PART THREE

Jazz changes

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
Published online by Cambridge University Press

10 1959: the beginning of beyond

DARIUS BRUBECK

The idea for this chapter came from Mervyn Cooke's suggestion that we jointly organise a seminar – on jazz in 1959 – at the University of Nottingham. As soon as I began I found the choice of year felicitous both as a decisive cultural moment in establishing an autonomous art-form and as a year for musical landmarks recorded in every style of jazz (from mainstream to avant-garde). Nineteen fifty-nine was the year when jazz, as it is now, began.[1] Jazz before this time is now largely regarded as historic, as music usually identified by regional (e.g., Harlem school, Chicago style) and temporal (early jazz, Swing Era) associations. From 1959 onwards, it more strongly resembles universal current practice, indicating – and without condescension to pre-1959 jazz – that this is the beginning of contemporary jazz. This is easily demonstrated by the still pervasive familiarity of certain of the recordings made in that year. *Kind of Blue* (Miles Davis), *Time Out* (Dave Brubeck), *Giant Steps* (John Coltrane) and Ornette Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come* are albums that can scarcely be unknown or un-owned by jazz *aficionados* – and the 1960s had not even officially begun. Perhaps they began when John F. Kennedy was elected to the US Presidency and Robert Frost read his poetry at the Inauguration ceremony. In his speech, the young president raised the image of a relay in which 'the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans'. This was turnover time in American culture and politics, as it was in jazz.

All reliable histories recount and analyse the musical achievements at and around this time and the broader discussion of American culture hinted at above is beyond the scope of this chapter. What is offered here is an interpretation of how and why so much happened when it did and the impact of this history on present-day jazz reality. The jazz life is as different from what it was 40 years ago as every other kind of life, but there has been surprisingly little discontinuity in the music. This is remarkable, given the breadth of outside influences and, of course, the many major artists who have flourished in the intervening years.

While the aforementioned album titles themselves proclaim new directions and the artists involved were simultaneously pushing the boundaries of jazz outwards,[2] jazz in general was 'groovin' high' and definitely in forward gear that year. Wes Montgomery signed with Riverside, Thelonious Monk recorded his famous Town Hall Concert and two of Miles Davis's sidemen

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

on *Kind of Blue*, John Coltrane and Bill Evans, were recording as leaders while Miles himself was working on *Sketches of Spain* with Gil Evans. Further, John Lewis and Duke Ellington composed feature-film scores, *Odds Against Tomorrow* and *Anatomy of a Murder* respectively. Nineteen fifty-nine also saw the term 'bossa nova' used for the first time (in connection with 'Desafinado' by Antonio Carlos Jobim) and the publication of the second edition of George Russell's almost mystical treatise on music theory, *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organisation for Improvisation.* It was the year Eric Dolphy moved to New York, of Johnny Dankworth's success and also of the infamous riot at Newport (the first regular US jazz festival, founded by George Wein in 1954), and much else. Studious fans could prolong this scene-setting recitative of 1959 to chapter length. The music that was recorded in that year is enough to flag it as one of unusual creativity in jazz even in the context of the extraordinary period from the mid-1950s through to the mid-1960s when American artists and intellectuals in every discipline were successfully modernising the cultural landscape. Indeed, it was a 'golden era' in terms of the high quality of art, music, dance, film, literature, drama and even television, one which was embraced by audiences large enough to confer full celebrity status on a few jazz musicians and many other artists in every field.

Historical records

The year 1959/60 is a sort of axis of symmetry between the first jazz recordings (1917) and the end of the twentieth century. It is often stated that jazz is the first music almost fully documented by sound recording. The annotated boxed set of records *From Spirituals to Swing*, made from Carnegie Hall concerts starring Benny Goodman in 1938 and 1939, only reached the market in 1959 and has remained the foundation of many enthusiasts' collections ever since. Prominently featuring Count Basie with members of his and Goodman's bands, with gospel, blues and boogie-woogie musicians representing African-American tributaries to the then modern music, the Carnegie Hall concerts were the first public presentation of jazz as a historical music, but it was really the 1959 release – which sold over a million copies – that popularised this idea. It is interesting to reflect that a sort of manufactured historical document in 1939 was, by 1959, really historical.

In the late 1950s, as compilations of archival jazz and folk recordings became available,[3] the relatively new medium of long-playing records made it possible to hear jazz history without being an expert collector. Anthologies compiled from early commercial releases of jazz, blues and 'field recordings' of African-American music in the Deep South posited and fixed (in time)

Published online by Cambridge University Press Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

musical traditions that became canonised as the roots of jazz. What had been mostly accessible to researchers as 'oral history' was becoming accessible to everybody as 'aural history', but always, of course, in the shape of a packaged product, which we now might see as somewhat suspect – not in terms of the authenticity or simple worthiness of the music presented, but for the criterion for selection. I have yet to be convinced that it is fundamentally wrong or misleading to teach a 'canon' in jazz studies,[4] but for better or worse this is how it started. Through the compilation of historical tracks, be they rescued from deepest archival obscurity or re-packaged hits, the musical past is constructed as leading up to something – in this case, modern jazz. This in turn encouraged people to believe, correctly, that modern jazz and jazz LPs could have long-term artistic and commercial value and would also be worth collecting; or, from the record companies' point of view, re-packaging.[5]

Even though members of the first generation of jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong had some good years left, Sidney Bechet's death in 1959 foreshadowed the inevitable passing of the New Orleans/Chicago era. Billie Holiday and Lester Young, who directly influenced modern jazz, particularly the cool style of the 1950s, also died in 1959. The 1950s generation of musicians that grew up listening to them, to Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Goodman and Basie, and later to Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, had all but taken over from those with local and historical connections with early jazz. Born in the 1920s and later, they were entering their prime in the 1960s as mature talents, hitting the scene just behind the watershed of bebop. They pursued careers with a full awareness that jazz is both a changing modern music and one with its own history and traditions. They were, on the whole, musically educated, experienced and inclined to experiment. This was not avant-gardism for its own sake. Making a living in jazz was going to depend on the appeal of the music *per se* rather than the previous built-in marketability of social dancing and jazz versions of popular songs. A 'personal voice', always prized and admired in jazz circles, was now also a personal 'approach' (in the jargon of the time) to music itself, more than just a 'sound' and some signature 'licks'. Many musicians felt that putting theory to work in practical and individual terms was going to be important to their survival, so it was important to 'study'.[6] Interest in music theory and theories about music was not 'academic' in the narrow sense, but part of finding an approach.

A critical debate at the end of the 1950s

The relationship between theory and practice, the pros and cons of jazz changing into a formalised discipline and getting closer to classical music

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

and further from 'pop', are the background dynamics for ongoing musical and critical developments in jazz. Much of the jazz from around this time entered the canon and so did the issues debated. The arguments in favour of 'intellectualism' in jazz take on new, unanticipated meanings in the present era of academic Jazz Studies, but anti-intellectual attitudes have remained the same. I believe opposing sides of the intellectualism issue as understood around 1959 are well represented by two articles summarised below. Much of the jazz criticism written in the 1950s revolves around ideas about music, which criteria should apply, what jazz is and is not, the search for 'direction' and the catch-phrase 'where jazz is going'. Readers and writers, musicians and critics, often identified themselves with opposing, prescriptive concepts of 'jazz' in the abstract, and must have wanted very much to influence others. Participation in an ongoing debate about jazz was apparently part of the joy of being a jazz fan.

Down Beat: Special Silver Anniversary Edition (20 August 1959) features an article entitled 'The Case for Swinging' by John Mehegan, which sums up the history of jazz as 'evolutionary', but argues against further evolution.[7] It also contains André Hodeir's 'Perspective of Modern Jazz: Popularity or Recognition' (translated by Eugene Lees), a prescient rumination on the nature of jazz-as-art.

Mehegan was a working jazz pianist and academic, and an influential pioneer in jazz pedagogy – perhaps the first to believe jazz was teachable in a systematic way.[8] Given this background, it is surprising that he espouses a vehement, anti-intellectual line, although it was common in those days to do so. Let me assure the reader that I am not unfairly quoting Mehegan (with whom I studied briefly) in order to make fun of him or his ideas but, rather, because he is the best-informed and most coherent representative of this persuasion. He was not, though it is hard to tell from this article, against modern jazz, but indeed an admirer of Lennie Tristano and Bill Evans and a modern-jazz player himself. Because of his technical knowledge, arguments he used count as an insider's informed opinion and bear consideration if only to arrive at a better understanding of the underlying issues. In other words, they are not the vapourings of a disaffected journalist who 'couldn't swing a rope'. However, in print he adopts a crusty, hostile tone. Near the end of the article he writes:

> If we continue to smother [jazz] with a superstructure of complexity and intellectuality it cannot possibly support, we will eventually destroy it. This applies specifically to the cabalists, the metaphysicians, the formalists, the pretenders, the beatniks, the Zen Buddhists and the been-zootists.
>
> [Mehegan 1959b]

Given the date of publication, exactly at the time of the Lenox School of Jazz (see below), I believe that his real targets are Gunther Schuller,

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

George Russell and John Lewis, although his shotgun blast takes in the whole avant-garde. Collectively these three were promoting the principles of third-stream music, a meeting of jazz and classical music on an equal basis which contrasts with the random couplings of the distant past. Russell, as we shall see, might indeed qualify as a 'cabalist' and 'metaphysician', and Schuller and Lewis were uninhibited advocates of intellectualism.

One of Mehegan's pet hates is formalism, which 'has not been generally successful musically speaking for the reason that jazz is basically a folk music employing visceral or non-intellectual materials and, like all folk art, is preponderantly *content* with a minimum of *form*'. This attitude should prepare us for the mindset of an academic but anti-intellectual conservative, with certain implicit beliefs about the world. Taking it 'from the top', Mehegan's article (drastically edited) reads:

> Did Charlie Parker leave a rich nourishing heritage for future jazz men – or did he finish off the art form? . . . The time composite of jazz has undergone extensive changes since 1920 . . . these changes, coupled with expanding instrumental and writing techniques, express in capsule the morphological history of the art form . . .
>
> Although the jazzman has displayed great ingenuity in the areas of time and horizontal extension, he has been singularly uninventive in dealing with the problems of vertical sound (harmony).

This is an odd opinion coming from a jazz pianist, but he does not stop to give reasons for it:

> Jazz is and always has been a tonal music employing the diatonic scale as its frame of reference.
>
> Parker himself never questioned the diatonic system in jazz harmony and never made any attempt to destroy it. In fact, as is well known, Parker returned to the most primitive harmonic materials, the blues, in order to deal freely with the horizontal line.

If the opposite of tonality is atonality, then few would fundamentally disagree, however much we might wince at the term 'primitive'.

With authoritarian bravura (and spectacular unintended irony), Mehegan concludes with a list of 'essentials' musicians in 1959 would question – or, using his words, 'attack' or 'destroy' – in order to arrive at a fresher conception of jazz:

> suppose we accept the circumscribed limits of a diatonic harmonic system, 4/4 time, eighth-note, quarter-note, half-note time composite, eight bar sections and the various attendant qualities we have been accustomed to. The point is that if we learned anything in the past 20 years, we have learned that to abandon or seriously alter any of these basic essentials of a jazz performance results in what can no longer be called jazz.

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

The four albums mentioned at the beginning of this chapter are remembered best for doing everything that 'results in what can no longer be called jazz'. Thus, in a strange way, one agrees with Mehegan. What was called jazz before 1959 is different from what is called jazz now, supporting the dichotomy between the historical and contemporary mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

But we are not quite through with Mehegan's case. If we accept the circumscribed limits of jazz he proposes (and his is not a bad description of what – in a statistical sense – jazz is), then his later statement that 'all, it would seem [is] in a state of exhaustion' logically follows. For Mehegan writing in 1959, 'the evolution of jazz' is at an end.

Hodeir's article is not 'the case against swinging' but it is in all other respects an opposing and, indeed, formalist view. In contrast to Mehegan, he is not worried about the 'exhaustion' of jazz as creative music, but rather the time it takes for an increasingly specialised form of creativity to make it into the mainstream. Hodeir demands an active role in the service of creativity from an elite audience.[9] He plunges the readers (of *Down Beat*!) into the historical and aesthetic problems of modernism, high culture and popular art:

> Carried along by the prodigious cadence of constant renewal, jazz dies almost as quickly as it is created . . . But it happens that the public . . . does not keep correct time with the rhythm of change . . . This phenomenon has been observed in European art [when] Cézanne and Debussy unveiled the beginnings of a 'modern art' that is in no way of popular origin.
>
> [Hodeir 1959]

The new problem for modern jazz, according to Hodeir, is that recognition (for an artist or work of art) comes before and perhaps without popularity. For example, Monk was recognised as historically important (in 1959) without having experienced popular acclaim. Like Mehegan, Hodeir constructs the narrative of jazz history around the theme of 'evolution', but they really mean different things by it. Hodeir's evolution is punctuated by outstanding masterworks which 'show enough strength and strictness of conception' to transcend the norm. Mehegan wants to set out rules that define jazz in technical terms that are normative for the genre. (These rules and a concept of 'jazz' itself, rather than any particular manifestation in the form of jazz masterworks, are what evolved out of chaos.) Hodeir does not define jazz at all. Like Ellington and most musicians, he believes that an artist must be free to create without reference to pre-determined categories and that there must be valid 'universal' criteria of musical value not limited by genre (see heading quotation on page 153).

For Mehegan, generic boundaries are all-important because he is trying to rule out 'what can no longer be called jazz', so 'popular music' and jazz,

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

while undeniably similar, are really antagonistic terms. The worst outcome of Mehegan's kind of evolutionary theory is that jazz musicians (he does not name any) looking for a way out of the 'cul de sac' of formalism (provided they have admitted they no longer live in the realm of 'folk-music') might opt for

> The final solution [which] is the oldest one in the world . . . Give the people what they want . . . So at last jazz has joined the other entertaining crafts that form the basis of what we call show business . . . The real difference between an art form and an entertaining craft is that an art form has a continuity which demands some contribution from each artist in order to insure its own succession; an entertaining craft makes no demand except that of popularity. [Mehegan 1959b]

Hodeir spends rather more time considering the meanings of the term 'popular'. Although frankly elitist in outlook, he never equates popular with vulgar. He also does not slip into the present-day assumption that popular equals commercial:

> A musical work can be popular in two very different ways: by its origin and by its audience. They do not always coincide.
>
> . . . the art of Ellington, and still more that of Armstrong, remained rather close to the popular origins [note the strict sense of 'popular' here] wherefrom jazz was little by little emancipated. Both won popularity before the cultural interest in jazz was fully realised. And it is only fair to add that they contributed powerfully to the recognition of jazz as an art. Better yet, jazz recognition was identified with their recognition.
>
> With the advent of modern jazz, however, the problem of achieving popularity truly began to pose itself . . . For having wished to invent a complex language, suitable to convey a certain number of new truths, jazz became an art of specialists; in cutting itself free of its popular sources, it voluntarily limited itself to an audience of connoisseurs. Then it became risky to seek popularity if, deep down, one did not wish to give up what had been gained in modern jazz.
>
> True popularity for a 'difficult work' is recognition by a reasonably large elite. The most celebrated masterpieces have taken this cultural route to success; it is a route that is necessarily long. A work, an artist, is recognised only thanks to the diffusing influence of a few clairvoyant souls . . .
>
> And on a cultural level, the demand that this work show enough strength and strictness of conception to reach those whose sensibilities were nourished and developed by the greatest artists remains the least deceptive criterion of recognition.
>
> Aside from those happy few who today appreciate it, the most advanced jazz has already launched invisible missiles toward the public of tomorrow.
>
> [Hodeir 1959]

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

Conceptualising jazz

The familiar fault-lines in the generally accepted version of jazz history have always appeared immediately after an influential individual or group was in a position to articulate a conception of jazz. By this I mean defining what jazz was in their time, not a manifesto of which 'direction jazz should go in'. It is as if certain musicians in each generation, after a number of years of playing gigs and 'paying dues', gradually or suddenly find the hitherto hidden 'deep structure' of everything they have done or will ever do. These revelations, I believe, preceded and sometimes precipitated the new movements in jazz. Of course 'movements' or sub-genres do not have to happen consecutively and there is no reason that every new direction is inevitably 'forwards'.

Musicians have always been more concerned with ways of playing music than talking about it. Nevertheless thinking about the potential of what they do is as traditional as blue notes. In his chapter on Jelly Roll Morton in *Early Jazz*, Schuller uses Morton's own words (transcribed from the Library of Congress recordings made by Alan Lomax) and his own exhaustive case-study of Morton's work to show that what Morton called the 'invention' of jazz was the first conceptualisation of jazz:

> To Morton the composer, ragtime and blues were not just musical styles, but specific musical forms . . . These were as well defined as the sonata form was to a 'classical' composer, and Morton accepted them as active continuing traditions. At this point Morton's claim to be the 'originator of jazz' begins to take on a degree of plausibility. In his mind and perhaps in actual fact Morton had isolated as 'jazz' an area not covered by the blues or ragtime. Since he applied a smoother more swinging syncopation and a greater degree of improvisational license to a variety of materials, such as ragtime, opera and French and Spanish popular songs and dances, Morton's claim to have invented jazz no longer seems so rash. [1968, 139–41]

Morton's statement that 'jazz is a style that can be applied to any type of tune' and his use of 'jazz' as a verb, as in 'jazzing' the 'Miserere' from *Il Trovatore* (see page 163), make it clear that the essence of jazz (noun and verb) is process and perhaps manner, but not content. It must be remembered that the American popular song was early, but not original, material for jazzing.

A final comment from Schuller's chapter on Morton lends some strong historical backing to the 'formalism' that was decried as infiltrating and diluting modern jazz: 'Morton's vision of jazz entailed contrast and variety – instrumental, timbral, textural; in short, structural.' This aspect of Morton's vision was de-emphasised by bebop with its formulaic head–solos–head approach to performance. (The 'structure' talked about when musicological terminology is used to explain why an improvised bebop solo is 'great' is not what Morton had in mind.)

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

Valid conceptualisations are holistic by implication but in practice it often seems that a disproportionate amount of attention is focused on one parameter at a time. In Morton's music, jazz was structurally complex but also harmonically primitive and improvisationally constrained compared to later styles. For soloists to soar it was found that one needed cyclical rather than additive forms and simpler arrangements. The professionally composed 'popular song' replaced traditional sources like hymns, marches and other borrowings referred to by Morton and his contemporaries and the great challenge ahead was the 'jazzing-up' of complex harmony.

Jazz changes and 'invisible missiles'

Bebop drew on various and new sources, including modern European composers, but by far the greatest influence was the immediate past and present of jazz itself. The conventions of jazz playing had attained stability in the Swing Era, and Art Tatum and other piano virtuosi, professional arrangers working for Benny Goodman, Woody Herman, Stan Kenton, the Ellington–Strayhorn team and composers working in Hollywood were constantly pushing harmony towards greater complexity. Harmony in the 1940s was dense, functional yet richly chromatic and highly mobile. Jazz musicians, though popularly celebrated as 'rhythm cats' in the commercial media, had become chord-meisters. Just being able to play 'the changes', let alone improvise a coherent chorus on songs like 'Have You Met Miss Jones', 'Invitation' or 'Stella By Starlight', is still an indication of sophistication.

Playing 'standards' means creating culturally and musically transformed versions of recognised Broadway or Hollywood songs. Eventually this became the art of playing an alternative version to prior jazz versions while the non-jazz original faded from memory, leaving only the tune and chord progression. In this way, a 'standard' is infinitely re-adaptable. For jazz musicians, hearing 'the changes' is so ingrained and natural that they barely notice that it is probably only jazz musicians who automatically relate to music as being essentially 'the changes'. Most can name a tune they know well within a few seconds of hearing it, even if the excerpt starts in the middle of a solo and is played with a different feel or tempo, using different instruments from those in any previous version. In other words they have developed a way of conceptualising music that has little to do with how it sounds in an ordinary sense of audition.

Jazz musicians adapted and improved a notational system of alphabetical chord symbols, originally used as early as the 1910s for labelling ukelele or guitar tablature in sheet-copy versions of popular songs. For example, the first two measures of 'I Got Rhythm' would have four box diagrams showing

Published online by Cambridge University Press Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

frets, strings and finger position labelled thus: C6, Amin., Dmin., G7 (not indicating chord function, as in the analytical notation I, VI, II, V). Published 'stock arrangements' for dance bands included piano parts consisting of chords in staff notation, but besides being literally harder to see, staff notation seemed to require restating identical chord voicings chorus after chorus and, worse, articulating them in the same rhythm. It is difficult to think of one recording where such a part was actually played. Similarly, bass parts were notated bass parts, but players who understood how to construct bass lines by connecting chord tones usually ignored them and wrote in the chord progression according to the alphabetical system, referring to staff notation only where a specific bass line was required. Guitar parts were always in chord symbols and therefore became the *lingua franca* of rhythm-section players even as the traditional role of 'rhythm guitar' was becoming obsolete in the 1940s. In small combos where every player (not only the soloist of the moment) is improvising most of the time, the normal and easiest way to co-ordinate performance by visual means is to give every player the same information. All musicians (including poor readers and regardless of instrument) know how to work from a lead-sheet consisting of the melody in treble clef with chord symbols above the line and sometimes the lyrics.

Chord symbols consist of the letter name of the root, a symbol such as a '-' for minor plus numbers if needed. F-7 therefore means F minor seventh. If F-7 occurs at the beginning of a measure of 4/4 time, it means the harmony starts on the downbeat (not that the pianist must play the chord on 'one') and if it comes near the middle of the bar, F-7 is the chord 'change' on beat three. The merit of this system is that it leaves so much up to the musician. Chord symbols do not specify register, inversion, top note, doublings or density. They do show the harmonic rhythm, in other words, the sequence and distribution of 'the changes'. You can write 'the changes' for a tune on any scrap of paper that comes to hand – menus and napkins become bass parts between sets – or, if there isn't even a pen available, the pianist or bass player can just call them out. (Not exactly professional behaviour, but who hasn't done this once or twice?)

There was no authoritative source for chord symbols so there were inconsistencies and disagreements, especially regarding notating extensions beyond the seventh. Does F-7 +9 mean add the ninth (G) or add and raise the ninth (G♯)? Of course musicians could decide for themselves which sounded best and which seemed logical. (G♯ is A♭ enharmonically, which adds nothing to an F minor chord, so G is the right answer.) Certainly by the 1950s, jazz musicians had to know some 'theory' whether or not they thought of it as that. Composers such as Milhaud, Stravinsky, Bartók and even Schoenberg were icons of highbrow modernism to jazz musicians, but not ones to emulate on the gig.[10] Playing changes was, at first anyway, an

Published online by Cambridge University Press Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

exploration and re-codification of the inherited tonal system before there could be an 'attack' on it. Rhythm-and-blues and urban blues used improvisation, a heavy beat and much else in common with 1940s jazz, but revealing the harmonic subtlety of the popular song was the defining, exclusive characteristic of jazz.[11]

'The way the music had to go'

'Whatever we were using had been around since Bach's time, or maybe Brahms's. Parker had the *style*', Dizzy Gillespie told me in an unpublished interview in 1987. In context it was clear that Gillespie was talking about harmony, possibly the seamless modulating sequences in Bach and Brahms's reassertion of functional harmonic relationships (analogous to Parker's use of ii–V?). He was not more specific. From a present-day perspective, harmony is the least difficult aspect of bebop. (Correctly reproducing the rhythms and phrasing of a Bud Powell or Charlie Parker solo in transcription takes considerable practice at a high technical level, but any jazz pianist can play the left-hand chords by ear.) I think the point about harmony that older musicians keep coming back to is simply that jazz harmony seemed to be the one aspect of music that was systematic and learnable. I suspect that the mystique of harmony has to do with not having an overview of tonality as a coherent, closed structural system. When I asked Gillespie if his colleagues in the 1940s saw themselves as part of a movement, he said he didn't think so. Were they consciously developing a new style? No, 'it was just the way the music *had to* go', insisting on inevitability almost as if 'music' were determined to 'go' somewhere of itself. But not quite, because, without 'the style' of Parker, without his specific and essential integration of all elements, it would not have been bebop. Along with the individual beauty and brilliance of Parker's music, a virtuosic and studied approach to playing 'the changes' was in tune with post-war modernism.

This is perhaps a good moment to reflect a little further on the question of the 'evolution' of jazz. This was not a problem in the 1950s because it was true for everyone coming into their own at the time. They had experienced a modern movement that demanded (but also began providing) ever greater knowledge and skill on the part of musicians and repaid their efforts with ever greater creative freedom and sometimes even a good living doing interesting, experimental music. In the 1960s it became difficult to see where 'the music' was trying to go, but 'evolution' was still tenable because developments that were taking place side-by-side claimed a shared past. The confusion and disunity of the 1960s was not the result of running into blind alleys and losing audiences to rock so much as an inconvenient profusion of

Published online by Cambridge University Press Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

overlapping epiphanies. There was no single way in which the 'music had to go' or just one 'genius' that had the 'style'.

The Lenox School and jazz education

The Lenox School of Jazz lasted only four summers (1957–60) but it had a great influence on the immediate and long-term future of jazz. Organised by John Lewis and Gunther Schuller, it was surely one of the main launch-sites of Hodeir's 'invisible missiles'. Simply intoning some other names of teachers and students who were there (Bill Evans, George Russell, Bill Russo, Kenny Dorham, Jim Hall and Jimmy Giuffre among the former, and Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry, Freddie Hubbard, Chuck Israels, Don Ellis and Steve Kuhn among the latter) risks making this School sound even more momentous than it was. Realistically, three weeks a year of intense study and interaction with great musicians is probably not enough to change the everyday world of jazz completely, unless that world is taking off in new directions anyway. But, strangely, the opposite of exaggeration has occurred and relatively few people know about Lenox. Even though literature about jazz is a high proportion of what I read, the only reason I know about this amazing School is because I was there as a 12-year-old in 1959, the year my father Dave was 'in residence', accompanied by his family.[12]

Situated at The Music Inn, a summer resort in the Berkshires and within walking distance of Tanglewood (the famous summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra), the School had, in effect, its own country hotel, concert tent, two bars and other venues for making music 'inside' and/or 'outside' – in every sense that those terms came to imply. When I recently interviewed Schuller about 'Lenox' (as it is referred to), he modestly played down the unique role of the School, because 'it was everywhere at that time'. Common sense nevertheless suggests that, as a result of the concentration of professionally active, highly skilled, creative and analytical musicians at a specific time and place, new 'discoveries' in jazz were mutually recognised and at least made known within the nuclear community. This in turn would inevitably accelerate the diffusion and acceptance of new ways of playing and thinking about music. How long would it have taken for Ornette Coleman to be recognised (and even popular in Hodeir's sense) had he not been there? And, in the theoretical realm, who would have spontaneously gone out and bought a book by a little-known composer named George Russell, especially one called *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organisation for Improvisation*? News gets out when musicians are gathered.

Furthermore, the formal practical study of jazz was, to a great extent, later developed by two Lenox students, David Baker and Jamey Aebersold.

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

They were recruited, along with Freddie Hubbard and bassist, Larry Ridley, by Schuller from Indiana, and it was here that they were all first exposed to jazz as a formal academic discipline. After Lenox, Aebersold created and published practical methods for learning jazz, eventually building his publishing and training courses into a multi-million-dollar international business. Baker is the long-serving Distinguished Professor and Head of Jazz Studies at the Conservatory at Indiana University and author of numerous analytical and pedagogical works years ahead of the wave of jazz studies now cresting in American universities.

The Lenox School of Jazz prospectus offered 'a conception of the history of jazz, the development of its styles and idioms, and its relationship to music as a whole . . . a point of view toward jazz as a significant and vital art form of our time'. Schuller told me that Coleman was extremely moved by hearing Jelly Roll Morton's music for the first time. The largest impact from an education 'missile' was, however, both directly and indirectly, the kind of music theory being taught at Lenox. It remains a major influence on what jazz students learn today.

Theories of music

The ability of African performance arts to transform the European tradition of composition while assimilating some of its elements is perhaps the most striking and powerful evolutionary force in the history of modern music. [GIOIA 1997, 8]

The historical transformation of jazz from an entertainment music to an art music, initiated by the bebop revolution in the mid-1940s, represents arguably one of the most significant cultural shifts of the century . . . no form of mass culture seems to have crossed the boundary between 'entertainment' and 'art' as decisively or irreversibly as jazz. [GENDRON 1995, 31]

A perennial difficulty with teaching music theory is forcing minds and ears more attuned to the jazz tradition to accept as provisionally true fairly essential 'facts' of the European harmonic tradition. To jazz ears, the final tonic major chord of a piece or section could easily have a flat seventh. A dominant-seventh chord a tritone away from another chord is its freely interchangeable 'substitute'. Parallel octaves strengthen a line (but are seldom noticed given the common octave doubling of trumpet and tenor saxophone). In general, controlled 'dissonance' is more desirable than 'consonance', chord voicings without roots are 'hip' and simple triads with voices doubled are only used to convey an atmosphere of funky reverence.

What was still lacking in the 1950s was a self-contained, systematic theory of tonality and harmony that took for granted jazz chords and other devices that musicians actually had developed and put into practice over time. Such a theory was needed for 'irreversible development' as the 1950s drew to a close.

Published online by Cambridge University Press Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

A body of information (generalities about music) and drill (exercises to demonstrate their application) is what academic music curricula refer to as 'theory'. Corresponding information came into jazz usage through invention, discovery and piecemeal appropriation by individual artists like John Coltrane, who was 'looking for something to play' (Porter 1998, 88) and for practical solutions to specific musical problems:

> A new influence [on Coltrane in *c.*1951–2] was the legendary pianist Hasaan Ibn Ali. Born in Philadelphia in 1931, Hasaan, as he was called . . . became known as an original composer and theorist. He was interested in the properties of fourths, in chord progressions that moved by thirds or seconds instead of fifths, in playing a variety of scales and arpeggios against each chord – all of which figured prominently in Coltrane's music later on. [*Ibid.*]

Hasaan is reported to have used the chord-voicing of flat seventh, major third and thirteenth (without sounding the root) before it became common in the 1960s. This isolated piece of information (coupled with the fact that not many people today know about Hasaan) reads like erudite trivia, but actually provides a typical example of jazz musicians as 'a learning community' (see Berliner 1994, 36–62). Even better, this precise piece of 'trivia', the chord made up of an augmented fourth and a perfect fourth, is a distinctive feature of jazz harmony. It also represents the overvalued, fragmentary bits of information jazz musicians invented or collected to fill the vast space between 'legit' theory and jazz practice.

The Lydian Chromatic Concept

The first text written specifically as jazz theory was *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organisation* by George Russell, first published in 1953 and issued in a revised edition in 1959. Russell is a composer, teacher and sometime bandleader who had a great influence on the rising third-stream intelligentsia of the 1950s and early 1960s. He studied composition with Stephen Wolpe and also wrote scores for Gillespie. He taught at Lenox in 1958 and 1959, which gave his ideas the most important exposure imaginable at the time. (He later taught at New England Conservatory from the late 1960s.) As an academically trained composer he added unusual technical skill at manipulating structure, harmony and balance, affecting the usual concerns of jazz composition, which are the interplay of improvised solos and arranged ensemble passages. He was a daring and rigorous experimentalist as a composer (see, for example, 'All About Rosie' and 'Living Time'). Perhaps because he did not project himself enough as a performer (on piano)

Published online by Cambridge University Press Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

his music is little known to the public but it remains controversial, influential and respected within professional circles. Whatever the ultimate verdict on *The Lydian Chromatic Concept*, there is no doubt he was an inspirational teacher. 'All About Rosie' (re-issued on Schuller, *The Birth of the Third Stream*) is a singular accomplishment: it is mainly the exciting piano solo by Bill Evans that gives it an aura of historic specificity, but in style and conception it sounds as if it could have been written much more recently.

Unlike its respected author, *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organisation for Improvisation* (to use its full title) has a mixed reputation, probably because, according to Russell, 'The Lydian Chromatic Concept is as large as all of the music that has been written or that could be written in the equal tempered tuning system' ('Technical Appendix B'). Unfortunately, his attempt to present and prove such an audaciously comprehensive theory sometimes resulted in unreadably turgid discourse burdened with jargon, yet the work's influence has spread far beyond those who have actually read it:

> Russell codified the modal approach to harmony (using scales instead of chords) in a theoretical treatise that he says was inspired by a casual remark the eighteen-year-old Miles Davis made to him in 1944: Miles said he wanted to learn all the changes and I reasoned that he might try to find the closest scale for every chord . . . Davis popularised those liberating ideas in recordings like *Kind of Blue*, undermining the entire harmonic foundation of bop that had inspired him and Russell in the first place.
>
> [Giddins 1998, 6][13]

Davis, who according to this story was indirectly responsible for the Lydian Chromatic Concept, is reported to have given it its most succinct formulation, something like 'F should be where middle C is on the piano.' What this means is that instead of basing pitch relations on the major scale from C to C, our basic scale should be the Lydian mode, the white notes from F to F. The reasons given in Russell are acoustic (overtone series), historical (the major/minor scale system was a compromise which allowed for cadential harmony using the subdominant) and musical (the dissonant sound of fourth against major third making the fourth an 'avoid note' in major harmony). The series, moving up the cycle of fifths seven times starting from F, is as follows: F–C–G–D–A–E–B (–F). The augmented fourth (in either direction) is the last interval in this series, taking it back to F. Rearrange these notes in stepwise order and the result is the Lydian scale. To get to an enharmonic version of the 'perfect fourth' of the major scale (A♯) would require going right to the end of the series of fifths. (Continuing one more fifth would land on E♯ which is F, the starting note.) A♯, that is, B♭, is therefore the remotest possible note from the Lydian tonic. 'Enharmonic'

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

distinctions are inaudible and therefore meaningless to Russell who takes equal temperament for granted. Why do we have a major scale with a perfect fourth rather than a Lydian scale and its derivatives?

> The major scale probably emerged as the predominating scale of Western music, because within its seven tones lies the most fundamental harmonic progression of the classical era . . . the tonic major chord on C . . . the sub-dominant major chord on F . . . the dominant seventh chord on G – thus, the major scale *resolves* to its tonic major chord. The Lydian scale *is* the sound of its tonic major chord. [Russell 1959, iii, iv]

This is original, brilliant, even self-evident, but no one had quite said it before. The practical implications are indeed far-reaching and amount to a theory that works both for playing and teaching jazz. It follows then that Davis's original aim can be fulfilled by studying what are now called chord–scale relationships; this is, in fact, what jazz students are taught and there is of course much material (published by Aebersold) that supports teaching in this way. Davis's *Kind of Blue* is often used to illustrate what chord-scale relationships mean in practice and a pedagogy based on an ahistoric but serviceable system of modes (of major and melodic minor plus synthetic scales, etc.) is how improvisation is formally taught. For example, one of the first pieces I teach beginners is 'So What', which gives a convincing demonstration that the Dorian mode and the minor-seventh chord (with all extensions) are co-extensive; somewhat like describing light in physics as either a wave or a particle depending on what you need the description for.

Russell himself, perhaps thinking more as a composer and theorist than as a musician in search of an 'approach', took things in a somewhat more obscure direction, inventing special terminology (e.g., 'vertical polymodality' and 'auxiliary diminished scale'). The details of this aspect of the Lydian Chromatic Concept seem so far not to have infiltrated practice today but the basic principle of chord–scale is now pervasive, even clichéd.

Russell was not merely tinkering with abstract relationships for the sake of it. His vision also had an observational and predictive dimension that was proven correct by the end of the 1960s:

> Since the bop period, a war on the chord has been going on I think . . . [Parker] probably represented the last full blossoming of a jazz music that was based on chords . . . Even the need to do extended form pieces, whether successful or not, is a desire to get away from a set of chord changes. [Russell 1959, xx]

Ian Carr (1999) believes that Davis's mature career can be plotted as a gradual reduction of harmonic activity. The decade that started with *Kind of Blue* and *Sketches of Spain* ended with *In a Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*.

Published online by Cambridge University Press Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

The justifications, precedents and far-reaching claims Russell crowds into his oddly organised treatise tend to complicate rather than clarify, but the Lydian Chromatic Concept meant liberation from the obsolete concerns and dictates of 'legit' academic theory which is based on a different tradition of tonal organisation.

Even back in 1959, the 'war on the chord' escalated to thermonuclear proportions with the advent of free jazz and Coleman's harmolodic theory, which he has not systematically defined. His music generally seems to include reference to a tonal centre but no key or tonal hierarchy, accidental harmonies generated by moving parts (considerable parallelism) but no set sequences of chords, and communicative and often beautiful or humorous melodies.

In recent correspondence on these jazz theories, Barry Kernfeld wrote to me:

> the theoretical underpinnings of harmolodic theory are extremely suspect, even more so than those of George Russell's Lydian Chromatic Concept, but there is no question that these sorts of casual, home-made approaches to jazz theory have been of great value to performers and educators, helping them to capture, or to communicate, through inferential or emotive means, some of the processes involved in jazz improvisation.

To which I replied:

> I think the word 'theory' in Coleman's case has to be taken in a less technical – as in music theory – sense and recast as something like 'critical theory', 'reception theory'; even a musical version of relativity theory. It is an outlook or idea rather than a process of analysis or a set of instructions. My workaday answer to 'what does harmolodic mean?' is 'the theory that melody, harmony and rhythm should not be considered separately, especially in improvisation, because they all generate each other'.[14]

My workaday answer is an example of both the strength and weakness of formalism. It isolates a principle which Coleman has made the centre of his musical universe just as Russell has made the Lydian scale – 'the sound of its tonic major chord' – the centre of his. On the other hand, my quasi-definition cannot explain any particular musical result or why there was a need for harmolodic theory. Coleman must have had an intuitive cultural motive for dreaming up a word like 'harmolodic' and making it stick by playing out its implications throughout a career spanning decades. Coleman came from obscurity and gutbucket rhythm-and-blues gigs to the foremost intellectual forum of jazz in Lenox, encoding as 'theory' the emotional, primal and sacral substratum of a music now on the threshold of entering its academic phase. He renders unto academe a substantial and varied body of work and a word for it, a technical-sounding neologism of dual 'signifyin''[15] and

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

formalist connotations. Now it is up to us, not him, to do the explaining. I think Kernfeld is right about the pedagogic importance of leaving a path open to continue communication 'through inferential or emotive means, some of the processes involved in jazz improvisation'. I would add, in the creation of music generally.

The third stream

'Third stream' ideology offered the potential of the two great mainstreams of western music, jazz and classical, blending into a third style. For those who have not yet heard *The Birth of the Third Stream*,[16] 'blending jazz and classical' could have kitsch connotations ranging from Paul Whiteman's orchestral jazz in the late 1920s to modern popularisations such as the often disparaged *Bird with Strings*, Jacques Loussier playing Bach accompanied by brushes on the snare drum, and orchestral 'pops' arrangements of Gershwin tunes sung by an opera star or even with a lonely jazz soloist in front. That third stream was entirely something else will become clear to any jazz fan looking at the list of composers on *The Birth of the Third Stream*: Jimmy Giuffre, J. J. Johnson, John Lewis, Charles Mingus, Gunther Schuller and George Russell. The majority of the players are jazz musicians (for example, Bill Evans, Bernie Glow, Miles Davis, Urbie Green and the composers) and, other than the basses and Barry Galbraith on guitar, there are no strings attached.

Despite well-made manifesto albums[17] on major labels in the 1950s and a prolific and respected advocate in Schuller, third-stream music seems at first to have been only a movement of its time. Did any 'invisible missiles' arrive in the future? Record producer George Avakian writes in the liner notes to *The Birth of the Third Stream*: 'With the passing years, it's been said that one doesn't hear much about third stream any more. There is a good reason for this; it has been absorbed into the mainstream.' Some of Schuller's new liner notes for this re-release contain the same message:

> Looking back to those heady, exciting days of 40 years ago, it is also fascinating to observe how the technical and stylistic horizons of musicians have broadened and deepened in the intervening years . . . it is commonplace today to find many performers who will readily deal with any kind of music: improvised or written . . . Varèse and Stravinsky . . . Mingus and Coleman . . . The world of music in the 1950s was still for the most part divided among sharply defined lines of musicians who, on the jazz side, could not (or preferred not to) read music . . . while on the 'classical side' musicians could not improvise, could not swing, could barely capture the unique rhythmic inflections and expanded sonorities of jazz.

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

This is a triumphal update of Schuller's original notes for *Modern Jazz Concert*. He wrote that this concert would have been impossible ten years before, and the existence of a number of musicians who can perform difficult written music and play jazz in 1957 is proof of the advantageous intermingling of jazz and non-jazz influences.

The main period of production under the third-stream banner was more like a series of premieres than the 'birth' of a new style that would (as real and metaphorical offspring do) take on its own life away from its original creators as bebop did. Or, if *really* a new kind of music, then *as jazz did*! So far it is not 'the way the music had to go', but it did foretell the 'birth' of a new kind of musician. The birth metaphor fits well with the advent of total instrumentalists like Keith Jarrett and Wynton Marsalis (their public mutual animosity notwithstanding) and so many young, relatively unknown musicians who make up the professional scene today. Third-stream composers had musicians such as these in mind.

The 1959 recordings

Since 1959, unresolved questions surround the alternative approaches to harmonic activity as the primary controlling factor in jazz performance and composition. If playing 'the changes' can be questioned, so can every other 'given'. The almost simultaneous popularisation of devices that were undoubtedly known but barely used in jazz is no accident. I will now turn to the four recordings I listed at the start of this chapter, without meaning to imply that four very different musicians were knowingly working in tandem or constituted a self-conscious 'movement'. Along the way I pointed out contemporaneous critical and technical concepts and now we can examine what these records 'mean' in jazz history and why these 40-year-old recordings remain both contemporary and historical. All recorded in 1959, they confirm that jazz was not just on yet another new course but was rapidly expanding like a galaxy. To risk stating the obvious, the collection of music represented here does not add up to a new style; on the contrary, it signals the break-up of a broad consensus (already charged with centrifugal forces) and perhaps, with hindsight, the last chapter of the collectivist and evolutionary narrative. Each record included in this set showcases an idea that contributes to the overall stockpile of jazz resources, and the net result was to remove from jazz Mehegan's 'circumscribed limits of a diatonic harmonic system, 4/4 time, eighth-note, quarter-note, half-note time composite, eight bar sections and the various attendant qualities we have been accustomed to' (see above, p. 181). Taken together, these landmarks of modern jazz at the end of the 1950s anticipate

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

the 1960s as the epoch of stretching the form. And, by the way, they did call it 'jazz'.

Of all of the 'experimental' albums ever made, only *Kind of Blue* seems perfect and still able to please everybody. *Time Out* by Dave Brubeck was attacked as too 'commercial' while anything by Coleman is still too 'far out', just too different, for mainstream cultural assimilation. Leaving aside anything we know about the subsequent careers of the musicians involved, these three albums are high-quality realisations of their creators' artistic goals at the time; in every sense of the word, good records. In spite of its historic importance as a 'great' album, *Giant Steps* (with all due respect to Coltrane) sounds thrown together. Canonic status is accorded on other grounds: it represents a crucial stage in a celebrated artist's growth, premieres of compositions that will be performed for the rest of time, a strong declaration of stylistic stance.

An appreciation of jazz differs from the way one appreciates classical music. The 'rough edges', sloppy execution and inconsistency within some jazz performances are not there by design, but that they remain there at all in a medium that allows for re-takes, editing or rejecting a track that is unacceptable, points to other priorities. Jazz recordings that are considered good (and of course there is debate about which these are) have a long shelf-life and usually contain some brilliant unrepeatable moments framed within identifiable musical contexts that are interesting in themselves and capable of replication elsewhere. The context – composition, the ensemble, the style and maybe certain 'licks' in the solos – is all that alternate takes should have in common, so from the standpoint of a musician making a recording, the unrepeatable is most important. Next priority is the realisation of the composition, or concept, to the extent that there is one. Sometimes the first priority is to get down on record a prototype that can be improved on. But choosing between takes that equally get the idea across the brilliant improvised passage reverts to priority number one. Jazz musicians often hear or play 'what a piece is about' and are satisfied if the idea – in musical terms – is made sufficiently clear. Ideally, everyone plays the right notes, in time, in tune and with the right feeling and the instruments in perfect balance and sounding better under studio conditions with controlled reverberation than they would 'live'. Musicians accept that this cannot be always the case and listeners have learned too that high-quality jazz moments and imaginative ideas are worth more than flawless execution devoid of risk and freedom. That said, polished recordings such as those made by the Modern Jazz Quartet, the Miles Davis Sextet and the Dave Brubeck Quartet are not to be written off jazz-wise as less spontaneous, but rather the result of the same musicians working together long enough to develop a collective consistency of execution. (*The Shape of Jazz to Come* is spectacularly 'tight' in

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

a less obvious way.) *Giant Steps* did not document the collective effort of a working band but the leader's material and musical ideas.

Miles Davis was first identified with the bebop movement of the 1940s and, from then on, seemed to lead the way in every new movement in modern jazz. *Kind of Blue* was not so much a revolution as a realisation, a supreme realisation of achieved simplicity. This is music that is expressive and cool, modern and simple, intellectually conceived – it is explicitly based on a theoretical idea – yet spontaneous in execution. Declaring 'war on the chord' meant no longer having to race around a slalom course of harmonic 'changes'. For example, the opening track, 'So What', uses just two chords in 32 bars. In the album notes, Bill Evans refers to Davis's compositions not as 'tunes' but as 'frameworks': 'As the painter needs his framework of parchment, the improvising musical group needs its framework in time. Miles Davis presents here frameworks which are exquisite in their simplicity and yet contain all that is necessary to stimulate performance with a sure reference to the primary conception.'

Kind of Blue has been extensively written about and has by now, in a Milesian, low-key way, worked its way into mass culture (see, for example, Khan 2000). I have already discussed some of the background to modal jazz. *Kind of Blue* is not the first jazz record to 'use modes' consciously and of course it is not just one technical factor but a fully integrated aesthetic achievement, including the performances of all members of the sextet, that make it the modal 'classic'.[18]

In the same year that he recorded *Kind of Blue* as a member of the Miles Davis Sextet, Coltrane pushed working with chord changes to the nth degree on his own *Giant Steps*. Poet and sociologist LeRoi Jones, writing in 1963, was also aware of the war on the chord:

> If Coleman's music can be called nonchordal, John Coltrane's music is fanatically chordal. In his solos, Coltrane seems almost to 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 generalised block sound of the chord as the final determinant of the music's direction and shape. [228]

Certainly after *Giant Steps* Coltrane had nothing to prove as a virtuoso. Tunes using 'Coltrane changes' (progressions in thirds, semitones and fourths, perhaps inspired by Hasaan), along with transcriptions of his solos, are still the advanced literature of the tenor saxophone and indeed for chordal jazz in a modal era. If most musicians learned 'So What' because it was so simple, everyone had to learn 'Giant Steps' because it was so hard. Coltrane's short career at the top began with posing and solving technical problems (but with

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

passionate commitment), and ended with smashing his way through layers of complexity to pure expression. Perhaps he was looking for the answer to the rhetorical question, 'So what?' The year 1959 finds him still near the beginning of this self-described spiritual journey and at this stage his music is intellectual; he is preoccupied with its technical elements rather than the esoteric musician as conduit for divine energy he later became.

For Ornette Coleman, playing on chord changes would have been just 'playing the background', the equivalent of not really improvising at all. Naming an album that demonstrated his harmolodic alternative, *The Shape of Jazz to Come* was an affront or at best a puzzle to many musicians. Coleman's approach seemed a crude abandonment of hard-earned skills and the collective wisdom of two or three generations. 'Free jazz' was a rejection of deeply felt criteria of 'validity' so painstakingly learned and observed by jazz musicians. By 1959, most took for granted that their work happened within a tradition that they had inherited and that would outlive them. Coleman's re-shaping of jazz 'to come' was uncomfortable in this context. Most disquietingly of all, his music could be quite beautiful. It was correctly predicted by the nay-sayers that whatever merit there might be in Coleman's own music, the influence of free jazz as a movement would have the effect of driving people away. It did, and this had real-world consequences. The resolute traditionalism of our present age is perhaps meant to protect the jazz scene against a similar economic catastrophe in the future. In the 1960s, free jazz won adherents even among established players like Coltrane. To the average listener, the problem with much of free jazz had less to do with not being 'based on the chord' than with the strident and deliberately 'unmusical' sounds often associated with it. Nevertheless, in the long run, the mainstream benefited from avant-garde explorations of an enlarged jazz sound-world, e.g., how instruments are played, which sounds are musical and how sound is organised. The avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s generously opened up a non-imitative space for improvisers, especially European musicians, for whom the disciplines and re-worked 'standards' (tunes) of bebop were of marginal relevance to their artistic goals and culture.

After the intellectual intensity surrounding the three above-mentioned albums, to include a popular hit like *Time Out* may seem like dragging *Star Wars* into a discussion of avant-garde cinema, but it really did open up a 'final frontier' of jazz. Like *Kind of Blue*, it was an album entirely dedicated to working out a particular musical idea. Steve Race's sleeve notes begin:

> Should some cool-minded Martian come to earth to check on the state of our music, he might play through 10,000 jazz records before he found one that wasn't in common 4/4 time . . . Dave Brubeck . . . is really the first to explore the uncharted seas . . . The outcome of his experiments is this album.

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

Experimenting was much closer to Brubeck's outlook than hit-making. In fact, the production of *Time Out* was undertaken somewhat in a spirit of artistic rebellion under a cloud of corporate disapproval. Columbia Records did not like the idea of an album of 'originals', the odd time-signatures concept or even the cover art he wanted. Because Brubeck (like Davis) was one of the top-selling jazz artists on the label, Columbia agreed to release *Time Out*, but only on condition that he also record an album of standards (*Gone with the Wind*).[19]

In spite of 'war' rhetoric, chords are not really destroyed by modes and/or free playing any more than 4/4 is rendered obsolete by 5/4. Soon after *Kind of Blue*, the chord-density Davis cleared out of his kind of jazz came back as second growth in the shape of 'modal' changes, compound harmonies, chord shapes and clusters over pedal points, primarily through the influence of McCoy Tyner, Coltrane's pianist during his 'classic' Quartet years. The chord, though weakened, has not yet surrendered completely and unconditionally, and jazz musicians still play and compose 'tunes' based on 'changes'.

The freedom to import or invent musical resources fundamentally changed the role of the composer-performer in jazz. Like Jelly Roll Morton, one could go on inventing jazz or take it as a given. The jazz composer-performer can choose to be a creator within a form and/or creator of forms. The difference, as of 1959, is that jazz was at last strong enough to venture beyond established conventions without losing its identity.

In the twenty-first century the idealistic notion of an 'autonomous art form', especially one like jazz with popular roots, requires some qualification. What I have been writing about relates mostly to the internal methodologies of jazz because, as we have seen, this is what certain leading musicians and intellectuals were engaged with in 1959. Of course this engagement did not happen in a historical or cultural vacuum. Contributing factors ranged from the industry-wide changeover to the stereo 33⅓ LP record around 1957 to broad social trends such as the surge in higher education affecting musicians and audiences in post-war America, economic growth and nationalism (the decline of regionalism) in culture, electronic media and commerce, the appearance of sub-cultures identified with alternative expressions in the arts and the vexed, pervasive, dynamics of race. Zen and Existentialism proclaimed the reality of the here and now and the modernist spirit encouraged experimentalism for its own sake. In the otherwise ambiguous jazz world, a new phase was clearly ushered in by 'music about music', as demonstrated in the four albums briefly discussed in this chapter. I therefore considered the background of intellectualism, technical means and critical expectation in order to understand the amazingly rapid success

Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011
Published online by Cambridge University Press

and recognition by an elite and canonisation of what was, of course, radical innovation. Mehegan's blustering in *Down Beat* would not seem ridiculous to us now if *Kind of Blue*, *Giant Steps*, *The Shape of Jazz to Come* and *Time Out* had not been by and large accepted first of all by the dynamic artistic community in which they arose.

There is a relatively simple answer to the question asked earlier about the similarity between jazz now and 40 years ago, but it does require a cultural perspective on 'internalist' matters. Jazz musicians and their advocates were entering a further stage of the long struggle for legitimacy. Of course, the greater part of this struggle had (and has) to do with minimising the practical consequences of longstanding elitist and racial prejudices. For cultural legitimacy to be a prize worth having, jazz musicians also had to succeed in their internal struggle to invent or discover appropriate values. Articulate critics, academics and musicians were inevitably drawn to formalist terminology and experimentation, and were challenged to create as well as replicate. Criteria in the classical world, though not usually useful in valorising performances in terms that jazz musicians themselves thought relevant, were much closer to the level of practical criticism that was needed.[20] There were many earlier victories on the socio-cultural level, for example, the 1938 and 1939 Carnegie Hall concerts, but the collective breakthrough in 1959 was the decisive emancipation of jazz from its popular past; a break not only from being seen as popular entertainment and dance music, but from being defined by the very (musical) characteristics that lasted even through the so-called bebop revolution. Modern jazz was not a rejection of tradition but, like modern 'classical' music, was built on re-conceptualising what was already possible. Present-day jazz pedagogy and theory within the jazz tradition is a lasting and powerful link with this period.

The pre-1959 historical canon was already in place; the best of Morton, Armstrong, Ellington, Basie, Goodman, Parker (and of course many names that fit alongside or in between) and the present-day canon – Miles, Coltrane and all the rest – was simply added to it and is now taught around the world. The evolutionary hypothesis (in its technical aspects) works deceptively well up to this point, but for the longer future and beyond, the organic analogy with its corollary of artistic progress breaks down. It would be unfair to write off all the music of the 1970s and 1980s, but this was not a period of comparable importance for the art-form as a whole. The recent re-emergence of acoustic post-bop based on the 1960s and the unassailability of the modernist canon would seem to mark, if not 1959 exactly, then not very long after as the beginning of the present era. The reason there has been relatively little change over such a period is that a secure sense of cultural legitimacy, musical values and intellectual purpose was achieved with reference to music that was produced at the end of the 1950s. Significantly, not by

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011

fixing limits but by destabilising them, jazz remains an open, experimental field grounded in now universally accepted traditions.

DISCOGRAPHY

The following albums referred to in the text are available as CD reissues at the time of writing:

Brubeck, Dave, *Time Out*, CK 65122
Coleman, Ornette, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, Atlantic 7567-81339-2
Coltrane, John, *Giant Steps*, Atlantic 8122-75203-2, Rhino R275203
Davis, Miles, *Kind of Blue*, CK 64935
Goodman, Benny and various, *From Spirituals to Swing*, Vanguard VCD2-47/48
Mingus, Charles, *Mingus Ah Um*, CK 65512
Schuller, Gunther, *The Birth of the Third Stream*, CK 64929, 1996

[CK = Columbia Legacy]

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Companions Online © Cambridge University Press, 2011