INTRODUCTION

Stylistic Evolution or Social Revolution?

There is a trick to balancing a yardstick. Hold the yardstick out flat, with one index finger under each end. Then bring these fingers in slowly toward the center. They will not slide in evenly: one will be held up by friction while the other spurts ahead until it, too, is caught. But inevitably they will meet at the pivot point of the span and come into balance.

Imagine for the moment that the history of jazz is a solid, linear object, like a yardstick. One endpoint marks the origins of jazz, somewhere in the mists of the early twentieth century; the other, the present. As of this writing, at least, the point at which the yardstick comes into balance falls somewhere in the mid-1940s.

By any measure, this is a crucial period for the history of jazz. During the years 1940–45 the first modern jazz style, shaped by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and others, came into being. This music was known as bebop, or simply bop: "a most inadequate word," complained Ralph Ellison, that "throws up its hands in clownish self-deprecation before all the complexity of sound and rhythm and self-assertive passion which it pretends to name." But this music was crucial for the evolution of jazz and American music. For Ellison, bebop marked nothing less than "a momentous modulation into a new key of musical sensibility; in brief, a revolution in culture."

As the twentieth century comes to a close, bebop lies at the midpoint

of what has come to be known as the jazz tradition. It also lies at the shadowy juncture at which the lived experience of music becomes transformed into cultural memory. Inevitably, there will be fewer and fewer witnesses to contribute to—or contest—our ideas about the past. The recent passing of Dizzy Gillespie (1917–93) and Miles Davis (1926–92), among others, underscores our closeness to the physical and psychic reality of that history. In their absence we will be left with the image of bebop and jazz that we construct for ourselves.

Even as bebop recedes further into the past, it is unlikely to be dislodged any time soon from the heart of jazz discourse. Tradition, after all, is not simply a matter of cherishing the past, holding its memory sacred. There is some of that in jazz, but not much. What counts, as the musicologist Carl Dahlhaus has argued, is the continuing existence of the past in the present.

In this sense, bebop has a more legitimate claim to being the fount of contemporary jazz than earlier jazz styles. The large dance orchestras of the Swing Era and the improvised polyphony of the early New Orleans groups may hold a place of honor, but musicians no longer play that way. The nuances of the past have largely disappeared, along with the social contexts of nightlife and dancing that shaped and gave them meaning. A jazz orchestra of fifteen or more musicians suggests either nostalgia, the specter of superannuated bodies shuffling to yesterday's dance music, or the academic sterility of the university "lab band." The small New Orleans or "Dixieland" combo was long ago ceded to enthusiastic and atavistically minded amateurs. Even the most accomplished modern jazz repertory groups only drive home how difficult it is for a contemporary musician to inhabit the musical sensibility of King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, or Jimmie Lunceford.

By contrast, ask any member of the current generation of jazz musicians to play Charlie Parker's "Anthropology," or Gillespie's "A Night in Tunisia," or Monk's "'Round Midnight." It may not be their preferred avenue of expression, but they will know the music and how to play it. Bebop is a music that has been kept alive by having been absorbed into the present; in a sense, it *constitutes* the present. It is part of the experience of all aspiring jazz musicians, each of whom learns bebop as the embodiment of the techniques, the aesthetic sensibilities, and ultimately the professional attitudes that define the discipline. A musical idiom now half a century old is bred in their bones.

The perennial relevance of bebop is thus not simply a tribute to its

enduring musical value. After all, the music of Louis Armstrong or Duke Ellington enjoys a critical esteem equal to that of Parker, Gillespie, and Monk, *and* it is better known and loved by the general public. But bebop is the point at which our contemporary ideas of jazz come into focus. It is both the source of the present—"that great revolution in jazz which made all subsequent jazz modernisms possible"—and the prism through which we absorb the past. To understand jazz, one must understand bebop.

As its title suggests, *The Birth of Bebop* concerns itself primarily with the question of origins. It is less the chronicle of a musical movement than an accounting of the various social and musical factors that culminated in its emergence. It devotes much of its attention to the period usually known as the Swing Era and ends where a more conventional approach to the subject, such as Thomas Owens's *Bebop,* would begin: with the first stirrings of bebop as a public phenomenon, signaled by the first commercial recordings by Parker and Gillespie, in 1945.

This unusual narrative structure is designed to force certain underlying assumptions to the surface. An approach to bebop that focuses more narrowly on musical style, exemplified by Owens's recent study, tends to avoid issues with racial, political, or economic ramifications or, indeed, anything that might distract from the real business at hand—the tracing of stylistic development. Other issues are so basic to the discipline that they are taken for granted.

Few authors, for example, critically examine the basic tenet that bebop belongs to a larger category known as jazz. They assume that bebop is best viewed not as an isolated phenomenon of popular culture, but as one phase of an artistic tradition whose history can be expressed as a coherent progression encompassing nearly a century of continuous innovation, from New Orleans dance music to avant-garde experimentation. The "jazz tradition" (to use the title of Martin Williams's influential book) is an internally consistent art form, distinct from other twentieth-century American music (to say nothing of the European art music tradition) and governed by its own logic.

This assumption places clear constraints on historical inquiry. If one accepts "jazz" as the overarching framework, the question of bebop's origins recedes to the more delimited (and manageable) problem of *transition* from one phase of jazz to another—as the title of another book

puts it, from "swing to bop." Not surprisingly, this view of history privileges continuity over discontinuity. Although the distinctive identity of each jazz style cannot be entirely glossed over, resemblances must take precedence over differences if jazz is to cohere as a whole. The process of change that links these styles is seen as a gradual, linear evolution, conserving essential qualities even as it introduces innovations, thus continually affirming the integrity of the whole.

In contrast, consider the trope of *revolution:* bebop as a rejection of the status quo, a sharp break with the past that ushers in something genuinely new—in a word, discontinuity. This aspect of bebop, so evident in the phrase "the bebop revolution," seems to contradict the evolutionary flow of the jazz tradition. Yet any disjunction may be accounted for by the rhetoric of modernism, which by its insistence on the necessity of ongoing, radical innovation suggests that the process of growth in an artistic tradition is likely to be punctuated by many such "revolutions."

Characteristically, however, the revolutionary qualities of bop are situated not within but outside the jazz tradition, in the collision between jazz as an artistic endeavor and the social forces of commerce and race. Thus, bebop is often construed as a protest against commercialism: through the uncompromising complexity of their art, bop musicians are said to have asserted their creative independence from the marketplace. Bebop is also frequently cast in explicitly racial terms: as a movement by young African-American musicians (Parker, Gillespie, Monk) seeking to create an idiom expressive of the black subculture, not the white mainstream. While separable, these themes of revolution tend to intertwine as a rebellion by black musicians against a white-controlled capitalist hegemony.

There are thus two quite different avenues to understanding bebop as a historical phenomenon. The evolutionary approach is widely favored by critics, music scholars, musicians—indeed, all whose primary focus is on music itself, and for whom bebop lies at the core of the "jazz tradition." Those who prefer instead to see music as evidence of broader social or political currents in American culture tend to find the trope of revolution a more congenial and powerful mode of explanation.

My purpose is not to try to resolve this apparent contradiction. Instead, I hope to open up avenues of interpretation that move beyond the limiting simplifications of "evolution" and "revolution." In this introductory chapter I examine each approach in turn as a useful starting point for a deeper exploration of the social and musical meanings of bebop.

Organicism and the Jazz Tradition

Like most pedagogical simplifications, the concept of a jazz tradition seems natural, even inevitable—more common-sense description than theoretical abstraction. As a model for historical narrative, it is accepted virtually without question as the paradigm that defines the field. Anthologies like the *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* (a chronologically arranged collection of exemplary recordings judiciously balanced between pre- and post-bop styles), jazz textbooks, and the college survey courses they support—all embody a vision of jazz that, in the words of a jazz critic from the 1940s, extends "across the time and space of twentieth-century America, and back into the roots of African culture."

Yet any historical narrative as sweeping as the line that links the ur-jazz of New Orleans with avant-garde experimentation is necessarily vulnerable to fragmentation. Such a narrative links musics that are radically different in musical techniques and social circumstances, while excluding other musics on constantly shifting and emotionally charged grounds. Its forging has been a noisy process, characterized by bitter disputes pitting advocates of one vision of jazz against another, of which the tumultuous reception of bebop during the latter half of the 1940s is but one example.[1] If peace now reigns and the very idea of rejecting bebop as jazz, as the French critic Hugues Panassié continued to do as late as the 1960s, seems improbable, that is not because bebop has satisfied some a priori claim to be called "jazz," but because the definitions currently in circulation have been shaped in bebop's image.

The challenge of writing a coherent history of jazz has always been to prevent this fragile consensus from shattering under the pressure of internecine debate. The usual strategy is to retreat from the contentious world of historical particularity into the security of abstractions and essences—forces such as the evolution of style that seemingly operate outside human agency and ambition.

As with so much writing on the arts, jazz writing is permeated by the metaphor of organicism, conceiving of art forms as living entities. Like a great tree, the art form matures and branches out through impulses internal to itself. The proper focus of historical study is the art form itself, which acts as its own explanatory force. "Jazz" is an essence that "maintains its identity throughout the vicissitudes of change, thereby guar-

1. My argument here is drawn in large part from my article "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography" (DeVeaux 1991).

anteeing an unbroken continuity that prevents our picture of the past from disintegrating into unrelated fragments." To search for this essence, then, one looks not at any one style or cultural or historical context, but for that which binds all these things into a seamless continuum. The disparate styles must be understood not as isolated expressions of particular times and places, but as organically connected, as branches of a tree—the individual parts relating more to each other than to the world outside of art. The process of growth is ineffable, internal, and curiously static: the variegated manifestation over the course of time of a central, unchanging essence.

Can this essence be defined? Such a question is typically parried with mystification—"If you've got to ask, you'll never know." But semantic ambiguity is a necessary consequence of a historical narrative that swallows so much territory. There is no single workable definition of *jazz*, no single list of essential characteristics. Attempts to base a definition even on such seemingly unassailable musical fundamentals as improvisation and "swing" inevitably founder. Exceptions overwhelm and trivialize the rule. All that remains is the principle of continuity itself—the unbroken evolutionary succession of musical styles from turn-of-the-century New Orleans to the present. The writing of jazz history is accordingly obsessed with continuity and consensus, even—perhaps *especially*—when the historical record suggests disruption and dissent.

Nowhere is the disparity between the smooth certitude of evolutionary narrative and the "noise" (to use the French cultural critic Jacques Attali's term) of upheaval that signals social and cultural change clearer than in the jazz of the mid-1940s. If any movement in jazz can be said to reflect and embody the political tensions of its time, the aspirations, frustrations, and subversive sensibilities of an elite group of African-American musicians, it is bebop. "We were the first generation to rebel," remembers pianist Hampton Hawes, "Playing bebop, trying to be different, going through a lot of changes and getting strung out in the process. *What these crazy niggers doin' playin' that crazy music?* Wild. Out of the jungle."

But in many histories of jazz, the turmoil that accompanied bebop is almost reflexively subordinated to the seamless unfolding of musical style. Even the most radical departures from previous practice can be celebrated as an affirmation of a larger continuity—in a word, *tradition.* The following excerpt from a best-selling jazz textbook may be more blatant in this regard than most, but it is not unrepresentative:

> Modern jazz did not burst upon the jazz scene as a revolution. It developed gradually through the work of swing era tenor saxophonists Lester Young and Don Byas, pianists Art Tatum and Nat Cole, trumpeter Roy Eldridge, guitarist Charlie Christian, the Count Basie rhythm section, bassist Jimmy Blanton, and others. Parker and Gillespie themselves began their careers playing improvisations in a swing era style. They expanded on this music and gradually incorporated new techniques; their work eventually became recognized as a different style, which, though departing appreciably from swing era approaches, was still linked to the swing era. Rather than being a reaction *against* swing style, modern jazz developed smoothly *from* swing styles.

This approach begs the question: if the birth of modern jazz was the result of a gradual and altogether unexceptionable progression of musical style, why was it *perceived* as revolution? Some explanations emphasize the vagaries of circumstance—the cultural static that garbled communication between musicians faithfully laboring within their tradition and the public. The war, for instance: youthful jazz fans called overseas after Pearl Harbor missed out on the crucial intervening developments (the "gradual incorporation" of "new techniques") and failed to recognize the continuity of the new jazz style on their return. Those at home were stymied by the ban on recording called by the musicians' union in mid-1942 (see chapter 8), which effectively blocked the production of new recordings for nearly two years.

But the bebop furor need not be chalked up entirely to poor logistics. Paradoxically, the perception of revolution can be seen as the natural by-product of evolution. The pace of evolutionary growth demanded of jazz at this juncture proved too brisk for the average listener to understand. As bebop "spurted beyond" received categories of style, its rightful audience was left gasping for breath. "Although the beginnings of bop can be traced back quite a way," explained Marshall Stearns in a 1958 book that traced jazz from its African roots to the most up-to-date expressions, "the new style evolved with terrifying suddenness."

This headlong pace is typical for twentieth-century modernisms—a point critics sympathetic to the new movement did not hesitate to make in bebop's favor. Developments in the European sphere provided a handy frame of reference. "Any contemporary style, whether that of a James Joyce or an Arnold Schönberg, remains controversial, and bebop is no exception," explained Ross Russell in 1948. This line of argument was

not especially new: as Bernard Gendron has recently noted, the criteria by which jazz would be promoted as a modernist art form for decades to come had already been shaped by the "battle of jazz ancients and moderns" in the early 1940s, a noisy dispute that pitted defenders of New Orleans jazz against "progressive" swing music.[2] Bebop was simply the latest and most obvious wave of newness for jazz fans to absorb.

The artistic novelty of bop was such that its defenders felt obligated to educate audiences to shoulder their responsibilities as consumers of modern art. To the disgruntled or skeptical, they did not hesitate to point out that a studied disregard for audience sensibilities is the modern artist's prerogative. "The critics and jazz amateurs," noted Russell imperiously, "should bear in mind that it is not they but the working musicians who create jazz and authorize style changes."

Such high-handed mystification, ruling out any grounds for objection by the laity, only underscores the widening gulf between artist and audience. Bebop may well have been, in a narrow musical sense, a logical and seamless continuation of swing, but the consequence of musical innovation seems to have been social disruption. After all, jazz enjoyed no privileged status as high art before 1945. As a music created for immediate consumption through commercial channels, it had depended directly upon audience approval. Suddenly, with bebop, the terms of the relationship seem reversed: artists, acting on their own initiative, force radical and disorienting innovations upon a reluctant and bewildered audience, in this way guaranteeing a minority role in American culture for jazz as "avant-garde" art.

Is this an accurate representation of bebop? If so, what can account for this dramatic reversal? The answers to these questions depend very much on one's assumptions about the normal functioning of art in a capitalist economy.

Jazz and Commercialism: Improvisers in the Marketplace

The "jazz tradition" focuses on works of art: in this case, musical performances made permanent through the twentieth-century miracle of recording. While it is theoretically possible to write a history that restricts

2. Gendron argues that the "discursive formation" that resulted from this war of words in the early 1940s—the "concepts, distinctions, oppositions, rhetorical ploys, and allowable inferences, which as a whole fixed the limits within which inquiries concerning the aesthetics of jazz could take place, and without which the claim that jazz is an art form would be merely an abstraction or an incantation"—was adopted, consciously or unconsciously, by sympathetic critics wishing to make the case for bebop (1995, 34).

itself to aesthetic products (i.e., the development of musical language and style), few would find such a skein of abstractions to their liking. Instead, we seek linkages between the works of art and their creators—such jazz musicians as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Parker. We celebrate, literally, these musicians' *authority:* their ability to create artworks that embody their expressive intent, and their freedom to do so without interference from external restraints. We treat them, in short, as composers. The parallel with European art music is obvious. A recent jazz textbook bluntly sums up the prevailing critical strategy: "Jazz is a classical music, and improvising jazz musicians are, in fact, composers."

Yet this assessment is at odds with the cold realities of modern capitalism. With few exceptions (Ellington being the most obvious), jazz musicians have not primarily been composers but "mere" performers—a status several notches lower in economic and social prestige. The issue here is not intrinsic artistic worth: the accomplishments of an Armstrong or a Parker are beyond question. But in a music industry designed to funnel profits to the owners of copyrights, improvisers have found themselves in an anomalous and frustrating position. The history of jazz can be read, in part, as an attempt by determined musicians to close the gap between artistic ambition and economic reward.

We tend to take for granted the division of labor that separates composer from performer. In a recent survey of American music, for example, the musicologist Richard Crawford outlines the economics of music-making in this way: "All pieces of music must be created in the first place, and musical creation is the province of the *composer.* Before a composer's music can be experienced, someone must sing or play it, and that's the province of the *performer.*" The composer, in other words, is given creative priority ("pieces of music must be created in the first place") and ownership ("a composer's music"). The performer is an intermediary, a "productive laborer" (to use the Marxist jargon) whose skill is called into play because the published score is not itself musical sound, but only a legally certified blueprint to be realized according to the composer's intentions.

This division of labor, however, does not characterize all music-making. Many music cultures around the world have not placed this kind of weight on the social category of composer—if, indeed, they recognize it at all. Nobody knows who first created the ballad "Barbara Allen," or a North Indian raga, or the intricate repertory of West African drumming ensembles. Such knowledge is irrelevant. Creative priority and ownership

of music are not reserved for any one individual, but are placed in the hands of all who perform it.

The ethnomusicologist John Chernoff, probing into the musical history of the Dagbambas of Ghana, once asked a venerable *dondon* drummer who had introduced a particular genre. The response was a carefully considered paradox: "Any time you hear a dondon beater beating, and someone is dancing, then you must know that the dondon beater introduced the playing. He is the one who introduced the beating of the drum." The concept of composer has little weight in such societies because music is evanescent, subject to continuous change—even for musicians who understand themselves to be playing the "same" piece. "If an old man says that at the time they were drumming, the beat was good," the drummer continued, "I don't know what the beat was at that time, so I feel that what we are doing at present is good. And in the future they will feel that what they are doing is better than what we have been doing now. That is what will keep on happening."

The Western notion of composer is made possible only by the characteristically Western technology of music notation: a system of symbols for capturing music on the printed page specifically designed to remove music from the flux of orality. Notation imposes upon music the idea of a permanent text to which authorship can safely be ascribed and ownership securely established. Such fixity is a necessary precursor to commodification. As early as the sixteenth century, the invention of music printing transformed music into a fungible commodity, paving the way for its mass production and distribution. The intervening centuries have seen the systematic exploitation of this market for composed music, resulting in a specialized economy of music that has at times quite overshadowed the customary service-for-hire basis for performance.

The oral tradition of continuous re-creation of music has by no means disappeared, however. Even within European art music, which over the course of the nineteenth century gradually but emphatically established the principle that the author's intentions as embodied in print are to be strictly obeyed, performers have considerable autonomy. Their work is known as interpretation, but it is better understood as co-creation. In the popular sphere, the relationship between score and performance in the early years of jazz was even more hypothetical. Authors and publishers in the early twentieth century controlled only the rights to reproduction, not performance. As long as the sheet music sold briskly, they did not care that a published song would be realized very differently by fumbling

amateurs, lucky to play it straight, and charismatic professionals, capable of making the song "their own."

It is to this latter sphere, of course, that jazz has always belonged. Although jazz musicians may avail themselves of notation, they are not bound by it. Their performance of copyrighted material often departs so radically from the legally recognized text that it is known by a different name: not *interpretation,* but *improvisation.*

Improvisation is typically set apart from both composition and the performance of composed music, as if this mode of creation were somehow peculiarly anomalous. But upon more careful consideration, these distinctions erode. The ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl has argued that "we must abandon the idea of improvisation as a process separate from composition and adopt the view that all performers improvise to some extent. What the pianist playing Bach and Beethoven does with his models—the scores and the accumulated tradition of performance practice—is only in degree, not in nature, different from what the Indian playing an alap in *Rag Yaman* and the Persian singing the *Dastagh* of *Shur* do with theirs."

Similarly, one might say that what distinguishes improvisation from composition in a modern capitalist economy is that the improviser, almost by definition, renounces the intention of transmuting creativity into published commodity. Improvisation is process, not product. It is a way of reasserting creative autonomy within the normally circumscribed role of the performer, but without pursuing the rewards and privileges available to creators who become composers.

Except, of course, for recording. With the widespread introduction of recording technology into the popular market in the first decades of the twentieth century, music sound itself became a tangible object. In the process, the nuances of performance—which included African-American techniques of timbral variation, pitch bending, and swing as well as European rubato and expressive phrasing—could finally be made permanent. This had the potential to greatly expand the reach and prestige of the performer. In particular, recordings made possible the rise of the improvising jazz soloist, whose powers of on-the-spot creation are so compelling that the copyrighted music nominally performed seems to recede into irrelevance. As Evan Eisenberg has argued, "records not only disseminated jazz, but inseminated it . . . in some ways they created what we now call jazz."

But while recording (and radio) helped to make some performers fa-

mous, it did not necessarily make them rich. Even as sheet music steadily lost ground to recordings in the marketplace, economic power remained stubbornly in the grip of music publishers, who insisted (with the help of copyright law) that all financial benefits to creativity must flow to officially recognized composers. Since royalties for performance per se were relatively rare (contracts typically dictated a modest one-time fee), "mere" performers saw very little of this money, unless they somehow managed simultaneously to claim the role of composer. As before, most of their income came from the daily grind of live performance. Although improvising musicians began to win aesthetic acclaim for their work, they continued to strive for comparable economic reward well into the bebop era.

Moreover, the new technologies only deepened performers' involvement with and dependence upon the burgeoning popular music industry. As recording and radio systematically interposed themselves between performer and audience, musicians had no choice but to try to gain access to this highly centralized, capital-intensive technology. Such access was granted only on terms favorable to the industry. In practice, this often meant that the musicians most fully integrated within the system yielded control not only over repertory—over what tunes could be recorded and broadcast—but also over the way they performed them. Conversely, those who insisted on determining their own fate regularly found themselves pushed to the periphery. This ongoing struggle—between musicians' desire for artistic and economic autonomy and the logic of centralized control of mass-market capitalism—determined the dynamics of the emergence of bebop and gave rise to the commonplace perception of bebop (and jazz in general) as anticommercial.

One of the most striking aspects of the writing on jazz is a reluctance to relate the history of the music to the messy and occasionally sordid economic circumstances of its production. Not that this absence necessarily reflects ignorance of the subject. Many of the most prolific proselytizers for jazz—Leonard Feather, Martin Williams, Dan Morgenstern, Stanley Dance, John Hammond, Gene Lees, Gunther Schuller—have been intimately familiar with the business side of music, having observed jazz not as disinterested scholars but, variously, as journalists and editors for the trade press, publicists, concert promoters, record producers, writers of liner notes, and composers. These experiences, however, seem to have made them more determined than ever to present jazz as something other

than a form of entertainment music shaped by mass consumer preferences: in short, as an autonomous art form (the "jazz tradition"). And if jazz is an art, subject to its own aesthetic principles and laws of development rather than to forces of the marketplace, it follows that its creators are (or ought to be) similarly high-minded, pursuing their artistic vision in serene disregard of commercial considerations.

This perspective underlies one of the most persistent themes in writing about jazz: the demonizing of "commercialism" as a corrupting influence. Thus the jazz historian Rudi Blesh declared in 1946: "Commercialism [is] a cheapening and deteriorative force, a species of murder perpetrated on a wonderful music by whites and by those misguided negroes who, for one or another reason, chose to be accomplices to the deed. . . . Commercialism is a thing not only hostile, but fatal to [jazz]."

Such heated rhetoric was especially popular with atavistic defenders of New Orleans–style jazz who, like Blesh, narrowly identified jazz with a romanticized notion of folk culture, untouched by commodity capitalism. But ultimately it mattered little whether jazz was labeled "folk" or "art." In either case it was claimed as an intrinsically separate sphere, staked out by those who dauntlessly resisted the crass manipulations of the mass market.

Indeed, the anticommercial stance proved particularly congenial to champions of jazz as a form of modernism. All modernist art forms stoutly declare their independence from the marketplace and zealously patrol their borders with mass culture. The more blurred the boundaries, the greater the effort required to maintain them. And no one can deny that in the early years of jazz, the boundaries were very blurred indeed. "The very omnipresence of the jazz element in American popular music, and especially dance and show music, after the First World War meant that for most Americans it had no precise location or independent existence," notes the historian Eric Hobsbawm. Jazz "was . . . so deeply embedded in popular entertainment in the cities of the U.S. that it was almost impossible to separate it out as a special kind of art." By the height of the Swing Era in the late 1930s, when jazz (or swing) had become clearly visible to at least a determined minority as both an artistic activity and the object of cultish enthusiasm, the ties that bound jazz musicians to the networks of the culture industry were even more obvious.

Envisioning jazz as a privileged sphere necessitated a heroic effort by critics to lift it forcibly from this context, to reassert its autonomy in the face of co-optation. Hence the shrill rhetoric that occasionally surfaced in the defense of bebop. Bebop could not claim the mantle of folk purity,

but it could be said to carry on the fight against commercialism on its own terms. When bebop was itself attacked by conservative critics as shallow intellectual posturing masquerading as jazz, its advocates depicted it as the latest phase in the ongoing battle to fight the encroachment of popular culture:

> The story of bop, like that of swing before it, like the stories of jazz and ragtime before that, has been one of constant struggle against the restrictions imposed on all progressive thought in an art that has been commercialized to the point of prostitution.
>
> The war against the horrible products of the tunesmiths, which began with Fletcher Henderson in the 1920's, has been brought to a successful conclusion only by the beboppers. . . .
>
> Bebop is the music of revolt: revolt against big bands, arrangers, vertical harmonies, soggy rhythms, non-playing orchestra leaders, Tin Pan Alley—against commercialized music in general. It reasserts the individuality of the jazz musician as a creative artist, playing spontaneous and melodic music within the framework of jazz, but with new tools, sounds, and concepts.

The contrast in tone with Blesh's pronouncement is significant. Much of the early anticommercial rhetoric in jazz has a distinctly resigned and elegiac undercurrent, as if the efforts to reconstitute a folk music that had already been corroded by several decades of ruinous exposure to commodity capitalism were doomed to futility. Bebop, by contrast, is seen as heroic, affirmative, and deeply rooted in notions of progress. "What [Charlie] Parker and bebop provided," asserts Martin Williams, "was a renewed musical language . . . with which the old practices could be replenished and continued."

In many accounts of the circumstances leading to bebop, commercialism plays an important, if curiously passive, role. By the early 1940s, the story goes, jazz had reached an impasse. The reigning jazz style, swing, had become "threadbare" and "aging," a "harmonic and melodic blind alley" incapable of further development, a formulaic popular music undergoing "death by entropy," a "richly decked-out palace that was soon going to be a prison," a "billion-dollar rut."

These metaphors, sampled from the secondary literature, echo what the musicologist Leo Treitler has identified as the "crisis theory" of twentieth-century European music. Textbook after textbook imputes the eruptions of modernity in classical music at the beginning of the century

(Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky) to the stubborn failure of musical style to move decisively beyond the language of tonality that had become worn out from overuse in the nineteenth century. Something similar is implied about jazz in the early 1940s. Musicians should have moved on to the next step, extending the rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic language of jazz in directions plainly indicated by the music itself. Their failure to do so built up the pressure that resulted in an eruption of a new musical modernism.

But as phrases like "billion-dollar rut" clearly suggest, the real culprit is commercialism—the commingling of art and commerce that for a time allowed swing to be both an authentic jazz expression and a lucrative national fad. Even after the swing style had run its course, the machinery of the popular music industry continued to prop up the "threadbare" and "aging" idiom, seducing musicians into going through the motions long after they had any legitimate artistic reason to do so. In other words, mass-market capitalism contributed to a logjam in the path of musical evolution, which could be removed only by explosive force. Bebop provided the resolution to this crisis. It was, in Leonard Feather's words, a "new branch of jazz . . . born of the desire for progress and evolution."

Bebop thus figures as a crucial moment of definition. In the telling of the story of jazz, there is an implicit entelechy in the progress from New Orleans through swing to bebop: the gradual shedding of its associations with dance, popular song, and entertainment; the dawning awareness by musicians and audience alike that jazz could aspire to greater things. Bebop is the logical culmination of this process—the moment at which jazz became "art," declaring its autonomy by severing once and for all its ties to commercial culture. Once this goal is clearly in view, the temptation to cast the entire history of jazz to midcentury as the story of its inexorable realization is irresistible.

So important a goal could not have been achieved by accident. It must have been the conscious aim of those in the best position to effect the necessary changes: the creators of bebop themselves. Such, at least, is the conclusion of one musicologist in a widely distributed jazz textbook: "Bebop musicians were trying to raise the quality of jazz from the level of utilitarian dance music to that of a chamber art form. At the same time, they were trying to raise the status of the jazz performer from entertainer to artist."

One can certainly agree that bebop musicians were trying to do *some-*

thing. But should they be counted among the charter members of the effort to legitimize jazz as art? We ought to keep in mind that the subsequent success of this effort has understandably influenced our perspective. A half century after the birth of bebop, the status of jazz as an art form has been affirmed by such august entities as the National Endowment for the Arts, Lincoln Center, and numerous degree-granting institutions. As such, jazz has joined its well-heeled European cousins, "classical" music and opera, as a nonprofit enterprise regularly vying for private and public subsidy on the grounds that it is incapable of surviving in the open market.

The insistence that bebop is anticommercial may well continue to suit the needs of contemporary jazz discourse. (Apart from its usefulness for fund-raising, one may cynically note that an image of artistic incorruptibility helps to boost sales.) But it is a singularly poor basis for historical inquiry. It idealizes the circumstances of artistic creation and asks us to repress the unpleasant reality that, as the cultural critic Andrew Ross reminds us, "commercial and contractual relations enter into *all* realms of musical entertainment, or at least wherever music is performed in order to make a living." One may well ask: Were the creators of bebop so disdainful of their lot as "utilitarian" dance musicians? Were they so convinced of the desirability or the necessity—to say nothing of the possibility—of aspiring to the nebulous status of "artist"?

I argue that they were not. For the black jazz musicians of the 1930s and 1940s who are at the center of this book, mass-market capitalism was not a prison from which the true artist is duty-bound to escape. It was a system of transactions that defined music as a profession and thereby made their achievements possible. One need not romanticize the exploitative aspect of the music industry to see that it served as an extraordinary mechanism for social and economic advancement, especially for African Americans. For musicians who saw themselves first and foremost as *professionals,* such advancement was a necessary prerequisite (or corequisite) to artistic achievement.

A good deal of this book is accordingly devoted to economic issues—not as something external to the process of musical change, but as an essential component of it. To understand bebop, it is necessary to situate its creators within the economic landscape they inherited, inhabited, and hoped to transform. Their professional world was defined by a complex and tightly integrated system of cultural production with the entertaining dance orchestra, or swing band, at its core. Economic pressures, coupled after 1941 by the disruptions of war, painfully constricted some

opportunities, while underscoring the urgent need to develop new ones. By 1945 Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie had indeed willed something like a new musical subculture into being. But they were not trying to disengage from the "commercial" music world so much as to find a new point of engagement with it—one that would grant them a measure of autonomy and recognition.

But this is only half the argument—as I have already let on by specifying "*black* jazz musicians" as the focus of this study. Economic issues are inseparable from the issue of race: a topic no less contentious, no less pervasive, and no less central to an understanding of bebop.

Bebop and Race

What role should race be assigned in the history of jazz? Few doubt that jazz is in some fundamental sense an African-American music; the consensus on this point is a common ground for various historical narratives that otherwise diverge sharply in their assumptions, approaches, and interpretations. But ethnicity remains an inherently slippery, not to say controversial, issue. Jazz is a music that lies squarely on the fault line of race relations. From the beginning it has counted among its practitioners white musicians as well as black. It has thrived by satisfying the tastes of the larger and vastly more affluent white audience as well as the black community. How one construes the importance of race for the historical development of the music is not simply a matter of marshaling the evidence: it depends very much on who is speaking and what that speaker wants to prove.

Within the jazz tradition, the ethnicity of jazz—its "blackness"—is primarily a way of positioning it as an art form with unique and internally consistent features. The musical techniques that set jazz apart from European art music are precisely those that derive from black American musical folkways (and ultimately from Africa): swing, call-and-response patterns, vocalized timbre, "blue notes," improvisation, and so forth. These qualities can be identified and analyzed in and of themselves, but they are also deeply embedded within the historical narrative: histories of jazz typically begin not with its putative origins in New Orleans but with the rich context of blues, spirituals, and work songs in the late nineteenth century, underscoring the connections between an ageless black folk aesthetic and the nascent art form. These musical markers of ethnicity are usually treated as *essentials:* they are part of jazz's development but are *not themselves subject to development.* Their presence

throughout all the varied manifestations of jazz is a guarantee of authenticity. Conversely, their absence is a warning sign: music that doesn't swing, isn't improvised, and bears no obvious influence of the blues is in danger of being read out of the jazz tradition altogether.

But what is the relationship between this ethnically derived musical language and the musicians who play it? If musical technique resides in the realm of culture, not genetics, the two are separable. It should be possible for anyone with the requisite determination, sensitivity, and talent to master the distinctive nuances of jazz. "A note don't care who plays it—whether you're black, white, green, brown, or opaque," trumpet player Clark Terry has been quoted as saying, echoing a commonly voiced belief in the independence of music from petty, divisive racial politics.

This faith in the separability of the essential "black" musical qualities of jazz from the *political* circumstances of those who create it is the basis of the consensus liberalism that pervades so much historical jazz writing. One may readily grant that jazz is an ethnic music, deeply rooted in black traditions; that its most important innovators have been black; and that subsequent innovators may continue to be black, if only because mastery of ethnic nuance comes more easily to those absorbing it from birth. But the rapid spread of jazz away from its initial racial base, encompassing not only white Americans but Europeans, Latin Americans, and Asians, has suggested to many a transformation from a provincial folk expression to an art form with universal appeal. In the process of becoming a modern art, jazz ceases to be exclusively, or even primarily, an African-American music. It is, instead, "America's classical music"—a category into which racial difference and the political turmoil it entails finally disappear.

Bebop seems to affirm this view. At first glance, it is an unassailably African-American phenomenon. Even James Lincoln Collier, who has stridently attacked the automatic tendency to identify jazz with African-American culture, readily concedes the black character of the revolution: "Black musicians dominated bop in a way that they had not dominated other forms of jazz since the early days in New Orleans. Black musicians devised the music without any help from whites, and they were its stars for a considerable period thereafter: Parker, Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, and somewhat later, Fats Navarro, Clifford Brown, and Sonny Stitt were the quintessential boppers and they were all black." When one considers that bebop emerged against the background of the Swing Era, a time in which jazz-oriented white dance bands flooded the marketplace and Benny Goodman was crowned King of Swing, the racial quality of the bop movement is all the more striking.

Yet the bebop pioneers seemed unmotivated by racial exclusivity. Quite

the contrary: Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker made a point of hiring white musicians for some of the earliest bop bands. Admittedly, George Wallington, Stan Levey, and Al Haig are peripheral figures, but their very presence in otherwise all-black bands was a powerful statement—a deliberate breaching of the artificial barriers imposed by segregation. By admitting whites into the inner circle, Parker and Gillespie affirmed music to be a meritocracy rather than a racial privilege. If the initial creative impulse for bebop was rooted in an ethnic sensibility, musicians of both races quickly mastered the style, making it possible for Leonard Feather, writing in 1960, to assert the ultimate irrelevance of race: "As soon as the rigid segregation under which [black jazz musicians] had lived began to relax, it became clear that given a freer interchange of ideas anyone could play jazz, according to his environment, his ability and his value as an individual, not as white or Negro."

The explosive potential of race—its capacity to divide rather than to unite—is not entirely purged from this optimistic, color-blind narrative, however. One need only consider the implications of the process by which (to quote Feather again) "jazz, originally the music of the American Negro and the American white, now simply the music of the American, will become more than ever a music of the human being." To attain this transcendent universality, jazz must abandon its origins in a particular subculture. It must exchange an idiosyncratic provincialism ("[jazz] stemmed from a specific social environment, originally conditioned by slavery, in which a group of people largely shut off from the white world developed highly personal cultural traits") for the abstractions of style and technique, available to all.

Is this development both inevitable and welcome—a gift from black Americans to the world? Or is the exchange more sinister? Is it, in fact, an act of theft—yet another instance of the co-optation of black creativity in the interests of white hegemony that Amiri Baraka has called "the Great Music Robbery"? The bland assertion that jazz has become "America's classical music," Baraka argues, carries

> no warm welcome of blacks as full citizens into the American mainstream (complete with democracy and forty acres and a mule). No, this late mumbling is another attempt to deny the peoplehood and the lives and history of black Americans. . . .
>
> There can be no inclusion as "Americans" without full equality, and no legitimate disappearance of black music into the covering sobriquet "American," without consistent recognition of the history, tradition, and current needs of the black majority, its culture, and its creations.

And, by extension, there can be no history of jazz that does not take fully into account how deeply bound up the music is in the political implications of ethnicity—the gross imbalance in power relations between the races that has kept black Americans from enjoying the full citizenship nominally guaranteed them by law.

No serious advocate for jazz needs a lecture on these painful realities, least of all the white critics and historians who labored on behalf of the music in the years before the civil rights revolution. To insist on the dignity and inherent worth of the black expressive arts was in itself a risky political act in the 1940s and 1950s. Most writers, to their credit, went much further. Feather included a chapter on "Jazz and Race" in *The Book of Jazz,* detailing the head beatings and petty humiliations that still beset famous black musicians in the late 1950s. Potential jazz fans were offered this depressing litany on the grounds that "no study of jazz can be complete without a consideration of the socio-racial factors that determined the associations and the frustrations of the men who created it."

The point of this exercise, however, is not to connect the expressive power of the music to oppressive social conditions, but to exorcise them so that the rest of the book may be safely devoted to the development of musical language. Far from being bound up in the creative act, "socio-racial factors" remain in Feather's reading inherently external to it. They are obstacles to free expression, not causes; the role of art is to transcend them.

Bebop and Revolution

By way of contrast, consider the account of the genesis of bebop given by Langston Hughes. It takes the form of a dialogue with his fictional Harlem man-on-the-street, Jess B. Semple. "Simple," as he is known, is first spotted wildly scat-singing to a bebop recording on the stoop of his Harlem apartment. When upbraided by his nameless interlocutor for the patent meaninglessness of his "nonsense syllables," Simple reacts testily:

> "You must not know where Bop comes from," said Simple, astonished at my ignorance.
>
> "I do not know," I said. "Where?"
>
> "From the police," said Simple.
>
> "What do you mean, from the police?"
>
> "From the police beating Negroes' heads," said Simple. "Every time a cop hits a Negro with his billy club, that old club says, 'BOP! BOP! . . . BE-

BOP! . . . MOP! . . . BOP! . . . ' That's where Be-Bop came from, beaten right out of some Negro's head into those horns and saxophones and the piano keys that play it. . . .

"That's why so many white folks don't dig Bop," said Simple. "White folks do not get their heads beat *just for being white.* But me—a cop is liable to grab me almost any time and beat my head—*just* for being colored.

"In some parts of this American country as soon as the polices see me, they say, 'Boy, what are you doing in this neighborhood?'

"I say, 'Coming from work, sir.'

"They say, 'Where do you work?'

"Then I have to go into my whole pedigree because I am a black man in a white neighborhood. And if my answers do not satisfy them, BOP! MOP! . . . BE-BOP! If they do not hit me, they have already hurt my soul. *A dark man shall see dark days.* Bop comes out of them dark days. That's why real Bop is mad, wild, frantic, crazy—and not to be dug unless you've seen dark days, too. Folks who ain't suffered much cannot play Bop, neither appreciate it. They think Bop is nonsense—like you. They think it's just *crazy* crazy. They do not know Bop is also MAD crazy, SAD crazy, FRANTIC WILD CRAZY—beat out of somebody's head! That's what Bop is. Them young colored kids who started it, they know what Bop is."

Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) was a "young colored kid" in Newark when a cousin brought over a stack of new recordings to his house. "They were Guilds, Manors, Savoys," he recalls, "with groups like Charlie Parker's Reboppers, Max Roach and the BeBop Boys, Stan Getz, Dizzy Gillespie's 'Pooopapadow,' 'Hot House,' 'Ornithology,' 'The Lady in Red,' and waboppadapaDam! my world had changed!! I listened to BeBop after school, over and over. At first it was strange and the strangeness itself was strangely alluring. BeBop! I listened and listened." Gradually, the sounds began to take on meaning:

BeBop. A new language a new tongue and vision for a generally more advanced group in our generation. BeBop was a staging area for a new sensibility growing to maturity. And the BeBoppers themselves were blowing the sound to attract the growing, the developing, the about-to-see. Sometimes even the players was carrying about the end of another epoch as they understood it. Though they knew they was making change, opening a door, cutting underbrush and heavy vines away to make a path. And where would that path lead? That was the real question. It is the real question of each generation. Where will the path you've shown us lead? And who will take it?

The path, Baraka concluded years later, led to revolution: a radical transformation of American society with black activists, their revolutionary awareness awakened by the clarion call of bebop, in the vanguard. That revolution has still not come. As of this writing, Baraka is still waiting for the "single upward stroke to socialism" that will finally set to right the injustices suffered by African Americans under a white-dominated capitalist system. But bebop, according to his analysis, was created in the consciousness, however inchoate, of the revolution to come.

In this sense, Baraka's interpretation of bebop corresponds more closely to the concept of the "historical avant-garde" analyzed by the theorist Peter Bürger than to the high modernism of the jazz tradition. The terms *modernism* and *avant-garde* are often used interchangeably with reference to the radical innovations of twentieth-century art, and both have been applied to bebop.[3] But modernism, in Bürger's reading, is by definition disengaged from social relations. Although its continuous and rigorous attack on artistic convention strongly suggests a stance of alienation from society and antagonism toward its audience, modernism nevertheless accepts the place in bourgeois culture that has been reserved for it: an autonomous art carefully segregated from the "praxis of life." The modernist artist content to occupy a separate and privileged sphere has no connection to the world of power relations and is therefore powerless to effect meaningful change.

By contrast, the "historical avant-garde" of the early twentieth century (i.e., such movements as futurism, Dada, and surrealism) actively resisted the totalizing control of bourgeois culture by assaulting the category *art* itself. Exhibiting a urinal with the mock-delicate title *Fountain* and signing it "R. Mutt," or scrawling a mustache on a reproduction of the Mona Lisa (to cite two of the most notorious examples of Marcel Duchamp's shock technique), negates the sanctity of individual artistic creativity at the core of bourgeois notions of art and derides the institutions—galleries, museums, the academy—that support and justify art as a world unto itself.

Bürger's interpretation of the avant-garde has limited applicability to jazz, if only because the black American musician has (until very recently) been granted no privileged position in officially sanctioned culture

3. According to Grover Sales, bebop was "the first genuine avant-garde movement in jazz" (1984, 127). For Bruce Tucker, the creators of bebop were "steeped in the rhetoric of modernist avant-gardism and determined to turn jazz into an art music" (1989, 273). Eric Lott has characterized bebop as "one of the great modernisms" (1995, 249), while Mark Harvey has referred to it as both "the first authentically modern phase in jazz" and "the avant-garde style" (1991, 136, 137).

from which to carry out such an assault. "The substantial distance that has always existed between jazz and high art," Krin Gabbard has argued, "makes the old avant-garde stance unavailable to the contemporary jazz artist." Yet the distinction between an autonomous modernism and a politically engaged avant-garde remains useful in jazz. It takes the form of resistance, not from above but from below—a defiant assertion of ethnic consciousness in the face of efforts by a white-controlled culture industry to co-opt and contain its subversive potential. Baraka wishes to rescue the ethnicity of jazz from domestication as merely the constituent elements of musical language. He offers the example of the reduction of the "life tone and cultural matrix" of the blues to its formal, twelve-bar outline: "Without blues, as interior animation, jazz has no history, no memory. The *funkiness* is the people's lives in North America as slaves, as an oppressed nation, as workers and artists of a particular nationality! To think, as one critic has argued, that the blues is merely a particular twelve-bar form is to think dancing is those footprints in the Fred Astaire newspaper advertisement!"

In this struggle, race is inextricably linked to economics. "Commercialism" is a continual threat to jazz—not to its autonomy as an art music, but to the political and economic power due its black creators. As Andrew Ross has suggested, "a discourse about color ('whitened' music) is spliced with a discourse about commercialization ('alienated' music)" so consistently in writing on American popular music that "it is often assumed that the two are necessarily aligned; that commercialized music = whitened music, that the black performance of uncommercialized and therefore undiluted black music constitutes the only truly genuine form of protest of resistance against the white culture industry and its controlling interests, and that black music which submits to that industry automatically loses its autonomous power."

The thrust of the bop revolution, according to Baraka, was directed not just against white America, but also against those blacks who had yielded their birthright of cultural autonomy in pursuit of the fraudulent goal of assimilation. In his reading, swing was a hopeless dilution, sacrificing whatever connection it may have once had to the lives of the "blues people" for the sake of an illusory commercial success. (That this leaves Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and other black swing musicians in a tenuous position does not seem to trouble Baraka unduly.) Bebop was the antidote: a "willfully harsh, *anti-assimilationist*" music that sought to "restore jazz, in some sense, to its original separateness, to drag it outside the mainstream of American culture again."

The problem with the avant-garde stance is that it is doomed to failure.

The shock of seeing a urinal in an art gallery quickly wears off, its in-your-face gesture absorbed into the narrative of "official" modern art that it was designed to explode. The bebop movement, as Baraka characterizes it, was similarly fraught with internal contradictions, not least of which was the rapidity with which black *and* white musicians eagerly mastered its stance of alienation as well as its musical language. As Ralph Ellison has acerbically noted, "nothing succeeds like rebellion (which [Baraka] as a 'beat' poet should know)." The most visible signs of resistance—the subcultural wardrobe, the impenetrable lingo, the refusal to play the expected role of entertainer—defined a place for bop in the marketplace. "Today the white audience expects the rudeness as part of the entertainment," Ellison points out in an essay originally published in 1958. "If it fails to appear the audience is disappointed."

Indeed, the hoped-for "separateness" of bop falls apart because the "original separateness" of jazz from the entangling web of white-controlled capitalism was an illusion. From the necessity of forming a continuous engagement with the culture industry—recording companies, radio, publishers, booking agents, journalists, critics, historians—there is no escape short of socialist revolution. Perhaps the beboppers were only seeking, as Ellison has suggested, "a fresh form of entertainment which would allow them their fair share of the entertainment market." Otherwise, wondered one black pianist, if the idea was to keep the music out of the hands of white mass culture, "why go to a white recording studio and record it then? . . . The music was progressive, just the minds, the political thinking was a little absurd."

If I have lingered over Baraka's interpretation, it is because his work is one of the few examples of historical explanation not beholden to the narrative of the "jazz tradition," and because (not surprisingly) he gives race its proper place in the unfolding of the music. I am in strong sympathy with his insistence that jazz, and bop in particular, must be viewed through the prism of history. My criticism is with his reading of history, which typically is sketchy, unnuanced, and too transparently a prisoner to ideology.[4]

4. Bebop is crucial not simply to Baraka's vision of the march toward socialist revolution, but to his personal history as well. As John Gennari has noted: "Having grown up with bebop and having derived from it a sense of the possibility of an assertive black male ego, Baraka very much wanted this music to be seen as a threshold in black-white relations, as a cultural fault line marking the distinction between slavery and freedom. Among other

Baraka is at his most persuasive when his discussion of bebop is firmly grounded in historical detail—the ambivalent but highly charged reaction of African Americans to the transition between Depression and war. "Between the thirties and the end of World War II," he writes, "there was perhaps as radical a change in the psychological perspective of the Negro American toward America as there was between the Emancipation and 1930." On the one hand, the war economy widened "the bridge into the mainstream of American society," with tangible advances in income, educational opportunity, and geographic mobility. But these gains only sharpened "the sense of resentment Negroes felt at the social inequities American life continued to impose upon them."

Rising expectations met by intransigent racism, leading to a new sense of militancy: this history lesson is absent from most accounts of bop, which focus instead on the young musicians' supposed grievances about the commercialization of their art. But then, little attention is paid in general to what one historian has called the "forgotten years of the Negro revolution"—the powerful stirring of black political consciousness in the 1940s.

Compared with the achievements of the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s, the tangible results of wartime activism may seem paltry. A. Philip Randolph's threatened march on Washington in 1941 has been overshadowed by the real march two decades later; race riots in Detroit and Harlem in 1943 have been superseded in memory by the "long hot summers" of the 1960s and Los Angeles in 1992. By contrast, bebop survives as a cultural project that succeeded brilliantly in articulating the mood and energy of its time. "Bebop was intimately if indirectly related to the militancy of its moment," argues the contemporary scholar Eric Lott. "Militancy and music were undergirded by the same social facts; the music attempted to resolve at the level of style what the militancy combatted in the streets."

But what, exactly, constitutes the "intimate if indirect relationship" of music to politics? For while the bebop pioneers and the zoot-suit-wearing rebels of the urban underground shared certain experiences—most notably the arbitrary threat of the white policeman's billyclub—the two groups are by no means identical. This is a distinction that politically sensitized readings of bebop tend to ignore or gloss over. As highly skilled

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things, this enabled Baraka, at the very moment when he was emerging as a prophetic figure in black letters and politics, to claim a personal history that coincided with a liberationist thrust in the black arts" (1991, 491).

artists, the members of the bebop generation had "raised themselves by their talents and achievements above the level of the ordinary labourers from whom they had sprung." They carved out a professional world that isolated them, physically and psychically, from the mass. The usual attempt to cast them as self-conscious revolutionaries or anarchistic hipsters fails to take into account the unique privilege and distinctive ethos of their profession.

It may be exaggerating to call them, as Ralph Ellison does, "the least political of men." Black entertainers necessarily kept provocative opinions to themselves (unless, like Paul Robeson, they deliberately courted disaster). In private, they were better able to speak their minds. Bassist Milt Hinton remembered lengthy conversations with Charlie Parker "about politics and race and really deep things like the solution for blacks in America." Parker and Dizzy Gillespie shared an admiration for Vito Marcantonio, the fiery radical congressman from Spanish Harlem. Still, Gillespie's sense of political involvement was clearly informed by professional concerns that can only be called parochial: "We liked Marcantonio's ideas because as musicians we weren't paid well at all for what we created."

The bebop musicians' relationship to politics was oblique at best, and certainly very different from that of their counterparts on the street corners. If bop was a revolution, it was hardly a revolution aimed directly at the black masses, who insisted on a music that satisfied their taste for bluesy dance and entertainment.[5] Rhythm and blues, not bebop, became the soundtrack for the urban black experience of the late 1940s and 1950s. If, as the subway graffiti proclaimed on Charlie Parker's death in 1955, "Bird lives," it is not in the streets but in the music studios. Drummer Art Blakey's chilling epitaph for Parker is instructive: "A symbol to the Negro people? No. They don't even know him. They never heard of him and care less. A symbol to the musicians, yes."

5. This is a point that Gerald Early makes even more forcefully in his discussion of the later phase of Louis Armstrong's career. Armstrong, he argues, was doubly isolated by losing both the "finger-popping, "good-timing" black audience to rhythm and blues *and* the young intellectuals to bop. "Bebop musicians, despite their stance as militant, socially aware, artistically uncompromising professionals, were no more in tune with the black masses than the older Armstrong and, in some sense, were probably less so. The beboppers' insistence on seeing themselves as artists and not entertainers pushed them much closer to viewing their cultural function in more European terms. To Armstrong and to the black masses, the concept of the artist and of art as it is generally fixed by Euro-American standards is, quite frankly, incomprehensible. Armstrong saw himself as an entertainer who must, by any means, please his audience. And to the black masses generally there would scarcely be a reason for the public performer to exist if he did not feel that pleasing his audience was the prime directive" (Early 1989, 296–297).

Nevertheless, the "social facts" that sparked the Harlem riots also gave bebop its unmistakable edge of resistance—one that perhaps makes most sense when the successes of music professionals are set against the usual backdrop of frustration and despair. In the latter half of the 1930s, black musicians had good reason to feel optimistic. The triumph of swing held out the tantalizing possibility of a new prosperity in which black talent would play a leading role. Advances were dramatic and tangible: for the next several years the entertainment industry expanded rapidly, providing steady and lucrative employment for a small but influential elite of black musicians—the men who staffed the bands led by Ellington, Lunceford, Basie, and Cab Calloway. Hundreds more entered the profession, eager to be rewarded by a level of material gain, social freedom, and respect from white America that could not even have been imagined a few decades earlier. Within the black community, no single musician enjoyed the prestige of Joe Louis, the heavyweight boxing champion who from 1937 to 1949 literally beat white contenders to their knees. But as a class of skilled professionals who had proved their worth in open competition with their white counterparts, musicians were uniquely positioned to further the cause of black social and economic progress.

All this began to change in the 1940s. As the Swing Era inevitably cooled off, competition stiffened and the underlying inequities of race were felt with renewed force. Entrenched patterns of segregation, both in the music industry and in society at large, automatically gave white musicians a nearly insuperable advantage in the mainstream market, blunting black ambition and forcing it into new channels.

Bebop was a response to this impasse, an attempt to reconstitute jazz—or more precisely, the specialized idiom of the improvising virtuoso—in such a way as to give its black creators the greatest professional autonomy *within* the marketplace. Bop was the twin child of optimism and frustration, of ingenuity and despair.

"People Made Bebop"

Throughout this book I have sought to avoid the tendency either to reduce bebop to a textbook example of stylistic evolution or to represent it as a social upheaval expressed through music. My quarrel with these narratives is not that they fail to address important issues. To the contrary, any analysis of bop that ignores either the nuances of musical language or the political context for its creation is manifestly incomplete. But each approach tends to exclude the other. They operate from different assumptions and cherish their own characteristic modes of discourse—

the smooth evolutionary lines of style history on the one hand, the dialectical confrontations of black nationalism on the other.

There *is* a point, however, at which the apparently irreconcilable lines of the musical and the social meet: the professional musician. It is the day-to-day, year-by-year decisions made by the musicians of the bebop generation in the pursuit of their careers that constitute the real focus of this book. As Amiri Baraka once put it: "People made bebop. The question the critic [or historian] must ask is: *why?*"

If this obvious frame of reference has all too often been overlooked, that is because the usual narratives for jazz history remain largely suprapersonal. To be sure, jazz writing remains fixated on charismatic, idiosyncratic personalities. But beneath the surface of anecdotes, the real agents of change are abstractions to which individual will is subordinated. Even the "Great Man" school of historical writing, with its apparent focus on the individual exercise of genius, falls into this category. When Martin Williams speaks of Charlie Parker being *"called upon"* (like a minister receiving the call to preach) to "change the language of jazz, to reinterpret its fundamentals and give it a way to continue," Parker seems to have no choice in the matter. Or more precisely, questions of choice become irrelevant: had he declined, or proved unfit to the task, the call would have passed down the line to someone else. There is something to this view, of course. Currents in history are often larger than individuals. But the habit of telling history this way sacrifices the complexity and ambiguity of lives lived in a particular historical moment.

Bringing the focus of jazz history back from lofty abstractions to quirky contingencies not only restores a measure of common sense to jazz; it helps to heal the rift between the two main master narratives. For the young black men who created bebop, musical and social issues were not warring abstractions, but conjoined elements of their adult identities. They were, of course, *artists,* and as such enjoyed a degree of autonomy from society. Distinguished from the masses by their special gifts and absorbed with the details of their craft, they carried out their work with a certain disregard for their immediate environment. But at the same time they were *professionals:* ambitious and opportunistic, eager to exchange their specialized skills for monetary advantage in the service of their careers. And their experience as *African Americans* permeated their music as well as every aspect of their personal and professional lives.

My concern in this book is to understand bebop as the result of the decisions these musicians made. Why did the young professionals of the bebop generation choose to abandon swing and create a new musical

genre? The answer depends on how the inquiry is framed. If *swing* and *bebop* are reduced to abstract stylistic categories, the transition from one to the other means merely the exchange of one set of musical procedures for another, with musical texts the only permissible evidence. But *genre* is a concept that, in Leo Treitler's words, "overlaps 'style' . . . [with] the additional coordinate of function." Swing was more than a constellation of techniques and procedures to be altered at will by strong-minded artists. It was an integral part of the burgeoning entertainment industry, a genre of dance music embedded within an elaborate network linking musicians with booking agents, dance-hall and theater operators, songwriters, publishers, journalists, radio broadcasters, record companies—and of course, the public. It was a system that made musicians' careers possible and that defined their place within the whole. All of the bebop musicians began their careers within this system. Their decision to break, or at least radically revise, their relationship to it was no casual act. Nor, given the realities of power in American society, could it hope to be entirely successful.

The overall narrative structure of *The Birth of Bebop* is tripartite. The first part, "College of Music: Coleman Hawkins and the Swing Era," examines the Swing Era from a multitude of perspectives—musical, economic, cultural—with particular attention paid to the singular position of African-American musicians. Its chief protagonist is Coleman Hawkins, the preeminent tenor saxophonist of his generation and one of the most intriguing figures in the early history of jazz. As the title of the opening chapter suggests, he was a progressive, committed to a vision of social advancement in which the black jazz musician, through the disciplined exercise of talent in one of the few professional avenues open to African Americans, would find a place in the world commensurate with his skills.

The trajectory of Hawkins's career provides one pathway through a complex and rapidly changing landscape. Through the mid-1930s, he achieved a degree of fame as the featured soloist in the prominent black dance band led by Fletcher Henderson. In 1934 he exchanged his status as a salaried dance musician for the liberating uncertainties of life as a solo act in Europe. In 1939, at the height of the Swing Era, he returned from Europe to try his luck as the leader of his own dance orchestra. When that enterprise failed in 1940, he put aside hopes for success on a grand scale, concentrating instead on gaining a more modest niche for

himself as a freelance virtuoso. After a few discouraging lean years, he found himself once again thriving, this time in the clubs on New York's 52nd Street.

There, during the early 1940s, he came into contact with the corps of young musicians, roughly ten to fifteen years his junior, who were at the heart of the nascent bop movement. The second part of the book, "Professionals After Hours: Young Black Musicians in the 1940s," is the portrait of this generation. As one might expect, the early careers of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, bebop's central figures, are given special prominence. But their life stories were interwoven with those of numerous other aspiring musicians, some now well known, others still obscure, with whom they shared certain formative experiences. Most entered the profession during the initial heady years of the Swing Era boom and continued to make their way even as professional advancement became more difficult. Their professional world was bounded on the one side by public exchanges with their audience through live performance and the mass media, and on the other by the struggle for recognition within the musicians' community in the private sphere of the jam session. All felt the limits imposed on their aspirations and personal freedom by institutionalized racism—an experience only exacerbated by the upheavals of life on the home front. Gradually, their commitment to the professional world as they knew it (although not to professionalism per se) eroded, as they became alert to alternative tacks for pursuing their careers.

The third and final part of the book, "Taking Advantage of the Disadvantages: Bop Meets the Market," traces the complicated history of the formative years of bebop. During the war years, the economic structures of the Swing Era remained firmly in place. Common sense dictated that many young musicians (Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker among them) continue to work through the entertaining dance orchestras toward something like conventional success. But new opportunities, however modest, pointed in a different direction. Jazz aficionados created a market, both in live performance and on recordings, for small-combo jazz, pulling the distinctive aesthetic and procedures of the jam session out of the private and into the public sphere. The resolution of the union ban on recordings in 1943 indirectly encouraged the creation of scores of small independent record companies, providing an outlet for the commodification of new strains of improvised music. As a well-established freelance, Coleman Hawkins was an early beneficiary of these developments. But the bop generation, spearheaded by Gillespie's determination and entre-

preneurial instincts, was not far behind. The 1945 recordings matching Gillespie with Parker mark the beginning of a new genre.

This, in broad outline, is the story line of *The Birth of Bebop.* To answer the "how" and "why" of bebop, I consistently try to place the actions of musicians within the context of their professional world, an approach that entails close attention to the interpenetration of music-making and economics. At the same time I rely heavily on biography—drawing in large part from the rich resources of oral history that a living tradition provides. Wherever possible, I link the issues at play within the jazz world to broader trends in American, especially African-American, history and culture.

At times I address questions of musical style, sometimes in considerable technical detail. As a musicologist and a jazz performer, I feel a particular responsibility to do so. Music scholars have always faced the daunting challenge of explaining musical intricacies to a lay public and bringing the specialized jargon of music theory in line with the plainer prose of historical narrative. With jazz, the challenge is even greater. There is no widely accepted theoretical discourse to fall back upon, no scores to adduce as evidence in print, nor even substantive agreement on the aesthetic and technical principles that distinguish jazz from the tradition of European "classical" music. I cannot claim to have developed a more coherent or convincing approach to jazz analysis, but I have tried to draw music into the historical discussion in a way that does not do violence to its distinctive qualities—the qualities that make it worth caring deeply about in the first place. Although those without musical training may find a few passages difficult, I hope they will persevere, and that the coherence of the overall narrative will guide them to the conclusion.

The Birth of Bebop is not meant to be a comprehensive record of the beginnings of bebop. Any number of areas touched upon here—music, politics, economics, race, historiography—could be explored in more depth and detail. My aim is to explore how these varied considerations relate to one another in the birth of a musical genre some fifty years ago. My guiding principle has been that jazz must be understood as an integral part of American history and culture.