years ago, [before] the advance of the digital, we used to produce the music. That means produce the music, put the money to make the album. Now, more and more. . . except some cases, very special instances, we license the album from the artist. The artist is the one who puts the money to the album. Or finds a sponsor to put the money. . . . So the album, the music is owned by the artist, they produce the music, and they come to the label for manufacturing and distributing the album. And we license that from the artist. So many albums we did, that you see, today on Sunnyside, are owned by the artist, but we have the exclusive rights to manufacture and market the album.[58]

In addition to this, he mentioned several sources, such as the Doris Duke Foundation, Chamber Music America, and GoFundMe, that sponsor artists, and it seemed that he suggests these to artists

[57] François Zalacain, interview with the author, January 27, 2022.
[58] Ibid.

who want to make an album but are unable to finance it. As now the financial burden of making an album has moved from the label to musicians, I was wondering if there is risk, on the label's side, in licensing albums. Zalacain's answered that the label still takes on financial risk in licensing deals.

> Yes…of course. Because what we do, we pay for the manufacturing. Say that you record an album. You give the album to Sunnyside. And they license. Now, I have to manufacture the album. So I need to pay for the manufacturing of the album. Let's say… I spend, let's say, for manufacturing and so on and all the cost, and marketing, because marketing, we, you know, sending record to the press, to the radio, and so on, promotion. Let's say that we spend three thousand dollars, altogether. And we have manufactured, let's say one thousand albums. And we sell only two hundred units because the album doesn't work, or the pandemic happens, there're no gigs. So the musician cannot go on tour to promote the album as well. So we sell only two hundred units, we are not going to make any money.[59]

The duration of a license deal is usually five years and upon agreement on both sides, it is extended by two years, added Zalacain.

Since artists on Sunnyside self-finance their albums, I thought the label's artistic influence on albums would naturally be less than that of a label that finances production. However, the label gives advances to its artists occasionally, as I will discuss below in reference to Aaron Goldberg, and it is still possible that the label has leverage to some degree. However, Zalacain told me that he gives complete artistic freedom to his musicians, and gives suggestions only upon request:

[59] François Zalacain, interview with the author, January 27, 2022.

> When we select an artist, it's because we like what he [sic] does. Especially in jazz. The musician in jazz usually, or, they know the music, in terms of, they know their instrument, they know the music, they are composers. If we select them, [that's] because we like what they do. You need to give freedom to the artist. Now, the artist can ask your opinion. You can give your opinion on a particular aspect, of, let's say, you know, recording session, we can have some kind of input but not as, to give our opinion, what we think, if we like this thing better than this thing, and so on and so on. But the final say on the artistic side is a musician. That's jazz.[60]

However, he added that if they are making a "commercial album," such as an album to sell for Christmas, he could be more directive. His remark about a "commercial album" was striking as it carries the implication that he considers most of the other albums non-commercial, meaning that he does not have much expectation to make a profit. Confirming my assumption, Zalacain mentioned that "I do what I do, because of the music. So once I recoup the money . . . we continue to be able to exist and to work with musicians."[61]

Zalacain is a label executive who deeply loves jazz and his artists. Because he loves jazz, he diligently discovers musicians by listening to demos and receiving suggestions from other musicians, which results in a large catalog and roster. Money does not seem to be an issue with him as long as he can recoup his investment, and the fact that he knows organizations that funds the production of an album suggests he cares about musicians who are in need of money. While the advent of streaming services jeopardizes his business and forces him to make mainly licensing deals, it works better for musicians such as Aaron Goldberg, who values owning the masters more than labels' financial support.

[60] François Zalacain, interview with the author, January 27, 2022.
[61] Ibid.

1.2.1 Aaron Goldberg

Aaron Goldberg is an American jazz pianist born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1974. Goldberg attended prestigious Milton Academy, where he was enrolled in the jazz program and taught by Bob Sinicrope and Jerry Bergonzi. At age 17, he moved to New York to continue his study in jazz at the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music. However, after one year, he came back to Boston to pursue his academic interests at Harvard College.[62] After graduating from college, he moved to New York, formed his trio with bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Eric Harland, and performed with renowned artists such as Joshua Redman, Wynton Marsalis, Al Foster, and Kurt Rosenwinkel.[63] Around 31, after successfully establishing himself in the jazz scene, Goldberg returned to academia to pursue his master's degree in philosophy at Tufts University.[64] He maintained balance between jazz and academic studies, turning in coursework while touring the world.[65] Beginning with his debut album *Turning Point* in 1999, he has made six albums as leader and appeared on more than 80 albums as co-leader or collaborator. Since his Sunnyside debut with *Worlds* in 2006, he has made five more albums with the label, including his latest album, *At the Edge of the World* (2018).

Before working with Sunnyside Records, Goldberg worked with two other labels, J Curve Records and Fresh Sound New Talent, with which his experiences were not as positive. He remembered his experience with J Curve Records, for which he made his first two albums as leader:

[62] Matthew Kassel, "Aaron Goldberg Is between Two Worlds," DownBeat Magazine, March 6, 2019, https://downbeat.com/news/detail/aaron-goldberg-is-between-two-worlds/P2.
[63] Aaron Goldberg, "Bio." Aaron Goldberg. March, 7, 2022. https://aarongoldberg.com/bio.
[64] David R. Adler, "Aaron Goldberg: Beyond Logic," JazzTimes, April 26, 2019, https://jazztimes.com/features/interviews/aaron-goldberg-beyond-logic/.
[65] Matthew Kassel, "Aaron Goldberg Is between Two Worlds," DownBeat Magazine, March 6, 2019, https://downbeat.com/news/detail/aaron-goldberg-is-between-two-worlds/P2.

> J Curve was basically a guy [Dale Rabiner] and his assistant. . . . He'd had this idea of starting a record label. . . . He had this sense that like, it would still be possible to make some money with a new jazz label, if you choose some up-and-coming artists. . . . He was willing to invest some money in the good production of my first two albums, and he was looking for somebody like me, who, in the '90s, 1997, I just moved to New York, I'd graduated college, I was starting to tour with some different people. I was playing with Greg Tardy and Mark Turner and then Joshua Redman. [And] right around the time that I was joining Joshua Redman's band, he asked me if I wanted to do two albums for them. I said "yes, sure."[66]

As most record labels that invest money in the production of the album own the master, so did J Curve. Although he heard many musicians talking about the importance of owning the masters, at the time, Goldberg did not anticipate any negative ramifications that might later bring about:

> The most important part for me was that he owned the master. And then I made another record for him later. He owned both masters. And at the time, I thought, 'well, this guy is my friend,' you know. . . . I thought, 'well, it's not a big problem for him to own the master, because what's he going to do with it?' And he loves music, so, you know, I just didn't foresee any problem that might emerge from that relationship. Because musicians are always saying, 'no, no. You need to own your own masters.' And I understood the principle of that. You don't want people controlling your music and doing stuff with it that you don't want. On the other hand, I didn't see any risk. And he was willing to invest this amount of money that I wouldn't have been able to invest myself, so I said, "no problem." He's an investor, I get it. He wants to put the money in, he takes the risk. He's probably not going to make a lot of money off of me.[67]

[66] Aaron Goldberg, interview with the author, March 1, 2022.
[67] Ibid.

However, the issue came to the fore when he conceived the idea of putting out his early albums on vinyl and then contacted the founder of J Curve:

> So, now, fast-forward to today, I was thinking like, maybe it'd be nice to, for example, put these albums out on vinyl. So my manager got in touch with the J Curve guy. 'You know, these are my first albums. Some people still like them a lot. It'll be fun to re-release them on vinyl.' He said, 'oh, I sold the masters.' So we were like, "oh, well, okay. Well, who did you sell them to?" He's like, doesn't respond. So, for whatever reason, I think he sold the whole catalog. I may be wrong. He may have just sold my masters. All I know is that he told my manager that he sold the masters. He won't even give us the contact of whoever he sold them to, because maybe that person specifically said, 'I don't want the artist coming to contact me, so you can't tell them who you [sell].' Probably that's the only reason. . . . So these are the kind of reasons why people say 'control your own masters. Don't sell the masters to the record company, or don't let them own your music,' right? Because you never know what's going to happen twenty years later. And now twenty-five years later, we're in a different internet world. Not only do I not have the masters, but I don't even know where they are.[68]

Unfortunately, however, Goldberg's unsavory relationship with record labels did not end with J Curve Records. He shared his experience working with Fresh Sound New Talent, which released the first records of many now-established artists, such as Brad Mehldau, Avishai Cohen, and Omer Avital. Goldberg made two records with Fresh Sound New Talent as a group named OAM Trio, with bassist Omer Avital and drummer Marc Miralta, and he recalled the unreliable relationship he had with the label:

[68] Aaron Goldberg, interview with the author, March 1, 2022.

> They were trying to find the new guys, and the thing was that they would pay not very much money, which didn't really matter. . . . But the real problem with them was that you never could trust the royalties. You didn't know how many records they would sell, and they would tell you like, 'oh, yeah, we sold this amount or this amount,' and you knew that you couldn't trust the number. Or they might say like, 'oh, yeah, we are going to send you the royalty check,' but you never get the check. So, from a business standpoint, like, I don't know, they probably owe me money but I have no idea how much money they owe me, and they owe other people, too, but nobody knows. So this is why, I didn't want to make an album for them. . . . And this was happening to a lot of my friends. They would make an album for them, and that guy would pay for everything. So it wasn't like, so he would invest and pay for the session, but you couldn't trust what was going to happen after that.[69]

Having experienced disappointment with J Curve Records and Fresh Sound New Talent, Goldberg learned the importance of owning masters as well as working with and building up a trusting relationship with the record labels.

> So I learned my lesson from that, and Sunnyside. . . . had a relationship with my friend Guillermo Klein, whose band I was playing in. I knew that Guillermo really likes François, the guy who runs Sunnyside, as a person. And after I had some interactions with the J Curve guy that made me think like, 'oh you know what? Actually, I didn't know this guy as well as I probably should have. I realized that it was important for me to really have a good trusting relationship. And also, I had this sense that I wanted to work with some, a label that wasn't going to just disappear, right? Because it [Sunnyside] has been around for a long time. It wasn't a new label. And then had a reputation for

[69] Aaron Goldberg, interview with the author, March 1, 2022

> being honest and like full of nice people. I didn't really care, you know, about making money from it or not. I just wanted someone I could trust that I know he's going to be there. And I was going to have a good personal relationship with them. And Sunnyside is that and François, the guy runs the label, is that. He's a great guy. Plus, I felt like he had shown some good taste, because he had put out some albums of musicians that I liked and in good relationships with musicians that I liked and with my friends. So it was clear to me from the beginning that I wasn't going to make a lot of money, but also clear to me that I could trust him, and I could maintain the masters. I could retain masters myself.[70]

For Goldberg, for whom owning the master is crucial, Sunnyside's licensing deal was better, even though it means that now he has to fund the production of albums himself. The trusting relationship between Goldberg and the label reassured him to self-finance his projects:

> With Sunnyside, at least I trust it completely, a hundred percent, that I knew exactly how many records were sold, I knew exactly how much I was going to get for royalties. And so I could afford to invest, to pay for the session, and then. . . I know I'm going to get the money back when I sell those records. So for me, it's a more open and honest relationship that I could trust, and so, it was a better situation for me.[71]

In addition, Goldberg finds self-producing albums advantageous because by doing so, he is not restricted by the schedule the label arranges, which, at times, cause the artists to leave the recording studio unsatisfied:

[70] Aaron Goldberg, interview with the author, March 1, 2022.
[71] Ibid.

> When you lose control—if you don't control the production of the record, you lose the control of the art, because it's improvised music and you have to do it in real time in the studio. If they're paying for the studio and the engineer, then you're on their schedule. And the album is done. When they say you're done, you're done because they're paying. If you are paying, 'okay, the record is not done. I want to do a different song. I want to do another take.' You can make those decisions, those artistic decisions yourself. So this is the main reason why, if you can afford it, it's better to do everything yourself. Because you can control how long you are in the studio. Or I want to have, 'oh, I have an idea. I want to have another musician. I want to pay that guy.' The record company is going to say, 'no. I'm not going to pay any other. We're over budget. No.' You say, 'well, it's worth it to me. I'll pay.' If it's your album, you can just add somebody else, you know.[72]

Scholar Travis A. Jackson mentions that one of the huge differences between major labels and independent labels is "the amount of time the musicians have to record."[73] Therefore, while Goldberg, who had only worked with independent labels, finds the leeway in self-producing attractive, others, who are signed to major labels, might not find it as attractive.

Explaining the signification of an advance that it "determines how confident they [record labels] are that they are going to sell," Goldberg observed that on all but one occasion he received an advance from Sunnyside.[74] Although the advance is deducted from the album sales, meaning that the issue is just whether the musician takes the money now or later, there still is the risk from the label's side in giving the money upfront. I wondered whether the risk led to artistic input from the label, and Goldberg answered firmly. "*Never* at any moment have they ever tried to influence

[72] Aaron Goldberg, interview with the author, March 1, 2022.
[73] Travis A. Jackson, *Blowin' The Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 94.
[74] Aaron Goldberg, interview with the author, March 1, 2022

anything to do with the music on any of my albums. Nor would they. On the other hand, neither did J Curve."[75] To reaffirm what I just heard, I asked if he, then, had total artistic freedom in making albums. "Total. If I hadn't, I wouldn't have done it."[76]

However, he remembered that in other projects, in which he participated as side musician, he did witness a label exercising influence in making albums by, for example, suggesting songs for the album. Goldberg told me an anecdote about the saxophonist Gregory Tardy's album on Impulse Records, *Serendipity* (1998), in which he was one of the pianists:

> A little bit of influence coming from the record label or the producer, for example, some suggestions of songs you might want to play, they're like, 'okay, let's add a song by a popular singer of today. Do a jazz version of,' I mean, I will give an example. The first major label album I recorded on was with Greg Tardy. Gregory Tardy, saxophone player. I was playing in his band at the time he was recording Impulse. They suggested, 'we need to have a cover, jazz version of a song by Maxwell.' A new R&B star. Great. Greg said 'great, no problem. I like Maxwell.' 'Okay.' They chose a song together, you know, him and the producer on the record label. We did a cover of that song. The rest of the songs in the album were totally Greg's choices.[77]

In addition, describing the album's unusual concept of having two rhythm sections, Goldberg emphasized that these suggestions from the label did not compromise the music, but rather, made a mutually beneficial situation for both the label and Tardy:

[75] Aaron Goldberg, interview with the author, March 1, 2022.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

> I think even the idea of having, like, there were two rhythm sections. I was in one, and Mulgrew Miller, who was more famous than me at the time and a great pianist, was in another half of the album. I don't know if that was the record company's choice or Greg's choice. But probably, you know, it was a combination, because Greg loves Mulgrew, too. So he was happy to have Mulgrew. So this was an example of artistic influence coming from the record company and the producer, but it wasn't working against the interest of Greg. In fact, Greg, who wasn't famous at the time, he thought this might help him. Sell records and get radio play and all these things are going to benefit his career.[78]

Goldberg asserted that the relationship between the label, producer, and artist should be mutually beneficial and cooperative, and throughout his career, he has not seen a situation in which a label placed artists under pressure and had them make music in a way they did not want to:

> So in fact, you know, the way it supposed to work is that the producer and the record company have this artistic influence that doesn't compromise the music, makes the music better, and gives the artists ideas they wouldn't have otherwise had, gives the artists a bridge to the market, which they wouldn't have otherwise been able to think of own their own, and actually succeeds in helping the artists to sell records, which benefits the record company *and* the artists, and get it radio play, which benefits the record company *and* the artists. So the whole thing should be a collaborative, you know, win-win situation. And I think, I would say, I can't think of an example of recording session that I participated in, where I didn't think that it was going to be a win-win situation. I feel like nobody is forcing artists, at least in my lifetime, nobody is putting a gun to the head of an artist and saying like, 'you need to sign this record deal, you need to record this song, and if you don't,'

[78] Aaron Goldberg, interview with the author, March 1, 2022.

> boom! or 'if you don't, I'm going to blacklist you and you won't be able to have any records,' you know. In my lifetime, there was no such pressure in the industry.[79]

Although Goldberg stressed that the suggestions from the label were never coercive, our interview reveals that labels do give rather specific suggestions to musicians, and those suggestions are reflected on albums. Therefore, what audiences hear in jazz albums, in other words, the sound of jazz, is collaborative effort of the label, producer, and musician.

Since Goldberg produces his albums himself, meaning that he does not need financial support from labels, I asked why he works with the label, rather than self-releasing albums. He answered that self-releasing albums entails business affairs and that he wants to focus solely on music:

> If you are asking why do licensing as opposed to release the album yourself, the answer is just a headache. I mean, if I release an album myself, I have to find the distributor, I have to keep track of who needs CDs and, I have to keep track of how many CDs have been sold, I become a businessman. I don't want to become a businessman. I don't want to run a CD business. I don't want to have a CD label. I'm not a jazz musician because I want to have jazz business. I'm a jazz musician because I love playing jazz and I want to make art. I don't want to sit and worry about how many CDs I have sold, my record has sold. But absolutely, you are a hundred percent right. If you are the kind of jazz musician that doesn't mind doing that thing, those kind of things and even like it, in fact, you should talk to Mike Moreno. He records his own albums and he releases them himself.[80]

[79] Aaron Goldberg, interview with the author, March 1, 2022.
[80] Ibid.

Mike Moreno is a jazz guitarist born in 1978, in Houston, Texas. He attended the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music and performed with renowned musicians such as Joshua Redman, Robert Glasper, Aaron Parks, Wynton Marsalis, and Kenny Garrett. He recorded dozens of albums as a side musician and six albums as a leader. Of six albums, he made three with World Culture Music, which *NPR* describes as "a label run by a handful of artists who believe in the DIY approach to making music and releasing it to the public,"[81] and another three with Criss Cross Jazz, including his latest album as a leader, *Three for Three*, in 2017.

Through his experiences with J Curve and Fresh Sound New Talent, Goldberg realized the importance of owning the masters and building a trusting relationship with a label. Sunnyside's licensing deal and dependable founder fulfilled his needs, and working with the label enabled him to focus only on music, as the label takes care of all the business aspects. When he was making albums, Goldberg received an advance at times, but this did not prevent him from having total artistic freedom. While Greg Tardy's anecdote confirms that some labels exercise influence, Goldberg affirms that at Sunnyside it was always reciprocally profitable and never forceful and that making a jazz album is a collaborative effort of the label, producer, and musician. Another Sunnyside artist, Luciana Souza, despite a different contractual relationship to the label, voices a very similar opinion.

1.2.2 Luciana Souza

Brazilian singer and composer Luciana Souza is one of the most innovative singers in jazz. Born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1966 to musician parents, her life was full of music. Souza's professional

[81] Josh Jackson, "Mike Moreno: Jazz Guitar 'between the Lines'," NPR (NPR, February 5, 2008), https://www.npr.org/2008/02/05/18665098/mike-moreno-jazz-guitar-between-the-lines.

music career started at age three when she made her first record for a radio commercial, and by age sixteen, she was already a sought-after recording artist, having recorded more than 200 jingles and soundtracks. She earned her bachelor's degree in jazz composition at Berklee College of Music, and master's degree in jazz studies from New England Conservatory of Music. She has taught at Berklee College of Music and Manhattan School of Music for four years.

Beginning in 2002 with *Brazilian Duo*, Souza's first Grammy-nominated record, five more albums, *North and South*, *Duos II*, *Tide*, *Duos III*, and *The Book of Chet*, were nominated for the Grammy. Herbie Hancock's 2007 album *River: The Joni Letters*, in which Souza performed as one of the singers, won a Grammy, making Souza also a Grammy-winning artist. Besides Hancock, she has recorded with one of the most influential musicians including James Taylor, Paul Simon, and Bobby McFerrin. Souza has maintained a long-standing relationship with Sunnyside Records since 2000 with her Sunnyside debut *The Poems of Elizabeth Bishop and Other Songs*, and she has made nine more albums with the label including the latest, *Storytellers* in 2020.

As we have seen, Sunnyside mainly makes only licensing deals today, except for very special instances. Luciana Souza is one of those special instances in which Zalacain finances the production of her albums. Since Sunnyside funds her album productions, which means the label owns the masters, I thought Souza's experience with the label might be greatly different from other Sunnyside artists Aaron Goldberg and Miho Hazama, who signed to a licensing deal. In addition, her husband Larry Klein is an acclaimed bassist and a four-time Grammy-winning record producer, who worked on albums by Joni Mitchell, Herbie Hancock, Lang Lang, Norah Jones, and Tracy Chapman, among many others. Klein also worked as a producer on some of Souza's albums, so I asked her for an interview to hear her experience working with and having close relationships to a label and a record producer.

Souza made two albums, *The New Bossa Nova* (2007) and *Tide* (2009), for Universal Jazz France, and to my surprise, the person who arranged the meeting between Souza and the head of Universal Jazz France was Zalacain. As Souza explained it, "He [Zalacain] wanted nothing from me but from me to do well."[82] He watched for an opportunity to reinforce her status as a jazz artist when she gained wide recognition with her album *Brazilian Duos*, so he introduced her to his good friend, Daniel Richard, who was the head of Universal Jazz France at that time.

> I got introduced to a man named Daniel Richard. He was the head of jazz at Universal Jazz France. I got introduced to him by Sunnyside owner François Zalacain and they are very good friends. . . . And François, because he is such a unique person and a record label person, he really wanted what was best for me at the time, and [I] had a lot of visibility with Brazilian Duos. . . . So he introduced me to Daniel Richard, brought Richard to a concert that I was doing with a band that wasn't even mine. . . . So I met Daniel one night at Smalls, and then he approached me and said "Would you like to make a record together?" And then, at the same time, I had already met my husband Larry Klein. . . . But I had made *Duos* when I met Larry already, so I was still making records on my own without a producer. And then when I met Larry, this opportunity with Universal came, I thought, 'oh, what a great opportunity to do something very different.' And so, we made a record. I hired Larry to be my producer, and we made a record called *The New Bossa Nova* for Universal Jazz.[83]

Souza signed a three-record deal with Universal Jazz France. Her first album with Universal, *The New Bossa Nova* (2007) was very successful, and after that she made *Tide* (2009) with Universal Jazz France. However, Souza said that even though an artist signs to a three-record deal, it is just

[82] Luciana Souza, interview with the author, March 9, 2022.
[83] Ibid.

a formality, and after making the first record, it is the label that has the final word on whether to make another record or not as they finance the production. After Souza made *Tide* with Universal, both she and the label entered a new phase, and "for a variety of reasons,"[84] and both agreed upon not making the third album.

I asked Souza about the difference between Universal and Sunnyside when making an album, and she answered that there are many differences, but the biggest differences are the greater financial support provided by a major label and the responsibility that imposes on the artist. While Travis Jackson's interview with major-label artists reveal that the budget for a recording in 2012 was around $40,000,[85] Souza's experience working with Universal, which is the biggest among the music industry's "Big Three"—Universal Music Group, Sony Music, and Warner Music Group,[86] shows that a larger sum of money was spent on their projects:

> This is so much bigger and because they have such a large structure, where they're dealing with artists, at the time that I was in Verve—you know, it was Universal Jazz France but in the US, it was called Verve. . . . So Verve, at the time, had Diana Krall and all kinds of big artists, so you're traveling on the same—of course you're down here and they're up there—structure. So it's very expensive. And I understood that early on, and you also have to make a lot of money for a label. If you don't make the money for the label back—it's not $40,000 or $30,000. It's $150,000, $250,000 and the numbers just start going up because of this entire structure. And you start to borrow against

[84] Luciana Souza, interview with the author, March 9, 2022.
[85] Travis A. Jackson, *Blowin' The Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 93.
[86] Marie Charlotte Götting, "Record Labels in the U.S. - Statistics & Facts," Statista, November 23, 2021, https://www.statista.com/topics/2126/record-labels/#dossierKeyfigures.

> your own account with the label, basically. 'We're going to invest in you.' But you're always at a deficit in a way.[87]

The money invested by Universal Jazz France for its artists is incomparably greater than that of any other record company I have discussed in my interviews. As the label makes a considerable investment, I thought it might be inevitable for them to take part in making aesthetic decisions to recoup the money. However, I was proved wrong. When I asked Souza if she could tell me about any musical influences from the label, she said "I cannot, really, because I did not have any."[88]

> I think they knew who they were dealing with. When I wanted to do *The New Bossa Nova*, [it] was a record that I wanted to do, the way I wanted to do. And they might have made suggestion at some point about the title, but I don't even remember. I'm just coming up with this, like, maybe if there was something, it was something like that. But in the end, the record was exactly what I wanted it to be. And the way I wanted. . . . And because I was protected by this person called Daniel Richard, I wasn't dealing with, you know, people, like Universal, that didn't love me. Somebody there brought me there because they loved my talent, and they respected me. And he also knew that I was very opinionated, and that I was very strong and maybe he didn't want to fight with me. . . . So we just had a really good, healthy relationship.[89]

If Souza's relationship with Universal Jazz France was harmonious, her relationship with Sunnyside Records could not be better, as it is clear from the fact that her Universal record deal was encouraged by Zalacain. After making two records with Universal, she came back to

[87] Luciana Souza, interview with the author, March 9, 2022.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

Sunnyside, where she "ha[s] always belonged."[90] Souza has made ten records with Sunnyside, and among them, only *Brazilian Duos* was funded by herself, not because Zalacain did not want to fund it but because she recorded tracks in different times while traveling between Brazil and New York. She is aware that she is one of the few artists whose recordings Zalacain financially supports. "He [Zalacain] has been incredibly, incredibly, incredibly supportive. I've been successful because of him, because of his support," Souza observed.[91] While Zalacain mentioned "You don't tell Luciana Souza what to sing. She's the one who decides,"[92] I asked Souza again if she had total artistic freedom with Sunnyside.

> Absolutely. Well, I was only restricted by however much I had, meaning, you know, I [was] like, 'can I do five days in the studio?' 'well, we only have money for three days.' So my artistic freedom was controlled by financial situation. But in terms of artistic freedom, he would come sometimes to the studio, if I recorded it in New York. He would come but he never said anything but 'wow, it sounds amazing,' 'wow, you guys sound great,' or nothing, not 'make [this] short,' 'make this long,' or 'it's too many songs,' or . . . 'let's not get this musician.' He always approved and respected *absolutely everything* I wanted to do. Except for me coming to him and saying 'can I have a hundred thousand [dollars]?' He would say, 'no, I don't have a hundred thousand.' [Laughs.] But who does, right?[93]

Although the interviews with Goldberg and Souza reveal that at times, artists' aesthetic visions might not be fully reflected on their albums depending on how many hours are given to them in

[90] Luciana Souza, interview with the author, March 9, 2022.
[91] Ibid.
[92] François Zalacain, interview with the author, January 27, 2022.
[93] Luciana Souza, interview with the author, March 9, 2022.

the recording studio, Souza understands the financial limitations, and Zalacain left the musical decisions in her hands. In addition, whenever she wants to sell her CDs at her concert venues, Zalacain helped her to maximize profits by allowing her to buy her CDs at a low cost.

> François always let me buy my records for basically cost. He let me buy them [at a] very big discount. I don't remember how much I paid but I always paid more to Universal for my records than I paid to François, for each box of record I would sell in the road. So he always let me make as much money, and then I was making money on the record but also on the royalties of each record, mechanical [royalty], that I sold. So I reported to Soundscan, so get that.[94]

Souza also added that Zalacain was discreet in his behavior when coming to the recording session.

> He wouldn't come all the time, either. He would always be very respectful and say, 'Is it okay if I come?' Let's say we're recording Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday or something. He would say, 'Can I come on Tuesday? Is that a good day to come? When would you like me to come?' And I'd say, 'Come any time.' And then he would pop in, maybe come, bring some wine, at the end of a day, or not come and then come in the last day. So very, very respectful, lovely. And really, I cannot find one fault with him. At least my relationship with him. He has seen me through everything. I mean, we've been together since 2000. I mean, it's been twenty years.[95]

My interviews with Aaron Goldberg, Miho Hazama, and Avishai Cohen reveal that owning masters is critical for many musicians, and ceding masters to people they do not know well enough

[94] Luciana Souza, interview with the author, March 9, 2022.
[95] Ibid.

might cause an unpleasant situation. Since the majority of Souza's album is funded by, and therefore her masters are owned by, the label, I asked her opinion about not owning the masters. Because her parents were musicians and ran a record business, she was more understanding about the labels' efforts and commitment to their musicians, and she values having a good relationship with the label more than owning the masters.

> I have enjoyed belonging to a label for twenty years, developing a relationship with a label person, and those things were richer to me than owning my masters. I'm also the daughter of record label people, you know. They had a record label in Brazil, my parents. And I saw how much time and effort they put into making records and what it meant to them. So what François offered me was a home and a structure, and the ability to [make me] feel like I belong to a community, and legitimize my music. I'm from Brazil, and here is a jazz label saying 'you are okay,' you know. 'You are a jazz musician, you belong to the club, come on in.' And it wasn't that he let me in the door. I got through the door myself. I put a lot of work into my music, of course, but I don't have any resentment to François owning my masters.[96]

Souza also pointed out that she started her career before the streaming era, in which she could earn profits on her albums. The advent of the iPhone and streaming services, she argues, has reduced the significance of owning masters, as music became available at almost no cost.

> I think it's the length of time that you stay on a label, also. And where you're coming from. I had already made records on my own that were successful. I already had press. I mean, I wasn't, again, at the level of Dianne Reeves or Diana Krall, you know, those people who were, in my time, really

[96] Luciana Souza, interview with the author, March 9, 2022.

> high here. I was really low. I was here, but within my little space, my little corner, I was very successful. So we just had a really good, healthy relationship and then he [Daniel Richard] left Universal. The business started to change. The business had a big transition starting 2007, actually, with advent of iPhone. Music has started to be carried on the phone, not CDs anymore. Therefore, you didn't need to own anything. You didn't need to own or sell or have a physical CD.[97]

Souza has been a producer herself for several of her albums, but she also hired producers at times. I was curious how different the experiences are, being a producer herself and having a producer, and also asked Souza about the role of the producer in making albums.

> I'm a collaborator with myself. When I wear the producer hat and the musician hat, I have to ask these questions and get the answers alone. . . . Whenever I've worked with a producer, it's always been a dialogue, and also a sounding board—somebody that you come up with an idea, and go to this person, and you show, and they say, 'wow, that's really good. But it sounds a lot like the other thing[s] that you're writing.' So they remind you of things that you are either blind to or unaware of. So they are more like a mirror to you than somebody who's giving you opinions. I'm very lucky that I work with someone who's very gentle but also very experienced. So he [Larry Klein] can have a perspective that's macro, also micro. He's a bass player, he played with people like Wayne Shorter and Freddie Hubbard, for many years. So he knows from the point of view of performing—what it feels like being in the band, also being out of the band. And most of the great producers like him, like Don Was from Blue Note. Those guys, Larry and Don, they really know when to step away and let the artist go through the journey that they have to go through. So Larry comes in, he's very good about listening, giving suggestions, nudges little suggestions to me, to the musicians,

[97] Luciana Souza, interview with the author, March 9, 2022.

> keeping things with a purpose. 'What is the purpose of this? What is the direction that we want to take here? How do we say this in a way that feels cohesive, that feels meaningful, that feels that it fills the purpose of this piece? Do we need to have a bass here? Do we need to have drums? What do we need to have? What do we don't need to have?' So it's like, it's the perfect balance between you having your mind set on something and being like myself, being very stubborn about my art, and then getting somebody who loves me and who sees my talent and my needs.[98]

Being in a recording studio can put musicians under considerable tensions, which, as a result, sometimes prevent them from hearing their music objectively. They lack critical distance from the music because they are also actively creating it. Therefore, having a producer, who will make cool-headed judgements in real time on their behalf, could be hugely helpful. However, Souza stressed that while the producer helps musicians by giving constructive suggestions, it is musicians, above all, that take the helm and complete the album:

> So the leader is the person who imposes, who brings, contributes, the shape of the project. And after the leader, the producer is there as a collaborator, as a sound board, and a somebody who's listening and helping. . . . But the leader, the voice, not necessarily the singing voice, but the voice of the leader is what shapes the project. So if it's Maria Schneider, it's Maria Schneider's vision. If it's Danilo Perez, it's Danilo's vision.[99]

[98] Luciana Souza, interview with the author, March 9, 2022.
[99] Ibid.

1.3 Conclusion

The two Criss Cross Jazz artists, David Binney and Misha Tsiganov, asserted they had complete artistic freedom when making albums with the label. Crucially, Binney mentioned, "All the records are exactly the way I wanted to make them,"[100] and Tsiganov also mentioned similarly that "Whatever I recorded for Criss Cross, that's what exactly what I would record, even without Criss Cross. . . . Criss Cross hadn't changed my direction at all."[101] While their artistic visions were fully reflected in their albums, it is important to note that, to borrow Binney's words, it took "a weirdly long time" until they received offers from the label. In the end, it is the label that selects artists and decides which style of jazz is worth the audience's attention, and Criss Cross Jazz seeks only a specific style, which is "the aesthetic essence of cutting-edge hardcore New York jazz."[102] Thus, jazz musicians whose styles do not fit with Criss Cross's are not given the chance to become Criss Cross Jazz artists in the first place. In this vein, my question, "Is the sound—both the sonic quality and musical style—of jazz formed by both musicians and record labels?" could be answered positively, as the segment of jazz that audiences hear is the deliberate decision of a record label.

Sunnyside Records similarly selects artists and decides what is worth distributing to the audience. However, unlike Criss Cross, Sunnyside is a "relaxed label"[103] that is open to various styles of music. Aaron Goldberg and Luciana Souza, regardless of their different record deals which lead to different financial supports from the label, enjoyed complete artistic freedom, and they have been able to take a different approach for their albums. In the end, as Souza explained,

[100] David Binney, interview with the author, November 3, 2021.
[101] Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022.
[102] "Criss Cross Jazz - Founder & History," Criss Cross Jazz, accessed April 20, 2022. https://www.crisscrossjazz.com/founder.html
[103] "About Us." Sunnyside Records, accessed February, 28, 2022. https://www.sunnysiderecords.com/site/aboutus.

it is artists who have final words in making an album, but it is evident that record labels exercise non-negligible influence in deciding the future direction of jazz.

Chapter 2: More Interventional Record Labels

My interviews show that working with a record label that tries to give musical input is not preferable to many jazz musicians. As jazz is perhaps a genre that is more open than other genres for conveying the artist's creative vision, musicians seek for labels that trust in their visions and allow them to realize them rather than labels exercising influence. Crucially, in my interview with him, Aaron Goldberg stressed that the ideal relationship between musicians and labels would be that "The record company ha[s] this artistic influence that doesn't compromise the music, makes the music better, and gives the artists ideas they wouldn't have otherwise had." While this is not always fulfilled in working with labels, there are musicians who do achieve positive and successful outcomes and build mutually beneficial relationships with them.

In this chapter, I discuss record labels that are more interventional in the process of making a record. These labels include ECM Records, Hat Hut Records, Concord Records, and Mack Avenue Records. These labels involve themselves in deciding 1) the concept of an album, 2) the order of the tracks, 3) the tunes that will be included on an album, and 4) the tone and atmosphere of an album. Most labels that I selected for this chapter are particularly influential in the jazz industry. My initial motivation for this research project arose from my desire to understand the economics of jazz, especially the extent to which the financial constraints on the label affect the direction or content of a jazz record. For this reason, except for Mack Avenue, I interviewed jazz musicians rather than representatives of record labels, who I believe to be more objective in telling the experience working with the label. I interviewed jazz musicians Shai Maestro, Marc Copland, Taylor Eigsti, and a senior director of A&R at Mack Avenue Records, Will Wakefield. By

discussing how labels actively participate in making a record, I argue that making a jazz record is a collaborative work between musicians and labels.

2.1 ECM Records

ECM (Edition of Contemporary Music) is a Munich-based independent record label founded in 1969 by Manfred Eicher. Over the past 50 years, the label has gained reputation and commercial success mostly from jazz albums by the likes of Keith Jarrett, Jan Garbarek, Pat Metheny, and Chick Corea. However, the music the label produces is not confined to jazz: in its catalog, one can find European classical music, world music, Renaissance music, and film music. Perhaps it is the only independent jazz label that ranks—in terms of both sales and musical influence—with big labels such as Blue Note Records and Verve Records, both of which are under the umbrella of Universal Music Group.

The label's founder Eicher was classically trained as a double bassist but soon he became preoccupied with jazz. Having witnessed the highest standards in recording classical music while working as a production assistant at Deutsche Grammophon, Eicher believed the same level of technical excellence should be applied when recording jazz.[104] As a result, while diverse in music styles, the label's recordings became known to have the characteristic "ECM sounds": heavy reverb, lucid sound, and a sense of spaciousness,[105][106] which make the listening experience of recordings similar to the live experience. Besides the characteristic "ECM sounds," what distinguishes ECM from other labels is that with a few exceptions, the label has shied away from

[104] "The Label," ECM Records, accessed May 31, 2022. https://www.ecmrecords.com/story
[105] Tim Thurston, "The Next Best Sound to Silence: The ECM Story," *The Journal of Music in Ireland* 2, no. 1 (2001) 15-17.
[106] Andrew Gilbert, "ECM and the Silence in the Sound," San Francisco Classical Voice, November 2019, https://www.sfcv.org/articles/feature/ecm-and-silence-sound.

swinging, straight-ahead jazz. Instead, Eicher showed interest in free jazz players like Don Cherry, Albert Ayler, and Cecil Taylor, and set high value on free playing or free improvisation, through which he emphasizes the label's European identity.[107] This distinctive musical identity enables ECM to have a loyal fan base, and the label continues to be successful, releasing a dozen albums in the first half of 2022.

2.1.1 Shai Maestro

Shai Maestro is a jazz pianist born in 1987 in Israel. Maestro began playing piano at five and studied at the Thelma Yellin High School of Performing Arts in Givataim, Israel. In 2002 and 2003, he won the National Jazz Ensembles Competition "Jazz Signs," and from 2004 to 2010, he received scholarships from the America-Israel Cultural Fund for jazz piano. After that, Maestro attended Berklee College of Music's five-week summer program from which he was offered a full scholarship to be a full-time student. However, he declined the offer and soon after joined fellow Israeli and world-renowned jazz bassist Avishai Cohen's trio, with whom Maestro toured the world and made four albums. He formed his own trio with bassist Jorge Roeder and drummer Ziv Ravitz and released his first album as a leader in 2010 through the French label Laborie Jazz. In 2018, Maestro made his ECM leader debut with *The Dream Thief*, and his second record with the same label *Human* was released in February, 2020.

ECM Records is known for its distinctive sound as well as its producer and founder Manfred Eicher, who is responsible for that sound. Several musicians I have interviewed mentioned ECM Records for its hands-on approach in the record-making process, and ECM

[107] Charles Waring, "The Most Beautiful Sound: An Introduction to ECM Records," uDiscover Music, December 2, 2021, https://www.udiscovermusic.com/stories/ecm-records-beginners-guide/.

Records itself makes this explicit in its website by writing that "As a record producer, he [Manfred Eicher] is a partner in the artistic process, involved in everything from the choice of recording venue to the musical shaping of the album to the cover design for the finished product."[108] For this reason, I was eager to interview the label's musicians and founder. Unfortunately, the label did not respond to my email requesting an interview but I was lucky enough to have a conversation with Maestro in November, 2021, in the midst of his busy European tour. The interview was conducted via Zoom while he was staying in his home country, Israel.

Maestro's first encounter with the label was actually not through his own album, but through German singer and composer Theo Bleckmann's 2017 album *Elegy*, in which Maestro played piano. The first time he met Manfred Eicher was at a recording session in New York. Maestro "felt a good connection" with him, and they started talking about creating a record together.[109] Before they actually went into the studio in Lugano, Switzerland, to record Maestro's album, he and Eicher met many times over the course of almost two years and had conversations that were not confined to music. Eicher's effort to build a personal relationship made a good impression to Maestro, as the relationship could just have been a contractual one.

> . . . And then Manfred Eicher, the producer, legendary producer for ECM, started sending messages. . . . 'Hey, let's meet,' and [we] meet at his hotel, talk about music, politics, whatever. . . . And a personal connection which was really refreshing. Cause we live in a world where everything is business-oriented, and happening really faster, you know. It was really great to be in contact with a person that wants to develop some sort of, like personal relationship before getting to the studio.[110]

[108] "The Label," ECM Records, accessed May 31, 2022. https://www.ecmrecords.com/story
[109] Shai Maestro, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.
[110] Ibid.

This story fascinated me because I have never heard of this intimate relationship between the label head and the artist. However, considering that Eicher is not only a founder of the label but also a producer who is present at recording sessions actively giving suggestions, I could easily imagine, as a performing jazz musician myself, how having developed an intimate relationship before the recording session would help the artist and producer to bounce ideas off each other smoothly and easily. I asked Maestro if Eicher sought a specific sound in his album or had any musical preferences.

> He's just very quick in knowing what's good for the music, and so, you know, he believes in the values of air and space and time. And it's not going to be, he's not going to change drastically, but he would give us input and help shape the music, so it fits his vision. that's why we work together. That's why it's so great.[111]

Maestro mentioned Eicher seeking "air" and "space," which can be easily found in writings about the sound of ECM.[112] His remark suggests that both his and Eicher's visions are reflected in his album and he views this collaborative process very positively. I asked him to elaborate on the input from Eicher, and what Maestro told me displays Eicher's attention to the details.

> He would make comments about, you know, orchestrations sometimes and maybe he would say like, "Oh, we don't need to have any improvisation on this song. It can be just a melody." . . . He would comment about like the touch, you know, "Maybe we can play everything piano or

[111] Shai Maestro, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.
[112] Richard Scheinin, "ECM Records," SFJAZZ.org, 2019, https://www.sfjazz.org/onthecorner/ecm-records/.

> pianissimo" or whatever. . . . He is just, basically, the fourth member of the band, in that way, or the fifth, actually.[113]

Eicher's input—pointing out orchestration; whether to have improvisation or not on a certain piece; directing dynamics—sounds very specific and I felt some might even regard it as interference. Because Maestro is an established musician who has performed with Chick Corea, Tigran Hamasyan, Esperanza Spalding, and Diana Krall, I was curious whether he is okay with the producer's detailed demands. While acknowledging that this is a rare case, he expressed his respect to and belief in Eicher as a music producer.

> There's a handful of people, there's very small amount of people that I would be fine with my music. Because, you know, an artist music is important to him or her, and so there are not a lot of people that I would give that power to. But Manfred is, you know, he's done so much and has so much experience, and he's great. He's a great producer.[114]

In an interview with ECM Records itself for its podcast, ECM Records Podcast, Maestro expressed a more strong and explicit opinion on the same issue. "Giving the keys to your music to someone is crazy. Manfred is one of the few people in the world that I would give those keys to."[115] His remark suggests that if it were not Eicher, he would not be okay with it. However, because he believed in the label, its history, and its producer who made all these possible, he was able to gladly collaborate with the producer.

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[113] Shai Maestro, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Shai Maestro, interview with Caroline Fontenot, ECM Records Podcast, podcast audio, Feb 27, 2021, https://ecm-records-podcast.simplecast.com/

I asked Maestro the differences in working with ECM and two other labels, Sound Surveyor and Laborie Jazz. He mentioned the different sizes of each label, the extent to which the label participates in the production, and the amount of time given for the recording. ECM's Eicher was more hands-on in the production and ECM gives a shorter amount of time in the recording studio.

> I think Manfred was more involved in the actual music production, creation process than the rest. And I say it as a not a good or bad thing, just as a fact. Sound Surveyor is the smallest label I've recorded for. It's basically, it was my manager's label. And then Laborie is, I mean, they have a great roster of artist and great discography but they are not as big as ECM obviously. . . . For Laborie, for example, we went into this beautiful castle, chateau, in France, to record a record, for one week. . . . It was a longer process. With ECM, it's a shorter process. So, basically, in three days, you finish everything including mixing and mastering, with Manfred. At least that's the way it worked with us, with my record. We basically record a record in a day and a half.[116]

Contrary to my expectation, it seemed to me that a shorter recording time is not necessarily a bad thing to musicians if they have a seasoned producer such as Eicher at ECM. I asked Maestro whether he prefers to have a longer time for recording or shorter. Answering that it is just a different experience that demands different approach in the preparation, Maestro observed that sometimes having an extended recording time results in musicians losing perspective on selecting the best take. In that vein, making a record with ECM could be helpful because Eicher makes decisions on their behalf when musicians are lost in their dozens of takes.

[116] Shai Maestro, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.

> It's a different experience. When you know it's going to be very short, the preparation process is different. For the last record at least. . . . I knew that it's going to be short. . . . So I told the guys that "Hey, we need to be really, really prepared." So, like, all the preparation work happened before, and then we booked a handful of gigs right before the recording to get the music, you know, through the system, and have like some sort of mileage with it. And we came to the studio and it was more like, 'hey, let's just play it.' So, basically, all of the songs are, I would say, between one and two takes. And then some of them might have had like the third take but it's really not that common. . . . We remember we got into this crazy, like, 'hey, let's do take 15, 17.' And at this point it feel[s], you stop knowing, we don't know what's good or. . . . You are too much in your head and you keep thinking like it can be a better one and blah blah blah. And so it become[s] confusing. And with ECM, when you have someone as amazing as Manfred sitting in the controlling room telling you like 'oh, that take is great.' So he function[s] as this entity that helps you not getting in your head too much but just stay with your heart, stay with the ground, with the music.[117]

This anecdote shows a situation that can occur at a recording session when musicians are given plenty of time in the recording studio. Sometimes they record one song too many times, and as the takes add up, it becomes harder for musicians to listen to all of them and single out the best take. However, a great producer can act as a sounding board and musicians can proceed to record the next song without being caught up with the myriads of takes.

I was curious what Maestro's expectations were when he signed to ECM. He answered by using the analogy of Nike, as if ECM is a luxury brand if we liken record labels to clothing brands. As the brand Nike carries a certain credibility for its product, Maestro explained that ECM also carries credibility for its music. Maestro also mentioned the relationship between his manager and

[117] Shai Maestro, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.

the label and his connection with ECM's wide fan base, through which it is expected that he could increase album sales.

> It's like, with ECM, it's divided between the fact of just being on ECM and having that stamp is important. It's like a brand. Like when you buy a shoe, when you see Nike on it, you know, Nike, it's like a, it has this, the stamp. So that alone is great. And then if they're motivated to help and to get into the efforts of developing an artist, that's great. I think it really depends on the relationship between the manager and the label. So like my manager is on top of it with these guys and they're taking care of like, 'hey, we want to do this.' We want whatever idea they might have at the moment, and then see if ECM is into helping. Obviously, like making sure the record gets to all parts of the world, distribution, there's many things. But I think mainly being signed to ECM and joining their fan, their huge fan base is fantastic. Because they have a really loyal fan base.[118]

Maestro's remark on the manager drew my attention because almost all established musicians work with managers, yet very little has been studied on their specific role or importance for musicians to build a successful career. I asked Maestro to explain more about his manager. His manager works for an international live music agency so Maestro has not only a manager but also a group of people who take care of different parts of the music business such as concert booking, marketing, and strategy.

> He's great. His name is Mike Bindraban. His work, they have a company called Good Music Company. So that's him. Jurjen is a booking agent and then we have a production manager, and

[118] Shai Maestro, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.

> then a sub-agent, so all over Europe. Mike is basically centralizing everything in terms of like strategy, and how we want to, you know, where does he think my career can go.[119]

Maestro has a team of people who help him develop his career, communicate with labels, and oversee everything in the music production. So, when I asked him if he has thought about making a record by himself, his answer was no because he feels "very lucky to be surrounded by a team that can take care of things." In addition, he said, "I'm personally very happy to be on a record label. I also like having other people involved in my process."[120]

Although Eicher gives detailed suggestions at recording sessions, Maestro does not think of it as intervention but as collaboration. He has trust in Manfred's ability and expertise, which are proven by numerous ECM records that achieved both critical and commercial success. Also, Maestro's experience shows us how helpful the presence of a producer at recording sessions could be. While some musicians think that labels involving themselves in the music production is an unwelcomed addition, Maestro developed an intimate and positive relationship with ECM and Eicher. American jazz pianist Marc Copland's experience also demonstrates that working with more interventional labels can produce a fruitful result.

2.2 Hat Hut Records

Based in Basel, Switzerland, Hat Hut Records is an independent record label specializing in jazz and avant-garde music. Werner X. Uehlinger established the label in 1975 to release an album by American jazz saxophonist Joe McPhee, *Black Magic Man* (1975), and from there, it has

[119] Shai Maestro, interview with the author, November 22, 2021.
[120] Ibid.

documented music of important figures in the free jazz scene such as George Lewis, Marion Brown, Sun Ra, John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, and Don Cherry. Hat Hut owns several sub-labels, each of which is made to represent different styles: hat ART and hatOLOGY represent jazz and related improvised music; hat[now]ART represents contemporary composition and new music; and hatNOIR represents fresh, unpredictable, innovative, uncategorizable projects.[121] The label continues to release albums to this day, presenting various series such as "Revisited" and "ezz-thetics."[122]

2.2.1 Marc Copland

American jazz pianist Marc Copland was born in 1948 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He began playing the piano at age seven, but he stopped playing three years later and switched to alto saxophone. Until the mid-1970's, he performed as a professional saxophonist in the Philadelphia music scene, playing with renowned musicians such as Michael Brecker, Ralph Towner, Chico Hamilton, and John Abercrombie.[123] However, he was writing music that was harmonically complex at that time, and he realized that saxophone was not the best instrument to project his aesthetic vision. Thus, Copland switched to piano in 1973 and left the music scene to practice and study piano again.[124] It took more than ten years for him to feel ready to be part of the music scene, and finally in 1985, he rejoined the music scene as a professional jazz pianist. As a jazz pianist, he built a successful career again, performing with established musicians including Randy Brecker,

[121] "Hat Hut," Squidco, accessed June 6, 2022, https://www.squidco.com/miva/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=S&Category_Code=HAT.
[122] "#帽子," Hat Hut Records, accessed June 7, 2022. https://www.hathut.com/.
[123] "Marc Copland," Illusions Mirage, accessed June 7, 2022. https://illusionsmirage.com/artists.html.
[124] "Marc Copland," InnerVoice Jazz, accessed June 7, 2022. https://innervoicejazz.com/artists/marc-copland/.

Gary Peacock, Bill Stewart, Paul Motian, Kenny Wheeler, and Dave Liebman. Throughout his career, Copland has worked with more than ten record labels, and he is one of the most prolific jazz artists, releasing more than 40 albums as leader or solo artist. He is also an owner of two record labels, InnerVoice Jazz and Illusions Mirage, through which he carries out different projects and releases records.

I selected the musicians I discuss in this chapter through record labels. In other words, I selected record labels first and found musicians to interview in their roster. However, Marc Copland was an exception. I was amazed by the fact that he is very prolific and has worked with so many different European independent labels, and I thought that he might have more stories to share with me about those labels than other musicians. Fortunately, he came to my school to give a performance and lecture, so I was able to meet him in person on a beautiful day in December, 2021.

One thing that is very unusual about Copland is that although he has made many albums with various labels, he never actually signed with any of them. There was no long-term contract, only a contract for each record, and he made handshake deals.[125] Copland never signed exclusively with a label and instead stayed independent, which enabled him to release several records a year from different labels. This advice—don't sign with any labels and make three or four records a year with different European labels—was from jazz pianist Paul Bley. Copland took this advice because "Paul was playing in kind of a style that wasn't very commercial and. . . . all the American companies weren't interested in him either, but he built a whole career."[126] Bley's advice was based on the fact that none of these labels had as wide influence as other major labels. It was a

[125] Mar Copland, interview with the author, December 2, 2021.
[126] Ibid.

way for Copland and Bley to maximize their reach in the European countries. Sometimes this strategy caused concern and anxiety among label heads. However, Copland reassured them by making each album a different project or different style and having three or four months between albums so that they are not released at the same time.[127] In spite of that, major labels did not understand the way Copland works and therefore, he did not get a chance to work with them. Luckily, however, many independent labels did understand it, and once the labels witnessed that this approach works, they no longer questioned Copland about it and kept coming to him to make more records.

Although Copland never signed exclusively with a label and remained independent, the way each deal works was by and large similar to those with other labels in that the labels take care of the production cost. Since the labels invested their money on his albums, I was curious whether there was musical input from them. Very understanding about the labels' situation, Copland mentioned that label heads start the record business because they want to be part of the record-making process.

> Generally speaking, the guy with the smaller labels, the guy or the woman who owns the label, is the one who wants to have some creative roles. . . . That's what they want to do. With the larger labels, they'll have somebody produce, one of the so-called "suits" because they're businessmen. They don't really have so much to do with individual production. But, you know, again, ECM is probably the best-known, large creative jazz label. And Manfred Eicher is the guy and he's at every session. He takes a very active part in production. So, generally speaking, yes. That's why the guys

[127] Mar Copland, interview with the author, December 2, 2021.

> going through all the grief and all the stress and all the hard work of setting up the label and running, because he wants to have something to do with what comes out.[128]

Copland's answer reminded me of Misha Tsiganov, who also showed empathy and understanding towards label owners. Also, his remark confirmed Marty Khan's argument that independent record labels show a stronger desire to have artistic influence.

> While independents make fewer demands contractually, the involvement in the artistic process is often more intrusive. Whether under the direct control of the owner or a label head who provides the artistic vision, that person is likely to want substantially more involvement in the creative process than the big label mogul or the A&R people working under him.[129]

Copland, however, emphasized that labels' involvement can be helpful. Maintaining that it is almost impossible for an artist to handle everything in the album production, Copland mentioned the importance of having a producer, and that the label heads he worked with were all producers.

> All the owners are generally producers in their own right, generally speaking. And they all want to [have a] hand in shaping the music. And that can be constructive, you know. Sometimes it can be inhibiting. As a rule, I found that, if, it's not even about meeting people halfway. If you work with these guys and cooperate, it generally turns out positive. Because nobody, including me, that I've ever seen, is capable of like, doing it all, totally alone. Because it's such an all-observing process.

[128] Mar Copland, interview with the author, December 2, 2021.
[129] Marty Khan, *Straight Ahead: A Comprehensive Guide to the Business of Jazz (without Sacrificing Dignity or Artistic Integrity)* (Tucson, AZ: Outward Visions Books, 2004), 125.

> It's good to have an independent set of ears. Absolutely. I can say that without question. I've never seen anybody be able to do everything—play, and plan, and produce. You lose perspective.[130]

To give a concrete example of this, Copland shared an anecdote about his album *Haunted Heart & Other Ballads* (2001) released on Hat Hut Records. It was the first record that Copland made for Hat Hut. About ten days before the recording session, the founder Werner Uehlinger called Copland and proposed to make this album like an opera, with an introduction (or overture) and epilogue. Although Copland was not attracted to the idea and did not understand what exactly Uehlinger envisioned, instead of reacting adversely right at the moment, he decided to sleep on it and answered yes.[131]

As he was identifying the concept for this album, he decided to make it a trio album and play solo piano for an introduction and epilogue, reflecting Uehlinger's "opera" idea. However, he was not sure whether he should play free or write pieces for those sections. Pondering upon the overall outline of the album and the tunes he would play on it, Copland realized that these tunes were some of his favorites. Thus, for the introduction and epilogue, he decided to play different versions of "My Favorite Things."[132]

On the day of the recording session, Uehlinger, who lives in Switzerland and was not able to be at the session in New York, sent a representative named Art Lange to stand in for him. Lange did not interfere with music and just oversaw the details of the recording session, making sure everything was okay. After Copland and his side musicians finished recording trio pieces, Copland stayed in the studio alone and played about a dozen different versions of "My Favorite Things."[133]

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[130] Marc Copland, interview with the author, December 2, 2021.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

A few weeks later, Copland was listening back to the takes of "My Favorite Things" to sort out the good ones, and there were three takes he really liked. These three takes sparked a new idea in his head, and Copland called Uehlinger and suggested a new idea: adding an intermezzo section and having an overture, intermezzo, and an epilogue. Uehlinger also liked the idea and so they released *Haunted Heart & Other Ballads* with three different renditions of "My Favorite Things." The record gained both critical and commercial acclaim, and this was a big step up in his career, which opened up numerous opportunities in Europe.[134]

> So, we put it on. The record did great. . . . A lot of reviewers and people made mention of these three things and how much they like them. . . . So, that, to me, is a great example. . . . He was happy with it, I was happy with it, people really liked it. And when he first suggested to me, I was scratching my head—I don't even know what this guy means. But instead of saying to him "What are you talking about?," I just said, "okay." And I hung up the phone, and I figured, 'I'll figure this out later.' And I've generally found that to be true. They want to participate. As Werner once said to me, "You know, Marc, these are my babies, too." And I understand that. And I never would've thought to do that if he hadn't made this suggestion.[135]

Uehlinger proposed an outline for the album and at first, Copland did not understand his vision. In spite of that, Copland accepted the idea and mulled over how he could superimpose his artistic vision on what was already proposed. As a result, he was able to come up with a modified plan, which retained the original idea but reflected Copland's own idea as well. The album received

[134] Marc Copland, interview with the author, December 2, 2021. "This was the record that kind of really put me on the map in Europe. It sold well and was reissued later, you know. And all of a sudden, a lot of people knew who I was, who didn't know.
[135] Marc Copland, interview with the author, December 2, 2021.

great reviews about the opera-esque concept, and two people's collaborative efforts made this possible. As Copland observed, when making a record, sometimes working with another person gives him an idea that he never would have thought of and therefore, he asserts that it can be constructive.

> So, to me, that's very cool. It's people bouncing ideas off each other, and something good comes out. And, I mean, any producer I've worked with, it's been the same thing. . . . And generally speaking, if, as an artist, I don't get bent out of shape, and I'm willing to view it as a partnership. It works out fine![136]

Copland's experience demonstrates that working with more interventional labels does not necessarily mean that the artist will feel inhibited nor that the album would be less satisfying than the self-produced album. Copland's and Maestro's relationships to Hat Hut and ECM show that the collaboration with labels can be fruitful both artistically and commercially. However, many musicians I interviewed told me that they have heard depressing stories of labels taking a heavy hand and making the artist unsatisfied with the outcome. In the following section, I discuss unpleasant situations that can arise for an artist when working with a label.

2.3 Concord Jazz

Concord Jazz is the foundational label of Concord, which is an American independent creative rights company. Founded in 1973 by Carl Jefferson, Concord Jazz is home to recordings of legendary musicians including Art Blakey, Rosemary Clooney, Stan Getz, Kenny Burrell, and

[136] Marc Copland, interview with the author, December 2, 2021.

Marian McPartland. The success of the label led to business expansion, and Concord Jazz became one of the imprints of the parent company Concord, which "develops, manages, and acquires sound recordings, and music publishing and music theatrical rights."[137] With the desire to represent the "the best of best in the genre,"[138] Concord Jazz continues to introduce exceptional talents in the jazz scene such as Dianne Reeves, Eliane Elias, and Jamison Ross.

2.3.1 Taylor Eigsti

Taylor Eigsti is a Grammy-winning pianist and composer born in 1984. Growing up in Menlo Park, California, he started playing the piano at age four. He shared the stage with David Benoit at age eight,[139] performed for president Bill Clinton at 12, recorded his first album *Tay's Groove* (1998) at 14, and started teaching at the Stanford Jazz Workshop at 15.[140] Eigsti's music is not confined to jazz. He has performed and recorded with numerous renowned jazz musicians including Gretchen Parlato, Kendrick Scott Oracle, Eric Harland, Becca Stevens, and Terence Blanchard, but also performed with luminaries in other genres such as Sting, John Mayer, Joshua Bell, and Frederica von Stade. Eigsti has released eight albums as leader and appeared on more than 60 albums as side musician. His 2006 album *Lucky to Be Me* was nominated for two Grammy awards for Best Instrumental Composition and Best Instrumental Jazz Solo, and in 2022, Eigsti won a Grammy for Best Contemporary Instrumental Album for his album *Tree Falls* (2021).

[137] "Concord Jazz," Concord, accessed June 12, 2022. https://concord.com/labels/concord-jazz/.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Judith Schlesinger, "Taylor Eigsti Biography, Songs, & Albums," AllMusic, accessed June 12, 2022, https://www.allmusic.com/artist/taylor-eigsti-mn0000745482/biography.
[140] Lily O'Brien, "Taylor Eigsti Keeps It Fresh on New Album and at Stanford Jazz," San Francisco Classical Voice, July 11, 2019, https://www.sfcv.org/articles/artist-spotlight/taylor-eigsti-keeps-it-fresh-new-album-and-stanford-jazz.

For my research, I hoped to interview musicians and personnel from both independent and major labels because I wanted to see if the size of the company gives rise to a difference in the process of making a record. It was exceedingly difficult to make contact with major label executives and musicians who worked with them, and so as an alternative, I tried to interview figures related to more influential independent labels such as ECM Records and Concord Jazz. I found out that one of my favorite jazz pianists, Taylor Eigsti has made three albums with Concord Jazz, whose music is distributed by the large corporation Universal Music. Eigsti kindly accepted my interview request and we had our conversation over the phone.

Eigsti's relationship with Concord Jazz started from a meeting which was set up by his manager at the time, Mary Ann Topper, who was manager to jazz greats including Ray Brown, Diana Krall, Joshua Redman, and Ron Carter. Although he had worked with small labels previously, Eigsti and Topper were looking for a bigger label for their next projects. Thus, Topper arranged a meeting with Concord, and shortly after the meeting, they signed him.[141] For their first album *Lucky to Be M*e (2007), Concord put a great deal of effort into the promotion and the album did well artistically and commercially. Also, Eigsti observed, "it wasn't really so much that Concord had a control over the musical side of things. They were just very on board with what we were already going to do."[142]

However, the label took a more active role in the creative process for the second album, *Let It Come to You* (2008). Of three albums he made with Concord, Eigsti selected this album as his favorite because it was "more personal, was more closer to the type of music that I'm hearing and felt more like me. It felt like myself on that."[143] It includes his three-part "Fallback Plan Suite,"

[141] Taylor Eigsti, interview with the author, February 15, 2022.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.

which is comprised of "Less Free Will," "Not Lost Yet," and "Brick Steps," and it is co-produced by him and Chris Dunn, who was their head of A&R. Eigsti believes that "sequence tells the story of a record,"[144] and when he wrote the suite for this album, he wanted to break them up in the sequence.

> I wanted the whole album is starting with the first movement. I wanted the second movement of the suite somewhere in the middle of the record, and then the last movement which is called "Brick Steps," I wanted [that to be] the very end of the record. That's how I wanted the story to evolve.[145]

However, the label did not think that the suite fits on the record because, according to Eigsti, the label wanted to "put it in a category" so that it becomes "more marketable as a jazz piano record," but his suite made it harder for them to market the album.[146] Thus, months later, they asked him to record several more jazz standards such as "I Love You" and "Deluge." The recording session for these additional tunes was exacting. Eigsti recalled, "As much as I think those tunes came out pretty decently, my heart definitely wasn't in it. And we had to do like 25 takes of each of those tunes because it was just, it just never felt right or felt like it was coming together."[147] In the end, the label decided to include both his suite and those standards but instead of spreading them throughout the sequence as Eigsti wanted, they placed all three movements of the suite at the end.

Eigsti is not alone in taking a serious view of the sequence of an album. Album sequencing is a way for musicians to tell a story, and it is likely that the songs in the beginning are played

[144] Taylor Eigsti, interview with the author, February 15, 2022.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.

more than the songs at the end, as *Rolling Stone* explored in an article titled "Think You Have a Hit? Make Sure It's the First Song on Your Album."[148] In that vein, moving the suite made it less likely to reach the listener. Furthermore, because Eigsti's previous album *Lucky to Be Me* was nominated for two Grammy awards, he felt *Let It Come to You* was an opportunity for him to build on that. Thus, he hired an independent publicist and paid out of his own pocket to double the effort. Due to a miscommunication, the label then reduced their in-house publicity.

These dynamics continued with the label on his next album *Daylight at Midnight* (2010). The concept of this album was developed by an acclaimed producer Matt Pierson, who has produced records by distinguished musicians such as Brad Mehldau, Joshua Redman, Kenny Garrett, and Pat Metheny. For *Daylight at Midnight*, Pierson envisioned an album largely filled with cover songs, and Eigsti was given "a big pile of suggestions" from which he picked some tunes. As a result, songs by Coldplay, Nick Drake, Imogen Heap, Elliott Smith, and Rufus Wainwright made up the sequence along with some of Eigsti's originals. Ironically, while the concept of the album was cover songs, tracks that actually gained popularity were Eigsti's own compositions "Magnolia" and "Midnight After Noon," which were played by many students and college appliers.[149]

Beginning with *Lucky to Be Me*, Concord took an active role in the creative process and for that reason, I asked Eigsti if he considers the label as a musical collaborator. Saying yes to my question, Eigsti added that he has "never been overly stubborn" and has been "always open to suggestions and ideas."[150] Like Marc Copland, Eigsti mentioned that sometimes labels give good

[148] Elias Leight, "Think You Have a Hit? Make Sure It's the First Song on Your Album," Rolling Stone (Rolling Stone, March 8, 2019), https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/why-the-first-song-on-the-album-is-the-best-803283/.
[149] Taylor Eigsti, interview with the author, February 15, 2022.
[150] Ibid.

suggestions, and that he can live with the music he made with labels still now, because he is "still happy with those records." He also observed, however, that when working with a bigger label such as Concord Jazz, "There's pretty much guarantee to be input by the label, because the label wants to know what they are putting out."[151]

Closing the conversation, I asked Eigsti whether he prefers to collaborate with labels or to be the sole creator when making a record. He was not sure about the answer but he said he thinks any good art can be result of a lot of collaboration, and that it is better to have more ideas. In addition, he emphasized that ultimately, he expects to see labels "trusting in artists to carry out what their vision is" and that if it comes true, "we hear a lot more different music."[152] This is so important because, as Eigsti says, "sometimes labels are the gatekeepers of allowing some people's music to be heard by a lot of people and distributed by a lot of people."[153]

Eigsti's relationship with Concord Jazz not only illustrates that the sound of jazz is made by both musicians and labels but also provides examples of input that could be given by a label. For *Let It Come to You*, Concord had input on the order of the songs. Consequently, Eigsti's "Fallback Plan Suite" had less exposure than it might have with a different track order. In addition, the concept of *Daylight at Midnight* was significantly influenced by producer Matt Pierson. This dynamic shows stronger input from the label than other examples I explored in this thesis and a clear impact on the final sound of the produced albums.

Why does this happen? What causes friction between the label and the artist? It will be helpful for us to know what labels want and how they work with musicians, especially so if we can hear from the founder or employees working in the creative division such as A&R. In what

[151] Taylor Eigsti, interview with the author, February 15, 2022.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.

follows, by introducing Mack Avenue Records and its senior director of A&R Will Wakefield, I will discuss how a label selects artists and works with musicians, whether economic factors affect the musical direction, and what it pursues as a label.

2.4 Mack Avenue Records

Mack Avenue Records is an American independent record label based in Detroit, Michigan. It was founded by Gretchen Valade in 1999, who is an avid jazz fan and a chairwoman of Carhartt Inc.,[154] a workwear and apparel company in Michigan. The label's philosophy is to provide veteran musicians with a pathway for further career development while supporting undiscovered young and up-and-coming jazz musicians. Mack Avenue started as a jazz record label, releasing albums by George Shearing and Terry Gibbs. However, as it launched a publishing company in 2006 and made an acquisition of three contemporary imprints, it expanded the roster and Mack Avenue became specializing in more genres of music including gospel, adult R&B, singer/songwriter, and blues.[155] Following its philosophy, the label represents Joey Alexander, the youngest-ever Grammy nominee in a jazz category,[156] and high-profile musicians including Kenny Garrett, Christian McBride, and Yellowjackets. Mack Avenue's efforts to deliver a high quality of music has been recognized by their musicians winning Grammy awards, including Christian McBride

[154] "Mack Avenue Records," Crain's Detroit Business, September 7, 2013, https://www.crainsdetroit.com/article/20130830/NEWS/130829860/mack-avenue-records.
[155] "History," Mack Avenue Records, accessed June 20, 2022. https://www.mackavenue.com/about/history.
[156] Stephany Bai, "13-Year-Old Jazz Pianist Joey Alexander Nominated for 2017 Grammy," NBCNews.com (NBCUniversal News Group, December 6, 2016), https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/13-year-old-jazz-pianist-joey-alexander-nominated-2017-grammy-n692641.

who won the award for Best Large Ensemble Album in 2022. In addition, Mack Avenue Records has been named "Record Label of the Year" by Jazz Journalists Association in May, 2022.[157]

Mack Avenue Records is one of the biggest independent record labels, whose influence is comparable to Concord or ECM. Its roster includes many leading musicians in jazz, funk, and gospel, and as a jazz pianist myself, I received an impression that the label has been paying close attention to jazz piano "rising stars" such as Christian Sands, Emmet Cohen, Joey Alexander, Connie Han, each of whom was signed in recent years. Initially, I emailed the president to arrange an interview, but after a few conversations with the president's assistant, I was instead directed to Will Wakefield, a senior director of A&R at Mack Avenue. The interview was conducted via Zoom.

Unlike smaller independent record labels where the founders themselves are also A&Rs and producers in their own right, Mack Avenue has an A&R team of which the president is a part. The founder Gretchen Valade serves as the board director[158] and the president Denny Stilwell works with A&R team, directly communicating with artists.[159] Although A&Rs are known to be mainly responsible for finding promising musicians and signing them, their specific task varies from company to company. Thus, I asked Wakefield what A&Rs do at Mack Avenue. He answered that Mack Avenue's A&Rs do the common duties such as finding talent, signing them, and putting the talent together with the right songs and arrangement. However, in addition to that, A&Rs at Mack Avenue also participate in production, and their duties slide between producing and A&R. Wakefield observed that "I don't produce records in general. I've got production credits on some

[157] "2022 Winners for Jazz Performance and Recordings," JJA Jazz Awards, May 26, 2022, https://www.jjajazzawards.org/2022-winners-for-jazz-performance-and-recordings/.
[158] "Music on Mack Avenue," Music on Mack Avenue, June 22, 2022, http://www.musiconmackavenue.com/songwriters/gretchen_valade/.
[159] Brian Zimmerman, "Mack Avenue Records President Denny Stilwell on 20 Years of Extraordinary Jazz," JAZZIZ Magazine, February 21, 2019, https://www.jazziz.com/mack-avenue-records-president-denny-stilwell-on-20-years-of-extraordinary-jazz/.

records but I do everything leading up to that."[160] For example, Wakefield will have discussion with an artist through phone calls and meetings about creative direction. He will ask questions to an artist such as 'What are you thinking about this next record? What do you want to accomplish?,' and they will bounce ideas off of each other. If an artist is looking for a direction from the label about his/her career arc, Wakefield tries to think about what this artist did on previous records and how he can tie that all together. Regarding links between albums, Wakefield mentioned artists who are very eclectic with their tastes, but added that even if an artist loves rock and other genres, it will be ludicrous if a jazz artist releases a rock or heavy metal record. Aside from these conversations, he will also discuss more subtle aspects with an artist such as deciding on side musicians, whether he/she wants to have some special guests ("star players"), or whether he/she wants to do a straight-ahead, acoustic jazz record or bring electric pianos and string sections and take a different direction.[161]

The fact that Mack Avenue helps artists in building a career path came as a surprise. Contrary to my expectation that labels are interested simply in making a record, I was impressed that Mack Avenue looks to the artist's past to plan for their future together. Because the discussions held between the A&R and the artist are about the artist's career plan and general aspects of the next album, I was curious if musicians ask for musical direction as well. Answering no to my question, Wakefield said that most musicians have an idea of what they want to do, and that they will come to him "for input on lots of little things but not usually, specifically their music direction. It'll be bigger."[162] As an example for this, he shared how he worked with Veronica Swift, a 28-year-old female jazz singer, for her 2021 album *This Bitter Earth*. In the early stage of the

[160] Will Wakefield, interview with the author, January 12, 2022.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

production of this record, Swift had about 18 songs that she was thinking of recording. They were great songs and all fit in a theme that she was working on for *This Bitter Earth*. She came to Wakefield to discuss how she can make them work best. They decided to pull a couple of songs from that list by having conversations about 1) How to put these songs together? 2) Is this song a little bit overdone? 3) Have too many people sung this song?, and 4) Can we take this off the list and try something more obscure? Wakefield stressed that ninety percent of the decisions were made by Swift and that usually musicians are not looking for advice on where to go next. Surprisingly, musicians who are looking for help for next projects are older rather than younger musicians. Because "They've done all the crazy stuff that they wanted to in their twenties and thirties," they are exhausted and open to suggestions. Wakefield observed, "They're like, 'I don't need to come up with something else. Somebody else tell me to how to go about it.'"[163]

I asked Wakefield if he ever encounters a situation in which an artist writes tunes for the next album, and the A&R thinks one of the tunes will not work. Despite their having gone through conversations about the album ahead, Wakefield admitted that they occasionally face this situation. When it happens, it is because either the tune is not great or it is not in accord with the artist's previous works.

> Me and Denny [Stilwell] have plenty of times where we talk to somebody. We are like, 'Well, maybe that sounds a little bit way too far out for what you've been doing in your career. Maybe we can stick to something a little bit more like this.'[164]

[163] Will Wakefield, interview with the author, January 12, 2022.
[164] Ibid.

However, at the same time, they try to have these conversations in generalities, rather than being too specific. For example, the A&R will not say 'you have to play these four bars this way.'[165] Instead, they will have conversations with players about whether everybody has to take two solos for 32 bars, or whether the track should be nine minutes or four minutes. In addition, they will also talk about mechanical royalties because if an artist writes six songs but also wants to cover six songs, then he/she will lose all their royalties.

I was curious if the label takes out some tracks not only because of an artistic reason but also because of a financial reason. I was thinking about a situation in which the label thinks some track will not sell. Answering no to my question, Wakefield added, "I don't think we would ever think about one particular song in some sort of financial way. We wouldn't talk about it that way. We, like I said, we kind of think more in albums and full-album context."[166] I also asked if there is a specific sound that Mack Avenue pursues. "Pretty much straight-ahead, acoustic jazz down the middle," Wakefield answered. However, they also work with funk and R&B musicians such as Tower of Power and Macy Gray. In addition, in a broader sense, Wakefield mentioned that "I want it to be a really strong brand. I want people to know that when they buy a Mack Avenue record, they're getting a good album, you know. That's my goal."

After the label and the artist go through both the small details and generalities, the artist is ready to record an album. When the recording is done, Wakefield, as an A&R, collects everything—from the music, the multi-track, Pro Tools, the hard drives, to the masters—and brings them to the rest of the company. From this point, since he brainstormed ideas and concepts on the album with the artist from the very beginning, Wakefield becomes the artist's advocate. In

[165] Will Wakefield, interview with the author, January 12, 2022.
[166] Ibid.

other words, he becomes the first step for the rest of the company as he thoroughly understands what the new record is about. With this knowledge, Wakefield goes to the marketing, sales, and production departments, explains the theme of the record, and discusses photo shoot, fonts and texts, and the look of the record.

I asked Wakefield how Mack Avenue finds artists to sign. He answered that he finds artists through social media and Internet, but he also assesses other factors such as: 1) whether they have an established fan base, 2) whether they have toured, and 3) whether they have management. Wakefield observed that there are some artists who think 'I got signed by a record label, and now I don't have to do anything.' However, Mack Avenue prefers to partner with artists at a certain level rather than bringing them up completely from nothing. Besides the Internet, the label finds artists through recommendation from other artists, managers, and friends that they have known for years and trust. Although labels may state "we don't accept unsolicited material" on their websites, Wakefield explained that when labels say unsolicited, it means they will still accept materials brought by someone they know. As an artist himself who has played and sung in a band for twenty years, Wakefield thinks this is unfair and understands how hard it is for musicians when their work is not recognized. In addition, he observed that when they do not sign somebody, the quality of music is never the reason because most people that come to the label are "already quite good." Unfortunately, however, Wakefield said "There's just no way to get to all of that or be able to do everything for everybody."[167]

A&Rs' role is essential in making a record in that they work and share ideas with artists from the initial stage up until the final product is made. Because of their importance and influence, I was curious how one can become an A&R and what qualifications are required at Mack Avenue.

[167] Will Wakefield, interview with the author, January 12, 2022.

Wakefield answered that everybody who works as an A&R at Mack Avenue has been a musician and went to college for music. Wakefield himself is a graduate of Berklee College of Music. "My boss Denny [Stilwell], he was a drummer. He did music business. I did guitar and voice. My buddy Darrell [Garrett], he's a guitar player that toured around and played for years."[168] Although not every record label seeks these qualities when they hire an A&R, Wakefield said that at Mack Avenue, "qualifications are really having an ear for music, knowing the music."[169]

Mack Avenue tries to be an "artist-friendly" label,[170] and some artists do feel like "they're part of the Mack Avenue family."[171] My interview with Will Wakefield demonstrates that the label involves itself in the creative process. Like Criss Cross, Mack Avenue only produces jazz or "jazz-adjacent" music. The label's pursuit of specific genres deprives the musicians outside of "their genres" of a chance to be Mack Avenue artists, and the label wields power over who to sign and which music deserves distribution. One might argue that, since Mack Avenue, even when it comes to lesser-known artists, signs musicians who already have an established fan base—in other words, who are already proven—it is not completely true that the label decides which music deserves listeners' attention. However, leaving that aside, the A&Rs at Mack Avenue discuss with artists not only career arc but also album concept, side musicians, and instrumentation, which makes it clear that the forming the sound of jazz is a collaborative effort of musicians and labels.

[168] Will Wakefield, interview with the author, January 12, 2022.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Brian Zimmerman, "Mack Avenue Records President Denny Stilwell on 20 Years of Extraordinary Jazz," JAZZIZ Magazine, February 21, 2019, https://www.jazziz.com/mack-avenue-records-president-denny-stilwell-on-20-years-of-extraordinary-jazz/.

2.5 Conclusion

My interviews with Shai Maestro and Marc Copland reveal that some record labels are more interventional, and that working with these labels does not necessarily mean that musicians feel inhibited. Rather, through collaboration, sometimes musicians achieve a better outcome than when they work by themselves. ECM's Manfred Eicher supports Maestro as a producer, making comments on orchestration, his touch on the piano, and whether or not to improvise on some tunes. While Eicher's suggestions were rather specific, Maestro did not think of it as interference but collaboration because he trusted in Eicher's ability. Similarly, Hat Hut's Werner X. Uehlinger proposed an idea to Copland to have an opera-esque concept on his new album. Even though Copland did not understand Uehilnger's intention at first, he accepted it and then came up with a modified plan that included both his and Uehlinger's ideas. Both of them liked the modified plan and the record, *Haunted Heart and Other Ballads*, was released to critical acclaim. Without Uehlinger, Copland would not have otherwise thought of an opera concept, and their join effort produced an unexpected positive result.

Meanwhile, Taylor Eigsti's relationship with Concord Jazz also demonstrates labels participating in the album production, but his experience illustrates an intervention rather than a collaboration. Eigsti did not have control over the sequence of *Let It Come to You*, which hindered him from fully realizing his artistic vision. His third album *Daylight at Midnight* was produced by the producer Matt Pierson, and most of the tunes on that album was selected by him from the label's suggestions of songs. While Eigsti is satisfied with both records, his artistic freedom was restricted.

My interview with Will Wakefield is another example proving that labels are influential in forming the sound of jazz and shaping the music's future. The A&Rs at Mack Avenue find talented

musicians in specific genres, and they put "the talent together with right songs and material and arrangements." The word "right" in this context is highly subjective, which depends on the A&Rs' personal preference. From small details to general aspects, artists discuss with A&Rs, and while the musicians make most of the decisions, A&Rs also give opinions at times.

As Taylor Eigsti pointed out earlier in this chapter, by nature "labels are gatekeepers of allowing some people's music to be heard by a lot of people and distributed by a lot of people." In addition to selecting musicians, some labels actively involve themselves in the creative process, making detailed proposals. Sometimes the label's intervention can bring positive outcomes but other times it inhibits artists' creativity. Whether the outcome is positive or not, my interviews with Maestro, Copland, Eigsti, and Wakefield reveal that labels play an important role in making the sound of jazz and informing the future direction of jazz.

Chapter 3: Musicians Who Self-Produce Albums

Through my interviews in the previous chapters, I argued that labels participate in forming the sound of jazz and shaping the future direction of the music. The degree to which labels exercise artistic influence varies from label to label. A label such as Sunnyside Records allows its artists virtually complete artistic freedom, whereas ECM Records and Concord Jazz wield greater power over the aesthetic process. Whether the labels' influence is greater or lesser, labels, by nature, are gatekeepers in that they decide whose music is worth the audience's attention. In search of complete freedom in every aspect of making a record, some musicians end up either establishing their own labels or self-producing their albums.

In this final chapter, I discuss two musicians, Israeli bassist Avishai Cohen and American pianist Emmet Cohen, who self-produce their music. Avishai Cohen founded Razdaz Records with his manager Ray Jefford to have full artistic control in every step of making a record and also to give this power to his fellow and up-and-coming musicians. While he makes records through his label, Cohen still works with other labels, which is a tactical approach. Similarly, Emmet Cohen, although he did not register a business, self-produces records while making some of his records with other labels. About half of the albums in these musicians' discographies are self-released, while another half were released on other labels. Therefore, I argue that even in 2022, the supposed "streaming era," record labels are not only relevant but also indispensable to many musicians, as they support musicians by taking care of the business side of album production.

3.1 Avishai Cohen

Avishai Cohen is a jazz bassist, singer, and composer born in Kabri, Israel in 1970. He began playing the piano at age nine, and after his family moved to St. Louis, Missouri when he was fourteen, he started playing the bass guitar. Through his teacher, Cohen was introduced to the music of bassist Jaco Pastorius, which made him want to pursue his career in music as a bassist.[172] He moved to New York in 1992 and studied at the New School while performing and recording with luminaries such as Roy Hargrove, Brad Mehldau, Joshua Redman, Kurt Rosenwinkel, and Danilo Perez. In 1997, Chick Corea selected Cohen as a member of his band Origin and signed Cohen to his label Stretch Records, an imprint of Concord.[173] Cohen's first album as leader, *Adama*, was released on Stretch in 1998, and he made three more albums—*Devotion* (1999), *Colors* (2000), *Unity* (2001)—on this label. In 2002, Cohen established his own label, Razadaz Records, with his manager Ray Jefford, and Cohen's first album on the label *Lyla* was released in 2003. Along with up-and-coming musicians, already established musicians such as Jimmy Greene, Mark Guiliana, and Kurt Rosenwinkel released albums on Cohen's label. While releasing albums on Razdaz, Cohen continues to work with other major labels such as Blue Note, Parlophone Music France (Warner Music Group's imprint), and Sony Masterworks. In 2020, Cohen announced that he had joined Naïve Records (a division of Believe Group), and he has released two albums on the label including the latest, *Shifting Sands* (2022).[174]

Cohen is one of the few musicians who founded labels in the late '90s and early 2000s. While most label-owner musicians release only their music through their labels, the fact that Cohen

[172] "Bio." Avishai Cohen. June 29, 2022. https://avishaicohen.com/avishai-cohen/.
[173] Matt Collar, "Avishai Cohen Biography, Songs, & Albums," AllMusic, accessed June 30, 2022, https://www.allmusic.com/artist/avishai-cohen-mn0000071908/biography.
[174] "Avishai Cohen Joins Naïve Records," AICF, January 18, 2022, https://aicf.org/news/avishai-cohen-joins-naive-records/.

established Razdaz Records with a vision to create "an opportunity to record and produce young talented musicians whom he has enthusiasm for" distinguishes him from others.[175] I was curious why he continues to work with other labels after founding his own label. For these reasons, I reached out to Cohen through the contact form on his label's website. However, it was not Cohen but his manager Ray Jefford who responded to me. Jefford wrote that he could not commit Cohen's personal time to me but instead could do the interview on Cohen's behalf, as he is a co-founder of Razdaz Records and has been Cohen's personal manager for the last twenty years. Thus, I spoke with Ray Jefford, and the interview was conducted via Zoom.

Cohen's first four albums as leader were released on Stretch Records, an imprint of Concord, which as we have seen is one of the biggest independent record labels. As my interviews with Taylor Eigsti and Shai Maestro demonstrate, musicians want to be signed to bigger labels such as ECM or Concord because of their clout, but not everyone gain the opportunity to be their artist. Thus, I was curious what led Cohen to establish his own label, leaving behind Concord. Jefford answered that Cohen wanted to release his music without any restriction, and "restriction" in this context means "not just artistic control, but the timing of a distribution. And making decisions of investing money in certain things, like publicists or partners, or investing in iTunes marketing or all these things."[176] Furthermore, owning a label was important to them because it means they can own the masters. Record labels that finance the production of an album usually demand master rights in return for their investment. If a label owns the master rights, whenever the master is used on film, TV shows, or other media, the royalty goes to the master owner, which is the label, instead of the artist. To give an example of the importance of having the master, Jefford

[175] "About Us." Razdaz Records, accessed June, 30, 2022. https://www.razdazrecordz.com/about-us/.
[176] Ray Jefford, interview with the author, January 3, 2022.

mentioned one film that used Cohen's masters. "There's one French film where Avishai has 24 minutes of his music, in one film. And the film sold 10 million tickets worldwide. So we get a revenue because we owned the master rights of that content."[177] Moreover, Cohen composes his own music, which maximizes revenue. Jefford described that "it's the beauty" of owning the masters and being the composer. As a label owner, Jefford mentioned that he and Cohen do not demand master rights of their musicians. "We never take the master from the musicians. Never. We don't take that publishing or the master rights. We just do it as a gift to them to get their music out."[178]

As Jefford mentioned earlier, being a label owner gives Cohen complete freedom, and that is why he and Cohen decided to start a label. However, after they launched Razdaz Records, Cohen continued to work with other major labels, and even made an exclusive deal with Naïve Records.[179] I asked Jefford why Cohen still works with other labels. He answered that first of all, there are approaches from the "first-classes" of labels[180] and secondly, these labels may pay a big royalty to Cohen. In addition, Jefford observed that some recordings are more complicated to release than others, so in that case, they work with another label. For example, he said Cohen's *1970* (2017), which was released on Sony Masterworks, is a "mainstream" album and because of that, they "wanted to use a major [label]."[181] Sony Masterworks claims on its website that "this album pushes all boundaries of jazz," and that Sony Masterworks is "dealing with the closest we can get to POP with Avishai."[182] *1970* displays various styles of music such as folk, pop and fusion, and Cohen

[177] Ray Jefford, interview with the author, January 3, 2022.
[178] Ibid.
[179] "Avishai Cohen Joins Naïve Records," AICF, January 18, 2022, https://aicf.org/news/avishai-cohen-joins-naive-records/.
[180] Ray Jefford, interview with the author, January 3, 2022.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Asmita Khullar, "Avishai Cohen," Sony Masterworks, February 25, 2021, https://sonymusicmasterworks.com/artist/avishai-cohen/.

wrote on his website that "it's not a jazz record."[183] To promote a "pop" album and reach audiences beyond jazz, Cohen needed help from a large label, and that's why he "used' Sony Masterworks.

> We used Sony Music for that. Because it's more mainstream. So we needed their, hopefully, their resources to be able to do that. So it's tactical. It's professional decision-making based on an artistic approach and what we believe it needs and requires to get it out in the world in the best way.[184]

We have seen that, while collaborating with a major label provides an artist with considerable support, it can restrict musicians' artistic freedom to a certain degree. I asked how Cohen has dealt with restrictions and requests from labels. Jefford answered that Cohen has not signed to a label where the label has too much influence, and that he has only signed to labels where he feels he will still have considerable artistic freedom. "We don't want an A&R officer telling us that 'this track's no good' and 'that track's no good.' What we do is because of what we are and what he is, Avishai Cohen."[185] Generally, Cohen is able to exercise his influence over sequencing of the album and the tracks that will be included in the album. Jefford observed, "they [labels] generally accepted everything that Avishai's ever delivered. If he records 15 tracks, we usually end up using 14 of them."[186]

Jefford's remark that he and Cohen do not want an A&R telling them a certain track is not good made me curious whether the A&R's dislike for a certain song is based on financial or artistic reasons. To my surprise, Jefford answered that it is usually artistic. He added, "they're not the

[183] "'1970'," Avishai Cohen, June 30, 2017, https://avishaicohen.com/homepage/avishai-cohen-1970/#:~:text=Avishai%20Cohen's%20latest%20touring%20project,far%20in%20his%20illustrious%20career.
[184] Ray Jefford, interview with the author, January 3, 2022.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.

monsters that maybe you think they are, major labels. They're made up of people, you know."[187] I responded that even if labels are made up of good people, financial factors and making a profit are bound to be critical because otherwise, their business will go bankrupt. Agreeing that "they're very financially driven,"[188] Jefford answered that that is why most labels sign an artist for one or two records, instead of six or more records as they once did.

Finishing up the conversation, I asked about the biggest advantages and disadvantages for Cohen and Jefford of making albums by themselves. For the upside, Jefford answered, "just control. And maybe the back end, hopefully, the financial reward that comes with that." His answer for the downside was "financial risk and the amount of hours of work that needs to go in." For their investment, they are not always looking for economic rewards. Jefford added that sometimes they expect to obtain non-monetary rewards such as impact and exposure, which can enhance Cohen's artistic profile.

Since Cohen and Jefford founded Razdaz Records in 2002, Cohen has released 15 albums. Of these, eight albums were released on Razdaz and the rest were released on various major labels. Cohen started a label in search of complete artistic freedom, but he strategically continues to make records with other labels for various reasons including ownership of the masters, funding of the album production, and releasing and promoting a non-jazz album. Although Cohen only works with labels that allow him to have considerable freedom, he is not completely free of restriction and labels still wield power in, for example, selecting tracks that will be included in an album. For albums released on Razdaz, we can say that Cohen is solely responsible for the "sound of jazz"

[187] Ray Jefford, interview with the author, January 3, 2022.
[188] Ibid.

and contributing to shaping the future direction of jazz. However, another half of his discography is the results of collaborative effort between Cohen and other labels.

3.2 Emmet Cohen

Emmet Cohen is an American jazz pianist born in Miami, Florida, in 1990. He began playing the piano at age three, and soon discovered his talent for music. Cohen's professional music education began when he was eleven, at the Manhattan School of Music's Pre-College Division, in which he studied classical piano.[189] As a high school student, he played in the Gibson/Baldwin GRAMMY Jazz Combo in 2008.[190] Cohen received his bachelor's degree from the University of Miami, and master's degree from Manhattan School of Music. He ranked in third place in the 2011 Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Piano Competition, and won the 2019 American Pianist Awards. Cohen has performed and recorded with prominent musicians such as Christian McBride, Kurt Elling, Billy Hart, and Joe Lovano. Cohen has also conceived a three-part project named "Masters Legacy Series," which is comprised of recordings, interviews, and performances. Through this project, Emmet performed and recorded with luminaries including Jimmy Cobb, Ron Carter, Benny Golson, Tootie Heath, and George Coleman.[191] Starting with his first self-produced album *In the Element* (2011), he has released eight more albums, including the most recent album, *Future Stride*, which was released on Mack Avenue in 2021.

I interviewed Emmet Cohen because like Avishai Cohen, he works with other labels while self-releasing albums. However, Cohen was different from other label-owner musicians such as

[189] Matt Collar, "Emmet Cohen Biography, Songs, & Albums," AllMusic, accessed July 2, 2022, https://www.allmusic.com/artist/emmet-cohen-mn0002920059/biography.
[190] Linda Federico-O'Murchu, "Jazz Pianist Emmet Cohen: Back in Montclair in August," Montclair, NJ Patch (Patch, July 28, 2011), https://patch.com/new-jersey/montclair/jazz-pianist-emmet-cohen-back-in-montclair-in-august.
[191] "Bio." Emmet Cohen. July 2, 2022. https://emmetcohen.com/bio.

David Binney, Marc Copland, and Avishai Cohen in that he did not really found a label. David Binney and Avishai Cohen release other artists' music on their labels at times, and Marc Copland has a few people in his label who help him run the business. On the contrary, Cohen self-produces only his own albums without anyone's help. Despite the difficulty of making records by himself, Cohen has been prolific, releasing nine albums by age 32. I was curious to know what led him to self-produce albums and his perspective on being an independent artist. Cohen kindly accepted my interview request, and we had a conversation over the phone on the last day of 2021.

Cohen, who has been labeled as prodigy by writers and reviewers,[192][193][194] was waiting to reach a certain level of artistry where he feels he is finally ready to record his first album. To him, recording is rather different from performing in that it requires a different skill set. At first, Cohen simply wanted to know if he could sound good on a recording. In addition, Cohen needed his album in order to play gigs. Owners of jazz performance venues asked him if he had a CD. It was another form of business card and the owners wanted to see how he played before they hired him. In 2011, while Cohen was at the Frost School of Music, he recorded his first album *In the Element* with established musicians such as Rodney Green, Joe Sanders, and Greg Gisbert, then a professor at Frost. Through this record, Cohen gained a valuable experience where he learned all the steps of making an album, which include hiring musicians, setting the studio time, making an album art and physical copy, putting the music online, hiring a publicist, distributing the music, and sending music to radio stations and critics.

[192] Linda Federico-O'Murchu, "Jazz Pianist Emmet Cohen: Back in Montclair in August," Montclair, NJ Patch (Patch, July 28, 2011), https://patch.com/new-jersey/montclair/jazz-pianist-emmet-cohen-back-in-montclair-in-august.
[193] Edward Blanco, "Emmet Cohen: In The Element Album Review @ All about Jazz," All About Jazz, October 26, 2011, https://www.allaboutjazz.com/in-the-element-emmet-cohen-self-produced-review-by-edward-blanco.
[194]Andrew Gayle, "A Jazz Event at 'Emmet's Place,'" Coral Gables Magazine, January 31, 2022, https://coralgablesmagazine.com/a-jazz-event-at-emmets-place/.

Making a record is a costly project and it becomes more so when an artist hires established musicians as side musicians. From his first album, Cohen has recorded with distinguished musicians, and I was curious how he deals with the risk that comes with an investment. Cohen devoted more of his attention to building his career than to recouping the costs. He focused on the music he wants to document, what he wants to achieve, and his short-term and long-term plans. To a 21-year-old college graduate, building credibility through the record and ensuring performance opportunities were worth investing a big chunk of money upfront. Cohen observed, "It's less about making a record and selling a record. It's more about I'm an artist and I want to record."[195]

In his "Masters Legacy Series," which Cohen created with the vision of "bring[ing] closer together [his] generation with the generation of the jazz master,"[196] he performed and recorded with legendary jazz musicians Jimmy Cobb, Ron Carter, Benny Golson, Tootie Heath, and George Coleman, as well as interviewing them. Hiring these musicians was not easy for Cohen as a younger and lesser-known artist, but showing respect and being consistent made the collaborations possible. "I really tried to show as much respect as possible," Cohen observed.[197] Every time these musicians came to play in New York, he went to see their performances, sat beside them, and introduced himself. Once the musicians got to know him, Cohen then offered to make a record together. "It's more investment than just calling someone up and asking them to make a record."[198] In that way, starting in 2017 with Jimmy Cobb, Cohen made four records for the "Masters Legacy

[195] Emmet Cohen, interview with the author, December 31, 2021.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.

Series." Volumes 1 and 2 were released on Cellar Live, a Canadian jazz record label, and Volumes 3 and 4 were self-released by Cohen.

Because Cohen was reluctant to speak publicly about record labels he has worked with, it was impossible for me to know why he sometimes makes albums by himself and other times works with labels. However, when I asked what is the biggest benefit of making albums by himself, his answer could not have been clearer: "Having complete artistic control." Moreover, Cohen is effectively and successfully responding to the industry's changing environment in which CD and vinyl have lost ground, and shows how musicians can document their work and reach to audiences without the help of record labels. Cohen's ongoing project "Live From Emmet's Place" is a weekly live performance in which he plays about 15 tunes with his trio and special guests. It is livestreamed on every Monday night on YouTube, and also recorded and archived. Cohen considers this project a valuable alternate ways to release music, and his innovative way of approaching record-making is recognized by Jazz Journalism Association, which selected Cohen as "Live-Stream Producer of the Year."[199]

3.3 Conclusion

Avishai Cohen and Ray Jefford founded Razdaz Records in 2001 to have complete control in every aspect of making a record, including artistic freedom, master ownership, and distribution of the music on their desired schedule. Because Cohen rarely plays jazz standards or other musicians' compositions but mostly plays his own compositions on his albums, having full control over his music is especially important to him, and owning the masters allows him to maximize the profit.

[199] "2022 Winners in Jazz Journalism," JJA Jazz Awards, May 25, 2022, https://www.jjajazzawards.org/2022-winners-in-jazz-journalism/.

However, when it comes to heavy production or music outside jazz, Cohen works with major labels to find the best way to deliver the music to his audiences.

Emmet Cohen, as a younger and lesser-known musician, found self-production as a way of promoting his art and building credibility as a mature musician. Making his first record by himself became a practical and valuable experience, and his desire to have complete artistic control made him find ways to succeed as an independent and entrepreneurial musician. As a result, he successfully carried out "Masters Legacy Series" project and his current series "Live From Emmet's Place" gained recognition by the jazz community.

Although Avishai Cohen and Emmet Cohen continue to work with other labels, the biggest reason they found a label or self-release albums is to have complete artistic freedom. Self-released albums are clearly products of their own artistry, but about half of the albums in their discographies are the result of collaborative efforts between them and labels. While Avishai Cohen still has great freedom over his music when working with other labels, the labels' input is also reflected in his album, even if it is a very small portion. Therefore, while the sound of jazz is formed by musicians for the most part, record labels also take part in the process, and their influence is greater in shaping the future of jazz, as they select musicians to make a record together.

Conclusion

The rise of streaming services and social media hit the recording industry hard. Sales of CD and Vinyl have lost ground and it made it harder for labels to recoup their investment. As a result, some jazz labels such as Sunnyside Records either stopped funding the album production or changed the contractual terms, which imposed financial burden on musicians. While it is not hard to find musicians who either found their own labels of self-produce their albums, my interviews demonstrate that many musicians, even those who founded their labels, still want to work with labels for various reasons. Labels help musicians to concentrate on their music by taking care of all the business aspects. Being an independent artist means that everything—from hiring musicians and making physical copies of CDs to distribution and promotion—must be done by the artist. Because musicians do not have the infrastructure that labels have, it is hard for them to take care of every aspect. Also, depending on the project or the number of side musicians playing on a record, album production cost can increase significantly. However, not every musician is able to fund a high cost and to take a risk when they do not know whether they can recoup their investment or not. In this situation, labels' support can be greatly helpful. Moreover, some labels not only fund a high-cost production, but also allow musicians to earn money by paying royalties or advances. Besides the label's financial support, signing to influential labels can help musicians take their careers to the next level and build their fan base. Because there are so many advantages in working with labels, it is hard to assume that labels will lose ground in the industry any time soon.

However, as we have seen in the previous chapters, working with labels means having a collaborator or losing control to some extent in the creative process. Labels are involved in many aspects of the album-making process. Criss Cross Jazz's founder Gerry Teekens checked the

concept of new albums with his musicians to make sure they fits Criss Cross's musical identity, "cutting-edge hardcore New York jazz."[200] In addition, to maintain the label's sound, Teekens encouraged musicians to select side musicians from the "Criss Cross family."[201] He also suggested to musicians the ratio of original compositions to jazz standards. ECM's founder Manfred Eicher joins recording sessions and makes musical suggestions. His inputs are rather specific: orchestration, dynamic levels on the piano, and whether to improvise on some pieces. Similarly, Hat Hut Records' founder Werner Uehlinger gave detailed suggestions on Copland's album, making it an opera-esque album with an introduction and epilogue. Concord Jazz also participates in the creative process, having final say on the album sequencing and hiring a producer who developed Eigsti's album concept. Mack Avenue's A&R team makes suggestions on instrumentation, side musicians, and whether to have guest musicians.

Surprisingly, not only musicians who worked with less interventional labels, but also some of the musicians who worked with more interventional labels, think of their experiences positively. My interviews with Shai Maestro and Marc Copland show that when musicians collaborate with labels the result can be both artistically and commercially very successful. Moreover, although the result may not be always successful, Aaron Goldberg, Shai Maestro, Marc Copland, Taylor Eigsti, and Avishai Cohen show openness to suggestions from labels.

Understandably, however, some musicians start their own label or self-produce albums in search of total artistic freedom. Avishai Cohen and Ray Jefford established Razdaz Records to have full control in album production and distribution schedule and to own master rights. Emmet Cohen also makes self-produced albums and finds new ways of releasing music through social

[200] Criss Cross Jazz - Founder & History," Criss Cross Jazz, accessed April 20, 2022. https://www.crisscrossjazz.com/founder.html
[201] Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022.

media, especially YouTube, and this new approach is beginning to gain recognition in the jazz community. What is striking, however, is the fact that of the label-owner musicians or musicians who self-produce albums I have interviewed, none stopped making albums with other labels. David Binney, Marc Copland, Taylor Eigsti, Avishai Cohen, and Emmet Cohen continue to work with other labels even after they self-produce albums or started their own. This suggests labels' influence and necessity in the industry. In other words, the sound of jazz—both the sound of the production and the style of music—is formed by musicians and labels. The fact that labels decide which artists to sign and whose music is worthy of distribution enhances labels' impact in the industry, and therefore, we could also say that not only the sound of jazz but also the future direction of jazz is heavily influenced by the labels.

However, as my interviews have shown, label owners are clearly not the only collaborator involved in making albums. Producers and A&Rs also participate in the creative process, and many musicians I have interviewed emphasized the importance of producers. For reasons of space, I restricted my discussion to the relationship between jazz musicians and record label executives, but there are many questions to ask regarding producers including: 1) Who hires producers? Are they hired by record labels or musicians?, 2) What is the role of the producer?, 3) What kind of artistic suggestions do producers make when making an album?, and 4) What makes producers qualified to give artistic input to musicians? In addition, this study only discusses musicians and labels active in 2022. Throughout the history of jazz, the relationships between musicians and labels have changed. Further research into the relationships between musicians and labels throughout the entire history of jazz as well as the relationship between musicians and producers and producers and labels could give us valuable insights into not only the past and present "sound of jazz" but also the future direction of jazz.

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Misha Tsiganov, interview with the author, January 13, 2022.

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