

## 11 Free Jazz and the avant-garde

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'Free Jazz' refers to a historical movement that, despite earlier precedents, first significantly flowered in the late 1950s in the US. Its central focus was a liberation from musical conventions – but from a jazz player's perspective, since no liberation is ever complete. Initially known simply as the New Thing, it became Free Jazz after borrowing the title of a seminal 1960 album by saxophonist/composer Ornette Coleman. It subsequently has had international repercussions that seem set to continue well into the twenty-first century.

Its impact and relations to other developments remain controversial, and a variety of accounts of it are possible: as a culmination of the drive for individual creativity, a radicalisation of the scope of musical materials of jazz, a collection of statements by salient individuals and groups, or as a movement shaped by extramusical forces of political, cultural, racial and spiritual liberation – to mention only the most obvious. Here these are all taken as valid viewpoints, in need of reconciliation.

### The seminal role of creative improvisation

The nucleus of all jazz is creative improvisational expression (Louis Armstrong's 'the sound of surprise'), a process that brings into the music the joy of discovery, the magic of communication, and the uniqueness of both the moment and the individual. Yet it also introduces several profound tensions which early on planted the seeds for the ultimate blossoming of free jazz.

First, in all but solo improvisation there is a tension between the freedom of expression of the individual and the need to form coherent relations with other performers in the group. The most traditional handling of this tension in jazz is via role-playing. Each instrument takes its nominal part in the play: the bass provides chord foundations and time, the comping instrument feeds chordal colorations, drums set up the rhythmic matrix and drive, and the soloist plays a main melody. Other instruments, as far as they are used, have well-defined roles of rhythmic or motivic support, as in call-and-response designs or early jazz polyphony. In this way there is both a functional framework promoting coherence and latitude for creativity.

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Another tension is between freedom of expression and the song form. The recurring song cycle (most commonly the 12-bar blues or the 32-bar AABA form) provides harmonic propulsion and a time frame for phrasing; yet it can also act as a straitjacket, with too slavish a following of it yielding a vapid and predictable outcome. Experienced jazz performers and listeners handle this tension by using or recognising characteristic form-marking gestures (which may vary with instrument and performer), providing an extra level of surety for the imaginative introduction of form-threatening motivic processes, rhythmic overlays and accents.

A third tension is between freedom of expression and the conventional musical materials of African-American traditions, including styles and 'rules of the game' (see Jost 1974). These materials include technical resources such as scales, blues riffs, vamps, etc., and also aesthetic building blocks, such as swing, sound and feel. Such familiar materials and processes act psychologically, forming and invoking cultural and personal references that can bring forth powerful emotional associations in listeners. The common handling of this tension is to balance traditional materials with innovation, building a personal language that extends traditions but keeps the connection to them apparent.

Finally, there can be a profound tension between the creative urge and commercial viability, strongly affecting the jazz player's life conditions and view of self (see Rubington and Weinberg 1999). Jazz's origins are commercial, and it has built acceptance for its novelties by basing performances on the popular songs and styles of its own or earlier eras. When its expressions become too novel, its social functions are subverted: the music loses viability as a club music and has to move into the concert hall, alternative multi-stylistic venues or obscurity.

In mainstream song-form jazz, the containment of these tensions serves both improviser and listener, for constraints can spur both creation and intelligibility; the performer can react subliminally to the musical elements around him or her, saving precious cognitive facility for fluency and immediacy. Listeners can track the events in terms of the song. In short, listeners and performers have some sort of cognitive and emotional contract to experience and experiment with, and the ground rules ensure that everybody can have a good time.

But if one, or especially several or all, of these tensions are left unresolved, there are revolutionary consequences for perception, attitude and employability. And of course this is what free jazz set in motion. While jazz revolutions had been heralded before, notably with bebop, continuities with older traditions had soon become apparent and the fate of previous radicalism was rapid incorporation into an expanded view of the tradition. Not so here: many of the radicalisations of free jazz struck hammer blows at all these

simmering tensions, blows with effects that were to force a reconsideration of the very nature of jazz.

### **The radicalisation process**

Free jazz was a radical approach to music. Except for the choice of instruments, it ultimately radicalised every aspect of jazz: form, style, materials, context, relationships, sound, process – but not equally, nor at the same time. The changes to form were simple: the blues and 32-bar song forms might be abandoned, and new formats used, or form might emerge from process and interplay. Likewise, style was now a variable that players could adopt, extend, overlay and conceive anew, drawing on any source for materials, sometimes hearkening back to older roots like blues and the field holler for historical empowering.

With respect to context and relationship, there gradually came a realisation that nearly anything could be made to work in any context if the conceptual framework of expression were suitably broadened. Atonal clusters or discordant multiphonics (chords played on a reed instrument by cross-fingerings and overblowing) could sit in a complex polyphonic context, heard as avant-garde outpourings, or they could be a plaintive emotive cry within a traditional groove. Polyphony or heterophony could be replaced by an energetic collision of parts, by pantonal call-and-response, by conversational counterpoint or language-based gestures that might hearken back to early musical sources such as chant.

The radicalisation of sound was a deep and far-ranging process of individual exploration. The process was most powerful in instruments that provided continuous sustaining control of sound production, notably breath- and bow-based instruments. The scope of control intimacy was particularly acute with reed instruments, notably the saxophone (that most prototypical of modern jazz instruments), where the reed, mouthpiece, diaphragm, teeth, tongue, lips, cheeks and voice box provided an incredibly rich control apparatus. The cries of animals, the screechings of machines, the susurrations of the natural elements, the conversational twitterings of evoked harmonics and the gorgeous jazz ballad tone were now all equally possible. Novel fingerings were able to evoke luxuriant and unanticipated harmonic structures in a single note. What need for a melodic line when the single note was really a chord with internal movement, as could be heard in the centred urgency of tenor saxophonist Pharoah Sanders and later in the harmonic cascades of Evan Parker? But, was it still jazz?

The particular advantage that jazz brought to this putatively avant-garde language arose from its foundation as an aural tradition, since many of these

saxophone sounds were unnotatable (this was also true of some other instruments, notably the winds and double bass). The results differed from instrument to instrument, and from embouchure to embouchure, requiring the construction of a personal language for each performer based on aural tradition and experimental self-evaluation. This was irreconcilable with mainstream traditions of notation, except under a stance of virtually or literally unplayable hyperprecise notation (e.g., the works of Brian Ferneyhough, which have little to do with jazz), but it fits well with the jazz idea of the soloist's personal voice.

A similar story applies to the brass traditions, although the scope of timbral resources proves to be more restricted, particularly on trumpet. Trumpeter Don Cherry, a vital partner for Ornette Coleman, was an early brass explorer; later, trombonist Albert Mangelsdorf and others showed the connection between free jazz and the sound world of extended brass techniques via chords, glissandi and vocalisings into the instrument.

The piano became radicalised in several ways: first, the vocabulary of chords grew without limit – every chord did not have to be either lush or funky. Second, the insides of the piano could be used, and its timbre possibly 'prepared' (under the inspiration of John Cage) by the addition of materials to the strings (e.g., bolts, paper, wood). Third, new percussive techniques of performance, for example, clusters and hand-alternation techniques, notably pioneered by Cecil Taylor, changed the palette of gesture and articulation. Finally, the piano became electric, and the keyboard (followed by the guitar) became the dominant interface for the synthesiser, which meant that any sound, digitally sampled or constructed, could be tailored to polyphonic presentation.

In practice, these keyboard innovations exhibited limitations. The emotive power of many complex chords and their sequences proved limited, and the piano's fixed tempered tuning clashed with the microtonal potentials of all other jazz instruments (hence it was an early casualty from Ornette Coleman's line-up). The prepared piano is not practicable in most club gigs, and it occupies a rather specific timbral world. The new percussive piano techniques often came at the expense of a lyrical touch. Lastly, the keyboard was not only a liberation for synthesised sound, it was also a prison. Keyboard players were not expert in pitch bending and real-time modulation actions, and most never mastered them to full fluency. Without this, many synthesised and sampled sounds lack the note-to-note variability that underlies expression; the exact repeatability of sounds tends to clash (though not ineluctably) with the idea of the essential uniqueness of the moment that forms part of the jazz attitude.

The bass kept its groove and melodic functions, but expanded into a world of explosive bow-guided timbres. It was some time, though, before

the lessons of extended bass technique (as shown, for example, by Bert Turetzky) were fully incorporated into the playing of specific jazz bassists. Seminal in this transition were Dave Holland and Barry Guy.

The jazz drum kit evolved for jazz time; in early free jazz, it was the time which disintegrated first, replaced by clouds of activity that either played with or implied a pulse, via asymmetrical overlays, or soon abandoned pulse altogether. Drummers such as Rashied Ali and Sonny Murray saw to this. Major changes to the sound came later. The idea of percussion as a collection of timbral colorations of registral melody, with sounds drawn from found objects and many cultures, evolved more slowly. German percussionist Paul Lovens was among those who dramatically expanded the world of percussive sound. The free improvisation group, Kiva, with percussionist Jean-Charles François, was another.

The voice – the ultimate jazz source – was slower to find its freedom in a jazz context than it was in the hands of European composers such as Luciano Berio. Scat emphasises phonetics without semantic shackles, but the radicalisation of melody remained the province of only a few, such as the yodelling and falsetto techniques of Leon Thomas in the early free-jazz period. In the later 1990s, Kurt Elling emerged as a stunningly hip singer-commentator, showing a wealth of powers spanning impromptu sound poetry, transcendent rap and phonemic deconstruction.

## **Some historical threads**

In this short chapter it is impossible to give a comprehensive or even fully balanced history of free jazz. Rather, I will recount some precedents and its period of origin, and then examine the consequences of these developments by focusing on a few selected individuals as exemplars.

### **Precedents**

Free playing in jazz is not without historical precedent in other types of music. Although in the mainstream folk or traditional musics of the world, free self-expression reliably gives way to social function, something at least approaching free improvisation can emerge in some situations of religious ecstasy, trance or transcendence of the self – notably in traditional shamanism, and traditions of the Arabic world, India and many parts of Africa (though such situations often feature fixed music, too). In the West, such ecstatic musical behaviour was largely limited to certain melismatic church traditions (as in northern Scotland, or the spirituals of the American South), since the larger religious institutions attempted with considerable success to suppress them systematically.

Yet freedom came not only by ecstatic self-abandonment. Another path was driven by a frustration borne of the exhaustion of traditional materials. This can be documented in the West by written improvisational textbooks, which date back many centuries; while most such texts taught embellishment techniques, freer sources can also be found. For example, Carl Czerny, best known in today's educational traditions as a deviser of exercises, also wrote a book on free improvisation (*Systematic Introduction to Fantasy Playing on the Piano*, 1826),<sup>1</sup> emphasising the role of spontaneous intuition. This heightened emphasis on intuition was an inevitable outcome of the broader historical emphasis on the powers of the individual relative to received authority, seen in the Renaissance, the advent of empirical science, the Reformation, the Industrial and Information Revolutions.

Yet it unquestionably fell to the twentieth century to receive the ultimate consequences of these two approaches. Their timing was only roughly synchronous in composition and improvisation. In art-music composition, the exhaustively notated path to expressive freedom is traceable through diatonic extensions (Debussy, Ravel, Skryabin, Stravinsky), dodecaphony (Schoenberg, Webern, Berg), multi-serialism (Boulez, Babbitt) and hypercomplexity (Ferneyhough). This acted, of course, in tandem with its opposite: deliberate simplicity or primitivism (Satie, Reich, Glass, Pärt).

The more intuitionist path of abandon, focusing on the performance act via notation of deprecated specificity, is traceable through the works of Dada, the futurists, John Cage, Earle Brown, Cornelius Cardew, Pauline Oliveros, the Fluxus movement and many others. These two paths were roughly contemporaneous, supporting the idea that they were different responses to a widely felt underlying social condition, expressed in literature as alienation or existentialism.

In jazz these divisions were also apparent, as we will see below. The systematic extension of materials and their real-time performance potentials continues side by side with pure intuitionist stances.<sup>2</sup> The impact of electronics and computers via synthesis, loudspeaker culture and digital recording has also changed the concept of musical presentation drastically. Improvisations can be frozen and preserved, edited and reconstituted, fundamentally changing the face of the improvisation–composition continuum.

### **Early free jazz**

The first unmistakably relevant evidence of free musical improvisation appears to be the home recordings made in the early 1940s in New York by jazz violinist Stuff Smith and concert pianist Robert Crum. Later, in 1949, pianist Lennie Tristano's jazz group recorded the first spontaneous studio tracks 'Intuition' and 'Digression'. These recordings were not a spur-of-the-moment idea, but documentation of a long-running practice by Tristano's

group. A measure of their shock value can be found in the facts that the engineer intentionally erased two other free tracks recorded in the same session and the recording company refused for years to release either ‘Intuition’ or ‘Digression’, or to pay royalties for them.

Tristano’s path was incremental, in that his group interleaved stances of intuition (free playing) and rigour (public performances of tightly rehearsed complex jazz works and the *Inventions* of J. S. Bach). This led to a freedom which threw out formal design but maintained the inherited sound elements and phrasing of jazz, and the values of polyphony and the lyrical line.

There was then a gap of nearly ten years before significant others appeared. Important innovations occurred in this period that helped set the stage for free jazz, notably the interactive group processes developed by Charles Mingus and the modal approach to playing pioneered by Miles Davis and John Coltrane, but otherwise the jazz world was preoccupied with the dichotomy between hard bop and cool.

Then, in 1957–60, two artistic figures emerged of an individuality and influence sufficient to call all this into question, and a free-jazz movement was identified by jazz writers. Pianist Cecil Taylor and saxophonist Ornette Coleman were separately the architects of this movement, and their innovations were loudly decried as charlatanism and anti-jazz, even as they began to become widely influential.

### **Cecil Taylor**

Taylor brought uncommon intellectual drive to his African-American heritage, as his literary writings reveal (e.g., album notes for *Unit Structures*, 1966). Drawing on variegated musical influences, such as impressionism, atonality, the dense voicings of pianist Dave Brubeck and the free linear approach of Tristano, he early on abandoned the lyrical touch and conventional jazz chords, and organised his compositional work as motifs for performer communication, with form emerging from the process of group interaction. Yet his most upsetting stance to jazz purists was the complete abandonment of swing. If the words to Duke Ellington’s famous ‘It Don’t Mean a Thing . . .’ were right, either Taylor’s music was inconsequential or it was not jazz, and perhaps both. There was no question that this music occupied a different kinetic and emotional space from jazz that had gone before.

In a perceptive analysis of Taylor’s early work, Jost notes how Taylor’s extended free pieces, such as *Unit Structures*, had in practice a clear structural foundation, and that Taylor showed that ‘the freedom of free jazz does not mean the complete abstention from every kind of musical organization. Freedom lies, first and foremost, in the opportunity to make a conscious choice from boundless material’ (Jost 1974, 83).



Taylor's originality and iconoclasm left little scope for commercial success for many years. But by the time he gave a solo performance for Jimmy Carter at the White House in 1979, times had changed and the idiosyncratic virtuosity of Taylor's expression (likened by some to a pianistic field holler) was not only finely honed, but its expressive depth was evident even to the unconverted. His influence has become wide-ranging within and without jazz, even as it remains separate from the jazz mainstream, especially in the US.

### **Ornette Coleman**

Alto saxophonist Coleman's early statement, 'Let's play the music and not the background' (cited in Jost 1974, 17), proposed an escape from the recurring chordal prison of the song form. His novel approach rapidly attracted attention through an extended seminal residency at New York's prestigious Five Spot in 1959.

Although clearly an original, he seemed to many to lack sufficient technical proficiency to justify his high public profile – and, in truth, he did not at this time approach the fluidity or clarity of line of the best bop and post-bop horn players. Also disconcerting was the conflict between his maintenance of a tonal framework and traditional song forms in his compositions (which were and continue to be widely admired), and the improvisations on them, which though bop-like in style often gave faint reference to the chordal progressions, acting instead more linearly via chains of association (see Jost 1974). Controversy flared again in 1965 when, after a two-year hiatus, he reappeared in public performance, now also playing violin and trumpet with unconventional and (to most ears) rather limited technique.

The spirit of free thinking in his early work gave rise to the historically important album *Free Jazz*, appearing in 1960, an unbroken single piece featuring a double jazz quartet including both those associated with free jazz, such as Don Cherry (trumpet) and Eric Dolphy (bass clarinet), and those from the mainstream, such as Scott LaFaro (bass) and Freddie Hubbard (trumpet). The result was complex and unlike anything heard before; with hindsight it appears both seminal and emotionally static. It was a direction Coleman did not pursue.

In the longer time frame, the characteristic piano-less sound of Coleman's group and his integrated 'harmolodic' tonal approach (see page 193) – a vaguely specified philosophy also underlying his subsequent ventures into fully notated string quartets, symphonies and ballets – were to be more influential. In more recent work, his rhythm-and-blues roots re-emerged, producing 'free funk', a free improvisation above a funk foundation. His original compositions remain widely influential with both mainstream and free-jazz musicians.



Taylor's and Coleman's groups also served as training grounds for others who subsequently became leaders in their own right, such as saxophonists Archie Shepp and Albert Ayler, and trumpeter Cherry. But other independent voices also soon arose.

### **Other early voices**

Sun Ra, a keyboardist who played with Fletcher Henderson, took a developmental road to freedom in jazz, which involved the use of eccentric 'intergalactic' awareness (he claimed to have been born on the planet Saturn), a novel big-band instrumentation (including such unusual jazz instruments as timpani and bass marimba) and a pioneering use of electronics. Sun Ra's 'Arkestra' grew to encompass elaborate dance, theatrical and magic presentations which put him in the vanguard of performance art and at the same time hearkened to folk rituals of an earlier era.

Chicago not only gave us the Arkestra, but also the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, which sought to heighten the creative potentials of jazz and also provide links to community that went beyond concertising to education and mentoring. Richard Abrams (piano) more than anyone else began the process, which led to the Art Ensemble of Chicago, which included Roscoe Mitchell (woodwinds), Lester Bowie (trumpet), Anthony Braxton (saxophones) and others, whose influence continues. Braxton has remained highly prolific to the present day, his output varying across standards, intimate small groups, and compositions for large ensembles incorporating both simple folk traditions (e.g., parade music) and developments in European contemporary music.

John Coltrane was not an early part of a free-jazz movement, but his personal path came to intersect with it, notably in the last two years of his life, when in the view of many he became its leading exponent. His path was one of intense exploration of materials, giving in the view of many his intuitive free-jazz developments a tremendous power and spirituality. His great 'free' epic is the single-track album *Ascension*, its title referring not only to the scaling of artistic heights but also the ascension of Christ. This work has a level of intensity uncommon in music of any style, and brought together a seminal big band of two trumpets, two altos and three tenors, with Coltrane's quartet of McCoy Tyner (piano), Jimmy Garrison and Art Davis (basses), and Elvin Jones (drums). The piece is a series of alternating solo and tutti sections, based on a simple diatonic motif, and presents a wide gamut of approaches to expression, from the iconoclastic sound sculpting of saxophonists Sanders and Shepp (smeared tones, animal cries, kinetic outpourings) to the motivic manipulations of trumpeter Hubbard, and Coltrane himself. A certain structural rigour informs Coltrane's work, even when it is at its most radical and confrontational, as here. In this same period,

Coltrane developed the free-jazz ballad within the traditions of the jazz small group, which juxtaposed lyrical directness with eruptions of broken quasi-tonality (e.g., ‘Offering’ and ‘Ogunde’ on *Expression*). The spiritual side of Coltrane’s music was continued by his wife Alice (piano, organ, harp), as for example in *Journey in Satchidananda*.

Trumpeter Miles Davis also had a liberating influence on jazz language. The seminal role of modal playing in the late 1950s has already been mentioned. (For further on modal jazz at this time, see Chapter 10.) Although he himself did not play free solos, and spoke scathingly of free jazz, he later led moves to freer contexts by progressive small-group liberalisations of form and harmony with saxophonist Wayne Shorter and, most directly, by his electric free funk fusions, as heard on *Bitches Brew* (1969) or *Live at the Fillmore East* (1970), which brought together seminal musicians like Dave Holland (bass), Jack DeJohnette (drums), Chick Corea and Keith Jarrett (keyboards) in free-form gestures within a jazz-rock rhythmical matrix.

Beginning in the early 1970s, Jarrett has intermittently performed free solo-piano concerts, resulting in some stunning examples of the improviser’s art, such as *The Köln Concert* and the *Solo Concerts*. This music connected not only with jazz but with the great nineteenth-century piano traditions, and while it often was based on traditional tonal materials, its high level of refinement and sheer beauty were incontestable.

In summary, this foundation period provided a real sense of a revolutionary movement and exhibited great diversity. Since it was founded predominantly by African-Americans, a natural interpretation of this period is as an expression of black liberation and cultural empowerment.

### Later developments

Free jazz as a movement or foundation point may remain marginalised, diffuse and a thing apart, yet its influence – as a source of possibilities in jazz, contemporary concert music and even non-corporate rock music – runs deep. The variety of persons operating in the less traditional forms of jazz and improvised music is so great that it exceeds any ready classification scheme. In this short chapter it is impossible to do full justice to more recent developments, which are extensive and international.

Broadly, avant-garde jazz does not often appear at clubs, as it remains commercially suspect. It has a better chance at festivals, and is better-established in Europe than in the US, probably as a result of its cross-fertilisation with the European avant-garde traditions. The line between jazz and non-jazz is often blurred, with some mainstream jazz writers adopting an exclusive position based on use of jazz phrasing and forms, but with others taking inclusive positions based on the spirit of freedom of approach. At the close of the twentieth century, free-improvisation traditions emerging from

jazz but with their own traditions of development of nearly 40 years were now well-established in many countries. At the same time, a common view (expressed, for example, by pianists Anthony Davis and Chick Corea) is that free improvisation is a useful process subserving the greater goal of richer musical expression, but that aiming towards freedom alone often leads to sterile or clichéd territory.

Strong traditions exist in Europe, notably in the UK (e.g., AMM, guitarist Derek Bailey, bassist Barry Guy, saxophonist Evan Parker), Holland (e.g., pianist Misha Mengelberg, drummer Han Bennink and saxophonist Willem Breuker) and Germany (e.g., the Globe Unity Orchestra, trombonist Albert Mangelsdorf). In the US, the dominant *Zeitgeist* at the end of the millennium remained retrograde, as in the case of 'rebop'. Many freer players there strove to keep some explicit links with the traditional elements of jazz, reflecting the greater American stake in the origins of black music. Nevertheless, a number of players are active in presenting extensions of the improvisational languages of the early free-jazz period, and others in setting out in fresh directions that either extend, or go well beyond, the frontiers of jazz. The diverse directions include the work of pianists Anthony Davis and Marilyn Crispell, electric guitarist James Blood Ulmer, the Rova saxophone quartet, influential composer Carla Bley, the Jazz Composer's Orchestra, electronic music systems designer and trombonist George Lewis, meditative musician Pauline Oliveros and eclectic composer-saxophonist John Zorn, to mention only a few.

Given the impossibility of adequate coverage, and the regrettable neglect here of significant performers in Japan, Australia, Eastern Europe, Russia, Scandinavia, South America, Canada and other locales, I have selected three players to serve as case-studies of the directions in which free-improvisation trends went in the last quarter of the twentieth century. These are the Australian violinist Jon Rose, the British saxophonist Evan Parker, and the US saxophonist and composer John Zorn. This choice may be controversial, in that all three of these performers perform in a much wider context than that of jazz. However, my view is that free jazz and the improvisational freedom it presupposes have had a critical influence on their development.

### **Jon Rose**

An Australian who was born in England in 1951, Rose has since 1986 been based in Europe and has toured widely. He is dedicated to the development of improvisational languages on the violin (e.g., *Violin Music for Restaurants*) and on a myriad of other eccentric or extended string instruments of his own construction (e.g., *Fringe Benefits*). He has also used interactive digital electronics and interfaces extensively in recent work (e.g., *The Hyperstring Project*).

Trained early in classical music, he later (aged 15) abandoned formal music study to evolve a personal language, which had input from a great variety of musical genres, including jazz, soul, art-music composition, Italian club bands, Indian ragas and sound installations. He became a central figure in the development of free improvisation in Australia, both by prolific solo concert-giving and by a series of musical conversations with other significant players (e.g., drummer Louis Burdett), a project labelled *The Relative Band*.

With time, his focus came to include a project towards bowed string instrument extension of unparalleled invention and transmutation, called *The Relative Violin*. This has embraced extra strings, multiple necks, multiple bows, attached metal resonators, gigantic scale-ups in size, and such imaginative creations as the half-size megaphone violin, nine-string elbow violin, automatic violin quartet, violin vivisection, violino del jesu, double-piston triple-neck wheeling violin, amplified windmill violin, triple humming bow and MIDI bow.

The textures of Rose's music are busy and extroverted, often distinctly nonlyrical, and give a central role to explorational improvisation and physicality of performance. His music is also highly contrapuntal, and he sees this latter attribute as the unique contribution of western music to world culture. For him, the new technologies are not only of value for their expansion of the world of sound, but for their expansion of the potentials of computer-interactive counterpoint for the solo improviser.

In technical terms, Rose is an impressive virtuoso and has a developed ear for all manner of tonal relations. His bowing is not only a means of controlling sound production, but an enactment of psychodrama. His work is in parts intense, in parts whimsical, in parts satirical (e.g., *The Fence*) and exhibits rapid changes of texture. He also combines high and low tech, incorporating junk, kitsch and trash in his constructions. They not only contribute light relief, but aid his central aims of unpredictability of interaction and comprehensive exploration of timbre.

For example, he has created a mythical musical protagonist, Johannes Rosenberg, and provided a detailed identity for him. His *Violin Music in the Age of Shopping* is a wry modernist projection which has been incarnated as a book and a CD, as well as numerous concerts. Another recent work, *Perks*, features a deconstruction of snippets of music by Australian composer Percy Grainger using a MIDI-controlled piano triggered by two badminton players, with video and text presentation, an improvised violin obbligato acting as commentary. The badminton strokes (as with the MIDI violin bow) are monitored by pressure sensors and accelerometers, which can call up different electronic sounds and video material, which can then be modified and manipulated in real time.

**Evan Parker**

Nowhere is the difference between the free-jazz paths of Europe and North America clearer than in the instance of Evan Shaw Parker, born in Bristol in 1944. Virtually unknown in the US, he is regarded in Europe as a uniquely powerful innovator who continues to disclose hitherto unknown potentials of the tenor and soprano saxophones. He has worked in a variety of formats, including small groups and duets, particularly with pianist Aleksander Schlippenbach, guitarist Derek Bailey, bassist Barry Guy and drummers Paul Lytton, Paul Lovens and John Stevens. He has taken part in all the major European large free-jazz ensembles (including the Globe Unity Orchestra, the London Jazz Composer's Orchestra and the Berlin Jazz Composer's Orchestra), and has been involved in electronic projects, notably with Lawrence Casserley in real-time digital signal processing using the IRCAM workstation.

The originality of his contribution is most clearly seen in his solo saxophone work. Particularly on the soprano saxophone, his repertoire of extended sounds is astonishingly diverse and well-controlled, establishing a sense to many of a principled extension of the sound-world explorations begun long ago by Coltrane, Ayler, Shepp and Sanders. His foundation technique includes a thorough mastery of circular breathing, effortless leaps between registers, and an uncommon tonguing approach (up/down motion of the tongue rather than the tu-ku stop of the tongue on the hard palette) that in his view allows more rapid sequences of very short notes, better articulated over a greater dynamic range, than would otherwise be possible. In his own words, 'the saxophone has been for me a rather specialised bio-feedback instrument for studying and expanding my control over my hearing and the motor mechanics of parts of my skeleto-muscular system'.<sup>3</sup>

Parker typically favours the use of additive and mutational procedures for developing the potentials of prefigured material, generating complexity from simple cells. He can achieve pauseless delivery of long solos (up to 30 minutes or more) via circular breathing, which veer from overtone cascades to motivic manipulations across several distinct registers, the latter a form of polyphonic melody that he likens to the simultaneous parallel actions of circus performers. A conventional sense of tempo is absent from his playing, replaced by a manipulation of the density of events in time. He is prolific, having recorded over 150 albums.

**John Zorn**

Zorn, born in 1953, is a saxophonist and prolific composer who draws on roots from many traditions. Whether he is really a free-jazz exponent (a typically European view), or an avant-gardist/postmodernist (a more American position), Zorn qualifies as one of the most eclectic musicians of

any age. His eclecticism encompasses both high and low art, ranging from the most intricate of atonal structures to conceptual art, jazz tunes, whimsy, country music, reggae, klezmer and raging punk rock, not only in the same set, but often in 30-second blocks within the same song. Early examples of this mosaic style include the group Naked City, featuring Zorn on sax, Bill Frisell (guitar), Wayne Horvitz (keyboards), Fred Frith (bass), Joey Baron (drums) and Yamatsuka Eye (vocals).

Zorn's subsequent album *Spy vs. Spy* is a bent tribute to the tunes of Ornette Coleman. Zorn aimed to make the versions as iconoclastic as Coleman's early free jazz was, and so recast all the pieces in a confrontational hardcore punk style, using two drummers – a musical link not appreciated by everyone. In 1986, Zorn collaborated with Frisell and George Lewis (trombone) on *News for Lulu*, a tribute to four Blue Note hard-bop players of the 1950s and 1960s: Kenny Dorham, Hank Mobley, Sonny Clark and Freddie Redd. He has written many film scores.

Zorn also composes chamber music showing similar postmodern inclinations. For example, in his *Cat O'Nine Tails* (subtitled 'Tex Avery Meets the Marquis de Sade') for string quartet (1998), which is neither jazz nor improvised, we hear whimsically abrupt transitions between jazz standards, comical portamento whines, braying donkeys, polyphonic atonal textures, Jewish tangos and grinding solo cadenzas – a compressed version of the musical life of Manhattan.

Another tradition in Zorn's work is that of the game piece (e.g., *Cobra*), the use of sets of interactive instructions to determine the tactics and priorities of groups of improvising performers. Hand signals and cue cards are used to effect communication, making this a spectator sport as well as a sonic event. Such procedures have many precedents, such as the 1950s and 1960s explorations of the ensemble led by composer Lukas Foss (in a non-jazz style), and the graphic scores of composers such as Earle Brown (*String Quartet*, 1965) and John Cage (*Piano Concert*). Traditions of graphic composition for improvisers, though less fashionable than in the 1960s and 1970s, are still in active use, especially those involving mosaic techniques.<sup>4</sup>

The foundation of free jazz as a movement was a reflection of the richness and depth of the African-American musical culture. Its rise was associated with the cultural liberations of the 1960s, notably black power, and this early connection appears to have been essential in establishing vital directions. Subsequent developments have confirmed that this outpouring of freedom was the culmination of an individuation process in relation to received western culture of many centuries' duration, so that this freedom also very soon appeared strongly in European jazz and showed parallel development in contemporary art-music traditions, often yielding blurred

stylistic boundaries. The potentials of free improvisation have been altered dramatically by international media developments, computers, mass education and ethnic interactions. While free jazz and the related improvisational avant-garde remain confined to specialist audiences and certain types of film score, their spirit of exploration continues to feed into more mainstream musical forms, buttressed by the increasing incidence of stylistic crossover in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

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## WEBSITES

Websites change with time, and so few URLs are given here. However, in the area of jazz research, websites have become an indispensable companion. They provide extensive discographies for all the artists mentioned in this chapter and can be readily accessed via keyword search for their names using any standard search engine. An excellent set of resources of major players on the European free-jazz scene is at the time of writing available at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/misc/rec/ps/efi/>. Availability of audio discs can also be ascertained by access to broad commercial retailers in music, such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)