

American Classical?

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Musical Roots

Rock and roll took me in its grip from the time the Beatles and Rolling Stones invaded America in 1964. I listened to pop-rock as a 'tween and young teen with the greatest attentiveness. Sock hops, where very bad bands imitated the Beatles, the Stones, and long, rightfully forgotten bands like Gerry and Pacemakers and the Blues Magoos, were weekly events that kids 12 to 18 lived for during the summer months. A pocket size transistor radio – a new and miraculous device at the time – accompanied me everywhere. At school it stayed cleverly hidden until recess, when two other music-crazed teeny boppers and I would wander to the far end of the playground to tune into WONE, the only radio station with broadcasting wattage great enough to reach the hilly isolation of Bellefontaine, Ohio, that dared to play music actually recorded in the 1960s. Until that fateful British Invasion we listened to what our parents listened to: for some of us jazz, but for all of us Perry Como, Patti Page, Tennessee Ernie Ford, the Mills Brother (who by the way were hometowners), and if we were lucky Frank Sinatra. The faint, crackling reception of a station 60 miles away, combined with the radio's tinny one and half inch speaker, outside with 100 screaming banshees competing for aural attention, made for an audiophile's nightmare. We didn't care. We did not know that audiophilia existed, let alone how serious an affliction it would become later in life. We ecstatically accepted the conditions, sang along with the Troggs on *Wild Thing* (that two-note wonder of a ditty) and eagerly accepted the imprint of lyrics and tunes that 50 years later, with no regard for the abysmal quality of the music, are still at ready recall. If you've forgotten or never heard the song "Red Rubber Ball" by the Circle, see me after tonight's meeting. I haven't heard the song since 1967, but will gladly sing you every line of every verse, but will ask you to join me in the chorus to help conceal the fact that my talent for music is a pathetic mismatch with my passion for it.

As the 1960s drew on and I grew into full teenhood, my musical interests grew and morphed even faster than the size of my feet. I'm not sure how this happened. Bands playing the music that began to grab my attention were *not* stopping in Bellefontaine on their tours. I don't recall ever seeing the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, or Santana at the Rutan Park amphitheater, or even at the town's biggest annual event, the county fair. AM radio was not playing them, and, with no university within 50 miles, we had no clue that FM radio existed. But somehow, I became aware of the alternative forms of rock that emanated mostly from the east and west coasts, where I had never been and would not visit for many years yet. I suspect it was from older brothers or friends, some of whom were returning from Viet Nam with massive record collections and powerful stereo systems that they had purchased for pennies on the dollar. These music-producing behemoths made me wonder: what was that hissing and crackling from my transistor. I knew that this music, which seemingly made its way to the Midwest directly from Viet Nam, was more interesting, more complex, and, yes, even more sophisticated than anything produced by that tiny speaker in my pocket.

In 1969, of course, there was Woodstock, which I attended, as did I'm sure many of you here tonight. As you undoubtedly know, nine out of ten baby boomers attended Woodstock. Just ask them. We all claim we were there that summer, and many of us were, I suppose, in spirit. We all bought the three-album set, and we all saw the movie – many, many times – so that we could memorize our “experience” and speak convincingly of the bad trips, the lovely naked ladies, and of course the music. In actual fact, news of Woodstock did not reach Bellefontaine until 1970, a full year after the fact. But, late or not, it stoked my interest in a music built on more complex structures, extended forms, and occasionally, genuine virtuosity.

So how do these experiences, typical if not stereotypical of many of my generation, relate to the topic at hand, *American Classical*, which I realize may still be a mystery to you? Why do I want you to know about, what to many of you, is just the standard journey made by many out-of-touch Midwestern hippie flower-child “wannabees”? Why? Because it laid the foundation for my now almost 40-year love affair with jazz. Now we're getting somewhere.

Well, I should say we're getting close. But first, we must actually return to an earlier time, to the time when parents did no wrong, were objects of unquestionable reverence, and exerted their influence on their progeny by their every word and action. This is where my musical journey began. During my childhood in the 1950s and early 60s, there were few times when the family hi-fi was not serenading us, and the neighbors. The proximity of houses in our working class neighborhood enabled us to entertain everyone within three-house lengths on either side of ours. That hi-fi, a little square box of a machine encased in fake cherry wood with a tweed-covered single speaker on its face, barely sounded better than my grandparents' Victrola, vintage 1925. We listened daily, no not daily, multiple times daily, to the unctuous Perry Como oozing *Round and Round* and *Tina Marie*. And by the age of three my brother and I, after innumerable listenings, could sing, with or without accompaniment, the Ohio State fight song and a very rousing *Seventy-six Trombones*.

But these popular tunes are not what I remember most. More often than not, when my father arrived home from work, we would be serenaded by Miles Davis' muted trumpet on his album *Saturday Night at the Blackhawk*. The gentle, pure tones of Davis' horn, with his occasional shocking bursts of sound punctuating transition moments in tunes such as *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, left a deep impression that has endured to this very moment. The classically influenced chords issuing from Dave Brubeck's piano, particularly in his best known work *Take Five*, the quirky classic in 5/4 time, took root in a young boy's musical psyche. And the idiosyncratic pianist Thelonious Monk, pounding dissonant chords, tinkling angular melodies, was both mesmerizing and confusing. I didn't understand until years later why my father always had one hermit crab in his terrarium named Thelonious. He wanted that constant reminder of the great Monk.

My parents loved jazz equally. But sometimes their tastes did not coincide. The only time during my childhood I heard a serious argument between them it went like this: “Art Tatum is easily the finest piano player in the world. He can play anything, and play it perfectly,” Dad stated in a tone that left little room for rejoinder. But Mother, never a shrinking violet, did rejoin: “Pahh, he does not and cannot play chords the way Errol Garner does. Errol is the most original jazz piano player. And what is jazz all about, originality.” And so it went, for five minutes, ten minutes, but always ending in a kiss and a decision to play, usually, Garner.

With all forms of art, sometimes it is difficult to explain why one genre and not another appeals to ones senses and sensibilities; why one artist can move a person to tears and another elicit only a snort. Why do the paintings of Jasper Johns rivet my attention. I can practically sense the presence of one. Why does Mark Rothko leave me cold?

In the world of music, why does the urgent message of Art Blakey’s rhythmic bombardment of drums and cymbals give me a shot of joy like few other things do? And if presented with a choice of listening to Mozart or Monk, Debussy or Davis, or Bach or Bird, by now you probably know my answer.

I am not a musician. The analysis that I am about to begin is strictly personal, and I understand may be technically flawed and could even offend those of you who *are* trained musicians. But music occupies my core. It is integral to my being. I listen every day. And I *mean* listen. I brook few interruptions when my 100-amp-per-channel Harmon Kardon amplifier is pumping music to my twin Polk Audio towers, subwoofer, and twin bookshelf speakers. To my wife’s dismay, sometimes this means the windows rattle and our furniture dances across the hard wood floors. And occasionally a neighbor asks me, with a less than subtle wink-wink, “Was that jazz you were listening to last night?” My father’s legacy!

I do know the formal rudiments of music. But I failed miserably as a child to find, to exploit whatever musical ability was innate. It was futile. Miss Warner, my grade school music teacher once whispered to my parents during a teacher conference: “Poor boy. I think he’s tone deaf.” She let me blow the pitch pipe before each class sing-along, hoping that somehow the pipe’s pitch would translate into my own on-pitch sound. That worked about half the time. In junior high, Mrs. Green dismissed me from singing the required solo in front of the entire class. The thought of my crackling voice, not a child’s yet not a man’s, trying to navigate the leaps and nuances of the *Star Spangled Banner* must have been too painful for her to risk hearing. I was the only child excused from this requirement. I begged Mrs. Booth, a retired music teacher, to instruct me on the trombone. She finally agreed, despite warnings I’m sure she received from Miss Warner and Mrs. Green. This was a small town. And its few music teachers I’m sure exchanged notes over Friday evening cocktails and dinners. After two months, exasperated over my inability to master even the *Volga Boat Song*, the simplest of all folk tunes, she

suggested that I take a break and consider a “quieter instrument someday.” I loved the bleating, growling, slurring sounds I could make with a trombone. Every note came out sounding like a roaring lion or a lamb that the lion had decided to make its next meal. I played the trombone in our back yard, which was adjacent to a field where a herd of cows often grazed. On more than one occasion they gathered by the fence trying to find a way to what I’m sure they thought was their next lover. I had mastered bull sounds, much as I’m doing now.

By high school, still smitten with music and immersed in the world of then alternative rock and roll, I decided to take piano lessons. Every Monday evening I traipsed downtown to White’s music store, where in rooms thankfully sound-proofed, Mrs. White would spend an hour with me trying to make my fingers express the most basic chords. I was impatient. She was more impatient. I did not want to learn to play piano by practicing the lame songs in the instruction book. *On Top of Old Smokey* and *The Bear Went Over the Mountain* just weren’t going to keep this youngster’s mind focused. I wanted to learn the Beatles’ *Hey Jude* and the Rolling Stones’ *Ruby Tuesday*, with minimal effort. That did not happen. And while today I can barely find middle C, I did learn the basics of reading music, and my love of music only continued to grow.

In my early twenties, when a young man should begin to find clarity and contentment in most aspects of his life, I heard dissonant chords. While I worked on a factory assembly line for several years building industrial band saws for weapons manufacturers, I rarely missed an anti-war march on the capital in Columbus. While I was a talented mathematician and physics student, one day I dropped all my math and science courses and enrolled in Russian, Latin, and Greek. I fell in love at least twenty times; but when I met my wife of now 35 years I knew those days were over. And when it came to music, the forces were no less dissonant. Pop music seemed idle. Folk mostly bored me. Rock was sounding repetitive and derivative. Classical had not been a big part of my life. No, it was jazz, germinating, slowly and subtly sprouting after a long dormancy, whose roots must have finally found nourishment in my mind’s back forty. Something about it moved me like no other music did.

At least one other influence during childhood likely affected my predilection for less-than-popular music and I suppose other things in life. Ours was a house through which a continuous parade of characters marched. At the time, my father was the sports writer for the local newspaper. He was still a young man, and he won the confidence of high school athletes and promoted them in ways that resulted in many receiving college scholarships. These young men – in the 1950s and 1960s they *were all* men – were of every stripe and athletic persuasion: baseball players, football players, basketball players, white, black, and Latino. The last was a rarity in the region, but the high school’s international exchange program created a regular stream of Guatemalans into town. They all found their way sooner or later to the Marine house, where my father counseled them, where they played ball with his two young sons, and

where I'd hear the occasional, "Cool, that's Miles Davis isn't it?" when they entered the house. Jazz was *cool* to these idols, these veritable gods who could effortlessly dunk a basketball, throw 90 mile-an-hour fastballs, and deliver crushing tackles on the gridiron. Among my friends, at least, this was exposure to a diversity that none could claim, and that judging from the vividness of my memories had a life-long impact.

This Topic

But now, enough of the truths and lies, the influences and imaginations, of my childhood immersion into music, and the route by which I arrived at this odd place: a dilettante expounding on a complex musical topic and making bold pronouncements with which few may agree. And why all this context? Well, let's call it truth in advertising.

It's time now to get to our topic. It is this: Is jazz serious art music? Is jazz in fact America's classical music? I contend that much jazz is both. This paper is an exploration of these questions, not a history of jazz, although I will have to recount some historical facts. Rather, it is an examination of this music from two perspectives, seeking a convincing argument for my assertions.

What is Jazz?

Let's begin where all such explorations must begin, addressing assumptions. First, what is classical music, in its expansive sense, not the narrow academic definition? Finding a definition on which there is broad agreement is more difficult than one would think. Most definitions in the end resort to citing the elements of classical music rather than attempt to craft a true definition. Elements usually mentioned are: sophisticated forms, high levels of technical mastery, and complexity in theme, phrasing, texture, and harmony.

Art music, or serious music, in the modern tradition is often described as music descending from the classical tradition and *not* either folk or popular music. It has even been described as music that requires more work on the part of the listener to appreciate and understand than other music.

And then, what is jazz? This seems to be even more difficult to define, partly because the sub-genres that evolved over its one hundred year history are many and varied, and because its evolution so temporally compact. But since the 1940s, with the emergence of bebop, most jazz critics, practitioners, and academics agree that the styles that have emerged – bebop, cool, hard bop, modal, and free jazz – have been characterized by certain elements: rhythmic complexity, sophisticated and innovative harmonies, great technical proficiency, and of course improvisation and syncopation, that "swing" feeling.

In an effort to answer my questions, there are numerous approaches to analyzing this music. One is examining the influences of one genre on another: an historical analysis of common evolution and mutual influence. Another is deconstructing the elements of each for evidence of what is common *and* distinguishing: a musicological comparison. We shall examine the mutual influences argument first.

Common Development/Mutual Influence: An Historical Analysis

This analysis of jazz's relationship to classical music traces the influence of one on the other and explores coincidence of the two genres.

In the 1920s a movement emerged that fused features of classical music and jazz, earning the moniker "symphonic jazz." Musicians and composers overcame their prejudices. Jazz musicians turned to classical for inspiration. Classical composers began to incorporate elements of jazz. Previously, classical musicians had considered jazz only a popular music. Jazz musicians had considered their classical counterparts stiff, rote, merely repeaters, barely interpreters. (Schuller)

The most obvious influence classical had on jazz in this era was in instrumentation. Jazz musicians began to experiment with wind and string instruments far beyond the saxophone, clarinet, and bass violin. French horns, oboes, bassoons, and flutes appeared in jazz orchestras. But strings are what captured the imagination of a number of jazz musicians. Jazz composers attempted to adopt entire string sections, integrating them into the overall sound of their swing bands. Paul Whiteman was the most notable practitioner, but even Duke Ellington, considered the most advanced and innovative of the swing era band leaders and composers, integrated string sections into symphonic-like works. Some speculate that jazz musicians adopted classical elements to counter the perception that jazz was only commercial dance music. Classical elements, to their way of thinking, would make them more legitimate.

The influence of jazz on classical composers is even easier to trace. For instance, classical composers began to make use of jazz rhythms, such as Igor Stravinsky's "Ragtime for 11 Instruments" and Charles Ives' "Central Park in the Dark." This influence was not emulation. Rather, classical composers were inspired by the new music and incorporated elements into their own compositional styles. They did not, nor did they intend to, imitate jazz. The manifestation of the influence is often oblique and subtle. For instance, Darius Milhaud, as quoted by his wife "was determined to transpose the jazz idiom into a classical work." (Nichols) And Aaron Copland said: "... hearing jazz in a fresh context heightened my interest in its potential. I began to consider that jazz rhythms might be the way to make an American-sounding music." (Copland, Perlis) And in Leonard Bernstein's words: "I heartily submit the

thesis that serious music in America would today have a different complexion and a different direction were it not for the profound influence of jazz.” (Krupa, Bernstein)

George Gershwin was steeped in jazz, and composed some of the greatest popular music of his day, much of which was either jazz or sympathetic to jazz, music which jazz musicians found affinity with and transformed into jazz standards: “Fascinating Rhythm,” “My One and Only,” “Embraceable You,” “I Got Rhythm,” “Nice Work if You Can Get It,” “They Can’t Take That Away from Me,” and of course virtually the entire song list from *Porgy and Bess*, but especially “Summertime.”

Gershwin was probably the first composer to truly *blend* jazz and classical elements. He supposedly wrote *Rhapsody in Blue* to “prove to the world that jazz was a serious art form.” (Machlis) This was in 1924. He cast the composition in the classical concerto form rather than one of the standard 12 bar or 32 bar jazz forms, but infused the composition with jazz instrumentation (namely, saxophones and banjo), jazz sounds (here, muted trumpet and clarinet glissandi), all with lush orchestral strings. He also made full use of the blues sound, employing “blue notes” in much of the harmonic structure. As well, he employed jazz-like syncopations giving the music at the very least a swing-like sensation. This composition has nearly all the hallmarks of a work of jazz in a classical form.

Copland discovered jazz through the back door, so to speak. As an *ex patriot* living in Europe he was attracted to the composers Milhaud, Stravinsky, Claude Debussy, and Maurice Ravel. In *them*, he discovered jazz influences. He said: “Here, finally was a music an American might write better than a European.” (Copland, Perlis) His *Piano Concerto* employs jazz instrumentation, namely saxophone, jazz sounds, such as brushes on a snare drum, and jazz rhythms, that is, syncopations emphasizing beats two and four.

In the 1940s, in a reversal, Stravinsky, Ravel, Debussy, and Bela Bartok became inspirations themselves for another jazz movement, one that broke sharply in many ways from the hot jazz and swing music of Louis Armstrong and Ellington. While there were many influences on the seemingly spontaneous combustion that resulted in bebop in 1944, the progenitors, the inventors of this new music – Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and many lesser known musicians – proudly credited contemporary European composers of serious music for influence and inspiration. Charlie “Bird” Parker, the ur-bopper himself, made a point throughout his life of citing the influence of Stravinsky and Bartok, in particular, on his musical conception. (Hentoff)

Bebop dramatically altered jazz. Harmonies became dissonant, phrases sharper, tempos more varied, and melodies, well, less melodious. The level of virtuosity among boppers was astounding. They mastered their instruments, capable of flawlessly playing the most complex

jazz and classical compositions. Jazz itself was becoming serious music, and bebop musicians became serious artists creating original and multi-layered works. Bernstein even suggested that bebop was “the real beginning of serious American music.” According to his biographer, “he dismissed American symphonic works up to 1955 as being no more than personalized imitations of the European symphonic tradition from Mozart to Mahler.” (Burton)

In the mid-1950s, once again classically trained composers took an interest in jazz. This time, however, they did not just incorporate or blend jazz elements into their works. After the “symphonic jazz” experiments of the 1920s and 30s, with the exception of Ellington’s forays into concertos and extended works, the attempts to “legitimize” jazz by blending it with classical forms nearly disappeared. But in the mid-50s a group of classically trained musicians, who composed works of serious music *and* loved jazz, began to experiment again with compositions that now evolved into more than just blending the two genres. This movement, dubbed “Third Stream,” was characterized by all the compositional attributes of Western “serious” music and by the key elements of jazz, this time including improvisation. The foremost proponent of this style, Gunther Schuller, coined its appellation. Besides Schuller, the most prominent practitioners were Stan Kenton, Gil Evans, and John Lewis.

Third Stream was not classical music with jazz elements tossed in for effect or color or embellishment. Nor was it jazz molded into classical forms. Rather it was an attempt to fuse the two genres in ways that respected both. Schuller points out: “...the classical world can learn much about timing, rhythmic accuracy and subtlety from jazz musicians, as jazz musicians can in dynamics, structure and contrast from classical musicians.” Technology, particularly the amplification of quieter instruments, and, the expansion of jazz education at universities, where classical techniques were taught to musicians of all types, likely played a role in this convergence. Formal exposure to multiple genres bred understanding and appreciation. And quieter classical instruments, like the flute and violin, found their voices in jazz through amplification.

Finally, in this analysis we must examine one final movement: avant-garde music from the 1960s to the present. Avant-garde movements in classical music and jazz occurred concurrently, emerging from different ends on the music spectrum, but as musicologists have purported “converged to the point of becoming almost indistinguishable from one another.” (Norman) In jazz, the movement was pioneered by Ornette Coleman, who called his music “free jazz.”

In both of these “free” movements the mentality of experimentation predominated. Form, tonality, harmonic repetition, and rhythmic regularity were abandoned. There was no common practice or set of principles. Critics and audiences alike often questioned whether avant-garde results were music at all. Performance techniques also converged. The notion of acceptable

sound broadened in both. Glissandi, pitch blending, multi-phonics, and alternate fingerings evolved in both.

Avant-garde developments in classical music began in the early 20th century with Arnold Schoenberg and Stravinsky, and later with Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and John Cage. Many adopted jazz techniques, for instance Cage's increased integration of improvisation in his compositions. And by the 1960s jazz musicians were enrolled in conservatories and university music schools. They came into contact with the works of the classical avant-garde. For instance, the jazz pianist Cecil Taylor, who pioneered the free jazz piano, cites Schoenberg, Bartok, and Stravinsky as influences. And the saxophonist Anthony Braxton cites Cage and Stockhausen. In the music they created, as one musicologist put it, they "found an intersection in which [their] music can be heard as either classical or jazz, depending on the vantage point of the listener." (Maurer) The experimental mentality of the 1960s and, ironically in some ways, the growth of jazz training at universities resulted in jazz and classical movements that were nearly identical.

Musical Elements: A Musicological Analysis

Let us now consider the second approach to examining jazz: deconstructing the music to identify the elements that both distinguish jazz from other music and make it worthy of being called art or classical music.

First, there is rhythm. Jazz rhythm is characterized by three elements: swing, weak beats, and polyrhythm. Swing is another notion that critics and academics have difficulty defining. For example, one explanation claims swing is created when there is "a specific type of accentuation and inflection with which notes are played or sung, and a continuity – the forward propelling directionality – with which individual notes are linked together." (Schuller) A simpler explanation might be: rhythmic variability, that is, the playing just ahead or behind the beat of some instruments (often the soloists) and the steady on-the-beat pulse of others (usually upright bass and drums). As for weak beats, the second rhythmic element to consider, in typical 4/4 time the accents are on the second and fourth beats. This is unlike most classical and popular music, in which beats one and three are normally accented. And finally, jazz rhythm is characterized by multiple rhythms played by the various instruments, and often by the same instrument, creating a propulsion in the music.

After rhythm, unique approaches to harmony also give jazz its identity and complexity. Musicologists seem to agree that jazz harmony has its roots in European music, and consider it the primary European contribution to jazz. Jazz harmony, with a structure common to classical music, works within a framework of diatonic harmony. While the basic chord types of jazz and

classical music are the same, jazz makes broad use of expanded chords, including chords of up to eight notes, and frequently substitutes expected notes with sharps and flats.

In any musical genre, there are favored forms, a third element to consider. Superficially one may think that classical music, normally being entirely composed, is constructed according to a form, while jazz, which includes a predominating amount of improvisation, is formless.

Classical music can take a number of forms: prelude and fugue, rondo, sonata, and many others. While jazz does not adopt these forms, it does have its own distinct and well-defined forms, which mostly emerged from the African American experience. Specifically, the chorus pattern and the riff principle are the foundations of jazz forms. The chorus is probably the most fundamental principle to jazz. Its derivation is from master patterns of African dances. It is linked to everyday work and play functions and was not present in purely European-produced music. Likewise, the riff, rooted in the call and response patterns of African American field music and the blues, is an integral part of jazz composition and improvisation. The two main jazz forms, the 12 bar blues and the 32 bar song, are built on both the chorus pattern and the riff.

Fourth, there is improvisation. To many, improvisation is what defines jazz and distinguishes it from other genres. In jazz much of the music is spontaneously created, a type of improvisation called chorus improvisation. Embellishment or ornamentation, usually called paraphrase, is also practiced by beginning and less-talented jazz musicians, but is the lesser of the two, requiring minimal skills and creativity. In performing chorus improvisation the musician departs completely from the melody, improvising new melodies over the tune's chord structure or implied structure. The level of instrumental mastery and mental dexterity, and the encyclopedic knowledge of conventions and canon required to produce complex chorus improvisation are rare. Only the truly gifted and practiced jazz musician can improvise in this manner, can do more than simply embellish the written tune or create ornamental flourishes, and can formulate ideas seemingly instantaneously and expressively. Learning, absorbing, and then using these conventions, in the right hands, results in the musician creating a living work *while performing*.

Other elements, such as phrasing, sound, and tone color are the tools that jazz musicians use to create their unique sound, style, and identity. The great jazz musician cultivates a sound that can be distinguished from all others. When one hears the sheets of notes, or lightening fast arpeggios, of John Coltrane's vibratoless tenor saxophone, one would never mistake that sound for the viscous curly cues of Sonny Rollins' juicy notes, dripping with multi-phonics, produced by the same instrument. The pure succulent tone of Miles Davis' muted trumpet, weaving its way through chorus after chorus of his composition "So What", could never be confused with Dizzy

Gillespie's biting, high-pitched, loud and explosive trumpet solos in songs such as "Night in Tunisia."

Finally, a characteristic of jazz that aligns it with classical, and distinguishes it from most popular music, is the previously mentioned level of virtuosity required to play this music. To play jazz requires innate talent and a lifetime of dedication to the art and to skill development. To cite a recent personal experience, several months ago I attended a performance of the Ralph Peterson Fo'tet, comprising a drummer, Peterson, a double-bassist, a vibraphonist, and a clarinet player. The music was complex, with constant counterpoint, continuous shifting rhythms and time signatures, soaring melodies, and a tornado of pulses produced by the drummer's mastery on his simple drum kit. One tune in particular mesmerized the audience. Most were not sure why. Musicians in the audience were tapping feet and hands, but losing their way. The music breathed, and aggressively swung. But what caused it to spell bind people? When the tune ended, Mr. Peterson could see the joyful confusion on many faces. He smiled and asked: "you know what time signature that was?" A young man in the corner, a CCM student, eked out: "17/8?" Mr. Peterson, astonished, walked through the audience and shook the young man's hand.

Conclusion

This paper is obviously in part an homage to my parents and to the home and community that shaped my values and interests. But after exploring those roots, and the music for which they engendered a life-long passion, it's time to return to the questions that fascinated me: Is jazz serious art music? Is it American Classical?

Many who argue in favor of these assertions posit that jazz is classical music's equal because classical composers borrowed or blended elements of jazz in their works, or because jazz musicians found inspiration in many 20th century classical composers, or because a handful of musicians in the 1950s found a way to go beyond blending to create a new genre. While these phenomena are true, the case they make for jazz as serious music is by inference only. I seek an argument that holds up to aesthetic scrutiny as well as historical.

I believe this argument lies in the nature of the music itself. The salient elements of modern jazz, while not identical to, are akin to the elements found in modern art music of the European tradition. And they are elements and features that make a music "art" or "serious" rather than "pop."

Those elements that elevate jazz to serious music are easy to discern in the aforementioned modern jazz movements: complex rhythmic patterns, sophisticated harmonic structures, unique musical forms, chorus improvisation, individual style and identity, and consummate

virtuosity. The result is a music that is built on a defined aesthetic, requires immense talent to play, and demands and rewards serious attention.

So *is* jazz America's classical music? Well, it certainly *is* uniquely American. Music historians have repeatedly and with only minor variations traced its history to the American South where Black Americans melded African rhythms and melodies with European harmonic structures played predominantly on instruments of European origin. And since modern jazz meets the requirements of serious music, a term when applied to composers in the European tradition of art music is interchangeable with the word classical, this uniquely American form of serious music can rightfully be termed *American Classical*. It is serious composition, it is consummate mastery of instrumentation, and it is creative impulses in the service of spontaneous composition. It is meant to be attentively listened to, deserving the listener's undivided attention.

In 1963, had I realized that those growling blustery sounds I produced on my rented trombone were actually *glissandi*, with an enviable vibrato and a rather unique intonation at that, I might have been encouraged to continue my practice and would be here before you today better qualified to expound on this topic. But as George Gershwin's brother Ira wrote: "I got rhythm, I got music, I got my girl. Who could ask for anything more?"

Recommended Jazz Recordings

Bebop

Monk, Thelonious. *Genius of Modern Music*, 1947.

Parker, Charlie. *Genius of Charlie Parker*, 1945-1949.

Rollins, Sonny. *Saxophone Colossus*, 1956.

Cool

Davis, Miles. *Birth of Cool*, 1950.

Tristano, Lennie. *Intuition*, 1956.

Hard Bop

Blakey, Art. *Moanin'*, 1958.

Henderson, Joe. *Inner Urge*, 1964.

Modal

Davis, Miles. *Kind of Blue*, 1959.

Coltrane, John. *A Love Supreme*, 1964.

Free Jazz

Art Ensemble of Chicago, *Les Stances a Sophie*, 1970.

Coleman, Ornette. *Change of the Century*, 1960.

Mingus, Charles. *The Black Saint and Sinner Lady*, 1963.

Post Modern

Davis, Anthony. *Episteme*, 1981.

Lomax, Mark. *The State of Black America*, 2010.

Marsalis, Branford. *Romare Bearden Revealed*, 2003.

Parker, William, *Petit Oiseau*, 2008

Peterson, Ralph. *Duality Perspective*, 2012.

Sources

Burton, Humphrey. *Leonard Bernstein*, 1994.

Copland, Aaron and Vivian Perlis. *Copland 1900 Through 1942*, 1984.

Hentoff, Nat. "Counterpoint," *Down Beat*, January 1953, page 15.

Krupa, Gene and Leonard Bernstein. "Has Jazz Influenced the Symphony," *Reading Jazz*, 1996.

Machlis, Joseph. *Introduction to Contemporary Music*, 1961.

Maurer, John A. *A Comparison of Free Jazz to 20th Century Classical Music*, 1998.

<https://ccrma.stanford.edu/~blackrse/freejazz.html>

Nichols, Roger. *Conversations with Madeleine Milhaud*, 1996.

Norman, Lisa Karen. *The Respective Influence of Jazz and Classical Music on Each Other, the Evolution of Third Stream and Fusion and the Effects Thereof into the 21st Century*, Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2002.

Schuller, Gunther. *Early Jazz*, 1968.