PART ONE

Jazz times

1 The identity of jazz

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Among the many historical accounts of jazz, it is above all the discographies that convey most graphically and emphatically just how extensively performed and how diverse jazz has been since it arrived on the public scene in 1916–17. But it is beyond the brief of a discography to do much more than list, and so the nearest thing we have to a record of the sheer scale of jazz diversity and inventiveness is silent on many other questions. Thus, while many discographies take for granted that the diversity they chronicle represents a collective body of music – even if they appear to have built into them particular views of what is and is not 'jazz' – they do not see it as their task to identify what, if anything, might connect the music together (and how and why), even less to consider the question of how the achievements they enumerate belong in, reflect and respond to a wider world. And there is no particular reason why they should. But if we seek to go beyond diversity and extent and look for what made jazz distinctive, we need to ask questions such as: how did jazz acquire its identity in the twentieth century, how was that identity constructed, and what role was played in the formation of identity by the ways in which the music was connected to processes and histories both close to and beyond its immediate environment?

Diversity and connectedness; distinctiveness and conformity. In the complex cultural history of the twentieth century, jazz emerged to live as one music among many, one moreover that bore the imprint of its connections with other musics – musics as diverse as the blues and Broadway show tunes. At the same time, it was a music that continuously asserted its difference, and had its difference recognised. On the face of it, what seems most apparent about the perception of jazz is the strong contrast between different eras, exemplified in the gulf between the way jazz was associated with risk in the speakeasies of 1920s American cities, and the cosy image of 'dinner jazz' put out by end-of-the-century radio programming – from counterculture to counter-indigestion. This does not seem fertile ground on which to search for the consistency necessary to the formation of identity. Indeed, Scott DeVeaux has cautioned us against the assumption, often made in jazz historiography, of an underlying organic essence uniting all of jazz, however disparate, and of the construction of a 'unitary narrative', concepts which lead inexorably to the emergence of the notion of tradition (1991, 526ff., 540).

Accepting that advice, I nevertheless do not want to abandon the idea that there may be consistent factors within the process by which jazz has achieved identity and within the component parts of that identity. I do not mean for one minute to ignore or reduce in importance either the profound changes that took place within jazz or the ways in which jazz was used to support the desire for change, either in the arts or in society as a whole. Nor do I mean to propose a view of jazz as more conservative than radical. Rather I am interested in what LeRoi Jones, in the context of black culture, first termed 'the changing same'. The concept, as taken up by Paul Gilroy (1993, 101), provides an alternative to ideas of fixity on the one hand and a disconnected pluralism on the other. At the same time, a focus on the relationship between continuities and changes should not be confined to the particular stream of practice under scrutiny; instead, we need to see the many ways in which that stream connects to other streams, how it enters and engages in what George Lipsitz and Keith Negus, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin to write about popular culture and popular music, have thought of as multiple ongoing historical dialogues, dialogues in which 'no one has the first or last word' (Lipsitz 1990, 99; also quoted in Negus 1997).

What follows is an examination of certain features of the history of jazz as it developed in the twentieth century, areas where change has been steady, sometimes relatively straightforward, sometimes contested, but where also particular ideas appear to have emerged that have become strongly associated with the music and may have made a major contribution to its identity. These were not the unadorned invention of jazz – in each case jazz entered a dialogue already in existence – but neither were they dispensable to it. In them, jazz explored the relationship between consistency and particularity that may have been especially significant in enabling it to acquire the identity that it did.

One place to begin – and to establish that we are in no way dealing with an autonomous totality – is to register the many ways that jazz connected itself to particular aspects of twentieth-century experience. In no previous century had cultural, social, economic and technological activity interacted in such a dynamic way (especially where the culture concerned was not identified as high art), nor had cultural products of societies with economic power ever penetrated the cultures of other societies with such rapid and profound effect. As a music that emerged at a time when the motor of these processes was beginning to move rapidly through its gears, it is clearly possible that jazz's identity lay in its existence as a consequence of, a commentary on, even a symbol of the changes that were taking place.

Many specific connections have been made between jazz and twentieth-century experience. Some lie primarily in the realm of artistic life, such

as the influence of jazz on modernism, others in more overtly political territory, ranging from the role of jazz in wartime, to jazz as oppositional politics; others concentrate more on the role of jazz in changing social leisure behaviour, and still others on its role as the first twentieth-century music to move from local roots to international familiarity. One particular connection has been frequently seen as problematic: the connection between jazz and the music industry. Yet there is a persuasive argument that says this connection played one of the most significant parts in enabling jazz to establish its identity. It is here I would like to start.

Media and money

It was live performance by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB) from New Orleans that marked the first enthusiastic public response to jazz, in Chicago in 1916 and, especially, in New York in 1917, but it was the band's appearances on record that secured their fame and disseminated their music.[1] Within two years the band was an equal success in London, where their records had preceded them. Yet, obvious as it would later become that recording linked to live performance and touring was a highly effective element in promotional strategy, in the late 1910s records still played second fiddle to publishing, and the publishing–performing link was considered the most productive one. Forty years after the first appearance of sound recording, and nearly twenty years after the establishment of the first of what would become major record companies (Columbia, Victor, the Gramophone Company), there had been numerous commercial successes,[2] but in the still-developing music business they had not dented the hegemony of publishers – publishers who had themselves been a new generation, with very different ideas about their product and its promotion, in the 1890s.

With the ODJB's success, jazz became part of this business; but the market potential of jazz records did not develop with any great speed until the record companies began recording African-American music in the very early 1920s. In retrospect it seems clear that there was more than one reason for this slowness, and that these reasons were linked. Although the implications of the fact that a record dealt in performance were apparent to the record industry – which was, after all, making money from selling performance – they were still not fully so. The performers who recorded were mainly performers of pieces of music that had their own separate existence and were usually published as such. The implications of the record's ability to be at one and the same time both the music *and* the performance – in other words, to break the sequentiality that had been dominant hitherto – had not yet fully sunk in. Related to this was a lack of awareness across the

industry as a whole, including the record sector, of what was going on in vernacular culture in general, and in African-American vernacular culture in particular. As W. C. Handy had shown with songs such as 'St Louis Blues' (1914), if the blues could be notated, it could be published and sold with considerable success, but few yet recognised the market potential of a vernacular culture's music that did not require the intervention of notation (as had been the case with ragtime). Furthermore, while African-Americans had undoubtedly bought sheet music, as a group they had never been seen by the industry as major purchasers, and no doubt this contributed to the fact that the industry doubted the existence of a market for its product in those areas of society where vernacular culture flourished most strongly. But the ability of the record to deal primarily in performance, to capture music and re-deliver it, without the need for the intervention of notation, was a different story – or would be, once the connection was made. It was a different story also, of course, for other vernacular musics and their audiences. In due course, the record industry would respond to them, too, but not before music by and for African-Americans had established the trends and patterns.

If the link between jazz and records that developed in the early 1920s was crucial in the emergence of an identity for the music, the story of the link was not a simple one. The recording of African-American jazz owed a great deal to the development of 'race records',[3] *de facto* segregated catalogues of recordings which came into being in the wake of the first successful blues recording in 1920 and whose contents were produced and marketed entirely for black Americans. The race-records initiative convinced the record companies of the commercial opportunity that opened before them.

But the debt jazz owed to race records was not apparent in numerical terms – a great many more jazz records would appear in general catalogues than in race catalogues in the 1920s. In terms of the relationship between recording and public knowledge, jazz had a much better deal than other African-American musics (blues, gospel). It benefited from the race-records development, but public knowledge – and hence the reputation and identity of jazz – was not confined to race records or dependent on them.

There is little doubt that records led to jazz becoming more widely known than would have been the case if knowledge had depended on live performance alone. It is less often stated, but equally clear, that it was jazz above all that introduced into the world of the making and buying of commercial recordings the idea of the record as itself a primary event, not an event at the end of a sequence – a concept with hugely important ramifications for twentieth-century popular music. But, at the same time, the link between

jazz and records also ensured that just what it was that jazz was becoming known as and for was not always entirely clear.

For one thing, if jazz was introducing the notion of the potential primacy of the record – a notion without which the studio-only recordings by Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven ensembles, between 1925 and 1928, would probably not have taken place – not all records that passed for jazz were viewed in this way. And if it was becoming apparent that any publishing of a jazz tune in notated form bore only a limited relevance to the music on the records, notated music still held an important sway. In particular, the jazz-influenced dance-band music of leaders such as Paul Whiteman could have been said to have muddied the waters of jazz's identity as a recorded music. In placing syncopated decorum and careful planning so obviously ahead of spontaneity (real or imagined) and physical excitement, and indeed in their support for the term 'symphonic jazz', Whiteman and others conveyed a view of jazz as different only in some of the idiomatic resources available to it.

Further contributions to the growth of knowledge about jazz and the emergence of a sense of identity came from the music's relationships with other sectors of the industry. In the 1930s, for example, radio was a major source of familiarisation. But these relationships ebbed and flowed. Taken over a longer period, the relationship with records was the key music-industry relationship for jazz, one that continued through the numerous technological developments that took place (the arrival of the LP and magnetic tape in the late 1940s, of digital recording in the 1980s). Each of these developments also involved important changes in how the music and the record-industry sector responded to each other, from the increased track time afforded by the LP and its consequences for recorded jazz performance and the marketing image of the records, to the opportunity offered by CDs to reissue 'back catalogue' in such an extensive way that all past histories of recorded jazz became synchronically present.

Throughout these changes, much of the audience for jazz based the process of acquiring, developing and sustaining a knowledge and love of the music firmly around recordings, supplemented by radio listening and attendance at live performance. But the very centrality of the connection has also been a source of tension, or, more accurately, of two tensions. The first was between the record as a document of an event and as the event itself, and centred on arguments about the primacy or otherwise of the unique, unrepeatable performance. Although it had been a virtually inevitable outcome of the encounter between jazz and recording that the jazz record would become so significant, the fact that a record in effect froze one particular performance and had the power to repeat it *ad infinitum*

began to be seen, by many involved in jazz (both musicians and the steadily growing ranks of jazz critics), as inimical to the ideology of a lack of closure that was being constructed on the back of the centrality of improvisation. No other twentieth-century music seems to have felt the dialectical push-and-pull of this dilemma quite so sharply as jazz, even if, to a wider public largely unbothered by the finer points of an improvisation aesthetic (we will return to this later), such ambivalence in the end meant mainly a falling-off in the presence that jazz could command in the dominant musical medium.

The second tension was between the record as promoter of interest in the music and as controller of the direction in which the music should go, and centred on art/commerce arguments. In its crudest form the commercial processes were castigated as exploitative, or championed as part of creative endeavour. In these debates the record industry was not the only industrial sector involved, but was often cast as standing for the industry as a whole. Similar tensions with regard to the relationship between music and commercial interests characterised virtually every genre and sub-genre of western popular music to emerge in the twentieth century, and the results were engraved on the identity of many of them. DeVeaux points out the inconsistency in a view of jazz in which the music 'is kept separate from the marketplace only by demonising the economic system that allows musicians to survive' (1991, 530). In other musical areas it was not the plain fact that capitalism interferes that was at issue, but how much space it leaves, or doesn't leave, and how that space can be used. Such concerns were rare among the jazz writers who, from the late 1930s on, lamented the power of commerce over jazz, and who did so in large part in order to develop the idea that jazz was in some way superior. But despite their efforts this idea seems to have taken root mainly among the fraternity of the like-minded. What tended to emerge as part of jazz's identity for the broader public was the image of a music that could not make its mind up, that wanted the best of both worlds – to be both above the marketplace, and to benefit as and when from its promotional know-how.

On the road

Any such observations did not alter the fact that, from the late 1920s on, when the component parts of what would later be known as 'the music business' were being put in place,[4] jazz had been centrally involved in those processes and that its twentieth-century experience was marked by engagement with all those components, individually and collectively. In most of these encounters – with publishing, radio, film, copyright, the live performance

circuit – the story of jazz's experience shared many characteristics with those of other musical genres, but sometimes it was significantly different. The apparently inseparable link between copyright concepts and the primacy of the written score, for example, created problems in many generic areas, but peculiarly so in jazz where an improvised solo to all intents and purposes lay outside the boundaries of normal legislative concerns.[5]

One area where connections between jazz and a component part of the industry took on particular significance for jazz was that of musicians' mobility. For many, mobility began with migration to an urban centre, but it was more the role played by touring, from that or another urban base, that contributed to musicians' identity. The modern concept of touring had begun to be developed as early as the 1830s, connected to improvements in transportation. By the arrival of jazz, some element of mobility was endemic to the lifestyle of a great many musicians. For much of the 1920s, while some musicians concentrated on building an audience for their music in one particular place (typically a city, such as Chicago), moving between places to follow possible new opportunities, others leased their services to operations such as the Theater Owners Booking Agency, which organised tours of the African-American vaudeville circuit. By the late 1920s in some parts (such as the so-called 'territories' of the American southwest) and by the 1930s elsewhere, taking their music from place to place had become an integral part of musicians' promotional activity.

For those black bands and musicians whose journeys took them through the southern American states in the early decades of jazz, touring often brought a particularly unpleasant set of problems, but it was not the encounters with racism so much as the sheer stamina needed to survive the gruelling succession of one-night stands that marked the musicians out, black and white, and began to contribute to their identity. Life 'on the road' also put personal relationships under enormous strain, adding a sense of separateness, disconnectedness, even in some case isolation, to the image. The 'road' was also not complete without its antithesis, the big-city base, and this provided a further element in the characterisation of jazz musicians – not of travellers returning 'home' in a conventional sense, but of city-lovers replenishing themselves through contact with their peers and with their 'natural' terrain. Rootlessness and rootedness did not complement each other in the persona of the jazz musician, however, so much as exist in a fascinating ambiguity.

Once in place, these elements of characterisation retained their power. With the increasing prominence of individual musicians in the jazz performance, a further element was added – the expectation that being on the move so often would not result in repetition. Thus it became a further characteristic that the jazz musician on the road was expected, by the audience

and by the musicians themselves, to respond creatively to the challenge of a relentlessly changing performance environment.

Jazz in performance

One thing that emerges from even a brief analysis of jazz's connections into these areas of twentieth-century experience is that jazz did not invent the connections, but entered in its own way, and with its own interpretations, into ongoing processes and dialogues. In the example we have just seen, working out ways to deal with the relationship between stasis and mobility, jazz musicians drew on and learned from others who had had to face similar problems in earlier eras. But in acquiring a special significance for musicians (in terms of their lifestyles and opportunities) and for audiences (in terms of their interpretation of what they heard and saw), the particular jazz 'take' on the relationship raised it to a higher level of significance in the formation of identity than it had previously had in any other musical context.

Fundamental to the kind of relationship that grew up between jazz and the examples of twentieth-century experience that we have identified was the fact that jazz was perceived as laying a special emphasis on performance.

At first, the aspects of jazz performance that attracted most attention were its manner and character, particularly its display of those elements that history has often considered superficial or clichéd: energy, vitality and physicality, often exuberance. Not that these were totally absent before jazz arrived – the music for the dancing fashion of the first half of the 1910s was considered liberating (or threatening) in its encouragement of corporeality; and, if exuberance was not dominant in an approach to entertainment in the late 1910s that still bore the strong imprint of the nineteenth century, it was nevertheless present. But, ultimately, that same dance music was tailored mainly to reflect the image of the chaste vitality in the dancing of the sophisticated Irene Castle, while in popular song a good sentimental ballad such as Richard Whiting's 'Till We Meet Again' (1918) could always sell a million copies.

For many musicians, the energy and vitality in the music's performance were part of the attraction of the modern city. William Kenney notes that white Chicago jazzmen's 'initial desire to play this tension-filled, fast-moving music came from their anticipation of the excitement of urban life, their alienation from middle-class Victorian moralism' (1993, 116). Energy and excitement were not enough, however. From a quite early point a related yet substantially different phenomenon, that of *creative* energy in the guise of spontaneity, also became significant; and whilst the manner and character of jazz performance would shift radically – so that at some points 'studious'

would be a much more appropriate epithet than 'energetic' – spontaneity was the sign of a performance concept, maybe even an aesthetic, and as such had the potential to become fundamental.

Here, again, however, the basic idea was by no means new. Embellishing the music in an (apparently) spontaneous way and altering its rhythms, especially by syncopation, was part of the performance equipment of many ragtime artists, for example ('ragging' meaning just that); and, as John Whiteoak has shown in studying music-making in Australia, this was not just an American phenomenon but extended its influence far and wide (1999, 112ff). Spontaneity alone was not a sufficient idea in the longer term. As the jazz soloist emerged in the late 1920s, especially after Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings, the key identifiers in the area of performance for musicians, and, increasingly, for the audience also – at least for the knowledgeable audience – shifted towards what spontaneity might signify, namely improvisation.[6]

Jazz's way with performance, especially around the question of improvisation, was a central factor in the hostility to the music that followed its emergence. The antagonism to improvisation that emanated from worried guardians of culture was more aesthetic than moralistic, though the link between art and social morality, even politics, often proved too tempting. The *Musical Courier*, for example, polled a group of classical musicians in 1922 and reported back that they considered 'the "ad libbing" or "jazzing" of a piece . . . thoroughly objectionable'. Not content with that, they indicated that they deemed the 'smashing of the rules and tenets of decorous music' to be 'bolshevistic' and that in its 'excessive freedom of interpretation' the music had held 'makers of the rules of dignified social intercourse' in disregard (N. Leonard 1962, 42).

A somewhat different attack was to emerge later (1941) from the caustic dialectics of the exiled German critic, Theodor Adorno. For Adorno, the proposal that genuine musical individuality could emerge from the improvised performance of jazz was a contradiction in terms. All attempts to prove otherwise were false – the results of what he bitingly termed 'pseudo-individualisation', the music's need to create a veneer of difference in order to maintain interest in its products. Adorno was responding in particular to the music of the swing era that he heard on American radio in the late 1930s, and his ultimate target was not jazz itself, or indeed any other idiom, but the culture industry that produced it. But no subsequent changes in jazz style ever came near persuading him to change his mind, and though his insistence on the connections between twentieth-century popular musics and the imperatives of capital was and remains immensely important, there is a strong residual sense in reading Adorno that what ultimately bothered him was the failure of the music to be sufficiently like great classical music,

which operated on principles according to which it was the composer's task to use harmony (especially), melody and structural development to challenge the listener. Performance, whether improvised or not, could not introduce what was not already there; indeed, all its apparent departure from the original could ever do was remind the listener of the inexorable grip of the original, in all its limitations (for which, in the main, read harmonic limitations). Although listeners thought they were experiencing difference in jazz performance, all they were doing was 'differentiating between the actually undifferentiated' (Adorno 1991, 309).

In their different ways neither the 1920s guardians of aesthetic standards nor Adorno could ever distance themselves from the thought that the original composition was bound, in the last resort, to be the most important thing. Though this view, coupled with the stubborn suspicion that performance itself could never be as creative as pre-composition, found echoes in many unsympathetic responses to jazz across the century, neither the listening public nor jazz musicians seem ever to have been especially concerned by it. Rather, what made jazz in performance not only acceptable but distinctive, across different styles, was the way it combined creativity, energy and content. Whereas in other highly public musical idioms musical content generally dictated performance – performance existed so that musical content could be made known – in jazz it seemed more the other way round, that content was subservient to performance. Even in stylistic contexts apparently dominated by pieces and their arrangement, the issue of performance individuality was to become sacred. Thus, Duke Ellington, in his announcements at his orchestra's 1946 Carnegie Hall concert – at a home of the classical repertoire, therefore – was at pains to make clear that the purpose of the concerts was not to render his music (the standards and the new pieces), but was 'primarily to present our instrumentalists in their solo and ensemble responsibilities to the best of their advantage, in appreciation of the fact that they are the inspiration of all the things that are written'.[7]

As jazz established itself, it also established an approach to the relationship between performance and piece that allowed a wide range of options. This did not mean there were no arguments; quite the reverse. But none of these possibilities necessarily negated the value of an original piece or idea (indeed, numerous jazz musicians were keen to enhance their compositional skills), or, equally important, of its arrangement; rather, what the jazz approach did was create a context no longer controlled by notions of what was scripted and what unscripted, with all their value connotations. It was the very fact that a jazz performance appeared as neither scripted nor unscripted that appealed to many, practitioners and listeners.

For a great many musicians, what mattered was the opportunity that this approach offered for individuality of expression. For some – often deemed

the 'greatest' musicians by historians – this meant devising ways of meeting the challenge of creativity in performance, of creating afresh for the moment and, perhaps most important, of being motivated by the idea that the exploration of alternative solutions was a justifiable guiding principle. But many others were less concerned with those particular imperatives, yet still supported – believed in – a conception of performance that accorded them, the musicians, the leading roles. In some particular cases, a performance seemed, and still seems, designed to draw attention to the act of performing in itself (listen, for example, to Louis Armstrong perform a perennial favourite, 'Lazy River', on a 1955 recording, with its growled exhortation to his pianist, 'modulate, Billy Kyle, modulate').

What emerges as a constant identifier of jazz in its approach to performance is not so much the single, primary importance of improvisation and all that it might signify, but the fact that jazz performance constantly challenges ideas of set relationships between piece and performance and between preparation and realisation, continuously puts those relationships under its spotlight, and equally continuously validates the idea that the initiative is always with the performer, whether the performer in question is known as a reproducer, an interpreter or an improviser. For all of these types of musician, in different ways and in differing times, the end was not to have an end; the ultimate value lay in the act of performance itself. And it was this rather than improvisation itself that united them and helped fashion their identity across the century.

The jazz event

One might argue that all this shows, in the last analysis, is that a jazz performance which has the absolute minimum of pre-existing material at its starting point is at one extreme end of a spectrum that, at its other end, has performance in apparently complete subservience to composition, and that these extremes and all points in between are somehow conjoined. But taking such a position may miss a crucial point. It may impoverish jazz performance to see it as part and parcel of an ultimately indivisible spectrum of performance possibilities, and it makes more sense to see in jazz performance the development, to quite a high level, of a different concept, one in which the term 'event' is more useful than 'performance'.

If we could explain jazz's conception of and approach to performance by placing it at a variety of points on such a spectrum, it would presumably be possible to do this for another broadly based music that came to prominence in the twentieth century – popular music. And indeed, popular music performance can be seen, from one common perspective, to lie

within the dominant tradition of a piece and its realisation, while having many alternatives available to it as to what that realisation may mean and involve. But, as I have argued elsewhere (Horn 2000, 28–30), rather than think of much popular music as structured around pieces and their performance, it is useful to think in terms of popular music 'events'. The event is the sum of a number of occurrences or processes which may include any or all of: the origination, borrowing, development and arrangement of an 'idea', the participation of persons and technical equipment whose task is to produce sound, the relationships between them, the execution of the task, the transmission of the result, the hearing of the result, the context in which hearing takes place. These may link together and proceed in sequential fashion, but, equally, they may not. A musical 'idea', for example, may come at the start of a sequence of occurrences, and be followed by others – arrangement, reception – of which performance is one. But, equally, it may emerge in such a way as to make it impossible to tell who among the many participants in the event was the originator; and what is more, it may not matter. Similarly, although one process may dominate, attempts to establish hegemony are always subject to challenge, because there is no agreement on how the relationship between the various occurrences should be set. If neither established sequences nor the domination by one type of process or occurrence explains how events work, we might think of them instead as structured around an interactive nexus made up of performer, performance and performed. (By 'performed' I do not mean the end result, but the material on which performer and performance work.) This interactive nexus (not spectrum!) is characterised by movement and negotiation and permits many alternatives.

There is no space here to discuss the complexity – and contentiousness – of the relationship of jazz to popular music. But we may note that, at the time when the effects of activity within this nexus of performer–performance–performed began to have an impact on twentieth-century culture (which in its clearest form dates from the intervention of recording and the radio in the 1920s), jazz was well to the fore in popular culture, and continued to be so for some time; and that it is entirely plausible that it played an important role in establishing and disseminating the effect of this activity.

If, taking our cue from the popular music event described above, we speak of the 'jazz event', the two have much in common. For example, neither origination nor borrowing nor performance have consistent places in an established sequentiality. Here, as in popular music, the concept of negotiation within the nexus of performer–performance–performed offers a persuasive alternative to more traditional concepts. What seems to be distinctive about the way jazz handles the nexus is partly due to the music's preferences, each historically arrived at, for the particular character of the

contributing elements (for example, the choice of instruments used in performance). In particular, it is due to preference for types of relationship between the participants that provide the space for them to enter multiple dialogues. For example, we might see the nexus as allowing performers to face several ways: to the performed, to fellow musicians, to other musicians who have 'conversed' with the same material, and to the audience. It seems that particular ideas, especially those relating to the performer, have a persistent power, but equally that others are surrounded by uncertainty – for example, the role of the record producer. But the concept of the nexus allows us to see how, given these tendencies, the possibility always exists for dialogue. The role of ECM owner-producer, Manfred Eicher, offers a good example of this – a passionate believer in freedom for performers, his label is also known for its production standards and its own quality of sound.

Jazz as black music

By the latter part of the twentieth century the semiotic messages communicated by jazz were undoubtedly complex, involving many of the aspects of identity we have touched on so far, plus others such as those introduced, for example, by the use of jazz in film soundtracks. In the visual image of jazz, however, one element became particularly common. Marsha Hammel's painting, *Saxman* (see Plate 1.1), depicts a jazz musician playing, with a gracefully curved torso, an equally gracefully curved yellow sax. He is well dressed in a black suit with blue trim and a V-necked white T-shirt. The musician is black; and he is the epitome of 'cool'.

Over sixty years previously, the African-American painter Aaron Douglas, who was closely associated with the Harlem Renaissance, placed a black saxophonist at the centre of his 1934 painting called *Aspects of Negro Life: Song of the Towers* (Plate 1.2). The musician is dwarfed by skyscrapers and (or but), beneath the outstretched sax, which the musician holds one-handed, is seen the distant figure of the Statue of Liberty. As Donna Cassidy, who has discussed the painting at length, observes, the figure of the black jazz saxophonist had many meanings both for Douglas and for other African-Americans, incorporating a sense of cultural achievement, spirituality (the musician's pose recalls that associated with the Angel Gabriel) and social advancement, as well as, in Douglas's words, 'anxiety and yearning from the soul of the Negro people' (Cassidy 1997, 115–46; quotation from Douglas, 140).

A visual image connecting jazz and black culture can mean very different things, in different hands and in different contexts, and it is not my purpose to analyse the phenomenon any further here. But there is no doubting

Plate 1.1 Marsha Hammel, *Saxman*, by courtesy of Felix Rosenstiel's Widow & Son Ltd, London

Plate 1.2 Aaron Douglas, *Aspects of Negro Life: Song of the Towers.* Art and Artifacts division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

that the connection itself, whether made visually or by other means, has proved to have an enduring character. By the century's end it had become so widely accepted that any reference to it would typically be regarded as unexceptional. How the connection was interpreted by those close to jazz – musicians, critics or fans – was a different matter. There were many who held the view that, whoever had been most responsible for the music's character and development, jazz had become a *lingua franca*, and as such, was better described as 'interracial' and not constrained by racial boundaries. Others, while they could concur on the spread of the music, insisted on its remaining the cultural property of African-Americans.

The coexistence, if not concurrence, of these views might be viewed as a sign of some kind of a hard-won consensus after years of strife: jazz as somehow both an African-American music and a multi-ethnic music of the world. But it is an uneasy agreement at best, and one which serves equally as a reminder of the profound paradoxes and struggles that underlay the issue of jazz and race throughout much of the century, albeit with changing emphases and perspectives. It also conceals the infinite subtle and not-so-subtle variations that the broad positions contain.[8]

The incontrovertible fact of a strong connection between jazz and black American culture was part of a larger story, of course, that cannot be told or explained solely in regard to jazz. It is a story that involves both the wider contribution of African-Americans to American life and the complex nature of the cultural context in which that contribution was made. Noting both of these things, Ralph Ellison remarked in 1964 that 'white Americans have been walking Negro walks, talking Negro flavored talk . . . dancing Negro dances and singing Negro melodies far too long to talk of a "mainstream" of American culture to which they're alien' (256). In sports, too, the influence and contribution were profound. Ellison himself noted this on another occasion, but he also observed that, to him, all these centrally important contributions were, as he put it, 'jazz-shaped', suggesting a crucial dual role for jazz in this process, both as the enabler of the process and as a symbol – or, perhaps, an epitome – of black cultural achievement to date (Ellison 1970).

The issue of the contribution of African-Americans to American culture (and beyond) was itself one aspect of a larger subject, one that was writ large across twentieth-century American history and that played a significant role in the histories of other industrialised and urbanised countries also. Often summarised under the heading 'race relations', it involved the long struggle, by black and white, to persuade white-dominated societies and economies to open up those societies and economies on a fair and equal basis to the racial minorities whose members had been oppressed and/or marginalised in numerous ways. There is no need to rehearse even the outstanding features of this struggle here. The point is, first, to remind ourselves to place 'cultural relations' involving black contributions – and therefore 'jazz relations' – firmly in the wider context of race relations; and secondly to ask: did those 'jazz relations' merely reflect and re-enact, in the particular microcosm of jazz, the larger history, or, allowing for the umbilical connection between them, was the space in which jazz met race any different from other spaces where the racial encounter took place? And, if so, what does that tell us about the identity of jazz?

It was certainly the case that the connection between jazz and black culture had a complex history. If, by the 1990s, a jazz historian could write

that 'in creating jazz, black players exercised a kind of cultural leadership in America', he had at the same time to acknowledge that it was a kind of leadership that 'has rarely been permitted or acknowledged' (Peretti 1992, 76). The nature of the relationship between jazz and black culture was often sharply contested, and the contest could be as sharp among participants and *aficionados* as it was among those who disapproved of, or cared little about, the music. Equally, it was also subjected to the kind of power inequalities that could make contest itself very complicated. Not that power was not invariably all on the side of the socially and economically dominant group. As Kenney has shown (1993, 110–11), in 1920s Chicago far more opportunities for performance were available to black musicians than white; but the history of white treatment of black also meant that, although many black musicians let white musicians sit in with them, they were often ambivalent towards them and doubted their motives.

Whatever problems were encountered historically, jazz is rarely cited as much more than a footnote in books on 'the race question', and one reason for this may be that the degree and severity of the particular struggle around jazz never matched the intensity or the importance of other social, economic and political struggles involving race. It may nevertheless have been the case that only in contests around jazz was there found a range of opinion so wide that it could elevate the achievement of black Americans to the realms of high art or denigrate it as the lowest level of imitation, could accord those responsible the status of high priests of style or demean them as coarse servants of white pleasure, lacking even the permission to enter at the same door. What can we make of that? Perhaps that the issues tied up in cultural struggle, although linked to issues tied up in socio-economic and political struggles, were not necessarily identical with them, and that jazz provided a somewhat different space in which the interaction between them was sharply delineated. That space was constructed around a number of elements, of which we may identify four as particularly important: opportunity, ownership, origination and representation.

In considering the part played by jazz in making cultural activity a space where these factors could interact, it is important to recognise that the process had been going on for some time. After the end of Reconstruction in 1877, America saw a retreat from programmes of equality and opportunity (designed to link the black population into American society) and the concomitant rise of segregationist practices, and the black population was thrown back on to its own cultural resources – but with the flavour, as it were, of participation in a wider project still present. Though disillusion was deep, so was the cultural pool to be drawn on in this increased isolation, and one of the (many) things it contained was the knowledge that there was a strength in interpretative activity that could take elements observed in wider

society, examine them and, in an encounter with more endemic practices and the particularities of specific contexts, re-create them as something new and original.

These new things were intended for African-Americans themselves, who would understand the significance of the complex give-and-take that lay behind them. But if the 1890s and early years of the new century were characterised by increasing legal and social hostility to African-Americans, they were also a time in which the nascent American popular-culture industry began to notice some of the new products of cultural activity in African-American society and to consider their commercial possibilities. This involved bringing African-American musicians into the industry arena in certain areas, for example that of publishing (ragtime songs and piano pieces). Some doors began to be edged open by African-Americans themselves, most notably in the musical theatre, where Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson so impressed the Broadway production team of Klaw-Erlanger in 1903 that they were given a three-year contract to write distinctively 'Negro' songs for them, and went on to earn over $25,000 a year from the songs in royalties (Woll 1989, 21–2).

But in both publishing and stage performance black musicians had also to deal with well-established expectations regarding how black people were to be represented. The legacy of the minstrel show was very apparent in the vogue for 'coon songs' and in the requirement of stage performers to behave in a minstrel style. Both Cole and Johnson and another duo, Bert Williams and George Walker, began by conforming to the stereotypes (Williams and Walker appeared as 'Two Real Coons'), but determined to free their shows of this inheritance. Partly successful in this, and justifiably proud of their achievement, they could do nothing about the fact that audiences for their shows were predominantly white and that theatres operated strict segregation policies for those blacks who could afford tickets. This practice was still in operation in the early 1920s.

Much more detail could be added to this account, but it should be clear that in the years before jazz the black experience of participation in the twentieth century's popular-culture industry involved many tensions. The ying and yang of these experiences – separation and participation, welcome and rejection, initiation and appropriation, opportunity and precondition, ownership and surrender – also accompanied the emergence and subsequent history of jazz

The history within jazz of each of the factors I have suggested as important – opportunity, ownership, origination and representation – involved many connections between them, as well as many changes within them and many shifts in their ability to generate debate. A few examples must suffice.

Although black jazz bands made some appearances in early Hollywood movies that used jazz, opportunities were very limited, as 'studio personnel worried about showing black faces on the screen in roles equal to (those of) whites' (Erenberg 1981, 174). That the limiting of opportunity was linked to the issue of racial representation in the film industry's mind is clear from the way that Louis Armstrong was required to behave, in a leopard skin in *Rhapsody in Black and Blue* (1932) and singing to a horse in *Going Places* (1938). But as Berndt Ostendorf has shown in another context, 'the racist slur' is 'outdone by the sheer artistry . . . of the performance' (1982, 84). In Krin Gabbard's interpretation, Armstrong's performance in *Rhapsody* in particular is also a specific counter to demasculinisation, a phenomenon with its own long history (Gabbard 1995d, 104–5).

Some thirty years on, the link between opportunity and image was still operating, albeit in a different context and in a different way. That, at least, was the view of many musicians as reported by Frank Kofsky in his depiction of the attitude of what he called 'nightclub capitalism' to the music of John Coltrane, Archie Shepp and others. The opportunity offered by the night-clubs, in Kofsky's account, was contingent upon musicians complying with expectations regarding the length of their sets and their doing nothing to discourage the audience from buying drinks. It was predicated on a view of the contemporary black jazz musician 'as some kind of disembodied entity who has no existence except at the moment of artistic creation. If you are a jazz musician you are expected to go on the stand and create on demand, simply because the audience has paid its money . . . You can cease to exist the moment you lay down your horn' (Kofsky 1970, 145).

Questions of origination were present from a very early point, were frequently contested, and remained so, even if the participants in the debate changed. In the public career of jazz, the first to speak on the subject were the white musicians of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the product of a multi-ethnic working-class district of New Orleans, whose frenetic music (as we have already seen) became celebrated in 1916–17. Both at the time and in later recollection the members of the band insisted on the total absence of black input into the music. 'The colored', said Tom Browne, 'only play plantation music' (quoted in Peretti 1992, 80).[9] In 1919 the band visited England with huge success. Here, according to Chris Goddard, their denial of any black influence or contribution meant 'it was ten years before the seminal role of the black musician in jazz was understood' (1979, 28–9).

In the late 1910s, black New Orleans musicians had little or no access to any means of public expression in order to put an alternative point of view, but that was not the case for the growing class of black intellectuals in New York. As Ted Vincent has shown (1995, 152ff), among the founders of

the new black-run magazines there were some editors, most notably Cyril Briggs of *The Crusader*, who tirelessly promoted both jazz and the blues as new black urban music. By no means all of those involved in the Harlem Renaissance were as enthusiastic for the music or, consequently, as eager to argue for its point of origin or the pre-eminence of black musicians in its execution – or indeed for what jazz signified in terms of black Americans' ability to create their own beauty. The editors of *Crisis*, the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, largely ignored both jazz and blues, an attitude possibly caused, in Vincent's view, by a 'reluctance to confuse friendly Whites by trying to explain the value in music that seemed so "wild" – as in "wild African savage"' (172). In contrast, Joel A. Rogers, writing in Alain Locke's compilation *The New Negro*, described jazz as 'of Negro origin plus the influence of the American environment', adding, 'the Caucasians never could have invented it' (quoted in Cassidy 1997, 131). For Langston Hughes, the issue was, ultimately, one of creative independence. The 'blare of Negro jazz bands' was evidence that 'we younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter' (quoted in Floyd 1995, 133).

Such ideas of differentiation were to reappear in the 1940s, the time of bebop. Here there was no argument, in racial terms, as to who was responsible for the origination of the new idiom. But whereas in the minds of such as Langston Hughes in the 1920s, white understanding of black creativity was viewed with indifference, bebop musicians appear to have made the conscious attempt to create something that whites (musicians and audiences) would struggle to understand. Not only that: they sought to take charge of the image of the musician at the same time. If, as Eric Lott remarks, it is necessary 'to restore the political edge' to bebop, it is not necessarily easy, or correct, to map the politics of culture neatly on to the politics of the socio-economic reality (1995, 245). If we grant that 'the music attempted to resolve at the level of style what the militancy fought out on the streets' (*ibid.*, 246) we may also want to insist that in the encounter between bebop and the political moment, jazz did not merely reflect what it saw, it brought its own meditation on it, and its own way of managing it.

In its particular way of connecting opportunity, ownership, origination and representation, along with related issues such as appropriation, bebop offers us a good example of how jazz continued to provide an opportunity for aspects of the black cultural experience to be in constant – and constantly changing – dialogue, with each other and with wider society. It is perhaps the depth and richness of these explorations, above all else, that lies behind that part of the identity of jazz that connects it so unequivocally to black culture and the black experience.

The sounds of the time and the timing of the sounds

There is one further, fundamental way in which jazz acquired an identity, and that was through its sound, or, more accurately, its combination of sound, rhythm and timing. The establishment of jazz as a distinctive music can, and should, be ascribed to a complex convergence of musical, social, economic and technological factors, but to the public itself there seems little reason to doubt that what separated jazz most clearly from the norms of the day (whether these were old or relatively new) was the interaction of the music's sonic and temporal characteristics. Whatever music jazz found itself alongside, it retained the ability to sound different. In large measure, this was due to the leading roles that were persistently accorded to certain instruments and instrumental families, enabling us to speak of jazz as providing a distinctive sonic experience. But there was also a crucially important – if hard to describe – role for approaches to rhythm and, particularly, timing that could mark something as jazz, even when its sonic characteristics seemed less distinctive. To the distinctive sonic experience, therefore, was added a distinctive temporal experience, especially the inscribing of new patterns on time.[10]

The secular popular-music world into which jazz came was dominated by four sonorities, with distinct but connected histories: the voice–piano combination that was still the mainstay of domestic music-making; the brass, wind and percussion sounds of the public open spaces, especially those of marching bands; the full orchestral sound of the operetta; and the hybrid sound of the vaudeville theatre and dance orchestras. Although the impact of the sound of jazz was considerable, it did not come as a complete surprise. Those who had heard the 'society orchestras', for example, the dance bands that were highly popular in New York around 1913–14, had heard a combination that included violins, plucked strings, unison clarinet and cornet, trombone, piano and drums.

When jazz first attracted the public ear beyond the boundaries of the places – New Orleans especially – where it had been developing, it did so not as a set of unfamiliar sounds, but as familiar sounds in unfamiliar relationships. Most of the wind and percussion instruments making up the first widely heard jazz ensembles in the late 1910s and early 1920s were familiar from their role in band music (whether of the marching or the concert variety), while the plucked string instruments were known from the popular theatre and, in many cases no doubt, the home. With the gradual inclusion of the piano, the instrument that was perhaps the most familiar of all, and the most readily associated with the home, became present also. But we may note that contrasting connotations were being brought together: trumpet with the street, piano with domestic respectability and familial solidity; the banjo with an almost outmoded style of popular theatre.

Jazz, therefore, belonged to the sound world from which it also distinguished itself, but it was the sense in which it broke with norms that gave it sonic individuality. In this it was aided considerably by rhythm and timing. Here, too, jazz emerged into a musical world already deep in rhythmic exploration, but it was also the case that within a very short time there was a considerable contrast between the syncopations of ragtime and dance music and the off-beat phrasing of jazz.

Very early in the history of processes by which jazz was recognised, the music's departure from the norms of sound, rhythm and timing resulted in another further element of distinctiveness: the opportunity for individual musicians to present their own version of this combination – fashioning an instrumental sound and 'individualising' it with a distinctive approach to phrasing (see Bradley 1992, 48ff). Whereas, before jazz, audiences rated musicians highly mainly because they were skilled practitioners of a particular style, they now began to rate them because they sounded different. Not only different, of course; difference was persuasive only when married to skill, expressed within the music's broadly conceived templates. But whilst for the musicians themselves the question of what made a fellow musician or a band distinctive was often to be answered in technical terms, audiences were more likely to be affected by a mixture of pleasure in the new aural and temporal dimensions being evoked and the prospect of more difference to come.

Having forged a distinct sonic identity, jazz was able to preserve this identity through many changes of style. The exact character of jazz's combination of sound, rhythm and timing changed relentlessly as styles of jazz changed, but it remained the case that, whether the style in question was New Orleans revival, big-band swing, bebop, cool or free jazz, the listening public seems to have retained the ability to recognise the space that existed between jazz and other musics, even when specific features that had long been present in jazz, such as the exploration of nuances of timbre and rhythm, expressed in brief moments, began to appear elsewhere (for example, in rock).

The distinctiveness embodied in jazz's combination of sound, rhythm and timing, coupled with the music's apparently built-in opportunities for variety of expression, took on a range of signification beyond the purely musical. For some in the world of the arts in the United States in the 1920s, for example, the general sound of jazz evoked the American city, increasingly different from its European counterpart, while its individuality of sonic and rhythmic expression drew attention both to the possibility of fragmentation within that environment and to what painter Josef Stella called a 'new polyphony' (Cassidy 1997, 59). For others it was perhaps more a case of what the later twentieth century sometimes termed 'attitude' – a self-confidence

which, whether exuberant, aggressive or reflective, seemed unbeholden to any kind of external authority. And this, too, spoke to notions of American identity.

One of the connections most frequently made between human experience and the way jazz handled its sonic and temporal resources was in the confusing area where body met mind. To some degree, there was a historical shift here, one which complicates the notion of identity. Especially in its first two decades, the sound, rhythm and timing of jazz were often treated as having a correspondence to somatic behaviour. For early opponents of jazz, they not only connoted indecency, they encouraged it. 'Those moaning saxophones', wrote Fenton J. Bott in 1921, 'and the rest of the instruments with their broken, jerky rhythm make a purely sensual appeal . . . Jazz is the very foundation of salacious dancing' (quoted in N. Leonard 1962, 34). As subtle changes in rhythm, timing and phrasing appeared to break the link between jazz and bodily expression (i.e., in dance), and the increased use of the metallic sound of cymbals for rhythm seemed to speak to mental states where previously lower sounds had encouraged physical movement, so jazz seemed to many to connect more to mental than to somatic process.

But looking over the course taken by jazz in its use of its resources of sound, rhythm and timing, it is evident that, while there were tendencies and tensions, there never were mind–body splits. It made, and makes, little sense to speak of music as varied in its use of these resources as Bix Beiderbecke's 'Singin' the Blues' (1927), Lester Young's solo on Billie Holiday's version of 'All of Me' (1941), or Charles Mingus's 'Shoes of the Fisherman's Wife' (*Let My Children Hear Music*, 1972) in terms of body, mind, or even soul, alone. The way each goes about creating interplay between the aural and the temporal can speak to each, to all three, or indeed to none.

We have said nothing of how sound is organised in jazz – the enormous range, from small-group polyphony and heterophony to homogeneous instrumental sections, to successive individual 'statements'. But even this short list seems to support the idea that a variety of organisational principles can contribute to sonic plurality (Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia') without undermining the music's identity – that, in effect, the sound of jazz displays competing centrifugal and centripetal tendencies but that these are generative more than they are restrictive. It is quite a short step from this observation to one of a more socio-political nature, namely that, although it is clearly true that the issue of how to reconcile regularising forces and aspirations to identity (collective and individual) has characterised many centuries, the twentieth century experienced it more profoundly than any other; and that in jazz it had a very special example in which the threat of domination by either tendency was real, but whose nature it was to go beyond a mere *modus operandi*, an uneasy truce, into a vibrant, creative continuum.

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Looking back on his life, Sidney Bechet remarked that he was desperate to find 'the part of me that was there before I was' (1978, 4). In its manifold connections with the twentieth century, jazz drew on complex overlapping memories generated before and during its existence. But Bechet also remarked that 'Life isn't just a question of time; it's a way you have of talking back and forth to the music' (202). The identity of jazz lay, ultimately, neither in temporal shifts nor in anything that withstood such shifts, but in multiple dialogues, especially those around some specific themes, and in the particular way it talked back and forth both to prominent aspects of twentieth-century experience and to things that belonged to the particular character of music.