

The Divide: Continuing the Conversation

By Dr. Jonathan Saraga

This paper examines the existence of Jazz as black-American music, from the perspective of current-day black artists. It is the goal of this ethnomusicological study, which will survey not only the particulars, and narratives, but also the interpretives of the matter, to expose various perspectives on jazz and black-American music within current-day society, in hopes of shedding more light on an ongoing conversation regarding race relations.

“When you say ‘black music,’ understand that you are talking about rock, jazz, R&B, reggae, funk, doo-wop, hip-hop and Motown; black people created it all,”¹ says the iconic Bruno Mars. And even though it is, at this point, common knowledge that “every major American genre of music owes its existence to African-American originators,”² world renowned jazz saxophonist and composer, Wayne Escoffery, was unaware of this fact. “I didn’t know it was black music. I didn’t know that later that these amazing musicians like Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins and Lee Morgan would be some of my biggest inspirations musically, socially and culturally,”³ Escoffery says in a 2018 interview for *Downbeat* magazine. In fact, “when he was a teen, icons such as Coltrane and Rollins weren’t just musical heroes for Escoffery, they were surrogate father figures.”⁴ “Their legacies became my standard,” says Escoffery, “they really inspired me to be better, not just as a musician, but as a black man living in this country.”⁵ This

¹ Andy Hermann, “‘Black Music Means Everything’: Bruno Mars Drops Some Truth for Black History Month,” *L.A. Weekly*, February 2, 2017, <http://www.laweekly.com/music/black-music-means-everything-bruno-mars-drops-some-truth-for-black-history-month-7884903>.

² Ibid.

³ John Murph, “Chasing Transcendence,” *Downbeat*, March 2018, 42-45.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Murph, “Chasing Transcendence”.

‘black-pride’ spawned his Black Art Jazz Collective⁶, a sextet that Escoffery plays in with Grammy-nominated trumpeter, Jeremy Pelt (more on Pelt later); a group of “like-minded musicians from our generation who really felt that it was important to unapologetically celebrate black music and blackness without saying, ‘OK, this is black music but’”⁷ In fact the saxophonist claims that “the thing that moves me the most about this art form, and the thing that I think moves audiences worldwide, are the African elements. No matter how intellectual or philosophical I get about the music, it’s important for me to maintain a certain amount of the African, or quite frankly, the black elements of this music; because that’s what makes the music distinctive, powerful and transcendent.”⁸

But what is it that makes the black elements of music embody such qualities? We can’t argue that the black *experience*, at the very least, and by that I mean of the colored inhabitants of the the U.S. (circa 17th - 19th century), and even across the entirety of the African-American struggle, *is* certainly a powerful one. So is it in fact that experience that makes jazz music ‘distinctive, powerful, and transcendent’? And, is it something that can be perceived, even *without* knowledge of the backstory? Miles Davis once said that “[he] can tell the difference between a white band and a black band,”⁹ and “let’s be honest...the black expression...we’re the most hated people but the most copied people on the planet,”¹⁰ declares the iconic NYC-based saxophonist Stacy Dillard. Perhaps there is something to the phrase ‘often imitated never replicated.’ Undoubtedly, this is one of *the* defining components of the entirety of black-musical

⁶ In 2016, the collective recorded original compositions that paid homage to former U.S. President, Barack Obama, scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, and women’s rights activist Sojourner Truth.

⁷ Murph, *Ibid*.

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ Music, Movie Clips & Funny Videos, “Miles Davis Rare Interview (Part 1) - YouTube,” May 24, 2014, Accessed April 21, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3iR4LiUtCk>.

¹⁰ This quote and all quotes of Stacy Dillard found in this paper are taken from a live recorded phone audio interview I conducted with him on March 4, 2018. Audio file of interview available upon request.

history and even shows itself “in sports, in entertainment, even if you want to break it down to some scholarly shit, we can do that too; cuz we know who pretty much invented everything in America.”¹¹ Even multi-Grammy-winning pianist, composer and producer Robert Glasper says that “black people...built America...and gave it all of its pop culture and all of its great musical genres. That's us.”¹² So now, the question becomes, why? What is it that has allowed blacks to always be at the forefront of invention, creation, and progression, at the very least within American culture, and what is it that allows them to express themselves differently? Dillard offered a solution which was intriguing, and opens up a new can of worms: “From what I notice, it just seems like, they know how to let go better.”¹³

“To be able to just be in the moment, and be sureabral about it,” Stacy explains, might be the defining characteristic that separates a black jazz musician from a white one. From his own observation of post-performance discussion with white musicians he’s played with, he has come to this perspective. “This is in the moment music,” he says. “You can’t plan it....And when they think that what they did in the moment wasn’t good, they start talking about it like that, and the ways they discuss the music is mechanical.”¹⁴ I referenced classical music, and how, perhaps this behavior is due to the fact that for thousands of years European music was devoid of improvisation, and thus whites today aren’t able to ‘let go’ in that same way. But it was Stacy who alluded to the fact that in classical music in the days of old, performers *were* actually improvising in-the-moment cadenzas at the end of pieces regularly. Those cadenzas since have been written down, presented and taught devoid of the essence of *how* they came to be; without

¹¹ Interview with Stacy Dillard, March 4, 2018.

¹² Rawiya Kamier, “All American Music Is Black Music. Robert Glasper Is The Jazz Renaissance Man Tracing Its History,” *The Fader*, September 14, 2016, Accessed February 10, 2018, <http://www.thefader.com/2016/09/14/robert-glasper-artscience-interview>.

¹³ Interview with Stacy Dillard.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the inclusion of the fact that they *were* improvised. So then, if spontaneous creation of music is not *only* exclusive to blacks, what is it that makes *their* expression of it different, and where does the root of that difference stem?

It may be undeniable that black Americans were at the brink of the creation of all forms of American music, but we have to acknowledge the fact that none of them would even exist without the fusing of “European classical instruments, harmonies, and song forms *with* (italics mine) African, Afro-Caribbean, and American rhythms and melodic structures.”¹⁵ With that said, “you cannot properly assess Black American music through the lens of a European outlook,”¹⁶ says Grammy-winning, internationally acclaimed trumpeter, Nicholas Payton. Payton, who has coined the hashtag ‘#BAM’, which stands for ‘Black American Music’, offers his own argument toward the discussion of two components that have long been subject to discussion of their place within the history of jazz: the Black vs. the European aesthetics. Payton states that “they each must be respected on its own terms....Because Dvorak checked out Black American music doesn’t make his music less European. Because Duke Ellington listened to Debussy does not make his music any less Black.”¹⁷ Of course, it is not whether European musical elements and black musical elements have intersected throughout history that is the issue, but perhaps how important is either one’s contribution is to what has become known as jazz music.¹⁸

Payton opens his piece “On The European Influence In Black American Music” with the following offering: “Who invented harmony? Harmony exists in nature. We are harmonic beings. We are rhythmic beings. Black Americans didn’t invent harmony; neither did Europeans.

¹⁵ Eugene Holley Jr., “My Bill Evans Problem—Jaded Visions of Jazz and Race,” NewMusicBox, June 26, 2013, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/my-bill-evans-problem-jazz-and-race/>.

¹⁶ Nicholas Payton, “On The European Influence in Black American Music . . .” *Nicholas Payton* (blog), August 2, 2012, <https://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2012/08/02/on-the-european-influence-in-black-american-music/>.

¹⁷ Payton, “On The European Influence in Black American Music . . .”.

¹⁸ Nicholas Payton, “On The European Influence in Black American Music . . .”.

Because many Black American musicians have been influenced by European harmony it doesn't take away from the fact their music is a Black expression."¹⁹ Payton's continues his discourse on the universality of harmony (the stereotypical European component of jazz), and the gray area that has common-place throughout the teaching of the history of jazz, blues, and other forms of black music. "It's interesting to me," says Payton, "that many of the same people who think Black American music isn't valid because it doesn't adhere to a European aesthetic are the same people who try to claim ownership by saying it employs European harmonies."²⁰

Payton furthers his argument by referencing an actual musical example: the Dominant 7th chord, which he admits "may have existed in Classical music before it did Black American music, but in practice it's not the same Dominant 7th chord." He explains, "in Classical music, the Dominant 7th chord was typically used to resolve to the tonic (the reference note for all other pitches in a piece), in the Blues, the Dominant 7th chord *IS* the tonic, not just a passing chord." He goes on to say that "when cats want their music to sound less Black and less like the Blues, they avoid using Dominant 7th chords."²¹ A double-edged sword it seems, is the white man's role in black-American culture as a whole, not to mention within the creation of its music. Even Miles Davis admits that the racial prejudice he experienced made him "so mad [he] made up [his] mind to outdo anybody white on [his] horn," and states that "prejudice and curiosity have been responsible for what [he has] done in music." He goes on to say that "if [he] hadn't met that prejudice, [he] probably wouldn't have had as much drive in [his] work."²² So, then is it this 'prejudice' that has inspired a uniquely-black *ability* to artistically or musically express? Is it

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Nicholas Payton, "On The European Influence in Black American Music . . .".

²² Alex Haley, "Miles Davis, The Playboy Interview (September 1962)," Accessed April 21, 2018, <http://www.plosin.com/beatbegins/archive/miles.htm>.

only *because* of how black people dealt with, and perhaps *used* this ‘prejudice’ that we have jazz, and all other forms of black-American music to follow? And is this ‘prejudice’ perhaps the very *thing* that separates the black person’s quality of musical performance from that of whites?

Perhaps the more important question at this point is, can this query even be truly *understood* from the perspective of someone who is *not* black? Grammy-winning pop sensation Bruno Mars, speaks of his involvement within black music from a place of “being Puerto Rican,” and says that “even salsa music stems back to the Motherland [Africa]; so, in my world, black music means everything. It’s what gives America its swag.”²³ Clearly Mars and Escoffery share similar opinions and neither share the same musical, ethnic or cultural heritage. However, is there a limit to how far the conversation can stray from the perspectives of those who’s experience of black-American music is not blood-related? Legendary jazz pianist Bill Evans, who was the only white musician to play on the number one selling jazz album of all time, “Kind of Blue”, said that “he never experienced any racial barriers in jazz other than from some members of the audience.”²⁴ And, Miles Davis, the leader of that record, describes Evans as being “one of his favorite pianists.”²⁵

Clearly, one does not have to be of African-American descent to appreciate or play jazz at a world-class level, but perhaps there is something to *knowing* and *understanding* where the music came from and the human element associated with it, that factors into this discussion. “I want to remind people that black music is amazing; and there are all forms of it that we’ve forgotten, you know?,” says Robert Glasper. “Rock music is black music! Don’t forget that’s

²³ Dimas Sanfiorenzo, “Is Bruno Mars Guilty of Cultural Appropriation?”, *Okayplayer*, March 9, 2018, <http://www.okayplayer.com/music/bruno-mars-cultural-appropriation-twitter-reaction.html>.

²⁴ Eugene Holley Jr., “My Bill Evans Problem—Jaded Visions of Jazz and Race,” *NewMusicBox*, June 26, 2013, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/my-bill-evans-problem-jazz-and-race/>.

²⁵ Robrijn, *Miles Davis Interview about Bill Evans*, Sep 8, 2015, Accessed April 22, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXhmvOa5Xjo>.

what it is.”²⁶ Reminiscent of Duke Ellington’s career long approach to music-infused political activism²⁷, Glasper goes on to say that “in general [he] always [tries] to reflect what's going on in the world at the time when [he puts] an album out,” and that “[he’s] not the type to talk about it a lot, so [he tries] to put it in the music.”²⁸ Glasper’s political activism, which, he mentions, does not show itself in explicit or overly aggressive ways publicly, emerges only “with the goal of revealing factual things, or to have intellectual debates, although, neither happens often at all.”²⁹ Also, like Ellington, he appears to be extremely educated on the history of ‘his’ people, details of which, more often than not, get overlooked or intentionally not acknowledged by mainstream American culture. “People don't know that the very reason the police were made was to oversee slaves; they would be called overseers, and if a slave got out of line or tried to break away and escape, these were the people to hold them in and bring them back. Overseer, overseer, overseer, officer, officer, officer. That's the origin of the police.”³⁰

Glasper notes that although the history of the black man is one riddled with injustice, the music doesn’t *only* have to express the negatives. He reminds us that “so many songs that are like protest songs can be so dark, like there's no hope,” in reference to a song he collaborated on with artist, Common, who he says is “very good at laying out the history of our people” but in a way that’s “also an uplifting.” That song, Glasper says, “it actually gives you hope. It lets you

²⁶ Kamier, “All American Music Is Black Music. Robert Glasper Is The Jazz Renaissance Man Tracing Its History.”

²⁷ Ellington’s sold out 1943 Carnegie Hall performance, at which he debuted his 45 minute long suit, *Black Brown and Beige* is a prime example of his unspoken approach to black-civil rights activism, and the dissemination of black history. Unlike today, where blacks are freely speaking out about these issues, it was not as easy back in the times of true segregation, that was largely accepted by blacks in America. Ellington boldly stepped out of the norm and set an example by way of action and demonstration of value, rather than in the form of protest, a method akin to much of the political activism throughout history.

²⁸ Kamier, “All American Music Is Black Music. Robert Glasper Is The Jazz Renaissance Man Tracing Its History.”

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

know what's going on, but it also gives you a lot of hope when you hear it.”³¹ It is hard to ignore the direct correlation of this approach to composition to the attitudes of the slaves nearly 400 years ago; a people that turned everything they were forced to do into an opportunity to express their suppressed humanity and their courage. Once again we are reminded that the very music of jazz, blues, and gospel music, are all products of such an outlook; an outlook that was originally, specifically, a black experience.

So, is it the lack of knowledge of the history of the black struggle that is the issue? Could it be such that if the history and lineage of the people who created the music was taught more honestly and accurately, there would be more awareness of where this music really came from, and perhaps even realization of what gives it the ‘power’ and ‘transcendence’ Wayne Escoffery spoke of? To answer this, let’s examine the perspective of an NYC jazz musician; one who has been said to be “one of the truly original cats out here;” saxophonist Stacy Dillard. Stacy says that black-American music has been with him “forever”, and that the way he learned it “is pretty similar to the way it has been learned since before it has been commercialized and before its been boxed up and put into whatever package its been put into.” He says that the way the music was originally learned “is not driven enough and not supported enough, but, y’know, that’s America for you.”³² Nicholas Payton also backs this point by stating that “when a student transcribes a Charlie Parker solo, it becomes very easy to separate the music from the Black man who created it;”³³ a man who was “known among his peers as an avid reader who liked to talk about politics and philosophy.”³⁴ Of course, this was “less interesting to the press and his

³¹ Ibid.

³² Interview with Stacy Dillard.

³³ Nicholas Payton, “On The European Influence in Black American Music . . .”.

³⁴ Ingrid Monson, "The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 48, no. 3 (1995): 414.

imitators than his drug abuse, time spent in a state mental hospital in Camarillo, California, sexual excesses, and apparently magical, unmediated ability to coax entrancing sounds out of an alto saxophone.”³⁵ While the ‘imitators’ and the ‘press’ being referred to are not exclusively white in every case, it does correlate to an observation made by Eric Lott, in his book *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, which is that “the question [of] whether white identification with jazz has been primarily a ‘dialectic of misrecognition and identification.’”³⁶

To this point, Payton also reminds us that the label, “jazz(,) is the White characterization of Black American music,”³⁷ a point that while undeniable, is largely unspoken, at least within non-musically educated society. After all, it is a fact that it *was* whites who coined the term.³⁸ In fact, even Kenny Clarke and Max Roach, drum pioneers of bebop and hard-bop respectively, admit that the terms “*bop* and *bebop* were used only after the music moved ‘downtown’ from predominantly black Harlem to Fifty-second Street and its racially mixed clientele.”³⁹ Could it be that the term jazz “strips the music of its essence,” an essence which Payton describes as “free rhythmic thought”? He says that “the moment you do (categorize, label and box the music into a set of parameters), it no longer is free and you wind up with JAZZ.” The trumpeter even concludes that “Charlie Parker’s and Dizzy Gillespie’s chief contributions were based in feel, not notes,” and describes that the “major innovations in Black American music have been in sound and feel.”⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³⁷ Nicholas Payton, “On The European Influence in Black American Music . . .”.

³⁸ It was in 1915, that the *Chicago Daily Tribune* first used the term to describe music. See: Pascal Tréguer, “The Long History of ‘Blues’”, *Word Histories*, August 18, 2017, <https://wordhistories.net/2017/08/18/origin-of-blues/>.

³⁹ Shapiro and Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya* (MA: Courier Corporation, 1955), 350; Dizzy Gillespie, *To Be, or Not to Bop* (NY: Doubleday, 1979), 209.

⁴⁰ Nicholas Payton, “On The European Influence in Black American Music . . .”.

This point is further cemented by the words of world-renowned pianist and educator Hal Galper, in his account of how music is learned in African society, by stating that “the music is learned orally, through the process of the master/student relationship. The master plays something and tells the student ‘make it sound like this.’ It is through the direct experience of imitation, or copying the master, that the student is introduced to the music without intellectual intervention.”⁴¹ Amiri Baraka believes that “the essence of African American emotional expressivity has been in constant danger of dilution,” but also argues that it *is* possible for this essence to be preserved by way of a “reciprocal exchange between the modern African-American artist and the alienated ‘young white American intellectual artist.’”⁴² And while the label of a ‘sound’, ‘feel’ and way of playing music that has become known as ‘jazz’ may be a contributor to the ‘stripping away’ of the ‘black essence’ of the music, is it the young white musicians that are really the culprit? Has the term “jazz”, which many believe has ‘boxed the music into a set of parameters’ at fault, and influenced a ‘mechanical’ way of approaching it? It may be true that an ‘intellectual intervention’ of sorts has successfully infiltrated the study, practice and conception of jazz music, but why? Is there a centralized location where this has occurred? Dillard believes that it most directly occurs within the setting of academia; the place where jazz is now globally taught, learned, and sensationalized.

The saxophonist alludes to the mis-teaching of the history of jazz in institutions, in that large school-based jazz education programs do not do a good enough job of emphasizing the *way* in which the music came to be, and that the history and struggle of the people who made it is perhaps the most important element of its existence. Jazz music, was not taught in schools at its

⁴¹ Hal Galper, “The Oral Tradition,” *Hal Galper*, Accessed April 15, 2018. <http://www.halgalper.com/articles/the-oral-tradition/>.

⁴² Monson, 397.

onset, and it wasn't until the 50's that colleges began to institutionalize the music; nearly 40 years after its birth. "When people ask you if you play... [they then] ask you which school you goin' to!?!-Which school did you go to!?"⁴³ remarks Dillard. He related that scenario to jazz father-figures like Louis Armstrong and John Coltrane, by claiming that those musicians, and others coming up in, creating, and innovating the music⁴⁴ did not get asked these questions, nor did they concern themselves with them. But why is this worth discussing now? Does the fact that jazz is now mostly learned in colleges matter? Has the change in the way that jazz is taught, learned and practiced affected the *music itself*, and is the music devoid of anything that it once may have had because of this? Are musicians devoid of it?

In 1959, at the Five Spot, a New York nightclub, Charles Mingus addressed those members of the audience who he felt were there "because jazz has publicity, jazz is popular....and you like to associate yourself with this sort of thing. But it doesn't make you a connoisseur of the art because you follow it around."⁴⁵ While this statement concerned audience members, the idea of schools sensationalizing an idea or picture of what jazz is, attracts hundreds of thousands of students *and* parents around the country every year. At the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's annual concert in 2012, a panel of world renowned jazz artists, both young and old, offered opinions on how to "better communicate the need for real-world training, individual attention and cultural history to university program administrators."⁴⁶ "School leaves out the most important element which is knowing yourself," Dillard says, "the power of knowing

⁴³ Dillard interview.

⁴⁴ For reference let us use the general timeframe of the 1950's to 60's considering that the first degree in jazz studies was offered in 1947 at the University of North Texas by dean Walter H. Hodgson (a white man) , but the country-wide publicity and engagement did not pick up until the early 60's.

⁴⁵ Diane Dorr-Dorynek, "Mingus....," in *The Jazz World*, ed. Donn Cerulli, Burt Korall, and Mort Nasatir (New York: Ballantine Books, 1960), 17-18.

⁴⁶ Patrick Jarenwattananon, "The Future Of Jazz Among Black Folk," NPR.org., September 20, 2012, Accessed February 10, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/ablogsupreme/2012/09/20/161512493/on-the-future-of-jazz-among-black-folk>.

yourself, and being comfortable in your own skin; connecting with nature. The way it's taught now, is to reach out and pull the information in, as opposed to reaching in and pulling the information out.”⁴⁷

It should be stated that Stacy *does* mention that these approaches to developing oneself artistically and musically are not and were not necessarily exclusive to any so-called race, but that the later way, *was* being done by black people first. This is quite relevant to any discussion of black music, because we must remember that it was *not* by their own free will that blacks began adapting and creating their own ways of preserving their culture through sound, amidst their unforeseen circumstances. And although white culture would eventually observe and imitate black music, it must be emphasized, as Amiri Baraka did, that the “white beboppers of the 40’s were as removed from the society as Negroes, but as a matter of *choice* (italics mine). The important idea here is that the white musicians and other young whites who associate themselves with this Negro music identified the Negro with this separation, this nonconformity, though, of course, the Negro himself had no choice.”⁴⁸

Freedom vs. enslavement...Is *this* the determinant factor that separates the jazz music of black-Americans from that of White-Americans? Is it really not possible to play or understand ‘black-Music’ without having gone through, or without going through the double-standard of racial prejudice? Is the root of this discussion, really a matter of skin color, which separates blacks from whites, and thus the music they each create is equally subject to this division? Well, Eugene Holley, Jr., writer for *Down Beat*, *Playbill*, *The Village Voice*, *NPR*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and many other esteemed publications believes that “music is a cultural, *not*

⁴⁷ Dillard interview.

⁴⁸ Monson, 396.

(italics mine) a racial phenomenon,”⁴⁹ and as Ralph Ellison noted, “‘blood and skin don’t think,’ or to put it a different way: jazz didn’t come into existence because black people were simply black. Its creation was the result of history, geography, social conditions, and, most importantly, the will to create something of artistic human value.”⁵⁰ Perhaps this ‘will’, that is at the root of creation amidst hardship, is not specific to black-Americans, but it is something that every human being possesses. But the same question still stands: is it specifically the will of the *black man* that offers jazz its essence, or can a non-black musician convey this essence as well? Is it again a question of recognition, or even worship of the black struggle that is absent from white-jazz musician understanding?⁵¹

The fact is though, that “blacks *have* (italics mine) gotten their due as the art form’s primary creators, [and] no credible critic, musician, or music curriculum would state otherwise. At the same time, it is equally true that white musicians have made and continue to make great contributions to jazz.”⁵² While valid, this agreement still hasn’t nullified the racial divide within the communities of jazz artists or consumers. In fact, an argument can be made for the spawning of an opposite result, which Randy Sandke refers to as the “‘Crow-Jimmed’ white musician who has been racially discriminated against by blacks, the record industry, and white critics who are guilt-tripped into adopting an ‘exclusionary’ black agenda to support a kind of affirmative action

⁴⁹ Holley Jr., “My Bill Evans Problem—Jaded Visions of Jazz and Race.”

⁵⁰ Holley, “My Bill Evans Problem—Jaded Visions of Jazz and Race.”

⁵¹ Renowned saxophonist Antonio Hart, who teaches at Queens College, said he makes his students attend a service at a black church in order to better understand the cultural roots of the music they came to study.

⁵² Holley, *Ibid.*

for black musicians,”—a “pseudo-racist demagoguery” which has led to a type of “reverse apartheid for white musicians.”^{53, 54, 55}

It may not be possible to achieve a universal resolution to the discussion of race, cultural, ethnicity, skin color, and the slew of other determinants that affect human relations. But shouldn't we agree that music should be something that helps to nullify this disconnect. Lott says that “to the extent that black jazz musicians, and more generally African-American music, have come to symbolize political liberation, emotional depth and a sensual intensity, non-African Americans must examine the gendered racial logic that has shaped their popular understandings of African American music and culture.”⁵⁶ Music is something that no one person or group of people can own, and should be used for good. John Coltrane said “I know there are bad forces. I know that there are forces out here that bring suffering to others and misery to the world. But I want to be the opposite force. I want to be the force that is truly for good.”⁵⁷ Isn't that really what's important?

Is this writer's hope that through contemplation and perhaps not-confrontational discussion of such issues, this type of perspective can emerge. Otherwise, what Eugene Holley calls ‘the jazz infrastructure,’ which “by default can cause the racial aspect to become more prominent,”⁵⁸ will only continue to intensify. Even saxophonist David Binney, in a 2013 interview speaks of a “racial divide” that he says he “hasn't seen for a long time;” one that he

⁵³ Mentioned in his controversial book, *Where the Dark and Light Folks Meet: Race and Mythology, Politics, and Business of Jazz*, (MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010).

⁵⁴ Holley, Ibid.

⁵⁵ Holley, “My Bill Evans Problem—Jaded Visions of Jazz and Race.”

⁵⁶ Monson, 421.

⁵⁷ “CHASING TRANE: The John Coltrane Documentary,” Accessed April 29, 2018, <https://www.coltranefilm.com/>.

⁵⁸ Holley, Ibid.

describes as being “really kind of ugly and not cool.”⁵⁹ In such times as these, where human relations on a global scale regardless of profession, are being affected by so many negative factors, it becomes vital to make additional efforts to discuss and instil practices that can help to raise awareness. As Ingrid Monson said: “Our methodologies, epistemologies and ontologies may conflict but we have much to learn from one another,”⁶⁰ and to bring it full circle, I’ll quote Wayne Escoffery, and remind us to become ‘inspired’ by this knowledge to become ‘better.’

⁵⁹ JoJonah JonatJonah Jonathan, “onah Jonathan, David Binney Interview,” YouTube, Dec 17, 2012, Accessed April 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b68IMu1OHC4&t=1137s>.

⁶⁰ Monson, “The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse,” 422.

EPILOGUE



Anthony Tidd

March 11 · 🌐

"Jazz" and why it became important to push ahead while following in the footsteps of what came before:

"Jazz" is an aural tradition. It is not a type of music or genre. It is an entirely new approach to music. It is America's "classical music", but it has never been for the establishment or a museum music.

"Jazz", like Blues, Reggae, Calypso, Salsa, and Samba came out of a community, and that community was the African diaspora a.k.a black peoples, who were oppressed by their European slave masters, colonizers, and later, governments. For this reason, "jazz", like many of its counterparts was always political.

For oppressed peoples, politics was a part of their everyday life. An apolitical existence was a luxury afforded to those who were already in a privileged position. Those who were not had to endure, resist, organize, and fight every day to win basic rights that others were born with. This fight was in their religion, their slang, their fashion, their sport, their literature, their poems, their songs, their art, and yes, their music. Centuries of ongoing oppression had traumatized them and the arts became one of their many voices, true forms of expression, and therapy.

"Jazz" was born, came of age, and was taught within this environment. Its masters were for the most part, self taught, and learned by listening to and mimicking the masters who came before them, much like we have always learned language as babies. Its colleges and schools were the bands, big bands, jam sessions, stages and recording dates. Its professors were the musicians who made up its vast community, and the responsibility to raise the next generation was built into the music.

Its books and libraries were the vast collections of recordings made by its many masters. These recordings contained much of the detailed information necessary to create the next generation.

As a community which always expected to have anything of value taken away, or credited to somebody white, it became very important for the jazz community to;

1. Preserve an aural history by crediting one's own influences/teachers. One's greatest influences became a part of one's sound, and live on, made immortal by those who followed.

2. Express themselves creatively. Constantly innovate and update in order to stay ahead of their white counterparts. Every "jazz" musician sought to contribute something of their own, come up with their own approach to what came before, and push the music ahead. A musician who did not have some of themselves within their playing was considered inauthentic.

For these reasons, "jazz" managed to pack the innovation and progress of three hundred or so years into a period of around 70. As a music, for much of its history, "jazz" reinvented itself and constantly moved on, to the point of becoming a new genre, every two to four years. Every new master stood on the shoulders of the last.

"Jazz" was sometimes freely shared, but sometimes operated more like a secret society. Some masters intentionally created fake scores to be sold, hid their fingers, scolded musicians for teaching those outside of the community "the real deal", and shied away from writing method or theory books.

At the same time "Jazz" was a community music, where the black guy who washed cars for a living could have as deep an understanding and appreciation of the music as the white record exec who made his money by recording and selling it. Actually, sometimes the prior's understanding was deeper. One of the greatest jazz pianists to ever live drove a truck for a living by day, and reinvented piano by night.

People enjoyed "jazz" at concert halls, but they also enjoyed it at night clubs, dances, parties, house gatherings, jam sessions, speak easy's, and pretty much anywhere where black people gathered. Once upon a time, this community felt and enjoyed a deep ownership of "jazz". In this land, where they themselves were once owned, and now owned almost nothing, it was one of the few things that they could truly call their own.

Much of that ownership is now gone.

To be continued.



Michael Mwenso, Nabaté Isles and 154 others

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