

Blues People

Negro Music in White America

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*To My Parents . . .
the first Negroes I ever met*

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For another class of Negroes, the blues had to get to them via the big dance bands the rest of the country was listening to. They were committed to the "popular" form socially, and, as it turned out, emotionally as well. But the paradox of the black man's participation in American life could be pushed further: "The increasing popularity of swing arrangements on the Henderson model led to a general similarity of style in all the big bands, Negro and white. Goodman, Shaw, the Dorseys, Barnet, Hines, Calloway, Teddy Hill, Webb, were all approaching the same standards of proficiency. There is a terrifying record, an anthology called *The Great Swing Bands*, on which most of these bands are represented. If they are played without consulting notes or labels, *it is impossible to distinguish one from the other.*"²

So, many of the new citizens had got their wish. At that particular point in the development of big-band jazz, the Afro-American musical tradition seemed indistinguishable from the commercial shallowness of American dance music. With rhythm & blues, blues as an autonomous music had retreated to the safety of isolation. But the good jazzmen never wanted to get rid of the blues. They knew instinctively how they wanted to use it, *e.g.*, Ellington. The harder kinds of blues stayed in the old neighborhoods with the freedmen when the citizens moved out. Rhythm & blues was a popularization, in a very limited sense, of the older blues forms, and in many cases merely a commercialization, but it was still an emotionally sound music. Its very vulgarity assured its meaningful emotional connection with people's lives. It still intimated the existence of what I think to be a superior music: city, classic, or country blues. Its roots were still evident and functional. It held the blues line in the cities, and the radios gave it to the rural Negro as well.

² Hsio Wen Shih, *loc. cit.*, p. 72.

It is for want of a conscious critical sense and the intellectual powers of comparison and classification that the Negro has failed to create one of the great cultures of the world, and not from any lack of the creative impulse, nor from lack of the most exquisite sensibility and the finest taste.

(ROGER FRY, *Negro Sculpture*)

The blues occurs when the Negro is sad, when he is far from his home, his mother, or his sweetheart. Then he thinks of a motif or a preferred rhythm and takes his trombone, or his violin, or his banjo, or his clarinet, or his drum, or else he sings, or simply dances. And on the chosen motif, he plumbs the depths of his imagination. This makes his sadness pass away—it is the Blues.

(ERNEST ANSERMET, 1918)

When the swing style had run its course and most big-band jazz, except the blues-oriented bands in the Southwest and the Ellington organization (and the "traditional" or New Orleans jazz people still around), had become watered-down, slick "white" commercializations of Fletcher Henderson, the

“modern” people came on the scene. Thereby a more dreadful *separation* was instigated.

The blues people (as Ralph Ellison put it, “those who accepted and lived close to their folk experience”) had their continuum, but the middle-class Negroes had gotten “free” of all the blues tradition, except as it was caricatured in white swing style, or the pitiful spectacle of Carnegie Hall boogie woogie, or Hazel Scott playing Grieg’s *Concerto in A Minor* at Café Society. Assimilation, the social process they felt they must accept, always proposed that the enforced social scale of a people in American, or Western, society determined the value of that people’s culture. Afro-American musical tradition could hardly be considered a social (or economic) asset in American society. Autonomous blues could not reflect the mind of the middle-class Negro, even if he chose not to deny his folk origins.

Jazz demonstrated how the blues impulse, and thus Afro-American musical tradition, could be retained in a broader musical expression. Big-band jazz showed that this music could exist as a peculiarly American expression (and also that there was a commercial use for it), which included, of course, the broadened social perspective of the post-Depression, urban Negro. But as a true expression of an America which could be celebrated, as Whitman said, “in a spirit kindred to itself,” jazz could not be understood by a nation which had finally *lost* the Civil War by “placing private property above other values”—the result being such denials of human dignity as the legislation of inhumanity and oppression all over the South. As a folk expression of a traditionally oppressed people, the most meaningful of Negro music was usually “secret,” and as separate as that people themselves were forced to be. (“The old blues reminds me of slavery,” is the way many middle-class Negroes put it. And they could only think of slavery with the sense of shame their longing for acceptance constantly provided. Their Utopia could have no slaves nor sons of slaves.) But as the secret-

ness and separation of Negroes in America was increasingly broken down, Negro music had to reflect the growing openness of communication with white America. The ease with which big-band jazz was subverted suggests how open an expression Negro music could become. And *no* Negro need feel ashamed of a rich Jewish clarinetist.

By the forties the most contemporary expression of Afro-American musical tradition was an urban one, arrived at in the context of Negro life in the large industrial cities of America. And just as World War I and the Great Depression served to produce the “modern” Negro, so World War II produced even more radical changes within the psyche of the American black man. The Negro’s participation in World War II was much less limited than in World War I. Even though Negroes were still largely confined to “Negro units” of the Armed Forces, many of these units fought side by side with white units. There was even a fighter squadron composed exclusively of black pilots. The Negro’s role in this war could not be minimized as in World War I. World War II was an all out struggle, and the United States had to use all its resources. For this reason, more Negroes than ever were utilized in important positions or positions of authority. (According to NAACP figures, there were 404,348 Negroes as Army enlisted men in World War I, and 1,353 commissioned officers. In World War II, there were 905,000 Negroes as Army enlisted men and 8,000 officers. While the number of Negroes more than doubled, the number of commissioned officers increased almost *eight* times.) The sense of participation in the mainstream of the society was strengthened among all Negroes, not only the middle class. Dorie Miller, one of the first Negroes to die in the war, at Pearl Harbor, was almost canonized by Negroes all over the country. At my parents’ church in Newark, New Jersey, “Remember Dorie Miller” buttons which the church had purchased were passed out.

The sense of a world outside of America, first revealed to

Negroes by World War I, was reinforced by the even more international aspects of World War II. There were even blues sung about the war by the older singers or by "sophisticated" blues singers like Josh White. There was the song *Are You Ready?*, very popular in Negro communities, which extolled the virtue of heroism (by Negroes) in the war: "When the captain says, 'Attack' / There'll be no turning back / Are you ready? Are you ready to go?" There is also one portion of the song that has the prospective hero saying, "I'll batter that ratter till his head gets flatter." (It is interesting to note that the expression "Are you ready" was also being used a great deal among Negroes around that time to mean "Are you ready—to enter into white America?" The term of disparagement being, "He's not ready." For instance, "loud" or "vulgar" Negroes were termed by many self-appointed black guardians of white social propriety as "unready.")

The sense of participation and responsibility in so major a phenomenon as the World War was heightened for Negroes by the relatively high salaries they got for working in the various defense plants throughout the country. (The Pickatinny Arsenal in New Jersey was spoken of in reverent tones by Negroes in the area as a place where a black man could make "good money.") But this only served to increase the sense of resentment Negroes felt at the social inequities American life continued to impose upon them. This was especially true of the young men who returned from the war after having risked their lives for this country, only to find that they were still treated like subhumans, that it was only "their country" so long as they remained in "their places." Negroes who held good wartime jobs as civilians and whose incomes were much higher than ever before were infuriated to find that their increased economic status still couldn't buy them a way out of the huge Negro ghettos of the cities. Resentment and disgust with the *status quo* many times found expression in incidents of racial violence. As had happened during and after World War I, bloody riots broke out all over

the United States. The largest was probably the Harlem riot of 1943, when Negroes broke the windows of white business establishments in the area and menaced white policemen. Some of the riots, like the one in Cicero, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, began because the Negroes with their good money wanted to get homes as well. As thirty years before, there had been great migrations northward to the industrial centers. There were similar riots in Detroit, Chicago, and Newark. There were also social movements among Negroes which resulted in the formation of organizations to combat inequality, just as there had been around the time of World War I. One of the most effective of these was the 1941 March-On-Washington movement in which Negroes threatened to march on the capital if they were not included in the defense program. It was specifically because of this movement that President Roosevelt signed the executive order that was supposed to forbid discrimination by Government contractors. The committee that started the March-On-Washington movement later saw to it that the Fair Employment Practices Committee was set up. During the war, the Negro "secured more jobs at better wages and in a more diversified occupational and industrial pattern than ever before."¹

Between the thirties and the end of World War II, there was perhaps as radical a change in the psychological perspective of the Negro American toward America as there was between the Emancipation and 1930. In many respects the bridge into the mainstream of American society had been widened by the war and the resultant increase in general living standards of the black American. The Negro middle class had grown, and the percentage of Negroes completing high school and attending college had risen sharply. Many of the Negro veterans took advantage of the educational benefits offered under the G.I. Bill. In the South alone, for instance, "for the year 1933-34 only 19 per cent of the Negro children

¹ Robert C. Weaver, *Negro Labor* (New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1946), p. 306.

of high school age were in high schools.”² But by 1940, only six years later, the figure had risen to 35 per cent. And this was in the South; Frazier also points out that in 1940, “About twice the proportion of adult Negroes in the northern cities as in the southern cities have completed one to three years or four years of high school education.”³

In general, the war years and the period immediately after saw a marked resumption of the attacks by Negroes on legalized social and economic inequity in America. The period of economic chaos during the Depression thirties was cruelest for Negroes, and some of the fervor of anti-oppression feelings subsided among them, or at least was diverted, in their scramble to stay alive. But by the mid-forties that fervor had returned, and was reinforced by the Negro’s realization that he was in many ways an integral part of American society. What once could be excused, even by Negroes, as the result of dubious custom now came into focus more clearly as simple oppression. If the fruits of the society went to the “best qualified,” then all the Negro demanded was an equality of means. Given this equality politically and economically, there was only one America. And that was an America any citizen could aspire to. This was the psychological hypothesis which informed the Negro’s attitude toward America during the mid-forties. The middle class, as always, was more optimistic that such a hypothesis would be understood by white America. “Go to college or learn a trade”—these were the building blocks for the single society, and again because the black middle class confused legitimate political and economic desires with their shame at not already having attained these goals, they thought this meant they had to abandon history and the accreted cultural significance of the black man’s three hundred years in America. For the poor,

² E. F. Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York, Macmillan, 1957), p. 436

³ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

however, “culture” is simply how one lives, and is connected to history by habit.

Swing had no meaning for blues people, nor was it expressive of the emotional life of most young Negroes after the war. Nevertheless, by the forties it had submerged all the most impressive acquisitions from Afro-American musical tradition beneath a mass of “popular” commercialism. And most of America took the music to heart. There were swing radio programs throughout the country, the most popular swing musicians had their own radio shows and were almost as well known as movie stars. Big-band jazz, for all practical purposes, had passed completely into the mainstream and served now, in its performance, simply as a stylized reflection of a culturally feeble environment. Spontaneous impulse had been replaced by the arranger, and the human element of the music was confined to whatever difficulties individual performers might have reading a score. Philosophically, swing sought to involve the black culture in a platonic social blandness that would erase it forever, replacing it with the socio-cultural compromise of the “jazzed-up” popular song: a compromise whose most significant stance was finally catatonia and noncommunication. The psychological stresses of World War II and the unrealized weight of America’s promise in history could only be answered “popularly” with such moral sterility as would produce *Hut-Sut-Ralston*, *Chicory-Chic*, or *Marezy Doats*. As I said, catatonia and non-communication. The Negro’s conditional separation from the mainstream spared him.

When the moderns, the *beboppers*, showed up to restore jazz, in some sense, to its original separateness, to drag it outside the mainstream of American culture again, most middle-class Negroes (as most Americans) were stuck; they had passed, for the most part, completely into the Platonic citizenship. The willfully harsh, *anti-assimilationist* sound of

bebop fell on deaf or horrified ears, just as it did in white America. My father called me a "bebopper" in much the same way as some people say "beatnik" now. But the Negro middle class had wandered completely away from the blues tradition, becoming trapped in the sinister vapidness of main-line American culture.

Of the blues-oriented big bands of the thirties and early forties which I mentioned before as having resisted the commercialization and sterility of most big-band jazz, Count Basie's had the most profound effect on the young musicians of the forties who would soon be called "boppers." The Basie band was in the hard-swinging Southwestern blues tradition and was certainly less polished than the beautiful Ellington groups of the late thirties and early forties. But Basie's music offered a fresh, open method for contemporary reinterpretation of the Afro-American musical tradition—one that drew its strength from blues tradition, which automatically made it the antithesis of the florid vacuousness of the swing style.

". . . Basie . . . brought to jazz a style and body of music less varied than Ellington's, but one deeply rooted in folk art, powerful in its influence on jazz up to and including bebop.

"His [Basie's] forms used the riff, and its solo reply or obligato, in a manner based on old choral spirituals. The 'jump' rhythm, as he used it, also comes from a spirituals background, and in his hands it always has the human elasticity which it lacks in a manneristic treatment."⁴

Another important facet of Basie's music that had a great deal of influence on young musicians was the solo room the riff-solo structure provided. Basie's soloists, and especially the tenor saxophonists, could develop long melodically conceived solos based on the chords the riffs suggested. These solos seemed autonomous and possessed of a musical life of their own, even though at their most perfectly realized, their

⁴ *Jazz, A People's Music*, p. 206.

relationship to what the rest of the band was playing was unmistakable. In a sense the riff-solo structure was a perfect adaptation of the old African antiphonal vocal music as well as the Afro-American work song and spiritual. Tenor saxophonist Lester Young brought this kind of riff-solo relationship to its most profound form. He was also the first saxophonist to develop the saxophone as an autonomous instrument capable of making its own characteristic music. As I mentioned before, Coleman Hawkins' saxophone work, as impressive as it was, was really just an extension of the Armstrong style to another instrument. Hawkins was a saxophone virtuoso, but Young was an innovator. Young got the instrument away from the on-the-beat, eighth-note pattern that Hawkins utilized, and demonstrated with his light, flowing, gauzy tone how subtly beautiful the instrument could be. Also, as Ross Russell pointed out in an article on Lester Young and his relationship to the boppers, "Lester's insistence on the rhythmic priorities of jazz came as a tonic to a music which was drifting away from the drive of early New Orleans music. Lester did more than reaffirm these priorities. He replenished the stream polluted by the arrangers and thus made possible the even more complex rhythmic development of the bebop style."⁵

Since Lester Young, jazz has become, for the most part, a saxophone music. Hawkins played trumpet music and brought it to magnificent perfection on his own horn, but it was Lester Young who first committed jazz to using the saxophone as its most inspired instrument. The most important innovators since Young have been saxophonists; just as from Armstrong back into jazz history, the most important innovators were trumpet players.

Basie's music saved the big band as an honest musical form, and his uses of the small group provided a form for the young musicians of the forties. He initiated a kind of small

⁵ Ross Russell, "The Parent Style and Lester Young," in *The Art of Jazz*, p. 210.

group music that utilized all the most important harmonic and rhythmic discoveries the big band provided, but with the added flexibility and necessary solo virtuosity of the small band:

“Basie’s own piano style indicates the base for this music. It employs the full piano, but uses rich chords and full sounds sparingly, to punctuate and support the solo melodic lines. His large-band music also has this character, the full band often heard in many performances only for punctuation. . . . It was easy to move from this kind of music to an actual small-band music. A single trumpet, trombone and sax, if used together with a good knowledge of harmony, could sound chords as solid as a full-band choir. A single instrument, such as Basie’s piano or Young’s tenor, could riff as effectively as, and even more subtly than, a full band or full choir.”⁶

It is pretty obvious why the small band form was so attractive to the young jazz musicians of the forties. The tasteless commercialism of most of the swing bands had rendered them virtually incapable of serving as vehicles for any serious musical expression. The expanded sense of the communal expression so characteristic of Afro-American musical tradition which was found in the best large bands, certainly Basie’s and Ellington’s, had completely vanished in the swing period. Individual expression within this framework was also impossible. The autonomy, even anarchy, of the small band was not only an instinctive return to the older forms of jazz, but it must certainly have been a conscious attempt by these young musicians to secure some measure of isolation from what they had come to realize by now was merely cultural vapidness—the criterion of “equality of means” also provides for an objective evaluation of those means. It was the generation of the forties which, I think, began to consciously analyze and evaluate American society in many of that society’s own terms (and Lester Young’s life, in this

⁶ *Jazz, A People’s Music*, p. 213.

respect, was reason enough for the boppers to canonize him). And even further, this generation also began to understand the *worth* of the country, the society, which it was supposed to call its own. To understand that you are black in a society where black is an extreme liability is one thing, but to understand that it is the society that is lacking and is impossibly deformed because of this lack, *and not yourself*, isolates you even more from that society. Fools or crazy men are easier to walk away from than people who are merely mistaken.

The cultural breakdown attendant upon living in the large urban centers of the North and Midwest contributed importantly to the sense of objective cynicism which had evolved as a dominant attitude toward America among young Negroes in the forties—a sense that certainly provoked the question, “How come they didn’t drop that bomb on the Germans?” in many black neighborhoods. A culture whose rich sense of ironic metaphor produced the humor of “If you white, you all right/If you brown, hang around/But if you black, get back,” could now with equal irony propose as unofficial lyrics to one of the popular bebop originals during the forties, *Buzzy*, “You better get yourself a white girl/A colored girl ain’t no good.” Again, it was a change of perspective based on the assumption that all the terms of “successful adjustment” to the society had been at least understood by Negroes, and that the only barrier to complete assimilation into that society was the conditional parochialism that assimilation would demand. The “understanding” then only served to reinforce the cynicism. It was not that a Negro was uneducated or vulgar or unfit for the society which determined why he was not accepted into it, it was the mere fact that he *was* a Negro. No amount of education, taste, or compromise would alter that fact. Education, etc., was finally superfluous, given the basic term of “successful adjustment,” which was that you be a white man. The sociologists’ dogma of “progressive integration” into the society, based on successful application to the accomplishment of the fundamen-

tal prerequisites of worth in the society, becomes meaning less once those prerequisites are understood and desired, then possessed, and still the term of separation exists. This was one of the reasons so many college men from the black middle class went back into jazz during the thirties. They had met the superfluous requirements for acceptance into the successful elements of the society, but that acceptance was still withheld. Many of those musicians began to look upon jazz as "the Negro's business," but they overlooked the simple validity of Gresham's Law and the coming of the swing era.

The musicians of the forties, however, understood the frustration American society proposed for the Negro, *i.e.*, that the only assimilation that society provided was toward the disappearance of the most important things the black man possessed, without even the political and economic reimbursement afforded the white American. Swing demonstrates this again—that even at the expense of the most beautiful elements of Afro-American musical tradition, to be a successful (rich) swing musician, one had to be white. Benny Goodman was the "King of Swing," not Fletcher Henderson, or Duke Ellington, or Count Basie. There was, indeed, no way into the society on one's own terms; that is, that an individual be allowed to come into the society as an individual, or a group as an individual group, with whatever richness the value of local (social or ethnic) cultural reference could produce. The individuality of local cultural reference only reinforced separation from the society. Understanding this, the young musicians of the forties sought to make that separation meaningful, as their fathers had done before them, but with the added commitment that their conscious evaluation of the society would demand.

The cultural breakdown I have referred to was accomplished in most cases by the physical integration of Negroes and whites in many of the large cities of the North and Midwest. During the twenties and thirties, schools, movies, sport-

ing events, and to a certain extent, employment, all became areas where there could be an expanded social commerce between black and white America, and thus the various musical and entertainment fads that had originally come into existence as facets of Afro-American culture found popularity in mainstream American society. (To some extent, there has been this cross-fertilization of cultures since the time of the African slaves, but with the anonymity the social hierarchy enforced.) Even such a phenomenon as the Black Renaissance of the twenties depended upon a degree of social *leveling*, a leveling that enabled white Americans to understand what such a "Renaissance" was supposed to imply, and what is more important, that would allow the Negroes involved to explain what they meant by this "Renaissance." In the days of the slave society, for instance, a white man might have picked up a Negro song or dance or some unconscious element of speech, but it would have been absurd to suppose that he as master would be willing to listen to some slave explain why he was a "New Negro." The breakdown, or leveling, of the forties was even more extreme—if one can imagine the irony of white youth imitating a certain kind of Negro dress (the "zoot suit," which attained so much popularity during that decade, came "straight off Lenox Avenue"). Or even more ironic, the assumption by a great many young white Americans of many elements of a kind of Negro speech. "Bop talk" and in my own generation, "Hip talk" are certainly manifestations of this kind of social egalitarianism. But this leveling has implications more profound than egalitarianism.

Certainly a white man wearing a zoot suit or talking bop talk cannot enter into the mainstream of American society. More important, that white man does not desire to enter the mainstream (because all he would have to do is change clothes and start "talking right," and he would be easily reinstated). His behavior is indicative on most levels of a conscious nonconformity to important requirements of the

society (though the poor white boy in a really integrated neighborhood might pick up these elements of Negro culture simply as social graces within his immediate group). The white beboppers of the forties were as removed from the society as Negroes, but as a matter of choice. The important idea here is that the white musicians and other young whites who associated themselves with this Negro music identified the Negro with this separation, this nonconformity, though, of course, the Negro himself had no choice. But the young Negro musician of the forties began to realize that merely by being a Negro in America, one *was* a nonconformist.

The Negro music that developed in the forties had more than an accidental implication of social upheaval associated with it. To a certain extent, this music resulted from conscious attempts to remove it from the danger of mainstream dilution or even understanding. For one thing, the young musicians began to think of themselves as *serious* musicians, even artists, and not performers. And that attitude erased immediately the protective and parochial atmosphere of "the folk expression" from jazz. Musicians like Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk, and Dizzy Gillespie were all quoted at various times as saying, "I don't care if you listen to my music or not." This attitude certainly must have mystified the speak-easy-Charleston-Cotton-Club set of white Americans, who had identified jazz only with liberation from the social responsibilities of full citizenship. It also mystified many of the hobbyists, who were the self-styled arbiters of what Afro-American music should be. Most of the jazz critics and writers on jazz (almost all of whom, for obvious reasons, were white) descended on the new music with a fanatical fury. The young musicians were called "crazy" (which stuck in the new vernacular), "dishonest frauds," or in that slick, noble, patronizing tone that marks the liberal mind: "merely misguided." Critics like the Frenchman Hugues Panassie talked knowingly about "the heresy of bebop," saying that it simply wasn't jazz. Roger Pryor Dodge, one of the pioneer

jazz critics and historians, wrote in the pages of *The Record Changer*: "To sum up Bop and its derivatives, let us say that in spite of their own complicated development they function in essence as a music on a much lower level of musical significance than either early Dixieland or New Orleans. . . . In fact, let us say flatly that there is no future in preparation for jazz through Bop, or through any of those developments known as Cool and Progressive."⁷

For the first time critics and commentators on jazz, as well as critics in other fields, attacked a whole mode of Afro-American music (with the understanding that this attack was made on the music as music, and not merely because it was the product of the black American). The point is that because of the lifting of the protective "folk expression" veil from a Negro music, the liberal commentators *could* criticize it as a pure musical expression. And most of them thought it hideous. Even the intellectual attacked the music as "anti-humanistic"; poet and critic of popular culture Weldon Kees said of bebop: "I have found this music uniformly thin, at once dilapidated and overblown and exhibiting a poverty of thematic development and a richness of affectation, not only, apparently, intentional, but enormously self-satisfied." Kees then goes on to say, "In Paris, where Erskine Caldwell, Steinbeck, Henry Miller, are best-sellers and 'nobody reads Proust any more,' where the post-Picasso painters have sunk into torpor and repetition, and where intellectuals are more cynically Stalinized than in any other city in the world, bebop is vastly admired."⁸ A wild piece of sophistry!

But the characteristic criticism of bebop (and jazz fan magazines like *Downbeat* were so guilty in this regard, they have recently had to *re-review* classic bebop records by Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk, etc., and give them wild acclaim because their first reviews were so wrong-headed)

⁷ "Jazz: Its Rise and Decline," *The Record Changer*, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 9.
⁸ "Muskrat Ramble: Popular and Unpopular Music," *Partisan Review* (May, 1948), p. 622.

was voiced by art and jazz critic Rudi Blesh in the *Herald Tribune*: “. . . the irrelevant parts of bebop are exactly what they seem; they add up to no . . . unity . . . A capricious and neurotically rhapsodic sequence of effects for their own sake, [bebop] comes perilously close to complete nonsense as a musical expression . . . Far from a culmination of jazz, bebop is not jazz at all, but an ultimately degenerated form of swing, exploiting the most fantastic rhythms and unrelated harmonies that it would seem possible to conceive.”

It seems to me an even more fantastic kind of sophistry that would permit a white man to give opinions on how he thinks a black man should express himself musically or any other way, given the context of the liberal social organism, but under the canons of “art criticism,” this kind of criticism is obligatory. So then, if only by implication, bebop led jazz into the arena of *art*, one of the most despised terms in the American language. But, as art, or at least, as separated from the vertiginous patronization of the parochial term *folk art* (which often resulted in the lugubrious quotes with which I prefaced this chapter), the Negro music of the forties had pushed its way into a position of serious (if controversial) regard.

Socially, even the term bebop, which began merely as an onomatopoeic way of characterizing a rhythmic element of the music, came to denote some kind of social nonconformity attributable to the *general* American scene, and not merely to the Negro. Bebopper jokes were as popular during the forties as the recent beatnik jokes, and usually when these jokes were repeated in the mainstream American society, they referred to *white nonconformists* (or musicians, who were necessarily nonconformists) and not to Negroes. The bebop “costume,” which became the rage for “hip” or “hep” (then) young America, was merely an adaptation of the dress Dizzy Gillespie, one of the pioneers of bebop, wore. (And Dizzy’s dress was merely a personal version of a kind of fashionable Negro city dress.) Horn-rimmed glasses, a

beret, a goatee, and sometimes ridiculously draped suits in the manner of the zoot suit were standard equipment for the young bopper. (It may be not entirely irrelevant to note that nowadays the word *bop* is used by teen-agers to mean *fight*, or more specifically, a *gang fight*. The irony here, however, is that the term is used in this connection more by white teenagers, Negro gangs preferring the word *rumble*.)

What seem most in need of emphasis here are the *double* forms of assimilation or synthesis taking place between black and white American cultures. On one hand, the largely artificial “upward” social move, demanded by the white mainstream of all minorities, and the psychological address to that demand made by the black bourgeoisie, whereby all consideration of local culture is abandoned for the social and psychological security of the “main.” On the other hand, the *lateral* (exchanging) form of synthesis, whereby difference is used to enrich and broaden, and the value of any form lies in its eventual use. It is this latter form of synthesis (certainly available and actual, to varying degrees, since the first black man came into America) that became so important after World War II, and even more magnified after the Korean War. The point is that where one form of synthesis, which was actually assimilation, tended to wipe out one culture and make the other even less vital, the other kind of synthesis gave a local form to a general kind of nonconformity that began to exist in American (Western) society after World War II—a consideration I will come back to.

It is not strange that bebop should have met with such disapproval from older musicians, many of whom were still adjusting to the idea of “four even beats,” which characterized the best music of the swing era and delineated it from the accented off-beat (two-beat) music of earlier jazz. And even more alien were the rather “radical” social attitudes the younger players began to express. Parker, Monk, and the others seemed to welcome the musical isolation that historical

social isolation certainly should have predicated. They were called "cultists" by almost everyone who did not like the music, equating the bop dress with a specific form of quasi-religious indulgence; though if these same people had seen just an "average" Negro in New Jersey wearing a draped coat (of course *sans* the sophisticated "camp" of the beret, called "tam," and the window-pane glasses—used to assume an intellectual demeanor said, for three hundred years, to be missing from black Americans), they would have thought nothing of it. Socially, it was the young white man's emulation of certain of these Negro mores that made them significant in the mainstream of the society, since, as yet, the mainstream had no knowledge of bop as a music developed from older Negro music.

"By borrowing the principle of a two- and four-beat bar first from hymns and then from polkas and military marches, the American Negro made a sharp break with his African ancestors. However, his sense of rhythm was not completely at home in this rigid framework. An opposition arose between the container and the thing contained. Half a century after the birth of jazz, this opposition has not been smoothed away, and it probably never will be. The Negro has accepted 2/4 and 4/4 bars only as a framework into which he could slip the successive designs of his own conceptions . . . he has experimented with different ways of accommodating himself to the space between measure bars."⁹

Musically, the Negro's address to the West has always been in the most impressive instances lateral and exchanging. But the mode or attitude characterizing the exchange has always been constantly changing, determined, as I have tried to make clear, by the sum of the most valid social and psychological currents available to him. Given this hypothesis, the *contemporaneity* of the Negro's music in the context of Western cultural expression can be seen as necessary. Bebop, if anything, made this necessarily contemporaneous

⁹ *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, p. 210.

quality of Afro-American music definite and uncompromising, not because of any formal manifestoes (even the first recordings of the music were much behind the actual inception, due to the normal cultural lag as well as the recording ban of 1942-44 and the shortage of recording materials caused by the war), but because of a now more or less conscious attitude among these young jazzmen that what they were doing was different from what jazz players before them had done, and *separate* from the most popular jazzlike music of the day, which they frankly thought of as sterile and ugly. But the leaders of the changed jazz could still be looked at and placed, if one had the time, in terms of jazz tradition—and as logical, if not predictable, developers of that tradition. Gillespie has acknowledged his musical indebtedness to swing trumpeter Roy Eldridge (and, of course, to Armstrong) many times over. Charlie Parker is easily seen as an innovator whose dynamic and uninhibited comprehension of Lester Young's music made his own work possible. And Parker's modern placement of blues is as classic as any Negro's and at least as expressive as Bessie Smith's. What had changed was the address, the stance, the attitude.

"Bebop rhythm differs formally from swing rhythm, because it is more complex and places greater emphasis upon polyrhythmics. It differs emotionally from swing rhythm, creating greater tension, thereby reflecting more accurately the spirit and temper of contemporary emotions."¹⁰

There has been much talk about the influence of contemporary Western classical music on the Negro jazz musicians of the forties. It is already admitted, with this hypothesis, that jazz by the forties had had its influence on contemporary classical music as well. Composers like Stravinsky, Milhaud, and many lesser men produced works in which the influence of jazz or African rhythms was quite readily apparent. But I think that the influence of European and Euro-American classical music during the forties was indirect, and

¹⁰ Ross Russell, "Bebop," quoted in *The Art of Jazz*, p. 189.

not consciously utilized in the music of the boppers, though by the fifties (especially in the work of certain white jazzmen) and in our own time, many of these influences are conscious, sometimes affected. What seems to me most important about the music of the forties was its reassertion of many "non-Western" concepts of music. Certainly the re-establishment of the hegemony of polyrhythms and the actual subjugation of melody to these rhythms are much closer to a purely African way of making music, than they are to any Western concepts (except, as I mentioned, in the conscious attempts of certain contemporary classical composers like Stravinsky to make use of non-Western musical ideas).

Bebop also re-established blues as the most important Afro-American form in Negro music by its astonishingly contemporary restatement of the basic blues impulse. The boppers returned to this basic form, reacting against the all but stifling advance artificial melody had made into jazz during the swing era. Bop melodies in one sense were merely more fluent extensions of the rhythmic portions of the music. Many times it was as if the rhythmic portions of the music were inserted directly into the melodic line, and these lines were almost rhythmic patterns in themselves. In bop melodies there seemed to be an endless changing of direction, stops and starts, variations of impetus, a jaggedness that reached out of the rhythmic *bases* of the music. The boppers seemed to have a constant need for deliberate and agitated rhythmic contrast.

Concomitant with the development of these severely diverse rhythms, changes also were made in the basic functions of the traditionally non-solo instruments of the jazz group. Perhaps the biggest innovation was the changed role of the drummer. The steadiness of the beat was usually maintained in pre-bop jazz groups by the bass drum (either two or four beats to the bar). Then the bebop drummer began to use his top cymbals to maintain the beat, and used the bass drum for occasional accents or thundering emphases. The

top cymbal was hit so that the whirring, shimmering cymbal sound underscored the music with a *legato* implication of the desired 4/4 beat. This practice also made it necessary for the string bass to carry the constant 4/4 underpinning of the music as well, and gave the instrument a much more important function in the jazz rhythm section than it had ever had before. Above the steadiness and almost perfect *legato* implied by the cymbals' beat and augmented by the bass fiddle, the other instruments would vary their attack on the melodic line, thereby displacing accents in such a way as to imply a polyrhythmic effect. The good bop drummer could also, while maintaining the steady 4/4 with the cymbal, use his left hand and high-hat cymbal and bass drum to set up a still more complex polyrhythmic effect.

There is a perfect analogy here to African music, where over one rhythm, many other rhythms and a rhythmically derived "melody" are all juxtaposed. One recording of Belgian Congo music¹¹ features as its rhythmic foundation and impetus an instrument called the *boyeke*, which is actually a notched palm rib about four feet long which is scraped with a flexible stick to produce a steady rhythmic accompaniment. It is amazing how closely the use of this native African instrument corresponds to the use of the top cymbal in bebop. Even the sounds of the instruments are fantastically similar, as is the use of diverse polyrhythms above the basic beat. The function of the *drone* in many non-Western musics is also quite similar. But as Wilder Hobson pointed out, ". . . the blues may originally have consisted merely in the singing, over a steady, percussive rhythm, of lines of variable length, the length being determined by what phrase the singer had in mind, with equally variable pauses (the accompanying rhythm continuing) determined by how long it took the singer to think up another phrase."¹² And I think this consideration, while certainly pertinent to all Negro music, is an

¹¹ *Ekonda, tribal music of the Belgian Congo* (Riverside RLP 4006).

¹² *American Jazz Music* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1939), p. 36.

especially valuable idea when analyzing recent developments in the jazz of the sixties, which depends so much on the innovations and re-evaluations of bebop.

Although it would seem now that bop's rhythmic conceptions were its most complete innovations, during the forties many people who were unimpressed or disgusted with the "new" music seemed to be mystified most by its harmonic ideas. Actually the most "daring" harmonic re-evaluations in jazz are the ones that are going on at the present time, although to be sure, bebop provided a totally fresh way of thinking about jazz harmony. The boppers began to abandon the traditional practice of improvising or providing variations on a melodic theme. Instead, they began to play their variations on the chords on which the melody was based, usually creating entirely new melodies, or sometimes they merely used the original melody as the bass notes for a new set of chords, and improvised a countermelody. For these reasons many bop "originals" were really rephrased versions of popular songs like *Indiana*, *I Got Rhythm*, *Honeysuckle Rose*, *Cherokee*, etc.

"... the origin of the harmonic variation which has gradually dominated jazz is [not] difficult to trace within the music; like the rhythmic changes . . . it comes from the blues. Longer ago than we know (and probably ever shall know), playing the blues could mean freely improvising in an harmonic frame. And this is true whether the soloist is aware of an implicit harmonic frame or not, whether he uses one chord per chorus (or just one thump), two, three, or whatever, and whether he limits himself to 'regular' eight-, twelve-, or sixteen-bar choruses or lets inspiration dictate chorus length. It was evident that a man could take this conception and apply it to any chord and chorus structure—whether it came from his grandfather or the radio."¹³

The pianist's function in bebop was changed almost as

¹³ Martin Williams, "Extended Improvisation and Form: Some Solutions," *Jazz Review* (December, 1948), p. 15.

radically as the drummer's. Because of the increased dominance of the cymbal and the string bass as maintainers of the steady rhythm (especially the latter), the bop pianist could refrain from supplying strict rhythm lines with his left hand and develop a much more complex and flowing right-hand line. The pianist also could "feed" the soloist chords, solidifying the bop group harmonically. This practice was, in effect, much like the role Count Basie as pianist had assumed with most of his groups. (Basie's efforts helped move jazz piano away from the older "stride" style with its heavy insistence on an almost guitar-like left hand. Later Earl Hines was able to develop a piano style utilizing the long, fluent "horn" line, which was developed even further by pianists like Teddy Wilson and Art Tatum, all preparing the way for Bud Powell and the rest of the bebop pianists.)

I have already discussed some of the reasons *why* bebop developed, but *how* it developed, in some kind of social and historical sense, might also be interesting, though, I am convinced, it is not nearly as important as the first consideration. It is only about twenty years since the first news of a "new" kind of jazz literally turned the jazz world around. And even though the innovators like Parker, Gillespie, Monk, were unknown to large audiences while their music was developing, their influence on musicians, even in the early forties, was enormous. How the music developed and how the musicians who were eventually associated with it came together have been the subjects of many disputes for almost as long as the music itself has existed. In just twenty years, facts have become obfuscated by legend and opinion, and there is no clear account of how the various heroes of bebop did come together. Perhaps the most familiar and stereotyped version is the one André Hodeir repeated:

"Around 1942, after classical jazz had made its conquests, a small group used to get together every night in a Harlem night club called Minton's Playhouse. It was made up of several young colored boys who, unlike their fellow musicians

no longer felt at home in the atmosphere of 'swing music.' It was becoming urgent to get a little air in a richly decked-out palace that was soon going to be a prison. That was the aim of trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, pianist Thelonius Monk, guitarist Charlie Christian (who died before the group's efforts bore fruit), drummer Kenny Clarke, and saxophonist Charlie Parker. Except for Christian, they were poor, unknown, and unprepossessing; but Monk stimulated his partners by the boldness of his harmonies, Clarke created a new style of drum playing, and Gillespie and Parker took choruses that seemed crazy to the people who came to listen to them. The bebop style was in the process of being born."¹⁴

It sounds almost like the beginnings of modern American writing among the emigrés of Paris. But this is the legend which filled most of my adolescence. However, as one of the innovators himself has put it: "It's true modern jazz probably began to get popular there [Minton's], but some of these histories and articles put what happened over the course of ten years into one year. They put people all together in one time in one place. I've seen practically everybody at Minton's, but they were just there playing. They weren't giving any lectures."¹⁵

At any rate, Parker came to New York from Kansas City, where he had last been playing with the Jay McShann band, one of the blues-oriented Southwestern bands in the early forties. He had already been through the city earlier with the McShann band, and it was then that he started playing around a few Harlem clubs, principally Monroe's Uptown Club. But in 1942, "Bird" went with the great Earl Hines band as a tenor man. This band during those years included at one time or another Dizzy Gillespie and Benny Harris on trumpets; Budd Johnson and Wardell Gray, tenors; Sarah Vaughan as a second pianist and vocalist; along with Billy

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.

¹⁵ Thelonius Monk, as quoted by Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life* (New York, Dial, 1961), p. 195.

Eckstine, Benny Green, trombonist, and Shadow Wilson on drums. It was one of the first large bands to have a legitimately "boppish" accent. But the first real bop orchestra was the big band organized by Billy Eckstine in 1944, which included at one time or another Dizzy Gillespie, Fats Navarro, Miles Davis, Kenny Dorham, trumpets; Gene Ammons, Dexter Gordon, Lucky Thompson, tenor saxophones; Charlie Parker, alto; Leo Parker, baritone; John Malachi, piano; Art Blakey, drums; Tommy Potter, bass; arrangements by Budd Johnson, Tadd Dameron, Jerry Valentine; Sarah Vaughan and Billy Eckstine, vocals. Eckstine also played valve trombone. Almost all of these musicians played important roles in the development and popularization of bebop. And the Eckstine band demonstrated quite indelibly that bop could be scored, and scored for a large orchestra, and that the music was not merely a faddish affectation, but a serious and important musical language.

If bebop was an extreme, it was the only kind of idea that could have restored any amount of excitement and beauty to contemporary jazz. But what it perpetrated might make one shudder. Bebop was the *coup de grâce*, the idea that abruptly lifted jazz completely out of the middle-class Negro's life (though as I have pointed out, the roots of this separation were as old as the appointment of the first black house servant). He was no longer concerned with it. It was for him, as it was for any average American, "deep" or "weird." It had nothing whatsoever to do with his newer Jordans. And as I mentioned, the music by the mid-forties had also begun to get tagged with that famous disparagement *art* (meaning superfluous, rather than something that makes it seem important that you are a human being). It had no "function." "You can't dance to it," was the constant harassment—which is, no matter the irrelevancy, a lie. My friends and I as youths used only to emphasize the pronoun more, saying, "You can't dance to it," and whispered, "or

anything else, for that matter." It might not be totally irrelevant, however, to point out that the melody of one of Charlie Parker's bebop originals, *Now's the Time*, was used by blues people as the tune of an inordinately popular rhythm & blues number called *The Hucklebuck*, which people danced to every night while it was popular until they dropped. No function, except an emotional or aesthetic one—as no Negro music had had a "function" since the work song. I am certain *Ornithology*, a popular bebop original of the forties, would not be used to make a dance out of picking cotton, but the Negroes who made the music would not, under any circumstances, be willing to pick cotton. The boogie woogies that grew, and were "functional" in the house parties of the new black North were no more *useful* in any purely mechanical sense than bebop. But any music is functional, as any art is, if it can be put to use by its listeners or creators. A man might be right in thinking that bebop was useless to help one clear the west 40 (though I cannot see why, except in terms of one's emotional proclivities); nor was it really good to wear dark glasses and berets if one wanted to work in the post office or go to medical school. But the music was a feast to the rhythm-starved young white intellectuals as well as to those young Negroes, uncommitted to the dubious virtues of the white middle class, who were still capable of accepting emotion that came from outside the shoddy cornucopia of popular American culture.

In a sense the term *cultists* for the adherents of early modern jazz was correct. The music, bebop, defined the term of a deeply felt nonconformity among many young Americans, black and white. And for many young Negroes the irony of being thought "weird" or "deep" by white Americans was as satisfying as it was amusing. It also put on a more intellectually and psychologically satisfying level the traditional separation and isolation of the black man from America. It was a cult of protection as well as rebellion.

The "romantic" ornamentation of common forties urban Negro dress by many of the boppers (and here I mean the young followers of the music, and not necessarily the musicians), they thought, served to identify them as being neither house niggers nor field niggers. Granted, it was in a sense the same need for exoticism that drove many young Negroes into exile in Europe during these same years, but it was also to a great extent a deep emotional recognition by many of these same Negroes of the rudimentary sterility of the culture they had all their lives been taught to covet. They sought to erect a meta-culture as isolated as their grandparents', but issuing from the evolved sensibility of a modern urban black American who had by now achieved a fluency with the socio-cultural symbols of Western thinking. The goatee, beret, and window-pane glasses were no accidents; they were, in the oblique significance that social history demands, as usefully symbolic as had been the Hebrew nomenclature in the spirituals. That is, they pointed toward a way of thinking, an emotional and psychological resolution of some not so obscure social need or attitude. It was the beginning of the Negro's fluency with some of the canons of formal Western nonconformity, which was an easy emotional analogy to the three hundred years of unintentional nonconformity his color constantly reaffirmed.

The overemphasized, but still widespread, use of narcotics, not only among musicians and those similarly influenced but among poorer Negroes as well, should thus become understandable. Narcotics users, especially those addicted to heroin, isolate themselves and are an isolated group within the society. They are also the most securely self-assured in-group extant in the society, with the possible exception of homosexuals. Heroin is the most popular addictive drug used by Negroes because, it seems to me, the drug itself transforms the Negro's normal separation from the mainstream of the society into an advantage (which, I have been saying, I think it is anyway). It is one-upmanship of the

highest order. Many heroin addicts believe that no one can be knowledgeable or "hip" unless he is an addict. The terms of value change radically, and no one can tell the "nodding junkie" that employment or success are of any value at all. The most successful man in the addict's estimation is the man who has no trouble procuring his "shit." For these reasons, much of the "hip talk" comes directly from the addict's jargon as well as from the musician's. The "secret" bopper's and (later) hipster's language was the essential part of a cult of redefinition, in terms closest to the initiated. The purpose was to isolate even more definitely a cult of protection and rebellion. Though as the bare symbols of the isolated group became more widely spread, some of the language drifted easily into the language of the mainstream, most of the times diluted and misunderstood. (There is a bug killer on the market now called "Hep.")

The social and musical implications of bebop were extremely profound, and it was only natural that there should be equally profound reactions. One of these reactions, and one I have never ceased to consider as socially liable as it was, and is, musically, was the advent and surge to popularity of the "revivalists."

"At about the same time that the first little bop bands were causing a sensation on Fifty-Second Street, New York suddenly became conscious of New Orleans music and found itself in the middle of a 'New Orleans revival.' In doing research for the first historical study of jazz, *Jazzmen*, published by Harcourt, Brace and Company in 1939, the editors, Frederic Ramsey, Jr., and Charles Edward Smith, with the help of jazz enthusiast William Russell, had found an elderly New Orleans trumpet player named Bunk Johnson working in a rice field outside of New Iberia, Louisiana. There had been a series of semiprivate recordings of Bunk with a New Orleans band and they finally decided to bring Bunk to New York. On September 28, 1945, a seven-piece

New Orleans band led by Johnson opened at the Stuyvesant Casino, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. . . . If the writers and critics who were responsible for bringing him to New York had simply advertised that here was a New Orleans band which represented the jazz style of perhaps thirty years before, there would have been no trouble. . . . Instead the writers, not all of them, but a very clamorous group of them, said very openly that this was the last pure jazz band, the only one playing 'true jazz' and that newer styles were somehow a corruption of this older style."¹⁶

Bunk Johnson's "rediscovery" was only one development in the growth of the revivalist school. Lu Watters and his Yerba Buena Band, Bob Crosby and his Bobcats, and the many Eddie Condon bands in New York playing in residence at Condon's own club were already popular in the late thirties. By the forties the popularity of "Dixieland" bands was enormous at colleges throughout the country, or at any of the other places the young white middle class gathered. The "revived" Dixieland music was a music played by and for the young white middle class. It revived quite frankly, though perhaps less consciously, the still breathing corpse of minstrelsy and blackface. Young white college students trying to play like ancient colored men sounded, if one knew their intention, exactly like that, *i.e.*, like young white college students trying to play like ancient colored men.

". . . the Castle Band began to record Jelly Roll Morton's arrangements; the Frisco Jazz Band imitated Lu Watters; the early Bob Wilber band (associated with Scarsdale High School) copied King Oliver . . ." ¹⁷ The Tailgate Jazz Band even began to imitate the Yerba Band's imitations of the old Oliver Band. There were Dixieland revivalist groups all over the country, thriving like athletic antique dealers. A few of the old Negro musicians like Johnson and Kid Ory were re-recorded or rediscovered, but for the most part

¹⁶ *Jazz: A History of the New York Scene*, pp. 219-20.

¹⁷ *The Story of Jazz*, p. 153.

Dixieland was a kind of amateur “white jazz” that demonstrated more than anything the consistency of the cultural lag.

Whole bodies of criticism grew up around the senseless debate about “which was the real jazz.” Jazz criticism had grown more respectable around the early forties; also, there had been a great deal more legitimate research into the origins and diverse developments of the music, though much of it was still in the “gee whiz” or hobby stage. Many of the men who wrote about jazz were middle-class white men who “collected hot” (the term for collecting jazz records), and there is no body of opinion quite as parochial as the hobbyist’s. Quite a few “little magazines,” devoted to “collecting hot” and dedicated to the proposition that no one under fifty could play “the real jazz,” sprang up all over the country. Usually there were only two or three kinds of features in these magazines: articles castigating the “moderns” (which many times meant swing musicians); articles praising obscure Negroes who had once played second cornet for the Muskogee, Oklahoma, Masons; or discursive investigations of the “matrix numbers” of records issued by defunct record companies. Many of the critical writers in these magazines canonized the cultural lag by writing about jazz as if they were trying to discredit Picasso by reconstructing the Pyramids: “In a sense, the New Orleans revival demonstrated that a good portion of the white world had caught up with and was enjoying—frequently to the point of active participation—an imitation of the music that the American Negro had played twenty to thirty years earlier.”¹⁸

By the forties the “mixed group” had become a not uncommon phenomenon. Jelly Roll Morton had recorded with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings in the twenties, and during the thirties Benny Goodman had various mixed groups,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

and a few of the other white swing bands had also hired single Negro musicians or arrangers. Also, perhaps, there were more informal sessions where both white and black musicians blew. In the forties, however, these sessions grew very numerous, especially in New York. And many of the small bop recording groups were mixed, not to mention the groups that played around Fifty-Second Street. In fact, by the time the recording ban was lifted, and more bebop records could be heard, a great many of the most significant releases featured mixed groups. To a certain extent these mixed groups reduced the cultural lag somewhat, and many white musicians by the mid-forties were fluent in the new jazz language.

By 1945, the first really bop-oriented big white band had formed under clarinetist Woody Herman, and by 1946, Herman had one of the best big bands in the country. The band was made up both of swing musicians, liberated swing musicians, and after its break-up and remodeling, many young white beboppers. Right up until the fifties many of the best young white musicians in the country had played in the various Herman “Herds.” Men like Chubby Jackson, Neal Hefti, Ralph Burns, Bill Harris, Flip Phillips, Billy Bauer, Dave Tough (a swing retread), Stan Getz, Terry Gibbs, Urbie Green, Red Mitchell, Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, Jimmy Giuffre, all passed through these Herman bands, and they were among the white musicians who had grown impressed with, and then fluent in, bebop phrasing.

Herman’s bands played a useful mixture of wide open swing style with varying amounts of solid boppish accents. They had good soloists and in Neal Hefti and Ralph Burns, better than competent, though sometimes overambitious, arrangers. However, there were two other large white bands coming into their own around this same period, whose music in some ways was much like the Herman band (some of the same musicians played in all three bands), though they later began to use arrangements and compositions that were

even more ambitious than anything the Herman band wanted to do. These two bands, Stan Kenton's and Boyd Raeburn's, were the central figures (though Kenton for much longer) in the ascendancy of a new reaction, *progressive jazz*. Again, this was a music created for the most part by young white musicians, many of whom had had a great deal of experience in the large white swing organizations of the forties. Unlike Dixieland, this music did not conjure up any memories of minstrelsy or blackface; in fact, quite the opposite, progressive jazz was probably the "whitest" music given the name *jazz* to appear up until recent times. It was a music that was at its best vaguely similar to what contemporary classical composers were doing. It was a self-consciously "intellectual" and intellectualized music, whose most authentic exponent was Stan Kenton, with compositions like Bob Graettinger's *Thermopylae*, *City of Glass*, and *House of Strings*. (Raeburn's music, for all his ambitions toward a "serious popular music," as titles like *Boyd Meets Stravinsky*, *Yerxa* or *Dalvatore Sally* would indicate, still sounded quite a bit like bucolic mood music; "Mickey Mouse music" is a musicians' term for it.)

Not so strangely, the term *progressive jazz*, as it became more used in America, came vaguely to denote almost any jazz after swing except Dixieland. That is, any jazz that Americans could call, if they had an opportunity, "weird" or "deep." In fact, even today there are many people who speak knowingly of the progressive jazz musician, to mean, I suppose, anyone who does not play swing, "traditional" jazz, or Dixieland. In an ironic sense, Kenton's ideas were not much different from Paul Whiteman's; even the term *progressive* carries much the same intention of showing how much "advance" jazz had made since its cruder days when only Negroes played it. (Also, any term that denotes progress or advance, even in the arts, can be used quite comfortably in the post-Renaissance West. Kenton was at least as smart as Whiteman.) So two very apparent reactions resulting

from the emergence of bebop, revivalist Dixieland and progressive jazz, both the inventions of white musicians, shot off violently in two extremely opposite directions. One, toward the reproduction of a vanished emotional field, whose validity was that it removed its participants from the realization of the sterility and nonproductiveness of their contemporary emotional alignments; the other, an attempt to involve un-serious minds in a *Kitsch* of pseudo-serious artistic "experience." (Some of Raeburn's records were packaged in jackets with imitation "surrealistic" covers, with explanations of the "symbols" on the back of the jackets. The symbols were numbered for easy identification.) Both were essentially "college boy" musics, since it grows increasingly more difficult as one gets older to delude oneself about one's legitimate emotional proclivities. But the polarity and grim significance of these two "movements" is quite clear with only the advantage of twenty years' history. In either case, these twin reactions involved the white middle class; and the peculiar nature of each reaction seems as formal as would a political reaction caused by some similarly disrupting source (as bebop, and the social orientation concomitant with it). However, the *fact* of bebop and the attitudes that had engendered it could not be affected by white middle-class reactions to them. The Negroes these reactions could affect were just as outraged by the "meaningless" music of the forties as their white doubles. Stan Kenton was a big favorite at Howard University, though a young pre-medical student once told me how terribly hostile he thought Charlie Parker was.

What was called "cool jazz" cannot be placed simply as "reaction," that is, not as simply as progressive and Dixieland can be. In many ways cool was a legitimate style of jazz music, if the definition of the music can be widened a bit to include obvious innovators and masters who might not be ordinarily identified as members of the "cool school."

Cool was not the obvious reaction progressive and Dixieland represented, but in its final use as a "public" music, it did serve to obscure the most precious advances Parker and the other boppers had made. Except for individuals like Miles Davis, who is always cited as the innovator of the post-bop cool approach, most of the musicians readily associated with the style were white musicians who abandoned (or didn't properly understand) Parker's rhythmic innovations, and put to dubious use his melodic and harmonic examples. The recordings that Davis made in 1949 and 1950 (*Israel, Boplicity, Jeru, Godchild, Move, Venus De Milo, Budo, Darn That Dream*) with two groups of nine musicians that included Kai Winding, Lee Konitz, Gerry Mulligan, Max Roach, J. J. Johnson, John Lewis, Kenny Clarke (only Davis, Mulligan, and Konitz played on both sessions), are generally looked upon as the beginning of the cool style. All of the men named, with the exception of the drummers Roach and Clarke, both of whom were bop innovators, went on as leaders in the cool movement to one degree or another. These recordings also gave popularity to a new term, *chamber jazz*, and made the cool sound ubiquitous in a couple of years.

Miles Davis played with Parker very often, and is featured on several of the best records Parker ever made. At that time, Davis was still trying to find his own voice, first of all by discovering that he wasn't Dizzy Gillespie. (An obvious analogy is Gillespie's finding out he wasn't Roy Eldridge before he found his own voice.) Davis' rhythmical freedom and phrasing mark him as a bopper, even though he was regarded as a sort of leader of the cool movement. But his splendid lyricism and almost solipsistic tone, played almost exclusively in the middle register, put him very close to the cool sound that identified the new style. Also, his penchant for playing popular ballads followed a practice the other cool instrumentalists were very fond of. But Davis always made his versions of any popular ballad exclusively

his own in terms of the emotional weight he would give them, while most of the other instrumentalists identified with the style would play the ballad straight, seeking to make only the improvised choruses sound completely extemporaneous.

Most of the reed men associated with the cool style owed more allegiance to Lester Young, having forgotten or not having been interested, it seemed, in what Charlie Parker had done. And in copying Young's melodic approach, they also went straight back to his rhythmic attack as well. What was prized most of all in Young was his completely relaxed, anti-frenetic approach, as well as the languid, evanescent, almost alto-like tone that made his tenor saxophone so singular during the thirties. The majority of the cool instrumentalists never sought to further define Young's melodic and rhythmic accomplishments. The uses they made of them, with the cautious abandon that some fluency with bop accents supplied, were generally overly predictable and flat.

The nucleus of arrangers (Gil Evans, Mulligan, Carisi) and musicians Davis used for the 1949-50 recording dates (and also in an ill-fated band that made a couple of club dates) were out of the Claude Thornhill band, a white dance band. In fact, Evans was one of the first arrangers to do big-band arrangements of any of Charlie Parker's compositions. And there is small doubt that Davis did, and does, have a deep admiration for the purple lushness of the Thornhill sound, as can be readily attested by many of his own records, especially those on which Evans is the arranger. But for Davis, his small vibratoless tone was only a means rather than an end. He had a deep connection to the basic blues impulse, and he could insinuate more blues with one note and a highly meaningful pause than most cool instrumentalists could throughout an entire composition.

Perhaps for the reasons I mentioned in Chapter III, the cool timbre was much more suitable for most white musicians, who favored a "purity of sound," an artifact, rather

than the rawer materials of dramatic expression. Davis, too, for all his deep commitment to the blues, often seems to predicate his playing on the fabrication of some almost discernible object. And in this he seems closer to Bix Beiderbecke than Louis Armstrong. There were other Negro musicians before Davis who seemed as deeply persuaded by the beauty of the “legitimate” artifact-like sound, rather than by the classic open stridency of most jazz instrumentalists. Lester Young comes to mind immediately, but men like Teddy Wilson, Benny Carter, Johnny Hodges, seem obvious examples, also the many Negro saxophonists influenced by Young in Davis’ own generation. Davis himself became the most copied trumpet player of the fifties, and because of the apparent simplicity of his method, his style is even now one of the most ubiquitous in jazz.

The period that saw bebop develop, during and after World War II, was a very unstable time for most Americans. There was a need for radical readjustment to the demands of the postwar world. The riots throughout the country appear as directly related to the psychological tenor of that time as the emergence of the “new” music. Each response a man makes to his environment helps make a more complete picture of him, no matter what that response is. The great interest in the Muslim religion by Negro musicians in the forties (many of them actually changed their names to Muslim ones) adds to the image of the Negro in America at that time as much as our knowing how many more Negroes were able to buy homes in Scarsdale adds to that image. Knowing that a Negro musician felt like changing the name of a popular song from *Honeysuckle Rose* to *Scrupple From the Apple*, or that he would call one of his compositions *Klactoveedsedstene* helps clarify his attitudes and even further, the attitudes of a great many Negroes responsible to the same set of emotional alternatives.

The “harshness” and “asymmetry” of bebop was much closer to the traditional Afro-American concept of music

than most of its detractors ever stopped to realize. But it is easy to see that the “harshness and asymmetry” of the music (or ideas) of one period might seem relatively mild and regular in another, maybe only a few years later. If *Livery Stable Blues* seemed crude and unsophisticated to Paul Whiteman, it is relatively easy to see why Stan Kenton might think the same of most bebop and seek a similar solution. Though by Kenton’s time and during the years when cool jazz came into vogue in America, the lateral exchange of cultural reference between black and white produced an intercultural fluency that might have made such a misunderstanding, or lack of feeling, on Mr. Kenton’s part impossible. It was the Negro’s fluency with the technical references of Western music that made bebop (and all jazz, for that matter) possible, and it was certainly a fluency with these same superficial references of Negro music that produced, with whatever validity, the white cool style (or any jazz that white musicians played). What was not always attained in the case of the white jazz musician was the fluency of attitude or stance. And as I have said before, Negro music is the result of certain more or less specific ways of thinking about the world. Given this consideration, all talk of technical application is certainly after the fact.

Cool jazz is not as clearly a “white style” as Dixieland or progressive if Lester Young and Miles Davis can be placed within the definition. Yet Lee Konitz, a leader of the cool school and one of the most gifted white musicians to play jazz, cannot be linked to Davis or Young, except in the most superficial ways. In the case of Davis and Konitz, even though they have played together on several occasions and are together responsible for some of the best cool music (the eight recordings made in 1948-49), their basic approaches are entirely dissimilar, despite the fact that they both, within the demands of each instrument, favor light, pure tones with almost no vibrato. There the resemblance ends. John Lewis, the pianist and leader of the Modern Jazz Quartet, and

pianist Lennie Tristano, a white leader of one of the most exciting branches of the cool style, are both considered to be equally involved with this style; however, it would be difficult to find two more dissimilar instrumentalists and composers. Even though both men have shown deep interest in extended forms and the use of contrapuntal techniques in jazz, their methods are very different. Lewis, for all his persistence in drenching his compositions with the formal dicta of European music, is one of the most moving blues pianists in jazz, while it is hard to think of Tristano playing a blues.

During the late forties and right up until the middle fifties, the cool style was very popular. Long-playing albums by many of the musicians associated with the cool style (or "West Coast jazz," as it came to be called, with the great popularity of musicians like Shorty Rogers, Gerry Mulligan, and Dave Brubeck on the Coast) sold fantastically all over the country. The soft, intimate sound and regular rhythms of such groups, along with their tendency to redo popular ballads like *Spring Is Here* or *My Funny Valentine* with just a vague bop accent, made them listened to everywhere by white and black college students and young-men-on-the-way-up who were too sophisticated to listen to Dixieland. Also, many of the cool stylists maintained a healthy attitude toward the innovations that progressive jazz was supposed to have made, *contrapuntal jazz* and *jazz fugue* became standard terms that could be applied to a music whose name had once been a transitive verb unutterable in polite society.

There are many important analogies that can be made between the cool style and big-band swing, even about the evolution of the terms. *Swing*, the verb, meant a simple reaction to the music (and as it developed in verb usage, a way of reacting to anything in life). As it was formalized, and the term and the music taken further out of context, *swing* became a noun that meant a commercial popular

music in cheap imitation of a kind of Afro-American music. The term *cool* in its original context meant a specific reaction to the world, a specific relationship to one's environment. It defined an attitude that actually existed. To be *cool* was, in its most accessible meaning, to be calm, even unimpressed, by what horror the world might daily propose. As a term used by Negroes, the horror, etc., might be simply the deadeningly predictable mind of white America. In a sense this calm, or stoical, repression of suffering is as old as the Negro's entrance into the slave society or the captured African's pragmatic acceptance of the gods of the captor. It is perhaps the flexibility of the Negro that has let him survive; his ability to "be cool"—to be calm, unimpressed, detached, perhaps to make failure as secret a phenomenon as possible. In a world that is basically irrational, the most legitimate relationship to it is nonparticipation. Given this term as a consistent attitude of the Negro, in varying degrees, throughout his life in America, certain stereotypes might suddenly be reversed. The "Steppin-fecht" rubric can perhaps be reversed if one but realizes that given his constant position at the bottom of the American social hierarchy, there was not one reason for any Negro, ever, to hurry.

The essential irony here is that, like *swing*, when the term *cool* could be applied generally to a vague body of music, that music seemed to represent almost exactly the opposite of what *cool* as a term of social philosophy had been given to mean. The term was never meant to connote the tepid new popular music of the white middle-brow middle class. On the contrary, it was exactly this America that one was supposed to "be cool" in the face of.

The cool style, like arranged big-band swing, inundated America and most Negro musicians (bop or swing) who did not master the cool approach. (Actually, it did finally have a narrower definition, since even Miles Davis went into a virtual eclipse of popularity during the high point of the

cool style's success. In part, this might have been caused by Davis' personal problems, but I read in print more than a few times during the early fifties that Davis was "a bad imitation" of a white West Coast trumpeter, Chet Baker. If anything, the opposite was true; but Baker fitted in more closely with the successful syndrome of the cool. His barely altered renditions of popular ballads in a cracked, precious middle register were the rage of the mid-fifties, and Baker sang as well.) Like commercial swing, the music created a term of success and fame for its best-known stylists, who were inevitably white, Miles Davis and John Lewis were not the "Kings of Cool," as Basie and Ellington were not the "Kings of Swing"; instead, quite predictably, the "kings" during the height of the cool were white musicians like Gerry Mulligan, Chet Baker, Dave Brubeck, or Paul Desmond. In fact, the Dave Brubeck Quartet, which featured Paul Desmond on alto saxophone, was perhaps the perfect fifties cool success story. Brubeck, a pianist, had studied (though quite briefly, I believe) with the contemporary French composer Darius Milhaud, and it was he who, to a large extent, popularized the idea of using fugues, rondoes, and other such consciously affected pickups from European music. This was a natural for college-bred audiences who liked a little culture with their popular music. (A student at the University of Oregon suggested in an article in the *Northwest Review*, quoted in the *Jazz Review*, that Brubeck also played the alma mater of any college he happened to be visiting, "when the audience is beginning to drag.") Finally, Brubeck and his music formally entered the American mainstream when his picture appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine. Jazz had at last made it up the river from New Orleans (with the help of Paul Whiteman, Benny Goodman, and Dave Brubeck), right into the waiting room of Henry Luce's office.

Perhaps the Korean War, like the other two "major" wars before it, helped bring about changes in jazz. I am almost

certain that the fifties took on their own peculiar foreboding shape because of the grim catalyst of the Korean War and the emotional chaos that went with it. The Negro could not help but be affected; neither could his music. Cool was not a style that could outlast the fifties, and as in the case of commercial swing, most Negro musicians were never committed to it anyway. But the Japanese soldier in the racially significant Hollywood film had been changed to a North Korean or Chinese soldier, and now he asked the Negro soldier in the integrated Armed Forces questions, too. One question in the movie *Steel Helmet* was, "Black boy, why you fight this war . . . you can't even sit in the front of the bus?" And soldier James Edwards' answer was pitifully inadequate.

Korea and what historians are calling "the legacy of the cold war" proposed even harsher realities for America than World War II. The greater part of these are just now, in the 1960's, beginning to be felt in something like their real measure. But even in the mid-fifties America was a changed place from what it had been only a decade and a half before. Two hot wars and wedged between them and coming after them, a cold one, plus the growing significance of the atomic bomb as a force that had suddenly transformed the world into a place that was "no longer a series of frontiers, [but] a community which would survive or perish by its own hand" were only the impersonal parts of an American's experience of the contemporary world that had changed him and his society perhaps radically in the fifteen or so short years since 1940. The heroic wars "to make the world safe for democracy" had dwindled grimly into "police actions," the nature of which many American soldiers did not find out until they were captured. Even the term *democracy* was blackened by some ambitious, but hideously limited, men who thought that it meant simply "anti-communism." These phenomena are all legacies of the cold war era; the fifties were their spawning ground, and the

generation who would have to be fully responsible for them was not yet fully grown. Perhaps they were in college, as I was, listening to Dave Brubeck.

The Supreme Court was trying to answer James Edwards' interrogator, with its 1954 decision, to integrate the schools "with all deliberate speed." Now in 1963, nine years later, integration has not been fully accomplished, and in a great many cases where it has been, there is mere token integration. But the internal strife in the United States between black and white has at least been formally acknowledged as a conflict that might conceivably be legislated out of existence, though again it is the sixties that must test the validity of this desperate hypothesis. The fifties was a period of transition, in many aspects, of beginnings and endings. For one thing, Charlie Parker died in February of 1955, at thirty-five.

Perhaps it is good to use that mid-point of the fifties as an arbitrary point where the counterreaction called "hard bop" began to be noticed. An analogy between this development and the ending of the swing era by the beginnings of bebop in the forties is obvious, though the situation was not as extreme as it had been in the forties.

Amidst the cellos, flutes, fugues, and warmed-over popular ballads of the cool, there was evident, mostly among Negro musicians, a conscious, and many times affected, "return to the roots," as it has been called so often: "It was Horace Silver as musical director of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers who first announced it, of course, and obviously he and the rest had turned to church and gospel music and the blues as sources of renewed inspiration. If these men were reluctant to listen to King Oliver and Bessie Smith, they heard Ray Charles and Mahalia Jackson with a kind of reverence."¹⁹

The hard-bop reactions were loudest in the East, *i.e.*,

¹⁹ Martin Williams, "The Funky-Hard Bop Regression," *The Art of Jazz*, p. 233.

New York, which led quite predictably to the new style's being called "East Coast Jazz," to place it within the immediate reach of the press agents and jazz critics. *Funky* (a word with as dubious a place in polite society as *jazz*) became the treasured adjective, where once *cool* had been, with *soul* (as a quality of expression, probably found only in Negroes wearing Italian suits) following closely behind. The harsher, rawer, more classic timbres of older jazz were restored. Most of the melodies in hard-bop tunes were very simple, however, founded usually on some basic riff, usually much less complex than the jagged lines of the classic bop melodies. Pianists like Silver played fewer chords than the bop pianists, though their style was impossible without the innovations of bop pianist Bud Powell. But the soloist's dependence on chords was, if anything, made greater. The hard boppers sought to revitalize jazz, but they did not go far enough. Somehow they lost sight of the important ideas to be learned from bebop and substituted largeness of timbre and quasi-gospel influences for actual rhythmic or melodic diversity and freshness. The hard bop groups utilized rhythms that are amazingly static and regular when compared to the music of the forties. (And merely calling tunes *Dis Heah* or dropping *g*'s from titles is not going to make the music more compelling.)

Hard bop has by now become little more than a style. The opportunities for complete expression within its hardening structure and narrowly consistent frame of emotional reference grow more limited each time some mediocre soloist repeats a well-chewed phrase or makes of the music a static insistence rather than an opening into freer artistic achievement. It has become a kind of "sophistication" that depends more on common, then banal, musical knowledge, instead of truth or meaning suddenly revealed. What results, more times than not, is a self-conscious celebration of cliché, and an actual debilitation of the most impressive ideas to come out of bebop. One has the feeling, when listening to

the most popular hard-bop groups of the day, of being confronted merely by *a style*, behind which there is no serious commitment to expression or emotional profundity.

But what is most important about hard bop and the shape it took as a reaction to the growing insipidities the cool style had pushed on jazz is the change of stance which had to occur in order for the Negro musician to be able to react as he did. Again, this change, becoming apparent in the mid-fifties, had further implications that are only just now beginning to be fully understood. "Soul" music, as the hard-bop style is often called, does certainly represent for the Negro musician a "return to the roots." Or not so much a return as a conscious re-evaluation of those roots. Many times this re-evaluation proved as affected and as emotionally arid as would a move in the opposite direction. The shabbiness, even embarrassment, of Hazel Scott playing "concert boogie woogie" before thousands of white middle-class music lovers, who all assumed that this music was Miss Scott's invention, is finally no more hideous than the spectacle of an urban, college-trained Negro musician pretending, perhaps in all sincerity, that he has the same field of emotional reference as his great-grandfather, the Mississippi slave. Each seems to me merely burlesque, or cruder, a kind of modern minstrelsy.

The direction, the initial response, which led to hard bop is more profound than its excesses. It is as much of a "move" within the black psyche as was the move north in the beginning of the century. The idea of the Negro's having "roots" and that they are a valuable possession, rather than the source of ineradicable shame, is perhaps the profoundest change within the Negro consciousness since the early part of the century. It is a re-evaluation that could only be made possible by the conclusions and redress of attitude that took place in the forties. The feelings of inferiority which most Negroes had and still have to a certain extent were brought to their lowest valence up until the present time in the

forties. The emergence then of a psychological stance based on the emotional concept of "equality of means" meant that finally all the "barriers" against useful existence within the American society could be looked at by Negroes as being only the inventions of white Americans. The form and content of Negro music in the forties re-created, or reinforced, the social and historical alienation of the Negro in America, but in the Negro's terms. The Negro jazz musician of the forties was *weird*. And the myth of this weirdness, this alienation, was sufficiently important to white America for it to re-create the myth in a term that connoted not merely Negroes as the aliens but a *general* alienation in which even white men could be included. By the fifties this alienation was seen by many Negro musicians not only as valuable, in the face of whatever ugliness the emptiness of the "general" culture served to emphasize, but as necessary. The step from *cool* to *soul* is a form of social aggression. It is an attempt to place upon a "meaningless" social order, an order which would give value to terms of existence that were once considered not only valueless but shameful. *Cool* meant non-participation; *soul* means a "new" establishment. It is an attempt to reverse the social roles within the society by re-defining the canons of value. In the same way the "New Negroes" of the twenties began, though quite defensively, to canonize the attributes of their "Negro-ness," so the "soul brother" means to recast the social order in his own image. White is then not "right," as the old blues had it, but a liability, since the culture of white precludes the possession of the Negro "soul." Even the adjective *funky*, which once meant to many Negroes merely a stink (usually associated with sex), was used to qualify the music as meaningful (the word became fashionable and is now almost useless). The social implication, then, was that even the old stereotype of a distinctive Negro smell that white America subscribed to could be turned against white America. For this smell now, real or not, was made a valuable characteristic of

"Negro-ness." And "Negro-ness," by the fifties, for many Negroes (and whites) was the only strength left to American culture.

This form of cultural arrogance was certainly useful in defining the emergence of the Negro as an autonomous human factor within American society. But it could not sustain its weight as a means to artistic expression without an added profundity that would give it a fluency within the total aspect of the society. This strength had to be returned, as it were, to the culture that had given it shape. Its secrecy had been a form of protection and incubation; but for it to remain secret or exclusive at this point in American social history would make it as sterile as the culture from which it was estranged. Secrecy had been the strength of the Afro-American culture when it was dependent largely on folk sources for its vitality, but now it had to be reinterpreted in terms of the most profound influences in the open field of *all existing* cultures, or it would retreat to the conditional meaningfulness of the folk or the final meaninglessness of the popular. Hard bop did the latter.

The continuous re-emergence of strong Negro influences to revitalize American popular music should by now be pretty well understood. What usually happened, as I have pointed out, was that finally too much exposure to the debilitating qualities of popular expression tended to lessen the emotional validity of the Afro-American forms; then more or less violent reactions to this overexposure altered their overall shape. This was true as far back as the lateral and reciprocal influences Negro spirituals had on the white hymns they were superficially modeled upon. And these reactions almost always caused valid changes in the forms themselves. The result was a deliberately changing, constantly self-refining folk expression, the limbs of which grew so large that they extended into the wider emotional field to which all Western art wants constantly to address itself. The

Negro music of the thirties whose dilution resulted in commercial swing had already set its ends past that of a strict folk music. In fact, as jazz began to take on an autonomous shape and could define within this shape the native materials of its earlier forms as folk music (that is, jazz could do with the shout, the work song, the blues, what Bartok did with Hungarian gypsy music, but with the added advantage of a constant natural reference), it eliminated, at each re-evaluation, elements which might *only* have use in folk music. The fact that popular ragtime, Dixieland, swing, etc., were not Negro musics is important. They were the debris, in a sense, of vanished emotional references. The most contemporary Negro music to result afterward had absolutely nothing to do with this debris, except as a reaction to it. The uses to which these diluted musics put the Afro-American forms were not historical, but cultural. Negro big-band jazz of the thirties is related to the development of bebop, but neither music has much to do with commercial swing. Swing simply does not exist in the history of the development of Negro music. Each dilution was simply a phenomenon based on cultural limitations (or excess) and, as such, was only related directly to the cultural elements which provided for its existence. Fletcher Henderson was not *responsible* for the Ipana Troubadours, just as Charlie Parker was not responsible for Boyd Raeburn.

When hard bop began to some extent to redefine the materials of Negro music, the general emotional climate of American society was certainly in need of some kind of revitalization. The catatonia of the forties popular song was plainly evident; analogies could be made to almost all areas of American life. Jazz had, with its conscious address to that broader emotional field of which I spoke, necessarily divided itself, as does all Western art, into strata, just as we can demonstrate the different levels into which classical music is divided. There is a different kind of prehension necessary, even expected, to enjoy music as different as

that of Dukas and Mozart. (That one music demands the fuller application of intellectual faculties for its enjoyment seems to me apparent.) Most cool jazz, for instance, was, almost in its intentions, a *middle-brow* music. Hard bop, though it sought to erase the strong middle-brow flavor that the jazz of the fifties had developed, provided nevertheless, because of its musical and extra-musical affectations and its conspicuous “exclusiveness,” almost a group of anthems for another kind of American middle brow—a black one. But bop had moved in an opposite direction, just as the music of Armstrong and Ellington had moved toward the considerations and responsibilities of high art.

When the purely popular, purely “undignified,” music of America, its mainstream folk music, had almost completely calcified with even more drastic dilutions of swing style, it was a contemporary blues form that was utilized to revive it, and not the middle-brow extensions hard bop and cool had become. The general public had no use for them, in many cases did not even know they existed (except that a form of the latter was used as background music for many television programs).

Rhythm & blues, the urban contemporary expression of blues, was the source of the new popular revitalization; rock 'n' roll is its product. And it is, ask any “average” American mother, a music for “low brows.” But an Elvis Presley seems to me more culturally significant than a Jo Stafford.

Take out the papers and the trash
Or you don't get no spending cash.
If you don't scrub the kitchen floor
You ain't gonna rock and roll no more.

(From *Yakety Yak*, words and music by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller)

To be sure, rock 'n' roll is usually a flagrant commercialization of rhythm & blues, but the music in many cases

depends enough on materials that are so alien to the general middle-class, middle-brow American culture as to remain interesting. Many of the same kinds of cheap American dilutions that had disfigured popular swing have tended to disfigure the new music, but the source, the exciting and “vulgar” urban blues of the forties, is still sufficiently removed from the mainstream to be vital. For this reason, rock 'n' roll has not become as emotionally meaningless as commercial swing. It is still raw enough to stand the dilution and in some cases, to even be made attractive by the very fact of its commercialization. Even its “alienation” remains conspicuous; it is often used to characterize white adolescents as “youthful offenders.” (Rock 'n' roll also is popular with another “underprivileged” minority, *e.g.*, Puerto Rican youths. There are now even quite popular rock-'n'-roll songs, at least around New York, that have some of the lyrics in Spanish.) Rock 'n' roll is the blues form of the classes of Americans who lack the “sophistication” to be middle brows, or are too naïve to get in on the mainstream American taste; those who think that somehow Melachrino, Kostelanetz, etc., are too lifeless.

The reference hard bop (and an attendant “blues renaissance,” wherein many of the older blues singers were re-recorded and in some cases, restored to a good measure of popularity) made to the older forms of Afro-American music and the implications of such a cultural reconstruction became even more significant by the end of the fifties and the beginning of the new decade. This was so despite the fact that hard bop, sagging under its own weight, had just about destroyed itself as the means toward a moving form of expression. But there were a few musicians, like saxophonists John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins and drummer Elvin Jones, who had been identified closely with this style, who emerged in the sixties working in new areas, though their way had been prepared to a great extent by the “funky” style.

Sonny Rollins, for instance, was one of the leaders of the hard bop school, but he has gone into a music that is much more profound, though the seeds of it are definitely to be found in his earlier "funky" style. John Coltrane played with the Miles Davis Quartet and Quintet during the middle and late fifties, when for all Davis' lyricism, his groups were constantly identified as hard boppers; he also played with Thelonius Monk's "perfect" group. But Coltrane, too, has moved off into a music quite unconnected, and almost antithetical, to the work of most of the hard groups. Elvin Jones, also associated with many leading hard groups, has worked for the past couple of years in Coltrane's new bands, contributing greatly to the excellence and freshness of their music. Pianist Thelonius Monk, one of the bebop innovators, also re-emerged in the late fifties as an uncompromising individualist whose real contributions to jazz were just beginning to be really understood.

With these men, there also emerged in the sixties a younger group of musicians who, along with Rollins, Coltrane, etc., began to answer some of the weighty questions of the fifties and even to propose some new ones of their own. These young musicians I will call, for lack of a more specific term, "avant-garde." It has been said many times that this generation of Americans (my own generation) was born during a Depression, grew up during World War II, and grew to maturity in college or elsewhere during the Korean War. A major catastrophe for each decade of their lives. And now that they are moving toward a fourth decade, an even more violent catastrophe is within easy reach of reality.

The musicians of this generation are old enough to have been impressed as adolescents by the Negro music of the forties, and they are certainly old enough to have understood the reactions, like Dixie, progressive, cool, and hard bop, that have, to varying degrees, served to obscure the valuable legacies of that music. They are mature enough

now to have produced a highly articulate musical language that makes profound use of the vital music of the forties. In doing this, they are also re-emphasizing the most expressive qualities of Afro-American musical tradition while also producing an American music which has complete access to the invaluable emotional history of Western art. Pianist Cecil Taylor and alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman are the most important of these recent innovators.

What these musicians have done, basically, is to restore to jazz its valid separation from, and anarchic disregard of, Western popular forms. They have used the music of the forties with its jagged, exciting rhythms as an initial reference and have restored the hegemony of blues as the most important basic form in Afro-American music. They have also restored improvisation to its traditional role of invaluable significance, again removing jazz from the hands of the less than gifted arranger and the fashionable diluter (though no doubt these will show up in time).

Coleman's music is that of an improvising soloist; like Charlie Parker, he is a brilliant soloist, and his purely extemporaneous statements cannot be reproduced by any notation. Taylor's music seems to lend itself more to notation—in fact, he has recently scored quite a few works for larger groups. But even though the music is arranged, there is still the feeling of freedom and unmeasured excitement that only the musician who has developed as an extemporaneous artist can produce.

While the music, with its contemporary dependence on older forms, is in many ways similar to the music of the forties, there are also reinterpretations of the uses of formal musical definitions, though these are not necessarily based on any *theoretical* re-evaluations (only perhaps after the fact). The music has changed because the musicians have changed. And it would be absurd to suppose (as many jazz hobbyists have done) that anything else could be the case. There is no basis in social, psychological, economic, cultural,

or historical fact for assuming that Ornette Coleman or Cecil Taylor should be trying to play jazz that sounds like the Fletcher Henderson orchestra:

“The boppers were tired of the same old chords and explored new ones. But essentially, most of them were still playing a riff style; it is just that their kind of riffs were built on a new approach to harmony—but not really so new as one thought. Again the best of them leaned on the melodic background of the blues for a melodic form and unity of mood . . .”²⁰

By now, even the fresh uses to which the boppers put riff-based chords have been exploited and re-exploited to staleness. The hard boppers, if anything, increased to an even greater degree the improvising jazz musician’s reliance on “changes” (recurring chords). Also, the “tonal centers” of this music, especially as influenced by pseudo-gospel harmonies, are so predictable and flat that in this context even the gifted improvisers began to sound dull. What Coleman and Taylor have done is to approach a kind of jazz that is practically nonchordal and in many cases atonal (meaning that its tonal “centers” are constantly re-defined according to the needs, or shape and direction, of the particular music being played, and not formally fixed as is generally the case—what composer George Russell has called “pan-tonality”). Their music does not depend on constantly stated chords for its direction and shape. Nor does it pretend to accept the formal considerations of the bar, or measure, line. In a sense, the music depends for its form on the same references as primitive blues forms. It considers the *total area* of its existence as a means to evolve, to move, as an intelligently shaped musical concept, from its beginning to its end. This total area is not merely the largely artificial considerations of bar lines and constantly stated chords, but the *more* musical considerations of rhythm, pitch, timbre, and melody. All these are shaped by the emo-

²⁰ Martin Williams, as quoted in *The Jazz Life*, p. 180.

tional requirements of the player, *i.e.*, the improvising soloist or improvising group.

“. . . chords have always helped the jazz player to shape melody, maybe to an extent that he is now over-dependent on the chord. Ornette seems to depend mostly on the overall tonality of the song as a point of departure for melody. By this I don’t mean the key the music might be in. His pieces don’t readily infer key. They could almost be in any key or no key. I mean that the melody and the chords of his compositions have an overall sound which Ornette seems to use as a point of departure. This approach liberates the improviser to sing his own song really, without having to meet the deadline of any particular chord. Not that he can’t be vertical and say a chord if he chooses.”²¹

The implications of this music are extraordinarily profound, and the music itself, deeply and wildly exciting. Music and musician have been brought, in a manner of speaking, face to face, without the strict and often grim hindrances of overused Western musical concepts; it is only the overall musical intelligence of the musician which is responsible for shaping the music. It is, for many musicians, a terrifying freedom.

These young musicians also rely to a great extent on a closeness of vocal reference that has always been characteristic of Negro music. Players like Coleman, Coltrane, and Rollins literally scream and rant in imitation of the human voice, sounding many times like the unfettered primitive shouters. Charlie Parker also had to restore this quality to jazz timbre after the legitimatizing influences of commercial swing.

Along with the music that men like Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor are making, there are a few older musicians who are also helping to revitalize the jazz of the late fifties and early sixties. Two of these, as I have mentioned be-

²¹ George Russell, “Ornette Coleman and Tonality,” *Jazz Review* (June, 1960), p. 9.

fore, are John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins. In many ways the music these two men are making falls in direct contrast to the music of younger men like Coleman and Taylor. But its emotional directness and fresh reconsideration of all the elements of its musical existence have had an effect on jazz very similar to that of the younger musicians.

If Coleman's music can be called nonchordal, John Coltrane's music is fanatically chordal. In his solos, Coltrane attacks each chord and seems to almost want to separate each note of the chord (and its overtones) into separate entities and suck out even the most minute musical potential. With each instance, Coltrane redefines his accompanying chords as kinetic splinters of melody, rather than using the generalized block sound of the chord as the final determinant of his music's direction and shape.

Rollins, a marvelously gifted improviser, has recently shown signs of abandoning a purely chordal concept of playing, combining the overall direction Coleman, Taylor, and the other younger musicians have taken with his own ability to utilize both thematic, or melodic, variation as well as harmonic variation in shaping his music. He has also recently brought together a group with two former members of Ornette Coleman's original band: trumpeter Don Cherry and drummer Billy Higgins. The results have been extremely gratifying, and show how indelible an impression Ornette Coleman's music has made—though Rollins has made his own highly original appropriations of it.

In a sense, men like Coltrane and Rollins (especially Coltrane) are serving as this new generation's private assassins—demonstrating, perhaps, the final beauties to be extracted from purely chordal jazz, and in so doing, making it almost impossible for the music to continue to be committed to free emotional statement without coming to grips with the ideas that Coleman, Taylor, and some others have put forward.

There is another body of music emerging recently that seems to have developed out of the same concepts that pro-

duced progressive jazz. It is called "third stream jazz," and it is a music that utilizes as blatantly as possible some of the formal ideas and techniques of contemporary classical music. As one example, trumpeter Don Ellis, one of the musicians associated with third stream, has recently recorded a piece written by the contemporary German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. Composers such as Gunther Schuller have also contributed to the music, as well as such jazzmen as Jimmy Giuffre and John Lewis. Lewis and his Modern Jazz Quartet have even recently recorded with the Beaux Arts String Quartet, and Lewis once performed some of his own compositions with the Stuttgart Symphony Orchestra. Older classical forms are utilized in many of Lewis' compositions with varying degrees of success. Most of the time, his ambitious "serious" music, such as *European Windows*, which was played with the Stuttgart Orchestra, or the ballet score *Original Sin*, has seemed to me very close to the lifeless string music one is apt to hear in modern elevators. However, as I have said, Lewis himself can be a deeply moving pianist, and his group, the Modern Jazz Quartet, has been responsible for some of the most exciting jazz of the last few years. But Lewis' attempts to "combine" classical music and jazz have more often than not been frightening examples of what the *final* dilution of Afro-American musical tradition might be.

The attempt itself is an old clutch, and one that immediately revives memories of progressive jazz. And, of course, there are people who are lumping the efforts of men like Coleman and Taylor into the third-stream category in much the same way as bop was called progressive jazz. There is no doubt in my mind that the techniques of European classical music can be utilized by jazz musicians, but in ways that will not subject the philosophy of Negro music to the less indigenously personal attitudes of European-derived music. Taylor and Coleman know the music of Anton Webern and are responsible to it intellectually, as they would

be to any stimulating art form. But they are not responsible to it emotionally, as an extra-musical catalytic form. The emotional significance of most Negro music has been its separation from the emotional and philosophical attitudes of classical music. In order for the jazz musician to utilize most expressively any formal classical techniques, it is certainly necessary that these techniques be subjected to the emotional and philosophical attitudes of Afro-American music—that these techniques be *used* not canonized. Most third stream jazz, it seems, has tended to canonize classical techniques rather than use them to shape the expressive fabric of a “new” jazz music. The controversy over whether this music is jazz or not seems foolish and academic, since the genre does not determine the quality of the expression. However, in the case of third stream jazz the quality of the expression has been, in most instances, unimpressive.

The “artist’s life” has many definite social and historical connotations in the West. In Europe an artist or Bohemian is tolerated, even looked up to as a person of mysterious but often valuable capabilities, but in America no such admiration (nor even an analogous term of toleration) exists. The artist and his fellow-traveler, the Bohemian, are usually regarded in this society as useless con-men and as such, are treated as enemies. (If the political tone of contemporary American democracy can be perhaps too easily summed up as “anti-communist,” its cultural tone, with equal vagueness, can be called “anti-artistic.”) The complete domination of American society by what Brooks Adams called the economic sensibility, discouraging completely any significant participation of the imaginative sensibility in the social, political, and economic affairs of the society is what has promoted this hatred of the artist by the “average American.” This phenomenon has also caused the estrangement of the American artist from American society, and made the formal culture of the society (the diluted formalism of the

academy) anemic and fraught with incompetence and unreality. It has also caused the high art of America to be called “an art of alienation.” The analogy to the life of the Negro in America and his subsequent production of a high art which took its shape directly from the nature and meaning of his own alienation should be obvious. This consideration (dealt with consciously or instinctively) certainly reshaped certain crucial elements of the American art of the last two decades, and gave a deeply native reference to the direction of American Bohemianism, or artist’s life, of the fifties.

It was a lateral and reciprocal identification the young white American intellectual, artist, and Bohemian of the forties and fifties made with the Negro, attempting, with varying degrees of success, to reap some emotional benefit from the similarity of their positions in American society. In many aspects, this attempt was made even more natural and informal because the Negro music of the forties and again of the sixties (though there has been an unflinching general identification through both decades) was among the most expressive art to come out of America, and in essence, was possessed of the same aesthetic stance as the other high art of the period.

But the reciprocity of this relationship became actively decisive during the fifties when scores of young Negroes and, of course, young Negro musicians began to address themselves to the formal canons of Western nonconformity, as formally understood refusals of the hollowness of American life, especially in its address to the Negro. The young Negro intellectuals and artists in most cases are fleeing the same “classic” bourgeois situations as their white counterparts—whether the clutches of an actual black bourgeoisie or their drab philosophical reflectors who are not even to be considered a middle class economically. The important development, and I consider it a socio-historical precedent, is that many young Negroes no longer equate intelligence

or worth with the tepid values of the middle class, though their parents daily strive to uphold these values. The "New Negroes" produced a middle-class, middle-brow art because despite their desired stance as intellectuals and artists, they were simply defending their right, the right of Negroes, *to be* intellectuals, in a society which patently denied them such capacities. And if the generation of the forties began to understand that no such "defense" or explanation was necessary, the young Negro intellectuals of the fifties and sixties realize—many of them perhaps only emotionally—that a society whose only strength lies in its ability to destroy itself and the rest of the world has small claim toward defining or appreciating intelligence or beauty. Again, this address to Western nonconformity must be predicated on a fluency with, an understanding of, those canons, those attitudes; a fluency whose accomplishment is as available to analysis, and the results of this analysis as real, as the Negro's accomplishment of musical fluency with European instruments, which eventually resulted in the emergence of jazz.

The jazz of the forties was given its classic shape in Harlem, where most Negro musicians played. And traditionally, one had to go to the Negro ghetto in whatever city to hear the most legitimate and contemporary Afro-American music. The musicians, also, generally lived in those ghettos (which is what I meant earlier by "a natural reference" to the folk origins of the music). But Charlie Parker, during the later forties and fifties, used to frequent New York's Greenwich Village, traditionally a breeding ground of American art and the open-air fraternity house of a kind of American Bohemianism. Parker, in fact, at one point, was living in the village with a young Negro painter, Harvey Cropper, and in exchange for painting lessons, "Bird" was supposed to teach Cropper how to play the tenor saxophone. Many of Parker's closest acquaintances were painters and writers, and he moved in that society with relative ease. Dizzy

Gillespie has said about Parker: "No, he wasn't a big conversationalist about music . . . But he would talk. Oh, he was a great talker . . . about any subject you'd want to talk about. Like philosophy, or if you wanted to talk about art he'd talk with you. Or if you wanted to talk about History—European History, African History, or Middle Ages, or Stone Age History. Oh, he knew about current events and things like that."²²

The jazz of the late fifties and sixties, though it has been given impetus and direction by a diversity of influences, is taking shape in the same areas of nonconformity as the other contemporary American arts. In Greenwich Village, for instance, a place generally associated with "artistic and social freedom," based on willing (though sometimes affected) estrangement from the narrow tenets of American social prescription, young Negro musicians now live as integral parts of that anonymous society to which the artist generally aspires. Their music, along with the products of other young American artists seriously involved with the revelation of contemporary truths, will help define that society, and by contrast, the nature of the American society out of which these Americans have removed themselves.

The feeling of rapport between the jazz of the forties, fifties, and sixties with the rest of contemporary American art is not confined merely to social areas. There are aesthetic analogies, persistent similarities of stance that also create identifiable relationships. And these relationships seem valid whether they are found in the most vital contemporary American poetry or the best new American painting. The younger musicians sense this as much as, say, the younger writers.

The writers who have been called the "Beat Generation" (usually with great bitterness and imprecision) have gained much notoriety because of their very vocal attachment to jazz. Jack Kerouac's characters are always talking about

²² Felix Manskleid, "Diz On Bird," *Jazz Review* (January, 1961).

one jazz musician or another, and he has prefaced his book of poetry, *Mexico City Blues*, with the note: "I want to be considered a jazz poet/blowing a long blues in an afternoon jam/session on Sunday. I take 242 choruses;/my ideas vary and sometimes roll from chorus/to chorus or from halfway through a chorus to halfway into the next."²³ Also, poet Allen Ginsberg has spoken, perhaps somewhat ingenuously, of Kerouac's work exhibiting an authentic "bop prosody." And in the same vein, Ornette Coleman's recent recording, *Free Jazz*, perhaps his most important recording to date, has for its cover a reproduction of a Jackson Pollock painting; Coleman has also stated that he thought his playing had some rapport with Pollock's work.

Even the critical language of the Establishment has been very recently used almost interchangeably when talking about diverse areas of contemporary Western art. Thus it is that a somewhat reactionary *Downbeat* jazz critic can call the music of Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane "anti-jazz," apparently appropriating the term from reactionary critics in other fields—the terms in those other fields being "anti-theater," usually referring to the plays of Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, etc.; and "anti-painting," usually meaning the work of painters like Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, etc. It is also these general aesthetic empathies and the flattening of the distinction between the intents of contemporary American art and contemporary jazz that led one middle-brow "literary" magazine to refer to Coleman's music as "abstract" and "beatnik jazz." (But then I have even heard a tieless traveling salesman passing through Kankakee, Illinois, in a sports car, called a beatnik.) In jazz criticism this cross-fertilization between recent jazz and other areas of American art has met with predictable hostility. The same kinds of comment and misguided protest have greeted the music of Coleman and other young musicians that greeted the music of Parker, Gillespie, and

²³ *Mexico City Blues* (New York, Grove Press, 1959).

Monk in the forties. Where the music of Parker, *et al.*, was called in *Downbeat* magazine "ill-advised fanaticism," Coleman's music is called "anti-jazz." But as A. B. Spellman has written in a rebuttal to such criticisms, "What does anti-jazz mean and who are these ofays who've appointed themselves guardians of last year's blues?"

The most contemporary Negro music of the late fifties and sixties has again placed itself outside any mainstream consideration. Also, many musicians hate and misunderstand what Coleman, Taylor, Coltrane, and the others are doing, just as if they were any middle-brow magazine editor who still somehow connects Afro-American music with Kay Kayser. This recent music is significant of more "radical" changes and re-evaluations of social and emotional attitudes toward the general environment. But I cannot think that the music itself is a more radical, or an any more illogical, extension of the kinetic philosophy that has informed Negro music since its inception in America. Negro music is *always* radical in the context of formal American culture. What has happened is that there are many more Negroes, jazz musicians and otherwise, who have moved successfully into the featureless syndrome of that culture, who can no longer realize the basic social and emotional philosophy that has *traditionally* informed Afro-American music. (The hard boppers finally were left with a music as cultureless in its emotional propensities as mad Mantovani—a mood music for Negro colleges.) But even this phenomenon seems an old consideration if we can imagine the old secular shouters being reprimanded by the freedmen and new "sisters" for hollering all night "devil music," and songs not found in the "Sankey." It is simply that there is a more widespread fluency among Negroes with the "Sankeys," *i.e.*, more Negroes now have purged themselves of "stink" and color to crawl into those casually sanctified halls of white middle-brow culture. (In one sense, they have traveled a complete circle, stepping

right back into the heart of a paternal and parochial society—from slave to citizen—and have run through blues and discarded it on the way. But they had to, it was one of those ugly reminders that they had once been outside the walls of the city. And there are not too many people in this country, black or white, who'd be willing to admit that.) But perhaps the proportion is being significantly adjusted as even more young Negroes begin to consciously flee the stale purity of the missionaries' legacy. It is a curious balance, though one, as the West finds itself continuously redefining its position in the world and in need of radical reassessment of its relationships to the rest of the world, that will prove of the utmost importance. It is no secret that the West, and most particularly the American system, is in the position now of having to defend its values and ideas against totally hostile systems. The American Negro is being asked to defend the American system as energetically as the American white man. There is no doubt that the middle-class Negro is helping and will continue to help in that defense. But there is perhaps a question mark in the minds of the many poor blacks (which is one explanation for the attraction of such groups as the Black Muslims) and also now in the minds of many young Negro intellectuals. What is it that they are being asked to save? It is a good question, and America had better come up with an answer.

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